

Book of Acts Study, Part 93 – Wednesday, November 17, 2021 (COVID 19 Livestream #86)

The Book of Acts fills in between the Gospel of John and the Book of Romans.

Not only in the order in which the Books of the Bible are listed, but chronologically.

So the Book of Acts is very important, it fills in important history of the propagation of the early church. It documents the spread of the Gospel into the Gentile world.

Last week, we looked at the setting of the Book of Acts. We looked at the author Luke, and learned a little about him. But we also established the themes for the Book of Acts that we will be rallying around for our church, at such a time as this.

Two main themes of the Book of Acts we will be emphasizing:

- 1. Humanly speaking, the early Christians had nothing going for them. The church was new, with unproven leaders. They weren't educated, they had no money, no modern means for spreading the gospel. They faced incredible opposition and enormous obstacles. Yet they were empowered by the Holy Spirit to do the impossible and bring a simple salvation message to an unsaved world. *This is encouraging for us here at Crossover, because it reveals an important point...God doesn't call the qualified, He qualifies the called. What is going to happen here at Crossover will be a clear work of the Holy Spirit and it will be done through common broken people, amen?!***
- 2. Persecution was meant to squash Christianity. But God took the very act of persecution and used it to spread the Gospel like wildfire. Another name for the Book of Acts could be "The Unstoppable Church". *Each of us has a past. The enemy wants to use it against us to discourage us, to disqualify us, to rob us of our hope. But God does the opposite...He takes the very things Satan uses to destroy us and uses them for good. Out of our greatest hurts can come our greatest ministry, amen?!***

Tonight, we are in Chapter 24, where Paul is brought before the Roman governor Felix.

In recent weeks Chapter 21, we saw Paul being arrested in Jerusalem under false charges. He had been slandered and accused of teaching Jewish believers to abandon their Jewish traditions. We saw him face his accusers, including speaking directly to the Sanhedrin. This created quite a commotion. He was then transferred in the company of 470 Roman soldiers to Caesarea to be questioned by Antonius Felix, the governor of Caesarea. He had jurisdiction over Israel and parts of Syria. He was a tyrant and well known for being corrupt and cruel. However, interestingly enough, he was married to a Jewish woman. So he would have been well acquainted with Jewish laws and traditions. And at the same time, it was important that Paul, a Roman citizen, be tried by Roman authorities. So with all these “coincidences” we see God behind the scenes, working, orchestrating.

Let’s pick up the story in Chapter 24, as Paul faces Governor Felix:

Acts 24

¹ Five days later the high priest Ananias went down to Caesarea with some of the elders and a lawyer named Tertullus, and they brought their charges against Paul before the governor. ² When Paul was called in, Tertullus presented his case before Felix: “We have enjoyed a long period of peace under you, and your foresight has brought about reforms in this nation. ³ Everywhere and in every way, most excellent Felix, we acknowledge this with profound gratitude. ⁴ But in order not to weary you further, I would request that you be kind enough to hear us briefly.

⁵ “We have found this man to be a troublemaker, stirring up riots among the Jews all over the world. He is a ringleader of the Nazarene sect ⁶ and even tried to desecrate the temple; so we seized him. ⁸ By examining him yourself you will be able to learn the truth about all these charges we are bringing against him.”

⁹ The other Jews joined in the accusation, asserting that these things were true.

¹⁰ When the governor motioned for him to speak, Paul replied: “I know that for a number of years you have been a judge over this nation; so I gladly make my defense. ¹¹ You can easily verify that no more than twelve days ago I went up to Jerusalem to worship. ¹² My accusers did not find me arguing with anyone at the temple, or stirring up a crowd in the synagogues or anywhere else in the city. ¹³ And they cannot prove to you the charges they are now making against me. ¹⁴ However, I admit that I worship the God of our ancestors as a follower of the Way, which they call a sect. I believe everything that is in accordance with the Law and that is written in the Prophets, ¹⁵ and I have the same hope in God as these men themselves have, that there will be a resurrection of both the righteous

and the wicked. ¹⁶ So I strive always to keep my conscience clear before God and man.

Last week we began to unpack this and focused on the idea that God sometimes allows the odds to be stacked against us.

Some highlights:

God often allows the odds to be stacked against us so He gets the glory when He comes through!

So therefore: *God likes to use underdogs.*

God allows the odds to be stacked against us so there will be no question who did it when the enemy is defeated!

If it is done by human hands, it will bring human results.

If I were to give tonight's study a theme, it would be: *A clear conscience makes a soft pillow.*

¹⁵ and I have the same hope in God as these men themselves have, that there will be a resurrection of both the righteous and the wicked. ¹⁶ So I strive always to keep my conscience clear before God and man.

Here we see Paul giving his defense, and in essence, is saying "Hey, I have to answer to God. The last thing I want to do is be a scoundrel!"

Question: *How would our lives change if we were concerned first about having a clear conscience before God?*

If we are concerned first about doing right by God, we will never have to worry about doing right by man.

Think about that...

When we do right by God, there is no lying...etc

It is the same position Joseph had when he was accused of making an advance of Potiphar's wife.

Genesis 39:9

⁹No one is greater in this house than I am. My master has withheld nothing from me except you, because you are his wife. How then could I do such a wicked thing and sin against God?"

Notice how he made it about God first. He kept his heart clean before God, therefore there was no worry keeping it clean before his employer.

If we focus first on not sinning before God, we will naturally not sin against man.

And that is what Paul was saying...Hey, my hope is in God. I want to please Him...why then would I do these things you accuse me of?

Here's another way of saying it: When we seek to please God, we will naturally walk straight before man.

Then we don't have to worry about keeping ourselves straight or being honest.

Jesus said in Matthew 5:37

³⁷But let your 'Yes' be 'Yes,' and your 'No,' 'No.' For whatever is more than these is from the evil one.

In other words...Always speak the truth, then you never have to fix what you said.

Being straight and honest is less work than lying...always having to remember your last lie.

So again, Paul, in his defense, is saying..."Hey, I answer to God. I am shooting straight because if I don't, I'll have God to answer to first."

Now, I want to point out another thing about what Paul is saying in vv15-16 in tonight's text:

¹⁵and I have the same hope in God as these men themselves have, that there will be a resurrection of both the righteous and the wicked. ¹⁶So I strive always to keep my conscience clear before God and man.

Notice that...I have hope in God that there is a resurrection for all...one way or the other.

We learned this several weeks ago when we looked at the end times.

The soul of every person is immortal, and will dwell eternally either with God or apart from Him.

Guys – this world is not the end...we need to get over this world!

And because of this...Paul says:

¹⁶ So I strive always to keep my conscience clear before God and man.

It reminds me what John said in 1 John 3:

1 John 3:1-3

¹ See what great love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are! The reason the world does not know us is that it did not know him. ² Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when Christ appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is. ³ All who have this hope in him purify themselves, just as he is pure.

Look at that: All who have this hope in him purify themselves.

i.e. in light of the fact that this world is not it, Jesus is returning soon to take us to our eternal destiny...what is a good response? *Purify yourself, and be ready! Keep your conscience clear before God and man.*

It's logical and it's reasonable.

The reasonable response, as we wait for Jesus' return, is to purify ourselves and be ready!

Romans 12:1-2

*¹ Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship. **(reasonable...spiritual)** ² Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.*

And Paul is the one that wrote that to the Roman church.

He is practicing what he preaches.

It reminds me of when the Israelites had escaped slavery in Egypt. God had led them through the desert. And now, they were sitting at the cusp of the Promised Land...ready to take the first town, Jericho.

Joshua 3:5

⁵ Joshua told the people, "Consecrate yourselves, for tomorrow the Lord will do amazing things among you."

In other words: *You are about to have an encounter with God Almighty Himself. Prepare yourself! Focus! Now is not the time for the flesh! Now is not the time to be bound up in your head!*

Let's take a look at this word Consecrate: *devote exclusively to a particular purpose.*

make or declare sacred; dedicate formally to a divine purpose.

In fact, the Latin root is the same word we get *sacred* from

Which means *connected with God*, dedicated for His purpose

Key words: devote, connect, dedicate...it is about committing one self, and hear me on this: ***It's a choice! Stop waiting for the feeling!***

¹ *Five days later the high priest Ananias went down to Caesarea with some of the elders and a lawyer named Tertullus, and they brought their charges against Paul before the governor.*

We talked last time about the severity of the situation and how serious the 40 Jewish men were that were conspiring to kill Paul.

**They made an oath that in essence said:
*May God strike me dead if I don't kill Paul.***

That's commitment...that's pretty serious...and tonight, we see the high priest, some of the elders of the temple, and a high-powered lawyer journey from Jerusalem to Caesarea solely to bring charges against Paul.

Notice v1 says they “went down” to Jerusalem. So, was that a figure of speech, like we say “I went down to the store”?

Caesarea was approx. 75 miles from Jerusalem, when using roads (show map). But also, Caesarea was at sea level, whereas Jerusalem was at approx. 2500 ft elevation. So indeed, they did “go down”.

Which, of course, means they'll have to go back up.

I thought about it, and did some research. Oakhurst is approx. 2300 ft elevation. These men traveling from Caesarea to Jerusalem is just about equivalent to walking from Oakhurst down into the valley and then cutting over to Reedley...all by foot.

OK, so what? My point is...these men were serious, and they were committed.

As I was using my imagination, I saw the scene...Paul's nephew overheard...told the Roman commander...the commander organizes a cons to get Paul out of town safely under the guard of 470 soldiers. The soldiers take Paul 75 miles away to Caesarea where the Roman Governor is, with the idea that Paul, being a Roman citizen, would have to be tried in a Roman court, and if the Jewish leaders still wanted to press their case against Paul, they'd have to make that inconvenient journey on their own. Not likely, right?

They'll probably just let it go...drop their case, right?

But no...instead of letting it go, they went out and hired Sam Waterston from Law and Order to go with them. *Oh great!*

It looks like God is allowing the odds to be stacked against Paul.

Does God really do that? And then I thought...Does God use the weak to confound the strong? The foolish to confound the wise?

Does God use a young shepherd boy with only a slingshot to take down a giant?

Does God use a small boy with only a few loaves and fishes to feed 5000 men?

Does God use a man armed with only a donkey's jawbone to take out 1000 Philistines?

1 Corinthians 1:27

²⁷ But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong.

Why does He do that? The answer lies in the subsequent verses:

²⁸ God chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things—and the things that are not—to nullify the things that are, ²⁹ so that no one may boast before him. ³⁰ It is because of him that you are in Christ Jesus, who has become for us wisdom from God—that is, our righteousness, holiness and redemption. ³¹ Therefore, as it is written: “Let the one who boasts boast in the Lord.”

It is the same idea as:

Ephesians 2:8-9

⁸ For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—⁹ not by works, so that no one can boast.

God often allows the odds to be stacked against us so He gets the glory when He comes through!

Tonight's theme: *God likes to use underdogs.*

There is a story in the 7th chapter of Judges that is a perfect example of this. It involves Gideon, a reluctant leader of the Israelite army...an *underdog*.

Israel had done evil in the eyes of the Lord, worshipping Baal and other idols. And because of this, God allowed Israel to be invaded and oppressed by the Midianites. The Israelites called out to God and God sent a prophet:

Judges 6:8-10

⁸ he sent them a prophet, who said, “This is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says: I brought you up out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery. ⁹ I rescued you from the hand of the Egyptians. And I delivered you from the hand of all your oppressors; I drove them out before you and gave you their land. ¹⁰ I said to you, ‘I am the LORD your God; do not worship the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you live.’ But you have not listened to me.”

And yet, even with this reminder, the Lord graciously relented and sent an angel to Gideon:

Judges 6:12

¹² And the Angel of the LORD appeared to him, and said to him, “The LORD is with you, you mighty man of valor!”

Look at Gideon's response...he didn't see any evidence of God being with them, and he sure didn't see himself as a mighty man of valor, or a mighty warrior.

Judges 6:13-16

¹³ “Pardon me, my lord,” Gideon replied, “but if the LORD is with us, why has all this happened to us? Where are all his wonders that our ancestors told us about when they said, ‘Did not the LORD bring us up out of Egypt?’ But now the LORD has abandoned us and given us into the hand of Midian.”

14 The LORD turned to him and said, “Go in the strength you have and save Israel out of Midian’s hand. Am I not sending you?”

15 “Pardon me, my lord,” Gideon replied, “but how can I save Israel? My clan is the weakest in Manasseh, and I am the least in my family.”

16 The LORD answered, “I will be with you, and you will strike down all the Midianites, leaving none alive.”

And even with this promise from God, Gideon was still unsure, so he asked the Lord for a sign...twice.

Not much of a man of valor or great fortitude. Yet, this is the underdog God chose to lead the Israelite army into battle.

Guys: It would be so easy for us to be like Gideon right now, as we look around at the world we live in. “Lord, I don’t see much evidence right now that You are moving...in fact, it looks like the obvious.”

“And Lord, I’m feeling very unqualified to be part of anything great You want to do.”

That’s why we need these reminders...God is always at work, even when it doesn’t look like it.

And as we learned last week: *God doesn’t call the qualified, He qualifies the called.*

What happens here at Crossover will be a clear work of the Holy Spirit and it will be done through common broken people!

But this unlikely underdog approach didn’t stop with the selection of Gideon.

Judges 7:1-3

1 Early in the morning, Jerub-Baal (that is, Gideon) and all his men camped at the spring of Harod. The camp of Midian was north of them in the valley near the hill of Moreh. 2 The LORD said to Gideon, “You have too many men. I cannot deliver Midian into their hands, or Israel would boast against me, ‘My own strength has saved me.’ 3 Now announce to the army, ‘Anyone who trembles with fear may turn back and leave Mount Gilead.’” So twenty-two thousand men left, while ten thousand remained.

Look at this scene. The Midianites *and* the Amalekites, as well as other people, had all crossed the Jordan and come to destroy Israel. Later in chapter 7 it says there were so many of them they were like locusts, and their camels were like the grains of sand in the sea.

I'd say the odds were stacked against them. So Gideon assembles all the Israelite men he can...32,000 of them. Hedging his bets. *Do we hedge our bets sometimes?*

What are some of the ways we do that?

If we are trusting God for something, we should not take matters into our own hands.

Well, God wasn't going to let him hedge his bets...

² The LORD said to Gideon, "You have too many men. I cannot deliver Midian into their hands, or Israel would boast against me, 'My own strength has saved me.' ³ Now announce to the army, 'Anyone who trembles with fear may turn back and leave Mount Gilead.'" So twenty-two thousand men left, while ten thousand remained.

A simple test...*those that afraid can leave now. 22,000 left! Can you imagine?!*

However, this number was still too many, so God then further reduced the number down to 300.

300 men against an army of two enemy nations. And yet it was with those 300 men that Gideon defeated the enemy...every last one of them.

God was glorified! God allows the odds to be stacked against us so there will be no question who did it when the enemy is defeated!

I guaranty Gideon and all the Israelite army knew who won the battle that day! As well as the Midianite and Amalekite nations, and all other surrounding areas.

Why does God do this? Is He so insecure that He needs all the attention and glory?

If it is done by human hands, it will bring human results.

And getting back to Paul's story, we see God allowing the odds to be stacked against Paul. Yet, we see the miraculous hand of God in all of it.

Next week we'll unpack this further and look at Paul's defense.

¹⁷ “After an absence of several years, I came to Jerusalem to bring my people gifts for the poor and to present offerings. ¹⁸ I was ceremonially clean when they found me in the temple courts doing this. There was no crowd with me, nor was I involved in any disturbance. ¹⁹ But there are some Jews from the province of Asia, who ought to be here before you and bring charges if they have anything against me. ²⁰ Or these who are here should state what crime they found in me when I stood before the Sanhedrin— ²¹ unless it was this one thing I shouted as I stood in their presence: ‘It is concerning the resurrection of the dead that I am on trial before you today.’”

²² Then Felix, who was well acquainted with the Way, adjourned the proceedings. “When Lysias the commander comes,” he said, “I will decide your case.” ²³ He ordered the centurion to keep Paul under guard but to give him some freedom and permit his friends to take care of his needs.

²⁴ Several days later Felix came with his wife Drusilla, who was Jewish. He sent for Paul and listened to him as he spoke about faith in Christ Jesus. ²⁵ As Paul talked about righteousness, self-control and the judgment to come, Felix was afraid and said, “That’s enough for now! You may leave. When I find it convenient, I will send for you.” ²⁶ At the same time he was hoping that Paul would offer him a bribe, so he sent for him frequently and talked with him.

²⁷ When two years had passed, Felix was succeeded by Porcius Festus, but because Felix wanted to grant a favor to the Jews, he left Paul in prison.

Footnotes

- a. Acts 24:7 Some manuscripts include here *him, and we would have judged him in accordance with our law.* ⁷ *But the commander Lysias came and took him from us with much violence,* ⁸ *ordering his accusers to come before you.*

Acts 23:12-35

¹² *The next morning some Jews formed a conspiracy and bound themselves with an oath not to eat or drink until they had killed Paul.* ¹³ *More than forty men were involved in this plot.* ¹⁴ *They went to the chief priests and the elders and said, “We have taken a solemn oath not to eat anything until we have killed Paul.* ¹⁵ *Now then, you and the Sanhedrin petition the commander to bring him before you on the pretext of wanting more accurate information about his case. We are ready to kill him before he gets here.”*

Last week we asked, how would you like to hear there was a conspiracy against you personally?

These men were committed and devoted! Swore and took an oath.

In the Greek, it really meant they spoke a curse over themselves if they didn't succeed.

i.e. May God strike me dead if I don't kill Paul.

And then we looked at how the devil and his demons likewise conspire against us.

Guys, we need to understand our enemy, and what their motives are.

Our enemy is not today's culture...the other political party...the president...the police...the vaxers or the anti-vaxers...

Our real enemy is the devil and the dark forces that work with him. They are bent on our destruction.

Let's move on in the story:

¹⁶ *But when the son of Paul's sister heard of this plot, he went into the barracks and told Paul.* ¹⁷ *Then Paul called one of the centurions and said, “Take*

this young man to the commander; he has something to tell him.”¹⁸ So he took him to the commander.

The centurion said, “Paul, the prisoner, sent for me and asked me to bring this young man to you because he has something to tell you.”

There “just happened” to be the son of Paul’s sister there.

I’ll say it again...*There are no coincidences with God.*

He is always at work, behind the scenes...orchestrating...arranging...

Why? Because *the battle belongs to God!*

The battle is His, and therefore *God has a reason for everything He does and everything He allows to be done.*

Those that plot evil think they are in control...but look at this...

Psalm 2:1-4

¹ *Why do the nations conspire
and the peoples plot in vain?*

² *The kings of the earth rise up
and the rulers band together
against the LORD and against his anointed, saying,*

³ *“Let us break their chains
and throw off their shackles.”*

⁴ *The One enthroned in heaven laughs;
the Lord scoffs at them.*

Proverbs 19:21

²¹ *Many are the plans in a person’s heart,
but it is the LORD’s purpose that prevails.*

The devil himself thinks he has sway over us...

But:

1 John 4:4

⁴ *You, dear children, are from God and have overcome them, because the one who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world.*

Back to the story:

¹⁹ *The commander took the young man by the hand, drew him aside and asked, “What is it you want to tell me?”*

²⁰ *He said: “Some Jews have agreed to ask you to bring Paul before the Sanhedrin tomorrow on the pretext of wanting more accurate information about him. ²¹ Don’t give in to them, because more than forty of them are waiting in ambush for him. They have taken an oath not to eat or drink until they have killed him. They are ready now, waiting for your consent to their request.”*

²² *The commander dismissed the young man with this warning: “Don’t tell anyone that you have reported this to me.”*

OK, we see a subplot developing...a subplot to protect Paul from this conspiracy. But was it really a “subplot”? Or was it actually “the” plot?

Paul Transferred to Caesarea

²³ *Then he called two of his centurions and ordered them, “Get ready a detachment of two hundred soldiers, seventy horsemen and two hundred spearmen to go to Caesarea at nine tonight. ²⁴ Provide horses for Paul so that he may be taken safely to Governor Felix.”*

Look at all of this hubbub. 200 soldiers, 70 horsemen, and 200 spearmen. That is quite an escort. And it is all for Paul.

This commander is really fighting for Paul! Right?

Who is really fighting for Paul?

It was the Lord, behind the scenes, fighting for Paul.

Zephaniah 3:17

¹⁷ *The LORD your God is with you,
the Mighty Warrior who saves.
He will take great delight in you;
in his love he will no longer rebuke you,
but will rejoice over you with singing.”*

But does God really fight for us? Have you ever questioned this? When we are facing a trial or intense frustration and opposition...it’s easy to ask “God, where are You in all of this?”

Deuteronomy 3:22

²² Do not be afraid of them; the LORD your God himself will fight for you.”

Another way of saying it...vindicate. God has promised to vindicate us when we are wronged.

That simply means – He will fight for our cause. We talked about this a little last week.

And that is what we see here in Paul’s story...God was with him...working behind the scenes...orchestrating circumstances...having people in just the right place at the right time.

And He will do the same for us if we commit our way to Him.

Psalm 37:5-6

*⁵ Commit your way to the LORD;
trust in him and he will do this:*

*⁶ He will make your righteous reward shine like the dawn,
your vindication like the noonday sun.*

He will make your righteousness shine like the dawn, and the justice of your cause like the noon day sun.

Psalm 57:2

*² I cry out to God Most High,
to God, who vindicates me.*

Bottom line: *Indeed - God fights for us!*

Don’t give up...and don’t take matters into your own hands...trust in God and allow Him time to fight for your situation.

Let’s get back to the Roman commander in this story:

²⁵ He wrote a letter as follows:

*²⁶ Claudius Lysias,
To His Excellency, Governor Felix:
Greetings.*

²⁷ This man was seized by the Jews and they were about to kill him, but I came with my troops and rescued him, for I had learned that he is a Roman citizen. ²⁸ I wanted to know why they were accusing him, so I brought him to their Sanhedrin. ²⁹ I found that the accusation had to do with questions about their law, but there was no charge against him that deserved death or imprisonment. ³⁰ When I was informed of a plot to be carried out against the man, I sent him to you at once. I also ordered his accusers to present to you their case against him.

³¹ So the soldiers, carrying out their orders, took Paul with them during the night and brought him as far as Antipatris. ³² The next day they let the cavalry go on with him, while they returned to the barracks. ³³ When the cavalry arrived in Caesarea, they delivered the letter to the governor and handed Paul over to him. ³⁴ The governor read the letter and asked what province he was from. Learning that he was from Cilicia, ³⁵ he said, "I will hear your case when your accusers get here." Then he ordered that Paul be kept under guard in Herod's palace.

So we need to understand something here. This governor was Antonius Felix, the governor of Caesarea. He had jurisdiction over Israel and parts of Syria. He was a tyrant and well known for being corrupt and cruel. However, interestingly enough, he was married to a Jewish woman. So he would have been well acquainted with Jewish laws and traditions. And at the same time, it was important that Paul, a Roman citizen, be tried by Roman authorities.

Guys, you couldn't script it any better than this. Look at all these details, colliding together at just the right time.

Paul, a Jew, is being plotted against by a group of Jews conspiring to kill him in a carefully orchestrated coup. However, Paul's nephew just "happens" to overhear the plot. He tells a Roman commander about it, who apparently takes great pride in his ability to keep the peace, and was not about to let a murderous conspiracy happen on his watch. This commander sends 470 Roman soldiers to protect Paul and bring him to a safe, neutral place.

Meanwhile, this commander writes a letter to the Roman governor who, "coincidentally enough" is married to a Jewish woman and knows the Jewish customs, but also knows the law that states a Roman man must stand trial in a Roman court.

**I ask again...was Paul saved by? the Roman commander? The 470 soldiers?
The Roman governor? Or God?**

Indeed, *The battle belongs to God!*

**Even the governor, as high ranking as he was, was merely playing a role
in God's story!**

Proverbs 21:1

*¹ In the LORD's hand the king's heart is a stream of water
that he channels toward all who please him.*

Another version says:

*"The king's heart is in the hand of the LORD; he directs it like a watercourse
wherever he pleases."*

Indeed, *The Battle belongs to God!*

One last question...*Why didn't God just take Paul?*

He still had work to do.

*"That all of God's men are immortal until God is through with them is a
wonderful comforting thought for today. And when He is through with
you, He will remove you from the earth."*

J. Vernon McGee

They even swore to not eat anything until they did! This is real...and it is specifically about Paul.

And notice how Luke is careful to point out there were over 40 of these men!

Can you imagine over 40 people committed like that to your destruction? You specifically?!

And by the way...did it phase Paul? Remember, a few weeks ago:

Remember, this is the same Paul who was well aware of the hornets nest he was walking into by going back to Jerusalem. He was able to face it because he was prepared to die. Death did not scare him. He was convinced death was better because he would be in the presence of Jesus.

Acts 21:13

13 Then Paul answered, "Why are you weeping and breaking my heart? I am ready not only to be bound, but also to die in Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus."

What gives a man this kind of resolve?

Paul was convinced that because of Christ, dying was better.

For us, can we say the same? Or, are we too attached to this world?

We may not have 40 people literally plotting our demise, but do we have enemies? If we are people-pleasers, we try hard not to have any enemies.

Listen, church: I believe *God wants us to have a supernatural viewpoint of the world we live in today.*

What do I mean? *There is more going on in the unseen world than in the seen world.*

Ephesians 6:10-12

¹⁰ Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. ¹¹ Put on the full armor of God, so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes. ¹² For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.

What am I saying? Are there demons assigned to us? You'd better believe there are. And that is where our battle lies.

Are these demons committed to our destruction like these 40 men in tonight's story?

John 10:10

¹⁰ The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.

1 Peter 5:8

⁸ Be alert and of sober mind. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour.

Guys, we need to understand our enemy, and what their motives are.

Our enemy is not today's culture...the other political party...the president...the police...the vaxers or the anti-vaxers...

Our real enemy is the devil and the dark forces that work with him. They are bent on our destruction.

And again, There is more going on in the unseen world than in the seen world.

There is a story in the Old Testament that displays this well.

2 Kings 6:8-17

⁸ Now the king of Aram was at war with Israel. After conferring with his officers, he said, "I will set up my camp in such and such a place."

⁹ The man of God sent word to the king of Israel: "Beware of passing that place, because the Arameans are going down there." ¹⁰ So the king of Israel checked on the place indicated by the man of God. Time and again Elisha warned the king, so that he was on his guard in such places.

¹¹ This enraged the king of Aram. He summoned his officers and demanded of them, "Tell me! Which of us is on the side of the king of Israel?"

¹² "None of us, my lord the king," said one of his officers, "but Elisha, the prophet who is in Israel, tells the king of Israel the very words you speak in your bedroom."

¹³ "Go, find out where he is," the king ordered, "so I can send men and capture him." The report came back: "He is in Dothan." ¹⁴ Then he sent horses and chariots and a strong force there. They went by night and surrounded the city.

¹⁵ When the servant of the man of God got up and went out early the next morning, an army with horses and chariots had surrounded the city. "Oh no, my lord! What shall we do?" the servant asked.

¹⁶ "Don't be afraid," the prophet answered. "Those who are with us are more than those who are with them."

¹⁷ And Elisha prayed, "Open his eyes, LORD, so that he may see." Then the LORD opened the servant's eyes, and he looked and saw the hills full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha.

Getting back to the story of Paul, let's look again at v16 of tonight's text:

¹⁶ But when the son of Paul's sister heard of this plot, he went into the barracks and told Paul.

There "just happened" to be the son of Paul's sister there.

There are no coincidences with God.

He is always at work, behind the scenes...orchestrating...arranging...

That is who You are, Lord!

Even when I don't see it, You're working

Even when I don't feel it, You're working

You never stop, You never stop working

You never stop, You never stop working

*You are
Waymaker, Miracle Worker, Promise Keeper
Light in the darkness, my God
That is who You are*

I want to introduce you to a word: *Providence:*

the foreseeing care and guidance of God; a manifestation of divine care or direction.

God's providence...perhaps you have experienced it. When things line up in such a way that they can't be written off as coincidence. Many of us have experienced this...when God masterfully creates a complicated matrix of "coincidences" that all work together in our lives, and when we look back we have to conclude that we've just experienced a "God-thing"

Anyone here testify to this? And why does God do this? Because He loves us!

And that is what we see here in Paul's story...God was with him...working behind the scenes...orchestrating circumstances...having people in just the right place at the right time.

And He will do the same for us if we commit our way to Him.

Psalm 37:1-6

¹ *Do not fret because of those who are evil
or be envious of those who do wrong;*

² *for like the grass they will soon wither,
like green plants they will soon die away.*

³ *Trust in the LORD and do good;
dwell in the land and enjoy safe pasture.*

⁴ *Take delight in the LORD,
and he will give you the desires of your heart.*

⁵ *Commit your way to the LORD;
trust in him and he will do this:*

⁶ *He will make your righteous reward shine like the dawn,
your vindication like the noonday sun.*

***He will make your righteousness shine like the dawn, and the justice of your
cause like the noon day sun.***

Bottom line: *God fights for us!*

I think I'll quit here for tonight. We'll pick up the story next week.

¹ Paul looked straight at the Sanhedrin and said, “My brothers, I have fulfilled my duty to God in all good conscience to this day.” ² At this the high priest Ananias ordered those standing near Paul to strike him on the mouth. ³ Then Paul said to him, “God will strike you, you whitewashed wall! You sit there to judge me according to the law, yet you yourself violate the law by commanding that I be struck!”

⁴ Those who were standing near Paul said, “How dare you insult God’s high priest!”

⁵ Paul replied, “Brothers, I did not realize that he was the high priest; for it is written: ‘Do not speak evil about the ruler of your people.’”

⁶ Then Paul, knowing that some of them were Sadducees and the others Pharisees, called out in the Sanhedrin, “My brothers, I am a Pharisee, descended from Pharisees. I stand on trial because of the hope of the resurrection of the dead.” ⁷ When he said this, a dispute broke out between the Pharisees and the Sadducees, and the assembly was divided. ⁸ (The Sadducees say that there is no resurrection, and that there are neither angels nor spirits, but the Pharisees believe all these things.)

⁹ There was a great uproar, and some of the teachers of the law who were Pharisees stood up and argued vigorously. “We find nothing wrong with this man,” they said. “What if a spirit or an angel has spoken to him?” ¹⁰ The dispute became so violent that the commander was afraid Paul would be torn to pieces by them. He ordered the troops to go down and take him away from them by force and bring him into the barracks.

¹¹ The following night the Lord stood near Paul and said, “Take courage! As you have testified about me in Jerusalem, so you must also testify in Rome.”

Let’s unpack what is happening here:

First of all, a refresher on the Sanhedrin, the Sadducees, and Pharisees.

The Sanhedrin:

What is the Sanhedrin? *The Sanhedrin was the assembly of the temple elders.*

It was literally the Jewish court system. It was an assembly of 71 sages, some Pharisees, some Sadducees. They met in a special room at the temple. They met daily, except for the sabbath and during festivals. The Sanhedrin was the final authority on Jewish law and anyone who went against its decisions was put to death.

Can you imagine the tradition? The pious atmosphere in that room? The Sanhedrin had a reputation for being pompous and overextending their authority. They often made judgments and even invoked punishments that weren't as much about God's law as they were about their own agendas and egos.

(show pic) This is the same Sanhedrin who questioned Peter and John back in Chapter 4 when they healed the lame man.

Pharisees:

The Pharisees were members of an elite Jewish sect, dating back to ancient times. They were known for their strict observance of the traditional and written law. They had a reputation for being pretentious and pious, claiming superiority over the common Jew.

They were well-trained in the Torah, and came from all the right families, wore all the right robes (show pic). The very name Pharisee became a word picture of someone who was pious and self-righteous. BTW...Paul, or Saul, was a Pharisee.

So, was Jesus impressed with the Pharisees' training and knowledge? *Jesus often clashed with the Pharisees and used them as examples in His instruction.*

Matthew 5:20

²⁰ For I tell you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven.

And check this out. Jesus used in a story, compared to a tax collector:

Luke 18:9-14

The Parable of the Pharisee and the Tax Collector

⁹ To some who were confident of their own righteousness and looked down on everyone else, Jesus told this parable: ¹⁰ "Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. ¹¹ The Pharisee stood by himself and prayed: 'God, I thank you that I am not like other people—robbers, evildoers, adulterers—or even like this tax collector. ¹² I fast twice a week and give a tenth of all I get.'

¹³ "But the tax collector stood at a distance. He would not even look up to heaven, but beat his breast and said, 'God, have mercy on me, a sinner.'

14 “I tell you that this man, rather than the other, went home justified before God. For all those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted.”

So that’s the Pharisees. How about the Sadducees?

The Sadducees were the party of high priests, and mostly from wealthy and aristocratic families. They were politicians who maintained a good relationship with the Roman rulers in the area of Jerusalem. They dominated the temple and the priesthood, and claimed that their family lines, and social and economic status gave them their authority.

The Sadducees held tight to the written Torah as the only authority (the first five books of the Old Testament). They didn’t believe in the priestly written or oral traditions. *The Sadducees were the epitome of legalism.* They, and the Pharisees, were the group John the Baptist called a Brood of Vipers.

Matthew 3:7

7 But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming to where he was baptizing, he said to them: “You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the coming wrath?”

The compromise of the Sadducees with the Romans, along with their haughty and pompous positions, caused the common Jew to hate the Sadducees.

But the most interesting thing about the Sadducees was their denial of the resurrection, and of spirits, including demons or angels.

So with all this in mind, you can understand the Sadducee’s concern for anything having to do with Jesus, His teachings, or His disciples.

With Jesus Himself, they tested Him several times, trying to catch Him saying something they could convict Him on.

Let’s look at this scene in Matthew 22:23-33

23 That same day the Sadducees, who say there is no resurrection, came to him with a question. 24 “Teacher,” they said, “Moses told us that if a man dies without having children, his brother must marry the widow and raise up offspring for him.

25 Now there were seven brothers among us. The first one married and died, and

since he had no children, he left his wife to his brother. ²⁶ The same thing happened to the second and third brother, right on down to the seventh. ²⁷ Finally, the woman died. ²⁸ Now then, at the resurrection, whose wife will she be of the seven, since all of them were married to her?"

²⁹ Jesus replied, "You are in error because you do not know the Scriptures or the power of God. ³⁰ At the resurrection people will neither marry nor be given in marriage; they will be like the angels in heaven. ³¹ But about the resurrection of the dead—have you not read what God said to you, ³² 'I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob'? He is not the God of the dead but of the living."

³³ When the crowds heard this, they were astonished at his teaching.

In this scene the Sadducees asked Jesus a hypothetical question, but notice its ridiculous nature. They were setting Him up, apparently trying to show the nonsense of the idea of the resurrection. But notice, Jesus didn't bite.

Instead, look at what He said.

²⁹ Jesus replied, "You are in error because you do not know the Scriptures or the power of God.

Jesus knew how to go right to the heart of the matter. *You are in error because you do not know the Scriptures or the power of God.*

What a statement to make. They were the most legalistic, pompous, and pious Jews around, priding themselves on their knowledge of the law. They saw themselves as God's enforcers. Their religion was their career.

Yet, in all of this...they didn't really *know*.

Is it possible to be guilty of that today? Knowing scripture...memorized, judging others by it, and even making a career of it, but not really *knowing* it...not *living* it...not having any *power* because of it?

You'd better believe it, and we will see even more of it as we approach Jesus' return.

Look at how Paul warned of this:

2 Timothy 3:1-5

¹ *But mark this: There will be terrible times in the last days. ² People will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boastful, proud, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, ³ without love, unforgiving, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not lovers of the good, ⁴ treacherous, rash, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God— ⁵ having a form of godliness but denying its power. Have nothing to do with such people.*

Look at that:

⁵ *having a form of godliness but denying its power. Have nothing to do with such people.*

That was a perfect picture of the Sadducees.

But Jesus wasn't done...look what He said next:

³⁰ *At the resurrection people will neither marry nor be given in marriage; they will be like the angels in heaven.*

Jesus was addressing their question of marriage in heaven. But really, if you look closely, He was really making two other emphatic statements.

1. **There is a resurrection**
2. **There are angels**

The Sadducees didn't believe in the supernatural...angels, or the resurrection.

And basically, Jesus was saying “Here you thought you knew scripture, but you don't because you don't believe in its power”

One writer put it this way:

*“The Sadducees denied supernatural truths such as the existence of angelic beings and the bodily resurrection. They had a fundamental doubt of **the power of God** to do beyond what they could measure and understand in the material world; many today are like the Sadducees in this respect.”*

The idea being:

If you knew the power of God, you would know that God is able to raise the dead...If you knew the Scriptures, you would know that God will raise the dead.”

Now we understand a little better what was going on in tonight's story.

I'll close with this question:

Here is Paul, a rogue, misfit, Jewish man. Formerly a Pharisee, taking on the staunch established church...standing before the leaders of God's temple.

Who was right – who was wrong? Is there any way of knowing?

Look at v11 of tonight's text:

¹¹ The following night the Lord stood near Paul and said, "Take courage! As you have testified about me in Jerusalem, so you must also testify in Rome."

Notice that...The Lord! He didn't send a prophet or an angel. The Lord Himself came to comfort him. But more than that, he gave His approval of what Paul was doing. So much for all the pomp and tradition of the high priests. They genuinely thought they were doing right.

But their heart wasn't in the right place.

Isaiah 29:13

¹³ The Lord says:

*"These people come near to me with their mouth
and honor me with their lips,
but their hearts are far from me.*

Their worship of me

is based on merely human rules they have been taught.

We'll pick it back up next week.

Acts 22:1-30

¹ *“Brothers and fathers, listen now to my defense.”* **(He had a right to defend himself. He had been accused falsely)**

² *When they heard him speak to them in Aramaic, they became very quiet.* **(Aramaic was a Hebrew dialect. So for him to speak in this language gave him instance credibility with the Jews. Remember, he had just been accused of abandoning the Jewish traditions)**

Then Paul said: ³ *“I am a Jew, born in Tarsus of Cilicia, but brought up in this city. I studied under Gamaliel and was thoroughly trained in the law of our ancestors. I was just as zealous for God as any of you are today. (he is connecting with them...I am one of you. I used to act and think just like you. And now he demonstrates how zealous he was for the Jewish traditions...)* ⁴ *I persecuted the followers of this Way to their death, arresting both men and women and throwing them into prison,* ⁵ *as the high priest and all the Council can themselves testify. I even obtained letters from them to their associates in Damascus, and went there to bring these people as prisoners to Jerusalem to be punished. (This is an interesting thing to say to a crowd that tried to kill him. He more than *tried* to kill Christians...he *did* kill them. In other words, he was more radical than they are. There was some real irony in this scene, but again, we see him connecting with them)*

⁶ “About noon as I came near Damascus, suddenly a bright light from heaven flashed around me. ⁷ I fell to the ground and heard a voice say to me, ‘Saul! Saul! Why do you persecute me?’

⁸ “‘Who are you, Lord?’ I asked.

“ ‘I am Jesus of Nazareth, whom you are persecuting,’ he replied. ⁹ My companions saw the light, but they did not understand the voice of him who was speaking to me.

¹⁰ “‘What shall I do, Lord?’ I asked.

“ ‘Get up,’ the Lord said, ‘and go into Damascus. There you will be told all that you have been assigned to do.’ ¹¹ My companions led me by the hand into Damascus, because the brilliance of the light had blinded me.

¹² “A man named Ananias came to see me. He was a devout observer of the law and highly respected by all the Jews living there. ¹³ He stood beside me and said, ‘Brother Saul, receive your sight!’ And at that very moment I was able to see him.

¹⁴ “Then he said: ‘The God of our ancestors has chosen you to know his will and to see the Righteous One and to hear words from his mouth. ¹⁵ You will be his witness to all people of what you have seen and heard. ¹⁶ And now what are you waiting for? Get up, be baptized and wash your sins away, calling on his name.’

What is he doing here? He is sharing his testimony.

A testimony has three parts: Where we were, what God did for us, and where we are now.

So with that definition in mind, We each have a testimony.

We can’t say “I don’t have a testimony because I wasn’t a drug addict, or I didn’t kill Christians like Paul.”

There is no hierarchy or pecking order with sin. Sin is sin. We are the ones to categorize it as if some are worse than others.

Romans 3:23-24

²³ for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, ²⁴ and all are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus.

Romans 6:23

²³ For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

All believers have received the gift of grace equally.

So whether we are the drug addict under a bridge, or the president of the local PTA, we are sinners in need of a Savior.

So indeed, you have a testimony!

Why is a testimony important? A few quick things about testimonies:

First: A Testimony shows we can relate to those who are struggling.

It's about being real. And that is what we see Paul doing – relating to the Jews...finding common ground. Showing transparency and vulnerability.

Transparency and honesty are great evangelistic tools.

A great way to endear yourself to someone.

Also: A testimony is like medicine for shame.

What do I mean by that? God made us for relationships...connection. When we have had trauma, abuse, hurts, when we have made bad mistakes, experienced losses...these produce barriers to these connections. Emotional barriers...relational barriers...even psychological barriers. These barriers isolate us. One of the best ways to break out of that isolation is to give our testimony. To muster up the courage to share the things that we have been shamed for – it is like pouring disinfectant on a wound.

And for the person *listening* to the testimony, it can be a catalyst for their healing. For one, it tells them they are not weird...they are not alone. It gives hope when you hear of someone that struggled like you, yet overcame. It is easy to think...Hey, maybe it will work for me too. It is easier for a person to begin coming out of isolation when they can connect with someone else through the honesty of sharing their struggle.

Also, another point: A testimony is our own story, and not open for debate.

(expand on)

“A man with an experience of God is never at the mercy of a man with an argument.”

— Leonard Ravenhill

Reminds me of the blind man healed by Jesus in John 9. (give summary)

²⁵ He replied, “Whether he is a sinner or not, I don’t know. One thing I do know. I was blind but now I see!”

And lastly: *A testimony helps us overcome as we give it.*

Revelation 12:11

¹¹ And they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony

Getting back to Paul’s defense:

¹⁷ “When I returned to Jerusalem and was praying at the temple, I fell into a trance ¹⁸ and saw the Lord speaking to me. ‘Quick!’ he said. ‘Leave Jerusalem immediately, because the people here will not accept your testimony about me.’

¹⁹ “‘Lord,’ I replied, ‘these people know that I went from one synagogue to another to imprison and beat those who believe in you. ²⁰ And when the blood of your martyr Stephen was shed, I stood there giving my approval and guarding the clothes of those who were killing him.’

²¹ “Then the Lord said to me, ‘Go; I will send you far away to the Gentiles.’ ”

Did you notice that? Did you see the grace in that? God told Paul He had a great work for him to do. Paul told God he was disqualified because of His past.

Why didn’t God even acknowledge Paul’s rebuttal?

Because *Paul’s sins were forgotten the moment he confessed them.* (and the same with us)

Paul’s past did not disqualify him for his future.

Psalm 103:8-12

*⁸ The LORD is compassionate and gracious,
slow to anger, abounding in love.*

*⁹ He will not always accuse,
nor will he harbor his anger forever;*

*¹⁰ he does not treat us as our sins deserve
or repay us according to our iniquities.*

¹¹ For as high as the heavens are above the earth,
so great is his love for those who fear him;

¹² as far as the east is from the west,
so far has he removed our transgressions from us.

God doesn't hold our past against us – we shouldn't either!

This also reminds me of the prodigal son story. Getting back to the story...

Paul the Roman Citizen

²² The crowd listened to Paul until he said this. Then they raised their voices and shouted, “Rid the earth of him! He’s not fit to live!”

²³ As they were shouting and throwing off their cloaks and flinging dust into the air, ²⁴ the commander ordered that Paul be taken into the barracks. He directed that he be flogged and interrogated in order to find out why the people were shouting at him like this. ²⁵ As they stretched him out to flog him, Paul said to the centurion standing there, “Is it legal for you to flog a Roman citizen who hasn’t even been found guilty?”

²⁶ When the centurion heard this, he went to the commander and reported it. “What are you going to do?” he asked. “This man is a Roman citizen.”

²⁷ The commander went to Paul and asked, “Tell me, are you a Roman citizen?”
“Yes, I am,” he answered.

²⁸ Then the commander said, “I had to pay a lot of money for my citizenship.”
“But I was born a citizen,” Paul replied.

²⁹ Those who were about to interrogate him withdrew immediately. The commander himself was alarmed when he realized that he had put Paul, a Roman citizen, in chains.

Paul Before the Sanhedrin

³⁰ The commander wanted to find out exactly why Paul was being accused by the Jews. So the next day he released him and ordered the chief priests and all the members of the Sanhedrin to assemble. Then he brought Paul and had him stand before them.

²⁶ *The next day Paul took the men and purified himself along with them. Then he went to the temple to give notice of the date when the days of purification would end and the offering would be made for each of them. (explain)*

Paul Arrested

²⁷ *When the seven days were nearly over, some Jews from the province of Asia saw Paul at the temple. They stirred up the whole crowd and seized him, ²⁸ shouting, “Fellow Israelites, help us! This is the man who teaches everyone everywhere against our people and our law and this place. (3 areas...people, law, and the temple. Yet, the truth is, Paul hadn’t said anything other than state that *these things don’t save us*. It is only through faith in Jesus Christ that we are saved. Paul had a unique way of keeping that razor sharp focus. He said in*

1 Corinthians 2:2

² *For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified.*

Talk about keeping the main thing the main thing!
The simplicity of the Gospel kept Paul laser-focused.

A theme of tonight’s study could be “focus”. Paul was focused on the main thing. See, here’s the thing about focus:

You can’t focus on more than one thing at the same time.

We do have the ability to see more than one thing, but not *focus*.

Bruce Lee said:

“The successful warrior is the average man, with laser-like focus.”

And here’s why focus is so important:

We will naturally move toward the object of our focus. motorcycling

German Silva (show pic) – 1994 NY Marathon

OK, what’s my point?

Guys, I am concerned that today, it would be easy for the church to lose its focus.

I’ve read the book, God wins in the end. The right now, Satan is seemingly winning by using all the turmoil in the world to get people distracted, anxious, and divided. And that includes the church!

Guys, God is calling us back to our first love!

Back to where the main thing is the main thing. And the main thing is Jesus! The simplicity of the power of the Gospel story.

I believe that revival can occur right in the middle of what we are living in.

I believe God spoke to us about break out and breakthrough!

But I also believe *God is waiting for us to be in position for breakthrough!*

And that position is *Belief and Obedience.*

We can’t be in position if our focus is divided.

Question: *In an average day, what is the object of your focus?* There are many things today demanding our attention.

It was Paul’s laser-sharp focus that enabled him to remain undaunted by all the chaos going on around him. Can we say the same?

What I mean by this talk of position and focus is this:

Our focus is determined by our vantage point.

Vantage point: *position or standpoint from which something is viewed or considered*

(show pic of optical illusion)

I submit that:

As believers, there are two distinct vantage points we operate from: Spirit and Flesh.

(And they each have their own payoff!)

John 3:6

⁶ Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit.

If we pray for healing, and position ourselves with focus, we won't miss the Healer when He comes to heal. (reviving, delivering, etc)

Getting back to our story, the accusations continue to fly about Paul in v28:

And besides, he has brought Greeks into the temple and defiled this holy place.” ²⁹ (They had previously seen Trophimus the Ephesian in the city with Paul and assumed that Paul had brought him into the temple.) **This too was slander. It wasn't true at all. Gentiles were allowed in the courts of the temple, but not beyond that. In fact, there was a sign posted there saying so. Paul was very aware of that law. There was no evidence he brought Gentiles into the temple, but the accusers knew this accusation would enrage the other Jews.**

³⁰ *The whole city was aroused, and the people came running from all directions. Seizing Paul, they dragged him from the temple, and immediately the gates were shut. As I read this, I thought it was a little ironic. I remembered the similar scene in Acts 7 regarding Stephen, the first martyr*

Acts 7:54-58

⁵⁴ *When the members of the Sanhedrin heard this, they were furious and gnashed their teeth at him.* ⁵⁵ *But Stephen, full of the Holy Spirit, looked up to heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God.* ⁵⁶ *“Look,” he said, “I see heaven open and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God.”*

⁵⁷ At this they covered their ears and, yelling at the top of their voices, they all rushed at him, ⁵⁸ dragged him out of the city and began to stone him. Meanwhile, the witnesses laid their coats at the feet of a young man named Saul.

And by the way, the next chapter opens with:

Acts 8:1

⁸ And Saul approved of their killing him.

The Church Persecuted and Scattered

On that day a great persecution broke out against the church in Jerusalem, and all except the apostles were scattered throughout Judea and Samaria.

Getting back to tonight's story, v31:

³¹ While they were trying to kill him, news reached the commander of the Roman troops that the whole city of Jerusalem was in an uproar. ³² He at once took some officers and soldiers and ran down to the crowd. When the rioters saw the commander and his soldiers, they stopped beating Paul.

³³ The commander came up and arrested him and ordered him to be bound with two chains. **This was serious. Not just one but two chains. This was what was prophesied about his earlier in chapter 21 before he went to Jerusalem:**

Acts 21:11

¹¹ Coming over to us, he took Paul's belt, tied his own hands and feet with it and said, "The Holy Spirit says, 'In this way the Jewish leaders in Jerusalem will bind the owner of this belt and will hand him over to the Gentiles.'"

Then he (**the commander**) asked who he was and what he had done. ³⁴ Some in the crowd shouted one thing and some another, and since the commander could not get at the truth because of the uproar, he ordered that Paul be taken into the barracks. ³⁵ When Paul reached the steps, the violence of the mob was so great he had to be carried by the soldiers. ³⁶ The crowd that followed kept shouting, "Get rid of him!"

Don't think for a moment the soldiers were sympathizing with Paul, they were just trying to keep order.

We have to remember...Paul was prepared for this.

Paul Speaks to the Crowd

³⁷ As the soldiers were about to take Paul into the barracks, he asked the commander, “May I say something to you?”

“Do you speak Greek?” he replied. ³⁸ “Aren’t you the Egyptian who started a revolt and led four thousand terrorists out into the wilderness some time ago?”

³⁹ Paul answered, “I am a Jew, from Tarsus in Cilicia, a citizen of no ordinary city. Please let me speak to the people.”

⁴⁰ After receiving the commander’s permission, Paul stood on the steps and motioned to the crowd. When they were all silent, he said to them in Aramaic:

This is where we will end tonight.

This worried several of the believers and even the other apostles. But Paul wasn't worried at all of the dangers of going to Jerusalem. The Holy Spirit warned him of what he would be facing. Yet Paul remained resolute to go. Look at what he said in v13

¹³ Then Paul answered, "Why are you weeping and breaking my heart? I am ready not only to be bound, but also to die in Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus."

What gives a man this kind of resolve?

Paul was convinced that because of Christ, dying was better than living.

With that resolve Paul did go back to Jerusalem. Tonight, we'll look at that return:

Acts 21:17-40

Paul's Arrival at Jerusalem

¹⁷ When we arrived at Jerusalem, the brothers and sisters (including James and the other elders) received us warmly. ¹⁸ The next day Paul and the rest of us went to see James, and all the elders were present. ¹⁹ Paul greeted them and reported in detail (likely great detail) what God had done among the Gentiles through his ministry.

*²⁰ When they heard this, they praised God. Then they said to Paul: "You see, brother, how many thousands of Jews have believed, and all of them are zealous for the law. (in the area of Jerusalem, most Christians came from Jewish decent, and they still practiced many of the Jewish traditions. Was that a problem? Well, let's read on) ²¹ They have been informed that you teach all the Jews who live among the Gentiles to turn away from Moses, telling them not to circumcise their children or live according to our customs. ²² What shall we do? They will certainly hear that you have come, (what's going on here? Notice it says "they have been informed". Informed by whom? There were slanderous rumors floating around about Paul. He had *not* told them to abandon their Jewish heritage...he was *not* anti-Jewish. There was nothing wrong with retaining their heritage, he himself still practiced some of those traditions. His point all along was – these traditions in and of themselves were not wrong, as long as they didn't think these traditions saved them. He addressed that very plainly in*

Ephesians 2:8-9

⁸ For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—⁹ not by works, so that no one can boast.

But again, Paul himself held to some of the old traditions. In fact, a few weeks ago, we discussed the Nazarite vow of purification he took.

And look at what he said in Romans 14

Romans 14:1-13

¹ Accept the one whose faith is weak, without quarreling over disputable matters. ² One person's faith allows them to eat anything, but another, whose faith is weak, eats only vegetables. ³ The one who eats everything must not treat with contempt the one who does not, and the one who does not eat everything must not judge the one who does, for God has accepted them. ⁴ Who are you to judge someone else's servant? To their own master, servants stand or fall. And they will stand, for the Lord is able to make them stand.

⁵ One person considers one day more sacred than another; another considers every day alike. Each of them should be fully convinced in their own mind. ⁶ Whoever regards one day as special does so to the Lord. Whoever eats meat does so to the Lord, for they give thanks to God; and whoever abstains does so to the Lord and gives thanks to God.

And look at what Paul says is more important than the traditions themselves:

¹³ Therefore let us stop passing judgment on one another. Instead, make up your mind not to put any stumbling block or obstacle in the way of a brother or sister.

Do we have freedom in Christ? Absolutely! But:

We should never let the freedom we have in Christ cause someone else to stumble.

A few verses later:

Romans 14:16-19 New King James Version

¹⁶ Therefore do not let your good be spoken of as evil

Looking at Paul in this story, there was no basis for the accusations being thrown out.

So again, he was being falsely represented...slandered...false rumors.

Question: What do you do when you are being falsely represented or slandered?

David knew about this...

Psalm 27:1-3

¹ *The LORD is my light and my salvation—
whom shall I fear?*

*The LORD is the stronghold of my life—
of whom shall I be afraid?*

² *When the wicked advance against me
to devour^[a] me,*

*it is my enemies and my foes
who will stumble and fall.*

³ *Though an army besiege me,
my heart will not fear;
though war break out against me,
even then I will be confident.*

Footnotes

a. Psalm 27:2 Or *slander*

Slander: Make false and damaging statements about someone.

David didn't take too kindly to slander:

Psalm 101:5

⁵ *Whoever slanders their neighbor in secret,
I will put to silence;
whoever has haughty eyes and a proud heart,
I will not tolerate.*

Jesus said:

Matthew 15:19

¹⁹ *For out of the heart come evil thoughts—murder, adultery, sexual immorality,
theft, false testimony, slander.*

Slander is grouped with murder, adultery, and sexual immorality.

And we are told:

Ephesians 4:31

³¹ *Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice.*

We need to be careful when, out of our anger towards someone, we want to lash out and slander them.

Remember: *You rarely need to apologize for what you don't say.*

Looking further at David's example, he knew about slander. Many people slandered him and plotted his destruction. But he also knew of the faithfulness of God to fight for him.

So what do we do if we are slandered? Defend ourselves? Sure, why not. Nothing wrong with speaking up if we have been falsely accused. But more than that...

If we have been slandered, we must rely of God's vindication.

Psalm 37:5-9

⁵ *Commit your way to the LORD;
trust in him and he will do this:*

⁶ *He will make your righteous reward shine like the dawn,
your vindication like the noonday sun. (justice of your cause like the noon...)*

⁷ *Be still before the LORD
and wait patiently for him;
do not fret when people succeed in their ways,
when they carry out their wicked schemes.*

⁸ *Refrain from anger and turn from wrath;
do not fret—it leads only to evil.*

⁹ *For those who are evil will be destroyed,
but those who hope in the LORD will inherit the land.*

Vindication: *God fighting for our cause.* (justice...our name is cleared)

Getting back to Paul's story tonight, I don't see him fretting, or turning to anger because of his slanderers. Let's pick the story back up:

²³ *so do what we tell you. There are four men with us who have made a vow. ²⁴ Take these men, join in their purification rites and pay their expenses, so that they can have their heads shaved. (not only join them, but pay their*

expenses...i.e. sponsor them, endorse and participate in what they're doing) Then everyone will know there is no truth in these reports about you, but that you yourself are living in obedience to the law. **(the Jewish leaders wanted to show the Jewish people Paul wasn't anti-Jew)** ²⁵ As for the Gentile believers, we have written to them our decision that they should abstain from food sacrificed to idols, from blood, from the meat of strangled animals and from sexual immorality." **The Gentiles weren't subject to the traditions and rituals the Jews were. However, they did require instruction. This shows the heart of the leaders of the church, and their concern for the new believers. If you recall, this message to the Gentiles goes back to Acts chapter 15, where the leaders of the church heard about Judaizers coming into the areas of Antioch, Syria and Cilicia and telling the new Gentile believers they must adhere to the Old Testament traditions of the Jews. Let's take a look at the letter they wrote and see if any of it sounds familiar:**

Acts 15:24-29

²⁴ We have heard that some went out from us without our authorization and disturbed you, troubling your minds by what they said. ²⁵ So we all agreed to choose some men and send them to you with our dear friends Barnabas and Paul—²⁶ men who have risked their lives for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. ²⁷ Therefore we are sending Judas and Silas to confirm by word of mouth what we are writing. ²⁸ It seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us not to burden you with anything beyond the following requirements: ²⁹ You are to abstain from food sacrificed to idols, from blood, from the meat of strangled animals and from sexual immorality. You will do well to avoid these things. Farewell.

Look at the Holy Spirit's confirmation of what they saying. Clearly, the church leaders had prayed diligently about this important matter, and were following the Holy Spirit. That's a pretty good endorsement.

And the message being:

We are glad you are part of us. You were not trained in the Jewish customs, and we don't want to saddle you with impossible rules that we ourselves can't even keep. But lifestyle is important, your life should show that you have been saved by grace. Therefore, here are the essentials we want you to practice in order to be in fellowship.

29 You are to abstain from food sacrificed to idols, from blood, from the meat of strangled animals and from sexual immorality. You will do well to avoid these things.

Why just these things? Are these really the only things that mattered? You don't see these mentioned as the essentials with the Jewish people. What's going on here? Is there a double standard? Are they lowering the bar for the Gentiles? Here's the bottom line. These specific requirements were given to the Gentiles in this region because all three areas had to do with idol worship.

They were prevalent pagan practices in the culture of that region. (we went over each of them a few weeks ago)

The church leaders were preventing the culture from infiltrating the church.

Do we still need to practice that today?

Next week, we will continue and see that Paul did go through this purification process with these men and was then arrested.

Philippians 1:21-24

²¹ For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain. ²² If I am to go on living in the body, this will mean fruitful labor for me. Yet what shall I choose? I do not know! ²³ I am torn between the two: I desire to depart and be with Christ, which is better by far; ²⁴ but it is more necessary for you that I remain in the body.

Unpack

Once we determine that heaven is better than life on earth, we can live our lives for Christ and others!

Think about that...the grave is not the end...it's just the beginning!

What's the opposite? For those who don't have this promise, the grave is the end, so why not live life to the fullest...get all you can...you only go around once, right?!

But Paul knew this world was not the end. And we can't take it with us.

1 Corinthians 15:50-55

⁵⁰ I declare to you, brothers and sisters, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable. ⁵¹ Listen, I tell you a mystery: We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed— ⁵² in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed. ⁵³ For the perishable must clothe itself with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality. ⁵⁴ When the perishable has been clothed with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality, then the saying that is written will come true: "Death has been swallowed up in victory."^[h]

*⁵⁵ "Where, O death, is your victory?
Where, O death, is your sting?"^[i]*

h. Isaiah 25:8

i. Hosea 13:14

And to the church in Rome he said:

Romans 8:18

¹⁸ I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us.

What is a takeaway for us in this? Does this change perspective? This is all about perspective, isn't it?

Imagine what we could do if we had no fear!

Fear of death...Another similar term is *death anxiety*.

Much has been said about the fear of death.

Woody Allen said: *"I'm not afraid of death. I just don't want to be there when it happens."*

The fear of death and death anxiety are the most prevalent fear among adults. Statistically, more with women than men. A close second is public speaking, BTW...The fear of death is so common, there is a name for the study of it... *thanatology*.

There are many ways the pandemic has changed us. One of those ways is that we have become increasingly aware of our mortality. (expand)

The fear of death can obviously lead to anxiety (thus, death anxiety). And this can have all the effects on us that we know anxiety brings.

Makes us timid...overly cautious...even neurotic...unwilling to risk or adventure...

The fear of dying can cause us to miss out on living.

(the only thing more tragic than death....)

God doesn't want us to live in fear of anything, including death.

So let's do something a little different tonight and take an intentional approach...let's talk about death and the fear of death with open eyes tonight...and address it from a Biblical standpoint.

I thought a good way to do this would be to address the underlying issues associated with an unhealthy fear of death, and address each one of them with scripture.

First, let's talk about the obvious...*Fear of physical pain and suffering.*

This is real and legitimate. Who wants to suffer, right?

In fact, much of what they do in palliative care is help alleviate pain and keep the patient comfortable. (quality of life)

I'd love to tell you the Bible says God takes away all physical pain, but I can't. Pain, even physical pain, is part of life in a fallen state. (goes back to the garden) I can tell you, though:

God promises to ease our suffering.

1 Peter 5:10

¹⁰ And the God of all grace, who called you to his eternal glory in Christ, after you have suffered a little while, will himself restore you and make you strong, firm and steadfast.

And Paul was a man who knew pain:

2 Corinthians 11:24-27

²⁴ Five times I received from the Jews the forty lashes minus one. ²⁵ Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was pelted with stones, three times I was shipwrecked, I spent a night and a day in the open sea, ²⁶ I have been constantly on the move. I have been in danger from rivers, in danger from bandits, in danger from my fellow Jews, in danger from Gentiles; in danger in the city, in danger in the country, in danger at sea; and in danger from false believers. ²⁷ I have labored and toiled and have often gone without sleep; I have known hunger and thirst and have often gone without food; I have been cold and naked.

And yet he said:

Romans 8:18

¹⁸ I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us.

We have the promise that after death, there will be no more pain.

Revelation 21:4

⁴ 'He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death' or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.'

Let's now move on to the *next* most obvious aspect of the fear of death: *Fear of absolute vulnerability.*

Some people try to control everything in their lives, even their death. Listen, when death comes, there is absolutely nothing you can do about it. The strong, the weak, the rich, the poor, death is the great equalizer.

Job said:

Job 1:21

²¹ ∴ "Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked I will depart.

The LORD gave and the LORD has taken away; may the name of the LORD be praised."

When death comes, you will not have time to do your makeup, finish up your to-do list, spiffy up your investment portfolio...you will not dictate anything...death is indiscriminate.

But we as believers have already embraced the idea that our lives are not our own...and this enables us to be at peace when it happens, however it happens.

Matthew 10:39

³⁹ Whoever finds their life will lose it, and whoever loses their life for my sake will find it.

1 Corinthians 6:19

¹⁹ Do you not know that your bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own

So we obviously have no control over ourselves at death, but part of this fear of having no control is fear for what will happen to our loved ones when we're gone.

Story of young couple who died of COVID.

What promises do we have as believers about this? Guys – parents - simply put: *We must be able to move from fear-based parenting to trust-based parenting.*

We must trust our kids to the God the loves them even more than we do.

Our kids need to be able to experience the freedom of being a child without an out-of-control anxious parent controlling and dictating their every move.

Guys – we need to learn how to let our kids go...and trust them in the hands of God. Pray for them...trust that God has good plans for them.

Another common aspect of the fear of death: *Fear of damnation.*

This requires no explanation. It is common to fear eternal punishment for what we have done. Especially if we struggle with shame.

But again, we are looking at this from the perspective of a believer...what does the bible say about this?

Romans 8:1-2

¹ Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, ² because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit who gives life has set you free from the law of sin and death.

(we need look no further than the thief on the cross)

The last aspect I want to address tonight: *Fear of the unknown.*

What's out there on the other side? Will I simply cease to exist?

Does the light simply burn out and then that's it?

This is so common that there's a name for this: *Existential death anxiety.*

It is fueled by nagging questions: "*Is this all there is? Is death really the end?*"

Nothing in this life is sure except death and taxes, the old saying goes. We all know we are heading to the grave...there is no avoiding it. We ignore it...just don't think about. But we do think about it...we can't help it. And if we are not sure what is on the other side, the thought is almost unbearable.

I mean, if the grave really is the end, then what is the purpose in it all?

Are we here just to get through life, and get what we can before we leave?

This quandary must absolutely haunt an unbeliever. No wonder since the dawn of time we've pondered the meaning of life.

Our mortality is a weighty dilemma that demands consideration.

I mean, despite all our advancements, no one has escaped death!

We know that, but we don't want to consider it. Without the hope of heaven, we can't bear up under its load. So, enter stage left...*denial*.

But for us believers, we do have the hope of heaven.

Our hope of heaven enables us to face death without denial. So indeed, where O death is your victory...where O death is your sting?

We, as believers, have the truth that sets us free.

Death is not the end. Actually, it is really the beginning.

In fact, it could be said: *Death is a doorway to our destiny.*
One way or the other.

What happens when we die?

As believers, if we die before Jesus' return, we will be immediately spiritually united with Jesus. Our earthly body stays earthly and decays, or is cremated. There is no holding place, or temporary waiting period.

We have that hope. Paul had that hope. That's what gave him the tenacity to face what he knew was coming in Jerusalem.

Because of Paul's healthy view of death, he wanted to optimize his time while he was alive.

Guys: Death can never be fully understood by anyone who is living, but we can at least let it drive us to live life to the fullest while we are living.

Someone said:

"The only people who fear death are those with regrets." Anonymous

I'm not sure I completely agree with that, but I understand the spirit behind it.

Make the most of your time here on earth. Experience God's love and healing so you can live life to the fullest! Don't go to bed angry...always say I love you. Don't wait til tomorrow to forgive. Don't take your loved ones for granted. Make that phone call you've been putting off. Kiss your spouse passionately...And most of all...*live like you're loved!*

Let's pick it up in Chapter 21

Acts 21:17-40

¹⁷ When we arrived at Jerusalem, the brothers and sisters received us warmly. ¹⁸ The next day Paul and the rest of us went to see James, and all the elders were present. ¹⁹ Paul greeted them and reported in detail what God had done among the Gentiles through his ministry.

²⁰ When they heard this, they praised God. Then they said to Paul: "You see, brother, how many thousands of Jews have believed, and all of them are zealous for the law. ²¹ They have been informed that you teach all the Jews who live among the Gentiles to turn away from Moses, telling them not to circumcise their children or live according to our customs. ²² What shall we do? They will certainly hear that you have come, ²³ so do what we tell you. There are four men with us who have made a vow. ²⁴ Take these men, join in their purification rites and pay their expenses, so that they can have their heads shaved. Then everyone will

know there is no truth in these reports about you, but that you yourself are living in obedience to the law. ²⁵ As for the Gentile believers, we have written to them our decision that they should abstain from food sacrificed to idols, from blood, from the meat of strangled animals and from sexual immorality.”

²⁶ The next day Paul took the men and purified himself along with them. Then he went to the temple to give notice of the date when the days of purification would end and the offering would be made for each of them.

Paul Arrested

²⁷ When the seven days were nearly over, some Jews from the province of Asia saw Paul at the temple. They stirred up the whole crowd and seized him, ²⁸ shouting, “Fellow Israelites, help us! This is the man who teaches everyone everywhere against our people and our law and this place. And besides, he has brought Greeks into the temple and defiled this holy place.” ²⁹ (They had previously seen Trophimus the Ephesian in the city with Paul and assumed that Paul had brought him into the temple.)

³⁰ The whole city was aroused, and the people came running from all directions. Seizing Paul, they dragged him from the temple, and immediately the gates were shut. ³¹ While they were trying to kill him, news reached the commander of the Roman troops that the whole city of Jerusalem was in an uproar. ³² He at once took some officers and soldiers and ran down to the crowd. When the rioters saw the commander and his soldiers, they stopped beating Paul.

³³ The commander came up and arrested him and ordered him to be bound with two chains. Then he asked who he was and what he had done. ³⁴ Some in the crowd shouted one thing and some another, and since the commander could not get at the truth because of the uproar, he ordered that Paul be taken into the barracks. ³⁵ When Paul reached the steps, the violence of the mob was so great he had to be carried by the soldiers. ³⁶ The crowd that followed kept shouting, “Get rid of him!”

Paul Speaks to the Crowd

³⁷ As the soldiers were about to take Paul into the barracks, he asked the commander, “May I say something to you?”

“Do you speak Greek?” he replied. ³⁸ “Aren’t you the Egyptian who started a revolt and led four thousand terrorists out into the wilderness some time ago?”

³⁹ Paul answered, “I am a Jew, from Tarsus in Cilicia, a citizen of no ordinary city. Please let me speak to the people.”

⁴⁰ After receiving the commander’s permission, Paul stood on the steps and motioned to the crowd. When they were all silent, he said to them in Aramaic:

He told in detail those things which God had done among the Gentiles through his ministry: Upon arriving in Jerusalem, Paul met with the leaders of the church there (**James** and **all the elders**), and gave them a full report of his work in preaching and planting churches.

i. Williams on **told in detail**: “The Greek has the sense of recounting every single thing.” Paul told these Christians from a Jewish background everything God had done in his missionary efforts.

b. **And when they heard it, they glorified the Lord**: The elders in Jerusalem were thankful for what God was doing among the Gentiles. They saw some of the Gentile converts with Paul and could tell of their genuine love for and commitment to Jesus.

2. (20b- 22) Paul learns of his bad reputation among some of the Christians of Jerusalem.

And they said to him, “You see, brother, how many myriads of Jews there are who have believed, and they are all zealous for the law; but they have been informed about you that you teach all the Jews who are among the Gentiles to forsake Moses, saying that they ought not to circumcise *their* children nor to walk according to the customs. What then? The assembly must certainly meet, for they will hear that you have come.”

a. **You see, brother, how many myriads of Jews there are who have believed, and they are all zealous for the law**: The elders of Jerusalem were happy for what God was doing among the Gentiles. Yet in Jerusalem the Christian community was almost entirely from a Jewish background, and these Christians still valued many of the Jewish laws and customs. They were still **zealous for the law**.

b. **They have been informed about you that you teach all the Jews who are among the Gentiles to forsake Moses**: The Christian community of Jerusalem heard bad, false rumors about Paul. They heard that he had become essentially anti-Jewish, and told Jewish Christians that it was wrong for them to continue in Jewish laws and customs.

i. Based on [Romans 14:4-6](#), it seems that Paul didn’t have a problem with Jewish Christians who wanted to continue to observe old customs and laws. It seems that he himself did so sometimes, such as when he took and fulfilled a vow of consecration in [Acts 18:18-21](#) (probably a Nazirite vow). Paul seemed fine with this, *as long as they didn’t think it made them more right before God*.

c. **What then? The assembly must certainly meet, for they will hear that you have come**: This has the sense of, “Paul, this is controversial and people will hear about it. Let’s do something about this.”

3. (23-25) The leaders of the Jerusalem Church make a recommendation.

“Therefore do what we tell you: We have four men who have taken a vow. Take them and be purified with them, and pay their expenses so that they may shave *their* heads, and that all may know that those things of which they were informed concerning you are nothing, but *that* you yourself also walk orderly and keep the law. But concerning the Gentiles who believe, we have written *and* decided that they should observe no such thing, except that they should keep themselves from *things* offered to idols, from blood, from things strangled, and from sexual immorality.”

a. **We have four men who have taken a vow. Take them and be purified with them, and pay their expenses:** They advised Paul to both *join* and *sponsor* these four Christians from a Jewish background.

i. **Four men who have taken a vow:** The particular vow of consecration was probably similar to Paul's Nazirite vow mentioned in [Acts 18:18-21](#).

b. **That all may know:** The Jerusalem elders believed this would convince everyone that Paul did not preach against Jewish laws and customs for those Christians who wanted to observe them.

i. Paul agreed to do this, to demonstrate that he never taught Christian Jews *to forsake Moses* and *not to circumcise their children* and that they were required to ignore Jewish customs, as he had been false accused by some among the Jerusalem Christians.

c. **But concerning the Gentiles who believe:** The Jerusalem elders understood that this had *nothing* to do with **Gentiles who believe** in Jesus. It didn't mean that *they* had to perform any Jewish rituals to be right with God. Paul would rightly refuse to compromise on this important point.

4. (26) Agreeing with the recommendation, Paul sponsors and joins some Christians in a Jewish purification rite.

Then Paul took the men, and the next day, having been purified with them, entered the temple to announce the expiration of the days of purification, at which time an offering should be made for each one of them.

a. **Then Paul took the men:** Paul could agree to this and sponsor the four men taking the vow of consecration because there was never a hint that such things would be required of Gentiles as a test of righteousness.

i. "He had shown them that their ceremonies were *useless* but not *destructive*; that they were only dangerous when they depended on them for salvation." (Clarke)

ii. Many commentators believe this was a terrible compromise on Paul's part; that he was a hypocrite. Yet the motive behind Paul's sponsorship of these Christian Jews completing their Nazirite vow is explained in [1 Corinthians 9:20](#): *And to the Jews I became as a Jew, that I might win Jews; to those who are under the law, as under the law, that I might win those who are under the law.*

b. **At which time an offering should be made:** It's important to understand that this offering – an animal sacrifice – was not in any way for the purpose of atonement or forgiveness. Paul absolutely understood that *only the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross* atones for sin. Yet not every sacrifice in the Jewish system was for atonement; many were for thanksgiving or dedication, as this one was.

5. (27-30) Jews from Asia stir a mob against Paul.

Now when the seven days were almost ended, the Jews from Asia, seeing him in the temple, stirred up the whole crowd and laid hands on him, crying out, "Men of Israel, help! This is the man who teaches all *men* everywhere against the people, the law, and this place; and furthermore he also brought Greeks into the temple and has defiled this holy place." (For they had previously seen Trophimus the Ephesian with him in the city, whom they supposed that Paul had brought into the temple.) And all the city was disturbed; and the people ran together, seized Paul, and dragged him out of the temple; and immediately the doors were shut.

- a. **Jews from Asia, seeing him in the temple, stirred up the whole crowd:** They claimed that Paul was **against the people** [Israel], **the law, and this place** [the temple], but these accusations were unfounded. Paul simply rejected trust in any of these as a basis for righteousness before God, which comes only through Jesus Christ.
- i. The charges against Paul in [Acts 21:28](#) were an echo of the charges Stephen was executed for ([Acts 6:13](#)). Paul helped preside over that execution; now he is accused in a similar way.
- b. **All the city was disturbed; and the people ran together:** The crowd was *enlarged* because it was feast-time ([Acts 20:16](#)). It was *enraged* because they believed Paul not only preached against the people, the law, and the temple, but also profaned the temple by bringing Gentiles into its inner courts (they said, **“he also brought Greeks into the temple and has defiled this holy place”**).
- c. **Trophimus the Ephesian... whom they supposed that Paul had brought into the temple:** It was absolutely prohibited for Gentiles to go beyond the designated “Court of the Gentiles” in the temple grounds. Signs were posted which read (in both Greek and Latin): “No foreigner may enter within the barricade which surrounds the temple and enclosure. Any one who is caught trespassing will bear personal responsibility for his ensuing death.” The Romans were so sensitive to this that they authorized the Jews to execute anyone that offended in this way, even if the offender was a Roman citizen.

6. (31-36) Roman soldiers rescue Paul.

Now as they were seeking to kill him, news came to the commander of the garrison that all Jerusalem was in an uproar. He immediately took soldiers and centurions, and ran down to them. And when they saw the commander and the soldiers, they stopped beating Paul. Then the commander came near and took him, and commanded him to be bound with two chains; and he asked who he was and what he had done. And some among the multitude cried one thing and some another. So when he could not ascertain the truth because of the tumult, he commanded him to be taken into the barracks. When he reached the stairs, he had to be carried by the soldiers because of the violence of the mob. For the multitude of the people followed after, crying out, “Away with him!”

- a. **Now as they were seeking to kill him:** Paul had been seized by an enraged mob, and the mob didn’t just want to take him out of the temple courts. They wanted to kill him, right there in the outer courtyard area of the temple mount. Paul had been near death because of the attacks of murderous mobs before ([Acts 14:5, 19](#)), and he must have thought, “Here we go again!”
- b. **News came to the commander of the garrison that all Jerusalem was in an uproar:** From the Tower of Antonia, at the northwest corner of the temple mount, more than 500 Roman soldiers were stationed only two flights of stairs from the Court of the Gentiles.
- c. **When they saw the commander and the soldiers, they stopped beating Paul:** The Romans didn’t sympathize with Paul, but they were interested in keeping public order, so they arrested Paul both for his own protection and to remove the cause of the uproar.
- i. **Two chains** means Paul was handcuffed to a soldier on either side. Paul must have immediately remembered the prophecy of Agabus ([Acts 21:11](#)).

d. **The multitude of the people followed after, crying out, “Away with him!”** When the mob cried out for his death, Paul must have remembered when he was part of such a mob, agreeing with the martyrdom of Stephen ([Acts 7:54-8:1](#)).

i. Or, perhaps, it even reminded him of the trial of Jesus: “The shout *Away with him!* which pursued him as he was carried up the steps was the shout with which Jesus’ death had been demanded not far from that spot some twenty-seven years before ([Luke 23:18](#); [John 19:15](#)).” (Bruce)

ii. Boice on **Away with him!** “They did not mean, ‘Take him away from the temple area.’ They meant, ‘Remove him from the earth.’ They wanted him dead.”

7. (37-39) Paul speaks to the Roman commander.

Then as Paul was about to be led into the barracks, he said to the commander, “May I speak to you?” He replied, “Can you speak Greek? Are you not the Egyptian who some time ago stirred up a rebellion and led the four thousand assassins out into the wilderness?” But Paul said, “I am a Jew from Tarsus, in Cilicia, a citizen of no mean city; and I implore you, permit me to speak to the people.”

a. **As Paul was about to be led into the barracks, he said to the commander:** At first, the Roman **commander** thought that Paul was a terrorist, and was surprised that Paul was an educated man and could **speak Greek**.

i. *The language was a surprise*, because both the language and phrasing showed that Paul was a man educated in the Greek world, not a rabble-rouser. *The phrase itself was a surprise*; it seems far too polite and reserved. We would expect Paul to be screaming, “Help, help!” and not, “Pardon me sir, may I have a moment with you?”

ii. **The Egyptian** mentioned (also mentioned by the Jewish historian Josephus) led a ragged army of four thousand men to the Mount of Olives where they declared they would take over the temple mount. Roman soldiers had quickly scattered them, but the leader got away.

b. **I am a Jew from Tarsus, in Cilicia, a citizen of no mean city:** When Paul identified himself to the Roman commander, it put him in an entirely different standing. He was a citizen of **Tarsus**, not a suspected terrorist.

c. **I implore you, permit me to speak to the people.** At this moment, when his life was in danger from an angry mob and he was suspected of being a dangerous criminal, Paul had one thing on his mind: “Let me preach the gospel!”

i. It’s amazing that Paul could think and speak so clearly, considering that he had just been beaten. Some critics – such as the German theologian Ernst Haenchen – think that this proves that this whole account is a fabrication. What they don’t take into account is the power of the Holy Spirit and Paul’s great passion.

8. (40) Paul is permitted to address the mob that wanted to kill him.

So when he had given him permission, Paul stood on the stairs and motioned with his hand to the people. And when there was a great silence, he spoke to them in the Hebrew language, saying,

a. **So when he had given him permission:** The Roman commander bound Paul with two chains ([Acts 21:33](#)) because he suspected Paul was a troublemaker. Yet, he gave

Paul **permission** to speak to the crowd, probably because he hoped that Paul's speech might quiet the mob. At first, it did quiet the people down.

b. **Paul stood on the stairs and motioned with his hand to the people. And when there was a great silence, he spoke to them in the Hebrew language:** What a dramatic

moment! Paul, standing on stairs overlooking the massive open courtyard of the temple mount, made a dramatic sweep of his hand – and the angry, rioting mob fell silent.

Then, Paul **spoke to them in the Hebrew language**, identifying himself with his Jewish audience, not with his Roman protectors.

i. This was an opportunity Paul had waited a lifetime for. He had an incredible passion for the salvation of his fellow Jews ([Romans 9:1-5](#)), and had probably thought of himself as uniquely qualified to effectively communicate the gospel to them – if he only had the right opportunity.

ii. Similarities between Jesus and Paul as shown in [Acts 20](#) and [21](#):

- Like Jesus, Paul traveled to Jerusalem with a group of disciples.
- Like Jesus, Paul had opposition from hostile Jews who plotted against his life.
- Like Jesus, Paul made or received three successive predictions of his coming sufferings in Jerusalem, including being handed over to the Gentiles.
- Like Jesus, Paul had followers who tried to discourage him from going to Jerusalem and the fate that awaited him there.
- Like Jesus, Paul declared his readiness to lay down his life.
- Like Jesus, Paul was determined to complete his ministry and not be deflected from it.
- Like Jesus, Paul expressed his abandonment to the will of God.
- Like Jesus, Paul came to Jerusalem to *give* something.
- Like Jesus, Paul was unjustly arrested on the basis of a false accusation.
- Like Jesus, Paul alone was arrested, but none of his companions.
- Like Jesus, Paul heard the mob crying out, *Away with him!*
- Like Jesus, the Roman officer handling Paul's case did not know his true identity.
- Like Jesus, Paul was associated with terrorists by a Roman official.

iii. In a way unique to most of us, Paul really did know *the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death* ([Philippians 3:10](#)).

iv. Paul's particular call and ministry make these similarities especially striking, but we are called to follow after Jesus also. We shouldn't be surprised when events in our lives are like events in Jesus' life. There may be a time of temptation in the wilderness, a time when people come to us with needs only God can meet, a time when we seem at the mercy of a storm, a time when we must cry out to God as in the Garden of Gethsemane, a time when we must simply lay down our lives and trust God will gloriously raise us up. We, like Paul, are *predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son* ([Romans 8:29](#)).

v. However, Paul's experience was obviously different in many ways, not the least of which was the manner in which he will make his defense in the next chapter, while Jesus refused to defend Himself before His accusers.

¹ After we had torn ourselves away from them, we put out to sea and sailed straight to Kos. The next day we went to Rhodes and from there to Patara. ² We found a ship crossing over to Phoenicia, went on board and set sail. ³ After sighting Cyprus and passing to the south of it, we sailed on to Syria. We landed at Tyre, where our ship was to unload its cargo. ⁴ We sought out the disciples there and stayed with them seven days. Through the Spirit they urged Paul not to go on to Jerusalem.

⁵ When it was time to leave, we left and continued on our way. All of them, including wives and children, accompanied us out of the city, and there on the beach we knelt to pray. ⁶ After saying goodbye to each other, we went aboard the ship, and they returned home.

⁷ We continued our voyage from Tyre and landed at Ptolemais, where we greeted the brothers and sisters and stayed with them for a day. ⁸ Leaving the next day, we reached Caesarea and stayed at the house of Philip the evangelist, one of the Seven. ⁹ He had four unmarried daughters who prophesied.

¹⁰ After we had been there a number of days, a prophet named Agabus came down from Judea. ¹¹ Coming over to us, he took Paul's belt, tied his own hands and feet with it and said, "The Holy Spirit says, 'In this way the Jewish leaders in Jerusalem will bind the owner of this belt and will hand him over to the Gentiles.'"

¹² When we heard this, we and the people there pleaded with Paul not to go up to Jerusalem. ¹³ Then Paul answered, "Why are you weeping and breaking my heart? I am ready not only to be bound, but also to die in Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus." ¹⁴ When he would not be dissuaded, we gave up and said, "The Lord's will be done."

¹⁵ After this, we started on our way up to Jerusalem. ¹⁶ Some of the disciples from Caesarea accompanied us and brought us to the home of Mnason, where we were to stay. He was a man from Cyprus and one of the early disciples.

OK, that's as far as we'll go tonight. Let's go back and unpack it...there are a few things to talk about.

Acts 21:1-4

¹ After we had torn ourselves away from them, (**hard to leave**) we put out to sea and sailed straight to Kos. (**show map pic**) The next day we went to Rhodes and from there to Patara. ² We found a ship crossing over to Phoenicia, went on board and set sail. ³ After sighting Cyprus and passing to the south of it, we sailed on to Syria. We landed at Tyre, where our ship was to unload its cargo. (**show map pic**) ⁴ We sought out the disciples there and stayed with them seven days. Through the Spirit they urged Paul not to go on to Jerusalem.

As we read this *last* verse, it would be easy to take it at face value and move on. However, let's read it again, and compare it Acts 20:22 we read last week.

⁴ We sought out the disciples there and stayed with them seven days. Through the Spirit they urged Paul not to go on to Jerusalem.

²² “And now, compelled by the Spirit, I am going to Jerusalem, not knowing what will happen to me there.

What's going on here? On the surface it looks like a contradiction. Especially when you look at vv10-14

¹⁰ After we had been there a number of days, a prophet named Agabus came down from Judea. ¹¹ Coming over to us, he took Paul's belt, tied his own hands and feet with it and said, “The Holy Spirit says, ‘In this way the Jewish leaders in Jerusalem will bind the owner of this belt and will hand him over to the Gentiles.’” ¹² When we heard this, we and the people there pleaded with Paul not to go up to Jerusalem. ¹³ Then Paul answered, “Why are you weeping and breaking my heart? I am ready not only to be bound, but also to die in Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus.” ¹⁴ When he would not be dissuaded, we gave up and said, “The Lord's will be done.”

It looks like the Holy Spirit is warning Paul through several people not to go to Jerusalem. If that's true, then how do we explain what Paul said in Chapter 20 where he was compelled by the Spirit to go there?

To understand the full context, let's go back and read vv22-24 in Chapter 20:

²² “And now, compelled by the Spirit, I am going to Jerusalem, not knowing what will happen to me there. ²³ I only know that in every city the Holy Spirit warns me that prison and hardships are facing me. ²⁴ However, I consider my life worth nothing to me; my only aim is to finish the race and complete the task the Lord Jesus has given me—the task of testifying to the good news of God's grace.

I believe the Holy Spirit was giving Paul periodic reality checks. Reminding him the cost of obedience and offering him a choice to continue, or bail out. In His grace, God was warning Paul ahead of time of the coming suffering. There is a lot of grace here, when you consider it.

By warning Paul of the coming trials, Paul could go into them with his eyes wide open.

When we are led by the Spirit, He will give us daily direction, and in some cases, specific warnings.

Has that ever happened to you?

But these warnings also gave Paul the ability to prepare. How did he prepare?

Several ways, but perhaps the most important: *Paul knew the importance of being continually filled with the Spirit.*

We need to be filled with the Spirit – continuously.

A Spirit-filled life should not be a "hit-and-miss" existence.

on again off again....

We don't have to walk around as if there are some moments when we're filled with the Spirit and other moments when we're not...moments when we're "more spiritual" than others. We can be continually filled with His Presence.

Now more than ever we need to be filled with the Holy Spirit, need to be filled with His authority, with the power of the Holy Spirit working in their lives.

Analogy of a sail of a sailboat (show pic)

Sail must be continuously filled with wind the drive the boat.

Paul talked about this in his letter to this Ephesian church:

Ephesians 5:18

¹⁸ Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit.

The Greek word is plerousthe

Present imperative verb meaning "*constantly being filled, or keep being filled*"

Many examples in Bible of those “full of the Spirit”

So, how do we keep our hearts overflowing? our sails filled?

I believe it starts with desire and determination.

Remaining filled with the Spirit starts with desire and determination.

“Lord, fill my sails today”

We set our minds on things above. We set our hearts like flint on the things of God.

Colossians 3:2

² *Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things.*

We make up our minds...it takes discipline...it takes a choice

"I believe firmly that the moment our hearts are emptied of pride and selfishness and ambition and everything that is contrary to God's law, the Holy Spirit will fill every corner of our hearts. But if we are full of pride and conceit and ambition and the world, there is no room for the Spirit of God. We must be emptied before we can be filled."

DL Moody

Secondly:

We remain filled with the Spirit through repentance

I used the analogy of a sail a few minutes ago:

Sin hinders our ability to live by the Spirit (being constantly filled)

When the rope of a sail comes untied, the sail just flaps in the wind: (show pic)

The boat is dead in the water

Subject to drift with the current

With no forward progress, no steering capability

(show pic - adrift boat) Likewise, in our lives....we drift...dead in the water

But repentance re-ties the rope so the wind can fill the sails again (show pic)

“Revival cannot be organized, but we can set our sails to catch the wind from heaven when God chooses to blow upon His people once again.”

G. Campbell Morgan.

And third:

We remain filled with the Spirit by spending time in His presence

Worship, reading His Word, prayer, meditating on Him

When I find the joy of reaching Your heart

When my will becomes enthralled in Your love

When the things of this earth become shadows in the light of You

I worship You, I worship You

The reason I live is to worship You.

“Abandonment to God is of more value than personal holiness”

Oswald Chambers

Getting back to Paul in Acts 21, I believe this is why the Holy Spirit warned him.

A couple other quick things to point out about tonight’s story, in vv8-9:

⁸ Leaving the next day, we reached Caesarea and stayed at the house of Philip the evangelist, one of the Seven. ⁹ He had four unmarried daughters who prophesied. Notice it is talking about Philip.

If you recall, back in Acts 6, there was a dispute in the church because of the neglect of the Hellenistic Jewish widows. Several men were appointed to help with this and other practical needs of the church:

Acts 6:5-6

⁵ ...They chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit; also Philip, Procorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolas from Antioch, a convert to Judaism. ⁶ They presented these men to the apostles, who prayed and laid their hands on them.

This is the same Philip mentioned in tonight's text. This man who was appointed to stay behind the scenes, serving humbly and quietly.

But was he just a secretary? He was one of the first disciples sent out to carry out Jesus' mission statement in Acts 1:8 when He said "*and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.*"

And we know the first wave of persecution in Jerusalem did exactly what Jesus wanted. Let's look at Acts 8:5

Acts 8:5

⁵ Philip went down to a city in Samaria and proclaimed the Messiah there.

This humble man, serving behind the scenes in an administrative role, is now thrust *onto* the scene and is proclaiming the news of Jesus Christ in a foreign city.

That should give us all hope...*God can use anyone for His purposes.* You don't have to be a pastor or a leader.

Colossians 3:16

¹⁶ Let the message of Christ dwell among you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom through psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit, singing to God with gratitude in your hearts.

Guys... *We each have a ministry*

This man was on fire (evangelist)...even his 4 daughters were prophesying.

¹ When the uproar had ended, Paul sent for the disciples and, after encouraging them, said goodbye and set out for Macedonia. ² He traveled through that area, speaking many words of encouragement to the people, and finally arrived in Greece, ³ where he stayed three months. Because some Jews had plotted against him just as he was about to sail for Syria, he decided to go back through Macedonia. ⁴ He was accompanied by Sopater son of Pyrrhus from Berea,

Aristarchus and Secundus from Thessalonica, Gaius from Derbe, Timothy also, and Tychicus and Trophimus from the province of Asia. ⁵ These men went on ahead and waited for us at Troas. ⁶ But we sailed from Philippi (notice it says “we”) after the Festival of Unleavened Bread (Passover), and five days later joined the others at Troas, where we stayed seven days. (show map)

Eutychus Raised From the Dead at Troas

⁷ On the first day of the week we came together to break bread. Paul spoke to the people and, because he intended to leave the next day, kept on talking until midnight. ⁸ There were many lamps in the upstairs room where we were meeting. ⁹ Seated in a window was a young man named Eutychus, who was sinking into a deep sleep as Paul talked on and on. When he was sound asleep, he fell to the ground from the third story and was picked up dead. ¹⁰ Paul went down, threw himself on the young man and put his arms around him. “Don’t be alarmed,” he said. “He’s alive!” ¹¹ Then he went upstairs again and broke bread and ate. After talking until daylight, he left. ¹² The people took the young man home alive and were greatly comforted.

This is an amazing story...expand on...what takeaways could we get from this?

What caused the boy to fall asleep? Exhaustion? The fumes from the lamps?

We don’t know. But he did fall 3 stories. And remember, Luke was a doctor...if he says the boy was dead, I believe he was dead.

I couldn’t help but to think about this a moment...I’m not sure this was the point of the story, but I thought about how easy it is for us to “fall asleep” and fall these days. (expand on)

What’s even more amazing than that is how Paul handled this.

¹⁰ Paul went down, threw himself on the young man and put his arms around him. “Don’t be alarmed,” he said. “He’s alive!” ¹¹ Then he went upstairs again and broke bread and ate. After talking until daylight, he left. ¹² The people took the young man home alive and were greatly comforted.

Just another day at the office. Acted like it was no big deal. How would I have handled it?

Paul knew: *In the Kingdom of God, the “sensational” is not the end, it is a means to an end.*

1 Corinthians 12:29-32

²⁹ Are we all apostles? Are we all prophets? Are we all teachers? Do we all have the power to do miracles? ³⁰ Do we all have the gift of healing? Do we all have the ability to speak in unknown languages? Do we all have the ability to interpret unknown languages? Of course not! ³¹ So you should earnestly desire the most helpful gifts.

But now let me show you a way of life that is best of all.

And what way is that?

1 Corinthians 13

Love Is the Greatest

¹ If I could speak all the languages of earth and of angels, but didn't love others, I would only be a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. ² If I had the gift of prophecy, and if I understood all of God's secret plans and possessed all knowledge, and if I had such faith that I could move mountains, but didn't love others, I would be nothing. ³ If I gave everything I have to the poor and even sacrificed my body, I could boast about it; but if I didn't love others, I would have gained nothing.

And then later in v13

¹³ Three things will last forever—faith, hope, and love—and the greatest of these is love.

Bottom line:

Spiritual gifts are meant to confirm the Word of God and expand the Kingdom of God. The love of God and the Gospel of Jesus Christ are the main things!

Getting back to the text:

Acts 20:13-38

Paul's Farewell to the Ephesian Elders

¹³ We went on ahead to the ship and sailed for Assos, where we were going to take Paul aboard. He had made this arrangement because he was going there on foot. ¹⁴ When he met us at Assos, we took him aboard and went on to Mitylene. ¹⁵ The next day we set sail from there and arrived off Chios. The day after that we crossed over to Samos, and on the following day arrived at

Miletus. ¹⁶ Paul had decided to sail past Ephesus to avoid spending time in the province of Asia, for he was in a hurry to reach Jerusalem, if possible, by the day of Pentecost.

¹⁷ From Miletus, Paul sent to Ephesus for the elders of the church. **(show map)** ¹⁸ When they arrived, he said to them: “You know how I lived the whole time I was with you, from the first day I came into the province of Asia. ¹⁹ I served the Lord with great humility and with tears and in the midst of severe testing by the plots of my Jewish opponents. ²⁰ You know that I have not hesitated to preach anything that would be helpful to you but have taught you publicly and from house to house. ²¹ I have declared to both Jews and Greeks that they must turn to God in repentance and have faith in our Lord Jesus. **(is he laying on a guilt trip? He is basically saying “I gave it my all, and now I am turning it over to you to walk it out)**

²² “And now, compelled by the Spirit, I am going to Jerusalem, not knowing what will happen to me there. **(wait what? The Holy Spirit compelled him to go there but he had no idea why. Does that happen? Have you ever been somewhere that you really didn’t want to be? Wondering why God led you there? Books have been written on the topic of obeying God when it doesn’t make sense. Let’s face it...Sometimes God doesn’t make sense – at least to us. But He is intentional in all He does. Has He ever asked you to pray for an enemy? Or maybe to start a ministry even though you don’t feel qualified? Or maybe to start being more faithful in your tithing even though you are short on funds? You’re in good company. One example that comes to mind is Abraham. (leave this place and go to a place I will show you....the promise of Isaac. But also look at what it says in Hebrews:**

Hebrews 11:8

⁸ By faith Abraham, when called to go to a place he would later receive as his inheritance, obeyed and went, even though he did not know where he was going.

Hebrews 11:17-19

¹⁷ By faith Abraham, when God tested him, offered Isaac as a sacrifice. He who had embraced the promises was about to sacrifice his one and only son, ¹⁸ even though God had said to him, “It is through Isaac that your offspring will be reckoned.” ¹⁹ Abraham reasoned that God could even raise the dead, and so in a manner of speaking he did receive Isaac back from death.

And of course:

Genesis 15:6

⁶ Abram believed the LORD, and he credited it to him as righteousness.

Guys: When God speaks, He doesn't expect us to understand and agree, He expects us to obey.

Getting back to the text:

²³ I only know that in every city the Holy Spirit warns me that prison and hardships are facing me. ²⁴ However, I consider my life worth nothing to me; my only aim is to finish the race and complete the task the Lord Jesus has given me—the task of testifying to the good news of God's grace.

This reminds me of what he told the Philippian church:

Philippians 3:3-9

³ For it is we who are the circumcision, we who serve God by his Spirit, who boast in Christ Jesus, and who put no confidence in the flesh— ⁴ though I myself have reasons for such confidence.

If someone else thinks they have reasons to put confidence in the flesh, I have more: ⁵ circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; in regard to the law, a Pharisee; ⁶ as for zeal, persecuting the church; as for righteousness based on the law, faultless.

⁷ But whatever were gains to me I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. ⁸ What is more, I consider everything a loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them garbage, that I may gain Christ ⁹ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ—the righteousness that comes from God on the basis of faith.

Getting back to the text:

*²⁵ “Now I know that none of you among whom I have gone about preaching the kingdom will ever see me again. ²⁶ Therefore, I declare to you today that I am innocent of the blood of any of you. ²⁷ For I have not hesitated to proclaim to you the whole will of God. ²⁸ Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers. **(guard yourself)** Be shepherds of the church of God, which he bought with his own blood. ²⁹ I know that after I leave, savage wolves will come in among you and will not spare the flock. ³⁰ Even from your own*

number men will arise and distort the truth in order to draw away disciples after them. ³¹ So be on your guard! Remember that for three years I never stopped warning each of you night and day with tears.

³² “Now I commit you to God and to the word of his grace, which can build you up and give you an inheritance among all those who are sanctified. ³³ I have not coveted anyone’s silver or gold or clothing. ³⁴ You yourselves know that these hands of mine have supplied my own needs and the needs of my companions. ³⁵ In everything I did, I showed you that by this kind of hard work we must help the weak, remembering the words the Lord Jesus himself said: ‘It is more blessed to give than to receive.’ ”

³⁶ When Paul had finished speaking, he knelt down with all of them and prayed. ³⁷ They all wept as they embraced him and kissed him. ³⁸ What grieved them most was his statement that they would never see his face again. Then they accompanied him to the ship.

²³ About that time there arose a great disturbance about the Way.

First of all, what is “the Way”?

Well, clearly, there were many “ways” being offered in Ephesus. This was very much a pagan, pluralistic city, with many pagan practices.

The first church called themselves “The Way” to differentiate from the other ways. Notice they didn’t call themselves “a way”.

Jesus isn’t “a” way, He is “The” Way!

This is in reference to what Jesus said about Himself:

John 14:6

⁶ Jesus answered, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.

It wasn't only then...it is just as true today!

The writer of Hebrews said it succinctly:

Hebrews 10:19-23

¹⁹ Therefore, brothers and sisters, since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus, ²⁰ by a new and living way opened for us through the curtain, that is, his body, ²¹ and since we have a great priest over the house of God, ²² let us draw near to God with a sincere heart and with the full assurance that faith brings, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water. ²³ Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful.

i.e. Guys, there are a lot of "ways" to act and react in light of what is happening...but stick with "The Way". It is the only way! He is the The Way, and He is faithful!

This is so very vital today!

If we act and react like the world, we have nothing to offer the world!

Now, getting back to the text...notice it said there was a great disturbance because of the church.

Acts 19:23

²³ About that time there arose a great disturbance about the Way.

(there has been a great disturbance in the force)

Another translation says a huge ruckus occurred.

This was the third major disturbance caused by the church mentioned in the Book of Acts.

The analogy that comes to mind is a bat cave...peaceful...dark...

Darkness is simply the absence of light.

Darkness cannot stand to the light of God's Truth!

So...a ruckus occurred...a fuss, a great commotion...a fracas

Well, let's see what that commotion is all about. Perhaps the Way has been up to some shenanigans, some kind of unlawful or offensive mischief...

Acts 19:24-27

²⁴ A silversmith named Demetrius, who made silver shrines of Artemis, brought in a lot of business for the craftsmen there. ²⁵ He called them together, along with the workers in related trades, and said: "You know, my friends, that we receive a good income from this business. ²⁶ And you see and hear how this fellow Paul has convinced and led astray large numbers of people here in Ephesus and in practically the whole province of Asia. He says that gods made by human hands are no gods at all. ²⁷ There is danger not only that our trade will lose its good name, but also that the temple of the great goddess Artemis will be discredited; and the goddess herself, who is worshiped throughout the province of Asia and the world, will be robbed of her divine majesty."

Let's unpack that:

This is actually funny. This isn't so much about some horrible blasphemous heretic coming into town spouting crazy-talk. This is about the aftermath of the power of the Holy Spirit...amazing miracles had been performed...handkerchiefs that had merely touched Paul were taken and laid on sick people and they got well. And instead of being amazed at all this, the silversmith was angry because this was cutting in on his action. This was affecting his income!

²⁵ He called them together, along with the workers in related trades, and said: "You know, my friends, that we receive a good income from this business."

They had a pretty good gig going...then this Paul came in and messed it all up.

²⁶ And you see and hear how this fellow Paul has convinced and led astray large numbers of people here in Ephesus and in practically the whole province of Asia.

How dare he! What a despicable thing Paul was doing! Offering these people the way to new and everlasting life...a life of freedom like they never knew. Some nerve!

The gospel was affecting the economy, wasn't it?

More than that...*The Gospel of Jesus Christ will upset the status quo.*

That is the theme of the Bible...OT and new...the light of Truth piercing the quiet of darkness.

*Did you know drug dealers lose money when addicts say no?
Did you know liquor stores lose money when addicts get sober?
Did you know abortion clinics lose money when a mother chooses the life of the unborn child?*

And that status quo does not like to be disturbed!

Now also notice in v26

He says that gods made by human hands are no gods at all.

Let's go back and look at that scene in chapter 17, where Paul is addressing the philosophers in Athens:

Acts 17:29-30

²⁹ "Therefore since we are God's offspring, we should not think that the divine being is like gold or silver or stone—an image made by human design and skill. ³⁰ In the past God overlooked such ignorance, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent.

And that is exactly what people were doing...repenting. If you recall from last week, the power of God was so strong that many not only believed, but publicly confessed and brought the things associated with their sin to be burned. It says the value of sorcerers' scrolls brought to be burned amounted to 50,000 drachmas. A drachma is basically a day's pay. To put this in perspective, at \$20/hr, 50,000 drachmas amounts to about \$8,000,000 today.

That's real! And that's power. V20 says:

²⁰ In this way the word of the Lord spread widely and grew in power.

Praise God, right? Well, not according to these Ephesians. This was a direct insult to them...this idea that *gods made by human hands are no gods at all.*

We laugh...but they were quite serious. This was their whole belief system, and way of life. And Paul was directly affecting that way of life.

So, what was Paul's motive? Did he come into town to stir up trouble?

Paul was simply preaching the life-giving Gospel of Jesus Christ, and as the light pierced the darkness...the bats began flapping around.

The Gospel of Jesus Christ does not need polishing, it just needs to be presented.

The Holy Spirit will do the rest.

Was Paul expressing his opinion? Getting a few digs in? What does God say about this subject of idols fashioned by human hands? (glad you asked)

Isaiah 44:9-20

⁹ *All who make idols are nothing,
and the things they treasure are worthless.
Those who would speak up for them are blind;
they are ignorant, to their own shame.*

¹⁰ *Who shapes a god and casts an idol,
which can profit nothing?*

¹¹ *People who do that will be put to shame;
such craftsmen are only human beings.
Let them all come together and take their stand;
they will be brought down to terror and shame.*

¹² *The blacksmith takes a tool
and works with it in the coals;
he shapes an idol with hammers,
he forges it with the might of his arm.
He gets hungry and loses his strength;
he drinks no water and grows faint.*

¹³ *The carpenter measures with a line
and makes an outline with a marker;
he roughs it out with chisels*

*and marks it with compasses.
He shapes it in human form,
human form in all its glory,
that it may dwell in a shrine.*

*¹⁴ He cut down cedars,
or perhaps took a cypress or oak.
He let it grow among the trees of the forest,
or planted a pine, and the rain made it grow.*

*¹⁵ It is used as fuel for burning;
some of it he takes and warms himself,
he kindles a fire and bakes bread.
But he also fashions a god and worships it;
he makes an idol and bows down to it.*

*¹⁶ Half of the wood he burns in the fire;
over it he prepares his meal,
he roasts his meat and eats his fill.
He also warms himself and says,
“Ah! I am warm; I see the fire.”*

*¹⁷ From the rest he makes a god, his idol;
he bows down to it and worships.
He prays to it and says,
“Save me! You are my god!”*

*¹⁸ They know nothing, they understand nothing;
their eyes are plastered over so they cannot see,
and their minds closed so they cannot understand.*

*¹⁹ No one stops to think,
no one has the knowledge or understanding to say,
“Half of it I used for fuel;
I even baked bread over its coals,
I roasted meat and I ate.
Shall I make a detestable thing from what is left?
Shall I bow down to a block of wood?”*

*²⁰ Such a person feeds on ashes; a deluded heart misleads him;
he cannot save himself, or say,
“Is not this thing in my right hand a lie?”*

Isaiah 57:13

*¹³ When you cry out for help,
let your collection of idols save you!*

*The wind will carry all of them off,
a mere breath will blow them away.
But whoever takes refuge in me
will inherit the land
and possess my holy mountain.*

Let's finish this section:

Acts 19:28-31

²⁸ When they heard this, they were furious and began shouting: "Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!" ²⁹ Soon the whole city was in an uproar. The people seized Gaius and Aristarchus, Paul's traveling companions from Macedonia, and all of them rushed into the theater together. ³⁰ Paul wanted to appear before the crowd, but the disciples would not let him. ³¹ Even some of the officials of the province, friends of Paul, sent him a message begging him not to venture into the theater.

This guy Demetrius was no dummy. He had appealed to their livelihood, now he appealed to their civic sensibilities. These people loved their temple and they reveled in their worship of the goddess of that temple.

The Temple of Artemis, also called Temple of Diana, was an architectural wonder (show pic). For years, it was one of the 7 wonders of the world. It was later plundered by Nero when he raided the area, and eventually destroyed by the goths.

So it is no wonder they were so distraught by this foreigner Paul coming in and disturbing their proud traditions.

Back to the story:

*³² The assembly was in confusion: Some were shouting one thing, some another. Most of the people did not even know why they were there. **(reminds me of today...mercenary rioters)** ³³ The Jews in the crowd pushed Alexander to the front, and they shouted instructions to him. He motioned for silence in order to make a defense before the people. ³⁴ But when they realized he was a Jew, they all shouted in unison for about two hours: "Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!" ³⁵ The city clerk quieted the crowd and said: "Fellow Ephesians, doesn't all the world know that the city of Ephesus is the guardian of the temple of the great Artemis and of her image, which fell from heaven? ³⁶ Therefore, since these facts are undeniable, you ought to calm down and not do anything rash. ³⁷ You have brought these men here, though they have neither robbed temples nor blasphemed our goddess. ³⁸ If, then, Demetrius and his fellow craftsmen have a grievance*

against anybody, the courts are open and there are proconsuls. They can press charges. ³⁹ If there is anything further you want to bring up, it must be settled in a legal assembly. ⁴⁰ As it is, we are in danger of being charged with rioting because of what happened today. In that case we would not be able to account for this commotion, since there is no reason for it. ” ⁴¹ After he had said this, he dismissed the assembly.

God once again used an unsuspecting non-believer in power to preserve His people. God is in control, guys.

Acts 19:23-41

²³ About that time there arose a great disturbance about the Way. ²⁴ A silversmith named Demetrius, who made silver shrines of Artemis, brought in a lot of business for the craftsmen there. ²⁵ He called them together, along with the workers in related trades, and said: “You know, my friends, that we receive a good income from this business. ²⁶ And you see and hear how this fellow Paul has convinced and led astray large numbers of people here in Ephesus and in practically the whole province of Asia. He says that gods made by human hands are no gods at all. ²⁷ There is danger not only that our trade will lose its good name, but also that the temple of the great goddess Artemis will be discredited; and the goddess herself, who is worshiped throughout the province of Asia and the world, will be robbed of her divine majesty.”

²⁸ When they heard this, they were furious and began shouting: “Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!” ²⁹ Soon the whole city was in an uproar. The people seized Gaius and Aristarchus, Paul’s traveling companions from Macedonia, and all of them rushed into the theater together. ³⁰ Paul wanted to appear before the crowd, but the disciples would not let him. ³¹ Even some of the officials of the province, friends of Paul, sent him a message begging him not to venture into the theater.

³² The assembly was in confusion: Some were shouting one thing, some another. Most of the people did not even know why they were there. ³³ The Jews in the crowd pushed Alexander to the front, and they shouted instructions to him. He

motioned for silence in order to make a defense before the people. ³⁴ But when they realized he was a Jew, they all shouted in unison for about two hours: “Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!”

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⁸ Paul entered the synagogue and spoke boldly there for three months, arguing persuasively about the kingdom of God. ⁹ But some of them became obstinate; they refused to believe and publicly maligned the Way. So Paul left them. He took the disciples with him and had discussions daily in the lecture hall of Tyrannus. ¹⁰ This went on for two years, so that all the Jews and Greeks who lived in the province of Asia heard the word of the Lord.

¹¹ God did extraordinary miracles through Paul, ¹² so that even handkerchiefs and aprons that had touched him were taken to the sick, and their illnesses were cured and the evil spirits left them.

Let’s stop there. Interesting...Paul had the power of the Holy Spirit all over him, he was speaking boldly and moving with power...so much power that handkerchiefs he had touched were laid on sick people and they were healed. That is power! Yet some people dug their heels in and stubbornly refused to change their position. What did Paul do? He left them and moved on.

When you defend your faith to others, do you take it personally if they don't respond? Do you have to be right?

*Do you see yourself as God's enforcer?
Do you think it is up to you to win them?*

Jesus said in John 6:44

⁴⁴ *"No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws them*

We do not draw people to God – it is God Himself that does it.

What is our job, then? To be full of the Spirit, walk in the Spirit, and be ready when He brings along opportunities to do our part. And what is that part? Well, it depends...sometimes it is to sow a seed...sometimes it is to water...and sometimes it is to harvest. It is up to God, He is the One who orchestrates it all.

Paul wrote about this to the Corinthian church, who was arguing about whether it was right to follow Apollos or Paul.

1 Corinthians 3:5-8

⁵ *What, after all, is Apollos? And what is Paul? Only servants, through whom you came to believe—as the Lord has assigned to each his task. ⁶ I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God has been making it grow. ⁷ So neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but only God, who makes things grow. ⁸ The one who plants and the one who waters have one purpose, and they will each be rewarded according to their own labor.*

When we are full of the Spirit, and walking in the Spirit, we will recognize those opportunities as they come up. We will also recognize when the person we are witnessing to is not receptive, and we will realize the futility, and graciously walk away.

Matthew 7:6

⁶ *"Do not give dogs what is sacred; do not throw your pearls to pigs. If you do, they may trample them under their feet, and turn and tear you to pieces.*

As translated from the Aramaic. The Greek is "Don't let the dogs have consecrated [holy] meat."

The spiritual truths of God are gifts from God, and revealed by Him.

God's wisdom is not appreciated by those who don't have spiritual ears to hear it.

1 Corinthians 1:18

¹⁸ For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.

Now, did you notice the second half of what we just read in Matthew 7?

⁶ "Do not give dogs what is sacred; do not throw your pearls to pigs. If you do, they may trample them under their feet, and turn and tear you to pieces.

Could that really happen? Well, let's get back to tonight's text in Acts 19:

Acts 19:13-16

¹³ Some Jews who went around driving out evil spirits tried to invoke the name of the Lord Jesus over those who were demon-possessed. They would say, "In the name of the Jesus whom Paul preaches, I command you to come out." ¹⁴ Seven sons of Sceva, a Jewish chief priest, were doing this. ¹⁵ One day the evil spirit answered them, "Jesus I know, and Paul I know about, but who are you?" ¹⁶ Then the man who had the evil spirit jumped on them and overpowered them all. He gave them such a beating that they ran out of the house naked and bleeding.

Kids – don't try this at home! You can't make this up! This is drama and comedy combined. Look at the Message Version:

Some itinerant Jewish exorcists who happened to be in town at the time tried their hand at what they assumed to be Paul's "game." They pronounced the name of the Master Jesus over victims of evil spirits, saying, "I command you by the Jesus preached by Paul!" The seven sons of a certain Sceva, a Jewish high priest, were trying to do this on a man when the evil spirit talked back: "I know Jesus and I've heard of Paul, but who are you?" Then the possessed man went berserk—jumped the exorcists, beat them up, and tore off their clothes. Naked and bloody, they got away as best they could.

Guys, Satan and his demons are no dummies. They know whether you have the power of the Holy Spirit. Authority and power come from our intimacy with Jesus Christ, not by using so-called proven formulas. Example of prayer handkerchief.

Bottom line: We should not take spiritual warfare lightly.

Let's finish this section of Acts 19:

¹⁷ When this became known to the Jews and Greeks living in Ephesus, they were all seized with fear, and the name of the Lord Jesus was held in high honor. ¹⁸ Many of those who believed now came and openly confessed what they had done. ¹⁹ A number who had practiced sorcery brought their scrolls together and burned them publicly. When they calculated the value of the scrolls, the total came to fifty thousand drachmas. ²⁰ In this way the word of the Lord spread widely and grew in power.

²¹ After all this had happened, Paul decided to go to Jerusalem, passing through Macedonia and Achaia. "After I have been there," he said, "I must visit Rome also." ²² He sent two of his helpers, Timothy and Erastus, to Macedonia, while he stayed in the province of Asia a little longer.

What we see here is some good old-fashioned fear of the Lord. The people saw for themselves a clear and graphic display of the power of the spiritual world. They also saw the clear authority of the name of Jesus Christ. They were scared straight!

Too bad it took that to believe! And by the way...It took a flood to believe, but by that time it was too late. It will take the coming of Jesus Christ on a white horse and fire in His eyes to make many people believe, but it will be too late.

But here, in tonight's story, it wasn't too late. Many not only believed, but publicly confessed and brought the things associated with their sin to be burned. It says the value of the scrolls amounted to 50,000 drachmas. A drachma is basically a day's pay. To put this in perspective, at \$20/hr, 50,000 drachmas amounts to about \$8,000,000 today.

That's real! And that's power. V20 says:

²⁰ In this way the word of the Lord spread widely and grew in power.

Is it going to take something like that today to reach this culture? I don't know...only God knows. It is surely not something that will be scripted, manipulated, or packaged. It will be a powerful move of the Holy Spirit.

What's our part? What do we do, meanwhile?

Paul later wrote to this very church in Ephesus:

Ephesians 5:15-20

¹⁵ Be very careful, then, how you live—not as unwise but as wise, ¹⁶ making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil. ¹⁷ Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the Lord's will is. ¹⁸ Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit, ¹⁹ speaking to one another with psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit. Sing and make music from your heart to the Lord, ²⁰ always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

¹ While Apollos was at Corinth, Paul took the road through the interior and arrived at Ephesus. There he found some disciples ² and asked them, "Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?"

They answered, "No, we have not even heard that there is a Holy Spirit."

*³ So Paul asked, "Then what baptism did you receive?"
"John's baptism," they replied.*

⁴ Paul said, "John's baptism was a baptism of repentance. He told the people to believe in the one coming after him, that is, in Jesus." ⁵ On hearing this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. ⁶ When Paul placed his hands on them, the Holy Spirit came on them, and they spoke in tongues and prophesied. ⁷ There were about twelve men in all.

This sounds a lot like the story of Apollos. We saw last week in Acts 18:25

²⁵ He had been instructed in the way of the Lord, and he spoke with great fervor and taught about Jesus accurately, though he knew only the baptism of John.

Apollos was saved...He loved the Lord...just like these disciples...but notice

It says he only knew the baptism of John. This is in reference to John the Baptist. What does that mean “he knew only the baptism of John”?

When you consider the chronology of John the Baptist’s ministry before his own death, he was a voice in the wilderness calling people to repentance...the forgiveness of sins...baptizing in water and prophesying of the coming Messiah...the Lamb of God that takes away the sins of the world.

We said this last week, but it bears repeating, because it is applicable here in this story tonight.

John the Baptist preached repentance, but did not have the full story of the Gospel. He didn’t live long enough to see Jesus healing the blind man...raising the dead...didn’t see Jesus crucified...paying the debt for our sin...He didn’t see Him resurrected on the third day like He said He would...

And he wasn’t on the scene when Jesus said to the disciples before His ascension to the Father:

Acts 1:4-5

⁴ On one occasion, while he was eating with them, he gave them this command: “Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised, which you have heard me speak about. ⁵ For John baptized with water, but in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.”

So The baptism of Jesus involves the baptism of His Spirit.

And that baptism is not about forgiveness of sins...The Baptism of the Holy Spirit is about power!

Power to do what they could not have done on their own.

Acts 1:8

⁸ But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”

Get that...*"you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you"*?

In fact, a good working definition of the person and role of the Holy Spirit is:

God's power and presence dwell in us in the person of the Holy Spirit.

"in us". The Holy Spirit is in us as believers

1 Corinthians 6:19

¹⁹ Do you not know that your bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own

Just like the disciples in tonight's story, He is *in us*...we received Him from God when we believed.

We are not our own, and we are not on our own.

When we became believers, the Holy Spirit moved in and took up residence. Basically.....it's no longer about us!

He is with us and in us, everywhere we go and in each circumstance. No matter what we face, the Holy Spirit is there with us. We are not alone.

(So) As believers, the disciples had already received the Holy Spirit within. Now, Jesus was instructing them to receive the Holy Spirit upon them.

In other words, completely submerged, completely immersed in the Holy Spirit.

John the Baptist said:

Matt 3:11

¹¹ "I baptize you with water for repentance. But after me comes one who is more powerful than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire.

Baptism in the Holy Spirit occurs when believers are filled, immersed, and empowered by the Holy Spirit.

Empowered for service! Empowered for incredible works!

It is God's design that:

The Holy Spirit would dwell inside us as believers (-and-)

The Holy Spirit would “come upon” us in power to carry out the work that He has given us to do.

Getting back to the disciples in Acts 1 who were told to stay put until the Holy Spirit came.

Did they receive power? Let’s take a look at that scene a few verses later:

Acts 2:1-4

¹ When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place. ² Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting. ³ They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them. ⁴ All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them.

So that was the scene in Acts 2 in Jerusalem in the upper room. Look at the scene in tonight’s story 18 chapters later in Ephesus:

Acts 19:6

⁶ When Paul placed his hands on them, the Holy Spirit came on them, and they spoke in tongues and prophesied.

The Holy Spirit coming on them in power, baptizing in fire, enabling them to do what they could not have done on their own...as evidenced by them speaking in different tongues they did not know.

So what is the significance of speaking in tongues, and why is it intentionally mentioned in these stories? (and by the way, we will see it later in the house of Cornelius)

*Well, for one thing, **Speaking in tongues is evidence of the baptism of the Holy Spirit.***

It is definitely something we could not do on our own.

Another significant thing...

Speaking in tongues builds us up.

Another way of saying it is *praying in the Spirit*, or using our heavenly language.

Jude 20

²⁰ But you, dear friends, by building yourselves up in your most holy faith and praying in the Holy Spirit

Other ways of saying this: “praying as led by the Spirit,” “praying in the Spirit’s realm,” or “praying in the power of the Spirit.”

Romans 8:26

²⁶ In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us through wordless groans.

(expand on praying in the Spirit)

And by the way...the key is being led by the Spirit. Notice the scene in Acts 2:

⁴ All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them.

Notice “as the Spirit enabled them” another version says “as the Spirit gave the utterance”

i.e. This is not something we conjure up ourselves. It is not contrived or manipulated.

Another significant thing...

Speaking in tongues edifies the church.

1 Corinthians 14:1-5

¹ Follow the way of love and eagerly desire gifts of the Spirit, especially prophecy. ² For anyone who speaks in a tongue does not speak to people but to God. Indeed, no one understands them; they utter mysteries by the Spirit. ³ But the one who prophesies speaks to people for their strengthening, encouraging and comfort. ⁴ Anyone who speaks in a tongue edifies themselves, but the one who prophesies edifies the church. ⁵ I would like every one of you to speak in tongues, but I would rather have you prophesy. The one who prophesies is greater

than the one who speaks in tongues, unless someone interprets, so that the church may be edified.

(expand on)

One last significant thing that doesn't get talked about much...

When we are baptized in the Holy Spirit and speaking in tongues, we are empowered to get out of the flesh and walk in the Spirit.

Galatians 5:15-18

¹⁶ So I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh. ¹⁷ For the flesh desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the flesh. They are in conflict with each other, so that you are not to do whatever you want. ¹⁸ But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law.

We need to get out of the flesh...period.

When we try to discern truth from our human standpoint we make interpretations of life's circumstances through our brokenness.

We absolutely must have the discernment and empowerment of the Holy Spirit if we are to move forward in victory and truth.

1 Corinthians 2:14

¹⁴ The person without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God but considers them foolishness, and cannot understand them because they are discerned only through the Spirit.

The apostles knew this. And so we see them praying in the Spirit and preaching the importance of the new believers receiving the baptism of the Holy Spirit for empowerment.

⁴⁹ I am going to send you what my Father has promised; but stay in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high.”

In this scene we see the disciples gathered together, still mourning Jesus' death, likely confused. Then the resurrected Christ Himself appears to them and their sorrow turns to joy...their confusion to praise. *But according to Jesus, there was yet another wonderful event still to happen.*

Look at the same scene in book of Acts 1:4-5:

Acts 1:4-5

⁴ On one occasion, while he was eating with them, he gave them this command: “Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised, which you have heard me speak about. ⁵ For John baptized with water, but in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.”

Here, Jesus refers to a *baptism*

So, up to this point, we have heard Jesus:

- Say "*when the Holy Spirit comes on you*" and "*clothed with power*"
- Refer to "*what the Father has promised*"
- Refer to a "*baptism in the Holy Spirit*"

To help us understand this, let's look at the definition of the word *baptize*:

To completely immerse (as in water)

Jesus was instructing them to receive the Holy Spirit *upon them*.

In other words, completely submerged, completely immersed in the Holy Spirit.

Similar to what Paul meant in 2 Cor 5:17

2 Corinthians 5:17

¹⁷ Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation has come: The old has gone, the new has come!

A word study will show that the words "in Christ" mean the same as "submerged or immersed in"

John the Baptist said:

Matt 3:11

¹¹ "I baptize you with water for repentance. But after me comes one who is more powerful than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire.

What is the significance of baptism, if we already have the Holy Spirit in us?

Jesus answered that question in Acts 1:8.

⁸ But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you

It is about power! Being clothed in power! Power for service! Power from on high to do what we could never have done on our own!

And guys, I believe that is what happened to Apollos. I believe prior to this story he only knew the water baptism of John. But now, he had been baptized in the Holy Spirit and fire.

And again...for what? Power! Did Apollos have power?

⁸ Paul entered the synagogue and spoke boldly there for three months, arguing persuasively about the kingdom of God. ⁹ But some of them became obstinate; they refused to believe and publicly maligned the Way. So Paul left them. He took the disciples with him and had discussions daily in the lecture hall of Tyrannus. ¹⁰ This went on for two years, so that all the Jews and Greeks who lived in the province of Asia heard the word of the Lord.

¹¹ God did extraordinary miracles through Paul, ¹² so that even handkerchiefs and aprons that had touched him were taken to the sick, and their illnesses were cured and the evil spirits left them.

last two weeks we looked at Corinth, the setting of Chapter 18. We saw that Corinth was a major center of commerce and trade, with two shipping ports. We also saw that it was a city full of debauchery and immorality. We saw the introduction of a couple named Aquila and Priscilla. We'll read about them more a little later. Let's pick up the story tonight in verse 18:

Acts 18:18-28

¹⁸ Paul stayed on in Corinth for some time. Then he left the brothers and sisters and sailed for Syria, accompanied by Priscilla and Aquila. Before he sailed, he had his hair cut off at Cenchreae because of a vow he had taken.

So what's going on here? Why does Luke take the time to talk about Paul getting a haircut? It's not so much about the haircut as it is about the vow he had taken. Scholars believe this was the Nazirite vow. A Nazirite was an Israelite who voluntarily took a vow of personal consecration to the Lord for a certain amount of time. This is mentioned in Numbers 6:

Numbers 6:1-8

¹ The LORD said to Moses, ² "Speak to the Israelites and say to them: 'If a man or woman wants to make a special vow, a vow of dedication to the LORD as a Nazirite, ³ they must abstain from wine and other fermented drink and must not drink vinegar made from wine or other fermented drink. They must not drink grape juice or eat grapes or raisins. ⁴ As long as they remain under their Nazirite vow, they must not eat anything that comes from the grapevine, not even the seeds or skins.

⁵ "During the entire period of their Nazirite vow, no razor may be used on their head. They must be holy until the period of their dedication to the LORD is over; they must let their hair grow long.

⁶ "Throughout the period of their dedication to the LORD, the Nazirite must not go near a dead body. ⁷ Even if their own father or mother or brother or sister dies,

they must not make themselves ceremonially unclean on account of them, because the symbol of their dedication to God is on their head. ⁸ Throughout the period of their dedication, they are consecrated to the LORD.

Consecrated to the Lord. What does that mean? And what was significant about Paul taking this vow now?

Paul had been in the city of Corinth for around two years. That is a lot of time to evangelize and disciple new believers. But it is also a lot of time spent in a city wallowing in debauchery. Have you ever been in a place where it seemed like evil was present? Don't you feel like you need to wash afterwards? Paul had spent two years in one of the most immoral places that existed at the time. I believe he knew God had much more for him to do, and it was time to move on. But he needed a time of cleansing and purification first.

God still had miraculous works to do through Paul, but Paul needed to consecrate himself first.

It reminds me of when the Israelites had escaped slavery in Egypt. God had led them through the desert. And then, when they were sitting at the cusp of the Promised Land...ready to take the first town, Jericho, Joshua said:

Joshua 3:5

⁵ Joshua told the people, "Consecrate yourselves, for tomorrow the Lord will do amazing things among you."

In other words: You are about to have an encounter with God Almighty Himself. Prepare yourself! Focus! Now is not the time for the flesh! Now is not the time to be bound up in your head!

Let's take a look at this word Consecrate: *Devote exclusively to a particular purpose. Make or declare sacred; dedicate formally to a divine purpose.*

In fact, the Latin root is the same word we get *sacred* from

Which means *connected with God*, dedicated for His purpose

Key words: devote, connect, dedicate...it is about committing one self. And we must understand: ***Consecrating oneself to God is a choice! Don't wait for the feeling!***

The idea of consecration goes back to the early beginnings of the priesthood, when God began to instruct Moses and Aaron on the elements of worship, they were to be consecrated...set aside, devoted to God Himself. Fully committed to God and to no other purpose.

But I want to propose something to you -

When it comes to partnering with God, joining Him in battle, advancing to take the promise, there is another level of consecration called for.

The consecrating and preparing is not about elements of worship...it's *not* about cleaning the carpet in the church and making sure our name tags are straight, it's not about leadership meetings and fund raisers,

This is a different level of consecration...we are consecrating *ourselves!*

Choosing to devote and dedicate ourselves, to commit ourselves to the Lord.

Allowing ourselves to be cleansed, purged...*destroying that which doesn't please Him!*

That, my friends, is the consecration God is asking for when He says

"Consecrate yourselves, for tomorrow the Lord will do amazing things among you."

And I say it again...it's a *choice*, not a feeling!

Someone said:

"You can't really say "yes" to God's call on your life until you can say "no" to things that will keep you from that call."

Let's get back to the text in Acts 18:

¹⁹ They arrived at Ephesus, where Paul left Priscilla and Aquila.

This is the area mentioned in Acts 16 when Paul was prevented by the Holy Spirit from going.

Acts 16:6

⁶ Paul and his companions traveled throughout the region of Phrygia and Galatia, having been kept by the Holy Spirit from preaching the word in the province of Asia.

Getting back to Acts 18:

He himself went into the synagogue and reasoned with the Jews. ²⁰ When they asked him to spend more time with them, he declined. ²¹ But as he left, he promised, “I will come back if it is God’s will.” Then he set sail from Ephesus. ²² When he landed at Caesarea, he went up to Jerusalem and greeted the church and then went down to Antioch.

*²³ After spending some time in Antioch, Paul set out from there and traveled from place to place throughout the region of Galatia and Phrygia, strengthening all the disciples. **So Paul went throughout the region strengthening and teaching the new churches that had been planted.***

²⁴ Meanwhile a Jew named Apollos, a native of Alexandria, came to Ephesus. He was a learned man, with a thorough knowledge of the Scriptures. ²⁵ He had been instructed in the way of the Lord, and he spoke with great fervor and taught about Jesus accurately, though he knew only the baptism of John. ²⁶ He began to speak boldly in the synagogue. When Priscilla and Aquila heard him, they invited him to their home and explained to him the way of God more adequately.

What is happening here? (give a little history on Apollos’ education). But look at v25:

²⁵ He had been instructed in the way of the Lord, and he spoke with great fervor and taught about Jesus accurately, though he knew only the baptism of John.

He was saved...He loved the Lord...He was gifted and spoke with passion and eloquence, but there was apparently something still missing...that missing ingredient needed to really launch him...what was it?

It says he only knew the baptism of John. This is in reference to John the Baptist. What does that mean “he knew only the baptism of John”?

When you consider the chronology of John the Baptist's ministry before his own death, he was a voice in the wilderness calling people to repentance...the forgiveness of sins...baptizing in water and prophesying of the coming Messiah...the Lamb of God that takes away the sins of the world.

And while that's great and true, it is not the full story of the Gospel. John the Baptist didn't live long enough to see Jesus healing the blind man...raising the dead...He didn't see Jesus labor in the garden of Gethsemane...he didn't see Jesus betrayed with a kiss...he didn't see Jesus beaten and whipped...crucified...paying the debt for our sin...He didn't see Him resurrected on the third day like He said He would...He wasn't there to Jesus walking in His post-resurrected body...

And he wasn't on the scene when Jesus said to the disciples before His ascension to the Father:

Acts 1:8.

⁸ But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth. ”

Get that...*"you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you"*?

And in Luke: Luke 24:49

⁴⁹ I am going to send you what my Father has promised; but stay in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high. ”

In this scene we see the disciples gathered together, still mourning Jesus' death, likely confused. Then the resurrected Christ Himself appears to them and their sorrow turns to joy...their confusion to praise. *But according to Jesus, there was yet another wonderful event still to happen.*

Look at the same scene in book of Acts 1:4-5:

Acts 1:4-5

⁴ On one occasion, while he was eating with them, he gave them this command: “Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised, which you have heard me speak about. ⁵ For John baptized with water, but in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit. ”

Here, Jesus refers to a *baptism*

So, up to this point, we have heard Jesus:

- Say "*when the Holy Spirit comes on you*" and "*clothed with power*"
- Refer to "*what the Father has promised*"
- Refer to a "*baptism in the Holy Spirit*"

To help us understand this, let's look at the definition of the word *baptize*:

To completely immerse (as in water)

Jesus was instructing them to receive the Holy Spirit *upon them*.

In other words, completely submerged, completely immersed in the Holy Spirit.

Similar to what Paul meant in 2 Cor 5:17

2 Corinthians 5:17

¹⁷ Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation has come: The old has gone, the new has come!

A word study will show that the words "in Christ" mean the same as "*submerged or immersed in*"

John the Baptist said:

Matt 3:11

¹¹ "I baptize you with water for repentance. But after me comes one who is more powerful than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire.

What is the significance of baptism, if we already have the Holy Spirit in us?

Jesus answered that question in Acts 1:8.

⁸ But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you

It is about power! Being clothed in power! Power for service! Power from on high to do what we could never have done on our own!

And guys, I believe that is what happened to Apollos. I believe prior to this story he only knew the water baptism of John. But now, he had been baptized in the Holy Spirit and fire.

And again...for what? Power! Did Apollos have power?

*²⁷ When Apollos wanted to go to Achaia, the brothers and sisters encouraged him and wrote to the disciples there to welcome him. When he arrived, he was a great help to those who by grace had believed. **(helped them grow in grace)** ²⁸ For he vigorously refuted his Jewish opponents in public debate, proving **(undeniably)** from the Scriptures that Jesus was the Messiah.*

¹ After this, Paul left Athens and went to Corinth. ² There he met a Jew named Aquila, a native of Pontus, who had recently come from Italy with his wife Priscilla, because Claudius had ordered all Jews to leave Rome. Paul went to see them, ³ and because he was a tentmaker as they were, he stayed and worked with them. ⁴ Every Sabbath he reasoned in the synagogue, trying to persuade Jews and Greeks.

Let's stop right there and look at the setting.

Paul left Athens and traveled to Corinth (show map)

Corinth is approx. 50 miles from Athens. It was already an old city at this time, and was a major center of commerce and trade. It had ports where ships from all over the world brought goods for trade.

What was Corinth known for? (besides making rich leather for the Chrysler Cordoba)

For one, it was the place where the Isthmian Games were held. These were large athletic competitions that were held the year before and the year after the Olympics. The first games were held in 582 BC, so this was indeed an old city.

The city was also home to the temple of Aphrodite, the Greek goddess of love and pleasure. In the temple were a thousand prostitutes. This place was well known for its debauchery and depravity.

OK, what's the point in all this? The point is...*this* is the place where the Holy Spirit led Paul to establish one of the most thriving Christian churches. Right in the middle of the immorality.

God is not intimidated by evil.

In the face of evil, goodness thrived. *Evil is not stronger than good. And God is still in control!*

Just like darkness is simply the absence of light, evil is the absence of good.

It is not stronger than good! It is not a force that overcomes good!

Evil must yield the name of Jesus Christ!

And it was right in the middle of this culture and debauchery that God built a church!

What a lesson for us today?

What do we do when it looks like evil is winning?

Reminds me of what David said in the famous 23rd Psalm:

Psalm 23:5

*⁵ You prepare a table before me
in the presence of my enemies.*

Get that...in the presence of my enemies.

“Another task the shepherd takes on is to keep an eye out for predators. He will look for signs of wolves, coyotes, cougars, and bears. Often what happens is that the crafty predators lurk up on the rimrock watching every movement the sheep make, hoping for a chance to make a swift attack that will stampede the sheep. Then sheep will be separated and will fall easy to the attacker. The picture here is full of drama, action, suspense – and possible death. Only the preparation and alertness of the shepherd who tends the flock on this tableland in full view of the enemies can prevent them from fall prey to attack.”

Adapted from *A Shepherd Looks at Psalm 23* by Phillip Keller

What is the key here? Why would the shepherd do this in full view?

It's about the shepherd's protection.

Sheep are easily spooked. In order for them to graze they must be at peace. And in this picture they are peacefully grazing in plain view of their enemy!!

Remember, the bible says Satan is like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour.

But also remember it's not about the sheep, the lion, predators, etc. *It's about the presence of the shepherd!*

The shepherd knows very well the tricks, tactics, and treachery of the predator; he prepares for it, and protects against it.

Guys, I believe this:

God wants us to have holy audacity. (boldness, not rude or disrespectful)

I'm talking about God-confidence!

In the face of danger - the sheep are at peace

In the middle of a trial - we can be at peace

In the middle of a pandemic - our needs are met

In the throes of rejection - we know we are loved

In the onset of depression - we can have clarity

In the midst of a sinful culture – we can represent the light of God's truth and display the power of the Gospel!

The key: *As we stay near the shepherd, we are protected. His presence is the difference-maker!*

Psalm 23:4

*⁴ Even though I walk
through the darkest valley,
I will fear no evil,
for you are with me*

It's the same concept mentioned in James:

James 4:7-8

⁷ *Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.*

⁸ *Come near to God and he will come near to you.*

Notice the sequence...

This idea plays out in our story, because let's look a few verses ahead:

⁹ *One night the Lord spoke to Paul in a vision: "Do not be afraid; keep on speaking, do not be silent. ¹⁰ For I am with you, and no one is going to attack and harm you, because I have many people in this city." ¹¹ So Paul stayed in Corinth for a year and a half, teaching them the word of God.*

OK, so that's the setting of Corinth. What other new characters do we see being introduced in this chapter? *Aquila and Priscilla.*

What do we know about them? Well, for one, as we will see, this couple is always mentioned together. *Aquila and Priscilla...Priscilla and Aquila.*

So what? Well, this story shows how powerful and effective a Christian couple can be when they are in one mind and heart.

As a couple grows in their love for God, they naturally grow closer together. (show triangle)

It just stands to reason. If you are in a relationship with someone who is committed to Christ, you will tend to be more committed to Christ. (or at least that's the way it's supposed to be)

And *A couple that is unified in their commitment to Christ can do anything!*

Marriage can be thought of as a lifelong journey of learning to love like Christ.

And that is what we will see in Aquila and Priscilla.

They opened their home to Paul the evangelist. Sure, they had the common bond of being tent makers, but I think it was more than that.

They listened carefully to every word that was spoken about the Gospel. They studied the Word themselves and grew in maturity. As we will see, they saw a young evangelist named Apollos, and took him under their

wing. They taught him things he needed to know to make him more affective in ministry.

Later, when they returned to Rome, they turned their home into a successful and vibrant home church. They are mentioned in Romans 16:3-5

³ *Greet Priscilla and Aquila, my co-workers in Christ Jesus. ⁴ They risked their lives for me. Not only I but all the churches of the Gentiles are grateful to them.*

⁵ *Greet also the church that meets at their house.*

They are mentioned in 1 Corinthians 16:19 where Paul gives his final greeting to the Corinthian church:

¹⁹ *The churches in the province of Asia send you greetings. Aquila and Priscilla¹ greet you warmly in the Lord, and so does the church that meets at their house.*

2 Timothy 4:19 in his final greetings to Timothy:

¹⁹ *Greet Priscilla and Aquila...*

So this couple clearly played an important role in the propagation of the Gospel in that region. And they were just an ordinary couple, untrained. Yet, they loved they Lord and devoted their lives and their home to His work.

Question: *Could it be the same for you?*

Let's get back to the text and finish up for tonight:

⁵ *When Silas and Timothy came from Macedonia, Paul devoted himself exclusively to preaching, testifying to the Jews that Jesus was the Messiah. ⁶ But when they opposed Paul and became abusive, he shook out his clothes in protest and said to them, "Your blood be on your own heads! I am innocent of it. From now on I will go to the Gentiles." **As if to dust his hands off and say, OK, you had your chance...now I will take it to the Gentiles. They will receive it. Reminds me of what is says in John 1:11-13***

¹¹ *He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him. ¹² Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to*

become children of God—¹³ children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God.

Getting back to the text to finish:

⁷ Then Paul left the synagogue and went next door to the house of Titius Justus, a worshiper of God. ⁸ Crispus, the synagogue leader, and his entire household believed in the Lord; and many of the Corinthians who heard Paul believed and were baptized. **(leader of the Jewish synagogue became a believer)**

⁹ One night the Lord spoke to Paul in a vision: "Do not be afraid; keep on speaking, do not be silent. ¹⁰ For I am with you, and no one is going to attack and harm you, because I have many people in this city." ¹¹ So Paul stayed in Corinth for a year and a half, teaching them the word of God.

¹² While Gallio was proconsul of Achaia, the Jews of Corinth made a united attack on Paul and brought him to the place of judgment. ¹³ "This man," they charged, "is persuading the people to worship God in ways contrary to the law."

¹⁴ Just as Paul was about to speak, Gallio said to them, "If you Jews were making a complaint about some misdemeanor or serious crime, it would be reasonable for me to listen to you. ¹⁵ But since it involves questions about words and names and your own law—settle the matter yourselves. I will not be a judge of such things."
(interesting...expand on)

Proverbs 21:1

¹ The king's heart is like a stream of water directed by the LORD

¹⁶ So he drove them off. ¹⁷ Then the crowd there turned on Sosthenes the synagogue leader and beat him in front of the proconsul; and Gallio showed no concern whatever. **Apparently, Sosthenes replaced Crispus as the leader of the synagogue. Perhaps the crowd beat him out of frustration for losing the case...we don't know. But he go the brunt of it. But interestingly enough, there is evidence that Sosthenes became a believer himself. Look at how 1 Corinthians starts out:**

1 Corinthians 1:1-2

¹ Paul, called to be an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, and our brother Sosthenes,

² To the church of God in Corinth, to those sanctified in Christ Jesus and called to be his holy people, together with all those everywhere who call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ—their Lord and ours:

This is a very important topic, and worth a side bar from our usual Book of Acts study.

Tonight, and next week we will look at these questions.

**Tonight, it will be all we can do to tackle this question:
*What does the Bible say about death?***

We will look at this question for a *believer* as well as the *unbeliever*.

Hebrews 9:27-28

²⁷ Just as people are destined to die once, and after that to face judgment, ²⁸ so Christ was sacrificed once to take away the sins of many; and he will appear a second time, not to bear sin, but to bring salvation to those who are waiting for him.

First of all, this scripture tells us a few things about death:

Death is unavoidable for everyone. (no one is exempt)

(expand on...people trying to stay young)

Death is not the end.

Actually, it is really the beginning, as we will see.

In fact, it could be said: *Death is a doorway to our destiny.*

One way or the other.

So let's get into it...***What happens when we die?***

As believers, if we die before Jesus' return, we will be immediately spiritually united with Jesus. Our earthly body stays earthly and decays, or is cremated. There is no holding place, or temporary waiting period.

Jesus clearly indicates this when he said to the thief on the cross:

Luke 23:43

⁴³ Jesus answered him, “Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in paradise.”

And 2 Cor 5 says to be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord.

Paul described this as the Third Heaven in a vision:

2 Corinthians 12:2-4

² I know a man in Christ who fourteen years ago was caught up to the third heaven. Whether it was in the body or out of the body I do not know—God knows. ³ And I know that this man—whether in the body or apart from the body I do not know, but God knows—⁴ was caught up to paradise and heard inexpressible things, things that no one is permitted to tell.

Scholars believe Paul is speaking of himself here. And notice he references a “third heaven” in v2, then he calls it paradise in v4...same word Jesus used.

Third heaven...paradise...whatever the terminology, we are talking about the literal presence of God! A place so marvelous Paul couldn't even put mortal words to it. A place where there is literally no more sorrow, grief, pain, worry...no more sickness...no more death!

Reminds me of the old song that said:

*What a day that will be
When my Jesus I shall see
When I look upon His face
The One who saved me by His grace
When He takes me by the hand
And leads me to the Promised Land
What a day, glorious day that will be*

It is the same place Jesus described in Matthew 5:14-16

¹⁴ “You are the light of the world. A town built on a hill cannot be hidden. ¹⁵ Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. ¹⁶ In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven.

And the same place mentioned by Solomon in 1 Kings 8:27

²⁷ "But will God really dwell on earth? The heavens, even the highest heaven, cannot contain you. How much less this temple I have built!"

This God that cannot be contained...even in His highest heaven, is the same God whose presence we will bask in the moment we die as believers.

There's an old story that is very fitting here:

A sick man turned to his doctor as he was preparing to
Leave the examination room and said,
*'Doctor, I am afraid to die.
Tell me what lies on the other side.'*

Very quietly, the doctor said, *'I don't know.'*
*'You don't know? You're, a Christian man,
And don't know what's on the other side?'*

The doctor was holding the handle of the door;
On the other side came a sound of scratching and whining,
And as he opened the door, a dog sprang into the room
And leaped on him with an eager show of gladness.
Turning to the patient, the doctor said,

*'Did you notice my dog?
He's never been in this room before.
He didn't know what was inside.
He knew nothing except that his master was here,
And when the door opened, he sprang in without fear.
I know little of what is on the other side of death,
But I do know one thing...
I know my Master is there and that is enough.'*

For a believer, death is not the end, it's really just the beginning. A graduation if you will.

And death does not represent a threat.....

1 Corinthians 15:55

⁵⁵"Where, O death, is your victory?
Where, O death, is your sting?"

Now we understand why it says in Psalm 116:15:

¹⁵*Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of His saints.*

However, we also must understand what we just read in Hebrews 9

²⁷ *Just as people are destined to die once, and after that to face judgment*

When we die we will indeed be in the presence of God, but we will also come before the Judgment Seat of Christ. For the believer, the Judgment Seat is not about whether we will enter heaven—we'll already be there because our sins have been atoned for on the cross by Jesus Christ. It will, however, be a time to give an account of the works we have done on earth, and we will be rewarded accordingly. We'll be assigned places of authority in the coming Millennium based upon our faithfulness to God when we were on earth.

Look at how this is addressed in 2 Corinthians 5:6-10

⁶ *Therefore we are always confident and know that as long as we are at home in the body we are away from the Lord. ⁷ For we live by faith, not by sight. ⁸ We are confident, I say, and would prefer to be away from the body and at home with the Lord. ⁹ So we make it our goal to please him, whether we are at home in the body or away from it. ¹⁰ For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each of us may receive what is due us for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad.*

This will be a great time of celebration! One writer put it this way:

"The Christians are in heaven. God is seated on the throne, which is surrounded by a rainbow of emerald greens. The twenty-four elders representing the church-age saints sit around the throne. Before the throne is a sea of glass. In the midst of the throne are the four living creatures, and singing praise to the One on the throne are the angels and the Church. This is the worship of the glorified Christ, the Creator of the world. God is just about to deal with the physical earth in judgment, and before He does, the Creator of earth is worshiped by the Church in

heaven. Thunder, lightning, and voices signify the judgment which is about to fall on the earth.”

So that is for believers...

What happens to unbelievers when they die?

Jesus told a story in Luke 16:19-31

¹⁹ “There was a rich man who was dressed in purple and fine linen and lived in luxury every day. ²⁰ At his gate was laid a beggar named Lazarus, covered with sores ²¹ and longing to eat what fell from the rich man’s table. Even the dogs came and licked his sores.

²² “The time came when the beggar died and the angels carried him to Abraham’s side. The rich man also died and was buried. ²³ In Hades, where he was in torment, he looked up and saw Abraham far away, with Lazarus by his side. ²⁴ So he called to him, ‘Father Abraham, have pity on me and send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue, because I am in agony in this fire.’

²⁵ “But Abraham replied, ‘Son, remember that in your lifetime you received your good things, while Lazarus received bad things, but now he is comforted here and you are in agony. ²⁶ And besides all this, between us and you a great chasm has been set in place, so that those who want to go from here to you cannot, nor can anyone cross over from there to us.’

²⁷ “He answered, ‘Then I beg you, father, send Lazarus to my family, ²⁸ for I have five brothers. Let him warn them, so that they will not also come to this place of torment.’

²⁹ “Abraham replied, ‘They have Moses and the Prophets; let them listen to them.’

³⁰ “‘No, father Abraham,’ he said, ‘but if someone from the dead goes to them, they will repent.’

³¹ “He said to him, ‘If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, they will not be convinced even if someone rises from the dead.’”

We’ll close tonight by unpacking this story:

First, we see Jesus contrasting two men. One is rich, wallowing in luxury every day. Jesus specifically points out that this man lived in worldly indulgence every day! This wasn’t just an occasional thing. He had all he needed from his worldly possessions, and lavished in it. *No need for God!*

Meanwhile, at his gate was a man names Lazarus (not Lazarus that Jesus’ raised from the dead) This man was miserable and lived in utter poverty and was in desperate need of medical attention. Being positioned at the gate, the

rich man would've surely seen him every time he came home. Yet, the rich man was clearly self-absorbed and wasn't interested in helping him.

Both men died, because as we learned earlier, death is unavoidable.

And in death, the roles were reversed. The beggar, who must've been a believer, was carried to Abraham's bosom...or paradise. The rich man was sent to Hades, which means the place of the dead. In Hades, he, like the beggar before, could see the one who could bring relief...*He now had a desperate need for God...but it was too late.* His soul was now in constant torment...*he* was the one now begging for mercy....but to no avail. Unimaginable punishment, torment, sorrow, with no relief available.

In this story, one died and received eternal comfort – the other died and received eternal torment.

And this torment was being dealt in the soul of the rich man. His body was still in the ground decaying.

Revelation 20:5 says:

⁵ *(The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were ended.)*

As will learn next week, when Jesus returns, those condemned unbelievers will be united with their bodies and sent to the Lake of Fire (hell) to spend eternity with the devil and his demons in literal agony and torment for eternity, both in the soulish realm and in the physical. The Lake of Fire will be a literal and physical place...a place where there will be constant sorrow and gnashing of teeth (more on the resurrection next week)

But notice in Jesus' story the most torment punishment of it all is the despair of knowing that with all the begging and bargaining...it will be too late!

Last week we looked at what the Bible says about death. Specifically, what happens to us when we die prior to Jesus' return...we found out that death is not the end. In fact, it's the beginning...a doorway, as it were. Whether a believer or a non-believer, death ushers us into our eternal destiny.

For the believer, when we breathe our last breath on this earth we are instantaneously transported into the glorious presence of God.

For the unbeliever, there is an instantaneous transportation too...but not the glorious type. They are sent to a place Jesus called Hades, a place of constant torment and separation from God. There, they await their final and eternal condemnation to the Lake of Fire with the devil and his demons.

Tonight, we will look at Jesus' return and end time events.

What does the Bible says about Jesus' return?

First of all: The timing of Jesus' coming is God's calendar: We will not figure it out.

Acts 1:7

⁷ He said to them: "It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority.

1 Thessalonians 5:1-2

The Day of the Lord

¹ Now, brothers and sisters, about times and dates we do not need to write to you, ²for you know very well that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night.

Matthew 24:36

The Day and Hour Unknown

³⁶ "But about that day or hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father.

Matthew 24:42,44,50

⁴² "Therefore keep watch, because you do not know on what day your Lord will come.

⁴⁴ So you also must be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him.

⁵⁰ The master of that servant will come on a day when he does not expect him and at an hour he is not aware of.

Let's now move into this time of God's judgment of the earth.

What does the Bible teach about the end times?

We believe in the *Premillennial second coming of Jesus*.

First, to resurrect the dead saints and then to catch away the living saints to Him in the air. (Rapture)

1 Corinthians 15:52

⁵² in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed.

1 Thessalonians 4:15-17

¹⁵ According to the Lord's word, we tell you that we who are still alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will certainly not precede those who have fallen asleep. ¹⁶ For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. ¹⁷ After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever.

Christ raptures His Church up into heaven before the Tribulation to remove the Christians from the coming judgment on the earth.

1 Thessalonians 5:9

⁹ For God did not appoint us to suffer wrath but to receive salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ.

What happens when we are with Jesus after the rapture?

After the Rapture, we will come before the Judgment Seat of Christ just like those that have died before Jesus' return.

What happens after the rapture?

Tribulation, Anti-Christ, Mark of the Beast

OK, so we said:

The Premillennial second coming of Jesus: *First, to resurrect the dead saints, reuniting them with a glorified body, and then to catch away the living saints to Him in the air. (Rapture)*

Second, to reign on the earth a thousand years.

Jesus comes in power and great glory at the end of the Tribulation. He will come in judgment and will reign on this earth during the Millennium. At this time, everyone will know He is King.

Matthew 24:29-31

²⁹ *“Immediately after the distress of those days*

*“the sun will be darkened,
and the moon will not give its light;
the stars will fall from the sky,
and the heavenly bodies will be shaken.’*

³⁰ *“Then will appear the sign of the Son of Man in heaven. And then all the peoples of the earth will mourn when they see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven, with power and great glory. ³¹ And he will send his angels with a loud trumpet call, and they will gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of the heavens to the other.*

Zechariah 14:4

⁴ *On that day his feet will stand on the Mount of Olives, east of Jerusalem, and the Mount of Olives will be split in two from east to west, forming a great valley, with half of the mountain moving north and half moving south.*

1 Thessalonians 4:14

¹⁴ *For we believe that Jesus died and rose again, and so we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in him.*

2 Thessalonians 1:7-10

⁷ *... This will happen when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven in blazing fire with his powerful angels. ⁸ He will punish those who do not know God and do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. ⁹ They will be punished with everlasting destruction and shut out from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his might ¹⁰ on the day he comes to be glorified in his holy people and to be marveled at among all those who have believed. This includes you, because you believed our testimony to you.*

Jude 14,15

¹⁴ Enoch, the seventh from Adam, prophesied about them: “See, the Lord is coming with thousands upon thousands of his holy ones ¹⁵ to judge everyone, and to convict all of them of all the ungodly acts they have committed in their ungodliness, and of all the defiant words ungodly sinners have spoken against him.”

Revelation 19:11-21

The Heavenly Warrior Defeats the Beast

¹¹ I saw heaven standing open and there before me was a white horse, whose rider is called Faithful and True. With justice he judges and wages war.

¹² His eyes are like blazing fire, and on his head are many crowns. He has a name written on him that no one knows but he himself. ¹³ He is dressed in a robe dipped in blood, and his name is the Word of God. ¹⁴ The armies of heaven were following him, riding on white horses and dressed in fine linen, white and clean. ¹⁵ Coming out of his mouth is a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations. “He will rule them with an iron scepter.” He treads the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God Almighty. ¹⁶ On his robe and on his thigh he has this name written:

KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS.

¹⁷ And I saw an angel standing in the sun, who cried in a loud voice to all the birds flying in midair, “Come, gather together for the great supper of God, ¹⁸ so that you may eat the flesh of kings, generals, and the mighty, of horses and their riders, and the flesh of all people, free and slave, great and small.” ¹⁹ Then I saw the beast and the kings of the earth and their armies gathered together to wage war against the rider on the horse and his army. ²⁰ But the beast was captured, and with it the false prophet who had performed the signs on its behalf. With these signs he had deluded those who had received the mark of the beast and worshiped its image. The two of them were thrown alive into the fiery lake of burning sulfur. ²¹ The rest were killed with the sword coming out of the mouth of the rider on the horse, and all the birds gorged themselves on their flesh.

Revelation 20:4-6

⁴ I saw thrones on which were seated those who had been given authority to judge. And I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded because of their testimony about Jesus and because of the word of God. They^[a] had not worshiped the beast or its image and had not received its mark on their foreheads or their hands. They came to life and reigned with Christ a

thousand years. ⁵ (The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were ended.) This is the first resurrection. ⁶ Blessed and holy are those who share in the first resurrection. The second death has no power over them, but they will be priests of God and of Christ and will reign with him for a thousand years.

Also Revelation 20:12-15 lake of fire

Matthew 25:31-46

The Sheep and the Goats (another translation...Judgment of the Multitudes)

³¹ “When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his glorious throne. ³² All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. ³³ He will put the sheep on his right and the goats on his left.

³⁴ “Then the King will say to those on his right, ‘Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. ³⁵ For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, ³⁶ I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.’

³⁷ “Then the righteous will answer him, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? ³⁸ When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? ³⁹ When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?’

⁴⁰ “The King will reply, ‘Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.’

⁴¹ “Then he will say to those on his left, ‘Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. ⁴² For I was hungry and you gave me nothing to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, ⁴³ I was a stranger and you did not invite me in, I needed clothes and you did not clothe me, I was sick and in prison and you did not look after me.’

⁴⁴ “They also will answer, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or needing clothes or sick or in prison, and did not help you?’

⁴⁵ “He will reply, ‘Truly I tell you, whatever you did not do for one of the least of these, you did not do for me.’

⁴⁶ “Then they will go away to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life.”

Acts 17:16-34

In Athens (show map)

¹⁶ While Paul was waiting for them in Athens, he was greatly distressed to see that the city was full of idols. ¹⁷ So he reasoned in the synagogue with both Jews and God-fearing Greeks, as well as in the marketplace day by day with those who happened to be there. ¹⁸ A group of Epicurean and Stoic philosophers began to debate with him. Some of them asked, “What is this babbler trying to say?” Others remarked, “He seems to be advocating foreign gods.” They said this because Paul was preaching the good news about Jesus and the resurrection. ¹⁹ Then they took him and brought him to a meeting of the Areopagus, where they said to him, “May we know what this new teaching is that you are presenting? ²⁰ You are bringing some strange ideas to our ears, and we would like to know what they mean.” ²¹ (All the Athenians and the foreigners who lived there spent their time doing nothing but talking about and listening to the latest ideas.)

Let’s unpack this a little. If we recall from last week, an angry mob from Thessalonica chased Paul out of Berea. Silas and Timothy remained in Berea. Paul went to Athens and was waiting for the others to join him. While there, he began to look around and immediately noticed the city was full of idolatry. So he went to the synagogue to make his case. He also went to the marketplace.

This scene is in reference to the area of Mars Hill. The “Areopagus” as mentioned in v19 was a group of intellectuals and pontificators...they would meet on this raised rock formation (show pic) named after the Greek god Mars, or Ares. In English, it is translated as *Mars Hill*. This was an area for public debates and even court cases. But mostly, it was an area where intellectuals and philosophers loved to sit around and listen to themselves talk. (v21 *spent their time doing nothing but talking about and listening to the latest ideas.*) Another way of putting it...they “word wrestled”)

Look at v18: *A group of Epicurean and Stoic philosophers began to debate with him. Some of them asked, “What is this babbler trying to say?”*

Which is ironic, because I get a sense that “babbling” was what this area was all about. I can picture it now...pontification...

Ever been around someone who seemed to love to hear themselves talk? They had a story for everything? “That ain’t nothing...”

1 Corinthians 4:20

²⁰ *For the kingdom of God is not a matter of talk but of power.*

Look at v18 again...

A group of Epicurean and Stoic philosophers

What does that mean?

***Epicureans* were those that followed the teachings of the Greek Philosopher Epicurus. He denied the afterlife and taught that people should live for the moment...get all they could from life with pleasure and money. It was all about material gain...nothing else mattered because once we die, that’s it.**

***Stoic philosophers*...stoicism was about not showing feelings one way or the other...basically undaunted by life...one mode...perhaps you know a stoic person. The “stoic” philosophy was about the importance of being impervious to life...good or bad. The ultimate sign of human achievement and strength was to not be swayed by the good or the bad...any sign of emotion was weakness. True peace, true virtue, and even god-like status was found in complete self-control...mastering the human emotions and passions.**

OK, that’s who those philosophers were...that’s what they believed and wanted to talk about. So what? What does that have to do with us?

These men prided themselves on their talk...their intellect...v21

²¹ *(All the Athenians and the foreigners who lived there spent their time doing nothing but talking about and listening to the latest ideas.)*

When we are walking in power, we don’t need talk.

Power first, then talk.

If our lives aren’t backing up our talk, then we have no power or credibility!

On the other hand...Paul walked into that hornet's nest wielding power...the power of the Holy Spirit!

²² Paul then stood up in the meeting of the Areopagus and said: "People of Athens! I see that in every way you are very religious.

Can I just stop right there and say this?

Christianity is about relationship, not religion!

Religion is easy. This world today doesn't necessarily have a problem with religion. But you start mentioning the name Jesus...you start mentioning repentance, the forgiveness of sins...the importance of holiness and obedience...the very idea of morality...boy oh boy...

So these men were "religious"...but the problem is that their religion was baseless.

Paul warned Timothy about this:

2 Timothy 3:1-5

¹ But mark this: There will be terrible times in the last days. ² People will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boastful, proud, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, ³ without love, unforgiving, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not lovers of the good, ⁴ treacherous, rash, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God— ⁵ having a form of godliness but denying its power. Have nothing to do with such people.

What a picture of the culture we live in today.

But I also wonder if Paul said this because of what he saw at Mars Hill.

Check out how Paul challenges them on their so-called religion:

²³ For as I walked around and looked carefully at your objects of worship, I even found an altar with this inscription: TO AN UNKNOWN GOD. So you are ignorant of the very thing you worship—and this is what I am going to proclaim to you.

Their religion is so shallow, they didn't even know the god they are worshipping. This is more *superstition* than anything else. As silly as that sounds, the background to that is even sillier.

According to historians, several hundred years prior to this, a horrific plague hit the city. To try to seek relief from this plague, they decided to sacrifice to the gods. A flock of sheep was released to run through the town. Wherever they stopped to lay down, that sheep was sacrificed to the god of the closest temple. If a sheep stopped to lay down where there was no temple nearby, it was sacrificed to the unknown god.

But now, through the power of the Holy Spirit, Paul is going to tell them about true religion...worship of the one true God.

James 1:27

²⁷ Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world.

i.e. put the needs of others before your own...especially those that are needy and helpless...and pursue holiness. That's it in a nutshell.

Now notice how he presents the gospel and masterfully packages it in a way that they understand. Watch how he systematically dissects their whole basis of understanding. There is so much here for us to benefit from today. Let's go line-by-line, looking for takeaways as well as scriptural backup:

²⁴ "The God who made the world and everything in it is the Lord of heaven and earth and does not live in temples built by human hands. ²⁵ And he is not served by human hands, as if he needed anything. Rather, he himself gives everyone life and breath and everything else.

God is not limited to anything of human origin or design.

Genesis 1:1

¹ In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.

The word for God here in Gen 1 is *Elohim* - All-powerful God, Creator of all things.

The sentence structure “*in the beginning God*” indicates God’s self-sufficiency, eternal existence, and His mighty power and sovereignty that can create all that we see.

He is the Mighty One over all of creation – this earth, the sun, moon, and stars – He created all these wonders by the work of His own hand.

**How that must have clashed with the thinking of those philosophers.
They worshipped the sun, moon, and stars.**

God still reminds us today that He is Elohim – Creator and All Powerful God. His omnipotent power is at work in every breath we breathe, in every sunrise, every sunset, in the way He holds the stars in the sky, and the way He sustains His people through difficult times. We can rest assured, we are created and sustained by an Almighty God, we never have to fear. He is all we need.

God is all-sufficient, self-sufficient...but get this...

God doesn’t need us...but He wants us.

26 From one man he made all the nations, (Adam) that they should inhabit the whole earth; and he marked out their appointed times in history and the boundaries of their lands. 27 God did this so that they would seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him, though he is not far from any one of us. 28 ‘For in him we live and move and have our being.’ As some of your own poets have said, ‘We are his offspring.’

We were made for relationship with God. (v27)

“For in Him we live and move and have our being...we are his offspring”...i.e. we are God’s...our very nature is from Him

In v28 Paul is directly quoting from Greek philosophers, Aratus and Cleanthes

29 “Therefore since we are God’s offspring, we should not think that the divine being is like gold or silver or stone—an image made by human design and skill. (again, God is not conceived or made by man...quite the opposite) 30 In the past God overlooked such ignorance, but now he commands all people

everywhere to repent. ³¹ For he has set a day when he will judge the world with justice by the man he has appointed. He has given proof of this to everyone by raising him from the dead.”

In v30 it says God commands everyone to repent. i.e. turn away from idolatry and worship the true God. Our takeaway...?

The only way to endure the coming judgment is to repent.

³² When they heard about the resurrection of the dead, some of them sneered, but others said, “We want to hear you again on this subject.” ³³ At that, Paul left the Council. ³⁴ Some of the people became followers of Paul and believed. Among them was Dionysius, a member of the Areopagus, also a woman named Damaris, and a number of others.

So Paul proceeded to tell them about the resurrection of the dead. And what does the Bible say about that?

If we die before Jesus’ second coming, we will immediately be spiritually united with Jesus. Our earthly body stays earthly and decays, or is cremated. There is no holding place, or temporary waiting period.

Jesus clearly indicates this when he said to the thief on the cross:

Luke 23:43

⁴³ Jesus answered him, “Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in paradise.”

And 2 Corinthians 5 says to be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord.

We believe in the Premillennial second coming of Jesus. First, to resurrect the dead saints, reuniting them with a glorified body, and then to catch away the living saints to Him in the air.

First, to resurrect the dead saints and then to catch away the living saints to Him in the air. (Rapture)

1 Corinthians 15:52

⁵² in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed.

1 Thessalonians 4:15-17

¹⁵ According to the Lord's word, we tell you that we who are still alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will certainly not precede those who have fallen asleep. ¹⁶ For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. ¹⁷ After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever.

This didn't sit too well with the Greek philosophers, who believed this life was it. However, we see that a few were convinced and became believers.

My story about 11th hour alumni night.

- a. 17:26 The Aramaic adds an interesting nuance: "He commands the separation of the seasons and sets the lifespan of every person."
- b. 17:27 The Aramaic is "investigating him in his creation."
- c. 17:27 Or "the God who is not far from each one of us."
- d. 17:28 Paul is quoting two classical Greek writers (ca. 270 BC): Aratus (*Phaenomena*, 5) and Cleanthes (*Hymn to Zeus*, 5).
- e. 17:28 Or "Our nature comes from him," as translated from the Aramaic. The Greek is "We are his offspring." The Greek word is *genos*, which means "kindred" or "family" (taken from his genes).
- f. 17:30 Or "deliberately paid no attention to."
- g. 17:30 As translated from the Aramaic.
- h. 17:30 That is, to turn away from idolatry and worship the true God.
- i. 17:31 The Aramaic is "God turns the hearts of men to faith in him [Jesus] and raises them from among the dead."
- j. 17:34 As translated from the Aramaic. According to the church historian Eusebius, Dionysius later became the Bishop of Athens (Eusebius, *Historia Ecclesiae* III: iv).
- k. 17:34 The Greek word can also mean "wife," indicating she was possibly the wife of Dionysius. Regardless, she must have been a woman of high social standing to be included in the meeting of the leadership council.
- l. The sense is that Paul would have preferred to wait until Timothy and Silas came from Berea before he began ministry in Athens. But **when he saw that the city was given over to idols**, he was compelled to preach the gospel immediately.
- m. i. As Paul sailed to Athens from the sea near Berea, he came to a city he had probably never been to before, and like any tourist, he was ready to be impressed by this famous and historic city – which, hundreds of years before, was one of the most glorious and important cities in the world. But when Paul toured Athens, he was only depressed by the magnitude of the idolatry he saw all around.
- n. ii. The idea behind **given over to idols** (*kateidolos*) is really *under* idols, or *swamped by idols*. Paul saw the beauty of Athens, having the best that Greek sculptors and architects could offer; but all that beauty did not honor God, so it did not impress him at all.
- o. b. **Therefore he reasoned in the synagogue... and in the marketplace daily:** Paul's practice was to preach wherever he could get an audience. Here it was both in the **synagogue** and in the **marketplace**.
- p. c. **Those who happened to be there:** Paul faced a challenging audience in Athens. It was a cultured, educated city that was proud of its history. It was an intellectual center, much like Oxford or Cambridge. Paul spoke to a city perhaps different than any other city he had preached in.

- q. i. "Although Athens had long since lost the political eminence which was hers in an earlier day, she continued to represent the highest level of culture attained in classical antiquity." (Bruce)
- r. ii. "By now the greatest days of Athens were behind it, but it could still be fairly described as the intellectual capital of the Greco-Roman world and, at the same time, the religious capital of Greece." (Williams)
- s. **2. (18-21) The novelty of his message earns Paul an invitation to preach at the intellectual center of the city, the Areopagus.**
- t. **Then certain Epicurean and Stoic philosophers encountered him. And some said, "What does this babbler want to say?" Others said, "He seems to be a proclaimer of foreign gods," because he preached to them Jesus and the resurrection. And they took him and brought him to the Areopagus, saying, "May we know what this new doctrine is of which you speak? For you are bringing some strange things to our ears. Therefore we want to know what these things mean." For all the Athenians and the foreigners who were there spent their time in nothing else but either to tell or to hear some new thing.**
- u. a. **Then certain Epicurean... philosophers encountered him:**
The *Epicureans* pursued pleasure as the chief purpose in life, and valued most of all the pleasure of a peaceful life, free from pain, disturbing passions and superstitious fears (including the fear of death). They did not deny the existence of gods, but believed that they had nothing to do with man.
- v. b. **Then certain... Stoic philosophers encountered him:** The *Stoics* were pantheists who put great emphasis on moral sincerity and a high sense of duty. They cultivated a spirit of proud dignity, and believed that suicide was better than a life lived with less dignity.
- w. i. The Stoics believed that everything was god, and god was in everything. So they believed that all things, good or evil, were from "god," and so nothing should be resisted, and they believed there was no particular direction or destiny for mankind.
- x. c. **And some said:** Some mocked Paul because he did not speak with the philosophical niceties popular in Athens (**What does this babbler want to say?**). Others thought Paul was an exotic **proclaimer of foreign gods.**
- y. d. **He preached to them Jesus and the resurrection:** Though Paul spoke in a different place, to a different kind of audience, his message did not change in Athens. He focused on **Jesus and the resurrection.**
- z. e. **For all the Athenians and the foreigners who were there spent their time in nothing else but either to tell or hear some strange new thing:** It was the *novelty* of Paul's message that earned him the invitation to the **Areopagus.** These ancient Greeks loved a constant and always changing stream of news and information.
- aa.i. In the early nineteenth century, Adam Clarke described the situation of his day, and it sounds like it is even truer of our own time. "This is a striking feature of the city of London in the present day. The itch for news, which generally argues a

worldly, shallow, or unsettled mind, is wonderfully prevalent: even ministers of the Gospel, negligent of their sacred function, are become in this sense Athenians; so that the book of God is neither read nor studied with half the avidity and spirit as a *newspaper*. . . It is no wonder if such become political preachers, and their sermons be no better than husks for swine. To such *the hungry sheep look up, and are not fed.*”

bb. 3. (22-23) Paul begins to speak on Mars’ Hill (the Areopagus).

cc. Then Paul stood in the midst of the Areopagus and said, “Men of Athens, I perceive that in all things you are very religious; for as I was passing through and considering the objects of your worship, I even found an altar with this inscription: TO THE UNKNOWN GOD. Therefore, the One whom you worship without knowing, Him I proclaim to you:

dd. a. Men of Athens, I perceive that in all things you are very religious: Paul did not begin with an exposition of Scripture, which was his custom when dealing with Jews or Gentiles who were familiar with the Old Testament. Instead, Paul began with general references to religion.

ee. b. In all things you are very religious: Many ancient observers noticed the religious character of Athens, and some thought that Athenians were the most religious of all people. But when Paul said this of the Athenians, he didn’t necessarily mean it in a positive way. Religion can lead one away from God, and if we trust in a false religion, it is little credit to say of us that we are “religious.”

ff. c. I even found an altar with this inscription: TO THE UNKNOWN GOD: Paul understood that in their extensive pantheon, the Greeks had an **UNKNOWN GOD**, who covered any god that may have been neglected. Paul wanted to reveal the identity of the **UNKNOWN GOD**.

gg. i. Athens was filled with statues dedicated TO THE UNKNOWN GOD. Six hundred years before Paul, a terrible plague came on the city and a man name Epimenides had an idea. He let loose a flock of sheep through the town, and wherever they lay down, they sacrificed that sheep to the god that had the nearest shrine or temple. If a sheep lay down near no shrine or temple, they sacrificed the sheep **TO THE UNKNOWN GOD**.

hh. 4. (24-29) Paul tells the Athenians who God is.

ii. God, who made the world and everything in it, since He is Lord of heaven and earth, does not dwell in temples made with hands. Nor is He worshiped with men’s hands, as though He needed anything, since He gives to all life, breath, and all things. And He has made from one blood every nation of men to dwell on all the face of the earth, and has determined their preappointed times and the boundaries of their dwellings, so that they should seek the Lord, in the hope that they might grope for Him and find Him, though He is not far from each one of us; for in Him we live and move and have our being, as also some of your own poets have said, ‘For we are also His offspring.’ Therefore, since we are the offspring of God, we ought not to think that the Divine Nature is like gold or silver or stone, something shaped by art and man’s devising.

- jj. a. **God, who made the world and everything in it, since He is Lord of heaven and earth:** Paul spoke about the God who created everything, yet is distinct from His creation. Paul told them that God was bigger than any temple men's hands could build (**does not dwell in temples made with hands**), and could not be represented by anything men could make with their hands (**Nor is He worshipped with men's hands**).
- kk. i. In explaining God to them, Paul started at the beginning: God is the Creator, and we are His creatures. "This view of the world is very different from either the Epicurean emphasis on a chance combination of atoms or the virtual pantheism of the Stoics." (Stott)
- ll. ii. Paul recognized that these philosophers had to change their ideas about God. They had to move from their own personal opinions to an understanding of who God is according to what He tells us about Himself in the Bible.
- mm. b. **And He has made from one blood every nation of men:** Paul told them we are all descended from Adam through Noah, and that there is one God who created us all and to whom we all are obligated. Since God created us all, we **should seek the Lord... though He is not far from each one of us**.
- nn. c. **For in Him we live and move and have our being...For we are also His offspring:** These two quotations Paul used from Greek poets are attributed respectively to Epimenides the Cretan [600 B.C.] (who Paul quotes again in [Titus 1:12](#)) and Aratus [310 B.C.].
- oo. i. Paul did not quote these men because they were prophets or because all their teaching was of God. He quoted them because these specific words reflected a Biblical truth, and by using them he could build a bridge to his pagan audience.
- pp. d. **Therefore since we are the offspring of God, we ought not to think that the Divine Nature is like gold or silver or stone:** Paul told them of our responsibility to God because we are His **offspring**. Since we are His **offspring**, we are responsible to have right ideas about God, and therefore must reject the wrong idea that **gold or silver or stone** could represent God.
- qq. i. "The Athenians have acknowledged in their altar inscription that they are ignorant of God, and Paul has been giving evidence of their ignorance. Now he declares such ignorance to be culpable." (Stott)
- rr. 5. (30-31) Paul tells the Athenians what they must do because of who God is.*
- ss. **Truly, these times of ignorance God overlooked, but now commands all men everywhere to repent, because He has appointed a day on which He will judge the world in righteousness by the Man whom He has ordained. He has given assurance of this to all by raising Him from the dead."**
- tt. a. **Now commands all men everywhere to repent, because He has appointed a day on which He will judge the world in righteousness:** Paul went from knowing

who God is (our Creator), to who we are (His offspring), to our responsibility before Him (to understand Him and worship Him in truth), to our accountability if we dishonor Him (judgment).

uu. i. Paul didn't preach a "soft" gospel. He boldly confronted the wrong ideas the Athenians had about God, and confronted them with the reality of coming judgment.

vv. b. **He will judge the world in righteousness by the Man who He has ordained:** Now, for the first time in his message to the Athenians, Paul referred to Jesus. His first mention of Jesus presented Jesus as a righteous judge.

ww. i. Certainly, Paul did not want to leave the Athenians with the idea that Jesus was *only* a righteous judge. However, he was stopped short before he could tell them everything he wanted to about Jesus. Probably, all that Paul said before was introduction. He would now begin at what he really wanted to speak about: The person and work of Jesus.

xx. c. **He has given assurance of this by raising Him from the dead:** The emphasis on the resurrection is important. Paul saw the resurrection of Jesus as the **assurance of this**; it demonstrated that Jesus Himself, His teaching, and His work were all perfectly approved by the Father.

yy. i. Paul seemed unable to preach a sermon without focusing on the resurrection of Jesus. For him, none of the Christian life made sense without the triumph of Jesus' resurrection.

zz. 6. (32-34) The reaction of the listeners at Areopagus.

aaa. **And when they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some mocked, while others said, "We will hear you again on this matter." So Paul departed from among them. However, some men joined him and believed, among them Dionysius the Areopagite, a woman named Damaris, and others with them.**

bbb. a. **When they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some mocked:** The resurrection was not a popular idea among Greek philosophers. Some thought Paul foolish for even believing such a thing, and others wanted to hear more about this new teaching (**others said, "We will hear you again on this matter"**).

ccc. i. The Greeks were fond of the idea of the immortality of the soul, but not of the idea of the resurrection of the body. They felt that anything material was inherently evil, so there really could be no such thing as a glorified body. They thought the ultimate form of glory would be pure spirit.

ddd. ii. "All Greeks thought that man was composed of spirit (or mind), which was good, and matter (or body), which was bad. If there was to be a life to come, the one thing they certainly did not want it cluttered up with a body." (Boice)

eee. b. **So Paul departed among them:** Paul wanted to talk about Jesus. He could have, if he wanted to, stayed there and discussed Greek philosophy all day

long. But Paul was not interested in that; if he couldn't talk about Jesus, he didn't have much to say.

fff. i. Without doubt, Paul was really just beginning his sermon. Far more than wanting to quote Greek poets, he wanted to tell them about Jesus. But as soon as he mentioned the resurrection, they stopped him short. Certainly, Paul discussed more with people one-on-one. But he was prevented from saying all he wanted to in his speech at the Areopagus.

ggg. c. **However, some men joined him and believed:** The results at the Areopagus seemed small, yet some did believe. Among those believing were a man named **Dionysius** (who must have been a regular participant at the Areopagus) and a woman named **Damaris**.

hhh. i. Some criticize Paul's sermon in Athens because there is no detailed reference to the cross or specific quotes from the Old Testament. Some think Paul compromised his message for an intellectual audience, and therefore there were few conversions.

iii. ii. This idea continues, saying that when Paul went next to Corinth, he decided to preach the cross and the cross only, even if it seemed foolish ([1 Corinthians 1:18-2:5](#)). Because Paul preached this way in Corinth, the thinking goes, he saw much better results.

jjj. iii. Ramsay popularized the theory that Paul was disappointed by his "meager" results in Athens, and went on to Corinth preaching the gospel with a pure focus on the cross, and without any attempt at philosophical explanation.

kkk. iv. Yet Paul's sermon here *was* eminently Biblical. "Like the biblical revelation itself, his argument begins with God the creator of all and ends with God the judge of all...The speech as it stands admirably summarizes an introductory lesson in Christianity for cultured pagans." (Bruce)

lll. v. As well, Paul *did* preach Christ crucified in Athens. In [Acts 17:30-31](#) he specifically mentioned the resurrection, and how could he preach the resurrection without preaching the cross which came before it? This is obviously a short extract of Paul's speech on the Areopagus; what is recorded takes barely two minutes to say.

mmm. vi. "We learn from Paul that we cannot preach the gospel of Jesus without the doctrine of God, or the cross without the creation, or salvation without judgment." (Stott)

nnn. vii. In addition, it is dangerous to judge the content of the message by the magnitude of the response. "The reason the gospel did not take root there probably lay more in the attitude of the Athenians themselves than in Paul's approach or in what he said." (Longenecker)

¹ When Paul and his companions had passed through Amphipolis and Apollonia, they came to Thessalonica, where there was a Jewish synagogue. ² As was his custom, Paul went into the synagogue, and on three Sabbath days he reasoned with them from the Scriptures, ³ explaining and proving that the Messiah had to suffer and rise from the dead. “This Jesus I am proclaiming to you is the Messiah,” he said. ⁴ Some of the Jews were persuaded and joined Paul and Silas, as did a large number of God-fearing Greeks and quite a few prominent women.

Let’s unpack this as we go. If you’ll notice in v1 Luke is back to telling the story from the standpoint of a narrator. He wasn’t with them on this trip. He stayed in Philippi. Paul, Silas, and Timothy were on this journey.

They journeyed from Philippi to Thessalonica. (show pic) About a 3 day walk.

Thessalonica was a thriving city. It had a lot of wealthy and influential people. And it is the first mention in the Book of Acts about wealthy and influential people – *important* figures in society - responding to the Gospel. The church grew quickly, and was near and dear to Paul’s heart. In fact, Paul mentions the Thessalonica church in Philippians

Philippians 4:15-16

¹⁵ Moreover, as you Philippians know, in the early days of your acquaintance with the gospel, when I set out from Macedonia, not one church shared with me in the matter of giving and receiving, except you only; ¹⁶ for even when I was in Thessalonica, you sent me aid more than once when I was in need.

His wrote his two letters to the church in Thessalonica, 1st and 2nd Thessalonians, to strengthen them in the Lord, encourage them in their faith, and warn them to stand strong against false teachers who intended to sway them from the faith.

⁵ But other Jews were jealous; so they rounded up some bad characters from the marketplace, formed a mob and started a riot in the city. They rushed to Jason’s house in search of Paul and Silas in order to bring them out to the crowd. ⁶ But when they did not find them, they dragged Jason and some other believers before the city officials, shouting: “These men who have caused trouble all over the world have now come here, ⁷ and Jason has welcomed them into his house. They are all defying Caesar’s decrees, saying that there is another king,

one called Jesus.”⁸ When they heard this, the crowd and the city officials were thrown into turmoil.⁹ Then they made Jason and the others post bond and let them go.

This is funny...so much for the validity of their gripes. They rounded up thugs...mercenaries...rioters for rent...

But notice...it doesn't say they opposed Paul and Silas necessarily because of their message or even their doctrine. They opposed them for what reason?

Jealousy! Jealous of what? Their *success*, likely.

Have you ever noticed people are *rarely jealous of losers!*

That's the whole idea...jealousy is about the envy of someone that is seemingly doing better than you in some way.

Jealousy focuses on other people.

That's amazing when we look at it that way.

We are expending our energy and time focusing on what others have. Pretty sad. It's actually a little creepy when you think about it. You spend time thinking about that person, thinking about what they have...imagine being them...it's almost like a stalker in an indirect way.

“Jealousy is an inner consciousness of one's own inferiority. It is a mental cancer.”

BC Forbes

But could jealousy really cause someone to organize a riot like we see in our story tonight?

Proverbs 27:4

*⁴ Anger is cruel and fury overwhelming,
but who can stand before jealousy?*

Jealousy is like a ravaging fire. (think about that...)

That's why we are told in the New Testament to avoid it.

Romans 13:13

¹³ Let us behave decently, as in the daytime, not in carousing and drunkenness, not in sexual immorality and debauchery, not in dissension and jealousy.

Getting back to the text: v5

⁵ But other Jews were jealous; so they rounded up some bad characters from the marketplace, formed a mob and started a riot in the city. They rushed to Jason's house in search of Paul and Silas in order to bring them out to the crowd.

We see a man mentioned named Jason. We don't know much about him, but he was clearly a Christian, and likely a leader in the church...from the fact that they went to his house first looking for Paul and Silas.

So they dragged Jason to the city officials and made their accusations.

⁶ But when they did not find them, they dragged Jason and some other believers before the city officials, shouting: "These men who have caused trouble all over the world have now come here, ⁷ and Jason has welcomed them into his house. They are all defying Caesar's decrees, saying that there is another king, one called Jesus."

"This one called Jesus"

Have you noticed today...people don't have much of a problem with the idea of a superior being...or a spiritual force out there, guiding us...many people use spiritual phraseology...I'm on my journey...this is my journey...we called it a journey. The problem is that it becomes easy to write off our choices and sin as "just part of our journey"

But when Jesus is mentioned, that's when lines are drawn, controversy brews, and even wars erupt.

Whether you love Him, hate Him, or are indifferent, you must do something with Jesus Christ. He is a polarizing figure like none other in the history of man.

I'm reminded of a story:

Terry Sartain, police chaplain in Charlotte, N.C., and a member of the Billy Graham Rapid Response Team that served at the Virginia Tech shooting in Blacksburg, Va., in 2007, was given the news three days before a promotion ceremony that there was a change in policy - He could no longer pray in Jesus' name during public events held on government property. He was told by his superiors he had 24 hours to consider his decision. He responded by saying he didn't need 24 hours. He didn't need 24 seconds.

"The only thing I have to offer is Jesus," said Sartain, who asked to be excused from giving the invocation.

Question: *Who do you say Jesus is?*

Philippians 2:9-11

⁹ *Therefore God exalted him to the highest place
and gave him the name that is above every name,
¹⁰ that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow,
in heaven and on earth and under the earth,
¹¹ and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord,
to the glory of God the Father.*

And I'll tell you another thing:

Hebrews 13:8

⁸ *Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever.*

It was the name of Jesus that was stirring all this up.

But look how the NKJV puts it in v6:

⁶ *But when they did not find them, they dragged Jason and some brethren to the rulers of the city, crying out, "These who have turned the world upside down have come here too.*

Turn the world upside down.

Have you ever noticed...

When you're upside down, right-side up looks upside down.

I'd say it's quite the opposite:

The name of Jesus turns the world right-side up!

And we, the church, are called to be a part of that ministry...

Showing the way...helping the lost be reconciled...speaking the truth with love...to turn this upside down world rightside up. Isn't that what the church is supposed to do also?

Let me be a part of that church!

This nation needs Jesus! The world needs Jesus!

Let's get back to the text, and pick it up in v10:

In Berea

¹⁰ As soon as it was night, the believers sent Paul and Silas away to Berea. On arriving there, they went to the Jewish synagogue. ¹¹ Now the Berean Jews were of more noble character than those in Thessalonica, for they received the message with great eagerness and examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true. ¹² As a result, many of them believed, as did also a number of prominent Greek women and many Greek men.

OK, so a different scene in Berea...instead of being filled with jealousy (it says they were of more noble character) they received the message with eagerness and examined the scriptures every day to see if what they were saying was true.

**That must've been refreshing for the apostles.
Did you know we are supposed to do the same thing? We are supposed to search out the truth for ourselves...test the spirits.**

1 John 4:1

¹ Dear friends, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world.

2 Timothy 3:16

¹⁶ All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness

But also look at what else Paul said in 2 Timothy:

2 Timothy 2:15

¹⁵ Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth.

Let's finish tonight:

¹³ But when the Jews in Thessalonica learned that Paul was preaching the word of God at Berea, some of them went there too, agitating the crowds and stirring them up. ¹⁴ The believers immediately sent Paul to the coast, but Silas and Timothy stayed at Berea. ¹⁵ Those who escorted Paul brought him to Athens and then left with instructions for Silas and Timothy to join him as soon as possible.

The persecution continues...they weren't satisfied driving them out of their city in Thessalonica, they followed them to the next town of Berea.

That's a practical lesson for us:

Evil doesn't take a break.

Satan doesn't let his guard down...we shouldn't either.

¹⁶ Once when we were going to the place of prayer, we were met by a female slave who had a spirit by which she predicted the future. She earned a great deal of money for her owners by fortune-telling. ¹⁷ She followed Paul and the rest of us, shouting, "These men are servants of the Most High God, who are telling you the way to be saved." ¹⁸ She kept this up for many days. Finally Paul became so

annoyed that he turned around and said to the spirit, “In the name of Jesus Christ I command you to come out of her!” At that moment the spirit left her.

¹⁹ When her owners realized that their hope of making money was gone, they seized Paul and Silas and dragged them into the marketplace to face the authorities. ²⁰ They brought them before the magistrates and said, “These men are Jews, **(notice that)** and are throwing our city into an uproar ²¹ by advocating customs unlawful for us Romans to accept or practice.”

²² The crowd joined in the attack against Paul and Silas, and the magistrates ordered them to be stripped and beaten with rods.

²³ After they had been severely flogged, they were thrown into prison, and the jailer was commanded to guard them carefully. ²⁴ When he received these orders, he put them in the inner cell and fastened their feet in the stocks. **(making sure they wouldn’t escape). Now, of all the ways Paul & Silas could’ve reacted...**

²⁵ About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the other prisoners were listening to them. ²⁶ Suddenly there was such a violent earthquake that the foundations of the prison were shaken. At once all the prison doors flew open, and everyone’s chains came loose.

Last week we asked: *Is everything supernatural from God?*

We also noted the authority in which Paul spoke. He spoke in the name of Jesus! Not his own authority.

**And we discussed a powerful weapon we have against the enemy:
*Subject the enemy to what he hates the most, worship of God.***

Tonight, we’ll continue in this story:

Acts 16:27-40

²⁷ The jailer woke up, and when he saw the prison doors open, he drew his sword and was about to kill himself because he thought the prisoners had escaped. ²⁸ But Paul shouted, “Don’t harm yourself! We are all here!”

What’s going on here? His reaction seems a little extreme, doesn’t it?

There’s more here than meets the eye. In Roman culture at the time, a prison guard’s position was extremely important. They

guarded enemies of the Roman government. They guarded them with their life – literally.

If a prisoner was allowed to escape, the guard paid with his own life.

Paul knew this, so he called out “*Don’t harm yourself! We’re all here!*” Assuring him that no one escaped on his watch.

While this alone is interesting, the underlying story is even more amazing.

Paul and Silas had been flogged. Publicly beaten and humiliated. And then put in a prison cell deep inside the prison to make sure they didn’t escape. There they are - wrongly incarcerated, their feet in shackles, they were beaten...open wounds...bleeding.

Surely in physical agony. And in that agony, instead of focusing on their misery, they are singing and praising God. A mighty earthquake shakes the building and the prison doors swing open. Their shackles fell off. They were free!

Yet, they were not concerned about their own well-being as much as God’s purpose.

Think about it...it would’ve been so easy to praise God for the miracle...they were free! Yet they stayed put. Why? Because they recognized a God moment.

God had a greater purpose...and it was to reach an unsaved jailer and his family, as we will see in a moment.

Question: *What if God has a greater purpose for the things in our lives we want to be rid of?*

What if the very thing that we are praying against is the very thing God is trying to use for a greater purpose?

I’m just saying...

We will never know God's greater purpose if we are constantly wishing our seasons away.

(destination mentality)

Instead...perhaps we could pray “*Lord, if it be your will, please take this from me. But not my will be done – Your’s be done. Meanwhile, Lord, You have my attention...do in me what You couldn’t do without this season I’m in.*”

I don’t want to miss anything You want to do in me!

And then, guess what...God will indeed move you out of that season...when? As soon as we have aligned ourselves and responded in obedience.

Either Romans 8:28 is true or it isn’t.

Romans 8:28

²⁸ And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.

Getting back to our story:

How did the jailer respond? Let’s read it again.

²⁷ The jailer woke up, and when he saw the prison doors open, he drew his sword and was about to kill himself because he thought the prisoners had escaped.

Did you notice? It doesn’t say anything about the jailer responding to the earthquake. He was more concerned about the prison doors being opened!

And now let’s read on.

²⁹ The jailer called for lights, rushed in and fell trembling before Paul and Silas. ³⁰ He then brought them out and asked, “Sirs, what must I do to be saved?” ³¹ They replied, “Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved—you and your household.” ³² Then they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all the others in his house. ³³ At that hour of the night the jailer took them and washed their wounds; then immediately he and all his household were baptized. ³⁴ The jailer

brought them into his house and set a meal before them; he was filled with joy because he had come to believe in God—he and his whole household. (this is the same man who was - just a few moments earlier – so afraid that he wanted to end his life)

I believe the reason the jailer wasn't concerned about the earthquake was because he knew these men were of God. I know I'm filling in a few blanks here, but it stands to reason...he knew these men were evangelists...he might have even been one of the guards who beat them earlier. He likely heard them singing and praising God. Now, the earthquake, the building shook, chains fell off, prison cell doors swung open...he rushes in, realizes this is an act of God and fears for his life.

This plays out in his reaction in vv29-30

²⁹ The jailer called for lights, rushed in and fell trembling before Paul and Silas. ³⁰ He then brought them out and asked, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?"

i.e. "OK, I see you are from God, and you just did the most unselfish and god-like thing I've ever seen by staying put when you could've left...you even showed compassion for me by yelling out that you didn't escape.

What must I do to have what you have?"

The jailer wanted what Paul and Silas had.

Isn't that what evangelism is all about? It's not about fancy words and bug stories...compelling speech or a glistening personality.

The best way to evangelize is by our own lives of victory and joy.

So that our neighbors...our co-workers...our family...our spouses...would say:

What must I do to have what you have?

If we don't act and react different than the culture – we have nothing to offer the culture!

"It is no use walking anywhere to preach unless our walking is our preaching."

St Francis of Assisi

We are supposed to be magnets that draw people to the Lord.

Question: *Do you draw people to the Lord, or repel them from the Lord?*

Back to the story:

³⁵ *When it was daylight, the magistrates sent their officers to the jailer with the order: “Release those men.”* ³⁶ *The jailer told Paul, “The magistrates have ordered that you and Silas be released. Now you can leave. Go in peace.”*

³⁷ *But Paul said to the officers: “They beat us publicly without a trial, even though we are Roman citizens, and threw us into prison. And now do they want to get rid of us quietly? No! Let them come themselves and escort us out.”*

³⁸ *The officers reported this to the magistrates, and when they heard that Paul and Silas were Roman citizens, they were alarmed.* ³⁹ *They came to appease them and escorted them from the prison, requesting them to leave the city.* ⁴⁰ *After Paul and Silas came out of the prison, they went to Lydia’s house, where they met with the brothers and sisters and encouraged them. Then they left.*

OK, so what is going on here?

The area of Philippi was under Roman control. It was a serious crime to treat a Roman citizen the way they had treated Paul and Silas. The tables have turned now, haven’t they.

We see the magistrates suddenly flip-flop and try to appease them, yet still asked them to leave the city. But Paul wanted to stay and encourage the new converts, including Lydia...jailer, slave girl even?

Did you know Satan hates it when you worship God? Why? Because he wants the worship. It was his pride that got him kicked out of heaven.

Isaiah 14:12-15

¹² *How you have fallen from heaven,
morning star, son of the dawn!
You have been cast down to the earth,
you who once laid low the nations!*

¹³ *You said in your heart,
“I will ascend to the heavens;*

*I will raise my throne
above the stars of God;
I will sit enthroned on the mount of assembly,
on the utmost heights of Mount Zaphon.
¹⁴ I will ascend above the tops of the clouds;
I will make myself like the Most High.”
¹⁵ But you are brought down to the realm of the dead,
to the depths of the pit.*

Satan wanted to be worshipped like God. But he was brought down from heaven, and now he hates God and anything to do with God. And he especially hates it when we worship and praise God!

Praising God is one of the ways we resist the enemy.

James 4:7

⁷ Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.

Did you know the enemy hates it when you submit to God and praise Him?

Two great examples from the Bible:

2 Chronicles 20:22

²² As they began to sing and praise, the Lord set ambushes against the men of Ammon and Moab and Mount Seir who were invading Judah, and they were defeated.

In this story, we see God miraculously defeat the enemy because of the people's obedience to praise Him.

Praise and worship will make the enemy flee.

**Evil will not stick around if we're praising our God.
And tonight's story:**

Acts 16:25-26

²⁵ About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the other prisoners were listening to them: ²⁶ Suddenly there was such a violent earthquake that the foundations of the prison were shaken. At once all the prison doors flew open, and everyone's chains came loose.

Praise and worship pushes back the darkness. It blocks the enemy's attacks - it breaks the chains.

Praise and worship serve as a conduit for God's presence – and when God is present, anything can happen!

God shakes things up through praise. As Paul and Silas sat in prison, shackled and chained, they kept right on praising God. And God sent an earthquake that shook the cells and broke the chains. The jailer and all his entire family came to know Christ that very night.

Don't stop praising the Lord in Your situation!

I remember that old Imperials song:

*When you're up against a struggle that has shattered all your dreams
And you hopes have been cruelly crushed by Satan's manifested schemes
And you feel the urge within you to submit to earthly fears
Don't let the faith you're standing in seem to disappear*

*Praise the Lord! He can work through those who praise Him.
Praise the Lord! For our God inhabits praise.
Praise the Lord! For the chains that seem to bind you
Serve only to remind you, that they fall powerless behind you
When you praise Him.*

We'll continue this story and finish it next week, where we look closer at the jailer.

Because Paul and Silas were Roman citizens, they *had* recognized civil rights, which were violated by the Philippian magistrates. Upon learning this, the magistrates were

filled with fear, because it was a grave offense to treat Roman citizens as Paul and Silas had been treated.

- i. Why didn't Paul and Silas reveal their Roman citizenship earlier? It is possible that they didn't have the opportunity, but it is more likely that the Holy Spirit directed them to not reveal it until a certain time.
 - ii. Our *rights* are not as important as our *obedience* to the will of God. God may ask us to lay down our rights for the good of another (in this case, for the good of the Philippian jailer).
 - iii. How could Paul and Silas prove their Roman citizenship? "They may each have carried a copy of his *professio* or registration of birth, in which his Roman status would have been recorded. These were convenient in size...To claim Roman citizenship falsely was punishable by death." (Williams)
- b. **They came and pleaded with them and brought them out, and asked them to depart from the city:** The magistrates acted as politicians often act by instinct. They tried to make their problem go away quietly by sweeping it under the rug.

12. (40) Paul and Silas leave Philippi on their own terms.

So they went out of the prison and entered the house of Lydia; and when they had seen the brethren, they encouraged them and departed.

- a. **When they had seen the brethren, they encouraged them:** Only after this did they agree to go. Paul and Silas would not be hurried out of town until they had brought their work there to a conclusion.
 - i. The great missionary David Livingstone summarized the spirit of Paul when he said, "I am prepared to go anywhere, so long as it is forward." (Cited in Barclay)
 - b. **They encouraged them and departed:** In Philippi, Paul and Silas left behind two notable converts: Lydia and the prison guard. Each of these two had their lives touched by Jesus in very different ways.
 - i. Lydia was a churchgoer; the guard was not. Lydia was prospering in business; the guard was about to kill himself. Lydia's heart was gently opened; the guard's heart was violently confronted. The guard had a remarkable sign – an earthquake, but all Lydia had was the move of the Holy Spirit in her heart. Both heard the gospel and believed, and through each of them their whole families were touched!
 - ii. It was a strange and wonderful church they left behind in Philippi: Lydia, perhaps the slave girl, the jailer and his household, and others. The use of "**they**" here suggests that Luke stayed behind in Philippi for at least a while, perhaps to care for this new congregation.

¹¹ From Troas we put out to sea and sailed straight for Samothrace, and the next day we went on to Neapolis. ¹² From there we traveled to Philippi, a Roman colony and the leading city of that district of Macedonia. And we stayed there several days.

¹³ On the Sabbath we went outside the city gate to the river, where we expected to find a place of prayer. We sat down and began to speak to the women who had gathered there. ¹⁴ One of those listening was a woman from the city of Thyatira named Lydia, a dealer in purple cloth. She was a worshiper of God. The Lord opened her heart to respond to Paul's message. ¹⁵ When she and the members of her household were baptized, she invited us to her home. "If you consider me a believer in the Lord," she said, "come and stay at my house." And she persuaded us.

So first, let's notice again Luke uses the word "we". He is clearly on this mission with the apostles.

This is Luke's first mission trip. He would no longer be writing the Acts of the Apostles from stories told by others and the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. This time he went himself. This tells me:

Anyone can do mission work.

We asked last week: *What is your mission?* Maybe it's not Asia or Europe, but how about your workplace? How about your home? Your family? Your neighborhood.

Luke was not just a smart physician and historian that they recruited to follow them around. He had a prolific ministry himself. He was called *Luke the Evangelist*. He was with Paul at the end of Paul's life, when Paul wrote to Timothy:

2 Timothy 4:11

¹¹ *Only Luke is with me.*

The point is...Luke was a Greek physician...living his life the way he thought fit...then the Holy Spirit got a hold of him and transformed him into Luke the Evangelist. (My own life) You never know what God can do through you if you would just commit and submit.

To fully realize our destiny on this earth we must commit and submit.

“The world has yet to see what God will do with a man fully consecrated to Him.”

— DL Moody

Also notice –

¹¹ From Troas we put out to sea and sailed straight for Samothrace, and the next day we went on to Neapolis.

(show map) As we can see they are leaving the continent of Asia and heading for the continent of Europe, as the Gospel is about to enter into the “utter parts of the earth” as Jesus put it in Acts 1:8. This was no minor thing. They had to sail across the Aegean Sea. This was 155 miles, and they sailed it in two days. This same trip took them 5 days later.

Acts 20:6

⁶ But we sailed from Philippi after the Festival of Unleavened Bread, and five days later joined the others at Troas, where we stayed seven days.

OK, so what? You could say “the wind must’ve been behind their backs” which was an old sailing phrase.

But I like to think it might have been a little more intentional than that. Clearly, they had the favor of the Lord. “The wind was at their backs” well, OK great...guess what...the wind could just have easily not been at their backs.

The favor of God will take you places you wouldn’t go without it.

It’ll get you there faster, more efficiently, and with more success.

There is never regret or second guessing when we are led by the Spirit.

And now notice in v12:

¹² From there we traveled to Philippi, a Roman colony and the leading city of that district of Macedonia. And we stayed there several days.

This is Philippi...*the* Philippi...as in the Philippian church.

It was a major city in that region of Macedonia. It had a thriving marketplace, it was a major trade center...it was full of art and culture...even a large theater (show pics)

Philippi was the first major city in Europe where Paul preached.

His efforts were successful. The Philippi church was established. He made two later trips back to check on the church. In fact, Paul's influence on the city was felt well into the 5th and 6th centuries.

The Basilica of Paul was an architectural wonder at the time (show pic)

And how did Paul feel about this church?

Philippians 1:1-8

¹ Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus,

To all God's holy people in Christ Jesus at Philippi, together with the overseers and deacons:

² Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

³ I thank my God every time I remember you. ⁴ In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy ⁵ because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now, ⁶ being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.

⁷ It is right for me to feel this way about all of you, since I have you in my heart and, whether I am in chains or defending and confirming the gospel, all of you share in God's grace with me. ⁸ God can testify how I long for all of you with the affection of Christ Jesus.

I'd say he was pretty fond of them.

So this is the setting. Let's now look at v13

¹³ On the Sabbath we went outside the city gate to the river, where we expected to find a place of prayer. We sat down and began to speak to the women who had gathered there. ¹⁴ One of those listening was a woman from the city of Thyatira named Lydia, a dealer in purple cloth. She was a worshiper of God.

Do you sense a divine appointment here?

This was on the sabbath, and it says they went outside the city gate to the river. This tells me that indeed, Philippi was a gentile city. They obviously didn't have a temple. But this is exactly where the Holy Spirit wanted them.

Sometimes we need to lay down our sensibilities so the Holy Spirit can work with us.

It's easy for us to get a little too heaven-minded to be of any earthly good. Sometimes God wants us to just be regular folks...talk to people on a "people level"...just be "one of the guys"...we need to be able to join God where He is working. And in this case, the apostles had to be willing to travel a little on the sabbath...to go outside the gates down to the river. But here's the thing...the river is where the Holy Spirit was working.

Oh, that we would be in tune to the Holy Spirit and look for those "river opportunities"

And by the way, this could explain why the HS helped them get across the Aegean Sea so quickly. They had a divine appointment with a lady named Lydia.

Let's take a look at our new friend Lydia. What do we know about her?

She was listening

¹⁴ One of those listening was a woman from the city of Thyatira named Lydia

Did you know *There is a difference between hearing and listening.*

James 1:22-25

²² Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says. ²³ Anyone who listens to the word but does not do what it says is like someone who looks at his face in a mirror ²⁴ and, after looking at himself, goes away and immediately forgets what he looks like. ²⁵ But whoever looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom, and continues in it—not forgetting what they have heard, but doing it—they will be blessed in what they do.

Listening implies hearing with intent.

Focus, reverence, and a readiness to act, obey.

Secondly, it says Lydia was a dealer in purple cloth.

¹⁴ One of those listening was a woman from the city of Thyatira named Lydia, a dealer in purple cloth.

What does that mean? Culturally at that time, purple cloth, purple robes...purple *anything* was a sign of luxury and affluence. Purple dyes were expensive and hard to come by.

This lady Lydia was a successful woman...a woman of affluence.

And yet, she was a God-fearing woman.

Question: *Is money evil?*

1 Timothy 6:10

¹⁰ For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs.

It is the love of money that leads to sin, not necessarily money itself.

Another question: *Do you have to be rich to be guilty of the love of money?*

I believe you can have no money, and yet be guilty of the sin of the love of money.

Lastly, we see Lydia was a worshipper of God.

¹⁴ One of those listening was a woman from the city of Thyatira named Lydia, a dealer in purple cloth. She was a worshiper of God.

She had a heart for God, she was godly woman. She was a worshipper of God. Not just with her talk, but in her actions, in her attentiveness.

Question: *Are you attentive to the Lord?*

On an average day do you pay any attention to God or His will?

Isaiah 29:13

¹³ The Lord says:

*“These people come near to me with their mouth
and honor me with their lips,
but their hearts are far from me.*

Their worship of me

is based on merely human rules they have been taught.^[a]

Footnotes

- a. Isaiah 29:13 Hebrew; Septuagint *They worship me in vain; / their teachings are merely human rules*

Jesus said in John 4:23

²³ Yet a time is coming and has now come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in the Spirit and in truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks.

Getting back to Lydia, Luke was careful to point out that she was a worshipper of God. And get this:

Lydia's attentiveness to God positioned her for a move of the Holy Spirit.

(positioned for a God-encounter)

Notice it says:

¹⁴ One of those listening was a woman from the city of Thyatira named Lydia, a dealer in purple cloth. She was a worshiper of God. The Lord opened her heart to respond to Paul's message.

The table was set...and God opened her heart.

Jesus said:

John 6:44

⁴⁴ "No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws them

It was God at work drawing Lydia...

This encourages me...and should encourage you too...don't quit praying...

God can open anyone's heart!

He can do whatever He wants. He's God!

2. (13-15) *The conversion of Lydia.*

And on the Sabbath day we went out of the city to the riverside, where prayer was customarily made; and we sat down and spoke to the women who met *there*. Now a certain woman named Lydia heard *us*. She was a seller of purple from the city of Thyatira, who worshiped God. The Lord opened her heart to heed the things spoken by Paul. And when she and her household were baptized, she begged *us*, saying, “If you have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come to my house and stay.” So she persuaded *us*.

a. **On the Sabbath day we went out of the city to the riverside, where prayer was customarily made:** The fact that the Jews of Philippi had no synagogue and met by the river means that there were not many Jewish men in Philippi.

i. “Had there been ten Jewish men, they would have sufficed to constitute a synagogue. No number of women would compensate for the absence of even one man necessary to make up the quorum of ten.” (Bruce)

b. **Lydia... was a seller of purple:** Anyone who **was a seller of purple** dealt in a valued, luxurious product. The dyes used for making purple were expensive and highly regarded. This woman was the first convert in Europe, and one might say that the Macedonian man turned out to be a woman.

i. **From the city of Thyatira:** **Thyatira** was well known as a center for this purple dye and fabric made from it. Later, there was a church in Thyatira also, and it was one of the seven churches addressed in Revelation ([Revelation 2:18-29](#)).

c. **The Lord opened her heart to heed the things spoken by Paul:** Before Lydia was converted (as demonstrated by her baptism), **the Lord opened her heart**. This is a work God must do in all who believe, because as Jesus said, *no one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him* ([John 6:44](#)).

i. Therefore, a most important element in evangelism is asking God through prayer to *open hearts*, for without this there can be no genuine conversion.

d. **She begged us, saying, “If you have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come to my house and stay.”** Immediately, Lydia set about doing good. Her hospitality was touching and a wonderful example.

⁶ Paul and his companions traveled throughout the region of Phrygia and Galatia, having been kept by the Holy Spirit from preaching the word in the province of Asia. ⁷ When they came to the border of Mysia, they tried to enter Bithynia, but the Spirit of Jesus would not allow them to. ⁸ So they passed by Mysia and went down to Troas. ⁹ During the night Paul had a vision of a man of Macedonia standing and begging him, “Come over to Macedonia and help us.” ¹⁰ After Paul had seen the vision, we got ready at once to leave for Macedonia, concluding that God had called us to preach the gospel to them.

As we unpack this, let’s start with the easiest and most obvious observation. Notice in v10 Luke says “we”:

¹⁰ *After Paul had seen the vision, we got ready at once to leave for Macedonia, concluding that God had called us to preach the gospel to them.*

Up until this point Luke was telling the story from the standpoint of an observer, or narrator. Now he says “we”.

This is apparently Luke’s first mission trip. He would no longer be writing the Acts of the Apostles from stories told by others and the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. This time he went himself. This tells me:

Anyone can do mission work.

What is your mission? Maybe it’s not Asia or Europe, but how about your workplace? How about your home? Your family? Your neighborhood.

Perhaps the gospel would stand a better chance if it were a Coke:

97% of the world has heard of coke-a-cola

72% of the world has seen a can of coke-a-cola

51% of the world has tasted a can of coke-a-cola

Coke has only been around 120 years

If God had given the task of world evangelization to the Coke company it would probably be done by now.

Timothy 4:2

² *Preach the word of God. Be prepared, whether the time is favorable or not.*

NIV says *In season and out of season...*

Second point tonight:

This is the first example of the Gospel going to Europe.

In v7 it says:

⁷ When they came to the border of Mysia, they tried to enter Bithynia, but the Spirit of Jesus would not allow them to. ⁸ So they passed by Mysia and went down to Troas.

These areas of Mysia and Bithynia are both regions of modern day Turkey. So they passed and went to Troas. During the night Paul had a vision:

⁹ During the night Paul had a vision of a man of Macedonia standing and begging him, "Come over to Macedonia and help us."

(show pic) Macedonia is in the area of modern day Bulgaria and the area formerly called Yugoslavia.

The Gospel was indeed about to go into Europe.

This reminds of what Jesus said way back at the beginning of the study:

Acts 1:8

⁸ But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."

God will make sure His work is accomplished.

Don't give up if you don't see the results...

I want to spend the remaining time on the biggest issue of all in tonight's text:

The Holy Spirit prevented them from going to a place and preaching.

⁶ Paul and his companions traveled throughout the region of Phrygia and Galatia, having been kept by the Holy Spirit from preaching the word in the province of Asia. ⁷ When they came to the border of Mysia, they tried to enter Bithynia, but the Spirit of Jesus would not allow them to.

Does the Holy Spirit really do that?

Has anyone ever experienced that?

Anyone ever felt a door close? Or experience a situation that feels like a square peg in a round hole? I have found that continued frustration usually means God is trying to do something or tell me something.

Also, why would the HS prevent them from going somewhere to preach? I thought that's what they were supposed to do.

I have a couple speculative answers, before we get into what the text says...

One:

It is something we already discussed...Luke had apparently joined them on this mission. Luke was a Greek physician and historian...and now he was an evangelist. He apparently stayed with them on the missionary journey until they went to Philippi, which we will see later in the study.

Look at what Paul said in his closing remarks in his letter to the Colossian church:

Colossians 4:14

¹⁴ Our dear friend Luke, the doctor, and Demas send greetings.

So clearly, Luke was with them. But what's interesting about this is that:

Many scholars believe Luke was from Troas.

And Troas just happens to be the place they went when the Holy Spirit stopped them from going where they intended to go.

⁷ When they came to the border of Mysia, they tried to enter Bithynia, but the Spirit of Jesus would not allow them to. ⁸ So they passed by Mysia and went down to Troas.

Could it be that the Holy Spirit intended for them to swing by and pick up Luke?

We don't know for sure, but we do know this:

God can do whatever He wants.

Another speculative reason the HS might stop them from going to Mysia and Bithynia:

Possibly because of imminent danger.

How many times has the HS caused you to hit red lights ? Maybe we'll find out in heaven how many wrecks He saved us from.

Possibly because He knew the area wouldn't be receptive. That may not have been where the HS was moving at that time.

Ecclesiastes 3:11

¹¹ He has made everything beautiful in its time.

After all...The right thing at the wrong time is the wrong thing.

How many times have we tried to force something to happen at the wrong time?

These speculative answer may have some validity, we don't know...but we do know one thing, as it plays out in vv9-10:

God had other plans. And it is His plans that prevail.

Proverbs 19:21

*²¹ Many are the plans in a person's heart,
but it is the LORD's purpose that prevails.*

How does that grab you? Does that mean we shouldn't plan? Dream? No.

It means go ahead and plan...go ahead and dream...but give it to God. Defer to His will.

God I plan to do so and so...but Your will be done.

Question: *Do you give God veto power over your plans?*

James 4:13-15

¹³ Now listen, you who say, "Today or tomorrow we will go to this or that city, spend a year there, carry on business and make money." ¹⁴ Why, you do not even know what will happen tomorrow. What is your life? You are a mist that appears

for a little while and then vanishes. ¹⁵ Instead, you ought to say, “If it is the Lord’s will, we will live and do this or that.”

Look at how this plays out in our text tonight:

⁹ During the night Paul had a vision of a man of Macedonia standing and begging him, “Come over to Macedonia and help us.” ¹⁰ After Paul had seen the vision, we got ready at once to leave for Macedonia, concluding that God had called us to preach the gospel to them.

Listen, the bottom line is:

God is the Lord of the Harvest.

It’s His harvest, it’s His church, it’s His mission, it’s His everything!

He is the One who appoints and anoints...He is the One who raised up evangelists, prophets, teachers, preachers, pastors...and His will will be done!

Isaiah 43:10-13

*¹⁰ “You are my witnesses,” declares the LORD,
“and my servant whom I have chosen,
so that you may know and believe me
and understand that I am he.*

*Before me no god was formed,
nor will there be one after me.*

*¹¹ I, even I, am the LORD,
and apart from me there is no savior.*

*¹² I have revealed and saved and proclaimed—
I, and not some foreign god among you.*

You are my witnesses,” declares the LORD, “that I am God.

¹³ Yes, and from ancient days I am he.

*No one can deliver out of my hand.
When I act, who can reverse it?”*

The Book of Acts is often called the Acts of the Apostles. But it would be more accurately names The Acts of the Holy Spirit.

Humanly speaking, the early Christians had nothing going for them. The church was new, with unproven leaders. They weren’t

educated, they had no money, no modern means for spreading the gospel. They faced incredible opposition and enormous obstacles. Yet they were empowered by the Holy Spirit to do the impossible and bring a simple salvation message to an unsaved world.

If this isn't encouraging for us here at Crossover, I don't know what is. God doesn't call the qualified, He qualifies the called. What is going to happen here at Crossover will be a clear work of the Holy Spirit and it will be done through common broken people, amen?!

16:7 We do not know how the Holy Spirit kept them from going into Bithynia, but it could have been through a warning given by means of a dream or vision. In any case, it is obvious the Holy Spirit was guiding his missionaries. He is the Lord of the harvest who prepares, imparts gifts, anoints, and sends out his servants to gather the nations to Jesus Christ. The book of Acts is best understood as the book of Activities of the Holy Spirit. Here he is designated "the Spirit of Jesus." True and lasting fruit in ministry comes through the work and leading of the Spirit of Jesus.

16:10 Apparently, Luke now joins the missionary team going to Macedonia (which includes parts of modern-day Bulgaria and former Yugoslavia). This is the first instance in Acts of the gospel going to Europe. Luke likely left the group later, as he is not included in the team starting in v. 40. Portions of Acts appear to be Luke's missionary travel journal.

They were forbidden by the Holy Spirit to preach the word in Asia: After strengthening the churches in the region, Paul sought to go next to the south-west, towards the important city of Ephesus. Yet, Paul was **forbidden by the Holy Spirit** to go there.

i. We note with interest that the Holy Spirit actually forbade Paul to do something we normally think of as *good* – preaching God’s Word to those who need it. Yet the Spirit of God directed this work, and Paul wasn’t the right person in the right place at the right time to begin bringing the gospel to the Roman Province of Asia Minor. There was certainly nothing wrong with Paul’s *desire* to **preach the word in Asia**; but it wasn’t God’s timing, so this was **forbidden by the Holy Spirit**.

ii. It is difficult to say exactly how the Holy Spirit said *no*; it may have been through a word of prophecy, or by an inward speaking of the Holy Spirit, or by circumstances. One way or another, Paul and his company got the message. Ephesus would come later, not now.

iii. **Asia** does not refer to the Far East as we know it today. It refers to the Roman Province of Asia Minor, which is modern day Turkey.

b. **They tried to go into Bithynia, but the Spirit did not permit them:** After the attempt to go to Asia, Paul sought to go north into **Bithynia**, but was again prevented by the Holy Spirit. So, **they came down to Troas**.

i. Paul didn’t set out to go to **Troas**. It was at least the third choice for him. But it was the Holy Spirit’s plan to lead him there. Paul, beautifully responsive to the Holy Spirit, was willing to lay down his will and his plans for the direction that the Holy Spirit brings.

ii. Paul was guided by hindrance. The Holy Spirit often guides as much by the *closing* of doors as He does by the *opening* of doors.

iii. David Livingstone wanted to go to China, but God sent him to Africa. William Carey wanted to go to Polynesia, but God sent him to India. Adoniram Judson went to India, but God guided him to Burma. God guides us along the way, to just the right place.

4. (9-10) God directs Paul to the region of Macedonia.

And a vision appeared to Paul in the night. A man of Macedonia stood and pleaded with him, saying, “Come over to Macedonia and help us.” Now after he had seen the vision, immediately we sought to go to Macedonia, concluding that the Lord had called us to preach the gospel to them.

a. **And a vision appeared to Paul in the night:** In Troas, God made Paul’s direction clear. In **a vision**, Paul was invited to the region of Macedonia, westward across the Aegean Sea.

i. This moved Paul and his missionary team from the continent of Asia to the continent of Europe; this was the first missionary endeavor to Europe.

ii. The wisdom and greatness of God’s plan was beginning to unfold. In Paul’s mind, he wanted to reach a few cities in his region. But God wanted to give Paul a *continent* to win for Jesus Christ.

b. A man of Macedonia stood and pleaded with him, saying, “Come over to Macedonia and help us.” The Macedonian man wanted **help**. So Paul went to bring Macedonia the gospel – the best possible help.

i. The greatest help we can bring anyone is the life-changing gospel of Jesus Christ. It is good for us to bring other help along with the gospel, but without the gospel, little *real* help is given.

c. Now after he had seen the vision, immediately we sought to go: Paul did not hesitate to answer the call of the Macedonian man. Paul’s missionary team did not hesitate to follow him on the basis of this call. This was a strong, godly man, leading a strong, godly team.

i. God still calls people to the mission field, and He may call through unusual ways. It’s still possible for a type of Macedonian Man to give an unusual call to serve God in a distant place. When that happens, it’s important to respond the way Paul and his team did.

d. Immediately we sought to go: The shift from *they* (*they came down to Troas, Acts 16:8*) to **we** in this verse probably means that Luke joined the band of missionaries in Troas. Perhaps he even came as Paul’s personal doctor.

i. Now we see another reason why *they were forbidden by the Holy Spirit to preach the word in Asia*. We see another reason why *the Spirit did not permit them* to go into Bithynia. God wanted Paul and his team to go to Troas and pick up a doctor named Luke. Because God said “no” to Paul these two times, we have a gospel and a Book of Acts written by Doctor Luke.

ii. At the time, Paul probably had no idea of the greatness of God’s purpose. God wanted to give him a continent for Jesus, to give him a personal doctor, and to give all of us the man whom God would use to write more of the New Testament than anyone else did. God knows what He is doing when he says, “No.”

Timothy Joins Paul and Silas

¹ Paul came to Derbe and then to Lystra, where a disciple named Timothy lived, whose mother was Jewish and a believer but whose father was a Greek. ² The believers at Lystra and Iconium spoke well of him. ³ Paul wanted to take him along on the journey, so he circumcised him because of the Jews who lived in that area, for they all knew that his father was a Greek. ⁴ As they traveled from town to town, they delivered the decisions reached by the apostles and elders in Jerusalem for the people to obey. ⁵ So the churches were strengthened in the faith and grew daily in numbers.

Biblical scholars believe this scene took place around 5 years after Paul’s first missionary trip. And now Paul is returning back to check on the churches. They returned to Derbe, where, if you recall, they had great success...many

people came to the faith. They also went back to Lystra, where the people thought Paul and Barnabas were gods and wanted to worship them.

And, within the 5 years since the first mission trip to Lystra, a young man named Timothy had responded and become a believer. Paul had never met him...he just heard about him. V2 says;

² The believers at Lystra and Iconium spoke well of him.

Paul met Timothy, got to know him, saw his heart...and was so impressed that he wanted to take him on his next journey. He did take him, and grew very close to him. Look at how Paul addressed him in his first letter to him:

1 Timothy 1:1-2

¹ Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the command of God our Savior and of Christ Jesus our hope,

² To Timothy my true son in the faith:

Grace, mercy and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord.

And in his letter to the Philippian church, Paul wrote this about Timothy:

Philippians 2:19-22

¹⁹ I hope in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy to you soon, that I also may be cheered when I receive news about you. ²⁰ I have no one else like him, who will show genuine concern for your welfare. ²¹ For everyone looks out for their own interests, not those of Jesus Christ. ²² But you know that Timothy has proved himself, because as a son with his father he has served with me in the work of the gospel.

Paul is very fond of Timothy, calling him a true son in the faith...saying he had no one else like him...that he had genuine faith.

And with all this, it occurred to me that Timothy was not a direct convert of Paul's...meaning Paul didn't minister to him directly when he became a believer.

Timothy was a product of the seeds planted by Paul's ministry.

OK, so that's Timothy...what does that have to do with us?

This is just another reminder to never give up! You never know who will be affected by your prayers and your testimony. People are watching! It may even be a second or third layer of ripple effect. You never know...only God knows.

Now we move into a potentially confusing topic. V3 says

³ Paul wanted to take him along on the journey, so he circumcised him because of the Jews who lived in that area, for they all knew that his father was a Greek.

This is a curious verse, it seems to conflict with what had been said in Chapter 15...even with what Paul says in the Book of Galatians. What's going on here?

Is Paul contradicting himself?

Well, let's go back and read a little of the incident in Chapter 15.

Acts 15:1

¹ Certain people came down from Judea to Antioch and were teaching the believers: "Unless you are circumcised, according to the custom taught by Moses, you cannot be saved."

And how did Paul handle this?

² This brought Paul and Barnabas into sharp dispute and debate with them.

And the whole book of Galatians

So on one hand Paul was coming down hard on believers who were insisting on circumcision, and yet in chapter 16 he had Timothy circumcised. It would be very easy to get confused. This looks like inconsistency.

The answer lies within the verses we read:

Acts 15:1

¹ Certain people came down from Judea to Antioch and were teaching the believers: "Unless you are circumcised, according to the custom taught by Moses, you cannot be saved."

And in tonight's text:

³ Paul wanted to take him along on the journey, so he circumcised him because of the Jews who lived in that area, for they all knew that his father was a Greek.

This was not for the sake of salvation. It was done in order to be less of a hindrance when they went to minister to the Jews.

One author put it this way:

“Paul did not contradict his belief or the findings of the council when he had Timothy circumcised. Paul did this not for Timothy's salvation or right standing with God, but so that Timothy status as a non-circumcised man from a Jewish mother would not hinder their work among the Jews and in synagogues.”

David Guzik

And then in v5 it says:

⁵ So the churches were strengthened in the faith and grew daily in numbers.

OK, so we read about this and ask...what could be a takeaway for us from this story of circumcision?

In God's work we must always keep the main thing the main thing.

We must prioritize the advancement of God's kingdom over our own “freedoms”.

Timothy was under grace, and had freedom. He didn't need to be circumcised in order to be saved, or even in order to minister. But he saw the importance of not letting his own freedom get in the way of ministering the gospel to the Jews. So he made the sacrifice and allowed himself to be circumcised.

In other words...Just because we have freedoms, doesn't mean should always use them.

I'm under grace, not law...so therefore I can have a drink if I want. But that doesn't mean I should...especially if it would cause someone to stumble. (I'm saying that rhetorically -I personally...)

Likewise, I can eat whatever I want...I could even let my language get a little "salty" at times...but should I? Especially if it could effect my ministry and cause someone to stumble?

Paul addressed this idea

Romans 14:1-8

¹ Accept the one whose faith is weak, without quarreling over disputable matters. ² One person's faith allows them to eat anything, but another, whose faith is weak, eats only vegetables. ³ The one who eats everything must not treat with contempt the one who does not, and the one who does not eat everything must not judge the one who does, for God has accepted them. ⁴ Who are you to judge someone else's servant? To their own master, servants stand or fall. And they will stand, for the Lord is able to make them stand.

⁵ One person considers one day more sacred than another; another considers every day alike. Each of them should be fully convinced in their own mind. ⁶ Whoever regards one day as special does so to the Lord. Whoever eats meat does so to the Lord, for they give thanks to God; and whoever abstains does so to the Lord and gives thanks to God. ⁷ For none of us lives for ourselves alone, and none of us dies for ourselves alone. ⁸ If we live, we live for the Lord; and if we die, we die for the Lord. So, whether we live or die, we belong to the Lord.

**There are matters in the faith that are doctrinal and indisputable.
Salvation issues...Jesus is the way...the trinity...**

But there are also what we call "disputable matters". Things that may be important to one person, but not another.

For instance...songs we sing, wearing suits, jewelry, makeup

In the church, we are not to quarrel over "disputable matters".

Sad to think that we would dig our heels in on these less important "disputable matters" and potentially cause someone to stumble. I mean, churches have spilt over some of these things.

Similar to the idea of speaking the truth with love...

Our conduct should always glorify God and build people up.

Ephesians 4:29

²⁹ Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen.

This idea of “keeping the main thing the main thing”...glorifying God, not wanting to cause someone to stumble...that is what we see going on here with Paul and Timothy.

Because of grace, circumcision was now a “disputable matter” that Paul was not going to allow to be a problem in the case of Timothy ministering to the Jews.

Paul, Silas, and Timothy together enjoyed great success in their work of strengthening and growing churches.

i. Their work was successful because their first interest was in strengthening the churches. Strong churches will naturally increase in number daily, without relying on man-centered and manipulative methods.

Acts 16:6-10

Paul’s Vision of the Man of Macedonia

⁶ Paul and his companions traveled throughout the region of Phrygia and Galatia, having been kept by the Holy Spirit from preaching the word in the province of Asia. ⁷ When they came to the border of Mysia, they tried to enter Bithynia, but the Spirit of Jesus would not allow them to. ⁸ So they passed by Mysia and went down to Troas. ⁹ During the night Paul had a vision of a man of Macedonia standing and begging him, “Come over to Macedonia and help us.” ¹⁰ After Paul had seen the vision, we got ready at once to leave for Macedonia, concluding that God had called us to preach the gospel to them.

After strengthening the churches in the region, Paul sought to go next to the south-west, towards the important city of Ephesus. Yet, Paul was **forbidden by the Holy Spirit** to go there.

i. We note with interest that the Holy Spirit actually forbade Paul to do something we normally think of as *good* – preaching God’s Word to those who need it. Yet the Spirit of God directed this work, and Paul wasn’t the right person in the right place at the right time to begin bringing the gospel to the Roman Province of Asia Minor. There was certainly nothing wrong with Paul’s *desire* to **preach the word in Asia**; but it wasn’t God’s timing, so this was **forbidden by the Holy Spirit**.

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i. This moved Paul and his missionary team from the continent of Asia to the continent of Europe; this was the first missionary endeavor to Europe.

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i. The greatest help we can bring anyone is the life-changing gospel of Jesus Christ. It is good for us to bring other help along with the gospel, but without the gospel, little *real* help is given.

c. **Now after he had seen the vision, immediately we sought to go:** Paul did not hesitate to answer the call of the Macedonian man. Paul's missionary team did not hesitate to follow him on the basis of this call. This was a strong, godly man, leading a strong, godly team.

i. God still calls people to the mission field, and He may call through unusual ways. It's still possible for a type of Macedonian Man to give an unusual call to serve God in a distant place. When that happens, it's important to respond the way Paul and his team did.

d. **Immediately we sought to go:** The shift from *they* (*they came down to Troas, Acts 16:8*) to **we** in this verse probably means that Luke joined the band of missionaries in Troas. Perhaps he even came as Paul's personal doctor.

i. Now we see another reason why *they were forbidden by the Holy Spirit to preach the word in Asia*. We see another reason why *the Spirit did not permit them to go into Bithynia*. God wanted Paul and his team to go to Troas and pick up a doctor named Luke. Because God said "no" to Paul these two times, we have a gospel and a Book of Acts written by Doctor Luke.

ii. At the time, Paul probably had no idea of the greatness of God's purpose. God wanted to give him a continent for Jesus, to give him a personal doctor, and to give all of us the man whom God would use to write more of the New Testament than anyone else did. God knows what He is doing when he says, "No."

Acts 15:36-41

³⁶ *Some time later Paul said to Barnabas, "Let us go back and visit the believers in all the towns where we preached the word of the Lord and see how they are doing."*

³⁷ *Barnabas wanted to take John, also called Mark, with them, ³⁸ but Paul did not think it wise to take him, because he had deserted them in Pamphylia and had not continued with them in the work. ³⁹ They had such a sharp disagreement that they parted company. Barnabas took Mark and sailed for Cyprus, ⁴⁰ but Paul chose Silas and left, commended by the believers to the grace of the Lord. ⁴¹ He went through Syria and Cilicia, strengthening the churches.*

As we unpack this, the story starts out well enough in v36:

³⁶ *Some time later Paul said to Barnabas, “Let us go back and visit the believers in all the towns where we preached the word of the Lord and see how they are doing.”*

We know Paul was a great evangelist. He boldly brought the gospel to areas who had never heard it. He preached with passion. But he also had a pastor’s heart...he was concerned with the well-being of the new converts. That was the reason for this second missionary trip...to do a health check on the people...make sure they were growing in faith. That must be part of the church’s mission today. We must develop self-feeders. That’s why I say I have failed if...

Now notice in v37 Barnabas wanted to take John, also called Mark.

³⁷ *Barnabas wanted to take John, also called Mark, with them*

This is John Mark, or also called Mark, who wrote the gospel of Mark. He was the cousin of Barnabas, as we see in:

Colossians 4:10

¹⁰ *My fellow prisoner Aristarchus sends you his greetings, as does Mark, the cousin of Barnabas. (You have received instructions about him; if he comes to you, welcome him.)*

But Paul doesn’t want Mark to go with them:

³⁸ *but Paul did not think it wise to take him, because he had deserted them in Pamphylia and had not continued with them in the work.*

What’s going on here? This was mentioned in chapter 13:

Acts 13:13

¹³ *From Paphos, Paul and his companions sailed to Perga in Pamphylia, where John left them to return to Jerusalem.*

The Bible is not clear on why John Mark left. But it is obvious Paul wasn’t impressed with his work ethic. V38 of tonight’s text says John Mark *deserted them*. “*Deserted them*”...wow.

Paul clearly had an issue with that and probably didn’t trust him enough to take on a new missionary trip. However, as we saw, Barnabas

did not share in his opinion of Mark. Was it just because he was his cousin? Was Barnabas showing partiality? To a family member?

Perhaps. But we also know a couple things about Barnabas:

Acts 4:36

³⁶ Joseph, a Levite from Cyprus, whom the apostles called Barnabas (which means “son of encouragement”

Acts 9:26-27

²⁶ When he came to Jerusalem, he tried to join the disciples, but they were all afraid of him, not believing that he really was a disciple. ²⁷ But Barnabas took him and brought him to the apostles. He told them how Saul on his journey had seen the Lord and that the Lord had spoken to him, and how in Damascus he had preached fearlessly in the name of Jesus.

Obviously a man of compassion and encouragement. It is likely he was being compassionate to Mark and giving him another chance. That’s Barnabas...he was an encourager. It’s good to be an encourager. The very word insinuates that you *instill courage...speak courage.*

Do you encourage? Do your words build confidence in others, or tear down their confidence? How much that comes out of your mouth is corrective?

I’ve heard relationship experts say *In our key relationships, we should preface every corrective statement by 5 complimentary statements.*

In other words...make some deposits before your withdrawals.

1 Thessalonians 5:11

¹¹ Therefore encourage one another and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing.

Hebrews 3:13

¹³ But encourage one another daily, as long as it is called “Today,” so that none of you may be hardened by sin’s deceitfulness.

Ephesians 4:29

²⁹ Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen.

Do your words benefit those who listen?

Barnabas was an encourager. But at the same time - he wasn't always perfectly in sync with the other apostles. In fact, in Galatians, Paul describes an incident where he had to confront Peter, and it involved Barnabas:

Galatians 2:11-13

¹¹ But when Peter came to Antioch, I had to oppose him to his face, for what he did was very wrong. ¹² When he first arrived, he ate with the Gentile believers, who were not circumcised. But afterward, when some friends of James came, Peter wouldn't eat with the Gentiles anymore. He was afraid of criticism from these people who insisted on the necessity of circumcision. ¹³ As a result, other Jewish believers followed Peter's hypocrisy, and even Barnabas was led astray by their hypocrisy.

In this story here in Galatians, we see both Peter and Barnabas getting off track. Each being weak in the flesh. Each showing their humanity. Paul had to confront them. But here's the thing...in all of that,

God used these men mightily!

God uses imperfect people!

Aren't you glad for that?

I don't know about you, but I would think God would pick people that won't let their flesh get in the way and potentially mess things up.

Romans 11:29

²⁹ for God's gifts and his call are irrevocable.

There is so much grace in that statement.

**And notice in our story tonight, it said in vv39-40
Acts 15:39-40**

³⁹ They had such a sharp disagreement that they parted company. Barnabas took Mark and sailed for Cyprus, ⁴⁰ but Paul chose Silas and left, commended by the believers to the grace of the Lord.

Question: *Can God's people disagree? Is that even OK?*

We have seen in other stories in the Book of Acts even recently. For instance the contention that developed earlier in Chapter 15 regarding the question of whether the Gentile Christians needed to adhere to the Jewish law, including circumcision.

In that case as well as in tonight's story, the situation was dealt with and God's work went on.

God was still in it! Can we all say that?

That is such an important point and we must get it.

Human weakness does not negate God's work.

It is so easy to have a conflict, or have a misunderstanding between fellow believers...to have a misstep in a project we are doing for the Lord...and then assume God wasn't in it!

God can't be in it...there is confusion or even disunity...

But we must understand...there is confusion and disunity because people are involved! Not because of God, and not always because we missed God!

God chose to use broken people for two reasons:

- **To show His grace.**

Romans 5:20

²⁰ *...But where sin increased, grace increased all the more*

- **So He gets the glory**

Let's face it...If God used perfect people then when a great work occurs we would get the credit...we would make it about how good we are.

Ezekiel 36:22

²² “Therefore say to the Israelites, ‘This is what the Sovereign LORD says: It is not for your sake, people of Israel, that I am going to do these things, but for the sake of my holy name, which you have profaned among the nations where you have gone.’

Indeed God uses imperfect people. In this story, Paul and Barnabas could not agree on Mark, so they split up. And guess what...God blessed them both!

b. **Barnabas was determined... But Paul insisted:** Luke did not give us a clue as to who was right and who was wrong in the dispute between Paul and Barnabas. But it is never good when personal disputes flare up among those serving in the ministry.

i. **Then the contention became so sharp:** Wherever there is **sharp...contention**, *someone* is wrong, and usually there is wrong on both sides. There could be no way that *both* Paul and Barnabas were each walking in the Spirit on this issue.

ii. Earlier in this chapter there was *dispute* and *no small dissention* ([Acts 15:2](#)) and *much dispute* ([Acts 15:7](#)) over an important doctrinal matter. Here the sharp contention seemed less important and more personal.

iii. The relationship between Paul and Barnabas was probably also strained when Barnabas sided with the Judaizers in Antioch when Peter came to visit ([Galatians 2:13](#)).

c. **Barnabas took Mark and sailed to Cyprus:** Since Barnabas was John Mark's cousin ([Colossians 4:10](#)), and because Barnabas had such an encouraging, accepting character ([Acts 4:36](#), [9:26-27](#)), it is easy to see why he would be more understanding towards John Mark.

d. **They parted from one another:** So, Paul (accompanied by Silas) and Barnabas (accompanied by Mark) split, each going out to different fields of ministry.

i. It is hard to know if their personal relationship was strained for a prolonged period. As Christians, we are commanded to resolve relationship problems with others before we present ministry to God ([Matthew 5:23-24](#)). It is always wrong to step over people in the name of ministry, and when it happens it must be made right.

ii. There is no doubt God used this division; but this can never be casually used as an excuse for carnal division. God can redeem good out of evil, yet we are all held accountable for the evil we do, even if God ends up bringing good out of the evil. Either Paul or Barnabas – probably both – had to get this right with God and each other.

iii. “But this example of God's providence may not be used as an excuse for Christian quarreling.” (Stott)

iv. Later, Paul came to minister with John Mark and to value his contributions to the work of God ([Colossians 4:10](#); Philemon 4:24; [2 Timothy 4:11](#)). We don't know if it was

Mark who changed or Paul who changed. Probably God had a work to do in both of them!

e. **Paul chose Silas:** Silas (also called *Silvanus* in several passages) became an important part of Paul's team in doing the work of the ministry.

- Silas was recognized as one of the *leading men among the brethren* ([Acts 15:22](#)).
- Silas was a prophet ([Acts 15:32](#)).
- Silas was a Roman citizen ([Acts 16:37](#)).
- Silas probably spoke Greek (comparing [Acts 15:22](#) and [15:32](#)).
- Silas wrote out one of Peter's letters ([1 Peter 5:12](#)) and maybe some of Paul's ([1 Thessalonians 1:1](#); [2 Thessalonians 2:1](#)).

f. **Strengthening the churches:** This was Paul's work, in addition to evangelism. New Christians needed strong churches to grow and mature in.

Acts 15:22-35

²² Then the apostles and elders, with the whole church, decided to choose some of their own men and send them to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas. They chose Judas (called Barsabbas) and Silas, men who were leaders among the believers. ²³ With them they sent the following letter:

*The apostles and elders, your brothers,
To the Gentile believers in Antioch, Syria and Cilicia:
Greetings.*

²⁴ We have heard that some went out from us without our authorization and disturbed you, troubling your minds by what they said. ²⁵ So we all agreed to choose some men and send them to you with our dear friends Barnabas and Paul—

²⁶ men who have risked their lives for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. ²⁷ Therefore we are sending Judas and Silas to confirm by word of mouth what we are writing. ²⁸ It seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us not to burden you with anything beyond the following requirements: ²⁹ You are to abstain from food sacrificed to idols, from blood, from the meat of strangled animals and from sexual immorality. You will do well to avoid these things.

Farewell.

³⁰ So the men were sent off and went down to Antioch, where they gathered the church together and delivered the letter. ³¹ The people read it and were glad for its encouraging message. ³² Judas and Silas, who themselves were prophets, said

much to encourage and strengthen the believers. ³³ After spending some time there, they were sent off by the believers with the blessing of peace to return to those who had sent them. ^[34]^[a] ³⁵ But Paul and Barnabas remained in Antioch, where they and many others taught and preached the word of the Lord.

As we unpack this, the first thing we notice is that this letter was written to the Gentile believers. Specific to the Gentiles...addressing an issue that troubled them. And what was that issue?

V24 of what we just read:

²⁴ We have heard that some went out from us without our authorization and disturbed you, troubling your minds by what they said.

What was it that disturbed the Gentiles, troubled their minds?

We read about it last time:

Acts 15:1

¹ Certain people came down from Judea to Antioch and were teaching the believers: “Unless you are circumcised, according to the custom taught by Moses, you cannot be saved.”

We talked last week about how some Jewish Christians (also called “Judaizers”) came to the scene to “straighten” the people out...telling them that yes, gentiles could be Christians, but only if they accept and practice all the old Jewish traditions, including circumcision.

We talked about: *We often try to put God in a box.*

“this is the way we’ve always done it”. It is comfortable – familiar.

One thing I’ve learned...God can do whatever He wants!

Jesus never healed the same way twice.

And when you look at the Old Testament as it applies to the New Testament, the Old Covenant – New Covenant...

The law wasn’t the way – it pointed to The Way.

The law showed us our utter need for God and His forgiveness. Jesus came to fulfill the law and be the bridge to God and His forgiveness.

It was always about Jesus...It's always been about Him!

From the beginning to the end...it all pointed to Him.

But it also occurred to me there may be another reason the Judaizers came to Antioch to “straighten them out”. They likely thought they were protecting the sanctity of God’s name.

When you consider what had happened in the region...here they were, Jews...raised in the traditions and teaching of the Torah. They knew the law...they knew what God required. They honored it. And then they see the gospel going out to the Gentiles...many of whom were receiving it. And there were a lot more Gentiles out there than there were Jews. It would be easy to fear that the more Gentile Christians there were coming into the kingdom, the more the church would get watered down...the makeup of the church, demographics...traditions...they were all changing before their very eyes.

And what does a person natural do when they are feeling like they're losing control of something? *Take the control back.* Keep it familiar and comfortable.

And that's why we say: *God will not be put in a box.*

We must remember...*The church belongs to God!*

He can bring whatever increase He wants. He can move however He wants. He can raise up whomever He wants to lead.

Question: For us today, in our church...What will we do when God's harvest looks different than what we expect?

It is God's church! Can we say that together? *It is God's church!*

We are simply stewards of it.

And what we see in this story tonight are the church leaders being good stewards...realizing the Holy Spirit had sanctioned and anointed a gospel message of grace, apart from the law, a message that was intended for all people. *These leaders saw what God was doing and joined God in it.*

That is a great model for church operation!

Question: *Do we ask God what He is doing, or do we tell God what we want to do for Him?*

But in our story tonight...this is what God was doing!

In other words...*The Gospel message was the heart of God.*

Therefore: *As Christians, we are stewards of the heart of the God.*

That changes the perspective, doesn't it?

And we the hearts of the church leaders...showing concern and caring for the young Christians...coming to their rescue...protecting them from the heaviness of going back to the law.

And notice what vv28-29 say:

²⁸ It seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us not to burden you with anything beyond the following requirements: ²⁹ You are to abstain from food sacrificed to idols, from blood, from the meat of strangled animals and from sexual immorality. You will do well to avoid these things. Farewell.

Look at the Holy Spirit's confirmation of what they saying. Clearly, the church leaders has prayed diligently about this important matter, and were following the Holy Spirit. That's a pretty good endorsement.

And the message being:

We are glad you are part of us. You were not trained in the Jewish customs, and we don't want to saddle you with impossible rules that we ourselves can't even keep. But lifestyle is important, your life should show that you have been saved by grace. Therefore, here are the essentials we want you to practice in order to be in fellowship.

²⁹ You are to abstain from food sacrificed to idols, from blood, from the meat of strangled animals and from sexual immorality. You will do well to avoid these things.

Why just these things? Are these really the only things that mattered? You don't see these mentioned as the essentials with the Jewish people. What's going on here? Is there a double standard? Are they lowering the bar for the Gentiles? Here's the bottom line. These specific requirements were given to the Gentiles in this region because all three areas had to do with idol worship.

They were prevalent pagan practices in the culture of that region.

The church leaders were preventing the culture from infiltrating the church.

Do we still need to practice that today?

Let's look at each of them: *²⁹ You are to abstain from food sacrificed to idols*

This was a problem, and not just in this area. Paul had to write to the Corinthians on the same subject:

1 Corinthians 8:4-7

⁴ So, what about eating meat that has been offered to idols? Well, we all know that an idol is not really a god and that there is only one God. ⁵ There may be so-called gods both in heaven and on earth, and some people actually worship many gods and many lords. ⁶ But for us,

*There is one God, the Father,
by whom all things were created,
and for whom we live.*

*And there is one Lord, Jesus Christ,
through whom all things were created,
and through whom we live.*

⁷ However, not all believers know this. Some are accustomed to thinking of idols as being real, so when they eat food that has been offered to idols, they think of it as the worship of real gods, and their weak consciences are violated.

Secondly: *from blood, from the meat of strangled animals*

On the surface this sounds like a ceremonial law, which is exactly what grace came to fulfill. Why are they saying to practice this?

First of all...remember, this is from the Holy Spirit...for them...now.

God doesn't make mistakes, or conflict with Himself or His Word.

An animal that was strangled had not been properly drained of blood.

This wasn't about ceremonial law. This was a practical, dietary law that that went all the way back to the flood, when God told Noah what he could eat and what not to eat.

Genesis 9:1-4

¹ Then God blessed Noah and his sons, saying to them, "Be fruitful and increase in number and fill the earth. ² The fear and dread of you will fall on all the beasts of the earth, and on all the birds in the sky, on every creature that moves along the ground, and on all the fish in the sea; they are given into your hands. ³ Everything that lives and moves about will be food for you. Just as I gave you the green plants, I now give you everything.

⁴ "But you must not eat meat that has its lifeblood still in it.

And in Leviticus 17:11

¹¹ For the life of a creature is in the blood, and I have given it to you to make atonement for yourselves on the altar; it is the blood that makes atonement for one's life.

The atonement for sin was attained by the life in the blood.

So blood was consecrated, as it were, to God.

In the desert, when God was instructing Moses on how the people were to live:

Deuteronomy 12:16

¹⁶ But you must not eat the blood; pour it out on the ground like water.

Deuteronomy 12:23

²³ But be sure you do not eat the blood, because the blood is the life, and you must not eat the life with the meat.

And lastly: *and from sexual immorality*

Romans 13:13

¹³ Let us behave decently, as in the daytime, not in carousing and drunkenness, not in sexual immorality and debauchery, not in dissension and jealousy.

1 Corinthians 6:9-11 Living Bible

⁹⁻¹⁰ Don't you know that those doing such things have no share in the Kingdom of God? Don't fool yourselves. Those who live immoral lives, who are idol worshipers, adulterers or homosexuals—will have no share in his Kingdom. Neither will thieves or greedy people, drunkards, slanderers, or robbers. ¹¹ There was a time when some of you were just like that but now your sins are washed away, and you are set apart for God; and he has accepted you because of what the Lord Jesus Christ and the Spirit of our God have done for you.

That's hate speech! That's in the Bible...take it up with God!