



DAYBREAK

Luke, Acts, James, Galatians, Romans



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| <input type="checkbox"/> Luke 1:1-38 | <input type="checkbox"/> Luke 22:66—23:25 | <input type="checkbox"/> Acts 27:1-44 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Luke 1:39-80 | <input type="checkbox"/> Luke 23:26-56 | <input type="checkbox"/> Acts 28:1-31 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Luke 2:1-20 | <input type="checkbox"/> Luke 24:1-53 | <input type="checkbox"/> James 1:1-27 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Luke 2:21-52 | <input type="checkbox"/> Acts 1:1-26 | <input type="checkbox"/> James 2:1-26 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Luke 3:1—4:13 | <input type="checkbox"/> Acts 2:1-47 | <input type="checkbox"/> James 3:1-18 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Luke 4:14-44 | <input type="checkbox"/> Acts 3:1-26 | <input type="checkbox"/> James 4:1-17 |
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| <input type="checkbox"/> Luke 5:27—6:11 | <input type="checkbox"/> Acts 4:32—5:16 | <input type="checkbox"/> Galatians 1:1-24 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Luke 6:12-49 | <input type="checkbox"/> Acts 5:17-42 | <input type="checkbox"/> Galatians 2:1-21 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Luke 7:1-17 | <input type="checkbox"/> Acts 6:1—7:1 | <input type="checkbox"/> Galatians 3:1-29 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Luke 7:18-50 | <input type="checkbox"/> Acts 7:2-29 | <input type="checkbox"/> Galatians 4:1-31 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Luke 8:1-21 | <input type="checkbox"/> Acts 7:30-60 | <input type="checkbox"/> Galatians 5:1-26 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Luke 8:22-56 | <input type="checkbox"/> Acts 8:1-40 | <input type="checkbox"/> Galatians 6:1-18 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Luke 9:1-36 | <input type="checkbox"/> Acts 9:1-43 | <input type="checkbox"/> Romans 1:1-17 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Luke 9:37-62 | <input type="checkbox"/> Acts 10:1-48 | <input type="checkbox"/> Romans 1:18—2:9 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Luke 10:1-42 | <input type="checkbox"/> Acts 11:1-30 | <input type="checkbox"/> Romans 2:10—3:20 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Luke 11:1-28 | <input type="checkbox"/> Acts 12:1-25 | <input type="checkbox"/> Romans 3:21—4:25 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Luke 11:29-54 | <input type="checkbox"/> Acts 13:1-52 | <input type="checkbox"/> Romans 5:1-21 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Luke 12:1-59 | <input type="checkbox"/> Acts 14:1-28 | <input type="checkbox"/> Romans 6:1-23 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Luke 13:1-35 | <input type="checkbox"/> Acts 15:1-35 | <input type="checkbox"/> Romans 7:1-25 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Luke 14:1-35 | <input type="checkbox"/> Acts 15:36—16:40 | <input type="checkbox"/> Romans 8:1-39 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Luke 15:1-32 | <input type="checkbox"/> Acts 17:1-34 | <input type="checkbox"/> Romans 9:1-33 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Luke 16:1-31 | <input type="checkbox"/> Acts 18:1-22 | <input type="checkbox"/> Romans 10:1-21 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Luke 17:1—18:8 | <input type="checkbox"/> Acts 18:23—19:41 | <input type="checkbox"/> Romans 11:1-36 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Luke 18:9-30 | <input type="checkbox"/> Acts 20:1-38 | <input type="checkbox"/> Romans 12:1-21 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Luke 18:31—19:27 | <input type="checkbox"/> Acts 21:1-17 | <input type="checkbox"/> Romans 13:1-14 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Luke 19:28-48 | <input type="checkbox"/> Acts 21:18—22:30 | <input type="checkbox"/> Romans 14:1-23 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Luke 20:1-47 | <input type="checkbox"/> Acts 23:1-35 | <input type="checkbox"/> Romans 15:1-33 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Luke 21:1-38 | <input type="checkbox"/> Acts 24:1-27 | <input type="checkbox"/> Romans 16:1-27 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Luke 22:1-38 | <input type="checkbox"/> Acts 25:1-27 | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Luke 22:39-65 | <input type="checkbox"/> Acts 26:1-32 | |

Daybreak is a personal Bible study continuum for the high school and adult levels. Scripture references are taken from the King James Version of the Bible. A companion series of Sunday school lessons, titled Discovery, is also available. All of the material is available on our website, as well as in printed form. The print version is designed to be stored in a binder; subsequent modules can then be easily inserted. Daybreak is an official publication of the Apostolic Faith Church. All rights are reserved.



Overview for Luke

Purpose: To provide a more complete account of the life of Jesus Christ for a man named Theophilus, and to emphasize the humanity of Jesus, the Savior for all people everywhere (see Luke 1:1-4 and 19:10).

Author: Luke is thought by many commentators to have been a Gentile. His name is Greek, and he was well educated in Greek literary and scientific culture. Likely a native of Antioch in Syria, he was a physician by profession. He was a close friend and traveling companion of Paul, and the one who remained with the Apostle after others deserted him. Luke also wrote the Book of Acts, which is a sequel to the Gospel account. Tradition says Luke died a martyr.

To Whom Written: Luke's Gospel was written to Theophilus, a fellow Greek who probably was an individual of high rank. *Theophilus* means "friend of God," so this may have been a nickname indicating his strong interest in the Christian religion. The Book of Acts is also addressed to him.

Time Period Covered: From directly before Jesus' birth to His ascension.

Date Written: Based on events recorded in the Book of Acts, Luke probably wrote his Gospel about A.D. 58-60.

History: The events in the Gospel of Luke took place approximately four hundred years after the close of the Old Testament. During that period, the Persians dominated the Jews' homeland until 332 B.C., when Alexander the Great conquered the area. From 332-167 B.C. the Jews came under powerful Greek (or Hellenic) influence while under the rule of Alexander. The Maccabean revolt brought a period of Jewish independence from 164 to 63 B.C. Then the Romans conquered the area and set up a regional government, which lasted from 63 B.C. to A.D. 73, a period which encompassed the events recorded in the Gospel of Luke. During all those years, the Jewish people looked and prayed for the Messiah to come and rebuild the Kingdom of David.

Setting: Roman society in the time of Jesus was characterized by economic inequality. The vast wealth of the Roman Empire was controlled by a few individuals who had gained status through their public works and philanthropic deeds. Business and finance were dominated by international trade and an enforced system of

taxation. Due to the practice of subjugating conquered people groups, slaves made up a sizable segment of the population.

The Hebrew people maintained their identity throughout those years of domination, mainly because the Jewish faith kept alive the traditions regarding purity and defilement which set them apart from other nations in the region. By the time of Christ, the Temple was still the official center of Jewish worship, but the synagogues in every Jewish city were even more at the center of Jewish life. Religious leaders were split into three major groups: the Pharisees, Sadducees, and Essenes (who are best known for their preservation of the Dead Sea Scrolls).

Style: Luke's Gospel is the most universal of the four Gospels. Matthew presented Christ as the Messiah to a Jewish audience, Mark stressed the aspect of Jesus as the humble Servant to those of a Roman background, and John wrote for the emerging church with an emphasis on Christ's divinity. Luke, however, focused on the humanity of Christ, often referring to Him as the "Son of Man," and making it clear that Christ came to be the Savior of the whole world.

Luke's writing indicates he was an educated man. He had an outstanding command of the Greek language and a more polished vocabulary than those of Matthew and Mark. His writing is characterized by orderly arrangement, attention to historical detail and dates, accurate descriptions of places (verified by contemporary archaeologists), and a warm, sensitive understanding of Jesus and those around Him.

Unique Features: About thirty-five percent of the material in Luke is unique to his Gospel. Some of the most well-known of Jesus' parables were recorded only by Luke, including *The Good Samaritan* and *The Prodigal Son*. Luke wrote more about prayer than any of the other Gospel writers. He also recorded some of the greatest songs of the Christian faith: the *Benedictus* (the song of Zacharias), the *Magnificat* (the song of Mary after she met with Elisabeth), and *Gloria in Excelsis* (the song of the angelic choir), which are all in the first two chapters.

Summary: Luke began his discourse with a prologue, stating his purpose for writing. He detailed the birth and infancy of both Jesus and His forerunner, John the Baptist, pointing to these events as the dawn of the

promised era of Israel's salvation. He outlined the divine preparation for Jesus' ministry, including John's prophetic role, the baptism of Jesus, and Jesus' temptation in the wilderness.

The second section of the book concerns Jesus' teaching and His miracles. Luke related events which took place during Jesus' ministry in Galilee, and the hostile reception He received there. He described Jesus' journey to Jerusalem, where He would face His destiny as the Messiah. Included in this section are a

number of Jesus' parables. Luke then described how Christ's ministry resulted in growing antagonism by the religious leaders.

In the final section of the book, Luke told of Jesus' last supper with His closest followers, followed by His betrayal, arrest, interrogation, and crucifixion. The Gospel concludes with Luke's record of events from the Resurrection to the Ascension, showing Jesus' death to be divinely ordained and in accordance with prophecy.

Timeline

Many of these dates are approximate, as reference materials differ slightly.

Jesus crucified; Pentecost; Church begun A.D. 30	Stephen martyred; Paul's conversion 35			Peter's ministry in Asia Minor 47	Jerusalem council 50	PAUL IMPRISONED (CAESAREA) 57-59	PAUL'S HOUSE ARREST 60-62	James (Jesus' brother) martyred 62	Peter & Paul martyred 67/68?	Jude martyred 72
PAUL IN CILICIA & SYRIA 35-46		PAUL'S MISSIONARY JOURNEYS 46-48 50-52 53-57			Paul's trip to Rome 59				Rome destroys Jerusalem 70	
		Holy Spirit falls on Gentiles 41	James (the Apostle) martyred; Peter imprisoned 44	Galatians; James 49	1 & 2 Thessalonians 51/52	1 & 2 Corinthians 55	Romans 57 St. Mark 58/60	Ephesians; Colossians; Philemon 60 Philippians 61 St. Matthew; St. Luke 61/64	1 Timothy; Titus; 1 Peter 64 Jude 65 Acts; 2 Peter; 2 Timothy 66/68	Hebrews 68

Outline

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A complete amplified outline of this book is available on our website at www.apostolicfaith.org.

- I. The preface to the Gospel (1:1-4)
 - A. The sources for the Gospel (1:1-2)
 - B. The research for the Gospel (1:3)
 - C. The purpose for the Gospel (1:4)
- II. The advent of the Son of Man (1:5—2:52)
 - A. The annunciations (1:5-56)
 - B. The advent of John (1:57-80)
 - C. The advent of the Son of Man (2:1-52)
- III. The preparation of the Son of Man (3:1—4:13)
 - A. The forerunner of the Son of Man (3:1-20)
 - B. The baptism of the Son of Man (3:21-22)
 - C. The genealogy of the Son of Man (3:23-38)
 - D. The temptation of the Son of Man (4:1-13)
- IV. The ministry of the Son of Man (4:14—9:50)
 - A. The commencement of the ministry of the Son of Man (4:14-44)
 - B. The course of the ministry of the Son of Man (5:1—6:11)
 - C. The climax of the ministry of the Son of Man (6:12—8:56)
 - D. The conclusion of the ministry of the Son of Man (9:1-50)
- V. The rejection of the Son of Man (9:51—11:54)
 - A. The commencement of the rejection of the Son of Man (9:51—11:13)
 - B. The conflict causing the rejection of the Son of Man (11:14-36)
 - C. The consequence of the rejection of the Son of Man (11:37-54)
- VI. The instruction of the Son of Man (12:1—19:27)
 - A. Instructions concerning hypocrisy (12:1-12)
 - B. Instructions concerning wealth (12:13-59)
 - C. Instructions concerning repentance (13:1-9)
 - D. Instructions concerning the Kingdom of God (13:10—19:27)
- VII. The passion of the Son of Man (19:28—23:56)
 - A. The presentation of the Son of Man (19:28-48)
 - B. The public ministry of the Son of Man concluded (20:1—21:38)
 - C. The preparation of the death of the Son of Man (22:1-46)
 - D. The arrest and trial of the Son of Man (22:47—23:56)
- VIII. The triumph of the Son of Man (24:1-53)
 - A. The empty tomb (24:1-12)
 - B. The appearance near Emmaus (24:13-32)
 - C. The appearance to the disciples (24:33-43)
 - D. The instruction of the disciples (24:44-49)
 - E. The ascension of the Son of Man (24:50-53)

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DEVOTIONAL FOCUS

**“For with God nothing shall be impossible.”
(Luke 1:37)**

“You probably will not be able to have any children,” the doctor said after doing some testing. This report came to my future husband and me not long before our marriage. In the years following our wedding, the doctor’s diagnosis proved to be correct—there were no children. Sometimes it seemed as if we were riding an emotional rollercoaster as we went through times of hope and times of sadness. I would pray and consecrate the matter to the Lord, and then another wave of grief would come, so I would need to pray and consecrate it again. Eventually, we felt God had led us into an avenue of helping young people that we believed was our calling instead of having children.

However, eight years after our wedding, God unexpectedly changed the direction of our lives when we found out that I was pregnant. More tests were done, and a different doctor said conception was one chance in a million. What joy we felt when our miracle baby son was born! Then nineteen months later, another miracle occurred when our baby daughter came into the world. We experienced for ourselves that “with God nothing shall be impossible.”

The births of our son and daughter gave my husband and me personal understanding about the joy Zacharias and Elisabeth must have felt when they learned God would give them a son. They had been married far longer than eight years, and not only that, they were past the child-bearing time of life. No doubt they had undergone many emotions over the years—anticipation, disappointment, joy, grief, and more. Although they thought their situation was past hope, God had a divine plan.

Then the time came for God to implement His plan of redemption that had been established from the foundation of the world. This began with the message to Zacharias that he and his wife would have a son who would prepare the hearts of the people for the coming Messiah. Soon after appearing to Zacharias, the Angel Gabriel was sent to Mary to tell her that she would conceive and bear God’s Son. Thus, with two miraculous births, a new dispensation in God’s plan for the salvation of mankind began.

The miraculous births of our two children certainly did not have the large-scale impact of the births foretold in today’s text. But our story, along with the miracles experienced by many others, is a testimony

to God’s power to do the “impossible.” Maybe you are facing a situation that seems to have no solution. Perhaps your emotions have fluctuated between hope and despair as you’ve dealt with this difficulty. May you be encouraged by the knowledge that God has a plan, and He is well able to accomplish the impossible.

BACKGROUND

After four hundred years without a message from one of God’s prophets, the Israelite people were expecting their Messiah to come, heralded by a forerunner prophesied by Malachi. Luke began his historical documentation with the two announcements which started a new dispensation: the messages delivered by the Angel Gabriel as he appeared to Zacharias and then to Mary.

The first four verses of the Book of Luke are an introduction. The author’s purpose was to write a historical account based upon the words and writings of eyewitnesses.

Verses 5-7 give a point of reference for the date and introduce Zacharias and Elisabeth, the parents of John the Baptist. In Luke’s individual style, he indicated the time frame when he wrote, “In the days of Herod, the King.” Herod the Great was born in Idumea, an area south of Judah that was inhabited by Esau’s descendants. Appointed by the Roman Senate, this Herod ruled until his death in 4 B.C.

Zacharias was a priest “of the course of Abia” (verse 5). Because of the great number of priests, King David had separated them into twenty-four groups for a rotation of duty. It was considered commendable for a priest to marry a descendant of Aaron, which Elisabeth was, and Zacharias and Elisabeth had faithfully kept God’s commandments and the religious customs, serving God from their hearts. However, in that culture and era, having no children was considered to be the consequence of not pleasing God, so they had undoubtedly felt humiliation and condemnation as the years had passed.

Incense was offered in the Holy Place before the daily morning sacrifice and again following the sacrifice made in the evening. Many people and priests stood in the courtyards about the Temple and prayed during these offerings, as it was a sacred time. Perhaps a thousand priests were in each rotation, so the priest who offered the incense was chosen by lot, and could only perform this service once in his lifetime. In our text, this great honor fell upon Zacharias (verses 8-10).

While Zacharias was ministering, he was visited by the Angel Gabriel and given a startling message (verses 11-17). He would father a son who would “drink neither wine nor strong drink” (be a Nazarite), and would be commissioned for his calling by the Holy Ghost as the Old Testament prophets had been. This son, who was to be named John, would fulfill the prophecies of Malachi 3:1 and 4:5-6, becoming the forerunner of Christ.

Verses 18-25 tell that although he was righteous, Zacharias demonstrated unbelief at this announcement and asked for a sign. The sign given was disciplinary—he was unable to speak until the baby was born.

Six months after Elisabeth conceived, the Angel Gabriel appeared to Mary (verses 26-38), who was living in Nazareth, a small town about sixty-five miles from Jerusalem to the northeast. Mary was espoused to Joseph. Jewish couples were often engaged for as much as a year before they were actually married. However, the betrothal was binding and legal; faithfulness was expected and unfaithfulness punishable by divorce and death.

The word *hail* in the angel’s greeting meant “be glad,” and was a greeting when used in this context. It could be stated, “Joy be with thee.” The angelic message was that Mary would conceive a son to be called *Jesus*, which means “Savior” or “Jehovah saves,” and that He would be the Son of God, the Messiah. He would fulfill God’s promise to David that his throne would be established forever (2 Samuel 7:16) and the prophecy that his kingdom would be eternal (Isaiah 9:6-7).

Mary “cast in her mind” (reasoned), but did not understand how this could happen. Her response to the angel showed perplexity, not doubt. The Angel Gabriel’s answer indicated that miraculously, God’s Son would take on the form of a human and be born into the world as a baby. The Incarnation was designed and implemented by God himself so that Jesus was born without sin.

As additional assurance, the angel told Mary that her cousin Elisabeth had conceived a son. Mary’s response, “Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it unto me according to thy word” (verse 38) showed complete submission to God’s plan. She undoubtedly knew that unkind and untrue statements would be made about her, yet she was fully ready to obey.

AMPLIFIED OUTLINE

Hannah’s Bible Outlines
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- I. The preface to the Gospel (1:1-4)
 - A. The sources for the Gospel (1:1-2)
 - B. The research for the Gospel (1:3)
 - C. The purpose for the Gospel (1:4)
- II. The advent of the Son of Man
 - A. The annunciations

1. The announcement of the birth of John (1:5-25)
 - a. The parents of John (1:5-7)
 - b. The promise of John (1:8-23)
 - c. The prospect of John (1:24-25)
2. The announcement of the birth of the Son of Man (1:26-38)
 - a. The appearance of the angel (1:26-29)
 - b. The message of the angel (1:30-33)
 - c. The reassurance of the angel (1:34-38)

A CLOSER LOOK

1. What was Zacharias doing when the angel appeared to him?

2. Why do you think Mary responded so quickly and positively to the angel’s startling message?

3. What “impossible” situations has God worked out for you or for someone you know?

CONCLUSION

Even impossible situations are not too big for God, and we can come to Him with all our problems, needs, and circumstances.

NOTES



DEVOTIONAL FOCUS

“And thou, child, shalt be called the prophet of the Highest: for thou shalt go before the face of the Lord to prepare his ways.” (Luke 1:76)

A Google search for the phrase “great men” brings up over a billion results. Glancing through the first few websites listed, you will find articles concerning great men of history, great men of peace, great men based on wealth, and great men of intellect and achievement. You can read the poems and love letters of great men, or peruse a multitude of quotations by great men—notable historical figures, authors, celebrities, and newsmakers.

If you want to narrow down the field of “greatness,” check out *TIME* magazine. Every year since 1927, *TIME* has selected an official “Person of the Year,” recognizing an individual whom the editors feel has done the most to influence world events during the past year and best embodies what was important during that period of time. (Some of these men had a negative impact on the world: the list includes such names as Joseph Stalin, Adolf Hitler, Ayatollah Khomeini, and Vladimir Putin!)

Alexander Maclaren, a renowned Baptist preacher, pastor, and author in the mid-1800s, once said, “No epithet is more misused and misapplied than that of ‘a great man’ . . . Every little man who makes a noise for a while gets it hung around his neck.” Based on the world’s estimation, the title “great” is conferred upon a few who deserve such acclaim and many more who do not.

God’s estimation of greatness is based upon vastly different criterion from that of the world. Today’s text records the birth of John the Baptist, a man whose miraculous birth was foretold by an angel who proclaimed of the unborn child, “He shall be great in the sight of the Lord” (Luke 1:15). In our focus verse, John’s father Zacharias prophesied that his son would be called “the prophet of the Highest,” and would “go before the face of the Lord to prepare his ways.” What a key role that little infant in his arms would play in the drama of the ages—and what a truly great individual is introduced to history in this passage!

John’s personal biography for the next thirty years is summarized in one short verse which concludes the chapter: “The child grew, and waxed strong . . . till the day of his shewing unto Israel.” Subsequent references to him in Luke and the other Gospels validate the prophetic words uttered by the angel and

Zacharias. John would be great because of his unwavering courage, his disregard for personal comfort or convenience, his absolute humility, and his fiery enthusiasm for righteousness. Most importantly, he would fulfill the role described by Zacharias, preparing the people for the coming Messiah.

The Source of true greatness is available to us all. We must begin by yielding our hearts and wills to the One to whom John so zealously pointed: Jesus Christ, the Son of God. We must let a vision of Him erase all thoughts of our own importance. Then, our closeness to Christ and our experience of His power can kindle in us the courage, self-denial, humble spirit, and zeal for righteousness that was so clearly exemplified by the forerunner of Christ.

It is a poor ambition to seek to be called “great,” but it is a noble desire to be “great in the sight of the Lord.” While we will not have the same role as John did in God’s service, we can all be great in God’s sight. It will not matter what men thought of us on this earth if at the end we receive praise from the One who purchased our salvation with His own Blood!

BACKGROUND

Today’s text covers several significant events immediately preceding the birth of Christ: Mary’s visit to Elisabeth (verses 39-45), her hymn of praise (verses 46-56), and the birth of John the Baptist, the forerunner of Christ (verses 57-80).

After Gabriel’s announcement to Mary that she would bear the Christ Child, he informed her that her elderly cousin Elisabeth had also conceived (see Luke 1:36). The word translated *cousin* means “kinswoman,” indicating that the two women were related in some way through marriage or blood. Mary immediately went to see Elisabeth, traveling a distance of about sixty-five miles to Nazareth. She stayed there for three months, until just before the birth of John.

Verse 41 indicates that when Mary entered the house of Zacharias, the baby “leaped” in Elisabeth’s womb, in accord with the angelic proclamation to Zacharias that his child would be “filled with the Holy Ghost, even from his mother’s womb” (Luke 1:15). Elisabeth was spiritually attuned, for she immediately identified Mary as “the mother of my Lord” even though she presumably had no prior knowledge of what had transpired in Mary’s life or the fact that her young kinswoman was with child. No doubt this Spirit-inspired greeting strengthened Mary’s faith.

Mary’s beautiful song of praise to God, recorded in verses 46-55, is both poetic and prophetic. Known

as *The Magnificat* (a title derived from the key word in the Latin translation of the first line of this passage), it is an unscripted outpouring of deep emotion similar to that of Hannah in the Old Testament (see 1 Samuel 2:1-10). In stating that God “hath regarded the low estate of his handmaiden” (verse 48), Mary alluded to her own background of poverty and low social standing in society.

Verses 57-80 of the text describe events surrounding the birth of John the Baptist. At the time of circumcision (which occurred eight days after birth, according to the Levitical Law) it was also customary to name the child. When Elisabeth broke with the tradition of naming the firstborn son after the father and insisted that the child’s name would be John (as the angel had decreed in Luke 1:13), those at the ceremony appealed to Zacharias by making signs (verse 62). This seems to indicate that Zacharias was deaf as well as unable to speak. When he wrote on a tablet “His name is John,” his speech was instantly restored.

Four hundred years had passed since the last recorded utterances of the prophets, and during all that time devout individuals had awaited the promised Messiah. This accounts for the joyous rapture which filled Zacharias and was poured out in his hymn of thanksgiving (verses 67-79) known as *The Benedictus* (a word also derived from the Latin translation).

The emphatic tenses “hath visited and redeemed . . . hath raised” (verses 68-69) are prophetic. The fact that Zacharias spoke of the Incarnation as an already accomplished fact is evidence that he believed with certainty. In verses 76 and 77, he addressed his infant son and foretold that he would be “a prophet of the Highest” and the forerunner of the promised Messiah. Zacharias’ concluding statement that the “the day-spring . . . hath visited us” alluded to the prediction of Malachi at the close of the Old Testament, that the “Sun of righteousness” would arise with healing in His wings (Malachi 4:2).

AMPLIFIED OUTLINE

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- II. The advent of the Son of Man
 - A. The annunciations
 - 3. The assurance of the promised births (1:39-56)
 - a. The arrival and salutation of Mary (1:39-40)
 - b. The song of Elisabeth (1:41-45)
 - c. The song of Mary (1:46-55)
 - d. The return of Mary (1:56)
 - B. The advent of John (1:57-80)
 - 1. The birth of John (1:57-58)
 - 2. The naming of John (1:59-66)
 - 3. The song of Zacharias (1:67-79)
 - 4. The childhood of John (1:80)

A CLOSER LOOK

1. What are three of God’s wonderful deeds mentioned by Mary in her outpouring of praise?

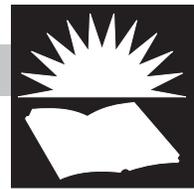
2. When Mary said, “From henceforth all generations shall call me blessed” (verse 48), do you think she was exhibiting pride? Why or why not?

3. God had a specific purpose for John the Baptist, as He has for each one of us. What purposes has He revealed to you regarding your life and service to Him?

CONCLUSION

Our goal in life should be to please our Lord rather than to gain the applause of man. Let us follow the example of John the Baptist, and do our best to point those around us to the Source of all true greatness.

NOTES



DEVOTIONAL FOCUS

“And the angel said unto them, Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people.” (Luke 2:10)

While looking through a coloring book of Nativity scenes one Christmas, I was struck by the contrast in the lives of the people God chose to receive the announcement of the birth of His Son.

On one page were the shepherds dressed in plain robes, sleeping in a field next to their sheep, with Bethlehem in the background. On another page were the Wise Men, dressed in the finery of a distant eastern country and carrying expensive gifts. In one picture, John the Baptist leaped as a babe in his mother’s womb at the salutation of Mary. In another, Anna, a woman over a century old, was shown giving thanks to the Lord as the Christ Child was dedicated at the Temple.

Shepherds of that day were the poor, despised, and often criminal outcasts of society. They were quite a contrast to the Wise Men who were granted an audience with King Herod to discuss astronomy. In looking at these pictures, it occurred to me that God didn’t leave anyone out. The Gospel is for everyone! That was not only true when Jesus was born, but it is also true in our day.

When my son was five years old, he came to me after dinner one evening and said that he wanted to ask Jesus to come into his heart, as I had done a few months before. I didn’t know if I should humor him or tell him that he was too young. I decided to humor him and we prayed. Over the next six months, there was such a change in his behavior that I realized God had saved him, and that the Gospel is for the young.

When my grandmother’s health began to decline, I knew she wasn’t ready for Heaven, but I had no intention of talking to her about the Gospel again because I thought it was too late. She was eighty-nine years old and had waited too long. However, two days before she died, she called me to her bedside and said she wanted to pray to go to Heaven. We prayed and afterward two nurses and my mother came into the room and asked, “Why is she suddenly so peaceful?” I knew then that the Gospel is for the aged.

God didn’t leave anyone out. As our focus verse says, “I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people.” God made it clear from the very beginning that the Gospel is for the poor like the shepherds and for the wealthy like the Wise Men. It is

for the young like John the Baptist and my son; it is for the aged like Anna and my grandmother. It is for the near and for the far. It is for the uneducated and the learned. It is for the popular and the outcast.

The Gospel is for me, and the Gospel is for you.

BACKGROUND

In this chapter Luke gave the account of Jesus’ birth, emphasizing that the Son of God was born of low estate, and was sent as a Savior for all people.

Christ’s humble birth was by design. In Micah 5:2, it had been prophesied that “little” Bethlehem would be the birthplace of a “ruler in Israel; whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting.”

Luke opened the chapter by showing how God orchestrated events to draw Jesus’ parents from where they lived in Nazareth (verse 4) to Bethlehem, a distance of eighty miles, at precisely the time of His birth. Caesar Augustus (who was the first emperor of Rome, ruling from 31 B.C. to A.D. 14) issued a decree for all the Roman Empire to be taxed (verse 1). Luke said this took place “in the days of Herod, the king of Judaea” (Luke 1:5) and “when Cyrenius was governor of Syria” (verse 2). The exact dates in which these reigns coincided is not known. However, the dates have been narrowed to between 4 B.C. (the earliest date for Herod’s death) and A.D. 9 (the latest date for Cyrenius’ term as governor).

To register for paying the tax, the Jewish people were required to return to the place of their ancestry (verses 3-4). This was the case in at least two subsequent censuses as well (in A.D. 481 and 1042). Both Joseph and Mary could trace their lineage back to King David (see Matthew 1:1-17 and Luke 3:23-38), so they went to Bethlehem, known as the City of David. This town was part of the land allotted by God to the tribe of Judah which David was from.

At Bethlehem, Joseph and Mary found “there was no room for them in the inn” (verse 7). The word “inn” is a translation of the Greek word *kataluma* which can also mean “guest chamber” (see Luke 22:11 and Mark 14:4). Since it is possible that Joseph and Mary had relatives in Bethlehem, it may have been that the guest room where they expected to lodge was occupied, and so they stayed among the animals. A typical house of that time would have included a room where the family’s animals were kept overnight. These rooms had feeding troughs or mangers built into the floor.

It is also possible that Jesus was born in a cave. Bethlehem is a hilly area full of natural caves, and it



DEVOTIONAL FOCUS

“And when they found him not, they turned back again to Jerusalem, seeking him. And it came to pass, that after three days they found him in the temple, sitting in the midst of the doctors, both hearing them, and asking them questions . . . And he said unto them, How is it that ye sought me? wist ye not that I must be about my Father’s business?” (Luke 2:45-46,49)

When we hear on the news that a child is missing, most of us identify with the anxiety the parents must be experiencing. Several years ago, two boys from our church, ages four and five at the time, wandered away while their parents were packing up after a vacation in a remote wooded area. When they realized the boys were missing, the parents called the church office for prayer and notified the local sheriff. In a few hours, search crews were on the scene. Rescue workers on horses and all-terrain vehicles began combing the area, but as evening came, the boys still had not been located. Prayer was made around the world as the word spread. By morning, news organizations had converged at the spot and updates were aired on national television networks. Around noon, the glad word came: the boys had been found on a side road about three miles away. They were muddy, thirsty, and tired . . . but safe!

Our text relates that as Mary and Joseph returned from the Feast of the Passover in Jerusalem, they realized that twelve-year-old Jesus was not with them. Although the era and circumstances were different than that of the lost boys described above, no doubt the emotions experienced by the parents were very similar. It is easy to imagine the anxiety they must have felt. After seeking among those traveling with them but failing to find Jesus, Mary and Joseph retraced their steps to Jerusalem, and there they found Him.

Mary revealed her concern (and perhaps just a trace of motherly exasperation) when she asked, “Son, why hast thou thus dealt with us? behold, thy father and I have sought thee sorrowing.” Notice the sense of necessity in Jesus’ reply: “How is it that ye sought me? wist ye not that I must be about my Father’s business?” His words indicated not only a consciousness of His relationship to His Heavenly Father and His mission on earth, but also an assumption that Mary would grasp the divine compulsion underlying the word *must*.

What a lesson is contained for us in that word! That same awareness of relationship to our Heavenly Father and our duty to serve Him should be in our

hearts. Do we long to hear and learn the things of God? Is there a purpose to always be about our Father’s business? As it was with the child Jesus, so it should be with His followers. A sense of divine necessity should impact our lives also. Our whole inclination and purpose should be submitted to the Father’s authority.

This event is the only glimpse we have of Jesus’ childhood; the chapter concludes by simply relating that Jesus returned with His parents to Nazareth, was subject to them, and “increased in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and man” (Luke 2:52). Normal family routine was resumed. The necessity of “must” was followed by Jesus’ submission to parental authority and acceptance of the lowly duties which were the lot of a carpenter’s son.

For us, even our most common activities can be “the Father’s business” when done as unto Him. When we keep a submissive spirit and carry a deep sense of mission into all tasks of life, we will find—as Jesus did—the joy that comes in doing the will of our Father.

BACKGROUND

Today’s text covers two visits by Jesus to the Temple in Jerusalem: when He was forty days old for presentation to the Lord (verses 21-40), and when He was twelve years old for the annual Feast of the Passover (verses 41-52).

Jesus was raised according to Jewish custom. His circumcision (which took place on the eighth day after birth), and the purification of Mary (which lasted for forty days after the birth of a male child), were rites prescribed by Mosaic Law. Both were reminders to the participants of the taint of sin and uncleanness. Though Jesus was sinless, throughout His life He participated in the religious observances required under the Law, thus fully identifying Himself with sinful mankind.

The purpose of Joseph and Mary’s visit to the Temple when Jesus was eight days old was His presentation to God, symbolic of the redemption of the first-born (see Exodus 13:2,11-16 and Numbers 18:15-16). This ceremony included the practice of “redeeming” or buying back the child from God through an offering. The humble lifestyle of Jesus’ earthly parents is evidenced by their sacrifice of “a pair of turtledoves, or two young pigeons” (verse 24). The typical requirement was a lamb, but a concession for the poor was made by allowing the substitution of turtledoves or pigeons.

The presence of the devout man Simeon in the Temple when Mary and Joseph arrived with Jesus was orchestrated by the Holy Spirit (see verse 27), who had

previously revealed to this godly man that he would not pass from earth without seeing the Messiah. As Simeon held the Promised One in his arms, he prophetically stated that some people would find refuge in Him, while others would reject Him and “fall” because of their attitude. He also foretold the sorrow that would pierce Mary’s heart thirty-three years later, when she would watch her Son being crucified (verses 34-35).

Most commentators concur that the prophetess Anna had been a widow for eighty-four years, so she may have been more than one hundred years old when she saw the infant Jesus. Her regular attendance in the Temple, along with her continual fastings and prayers, are memorialized in verse 37. That she was in close contact with God is evidenced by the fact that she instantly identified the divine nature of the Child (whom Simeon may still have been holding) and gave thanks.

Jesus’ journey to the Temple at age twelve (verses 41-52) is the only Scriptural record of any event in His childhood. The fact that the account describes what the parents thought and felt suggests that it was from Mary that the author Luke received such intimate details.

According to Talmudic tradition, even young boys were required to attend religious festivals, and Mary and Joseph were devout people. Mary attended every year (verse 41) even though as a woman she was not required by the Law to do so. So Jesus may have traveled to Jerusalem for religious observances at other times during His childhood. If that is the case, likely this particular journey to Jerusalem was described because of the incident which took place in the Temple.

In Bible times, people often traveled together in large groups as a means of protection from robbers. Typically, women and children journeyed at the front of the caravan, and the older boys and men came behind. A twelve-year-old could have been part of either group, so as the return from the visit to the Temple began, most likely Mary thought he was with his father, while Joseph assumed he was at the front with his mother and the younger children.

The phrase “after three days” (verse 46) does not mean that Mary and Joseph spent three days searching in Jerusalem for Jesus. After the Passover week, the first day was spent traveling toward home. On the second day the couple retraced their steps, likely arriving in Jerusalem at a late hour. On the third day, they probably went to the Temple first, since that was the last place they knew He had been.

Mary’s comment to Jesus in verse 48 reveals that He was typically obedient and considerate toward His earthly parents. The fact that they “understood not the saying which he spake unto them” (verse 50) seems to indicate that His childhood had not been characterized by supernatural events revealing His divine nature. While Mary and Joseph knew Jesus was the Son of God, they apparently did not grasp what that meant or how His divinity would be manifested. Perhaps their

limited perspective was necessary in order to ensure that Jesus would have a normal upbringing, rather than one in which His parents worshipped Him.

AMPLIFIED OUTLINE

Hannah’s Bible Outlines
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- II. The advent of the Son of Man
 - C. The advent of the Son of Man
 - 2. The circumcision of the Son of Man (2:21)
 - 3. The presentation of the Son of Man (2:22-38)
 - a. The presentation in the Temple (2:22-24)
 - b. The recognition in the Temple (2:25-38)
 - (1) By Simeon (2:25-35)
 - (a) His character (2:25-26)
 - (b) His reception of Jesus (2:27-28)
 - (c) His song (2:29-33)
 - (d) His message to Mary (2:34-35)
 - (2) By Anna (2:36-38)
 - 4. The childhood of the Son of Man (2:39-52)
 - a. Childhood at Nazareth (2:39-40)
 - b. Passover at Jerusalem (2:41-50)
 - c. Maturity at Nazareth (2:51-52)

A CLOSER LOOK

- 1. To whom did Simeon say that the Child he held in his arms would be a light?

- 2. What do you think is meant by the statement that the child Jesus “waxed strong in spirit”?

- 3. What are some ways we can demonstrate a commitment to be about our “Father’s business”?

CONCLUSION

From boyhood, a sense of divine compulsion characterized Jesus’ life on this earth. As His followers, it should be our joy and consuming desire to obey God’s purpose for our lives.



DEVOTIONAL FOCUS

“And Jesus being full of the Holy Ghost returned from Jordan, and was led by the Spirit into the wilderness, being forty days tempted of the devil. And in those days he did eat nothing; and when they were ended, he afterward hungered.” (Luke 4:1-2)

Located twenty miles from the Atlantic Coast in New Bern, North Carolina, the four-span Neuse River Bridge opened to traffic in the fall of 1999. Construction of the massive superstructure required 49,000,000 pounds of steel, nearly 200,000 cubic yards of reinforced concrete, and 40 miles of pilings/drilled shafts. However, the amount of material used was not what made this project newsworthy. The Neuse River Bridge was unique because it was built with high-performance concrete and thus utilized significantly fewer support beams than previous designs.

After work on the bridge was completed, it became the subject of a first-of-its-kind test. A dump truck carrying a forty-ton load pulled up to the bridge, which had been wired to sensors under the bridge. The sensors were designed to feed stress data into computers, and engineers stood by to analyze the results. Slowly the heavy truck moved forward over the bridge, stopping at designated test points so data could be transmitted and evaluated. The test was not designed to break the bridge, but rather to prove that the bridge would *not* break.

“We’re trying to learn from the bridge so that we can apply it to all the other bridges in the state,” engineer Tom Koch said. “There are 18,000 bridges in our state that need to be replaced or repaired at some point.”¹ Once proof was provided that this type of bridge was sound, the same principles of construction were applied to other spans.

Just as engineers performed tests on the Neuse River Bridge to prove its structural integrity, God allowed His Son to be tested to prove His spiritual integrity. The point was not to see if Jesus would sin, but to prove that He would *not*.

Two factors lead to that conclusion. First, our focus verse tells us that Jesus was “led by the Spirit” into the wilderness, where He was tempted by the devil. Since we know God does not entice anyone to sin (see James 1:13), He clearly had another purpose in view. Second, the word translated *tempted* in this verse comes from the Greek word *peirazo*, which in early Greek literature had the meaning of “to test, try, or prove.” Satan desired to entice Jesus to evil and hoped that He would

fall. However, God knew that His Son would triumph, and by so doing would show us how to triumph as well.

Temptation is part of the human experience, and in order for Jesus to experience humanity completely, He had to face temptation just as we do. In today’s text, Luke describes three specific levels on which Satan made attacks: the physical (tempting Jesus to create food), the intellectual (tempting Him to do something sensational), and the spiritual (tempting Him to worship Satan rather than God). The adversary still tempts people on these levels, and the method Jesus used to withstand temptation can be used in our lives as well: He countered each attack with the Word of God. Scripture is still an effective spiritual weapon, and one that we must learn to utilize.

Knowing that Jesus was tried in the same ways we are and yet triumphed is an encouragement to us when temptation comes our way. He withstood the attempts of Satan, and by the grace of God, so can we!

BACKGROUND

Chapter 3 of Luke covers two significant events which preceded Christ’s public ministry: the emergence and teaching of John the Baptist (verses 1-20), and the baptism of Jesus by John (verses 20-22). The chapter ends with a description of the lineage of Jesus (verses 23-38).

The Gospels of Matthew and Mark also describe the ministry of John the Baptist, which took place in the barren wilderness between the hill country and the Jordan River. However, only Luke provided details which date the beginning of John’s ministry (verses 1-2). Possibly he identified the evil secular and religious leaders to show the darkened civil, moral, and religious condition of the Jews at that point in history.

Verses 4-6 quote from Isaiah chapter 40. The imagery relates to those who would travel ahead of a king to prepare the way over which he would travel. John’s role was to prepare the way for the Messiah, warning the people to make their lives ready so the Lord could come to them.

Luke records nothing about John’s attire or food, but goes immediately to the prophet’s message of repentance, which is summarized in verses 7-14. John insisted that true repentance would be manifested by a change in the manner of living. Baptism attested to the reality of that repentance. John was fearless in delivery and vehemently rebuked some, calling them a “generation of vipers,” possibly because they wanted to be baptized though giving no indication of sorrow for sins.

In verses 15-18, John's message of repentance transitioned to one reflecting his divine appointment as the herald of the King. When the people wondered if John himself were the Messiah, he pointed ahead to the One who would baptize them "with the Holy Ghost and fire." (Jesus quoted this prediction in Acts 1:5, just before His ascension.) Fire is frequently used in both the Old and New Testaments to portray the purging, vitalizing, transforming energy of the Holy Spirit.

Verses 18-20 conclude Luke's description of John as the preacher and martyr of righteousness. This passage is non-sequential, but it effectively ends the account of John and transitions to Luke's focus upon Jesus. Luke did not describe the death of John, though he knew of it (see Luke 9:7-9).

Luke's description of the baptism of Jesus (verses 21-22) is briefer than that of Matthew and Mark. Only Luke relates that Jesus prayed following His baptism, prior to the Holy Spirit descending in the form of a dove. Most of the Biblical record of Christ's prayers occurs in the Gospel of Luke.

The chapter concludes with a tracing of Jesus' lineage back to Adam. Matthew's record only goes back to Abraham; Luke's extended genealogy may have reflected his purpose not only to present Jesus as the Messiah of the Jews (who looked to Abraham as their father), but also as the Savior of the world.

Verses 1-13 of chapter 4 record the temptation of Jesus by the devil. Matthew 4:1 says Jesus was "led up," indicating that Jesus probably climbed from the Jordan Valley, which is over a thousand feet below sea level, to the craggy heights of the wilderness area of Judea. The spot traditionally identified as the place of Jesus' temptation is northwest of Jericho.

Verse 2 indicates that Jesus fasted during this period of forty days, as part of the spiritual preparation for the ministry He was about to begin. Mark identified His tempter as "Satan," but Luke referred to him only as "the devil," using the Greek word *diabolos* which means "slanderer" or "false accuser."

Jesus endured temptation in part to fully identify with mankind (see Hebrews 2:17-18; 4:15), but also to undo Adam's work (see Romans 5:12-19). When Adam succumbed to temptation, he passed sin on to the whole human race. When Jesus triumphed over temptation and sin, He opened the way to victory for all of Adam's descendants.

Jesus used the Word of God to withstand the devil's attacks. In each of the three recorded temptations, He quoted from the Book of Deuteronomy. The verb tense of the phrase "It is written" (verses 4 and 8) indicates not only completed action but also continuing action. It could be translated, "It has been written, and still stands written," thus emphasizing the eternal nature of God's Word.

The fact that the devil departed from Jesus "for a season" (verse 13) indicates that he assailed Christ

in other times and ways as His ministry on earth proceeded. Matthew and Mark both record that angels ministered to Jesus at the end of this temptation.

AMPLIFIED OUTLINE

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- III. The preparation of the Son of Man (3:1—4:13)
 - A. The forerunner of the Son of Man (3:1-20)
 - 1. The time of John's ministry (3:1-2)
 - 2. The content of John's ministry (3:3-17)
 - a. The emergence of John (3:3-6)
 - b. The message of John (3:7-17)
 - (1) Concerning wrath (3:7-14)
 - (2) Concerning Christ (3:15-17)
 - 3. The rejection of John (3:18-20)
 - B. The baptism of the Son of Man (3:21-22)
 - 1. The submission of the Son (3:21)
 - 2. The anointing of the Spirit and authentication of the Father (3:22)
 - C. The genealogy of the Son of Man (3:23-38)
 - D. The temptation of the Son of Man (4:1-13)
 - 1. Summary (4:1-2)
 - 2. The first temptation (4:3-4)
 - 3. The second temptation (4:5-8)
 - 4. The third temptation (4:9-12)
 - 5. Conclusion (4:13)

A CLOSER LOOK

1. When publicans came to John to be baptized, what did he tell them to do?

2. Since baptism was an outward sign of inward repentance, why do you think Jesus asked John to baptize Him?

3. What are some ways we can prepare ourselves to resist the temptations of the enemy?

CONCLUSION

The devil tried to entice Jesus to succumb to temptation, but failed. When we face temptations, we can find both encouragement to prevail and a strategy for victory in the example of our Lord.

1. wral.com, "DOT Engineers Get Creative to Test Strength of Bridge," (June 10, 2003), *Capital Broadcasting Company*, <http://www.wral.com/news/local/story/105594/>.



DEVOTIONAL FOCUS

“And they were all amazed, and spake among themselves, saying, What a word is this! for with authority and power he commandeth the unclean spirits, and they come out.” (Luke 4:36)

I distinctly remember the first time I heard our newly hired professor perform. Alexander Tutunov had grown up as a child protégé under the Communist regime in Russia, and now he lived in the United States. Rumors had circulated that he was an amazing pianist. Everyone was curious to meet this fascinating new faculty member to see if he really was as good as rumor claimed.

As a music major at Southern Oregon University, I was required to attend many concerts throughout the academic year. Doing so wasn't really drudgery, since world-renowned musicians frequently performed at our concert hall. However, I looked forward to hearing our new professor more than the usual concerts.

The man who walked on stage was small, probably shorter and thinner than anyone else in the room. He bowed his head shyly in response to our applause. I thought, *This man is nothing like I expected*. Then he began to play. It remains the most powerfully executed and emotionally charged performance I have ever heard. As a student, I usually applauded politely (if slightly apathetically), but at the end of this concert, I was standing on my feet and hollering with everyone else. I still remember seeing our very stoic band professor screaming too. The expectation had been great, but that night, the dynamic performance turned out to be even greater.

At the time of the events in today's text, Jesus was becoming known throughout the region of Galilee. Perhaps some people came to listen to Him simply because they wanted to see if He was as good a speaker as rumors had indicated, or if He really could heal people. Likely there were many openly curious spectators and just as many skeptics.

Whatever their intent, those who came to Jesus were astounded at what they saw and heard. Jesus spoke with power from Heaven. He instantaneously healed people of terrible diseases. And when the crowds thought it couldn't get any greater, He commanded demons to come out of a man and they obeyed! Jesus was more than a dynamic speaker and miraculous healer. He had power over every power of evil! Hope began to stir among the people who watched and listened. Our focus verse says, “And

they were all amazed, and spake among themselves, saying, What a word is this! for with authority and power he commandeth the unclean spirits, and they come out.”

In our lives, we are often awed by a great feat or a mighty performance, yet what God does is far greater. He can deliver a person from evil. He has power to heal. He can miraculously transform a broken life into one of peace and joy. Have you seen what God can do? Have you experienced the life-changing salvation that only God can give? You will discover it greatly exceeds anything you imagined.

BACKGROUND

Nazareth (see verse 16) is situated at the southern edge of the hill country of Galilee overlooking the Jezreel Valley. In the time of Jesus, it was a small and insignificant agricultural village, likely not exceeding five hundred in population. Since no trade routes ran through it, the town was of little economic importance. It was here that Jesus had grown up, a place where residents knew one another.

During the Jews' exile, when they no longer had their Temple, synagogues had become a place of worship on the Sabbath and a school where the Holy Scriptures were taught during the week. This custom continued after the Temple was rebuilt. A synagogue was allowed in any Jewish village where there were at least ten Jewish families. Each synagogue had a leader and an assistant, who often invited visiting rabbis to read and teach from the Scriptures.

Verse 16 relates that Jesus went to the synagogue “as his custom was.” He had worshipped there regularly on the Sabbath when he was living in Nazareth. On this particular day, Jesus participated in the reading from Isaiah 61 (verses 1 and 2). He read about the promised Messiah's earthly ministry of preaching and healing. Then He stopped reading, almost midsentence, just before the mention of judgment to come in the end times (Isaiah 61:2).

At first the men in the synagogue “bare witness of him” or spoke well of Him. However, their reaction swiftly changed to anger as Jesus expounded on the Word. He intimated that He was the Messiah, and also that God's blessings had gone to Gentiles (the widow of Sidon and Naaman the Syrian) because there was a lack of faith in Israel. The men in the synagogue took offense to both assertions, and so Jesus was not accepted as the Messiah in His hometown. Perhaps this rejection symbolized that of the Jewish nation as a whole.

Jesus proceeded from the higher elevations of southern Galilee to Capernaum, 650 feet below sea level at the northern edge of the Sea of Galilee (verse 31). Capernaum was a thriving city of great wealth and decadence, and the headquarters for many Roman troops. It also was the hometown of Peter, Andrew, James, and John.

Jesus apparently had been given the opportunity of teaching in the synagogue. The same day He healed Peter's mother-in-law of a serious fever, and she was able to attend to others' needs immediately after.

At sunset on that day, many people came to Jesus at Peter's house for healing. Sunset marked the end of the Sabbath, which had begun at sunset on the previous day. The Law prohibited traveling and working on the Sabbath.

AMPLIFIED OUTLINE

Hannah's Bible Outlines
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IV. The ministry of the Son of Man

- A. The commencement of the ministry of the Son of Man (4:14-44)
 - 1. The claims of the Son of Man (4:14-30)
 - a. The beginning of Jesus' ministry (4:14-15)
 - b. The reading in the synagogue (4:16-20)
 - c. The interpretation in the synagogue (4:21-22)
 - d. The illustration (4:23-27)
 - e. The rejection of the Son (4:28-30)
 - 2. The proof of the Son's claims (4:31-41)
 - a. His authoritative teaching (4:31-32)
 - b. His authority over demons (4:33-37)
 - c. His authority over disease (4:38-41)
 - 3. The mission of the Son of Man (4:42-44)

A CLOSER LOOK

1. According to verses 28-29, what was the reaction in the Nazareth synagogue after Jesus read from Isaiah? What was the reaction in the Capernaum synagogues after Jesus' teachings (verses 31-32)?

2. Why do you think the men in the Nazareth synagogue were so angry with Jesus?

3. What amazing things have you seen God do in the course of your lifetime?

CONCLUSION

If you have yet to experience the amazing power of God, come to Him today. Like those in Jesus' day, you will be amazed!

NOTES



DEVOTIONAL FOCUS

“Whether is easier, to say, Thy sins be forgiven thee; or to say, Rise up and walk? But that ye may know that the Son of man hath power upon earth to forgive sins, (he said unto the sick of the palsy,) I say unto thee, Arise, and take up thy couch, and go into thine house.” (Luke 5:23-24)

Florence Crawford, the founder of the Apostolic Faith Church, was born to pioneer parents in 1872. Although her mother and father did not believe in God and often discounted the Bible in their home, something in young Florence’s heart yearned for God. One time, when she was asked to sing prior to a lecture by a renowned atheist, she sang “Jesus, Lover of My Soul,” effectively putting a damper on the lecture!

After she was married with two young children, she heard the call of God while dancing in a ballroom. She prayed for several days, wrestling with the enemy of her soul, and then went to the home of a woman she knew was a Christian. There, Jesus came into her heart and made a wonderful change!

Although she rejoiced in what God had done for her, Florence had numerous physical ailments that inhibited her from living to the fullest. Three bouts of spinal meningitis early in life had severely affected her head and eyes. She had lung and heart trouble that drove her to try a number of remedies. She also had been thrown from a carriage as a girl, and had to wear a brace in order to walk.

After being sanctified and receiving the baptism of the Holy Ghost, Florence began seeking God for her healing. God miraculously healed her eyes and she no longer needed to wear glasses. Another time, God touched her lungs and heart. One night after she was prayed for Florence took off her brace and walked twenty-three blocks with no pain, something she previously had been unable to do. Each time God healed her, she witnessed the same power of God that had saved her.

In our text, a man with a form of paralysis was brought to Jesus to be healed. First, Jesus said to him, “Man, thy sins are forgiven thee.” This caused a stir among the scribes and Pharisees, who did not believe that Jesus was divine and had the authority to forgive sins. Jesus then asked which was easier: to forgive sin or to heal. Of course, He had the power to do both!

The world today still questions the identity of Jesus and challenges His authority. Jesus was not a pretender. Nor was He a radical preacher or an

attention-getting revolutionary. He was far more than a great rabbi or a man with extraordinary power to do miracles. He was and is the Son of God! Jesus still has power today to save souls and heal bodies. What He did for Florence Crawford and the paralytic in today’s text, He can do for us. Whatever our needs, whether they be spiritual or physical, we can bring them to Jesus and trust Him to meet them.

BACKGROUND

Today’s text relates the calling of Jesus’ disciples and His healing of the leper and paralytic. Luke’s narrative in verses 1-11 begins after the crowd had gathered, explaining the slight differences from Matthew’s and Mark’s accounts, which begin as Jesus walked by the sea.

The “lake of Gennesaret” (verse 1) was another name for the “Sea of Galilee.” This body of water is 685 feet below sea level, around seven miles wide and twelve miles long. Its abundance of fish made it a well-known fishing spot during Jesus’ time. Because Jesus’ renown had generated large crowds, causing the people to throng Him, Jesus got into Peter’s boat and asked him to push away from the shoreline.

Luke did not expound on what Jesus taught, but focused on what occurred after He finished speaking. Peter was a seasoned fisherman, but after fishing all night and catching nothing, he willingly did what Jesus commanded. The statement, “Launch out into the deep” (verse 4), implied the fishermen needed to take their nets into deeper water, rather than the common practice of fishing near the shoreline. The word “draught” indicated that their obedience would result in a large catch. The ensuing miracle astounded the fishermen and made Peter feel unworthy in the presence of Jesus’ power and holiness. The assurance that He would make them “fishers of men” caused Peter, James, and John to forsake the fishing business and follow Jesus. Although Andrew is not mentioned in this text, he is included in Matthew’s and Mark’s accounts, indicating that he was also there.

Verses 12-15 recount the healing of the man with leprosy, a dreaded disease that resulted in the afflicted person being separated from society. As a physician, Luke’s statement that the man was “full of leprosy” indicated that his whole body had been affected by the disease. The man’s faith was evidenced by his belief that Jesus could heal him even at that advanced stage. After healing him, Jesus commanded the former leper to go and show himself to the priests and make the appropriate offering, as the Law required (Leviticus 14).

Jesus also told him not to tell anyone, possibly indicating His desire for people to come to Him for spiritual cleansing, rather than just physical healing. Nevertheless, Jesus' fame continued to spread, and multitudes came to hear His teachings and be healed of their diseases. Verse 16 emphasizes Christ's need to get away from the crowds and spend time in prayer with His Father.

Verses 16-26 describe the healing of the man with palsy, a type of paralysis. Luke's reference to the religious leaders who came from as far away as Jerusalem—a distance of around eighty miles—highlighted the controversy and curiosity that Jesus' teachings had generated. When the friends of the palsied man brought him on a pallet to be healed, the crowd was too large for them to get through. Houses in that day were built with flat roofs and often had staircases or ladders on the outside to provide access to the roofs. The roof tiles were probably plates of burnt clay, and the four friends removed the tiles above where Jesus was teaching so they could lower the sick man to where He stood. Seeing their faith, Jesus' first response was to forgive the sick man's sins. Observing that the religious leaders disputed His ability to forgive sins, Jesus responded that He would prove His authority by healing the sick man, alluding that it took the power of God to both heal and forgive.

AMPLIFIED OUTLINE

Hannah's Bible Outlines
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- IV. The ministry of the Son of Man
 - B. The course of the ministry of the Son of Man
 - 1. The call of Simon (5:1-11)
 - a. The instruction (5:1-3)
 - b. The demonstration (5:4-9)
 - c. The invitation (5:10-11)
 - 2. The cleansing of the leper (5:12-16)
 - a. The request (5:12)
 - b. The response (5:13)
 - c. The caution (5:14-16)
 - 3. The cure of a paralytic (5:17-26)
 - a. The claim (5:17-21)
 - b. The authentication (5:22-26)

A CLOSER LOOK

1. Why did Jesus choose to teach from Peter's boat?

2. Why do you think Jesus instructed the leper not to tell anyone about his healing?

3. How does Jesus' power to save and heal encourage you to take your needs to Him?

CONCLUSION

In all circumstances of life, we can rely on Jesus' power to respond to every need as we put our faith and trust in Him.

NOTES



DEVOTIONAL FOCUS

“And Levi made him a great feast in his own house: and there was a great company of publicans and of others that sat down with them.” (Luke 5:29)

Hospitality can be an evangelistic outreach. This was true in New Testament times, and it is true in our day too. A family in our congregation tells of the impact that Christian hospitality can make upon troubled individuals in need of God.

After five years of marriage, Warren’s gambling habit had caused a great deal of turmoil. Finally, one Christmas Eve his wife Lucille told him to leave their home—she didn’t care if she ever saw him again. A few weeks later, this desperate young man went to the Apostolic Faith Church in Los Angeles, California, and prayed through to salvation. When his wife made it clear that she had no interest in reconciling, he moved to Portland, Oregon, for employment.

After several months, Lucille agreed to come to Portland to see if their marriage could be restored. Although she was determined not to get saved, the love and hospitality bestowed on her by the church people began to melt her heart. She could feel their love and genuine interest in her. On one occasion, she and Warren were invited to a couple’s home for dinner. The table was beautifully set with fine china, but somehow it collapsed, toppling everything onto the floor. The graciousness exhibited by the hostess in this embarrassing event made a lasting impression on Lucille, providing another Christian example for her to reflect on. It was not long before she made her way to an altar of prayer and surrendered her life to God. Warren and Lucille served the Lord together for the rest of their lives.

In today’s text, we find a Biblical example of hospitality that possibly was extended with a strategic reason in mind. Levi had responded to Jesus’ invitation to follow Him, and had given up wealth, privilege, and position to do so. The change that Jesus had made in his life motivated Levi to invite his former coworkers and friends to a feast at his house so they, too, could get acquainted with Jesus and learn more about Him. He no doubt wanted to win his fellow tax collectors to Christ, just as the church people in Portland extended hospitality to Lucille with the thought of encouraging her to become a Christian.

The scribes and Pharisees were indignant that Jesus would mix with a crowd of publicans and sinners. In the culture of that day, fellowship during a

meal signified full acceptance. The publicans were tax collectors for the Roman government and generally hated by the Jews, while “sinners” could have been anyone who did not adhere to the rigorous ceremonial requirements set forth by the religious leaders. However, in response to the scribes and Pharisees’ disapproval, Jesus emphasized that His mission was to call sinners, not righteous individuals, to repentance.

The Greek word for “hospitality” is *philoxenia*, which means “love of strangers.” How can we draw people to God by the use of our homes and resources? Who might need reinforcement in the battle against loneliness? Are there people among our acquaintances who could be brought together in a warm and friendly environment for the sake of God’s Kingdom?

Christian hospitality is both challenging and rewarding. It unquestionably takes time, effort, and reliance on God. However, a casual gathering of friends or an invitation to dinner may be just what is needed to encourage others to give their lives to God. By being welcoming hosts, we can invite the outside world into our world of faith and trust in Him. Let us purpose to look for opportunities to be hospitable to those who are strangers to Christ, and demonstrate God’s love in every way we can.

BACKGROUND

Today’s text covers the call of Levi (5:27-33) and Jesus’ responses to the scribes and Pharisees’ questions about fasting (5:33-39) and lawful activities on the Sabbath (6:1-11).

The word *publican* is a translation of the Greek word *telones*, which means “tax gatherer.” Levi, also known as Matthew, was a publican or tax collector in Capernaum, which was a sizable fishing port and trade center. Levi would have been one of many such collectors exacting levies on imported goods and local citizens. All caravans passing through Capernaum on the highway from Damascus to Egypt were required to pay a toll. The Jews also paid taxes on their lands, produce, animals, and the productive fishing industry. These oppressive taxes were even more offensive to the Jews because of their loathing for the Roman government. They despised the tax collectors, who not only worked for the Roman government, but were often corrupt in their business practices, collecting more than what was owed and keeping the overcharge for themselves.

As Jesus passed by Levi’s toll booth near the Sea of Galilee, He said just two words, “Follow me.” Levi immediately left the wealth and security of his

position to follow Christ. The feast mentioned in verse 29 may have been a farewell party to announce Levi's intention to leave his employment and follow Jesus. It also provided an opportunity for Levi to introduce his guests to Jesus.

In verses 30-32, the scribes and Pharisees questioned why Jesus attended a feast which included publicans and sinners. The religious leaders looked down on most Jews as "unspiritual," and would never socialize with anyone who did not adhere to the ceremonial requirements of the Law. Jesus' response revealed His knowledge that the Pharisees felt they had no need of Him because they considered themselves already free from the disease of sin. Jesus said He came to minister to sinners who were sick of sin and wanted to be free from it.

In verses 33-35, the question regarding fasting may have been asked on an actual fast day since the Pharisees and other devout Jews fasted weekly. As fasting was a type of mourning, Jesus alluded to the joyful occasion of a marriage and replied that it was not fitting to make the "children of the bridechamber," or "friends of the bridegroom," fast while the bridegroom was with them. He said the day would come when the bridegroom (symbolizing Jesus) would be taken away, and then they would fast.

In verses 36-39, the obvious absurdities in Jesus' contrasts illustrated the incompatibility of trying to mix the old ways (Jewish traditions) with the new (Jesus' teachings).

In Luke 6:1-5, the phrase "second sabbath after the first" may mean "the sabbath after Passover." Plucking corn in a neighbor's field was permissible as long as a sickle was not used (see Deuteronomy 23:25), but the controversy was whether doing so was lawful on the Sabbath. Jesus referred to David and his men eating the loaves of "shewbread" from the Tabernacle when they were fleeing from Saul (see 1 Samuel 21:1-6). This bread was consecrated to God and was to be eaten by the priests only, but Jesus implied that there can be exceptions to rigorous religious requirements in times of need. Jesus also stressed that as the "Son of man" (a Messianic title), He had the authority to determine what was lawful or not lawful on the Sabbath.

Verses 6-11 describe another Sabbath when Jesus taught in the Temple. The religious leaders were ready to accuse Him if He chose to heal on that day, but Jesus caught them off guard with His symbolic question, and they knew it would make them look punitive to argue against doing good or saving lives on the Sabbath. They were enraged that He had once again verbally outmaneuvered them, and discussed how they might destroy Him.

AMPLIFIED OUTLINE

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- IV. The ministry of the Son of Man
 - B. The course of the ministry of the Son of Man
 - 4. The call of Levi (5:27-39)
 - a. The invitation (5:27-28)
 - b. The association (5:29)
 - c. The inquiry (5:30)
 - d. The answer (5:31-32)
 - e. The charge (5:33)
 - f. The explanation (5:34-39)
 - 5. Controversy over Sabbath-work tradition (6:1-5)
 - a. The setting (6:1)
 - b. The question (6:2)
 - c. The answer (6:3-5)
 - 6. Controversy over Sabbath-healing tradition (6:6-11)
 - a. The circumstance (6:6)
 - b. The charge (6:7)
 - c. The cure (6:8-10)
 - d. The hatred (6:11)

A CLOSER LOOK

1. Why did the scribes and Pharisees complain about Jesus attending a feast at Levi's house?

2. What gives Christian hospitality its eternal value and differentiates it from mere secular socializing?

3. What are some ways you might be able to extend hospitality to the unsaved and introduce them to Jesus?

CONCLUSION

Demonstrating love and hospitality will cause others to see Jesus reflected in you, and may go a long way toward drawing souls to Christ.



DEVOTIONAL FOCUS

“He is like a man which built an house, and digged deep, and laid the foundation on a rock: and when the flood arose, the stream beat vehemently upon that house, and could not shake it: for it was founded upon a rock. But he that heareth, and doeth not, is like a man that without a foundation built an house upon the earth; against which the stream did beat vehemently, and immediately it fell; and the ruin of that house was great.”
(Luke 6:48-49)

The city of New Orleans, Louisiana, is nearly surrounded by water: Lake Pontchartrain lies to the north and Lake Borgne to the east, and the Mississippi River runs along its southern border. When the city was founded, flooding was an obvious concern, so levees (man-made walls along the edges of waterways) soon were built to keep the city safe. The levee system was expanded as the city grew, and was especially relied upon during hurricanes and other tropical storms. The safety of the citizens' lives and possessions depended upon its effectiveness.

On August 29, 2005, Hurricane Katrina—a Category 3 storm—struck southeast Louisiana. Some residents had fled the city, knowing the hurricane was coming, but many stayed behind. They had survived other hurricanes before Katrina, and were relying on the levees to keep them safe from any storm surge. That decision cost many of them their lives. The levees failed, and the resulting flooding led to Katrina being one of the five deadliest hurricanes in the history of the United States, as well as the costliest in property damage.

There were a variety of reasons for the levee failures in New Orleans, but one of them was an overestimation of the strength of the soil underneath some of them. The engineers had known they were building on soil, but they had believed the soil to be stronger than it actually was. As a result, when the storm surge swept into New Orleans, the force of the water literally pushed the levees over. Mass flooding ensued, and eighty percent of the city was left underwater.^{1,2}

In today's text, Jesus told a parable of two men who each built a house. One chose to build on solid rock; the other built upon soil. We might wonder, Why did the one man choose to build where there was no solid foundation? Jesus doesn't say, but we know building on rocky terrain would have taken time, patience, and hard work. It would have been challenging

to chip into the rock to get a level footing for the house. It could have taken a long time to work around rocky outcrops and to attach the structure to bedrock.

The wise man seems to have considered that anchoring to a solid foundation would be worth the effort. Built into the rock, he knew his house could endure the inevitable storms that would come. The other builder was shortsighted and careless, and his lack of concern cost him everything. In Jesus' parable, when the storm came, the house built upon the rock stood fast but the house built upon the soil fell.

Jesus pointed out that the person who carefully follows His instructions is like a builder who puts his foundation upon a rock; the one who neglects or ignores the Word of God is like a man who builds upon soil, with nothing to provide real stability.

Today, let's learn a lesson from Hurricane Katrina and the builders in Jesus' parable. We must be careful to make sure we are building our lives on a solid spiritual foundation. The trials of life are sure to come our way at some point, but if we have built our lives on Jesus Christ and are carefully following the instructions in His Word, we will never be overwhelmed.

BACKGROUND

This portion of Luke 6 records Jesus' selection of the twelve disciples which He designated as Apostles, and a series of teachings laying out a standard of conduct for His followers.

The verse immediately preceding the verses in today's text indicates that the scribes and Pharisees were “filled with madness” against Jesus, and His response in verse 12 was to seclude Himself in a mountain and spend all night in prayer to His Father. When day came, He selected the twelve Apostles from among a larger group of disciples (verses 13-16). A distinction exists between the words “disciple” and “apostle.” Today, both are commonly used to refer to “the twelve,” but they hold different meanings in Scripture. In verse 13, the word *disciple* is translated from the Greek word *mathetes*, meaning “learner” or “pupil.” In the same verse, the word *apostle* comes from the Greek word *apostolos*, which refers to a “messenger” or “delegate.”

There are several other lists given in Scripture which name the twelve Apostles (see Matthew 10:2-4, Mark 3:16-19, and Acts 1:13). The exact names vary slightly. In some places, Peter is referred to as Cephas or Simon, and Lebbaeus was sometimes called Judas. In the Gospels of Matthew and Mark, Levi is called Matthew. Bartholomew is thought to be Nathaniel.

In verses 17-19, Jesus came down from the mountain with the twelve and stood in a plain with a “great multitude” of disciples who had traveled to see Him. There He healed not only those with diseases and unclean spirits, but all who touched Him: virtue flowed from Him, and all were benefited by coming in contact with the Lord.

After healing the multitude, Jesus proceeded to preach to them. The text in verses 20-49 is sometimes called the “Sermon on the Plain,” but almost all of Jesus’ teachings here are also found in the Sermon on the Mount, recorded in Matthew chapters 5-7. (The “woes” in verses 25-26 are found only in Luke.) Given the similarity in content, it is possible that this is actually the same sermon. Luke stated that Jesus came down from the mountain and “stood in the plain” to heal the multitude, but when it came time to speak, He may have ascended the mountain again to make it easier for the people to hear Him. This would be consistent with Matthew’s account. However, it is also possible that Jesus preached similar messages on various occasions; while the audiences were different, the same message of truth would have applied to all.

AMPLIFIED OUTLINE

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- IV. The ministry of the Son of Man
 - C. The climax of the ministry of the Son of Man
 - 1. The call of the twelve (6:12-16)
 - 2. The instruction of the disciples (6:17-49)
 - a. The setting (6:17-19)
 - b. The content (6:20-49)
 - (1) Characteristics of those in His kingdom (6:20-26)
 - (2) Practice of those in His kingdom (6:27-45)
 - (3) Exhortation to those who consider Him (6:46-49)

A CLOSER LOOK

1. Why did Jesus say His disciples should rejoice when they were persecuted for His sake?

2. What might be some of the reasons the wise man chose to build on a firm foundation? What might be some of the reasons the foolish man failed to do so?

3. How can we ensure we are building our lives upon Christ, the Solid Rock?

CONCLUSION

Let us determine to be faithful disciples of Jesus and build our lives upon Him. If we do so, He will keep us through every trial that comes our way.

NOTES

1. Allison Plyer, “Facts for Features: Katrina Impact,” *The Data Center: Independent Analysis for Informed Decisions in Southeast Louisiana*, <https://www.datacenterresearch.org>, accessed May 29, 2020.
 2. Robert Kayen, Brian Collins, and Helen Gibbons, “USGS Scientists Investigate New Orleans Levees Broken by Hurricane Katrina,” *Sound Waves Monthly Newsletter*, Dec 2005/Jan 2006, <https://archive.usgs.gov/archive/sites/soundwaves.usgs.gov/2006/01/index.html>, accessed May 29, 2020.



DEVOTIONAL FOCUS

“When Jesus heard these things, he marvelled at him, and turned him about, and said unto the people that followed him, I say unto you, I have not found so great faith, no, not in Israel. And they that were sent, returning to the house, found the servant whole that had been sick.” (Luke 7:9-10)

Corrie ten Boom, who along with other family members helped many Jews escape the Nazi holocaust during World War II, has long been honored by Christians all around the world as an example of Christian faith in action.

One time Corrie spoke at a missionary conference in Vellore, India, on the reality of God’s promises in His Word. Afterward a frail-looking missionary woman approached Corrie and asked if she believed God still divinely healed. Corrie assured the woman that indeed she did. The woman explained that she was ill, and asked Corrie to lay hands on her and pray for her healing. When Corrie agreed, the woman knelt down, Corrie laid hands on her, and together they prayed in the name of Jesus. When the woman arose to her feet, she said, “Now I will tell you my sickness. I have leprosy.”

Corrie had visited leper colonies and was familiar with how that disease ravaged the human body. For one moment she felt fear, and wished that she had known before praying about the woman’s condition. Immediately, though, she felt ashamed of such a thought and asked God to forgive her. In the months that followed, she frequently thought of the woman and prayed for her.

Five years later, Corrie was back in India. One day a beautiful woman came to her hotel room and asked, “Do you remember me?” Corrie thought she looked familiar, but could not place where and when they had met. The woman then asked, “Do you remember a time in Vellore when you laid hands on a leper woman and prayed in Jesus’ name that she would be healed?” Corrie responded, “Oh, yes, I surely do!” The woman told her, “That was me. The Lord wonderfully undertook for me, and the doctors say I am absolutely healed from leprosy.”¹

In today’s text, we read of a Roman centurion whose servant was desperately ill. The centurion did not see the necessity of Jesus coming to his home to heal his servant, stating that just as he did not need to be present to have his orders carried out, Jesus could simply speak the word and his servant would

be healed. In our focus verses, Jesus commended the centurion’s faith, and the servant was healed.

God honors faith. He wants us to pray in faith and ask great things of Him, but we must always ask in accordance with His will. Not everything we ask for in prayer will be accomplished the way we want. When we look back on our lives, most of us can be thankful that God didn’t always answer the way we thought He should, because His way turned out to be best. The same principle applies to healing. We do not know what is best for us, but God does. We should always seek to desire what God desires. However, we do serve a loving God. He does not enjoy our suffering, and He most certainly sympathizes with it. When we ask God to heal us, we can have the confidence that He *can* heal and that He may very well do that for us. Remember, our faith is in a great God. Faith in His power is “great faith,” and great faith often results in miracles.

BACKGROUND

Today’s text covers two events: the healing of the centurion’s servant (verses 1-10), and the raising of the widow’s son from the dead (verses 11-17).

This section of Luke starts out as Jesus and the disciples left the plains where He had preached and healed, and entered into Capernaum, a fishing community on the north side of the Sea of Galilee. Capernaum is where Peter, Andrew, James, and John originally lived and fished, and where Jesus called them to follow Him. Jesus called this city His home during at least a portion of His ministry. From there He traveled to Nain (which means “fair” or “lovely”), a community around twenty miles southwest of Capernaum, near Mount Tabor.

The centurion was probably a member of Herod Antipas’ forces, which were often organized into companies of one hundred. Roman soldiers were generally hated by the Jews because of their oppression and control. However, the centurion in today’s text was recognized even by the Jewish populace as an honorable man who was a friend of the Jews, a “worthy” man who had even built a synagogue for them.

The healing of the widow’s son is a miracle recorded only by Luke. In that day, honoring the dead was an important part of Jewish tradition, and part of the ceremony was a funeral procession. Hired mourners often were part of such a procession; they mourned aloud and drew attention to the event. The “bier,” referenced in verse 14, was a flat platform like a stretcher or bed on which the body lay wrapped in

cloths. Generally, the family's period of mourning lasted thirty days.

Widows in that culture were in a very vulnerable position. They typically were supported by male family members, and since this woman's only son had died, she likely would have been left with no means of livelihood. While many of Jesus' miracles likely were done to attest to His divinity, according to verse 13, the motive for this instance of divine intervention was compassion for the sorrowing mother.

AMPLIFIED OUTLINE

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IV. The ministry of the Son of Man

C. The climax of the ministry of the Son of Man

3. The authentication of the Son of Man

a. The healing of the centurion's servant (7:1-10)

(1) The setting (7:1-5)

(2) The centurion's attitude (7:6-8)

(3) Jesus' response (7:9-10)

b. The raising of the widow's son (7:11-17)

(1) The setting (7:11-12)

(2) The miracle (7:13-15)

(3) The response (7:16-17)

A CLOSER LOOK

1. Who came to Jesus on behalf of the Roman centurion? Why do you think they did this for a man who normally would have been considered their enemy?

2. What do Jesus' actions in these two events reveal about Him?

3. How can we demonstrate in our lives the kind of faith and humility the centurion had?

CONCLUSION

God is well able to undertake on our behalf when we approach Him in true faith.

NOTES



DEVOTIONAL FOCUS

“There was a certain creditor which had two debtors: the one owed five hundred pence, and the other fifty. And when they had nothing to pay, he frankly forgave them both. Tell me therefore, which of them will love him most? Simon answered and said, I suppose that he, to whom he forgave most. And he said unto him, Thou hast rightly judged.” (Luke 7:41-43)

Pete Friesen, a minister in the Apostolic Faith work, was not reticent about publically expressing his gratitude to God. He loved to get to his feet in our church services and enthusiastically give praise to God for the marvelous deliverance God gave him from a life of sin. He would testify, “As a child, I was taught about God, but for a long time the Gospel just did not appeal to me. When I was about thirteen I went to the altar to pray for salvation, and the Lord showed me some marbles I had stolen. He asked me to make restitution, and I refused. I went out of there and did not pray again to get saved until I was over forty-three years old.

“When I got out of school, I went to work in the logging camps. There I lived just like the rest of the loggers. I came to town and drank, fought, and got into all kinds of trouble. I never thought about serving the Lord. One day, though, God got hold of my heart in a definite way. I was sitting in a bar on a Saturday afternoon, watching a football game on television, when I heard a Voice say, ‘Where will you spend eternity?’ I turned toward the stool next to me but nobody was there. I turned back to watch the game and I heard that Voice again. This time it said, ‘What difference is it going to make in eternity who wins that ball game?’ Right then I knew Who was talking to me. I got up and went out of that place.

“Although I was never one to be afraid, that afternoon I was terrified. I was afraid I was going to die before I could get to church. The next Sunday morning I went to church and started to pray, and I didn’t quit praying until God came down and saved my soul. He made a wonderful change in my life! The habits and appetites of a lifetime were gone in a moment, and I had a brand new outlook on life.”

When we grasp the lost and hopeless condition we were in before we came to Christ, we will appreciate and give thanks to Him for what He did by forgiving our sins. Brother Pete had a deep gratitude for God’s mercy that reached out to him. In today’s text, the tears

and precious ointment lavished upon Jesus by the uninvited woman at Simon’s house likely were prompted by the remembrance of her past sinful life, and were an expression of her deep appreciation for God’s mercy.

When Brother Pete became a minister, the importance of praising God was often a part of his sermons. In one message, he asked, “Do we praise God enough? Consider the wonderful salvation that Christ offers and all the benefits which go with it—the peace, joy, and happiness we have. Above all, think about the hope of Heaven that is ours. How can we put a value on the knowledge that we will spend eternity with Jesus? Every moment of the day our hearts should be filled with thanksgiving and praise. It ought to be like a spring bubbling up and flowing out of us all the time.”

Let us purpose to follow the example of the woman in today’s text, and like Brother Pete, freely and unashamedly express our deep gratitude to God for His abundant grace toward us.

BACKGROUND

Two events are recorded in this portion of Luke chapter 7: Jesus’ response to John the Baptist’s questions (verses 18-35), and the account of the woman who anointed Jesus’ feet at the home of Simon the Pharisee (verses 36-50).

John the Baptist was cast into prison not long after he introduced Christ to the Jewish people. Perhaps the reports reaching him after his incarceration were incomplete, but what he heard did not match his expectations of how the Messiah would destroy the Roman oppressors and assume the throne. This caused the prophet to become disheartened, and he sent two of his followers to Jesus to ask if He truly was the One for whom Israel had been waiting. Instead of giving the messengers a categorical answer, Jesus told them to tell John the observable deeds which He had done. He knew that these physical proofs would reassure the prophet in his time of suffering.

In verse 28, Jesus gave the highest commendation to the prophet, saying that “among those that are born of women there is not a greater prophet than John the Baptist.” However, he followed that supreme compliment with the words, “. . . but he that is least in the kingdom of God is greater than he.” Bible scholars suggest that the meaning of this somewhat enigmatic statement is that the “least” Christian is greater in privilege than John the Baptist, who in reality was the last of the Old Testament prophets because the New Testament dispensation of grace began after Calvary.

The event at Simon the Pharisee's house in verses 36-50 is recorded only in Luke's Gospel. While similar in some respects to accounts in Matthew, Mark, and John of Jesus eating at the house of Simon the leper, Bible historians generally agree that the differences between the two situations are too numerous to view them as the same occasion.

Parties or banquets in Jesus' day were public events. Homes had open courtyards where uninvited people could stand and observe the festivities. It was customary for guests at a banquet to recline on one elbow while eating, with their feet stretched out behind them. Thus, it would have been quite easy for a woman to move out of the crowd of spectators and weep over Jesus' feet, then dry them with her hair and pour ointment over them.

Verse 37 says the woman who anointed Jesus' feet "was a sinner." The wording in verse 39 could suggest that she was one who had practiced prostitution. The Pharisees used the term "sinner" in a very condemnatory sense, referring to those whom they considered the lowest of people morally and spiritually. However, Jesus' statements about the woman in verses 44-50 seem to indicate that her actions were an expression of joyful gratitude—that her heart already had been converted when she had turned from her life of shame in an earlier encounter with the Savior.

Alabaster was a type of gypsum which was white but not as hard as marble, making it easier to carve into containers.

In verse 44, Jesus pointed out that Simon had failed to provide the common courtesy of washing guests' feet. Foot washing was viewed simply as hospitable service to one's guests, and was a common custom at formal Jewish banquets. It typically took place either upon the guest's arrival or before the meal, and was done by servants in the household.

Cheek kissing, alluded to in verse 45, was a ritual or social gesture given to indicate friendship, perform a greeting, confer congratulations, comfort someone, or to show respect. It was a common form of greeting in Israel well before Jesus' time. Failure or refusal to give or accept a kiss was taken as an indicator of antipathy. The fact that Simon did not provide Jesus with the normal social amenities may show that he had invited Jesus out of curiosity about a local celebrity rather than as a seeker of truth.

AMPLIFIED OUTLINE

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- IV. The ministry of the Son of Man
 - C. The climax of the ministry of the Son of Man
 - 3. The authentication of the Son of Man
 - c. The explanation of John the Baptist (7:18-35)
 - (1) John's inquiry (7:18-20)
 - (2) Jesus' reply (7:21-23)

- (3) Jesus' message of John (7:24-28)
- (4) The varied response (7:29-30)
- (5) Jesus' characterization of Israel (7:31-35)
- d. The gratitude of the woman (7:36-50)
 - (1) The setting (7:36-38)
 - (2) The Pharisee's reaction (7:39)
 - (3) Jesus' explanation (7:40-48)
 - (4) The result (7:49-50)

A CLOSER LOOK

1. What message did Jesus give to John's disciples for the prophet?

2. What do you think Simon the Pharisee's motivations were for inviting Jesus to his home? What was the woman's motive for coming to see Jesus?

3. What are some ways we can show the Lord the kind of love and gratitude the woman in today's text showed Him?

CONCLUSION

The woman who washed Jesus' feet with her tears showed tremendous love for Him and appreciation for His forgiveness. Like her, we want to recognize what Jesus has done for us, and freely express our gratitude toward Him.

NOTES



Luke 8:1-21

DEVOTIONAL FOCUS

**“But that on the good ground are they, which in an honest and good heart, having heard the word, keep it, and bring forth fruit with patience.”
(Luke 8:15)**

Harold and Sally Barrett loved to tell the testimony of Mool Ajumoni (or “water lady”), whose heart was like the good ground of our focus verse, being receptive to the Word of God. During the Barretts’ early years as missionaries to Korea in the late 1960s, their house had no running water so water had to be brought in every day. The woman who delivered that precious commodity to their hillside neighborhood worked very hard, carrying the water in a big container on her head as she climbed the steep roads between the houses. When she came to the Barretts’ home, they showed her kindness, often inviting her in to rest for a bit and share a cup of tea. There she heard about Jesus and His love for her soul. Her heart responded eagerly to the message of salvation and she soon prayed through to a real, born-again experience. What a change took place! From then on, in spite of her difficult life, her face literally glowed with joy.

The water lady’s family was poor, and lived in a one-room house. Her husband was an alcoholic, and the wine shops were where he would spend the little money he made pushing a fruit cart around the streets. Often he would come home intoxicated and would beat his wife. Before she was saved she had hated him and wished he would die, but after she became a Christian her attitude changed. One day she came running to the missionary’s home and said, “Brother Barrett, please come! My husband is dying!” He went immediately to the small home where the water lady’s husband lay ill, and prayed for him. God raised the man up, and he too prayed through to an experience of real salvation.

The two oldest sons of the couple were alcoholics as well, following in their father’s footsteps, but in time they also were saved. The peace of God began reigning in that humble home! A little daughter was born to the couple, and those in the neighborhood marveled at the difference in the lives of this family. When the missionaries eventually left Korea, the water lady wrote them a note saying, “Thank God He ever sent you to Korea, just for our family.”

In today’s text, Jesus used a parable about soil and seed to teach about receptivity to the Word of God. Though crowds had come out from nearby cities to

hear Him, Jesus knew that few of the seemingly eager throng had the “honest and good heart” described in our focus verse. Similarly, during the time the Barretts were in Korea, many in that country claimed to be Christians, but only comparatively few understood true salvation and proved that individuals can live a life without sin. Mool Ajumoni was one of those few.

Jesus’ parable made it clear that while receiving the Word was important, it also must be steadfastly retained, no matter who or what might seek to uproot it from the heart. For more than forty-five years after her conversion, Mool Ajumoni clung to God through good times and hard times. She was faithful in giving her testimony, and her life bore spiritual fruit. In time her husband went home to Heaven, and early in 2016, this faithful woman also passed away. However, the results of her faithfulness remain: recently the daughter who was born after Mool Ajumoni’s conversion—now a grown woman with a family of her own—attended the camp meeting in Portland and rejoiced in her opportunity to visit the home church of the missionaries who brought the Gospel to her parents so many years ago.

Perhaps many of us have been serving the Lord for years. However, we can still learn from Jesus’ parable of the soil. As any gardener knows, good soil takes maintenance. Without monitoring and attention, rocks appear and weeds spring up. In like manner, we must be vigilant about maintaining our spiritual well-being. Today, let us determine that we will absorb the Word of God into our hearts and apply it, and do our best to keep our lives free from the “stones and weeds” which hinder spiritual growth. As we do so, we can be sure that, like Mool Ajumoni, we will bring forth spiritual fruit in our lives.

BACKGROUND

Today’s text includes the parable commonly referred to as “The Sower and the Seed,” which is also found in Matthew 13 and Mark 4. Of the many parables of Jesus recorded in Scripture, He only clarified the meaning of three, and this is one of them. The parable is recounted in verses 4-8, and the meaning given in verses 10-15. Verses 16-18 concern the responsibility of those who hear the Word. In verses 19-21 of the text, Jesus described His true family.

Verses 1-2 reveal *what* the daily occupation of Jesus was (“preaching and showing the glad tidings of the kingdom”), *where* He performed that duty (“throughout every city and village”), and *who* traveled with Him (“the twelve . . . and certain women”). Jesus did not restrict His message to the rabbis and

religious leaders, as was the custom of spiritual teachers in His day. Though women were considered a lower social class, Jesus elevated them from a place of servitude to one of fellowship and evangelistic ministry. Each of these women had a particular reason to be grateful to Jesus, as they had been “healed of evil spirits and infirmities.”

The setting of the parable would have been familiar to the multitude, as they lived in an agricultural society. No fences divided properties; parcels of land were distinguished by natural landmarks and were separated by foot paths of hard-trodden ground, usually just a foot or two wide. Given that setting, when seed was sown by the broadcasting method (as was typical in that era), it easily could have fallen on different types of ground.

Jesus identified four types of soil, each symbolic of types of human hearts and their spiritual receptivity. The wayside soil (verse 5) represented hardened hearts. Rocky soil (verse 6) referred to shallow hearts in which the seed would spring up at first, but quickly die. Soil that was thorn-infested (verse 7) represented those who allow the Gospel to be choked out by other interests. Finally, the good ground soil (verse 8) indicated those who received the truth and nourished healthy plants that produced fruit.

The word translated “mysteries” in verse 10 is derived from a word meaning “to shut the mouth,” and has a sense of secrets that were known only to the initiated. Jesus’ statement indicates that while the truth would be clear to those whose hearts were prepared to receive His words, it would be obscured to those who were resistant. This obscuring was not intended to be punitive but remedial; it was designed to stimulate a deeper search which would result in ultimate acceptance of truth. However, Jesus realized that only a few of His hearers would be truly receptive; the majority of hardened, shallow, and choked hearts would never produce fruit.

The seed is identified in verse 11 as the Word of God—an apt illustration since there is potential of physical life in a seed and potential of spiritual life in the Word of God. Seeds found in the tombs of the Pharaohs are over four thousand years old, yet still germinate, and God’s Word, though written thousands of years ago, still can produce spiritual life. Scientific research has demonstrated that within each small seed exists a much tinier particle which contains the instructions or “blueprint” for the complex life form that will spring from it. Still, the seed needs the right environment in order to grow, which is the point Jesus made in this parable.

- e. The preaching of the kingdom of God (8:1-21)
 - (1) The setting (8:1-3)
 - (2) The parable of the soils (8:4-15)
 - (a) The parable recited (8:4-8)
 - (b) The parable explained (8:9-15)
 - (3) The parable of the lamp (8:16-18)
 - (a) The parable recited (8:16-17)
 - (b) The parable applied (8:18)
 - (4) The resultant implication (8:19-21)

A CLOSER LOOK

1. Who did Jesus say took away the seed that fell on wayside soil?

2. Jesus concluded His parable by saying, “He that hath ears to hear, let him hear.” What do you think He meant by those words?

3. Garden soil is sometimes amended to make it more productive. What are some “nutrients” that we could add into the soil of our hearts to improve its condition? What are some “toxicities” that could impede spiritual growth and fruit production?

AMPLIFIED OUTLINE

Hannah’s Bible Outlines
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- IV. The ministry of the Son of Man
 - C. The climax of the ministry of the Son of Man
 - 3. The authentication of the Son of Man

CONCLUSION

It is wise to periodically evaluate the condition of the soil of our hearts, asking God to help us be “good ground” hearers who bring forth fruit for eternity.



DEVOTIONAL FOCUS

“But as they sailed he fell asleep: and there came down a storm of wind on the lake; and they were filled with water, and were in jeopardy. And they came to him, and awoke him, saying, Master, master, we perish. Then he arose, and rebuked the wind and the raging of the water: and they ceased, and there was a calm.” (Luke 8:23-24)

In January of the year 1854, Hudson Taylor was sailing to China to begin his missionary work when the *Dumfries*, the ship he was on, came into serious trouble. The wind had died down and a strong current was carrying them toward dangerous reefs off the northern shore of Papua, New Guinea. The crew of the vessel did everything they could, but the situation became desperate and it seemed certain the *Dumfries* would crash onto the deadly rocks.

When the captain relayed this information to the young missionary, Taylor suggested that the four Christians on board go to their cabins and pray that God would send a wind enabling the ship to sail away from the reefs. After just a brief time of prayer in his cabin, Taylor received a settled assurance in his spirit that the wind would come and the ship would be saved. He went back up on deck and suggested to the first officer that the mainsail be let down because a wind would be coming shortly. The officer scoffed at this suggestion of an inexperienced passenger, saying derisively, “I would rather see a wind than hear of it!” As he spoke, he glanced up at the topmost sail . . . and to his astonishment, saw that it was beginning to flutter in the breeze. Within just a few moments, a stiff wind was blowing and the ship’s crew was able to steer the vessel safely out to sea.¹

Today’s text records how Jesus calmed a fierce storm on the Sea of Galilee by rebuking the wind. In Hudson Taylor’s experience, God created a wind to enable a ship to sail to safety.

Jesus’ disciples no doubt had been in severe storms during their years of fishing on the Sea of Galilee, but they never had seen a storm stilled by a command. The parallel account to our text, found in Matthew 8:27, says that they “marvelled.” No wonder! And it is no wonder the first officer on the *Dumfries* was astonished when he observed the topsail above him begin to move in the wind. Never before had he seen wind summoned by a simple prayer. The fact is, we serve an amazing God! Both events demonstrate God’s complete and absolute sovereignty over the forces of nature.

In our recognition and awe of the power of God, however, we might overlook a significant detail in these two accounts: in both cases, the divine intervention took place in response to a need and a cry for help.

At times we too may find ourselves in crisis situations where we see no solution. We may wonder where God is or if He really cares. He does! Just as Jesus responded to the disciples and to Hudson Taylor, He will respond when we call on Him. We do not always know *how* He will undertake but we can be assured that He *will*. His miracles are clear evidence of not only His ability but also of His willingness. We can trust Him!

BACKGROUND

This portion of Scripture addresses Jesus calming the storm (verses 22-25), healing the man possessed with devils (verses 26-39), and healing the woman with the issue of blood and Jairus’ daughter (verses 40-56). These miracles are included in all three Synoptic Gospels—Matthew, Mark, and Luke.

The Sea of Galilee was a familiar place for Jesus and His disciples. Jesus lived in Capernaum, which is located on the lake, and sailing on its waters was a common mode of transportation for those in the vicinity. Several of Jesus’ disciples had made their living fishing on the Sea of Galilee. They were all acquainted with the unpredictability of this body of water, and how suddenly a storm could arise without warning.

Although it is referred to as the “Sea of Galilee,” this body of water is actually quite small and more like a lake. It is located 680 feet below sea level and is surrounded by hills that reach as high as 2,000 feet. The sudden storms that arise are a result of the temperature difference between the lake and the mountains—the air in the mountains is often cool and dry, while the climate around the lake is mostly semi-tropical. The difference in height between the mountains and the lake itself causes pressure changes, resulting in strong winds and storms. The lake is also relatively shallow, allowing more turbulence than in deeper water. Small boats caught in the middle of one of these storms are in imminent danger.

When the fierce storm in our text occurred on the Sea of Galilee, Jesus and His disciples were headed to the country of the Gadarenes—the Gentile region surrounding the town of Gadara, which is located on the southern tip of the lake. The parallel account in Matthew 8:28 mentions two men possessed with demons, but Luke chose to focus on one of the men, possibly because he was the one who fell down before Jesus and cried out.

The “tombs” (verse 27) may have referred to either a burial ground or caves, several of which have been discovered in that region. The demons who possessed the man enabled him to have extraordinary strength; he could break chains, and it was impossible to confine him (verse 29). The man said his name was “Legion,” referring to the many demons that possessed him. A legion of Roman soldiers numbered three to six thousand, indicating the severity of the man’s possession.

Since the swine were being herded, this clearly was a Gentile area, as swine were an abomination to the Jews. The destructive nature of the demons was demonstrated in the violent way the swine reacted when the demons entered into them (verse 33).

Verses 40-56 describe two miracles Jesus performed in a single episode. When Jesus returned from the region of the Gadarenes, He was met by a man named Jairus whose young daughter was very ill and at the point of death. Since Jairus was a ruler in one of the synagogues and Jesus often taught in the synagogues, it is possible that they were already familiar with each other. Jesus agreed to go to his home, but the crowd thronged Him, making it difficult to progress toward His destination.

The woman with the issue of blood had been ceremonially unclean for twelve years according to Jewish Law (see Leviticus 15:19) and thus was not permitted to come near people, but she was desperate enough to ignore the Law. Jesus’ question, “Who touched me?” required that the woman acknowledge what had happened. This was not only for her benefit, but also a testimony to the crowd of Jesus’ healing power.

Verses 49-56 continue the account of Jairus and his daughter. As a result of the delay and thronging crowd, Jairus’ daughter had passed away before Jesus could get there. When Jesus inferred that the young girl was not dead but only sleeping, the people scorned Him. However, Jesus demonstrated His power and divinity when He raised the girl from the dead, providing a witness to both her parents and the scorners.

AMPLIFIED OUTLINE

Hannah’s Bible Outlines
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- IV. The ministry of the Son of Man
 - C. The climax of the ministry of the Son of Man
 - 3. The authentication of the Son of Man
 - f. The stilling of the storm (8:22-25)
 - g. The healing of the demoniac (8:26-39)
 - (1) The setting (8:26-27)
 - (2) The miracle (8:28-32)
 - (3) The result (8:33-39)
 - h. The healing of Jairus’ daughter (8:40-56)
 - (1) The request of Jairus (8:40-42)
 - (2) The patient faith of Jairus (8:43-48)
 - (3) The reward of Jairus (8:49-56)

A CLOSER LOOK

1. What was the disciples’ response after Jesus calmed the storm?

2. Why do you think the people of the Gadarenes were afraid of Jesus after He healed the man possessed with demons?

3. How does the account of Jairus’ daughter inspire you to know that God’s timing is always right?

CONCLUSION

When the storms of life come our way, we can rest assured that the Master of the wind and waves will bring us through when we cry out to Him!

NOTES

1. Vance Christie, *Timeless Stories: God’s Incredible Work in the Lives of Inspiring Christians*, pgs.66-67.



DEVOTIONAL FOCUS

“Then he took the five loaves and the two fishes, and looking up to heaven, he blessed them, and brake, and gave to the disciples to set before the multitude. And they did eat, and were all filled: and there was taken up of fragments that remained to them twelve baskets.” (Luke 9:16-17)

God is well able to provide for the physical needs of man, even in situations that appear to be impossible. In today’s text, Jesus used five loaves and two fishes to nourish five thousand men. In a more recent miracle of divine provision, God provided water for a farming family whose trust was in Him.

Back in the 1920s, Owen and Oca Wilson moved onto a homestead in South Dakota. For a time their farm did well, but then a period of extended drought came. There was not enough rain to supply the water table, and all the wells in the area were going dry. Farmers lacked water for their animals and the situation was becoming increasingly desperate.

Owen Wilson was a Christian, and it was natural for him to bring situations like this before God. One day as he was praying in the farmhouse, God gave him specific direction on where to dig to find water. The place the Lord indicated was a very unlikely spot, but Owen was willing to dig anyplace at all in obedience to God’s instruction. He walked to the barn and got his posthole digger, went out to the location God had showed him, and began to dig. A posthole digger could only go down about three-and-a-half or four feet, but before Owen reached the four-foot mark, water began filling the hole. He had uncovered an artesian spring!

That spring supplied so much water that the Wilsons let the neighbors know they could come and get all the water they wanted. Nearby farmers began arriving with barrels and tubs on their wagons, which they filled with water. Some of them said to Owen, “Why don’t you sell the water? It is on your land and it belongs to you.” He replied, “No, it’s the Lord’s water—He showed me where it was. You can have all you want free of charge.” For the duration of the drought, that well met all the water needs of the surrounding area. In fact, the spring was still producing water when the Wilson family eventually moved from the homestead.

It is interesting to note that in both the account in our text and in the provision of water for the Wilsons’ drought-stricken community, God chose to use human

instrumentalities to bring a solution. The disciples obeyed the command of Jesus to carry the loaves and fishes to the multitude, and the huge crowd was fed. Owen Wilson obeyed the direction that came to him as he prayed, and abundant water was provided for him and his neighbors. What a lesson for us! No matter how impossible the situation or task set before us may appear to be, when we step out in faith and obedience to God’s command, we can be assured of the results.

Let us purpose to avoid any tendency to focus on what we do *not* have: not enough food or water or strength or ability or whatever. When we face challenges, it is good to remember that God is able! There is no problem too big for Him to resolve. And He will never ask us to do anything that we cannot accomplish when we obey and simply look to Him for the resources He provides.

BACKGROUND

Today’s text covers several significant events which occurred approximately six months prior to Jesus’ crucifixion, along with His first disclosure to His disciples of His impending death. Some Bible scholars refer to this chapter as the fourth period of Jesus’ Galilean ministry; it concludes Luke’s account of Jesus’ works in Galilee. (Luke covers the first period in chapter 4:14-44, the second in chapters 5:1-6:11, and the third in chapters 6:12-8:56.)

Verses 1-6 are a description of Jesus sending out the twelve disciples. This event is also recorded in Matthew 10:1-15 and Mark 6:7-13. Matthew’s description indicates that this mission was limited in scope: the twelve were to go exclusively to “the lost sheep of the house of Israel” (Matthew 10:6) since the religious leaders of the Jewish people were not fulfilling their role as spiritual shepherds. Christ granted these twelve disciples authority over all devils (the Greek word *daimonian* used here could also be translated “demons”; the Matthew account refers to authority over “unclean spirits”). They were also given ability to heal diseases, seemingly as a divine seal of approval upon their message.

Herod’s question regarding the identity of Jesus is described in verses 7-9. (This Herod was the son of the Herod who ordered all the male babies killed at the time of Jesus’ birth.) A wicked and contemptible man, Herod had previously beheaded John the Baptist (see Matthew 14:1-12), and he wondered if John had risen from the dead, or if Jesus was a reincarnation of Elijah or one of the other prophets. Herod’s desire to

see Jesus was fulfilled just a few months later at Jesus' trial in Jerusalem, when Pilate sent Jesus to him.

In verses 10-17, Luke records Jesus' feeding of the five thousand. Apart from the Resurrection, this is the only miracle of Jesus which is described in all four Gospels. The term "desert place" (verse 10) meant an uninhabited area, somewhere near Bethsaida on the northeastern shore of the Sea of Galilee. Matthew's account indicates Jesus traveled there by ship while the people went on foot, probably traveling about eight miles. Matthew also adds the information that along with the five thousand men, an uncounted group of women and children were present. The women and children, in accord with custom, would have eaten separately from the men.

Peter's acknowledgement that Jesus was the Messiah occurs in verses 18-20. This is followed by Jesus' first prediction of His coming death (verse 22) and His teaching the disciples the necessity of faithfulness, self-denial, and daily sacrificial living (verses 23-27). In verse 26, Jesus cautioned against being "ashamed" of the Gospel. Luke, who was a Greek, would have recognized that his primarily Gentile audience would have no understanding of a God who died unless they looked past that to His Resurrection and Second Coming, when He "shall come in his own glory, and in his Father's, and of the holy angels."

The last segment of this text, verses 28-36, describes Jesus' transfiguration on the mountain. Parallel accounts are given in Matthew 17:1-13 and Mark 9:2-13. Luke's description provides three details which are unique to his account: that it was while Jesus was praying that He was transfigured (verses 28-29); that Moses and Elijah, who appeared with Jesus, spoke of His approaching death in Jerusalem (verse 30-31); and that Peter, James, and John, who accompanied Jesus, were sleeping when the two Old Testament saints appeared, but awoke to see the three together (verse 32). Bible scholars suggest that Moses represented the Law and Elijah represented the prophets in their encouragement and support of Jesus as He faced the culmination of God's plan and His payment of redemption's price through His death.

AMPLIFIED OUTLINE

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- IV. The ministry of the Son of Man
 - D. The conclusion of the ministry of the Son of Man
 - 1. The commission of the twelve (9:1-6)
 - 2. The anxiety of Herod (9:7-9)
 - 3. The feeding of the five thousand (9:10-17)
 - 4. The revelation of the Son of Man
 - a. Concerning His person (9:18-20)
 - (1) Jesus' question (9:18)
 - (2) The disciples' reply (9:19)
 - (3) Peter's reply (9:20)

- b. Concerning His work (9:21-27)
- c. Concerning His glory (9:28-36)

A CLOSER LOOK

1. What did Jesus tell His disciples that they were *not* to take with them as they went forth to preach the Gospel? Why do you think He gave this instruction?

2. Jesus taught His disciples that they should be prepared to deny themselves, take up their crosses daily, and be willing to die. Why was this understanding so important for them?

3. What are some of the blessings that come into our lives through self-denial?

CONCLUSION

No challenge is too big for God—His resources and ability are unlimited! Our challenge is to simply believe in Him no matter what circumstances we face or what pressures array themselves against us.

NOTES



DEVOTIONAL FOCUS

“And [Jesus] said unto them, Whosoever shall receive this child in my name receiveth me: and whosoever shall receive me receiveth him that sent me: for he that is least among you all, the same shall be great.” (Luke 9:48)

Soon after my wife and I moved to the city where we currently live and began worshiping at our small branch church, I met a man who truly exemplified the concluding words of our focus verse, “. . . for he that is least among you all, the same shall be great.” This brother wasn’t musically gifted, nor was he physically imposing. (When he was younger, his friends used to call him “Shorty,” which provides a clue regarding his stature.) At the time we learned to know him, he recently had been widowed and was in his retirement years. He easily could have gone unnoticed.

However, we couldn’t help but observe the twinkle in his eye and his genuine friendliness. We saw how quick he was to jump to his feet to testify for his Lord. Then we started noticing how he helped out in a lot of little (and some big) ways around church. He helped clean on a regular basis, cheerfully vacuuming the sanctuary. More than once after a special event, I saw him taking home giant black bags of garbage because the dumpster in the back was full.

Beyond those more or less public activities, he was very faithful in his private life. I discovered later that when people moved away from our city, he continued to mail them Sunday school lessons and devotional materials regularly over a period of years. Then there were times in the prayer room when I would overhear him praying for missionaries and Christians around the world.

One of this brother’s favorite Scriptures was 1 Corinthians 15:58, and he lived by it daily—he was an example of being “stedfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord.” I am sure he did not think he was anybody special or better than others. However, in Heaven, I believe he will be granted a great reward for his unpretentious faithfulness.

In today’s focus verse, Jesus pointed out that true greatness in life is not found in self-promotion but in sacrificial love toward God and other people. Nothing we do will earn us a place in the heavenly kingdom; salvation is the gift of God, and was made possible solely by Jesus’ death on the Cross. But once we have received this wonderful gift, is there anything for us to do? The answer is an emphatic yes! In fact, one of

the key messages of our text is what God expects of those who follow Him: we are to “receive” (welcome or care for) others, to exemplify humility, and to deny ourselves.

How have you served lately—especially those who are unable to reciprocate? Are you willing to care for others even when your efforts are largely unnoticed? Your honest response to these questions may provide a good evaluation of your true greatness in God’s eyes.

BACKGROUND

The first portion of today’s text (verses 37-43) took place after Jesus and His three closest disciples returned from the Mount of Transfiguration to find the other disciples surrounded by a crowd of people. In Jesus’ absence, the disciples had been unable to cast a demon out of a tormented young boy. At the father’s request, Jesus quickly healed the boy.

In the parallel account in Matthew, the boy is described by the word “lunatic” (from the Latin word *lunaticus* meaning “of the moon,” pointing to the ancient superstition which suggested that seizures were caused by changes in the moon). Also in Matthew, Jesus explained that the disciples’ inability to cast out the devil was because of unbelief. In Mark’s account, Jesus gave His disciples, who had questioned Him privately, another important truth regarding spiritual effectiveness: “This kind can come forth by nothing, but by prayer and fasting” (Mark 9:29).

Following this incident, Jesus and His disciples left the region and went through Galilee with the intention of remaining incognito (see Mark 9:30). This may have been so Jesus could spend time alone with His disciples to teach them. Several weighty subjects were discussed as they traveled: for the second time, Jesus predicted His coming death (verses 44-45), and also spoke on true discipleship (verses 46-50).

Verse 51 marks a division in the text, and begins the account of Jesus’ ministry in Perea, the territory east of Jordan. His life was in constant danger during this six-month period, which lasted until His final Passover. Most of the accounts in this section (which ends at Luke 19:27), appear only in Luke. The majority of Christ’s parables are contained in these chapters.

Also, verse 51 indicates Jesus’ determination to go to Jerusalem. His journey was not a straightforward, continuous trip but rather an extended period of teaching ministry, during which Jesus looked ahead with fixed purpose to the culminating events of His earthly life which would occur in Jerusalem.

Jesus and His disciples faced an antagonistic reception from the Samaritans (verses 51-56) who were of mixed race and semi-pagan in their religion. The Samaritans typically were hostile to Jews, and regularly refused overnight shelter for travelers who were headed to Jerusalem for religious festivals. In return, the Jews considered the Samaritans to be on a level with dogs. The antipathy between them was so great that frequently travelers would walk around Samaria rather than through it, although this lengthened their journey significantly. Jesus' disciples wished to call down judgment upon these people, but Jesus' response was to remind them that He had come not to destroy men but to call them to repentance.

In the final verses of this text (verses 57-62), Jesus taught about the meaning of true discipleship.

AMPLIFIED OUTLINE

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- IV. The ministry of the Son of Man
 - D. The conclusion of the ministry of the Son of Man
 - 4. The revelation of the Son of Man
 - d. Concerning His power (9:37-43)
 - e. Concerning His death (9:44-45)
 - 5. The teaching of the Son of Man (9:46-50)
 - a. Concerning humility (9:46-48)
 - b. Concerning toleration (9:49-50)
- V. The rejection of the Son of Man
 - A. The commencement of the rejection of the Son of Man
 - 1. The rejection in Samaria (9:51-56)
 - 2. The rejection of His call (9:57-62)

A CLOSER LOOK

1. What was the point of contention the disciples discussed between themselves? How did Jesus settle the matter?

2. What do you think was meant by the statement in verse 51 that Jesus “stedfastly set his face to go to Jerusalem”?

3. What are some services you could do for the good of others for which you probably would get little if any credit?

CONCLUSION

True greatness is manifested by humble service.

NOTES



DEVOTIONAL FOCUS

“And Jesus answered and said unto her, Martha, Martha, thou art careful and troubled about many things: but one thing is needful: and Mary hath chosen that good part, which shall not be taken away from her.” (Luke 10:41-42)

Several months ago at a Bible study, our teacher set a large glass jar on a table in front of the audience. Then she removed some large stones from a sack and proceeded to fill the jar to the brim, commenting as she did so that the stones represented priorities in our lives. When there was no more room in the jar, she asked us if the jar was full. We all nodded that yes, it was. She opened the sack again and withdrew handful after handful of small pebbles which she put into the jar, shaking it so that the small stones fell between the larger ones. When she could get no more in, she asked again if the jar was full. Again, we agreed that it was.

Finally she took out a container of sand and proceeded to pour that over the large rocks and the smaller pebbles. For the third time, we agreed that the jar was full. Then she explained that the jar was like our lives. The large rocks were the most important parts of our lives: our relationship with God, our families, our responsibilities as Christians. The pebbles represented things that matter to us: our jobs, our homes, our personal interests. The sand represented everything else. She pointed out that if she had filled the jar first with sand, or even with pebbles, there would have been no room for the larger stones. It is important to put first things first!

Priorities play a part in almost everything we do beginning the moment we wake up each day. If we value sleep more than breakfast, we may choose to sleep in. If we want good grades in school, we do our homework. If we want to save money, we pack a lunch rather than going out.

How we spend our time is a reflection of our priorities. Many times at work, I have been given a list of tasks to do, and sometimes I must ask which is most important. While all the tasks are necessary, if I place too much emphasis or invest too much time on the wrong project, my productivity may suffer.

In today's text, we read of a woman named Martha who welcomed Jesus and His disciples into her home. In an effort to show honor and be a good hostess, she spent much time preparing food and serving her guests. Meanwhile, her sister Mary “sat at Jesus' feet, and heard His word.” Martha was perturbed because Mary

was not helping her, but Jesus explained that while Martha was busying herself with more than was necessary, Mary was spending her time wisely.

Note that what Martha was doing wasn't wrong in and of itself. Certainly it is appropriate to care for the needs of one's guests, but Jesus pointed out that Martha's priorities were misaligned: she had placed too much importance on the details of this life and not enough importance on spiritual matters.

We must be careful to not fall into the same trap Martha fell into. Most of us have many responsibilities that require our attention and time commitments we must honor. Among all our activities, however, we must be careful to keep our relationship with the Lord as the top priority. Often we do not have control over all the aspects of our daily schedule, but if we truly want the Lord to be first in our lives, we must honor Him with our time. In return, He will be faithful to reward our commitment to Him.

BACKGROUND

Chapter 10 of Luke's Gospel can be broken into three main sections: the mission of the seventy (verses 1-24), Jesus' discussion with the lawyer and the parable of the Good Samaritan (verses 25-37), and His stay in Bethany at Mary and Martha's house (verses 38-42).

Today's text opens with Jesus appointing seventy disciples. The number seventy had special significance to the Jewish people. For example, seventy elders were appointed by Moses to judge the Children of Israel (see Exodus 24:1 and Numbers 11:16), and the Sanhedrin had seventy members (plus the High Priest). Jewish tradition also held that there were seventy peoples or nations other than the Jews, so possibly the number of disciples sent out was symbolic of an effort to reach all of those nations.

Jesus specified that these disciples were to travel in groups of two rather than individually. In pairs, they could not only support and encourage each another, but could also verify one another's account: according to the Law, at least two witnesses were required to establish something as true (see Deuteronomy 19:15 and Matthew 18:16).

In verse 25, a lawyer asked Jesus what he needed to do to inherit eternal life. In that era, a lawyer was a scribe or person of a similar occupation who studied the Law. Thus, when Jesus asked what was in the Law, this man was well able to answer. When the lawyer asked Jesus who his neighbor was, Luke said he sought to “justify himself” (verse 29). According to the Law, a neighbor was defined specifically as a fellow Israelite

(see Leviticus 19:18). The lawyer likely expected Jesus to refer to this definition, and his righteousness in this area would thus be shown. Instead, Jesus related the story known as the Parable of the Good Samaritan.

At that time, many priests lived in Jericho—possibly as many as twelve thousand—and the road Jesus referred to in His parable was the main road between there and Jerusalem. The surrounding area was frequented by many thieves, making Jesus’ parable especially relatable. When the priest and Levite passed by the injured Jew, they were in direct contradiction of the Law, which commanded that they have compassion on their fellowmen (see Deuteronomy 22:1-4). Samaritans, on the other hand, were cultural enemies of the Jews, making the compassion of the Samaritan in the parable all the more remarkable.

In the previous chapter, Luke had recounted that Jesus was rejected in a Samaritan village (Luke 9:52-53). Nevertheless, Jesus clearly showed that even the Samaritans were deserving of love and mercy. When asked who “was neighbour unto him that fell among the thieves,” the lawyer’s prejudice prevented him from explicitly responding, “The Samaritan.” Instead, he referred to him simply as “he that shewed mercy upon him” (verse 37).

Chapter 10 closes with the account of Jesus’ visit to the home of Mary and Martha. In verse 39, we read that Mary “sat at Jesus’ feet, and heard his word.” She was listening intently, and was seated in the same position that Jewish scholars sat when learning from rabbis. In verse 42, Jesus tells Martha that only “one thing is needful.” This seems to indicate that the “good part” chosen by Mary—learning from Jesus—was that one needful thing. However, some commentators suggest that Jesus was saying that only one simple meal was necessary, as opposed to the excess Martha was preparing (to which He had just referred in the previous verse). In either case, Jesus’ point was clear: the things of God are of far more importance than temporal things.

AMPLIFIED OUTLINE

Hannah’s Bible Outlines
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- V. The rejection of the Son of Man
 - A. The commencement of the rejection of the Son of Man
 3. The mission of the seventy (10:1-24)
 - a. Instructions to the seventy (10:1-12)
 - b. Judgment for rejection of the seventy (10:13-16)
 - c. Report of the seventy (10:17-24)
 - (1) Their rejoicing (10:17-20)
 - (2) His rejoicing (10:21-24)
 4. The rejection by the lawyer (10:25-37)
 - a. The question concerning eternal life (10:25-29)

(1) The inquiry of the lawyer (10:25)

(2) The answer of Jesus (10:26-29)

b. The illustration regarding eternal life (10:30-37)

5. The reception at Bethany (10:38-42)

A CLOSER LOOK

1. Upon returning from their mission, in what did Jesus instruct the seventy to rejoice?

2. Why did Martha feel justified in her actions? Where did she go wrong in her logic?

3. With the busyness of everyday life, what are some things you can do to be less like Martha and more like Mary?

CONCLUSION

As we go about fulfilling our many daily responsibilities, may we never allow anything to become more important to us than Jesus.

NOTES



DEVOTIONAL FOCUS

“And I say unto you, Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you. For everyone that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened.” (Luke 11:9-10)

Countless people of God have proved that persistence in prayer brings results. May Richardson was one who received an answer after many years of praying for the salvation of her husband, Art.

May met Art just before she graduated from high school. His family had been a part of the Apostolic Faith Church for years, but he had gone his own way. After the two were married, a group of mothers in the church began to pray for their unsaved children, and May’s mother-in-law was among them. She invited Art and May to attend a camp meeting service, and May later testified, “God put such conviction on me from the moment I entered the church that I felt it was my last chance to pray. I fought all through the service, wondering if I could take that step or not. I tried to sing; I couldn’t. I tried to listen; I couldn’t. When the preacher asked those who wanted prayer to raise their hands, I almost had to sit on mine to keep it down. As soon as the benediction was given, I asked Art to pray with me. He said no, but told me to go and pray and he would wait for me. I made my way through the crowd toward the altar, and knelt at a seat in the front row. I poured out my heart to God, and before I got up from that place of prayer, God gave me His wonderful salvation.”

A few weeks later, May received her sanctification, and two months after that, the baptism of the Holy Spirit. The years went by, and May continued to serve the Lord faithfully, but Art still was not saved. She recounted, “I prayed long and earnestly for Art. One year he didn’t go to church with me even once, though he always encouraged me to take the children to Sunday school and church. Occasionally he came, and he would be under such conviction and yet would leave without praying. Often I wondered, *What am I doing wrong?* But how close God was to me through those years!

“One day I felt overwhelmed with the burden. I cried out to God, ‘You take over completely. Let me be clear out of the way.’ I continued to pray for Art, but I let go of all the preconceived ideas about how God would work. And God began to put heavy conviction on him. About two weeks later, he gave up to

the Lord and prayed through to salvation at an altar of prayer—twenty-one years after I had been saved. We were able to serve the Lord together until God called him home, many years later.”

In our text today, one of Jesus’ disciples said to Him, “Lord, teach us to pray, as John also taught his disciples” (Luke 11:1). In response, Jesus gave what is often referred to as “The Lord’s Prayer.” Also He related a parable which taught the importance of importunity in prayer—of persisting until the answer comes. Then He stated our focus verse, instructing His disciples to ask, seek, and knock. To persist in prayer does not mean spending hours repeating the same words over and over. It means keeping our requests constantly before God as we live for Him every day, believing always that He hears our prayers and will answer in His way and time.

Persistence in prayer requires patience, and waiting can be a time of spiritual growth. As we tarry before God, He can use that time to mold and transform our desires, to change how we pray, and draw us closer to Him.

Perhaps you have a personal experience of waiting for an answer from God. Take heart! Persistence does not guarantee you will get what you asked for, but God *will* answer your prayers . . . perhaps not when you wanted or even how you wanted, but in a way that you truly longed for in the depths of your soul.

BACKGROUND

Today’s text has two sections. In verses 1-13, Jesus taught His disciples about prayer. In verses 14-28, He answered hostile accusations about how He cast out demons.

The initial entreaty, “Lord, teach us to pray” seems to indicate that the disciple who made the request had been deeply moved by listening to Jesus pray. Christ’s prayer was no doubt very different than the formal prayers typically offered in the synagogue.

The model prayer Jesus gave in verses 2-4 is similar to the version found in the Gospel of Matthew, chapter 6. The key difference is the phrase “forgive us our sins” which Matthew records as “forgive us our debts.” While the Bible teaches that Christians do not commit sin, this verse does indicate that it is still *possible* for Christians to fall back into sin. If that should occur, forgiveness and restoration is contingent upon a willingness to forgive others. It also seems to indicate that unintentional wrongs, once recognized, should be acknowledged and made right.

Following His model prayer, Jesus used the parable of a friend at midnight to teach a vital truth about prayer: the necessity of perseverance. The daytime heat in that area east of the Jordan River made night travel common, so a friend arriving at midnight would not have been unusual to Jesus' hearers.

The request for three loaves (verse 5) would also have been understandable. Typically one loaf was provided for the guest, one was for the host who would sit at the table with his guest, and one was set out as evidence that abundant provisions were available and the guest need not fear that he would be consuming the last of his host's supply. Etiquette norms of the day dictated that a host could not allow a guest to retire hungry, so the host in Christ's parable who lacked a supply of food had to go to his neighbor with a request for the necessary provisions. The phrase "my children are with me in bed" refers to the local custom of the entire family sleeping on a raised platform or "bed" in the typical one-room house.

The point of Christ's parable was that importunity, or persistence in prayer, brings results. Resolute and continued seeking is not discourteous toward God but rather indicates a realization that He is the only possible resource for an urgent need.

After casting a devil out of an individual, Jesus was accused of casting out devils through Beelzebub. *Beelzebub* is the Greek form of the Hebrew name *Baal-Zebub*. It is not known how that name came to be regarded as a designation for Satan, but that was the inference in this accusation. Matthew and Mark both record a similar event (see Matthew 12:22-45 and Mark 3:20-30) but this event took place in Judea, while the event described in the other Gospels took place in Galilee.

Jesus' reference to the strong man keeping his palace (verse 21-22) may have been a reference to Isaiah 49:24-26.

AMPLIFIED OUTLINE

Hannah's Bible Outlines
Used by permission per WORDsearch

- V. The rejection of the Son of Man
 - A. The commencement of the rejection of the Son of Man
 6. The instruction in prayer (11:1-13)
 - a. The request for a lesson in prayer (11:1)
 - b. The model of prayer (11:2-4)
 - c. The principles of prayer (11:5-13)
 - (1) Need of persistence (11:5-10)
 - (2) Need of trust (11:11-13)
 - B. The conflict causing the rejection of the Son of Man
 1. The occasion (11:14)
 2. The charge of empowerment by Satan (11:15-16)

3. The defense against the charge (11:17-23)
4. The illustration of Israel's plight (11:24-28)

A CLOSER LOOK

1. What other follower of Jesus taught his disciples to pray?

2. Why do you think forgiveness is such a key aspect of successful prayer?

3. Since God knows our hearts as well as our needs, why do we need to persevere in prayer?

CONCLUSION

Jesus' parable teaches us that persistence in prayer will bring a response from our loving Heavenly Father.

NOTES



DEVOTIONAL FOCUS

“And when the people were gathered thick together, he began to say, This is an evil generation: they seek a sign; and there shall no sign be given it, but the sign of Jonas the prophet.” (Luke 11:29)

In today’s focus verse, Jesus condemned the “evil generation” of His day who sought for a sign, perhaps to satisfy their curiosity, or as proof of His ability to work miracles. However, spiritual unbelief did not exist solely in the time when Jesus walked this earth. Throughout the ages, Christ and His teachings have been viewed with skepticism, doubted, mocked, and rejected by many.

One such demonstration of unbelief occurred in nineteenth century London, when Charles Bradlaugh, an avowed atheist, challenged Christian preacher H. P. Hughes to a debate on the existence of God and the legitimacy of religious faith. Hughes accepted the challenge on one condition: that he and Bradlaugh would each bring to the debate one hundred individuals whose lives gave “concrete evidence of the validity of their beliefs.” Hughes, who worked among the poor in the slums of London, said he would bring one hundred people whose lives had been changed for the better by Christ. Bradlaugh was to bring one hundred people who would certify that their lives had been made profoundly stronger, nobler, and more decent by their unbelief. Each side would be allowed time to cross-examine the witnesses of the other, in order to satisfy themselves as to the truth of the claims made.

When the appointed time for the debate arrived, a vast crowd had gathered to hear what they assumed would be a lively exchange. Hughes had experienced no difficulty in finding one hundred believers who had once lived in deep sin but whose lives had been transformed by Jesus Christ. Bradlaugh, however, could not find a single individual who would testify in support of his position! Apparently embarrassed by that fact, he never even showed up for the debate—and as a result, Hughes was able to preach the Gospel to the assembled crowd without hindrance. The one hundred believers gave their personal testimonies, and many who had come to hear the debate gave their lives to Christ as a result.

Like Charles Bradlaugh, those in the crowd around Jesus who asked for a sign were guilty of unbelief—they had even accused Him of casting out devils through Beelzebul, the chief of the devils (see Luke 11:15). Jesus already had done many miracles

in their midst, and He refused their demand for some spectacular or sensational action by saying that no sign would be given them except the sign of the prophet Jonas. Just as Jonah came forth after three days in the belly of the whale, Jesus Christ would come forth triumphant over death after three days in the tomb.

Disbelief and rejection of Christ’s message will one day bring judgment. Jesus pointed out that the heathen queen of the south and the warlike people of Nineveh had responded by believing when enlightened by truth. What condemnation will fall upon those who have had far more opportunity but have failed to believe!

Today, we live in a society that is rife with religious skepticism. We must guard against being influenced by its negative pressure. As we study today’s text, let us make careful evaluation of our hearts. Do we *really* believe? Do we have complete confidence in Christ’s words? It takes courage and determination to stay solidly rooted in our faith in our increasingly cynical and anti-Christian world, but God can and will help us do so as we look to Him.

BACKGROUND

Today’s text covers three topics: Jesus’ warning against unbelief (verses 29-32), His teaching about the light within (verses 33-36), and His condemnation of religious leaders for their hypocrisy and legalism (verses 37-54).

In verses 29-32, Jesus denied the request of those who “tempting him, sought of him a sign from heaven” (Luke 11:16). He had just healed a demoniac, and no further proof of His divine authority should have been needed. The word translated *sign* in this verse means “a supernatural token or wonder” and is the word commonly used in the Gospels to refer to miracles. The meaning of verse 30 is amplified by Matthew 12:40, which indicates that just as Jonah spent three days in the whale’s belly, Jesus would spend three days in the tomb before being resurrected. The repentance of the men of Nineveh is documented in the Book of Jonah; Jesus’ reference to Jonah in this passage verifies the historical fact of Jonah’s experience. The “queen of the south” was a reference to the Queen of Sheba, who pronounced a blessing on Solomon’s God when she observed Solomon’s great wisdom and wealth (see 1 Kings 10:1-13).

The concept of the light within as addressed in verses 33-36 is also referenced in the other Gospels. The word translated “single” in verse 34 means

“healthy” or “sound.” The light represents Christ. Thus, Christ was teaching that when one is open and receptive to spiritual understanding and insight, every part of the body benefits. He warned against allowing evil influences to obscure or blot out the light of Christ’s presence.

Verses 37-54 are a denunciation of the Pharisees and lawyers whose public displays did not align with the inward condition of their hearts. While Matthew 23 records a similar condemnation, the event in our text was a different occasion; the Matthew 23 passage occurred in Jerusalem, while the setting of the Luke text was in the region of Perea (the eastern side of the Jordan River valley).

Since the Pharisees were already aligned against Jesus, the invitation of verse 37 may have been a trap in which the religious leaders hoped to observe Jesus breaking one of their many regulations. Since the same verse implies that Jesus went in and sat down immediately, it is quite probable that He purposefully refrained from the customary washing upon entering with the intent of precipitating the discussion that followed.

Jesus addressed the behavior of the Pharisees very directly. Six times in this passage He uttered the words, “Woe unto you . . .” which could be translated “Alas for you!” and was an exclamation of doom and denunciation. (This phrase is used forty times in thirty-three verses in the New Testament, and it was uttered by Jesus thirty-two of those times.) He also called the Pharisees “fools” (spiritually imperceptive) and “hypocrites.” He accused them of a range of corrupt behaviors: neglect of the inner man (verse 40), failure to treat others properly (verse 42), pride (verse 43), corrupting others (verse 44), putting legalistic burdens on others (verse 46), approving the slaying of the prophets (verse 47), and making God’s truth hard to understand and practice (verse 52).

AMPLIFIED OUTLINE

Hannah’s Bible Outlines
Used by permission per WORDsearch

- V. The rejection of the Son of Man
 - B. The conflict causing the rejection of the Son of Man
 - 5. The sign to the nation (11:29-32)
 - 6. The warning to the nation (11:33-36)
 - C. The consequence of the rejection of the Son of Man (11:37-54)
 - 1. The occasion (11:37-38)
 - 2. Woes pronounced upon the Pharisees (11:39-44)
 - a. For their externalism (11:39-41)
 - b. For their disregard of true justice (11:42)
 - c. For desire to be regarded by men (11:43)
 - d. For their deceit (11:44)

- 3. Woes pronounced upon the lawyers (11:45-52)
 - a. For their lack of care (11:45-46)
 - b. For their attitude toward the prophets (11:47-51)
 - c. For their hindrances (11:52)
- 4. The result (11:53-54)

A CLOSER LOOK

1. What did Jesus say the men of Nineveh did when they heard the teaching of Jonah? What did their action indicate?

2. How do you think the lawyers took away the “key of knowledge” from the people? Luke 11:52

3. What are some steps we can take to ensure that an attitude of pride does not creep into our lives?

CONCLUSION

God may bless us with visible “signs” or miracles, or He may choose not to. Either way, we must continue to believe in Christ, and trust that what God says is always right and true.

NOTES



DEVOTIONAL FOCUS

“Be ye therefore ready also: for the Son of man cometh at an hour when ye think not.” (Luke 12:40)

At a routine check-up five weeks before our second child’s due date, my doctor made a startling announcement—the baby could arrive at any moment! My husband and I had thought we had more than a month to go, so you can imagine that our relaxed pace of “getting ready for baby” abruptly shifted into high gear. We posted a to-do list on the refrigerator, and one by one checked off items. The bassinette got a fresh coat of paint, and I packed my suitcase with items baby and I would use in the hospital. We put some caseroles in the freezer, and purchased diapers and a few other needed items. Somehow I even squeezed in time to finish the little outfit I had been making to bring our baby home in!

Each morning before my husband left for work, the two of us would discuss childcare for our toddler and other details which would need to be worked out quickly if the baby were to come that day. As we looked ahead to upcoming activities scheduled at church and with our extended family, we prefaced our comments with the phrase, “If the baby hasn’t come yet . . .” Countless times I asked myself, What if it were today? Is everything ready? It seemed like nothing else really mattered.

Anticipation. What comes to your mind when you hear that word? If you are a Christian, there is one coming event that should inspire a feeling of expectancy like nothing else—the soon return of Christ to this earth. In today’s text, Jesus spoke of that event and the necessity of being prepared. He used two examples to illustrate His point: servants who watched for the return of their lord through the night hours, and the master of a household who was caught unawares by a thief.

In order to be ready for Christ’s return, we must commit our lives to God, and then daily live in a manner pleasing to Him. We must study what Scripture says to do to prepare ourselves, and follow through in obedience. In short, we must do everything possible to be sure we are completely prepared for the event that will change everything.

Jesus indicated to His disciples that “the Son of man cometh at an hour when ye think not.” While we do not know the exact day or hour of His appearance, the Bible describes many signs that will immediately precede His coming. When we compare the world

situation today to those indicators in Scripture, the conclusion is inescapable: His return cannot be far off.

Exactly six weeks after my doctor’s startling announcement, our beautiful little daughter arrived. Those six weeks seemed to last forever! However, my husband and I learned a good lesson in what real anticipation is all about.

Today, let’s take inventory. Is Christ’s return the focus of our lives? Do our actions today and plans for tomorrow revolve around that most important event? Let’s live in expectation of that moment, and be sure our preparations have been made!

BACKGROUND

Today’s text relates a discourse given by Jesus concerning various aspects of Christian discipleship. He spoke out against hypocrisy (verses 1-12), gave the parable of the rich fool (verses 13-21), warned against worry (verses 22-34), addressed the necessity of being ready for His return (verses 35-48), and predicted coming division and crisis (verses 49-59). Though Jesus directed His words primarily to His disciples, His discourse took place in the presence of a crowd which had gathered while Jesus was in the house of the Pharisee. (See Luke 11:37 in conjunction with the text’s opening words, “In the mean time . . .”)

Verses 1-12 are sometimes referred to as “The Creed of Courage and of Trust.” The word “leaven” in verse 1 alludes to any activating agent, so the “leaven of the Pharisees” pointed to their teaching and practices that were influencing the people. Evidently hypocrisy was their most dangerous characteristic. Their attitudes could not be hidden; like yeast, they would grow, and eventually the power-hungry, self-serving Pharisees would be exposed.

The instruction given in verses 4-5 foreshadowed the persecution of Jesus’ followers, which would begin with His crucifixion and continue almost unabated for the next three centuries. In verses 6-12, Jesus went on to assure His disciples that mortal life is not man’s most precious possession, and that God was aware of whatever befell them.

In Luke 12:10, Jesus referred to what has been termed by some as the “unpardonable sin.” Blasphemy against the Holy Ghost is persisting to reject the very One who convicts of sin—the only One who can draw a person to repentance. Thus, by his own actions the individual who chooses this course of rejection will find no place of repentance.

The parable of the rich fool (verses 13-21) was precipitated by a request from “one of the company”

for Jesus to resolve an issue concerning an inheritance. Jesus refused to step into the role of arbitrator, and instead put His finger on the man’s real motive, implying that the question sprang from greed (verse 15). Jesus then related the parable as an illustration. The rich man’s selfish attitude was demonstrated by the frequent use of first person pronouns; in verses 17-19, the words “I” and “my” occur eleven times.

In verses 22-34, Jesus contrasted faith with anxiety, especially regarding temporal needs. In the original Greek, the prohibition “neither be ye of doubtful mind” (verse 29) is very picturesque. The image is that of a boat tossed by a rough sea—one that Jesus’ listeners, who lived in proximity to the Sea of Galilee with its sudden squalls, easily would have understood. Jesus was warning against fluctuating between elation and despair, or hope and fear, as such fluctuations were the opposite of calm repose in certainty of God’s providential care.

Verses 35-48, in which Jesus taught about the importance of being ready for His return, are also connected to His warning about focusing on the material aspects of life. Strong attachment to temporal things could be an “anchor” at the time of the Rapture. “Let your loins be girded about . . .” in verse 35 refers to the custom of drawing one’s robes up around the waist to allow unhindered movement of the legs and feet, in preparation for immediate action.

Jesus employed two illustrations to make His point about readiness: servants who remained watchful and prepared throughout the night for their lord’s arrival, and in contrast, the master of a house who was *not* watchful and thus unprepared for a thief’s entrance. After a question by Peter, Jesus returned to the illustration of the servants in verses 36-38. His amplification of the parable in verses 42-48 teaches that in eternity there will be degrees of rewards and punishments dependent upon degrees of faithfulness or unfaithfulness.

In verses 49-56, Jesus explained to His disciples that He did not come to institute immediate universal peace. His coming would create an initial divide between those who would follow Him and those who would not. He called those who refused to heed the signs of His ministry and the end of time “hypocrites” (verse 56) because they professed to be well-versed in Old Testament prophecies of the Messiah, yet they refused to acknowledge Jesus as the fulfillment of those prophecies.

AMPLIFIED OUTLINE

Hannah’s Bible Outlines
Used by permission per WORDSearch

- VI. The instruction of the Son of Man
 - A. Instructions concerning hypocrisy (12:1-12)
 - 1. The instruction (12:1-3)
 - 2. The reason for the instruction (12:4-7)
 - 3. The results of the instruction (12:8-12)
 - B. Instructions concerning wealth (12:13-59)
 - 1. Instructions to the crowd (12:13-21)

- a. The question (12:13)
- b. The answer (12:14-15)
- c. The illustration (12:16-21)
- 2. Instructions to the disciples (12:22-53)
 - a. The statement (12:22)
 - b. The explanation (12:23-28)
 - c. The exhortations (12:29-53)
 - (1) For proper priorities (12:29-34)
 - (2) For proper perspective (12:35-53)
 - (a) Faithfulness demanded (12:35-40)
 - (b) Faithfulness to be rewarded (12:41-44)
 - (c) Faithlessness to be punished (12:45-48)
 - (d) Decisive effect of His ministry (12:49-53)
- 3. Instructions to the crowd (12:54-59)
 - a. The signs of the times (12:54-56)
 - b. The urgency of reconciliation (12:57-59)

A CLOSER LOOK

1. Where did Jesus say that secrets told in closets would be proclaimed?

2. What do you think Jesus meant by His instruction in verse 22?

3. Verse 34 states an important spiritual principle. How will a focus on this verse help us to prepare for Christ’s coming?

CONCLUSION

How often does the thought of Christ’s return to earth cross our minds? Let’s keep our focus on that impending event, and make sure we are ready.

NOTES



Luke 13:1-35

DEVOTIONAL FOCUS

“Strive to enter in at the strait gate: for many, I say unto you, will seek to enter in, and shall not be able.” (Luke 13:24)

When I was a small boy, my mother often read aloud to me. One of my favorite books was *Pilgrim’s Progress*, a spiritual allegory written by John Bunyan in the seventeenth century. The account of Christian and his journey to Celestial City gives a vivid picture of the believer’s life, and Bunyan’s creative story-telling style makes it possible for even children to understand the spiritual significance of the depictions in the story. I looked forward with excitement to hearing the next segment of Christian’s adventures, and frequently begged my mother to read just one more chapter. The book truly impacted my young life.

In those childhood reading sessions, I learned that the poor, burdened sinner, Christian, had to start his spiritual journey at the Wicket Gate of salvation, and going through that gate took some striving. To leave the City of Destruction behind took effort and purpose. Once Christian arrived at the gate to the cross, he had to choose to go through it. Then choices had to be made along the way in order to keep on the path toward the Celestial City.

Some great spiritual truths were made apparent in Christian’s story. When a person feels the beckoning call of the Holy Spirit to salvation, he soon realizes there is a price that must be paid in order to obtain forgiveness. As our focus verse states, there is a “strait [or narrow] gate” which must be entered, and doing so will take striving. It takes a willingness to surrender. It takes a turning away from sin. It takes repentance. However, going through the gate and kneeling at the Cross results in the heavy burden of sin being lifted. Then the path that leads to Heaven opens up. Every person will have an opportunity to enter the gate of salvation at some point. Those who fail to do so will continue on the broad road that leads to judgment and destruction.

In *Pilgrim’s Progress*, the path that Christian chose led to the Celestial City, but it was not always an easy path. There were many distractions along the way. As long as Christian stayed on the path that he had entered through the Wicket Gate, he neared his heavenly goal. If he turned aside, he was in trouble. Evangelist warned Christian not to listen to the voices that would beckon away from the path—the traveler must not let fear, weariness, or enticements distract him.

The same is true for us. After we are saved and start on our spiritual journey, there are many detours that could lead us away from the path to Heaven. Every day we are presented with choices. Will we choose to do right or will we give in to temptation? Our text tells us that we must “strive” to enter into Heaven. The word *strive* means “to agonize, struggle, contend, to exert oneself to the fullest, to labor fervently.” In other words, we must be wholehearted in our dedication and effort to reach our eternal goal. Only by the grace and power of God can we withstand the diversionary tactics of the enemy of our souls.

Although our spiritual journey is filled with challenges, think about the glory that awaits those who have gone through the “strait gate” of salvation and have continued faithfully to the end! Verse 29 of our text tells us, “They shall come from the east, and from the west, and from the north, and from the south, and shall sit down in the kingdom of God.” What a glorious meeting when we all gather together up there. And what stories of victory we will hear!

BACKGROUND

This chapter describes several of Jesus’ teachings, and records His healing of the woman who had been bowed over for eighteen years. It concludes with Jesus grieving over the city of Jerusalem.

In verses 1-9 of today’s text, Jesus continued to instruct His hearers about repentance. Some who were present inquired about an event that apparently had taken place recently: Pilate’s soldiers had killed some Galileans as they were sacrificing in the Temple. The ancient historian Flavius Josephus states that the Galileans were the most seditious people in the land, so it is possible Pilate thought he was doing Rome a favor by having them killed.

In Jesus’ response, He alluded to eighteen seemingly innocent people in Siloam who were killed when a tower fell on them, possibly while working on an aqueduct. This tower is believed to have been built over one of the porches near the Pool of Siloam in Jerusalem. This event appeared to be an accident, and not a murderous act like the preceding one. Jesus used both of these events to teach the people that evil or unfortunate events do not necessarily occur as punishment because of sin, but that everyone should look to his or her own day of judgment.

Jesus illustrated His point by giving the parable of the fig tree (verses 6-9). In the Old Testament, fruitful plants often symbolized a godly life. The tree Jesus pictured was in a vineyard suitable for growing figs,

and was cared for by a “dresser” (gardener). While it had every advantage, it bore no fruit. Jesus was pointing out that those who reject the opportunity to bear fruit for God’s Kingdom will face ultimate destruction.

In the next portion of text (verses 10-17), Jesus healed an infirm woman. The ruler of the synagogue found fault with Jesus for healing on the Sabbath. Under the Law, healing was considered the work of doctors, and practicing one’s profession on the Sabbath was forbidden. Jesus called the synagogue leader a hypocrite because of his lack of compassion, and emphasized that compassion was at the heart of the Law.

Verse 22 indicates the setting of the next portion of text: Jesus was on His way to Jerusalem where He would soon be put to death. On the way, He gave several parables to illustrate the Kingdom of God and help the people to better understand His message. He likened the Kingdom of God to a grain of mustard seed (verse 19) and to leaven or yeast (verse 21), both of which have the capacity to grow. The Jewish people expected the Messiah to come as a great leader who would vanquish Rome and raise Israel to its former glory. However, Jesus wanted the people to understand that His Kingdom would begin in a small and seemingly insignificant manner, but later would expand outward until the whole world was changed.

In verses 22-30, Jesus continued teaching about the Kingdom of God, using a variety of visual illustrations which brought out that serving God takes effort, and that the decision to follow Jesus must be made while the door is open, because one day it will be shut.

The final verses of this chapter (verses 31-35) tell of Jesus grieving over Jerusalem. The city of Jerusalem symbolized the nation of Israel, as it was the political capitol as well as the spiritual center of the land. Jerusalem had a long history of persecuting and killing God’s prophets, just as they were about to kill their Messiah. Jesus would have loved to nurture His people and shelter them, but they continued to reject Him, so He grieved, knowing the ultimate fate of the nation.

AMPLIFIED OUTLINE

Hannah’s Bible Outlines
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- VI. The instruction of the Son of Man
 - C. Instructions concerning repentance (13:1-9)
 - 1. The need for repentance (13:1-5)
 - 2. The nearness of judgment (13:6-9)
 - D. Instructions concerning the Kingdom of God
 - 1. Instructions concerning the nature of the Kingdom (13:10-35)
 - a. The confrontation in the synagogue (13:10-17)
 - (1) The condition (13:10-11)
 - (2) The cure (13:12-13)
 - (3) The complaint (13:14)
 - (4) The conclusion (13:15-17)

- b. The parable of the mustard seed (13:18-19)
- c. The parable of the leaven (13:20-21)
- d. The individuality of entrance into the Kingdom (13:22-30)
- e. The failure to seek His kingdom (13:31-35)

A CLOSER LOOK

1. How long had the woman Jesus healed in today’s text been suffering from her infirmity?

2. In verses 6-9 of our text, Jesus gave the parable of the fig tree. What do you think the nonexistent “fruit” on the tree represented?

3. In verse 24 Jesus taught that His followers must “strive” to enter into Heaven. What are some specific ways we can strive in our daily lives?

CONCLUSION

What rejoicing there will be by those who go through the “strait gate” and continue on the narrow way until they arrive at their heavenly goal!

NOTES



Luke 14:1-35

DEVOTIONAL FOCUS

“And whosoever doth not bear his cross, and come after me, cannot be my disciple. For which of you, intending to build a tower, sitteth not down first, and counteth the cost, whether he have sufficient to finish it?” (Luke 14:27-28)

The skyline of Washington D.C. is low and sprawling by design, so that from a number of vantage points near the Potomac River, one can see several of the nation’s most notable landmarks. The capitol building, the White House, the Lincoln Memorial, and many other important buildings are all within a few miles of each other. The easiest landmark to see, however, is the Washington Monument: this majestic 555-foot pillar commemorating the first president of the United States of America is the tallest stone structure in the world.

The grandeur of this monument can be seen from all around, but a closer inspection reveals a detail that might otherwise be overlooked: the stones in the lower third of the tower are of a different shade than those of the upper two-thirds. This is because the monument was built in two separate phases.

Construction of the monument began in 1848, after \$87,000 had been raised for the project. The Washington National Monument Society knew it didn’t have enough money to complete the structure, but was counting on more donations coming in. Six years later, however, funds ran out and construction slowed to a halt. After the Civil War, interest in completing the project grew, and construction began again in 1879—this time with marble from a different quarry. The monument was completed in 1884, and at the time, it had a consistent color from top to bottom. Gradually, however, the marble in each section weathered differently, producing the two distinct colors seen today.

In our focus verse, Jesus indicated that following Him is like building a tower. Before beginning construction, a wise builder will consider the total cost and ensure that he has sufficient funds to complete the project. Jesus was emphasizing the requirements of discipleship: complete renunciation of all that hinders total commitment to Him. To follow Christ is costly! We must live a surrendered life, yielding full control to Him. We must value Jesus above all else, including family, friends, and possessions. The rewards of a victorious Christian life are certain to outweigh the sacrifices, but if we have not considered the cost in advance, we may not be prepared to complete our spiritual “structure.” That could result in eternal loss!

Have you counted the cost of true discipleship? Are you fully committed to the Lord today? If you are, He will help you reach the eternal goal.

BACKGROUND

In today’s text, Jesus taught those around Him about true humility, the Gospel call, and the cost of discipleship.

Chapter 14 begins with Jesus eating a meal on the Sabbath in the house of a ruler among the Pharisees. When the text says those at dinner “watched” Him, the original Greek indicates a malicious intent. The Pharisees were trying to find something to accuse Jesus of, and, feigning friendship, had likely invited Him to dine with them for that very purpose. When a man with dropsy approached, Jesus asked if it was lawful to heal on the Sabbath. The Pharisees held their peace, knowing they could not answer in the affirmative if they were to accuse Him of breaking the Sabbath. Jesus performed the miracle, and they had to remain silent again—this time because He had provided reason against which they could not argue.

In verses 8-11, Jesus told a parable about humility to those at the table, and in so doing, rebuked them for the behavior He had just observed. He went on to say in verses 12-14 that men should invite the poor and maimed to dinner, rather than their friends. Jesus was not forbidding the entertainment of friends, but rather was calling out the practice of hosting others for reasons of pride or in the hope of gaining something in return.

In verses 15-24, we read the Parable of the Great Supper, which holds both a prophetic and a spiritual meaning. Prophetically, it refers to the offer of the Gospel to the Jews, and, after their rejection, to the Gentiles. Spiritually, this parable is a warning to people of every generation. Those who refused the initial call to the feast made excuses to perform activities which, in and of themselves, were not evil. The problem was that they allowed these things to take precedence over the call of God. This parable is a reminder to put and keep God first, and to extend the Gospel message to everyone—even those who seem unlikely to receive it.

In verses 25-35, Jesus was no longer at the Pharisee’s house, but was addressing “great multitudes with him.” He took this opportunity to teach about what true discipleship entails. The word “hate” in verse 26 does not mean that one should actually despise his family and friends, but that a disciple must love Jesus *more* than his family and friends.



Luke 15:1-32

DEVOTIONAL FOCUS

“And when he came to himself, he said, How many hired servants of my father’s have bread enough and to spare, and I perish with hunger! I will arise and go to my father, and will say unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and before thee.”
(Luke 15:17-18)

Like the parable of the Prodigal Son in today’s text, the testimony of Nick Segres is a beautiful illustration of God’s amazing grace and forgiveness. Nick’s father was a preacher, and his parents reared him carefully and taught him the right way to go. However, he turned away from God’s call to his heart.

Nick related, “Drinking, smoking, stealing, and gambling became a part of my life. Though I hardened my heart, I still had no doubt that God was real. He proved that to me one night in an unmistakable way. I had my mind made up to attend a dance that evening, but to get there I had to walk past the church where special revival services were being held. As I passed the church building, I could hear people inside singing. The Lord laid it on my heart that I should go in. I looked up at the sky and told God, ‘If You want me to go to church tonight, let that star fall.’ I raised my hand and pointed out a bright star. As my hand came down, that star fell! At that moment I knew that God had heard my prayer. Fear struck my heart, and I turned around and started back toward the church. Then some friends drove by on their way to the dance. When they stopped and invited me to go with them, I didn’t have the courage to tell them no.

“Later I spent some time in the military, and after receiving my discharge, I rented an apartment in a neighboring city. My friends and I spent evenings and weekends having what we called a ‘good time.’ Often I would stay up all night, getting back early in the morning with just enough time to change clothes and go to work. Soon I even became involved in stealing.

“One day my friend and I decided to work on his car, but a storm came up. We pushed the car under a tree to keep the rain off us, and we raised the hood against a clothesline connected to the tree. I was squatting against the tree trying to stay dry when the mechanic with us said he needed something, which I went after.

“Just as I was almost back to the car, lightning hit. The current raced down the tree to the clothesline and across to the car. My friend was leaning on the car—where I had been just a short time earlier—and

he fell to the ground, unconscious. In panic, we rushed him to the hospital. The mechanic drove while I crouched in the back seat and gave my friend artificial respiration, trying to keep him alive.

“We were driving fast through the pouring rain, and water was accumulating on the highway. Suddenly the car went into a spin. As we slid around, the back door flew open, and my friend started to slide out. I reached to grab him, and then I was falling too. Somehow I caught the handle of the door and managed to hold us both in as the car spun crazily in circles. When we were finally righted on the road, we went on to the hospital. But we were too late; my friend had died.

“As I went home that night, God talked to me. He asked, ‘If it had been you, where would your soul spend eternity?’ I knew the answer. At the first opportunity, I went to church and prayed, repenting of all my sins and asking forgiveness for turning my back on God for so long. He didn’t reject me the way I had Him. He saved me! What peace and joy came into my heart!”

Nick prayed on and received the experiences of sanctification and then the baptism of the Holy Ghost. He became a preacher and a pastor. Until he went home to Glory, he rejoiced in the fact that God loved him enough to save his soul and change his life.

In Luke’s parable, it was love that impelled the father to watch for his wayward son’s return, and to welcome him home with open arms. In Nick’s story, it was love that responded to a young man’s prayer for forgiveness and transformed his life. Today, the love of our Father in Heaven is extended still toward anyone who will turn His way in repentance. What a merciful and loving God we serve!

BACKGROUND

Luke 15 contains three parables related to seeking the lost: the lost sheep (verses 4-7), the lost coin (verses 8-10), and the lost son (verses 11-32). The murmuring of the scribes and Pharisees—who were wellknown for their animosity toward publicans and “sinners”—makes it likely that some of these despised individuals were in the crowd around Jesus when He gave these accounts.

In the agricultural society of the area, sheep and shepherds were a familiar sight, and thus an understandable subject for Jesus’ first parable in today’s text. Sheep are known to be somewhat senseless animals with a tendency to wander. If a shepherd did not go out and seek a lost sheep, it would not find its

way back on its own. Verse 7 gives the point of this parable: God values everyone. He actively seeks those who are sinners (lost), and all Heaven rejoices with Him at each person who repents (is found).

The second parable, the account of the lost coin, presents the same truth with a different illustration. A number of coins were used in the New Testament period, but the silver coin in this parable was likely a Roman *denarius*. A single denarius was worth about a day's wage, so the loss of a coin was significant. It was customary in that society for a woman to receive ten silver coins as a wedding gift. These coins held sentimental as well as monetary value, so if one was lost, a search would certainly ensue.

The Parable of the Prodigal Son, as verses 11-24 have traditionally been called, is one of Jesus' best-known parables. Through the centuries it has been portrayed in numerous world-famous paintings, in musical pieces, and in literature. This parable appears only in the Gospel of Luke. While the first two parables in this group were reflective of the lower class of Jewish society, this parable was woven around an upper class family that enjoyed significant wealth and influence.

The younger son's share of the inheritance typically would have been one-third of his father's estate (see Deuteronomy 21:17). Normally he would have received his share upon the passing of his father, although it was not uncommon in Jewish society for the father to retire from active management of his estate and distribute at least a portion of his resources earlier.

The "far country" in the parable illustrated that the environment was very different from the Jewish home in which the young man had grown up.

Although the Jews were allowed to raise pigs and sell them to Gentiles, according to Mosaic Law, pigs were unclean animals and were not to be touched, eaten, or used for sacrifice. Thus, working with the swine was a reversal of both the young man's former social position and his religion.

The second part of the parable—the response of the elder son when his younger brother was welcomed back into the home—was directed at the Pharisees and scribes who were listening. The elder brother exhibited the attitude of judgmental legalism like that of the Pharisees, who considered themselves righteous and faithful but in reality were self-righteous and self-ish. The prodigal younger brother represented the publicans and sinners who were denigrated and despised by the Pharisees. It is noteworthy that the father's love for his elder son was in no way lessened by the loving mercy and forgiveness he extended toward his wayward son.

AMPLIFIED OUTLINE

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- VI. The instruction of the Son of Man
 - D. Instructions concerning the Kingdom of God

- 2. Instructions concerning the nature of those in the Kingdom
 - a. Instructions before the religious leaders
 - (3) The basis for the invitation (15:1-32)
 - (a) His search for sinners stated (15:1-2)
 - (b) His search for sinners illustrated (15:3-32)
 - [1] The lost sheep (15:3-7)
 - [2] The lost coin (15:8-10)
 - [3] The lost son (15:11-32)

A CLOSER LOOK

1. In addition to the physical environment, where was joy experienced over the finding of the lost articles in the first two parables?

2. What parallels can be drawn between the plight of the Prodigal Son away in the "far country," and one who is far away from God?

3. What are some ways we can show mercy and love to a "prodigal" in our day who returns to the Lord?

CONCLUSION

Each individual is precious to God, and He is continually searching for those who have wandered away from Him.

NOTES



DEVOTIONAL FOCUS

“And he said also unto his disciples, There was a certain rich man, which had a steward; and the same was accused unto him that he had wasted his goods. And he called him, and said unto him, How is it that I hear this of thee? give an account of thy stewardship; for thou mayest be no longer steward.” (Luke 16:1-2)

One of the definitions of the word *steward* is “one who manages the property or financial affairs of another.” That is the responsibility God has given each of us, whether we possess a lot or a little. He has put us in charge of the resources, talents, and opportunities He has blessed us with, and how we utilize and take care of them is what matters.

A while back a brother in our church testified about having his truck stolen. Though undoubtedly he was inconvenienced by the robbery and the necessary follow-up of police reports, insurance claims, and the need for a replacement vehicle, what impressed me was his reaction. The first words that came out of his mouth were, “Lord, someone stole *Your* truck!” He had the right perspective: he was reminding himself that the vehicle really belonged to the Lord and he was merely the steward.

It is easy to lose sight of that correct perspective and consider ourselves to be the owners of what we have. The unquestionable trend in society is to focus on personal possessions, rights, and preferences. However, the Bible constantly reminds us of our responsibilities. Owners have rights; stewards have responsibilities.

Today’s parable of the unjust steward brings out three important principles regarding Biblical stewardship. First, we see the principle of *ownership*. None of the instruction in Scripture will make sense if we overlook the fact that God, as our Creator, has full rights of ownership. And His ownership does not just apply to material resources or objects; it also includes the opportunities and abilities He has given us.

Once we understand that God is the owner of all, we can move on to the second principle: that of *responsibility*. Some may say, “I can’t sing or play an instrument. I don’t have any special talents, so the concept of stewardship doesn’t apply to me.” That is not the case. Remember, as God’s stewards we are not only to faithfully use our abilities, but we must also use our material resources, our time, and our opportunities as God would have us. All are divinely

ordained; they all belong to the One who bestowed them, and we are to use them effectively for Him.

Finally, we learn the principle of *accountability*. Like the unjust steward in today’s parable, a day of reckoning is coming! Some day we will be called to give an account concerning how we managed what God entrusted to our care.

Let us never forget that the key to success from God’s perspective is conducting our lives on the basis of stewardship rather than personal ownership. Then we can look forward to the day when we will be welcomed home to Heaven and hear Christ himself say, “Well done, good and faithful servant.”

BACKGROUND

Luke 16 contains two accounts given by Jesus as He traveled through the countryside on His way to Jerusalem for His last Feast of Tabernacles. Verses 1-13 are a parable about an unjust steward, probably given shortly after the parables found in chapter 15. Verses 19-31 are Jesus’ account of the rich man and Lazarus.

A steward in Bible times was a manager who acted as his master’s agent in handling business affairs, and had broad powers in controlling and dispensing his master’s wealth. The word translated *wasted* in verse 1 literally means “scattering.” The same word is used in the Parable of the Prodigal Son where it says he went into a far country and “wasted his substance with riotous living.”

The phrase “give an account” in verse 2 was a demand for a complete financial statement. This accounting was not to prove the innocence or guilt of the steward. Apparently the misuse of the master’s assets was already clear beyond doubt, because the steward had been informed, “Thou mayest be no longer steward.” However, a review of the accounts would seal the steward’s doom.

It is important to understand that a division exists between the two clauses of verse 8. In the first clause, the “lord” who offered commendation was the master in the parable, not Jesus. Although the master showed a certain grudging admiration for the steward’s shrewdness, Jesus labeled the steward “unjust.” God does not condone sin for any reason. In the second part of this verse, Jesus observed that frequently the children of the world show more wisdom than the “children of light” (or Christians).

“Mammon of unrighteousness” in verse 9 refers to temporal wealth. The Greek phrase translated, “when ye fail,” actually could be translated as “when

it fails” or “when it is no longer available.” “Everlasting habitations” refers to the eternal future. Given these definitions, Jesus seemingly was urging His hearers to use this world’s goods in a way that would prepare them for eternity.

Most Bible scholars believe the account of the rich man and Lazarus in verses 19-31 was not a parable, but rather an actual event. One reason is that Lazarus, Abraham, and Moses are all named; in parables, names are not given. However, whether a parable or a true story, Jesus saw the need to instruct those with Him regarding the hereafter. These verses clearly disprove the doctrine of annihilation—the belief that a human soul is not immortal unless it is given eternal life and thus, like the animals, sinners simply cease to exist at death.

The Lazarus in this account should not be confused with the Lazarus who was the brother of Mary and Martha, whom Jesus raised from the dead. With regard to Jesus’ comment in verse 31 that those who resisted His teaching would not be persuaded “though one rose from the dead,” it is interesting to note that the brother of Mary and Martha *did* rise from the dead. Though the religious leaders did not believe, and tried to kill Lazarus, there were many who did believe as a result of that miracle (see John 12:9-11).

Verse 23 says, “In hell he lift up his eyes, being in torments.” This invalidates the teaching of “soul sleeping”—the belief in an intermediate state of unconsciousness between death and the resurrection. At death, the soul and spirit of a saved individual go immediately to be with the Lord; the unsaved go to a place of suffering and torment. At the resurrection, the body, soul, and spirit of the redeemed will be reunited in a glorified body, and will continue existence with the Lord eternally; the body and soul of the unsaved will reside forever in a place of eternal punishment.

Abraham’s words “Son, remember . . .” (verse 25) indicate that in Hell, a clear memory exists of events and circumstances which occurred during the individual’s lifetime.

AMPLIFIED OUTLINE

Hannah’s Bible Outlines
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- VI. The instruction of the Son of Man
 - D. Instructions concerning the Kingdom of God
 - 2. Instructions concerning the nature of those in the Kingdom
 - b. Instructions before the disciples
 - (1) Concerning the use of money (16:1-31)
 - (a) The parable (16:1-8)
 - (b) The application (16:9-13)

- (c) The Pharisees (16:14-31)
 - [1] Their reaction (16:14)
 - [2] Jesus’ reply (16:15-31)
 - [a] Stated (16:15-18)
 - [b] Illustrated (16:19-31)

A CLOSER LOOK

1. What was the accusation against the steward that caused the master to summon the steward and relieve him of his duties?

2. What do you think is meant in verse 8 by the phrase “for the children of this world are in their generation wiser than the children of light”?

3. In verse 25, Abraham told the rich man, “Son, remember . . .” Evaluate your life now. What do you look forward to remembering in Heaven?

CONCLUSION

One day we will all be held responsible for how we managed the resources and opportunities with which God has blessed us. Let us endeavor to be faithful stewards!

NOTES



DEVOTIONAL FOCUS

“For as the lightning, that lighteneth out of the one part under heaven, shineth unto the other part under heaven; so shall also the Son of man be in his day.” (Luke 17:24)

A woman in our congregation, Barbara, has testified many times about how the importance of being ready for Christ’s return was brought vividly to her attention when she was a young girl. One evening her mother, father, and older sister went to a Christian outreach meeting. Barbara was old enough to be left home alone, and her parents told her that they would return before it was late. She was fine with that arrangement, and the evening went by without incident.

As the family’s expected return time drew near, Barbara went out to wait on the front porch. She looked up the road, expecting to see the lights of their approaching car within a few moments. However, the minutes ticked by, one after another. After some time had passed and there still was no sign of her family, Barbara began to get anxious. Then the thought came to her: What if Jesus had come and taken them to Heaven? What if she had been left behind? She knew that she had not given her life to the Lord and if He returned to this earth, she was not ready.

As that thought took shape in her mind, her concern grew. Finally she saw the lights of a car approaching. What a relief! She did not want to appear worried, so she hurried inside the house and sat down with a book in her hand. However, the car continued on by her house. Then she was more worried than ever! This happened several times, and each time her fear increased.

Finally her folks did return, of course. All was well, and her immediate anxiety subsided. However, the Lord was able to use that episode to get Barbara’s attention. Just a few days later, she gave her life to the Lord. And oh, the peace she experienced, knowing that whenever Jesus *did* return to earth, she was ready!

Luke, along with the other authors of the Gospels and New Testament epistles, recorded that during Jesus’ earthly ministry, He taught on several occasions that He would come back to earth one day. No one knows exactly when Christ’s Second Coming will occur. However, Scripture does provide some details about that event. For example, today’s focus verse indicates that it will take place as quickly as lightning flashes across the sky. Those who are alive

and serving God when Christ returns will be instantaneously raptured.

Since we do not know when that day or hour will be, we need to be ready at every moment. Jesus repeatedly instructed His disciples to be prepared for His return, and the Early Church lived in anticipation of that event. Believers of every era are challenged in God’s Word to live in that same state of continual readiness. Are you ready? You can be . . . you *must* be!

BACKGROUND

Today’s text covers four distinct teachings of Christ’s earthly ministry. In verses 1-10 of Luke 17, Jesus taught His disciples about forgiveness, faith, and duty; in verses 11-19, He healed ten lepers and used their response to teach about gratitude to God; and in verses 20-37, He taught about the Kingdom of God. In verses 1-8 of chapter 18, He gave a parable related to persistence in prayer.

While Jesus’ instruction regarding how to deal with those who cause offenses (verses 1-4) is applicable to all, it is particularly necessary for Christ’s followers because of their responsibility toward their fellowman. The Greek word translated “offense” in verse 1 is *skandalon* (from which our English word *scandal* is derived). It is an immensely strong word which goes beyond an error or misstep that can be recovered from; it means a “trap” or “snare,” and has the sense of spiritual destruction. Jesus was giving a very forceful warning against causing new or weak Christians to falter in their spiritual walk.

Jesus went on to indicate how His followers were to respond to one who trespassed against them: they were to forgive. The disciples evidently were dismayed by Jesus’ stern teaching regarding offenses, and expressed their need by saying to Him, “Increase our faith” (verse 5). Jesus responded by comparing faith to a mustard seed, indicating that although it is small, it is alive and has potential for growth.

The brief parable recounted in verses 7-10 does not relate directly to Jesus’ preceding teaching, but is a part of a theme (which began with chapter 13) of opposition to the teachings of the Pharisees. The parable points out that there is no merit in works; tasks for the Master are simply the duty of servants. For that reason, the follower of God should not commend himself regarding what he does in the service of God.

The lepers who met Jesus as He approached a village “stood afar off” (verse 12) in accordance with Mosaic Law which prohibited such individuals from living in populated places (see Leviticus 13:46).

Jesus' instruction for the ten to show themselves to the priests was also in accord with the Law (see Leviticus 14:2-7). The fact that Jesus used the plural form "priests" in verse 14 could indicate that the leprous men were originally from different areas. When they stepped out in obedience and faith before seeing any visible change in their physical condition, healing occurred. However, only one of the ten returned to give thanks. The fact that Luke called attention to his ethnicity—according to verse 16, he was a Samaritan—highlights an aspect of Jesus' ministry that Luke frequently emphasized: the Lord had compassion for all, even those who were despised by society. In verse 19, Jesus' comment that "thy faith hath made thee whole" undoubtedly referred to spiritual wholeness, as the man who gave thanks had already been healed of his leprosy.

Jesus' teaching concerning the Kingdom of God in verses 20-37 was precipitated by an aggressive question from the Pharisees, who "demanded" to know when the Kingdom of God would come. These religious leaders believed the Messiah would set up an earthly kingdom, overthrow Roman authority, and make the Jews the rulers of the world. Since Jesus had not done this, the Pharisees seemingly assumed that He would be forced to admit He was not the Messiah. Jesus responded by turning to His disciples and teaching about the true nature of the Kingdom of God.

The parable of the unjust judge (Luke 18:1-8) was a continuation of the previous discourse. At other occasions as well, Jesus taught the importance of persevering in prayer, but in this instance, He used a form of logic that moved from the least to the greatest. The point was this: if an unscrupulous and unwilling judge ultimately dispensed justice because of persistent petitions, how much more could they depend upon a good and loving God to answer prayer, even though at times the answer seemed to be delayed!

AMPLIFIED OUTLINE

Hannah's Bible Outlines
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- VI. The instruction of the Son of Man
 - D. Instructions concerning the Kingdom of God
 - 2. Instructions concerning the nature of those in the Kingdom
 - b. Instructions before the disciples
 - (2) Concerning offences and forgiveness (17:1-10)
 - 3. Instructions concerning the coming of the Kingdom
 - a. The background (17:11-19)
 - b. The inquiry and response about the Kingdom (17:20-21)
 - c. The instructions about the Kingdom (17:22-18:8)

- (1) Concerning His coming (17:22-37)
 - (a) The nature of His coming (17:22-24)
 - (b) The prerequisite for His coming (17:25)
 - (c) The suddenness of His coming (17:26-37)
 - [1] Various examples (17:26-29)
 - [2] Vivid description (17:30-37)
- (2) Concerning the necessity of prayer (18:1-8)

A CLOSER LOOK

1. According to Luke 17:28-29, what six specific activities were the people of Lot's day engaged in prior to the destruction of Sodom?

2. Why do you think Jesus used a description of the normal daily activities of Noah's and Lot's days as He taught the importance of being ready for His return?

3. What are some ways we can encourage ourselves "always to pray, and not to faint"?

CONCLUSION

The exact timing of the return of Christ to this earth is unknown, but the fact that it will happen is certain. We need to be ready!

NOTES



DEVOTIONAL FOCUS

“But Jesus called them unto him, and said, Suffer little children to come unto me, and forbid them not: for of such is the kingdom of God. Verily I say unto you, Whosoever shall not receive the kingdom of God as a little child shall in no wise enter therein.” (Luke 18:16-17)

A week or two ago, my grandchildren and I went out for a stroll in our neighborhood. The early summer evening was warm and inviting, and many of our neighbors were out enjoying it too. We passed several young parents pushing strollers, people walking their dogs, and a number of folks working in their yards.

Our six-year-old granddaughter is the epitome of friendliness, and she cheerily greeted every individual within speaking distance—even if they happened to be across the street on the opposite sidewalk, or were busily engaged in weeding flowerbeds. She never seemed to run out of comments to make: our walk was peppered with “Hello! I like your dog!” and “What kind of flower is that?” and “That’s a nice bike!” No one we passed was neglected; her attention and interest were bestowed without regard to age, gender, or appearance.

As we neared the end of our walk, we went by a heavily tattooed and metal-studded man who was working on a motorcycle. His furrowed brow and somewhat unique appearance might have deterred a less friendly individual, but my granddaughter was not in the least put off. She paused and inquired animatedly about his motorcycle, wondering what was wrong with it and exactly what he was doing. I was amazed to see his somewhat grim expression melt away in a matter of seconds. In fact, he lit up like a Christmas tree! He responded with a smile to her questions, and then stood up to engage in several minutes of friendly chatting before we moved on.

In today’s focus verse, Jesus indicated that the Kingdom of God belongs to those who have the qualities of little children. While He did not specify exactly what childlike attributes His followers were to emulate, He may have been pointing to the implicit innocence, acceptance, and trust that seem to be inherent in the young.

Jesus wants each of us to possess childlike trust in Him—a pure, unassuming, and humble faith. This straightforward spirit of acceptance allows us to receive God’s gift of salvation simply. It enables us to believe without question that God is who He says He

is. It helps us to instinctively depend on our Heavenly Father to supply our needs in both the spiritual and physical realms.

That unpretentious and open spirit is what Jesus was saying must be in our lives in order to enter His Kingdom. Let us continue to walk as trustful children, for we *are* children—God’s children!

BACKGROUND

In this text, Jesus continued His instructions to the people regarding the criteria for entering the Kingdom of God.

Having taught about God’s part in answering persistent prayer in the preceding parable (Luke 18:1-8), Jesus taught about man’s part in the first segment of today’s text (verses 9-14). This parable was directed to “certain which trusted in themselves that they were righteous.” It contrasted two men who went into the Temple to pray. One man was a Pharisee—the strictest and most legalistic of Jewish religious groups of that time. The other man was a publican, or tax collector, for the Romans. Tax collectors were often dishonest and were known to be money gougers, so they were greatly hated by the Jews.

The prayers of the two men also contrasted greatly. The Pharisee was self-righteous and proud, and his words were less a prayer than a proclamation of his great merit. The phrase “prayed thus with himself” (verse 11) was an indicator that his focus was on himself rather than God. The publican was self-effacing in manner—he stood “afar off” (verse 13), evidently not deeming himself worthy to be near the Temple, which was the symbol of God’s presence. Both his words and the action of smiting himself upon the breast showed a repentant and humble spirit. He said nothing to prove his own worthiness, but simply pled with God for mercy. Jesus’ audience, who had been taught that scrupulous observance of the Law was what gained God’s favor, was no doubt startled by the conclusion: the publican went home justified, while the Pharisee did not.

In the second portion of our text, mothers brought their children to Jesus to be blessed (verses 15-17). While Luke identifies these little ones as “infants,” the other Gospel writers refer to them as “children.” In that era, children had no social status, and the disciples seemingly reflected society’s dismissive attitude, perhaps in an effort to protect Jesus’ time or prevent infringement upon His ministry by inconsequential individuals. However, Jesus used the situation to teach what is necessary for those who wish to have a part in the Kingdom of God.

The third and final segment of today’s text (verses 18-30) concerns a ruler who came to Jesus desiring eternal life and asking what he must do to obtain it. While Luke refers to this man merely as a “ruler,” Matthew’s Gospel adds the fact that he was young. Matthew, Mark, and Luke all indicate that he was rich. Some Bible scholars believe he may have been a member of the Sanhedrin, or perhaps an official in a local synagogue.

Jesus responded to the rich young man’s question by instructing him to follow several of the Ten Commandments—the seventh, sixth, eighth, ninth, and fifth, respectively (Exodus 20:12-16). Each of these commandments pertains to man’s relationship to man (the first four of the Ten Commandments deal with man’s relationship with God).

While the rich young ruler had obeyed the Law from his youth and seemingly was devout, Jesus indicated that he lacked one thing: he needed to sell all and give his goods to the poor. This instruction was not intended to be a mandate for all who had material wealth. Rather, Jesus was addressing the key issue in this young ruler’s heart. Luke records that he was “sorrowful” and Matthew adds that he “went away sorrowful” (Matthew 19:22), unwilling to give up his wealth and possessions to become a disciple.

Jesus’ followers were amazed at this requirement because to the Jews, money was an indicator of God’s blessing. If this very moral ruler could not make Heaven, they wondered aloud, “Who then can be saved?” Jesus made it clear that it was not wealth that kept the ruler out of Heaven, but the unwillingness to put the Kingdom of God first.

AMPLIFIED OUTLINE

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- VI. The instruction of the Son of Man
 - D. Instructions concerning the Kingdom of God
 - 3. Instructions concerning the coming of the kingdom
 - d. The entrance into the Kingdom (18:9-30)
 - (1) Necessity of a proper attitude (18:9-14)
 - (2) Necessity of childlike faith (18:15-17)
 - (3) Necessity of personal righteousness (18:18-30)

A CLOSER LOOK

1. What was the attitude of those to whom Jesus directed His parable of the two men who went to the Temple to pray?

2. Why do you think it is often easier for a child to have simple faith than for an adult?

3. What are some ways we can evaluate exactly who or what has first place in our hearts?

CONCLUSION

Jesus took time to teach His followers why He considered little children important. He even explained that He will only give His Kingdom to people who are like little children—those who have open, humble, and trustful hearts.

NOTES



DEVOTIONAL FOCUS

“And Zacchaeus stood, and said unto the Lord; Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor; and if I have taken any thing from any man by false accusation, I restore him fourfold.” (Luke 19:8)

While restitution is not a requirement for salvation, it certainly is a *result* of salvation. Genuine conversion puts in the heart of a newly saved individual the desire to make right any wrong actions of the past, and that includes making restoration whenever possible.

The testimony of Stan Frank, a brother in the Portland congregation, illustrates this. He said, “When God saved my soul, I told Him I would go back and straighten up my life, and I did. I asked the ministers to pray for me and for the letters I would be writing. I have responses today from people I made restitution to—letters of forgiveness.

“I had worked for the Union Pacific Railroad and stole from them for years. After I was saved I made trip after trip back there until one time someone said, ‘Not again! You are bringing back *more* things?’ I said, ‘Yes, I am bringing back to the railroad everything that is marked U.P.R.R.’

“I was bothered for over three years about something I had taken but couldn’t find. I looked high and low—in the garage, in all the cupboards, in the attic, and in the basement—but could not locate the item. One day my son-in-law came over needing a large cardboard box. I said, ‘I don’t know if we have a large one, but let’s look out in the garage.’ High overhead I found a box I thought was empty, and when we took it down, there was the item. Thank God, I took it back to the railroad! Today I have the peace of God in my heart. It’s a good feeling down on the inside when you know you are right with God and your fellowman. I have a clear record today and I praise God for it.”

Today’s text records the conversion of the tax collector Zacchaeus, who was well known as a wicked and oppressive man. Like Stan Frank, Zacchaeus’ immediate response to salvation was a desire to make restitution—to voluntarily restore anything he had taken wrongfully from others. In our focus verse, he declared to the Lord, “The half of my goods I give to the poor; and if I have taken any thing from any man by false accusation, I restore him fourfold” (Luke 19:8). He was so remorseful over his defrauding of people that he was determined not only to square up accounts, but to repay with generous interest all dishonest gain!

Notice that Zacchaeus’ inward transformation was verified by outward action. We too must demonstrate our changed hearts by our changed behavior. As believers, we should deal honestly with the world. We should repay our debts and make amends for harm we have caused. If we do not remember all the misdeeds we need to make right, God will gently remind us. And more than that, He will go before us as we make those restitutions.

Today, if there are things in your past that you have not straightened out, follow Zacchaeus’ example and take care of them! When those wrongdoings are made right, you will rejoice in the peace that comes with knowing that your conscience is clear before both God and man.

BACKGROUND

Today’s text covers events in Jesus’ life just prior to His Triumphal Entry into Jerusalem, less than two weeks before His trial and crucifixion. Four significant events occur in this portion of Scripture. At the conclusion of chapter 18, Jesus foretold for the third time His coming suffering and death (Luke 18:31-34), and healed a blind man (verse 35-43). Chapter 19 begins with the account of Zacchaeus’ conversion (Luke 19:1-10), and continues with Jesus’ parable of the ten servants (verses 11-27).

In verses 31-34 of chapter 18, Jesus called His disciples aside and spoke to them again regarding His coming death. Although the sacrifice of the Messiah had been foretold in detail by the prophets (for example, see Psalm 16:10; 22:16-18; 41:9; and Isaiah 53:4-7), Christ’s followers seemingly could not comprehend what He meant. This may have been because His words contradicted everything they presumed about the kingdom of the Messiah.

The healing of Bartimaeus, who was blind, recorded in verses 35-43, is also described in Matthew 20:29-34 and Mark 10:46-52. Beggars of that time often positioned themselves along roads leading into cities, because the extensive foot traffic in those areas made their pleas for assistance more likely to be profitable. Luke and Matthew describe the location of the miracle differently; Luke says it took place as Jesus and the disciples “drew nigh” to Jericho, and Matthew says it was “as they departed” from Jericho. This seeming contradiction may be related to the fact that there were two Jerichos: Old Jericho and New Jericho. Possibly the healing took place between the two locations. Matthew also describes two blind men being healed, so it may be that one healing took place

near Old Jericho and the other by New Jericho. Mark is the only writer who identifies the blind beggar as Bartimaeus.

The conversion of Zacchaeus (Luke 19:1-10) is recorded only in Luke. This event also took place near Jericho, which was a prosperous trade city during the time of Christ. It is located in the Jordan valley, about seventeen miles from Jerusalem. The sycamore tree which Zacchaeus climbed to see Jesus may have been a type of fig tree with leaves like a mulberry, which has low, horizontal limbs and thick foliage.

Tax collectors were regarded with hatred and disdain in the time of Christ. The Romans levied heavy taxes upon the people they conquered, and Jewish citizens who worked for Rome in overseeing the collection were considered traitors by their fellow Jews. Added to that, it was well known that tax collectors often used their position of authority to extort the people, demanding payment far beyond Rome's requirements, and then pocketing the extra.

Zacchaeus' purpose to restore fourfold possibly was based on Exodus 22:1, which says that a man who stole a sheep and slaughtered or sold it must pay the owner back with four sheep. However, fourfold restitution was not required by Jesus—Zacchaeus' offer was entirely voluntary. As a further demonstration of his changed heart, he purposed to give away half of his wealth to the poor.

In verses 11-27 of chapter 19, Jesus gave the parable of the ten servants. The reason for the parable is stated in verse 11: Jesus recognized that His disciples and followers mistakenly believed that He would shortly set up His kingdom.

The pounds mentioned in this parable represented a very small amount of money in the currency of that era. The instruction given by the nobleman to his ten servants was to "occupy till I come" (verse 13). The word translated *occupy* literally means "gain by trading." The nobleman apparently had a two-fold goal: he wanted his servants to increase his wealth, and he intended to determine by this method their fitness to assume positions of responsibility in his affairs.

The attitude of the servant who failed in his duty is evidenced by his disrespectful reference to the nobleman as an "austere man" (verse 21). The word translated *austere* means "harsh, oppressive, or severe." The servant also implied that his master was dishonest, saying, "Thou takest up that which thou layedst not down, and reapest that thou didst not sow." The unfaithful servant was punished because of disobedience and unfulfilled stewardship.

AMPLIFIED OUTLINE

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- VI. The instruction of the Son of Man
 - D. Instructions concerning the Kingdom of God
 - 3. Instructions concerning the coming of the Kingdom

- e. Further instructions for the twelve (18:31—19:27)
 - (1) Concerning His passion (18:31-35)
 - (2) Concerning faith (18:36-43)
 - (3) Concerning His goals (19:1-10)
 - (4) Concerning their duty (19:11-27)

A CLOSER LOOK

1. Why did the people on the road to Jericho complain when Jesus said that He was going to Zacchaeus' house?

2. Several principles regarding salvation are brought out in the account of Zacchaeus' conversion. What is one of them?

3. Consider the resources and talents the Master has entrusted to you. What steps can you take to further utilize them for the furtherance of His kingdom?

CONCLUSION

Zacchaeus' encounter with Jesus Christ provides an illustration of the fact that genuine conversion creates within the heart a desire to make restitution.

NOTES



DEVOTIONAL FOCUS

“And as he went, they spread their clothes in the way. And when he was come nigh, even now at the descent of the mount of Olives, the whole multitude of the disciples began to rejoice and praise God with a loud voice for all the mighty works that they had seen; Saying, Blessed be the King that cometh in the name of the Lord: peace in heaven, and glory in the highest.” (Luke 19:36-38)

The annual Grand Floral Parade—a colorful, crowd-packed, flower-bedecked summer tradition in the city of Portland, Oregon—is an unforgettable part of my childhood memories. On the appointed Saturday morning in June, my parents would pack a picnic lunch, gather up folding chairs, snacks, and sunscreen, and take my siblings and me downtown to our favorite parade-viewing location near the end of the Burnside Bridge. There we would join the throng vying for a front-row spot and a clear view. The parade draws thousands of cheering viewers of every age, who gather along a four-mile route that winds through the heart of the city and across the river. I was always excited to be one of the throng.

Each year somewhere in this popular annual procession, a car carrying the Grand Marshal comes along. The privilege of being Grand Marshal traditionally is bestowed on a person who deserves recognition as a community leader or cultural hero. Through the years of Rose Festival history, the honor has been accorded to an Olympic gold medal swimmer, an Apollo 13 astronaut, various recording and TV stars, the conductor of the Oregon Symphony, an Indy race car driver, heroic police officers, a major league baseball player, and the governor of the State of Oregon. However, as a kid, I rarely knew much about the Grand Marshal or why that particular individual was being honored.

I suppose there were children in the crowds that lined the way as Jesus rode into Jerusalem on a donkey, an incident described in today’s text. Like all kids at a parade, no doubt the young ones did their best to work their way through the people to get a clear view. Though they may not have known much about Jesus or why everyone was so excited as He rode by, I can picture them joining enthusiastically in the cries of “Hosanna!” I am sure they waved their branches with gusto and enthusiasm as those around them spread garments before Jesus and praised God together.

The fact is, very few of those present that day truly grasped the importance of the One being honored

in that humble procession. Even the adults in the crowd who joyously were acclaiming Jesus had the wrong idea about Him. They were thrilled that their long-prophesied King had come, and excited because they anticipated that shortly He would overcome their Roman oppressors and restore their nation to its former glory.

However, the cheers and shouts of adulation soon faded away. The joy and euphoria vanished. In fact, it may be that some of the very people who had cried “Hosanna” turned against Jesus when they realized that He was not going to fulfill their hopes for national restoration. They did not understand that Jesus was establishing a much greater and more permanent kingdom than anything they could imagine—His eternal Kingdom!

In our day, too, few really understand who Jesus is and the significance of the Kingdom He is building. He is God the Son, who came from Heaven for us! He traveled down that road to Jerusalem, knowing full well that His journey would end in His sacrificial death for the sins of the world. Let us be among those who honor the One who truly deserves recognition and heartfelt praise!

BACKGROUND

Today’s text in Luke 19 covers three significant events which occurred during the final days before Jesus’ crucifixion: His triumphal entry into Jerusalem on a donkey (verses 28-40); His weeping over the city of Jerusalem (verses 41-44); and His cleansing of the Temple for the second time (verses 45-48).

Not long before Jesus’ ride into Jerusalem, He had raised Lazarus from the dead. Since Lazarus lived in Bethany, which was located on the eastern slope of the Mount of Olives less than two miles from Jerusalem, it is probable that most of the people in the area had heard of this amazing miracle. Because the Passover was less than a week away, there were large numbers of travelers who also could have heard of the event. Very likely, these groups of people were among those rejoicing as Jesus entered into the city.

The fact that Jesus rode on a donkey was significant; this specific detail regarding the Messiah had been foretold in Zechariah 9:9, a prophecy written over five hundred years earlier.

The view that Jesus would have seen as He approached Jerusalem (verse 41) was quite spectacular, the great wall of the city encompassing the beautiful Temple, and the palaces and gardens of wealthy Jewish residents. However, Jesus looked beyond all of

the scenic surroundings, and wept regarding the calamities He knew would occur at that very spot.

In Leviticus 26:31, God had warned Israel what would happen if they failed to obey Him. As Jesus approached Jerusalem, He foretold that enemies would encompass the city and destroy it (verses 43-44). This prophecy began to be fulfilled in A.D. 66, when the Jews revolted against the Roman yoke. The Romans responded by plundering Jerusalem and executing six thousand Jews, prompting a full-scale rebellion. After a lull in military operations because of turmoil in Rome, in A.D. 70 the Roman general Titus moved against the rebels in Jerusalem. A seven-month siege ensued before Jerusalem fell, and the city was completely destroyed.

Only John records Christ's first cleansing of the Temple (John 2:13-17), an event which took place near the start of Jesus' ministry. Matthew, Mark, and Luke all describe the similar event recorded in today's text (verses 45-46), which took place during Christ's final week before His crucifixion.

AMPLIFIED OUTLINE

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VII. The passion of the Son of Man

- A. The presentation of the Son of Man (19:28-48)
 - 1. The entrance into Jerusalem (19:28-41)
 - a. The preparation (19:28-35)
 - b. The procession (19:36)
 - c. The proclamations (19:37-39)
 - d. The prejudice (19:40-41)
 - 2. The distress for Jerusalem (19:42-44)
 - 3. The entrance into the Temple (19:45-48)
 - a. The cleansing of the Temple (19:45-46)
 - b. The teaching in the Temple (19:47-48)

A CLOSER LOOK

1. What instructions did Jesus give two of His disciples just prior to His entry into Jerusalem?

2. Why do you think the owner of the colt allowed the disciples to take the animal that Jesus rode upon?

3. How can we show Jesus honor in our daily actions?

CONCLUSION

Jesus journeyed into Jerusalem knowing that although the crowds momentarily acclaimed Him, His journey would end at Calvary. We should honor the One who truly deserves our praise for His great sacrifice for mankind!

NOTES



DEVOTIONAL FOCUS

“And it came to pass, that on one of those days, as he taught the people in the temple, and preached the gospel, the chief priests and the scribes came upon him with the elders, And spake unto him, saying, Tell us, by what authority doest thou these things? or who is he that gave thee this authority?” (Luke 20:1-2)

When my sister-in-law’s children were young, she provided in-home childcare for other youngsters as well. One day, the mother of one of the children came to pick up her son. However, Billy was playing with my nephew and did not want to leave, so he ignored his mother when she said it was time to go. She summoned him the second time, saying in a firmer tone, “Billy, you need to come *now*.” Still not inclined to comply, he defiantly responded, “You aren’t the boss of me!” There was a moment of absolute silence, and then his mother asked in a slow and measured tone, “What . . . did . . . you . . . say?” Billy, realizing his error, nervously responded, “No, I mean you and dad, you’re *both* the boss of me.”

I am not sure if Billy’s about-face got him out of trouble, but his quickly-modified reply illustrates that there is an appropriate response to people with authority, and also responses that are not appropriate. Authority is a concept accepted by most people, because without it, society would be chaotic. Some individuals, however, choose to reject authority. They typically pay a price: the world’s prisons are full of such rebels.

In today’s focus verse, the priests and scribes challenged Jesus’ authority as the divine Son of God by trying to entrap Him. If Jesus had responded to their question about where His authority came from by asserting it was from God, they would have accused Him of blasphemy. However, His response was to ask them a question which He knew they would not answer for political reasons. Since they would not respond to His query, according to tradition He was under no obligation to answer theirs.

Then Jesus told the parable of the vineyard, in which the husbandmen who had the responsibility of caring for the vineyard failed to provide the owner with a return on his investment. Obviously, the husbandmen had rejected the owner’s authority, and viewed the vineyard as theirs. The priests and scribes were furious when they heard this parable. They knew Jesus was pointing out their failure to care properly

for the spiritual welfare of Israel, and their rejection of His authority as the long-awaited Messiah.

The priests and scribes of Jesus’ day are not the only ones to whom this parable relates. In society today, many challenge Jesus’ authority. The deity of Christ and the authority of His teachings are under continual onslaught from many, including atheistic college professors, anti-religious movie producers, ungodly authors, and immoral cultural activists. However, even widespread opposition does not change the facts.

The deity of Christ is the foundation of our faith. Rejection of the authority of Jesus Christ dismisses the fact that all mankind is born into sin, that there is an eternal penalty for sin, and that we have a responsibility toward God. In fact, every Biblical principle crumbles if Jesus is not God’s Son, come to earth to give His life for the salvation of mankind.

Let us honor and respect the authority of Jesus, the Son of God. He is worthy!

BACKGROUND

Luke paid great attention to detail, including dates and events that happened throughout the life of Christ, so today’s text in Luke chapter 20 gives another reliable glimpse into the opposition of Jewish religious leaders to Jesus’ ministry. This portion of Scripture records three occasions in which the chief priests and the scribes challenged His authority. First, we read of their question regarding the source of His authority, to which Jesus responded with His own question and the parable of the wicked husbandmen (verses 1-19). Next, they queried Him about paying taxes (verses 20-26). Finally, they asked questions about the resurrection (verses 27-47).

With respect to the parable of the vineyard and husbandmen, it was customary in Jesus’ day for property owners to have tenant farmers work their land. Absentee landlords were common, and in such cases, payments to the land owner were made at harvest time. Typically the relationship between the tenants and owners was good, and the tenants were grateful for the work.

Jesus’ mention of the “stone which the builders rejected” (verse 17) was a quote from Psalm 118:22. He was pointing out to the religious leaders that their rejection of Him was a fulfillment of prophecy. While Jesus’ words might have been obscure to some who were listening, the chief priests and scribes would have had no trouble in recognizing that Jesus was referring to them.

The religious leaders' question in verse 22 was designed to entrap Jesus. If He had responded that they should pay taxes, they assumed Jesus' hearers would turn against Him because of their hatred of the Roman oppressors. If He responded that they need not pay taxes, the religious leaders could turn Him in as a traitor to Rome. However, once again Jesus outwitted them by His response.

The Sadducees who questioned Jesus regarding the resurrection did not believe in resurrection, angels, or spirits (see Acts 23:8). Again, the motive of their question was to entrap Jesus. However, Jesus sidestepped their efforts by basing his answer on the writings of Moses, the only author of ancient writings that the Sadducees acknowledged as an authoritative source.

AMPLIFIED OUTLINE

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VII. The passion of the Son of Man

B. The public ministry of the Son of Man concluded

1. The opposition of the priests (20:1-26)
 - a. Over authority (20:1-19)
 - (1) The question of authority (20:1-2)
 - (2) Jesus' reply: a silencing question (20:3-8)
 - (3) The parable of His rejection and the promise of His triumph (20:9-19)
 - b. Over tribute (20:20-26)
 - (1) The question of taxes (20:20-22)
 - (2) Jesus' reply (20:23-26)
2. The opposition of the Sadducees (20:27-38)
 - a. The question (20:27-33)
 - b. The reply (20:34-38)
3. The opposition of the scribes
 - a. Their statement (20:39-40)
 - b. Jesus' question (20:41-44)
 - c. Jesus' condemnation of the scribes (20:45-47)

A CLOSER LOOK

1. What was the response of the chief priests and scribes to the question Jesus asked them in verse 4?

2. Which verse in the parable given in Luke 20:9-16 do you think reveals the most about the motives and character of the Pharisees?

3. What are some ways we can show compliance with God's authority?

CONCLUSION

Like the religious leaders of Jesus' time, many today reject Christ's authority. However, we want to be among those who acknowledge, respect, and obey Him.

NOTES



DEVOTIONAL FOCUS

“Watch ye therefore, and pray always, that ye may be accounted worthy to escape all these things that shall come to pass, and to stand before the Son of man.” (Luke 21:36)

The largest and most catastrophic avalanche in history occurred on May 31, 1970, when an earthquake off the coast of Peru caused a large section of the north slope of Mount Huascarán to collapse. The avalanche—a crushing mass of roughly eighty million cubic feet of ice, mud, and rock, about a half-mile wide and a mile long—moved at a speed of one hundred miles per hour. The flow swept downhill for nearly eleven miles, burying the towns of Yungay and Ranrahirca in up to three hundred feet of ice and debris.

Sadly, a warning that just such a deadly event was imminent had been given eight years earlier. In 1962, climbers David Bernays and Charles Sawyer were concluding a climbing expedition through the Cordillera Blanca mountain range in Peru when they decided to investigate a glacier known only as “Glacier 511,” which was thought to have been the source of an earlier avalanche. They discovered that the glacier was precariously unstable. They quickly ended their expedition in order to warn Peruvian authorities, but their assessment was rejected out of a fear that tourism dollars would be lost if the avalanche potential was known. Eight years later, the worst ice, mud, and rockslide in history buried over 25,000 people.

In today’s text, Jesus told His followers of the approaching destruction of Jerusalem, of His Second Coming, and of several distinct signs that would precede these events. He instructed His disciples to watch for these signs and pray continually; otherwise, they could be caught off guard and suffer destruction.

The words of our focus verse were not just for the disciples who walked with Jesus; they are for us as well. Many today believe in God and have heard of His Second Coming, but how many are truly watching for Christ’s return and preparing themselves spiritually? Tragically, it seems that most people, like the Peruvian authorities, are choosing to ignore the warning. Just as it was not enough to simply be aware of the indicators that a massive avalanche could occur, knowledge of the Lord’s second coming will not be enough to ensure readiness for that event. It takes action! To watch for the Lord’s return is to endeavor daily to live our lives in a way that pleases Him, to

maintain an active prayer life, and to be a witness to those around us.

Today, let us take notice of the signs of the times that surround us, and purpose in our hearts to be ready for the Lord’s return. Jesus is coming soon! Are you watching?

BACKGROUND

Today’s text opens with a brief account of a widow putting two small coins into the treasury. “Mites” here probably refers to prutahs, the smallest coins used by the Jews. In Mark’s account of this story (Mark 12:41-44), the author pointed out that two mites equal one “farthing,” or quadrans, which was the smallest Roman copper coin. In all, the widow’s contribution may have equated to about six minutes of work at an average rate of pay, but because it was all she had, this tiny sum was more valuable to Jesus than any of the contributions of the rich men. In fact, in the original Greek, Mark’s account indicates that even the rich men may have been putting prutahs into the treasury—a large quantity of small coins, as opposed to a large sum of money.

The remainder of chapter 21 includes Jesus’ discourse on the events that were to come. He foretold two distinct events—the destruction of Jerusalem, and His second coming. Jesus transitioned so seamlessly between one event and the other that it can be challenging to ascertain which signs referred to which event, perhaps by design. History shows that some of His prophecies already have come to pass; others are yet to be fulfilled.

Perhaps the most explicit prophecy Jesus made regarding the destruction of Jerusalem is found at the beginning of His discourse. After the people commented on the “goodly stones and gifts” of the Temple, Jesus said there would come a day when “there shall not be left one stone upon another, that shall not be thrown down” (verse 6). According to the ancient historian Flavius Josephus, the stones which Jesus referred to were as much as forty cubits long and ten cubits high, or about sixty feet long by fifteen feet high. In spite of their immense size, history confirms the accuracy of Jesus’ prophecy. In A.D. 70, Jerusalem was destroyed by the Romans, led by then-general (and later, emperor) Titus. In fact, the Romans did not just destroy the city—they dug up its foundation (fulfilling the prophecy of Micah 3:12 that the city would be “plowed as a field”). Historical records indicate that Jerusalem was so thoroughly destroyed that, with the exception of a few towers and a

part of the wall, there was not enough left of the city to indicate that anyone had ever lived there. In the midst of this destruction, the Temple was completely leveled, just as Jesus had foretold.

In verses 20-24, Jesus spoke of a time when Jerusalem would be “compassed with armies,” and instructed His followers to “flee to the mountains.” Prior to the destruction of Jerusalem by Titus, Syrian president Cestius Gallus laid siege to the city in A.D. 66. He appeared to be in position to conquer the city, but to the surprise of all, he ended the siege and left. Vespasian was set to take the place of Cestius Gallus, but several factors (including the death of Nero) delayed his confirmation in the empire and the appointment of his son, Titus, to lead the Judean forces. It was during this unique window of opportunity that the Christians in Jerusalem followed Jesus’ instructions to flee, thereby saving their lives before the continued attack and eventual destruction of the city.

In verses 25-28, Luke recorded the signs given by Jesus that related to His second coming. While these were also recorded by the other synoptic Gospel writers (Matthew and Mark), Luke includes two prophetic details not mentioned in those other accounts: the fact that men’s hearts would fail them for fear, and that the “powers of heaven” would be shaken (verse 26).

In Jesus’ parable of the fig tree (verses 29-33), the fig tree is generally thought to represent Israel, whose revival will be an indicator of coming events. While this parable perhaps alluded to the coming destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70, Bible scholars agree that it may also have a broader scope as a sign of Christ’s return to earth and the setting up of His kingdom.

The chapter concludes with Jesus’ exhortation regarding the necessity of watchfulness and prayer as the key to constant readiness for His return.

AMPLIFIED OUTLINE

Hannah’s Bible Outlines
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VII. The passion of the Son of Man

- B. The public ministry of the Son of Man concluded
 - 3. The opposition of the scribes
 - d. The widow’s contrast to the scribes (21:1-4)
 - 4. The destruction of Jerusalem predicted (21:5-36)
 - a. The occasion (21:5-7)
 - b. The discourse (21:8-27)
 - c. The exhortations (21:28-36)
 - 5. The conclusion of Christ’s public ministry (21:37-38)

A CLOSER LOOK

1. In verse 8, what did Jesus instruct His followers to “take heed” against?

2. What is the significance of the fact that Jesus gave great detail about events which had not yet occurred?

3. Since we cannot physically watch the sky for Jesus’ return, what are some practical ways we can watch for His Second Coming?

CONCLUSION

As the world around us neglects the warnings of Christ, let us renew our commitment to be ready for His return!

NOTES



DEVOTIONAL FOCUS

“And he took bread, and gave thanks, and brake it, and gave unto them, saying, This is my body which is given for you: this do in remembrance of me. Likewise also the cup after supper, saying, This cup is the new testament in my blood, which is shed for you.” (Luke 22:19-20)

In April of 1968, I was an assistant to the chaplain on board a troop ship heading to the combat zone in Vietnam. The Jewish Passover would occur during the twenty-one days we were en route across the Pacific, and some of the Jewish military personnel on board expressed their desire to hold a Seder—a ritual feast that marks the beginning of the Passover. Permission was granted, and I volunteered to assist in the activity because I was interested in learning more about how the Jewish people observed this commonly celebrated religious ritual.

Although I was not allowed in the room during the Seder, I could hear and see through several windows. Part of the observance involves rehearsing how God fulfilled His promises of deliverance and brought the Israelites out of bondage in Egypt. A book whose title *The Haggadah* literally means “the telling,” is traditionally used to recount highlights of the Exodus. Four cups are passed around, representing the four expressions of deliverance promised by God in Exodus 6:6-7: “I will bring you out,” “I will deliver,” “I will redeem,” and “I will take.” Symbolic foods are placed on the Seder plate and shared.

As I watched and listened, I remembered that on the night before Jesus’ crucifixion, the Lord expressed His desire to celebrate a final Passover meal with His disciples. The Seder is generally performed by a community or multiple generations of a family, and at that Last Supper with His disciples, Jesus truly was with His closest earthly companions. In addition to sharing a precious time of communion with them, Jesus knew the religious significance that evening would have for His followers in the coming centuries.

My thoughts went back to the many ordinance services I had attended through the years—special times when believers are encouraged to reflect on Jesus’ sacrificial death on Calvary for man’s deliverance from sin. Today’s focus verse relates that at the conclusion of the Passover meal with His disciples, Jesus “took bread, and gave thanks, and brake it, and gave unto them, saying, This is my body which is given for you: this do in remembrance of me. Likewise also the cup

after supper, saying, This cup is the new testament in my blood, which is shed for you.” Later, this deliberate, ceremonial distribution of bread and the fruit of the vine was to become one of the greatest expressions of faith and adherence to the doctrines of Christianity. That is because the death and resurrection of Christ is the bedrock of the Christian faith. When Jesus died on the Cross, His Body was broken and His Blood was poured out; this was the price He paid for mankind’s redemption.

While the Jewish Passover looks back to the Israelites’ deliverance from physical bondage, the Lord’s Supper looks back to Christ’s death which made possible our deliverance from spiritual bondage. How vital it is that Christians periodically take time to ponder His great sacrifice for us! Partaking of the Lord’s Supper offers us that opportunity. Let us take advantage of the opportunities we have to observe this ordinance with God’s people, and as we receive the symbolic emblems, commemorate together the time when God gave His life for us.

BACKGROUND

In this portion of text, Luke continues the narrative of events leading up to Christ’s trial and crucifixion, describing Judas’ plot to betray Jesus (verses 1-6), Jesus’ Last Supper with His disciples (verses 7-30), His foretelling of Peter’s denial (verses 31-34), and His prediction of opposition toward His disciples (verses 35-38).

During the Passover season, Jewish males over the age of twelve were required to gather in Jerusalem for the seven-day “feast of unleavened bread” (verse 1) and to commemorate the great deliverance from Egypt which had taken place centuries earlier. Before the Passover meal, homes were cleansed of leaven from top to bottom, and the symbolic food was prepared with care. Lamb was served at the Passover feast in memory of the lamb slain in each Jewish household on the night before the Exodus (see Exodus chapter 12). It was a reminder that the blood of a lamb was applied to the door posts of homes to ensure that the firstborn would be spared when the Lord passed through the land bringing death to the Egyptians.

Jesus’ comment, “I will not drink of the fruit of the vine, until the kingdom of God shall come” (verse 18), was a figurative way of stating that before the next Passover, He would die, be resurrected, and the descent of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost would occur, ushering in a new and glorious era of the Kingdom of God.

During this final sacred Passover feast before Jesus' death, the disciples argued among themselves who would have the highest position of authority in Christ's kingdom (verse 24). In most societies of that era, the person of highest rank sat to the right of the host and the next highest on the left. The succession of position would continue to alternate between right and left until everyone was seated.

In verse 25, Jesus alluded to the custom of Gentile rulers referring to themselves as "benefactors" in an effort to gain a good reputation based on acts of public generosity. Often, any beneficence was inspired by political aspirations or self-interest rather than genuine concern for the needy. Jesus wanted His followers to know that in Christ's kingdom, greatness would be more than position or acclaim; humble service would be the mark of distinction.

Jesus foretold Peter's denial in verse 31, indicating that Satan would attempt to "sift you as wheat." This metaphor of sifting to remove chaff or foreign particles from wheat would have been easy for Peter to picture. Satan "sifts" by presenting temptation to remove Christ's followers from His "wheat." He wanted to blow Peter away like worthless chaff, but Christ indicated that He had prayed for Peter. He knew that although Peter would fail Him, he would be wiser and stronger because of the experience, and then would be able to help other brethren who would also have to endure temptation.

AMPLIFIED OUTLINE

Hannah's Bible Outlines
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- VII. The passion of the Son of Man
 - C. The preparation of the death of the Son of Man
 - 1. The betrayal of the Son of Man (22:1-6)
 - a. The desire of the leaders (22:1-2)
 - b. The betrayal by Judas (22:3-4)
 - c. The plot of Judas and the leaders (22:5-6)
 - 2. The observance the Passover meal (22:7-38)
 - a. The preparations (22:7-13)
 - b. The Passover meal (22:14-18)
 - c. The institution of the Lord's Supper (22:19-20)
 - d. The announcement of His betrayer (22:21-23)
 - e. The strife among the disciples (22:24-30)
 - f. The prediction of Peter's denial (22:31-35)
 - g. The prediction of opposition (22:36-38)

A CLOSER LOOK

1. Who did Judas confer with regarding his plot to betray Jesus?

2. According to verse 24, the disciples disputed among themselves regarding "which of them should be accounted the greatest." Why is a desire for greatness or acclaim a danger for Christians?

3. What steps can we take to make sure we regularly reflect upon the price Christ paid for our salvation?

CONCLUSION

The Passover was celebrated to remind the Jews of their great deliverance from Egypt; we observe the Lord's Supper in grateful remembrance of our deliverance from sin.

NOTES



DEVOTIONAL FOCUS

“And when he was at the place, he said unto them, Pray that ye enter not into temptation.” (Luke 22:40)

One afternoon I hurried into a local shopping center to buy a decorative basket as a gift for a friend. Finding the perfect basket took longer than I had hoped, but I finally discovered just what I had in mind stashed behind several smaller baskets. Putting it into my shopping cart, I quickly picked up a few grocery items and went to the checkout where the cashier rang up my items. As I paid, it flitted through my mind that the total was less than I had expected, but I was in a hurry so I brushed the thought aside.

While pushing my cart toward the door, though, God’s quiet voice spoke to my heart, “Check your receipt.” I stopped, pulled out my receipt, and immediately saw that the basket wasn’t on it. For a moment, I contemplated continuing on toward the door. After all, the mistake wasn’t my fault and going back would take extra time. Also, I was low on cash that month so maybe the clerk’s omission was a blessing in disguise!

The temptation to leave without pointing out the error was there, but suddenly a feeling of heaviness came over me. How could I even consider leaving without paying? I went back to the clerk who had just finished serving another customer, pointed out that the basket had not been rung up, and told her I wanted to pay for it. Her whole face lit up and she thanked me repeatedly for coming back. She even gave me an additional store discount for being honest!

The Scriptures tell us that we all face temptations. Even as Christians, they will come our way. Some will be significant; others at first glance may seem to be inconsequential. However, a temptation to do wrong is *never* inconsequential. We must resist any suggestion of the enemy to do what we know in our hearts is not right.

God has provided a way by which we are to overcome temptation and it is not complicated or hard to do. In our focus verse, Christ instructed His disciples, “Pray that ye enter not into temptation.” Simply pray! Prayer is vital to maintaining a healthy walk with God; otherwise, temptation will subtly overtake us in one way or another. Prayer is how we maintain discernment regarding what is right and wrong. Prayer is how we keep the channel clear between us and God so His Spirit can direct us. And prayer is how we gain strength to do what is right even when it is not easy or

convenient, because God’s strength will shore up our defenses and help us defeat Satan’s power.

Let’s purpose to avail ourselves of the privilege of prayer so that when temptations come, we can be victorious!

BACKGROUND

This portion of Luke 22 covers Jesus’ prayer in the Garden (verses 39-46), His betrayal by Judas and the arrest (verses 47-53), and Peter’s threefold denial and recognition of his failure (verses 54-62).

In a grove of olive trees near the Mount of Olives, Jesus spent His final hours before His arrest in prayer to the Father. (Matthew 26:36 and Mark 14:32 give the name of the Garden as *Gethsemane*, which means “oil-press.”) Jesus’ prayer culminated in the words, “Father, if thou be willing, remove this cup from me: nevertheless not my will, but thine, be done” (Luke 22:42). The “cup” referred to the anguish Jesus would soon go through. While the physical suffering He faced would be terrible, the deepest agony was the separation from His Father which He would have to endure in order to make atonement for the sins of all people. The One who knew no sin would be “made sin,” or a sin offering, for mankind (see 2 Corinthians 5:21).

Judas betrayed Jesus with a kiss (verses 47-48). This form of salutation was traditional in that era, and was used as a greeting, a farewell, and a sign of hospitality. The ritual also could demonstrate homage or submission, and it may have been this irony that prompted Jesus’ question to Judas, “Betrayest thou the Son of man with a kiss?”

After the arrest in the Garden, Jesus immediately was taken to the house of Caiaphas, the high priest, although it was in the middle of the night. Some Bible scholars suggest that the trial took place at the high priest’s house to ensure secrecy. Caiaphas served as high priest from A.D. 18-36, and was known as a Roman puppet who was expert in maneuvering the political scene. A son-in-law of Annas (a former high priest), Caiaphas continued to have a great deal of influence even after his tenure in office.

Only Luke records the fact that Jesus turned and looked at Peter after his third denial of his Lord and Master. The Gospel of John relates that Jesus was examined by Annas prior to being taken to His trial before Caiaphas and the religious leaders (see John 18:24). It may have been during this change of location that the meaningful glance between Jesus and Peter took place.

The men who guarded Jesus—likely the Temple guards who had arrested Him earlier—were the ones who taunted Jesus by blindfolding Him, hitting Him, and then commanding Him to “prophesy” (or disclose) who had struck Him.

AMPLIFIED OUTLINE

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VII. The passion of the Son of Man

- C. The preparation of the death of the Son of Man
 - 3. The prayer in the garden (22:39-46)
- D. The arrest and trial of the Son of Man
 - 1. The arrest of the Son of Man (22:47-53)
 - a. Judas' betrayal (22:47-48)
 - b. Peter's misunderstanding (22:49-51)
 - c. Jesus' comment (22:52-53)
 - 2. The denial of Peter (22:54-62)
 - 3. The mistreatment of Jesus (22:63-65)

A CLOSER LOOK

1. How did Jesus respond during His arrest when one of the disciples drew his sword and cut off the ear of a servant of the high priest?

2. What do you think Peter was afraid would happen to him if he acknowledged knowing Jesus?

3. What are some steps we can take to keep from succumbing to temptations the devil puts into our pathways?

CONCLUSION

Circumstances and situations in life may bring challenges in our Christian walk, but through prayer we can overcome every temptation of the enemy of our souls.

NOTES



DEVOTIONAL FOCUS

“And the whole multitude of them arose, and led him unto Pilate. And they began to accuse him, saying, We found this fellow perverting the nation, and forbidding to give tribute to Caesar, saying that he himself is Christ a King.” (Luke 23:1-2)

Eight generations up in my family tree is the name of Mary Towne Easty, who was convicted of witchcraft in colonial Massachusetts during the Salem witch trials of 1692. According to our family information, Mary was a kind and godly woman. She was married to Isaac Easty, a well-to-do farmer, and they had seven living children at the time she was accused.

The charges against her shocked the village. Mary was not a social outcast or an outspoken woman who might have offended the townspeople. Perhaps the accusation was inspired by envy—the Eastys owned a valuable farm near Salem—or she may have become a target after the conviction of her sister, Rebecca Nurse. Another sister, Sarah Cloyce, was also among those accused of being in collusion with the devil. None of the three were given an opportunity to defend themselves against the false charges, nor were they allowed any legal counsel to speak on their behalf.

The young women who were Mary’s accusers insisted that her specter-like form had appeared by their bedsides and attempted to strangle them, and that their “mouths were stopt [stopped]” and they could not move unless she allowed it. Mary was calm and respectful during her trial, but the mass hysteria sweeping the region prevailed. On September 9, Mary Easty was condemned of witchcraft despite her plea: “I am clear of this sin.”

Before her execution, Mary wrote a letter to the judges saying, “I petition your honors not for my own life, for I know I must die, and my appointed time is set . . . but if it be possible, [see] that no more blood be shed.” Her letter raised sympathy and caused doubt regarding her sentence, but it did not prevent her execution. Records show that she went peacefully to her death on September 22, 1692, with composure no doubt based on the fact that she was innocent and right with God. (In 1711, her false conviction was overturned and her descendants were given twenty pounds in compensation.)

We do not know why God permitted the false accusations and injustice to prevail in the trial of Mary Easty, but we *do* know why God permitted the false accusations and injustice to prevail in the trial of Jesus

Christ. The most infamous legal proceeding in history, recorded in today’s text, occurred so that God’s plan for the salvation of mankind could be fulfilled. The Innocent One was declared guilty not only in one court, but three: before the leaders of Jewish religious law (the Sanhedrin), in the court of Jewish secular law represented by Herod, and finally, in appearances before the Roman ruler, Pilate. In each case, the charges brought against Jesus were false. And in each case, He was condemned in spite of His innocence.

Reading of the wrongful accusations and cruel treatment that our Savior was subjected to brings grief to our hearts, but how grateful we are that He willingly endured it all for our salvation. What a price He paid that we might spend eternity with Him! And what a debt of gratitude we owe to Him!

BACKGROUND

Today’s text gives the account of Jesus’ trial, which took place in three locations.

Luke 22:66-71 describes Jesus being brought before the Sanhedrin. The term *Sanhedrin* is from a Greek word meaning “assembly” or “council.” During the time of Christ, the Sanhedrin was comprised of seventy men, plus the high priest, who served as its president. The members were drawn from among the chief priests, scribes, and elders of the tribes. The Sanhedrin only had authority over the province of Judea, but it had its own police force and could arrest and try people on both criminal and civil charges. In Jesus’ trial, the examination of Jesus began with an appearance before Annas, a former high priest who seemingly still had a great deal of power (see John 18:13-24). This was followed by an examination before Caiaphas, the ruling high priest (Matthew 26:57-68), and then by a formal session before the entire Sanhedrin (described in this portion of our text). There the decision was made to turn Jesus over to the Roman authorities.

Luke 23:1-5 gives the account of Jesus’ first appearance before Pilate, who was the Roman prefect (or governor) of Judea from A.D. 26–36, and was in Jerusalem for the Passover feast. Jesus had been accused of blasphemy before the Sanhedrin, but that was not a crime under Roman law. For that reason, new charges were invented to present before the Roman authority: that Jesus was guilty of inciting revolution against Rome, urging the people not to pay taxes, and claiming to be king of the Jews. (Although the third accusation was true, the implication was of treasonous rebellion.) Pilate could find no evidence

that proved Jesus was a threat to Roman jurisdiction. However, as the Roman ruler knew, he could lose his position if the Jewish people revolted; that may have been why he decided to shift the responsibility of a decision regarding Jesus to Herod.

Verses 6-12 describe Jesus being brought before Herod. Herod Antipas (son of the Herod who ordered all the male babies killed at the time of Jesus' birth) ruled over Galilee and Perea; his title was *tetrarch* which means "ruler of a quarter." Historically, he is known for the construction of Tiberias on the western shore of the Sea of Galilee. Although a wicked and contemptible man (he was the king responsible for the death of John the Baptist), Herod was curious about Jesus. However, Jesus made no response to Herod's questioning, so Herod sent Him back to Pilate. Verse 12 may indicate that Pilate's deference to Herod in sending Jesus to him resulted in the mending of a breach that had existed between the two rulers.

The conclusion of today's text, verses 13-25, details Jesus' second and final appearance before Pilate. Once again, Pilate could find no fault in Jesus. In verse 15, he referenced that Herod had failed to condemn Him, perhaps as a support for his own reluctance to condemn one who had done nothing worthy of death. In a final attempt to appease the people (they threatened to report him to Caesar, according to John 19:12), Pilate offered to release Jesus in accordance with the custom of freeing one prisoner annually at Passover. However, the crowd clamored for the release of Barabbas—a man guilty of murder and insurrection—and insisted upon the crucifixion of Jesus. At last Pilate succumbed to the demands of the mob, and sentenced Jesus to death.

AMPLIFIED OUTLINE

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- VII. The passion of the Son of Man
 - D. The arrest and trial of the Son of Man
 - 4. The trials of the Son of Man (22:66—23:25)
 - a. Before the Sanhedrin (22:66-71)
 - (1) The question and reply (22:66-69)
 - (2) The charge (22:70-71)
 - b. Before the Romans (23:1-25)
 - (1) Before Pilate (23:1-7)
 - (2) Before Herod (23:8-12)
 - (3) Before Pilate (23:13-25)

A CLOSER LOOK

1. What did Herod do that showed disdain for Jesus?

2. Why do you think the people so quickly turned from hailing Jesus as King (during His triumphal entry into Jerusalem) to demanding His death?

3. Pilate gave in to pressure from the people. How can we best prepare ourselves to stand for what is right, even when we face pressure from secular society to conform?

CONCLUSION

The false accusations and unjust trial of Jesus were all part of God's amazing plan of salvation, which existed before the foundation of the world. How grateful we are that Christ was willing to submit to being condemned for our sins that we might be saved.

NOTES



DEVOTIONAL FOCUS

“And he said unto Jesus, Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom. And Jesus said unto him, Verily I say unto thee, To day shalt thou be with me in paradise.” (Luke 23:42-43)

When my grandfather was alive, I used to pray every night for him to be saved. My parents led me in my nightly prayers when I was a child and Grandpa always was named. As I grew older, I continued entreating my Heavenly Father for him. However, year after year went by and my grandfather remained unsaved.

One day after a Portland camp meeting service, I felt a tremendous burden to pray for Grandpa. For a long time I wept and prayed earnestly at an altar of prayer, unaware that hours had slipped by. At last peace dropped into my heart and I knew God had answered; there was a definite assurance that my grandfather would be saved.

A few years after that prayer meeting, the moment finally came when Grandpa turned to God. Two weeks later, my family was singing hymns around his bedside as he entered into Heaven. Though he had spent almost his entire life in sin, in his last days he repented and God welcomed him with open arms.

In today's text, we read of another end-of-life conversion: that of the thief on the cross. In his final moments, one of the two malefactors crucified next to Jesus turned to Him and cried out, “Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom.” Though in physical agony, he turned to God in faith and Jesus responded, “To day shalt thou be with me in paradise.”

While the thief acknowledged that he had done bad things in his life and deserved his punishment of death, he did not have to straighten out his past before asking for mercy. He did not need a complete understanding of theology, or to grasp why Christ had to die. All he needed was a contrite heart and a belief that Jesus was the Son of God, and Jesus forgave him in an instant of time. What amazing grace!

It is never too late to pray—my grandfather and the thief on the cross are both witnesses to the fact that conversions can happen at the end of one's time on earth. Even if a person has spent an entire lifetime in sin and unbelief, God is willing to forgive. He extends the offer of salvation and eternal life to every individual. A repentant heart and a simple plea for salvation made in faith is all that is required by God.

We should never take God's forgiveness for granted or assume we can neglect our soul's salvation

and come to God on our deathbed. We do not know when our life on earth will be over. However, we should be grateful that anyone—even those who are just moments from death—can come to Jesus and make Heaven their final destination!

BACKGROUND

Today's text covers Jesus' crucifixion, the conversion of the malefactor crucified beside Him, the events surrounding Jesus' death, and His burial.

Simon, the Cyrenian who was compelled to carry Jesus' cross (verse 26), likely was a follower of Christ. Mark wrote that Simon was the father of Alexander and Rufus (see Mark 15:21).

Luke is the only Gospel writer who mentioned the women weeping for Jesus as He was led through the streets to be crucified (verses 27-31). To them, Jesus foretold what would take place in about forty years, when the Romans would destroy the Temple and Jerusalem.

The Romans often divided the clothing of executed criminals among themselves. By casting lots for Jesus' clothes, they were fulfilling the prophecy in Psalm 22:18, which states, “They part my garments among them, and cast lots upon my vesture.”

Greek, Latin, and Hebrew were the three languages in which the sign above Jesus proclaimed Him to be the King of the Jews (verse 38). Greek was the universal language in that day, Latin was the official language of the Roman Empire, and Hebrew was the official language of the Jews. The sign was meant to mock Jesus, and was presented in three languages to ensure that a maximum number of people could read it.

Jesus told the thief who believed in Him that they would meet in paradise. This is one of three times the Bible mentions the word “paradise,” the heavenly destination where the righteous go after death.

The veil (or curtain) being torn from top to bottom (verse 45) was symbolic of what Christ did for mankind when He died. The veil separated the Holy of Holies—a sacred place where only the high priest could enter once a year—from the rest of the Temple. When Jesus died, the barrier keeping mankind from entering into the Holy of Holies was torn apart, signifying that all men could now come directly to God.

Joseph was from Arimathea, a location about twenty miles northwest of Jerusalem. He was a wealthy member of the Jewish Council, the Sanhedrin. Joseph boldly requested the body of Jesus (verse 52), showing a devotion that could have cost him dearly: he risked his career and possibly his life by this act.

The tomb where Jesus' body was placed was likely a man-made cave cut into the limestone hills in the area around Jerusalem.

Joseph and Nicodemus (mentioned in the other Gospels) wrapped Jesus' body in long strips of cloth covered with a sticky, resinous mixture of myrrh and aloes. Nicodemus contributed about seventy pounds of these spices (see John 19:39), an amount so expensive it typically would have been used only for royalty.

AMPLIFIED OUTLINE

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VII. The passion of the Son of Man

D. The arrest and trial of the Son of Man

5. The Crucifixion of the Son of Man (23:26-56)

a. The procession to Calvary (23:26-32)

- (1) Simon of Cyrene (23:26)
- (2) The instruction on the way (23:27-31)
- (3) The two criminals (23:32)

b. The Crucifixion at Calvary (23:33-49)

- (1) The Son of Man on the Cross (23:33-38)
- (2) The repentant thief (23:39-43)
- (3) The accompanying signs (23:44-45)
- (4) The voluntary death (23:46)
- (5) The testimony of the centurion (23:47-49)

c. The entombment near Calvary (23:50-56)

- (1) The ministry of Joseph (23:50-54)
- (2) The ministry of the women (23:55-56)

A CLOSER LOOK

1. What was Jesus' prayer for those who put Him to death?

2. Why do you think Jesus' followers stood afar off during the Crucifixion?

3. What are some ways we can show our gratitude for the great price Jesus paid at Calvary for our salvation?

CONCLUSION

Any person can come to Jesus, regardless of how long he has waited or the evil he has done. Those who pray in repentance and believe will be able to make Heaven their final destination.

NOTES



Luke 24:1-53

DEVOTIONAL FOCUS

“He is not here, but is risen: remember how he spake unto you when he was yet in Galilee, Saying, The Son of man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men, and be crucified, and the third day rise again.” (Luke 24:6-7)

The resurrection of Jesus Christ is the crucial factor in the hope of everlasting life. It is what distinguishes Christianity from every other religion. And God, in His faithfulness, creates object lessons to illustrate this great hope.

Anna, a student from southern Africa, was attending a university in Portland, Oregon, when she experienced one of these object lessons. During her first winter in Portland, the temperatures grew cold, and rain and snow came. She was saddened to look around at many of the trees and plants, and she said to a friend, “They are all dead.” He replied, “Oh no, they will come back again in the spring.” She responded, “You lie!” However, winter passed, and Anna saw for herself that new life sprang up.

Three days after dying on a Roman cross on an afternoon around A.D. 30, Jesus of Nazareth came back to life and emerged from the grave. He was more than a great teacher, an attention-getting revolutionary, or even a man with extraordinary power to perform miracles. He was the divine Son of God, the Messiah, the One whom prophets had foretold throughout the ages, which makes His death on the Cross the most pivotal event in human history. However, Jesus’ time on earth did not end with the grief and darkness of Calvary. He arose, triumphant over death and the grave!

What dies can live again, because Jesus conquered death when He arose. That event, and His post-resurrection appearances to a multitude of witnesses, is the cornerstone of the Gospel for multiple reasons.

- Because of the Resurrection, we know that we serve the one true living God—One who has power over death and the grave.
- Because of the Resurrection, we have proof that God is personally and intimately involved with mankind—that He cares about His creation and made the ultimate sacrifice for our benefit.
- Because of the Resurrection, we have an assurance that one day Jesus will come to earth again, and we too will be raised from the dead to live forever with Christ.
- Because of the Resurrection, we have power and authority to preach the good news of Christ. Like the Apostles of the Early Church, our most important message and the ultimate proof of our beliefs is the fact that Jesus Christ rose from the dead.
- Because of the Resurrection, we understand that God has a purpose for ultimate good in even the most heartbreaking tragedy.
- Because of the Resurrection, we have hope. Not only has death been conquered, but Satan and all his evil power will one day be vanquished. We are assured that ultimate victory will be the Lord’s and that His Kingdom will be triumphant and eternal. And we can be a part of it!
- Because of the Resurrection, we can experience the witness of everlasting life in our hearts.

BACKGROUND

Today’s text covers the final events of Jesus’ life on earth: the women’s discovery and report of the empty tomb (verses 1-12), three post-resurrection appearances of Jesus (verses 13-49), and His ascension into Heaven (verses 50-53).

Tombs in that era generally were kept closed to prevent animals and vandals from disturbing the bodies. The stones used to block an entrance often weighed from one to three tons. Round, disk-shaped stones and square, cork-shaped ones were both used in Jewish tombs at the time of Jesus, although the square, cork-shaped stones were the most common. The opening of the tomb was probably waist high from the ground, which would require people to stoop down to look inside.

Commentator Matthew Henry offers an interesting perspective on why an angel rolled away the stone in front of Christ’s tomb. “Our Lord Jesus could have *rolled back the stone* himself by his own power, but he chose to have it done by an angel, to signify that having undertaken to make satisfaction for our sin . . . he did not *break [out of] prison*, but had a fair and *legal discharge*, obtained from Heaven. He did not break [out of] prison, but an officer was sent on purpose to *roll away the stone*, and so to open the prison door, which would never have been done, if He had not made a *full satisfaction* [payment for man’s salvation].”¹

Luke described the two angels at the tomb as men in shining garments (verse 4). Apparently they looked like humans except for their luminous clothes. In

Matthew and John, these two beings are identified as angels. Though women were considered second-class citizens in that society, the Resurrection of Jesus was revealed first to faithful and devout women.

All four Gospels recount that Jesus rose bodily from the dead, but they tell of different appearances of the risen Christ. Luke’s narrative focuses on the area of Jerusalem and nearby Bethany. The account of Jesus’ appearance to the two disciples on the road to Emmaus is given only by Luke. The exact location of Emmaus is uncertain, but the distance of “three score furlongs” from Jerusalem (verse 13) is equivalent to just under seven miles. Only one of the travelers to Emmaus is named: Cleopas. His companion could have been another disciple of Jesus (not one of the twelve), or possibly his wife, Mary (John 19:25). Their eyes were finally opened when Jesus blessed their food, perhaps by the way He prayed or by seeing His scarred hands.

“The eleven” (verse 33) is a collective term, meaning the group of disciples without Judas. It is unknown exactly who was present. The Gospel of John indicates that Thomas was absent. When Jesus appeared, He proved that He was not a ghost or a vision by having the disciples touch Him and by eating food. However, His body was not bound by human constraints; He was able to suddenly appear in a locked room and to vanish in a moment.

The Gospel of Luke begins with “good tidings of great joy” and ends with the disciples filled with “great joy” and continually “praising and blessing God.” From beginning to end, it expresses the positive outcome of the message that Jesus brought to earth.

AMPLIFIED OUTLINE

Hannah’s Bible Outlines
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- VIII. The triumph of the Son of Man (24:1-53)
 - A. The empty tomb (24:1-12)
 - 1. The visit of the women (24:1-7)
 - 2. The report of the women (24:8-11)
 - 3. The visit of Peter (24:12)
 - B. The appearance near Emmaus (24:13-32)
 - 1. The appearance on the road (24:13-16)
 - 2. Jesus’ question (24:17)
 - 3. Cleopas’ explanation (24:18-24)
 - 4. Jesus’ explanation of the Scriptures (24:25-27)
 - 5. The disclosure of His person (24:28-32)
 - C. The appearance to the disciples (24:33-43)
 - 1. The announcement to the eleven (24:33-35)
 - 2. The appearance to the eleven (24:36-43)

- D. The instruction of the disciples (24:44-49)
- E. The ascension of the Son of Man (24:50-53)
 - 1. Jesus’ departure (24:50-51)
 - 2. The disciples’ joy (24:52-53)

A CLOSER LOOK

1. How did the women respond when they saw the men in shining garments standing by Jesus’ tomb?

2. Why do you think Jesus revealed himself to Peter privately after His resurrection?

3. How can we know for sure that Jesus is alive today?

CONCLUSION

Jesus proved that He is the Son of God when He died and rose again, conquering death. Through Him, there is a promise of everlasting life to all who believe.

NOTES



Overview for The Acts of the Apostles

Purpose: To provide a sequel to the Gospel of Luke and an authoritative account of the origin and early expansion of the Christian church.

Author: Authorship is ascribed to Luke, traditionally thought to be a Gentile native of Antioch in Syria. Luke was well educated in Greek literary and scientific culture, and was a physician by profession. He became a close friend and traveling companion of Paul, and would have also had access to the other Apostles and Jesus' family, as his book provides details that could have been known only to Jesus' closest associates. Tradition says Luke was martyred near the end of Nero's persecution of Christians in Rome. He is considered by some to be the second most significant writer of the New Testament, preceded only by Paul.

To Whom Written: The book is addressed to Theophilus, as was the Gospel of Luke. In the former book, this man was referred to as "most excellent Theophilus," so possibly he was a Roman noble of high rank, perhaps of the ruling class. In Greek, *Theophilus* means "friend of God," so this may have been a nickname indicating his strong interest in the Christian religion.

Date Written: Likely around A.D. 62 while Paul was imprisoned in Rome, since the narrative ends at that point.

Key Verse: "But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth" (Acts 1:8).

Significant Features: The Acts of the Apostles is the first written history of Christianity. It provides a vital link between Jesus Christ's life on earth and the emergence of His Church, and between the Gospels and the Epistles, being the primary source of information about the expansion of Christ's message in the first century.

The main theological emphasis of the Book of Acts is the activity of the Holy Spirit. The Apostles were to begin their ministry only after they had been "endued with power from on high" (Luke 24:49). The

single most important event in the Acts of the Apostles is the outpouring of the Holy Spirit which occurred at Pentecost, empowering the followers of Christ to carry out the Great Commission.

Setting: The events described in Acts occurred over an approximate thirty-year period as the Church grew and expanded into areas of the world ruled by Rome. Acts concludes about A.D. 62 with an account of Paul's preaching at Rome while under house arrest.

Key People: The Apostle Peter is the key figure of chapters 1-12. From chapter 13 to the end of the book, the emphasis is on the conversion and missionary efforts of the Apostle Paul. Other notable figures include Stephen, the first Christian martyr; Philip the evangelist; and Paul's missionary companions, Barnabas and Silas.

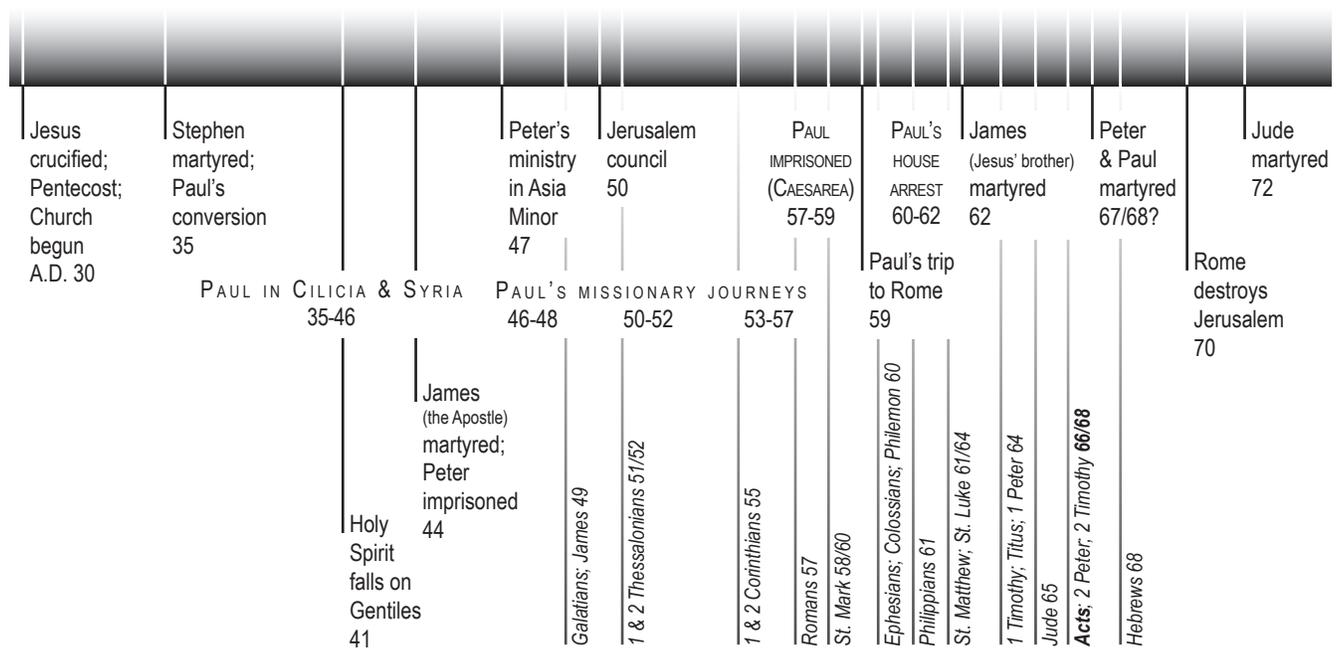
Historical Accuracy: Luke's care as a historian is revealed by his proper use of titles for the many and varied Roman officials—details that would have been difficult for someone without firsthand knowledge to have accurately provided, since provincial boundaries and terms changed frequently in that era. The accuracy of his record has been confirmed by inscriptions on archaeological discoveries.

Summary: Luke opens with a statement of the theme of the book, followed by a brief summary of the events that occurred between Christ's resurrection and ascension. Three categories of activities are described as having taken place during those forty days: Christ's living presence was witnessed (by sight, touch, and hearing), commandments were given to His followers, and instructions were received regarding how to implement those.

The subsequent content of the book can be divided into three parts. Chapters 1-12 describe the outpouring of the Holy Spirit and the emergence of the Christian church among the Jews, primarily through the ministry of Peter. Chapters 13-21, which record Paul's missionary journeys, give the history of the expansion of the faith among the Gentiles, a fulfillment of Jesus' commission to His disciples. Chapters 21-28 detail Paul's time in Rome, and the events that took him there.

Timeline

Many of these dates are approximate, as reference materials differ slightly.



Outline

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A complete amplified outline of this book is available on our website at www.apostolicfaith.org.

- I. Introduction (1:1-26)
 - A. Prologue: Luke's and Christ's previous and present ministries (1:1-5)
 - B. The ascension (1:6-11)
 - C. The preparation for preaching (1:12-26)
- II. The witness in Jerusalem (2:1—8:3)
 - A. The witness at Pentecost (2:1-47)
 - B. The witness by Peter and John (3:1—4:31)
 - C. The witness of the Apostles (4:32—5:42)
 - D. The witness of Stephen (6:1—8:3)
- III. The witness in Judea and Samaria (8:4—12:25)
 - A. The witness of Philip (8:4-40)
 - B. The witness to Saul (9:1-31)
 - C. The witness of Peter (9:32—11:18)
 - D. The witness of the persecuted church (11:19—12:25)
- IV. The witness "unto the uttermost part of the earth" (13:1—28:31)
 - A. The first missionary journey of Paul (13:1—14:28)
 - B. The Jerusalem Council (15:1-35)
 - C. The second missionary journey of Paul (15:36—18:22)
 - D. The third missionary journey of Paul (18:23—21:17)
 - E. The journey of Paul to Rome (21:18—28:31)



Acts 1:1-26

DEVOTIONAL FOCUS

“But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth.” (Acts 1:8)

Recently I came across the testimony of Dwight L. Moody, one of the renowned preachers in United States history, who described how he was alerted to his need for the power of the Holy Spirit. Moody related:

“I remember two holy women who used to come to my meetings. When I began to preach, I could tell by the expression on their faces that they were praying for me. At the close of the Sunday evening service they would say to me, ‘We have been praying for you.’ I said, ‘Why don’t you pray for the people?’ They answered, ‘You need power.’

“‘I need power?’ I said to myself. ‘Why, I thought I had power.’ I had a large Sunday school and the largest congregation in Chicago. There were some conversions at the time. I was, in a sense, satisfied. But right along these two godly women kept praying for me, and their earnest talk about being anointed for special service set me to thinking.

“I asked them to come and talk with me, and we got down on our knees. They poured out their hearts that I might receive the anointing from the Holy Spirit, and there came a great hunger into my soul. I did not know what it was. I began to pray as I never did before. I really felt that I did not want to live if I could not have this power for service. The hunger increased. I was praying all the time that God would fill me with His Holy Spirit.

“Well, one day in the city of New York—oh, what a day! I cannot describe it; I seldom refer to it; it is almost too sacred an experience to name. Paul had an experience of which he never spoke for fourteen years. I can only say that God revealed Himself to me, and I had such an experience of His love that I asked Him to stay His hand.

“I went to preaching again. The sermons were not different; I did not present any new truths; and yet hundreds were converted. I would not now be placed back where I was before that blessed experience if you gave me all Glasgow—it would be as the small dust of the balance. If we are full of the Spirit, anointed, our words will reach the hearts of the people. We need the filling always, and if we are filled

with the Spirit, there will be no room for Satan or self. If we are filled with the Spirit and full of power, one day’s work is better than a year’s without.”¹

Have you ever wished your efforts for God were more effective? Have you ever felt the need for more boldness or strength or ability to work for God? The Lord has promised the gift of the baptism of the Holy Ghost and fire to give us the power we need. Like Dwight L. Moody, we want to recognize our need and seek diligently for the power of God until we receive it. We do not have to beg for the infilling of the Holy Spirit. It is a gift! Jesus’ promise was, “Ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you” (Acts 1:8). God *wants* to fill us with His Spirit so that we will be able to accomplish His purpose.

May God put a longing in our souls for the power of the Holy Spirit, not for selfish reasons, but to accomplish the work of God on this earth. May we pray, “Lord, ignite a fire in my soul for the lost!” Many people are plunging toward a lost eternity, heedless of the danger they are in. They need help! As we consecrate our lives and pray with a desire to be our very best for God, the Holy Spirit will descend.

BACKGROUND

The first chapter of the Book of Acts begins with an introduction by Luke, the book’s author. Verses 3-8 provide Jesus’ final earthly commandment to His followers—a requirement to tarry in Jerusalem until they were filled with the Holy Ghost. Jesus’ ascension is documented in verses 9-11. Then, verses 12-14 indicate that the disciples followed Jesus’ instructions by returning to the Upper Room in Jerusalem immediately following His ascension. The chapter ends with an account of Matthias being chosen to replace Judas Iscariot as the twelfth disciple.

Two important designations in this chapter are “apostle” and “disciple.” The term “apostle,” as is used in verse 2, comes from the Greek word *apostolos*, and means “a delegate, ambassador, commissioner, messenger, or one who is sent.” This term typically is reserved for Jesus’ twelve closest followers, eleven of whom are listed by name in verse 13. The term “disciple,” as used in verse 15, comes from the Greek word *mathetes*, which translates into English as “learner” or “student.” Luke used this term in verse 15 to describe all those who were gathered in the Upper Room.

Verse 8 is a key verse in the Book of Acts, as it describes both the *power* given the Church (through the Holy Spirit), and its *mission* (to witness first in

Jerusalem, then in Judea and Samaria, and then in all the earth). The verse also provides a summary outline to the contents of the book: the outreach in Jerusalem (chapters 1-7), the outreach in Judea and Samaria (chapters 8-12), and the outreach into the Gentile world (chapters 13-28).

Being an eyewitness to the events surrounding the Resurrection is emphasized in this chapter. In verses 2 and 3, Luke stated that Jesus showed Himself alive to the Apostles. Then, in verse 22, Peter listed being an eyewitness to the Resurrection of Christ as one of the qualifications for replacing Judas.

Verses 18-19 are an explanation by Luke, and are not part of Peter's discourse.

In verse 20, citing prophecies in Psalm 69:25 and 109:8, Peter described the position vacated by Judas Iscariot, and later filled by Matthias, as that of a "bishoprick." This word comes from the Greek word *episkope*, meaning "overseer." This term was used to illustrate that one of the duties the Apostles would perform would be to provide governance over the church as part of God's authority structure.

AMPLIFIED OUTLINE

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- I. Introduction (1:1-26)
 - A. Prologue: Luke's and Christ's previous and present ministries (1:1-5)
 - B. The Ascension (1:6-11)
 - 1. Christ's announcement (1:6-8)
 - 2. Christ's ascension (1:9-11)
 - C. The preparation for preaching (1:12-26)
 - 1. The prayer meetings (1:12-14)
 - 2. The selection of Matthias (1:15-26)

A CLOSER LOOK

1. What physical activity did Jesus use as a comparison to explain what it is like to receive the Holy Ghost?

2. What do Jesus' instructions to the disciples tell us about the value or importance of having the power of the Holy Ghost upon our lives?

3. Jesus told the disciples to "wait for the promise of the Father." What are some things we can do while we wait for the promise to be fulfilled?

CONCLUSION

The disciples needed the infilling of the Holy Spirit in order to be effective witnesses for Christ throughout all the world. We have the same need today, and the same provision is available.

NOTES



DEVOTIONAL FOCUS

“And fear came upon every soul: and many wonders and signs were done by the apostles.”
(Acts 2:43)

A number of years ago, I started a new job at a cabinet making factory. During the fifteen years I held that job, the management of the company continuously focused on improving the business processes to try to keep the factory profitable. One word I heard repeatedly in staff meetings was “effective.” *Effectiveness* was the measure of whether or not we, as employees of the firm, were able to accomplish our purpose and produce the intended outcome. Management did their best to make sure every worker was motivated, equipped, and encouraged to achieve maximum results. Effectiveness mattered!

Have you ever wished your efforts for God were more effective? Have you ever felt the need for more boldness or strength or ability to work successfully for God? The Lord has promised the gift of the baptism of the Holy Ghost and fire to give us the power we need.

In today’s text, we read of the Holy Spirit descending upon Jesus’ followers who, after Christ’s ascension, had gathered in the Upper Room in obedience to His instruction for them to “wait for the promise of the Father” (Acts 1:4). After the baptism of the Holy Ghost was poured out upon their waiting hearts, Peter addressed the crowd that had gathered when news of what happened was “noised abroad.” The effectiveness of Peter’s message is evidenced by the fact that at the close of his sermon, “the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls” (verse 41). That effect was not because of Peter’s oratorical skills, but because of the anointing of the Holy Spirit. Our focus verse tells us that subsequently, “many wonders and signs were done by the apostles.” The Holy Spirit truly had filled those early believers with power from on high, and their witness had an impact on those around them!

Jesus still wants His followers to be effective as they work to fulfil the Great Commission. Strength, ability, and natural talent will only take us so far. We need God’s power on our lives in order to most effectively accomplish what He has called us to do. That is why the baptism of the Holy Ghost has been made available to us, as it was to the disciples of old.

The Spirit of God is the Spirit of might, of power and strength, of vigor, courage, and holy boldness—no confidence in ourselves, but in God. The Spirit gives us

grace to face dangers or trials without wavering, and to speak with clarity, liberty, and convincing power.

May God put a desire in each of our hearts for the power of the Holy Spirit, that we might accomplish the work of God on earth most effectively. The promise that the Spirit would come to “all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call” includes us! As we offer our lives to God with a sincere desire to be our best for Him, He will hear and answer.

BACKGROUND

This chapter of Acts can be divided into three sections: the empowerment of the disciples who had tarried in the Upper Room after Jesus’ ascension (verses 1-13); Peter’s sermon to the onlookers in Jerusalem (verses 14-36); and the effects of Peter’s sermon and the beginnings of the Early Church (verses 37-47).

Pentecost, the Greek word for “fifty,” was the Jewish holiday traditionally celebrated fifty days after Passover; it was also called the “Feast of Weeks” and the “Feast of Harvests.”

The phrase translated “with one accord” (verse 1) is from the Greek word *homothymadon* and indicates unanimous likemindedness. For ten days, the hundred and twenty brethren had obeyed Christ’s final instruction, spending their time in prayer, supplication, and patient waiting in harmonious expectancy. Then the promised outpouring of the Holy Spirit took place.

The coming of the Spirit was accompanied by two manifestations: the sound of “a rushing mighty wind” (verse 2) and the appearance of “cloven tongues like as of fire” (verse 3). John the Baptist had foretold One who would baptize “with the Holy Ghost, and with fire” (see Matthew 3:11 and Luke 3:16), and these two physical evidences were a graphic portrayal of the coming of the Spirit.

The evidence of the baptism of the Holy Ghost was that those who had been filled began to speak in “other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance” (verse 4). The Greek word translated “tongue” is *dialektos*, which means “language” or “dialect.” We know that these “other tongues” were known languages, because Jewish individuals from faraway countries who were in Jerusalem for the Day of Pentecost understood what was being spoken. They were amazed to hear their languages spoken by men who had never learned them. The fact that the speakers were Galileans (verse 7) made this evidence even more remarkable to the hearers, for the Galileans typically were looked down on as being unlearned and culturally inferior, and their speech was very heavily accented.

Verse 4 references both the Holy Ghost and the Spirit. The terms “Holy Ghost” and “Holy Spirit” are interchangeable in Scripture; the same Greek word is used for both in the original texts. The Holy Ghost is not an abstract entity or a remote influence, but is a distinct personality of the Godhead. He is God himself, part of the Trinity that is comprised of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. He has personality and all the attributes of Deity. Although the baptism of the Holy Spirit was typified in the Old Testament and promised by Old Testament prophets, it was not until the Day of Pentecost that the Holy Ghost was poured out upon believers.

Peter, the disciple who had been so fearful that he denied his Lord prior to Jesus’ death, was divinely chosen to be the person who spoke to the gathered crowd. His confidence came from the Holy Spirit, and his message explained what had just taken place to individuals from multiple locations: Parthians, Medes, Elamites, dwellers of Mesopotamia, Judea, Cappadocia, Pontus, Asia, Phrygia, Pamphylia, Egypt and parts of Libya near Cyrene, strangers of Rome, and Cretes and Arabians were all identified. The timing of the Spirit’s outpouring while these diaspora Jews were still in Jerusalem for the festival made it possible for the Gospel message to be spread in multiple directions when these individuals returned to their homes.

In his sermon, Peter drew attention to “that which was spoken by the prophet Joel” (verse 16), referring to Joel 2:28-29. In verse 22, he pointed the men of Israel to Jesus of Nazareth, whose Messiahship was “approved of God” (attested to) by certain evidences: “miracles” (from *dynamesi*, emphasizing His power), “wonders” (from *teras*, meaning “a marvel” and relating to the effect produced), and “signs” (from *semeiosis*, meaning “a mark or indication,” which demonstrated the reality of His divine appointment). In verse 24, Peter made a public proclamation of Christ’s resurrection—a fact that could be confirmed by many witnesses in Jerusalem. In verses 25-28, Peter quoted from Psalm 16:8-11, prophetic words written by David and fulfilled by Jesus.

Verses 37-40 recount the phenomenal effect of Peter’s preaching—his listeners were “pricked in their heart,” meaning they were convicted by the Holy Spirit through his powerful message. As a result, about three thousand were added to the small group of believers who had just received the infilling of the Spirit that day.

The verb tense in the original Greek of the phrase “had all things in common” (verse 44) signified continuous or repeated action, and could be rendered, “having all things common.” These contributions were not required; the believers simply had been and continued putting their possessions at the disposal of the church. The implication is that when needs arose within the community of believers, different ones of the group would sell property or give funds to meet the need.

AMPLIFIED OUTLINE

- II. The witness in Jerusalem
 - A. The witness at Pentecost (2:1-47)
 1. The power of Pentecost (2:1-13)
 - a. The filling of the Holy Spirit (2:1-4)
 - b. The results of the filling of the Holy Spirit (2:5-13)
 - (1) Amazement (2:5-12)
 - (2) Mockery (2:13)
 2. The preaching at Pentecost (2:14-47)
 - a. The explanation of the events by Peter (2:14-36)
 - (1) From Joel (2:14-21)
 - (2) From David (2:22-36)
 - b. The result of Peter’s sermon (2:37-47)
 - (1) Conviction (2:37)
 - (2) Confession (2:38-41)
 - (3) Commencement of the church (2:42-47)

A CLOSER LOOK

1. According to verse 15, what possible misconception did Peter immediately clear up as he began his Spirit-filled message?

2. Why do you think that Peter referred to the prophetic words of Joel and David in his message?

3. What attitude toward other believers was in place among those in the Upper Room when the Holy Spirit descended upon them at Pentecost? How can we ensure that same condition is in place in our lives?

CONCLUSION

God has provided the baptism of the Holy Ghost to empower believers and make them effective witnesses for Him.



DEVOTIONAL FOCUS

“And when Peter saw it, he answered unto the people, Ye men of Israel, why marvel ye at this? or why look ye so earnestly on us, as though by our own power or holiness we had made this man to walk? The God of Abraham, and of Isaac, and of Jacob, the God of our fathers, hath glorified his Son Jesus; whom ye delivered up, and denied him in the presence of Pilate, when he was determined to let him go.” (Acts 3:12-13)

When I was growing up, our family went through a similar ritual every Christmas season. Mom and Dad would act as though they had completely forgotten the holiday was coming. They did not ask us children to create a list of toys and other items we wanted. We did not see them leaving the house to go shopping for presents during the season, and there were no gifts being wrapped and set aside for us to open on Christmas day. We would talk about this lack of evidence among ourselves, in a mixture of complaining, proverbial wringing of our hands, and anxious wonderment as to whether our parents really loved us.

All the time we were experiencing this childlike consternation over their apparent forgetfulness, my parents were quietly making plans, shopping for Christmas gifts, and hiding them away. They never let us down. Without fail, our parents would bring out gifts for us children to open on Christmas morning, and we would enjoy celebrating together. It took us years before we figured out the amusement our parents enjoyed through this annual ruse.

In retrospect, I wonder why we ever thought they would fail us. This hoax only worked because of our low expectation of our parents. We should have known that if our parents had the means to give us gifts on Christmas day, they certainly would do so. Even if it was difficult, they would do whatever they could to make our Christmas awesome. We should have known, because we knew how much our parents loved us.

In our focus verses, we see Peter trying to make a similar point to the Jewish people who witnessed the healing of the man lame from birth. When the man stood to his feet and was seen walking, leaping, and praising God, Peter asked the onlookers why they marveled. He indicated that they should have expected no less from “the God of Abraham, and of Isaac, and of Jacob, the God of our fathers.” This was not a God foreign to them. Unlike the Gentiles who had no knowledge of God, the Jews had known of Him all

their lives! He had worked miracles repeatedly in their nation’s history, so why were they astounded at this event? Peter’s underlying point was that Jesus Christ was their promised Messiah, so they should not be surprised when works were done through His Name. After all, the prophets of old had foretold such works.

To be sure, there is always room for believers to have a healthy awe and wonder at the miracles God performs. However, we should also have an expectation that the God we know will move in our lives in miraculous ways when we need Him most. After all, we know He loves us and He has worked on our behalf before!

What challenges are you facing in life today? Do you expect God to show up and work out those challenges for His honor and glory? Remember, you can always count on Him . . . because He loves you!

BACKGROUND

The Apostles were dwelling in Jerusalem and therefore were in proximity to the center of Jewish life—Herod’s Temple. As Jews, Peter and John and the other disciples attended the different services of worship there.

Herod’s Temple was a complex with several precincts or courts to which admission was progressively restricted. All people were allowed to gather in the Temple’s outer court. From there, Jewish people could enter the area exclusively reserved for them. (Gentiles attempting to go beyond the outer court would have been subject to punishment, possibly even death.) The first of the inner courts was as far as the Jewish women were allowed to go; the next area was exclusively for ritually cleansed Jewish men; and the innermost court was reserved for the Temple priests.

There is some debate among Bible scholars regarding the exact location of the Beautiful Gate, although it probably was what is also known as the Nicanor gate. However, it would have been a gate separating the outer court where Gentiles were allowed from the inner area where only Jewish people could enter. Thus, the healing of the lame man not only would have been witnessed by residents of Jerusalem, but also by a mixed multitude of God-fearing Gentiles and Jews who had made a pilgrimage to the Temple from outside the local area. This location provided a rich opportunity for Peter and John to bear witness to the power of Jesus Christ to a large and diverse audience. In particular, it afforded an opportunity for the disciples to challenge a Jewish audience to acknowledge that Jesus was the Messiah.

Traditionally, many individuals with sicknesses of all types sat at the Beautiful Gate asking for alms (money, food, or other donations given to the poor or needy). No doubt this lame man whom Peter and John healed was a familiar sight. Thus, his healing clearly was an authentic miracle from God. Both his actions of leaping and walking, and his words of praise to God, were a testimony to the miraculous event that had taken place. No one present could deny the power of Jesus Christ, nor could they ignore the message that Peter proclaimed after the miracle.

Peter’s sermon repeated the theme of “repent” that characterized his first sermon (found in chapter 2). He admonished his hearers to “repent and be converted” (verse 19). The verb translated *repent* literally means to “return” or “turn again.” The result of so doing would be that their sins would be blotted out.

Verse 22 and 23 are probably a paraphrase of Deuteronomy 18:15, 18-19. In verse 24, Peter established that Samuel was the first of a succession of prophets who had foretold the coming of the Messiah. He concluded his message by reminding those listening that they were “the children of the prophets” (verse 25)—the rightful heirs to the promises made through the prophets. The phrase “unto you first” (verse 26) confirms that it was God’s plan for the message of salvation to be delivered initially to the Jews, and then be spread throughout the world by them.

AMPLIFIED OUTLINE

Hannah’s Bible Outlines
Used by permission per WORDsearch

- II. The witness in Jerusalem
 - B. The witness by Peter and John
 - 1. The miracle by Peter (3:1-11)
 - a. The setting (3:1-2)
 - b. The request (3:3)
 - c. The response (3:4-7)
 - d. The result (3:8-11)
 - 2. The message by Peter (3:12-26)
 - a. Israel’s rejection of Christ (3:12-18)
 - b. Israel’s need for Christ (3:19-26)

A CLOSER LOOK

1. What did Peter and John offer the lame man in lieu of the alms he requested?

2. What was the implication behind Peter’s words, “In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth . . .”?

3. Are there moments in your life when you do not expect God to do the things that He has promised to do in His Word? What can you do to reawaken your faith and have the expectation of Peter and John?

CONCLUSION

After the healing of the lame man, Peter saw an opportunity to preach to the amazed onlookers, and began by confronting their astonishment. His purpose and desire was to help them see that Jesus Christ, through whose Name the miracle had occurred, was indeed the Messiah prophesied by their forefathers.

NOTES



DEVOTIONAL FOCUS

“Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved.” (Acts 4:12)

Many times when we need to make a decision, there are a number of possible options. A while back, my wife and I decided we needed a newer vehicle. We went to a used car lot where there were four or five hundred cars on display, and gave the salesman who approached us a general description of what we were looking for and our approximate price range. He directed us to an aisle of cars, and we started working our way along, looking at various makes and models. We discussed color and style, studied documentation, compared prices, and sat in a number of them. About halfway down the aisle, I asked my wife what she thought so far. She said, “I don’t know. They are all running together!” There were just too many choices.

Sometimes, however, our options are limited. A few years ago, my wife and I were getting ready to go on a vacation out of the country. About two weeks before we were scheduled to leave, I was examining our paperwork and suddenly realized that my passport had expired. We had paid for most of the trip in advance, and many of those payments were non-refundable, including our plane tickets and hotel. I had a sinking, desperate feeling that our money would be wasted because I would not be able to travel with an expired passport!

Thankfully, a bit of online research revealed that others have faced a similar dilemma, and the United States government has an option for people who need a quick passport renewal. For an extra fee, travelers can get their passports renewed in a single day. I made an appointment at the nearest U.S. Consulate in Seattle, Washington, took a day off work, and made the three-hour drive to Seattle. It was the only good option, and I was thankful to have it.

When it comes to salvation from sin, there are not multiple options. In today’s focus verse, Peter said that there is only one Name under Heaven through which we can be saved. He was speaking to the Jewish leaders, and they did not want to believe that Jesus was the way to salvation. Today people may suggest there are many religions and ways to Heaven, but the Bible is clear that salvation comes through Jesus Christ. He who was sinless became the sacrifice for our sins, paying the price for our redemption. His option is the *only* option, and it is a good one. Over

the centuries, it has proved true and reliable for those who have taken advantage of it.

Today, we can rejoice that God has made a way for any person to be saved. And once we are forgiven, we want others to know about this way of salvation as well. We want them to find the only option for receiving everlasting life.

BACKGROUND

In the previous chapter, a lame man had been healed and Peter had preached his second sermon recorded in Acts. This chapter describes the reaction of the religious leaders and their efforts to stop the Apostles. Christ’s followers responded by praying for boldness to preach the Gospel (verses 23-31).

In verse 1, those who “came upon” Peter and John were the chief priests, the Temple guard captain (who was also a priest and responsible for maintaining order around the Temple), and the Sadducees. Many scholars conclude that most of the priests were Sadducees, a political and religious sect which did not believe in the resurrection of the dead. Therefore, they were particularly indignant that Peter and John “preached through Jesus the resurrection.”

Jewish law stipulated that judgments involving life or death matters had to begin and conclude during daylight hours. Temple sacrifices ended at about 4:00 p.m. and since no judgment had been rendered, Peter and John were incarcerated for the night.

The next day Peter and John were brought before the “rulers, and elders, and scribes” (verses 5-7). These included the Sanhedrin, which was the highest Jewish court. It consisted of seventy members and the high priest. Annas previously had been the high priest from approximately A.D. 6-15. At this time, his son-in-law, Caiaphas (who served from A.D. 18-36) held the title. Even though Annas was no longer the high priest, he had placed relatives in key positions, and continued to play an important role in the Temple.

The Sanhedrin felt they alone had the authority to decide what could be taught to the people. When they asked Peter and John the name by which they had preached, they may have been questioning the disciples’ authority. Peter began his response with, “Ye rulers of the people and elders of Israel,” which was a respectful way to address them. He proceeded to boldly attribute the healing to Jesus, and to reference Christ’s death and resurrection. In verse 11, Peter spoke of Psalm 118:22. Then in verse 12, he made the important declaration that salvation can only be obtained through Jesus Christ.

The words “unlearned and ignorant” in verse 13 referred to the fact that the Apostles had not received formal training as rabbis. “Unlearned” (in the Greek, *agrammatos*) has the literal meaning of “unlettered.” The members of the Sanhedrin—teachers who were well educated in Rabbinic schools—marveled that Peter and John could so confidently and aptly present their theology.

These Jewish leaders faced a dilemma. The man who had been healed was standing there, so the “notable miracle” (literally, “known sign”) mentioned in verse 16 could not be denied. In an effort to stop the spread of the belief in Jesus, they threatened the Apostles, commanding them not to teach in the Name of Jesus. Peter and John refused to acquiesce, and boldly declared their determination to “speak the things which we have seen and heard.” The only response the Sanhedrin could give was further threats.

When Peter and John were allowed to go, they met with believers to give a report, to praise God, and to pray for courage (verses 23-31). They began their prayer by acknowledging that God is the Creator, and therefore sovereign in every situation.

Verses 25-26 are a quote from Psalm 2:1-2. The believers’ petition was not for protection, but rather that they would have boldness to speak and work for God. The place where they were praying was shaken, and they received an assurance that their prayers were answered.

AMPLIFIED OUTLINE

Hannah’s Bible Outlines
Used by permission per WORDsearch

- II. The witness in Jerusalem
 - B. The witness by Peter and John
 - 3. The result of the message (4:1-31)
 - a. The imprisonment of Peter and John (4:1-4)
 - b. The interrogation of Peter and John (4:5-12)
 - (1) The inquiry concerning their power (4:5-7)
 - (2) The explanation by Peter (4:8-12)
 - c. The deliberation over Peter and John (4:13-22)
 - (1) The debate over punishment (4:13-18)
 - (2) The reply of Peter and John (4:19-20)
 - (3) The release of Peter and John (4:21-22)
 - d. The prayer for guidance (4:23-31)

A CLOSER LOOK

1. How old was the man who was healed (see verse 22) and why was his age significant?

2. The Jewish rulers were afraid that this notable miracle would cause the Gospel message of Jesus to spread. Why do you think that would be a concern to them?

3. How can we have boldness to proclaim that Jesus is the way to salvation?

CONCLUSION

Salvation comes only through Jesus Christ. We want to embrace that truth and share it with others.

NOTES



DEVOTIONAL FOCUS

“But Peter said, Ananias, why hath Satan filled thine heart to lie to the Holy Ghost, and to keep back part of the price of the land?” (Acts 5:3)

One of the restitutions I had to make after getting saved was confessing to my older sister that I had lied to her. She had drawn a picture of a girl complete with big eyes, freckles, and sticking-out pigtails, but in my opinion, she hadn't drawn the mouth quite right. As a six-year-old accomplished artist (at least according to my Mom), I was sure I could do better. However, my sister rejected my offer of help and insisted that I could not even *touch* her drawing. When she left the room, I saw my chance. Grabbing an eraser, I carefully deleted the less-than-perfect mouth and drew what I deemed a much-preferable rendition. Of course, my sister detected the alteration as soon as she looked at her picture again. However, when she accused me, I flatly denied having anything to do with her precious drawing. That lie eventually had to be made right!

Most people would consider my lie about my artistic endeavors to be “small.” By contrast, shortly before World War II broke out in Europe, Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union signed the German-Soviet Nonaggression Pact, in which the two countries agreed to take no military action against each other for the next ten years. The agreement fell apart in June 1941, when Nazi forces invaded the Soviet Union. Hitler had lied, and his lie was “large”—it impacted thousands upon thousands of people.

Numerous studies show that lying and deception are prevalent in all age groups, cultures, occupations, income brackets, and levels of society. One such study, conducted by Robert Feldman of the University of Massachusetts, stated that 60 percent of the people interviewed lied at least once during a ten-minute conversation, with most of them telling two or three lies during that timeframe.¹ Studies by Aldert Vrij and Bella DePaulo indicate that 75 to 82 percent of lies go undetected, while researcher Vasudevi Reddy found that children as young as six months often learn to deceive through certain behaviors.²

Why do people lie? At times, perhaps a lie is told to please someone or to avoid embarrassment. It may be done to gain benefits, to be accepted, or to influence others. In fact, lying has become so commonplace that some people simply lie out of habit!

In our text today, lying brought immediate punishment. The Early Church had been experiencing a

time of great unity. Many of the believers were combining their possessions to share with fellow members as needed, including proceeds from the sales of their houses and lands. Ananias and his wife, Sapphira, were among those who sold a piece of land for that purpose. Although they were not required to give the proceeds to the church, they determined to hold back part of the profit while making it look like they were giving the full amount. They obviously felt nobody would know of this deceit, but God knows everything, and as a result, Ananias and Sapphira both forfeited their lives through God's judgment.

God hates sin, and the sin of lying is condemned throughout Scripture. This is not to say God will punish an innocent omission or an unintentional misstatement. He looks at the heart. He knows the motive behind the words or behavior, and whether or not there was an intent to deceive. Though some might consider my childhood lie to my sister “innocent” or a “white lie,” it was intentional, and I had to make it right.

Even though we live in a society where lying and deception are commonplace, we need to remember that God cannot lie, and He wants His children to be truthful at all times. Telling the truth isn't always the easiest thing to do, but it is the *right* thing to do!

BACKGROUND

This portion of text can be divided into three segments. Verses 32-37 of chapter 4 describe the oneness that existed in the Early Church, resulting in the members being sensitive to each other's needs, with some selling their possessions to meet those needs as they arose. Acts 5:1-11 covers the deception and punishment of Ananias and Sapphira, while verses 12-16 detail the signs and wonders done by the Apostles through the power of the Holy Spirit.

Verse 33 of chapter 4 states that the unity in the church resulted in great power as the Apostles proclaimed the resurrection of Christ. Since the Jews thought that the death of Christ meant He could not have been the Messiah, one vital mission of the Apostles was to convince the Jews of the reality of Christ's resurrection.

In verse 36, Barnabas (who later traveled with Paul) is singled out as one who sold his land and gave the proceeds to the Apostles to distribute as needed. Since Barnabas is the only donor mentioned by name, the acknowledgement of his endowment may have been what caused Ananias and Sapphira to want similar recognition. His action was in contrast to their self-serving attitudes.

In Acts 5:1-2, Ananias and Sapphira sold a possession and gave the impression that they were offering the full amount for God’s use while holding back part of the proceeds for themselves. The Greek word translated as “kept back” in verse 2 also means “to set apart, withdraw covertly, appropriate for one’s own use.” This couple’s deceit and hypocrisy was a direct threat to the church’s unity and spiritual success, and resulted in swift punishment from God. Peter made it clear that they had not lied to man, but to God.

Verse 12 states that the believers were “all with one accord at Solomon’s porch.” While the Early Church met in homes and other venues, the signs and wonders done by the Apostles had resulted in the number of converts growing to where they started to convene at “Solomon’s porch.” This was a covered walkway on the east side of the Temple compound within the area known as the “Court of the Gentiles.”

Verse 13 indicates that while the people held the Apostles in high regard, those with impure motives did not dare join with them for fear of what had happened to Ananias and Sapphira. However, multitudes of men and women did believe, and the church continued to grow.

According to verses 15-16, the people were so impacted by Peter’s ministry that they brought those who were sick and laid them on cots or pallets in the streets, hoping they would be healed by the shadow of Peter when he walked by. There was no supernatural power in the Apostle’s shadow, but God honored their genuine faith, and as the multitudes of people from cities surrounding Jerusalem brought those who were sick and possessed with unclean spirits, they all were healed.

AMPLIFIED OUTLINE

Hannah’s Bible Outlines
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- II. The witness in Jerusalem
 - C. The witness of the Apostles
 - 1. The power of the Apostles (4:32—5:16)
 - a. Through their witness (4:32-37)
 - b. Through judgment (5:1-11)
 - (1) The setting (5:1-2)
 - (2) Ananias (5:3-6)
 - (3) Sapphira (5:7-10)
 - (4) The result (5:11)
 - c. Through miracles (5:12-16)

A CLOSER LOOK

1. According to Acts 4:35, on what basis did the Apostles distribute the funds that were offered by the believers?

2. What do you think caused the people in the Early Church to willingly share their assets with those in need?

3. What steps can you take to ensure that you are truthful in every circumstance?

CONCLUSION

God’s Word makes it clear that lying is abhorrent to Him. In order to please Him and avoid His displeasure, we must always openly declare the truth in both our words and deeds.

NOTES

- 1. R.S. Feldman, J.A. Forrest, and B.R. Happ, “Self-presentation and verbal deception: Do self-presenters lie more?” *Basic and Applied Social Psychology*, 2002:24, pg. 163-170. <https://www.umass.edu/>, accessed April 26, 2019.
- 2. Pamela Meyer, “10 Research Findings About Deception that Will Blow Your Mind,” *Liespotting.com*, <http://liespotting.com/2010/06/10-research-findings-about-deception-that-will-blow-your-mind/>, accessed April 26, 2019.



Acts 5:17-42

DEVOTIONAL FOCUS

“And when they had brought them, they set them before the council: and the high priest asked them, saying, Did not we straitly command you that ye should not teach in this name? and, behold, ye have filled Jerusalem with your doctrine, and intend to bring this man’s blood upon us. Then Peter and the other apostles answered and said, We ought to obey God rather than men.” (Acts 5:27-29)

From hostility and harassment to torture, imprisonment, and even death, Christians in areas with severe religious restrictions pay a heavy price for their faith. In some of these nations it is illegal to own a Bible, share your faith in Christ, change your religion to one that is not government approved, or teach your children about Jesus. In fact, Christians in at least sixty countries around the world face persecution simply because of their belief in Jesus Christ.¹ Yet even in those locations, Christians continue to witness to those around them and meet for worship.

Cheng Jie is one of those individuals. Living in China where religion is tightly controlled, this pastor’s wife, mother of two little boys, and former kindergarten director had prepared herself for the possibility of her husband’s arrest. However, she never thought she would be the one to spend time behind bars for her faith. In the end, it was her role as school director that caused her to be imprisoned for two years. Chinese authorities claimed the school and its administration were guilty of using what the authorities called “religious curriculum.” The school was closed, and Cheng Jie and three others were arrested.

Sentenced to two years in a hard labor camp, Cheng Jie at first was afraid. She was housed in a cell with fifteen criminals, some of them due to be put to death for murder. Their fifteen-by-fifteen foot cell had only one toilet. Quarrels often would break out between the women, and some of them wept continually. Though expected to work twelve-hour work days, the prisoners were fed very little, usually just rice with boiled cabbage or radishes.

Cheng Jie soon realized, however, that God had given her a unique opportunity to minister to the women incarcerated with her. “Even though I was in prison, I felt like I am happy because I have the joy from God,” she said. The prison guards refused to give Cheng Jie a Bible, but another prisoner had one and she gave it to Cheng Jie in trade for some personal items. Despite the long work hours, Cheng read

the Bible faithfully every night and found strength in God’s Word. She also taught her cellmates hymns and Bible stories. Her faith and trustworthiness made her stand out to prison authorities and after six months, she even was put in charge of the cells. In February 2016, Cheng Jie’s sentence was complete and she was released. The future for their family was uncertain, but she and her husband continued to cling to their faith in God and trust Him to be with them no matter what might lay ahead.²

Today’s text describes the second instance in Scripture of followers of Christ being imprisoned for their faith (the first is recorded in Acts 4:3). In this instance, Peter and the other Apostles were arrested and put in jail by the religious leaders, but an angel of the Lord “opened the prison doors, and brought them forth” (verse 19). Although they had been commanded after the first arrest not to teach in the name of Jesus, the Apostles had immediately resumed witnessing. Their allegiance was to Christ; they knew He had to be obeyed ahead of all earthly authorities. When they were apprehended a third time and questioned as to why they had defied the injunction of the council, Peter responded with the words recorded in our focus verse: “We ought to obey God rather than men” (Acts 5:29).

How would we respond if we were threatened with imprisonment and even death for talking about the Lord? To what extent are we willing to suffer for the sake of sharing the Gospel with others? These questions must be considered. The response of the Apostles in today’s account, and the courage of Cheng Jie and thousands of others who have suffered for the faith through the ages, challenges us. They have proven that, by God’s grace, it is possible to stand strong in the face of persecution. Faith in God does not make all of our troubles vanish; it simply puts them in the right perspective. When we live close to God and lean upon Him for strength and direction, we can be certain that He will give us power to endure whatever comes our way.

BACKGROUND

Today’s portion of chapter 5 describes the opposition of the religious leaders in Jerusalem to the preaching of Peter and the Apostles. The text can be divided into three main sections. Verses 17-25 cover the Apostles’ arrest and confinement, and angelic deliverance. Immediately returning to preaching, they once again were apprehended and brought before the council, where Peter fearlessly stated their position

that obedience to God must come first (verses 26-32). Finally, Gamaliel's restraining advice and the beating and release of the Apostles is related in verses 33-40.

Luke's statement that the high priest and other members of the council were "filled with indignation" (verse 17) also could be translated "filled with jealousy." These religious leaders no doubt felt their authority as spiritual teachers was being threatened as more and more of the populace accepted what Christ's followers were teaching.

The Apostles' supernatural deliverance from prison, recounted in verse 19, was evidence to the believers that the Lord was with His Church. However, that deliverance was not granted so the disciples could flee for their lives; this is made clear by the angelic charge in verse 20 where the Apostles were commissioned to go and take a stand by preaching at the Temple once more. This demonstrated to the Early Church that while God was *able* to deliver, if deliverance was not His plan, it was better to suffer for Christ than to seek preservation of the physical body.

It is noteworthy that when the Apostles were arrested and for the second time brought before the council (the Sanhedrin, which was the supreme authority or senate of the Jewish people in ancient Israel), the high priest did not ask how they had escaped from prison. He may have realized that their deliverance was supernatural and did not want to be forced to acknowledge that fact.

Peter's assertion that "we ought to obey God rather than man" (verse 29) was not a defiance of secular authority but a statement of spiritual obligation.

Verse 33 states that the members of the Sanhedrin were "cut to the heart"—they were furious at what they considered to be defiance, and determined to sentence the Apostles to death. Intervention came through the advice of Gamaliel, who was perhaps the most distinguished man of the entire council during the time of Christ. A rabbi and doctor of the law, he was the leader of the illustrious school of Hillel that taught Israel on matters of ritual practice, ethics, and theology. The school was crucial to the shaping of the oral law and Judaism as it is today.

Gamaliel reminded the Sanhedrin of insurgents in the past whose rebellions had died out, and pointed out that if the teachings of Jesus' disciples were not of God, their movement would come to nothing as well. If the movement *were* of God, it would be imprudent for the Sanhedrin to resist it. While Gamaliel's intervention preserved the Apostles from death, this may have been done to quell a potential conflict over their fate, which could have aroused the displeasure of Rome, rather than out of admiration for them.

Though the Apostles were beaten—the harshest punishment to that date in the emerging church—they were not cowed by the threats and demands of the council. From verses 41-42, it is apparent they were

singlehearted in their purpose to "teach and preach." The Greek word for "preach" is *evangelizo*, from which the English word "evangelize" was derived.

AMPLIFIED OUTLINE

Hannah's Bible Outlines
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- II. The witness in Jerusalem
 - C. The witness of the Apostles
 - 2. The persecution of the Apostles (5:17-40)
 - a. The arrest of the Apostles (5:17-18)
 - b. The release of the Apostles (5:19-25)
 - c. The rearrest of the Apostles (5:26-28)
 - d. The explanation of Peter (5:29-32)
 - e. The advice of Gamaliel (5:33-39)
 - f. The flogging of the Apostles (5:40)
 - 3. The joy of the Apostles (5:41-42)
 - a. In disgrace (5:41)
 - b. In duty (5:42)

A CLOSER LOOK

1. What did the angel of the Lord tell the Apostles that they were to do when they were released from prison (see verse 20)?

2. What doctrinal precepts of the faith did Peter refer to in verses 30-31?

3. What lessons can we learn from the behavior of Peter and the other disciples in this portion of text?

CONCLUSION

While opposition to the Gospel of Jesus Christ will come, God will embolden and strengthen those who courageously take a stand for Him.

- 1. Open Doors, "Persecution at a Glance," Open Doors, <https://www.opendoorsusa.org/christian-persecution/>, accessed April 26, 2019.
- 2. The Voice of the Martyrs, "China: Joy in prison," The Voice of the Martyrs, www.persecution.com/public/newsroom.aspx?story_ID=%3d383234&featuredstory_ID=%3d353530, accessed March 31, 2017.



Acts 6:1 through 7:1

DEVOTIONAL FOCUS

“Wherefore, brethren, look ye out among you seven men of honest report, full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business.” (Acts 6:3)

Often the job application process includes submission of a personal reference—a recommendation provided by someone who knows the individual outside of the workplace. Rather than focusing on work experience and skills (as a former employer might), personal references typically offer insight into aspects such as the person’s character, integrity, and people skills.

I have written a number of references of this type over the years. Occasionally, I find it a challenge to compose something that is both truthful and tactful! However, one I wrote several years ago comes to mind—not because it was hard to find something good to say, but because the young woman in question possessed so many exemplary qualities I ran the risk of sounding overly effusive.

In the reference, I had mentioned the candidate’s cooperative nature and her willingness to help with any task, even those that were challenging. She was dependable, trustworthy, kind, and gracious to young and old alike. I could unhesitatingly confirm that she was a person of high moral standards and impeccable integrity, and that both her words and actions revealed genuine concern for the needs of others.

If a character reference had been written for Stephen and the six others in our text who were chosen to “serve tables” (deal with administrative tasks in the church), no doubt many of the same characteristics could have been mentioned. In the Early Church, as in our day, at the core of every type of ministry was the quality of the person doing it. Spiritual character and attitudes toward other people, more than natural talents or formal training, determine effectiveness in the work of the Lord. And being “full of the Holy Ghost” brings the anointing of the Spirit.

This principle applies not just to pastors and preachers, but to those who sing, teach, clean, create, visit—individuals who serve in any capacity in God’s Kingdom. The daily activities and particular means employed by each one may differ, but such differences are relatively superficial. The basic goals of all these workers are the same, as are their basic qualifications.

All of us have a place we could serve—a role to fill—in the Lord’s work. The question is, are we spiritually qualified? Are we “of honest report, full of the

Holy Ghost and wisdom”? Let us purpose, with God’s help, to be people of integrity, godly discernment, and empathy for others, guided by God’s Spirit, so that when a need arises in the work of the Lord, we are qualified to step forward and serve.

BACKGROUND

Acts 6 covers two key events in the Early Church: the appointment of seven individuals to attend to the physical needs of the growing group of believers (verses 1-7), and the arrest of Stephen for supposed blasphemy (verses 8-15). The first verse of chapter 7 gives the high priest’s question to Stephen, thus setting the scene for Stephen’s response (covered in subsequent verses).

The outpouring of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost was only a few years past, and the Early Church was growing rapidly. With this increase came a variety of peoples and cultures, resulting in new challenges. The majority of church members were Hebrew-speaking Jews. However, Greek-speaking Jews (or Hellenists), the returning Diaspora who came from other countries, also joined with the disciples. These Hellenists began to complain that their widows were not getting the help they needed. Whether or not this was the case, the disciples took their concern seriously, and with compassion and wisdom, took immediate action.

In verse 1, the noun “ministration” is from the Greek word *diakonia*, a derivative of the Greek verb *diakoneo* which means “to serve.” Another form of this word, *diakonos*, means “deacon.” Therefore, many today refer to these seven men as the first “deacons” of the Church.

One of the criteria established was that these men were to be “of good reputation,” which translates from the Greek word *martureo*, meaning “a witness.” It can also mean, “to obtain an honest report, be well reported of.”

The task of serving tables, referenced in verse 2, does not refer only to serving food. *Trapeza*, the Greek word used here, refers more specifically to a money-changer’s table. This indicates that the responsibilities of these seven men probably included distributing money or provisions to those in need.

The men chosen for this task all had Greek names indicating that they were Hellenists. As such, they would have been accepted by the Greek-speaking Jews, and possibly were more sympathetic to their cause. The appointing of these men pleased everyone, and helped restore unity in the church, as is evidenced by its continued success and growth.



DEVOTIONAL FOCUS

“And the patriarchs, moved with envy, sold Joseph into Egypt: but God was with him, and delivered him out of all his afflictions, and gave him favour and wisdom in the sight of Pharaoh king of Egypt; and he made him governor over Egypt and all his house.” (Acts 7:9–10)

While attending university, I had worked for a local business for about six months when a new manager was appointed—a man who was younger than me. This manager seemingly was intimidated by the fact that I was a “college boy,” and set out to prove his worth by minimizing mine. He was quick to give me the most difficult assignments and then speak disparagingly when I completed them. There was no question about the fact that I was not his favorite employee! One time he even questioned my integrity concerning the amount of time I had worked in the shop training one of his relatives. Frustrating and hurtful as this situation was to me, there was little I could do to change anything other than pray, work hard, and try to do my best in spite of the negative surroundings. The time came when another job opened up for me that was much more pleasant and with a better working environment. I rejoiced that God had provided and I no longer had to endure the hassles of the old job.

After I graduated, I started a completely different career. I thought very little about the old job until over ten years later when I was asked to become a pastor and needed to find employment in the small town where I was transferred. Providentially, God provided work in the same trade I had worked in during that difficult employment of the past. I realized at once that even in the challenging period when I was being treated unfairly, God had been with me, training and preparing me for a future which only He knew.

In today’s text, Stephen drove home the point to the members of the Sanhedrin that God’s presence was not restricted to the Promised Land. Though Joseph had to endure being betrayed by his brothers and sold into slavery in Egypt, God delivered him out of all his afflictions. The truth Stephen illustrated that day through the example of Joseph was demonstrated in my employment situation as well. Just as God was with Joseph through his many challenges, God was with me. Just as God had a purpose for Joseph, God had a purpose for me.

I have been reminded many times over the years that God has promised to be with us. God has a plan

for our future. It is not only in the blessings and good times that He is with us, but also in the trials and difficult circumstances. Even when it is not evident to us, God is working for our benefit. Challenging situations and individuals will come and go in our lives, but God will be faithful to deliver and put us exactly where He desires, for His purpose and glory, as we faithfully serve Him.

BACKGROUND

In this portion of Acts 7, Stephen commenced his address to the members of the Sanhedrin, who were to judge the false accusation of blasphemy (see Acts 6:13), by giving a historical summary of God’s calling as illustrated by the lives of Abraham and Joseph.

This Spirit-filled deacon began by outlining the call of Abram into a covenantal relationship with Jehovah including geographical details and quotes from Genesis that were familiar to all who were listening. He continued with the patriarchal genealogy, specifically noting the prophecy of future Egyptian control that began with the sale of Joseph into slavery in Egypt by his brothers. This was Stephen’s first example of Israel’s opposition to the purpose and plan of God, in spite of the mighty works of God which they had seen, thus accusing them through their own history.

He reminded the religious leaders how God providentially used what Joseph’s brothers intended as evil toward Joseph to accomplish good both for him and for all his family, as well as succeeding generations. He summarized how Joseph was promoted, his family delivered from famine, and justice and mercy served.

Stephen then summarized the birth of Moses— a Hebrew child adopted into and educated in Pharaoh’s household, and his calling as a deliverer for Israel. Stephen characterized Moses as being “mighty in words and in deeds” (verse 22). While the Biblical account does not record much of Moses’ young life, Jewish historian Josephus notes his prowess as a military commander and leader, which was evidently a fact known to Jews of Stephen’s day.

Stephen was careful to make clear God’s faithfulness to every generation from the establishment of the Hebrew nation through their deliverance from Egypt and entrance into the Promised Land. In the Hebrew history recited in today’s text and in the following verses, Stephen went on to make his contention that the rejection and crucifixion of Jesus was a continuation of the Jewish rejection of God’s plan for them as a nation.

AMPLIFIED OUTLINE

Hannah's Bible Outlines
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- II. The witness in Jerusalem
 - D. The witness of Stephen
 - 3. The sermon by Stephen
 - a. His defense concerning God (7:2-16)
 - (1) God's relation to Abraham (7:2-8)
 - (2) God's relation to Joseph and his brethren (7:9-16)
 - b. His defense concerning Moses
 - (1) The need for a deliverer (7:17-19)
 - (2) The birth of the deliverer (7:20-22)
 - (3) The rejection of the deliverer (7:23-29)

A CLOSER LOOK

1. According to verse 8, what covenant did God give to Abraham?

2. Why do you think Stephen recited Israel's history to these religious leaders who were well acquainted with the facts he laid out before them?

3. God used adverse circumstances in the lives of Abraham, Joseph, and Moses to accomplish His will and plan for them and their succeeding generations. How is God using circumstances in your life to accomplish His will?

CONCLUSION

God was at work in the lives of Abraham, Joseph, and Moses as well as the generations in between them. Because of God's faithfulness and mercy, we can trust that He is also at work in our lives no matter what circumstances we face.

NOTES



Acts 7:30-60

DEVOTIONAL FOCUS

“And they stoned Stephen, calling upon God, and saying, Lord Jesus, receive my spirit. And he knelt down, and cried with a loud voice, Lord, lay not this sin to their charge. And when he had said this, he fell asleep.” (Acts 7:59-60)

The power of God to put a forgiving spirit in the human heart is wonderfully exemplified in the life story of Jim, an ex-convict known for many years as “Forty-five”—a man who spent twenty-five years in prison at hard labor for a crime he did not commit.

At the age of sixteen, Forty-five left his home in Rhode Island and headed west. One night he rode into the city of Tacoma, Washington, in a boxcar, reaching there just when a murder had been committed. He was arrested, tried, and sentenced to twenty-five years at hard labor.

In the penitentiary, Forty-five suffered all the severity of punishment meted out to desperate criminals in those days, including solitary confinement, rations of bread and water, being shackled by a ball and chain, and thirty lashes at a whipping post. After serving eighteen years of his sentence, he was transferred to the prison hospital, where he worked for the remainder of his term.

Upon his release, Forty-five was nearly wrecked in body and mind, homeless, and friendless. He took a train to Portland, Oregon, where he wandered the streets for four days looking for work, with nothing to eat and no place to sleep except the lumber piles. At last he went onto the Burnside Bridge intending to jump into the Willamette River. Just as he climbed up on the railing, a bridge keeper came rushing to him and pulled him down. As Forty-five walked away, he noticed the large lighted sign on the Apostolic Faith Church a short distance away. An unseen power seemed to compel him to attend a service there. At the close of the meeting, Forty-five went to the altar, prayed, and God saved him.

About two years later, as he was testifying in a service about his experiences and conversion, a man sat listening in the back of the church with tears flowing down his cheeks. Someone who talked with the man later told Forty-five that this stranger knew something about him. After tracing the man to San Francisco, California, Forty-five learned that he was dying of tuberculosis in a hospital there.

Forty-five took a job in the hospital, and had an opportunity to converse with the stranger. One night

the sick man asked to have the Bible read to him, so Forty-five read aloud the story of the Prodigal Son. Then the man looked at Forty-five and asked, “Can you ever forgive me for the wrong I have done you?” Brokenly, he confessed that he was the man who committed the murder that had sent Forty-five to prison.

Forty-five’s thoughts immediately went to the long years he had spent in confinement and all that he had suffered. Could he forgive? He left the sick man and went into a little room where he could be alone. Kneeling down, he prayed and wrestled with God for nearly three hours, asking God to put a real spirit of forgiveness in his heart. At last he went back to the sick man’s room and took the dying man in his arms. He said, “I forgive you for all the injuries you have done me, but you will also have to ask God to forgive you.” The man began to cry out, over and over, “God, be merciful to me a sinner!” God heard that broken plea and saved his soul. Three days later the man died, but because of Forty-five’s witness, he is spending eternity with the Lord.

Forty-five’s forgiveness of one who had caused him to suffer so terribly could only come from God. We see the same merciful spirit exemplified by Stephen, when he prayed the words of our key verse, “Lord, lay not this sin to their charge,” as the stones were pummeling his body.

Though most of us will never suffer as Forty-five and Stephen did, there may have been events in our lives that were hard, that were wrong, that have deeply wounded us and are difficult to forgive. We can have the same freedom from bitterness and revenge that was in the hearts of Forty-five and Stephen. They could forgive because they had experienced the Lord’s merciful forgiveness of their own sins. If we hold fast to the remembrance of the infinite debt our Lord Jesus forgave us through His death on the Cross, we will be able with God’s help to forgive others, even at great cost to ourselves. Let us purpose to hold no resentment in our hearts, but to live every day forgiving as freely as we have been forgiven.

BACKGROUND

The charges brought against Stephen are relayed in Acts 6:11 and 13-14. Firstly, his accusers claimed that he spoke blasphemous words against Moses and the Law, and tried to change Jewish customs. Secondly, they asserted that he spoke blasphemous words against God and God’s dwelling place, the Temple. Stephen had begun his defense before the council by giving a historical account of God’s

dealings with the Jewish people through events in the lives of Abraham, Joseph, and Moses. In this portion of text, he traced the forefathers of Israel's faith through Moses, Joshua (translated as "Jesus"), and David (verses 30-47). The chapter ends with the irate response of his hearers, and Stephen's martyrdom by stoning (verses 54-60).

Throughout Stephen's speech, he repeatedly alluded to Israel's continual rebellion and idolatry in spite of the mighty works of God which they had seen, thus condemning them through their own history.

In verse 38, the word translated "church" in the phrase "church in the wilderness" is from the Greek word *ekklesia*, meaning "assembly of the called out ones." Here it was a reference to the assembly of people that gathered at the foot of Mount Sinai.

In verses 42-43, Stephen asserted that Israel's rejection of Moses had led to false worship and breaking of the Law, so God "gave them up" to their worship of the host of heaven (the sun, moon, and stars) and their gods Molech (associated with child sacrifice) and Remphan (an Egyptian god). The statement "as it is written in the book of the prophets" is a reference to Amos 5:25-27.

In verses 44-50, Stephen pointed out that even though the Jews had the Tabernacle in the wilderness, and later the Temple in Jerusalem, that had not kept them from rejecting God and His messengers. While the Jews insisted that the Temple at Jerusalem was the only place where the Divine Presence was manifested, Stephen asserted that neither the Temple nor the Tabernacle were intended to be the place where God permanently dwelt. To support his statement, he pointed once more to the Old Testament, this time quoting Isaiah 66:1-2.

At verse 51, Stephen's tone abruptly shifted to that of a prosecutor. Some Bible scholars suggest that perhaps his sudden change in approach may have been caused by an angry outcry against what he had just said about the Temple. His charge that his hearers were "stiffnecked" was a description that had been applied to the Jews by God himself (see Exodus 33:5). The phrase "uncircumcised in heart and ears" meant that they had rebelled against the message God had revealed through the prophets, shutting their ears to the truth and thus disavowing their relationship with God. Because of this they were unclean and defiled.

The members of the Sanhedrin responded to Stephen's reproof with vehement anger. In the statement that they "were cut to the heart" (verse 54), the verb literally means "to saw asunder." In further witness to their burning hatred, they "gnashed on him with their teeth."

The Jews had no legal authority to carry out a death sentence, so Stephen's execution was illegal; it took place during a power vacuum between the departure of Pontius Pilate as Roman governor and the

arrival of his successor. Like his Savior, Stephen was executed outside the city wall. Even in this miscarriage of justice, Stephen's murderers adhered to the Mosaic Law, which decreed that the sin of blasphemy was to be punished by a death sentence.

Stephen finished his life by committing his soul to the Lord and devoutly praying for his persecutors.

AMPLIFIED OUTLINE

Hannah's Bible Outlines
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- II. The witness in Jerusalem
 - D. The witness of Stephen
 - 3. The sermon by Stephen
 - b. His defense concerning Moses
 - (4) The commission of the deliverer (7:30-34)
 - (5) The work of the deliverer (7:35-43)
 - c. His defense concerning the Tabernacle (7:44-50)
 - (1) The Tabernacle (7:44-46)
 - (2) The Temple (7:47-50)
 - d. His denunciation of his accusers (7:51-53)
 - 4. The stoning of Stephen
 - a. The death of Stephen (7:54-60)

A CLOSER LOOK

1. In verse 52, whom did Stephen accuse his hearers of murdering?

2. Why do you think Stephen so fearlessly addressed the council, even though he must have known his life was in danger for doing so?

3. The cost for proclaiming the Gospel in the first century was civil, social, and physical persecution. What is the potential cost in your circumstances?

CONCLUSION

The grace to forgive can be ours when we remember how much we have been forgiven.



Acts 8:1-40

DEVOTIONAL FOCUS

“And Philip ran thither to him, and heard him read the prophet Esaias, and said, Understandest thou what thou readest? And he said, How can I, except some man should guide me?” (Acts 8:30-31)

In today’s text, the evangelist Philip asked the Ethiopian eunuch, “Understandest thou what thou readest?” I can fully identify with the eunuch’s response, “How can I, except some man should guide me?” I did not know about salvation and the possibility of being delivered from sin until I met the Olufsons.

As an eighteen-year-old high school dropout, my life revolved around avoiding responsibility and finding the next “fun” thing to do. I was the only child of a single parent, and my mother had moved to another state as part of a job promotion. Our relationship was strained, but our agreement had been for me to finish high school and then go to live with her. However, with no one forcing me to attend school, my grades suffered and I eventually dropped out. I had no desire to apply myself to anything, and from time to time, I even contemplated suicide. My life was a mess, but God had a plan for me.

The Olufsons, a Christian family I had become acquainted with, observed what was happening in my life and invited me to stay with them until I could get on my feet. That family lived differently than what I had come to expect from people. They treated me with a love that I didn’t understand, especially Josephine, the mother of the family. It was in their home that I saw true Christianity displayed every day.

Josephine told me about the love that Jesus had for me, and about the tremendous price He paid for my sins. The family took me to church with them, and that summer, they invited me to attend the Apostolic Faith camp meeting in Portland, Oregon. There I met a whole group of people who were just like Josephine! The peace and serenity that I felt around the campground made a deep impression upon me. I did not fully realize it, but the Lord was dealing with my heart.

When we returned home after the camp meeting, God continued to talk to me. One August evening, I came home from my job at a hamburger shop so sick of life and its struggle that I felt I just could not take it anymore. My sin was a weight upon me, and I began to weep. I asked God to give me peace, and He did not disappoint me. In a very definite way, He touched my soul and washed away my sins. I wondered that night if the peace could possibly last, but when I woke up

the next morning, it was still there. I rushed to tell Josephine, “I got saved last night!” What a joy it was to know that Jesus would be with me every day. That joy has been in my heart from that moment until now.

In our text, the evangelist Philip saw that God had given him an open door and led him directly to a heart that would receive the truth—God clearly had arranged the meeting between Philip and the Ethiopian eunuch. In a different era and a different way, I believe God arranged for my acquaintance with the Olufson family. God cares about each individual soul, and He will go to amazing lengths to draw hungry hearts to Himself and ensure that they receive the instruction they need.

Today, be alert to the opportunities for evangelism that God places before you. Follow God’s leading! You may not understand His plans at first, but there are souls around each one of us who need the Lord. You may be the one to bring the truth to a hungry heart that God has already prepared.

BACKGROUND

Chapter 8 of Acts can be divided into three parts. Verses 1-4 cover the dispersion of the Jewish believers into the regions of Judea and Samaria due to persecution, and the resultant expansion of the Church. The ministry of the evangelist Philip in Samaria is described in verses 5-25, and the remainder of the chapter recounts Philip’s meeting with and instruction of the Ethiopian eunuch in the desert of Gaza.

The first sentence of chapter 8 could be included in the previous chapter, as it refers to the martyrdom of Stephen. The word translated “death” in this sentence actually implies an act of murder, rather than a death that occurred as a result of natural causes.

In the statement that Saul “made havock of the church” (verse 3), the words *made havoc* are translated from a verb that means “to loosen, break up, and destroy,” such as when a wild boar tears up a vineyard. The word *haling* means “to violently pull.”

According to verse 4, one endeavor common to the followers of Christ who were scattered abroad by persecution was that they “went every where preaching the word.” The Greek word translated “preaching” is *evangelizo* (from which we derive our English word “evangelize”), and it also could be translated “announce glad tidings.” It is a word Luke used extensively; approximately half of the times it appears in the New Testament are credited to him.

In Old Testament times, Samaria was the capital city of the Northern Kingdom of Israel. In the New Testament, the word generally referred to the area that

lay between Judea on the south and Galilee on the north. The reference in verse 5 to the “city of Samaria” is historically accurate; the historian Josephus records that the village of Sebaste had been rebuilt by Herod the Great on the ancient hill of Samaria, and was also referred to at times as “Samaria.”

While Philip’s preaching brought “great joy” in the city, the account of the false magician, Simon, in verses 9-24, reveals that not all continued in the faith. While Simon did believe (see verse 13), his commitment was only temporary. Simon’s desire to buy the power of God is the basis for the English word “simony,” which refers to the buying or selling of religious authority, privileges, or prestige.

Verses 14-17 describe what some Bible scholars term the “Samaritan Pentecost.” The fact that the Apostles prayed for the Samaritans to receive the Holy Ghost (verse 15) indicates that this experience of a personal Pentecost was considered a vital part of the believers’ spiritual walks.

In the midst of a successful revival, Philip was called by God to a new task: he was to “arise, and go” to Gaza (verse 26). The tenses of both these verbs imply a command to immediate action. Gaza was a desert region about ninety-four miles from Samaria, near the border of Egypt. The statement in the subsequent verse that “he arose and went” shows his prompt obedience.

The eunuch Philip met was from Ethiopia, a kingdom on the Nile which was located between Aswan in modern-day Egypt and Khartoum in Sudan, rather than the country identified today as Ethiopia, which is further south. The statement that this man was “of great authority” indicates that he was a prince. Candace was the traditional title of the Ethiopian female sovereign rulers (similar to Pharaoh as the designation for Egyptian kings). The eunuch’s honorable position is evidenced by the fact that he was riding in a chariot, which was the best means of transportation in that day.

The passage the eunuch was reading aloud from the Scripture was Isaiah 53:7-8, one of the most outstanding Messianic chapters of the Old Testament. His question of whom the prophet spoke of gave Philip a perfect opportunity to present Jesus. Undoubtedly the discussion between the two men went on for some time as the chariot traveled on along the desert road, and eventually culminated in the eunuch’s profession of faith in Christ (verse 37).

The precise location of the water where Philip baptized the new convert is unknown, though several bodies of water deep enough for baptism exist in the area.

Verse 40 indicates that Philip “was found” (appeared) at Azotus, which is the Old Testament city of Ashdod and was located approximately twenty miles north of Gaza. From there he walked northward to Caesarea, sharing the Gospel in coastal cities all along the way. The distance he covered would have been almost the length of Israel.

AMPLIFIED OUTLINE

Hannah’s Bible Outlines
Used by permission per WORDsearch

- II. The witness in Jerusalem
 - D. The witness of Stephen
 - 4. The stoning of Stephen (7:54-8:4)
 - b. The dispersion of the Church (8:1-4)
- III. The witness in Judea and Samaria (8:5-12:25)
 - A. The witness of Philip (8:4-40)
 - 1. His ministry in Samaria (8:4-25)
 - a. His preaching to the Samaritans (8:4-8)
 - b. His success among the Samaritans (8:9-13)
 - c. The unifying ministry of Peter and John (8:14-17)
 - d. The scheme of Simon Magnus (8:18-24)
 - (1) His wish (8:18-19)
 - (2) Peter’s rebuke (8:20-23)
 - (3) Simon’s repentance (8:24)
 - e. The return of Peter and John (8:25)
 - 2. His ministry to the Ethiopian (8:26-40)
 - a. The commission of Philip (8:26-28)
 - b. The command to Philip (8:29)
 - c. The witness of Philip (8:30-35)
 - d. The baptism by Philip (8:36-38)
 - e. The removal of Philip (8:39-40)

A CLOSER LOOK

1. According to verse 6, what prompted the people of Samaria to believe Philip’s words?

2. What does Philip’s experience with the eunuch teach us about God’s valuation of a single soul?

3. In today’s text, persecution led to a good result—the spread of the Gospel. What are some of the blessings and positive results that God has accomplished in your life through times of trial or adversity?

CONCLUSION

Clearly, God arranged the meeting between Philip and the Ethiopian, and this event provides us with a beautiful example of how God opens doors for evangelism. Are we doing our parts to step through the open doors God places in our paths?



Acts 9:1-43

DEVOTIONAL FOCUS

“And as he journeyed, he came near Damascus: and suddenly there shined round about him a light from heaven: and he fell to the earth, and heard a voice saying unto him, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?” (Acts 9:3-4)

Mosab Yousef was a young Palestinian who wanted to be a fighter. He was first arrested when he was ten years old. Before reaching his teen years, violence and terror had become so commonplace in his life that he was bored during the rare times when their town was quiet. Mosab wanted to be just like his father, a devout Muslim who was a founding leader of Hamas, a terrorist organization responsible for countless deadly attacks against Israel. As he grew older, Mosab began helping his father, and before he turned twenty-one, he had seen abject poverty, suffering, torture, and death.

While still in his early twenties, Mosab became an integral part of the Hamas organization, and was even imprisoned several times by the Israelis. However, doubts about Islam and Hamas began surfacing in his mind when he observed how Hamas used the lives of innocent civilians and children to achieve its goals.

One day as Mosab was walking past the Damascus Gate, a main entrance to the Old City of Jerusalem, he had an encounter that put him on a new path. After some casual conversation with a tourist from the United Kingdom, he was invited to a Bible study at the YMCA in West Jerusalem. Being a bit bored at the time, and somewhat curious about Christianity, he agreed to go.

Mosab was given a New Testament at that meeting. Because gifts are respected in the Arab culture, he decided to read it. He recounted, “I began at the beginning, and when I got to the Sermon on the Mount, I thought, *Wow, this guy Jesus is really impressive! Everything he says is beautiful.* I couldn’t put the Book down. Every verse seemed to touch a deep wound in my life. It was a very simple message, but somehow it had the power to heal my soul and give me hope.”¹ Thunderstruck by what he read, Mosab realized that this was what he had been searching for all his life. Jesus’ words made sense to him, and overwhelmed, he began to weep. He continued to read about Jesus and to pray, and eventually was secretly baptized in Tel Aviv by an unidentified Christian tourist.²

Mosab’s story brings to mind another encounter that took place near the same location. The conversion of Saul of Tarsus recorded in today’s text is one of the most significant events in the history of the Church.

The transformations of Saul and Mosab stand as potent testimonies to the love of God. They remind us that God finds people even when they are not looking for Him. No belief system, no past history, no political regime can block the hand of God from drawing seeking souls to Himself. Every conversion does not occur in a spectacular manner, but when an individual has an encounter with Jesus, and yields to Him, that person’s life will be changed. Like Saul and Mosab, that one will find a new purpose, a new path, and a new peace.

Today, let us give thanks to God again that He is still reaching out to all men everywhere, and saving souls. Nothing is impossible with God!

BACKGROUND

This text describes the conversion of Saul, later known as Paul. His testimony also is recorded in Acts 26:12-18, and referred to in 1 Corinthians 9:1 and 15:8. This emphasis is reasonable, as over half of the Book of Acts is a description of Paul’s activities, and he authored thirteen of the New Testament books (not including Hebrews, which many scholars attribute to him).

In the previous chapter, Acts 8:3 states that in Jerusalem, Saul “made havock of the church, entering into every house, and haling [violently pulling] men and women committed them to prison.” In today’s passage, he purposed to expand his efforts to the Syrian city of Damascus. The phrase “breathing out threatenings and slaughter” in verse 1 portrays his hot anger against the believers.

The high priest mentioned in verse 1 was Caiaphas. In 1990, an ancient burial box (called an “ossuary”), was found in Jerusalem inscribed with the name of this high priest and positively dated to the era of Christ. These are the first physical remains to be identified of a specific person mentioned in the New Testament.

It is likely Saul and his companions traveled on foot. Damascus was 130 miles from Jerusalem, a journey of at least six days. Saul’s eagerness to make that trek shows how committed he was to his cause.

Jesus addressed Saul by name in verse 4. In Scripture, the repetition of a name emphasizes the importance of what will be said and indicates deep emotion (as in the “Martha, Martha” of Luke 10:41, and the “Jerusalem, Jerusalem” of Matthew 23:37). In Saul’s response, “Who art thou, Lord?” the word “Lord” was simply a title of respect similar to “Sir,” rather than an acknowledgement of divinity.

The statement, “It is hard for thee to kick against the pricks” (verse 5), alluded to the use of a goad—a long, extremely sharp stick used to move an ox in a

certain direction. The hind legs of the ox were jabbed with this instrument until the animal cooperated. The inference was that Saul was only harming himself in his efforts because he was fighting against God.

The men with Saul fell to the earth with him (see Acts 26:14) but apparently arose to their feet while Saul continued to lie on the ground. They saw the brightness but did not see the Person of Jesus. In the original Greek, the difference in the verb forms for “heard” and “hearing” used in verses 4 and 7 indicate that Saul’s companions probably heard the sound of a voice but could not discern the words.

Ananias, whose name means “the Lord is gracious,” was not an Apostle, evangelist, elder of the church, or deacon—he was simply identified as “a certain disciple.” Though the command he received was startling and he initially protested, he ultimately obeyed and went to the humbled persecutor of believers.

The reference to the Christians in Jerusalem as “saints” (verse 13) is the first time in the Book of Acts this designation is given to the followers of Christ. The original Greek word, *hagios*, literally means “holy ones.” Paul’s later writings used this title forty times.

Immediately after his conversion, Saul “preached Christ in the synagogues” (verse 20). As a well-known rabbi who had been trained by Gamaliel (an esteemed doctor of Jewish law), he would have been a welcomed speaker. However, the fact that he was proclaiming the “heresy” he had violently opposed was startling to his hearers. The word *proving* in the phrase “proving that this is very Christ” (verse 22) means “joining together” and implies skillfully deducing or demonstrating.

Galatians 1:17-18 indicates that after his conversion, Saul spent three years in Arabia, the desert region southeast of Damascus. This period of time may have occurred between verses 22 and 23, or verses 25 and 26. Alternatively, his night escape described in verses 23-25 may have occurred shortly after his conversion, when the Pharisees first learned of his conversion.

Barnabas, who verified Saul’s testimony before the Apostles (verse 27), is first mentioned in Acts 4:36 as being among those who laid their possessions at the feet of the disciples.

Beginning at verse 32, the narrative of chapter 9 returns to Peter, describing two incidents in his ministry: the healing of Aeneas of the palsy (verses 33-35), and the raising of Dorcas from the dead (verses 36-42).

AMPLIFIED OUTLINE

Hannah’s Bible Outlines
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- III. The witness in Judea and Samaria
 - B. The witness to Saul (9:1-31)
 - 1. The call to Saul (9:1-9)
 - 2. The conversion of Saul (9:10-19)
 - a. Ananias’ dilemma (9:10-14)
 - b. Ananias’ instructions (9:15-16)
 - c. Ananias’ obedience (9:17-19)
 - 3. The confession of Saul (9:20-22)

- 4. The conspiracy against Saul (9:23-31)
 - a. The plot (9:23-24)
 - b. The narrow escape (9:25)
 - c. The removal to Jerusalem (9:26-29)
 - d. The removal to Tarsus (9:30-31)
- C. The witness of Peter
 - 1. His witness at Lydda and Sharon (9:32-35)
 - 2. His witness at Joppa
 - a. The raising of Dorcas (9:36-43)

A CLOSER LOOK

1. To whom did Saul go for permission to travel to Damascus to apprehend the believers there?

2. In what ways was Saul’s conversion similar to that of all Christians, and in what ways was it unique? What conclusions can we draw from these similarities and differences?

3. Based on the example of Ananias, how should we treat those who oppose our religious beliefs?

CONCLUSION

God is still reaching out to seek and save those who will open their hearts to His truth, no matter what their upbringing, beliefs, or past history.

- 1. Mosab Hassan Yousef and Ron Brackin, *Son of Hamas*, United States: Tyndale House Publishers, 2011, pg. 122.
- 2. In 2007, Mosab Yousef left the West Bank for the United States, where he sought and eventually was granted political asylum. In August 2008, he publicly revealed his conversion to Christianity and renounced Hamas and the Arab leadership. In his book, he describes his agonizing separation from family and homeland, the dangerous decision to make public his newfound faith, and his belief that the Christian mandate to “love your enemies” is the only way to peace in the Middle East.



DEVOTIONAL FOCUS

“And Cornelius said, Four days ago I was fasting until this hour; and at the ninth hour I prayed in my house, and behold, a man stood before me in bright clothing, and said, Cornelius, thy prayer is heard, and thine alms are had in remembrance in the sight of God.” (Acts 10:30-31)

In the early 1920s, Walter Frymire found out that a prayer meeting can have life-changing effects. He and his family were worshipping in an organization that taught the experiences of salvation and sanctification but felt that the baptism of the Holy Ghost was fanaticism. News of the Latter Rain Gospel was spreading, and traveling ministers were holding meetings and preaching about the baptism of the Holy Ghost. Some people from the Frymires’ church attended, and then studied their Bibles. They felt the baptism was of God and thought the Lord would not allow them to receive something false if they sought in their home church. One Sunday afternoon, in that church, six people received the baptism of the Holy Ghost!

Walter was one in that church who received the experience about that time. The leaders of the organization decided that it might be all right to have the baptism, but no one was to speak about it or witness to it during services. Therefore, those who had received the infilling of the Holy Spirit eventually felt they needed to withdraw from that organization.

The Frymires had received literature from the Apostolic Faith Church, and one daughter had been healed after they sent a prayer request to the headquarters in Portland. In time, God led them to move to where they could be a part of this church. The prayer meeting in the early 1920s was life-changing, and the blessings from it and subsequent decisions benefitted the succeeding generations. The Frymires had two sons and three sons-in-law who were ministers, and today grandchildren and great-grandchildren are helping spread the Gospel.

In today’s text, Cornelius had a prayer meeting in which he saw an angel. He obeyed the instruction he was given, and his life was changed when Peter preached in his home. In addition to Cornelius and the people within his sphere of influence, the whole Early Church was impacted. However, that notable prayer meeting was preceded by many not-so-eventful times when Cornelius communed with the Lord. The angel said those day-to-day prayers and good deeds were a memorial before God.

The lesson for us is obvious—we need to keep praying. There will be many days when it may seem to us that our prayers are not monumental. There will be many prayer meetings that do not appear to be life-changing. However, that does not mean those times are unimportant! Rather, those daily prayers are vital. God sees and hears our petitions. He will answer by giving guidance and strength and by fulfilling His promises in our lives.

BACKGROUND

Today’s text records a vital lesson for the Early Church. The events in this chapter caused the Apostles to realize that the Gospel was for the Gentiles as well as the Jews. They had been preaching to the Jews, who were direct descendants of Abraham; the Samaritans, who were of Jewish and Assyrian descent; and proselytes—individuals who had converted to Judaism and observed the whole Law of Moses. God used two men in two cities and a series of precisely timed events to reveal that all people are called to serve Him.

The chapter begins with Cornelius in Caesarea. Herod the Great had built Caesarea to be the primary seaport and also the Roman capital in Judea. The city was magnificent with palaces, temples, a long rectangular hippodrome for chariot races, a Roman theater, and white stone warehouses. The harbor was particularly outstanding, with a breakwater about two hundred feet wide giving protection.

Cornelius was a centurion, which means he was an officer over one hundred men in the Roman army. “The Italian band” referred to a cohort, which was usually about six hundred men. Because they were from Italy (the geographical term for the country of which Rome was the capital), they may have been especially distinguished or honored. Most members of the Roman army at Caesarea were Syrian, so likely the Italian cohort identified here was primarily made up of Italians, who were probably volunteers. In a turbulent province like Judaea, it would have been important in terms of national security to have at least one cohort of Italian soldiers at the seat of government.

Verse 2 gives five characteristics of Cornelius. He was “devout” which means godly. That he “feared God” tells us he was among a group of people (sometimes called “God-fearers”) who were familiar with the Jewish religion, attended synagogue, and observed the Sabbath and part of the ceremonial law. They believed in only one God (not a multitude of gods), but they were not actual converts to Judaism. “With all his house” indicates that Cornelius had led his family to

serve God. That “he gave much alms to the people” shows he was charitable, and “prayed to God alway” reinforces that he regularly worshipped God.

When Cornelius was praying at 3:00 p.m. (the ninth hour) an angel appeared to him with a commendation and instructions. Simon was a common Jewish name, so “whose surname is Peter” clarified, as did “Simon a tanner.” Cornelius immediately dispatched three men who had been affected by his godliness and could be trusted. They were to go to Joppa, which was about thirty miles south of Caesarea, and get Peter.

At noon, when the messengers were nearly to Joppa (verse 9), Peter was praying. The rooftops of houses of those times were quiet places that were ideal for prayer. Peter became hungry, and while lunch was being prepared, he saw in a vision a big sheet full of animals that Jewish people were prohibited from eating, and he was commanded to kill and eat them. When he protested, he was told, “What God hath cleansed, that call not thou common” (verse 15). It would later be explained that this meant Peter was not to regard the Gentiles as inferior people whom God would not redeem. Peter was given this object lesson three times. As he considered it, the men from Cornelius arrived, and the Spirit gave Peter specific instructions, which he followed.

God had the details worked out precisely. Here is a possible timeline:

- Cornelius had a vision at 3:00 p.m.
- The next day the servants set out for Joppa, perhaps walking. They went about twenty miles and spent the night.
- In the morning, the servants walked ten more miles and arrived in Joppa at noon. They met with Peter and then spent the night in Joppa.
- The third day after Cornelius’ vision, the servants, Peter, and “certain brethren from Joppa” (verse 23) started for Caesarea, traveling twenty miles.
- The fourth day after Cornelius’ vision the group traveled ten more miles and arrived at the house of Cornelius.

Cornelius knew when they should be coming and had called together his family and close friends who believed as he did. When Peter arrived, he told them God had showed him that he “should not call any man common or unclean” (verse 28). Peter had undergone a drastic change in thinking. He had housed the Gentile messengers in Joppa and had eaten with them. He had traveled with them and now was in a Gentile home. However, God had more yet to teach Peter and those accompanying him.

Peter began to preach (verses 34-43), giving a message that summarized the Gospel. Before he was done, the Holy Ghost fell, with the evidence of the people speaking in languages not known to them.

Convinced that God had included the Gentiles in His plan of salvation through Christ, Peter and the other brethren arranged for these believers to be baptized in water that day.

It was a landmark day for the Early Church. The subject of Gentile believers would have to be explained (see Acts 11) and God’s guidance requested as the Early Church continued to grow (Acts 15). However, God had made it clear that the Gentiles were invited to participate fully in the Gospel.

AMPLIFIED OUTLINE

Hannah’s Bible Outlines
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- III. The witness in Judea and Samaria
 - C. The witness of Peter
 2. His witness at Joppa
 - b. The preparation for further ministry (10:1-22)
 - (1) The angelic message to Cornelius (10:1-8)
 - (2) Vision of Peter (10:9-16)
 - (3) The Spirit’s message to Peter (10:17-22)
 3. His witness at Caesarea (10:23-48)
 - a. Peter’s meeting with Cornelius and his household (10:23-33)
 - b. Peter’s message before Cornelius and his household (10:34-43)
 - c. The result (10:44-48)

A CLOSER LOOK

1. What did the angel say to Cornelius about his prayers?

2. Why do you think the people at Cornelius’ home so quickly experienced the outpouring of the Holy Ghost?

3. Why is this chapter of the Bible especially important to us today?

CONCLUSION

The events at Cornelius’ house teach us that we must keep praying! The result will be eternal benefits.



Acts 11:1-30

DEVOTIONAL FOCUS

“When they heard these things, they held their peace, and glorified God, saying, Then hath God also to the Gentiles granted repentance unto life.” (Acts 11:18)

The principle of unity is a part of our national heritage in the United States of America. Symbolic of that fact are the words *E Pluribus Unum* that appear on all coins minted in this country. According to the U.S. Department of the Treasury, the motto was first used on U.S. coinage in 1795. An Act of Congress on February 12, 1873, made the inscription a legal requirement for all coins of the United States.

Even if we are not Latin scholars, we could probably guess the general meaning of these words once we realize that *pluribus* is the basis for our English word “plural,” and *unum* is related to the English word “unit.” *E Pluribus Unum* literally means “out of many, one.” Originally, the phrase referred to the thirteen colonies which joined together to form the United States of America. However, in later years its meaning came to suggest that out of many peoples, races, religions, languages, and ancestries has emerged a single people and nation. The United States truly is a “melting pot!”

The principle of unity is also a key aspect of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. God promised throughout Scripture that Gentiles as well as Jews would be recipients of the Gospel, although it would be delivered first to the Jews. However, many Jews supposed that God favored them over all other ethnic groups; some even had the false notion that merely being Jewish was evidence that one had a right standing before God. Impacted by this longstanding perspective, the converted Jews of the Early Church had a tendency to be exclusive and separate themselves somewhat from their Gentile brethren.

Peter’s experience at Cornelius’ house, where the Holy Spirit was poured out upon Gentile believers, opened his eyes to the truth. In today’s text, he gave the church elders in Jerusalem an account of what had happened, ending with the words of verse 17, “Forasmuch then as God gave them the like gift as he did unto us, who believed on the Lord Jesus Christ; what was I, that I could withstand God?” To that question, the church leaders could give no other response than, “Then hath God also to the Gentiles granted repentance unto life.” This was a turning point for the Early Church. The Jewish/Gentile divide had been perhaps the greatest impediment to the spread of the Gospel

following Pentecost. Once the church understood and accepted that the Gospel was for all, Christianity spread rapidly and many Gentiles became believers.

What are the implications of this great truth in our day? Simply this: the good news of Christ is for everyone. We must never permit differences of race, culture, economic class, religious background, education, or any other factor to be an impediment to unity within the Church, or to hinder us from reaching out to non-believers. The world will be blessed as we accept God’s divine plan and look beyond any diversities, working together to proclaim the Gospel to all.

BACKGROUND

Chapter 11 can be divided into two main sections: Peter’s explanation of his association with Gentiles to the church elders at Jerusalem (verses 1-18), and the spreading of the Gospel message to the Gentile world through evangelism (verses 19-30).

The traditional rites of the Jewish faith, particularly circumcision, were of great importance to Jewish believers. Those who emphasized the necessity of continued adherence to the Law were sometimes referred to as those “of the circumcision” (see verse 2). The “uncircumcised” (verse 3) were considered unclean, and it was thought that contact with such individuals would defile a person. The most stringent disapproval of Peter’s actions related to the fact that he had eaten with the uncircumcised, which no strictly observant Jew would do.

The narrative of verses 5-10 replicates the events described in chapter 10, verses 9-16. The church leaders in Jerusalem could make no rebuttal to Peter’s straightforward account, especially since his actions were validated by the Spirit’s descent upon the Gentiles. Additionally, Peter was accompanied by six brethren, who also witnessed this event. God had made evident that Gentiles could become believers, and that understanding began opening the door for the evangelizing of non-Jews.

At verse 19, Luke resumed the narrative he left off at Acts 8:1. (Acts 8:2 through 11:18 is an interjection given in order to provide a description of the ministry of Philip, Saul’s conversion, and some glimpses of Peter’s ministry.) Luke went back to his theme of the evangelism that took place due to the persecution and scattering of the believing Jews after the martyrdom of Stephen. Mention was made of three specific locations: Phoenicia, Cyprus, and Antioch. Phoenicia was a long, narrow country on the seacoast, in an area that is now

part of Lebanon and Syria; Cyprus was an island off the coast of Phoenicia; and Antioch was the capital of the Roman kingdom of Syria.

While early evangelistic efforts were being directed to Jews only, brave men of Cyprus and Cyrene (a city in the province of Libya in Africa) ventured to preach to the Grecians at Antioch. God blessed those efforts and “a great number believed” (verse 21). Thus, it was at Antioch where evangelism first became a worldwide outreach, because the Samaritans to whom Philip had preached were part Jewish, and Cornelius and his household to whom Peter had preached were Gentiles who were already worshipping the Jews’ God.

Having been informed regarding what was occurring in Antioch, the leaders of the church in Jerusalem sent Barnabas, a Spirit-filled Cyprian Jew (see Acts 4:36), to investigate. Rather than denouncing what he found at Antioch, Barnabas encouraged the new believers. Soon, evaluating that the job was too great for one man (Antioch at the time had a population of five hundred thousand or more), he traveled about 125 miles to Tarsus to find Saul, the educated young Jewish rabbi who had been converted some years before, and solicited his assistance. Locating him seemingly was not an easy task, as the word “seek” in verse 25 implies a difficult search.

Under the combined ministry efforts of Barnabas and Saul, the fledgling group of believers in Antioch prospered spiritually. Verse 26 indicates that it was at this location where Christ followers, formerly referred to as “believers,” “brethren,” “saints,” and “disciples,” were first identified as “Christians.” It is noteworthy that this designation was not chosen by them, but was assigned by Gentiles outside of the church. The fact that non-believers had to give a name to the emerging movement was an indicator of how large the group of Christ’s followers had become.

AMPLIFIED OUTLINE

Hannah’s Bible Outlines
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- III. The witness in Judea and Samaria
 - C. The witness of Peter
 - 4. His witness in Jerusalem (11:1-18)
 - a. Peter’s conflict with the Jews (11:1-3)
 - b. Peter’s explanation of his actions (11:4-17)
 - c. The result (11:18)
 - D. The witness of the persecuted Church
 - 1. The witness in Antioch (11:19-30)
 - a. The beginning of the Church (11:19-21)
 - b. The instruction of the Church (11:22-26)
 - c. The ministry of the Church (11:27-30)
 - (1) Agabus’ prediction (11:27-28)
 - (2) The Church’s relief (11:29-30)

A CLOSER LOOK

1. According to verses 20-21, what did the men of Cyprus and Cyrene preach to the Grecians, and what was the result?

2. Why did Peter’s simple retelling of what had happened at Cornelius’ house have such an impact on the church leaders in Jerusalem?

3. What are some ways you and your peers might be able to reach out to groups of people you have never approached before with the Gospel message?

CONCLUSION

The Gospel is for all people everywhere. Let’s take care to include people of all backgrounds, cultures, and religions in our evangelism!

NOTES



DEVOTIONAL FOCUS

“But the word of God grew and multiplied.”
(Acts 12:24)

In the centuries that have gone by since Luke penned the Book of Acts, followers of Christ have endured persecution. James and Peter, whose sufferings for the faith are recorded in today’s text, were just two of thousands upon thousands of believers who have experienced intimidation, opposition, assaults, imprisonment, and even martyrdom.

Nik Ripken wrote about his travels to some of the spiritually darkest locations on earth to meet with those who have triumphed despite intense persecution. One of the believers Ripken met was Dmitri, a pastor in Eastern Europe who had been jailed for seventeen years. Imprisoned with fifteen hundred hardened criminals and subjected to terrible physical torture, Dmitri began two routines that he continued throughout his confinement: he would write Scriptures on any scrap of paper he could find, and every morning he would stand, raise his arms in praise to God, and sing a hymn. This went on for years, even though the prison officials did everything in their power to stop him.

Finally, Dmitri was told he would be executed. As he was dragged down the prison corridor toward the courtyard, an amazing thing happened. Fifteen hundred hardened criminals rose to their feet, faced the east, and began to sing the song they had heard Dmitri sing every morning. The jailors were so shocked that they took the pastor back to his cell. What an impact that simple act of honoring God had made on those imprisoned with this faithful pastor! Sometime later, Dmitri was released and allowed to return to his family.¹

Dmitri’s story, and those of other Christians whose faithful witness endured in the most difficult of circumstances, led Nik Ripken to an amazing conclusion: the Gospel message not only can survive under persecution, but many times it thrives! When stalwart believers do not allow their tormentors to silence their testimony, their courageous behavior often inspires others to faith in Christ. Our focus verse bears that out—in the face of intense persecution, the Early Church stood fast and “the word of God grew and multiplied.”

Those of us who live in regions of the world that are safe from overt persecution (at least for now) have a challenge of our own: we must withstand the trend toward the secularization of the Gospel, and survive in an environment where our spiritual values seem increasingly strange in our culture. We should not only

pray for our persecuted brothers and sisters; we should also learn from them how to live with courage and undaunted commitment to our Lord in spite of opposition. As we follow their examples, we can trust God that our lives will impact others, and that the Gospel will continue to grow and multiply in all areas of the world.

BACKGROUND

In verse 19 of chapter 11, Luke had resumed his theme of the evangelism that took place due to the persecution and scattering of the believing Jews after the martyrdom of Stephen. Chapter 12 continues the theme of persecution, mentioning the death of James and describing the arrest, imprisonment, and miraculous release of Peter. Except for a brief mention in chapter 15, this is the last Luke spoke of Peter, who was the focus of the first twelve chapters of the Book of Acts. Peter subsequently met Paul in Antioch (Galatians 2:11-14), and later wrote two letters to suffering Christians scattered throughout Asia Minor, the Epistles of 1 and 2 Peter. Tradition says both Peter and Paul were martyred, likely after the Great Fire of Rome in A.D. 64, but before the last year of Nero’s reign in A.D. 68.

Verse 1 records that King Herod vexed (ill-treated, afflicted, or distressed) the followers of Christ. This was Herod Agrippa I, a grandson of Herod the Great—the ruler in the days of Jesus’ birth. Herod Agrippa I was also the nephew of Herod Antipas, who had a role in the trial of Jesus, and the brother of Herodias, who was responsible for the beheading of John the Baptist. After a thirty-five year period in which Judea had been administered by seven different procurators (governors), Herod Agrippa I had been appointed by the Romans to rule over Judea. Although he was partly Jewish and observed the Jewish feasts and sacrifices, he was a classic politician, aligning himself against the followers of Christ in the hope that his actions would solidify his position with the Jewish leaders who hated Christians.

One of Herod’s first actions was to execute James, the brother of John. James was the first of the original twelve disciples to suffer martyrdom, and the only one whose death is mentioned in Scripture. (His brother John was the last of the Apostles to die.) The Greek historian Eusebius (A. D. 260/265 – 339/340) related that the soldier who guarded James was so impacted by his witness that he declared himself a Christian before the court, and was willingly executed alongside of James.

When Herod saw that his action pleased the Jewish populace, he had Peter apprehended. The Apostle was placed under the supervision of four quaternions of soldiers—sixteen men, with groups of four taking each

three-hour watch period. Herod's intention to bring Peter out after the Passover (translated from the Greek *pascha* as "Easter") was probably based on the fact that the large crowds gathered for the festival potentially would laud him for his zeal in killing someone they believed to be a heretic.

Peter's imprisonment stirred the believers to prayer on his behalf. In verse 5, the phrase translated "without ceasing" is from the Greek word *ektenos*, which has the idea of earnestly and fervently. Luke used this same word to portray the agonizing prayer of Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane (Luke 22:44).

Verse 6 describes how the quaternion of soldiers was stationed around Peter. No doubt Herod knew that Peter had escaped from prison once before (see Acts 5:19), and was intent upon ensuring that would not happen again. However, an angel awoke the sleeping Apostle and led him out of the prison.

The home Peter went to following his deliverance was that of the mother of John Mark (the writer of the Gospel of Mark). Apparently the house was large enough to serve as a meeting place for a congregation; some Bible scholars suggest this may have been where the Last Supper was held and Pentecost occurred. After Peter explained to the assembled group what had happened, he instructed them to "go show" (or report) his escape to James and the brethren. This James was the one Paul referred to as "James the Lord's brother" in Galatians 1:19—the leader of the church in Jerusalem.

Verses 18-19 indicate that Herod executed the guards who had been charged with supervising Peter's imprisonment. It was a Roman custom to execute any guard who allowed a prisoner to escape.

Herod then went to Caesarea, which was the headquarters of the Roman government in Judea, and where he had a palace. At this time, his relationship with the people of the self-governing but economically dependent cities of Tyre and Sidon had been one of antagonism, and he had cut off their food supply. However, the people petitioned Herod for peace after gaining an audience through Blastus, his chief of staff.

According to the ancient Jewish historian Josephus, the "set day" (verse 21) at which Herod was to make an oration to the people of Tyre and Sidon was a festival during which vows would be made regarding the safety of the Roman emperor. While Luke related only that Herod was "arrayed in royal apparel" as he came into this event, Josephus noted that Herod's garment was made entirely of silver and was very resplendent, causing him to appear to be illuminated. In response to his vivid appearance, and perhaps to gain his favor, the people cried out "It is the voice of a god, and not of a man." There is no record that he rebuked the people, nor in any way rejected their impious assertions. Divine retribution was poured out, and Herod was smitten with worms. Josephus recorded that he endured great pain for five days before he finally died.

AMPLIFIED OUTLINE

- III. The witness in Judea and Samaria
 - D. The witness of the persecuted church
 2. The persecution in Jerusalem (12:1-25)
 - a. Herod's persecution of the church (12:1)
 - b. The death of James (12:2)
 - c. The confinement of Peter (12:3-23)
 - (1) Peter's arrest (12:3-4)
 - (2) The prayer of the church (12:5)
 - (3) Peter's deliverance (12:6-17)
 - (4) Herod's confession (12:18-19)
 - (5) Herod's death (12:20-23)
 - d. The growth of the church (12:24-25)

A CLOSER LOOK

1. According to verse 9, what was Peter's initial perspective about his deliverance from prison?

2. Why do you think it was so difficult for the group assembled in the home of Mary to believe Rhoda's report that Peter was at the door?

3. While we may not experience direct persecution for our faith, followers of Christ will face opposition from Satan. What are lessons we can learn from persecuted believers that will help prepare us to stand?

CONCLUSION

Hostility and hatred do not thwart the advance of God's kingdom. We can learn from persecuted believers to hold fast to our confidence in God through whatever trials He allows to come our way.

1. Nik Ripken with Gregg Lewis, *The Insanity of God*, Nashville: B&H Publishing, 2013, 151-160.



DEVOTIONAL FOCUS

“As they ministered to the Lord, and fasted, the Holy Ghost said, Separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them. And when they had fasted and prayed, and laid their hands on them, they sent them away.” (Acts 13:2-3)

In a grassy clearing on the campus of Williams College in Williamstown, Massachusetts, stands a simple marble monument inscribed with the words, “The Field is the World.” The “Haystack Monument” does not appear on most maps, yet it commemorates an important event in Christian history: a prayer meeting that sparked the formation of the first official mission organization in the United States.

On a hot August afternoon in 1806, a group of five spiritually minded students from the college met together in a grove of trees near the Hoosic River. Their purpose was to discuss missionary William Carey’s small booklet, “An Inquiry into the Obligation of Christians to Use Means for the Conversion of the Heathen,” a controversial publication that put the responsibility of world evangelism on all believers.

The leader of the group was Samuel Mills, who laid out a radical idea: sending missionaries to distant lands with the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Moreover, he proposed that the five of them be among those to go.

The group was so absorbed in their discussion that they failed to notice an approaching storm. However, thunder began to rumble around them and within moments, pouring rain and lightning strikes caused them to scramble for the nearest shelter—which happened to be a haystack! Over the roar of the deluge, the five continued to talk.

One of the group objected to Mills’ proposal, insisting China was too dangerous. But Mills felt certain that in spite of the danger, the Gospel message must be taken to remote areas. He finally cried out, “We can do this if we will!” At that moment, something broke loose in the hearts of all five—something that changed them forever and motivated an endeavor that would impact the world.

Until then, missionary organizations in the United States had focused entirely on the Western frontier and Native American tribes. These men felt believers had a responsibility to *all* nations. They continued to pray about this, and eventually went before the General Association of Massachusetts to urge that an American missionary agency be created. Their proposal was approved, and on June 28, 1810, the first official foreign

missions organization in the United States began. Many missionaries were sent overseas by this organization.

Our text today also records a landmark in the history of evangelism—when believers in Antioch laid hands on Saul (soon after, called Paul) and Barnabas and sent them out. This was the beginning of a great step forward in the spread of the Gospel. While a gradual expansion of the church beyond the confines of Judaism had already begun through the efforts of Philip and Peter, it was these two men who completed the process of establishing the Gospel among the Gentiles. This was the start of Paul’s initial missionary voyage. For the first time, the Gospel was carried over the sea.

God has given us the pattern for evangelism in His Word, and provides the power for it through His Spirit. The charge to go into all the world and preach the Gospel to every creature is still in effect. Are we willing to listen for the direction of the Spirit and do our part? We will not all be called to distant lands. Our part may be to pray for those who go. We may be called to offer our resources, or devote our time and energies for some task on the home front. The specific calls will differ, but the challenge is the same for all of us—to consecrate ourselves to the work of soul-winning. It will involve sacrifice and effort, but commendation and a heavenly reward will be given to those who do so!

BACKGROUND

Today’s text marks a natural division in the Book of Acts; from this point forward in the narrative, the principal figure is Saul. Chapter 13 describes the commissioning of Saul and Barnabas (verses 1-3), their visit to Cyprus (verses 4-12), and the beginning of Paul’s first missionary journey to the mainland of Asia Minor (verses 13-52).

Barnabas likely was the main leader of the church at Antioch, given that his name is mentioned first in the list of “certain prophets and teachers” in verse 1. He was among the Early Church members who laid their possessions at the feet of the Apostles (see Acts 4:36-37). He is also mentioned in Acts 9:27 as the one who verified Paul’s testimony before the Apostles when they were unsure of Paul’s true commitment to the Gospel of Jesus Christ. According to Acts 11:30, Barnabas had accompanied Paul on a trip to Jerusalem with an offering for the relief of Christians there who were suffering want because of a famine.

The past tense of the words “have called” in verse 2 implies that the Holy Spirit already had revealed to Saul and Barnabas the sphere of their work prior to their being separated (“set apart for some purpose,”

from the Greek word *aphorizo*). The actions by the church were simply a recognition and confirmation of the divine call. Some Bible scholars suggest that the phrase “sent them away” in verse 3 should be rendered “gave them leave to depart,” as verse 4 reiterates that that they were “sent forth by the Holy Ghost.”

Antioch in Syria was a logical embarkation point for the first evangelistic mission to the Gentiles, being the place where believers had first been called “Christians” and by that designation, differentiating them from Jewish adherents to the old Law. Cyprus, the first destination, is an island about 150 miles long and 40 miles wide, located about 100 miles southwest of Antioch. The missionaries began their ministry in Salamis, a main seaport on the east end of the island. After visiting Jewish synagogues throughout Cyprus, they departed from Paphos, the seat of the Roman government in Cyprus, located on the west end of the island.

The statement that Saul and Barnabas had John “to their minister” (verse 5) could be translated “as their attendant.” The Greek word used is *hyperetes*, which literally means “under rower” or one who serves under the authority of another. No reason is given for John Mark’s departure, noted in verse 13, although in Acts 15:37-38, Luke indicated that Paul thought the younger man, who was a nephew of Barnabas, was not worthy of traveling with them again because of his early departure from the first journey. (Later Paul and John Mark were reconciled; see 2 Timothy 4:11).

Establishing a pattern that Paul continued in later outreach efforts when entering a new location, the two men went first to the synagogue to preach (see verses 5 and 14). It was customary for the leaders of the synagogues to invite visiting rabbis to speak, so that was a natural place to minister. However, when Paul began to teach that Jesus was the Messiah, his message was vehemently rejected. At that point, he went to the Gentile community to teach about Jesus.

At verse 9, Luke began to refer to Saul as Paul. Since “Paul” is the Greek form of the Jewish name “Saul,” this may have been related to the fact that the missionary was now in Greek-influenced territory.

Paul’s rebuke of the sorcerer Elymas, who opposed the missionaries, was both stern and direct (verses 8-12). He charged the magician and false prophet with being “full of all subtilty” (or deceit). As punishment for resisting the true light, Elymas was temporarily struck blind. This divine retribution so affected the deputy of the country, Sergius Paulus, that he came to faith in Christ. The verb “being astonished” in verse 12 means “to strike with panic or shock.”

Paul’s message to the Jews in Pisidia (verses 16-41) is given in great detail. He began with familiar ground to his Jewish audience—God’s covenant with Israel. At the conclusion of his message, the Gentiles present asked to hear more of the truth on the next

Sabbath. When a great crowd gathered on that day, the devout Jews were “filled with envy” (perhaps because of the attention Paul and Barnabas were attracting) and contradicted Paul’s words. The two men informed the Jews that the message had come to them first, but since they had rejected it, they would turn to the Gentiles. This was a fulfillment of the prophecy in Isaiah 49:6.

AMPLIFIED OUTLINE

Hannah’s Bible Outlines
Used by permission per WORDsearch

- IV. The witness “unto the uttermost part of the earth”
 - A. The first missionary journey of Paul
 - 1. The activity in Antioch (13:1-3)
 - 2. The activity on Cyprus (13:4-12)
 - a. Arrival at Salamis (13:4-5)
 - b. Controversy with Bar-Jesus (13:6-11)
 - c. The faith of Sergius Paulus (13:12)
 - 3. The activity in Galatia
 - a. Arrival at Perga and departure of John Mark (13:13)
 - b. Ministry at Antioch (Pisidia) (13:14-52)
 - (1) The occasion (13:14-15)
 - (2) The message (13:16-41)
 - (3) The result (13:42-52)
 - (a) Evidence of belief (13:42-49)
 - (b) Evidence of unbelief (13:50-52)

A CLOSER LOOK

1. What did the church at Antioch do before they sent Paul and Barnabas out with the Gospel message?

2. Why do you think Paul began his message in the synagogue at Pisidia with an emphasis on God’s covenant with Israel?

3. What principles for evangelizing can be drawn from Paul’s presentation to the Jews that will be helpful for us as we reach out to unbelievers?

CONCLUSION

All of us can and should take part in reaching out to the unsaved.



Acts 14:1-28

DEVOTIONAL FOCUS

“And when they had preached the gospel to that city, and had taught many, they returned again to Lystra, and to Iconium, and Antioch, confirming the souls of the disciples, and exhorting them to continue in the faith, and that we must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God.” (Acts 14:21-22)

The dictionary indicates that the word *preach* means “to deliver a sermon or religious address to an assembled group of people, typically in church” or “to publicly proclaim or teach a religious message or belief.” While those definitions accurately describe how Paul and Barnabas taught, sometimes a song also can be a way of preaching.

Through the years, I have been privileged to sing with many choral groups, performing a wide range of musical styles. One of my favorite numbers, and one that certainly preaches the Gospel, is a traditional spiritual entitled “Good News, Chariot’s A-Comin’.” The lyrics powerfully communicate the longing for an eternal home that was handed down musically from generation to generation. As I sing it, I cannot help but mourn the suffering and oppression—some of the “much tribulation” alluded to in our focus verse—that led to such a song. However, I also marvel at the hope that transcended the circumstances of those early singers. The words are simple and repetitive, yet they offer reassurance about what awaits beyond this life:

*Good news, chariot’s a-comin’
and I don’t want it to leave me behind
There’s a long white robe in Heaven I know
and I don’t want it to leave me behind
There’s a starry crown in Heaven I know
and I don’t want it to leave me behind
There’s a golden harp in Heaven I know
and I don’t want it to leave me behind
Good news, chariot’s a-comin’
and I don’t want it to leave me behind*

The song shares the good news that one day all who have experienced new life through Jesus Christ will be taken into an eternity with Him. It proclaims the blessed hope that our current circumstances, no matter how troubled, are only temporary. The joys that await us in Heaven will be eternal. Now that is very good news!

According to our focus verse, Paul and Barnabas “preached the gospel” in Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch. The word “gospel” comes from a Greek word meaning

“good news,” and without doubt, the message of encouragement these two men preached was good.

Today, there are many sources of news in our world—everything from word of mouth to electronic messaging that can span the globe in mere seconds. There is plenty of bad news that graphically demonstrates the fact that humanity is broken and in great need of help. Yet, good news is also available! We can have hope of a bright future through Christ. That is the Gospel message which Paul and Barnabas preached, and which God also calls us to preach—through words, through our lives, or through song!

BACKGROUND

Acts 14 continues the account of Paul’s first missionary journey, focusing on his ministry in Galatia, an area that today is located in central Turkey. Paul, accompanied by Barnabas, had traveled from Antioch in Syria across the Mediterranean Sea to the island of Cyprus, on to Perga in Pamphilia, and then to Antioch in Pisidia near Asia Minor. Chapter 14 gives details of their time spent in Iconium (verses 1-7), Lystra and Derbe (verses 8-21), and their return to Antioch (verses 22-28). Themes of preaching the Gospel, embracing the truth (particularly by Gentiles), and withstanding persecution recur throughout the passage.

Because of the threat of stoning in Iconium, Paul and Barnabas departed from that city and went about twenty miles south to Lystra, and soon after that, east to Derbe, which was a distance of sixty miles. In Lystra, because of the healing of a man with crippled feet, the superstitious Lycaonians hailed Paul and Barnabas as incarnations of the Greek gods Jupiter and Mercurius (Roman equivalents for the Greek gods Zeus and Hermes). Jupiter was the most popular god in Galatia, and was the patron god of Lystra, where a temple had been built in his honor. According to an ancient legend, the two gods had visited the city many years before. An old couple had extended hospitality and were rewarded for their kindness. Possibly with that legend in mind, the people of the city brought garlands (used in religious rites) and oxen for sacrifices, with the intent of showering the two missionaries with gifts and honor.

Paul used this misunderstanding as an opportunity to direct the multitudes toward “the living God,” describing Him as Creator of the universe (verse 15). He cited as proof the people’s own geography and climate conditions, noting that the rain and abundance of crops were signs of God’s goodness to them, because the climate of the central Anatolian plateau typically was

semi-arid. Paul stated that God “left not himself without witness” (verse 17) even to those unfamiliar with His revelation to the Jews.

On this portion of his trip, Paul experienced a threat of stoning (verse 5) in Iconium, and subsequently was stoned and left for dead by Jews angry about his message (verse 19). Paul later referenced this incident in 2 Corinthians 11:25.

The home of Timothy, the younger minister mentored by Paul, was likely in this area. Acts 16 indicates that during the Apostle’s second visit to Lystra, Timothy was invited by Paul to join him, so he may have been converted during this first missionary journey. Another detail supporting this supposition is that in 2 Timothy 3:10-11, Paul referenced Timothy’s familiarity with the persecutions he had endured in that region, making it probable that the younger man had been in the vicinity when those persecutions occurred.

AMPLIFIED OUTLINE

Hannah’s Bible Outlines
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- IV. The witness “unto the uttermost part of the earth”
 - A. The first missionary journey of Paul
 - 3. The activity in Galatia
 - c. Ministry at Iconium (14:1-7)
 - d. Ministry at Lystra (14:8-20)
 - (1) The miracle (14:8-10)
 - (2) The response of the multitude (14:11-13)
 - (3) The message of Paul and Barnabas (14:14-18)
 - (4) The persecution of Paul (14:19-20)
 - e. Ministry in Derbe (14:21)
 - f. The return to Antioch (Syria) (14:22-28)

A CLOSER LOOK

1. According to verse 19, what group of people stirred up the citizens of Lystra and persuaded them to stone Paul and leave him for dead?

2. Why do you think Paul and Barnabas continued to preach even after their lives were threatened in Lystra and Derbe?

3. How can you use your current situation to give “testimony unto the word of his grace”?

CONCLUSION

We have received good news! While we may not all be preachers, we should all proclaim the Gospel through our words and our lives.

NOTES



Acts 15:1-35

DEVOTIONAL FOCUS

“But there rose up certain of the sect of the Pharisees which believed, saying, That it was needful to circumcise them, and to command them to keep the law of Moses. And the apostles and elders came together for to consider of this matter.” (Acts 15:5-6)

A “fork in the road” is a metaphor for a deciding moment in life or history when a major choice of options is required. In researching the origin of that phrase, I discovered that folk wisdom suggests the metaphor comes from an ancient Russian tale. In it, a knight on horseback approached a point where the road split. He saw an inscription: “If you ride to the left, you will lose your horse; if you ride to the right, you will lose your head.” Perhaps that was not a difficult decision to make, but it certainly was a potentially life-altering one!

The American poet Robert Frost mused upon this idea in his well-known poem “The Road Not Taken.” It begins, “Two roads diverged in a yellow wood . . .” and concludes with the author stating that his choice “has made all the difference.” That is a life principle, isn’t it? Decisions have consequences. At times, one small turning point determines the outcome.

We find an example of a major fork in the road of Christian history in today’s text. The leaders of the Early Church faced the question of whether Gentile believers had to be obedient to the requirements of the Mosaic Law—specifically the rite of circumcision—in order to be saved. Paul and his followers insisted that a person was justified by faith alone, while most of the converted Pharisees asserted God would not set aside the Law in receiving a Gentile believer. While the Pharisees could not deny that Gentiles had been genuinely converted through the preaching of Peter, they found it difficult to relinquish their long-held tradition of gaining favor with God through the keeping of the Law.

How different the course of Christian history might have been if the council at Jerusalem had yielded to pressure and chosen the path of insistence upon conformity to the Law’s requirements! Christianity could have been limited to a sect within Judaism, the emerging Church could have been back under bondage to the Law, and the expansion of the Gospel could have been impeded or carried out through another avenue. Instead, the Spirit-led decision—and one foretold in the prophecies of the Old Testament—allowed the Church

to grow unhindered by the cultural differences between the Jews and Gentiles, and to fulfill its God-ordained mission of expansion into the whole world.

There is a lesson here for us. When we come to a “fork in the road” in our personal lives, we too may be influenced initially by personal convictions. But like the elders at Jerusalem, we must seek divine guidance. We should look to Scripture for directing principles and the confirmation of God’s Word, while whole-heartedly submitting to God’s will. In addition, we may need to seek the counsel of godly Christian friends and leaders. We want to be certain that God is directing us! While our personal decisions may not impact the course of Christian history, they may well determine our eternal destiny.

BACKGROUND

Today’s text describes the first session of the Early Church held by the Apostles and elders in Jerusalem (often called the Jerusalem Council), which probably occurred about A.D. 50. The decision made by James and the church elders at this session is one of the most crucial determinations recorded in the Book of Acts.

In the infancy of the Early Church, most of those who converted to Christianity were Jews who had already been circumcised according to Old Testament Law. However, as the groups of Gentile believers at Antioch, throughout Galatia, and in other areas grew, it became imperative that a decision be made regarding whether Gentile Christians should be required to follow Jewish Law, as some insisted.

Verses 1-5 record that after Paul and Barnabas disputed with those who felt circumcision was necessary, the determination was made to bring the matter before the Apostles and elders at Jerusalem. This is evidence that while the Early Church was still in its infancy, the groups of believers in various locations operated under the direction of church officials. The fact that when conflicts arose in a local assembly, the church authorities in Jerusalem settled the matter, also indicates that there was a hierarchy of authority within the church.

Verses 6-12 relate that Peter, Paul, and Barnabas reminded those present at the meeting that God had accepted the Gentiles based on their faith alone, rather than adherence to Jewish Law. Peter reiterated that God had confirmed the authenticity of the Gentiles’ conversion by “giving them the Holy Ghost” (verse 8). He cites this as evidence that God had previously purified their hearts by faith (verse 9), thus substantiating not only the baptism of the Holy Ghost, but also the doctrine of entire sanctification.

The Apostle James was the brother of Jesus and moderator at the council, as well as pastor of the church at Jerusalem. In verses 13-21, he was the one to declare the conclusion that only believing in Christ is necessary for salvation. He rooted his declaration in Scripture by referencing “the prophets” and citing the words of Amos who foretold that God’s intention was to call all of mankind to Himself (see Amos 9:11-12).

Verses 22-35 relate that James’ declaration was supported by “the apostles and elders, with the whole church,” their unanimity bearing witness that the conclusion was Spirit-inspired. The only restrictions placed on the Gentiles was abstinence from certain idolatrous practices that broke the Law of Moses and were also specifically applicable to “strangers” dwelling with them. The decision was confirmed by a letter that was taken by a delegation to the Gentile believers, which brought great joy to the believers at Antioch.

AMPLIFIED OUTLINE

Hannah’s Bible Outlines
Used by permission per WORDsearch

- IV. The witness “unto the uttermost part of the earth”
 - B. The Jerusalem Council (15:1-35)
 - 1. The dissension (15:1-5)
 - 2. The discussion (15:6-21)
 - a. Peter’s testimony (15:6-11)
 - b. Paul and Barnabas’ testimony (15:12)
 - c. James’ judgment (15:13-21)
 - 3. The decision (15:22-35)
 - a. The letter to Antioch (15:22-30)
 - b. The ministry to Antioch (15:31-35)

A CLOSER LOOK

1. According to verse 7, the meeting of the council began with a period of “much disputing.” What occurred that caused the multitude to keep silence and hold their peace, as noted in verses 12-13?

2. Why do you think Peter’s address to the council had such an impact?

3. What can we learn from this text about the proper way to resolve problems and preserve unity in the church?

CONCLUSION

When we face a major fork in the road, looking to God for guidance is the only sure way to make the right decision.

NOTES



DEVOTIONAL FOCUS

**“And at midnight Paul and Silas prayed, and sang praises unto God: and the prisoners heard them.”
(Acts 16:25)**

During the American Civil War, as darkness descended the night before the Battle of Stones River, a Union Army band began to play softly the song, “Home Sweet Home.” After a time, a Confederate band began to play along. Soon another regimental band joined in, and then another, till all the bands from both sides of the conflict were playing together. The soldiers were quiet, likely pondering whether they would ever see home again. As the strains of “Home Sweet Home” began to fade away into the darkness, the hearts of the soldiers were touched and they were reminded of the cause they were fighting for—home!

Music has wonderful power. It can soothe a tiny baby to sleep. It can encourage the downcast to give a shout for the battle. It can comfort at the bedside of a dying child of God. Music can calm the heart after a trying day at the office, or add a mellow backdrop to a candlelit meal. It can humble us as we remember the tremendous price paid for freedom, and stir us to worship as we consider the tremendous price paid for our spiritual deliverance.

While the benefits music can bring are undeniable, it is not always easy to sing. In times of trial, pain, or crisis, it might seem impossible to lift our voices in praise. In today’s text, Paul and Silas had been beaten and thrown into prison. No doubt they were suffering terrible pain from the bleeding wounds on their backs, and the fact that their feet were secured in stocks. Singing would not be the natural response in such circumstances! Yet even though the two men did not know what the morrow would bring, they sang. What made that possible? Perhaps our focus verse gives the answer: before they “sang praises unto God,” Paul and Silas “prayed”! The Holy Spirit must have stirred their hearts as they communed with God, helping them to focus on Him and sing in the midst of the pain.

Sometimes we too must make a decision to sing or offer praise to God in spite of circumstances. It may cost us something to do so, but it will be a pleasing sacrifice to the Lord. We will find that to sing and praise in the midst of a trial will help lift the load, though it may be a heavy one. And what a testimony our sacrifice of praise will be to those around us! Like Paul and Silas, we will not only please the Lord, but we will impact those who listen to our song in a time of trial.

BACKGROUND

This portion of text describes the beginning of Paul’s second missionary journey, and the spread of Christianity northward and westward from his base in Antioch of Syria.

In the first verse of our text, Acts 15:36, Paul suggested that he and Barnabas visit places where they had planted churches on their earlier missionary trip. One meaning of the word translated *visit* is “to inspect, examine.” This indicates Paul’s desire to check up on the welfare of these new believers and nurture their faith.

Acts 15:36-41 records that a contention arose between Paul and Barnabas. John Mark had left them during their earlier missionary journey, and at this point, the two men differed on whether it was advisable to have him accompany them on this second trip. The Bible makes no effort to disguise the controversy; rather, it shows Christians acting in a very human manner. “The contention was so sharp between them” that they parted ways, with Barnabas and Mark going back to Cyprus. Paul later reconciled with John Mark, as recorded in Colossians 4:10; Philemon 1:24; and 2 Timothy 4:11, and the younger man eventually wrote the second of the four Gospels.

Paul chose Silas to accompany him in Barnabas’ place. Silas was a member of the Jerusalem church, and like Paul, was also a Roman citizen (see Acts 16:37).

It was on this second journey, in the city of Lystra, that Paul met Timothy (Timotheus). Lystra was where the crowd had tried to crown Paul and Barnabas as gods on their first missionary journey. Since their departure roughly five years before, the young man Timothy had grown spiritually, and was well respected among the Christians there. Timothy’s father was a Greek, so Paul had Timothy circumcised, not because it was a Christian requirement, but so that he could enter and preach in Jewish synagogues.

The shift from “they” in verse 8 to “we” in verse 10 probably means that Luke joined the missionaries in Troas. Luke was a Gentile native of Antioch. He was well-educated in Greek literature and science, and was a physician by profession. He became a close friend and traveling companion of Paul, perhaps becoming Paul’s personal physician.

Verses 9-12 record the famous Macedonian call—the plea, “Come over . . . and help us.” Philippi was a Roman colony and the largest city in the region of Macedonia. There, the missionary band initially met with a group of Jewish women by the riverside. This could indicate that the Jewish community in Philippi

was few in number, as they were not worshipping in a synagogue. (There had to be at least ten Jewish men in a town before a synagogue could be built in a city.)

Lydia (verse 14) was one of the early converts, and her “household” followed her example (this likely referred to servants and attendants, rather than children). She probably was an influential and wealthy woman, as the purple cloth she dealt in was an expensive, luxurious product. The dyes used for making purple were rare and highly valued.

The first opposition in Philippi came through a slave girl who was demon-possessed. Paul commanded the evil spirit to come out, and when the young woman’s masters realized their source of financial gain was no more, they “drew” (or dragged) Paul and Silas before the magistrates (Roman praetors). In the Roman Empire, there were two very different sets of laws: one for citizens of the Roman Empire, and one for those who were not citizens. Roman citizens had specific civil rights that were fervently protected. Non-citizens had no civil rights, and were subject to the whims of both the assembly and the magistrates. The people of Philippi assumed Paul and Barnabas were not Roman citizens and were offended that these obviously Jewish men would harass Roman citizens with their strange religion of a crucified Lord. The magistrates also felt free to abuse Paul and Silas for the same reason.

Verses 16-34 record Paul and Silas’ incarceration and the miraculous conversion of the Philippian jailor. The dungeon in which the two men were confined was likely a dark, underground hole below the jailor’s house, since he brought them into his own house after the earthquake (see verse 34). When the earthquake aroused him from sleep, he came into the prison area and found the doors open. He would have been silhouetted in the entrance, and thus, Paul and Silas were able to see him draw his sword and prepare to kill himself rather than face the fate of one who allowed prisoners to escape.

In verse 37, Paul asserted his rights as a Roman citizen. Why Paul waited to divulge his citizenship is not clear, but he must have been led of the Spirit, as it was through Paul and Silas’ suffering in jail that the jailor and his family were saved.

AMPLIFIED OUTLINE

Hannah’s Bible Outlines
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- IV. The witness “unto the uttermost part of the earth”
 - C. The second missionary journey of Paul
 - 1. The preparation for the ministry (15:36—16:5)
 - a. The conflict between Barnabas and Paul (15:36-40)
 - b. The confirmation of the churches (15:41—16:5)
 - 2. The ministry in Macedonia
 - a. The call from Macedonia (16:6-10)

- b. Arrival at Samothrace and Neapolis (16:11)
- c. Ministry at Philippi (16:12-40)
 - (1) The conversion of Lydia (16:12-15)
 - (2) The demon possessed slave girl (16:16-18)
 - (3) The imprisonment of Paul and Silas (16:19-25)
 - (4) The release of Paul and Silas (16:26-27)
 - (5) The conversion of the jailor (16:28-34)
 - (6) The departure from the city (16:35-40)

A CLOSER LOOK

1. According to Acts 16:2, what report did the brethren in Lystra make about Timothy?

2. The words of the demon possessed slave girl were true. Why do you think what she said disturbed Paul so much?

3. Paul received direction from the Holy Spirit in the form of a vision of a man from Macedonia. What are some other ways the Spirit gives direction?

CONCLUSION

We cannot always choose our circumstances, but like Paul and Silas, we can choose to pray and sing in our dark hours.

NOTES



Acts 17:1-34

DEVOTIONAL FOCUS

“For in him we live, and move, and have our being; as certain also of your own poets have said, For we are also his offspring.” (Acts 17:28)

As young teenagers, my brother and sister were arguing over a matter of opinion. Since it was an opinion, neither could be wrong but they both could have been right. They went back and forth at each other for a while, and then my very frustrated brother hollered, “You just have no knowledge of being!” None of us listening had a clue as to what that statement meant, but it stopped the discussion and then eventually became quite a joke in our family. Now, when any of us want a conversation to end but also want the last word, we say something that makes absolutely no sense. That leaves our opponent with his mouth open and nothing to say. At various times, family members have discussed just what a “knowledge of being” was, but none of us ever came up with a good definition. However, the phrase has stayed with us for years now!

Recently, I read today’s focus verse, “For in him we live, and move, and have our being,” and it reminded me of that long-ago exchange. I understand, as did Paul the Apostle, that my true existence is through Jesus Christ. Paul was speaking to men in Athens. He had discovered an inscription in their city, “To the Unknown God,” and declared to them that he knew who this God was—the Creator of all! Paul told these men that God did not need to be unknown to them; He actually was ready to be found of them.

Before Jesus came into my life, I was breathing, talking, thinking, and functioning in my environment, but my life had no true essence or real meaning. Now, Jesus *is* my life! I know that I live and move in Him. I am His. I belong to Him, and I am who I am because He forgave my sins and made me His child.

People who have not given their hearts to the Lord do not understand what causes believers to have such loyalty and honor for Him. The “knowledge of being” is the answer. We can thank God that He is not unknown to us, and praise Him for giving us the wonderful, comforting, exciting knowledge of being His children. And then we can ask Him to help us share with others the love He has for them.

BACKGROUND

After being released from the prison in Philippi, Paul and Silas continued their missionary journey. This chapter includes their visit to Thessalonica

(verses 1-9) and Berea (verses 10-15), where they were joined by Timothy. The chapter concludes with Paul’s message to the people in Athens and their response (verses 16-34).

Thessalonica was located about one hundred miles southwest of Philippi. Paul and Silas traveled along Via Egnatia, the road between the Adriatic Sea and modern day Turkey. Amphipolis and Apollonia were significant cities along this road, and if the travelers were walking, they may have spent a night at each place. Thessalonica was the capital of Macedonia, a seaport, and a wealthy city.

Jewish people liked to study, discuss, and even argue about the Scriptures. *Opening* in verse 3 means “explaining,” and *alleging* means “to place alongside,” indicating that Paul used Scriptures the Jews knew to prove his statements about Jesus’ death and resurrection.

After three Sabbaths, the Jews no longer allowed the two men to participate in the synagogue. It appears that Jason was hosting the missionaries and the group of believers met at his house. Those opposing the Gospel “gathered a company” (verse 5), which means they formed a mob and caused an uproar. When the mob could not find Paul, they took Jason and some other believers to the city rulers, releasing them once they had paid security as a guarantee there would be no further trouble.

“The brethren immediately sent away Paul and Silas by night unto Berea” (verse 10), a city about fifty or sixty miles to the west. In that city, Paul and Silas again went to the synagogue, and those people were “more noble” (generous or of better disposition) and eagerly studied the Scriptures daily. Followers of the Gospel grew in number, but Jews from Thessalonica came and stirred up trouble, so Paul had to leave immediately.

Paul traveled alone to Athens (verse 15), which was the intellectual and cultural center of the ancient world. Art, architecture, education, philosophy, and idols abounded. Paul adapted his evangelistic strategies to his environment. Here he met with Jews in the synagogue, and with Gentiles in the marketplace. The Epicureans and the Stoicks were two of the primary groups of philosophers. The Epicureans were materialists, believing that matter was the fundamental substance of nature, life, and creation, and also that pleasure was the most important goal for living. The Stoicks were fatalists, and felt the supreme good was virtue and that reason was of greater consequence than emotion, so they taught a life of self-denial.

Areopagus is another name for Mars Hill, which was the location of the ancient Athens court. It also became the name used for the court itself. Thus Paul was brought before the supreme judges in Athens to explain his doctrine. Paul was well-educated, coming from Tarsus which had a prestigious university, and having studied under Gamaliel, the predominant Jewish teacher at that time. Beyond that, the Holy Spirit dwelt in him. His address to the court is given in verses 22-31.

Paul declared to them that their “Unknown God” was the Creator of the world who gives humanity life and breath. Beginning at verse 30, he introduced repentance and judgment by “that man who he hath ordained” (Jesus Christ) and the Resurrection.

Verses 32-34 give the response of those listening to Paul. At least one member of this imposing group, Dionysius the Areopagite, believed.

AMPLIFIED OUTLINE

Hannah's Bible Outlines
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- IV. The witness “unto the uttermost part of the earth”
 - C. The second missionary journey of Paul
 - 2. The ministry in Macedonia
 - d. The ministry in Thessalonica (17:1-9)
 - (1) The message (17:1-3)
 - (2) The response of belief (17:4)
 - (3) The response of unbelief (17:5-9)
 - e. The ministry in Berea (17:10-15)
 - (1) The ministry (17:11-12)
 - (2) The departure (17:13-15)
 - 3. The ministry in Achaia
 - a. The ministry in Athens (17:16-34)
 - (1) His message in Athens (17:16-30)
 - (2) The response in Athens (17:31-34)

A CLOSER LOOK

1. What does God command all people to do? (verse 30)

2. If God is “not far from every one of us” (verse 27), why is it necessary to seek Him?

3. Paul adapted his style of witnessing to his audience. How can we know the best method of witnessing in a particular situation?

CONCLUSION

Is your life grounded in your relationship with Jesus Christ? He is waiting to be the focal point of your existence.

NOTES



Acts 18:1-22

DEVOTIONAL FOCUS

“Then spake the Lord to Paul in the night by a vision, Be not afraid, but speak, and hold not thy peace.” (Acts 18:9)

Since the days of the Early Church, there have been those who have spoken boldly for God in a setting of mockery and derision. One such incident occurred during the 1700s in the country of Prussia.

Frederick the Great, who ruled Prussia from 1740 to 1786, was widely known as an agnostic and scoffer against religion. One night, with members of his staff gathered around him, the king began making crude jokes about the Son of God until the whole place was filled with laughter. One of his most trusted officers, General Von Zealand, was among those present. Von Zealand was a devout believer, and after listening to the mocking comments for a time, he finally arose and solemnly addressed the king: “Sire, you know I have not feared death, you know I have fought for you in thirty-eight battles, and thirty-eight battles I have won; but, sire, my hairs are grey, I am an old man, and I shall soon have to go into the presence of One greater than thou—the mighty God, who saved me from my sin, the Lord Jesus Christ, whom you are blaspheming against. Sire, I cannot stand to hear my Saviour spoken of as thou has spoken of him. I salute thee, sire, as an old man who loves the Savior, on the edge of eternity.”

The room went deathly still. What would be the fate of one who rebuked the king with such boldness? Perhaps those present wondered if the old officer’s life hung in the balance in spite of his years of faithful service. Finally the king responded. With a voice that shook, he said, “General Von Zealand, I beg your pardon, I beg your pardon.” In moments, the whole company quietly exited the room.¹

God himself must have given courage to that venerable Prussian general, enabling him to stand before his king and scoffing fellow officers, and boldly declare his faith in his Savior, Jesus Christ, whom they were blaspheming.

In today’s text we read of another individual who took a stand for Christ among people who were expressing blasphemous opposition: the Apostle Paul. After his arrival in Corinth, Paul’s preaching had been met with fierce rejection by the Jews. In times past, he had been beaten, imprisoned, driven out of cities, and persistently attacked by Judaizers for his message. Now, in light of the uproar his teaching had stirred in

Corinth, Paul no doubt needed courage from God to continue.

God did not fail His servant. In our focus verse, we read that God spoke to the Apostle in a night vision, telling him, “Be not afraid, but speak, and hold not thy peace.” That encouragement helped Paul go on preaching in Corinth for another year and a half, until he began his third missionary journey.

Throughout the history of the church, Christians have defended their faith against the attacks of those who deride, doubt, or challenge it. They do not speak out to demonstrate their great oratorical skills or intellectual abilities, but to honor the One who is King of their lives.

We may never be required to stand for God before a mocking crowd of army officers or violent religious leaders. However, we will need to take a stand for God somewhere! Perhaps our opportunity to declare our faith will be before our peers in the classroom, our employer, or an unbelieving family member. Whatever the situation, we can be sure that God will give us the needed courage. He did that for Paul, and He will do so for us!

BACKGROUND

Today’s text covers Paul’s stay in Corinth during his second missionary voyage. The dating of an inscription referring to Gallio (see verse 12) found on archaeological ruins at Delphi suggests that events in this portion of Scripture likely took place from the spring of A.D. 50 to the fall of A.D. 51. Insight into Paul’s feelings after his arrival in Corinth can be found in 1 Corinthians 2:1-5. It is thought that Paul wrote the books of 1 and 2 Thessalonians, among the earliest letters of the New Testament, during this time.

Verses 1-4 described Paul’s early days in Corinth. The distance between Corinth and Athens, where the Apostle previously had been preaching, is about fifty-five miles; it is likely Paul walked. Corinth was the capital of the Roman province of Achaia and a cosmopolitan trade center. Dominated by a Temple to Aphrodite, the Greek goddess of love and war, the city was known for its vices and corruption.

The Apostle lodged in Corinth with Aquila and Priscilla, Christian Jews driven from Rome by anti-Jewish policies, who shared his avocation of tent making. As was his custom, he began his outreach efforts there by “reasoning” or discoursing in the synagogue, though he likely also used his workplace as a forum for witnessing. His audience was comprised of both Jews and Gentiles who worshiped with the Jews.

Verses 5-11 relate that Silas and Timothy arrived from Macedonia, which was an encouragement to Paul (see 1 Thessalonians 3:6-7). However, his intensified outreach efforts in the synagogue met with opposition by Jewish religious leaders, so the Apostle shifted his focus to the Gentiles. The shaking of his raiment in verse 6 was a symbolic gesture of renunciation, demonstrating that God had turned away from the Jews because of their rejection of Him.

Due to the increasing hostility of the Jews, Paul moved his center of operations to the home of Justus, a devout Gentile who resided next to the synagogue. Justus' name indicates that he was a Roman citizen, which would have given the small Christian congregation some status in the city. The subsequent conversion of Crispus, a leader of the synagogue, no doubt inflamed the Jewish religious leaders even more; this is suggested by the fact that God sent reassurance in a night vision to Paul instructing the Apostle to stop being afraid, and to go on speaking (the literal meaning of verse 9).

Verses 12-17 describe Gallio's response to Paul's ministry. Gallio was the governor of Achaia and the brother of Seneca, the philosopher, and tutor to Nero. The inscription "judgment seat" (verse 12) can still be seen on ruins of ancient Corinth.

The word "persuadeth" in the charge against Paul in verse 13 actually has the sense of evil persuasion, as in "seduction" or "misleading." Although the Jews' anger at Paul was based on a religious difference, they attempted to convey that he had broken Roman law. Gallio, however, saw through their duplicity and refused to judge the matter. The Greeks, perhaps venting their wrath at the Jews who had caused the turmoil, proceeded to beat Sosthenes, the ruler of the synagogue who replaced Crispus after his conversion.

Verses 18-22 indicate that Paul remained in Corinth for a while longer, and then traveled to Ephesus with Aquila and Priscilla. After a short stay in Ephesus, he returned to Jerusalem to "keep this feast"—likely either Passover or Pentecost.

AMPLIFIED OUTLINE

Hannah's Bible Outlines
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- IV. The witness "unto the uttermost part of the earth"
 - C. The second missionary journey of Paul
 - 3. The ministry in Achaia
 - b. The ministry in Corinth (18:1-17)
 - (1) Arrival in Corinth (18:1-4)
 - (2) His ministry to the Corinthians (18:5-11)
 - (3) The trial before Gallio (18:12-17)
 - 4. The ministry on the return to Antioch (18:18-22)
 - a. In Cenchrea (18:18)
 - b. In Ephesus (18:19-21)
 - c. In Antioch (18:22)

A CLOSER LOOK

1. What was the command of Claudius that forced Aquila and Priscilla to relocate in Corinth?

2. When Paul told the Jewish leaders that because of their rejection of Jesus as their Messiah, he would go to the Gentiles, what do you think he meant by the statement, "I am clean"?

3. What are some ways God has encouraged you or someone of your acquaintance in the face of persecution or rejection?

CONCLUSION

God can and will give us courage to stand up for Him, even when those around us are unreceptive, ridiculing, or hostile.

NOTES



DEVOTIONAL FOCUS

“And after he had spent some time there, he departed, and went over all the country of Galatia and Phrygia in order, strengthening all the disciples.” (Acts 18:23)

“There are faces before me tonight; there are voices pleading for the Gospel!” With those words, George Hughes acknowledged the deep longing in his heart to go back to Africa. Four years earlier he had made his first missionary trip to that continent. In the intervening years, the desire to return to visit the groups of faithful, but uninstructed, Christians he had left behind had grown stronger and stronger.

In a message at the annual camp meeting in 1952, he told of one place he had visited in Nigeria on his first trip: “There were six hundred people in that congregation, and I was with them for just one hour and a half. When we left, the leaders fell on their knees to weep because what they had prayed for and desired for years had been in their grasp for only one hour and a half. Ever since that day, that congregation has been before me.” He went on to describe some fifty-five other churches in the same area, saying, “If I went there and spent one week with each of these congregations, it would take me fifty-five weeks, to say nothing of the traveling time between. That is the need in one little area of Nigeria. . . . There is a challenge!”

Some weeks later, Brother George stood on the steps of a plane in Portland, Oregon, and waved good-bye to those who had gathered to say farewell. He was beginning his second missionary trip.

Back in Africa, he and local leaders, with a small bus and camping equipment, traveled around to newly developing Apostolic Faith churches scattered across the region. It meant hard travel in less than comfortable conditions, but his letters always mentioned the hundreds of hungry hearts they encountered.

Six and a half months after leaving Portland, Brother George said good-bye to his brothers and sisters in Africa and boarded a plane to head home. However, God had other plans. On that Portland-bound journey he became very ill and was taken off the plane at its first stop, in Roberts Field, Liberia. There he was called to Heaven. His body was buried in Africa, near the people he loved, to await the trumpet call.

In today’s text, we read of a great missionary of an earlier era embarking on his third evangelistic trip with a goal of “strengthening all the disciples.” Paul left from Antioch, his home base, and began a journey that

lasted from A.D. 53 to 57, visiting believers in Galatia, Phrygia, and concluding with a long stay in Ephesus.

The names of the places Paul visited were different from the ones George Hughes visited in Africa. The cultures, the conditions, and the people were different. But in both instances, there were hearts hungry for the truth. There were fledgling churches and groups of believers who needed more instruction. And in both the Mediterranean area and Africa, those who brought the message experienced the joy of seeing the seeds of truth taking hold, and the Gospel message spreading.

As we ponder the consecrated lives of these two missionary evangelists, may we feel the urgency of the same call they felt—a passion for the lost and an awareness that the spiritual challenge of evangelizing must be met in each succeeding generation. We may never be a George or a Paul. Perhaps many of us will never set foot outside the boundaries of our own countries as missionaries. However, we can and should have a heart for the lost and a willingness to do our part, whatever it may be, to spread the Gospel.

BACKGROUND

The final verses of chapter 18 begin the account of Paul’s third and last missionary journey, which started on the same route he had taken on his second one. On this approximately four-year trip throughout Asia Minor, he visited churches that he had planted during his first travels and had revisited on his second journey. Our text continues through chapter 19 and concludes with a riot in Ephesus, which indicated to Paul that it was time to move on (see Acts 20:1).

Acts 18:24-28 is an account of the Bible teacher, Apollos, who is described as “an eloquent man” in verse 24. The Greek word translated *eloquent* means “learned.” In addition to being well-educated, Apollos was also “mighty in the Scriptures” and “fervent in the spirit.” A Jew who had been born in Alexandria, Egypt, he seemingly had extraordinary ability to present the Messiahship of Jesus to a Jewish audience. However, though Apollos “taught diligently” (or accurately) the things of the Lord, he knew “only the baptism of John.” Aquila and Priscilla (Jewish Christians who had first met Paul in Corinth and shared in his work), taught him what was lacking in his understanding of the Gospel. Apollos then traveled to Corinth, where he quickly assumed a leadership role in the church.

In chapter 19, Luke recorded that after Apollos left Ephesus, Paul arrived there. The Apostle’s lengthy stay there points to the importance of the location—its wealth, population of around 300,000, and the fact that

it was a center for commercial trade made it a logical hub for evangelizing all the province of Asia.

Three significant events occurred during the Apostle's two-year stay in Ephesus. First, the Holy Ghost was poured out upon believers who had not previously heard about the Holy Spirit (verses 1-7). Next, Paul's effective ministry was met by a group of traveling exorcists who were assaulted by the demons they tried to cast out (verses 13-20). Then, a riot was caused by silver craftsmen who felt Paul's preaching threatened their livelihood of making shrines (verses 21-41).

Verse 9 records that Paul gathered the disciples in "the school of one Tyrannus." The word "school" referred to a hall used for lectures or other types of meetings, which probably was rented. Many people did not work during the heat of the afternoon, so during this time they were free to come to the school. Paul's teaching in such a venue pointed to his break with the synagogue and its rabbis. Since his efforts represented a bold and unashamed outreach to the "heathen" public, undoubtedly the Jewish leaders were further angered by this endeavor of the itinerant evangelist.

In verse 11, Luke indicated that miracles of healing occurred when handkerchiefs and aprons that had been used by Paul were taken to those who were sick, diseased, and troubled by evil spirits. There was no special power in the cloths themselves; God simply honored the faith of those early converts. One Bible scholar noted, "Sense-bound faith [faith which needs a tangible object to fasten upon] is not rejected, but is helped according to its need, that it may be strengthened and elevated."¹ It is noteworthy how carefully Luke's narrative puts Paul's part in its rightful place: God "wrought" and Paul was only the channel.

Ephesus was a center for occultism, and its people were very superstitious. The "curious arts" mentioned in verse 19 were the magic, spells, enchantments, and exorcisms that were commonplace in that society and thought to bring wealth, happiness, and protection.

Demetrius the silversmith (verse 24), who stirred up the opposition to Paul, was evidently an important man in the trade. The small shrines he and his fellow-craftsmen produced may have been representations of Diana (referred to by the Greeks as the goddess Artemis), who was thought to be the goddess of the hunt, the moon, and birthing, and supposedly had power to control animals. Making shrines to honor Diana had been a flourishing industry, and Paul's preaching must have caused a perceptible lessening of demand, given that the craftsmen were so easily stirred to anger over a threat to their financial security.

The townclerk who eventually appeased the mob (verse 35) was not a Roman official, but an Ephesian officer who worked closely with the Roman government. Since he would have been held responsible for any disorderly assembly, it was in his best interest to quell the riot and persuade the mob to disband.

AMPLIFIED OUTLINE

Hannah's Bible Outlines
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- IV. The witness "unto the uttermost part of the earth"
 - D. The third missionary journey of Paul
 - 1. The ministry in Galatia and Phrygia (18:23)
 - 2. The ministry in Ephesus (18:24—19:41)
 - a. Instruction of Apollos (18:24-28)
 - b. Instruction of some of John's followers (19:1-7)
 - c. Instruction of the Ephesians (19:8-20)
 - d. Instructions concerning his plans (19:21-22)
 - e. The riots in Ephesus (19:23-41)

A CLOSER LOOK

1. What question did Paul ask the disciples he met at Ephesus upon his arrival there (see Acts 19:2)? What was their response?

2. Why do you think the Word of God "mightily grew . . . and prevailed" (verse 20) in Ephesus despite heated opposition?

3. What can we learn from Paul's time in Ephesus that might apply to evangelizing in our day?

CONCLUSION

Spreading the Gospel may involve hardship, opposition, and persecution. However, a genuine and heartfelt love for souls will help us not to back away from the challenges that come with evangelizing.

1. Alexander Maclaren, *Expositions of Holy Scripture: the Acts*, (United States: BiblioLife, 2008) Pg. 482. E-book.



Acts 20:1-38

DEVOTIONAL FOCUS

“And when he had thus spoken, he kneeled down, and prayed with them all. And they all wept sore, and fell on Paul’s neck, and kissed him, sorrowing most of all for the words which he spake, that they should see his face no more. And they accompanied him unto the ship.” (Acts 20:36-38)

Effective spiritual leaders hold a special place in the hearts of the people in their congregations. This can be seen in the attitudes of the leaders of the Ephesian church toward Paul. And it can also be seen in the testimony of Jung Ok You regarding Harold and Sally Barrett, who were missionaries to Korea.

Jung Ok’s father was a merchant mariner, and she says, “Every time his ship pulled into the Portland harbor, Apostolic Faith people visited and invited the crew members to church and to their homes. My father wrote letters, telling us that these people were wonderful and very kind to all the Koreans.

“In 1967, missionary ‘Papa’ Harold Barrett and his wife, ‘Mama’ Sally, moved to Korea to preach this true Gospel. They began holding church services in a second-floor room of their house. The room was about ten by fifteen feet in size, and it became a small sanctuary that was called the ‘Upper Room Church.’ When I was sixteen years old, my family went there because my father wanted us to go.

“At the time, I didn’t know about the Gospel or Jesus. I only wanted to learn English from Mama Barrett. However, one day the Holy Spirit spoke to my heart and I realized I was a sinner. That day I confessed and repented of all my sins, and God saved me. I was one of the first converts in the Apostolic Faith Church in Korea.

“In time, my mother was saved. About one year after that, my father repented of his sins and was saved too. My younger brother and sister also were saved.

“In 1975, Papa and Mama Barrett left Korea to return to Portland, and most of the church members went to the airport to say goodbye. We were crying when they left, and we were so sad. We felt like children without a mother or father, so when they were gone, we went back to the church and prayed to the Lord. Then the Holy Spirit began to fall on the people. Day by day, the revival continued. During that time, I received my sanctification and the baptism of the Holy Spirit. The revival went on for some weeks, and around fifty people received the baptism of the Holy

Ghost. That really established the church and gave it a strong foundation.”

Similarly, the elders from Ephesus were sad when the Apostle Paul told them he would not see them again. He had labored in Ephesus for about three years, preaching, instructing, and nurturing. The believers were understandably sad at saying goodbye.

In the course of life, separation comes to us all. Mentors and teachers are called to other locations or on to their rewards in Heaven. Parents, grandparents, or others who have been strong spiritual influences in our lives will move or pass away. Yet when we turn to God for comfort and guidance in our sorrow, He can use the situation as an opportunity for spiritual growth. Like the people in Korea and Ephesus, we want to determine to let God use the circumstances in our lives to His full purposes.

BACKGROUND

Today’s text details Paul’s travels from the city of Ephesus in Asia, through the Roman province of Macedonia, to the city of Corinth in Achaia and then back toward Jerusalem on his third missionary journey.

After the riot in Ephesus, Paul moved forward his planned travel through Macedonia. It appears that he may have gone first to Troas, still in Asia, hoping to meet Titus, whom he had sent with a letter to Corinth (see 2 Corinthians 2:12-13). When Titus did not come, Paul went on to visit and encourage the Christians at Philippi, Thessalonica, and Berea in Macedonia. Titus did meet up with Paul there, bringing news of the church in Corinth. It is thought that Paul wrote the letter of 2 Corinthians at this time, and sent it back to Corinth with Titus. After exhorting the churches in Macedonia, Paul traveled on to Achaia (today’s southern Greece), and probably spent the next three months in Corinth, writing the Epistle to the Romans during that time.

Perhaps in the springtime when sailing was better, Paul planned to set out for Jerusalem. However, he learned of a plot against him. The Jews may have determined to arrest or kill him while on the ship or to throw him overboard. To thwart their plan, Paul traveled by land, going back the way he had come.

Some of the men who were to travel with Paul went on by ship and waited for him at Troas. The men of this group are thought to have been carrying money donated by the churches for the persecuted believers in Jerusalem. Sopater of Berea may have been the same person as Sosipater mentioned in Romans 16:21. If so, he was a relative of Paul. Aristarchus and Gaius are

mentioned in Acts 19:29. Timotheus is Timothy of 1 and 2 Timothy. Tychicus (see also Ephesians 6:21-22) and Trophimus (see also 2 Timothy 4:20) were from Ephesus.

In verse 6, Luke wrote “we,” indicating that he had again joined Paul’s traveling team. Not long after the church in Philippi had been established, Paul had left Luke there, probably to be the pastor of this new group. Now he sailed with Paul from Philippi to Troas, where they spent seven days.

Verse 7 says that the believers assembled on “the first day of the week,” which could be an indicator that they had changed their meeting day from the Jewish Sabbath to Sunday, the day that Jesus rose from the dead. “To break bread” may mean that they celebrated the Lord’s Supper. The word *preached* means “discuss, reason with, speak,” and the service was long. The room was lit with lamps that were no doubt smoky and added to the stuffiness.

The window may have been just an opening covered with lattice, or if there were shutters, perhaps they were open for ventilation. Eutychus sat in this opening, and sleep overcame him. He fell from the third floor. Some have suggested that Eutychus only had his breath knocked out, but Luke was a physician, and he wrote that the young man was dead. God’s miraculous power was demonstrated once again when he came back to life.

Paul went by land and the others by ship from Troas to nearby Assos, where Paul went on board. The specifics of their stops in verses 13-16 are typical of Luke’s attention to detail. The goal was to be in Jerusalem by Pentecost, which would have been the last part of May or the first part of June.

Verses 17-38 give Paul’s farewell to the elders of the church at Ephesus. The distance between Miletus and Ephesus was about thirty miles. When the elders arrived, Paul eloquently exhorted them. His concern for these people was evident as he reviewed his years at Ephesus and how he had lived among them. He had preached publicly and privately (in homes), to Jews and Gentiles (Greeks), the message of repentance and faith.

Paul knew difficulties were ahead of him, but he felt compelled by the Holy Spirit to go to Jerusalem. He urged these men to be good and watchful leaders, and then he commended, or committed, them to God’s sovereign care.

AMPLIFIED OUTLINE

Hannah’s Bible Outlines
Used by permission per WORDsearch

- IV. The witness “unto the uttermost part of the earth”
 - D. The third missionary journey of Paul
 - 3. The ministry in Macedonia and Achaia (20:1-5)
 - 4. The ministry in Troas (20:6-12)

- 5. The ministry in Miletus (20:13-38)
 - a. His journey to Miletus (20:13-16)
 - b. His message to the Ephesian elders (20:17-35)
 - (1) Concerning his ministry (20:17-27)
 - (2) Concerning the church (20:28-35)
 - c. His farewell to the Ephesians (20:36-38)

A CLOSER LOOK

1. What did Paul expect would happen to him once he arrived in Jerusalem?

2. What are some ways it is “more blessed to give than to receive” (verse 35)?

3. How can we know that we are doing God’s will even though we experience difficulties?

CONCLUSION

Perhaps someone who has been a strong spiritual help to you is no longer available. God is still with you, and you can commit yourself and your ways to Him. He has good planned for you.

NOTES



DEVOTIONAL FOCUS

“Then Paul answered, What mean ye to weep and to break mine heart? For I am ready not to be bound only, but also to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus. And when he would not be persuaded, we ceased, saying, The will of the Lord be done.” (Acts 21:13-14)

God’s will is perfect, even when we do not understand it. Reuel Green was fifty-six years old when he suffered a massive stroke that left him paralyzed on his right side and unable to speak more than a few words. He had been a preacher, pastor, and active in many areas of Gospel work as a church leader.

One day some months after the stroke, Reuel’s sister was entreating God to heal him. The Holy Spirit spoke to her heart, “Do you want to bypass My purpose for this?” Her tears flowed, and she responded, “No, Lord.” She still did not understand why God had allowed it, but she was fully committed to submitting to God’s will, and came away from that prayer meeting convinced that He had a purpose in Reuel’s affliction.

Sometimes God’s purposes may not be revealed to us in this life. Reuel lived twenty-six years after the stroke. Although he could not preach or converse, the Spirit of God was on his life and he continued to spread the Gospel in any way he could. He worked faithfully at the church office folding letters and putting tracts in envelopes. He prayed fervently beside those seeking God at the altars of prayer. He handed out tracts to anyone he could, including servers in restaurants and people he met as he walked along with his cane. Residents of the neighborhood where he lived said later, “It was as if he had a light inside of him.” Indeed he did, and he did not allow that light to be diminished by his lack of understanding of God’s purpose.

We can be inclined to think that if we are doing what God wants us to do, everything should roll along smoothly, and if we have difficulties, it must be because we are not in the Lord’s will. However, that may not necessarily be true. Today’s text and surrounding verses show that Paul was sure God wanted him to go to Jerusalem. Yet at many of his stops along the way, the Spirit indicated that trouble was ahead.

When hard situations come, it is valuable to search our hearts. We want to be certain that we are fully submitted to God and doing what He wants us to do. Once we have that clear assurance, it is important to keep on even if doing so is difficult.

Sometimes we may experience pain as we watch others suffer while doing the will of God. Reuel’s sister felt this, as did Paul’s friends and traveling companions in today’s text. It can be heartrending to see our parents, children, or friends suffering while fulfilling the will of God. At such times we want to cast our cares upon the Lord and encourage our loved ones and associates in their service to Him.

May our ultimate goal be like Paul’s—for God to be glorified no matter what the personal cost.

BACKGROUND

This text gives an account of the final portion of Paul’s third missionary journey and his arrival back in Jerusalem.

With characteristic attention to detail, Luke continued an event-by-event account of the travels. The first few days, Paul and those with him traveled in a boat that sailed along the coastline, probably stopping to load and unload some passengers and cargo at each place. Typically, great effort was made to be in a port by night for safety reasons. In Patara, Paul and his team no doubt secured places on a larger boat that went across the Mediterranean Sea from Patara to Tyre, a distance of about four hundred miles.

Tyre was a significant seaport of Phoenicia, and the ship’s cargo was unloaded there, apparently taking about seven days. “And finding disciples” in verse 4 indicates Paul and his fellow travelers had to look for the believers in Tyre, so they may not have been previously acquainted. Once found, clearly there was fellowship, and the local people warned of difficulties ahead for Paul in Jerusalem. While the Holy Spirit was making Paul aware of coming danger, He did not forbid Paul to go. Paul had said in Acts 20:22, “I go bound in the spirit unto Jerusalem,” so he clearly had directions from the Lord.

Embarking again, the travelers went about twenty-five miles to Ptolemais. This city was called Acco in the Old Testament, and currently is named Acre. It is in the northern part of Israel, across the bay from Israel’s largest seaport, Haifa. Believers there housed the travelers overnight.

Caesarea, which was about thirty-five miles south of Ptolemais, was the next stop. The trip had been completed quickly enough to allow the group to spend some days here in the home of Philip “the evangelist.” Philip was one of the seven deacons (Acts 6), and he had preached in Samaria, witnessed to the Ethiopian eunuch, and then had come to Caesarea (Acts 8). More than twenty years had transpired since Philip had been

appointed a deacon. He had four godly daughters who were yet unmarried. Often in the New Testament the word *prophesy* means “to preach.”

Agabus (verse 10) was from Jerusalem. Earlier he had visited Antioch and there predicted a famine that transpired during the reign of Claudius Caesar (Acts 11:27-28). In today’s text, he emphasized his message with a visual illustration by binding his own hands and feet with Paul’s belt. Men at that time wore loose outer garments that would be gathered around the waist with a belt (or girdle) while working or walking.

Verses 12-14 reveal deep emotion and Christian love shared by these believers. The “we” in verse 12 means that Luke and the others traveling with him—Philip, Philip’s four godly daughters, and other local believers—all tried to persuade Paul not to go. Their impassioned pleas had an effect on Paul. He said, “What mean ye to weep and to break mine heart?” *Break* means “to crumble or crush together.” His heart was fixed on doing God’s will, whatever the cost.

Seeing Paul’s determined purpose, the group bowed to God’s will. The phrase “took up our carriages” in verse 15 means that they prepared their baggage. Jerusalem was over sixty miles from Caesarea and had an altitude of 2,474 feet, so this part of the trip included a climb. Verse 16 says Mnason was “an old disciple.” This means he was an early disciple, perhaps having personally followed Jesus and been a part of the 120 at Pentecost.

AMPLIFIED OUTLINE

Hannah’s Bible Outlines
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- IV. The witness “unto the uttermost part of the earth”
 - D. The third missionary journey of Paul
 - 6. The ministry at Tyre (21:1-6)
 - a. His journey to Tyre (21:1-3)
 - b. His ministry in Tyre (21:4-6)
 - 7. The ministry in Caesarea (21:7-17)
 - a. Agabus’ prediction (21:7-12)
 - b. Paul’s reply (21:13-14)
 - c. The journey toward Jerusalem (21:15-17)

A CLOSER LOOK

1. What did the believers at Tyre do when they told Paul goodbye?

2. Why does the Holy Spirit sometimes give warning of an impending trial?

3. How can we retain our purpose to do God’s will when times are difficult?

CONCLUSION

Challenging circumstances may come our way in life, but we want to be in God’s will even when it is not easy. We can be assured that He has a purpose behind what He allows us to go through.

NOTES



DEVOTIONAL FOCUS

“I am verily a man which am a Jew, born in Tarsus, a city in Cilicia, yet brought up in this city at the feet of Gamaliel, and taught according to the perfect manner of the law of the fathers, and was zealous toward God, as ye all are this day.”
(Acts 22:3)

At times, people try to associate themselves with a person who is famous or has a reputation for excellence in a specific field. When I was in culinary school, some of the students would try to suggest they had a connection with a man named Auguste Escoffier. Escoffier was a French chef who systematized and organized the kitchen and also formed a kitchen brigade structure—a system of hierarchy found in restaurants and hotels employing extensive staff. He is highly regarded in the culinary field.

One day in Beginning Culinary class, our assignment was to roast a chicken. Many years before, my brother and sister-in-law had suggested roasting chickens breast-side down in the oven. This was so the fat in the skin would drip down and keep the white meat moist. The white meat needed to be cooked to just 165 degrees; at that temperature, the white meat would be cooked sufficiently and the dark meat would still taste good. I followed that method for the assignment.

Everyone presented their plates, which included a starch, a vegetable, and the chicken. The plates were not marked with our names. When the instructor tasted the meat from my plate, she said, “That was so moist and so good” and asked who made it. I raised my hand. At that point, I wished I could have said, “I learned that from Escoffier.” Of course I could not, and if I had said, “I learned that technique from my brother and sister-in-law,” it would not have carried any weight.

When Paul said he had been a student of Gamaliel, he was trying to establish credibility with his audience. His comment carried a great deal of weight in the Jewish community. The Pharisees paid particular attention to the Jewish oral law, which they depended upon to fill the gaps in the written commandments, and Gamaliel was well known as a wise man and teacher who was moderate in his viewpoint. Paul probably had been in Jerusalem to study when he was between the ages of fourteen and twenty. Consequently, he had a noteworthy education. In the culinary world, he would be one who did have a direct connection to Escoffier.

Paul wanted credibility with his audience because he wanted to present Jesus, and he earnestly desired

that those listening would believe what he said. He used his education from Gamaliel as a device to establish his credentials, but the majority of his declaration on this particular day was his own testimony of conversion.

There is great power in a testimony. While our educations and testimonies may not seem as outstanding as Paul’s, God can still use them. When we are born again, we have a direct connection with Jesus. His love can shine through when others hear about how we came to know Him. This is the reason for sharing what God has done for us. May He help us to give our testimonies whenever we have an opportunity.

BACKGROUND

Paul and his traveling companions had arrived in Jerusalem. This portion of Scripture tells about their meeting with the church leaders there, and Paul’s subsequent arrest and defense in the Temple.

The James in this text is traditionally viewed as the James who was a brother to Jesus. He was the leader of the church in Jerusalem and also of the Jerusalem Council—the Apostles and elders who had made the determination about what Jewish customs should be required of Gentile Christians (see Acts 15).

Paul and his team had brought an offering from the Gentile churches for the Christians in Jerusalem who were suffering and impoverished. There were several benefits to appearing together before the elders. First, multiple witnesses meant there could be no accusation of the donated funds being used inappropriately. Second, these emissaries would take a report home to their respective congregations about how the offerings were delivered, and the response of the elders. Third, this gave the Jerusalem leaders the opportunity to personally meet converts from the outreach efforts. The leaders rejoiced when they heard the report.

Meanwhile thousands of Jews had been converted in the Jerusalem area. Some of them seemed to have had the mistaken impression that Paul taught that Jewish Christians should forsake the Law of Moses and not circumcise their children or keep the customs. To prove that this rumor was incorrect, the church leaders suggested that Paul join with four brothers who had taken a vow. This was probably a Nazirite vow, which usually lasted about thirty days. Those who took this vow would not drink wine, eat grapes, or go near a dead body. At the end, each would shave his head and present an offering. Paul, who himself had a vow to complete (see Acts 18:18), agreed to do this, and went to the Temple with them (see Acts 21:21-26).

AMPLIFIED OUTLINE

When the time of the vow was nearly completed, Jews from Asia (perhaps near Ephesus) stirred up a violent mob who beat Paul and tried to kill him. The Temple doors were shut to prevent defilement by the murder. The castle mentioned in verse 34 was the Antonia Fortress, a tower that housed the Roman military. It overlooked the Temple and was connected to it by two flights of stairs so soldiers could quickly go down to the Temple area to maintain order.

It had been important to Paul to be in Jerusalem for the Feast of Pentecost (see Acts 20:16). Many Jews, even those from outside of Judea, attended this feast, so the Temple would have been crowded. Perhaps two hundred or more soldiers came from the Fortress to control the riot. They bound Paul with two chains, and the crowd was so violent that they carried him up the steps to the Fortress.

Paul spoke to the military captain in Greek, which showed that he was not an Egyptian as the captain had thought. Tarsus was well known for its learning, so Paul was letting the captain understand that he was not a rebel. He asked permission to speak to the crowd, and they became silent to hear him.

Acts 22 gives Paul's defense. He began by stating his credentials. He was a Jew, born in Tarsus, which indicated he was knowledgeable of Greek culture, and because he was educated by Gamaliel, he was well taught in the Scriptures. Then Paul told his testimony. This is the second of three times that his testimony is given in the Book of Acts (see also Acts 9:1-18 and 26:9-21). His Jewish audience listened until he said the Lord had commanded him to go to the Gentiles (verse 21). When he spoke the word "Gentiles," the violence erupted again.

The chief captain ordered him brought into the Fortress and beaten. The phrase "bound him with thongs" means they stretched him out and tied him to a whipping post in preparation for the lashes. However, the centurion stopped abruptly when he learned Paul was a Roman citizen. Roman law prohibited binding or beating those with citizenship, and also indicated that a man must be granted an opportunity for a legal defense before he was condemned. Since Roman citizenship could sometimes be purchased from family members or friends of the emperor, the fact that Paul was "free born" may mean that either his father or grandfather had gained citizenship by some method. Being a citizen by birth was superior to obtaining citizenship by purchase.

Instead of beating Paul, the chief captain decided to have him appear before the Jewish Sanhedrin the next day to confirm the accusations against him.

- IV. The witness "unto the uttermost part of the earth"
 - E. The journey of Paul to Rome
 - 1. His witness in Jerusalem
 - a. Paul's report to the elders (21:18-26)
 - b. Paul's arrest (21:27-36)
 - c. Paul's defense
 - (1) His first defense (21:37—22:23)
 - (a) The background (21:37-40)
 - (b) The content (22:1-21)
 - (c) The result (22:22-23)
 - (2) His second defense
 - (a) The background (22:24-29)
 - (b) The council (22:30)

A CLOSER LOOK

1. What did the mob intend to do to Paul?

2. In order to preserve unity among the believers, Paul was willing to join himself with the men who had taken a vow. What are some ways we can help preserve unity among our Christian brothers and sisters?

3. What part of your own testimony prompts the most gratitude in your heart?

CONCLUSION

Salvation makes us one of God's children; we have a direct connection to Him. Who might benefit by hearing your testimony today?



Acts 23:1-35

DEVOTIONAL FOCUS

“And the night following the Lord stood by him, and said, Be of good cheer, Paul: for as thou hast testified of me in Jerusalem, so must thou bear witness also at Rome.” (Acts 23:11)

At some point in life, everyone faces hard places. When such times occur, it is comforting to remember that God knows exactly where we are, and what we need to cheer and encourage our hearts.

Dixie Matthews is one person who has proved that. She recounts, “When my husband, Hal, and I were married, we had a game of matching strides when we walked. He could usually outstep me but it was still fun to try. We always enjoyed walking together, but one day he went where I could not go with him. He passed through the Valley of Death, and then I was a widow—and there were no footprints but my own.”

In those first days after Hal died of cancer, everything seemed unreal to Dixie. Family, friends, and neighbors did their best to help and offer comfort. Business arrangements were made, and the funeral came and went. Then, Dixie had to face day-to-day living. She was a young mother with three small children at the time, and she reflects, “I was amazed to realize that life still went on as usual, even though the best part of me was gone. I was overwhelmed by the responsibilities that suddenly were all mine.” However, just a few days after Hal’s death, God brought her comfort in a very tangible way.

She recounts, “Standing in my front doorway I noticed a hook on one of our front porch pillars. I said, ‘Lord, You know people will be sending us flowers. Please lay it on someone’s heart to give us a plant for that hook.’ Then I forgot my prayer. A few days later, we returned from having dinner with one of my brothers. There, hanging on that very hook, was a large, beautiful fuchsia basket. Tears ran down my face as I remembered my brief prayer, and realized that God had heard it—and He cared!”

In our text today, Paul the Apostle faced a different type of challenge, but in his situation as well, God brought comfort and encouragement in a tangible way.

One day earlier, the crowd in a Jewish synagogue where Paul had been speaking had erupted in anger when he stated that he was turning to the Gentiles with the message of salvation. As the hysteria of the mob escalated, Paul was only saved from being torn in pieces through the intervention of the Roman chief captain. Although he was safe for the moment from

physical assault, we can imagine the thoughts that must have gone through Paul’s mind that night as he lay in the Roman garrison. Was his long-cherished desire to preach the Gospel in the great capital of the Roman Empire to be frustrated? No doubt he wondered, *What is going to happen? Will my work for God be cut short? Will I be silenced forever because of the malice of the Jews?*

With his future in jeopardy and his life hanging in the balance, Paul needed some unusual support. Then the Lord whom Paul loved, and for whom he was suffering, stood by him and spoke simple words of encouragement—the words recorded in our focus verse. The divine message assured him that not only would he live, but God had a wider field of service still before him. Rome must hear his testimony as well as Jerusalem! There might be delay and suffering and a long trial of patience, but the end was certain—he was to reach the goal of Rome with the message of Jesus Christ. What an encouragement that must have been.

There are valuable lessons to learn from Paul’s experience. First, while challenging circumstances will come to each of us, we can be sure that the Lord knows all about them. Whatever distress we face, and no matter who or what aligns against us, if we are serving the Lord, He will be with us. Notice that the Lord stood at Paul’s side in the night hours! We may never see a physical manifestation of Jesus until He comes again or we stand before Him at death. However, the Lord is present with us spiritually, and He understands how we feel in all of our difficult circumstances.

Ask God to open your eyes to the many details in your situation that indicate His presence. Take note of the evidence around you of God’s care. Dixie did so, and it brought comfort to her heart! The more we recognize even the smallest blessings as gifts from God, the more we realize how present He is in our lives. In every conflict, stress, and heart-breaking circumstance, we can lean on God. He is willing and ready to give us strength, encouragement, hope, counsel, and the ability to endure whatever may be facing us.

BACKGROUND

Chapter 23 can be divided into three main sections: Paul’s appearance before the Sanhedrin, which resulted in a furious dispute between the Pharisees and Sadducees (verses 1-10); the foiled plot to kill Paul (verses 11-24); and Paul’s safe transfer to Caesarea to appear before Felix (verses 25-35).

The “council” Paul addressed at the beginning of this chapter was the Sanhedrin, the highest Jewish

judicial body in Jerusalem, which operated under the leadership of the high priest. The point of this meeting was to determine whether there were grounds to institute a legal proceeding against Paul. While the Romans respected determinations made by the Jewish council, they did not allow them to sentence a person to death without approval by the Romans.

Historical records indicate that Ananias was a crude, hot-tempered, and overbearing man, and one who was noted for cruelty and violence. He served as high priest from A.D. 48-58. When the revolt against Rome broke out in A.D. 66, his own people assassinated him.

Ananias' order for those who stood by Paul to strike him was an illegal act, as it was against the law to strike a prisoner before a conviction was handed down. In Paul's case, he had not even been charged. In verse 3, Paul called Ananias a "whited wall," which was a metaphor for a hypocrite. A person who stepped on a grave became ceremonially unclean, and for that reason, graves were whitewashed in order to make them visible at night. Thus, while the graves appeared clean, inside they were dirty and rotten. When Paul realized the identity of the one who ordered the striking, he in effect apologized for his words (verse 5), quoting from Exodus 22:28.

In view of the uproar in the Sanhedrin and the uncertainty regarding Paul's future, the comforting words of cheer when "the Lord stood by him" in the night (verse 11) were accompanied by the promise that Paul would achieve his goal of witnessing for the Lord in Rome (a record of his purpose is found in Acts 19:21).

The conflict between the beliefs of the Pharisees and Sadducees regarding the resurrection has been well-documented by the Jewish historian Josephus. The viewpoint of the Pharisees, which was based on Daniel 12:2, was the one held by the mainstream of Jewish orthodoxy.

Some historians suggest that the conspirators who banded together in a pact to kill Paul were probably from the Zealots who were later responsible for the revolt against Rome. Verse 12 states that they "bound themselves under a curse." This was a practice of calling down an execution of judgment upon themselves if their pledges were to prove false. Taking such an oath was evidence of extreme religious fanaticism, and indicates the very real danger Paul was in.

As a result of the warning delivered by Paul's nephew, the Apostle was transferred in the darkness of night to Caesarea where he was to appear before Felix the governor. He was accompanied by an escort of 470 armed soldiers. Claudius Lysias, the chief officer or tribune who prepared the official document that went with Paul, was a high-ranking military officer in charge of anywhere from 600 to 1,000 men. He likely crafted the letter most carefully to present his actions toward a Roman citizen in the best possible light.

AMPLIFIED OUTLINE

- IV. The witness "unto the uttermost part of the earth"
 - E. The journey of Paul to Rome
 - 1. His witness in Jerusalem
 - c. Paul's defense
 - (2) His second defense
 - (c) The content (23:1-9)
 - (d) The conflict (23:10)
 - d. Paul's deliverance (23:11-35)
 - (1) The encouragement (23:11)
 - (2) The plot (23:12-16)
 - (3) The counterplot (23:17-24)
 - (4) The letter to Felix (23:25-30)
 - (5) The deliverance to Felix (23:31-35)

A CLOSER LOOK

1. For what action did Paul rebuke the high priest Ananias? Why did he do so?

2. What examples do you find in today's text that illustrate the statement, "God's ways are not our ways"?

3. When we face troubling or stressful circumstances, what are some steps we can take to remind ourselves that God is with us and is in control?

CONCLUSION

Just as God comforted Paul in the midst of distressing circumstances, He will provide the encouragement we need in our time of trial.

NOTES



Acts 24:1-27

DEVOTIONAL FOCUS

“And as he reasoned of righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come, Felix trembled, and answered, Go thy way for this time; when I have a convenient season, I will call for thee.” (Acts 24:25)

Procrastinating when God’s Spirit calls is extremely dangerous. When Jim Gilmon was young, he had rheumatic fever, and the doctor told him he would never be healthy. Jim promised God his life if He would heal him, and God did. However, Jim broke his promise. He chose to travel down a pathway of sin, but God never let him forget his prayer.

One night, while under the influence of liquor, Jim was in an automobile accident. The doctors tried everything they could to restore him to consciousness with no success. Then the people at his mother’s church prayed. When he regained consciousness, he promised to serve God if He would get him out of the hospital. God did His part, but once again, Jim did not.

Later, as a logging truck driver, Jim had a truck loaded with logs get away from him. It rolled over two and a half times into a canyon. When the truck quit rolling, he was afraid to move for fear it would roll more. With his head on the seat, he cried out to God. Again, God spared his life, and he climbed out of that accident with only a few scratches. But still he was not ready to give up his life of sin.

Over a year later, Jim stopped alongside the road to look at a wrecked car. A woman was in the back seat calling for help and a man was dead under the steering wheel. Jim said, “Right then it seemed God spoke out of Heaven to me and said, ‘You are going to be next.’ I knew I was heading the wrong way, and I did not want to die in the condition I was in.

“The prayers of my parents and their Christian friends were being answered. I told myself I would go to church the next Sunday, but I did not. What conviction settled on me that night! I could not sleep. Finally I phoned my parents, and they told me to come to their home. They called the minister, and at an old davenport, I knelt to pray. I said, ‘I don’t know how to pray.’ My dad responded, ‘Ask Jesus to be merciful to you a sinner.’ When I did, the Lord did not turn me away. He saved me that night. He delivered me from drinking and from the cigarette habit—things I could not stop in my own power. He changed my filthy tongue. Thank God, he made me a new creature.”

Jim served God until he passed away in December 1977. Numerous times he had postponed fulfilling

his promises to God and rejected opportunities to be saved. Yet when God mercifully continued to call after his soul, he finally did yield.

What a contrast Jim’s story is to that of Felix in today’s text. Felix also had opportunities to surrender his heart to God. He was familiar with the Jewish laws and beliefs, and then Paul presented the Gospel to him. Felix seemed intrigued—he even trembled at Paul’s words. Yet he hesitated to act. Although he did call for Paul again and again, the Bible does not record that he ever actually gave his heart to God.

It is vital to respond to the call of God’s Spirit. There is no promise that He will call again, so waiting for a “convenient season” could be disastrous. How much better to surrender immediately to God!

BACKGROUND

Paul had been taken by military escort from Jerusalem to Caesarea to appear before the governor, Felix. In this chapter, the accusations of the Jewish elders were stated, and Paul gave his defense to Felix.

Tertullus, a professional prosecutor, likely had been hired by the high priest (Ananias), and paid from the coffers of the Temple. The Greek word for *orator* originally meant “public speaker,” but was used also for “lawyer” or “attorney.” It is unknown whether Tertullus was a Roman, Greek, or Jew.

Felix was born a slave, as was his mother, and apparently was freed by Antonia, mother of Emperor Claudius. Because his brother was favored by Claudius, Felix was made procurator of Judea. He was a cruel ruler, and under his leadership the Jewish rebellion became worse. Felix had been married three times; each wife was from a royal family. His wife at this time was Drusilla, a Jewess who was the daughter of Herod Agrippa I and sister of Herod Agrippa II. She previously had been married to the king of Emesa until Felix, with the help of Simon the magician, won her hand. Felix was well-versed in Jewish customs, not only because his wife was a Jewess, but also because he had spent a number of years living in Palestine.

Paul explained to Felix that the purpose of his presence in Jerusalem was to bring alms to the Jews there. This gift had been gathered for Christian Jews from Gentile churches in the provinces of Macedonia, Achaia, Galatia, and possibly others. His purpose was to unify the Jews and Gentiles in the Church into one body, making them interdependent and appreciative of one another.

Knowing that it could not be proven that Paul had profaned the Temple, the Jews modified their charge

to say he had “gone about” to profane it. Paul had been seen in the company of a Gentile before entering the Temple, and it was assumed that he had brought this man into the Temple with him. However, even if that had been so, the Gentile, not Paul, would have been worthy of death under the Jewish Law.

In Acts 24:21 Paul repeated what he stated in Acts 23:6—that the real issue was his affirmation of the resurrection of the dead. The Pharisees also believed in resurrection, although more strongly in the case of those who were righteous than for the unrighteous. This was a theological question, rather than a crime against Roman or Jewish Law.

Felix deferred, or called a temporary halt to the proceeding, until the chief captain Claudius Lysias could come, although no indication was given that he was actually coming. This ploy was basically to buy time, because Felix feared that releasing Paul would cause a riot among the Jews. He kept Paul in prison hoping for a bribe, and when Festus came to take over, he left Paul bound to please the Jews. He failed on both accounts; he never received money from Paul, and the Jews filed a complaint against him to Rome.

AMPLIFIED OUTLINE

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IV. The witness “unto the uttermost part of the earth”

E. The journey of Paul to Rome

2. His witness in Caesarea

- a. Paul’s defense before Felix (24:1-27)
 - (1) The setting (24:1)
 - (2) The accusations of Tertullus (24:2-9)
 - (3) The reply of Paul (24:10-21)
 - (4) The consequences (24:22-27)

A CLOSER LOOK

1. What were the four accusations against Paul, as stated by Tertullus? (verses 5-6)

2. Do you think Felix believed Paul’s statements of defense? Why or why not?

3. Paul delivered the Gospel message to Felix a number of times, even though Felix failed to respond. What does this tell us about our duty to share the Gospel even if we do not see a positive response?

CONCLUSION

Each person has a choice to respond promptly to God’s call or to postpone. How much better to choose to yield to the Lord!

NOTES



DEVOTIONAL FOCUS

“Therefore, when they were come hither, without any delay on the morrow I sat on the judgment seat, and commanded the man to be brought forth. Against whom when the accusers stood up, they brought none accusation of such things as I supposed: But had certain questions against him of their own superstition, and of one Jesus, which was dead, whom Paul affirmed to be alive.”
(Acts 25:17-19)

There are certain “defining moments” that fundamentally change the future of an individual, a movement, a nation, or even the world.

In our personal lives, the moment could be as significant as meeting our future spouse, or accepting the entry-level position that leads to a lifetime career. It may involve a pivotal decision or an unexpected crisis. Whatever the specifics, most of us can look back and identify a handful of events in our lives that changed us and our future in a dramatic way. As Christians, our experience of salvation would be first.

In a broader forum, multiple defining moments in history have shaped our world. Some of these events occurred in a single day; some spanned a century or more. Some affected only a country or two, while others touched every continent around the globe and brought about a completely new way of thinking. Included are the Renaissance, the invention of Gutenberg’s printing press, the Protestant Reformation, the American Revolution, the French Revolution, the Industrial Revolution, and the two World Wars.

While there is no question that all of these events radically affected our world, the most defining moment in history was the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the grave. In our text today, the stage was set for Paul to proclaim the doctrine of the Resurrection before Festus, Agrippa, and Bernice in his last message recorded in Acts. Festus described Paul’s case to King Agrippa by stating that the accusations against the Apostle were based on his preaching of “one Jesus, which was dead, whom Paul affirmed to be alive.”

Just as witnesses and historical records confirm that notable world events took place, witnesses and historical records attest to the reality of Jesus’ resurrection. In spite of the disbelief of the Jewish religious leaders, Festus, Agrippa, Bernice, and countless others through the ages, Jesus Christ, was dead and came back to life! The Resurrection is the most essential doctrine in Christianity. Paul boldly testified to it,

declaring at various times in his ministry and epistles that if Jesus Christ was not raised, then preaching is vain, our faith is ineffective, we are yet in our sins, the dead perish without hope, and Christians who are alive are “of all men most miserable” (1 Corinthians 15:19), having no hope beyond the grave.

Now the question is this: what will we do with the reality of the Resurrection? Some people, like the religious leaders of Paul’s day, will try to ignore or discount the event. Others, however, will acknowledge the defining nature of that long-prophesied and amazing occurrence, and worship Jesus Christ as their risen Lord. Let us purpose to be among the latter—to cherish and uphold the doctrine of Christ’s resurrection, and like Paul, to be faithful in proclaiming it!

BACKGROUND

In chapter 25, the high priest and Jewish religious leaders brought accusations against Paul, this time before Porcius Festus, the governor who succeeded Felix. Verses 1-12 cover the Jews’ plotting and charges against Paul, and the Apostle’s request to be tried before Caesar. Verses 13-22 record Agrippa’s arrival in Caesarea, and Festus’ explanation to him of the dilemma regarding the charges against Paul, whom he knew to be innocent. The final five verses of the chapter describe Festus’ introduction to Agrippa prior to Paul’s defense (which is recorded in chapter 26).

Until Festus’ arrival in Judea, historical records make no mention of him. He succeeded Felix when Felix was recalled to Rome to give an account for disturbances that had occurred under his jurisdiction; this likely took place about A.D. 58 or 59. Since Felix had failed to deal with the accusations against Paul, Festus had to make a determination about the prisoner after he assumed the office of governor.

The Jews wanted to have Paul sent to Jerusalem, intending to ambush and kill him as he traveled there. In their request to Festus, the statement that they “desired favour against him” (verse 3) indicates they pled with Festus in an urgent and persistent manner. Likely, the planned ambush involved the forty plotters whose earlier attempt had failed (see Acts 23:12-24) and who were more anxious than ever to achieve their goal of eliminating Paul. However, Festus denied their request and said Paul would be kept in Caesarea and his accusers would be invited to come there.

At the arraignment about ten days later, the complaints against the Apostle were “many and grievous” (literally, “weighty”), but they could not be proved because Paul was not guilty of breaking either Jewish

or Roman law. The case should have been dismissed at that point, but Festus was “willing to do the Jews a pleasure” (verse 9), indicating that Festus was primarily concerned about what would best serve his own interests. When Festus asked Paul if he would be willing to go to Jerusalem for a trial, the Apostle asserted his legal right as a Roman citizen to be tried before a Roman tribunal.

The “council” (translated from the Greek word *symbolion*) that Festus conferred with in verse 12 was not the Sanhedrin (*synedrion* in Greek) but a group of advisors to the governor.

Herod Agrippa II, officially named Marcus Julius Agrippa (sometimes called simply Agrippa), had come to power in A.D. 53 and governed most of Judea by the time of Paul’s trial. The son of Herod Agrippa and grandson of Herod the Great, he was the last of the Herodian dynasty and the final Jewish ruler to have the title “king.” The emperor had given Agrippa the right of superintending the Temple in Jerusalem and appointing its high priest, and he was considered to be thoroughly Roman in tastes and sympathies. He had a close acquaintance with the historian Josephus, having supplied him with information for his history, *Antiquities of the Jews*. Josephus preserved two of the letters he received from Agrippa.

Bernice was a sister to Agrippa, and according to historians, was living in an incestuous relationship with him at the time of Paul’s trial.

In verse 19, Festus acknowledged to Agrippa that the real contention surrounding Paul’s teaching related to the doctrine of the Resurrection. If the resurrection of “one Jesus” were accepted as fact, then the religious leaders would have to admit that the Man they killed was in fact their own long-awaited Messiah.

AMPLIFIED OUTLINE

Hannah’s Bible Outlines
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- IV. The witness “unto the uttermost part of the earth”
 - E. The journey of Paul to Rome
 - 2. His witness in Caesarea
 - b. Paul’s defense before Festus (25:1-12)
 - (1) The setting (25:1-5)
 - (2) The trial (25:6-11)
 - (3) The result (25:12)
 - c. Paul’s defense before Agrippa
 - (1) The arrival of Agrippa (25:13)
 - (2) Festus’ presentation of Paul’s case (25:14-22)
 - (3) Festus’ presentation of Paul (25:23-27)

A CLOSER LOOK

1. In verse 16, what Roman legal precedent did Festus state in his explanation to Agrippa?

2. Why do you think Paul asserted his right as a Roman citizen and appealed to Caesar?

3. Paul knew he was blameless of the charges against him. What are some of the benefits of having a clear conscience before God and man?

CONCLUSION

Paul’s preaching about the Resurrection of Jesus Christ created conflict between the Apostle and the Jewish religious leaders of his day. We, too, may face resistance from those who do not believe that Christ arose from the dead, but we must firmly uphold and teach that truth because it is the central doctrine of our Christian faith.

NOTES



Acts 26:1-32

DEVOTIONAL FOCUS

“At midday, O king, I saw in the way a light from heaven, above the brightness of the sun, shining round about me and them which journeyed with me. And when we were all fallen to the earth, I heard a voice speaking unto me, and saying in the Hebrew tongue, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me? it is hard for thee to kick against the pricks.”
(Acts 26:13-14)

Paul’s defense before Agrippa, recorded in today’s text, skillfully wove together a tapestry of his own experiences, doctrinal elements, persuasive arguments, and even a call to decision. However, his impassioned address centered on his personal testimony. His eagerness to share the story of his life-transforming encounter with Jesus on the Damascus Road brings to mind the old Gospel hymn “I Love to Tell the Story.” That song title clearly was the theme of Paul’s life after his conversion!

Katherine Hankey (1834-1911), the woman who wrote the lyrics of “I Love to Tell the Story,” was born into a Christian home in London, England, where guests were often invited to come and study the Bible. Her father especially was a devout Christian. He was also a banker and very prosperous, so Katherine, nicknamed Kate, never wanted for the better things in life. Although she could have chosen her friends from the elite, she had a place in her heart for the poor and hungry people in the most poverty-stricken parts of the city.

As a young girl, Kate taught Sunday school. When she was eighteen, she organized a Bible study for factory girls, taking the message of Jesus into the London slums. When her missionary brother fell ill in South Africa, Kate traveled there to assist him. That trip sparked a passion for foreign missions, and in her later life, when she became a published author, she donated all proceeds from her writing to missionary work.

At the age of thirty, Kate contracted a serious illness, and doctors ordered her to stop her church work and stay in bed for an entire year. She complied, in part. Though she did not travel as she had before, she remained a missionary via her pen—she composed poetry that told the story of Jesus. The most famous poem she wrote during that period had two parts and was one hundred stanzas in length, the first part titled “The Story Wanted,” and the second part “The Story Told.” She completed the poem in 1866, though it took most of the year to write it.

In 1867, the Young Men’s Christian Association held its international convention in Montreal, Canada, and one of the leaders ended a sermon by quoting from Katherine’s poem. Songwriter William Doane, who was in the audience, put part of the poem to music, composing the hymn we know today as “Tell Me the Old, Old Story.” Two years later, another composer, William Fischer, created a unique melody based on the second part of the poem, and his hymn, “I Love to Tell the Story” has been a favorite Gospel song of many ever since.

Katherine Hankey and Paul the Apostle both had a fervent desire to tell the story of Jesus. That desire can and should be ours as well! Perhaps no one has ever asked us for evidences of the Resurrection, a list of prophecies fulfilled by Jesus, or examples of intelligent design in our physical universe. However, most of us have likely experienced times when someone inquired about how we “became religious” or why we have peace and joy despite troubling circumstances. In most cases, people would rather hear about our personal experiences than our personal convictions.

We all have a testimony! We all can relate how Christ drew us to Himself and transformed our lives. Unbelievers can choose to argue with what the Bible says, but they cannot argue with what God has done for us. Like Paul, let’s choose to use every opportunity to share our testimony with others.

BACKGROUND

Chapter 26 is a record of Paul’s defense before Agrippa. (The setting, participants, and Festus’ explanation for why he convened the hearing are described in verses 23-27 of the preceding chapter.)

In verse 3, Paul’s comment to Agrippa suggesting that he was an “expert” in Hebrew matters may have been because Agrippa, in his position as king, supervised the appointment of the high priest in Jerusalem, controlled the Temple treasury, and had some influence in Jewish affairs.

Paul began by directly addressing Agrippa, though he quickly broadened his remarks to include the others present, as reflected by the plural pronoun in verse 8. The words translated “answered for himself” in verse 1 are from the Greek word *apologeomai*, related to our English word *apologetics*, which means “to give a defense or explanation of one’s beliefs.”

Verses 9-21 give the third description of Paul’s conversion in Scripture (see also Act 9:1-18; 22:3-21.)

In verse 14, the reference to kicking against the pricks was a common proverb in classical Greek. It

alluded to an ox striking back against the sharp goad used to direct the animal, and thus hurting itself.

Some Bible scholars consider verse 18 to be one of the most important passages in the Book of Acts. Similar to Colossians 1:12-14, it contains a concise but clear summary of Paul's message. It points out that salvation opens the eyes of those who have been blinded by sin and turns them from darkness to light, freeing them from the authority of Satan, and bringing forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified through faith in God.

Festus, the governor who granted Paul's request to be tried before Caesar, evidently had little knowledge of Jewish thinking or the teachings of the Old Testament. His abrupt statement in verse 24, "Paul, thou art beside thyself; much learning doth make thee mad," may indicate he thought Paul's study of the sacred Scriptures had developed into a mania. Festus died in office after serving for only two years, but in that period, though he lacked strength of character, he is considered by historians to have been wiser and more honest than his predecessor, Felix, or his successor, Albinus.

Bible scholars offer differing opinions regarding King Agrippa's comment in verse 28, "Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian," because the words in the original Greek are somewhat ambiguous. Some feel he was being sarcastic or contemptuous; others suggest that Paul's persuasive arguments had affected Agrippa, causing him to briefly consider whether Paul's testimony could be valid.

The hearing concluded when Agrippa, Festus, and those with them left the judgment hall. As they consulted privately, their joint conclusion was that Paul was not guilty and could have been released had he not appealed to Caesar. However, Paul's steps had been ordained by God, and He had promised Paul that he would have the opportunity to testify in Rome (see Acts 23:11). This was simply the next step in the fulfillment of God's plan for Paul.

AMPLIFIED OUTLINE

Hannah's Bible Outlines
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- IV. The witness "unto the uttermost part of the earth"
 - E. The journey of Paul to Rome
 - 2. His witness in Caesarea
 - c. Paul's defense before Agrippa
 - (4) Paul's defense before Agrippa (26:1-23)
 - (5) Paul's answer to Festus (26:24-26)
 - (6) Paul's interaction with Agrippa (26:27-29)
 - (7) The conclusion (26:30-32)

A CLOSER LOOK

1. In verse 11, what three actions did Paul say he took against the saints prior to his conversion?

2. What does verse 19 indicate about the attitude of Paul's heart after his encounter on the Damascus Road?

3. What are some of the spiritual characteristics of Paul revealed in this chapter that we could and should pattern after in our lives?

CONCLUSION

Paul set an example for us by sharing his testimony in every situation where he had an opportunity.

NOTES



DEVOTIONAL FOCUS

“And when neither sun nor stars in many days appeared, and no small tempest lay on us, all hope that we should be saved was then taken away.”
(Acts 27:20)

Everyone faces times in life when circumstances bring stress, but recently I went through a trial in which I experienced debilitating anxiety. I would be sitting in a crowded room when suddenly my heart would begin to beat rapidly and my breathing would become labored. My entire body would begin to shake as though I was in danger, even though there was nothing threatening around.

These panic attacks began to happen with regularity. Sometimes I would be driving and need to pull over. Other times I would be at a social gathering and need to retreat to a dark room. It even happened during church! It was scary, frustrating, and embarrassing.

I didn't want anyone to know, so I did my best to keep up the appearance of cheerfulness and confidence even though inside I was distraught. Instead of the anxiety lessening, however, it grew worse. My attempts at acting “normal” became anxiety-inducing in themselves. I found myself withdrawing from people in order to hide my internal suffering, which only brought loneliness and isolation. In addition, I felt guilty when I was forced to give up a responsibility due to what I was experiencing.

God led me to let go of my own attempts to gain control over my problem, and let Him help. The first step was to tell someone. Although it was not easy, I went to a trusted Christian friend and relayed what was going on. Instead of judgment or disapproval, she gave me encouragement and support. She began to pray. With my permission, she told a few others who also joined in praying for me. And immediately I felt peace—while times of stress still came occasionally, the weight of isolation and fear eased.

When I read today's text about the typhoon-like storm that hit the ship carrying Paul, Luke, and 274 others toward Rome, it made me think of that time of trial. I had no control of the winds of anxiety that hit me when I least expected it. I felt like I was being tossed about in a storm, with no idea how to remedy the situation. And in my case, like that of Paul and his shipmates, God gave direction. Although opening up to my friend felt like I was letting go of the wheel and allowing the storm to drive me, in fact it was the starting point for surviving the storm.

Many others have gone through similar trials. According to the *Anxiety and Depression Association of America*, more than forty million American adults suffer from depression.¹ However, mental health disorders are certainly not the only storms that come in life. They may come in the form of fear, loneliness, financial challenges, health concerns, grief, or any combination of these and more.

There are a couple important lessons we can learn from Paul's experience aboard the ship set for Rome. First, when the ship of life seems out of control, we must follow God's leading. In my case, that meant telling another Christian what I was going through. It may be an entirely different instruction for you, but the important thing is that we follow through in obedience to what God reveals.

Secondly, we must be sure not to abandon our relationship with the Lord. Paul warned the sailors who tried to escape the ship that they would not be saved unless everyone stayed aboard. We cannot abandon the Gospel, even in the worst of storms, or we have no assurance that we'll be saved in the end.

I can say from experience that trials are not easy, but God is the Great Deliverer. Let me encourage you with the words of Paul, “Be of good cheer.” We *will* overcome if we keep looking to the Lord and following what He tells us to do.

BACKGROUND

Use of the pronoun “we” in verse 1 reveals that Luke, the author of this account, accompanied Paul on this journey. He recorded a detailed sailing log of their travel to Rome. Although he was not a sailor, the accurate nautical terms and descriptions in his account reveal that he had (or acquired on this voyage) a good understanding of many aspects of sailing.

Aristarchus (verse 2) was a Macedonian from Thessalonica who had journeyed with Paul to Jerusalem two years before (see Acts 20:4). This journey may have been his intended trip home, though he later stayed in Rome with Paul. Paul's friends from Sidon in verse 3 were likely Christian friends made on his previous trips. The Roman centurion, Julius, allowed Paul to meet with them, showing his trust in Paul. The friends cared for Paul and possibly gave him provisions for the trip ahead.

The Alexandrian ship that Paul and Luke traveled on was part of the imperial grain fleet and was loaded with Egyptian grain to sell in Rome. These ships in the first century were made of wood and powered by sail. They generally ran 50-120 feet in length and could

carry 200 to 300 tons of cargo. Paul and the other prisoners were placed under the supervision of Julius (verse 1). Since Rome controlled the grain fleet, as a Roman centurion he was the highest-ranking officer on board, though he was not the owner of the ship.

Paul warned that the journey would be dangerous because “the fast was now already past” (verse 9). This refers to the Day of Atonement (Leviticus 23:27-32). The Jews observed this memorial in late September or early October. Any time after this observance would be closer to winter, a risky period to be traveling by sea.

The professional sailors deemed Fair Havens an unsuitable location to wait out the winter and desired to sail to Phoenix, located forty miles from Fair Havens (see verse 12). Phoenix (Phenice) was a major city that served as a place for sailors to winter since its harbor had protection from storms.

Luke called the storm that came upon them Euroclydon, which was a northeastern typhoon-like windstorm. He recorded that they ran “under a certain island which is called Clauda” (verse 16), meaning that they sailed between the islands of Clauda and Crete for protection from the boisterous wind.

The smaller boat Luke mentioned in verses 16-17 was a dinghy or skiff towed behind the ship; it was used for transporting goods and people from the ship when it was at anchor, and for maintaining the ship. The exact means of “undergirding the ship” is unknown, but it probably involved using the small boat to loop ropes or cables underneath the hull and secure them crosswise across the deck, to hold the ship together during a storm. Luke observed this was a difficult task, no doubt made more difficult by the tempestuous wind.

The quicksand Luke mentioned in verse 17 referred to the Syrtis, two long stretches of desolate banks of quicksand along the northern African coast. The wind was directing the boat at this point, and carried them toward the Syrtis at such a fast pace that the sailors lowered many of the sails to slow the ship.

In verse 24, the angel reaffirmed the promise Jesus had earlier made to Paul when he said Paul would live to be brought before Caesar (see Acts 23:11).

After being driven by the wind for many days, the sailors sensed they were near. “Sounded” in verse 28 refers to the process of measuring the water’s depth by use of a weighted line. Twenty fathoms equalled 120 feet, and fifteen fathoms was 90 feet deep, so the water was getting more shallow as they approached land.

Paul told the men onboard to cheer up and eat (verses 33-34). Fasting in Bible times often was done as a sign of distress, sorrow, or guilt, rather than a fast prescribed by the Law. In this case, the crewmembers were so distraught or seasick that they had not eaten. Paul’s assurance that “there shall not an hair fall” was a common Jewish saying meaning everyone would have absolute protection.

The men “lightened the ship” (verse 38) by throwing the grain cargo overboard so the vessel would ride high in the water and be driven as close to land as possible, enabling those on board to make it to shore. In the end, all on board made it safely to land.

AMPLIFIED OUTLINE

Hannah’s Bible Outlines
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- IV. The witness “unto the uttermost part of the earth”
 - E. The journey of Paul to Rome
 - 3. His witness on the way to Rome
 - a. His witness aboard ship (27:1-44)

A CLOSER LOOK

1. According to verse 11, why did Julius depart Fair Havens against Paul’s warning?

2. Why do you think Julius listened to Paul over the sailors when they were attempting to flee the ship, instructing his soldiers to cut the ropes? (verses 31-32)

3. What are some positive steps we can take when we face storms in our lives?

CONCLUSION

God is not unmindful when we face challenges in our lives. As we look to Him for help, He will send instruction and encouragement, just as He did for Paul and his fellow travelers.

NOTES

1. Anxiety and Depression Association of America, “About ADAA: Facts and Statistics,” *Anxiety and Depression Association of America*, <https://adaa.org/about-adaa/press-room/facts-statistics> (accessed June 1, 2019).



Acts 28:1-31

DEVOTIONAL FOCUS

“And it came to pass, that the father of Publius lay sick of a fever and of a bloody flux: to whom Paul entered in, and prayed, and laid his hands on him, and healed him. So when this was done, others also, which had diseases in the island, came, and were healed.” Acts 28:8-9

It is important to be faithful in utilizing every opportunity to share the Gospel message. Several years ago, some of our church people were visiting Aurangabad, India. While walking around in a local shopping center, they went into a small department store. There, a man approached them and asked what they were doing in India.

One of the women explained that she was in India to tell others about the love of Jesus and how He changes lives. The man was so interested that he asked if she would speak to all of his employees. When she agreed, he gathered his workers together and began to explain what each of them needed in their lives. He asked, “Can Jesus heal this man?” For another, “Can Jesus take away smoking?” Next, “Can Jesus take away bad attitudes?” The questions went on and on.

What joy this Christian woman felt as she responded in the affirmative to each question and told the assembled group that Jesus saves, and how He died on the Cross so that He could save them from their sins! She explained that salvation is the starting point in a walk with Jesus, and that He could solve every problem these people had in their lives. She handed out copies of a Gospel tract in the Hindi language explaining the love of Jesus and His forgiving power, and how through salvation, each one could make Heaven his or her eternal home. The employees took the tracts eagerly, and their eyes lit up as they heard about Jesus for the first time.

On her next visit, she went back to the shopping mall, only to find that the store had been closed. The impact the message of salvation had on these individuals will not be known until we reach Heaven, but she had done her part by speaking of Jesus when she had an opportunity.

In our lesson text today, Paul was another who took advantage of an unexpected opening to share the Gospel. As a prisoner bound for trial in Rome, the Apostle had come through a ferocious storm lasting at least two weeks, and then a shipwreck. After making it to land, he had been bitten by a venomous viper

while gathering sticks to build a fire. However, Paul was always ready to minister to others in the Name of the Lord. When he lodged with the chief man on the island and learned that his father was desperately ill, the Apostle prayed for him, and the man was healed. The result of this miracle was that many others on the island came to Paul for healing.

Our opportunities for sharing the Gospel message will be different than Paul’s. And we likely will never speak about Jesus in a department store in India. But we *will* have our own opportunities! When God opens a door, let us purpose to do what we can to plant the Gospel seed. It is the work of the Holy Spirit to cause the seed to grow, but we can be sure that our faithfulness in reaching out to those who do not know about Jesus will yield results in eternity.

BACKGROUND

Luke concluded his account of the Acts of the Apostles by detailing the end of Paul’s transport to Rome along with other prisoners. After their ship broke apart in the storm, they came to shore on the island of Malta, known by the Greeks and Romans as Melita. There they encountered “barbarians”—people who were not educated in the Greek language. Being descendants of the Phoenicians, the islanders were actually very civilized and educated in their own right.

Being educated did not prevent them from being superstitious, however. First, they assumed Paul must be receiving “vengeance” or justice from the gods after he was bitten by a snake they knew to be poisonous. Then, in a matter of minutes, their suspicion turned to admiration at his divine protection and they decided he must be a god himself.

Publius was a Roman name or title given to the chief official of Malta. Members of the island’s elite were likely Roman citizens, conversant in Latin and Greek. The “bloody flux” most likely was dysentery, a disease of the bowels that is very painful, accompanied by a fever, and often deadly.

Paul and his companions on this sea journey waited three months at Malta until it was safe to travel. The sailing season began in early February, but most voyages commenced in late February or early March. Luke continued his travelogue, cataloging the places they stopped along the way as he had before the shipwreck. The distance from Malta to Syracuse was nearly one hundred miles. Situated on the east coast, it was the main city on the island of Sicily.

Rhegium was a city on the mainland of Italy, near the strait that separated Sicily from Italy. It was

a common stop for travelers journeying between Sicily and Rome. From there, it took only a day for the ship Paul was on to reach Puteoli, due to a favorable wind from the south. At that location, Paul and Luke met fellow Christians who had heard of their coming. They were able to stay there a week, evidence that the captain of the ship was accommodating to Paul. The journey inland from Puteoli to Rome was over one hundred miles and usually took about a week.

The Forum of Appius was a small town which was forty-three miles from Rome. Some Roman Christians came this far to meet Paul.

As the largest city of the ancient Mediterranean world and capital of the Roman Empire, Rome had close to one million residents. There, Paul was allowed to live in his own rented house rather than being imprisoned. He used this “parole” as an opportunity to meet with anyone who came requesting his account of Jesus, guidance, or encouragement.

Apparently the decree that the emperor Claudius had made to expel the Jews from Rome (see Acts 18:2) had been allowed to lapse, and some Jews had returned to Rome. Several of their leaders came to see Paul, having heard of the events in Jerusalem regarding Jesus, and wanting to hear Paul’s account. Paul concluded his presentation by stating that God’s salvation had been sent to the Gentiles, which was a main theme of the Book of Acts.

The Book of Acts ends with Paul’s first Roman imprisonment; Luke states that Paul lived two years under house arrest. According to tradition, Paul was set free for a time after this. Historians indicate that charges had to be brought within two years, so he possibly was released when that time ran out. His letter to the church at Philippi, which was written during this first imprisonment, records Paul’s expectation of being released shortly (see Philippians 2:24). Later, Paul was imprisoned again, most likely in Rome, and under much more strict conditions. It was then that he wrote his final epistle, 2 Timothy. The New Testament does not say when or how Paul died, but historians believe he was martyred sometime after the Great Fire of Rome in A.D. 64 and before the last year of Nero’s reign in A.D. 68.

AMPLIFIED OUTLINE

Hannah’s Bible Outlines
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- IV. The witness “unto the uttermost part of the earth”
 - E. The journey of Paul to Rome
 - 3. His witness on the way to Rome
 - b. His witness on Malta (28:1-15)
 - (1) Paul’s miraculous preservation (28:1-6)
 - (2) Paul’s healing of Publius’ father (28:7-10)
 - (3) Paul’s continued journey toward Rome (28:11-15)

- 4. His witness in Rome (28:16-31)
 - a. The occasion for his witness (28:16-22)
 - b. The content of his witness (28:23-28)
 - c. The result of his witness (28:29)
 - d. The summary of Paul’s witness in Rome (28:30-31)

A CLOSER LOOK

1. What was the initial reaction of the island natives when the snake bit Paul? How did it change when he wasn’t hurt?

2. Why do you think the captain of the ship allowed Paul such freedom?

3. What are some ways you can serve others on a day-to-day basis?

CONCLUSION

Opportunities to share the Gospel message will come to each of us, sometimes in unexpected ways. Let us purpose to be alert for such times, and be faithful to utilize them for the furtherance of God’s Kingdom.

NOTES



Overview for James

Purpose: The Epistle of James was a general letter of instruction intended for circulation among the churches, rather than as a communication to a specific church or individual. It was written to warn early believers of doctrinal issues and provide practical advice and admonition regarding Christian living.

Author: In the opening verse, the author identifies himself as “James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ.” Several men in the New Testament bore that name, however tradition accepts that James, the “Lord’s brother” (see Galatians 1:19), was the author. Though not a follower of Jesus during the Savior’s time on earth (see John 7:5), James saw and believed on Jesus after His resurrection (1 Corinthians 15:7). He was numbered with those in the Upper Room who tarried for the infilling of the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:14). Paul counted him among the Apostles (see Galatians 1:19), and he served as the leader of the church in Jerusalem (Acts 15:13). According to the historian Flavius Josephus, James was executed in A.D. 62.

To Whom Written: The greeting to “the twelve tribes which are scattered abroad” indicates that James was addressing Jewish believers. However, what he wrote is applicable to all Christians.

Date Written: James probably wrote his epistle before the Jerusalem Council of A.D. 50, as no mention was made of the decision regarding admission of Gentiles into the church.

Setting: The epistle was sent to Jewish believers who had been dispersed by persecution and were residing in Gentile settlements outside Palestine (see Acts 11:19). At this time, there were Christians among almost every Jewish community throughout the world. Regarding those communities, Flavius Josephus wrote that there was no city, whether Greek or barbarian, or nation in which Jewish law and customs had not taken root.¹

Unique Features: Bible scholars consider the Epistle of James to be one of the most characteristically Jewish books in the New Testament. While references to Jewish theology such as circumcision, Sabbath, laws regarding purity, and the Temple are not part of this letter, James used frequent illustrations and allusions to individuals in the Old Testament such as Abraham, Rahab, and Elijah. There is a strong emphasis upon godly behavior, and for that reason, the book sometimes has been likened to the wisdom literature of the Old Testament.

Although Jesus is mentioned only twice in the epistle, there is a similarity between the tone of its teaching and Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount. This would be natural if, as is supposed, the author shared the boyhood environment of Jesus and was closely associated with Him prior to Jesus’ public ministry.

Summary: The structure of the Epistle of James is somewhat loose, but several themes are woven throughout the book. These include patient perseverance in trials, faith that produces works, Christian speech, and godly wisdom.

The pages of the Book of James are filled with direct commands for the practical pursuit of holy living. James wanted his readers to mature in their faith by living what they believed. To him, faith was not an abstract proposition, but an internal force that impacted every area of life. He offered numerous practical examples to illustrate this, pointing out that faith is steadfast in trials, calls on God for wisdom, controls the tongue, sets aside wickedness, visits orphans and widows, and does not confer favor. He condemned a number of carnal behaviors, including pride, hypocrisy, favoritism, and slander, and instructed believers to live by godly rather than worldly wisdom and to pray in all situations. James insisted that genuine faith in Jesus Christ would produce real life change (see James 2:17).

1. Josephus, *Against Apion* 2.39.282

Timeline

Many of these dates are approximate, as reference materials differ slightly.

Jesus crucified; Pentecost; Church begun A.D. 30	Stephen martyred; Paul's conversion 35			Peter's ministry in Asia Minor 47	Jerusalem council 50	PAUL IMPRISONED (CAESAREA) 57-59	PAUL'S HOUSE ARREST 60-62	James (Jesus' brother) martyred 62	Peter & Paul martyred 67/68?	Jude martyred 72
	PAUL IN CILICIA & SYRIA 35-46			PAUL'S MISSIONARY JOURNEYS 46-48	50-52	53-57	Paul's trip to Rome 59			Rome destroys Jerusalem 70
			Holy Spirit falls on Gentiles 41	James (the Apostle) martyred; Peter imprisoned 44						
				Galatians; James 49	1 & 2 Thessalonians 51/52	1 & 2 Corinthians 55	Romans 57 St. Mark 58/60	Ephesians; Colossians; Philemon 60 Philippians 61 St. Matthew; St. Luke 61/64	1 Timothy; Titus; 1 Peter 64 Jude 65	Acts; 2 Peter; 2 Timothy 66/68 Hebrews 68

Outline

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A complete amplified outline of this book is available on our website at www.apostolicfaith.org.

- I. Introduction: the author and recipients (1:1)
- II. Faith and trials (1:2-12)
 - A. Trials produce maturity (1:2-4)
 - B. Trials deepen the prayer life (1:5-8)
 - C. Trials provide perspective (1:9-11)
 - D. Trials produce rewards (1:12)
- III. Faith and temptations (1:13-18)
 - A. Tempting is contrary to God's character (1:13-15)
 - B. Tempting is contrary to God's conduct (1:16-18)
- IV. Faith and the Word (1:19-27)
 - A. The reception of the Word (1:19-21)
 - B. The doing of the Word (1:22-27)
- V. Faith and impartiality (2:1-13)
 - A. The command (2:1)
 - B. The illustration (2:2-4)
 - C. The instruction (2:5-13)
- VI. Faith and works (2:14-26)
 - A. Faith without works is non-faith (2:14-17)
 - B. Works are an evidence of faith (2:18-20)
 - C. Justification is only by faith that works (2:21-26)
- VII. Faith and the tongue (3:1-12)
 - A. The misuse of the tongue (3:1)
 - B. The control of the tongue (3:2)
 - C. The description of the tongue (3:3-12)
- VIII. Faith and wisdom (3:13-18)
 - A. The principle (3:13)
 - B. The nature of earthly wisdom (3:14-16)
 - C. The nature of heavenly wisdom (3:17-18)
- IX. Faith and conflicts (4:1-17)
 - A. Conflict with the flesh (4:1-10)
 - B. Conflict with fellow Christians: the command and reason (4:11-12)
 - C. Conflict with unspiritual thinking (4:13-17)
- X. Faith and various exhortations (5:1-20)
 - A. Exhortation to the rich (5:1-6)
 - B. Exhortation to patient endurance (5:7-11)
 - C. Exhortation to holy living (5:12-20)



James 1:1-27

DEVOTIONAL FOCUS

“My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations; knowing this, that the trying of your faith worketh patience. But let patience have her perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing.” (James 1:2-4)

Our three-year-old granddaughter, Lily, was spending the day with us. Midway through the morning, she announced rather dramatically, “Grandma, I’m *starving!*” Deciding that a little snack probably would not spoil her lunch, I had her sit down at our kitchen table. Pulling out a portion-size packet of her favorite crackers, I dumped them onto a small plate in front of her.

Lily is being homeschooled, and my husband and I have been instructed to utilize day-to-day events as “teachable moments.” So I suggested that she count the crackers before she ate them. She agreeably stuck out her finger and began, “One...two...three...” Noticing that she shoved any broken crackers to the side and did not include them, I indicated the broken pieces and asked, “Lily, why didn’t you count these?” A perturbed crease appeared between her eyebrows, and in a voice that indicated her displeasure at having to state the obvious, she responded, “Grandma, those crackers are *broken!*”

A few days later, I came across our focus verses in the first chapter of James. The word “count” made me think about Lily’s refusal to count broken crackers. I wondered: How often do we do the same thing when it comes to counting *all* of life’s circumstances as joy? It is easy to be thankful for the blessings God has given us, but how much harder it is to count as joy the things that make us feel sad, fearful, frustrated, discouraged, or stressed—in essence, the “broken crackers” in our lives!

Still, that is what we are instructed to do. When James said, “Count it all joy...” he was not referring to the acceptable, pleasant aspects of our existence. He specifically instructed that we are to count as joy the “divers temptations” (or trials) that come our way. Now, that is a challenge!

The Apostle was not writing to people whose lives were free of hardship, but to believers who had been scattered by persecution and were experiencing the challenges that come to displaced persons in a hostile environment. To experience God’s abundant, overflowing joy, we must choose whether we will heed his advice or not. James acknowledged the difficult

circumstances in his readers’ lives. At the same time, and with no hint of contradiction, he counseled them to rejoice during those very hardships. He encouraged them to face their trials with an attitude of joy, rather than viewing them as a punishment, a curse, or an unforeseen calamity.

His message is applicable for us today. Our initial reaction to such counsel might be, “That’s easier said than done!” We know what we are supposed to do, but how can we count times of sadness, frustration, affliction, or stress as *joy*?

Perhaps the secret lies in looking at the big picture. James went on to explain that “the trying of your faith worketh patience.” When we encounter trials, we are to trust God to use those circumstances for our spiritual good, focusing on the end result rather than the pain of the moment. Being “perfect and entire”—being spiritually mature and living a consistent life of holiness—is an end result worth making every effort to obtain.

True joy is not dependent on circumstances. It comes from our relationship with Jesus Christ and the assurance that He is working in and through all events that come our way. So let’s accept the broken pieces along with the whole. Let’s count as James would have us count, with an understanding that trials can help us to a greater spiritual maturity and a deeper relationship with God. Let’s count them *all* joy!

BACKGROUND

The Epistle of James is one of twenty-one epistles or letters in the New Testament. The first chapter contains two main sections: verses 1-18 concern remaining steadfast in times of trial, either by temptation or suffering, and verses 19-27 are a series of admonitions related to obedience to divine truth.

In the original language, the word translated *temptation* (verse 2) refers to trials, proving, or testing. The phrase “trying of your faith” (verse 3) implies an intention to prove the quality of something. Since James specifically pointed to “faith” as the target, it is clear he was not addressing those who were suffering as a consequence of sin, but followers of Christ who were experiencing hardships as they served the Lord.

In verse 4, James gave the reason for patient endurance of trials—so those suffering would become “perfect and entire, wanting nothing.” He was pointing them toward a spiritually mature life, complete and consistent in holy living.

Verses 5-8 concern godly wisdom that makes the right use of trials, viewing them as opportunities for

growth in holy living; James indicated this wisdom is a divine gift. He pointed out that if an individual lacked the ability to go through trials with joy, he could “ask in faith,” but that such a prayer must be sincere and unwavering, and not mask a secret desire for an easier way. The “double minded man” (verse 8) is the unstable individual who has divided affections and will not wholly commit himself to God.

Verses 9-11 continue the theme of trials developed in verses 2-4; many Christians of the Early Church faced challenges related to poverty and exploitation by the rich and powerful.

Bible scholars view the Epistle of James as being the most characteristically Jewish book in the New Testament. One example is in James’ statement, “Blessed is the man . . . he shall receive the crown of life” in verse 12; this has a marked similarity to the Beatitudes given by Jesus in Matthew 5. Jews used a “crown” to represent the highest state of happiness.

Continuing on through verse 18, the Apostle expanded upon the theme of trials, both sufferings and temptations, explaining the reward for faithfulness. He overcame the argument of those who excused failure by blaming God for sending a temptation, pointing out that a holy God never entices to evil. In the statement that a man is “drawn away [tempted] of his own lust” (verse 14), the word *lust* refers to any natural desire or susceptibility and does not necessarily imply desires that are selfish or wrong.

In verse 22, James admonished, “Be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only.” In the ancient world, most instruction was delivered orally, so it was common for people to hear a teacher. If a person tried to live by what the teacher said, that one was called a “disciple” of the teacher. James was pointing out that Jesus is looking for disciples—doers, not just hearers.

James’ instruction in verse 27 alluded to the fact that widows and orphans of that era had few means of economic or social support and thus were among the most vulnerable of people. There were few vocational opportunities for women in the ancient cultures, and no welfare system. Unless family members provided sustenance, widows and orphans were reduced to begging, going into slavery, or starving to death. James was making it clear that a genuine walk with God shows itself in simple, practical ways.

AMPLIFIED OUTLINE

Hannah’s Bible Outlines
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- I. Introduction: the author and recipients (1:1)
- II. Faith and trials (1:2-12)
 - A. Trials produce maturity (1:2-4)
 - B. Trials deepen the prayer life (1:5-8)
 - C. Trials provide perspective (1:9-11)
 - D. Trials produce rewards (1:12)
- III. Faith and temptations (1:13-18)
 - A. Tempting is contrary to God’s character (1:13-15)

1. The source of temptations (1:13-14)
 - a. Not of God (1:13)
 - b. Within man (1:14)
2. The fruit of temptations (1:15)
- B. Tempting is contrary to God’s conduct (1:16-18)
 1. The statement of God’s conduct (1:16-17)
 2. The example of God’s conduct (1:18)
- IV. Faith and the Word (1:19-27)
 - A. The reception of the Word (1:19-21)
 1. The principle (1:19)
 2. The reason (1:20)
 3. The method (1:21)
 - B. The doing of the Word (1:22-27)
 1. The command (1:22)
 2. The hearer described (1:23-24)
 3. The doer described (1:25)
 4. The practice desired (1:26-27)

A CLOSER LOOK

1. What aspects of nature did James use to illustrate the point he made in verses 9-11?

2. Why do you think bridling the tongue, referenced in verse 26, is so important for a Christian?

3. What are some specific areas of your life where God has challenged you to be a doer and not just a hearer of His Word?

CONCLUSION

As Christians, we know there is purpose in the trials we experience. Understanding that God intends them for our good can help us to go through hard places and retain our joy.



DEVOTIONAL FOCUS

“If ye fulfil the royal law according to the scripture, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself, ye do well: but if ye have respect to persons, ye commit sin, and are convinced of the law as transgressors.” (James 2:8-9)

As a teenager, my mother attended the Apostolic Faith Church in Portland, Oregon, for about a year. She was convinced that what she heard there was what the Bible taught and the way to have a relationship with God, but unfortunately did not pray through to a real assurance of salvation.

By the time I was a teenager, though, Mom had come to the Lord, and He had made a real change in her life. However, the nearest Apostolic Faith Church was a long way from where we lived, and we had no simple way of getting there. As we started attending whenever we could, a young church family took us under their wings and cheerfully began inviting us over for Sunday dinner after morning services. This made it possible for us to stay for the evening services as well. Looking back, I realize that we were at their house almost every Sunday for several years! And in all that time, they never made us feel as if we were imposing although in a sense, we were. They never looked down on us in any way. On the contrary, we always felt warmly welcomed.

The blessing to us went far beyond just the meeting of our temporal needs. Not only did we enjoy the food—the wife was an excellent cook—but for the first time in my life, I saw a loving, peaceful Christian home in action. It wasn’t long before I wanted exactly what that family had. And looking back now, after many years of serving the Lord together with my loving wife, I realize the great legacy this family left me. Truly, they were examples of what James alluded to in our focus verses: people who fulfilled the “royal law” of our Savior by loving their neighbors as themselves, without any hint of patronizing or superiority, even though we could do nothing for them in return.

Every Christian is called to love others, although we will not all be called to demonstrate that love in the same way. Gracious Christian hospitality, in which we share our resources and our time, is one way, but there are many other means by which we can show care and concern. The key point we must remember is that we all have something to give. The blessings God has poured into our lives are not just for our own benefit, but also for the enrichment of those around us.

Let’s purpose to be alert to any opportunities that God puts in our path to love our neighbors as ourselves!

BACKGROUND

The second chapter of James has two main sections. Verses 1-13 outline the proper Christian attitude toward social stature, and warn against showing partiality to certain classes of people. Verses 14-26 stress the importance of demonstrating living faith by loving actions—the “works” that should accompany a Christian’s faith.

James lived in an environment characterized by prejudice and hatred based on class, ethnicity, nationality, and religious background. Individuals were commonly categorized as Jew or Gentile, slave or free, rich or poor, Greek or barbarian, and so on. While the unity of the Early Church was unique in such an environment, this unity did not come about without effort. For that reason, in verse 1, James taught these early believers that genuine faith in the Lord Jesus Christ must be without “respect of person” (discrimination or partiality).

He provided an example in verses 2-4 to illustrate why it is never right to judge a person by his or her economic or social status. The “gold ring” was an indicator of nobility or a high governmental officer. The word *lampros*, translated *goodly*, means “splendid and magnificent,” indicating a luxurious and elegant dress style. The command to the poor man to “sit here under my footstool” indicated that the poorer attendee was being offered a position beneath that of honor (the chairs in the synagogue that were reserved for elders and scribes).

James gave a number of reasons in verses 1-13 regarding why it was wrong to show partiality to the affluent. These could be summarized as follows:

- Verse 1: It is not in alignment with Christ’s teaching.
- Verse 4: It is based in selfish motives and evil thoughts.
- Verse 6: It despises those who are poor.
- Verses 6-7: It favors those who oppress others, initiate legal proceedings, and blaspheme the name of Jesus.
- Verses 8-9: It goes against the law of love given by Jesus.
- Verse 9: It is a sin.
- Verse 10: It makes one a transgressor of all the law.
- Verse 11: It reveals a lack of mercy, which will result in judgment.

The second portion of this chapter, verses 14-26, deals with some of the specific “works” that James asserted would follow true faith. For example, James pointed out the hollowness of telling someone who was destitute to “be warmed and filled” while doing nothing to provide for his necessities (verses 15-16).

Though some might think that James’ statement in verse 17 contradicts Paul’s emphasis in Romans on salvation by faith, the two perspectives are actually in perfect harmony. James’ use of the word “faith” was a reference to *the* faith, and centered on how the Christian life was to be lived out after salvation. By “works,” he meant the righteous deeds that should be the natural outcome of a heart truly filled with love for God. He was not suggesting that good works could earn salvation, but simply that they were evidence of a right standing before God.

Paul’s use of the word “faith” referred to saving faith; the faith that must be exercised in coming to God for salvation. His point was that one attains salvation by faith in Christ’s atonement alone. He was not teaching that it was unnecessary to live in a godly manner after experiencing salvation. When Paul spoke of “works,” he was alluding to legalistic adherence to the requirements of the Jewish Law or other acts to earn or self-justify one’s salvation.

Both men believed and taught that true faith results in a changed life that is demonstrated or proved by good works. The differing emphasis is because the two men had different purposes in writing their epistles. Paul wrote to explain that salvation comes through faith, while James wrote to show how salvation through faith would impact daily living. Their teachings are in no way contradictory, but are complimentary.

AMPLIFIED OUTLINE

Hannah’s Bible Outlines
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- V. Faith and impartiality (2:1-13)
 - A. The command (2:1)
 - B. The illustration (2:2-4)
 - C. The instruction (2:5-13)
 - 1. God’s choice of the poor (2:5)
 - 2. The conduct of the rich (2:6-7)
 - a. Oppress and imprison (2:6)
 - b. Curse (2:7)
 - 3. The Scriptural injunction (2:8-11)
 - 4. The coming judgment (2:12-13)
- VI. Faith and works (2:14-26)
 - A. Faith without works is non-faith (2:14-17)
 - B. Works are an evidence of faith (2:18-20)
 - C. Justification is only by faith that works (2:21-26)
 - 1. The case of Abraham (2:21-24)
 - 2. The case of Rahab (2:25)
 - 3. The conclusion (2:26)

A CLOSER LOOK

1. What action did James identify as sin in verse 9?

2. Although James focused in this chapter primarily on partiality based on social class, what are some other areas in society today where partiality occurs? What should be a Christian’s attitude toward any type of favoritism?

3. Think of someone who took an interest in you as a young Christian and encouraged you. What are some lessons you learned from his or her example?

CONCLUSION

A genuine love for others will be among the many evidences of salvation apparent in the lives of those who truly love God.

NOTES



James 3:1-18

DEVOTIONAL FOCUS

“Even so the tongue is a little member, and boasteth great things. Behold, how great a matter a little fire kindleth!” (James 3:5)

On October 8, 2017, wind blasted through northern California, spreading a series of wildfires at an alarming rate. Flames raced from tree to tree, and then house to house, faster than a car could drive. What was once a few small, contained blazes became collectively the most devastating wildfire in the history of the United States, burning nearly 245,000 acres and causing at least \$9 billion in insured damages.¹

In our text, James compared the devastation of fire to the devastation that can come from uncontrolled words. How many times have words wounded a heart, damaged trust, or caused a person to stumble in his or her faith? Although James was specifically addressing teachers and spiritual leaders in this portion of his letter, his words should remind us all how important it is to control our tongues.

Catherine Marshall, an American inspirational author and wife of twice-appointed Senate Chaplain Peter Marshall, discovered through personal experience the importance of controlling one’s words. She had drifted into a habit of being critical of others, justifying her tendency toward negative speech by telling herself that God gave us intelligence to analyze and evaluate. However, she felt the Lord dealing with her about this, and eventually decided to try a one-day experiment—just for one day, she would refrain from criticism.

Within a few short hours, she realized this was *not* going to be easy! She was surprised to realize just how much of her daily conversations had been judgmental in nature. It took real effort to hold her tongue, and eventually she found herself simply sitting silently through a good portion of the day. However, through that experiment, God helped her learn a valuable lesson about the importance of being careful how she spoke.

Words can also be written, and a less-than-kind comment on social media can have just as much impact as a thoughtlessly spoken jab. Conversely, a quick email or text message of encouragement to a friend can be just as much of a blessing as a quietly voiced word of comfort or appreciation.

The key is control. If we control fire, we can use it to cook our food, warm our bodies, and light up a dark night. If we control our tongues, we can use that

power to honor God and to benefit others. So let us purpose to be careful with our words! They have great power to affect others, and could lead to eternal consequences.

BACKGROUND

The third chapter of James can be divided into two sections. Verses 1-12 deal with controlling the tongue, and verses 13-18 address the topic of genuine wisdom, or wisdom from above.

The Apostle began by specifically addressing leaders in the ministry. The word *masters* in verse 1 is the Greek word *didaskaloi*; it could also be translated as “teachers.” James knew these spiritual leaders had great influence over the followers of Christ, and for that reason, they would be held more accountable, facing greater judgment for careless words. James was not suggesting they refrain from becoming teachers but rather that if they became teachers, to do so knowing they would have a higher degree of accountability.

James continued with a common Jewish literary device of attributing fault to a specific member of the body; in this case, the tongue. In verses 3-4, he used two objects to illustrate his point: a bit and a rudder. A bit is a relatively small device, but when put into a horse’s mouth, it can control the animal. The same is true of a ship’s rudder. While insignificant when compared to the size of the ship, it dictates the direction of the vessel, even in a strong wind.

In verses 5-6, James likened the damage the tongue can do to that of a fire. The tongue’s unrighteous words or “world of iniquity” can spread devastation swiftly. The “course of nature” refers to the whole course of life.

James mentions a variety of living creatures in verse 7, asserting that while these could be tamed, no man could tame the tongue. This was not to imply the tongue cannot ever be tamed; James understood that God can tame it. The word “tamed” occurs in only one other New Testament passage, which was when the demoniac of Gadara was healed (Mark 5:4).

The Apostle pointed out in verse 9 that human beings were made “after the similitude” or in the image of God. This gives the reason for his assertion that the tongue should never be used to curse another human being—because doing so would essentially be cursing the image of God.

In verses 10-11, James spoke of a moral contradiction—that the tongue is capable of both good and bad speech. His point was that in Christians, “these things ought not so to be” because such contradictory

words are unlike God, evil or deliberately injurious words being the fruit of an evil or corrupted heart.

In verse 13, James began his description of genuine wisdom that comes from above by making the case that true wisdom can be measured by behavior. In verses 14-16, he described the wisdom that is carnal, and condemned “bitter envying” and “strife” as being “earthly, sensual, devilish.” “Bitter envying” indicates a harsh, resentful attitude toward others. “Devilish” (*diamoniodes*) refers to something that proceeds from Satan and is characteristic of the spirit of demons. Earthly wisdom reflects the deception of Satan and is foolishness in the sight of God. It is self-seeking, of this world, and demonic, and ends in confusion and strife.

Then James contrasted this earthly or carnal wisdom with the wisdom that is from above (verses 17-18). The eight characteristics of godly wisdom that he listed align closely with Paul’s fruit of the Spirit (given in Galatians 5:22-23). The first characteristic is “pure,” which in this context means “unmixed with evil.” Godly purity is a result of inward cleansing. Combined with the following manifestations, these two verses provide a picture of wisdom that resembles and patterns after the nature of God.

AMPLIFIED OUTLINE

Hannah’s Bible Outlines
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VII. Faith and the tongue (3:1-12)

- A. The misuse of the tongue (3:1)
- B. The control of the tongue (3:2)
- C. The description of the tongue (3:3-12)
 - 1. Its power (3:3-4)
 - 2. Its destructiveness (3:5-6)
 - 3. Its untamableness (3:7-8)
 - 4. Its inconsistency (3:9-12)

VIII. Faith and wisdom (3:13-18)

- A. The principle (3:13)
- B. The nature of earthly wisdom (3:14-16)
- C. The nature of heavenly wisdom (3:17-18)

A CLOSER LOOK

1. In verse 8, what did James say filled the uncontrolled tongue?

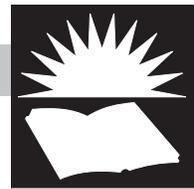
2. What are some types of negative or ungodly speech that would fit with James’ assertion that the tongue is an “unruly evil” (verse 8)?

3. What are some types of godly speech that we can and should cultivate as Christians?

CONCLUSION

We want our speech and behavior to be controlled by the Holy Spirit and used in ways that are pleasing to God.

NOTES



James 4:1-17

DEVOTIONAL FOCUS

“Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.” (James 4:7)

My dad was quite a storyteller, and he often told his children and grandchildren about a hard time he went through during his military service in World War II. Early in the summer of 1944, while stationed at a U.S. Air Force base in Arizona, he received a letter from Mom (his sweetheart at the time) which made him think she was breaking off their relationship. In later years, Mom’s remarks about that letter made me think she was really just trying to nudge him into officially proposing . . . but whatever her intent, Dad concluded that his courtship of several years had to end.

Far away from home, and already facing an uncertain future because of the war, that was a devastating blow. In his words, he “hit bottom” emotionally. Dad was a Christian—he had given his life to God when he was eleven years old—so he instinctively turned to his Heavenly Father for comfort and guidance. He went out to a dry drainage ditch that ran alongside a runway on the base, and there he prayed. However, he was not alone with God; he also wrestled with the enemy of his soul. As he sought the Lord, Satan taunted him, “You’re at the bottom. You might as well give up serving God.” Resisting that assault with everything in him, he told the devil, “If I’m at the bottom, then the only way from here is up. And I’m coming up fighting!”

Thankfully, my dad’s story has a happy ending. A few weeks later, he came home on furlough while camp meeting was in progress. He invited Mom for a date at Laurelhurst Park in southeast Portland, and as they sat beside the small lake in the middle of that park, he proposed to her. She said yes! They were married a few days after camp meeting—with time for a four-day honeymoon before he had to report back at his military base.

My father’s story teaches a vital lesson: Don’t listen when the devil says to give up! In time of trial, the enemy will try any strategy to persuade us that our situation is hopeless. However, if we submit to God by placing our lives under His authority and committing ourselves to Him, and then resist the enemy of our souls when he attacks, we are guaranteed victory. According to our focus verse in James, the devil will flee from us.

James’ readers were familiar with spiritual conflict. They were “scattered abroad” throughout the Roman world by persecution, and many of them were poor and

oppressed (see James 2:6). What an encouragement to their faith James’ words must have been in that difficult time!

Are you engaged in a spiritual battle today? Is the enemy of your soul on the attack? If you have submitted your life to God, He will fight for you and the devil will flee. Submit to God and hold on in faith! With God’s help, you can withstand any assault and come through victorious.

BACKGROUND

Chapter 4 of James addresses the remedy for the carnal nature—a nature that manifests itself in unholy behaviors such as strife, wrong desires, worldliness, and disunity.

In verses 1-10, the Apostle confronted church members, asserting that their quarrels—the “wars and fightings” mentioned in verse 1—were due to internal warfare that was rooted in carnality. “Lusts” in verse 1 could be translated “strong desires” and referred to their desire for personal gratification.

In verse 2, James’ use of forceful words such as “kill” (expressing the inward attitude of the heart rather than literal murder), “fight,” and “war” were meant to arrest attention, and stressed the seriousness of their attitudes. It is noteworthy that James was more troubled by a selfish spirit and the bitterness of quarrels than by the rights and wrongs of behavior. Asking “amiss” in verse 3 referred to asking with the wrong motives. Selfish, jealous, and contentious attitudes result in prayers being unanswered.

In verse 4, James’ reference to these individuals as “adulterers and adulteresses” was a figurative reference to their faithless and disloyal behavior in ignoring God and opposing His will, rather than an allusion to sexual misconduct. Jesus made a similar comment in Matthew 12:39 when He condemned the people of His day as an “adulterous generation.”

Verses 5-10 present the remedy for sin and carnality—Christ-like living through submission to God. In a series of imperatives or commands, James urged these believers to “submit” themselves to (or literally place themselves under) the authority of God. Then they were to “resist” the devil, “draw nigh” to God, “cleanse” their hands, “purify” their hearts (implying observable actions), “be afflicted . . . mourn . . . weep” (to show remorse and repentance for their past unfaithfulness), and “humble” themselves. Fully yielding oneself to God is required for each of these actions.

Bible scholars agree that the words “the Scripture saith” in verse 5 were not a reference to a specific

passage, but to general Old Testament teaching that the natural man is ruled by selfish emotions and desires. Since the natural man is inclined towards envy, and envy leads to “wars and fighting,” James’ reference is a link between his prior corrections and the coming exhortations. To substantiate his point, in verse 6, James quoted Proverbs 3:34, reminding his readers that God is able to provide greater supporting grace to those who submit to Him.

In verse 8, James’ sharp address of the recipients of his epistle as “sinners” and “double minded” no doubt was intended to penetrate their consciences and spur them to come to God for cleansing.

Verses 11-12 further address the subject of conflicts between believers. James’ emphasis on the words “brother” and “brethren”—used three times in verse 11 alone—reveals the importance he placed upon Christian unity. His point was that when a person slanders, judges, or criticizes another Christian, he is setting himself above the law that God has established.

Verses 13-17 are an exhortation to trust God in making future plans. The exclamation “Go to now” in verse 13 was a colloquial expression comparable to our “Come now.” The comparison of life to a fleeting vapor (verse 14) was intended to stimulate carnally minded individuals to assess their priorities in light of eternity. The accusation that “ye rejoice in your boastings” pointed out that one who brags about future plans while failing to recognize God’s sovereignty is not only foolish, but evil. The chapter concludes in verse 17 with a challenge for believers to live according to what they know in the Lord.

AMPLIFIED OUTLINE

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- IX. Faith and conflicts (4:1-17)
 - A. Conflict with the flesh (4:1-10)
 - 1. The problem: subjection to the world (4:1-4)
 - a. The source of conflicts (4:1)
 - b. The fruit of subjection (4:2-3)
 - c. The error of subjection (4:4)
 - 2. The solution: subjection to God (4:5-10)
 - a. The exhortation of Scripture (4:5-6)
 - b. The instruction of the Apostle (4:7-10)
 - B. Conflict with fellow Christians: the command and reason (4:11-12)
 - C. Conflict with unspiritual thinking (4:13-17)
 - 1. The attitude (4:13)
 - 2. The fallacy (4:14)
 - 3. The alternative (4:15)
 - 4. The error (4:16)
 - 5. The conclusion (4:17)

A CLOSER LOOK

1. What did James liken our lives to in verse 14?

2. What are some of the specific indicators of carnality James alluded to in this chapter?

3. What do you think is meant by the instruction in verse 8 to “draw nigh to God”? What are some ways we can do this?

4. How can an assault by the enemy of our souls contribute to our growth as disciples of Christ?

CONCLUSION

When we submit to God and are living holy lives before Him, He will help us win the victory in every confrontation with our spiritual enemy.

NOTES



DEVOTIONAL FOCUS

“Take, my brethren, the prophets, who have spoken in the name of the Lord, for an example of suffering affliction, and of patience. Behold, we count them happy which endure. Ye have heard of the patience of Job, and have seen the end of the Lord; that the Lord is very pitiful, and of tender mercy.”
(James 5:10-11)

Examples of patient endurance of trials are always encouraging to other Christians. Back in 1874, the American evangelist Dwight L. Moody visited a man in Dundee, Scotland, who had been bedridden for forty years as a result from a fall that had broken his back. For all those years, this man had endured acute suffering, as every movement brought considerable pain.

However, God was present in that bedroom. When Moody met the man and observed his sweet, trusting spirit, it seemed to him that little bedroom was as near to Heaven as one could get on earth. He commented later, “I can imagine that when the angels passed over Dundee, they had to stop there for refreshment.”

While visiting, the evangelist asked the bedridden man, “Doesn’t Satan ever tempt you to doubt God, and to think that He is a hard Master?” The man acknowledged that yes, Satan did try to tempt, especially when he saw his old school friends driving by in their carriages or observed some healthy young man walking by on the street. He said Satan would whisper, “If God loved you, couldn’t He have kept you from breaking your back?”

Moody asked, “What do you do when Satan tempts you?” The invalid man responded, “Ah, I just take him to Calvary and show him Christ. I point out those wounds in His hands and feet and say, ‘Doesn’t He love me?’ The fact is, he got such a scare there eighteen hundred years ago that he cannot stand it. He leaves me every time.”

In later years, Moody often told others about this man. He would relate, “That bedridden saint did not have much trouble with doubts. He was too full of the grace of God!”¹

Like Job, whom James mentioned in our key verses, the man in Dundee was an example of patient endurance. He, too, was determined to hold fast in the challenges that came his way without losing his faith in God. And today, nearly 150 years later, we also are touched and inspired by his unflinching trust.

Most of us likely will never suffer in the same ways that Job and the bedridden man from Dundee

suffered, but we will face challenges in life, and some pain as well. Let us follow James’ advice, and look to examples of those who have patiently held fast in affliction. They will provide us with the encouragement to hold on in our own trials so we, too, can be counted among those happy ones who endure!

BACKGROUND

The epistle of James concludes with a series of instructions focusing primarily on a warning to the rich (verses 1-6), the need for patience in time of suffering (verses 7-12), and some closing exhortations on faith, prayer, and the restoration of erring believers (verses 13-20).

In verses 1-6, it may have been James’ intention to encourage the poor who were the recipients of his epistle, or to warn them not to envy those who were wealthy. As in other New Testament teachings, James did not denounce the rich for their wealth, but rather warned against the temptations to which the wealthy can easily fall prey, such as hoarding, dishonest accumulation, and selfish satisfaction—the topics covered in these verses.

In verses 7-12, James’s discourse centered on God’s overriding providence. He mentioned the coming of the Lord in verse 7 without introducing or explaining this event; clearly it was such a common hope in the Early Church that no commentary was needed. The husbandman referenced in that verse was a farmer, and the “fruit of the earth” was a grain harvest. The harvest was deemed “precious” because it was what sustained the farmer and his family.

The word *grudge* in verse 9 means “to complain or grumble.” The Apostle acknowledged that pressures and afflictions could cause the patience of believers to be strained, and thus tempt them to murmur against each other.

The closing verses of this epistle (verses 13-20) are a series of admonitions, beginning with an exhortation to prayer in times of trial. James explained the proper response to affliction (any type of assault from the devil), and to times when the heart is merry. The instruction for the merry to “sing psalms” could be translated “sing praises.”

Beginning with verse 14, James specifically addressed health issues and the doctrine of divine healing. He noted that in such times, a Christian’s privilege was to “call for the elders of the church” (spiritual leaders were recognized or appointed in local congregations as early as A.D. 40-50). The practice of anointing with oil is also mentioned in Mark 6:13.

James did not qualify his statement regarding the results that would occur. It was tacitly understood that while one did not know how God would answer in each case, extraordinary cures would occur. In James 5:17, we read that Elijah was a “man subject to like passions as we are” and God answered Elijah’s prayer. Thus, while “thy will be done” was consistent with James’ prior writing and implied here, it was also implied that God would give uncommon results to people who pray with fervent faith.

The Apostle’s final exhortation is also addressed to “brethren,” and deals with the importance of restoration of one who has backslidden. The phrase “convert him” does not imply that the Christian brings about forgiveness of sin, but rather that he persuades the erring one to return to the truth. Although every individual is responsible for his own choices, James’ instruction makes it clear that efforts toward restoration of the backslidden is a spiritually worthwhile endeavor.

AMPLIFIED OUTLINE

Hannah’s Bible Outlines
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- X. Faith and various exhortations (5:1-20)
 - A. Exhortation to the rich (5:1-6)
 - 1. The call to repentance (5:1)
 - 2. The condemnation of the rich (5:2-3)
 - 3. The conduct of the rich (5:4-6)
 - B. Exhortation to patient endurance (5:7-11)
 - 1. The exhortation (5:7-9)
 - 2. The illustration (5:10-11)
 - C. Exhortation to holy living (5:12-20)
 - 1. In regard to oaths (5:12)
 - 2. In regard to various emotional experiences (5:13-15)
 - a. Depression and cheerfulness (5:13)
 - b. Weakness (5:14-15)
 - 3. In regard to prayer (5:16-18)
 - a. The principle (5:16)
 - b. The illustration (5:17-18)
 - 4. In regard to correction (5:19-20)

A CLOSER LOOK

1. What do you think James meant in verse 2 when he said, “Your riches are corrupted”?

2. What example from nature does James give in verse 7 to illustrate the need for patience?

3. Consider who you look to in your life as an example of patient endurance. What are some life lessons you have learned from that person which you would like to apply in your own life?

CONCLUSION

Individuals who have patiently held fast in affliction provide us with an example, and encourage us to hold fast and continue to trust God when we face challenging circumstances.

NOTES



Overview for Galatians

Author: The Apostle Paul

Purpose: The Epistle to the Galatians was written to address the first major doctrinal controversy that plagued the church in its early years—a contention regarding requiring Christians to obey the Mosaic Law. Paul wrote to refute the false teachings of the Judaizers who were insisting upon the rite of circumcision as a requirement for Gentiles who wished to be saved, and to reinforce the essential truth of justification by faith rather than by the works of the Law.

Key Verse: “Stand fast therefore in the liberty where-with Christ hath made us free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage.” (Galatians 5:1)

Date Written: No information in the text identifies a precise date of writing. Biblical historians have proposed dates ranging from A.D. 48-56, but most accept a probable timeframe of A.D. 53-55.

To Whom Written: Paul directed his epistle to the “churches of Galatia” (Galatians 1:2).

Setting: The exact location of the Galatian churches is uncertain because the term “Galatia” was used in two different ways at the time of writing. The Romans gave this name to an area in north central Asia Minor that came into their possession around 25 B.C., which they made into a province. However, in broader traditional usage, Galatia referred to a small southeastern portion of that province encompassing such locations as Derbe, Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch of Pisidia. Most probably, the letter was addressed to the churches in these locations of southern Galatia which Paul had founded earlier on his first missionary journey.

Summary: Paul had received a report that the churches in Galatia had fallen into error. After a brief salutation, he addressed those who were departing from the truth and accepting the distorted teaching of the Judaizers. Since this false teaching challenged Paul’s authority as an Apostle, he spent the first two chapters defending his authority on the basis that his call had been given to him by God, not man. Then in

chapter three, Paul went to the heart of the error that was subverting the Galatians’ faith: that justification came by adherence to the requirements of the Mosaic Law. Paul insisted that justification is obtained only by faith in Jesus Christ. Chapter 4 records Paul’s personal entreaty, and chapters 5-6 explain how the Gospel should be put into practice, contrasting life in the Spirit with a life of the flesh.

Style: Although by placement Galatians is the fourth of Paul’s letters, chronologically it likely was his first epistle. Paul wrote thirteen of the twenty-seven books of the New Testament. Nine of these books were letters to local churches (like the ones in Galatia).

Paul’s epistle to the Galatians is very personal in nature; approximately one-third of its contents revolve around his own experience. The remaining portion is rooted in his relationship with the One “who loved me, and gave Himself for me” (Galatians 2:20).

The news that his Galatian converts were being swayed by false teachings clearly was felt deeply by the Apostle, and he reacted by addressing them with piercing and forceful words. Paul’s close connection to these churches helps explain the strong tone that characterizes his letter. The epistle is not a systematic or tightly-organized treatise, but rather an impassioned rebuttal that is filled with emotion and firmly held convictions rooted in truth.

A tone of contention is present throughout the epistle, as both the Gospel message and Paul’s authority to preach it were being attacked. The Apostle, recalling the openness and enthusiasm with which his message of salvation through faith had been received initially, revealed his indignation over their defection in sharp words. However, in spite of the challenging nature of the epistle, Paul’s love and deep concern for the Galatian churches underscore every word. He wanted to make sure these early converts turned back to the path of truth and were not led further into deception, for he was absolutely convinced that any reliance upon religious law, form, or tradition for salvation, instead of repentance and faith through the grace of God, was heresy.

Timeline

Many of these dates are approximate, as reference materials differ slightly.

Jesus crucified; Pentecost; Church begun A.D. 30	Stephen martyred; Paul's conversion 35			Peter's ministry in Asia Minor 47	Jerusalem council 50	PAUL IMPRISONED (CAESAREA) 57-59	PAUL'S HOUSE ARREST 60-62	James (Jesus' brother) martyred 62	Peter & Paul martyred 67/68?	Jude martyred 72
	PAUL IN CILICIA & SYRIA 35-46			PAUL'S MISSIONARY JOURNEYS 46-48	50-52	53-57	Paul's trip to Rome 59			Rome destroys Jerusalem 70
			Holy Spirit falls on Gentiles 41	James (the Apostle) martyred; Peter imprisoned 44	<i>Galatians; James 49</i>	<i>1 & 2 Thessalonians 51/52</i>	<i>1 & 2 Corinthians 55</i>	<i>Romans 57</i> <i>St. Mark 58/60</i>	<i>Ephesians; Colossians; Philemon 60</i> <i>Philippians 61</i> <i>St. Matthew; St. Luke 61/64</i> <i>1 Timothy; Titus; 1 Peter 64</i> <i>Jude 65</i> <i>Acts; 2 Peter; 2 Timothy 66/68</i>	<i>Hebrews 68</i>

Outline

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A complete amplified outline of this book is available on our website at www.apostolicfaith.org.

- I. Introduction (1:1-10)
 - A. The salutation (1:1-5)
 - B. The situation (1:6-10)
- II. Paul's Gospel defended (1:11—2:21)
 - A. Received by revelation (1:11-24)
 - B. Recognized by the Jerusalem council (2:1-10)
 - C. Revealed by Paul's rebuke of Peter (2:11-21)
- III. Paul's Gospel defined (3:1—4:31)
 - A. The principle of faith established (3:1-14)
 - B. The priority of the promise established (3:15—4:7)
 - C. The personal entreaty of Paul (4:8-31)
- IV. Paul's Gospel practiced (5:1—6:16)
 - A. In liberty (5:1-12)
 - B. In Love (5:13-15)
 - C. In the Spirit (5:16-26)
 - D. In service (6:1-16)
- V. Conclusion (6:17-18)
 - A. The brand-marks of Jesus (6:17)
 - B. The benediction (6:18)



Galatians 1:1-24

DEVOTIONAL FOCUS

“But I certify you, brethren, that the gospel which was preached of me is not after man. For I neither received it of man, neither was I taught it, but by the revelation of Jesus Christ.” (Galatians 1:11-12)

In order for a person to become a Christian, the Holy Spirit must draw the heart, and some form of “revelation” of the Gospel is necessary. This may be as simple as a desire within a child to give Jesus his or her heart. Or it may be as dramatic as it was for the Apostle Paul on the Damascus Road when light struck him to the ground and he saw Jesus and heard His voice.

For Charles Rodman, the revelation of the Gospel took place on a July day in Portland, Oregon. Like Paul, Brother Rodman was well educated in theology, having attended Princeton and majored in the Greek language. Then he took a postgraduate course designed to equip a person to preach the Gospel. He studied with the best instructors and eventually earned three degrees. A man of high ideals, he tried to maintain good morals and to live what he thought was a Christian life.

After finishing school, he became a pastor in the state of Washington. He tried to point others to the way of eternal life, but he said, “On Sunday mornings, I faced my congregation knowing that I had fallen short of keeping the commandments and precepts of God’s Word. I was defeated and had no peace. Instead, there was turmoil in my soul. As time went on, instead of becoming more like Jesus, I was moving further from Him. I had the same love in my heart for the things of the world that any sinner has, and I had almost reached the point of believing there was nothing to religion after all.

“One July I came to Portland to a citizenship conference. Attended by twelve thousand people, its purpose was to find a way to make good citizens of bad ones. Great issues were discussed, including social conditions and needed reforms, but not once did I hear of an adequate remedy for the disease of sin that they had so thoroughly diagnosed.

“One day before the convention closed, I happened to go into a different part of the city. On a street corner, I came face-to-face with a group of young men who were telling the story of Jesus. One after another said they had been bound by sin and that their good resolutions and willpower had failed them. In their extremity, they had called upon God, repented of

their sins, and the entire course of their lives had been changed.

“I recognized that those men had found the solution to the problem that the educated men at the conference had failed to find. The solution had not come through great learning, legislation, reform, or any such thing, but through the transforming power of God.

“Here was the answer to the unrest in my soul. My eyes were opened to the truth. A Christian life is not a matter of struggling against sinful desires, but of repenting of one’s sins and becoming right with God. In spite of my profession, my moral life, and my theological training, I was a sinner in the sight of God.

“I realized that I had been utterly ignorant of the first principles of genuine Christianity. I determined that I would either become a real Christian or give up religion. I went to where the Apostolic Faith people were holding a camp meeting. There, I went on my knees, called upon God, and repented of my sins. I did not receive the witness of salvation while on my knees, but that night on my way back to where I was staying, Jesus came into my heart and became real to me. The peace of Heaven came over me like a calm after a storm. I became personally acquainted with the One who is able to save from sin, and He gave me power to live as a Christian should live.”

God had revealed the Gospel to Charles Rodman and his life was changed. From then on until his death, he faithfully told others how to find victory. In today’s text, the Apostle Paul was telling the Galatians that God had revealed the Gospel to him and called him to preach it.

God has also called each of us. While our salvation story may not seem as remarkable as the testimony of Paul the Apostle or Charles Rodman, the call of God is equally precious to every soul. The knowledge that He brought us to Himself and delivered us from sin must be the anchor that holds us when others resist or disparage our faith. We can know that Jesus Christ has been revealed to us and that His promises are true and will be fulfilled in our lives.

BACKGROUND

This first chapter of Galatians opens with Paul’s greetings, and then moves to a defense of his call to apostleship and the Gospel as he had preached it.

Verses 1-5 contain the salutation, which has many characteristics common in Paul’s letters. In the first verse he directly stated that he was called to be an Apostle “by Jesus Christ, and God the Father, who raised him from the dead.” Those teaching a different

doctrine endeavored to discredit Paul's authority as an Apostle, so he established his credentials at the beginning of his epistle. He was not appointed by the other Apostles, the high priest, or anyone else; he was appointed by God himself. He also mentioned Jesus' resurrection because that fact was the basis for the Gospel he preached.

Paul's customary greeting, "Grace be to you and peace from God the Father, and from our Lord Jesus Christ" was used in all his epistles. Often he followed this blessing by giving thanks and commendations to those to whom he was writing, but that is noticeably absent in this letter. Instead, he stated that Jesus Christ died to deliver people from sin. The believers in Galatia were being drawn back into thinking salvation came by adherence to the Mosaic Law, rather than through the grace of Jesus Christ, and Paul was making every effort to redirect them to the truth.

In verses 6-10, Paul expressed his amazement that the Galatians were turning away from the Gospel he had preached and listening to those who were perverting it. The word "removed" in verse 6 implies changing sides or turning away. The verb tense used shows that this action was taking place as Paul wrote, so this was an attempt at halting their movement away from the Gospel. Those who were stirring up trouble presented what seemed to be another gospel, but Paul refuted that, saying twice that anyone who preached another gospel should be accursed. "Accursed" is from the Greek *anathema*, indicating something God has commanded to be destroyed. This strong language revealed Paul's concern that the Galatians were headed toward apostasy. The Jews were accusing Paul of trying to please the Gentiles by abandoning the Law (verse 10), but Paul said he must please the Lord.

Beginning at verse 11 and continuing through chapter 2, Paul developed his arguments supporting his apostleship and the Gospel. He began with his own testimony, stating again that what he preached was not from man, but was what he had received from Jesus Christ. Clearly he was referring to knowledge he had received from God following his experience on the Damascus Road when he met Jesus.

Paul reminded the Galatians of how zealously he had defended the Jewish religion and persecuted the Christians. He had lived according to the Law as a Pharisee (see Philippians 3:5), with all its strict rules and traditions. The change in him was proof that it was God himself who had called him. God had been clear in showing Paul that he was commissioned to preach to the Gentiles.

After his conversion, Paul went to Arabia, which was a general term referring to an area south of Damascus and possibly extending to include today's Sinai Peninsula. Some scholars believe Paul went to Mount Sinai itself to meditate and commune with God. Three years later, Paul met with Peter and

James, leaders of the Jerusalem church, for fifteen days. Because his life was in jeopardy, God directed him to leave Jerusalem (see Acts 22:17-18) and the brethren sent him to Tarsus in Cilicia, which was his hometown. He also traveled in Syria. Antioch was the primary city in Syria, and the church there was somewhat a headquarters for the Gentile churches. Paul recounted all this to reinforce that his apostleship did not come from instruction by Peter, James, or the other church leaders, but directly from God.

AMPLIFIED OUTLINE

Hannah's Bible Outlines
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- I. Introduction (1:1-10)
 - A. The salutation (1:1-5)
 - 1. The declaration of Paul's apostleship (1:1)
 - 2. The destination of the epistle (1:2-3)
 - 3. The deliverance through Christ (1:4-5)
 - B. The situation (1:6-10)
 - 1. The defection of the Galatians (1:6)
 - 2. The deception of the legalists (1:7)
 - 3. The denunciation of Paul (1:8-10)
- II. Paul's Gospel defended
 - A. Received by revelation (1:11-24)
 - 1. Paul's claim (1:11-12)
 - 2. Paul's pre-conversion activity (1:13-14)
 - 3. Paul's call to preach and course after conversion (1:15-17)
 - 4. Paul's contact with the Apostles (1:18-24)

A CLOSER LOOK

1. What surprised Paul about the Galatians? (see verse 6)

2. What do you think Paul meant in verses 23-24 when he said the Christians of Judaea "glorified God in me"?

3. How did God reveal Himself to you and draw you to salvation?

CONCLUSION

Remembering God's call can help us hold tightly to the truths of the Gospel, knowing that our salvation is not from man but through the Blood of Jesus Christ.



Galatians 2:1-21

DEVOTIONAL FOCUS

“I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me.”
(Galatians 2:20)

Major Daniel Webster Whittle (1840-1901) was an American evangelist, Bible teacher, and hymn writer. Frequently composing under the pseudonym El Nathan, he wrote the words for about two hundred hymns. In one of his most well-loved hymns, Whittle speaks of his own conversion—an event which was the origin of the wonderful assurance on which he based his song: “Once far from God and dead in sin, no light my heart could see. But in God’s Word the light I found. Now Christ liveth in me.”¹

Whittle and his three brothers were raised in a home where their mother, a devout Christian, sought to instill godly principles in them. Although Whittle did not give his life to God in his youth, through that early training the Holy Spirit laid the foundation for an event that would transform his life.

During the Civil War, Whittle lost his right arm and ended up in a prisoner-of-war camp. It was there that he began to awaken to his spiritual needs. While in the hospital, he looked for something to read, and found a New Testament. Though its words challenged him, he was still not ready to yield to Christ. However, God knew how to draw this man.

He recounted, “I was awakened one midnight by the nurse, who said, ‘There is a boy in the other end of the ward, one of your men, who is dying. He has been begging me for the past hour to pray for him, or to get someone to pray for him, and I cannot stand it. I am a wicked man and can’t pray, so I have come to get you.’ ‘Why,’ said I, ‘I can’t pray. I never prayed in my life! I am just as wicked as you are.’ ‘Can’t pray?’ asked the nurse. ‘Why, I thought sure from seeing you read the Testament that you were a praying man. And you are the only man in the ward that I have not heard curse. What shall I do? There is no one else for me to go to. I can’t go back there alone. Won’t you get up and come and see him?’

“Moved by his appeal, I arose from my cot, and went with him to the far corner of the room. A fair-haired boy of seventeen or eighteen lay there dying. There was a look of intense agony upon his face as he fastened his eyes upon me and said, ‘Oh, pray for me! I am dying! I was a good boy at home in Maine. My

mother and father are members of the church, and I went to Sunday school and tried to do right. But since I became a soldier, I have learned to be wicked. I drank, and swore, and gambled, and went with bad men. And now I am dying and I am not fit to die! Oh, ask God to forgive me! Pray for me! Ask Christ to save me!’

“As I stood there and heard those pleadings, God said to my soul by His Spirit, just as plainly as if He had spoken in audible tones, ‘You know the way of salvation. Get down on your knees and accept Christ, and pray for this boy.’

“I dropped upon my knees and held the boy’s hand in mine as, in a few broken words, I confessed my sins and asked God to forgive me. I believed right there that He did forgive me, and that I was Christ’s child. I then prayed earnestly for the boy. He became quiet, and pressed my hand as I pleaded the promises. When I arose from my knees, he was dead. But a look of peace was upon his face, and I believe that God, who used him to bring me to my Savior, used me to get his attention fixed upon Christ and to lead him to trust in His precious Blood. I hope to meet him in Heaven.”²

From that day forward, Whittle’s testimony was, “Christ liveth in me. Oh! what a salvation this, that Christ liveth in me.” That key phrase of his hymn is taken from our focus verse. In Galatians 2:20, Paul was describing his position (and that of every saved and sanctified believer who lives in submission to the will of God). Paul had given Christ his old life—his try-in-my-own-strength-to-obey-the-Law life. That old life had died, and now he had a whole new way of life.

The principle Paul was expressing still holds true today. When an individual comes to Jesus Christ for forgiveness, he is justified through faith. When the sin nature is put to death, he dies to self and sin and the world, and becomes alive in Christ. From then on, he lives with Christ as his center and nucleus.

Is that your experience? Have you given yourself fully to Christ, recognizing that He died as your sacrifice to take away your sin and its penalty of death? Have you made Him the pattern, motive, and reward of all you do? If so, then you can say with Major Whittle and the Apostle Paul, “Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me.”

BACKGROUND

In chapter 2, Paul continued to defend his apostleship, relating two key events in his spiritual history. In verses 1-10, he reviewed his meeting with the leaders of the church in Jerusalem, noting their recognition of his

call to minister to the Gentiles and his equal standing with them in terms of authority. Then, in verses 11-14, Paul described a confrontation which took place in Antioch between himself and Peter regarding the acceptance of converted Gentiles. Verses 15-21 are an initial presentation of Paul's proof that justification is by faith, without reliance on the Mosaic Law.

In verse 1, Paul's statement that he went to Jerusalem "fourteen years after" does not identify what event "after" refers to. If he meant after his conversion, the visit would be the one recorded in Acts 11:30. If he meant after his previous visit, that record is found in Acts 15:2. Bible scholars hold differing views as to the chronology referenced here, but the critical nature of Paul's message is not affected by either date. The purpose of Paul's visit was to place before the leaders of the church the Gospel he was preaching among the Gentiles. He wanted their unified understanding and backing of the direction of his ministry, and it was also important that they recognize Paul's right to speak for God along with the other apostolic delegates.

Paul traveled to Jerusalem with Barnabas, a Levite of Cyprus who had the confidence of the church, and Titus, a Gentile believer. According to verse 2, he went "by revelation," or in response to God's revealed will.

Paul's statement in verse 3 that Titus had not been compelled to be circumcised is the first mention in this letter to the specific question facing the church: whether Gentile converts were required to obey the Mosaic Law. Verses 4-5 are a parenthetical insert describing some who had come with the secret purpose of observing the Gentile believers, with the intent of forcing observance of the Law upon them. However, Paul recognized that if the leaders in Jerusalem insisted on circumcision and other rites of the Law for the Gentile converts, his entire labor among the Gentiles would have been in vain. He had no doubts or misgivings about the message he had already preached for fourteen years.

Paul's assertion in verse 6 that those who were in conference "added nothing to me" did not mean that he had no respect for the church leaders, but rather that they made no addition, correction, or deletion to Paul's message. Rather, according to verses 7-9, they heartily approved of him and his message to the Gentiles.

The actions of Cephas (Peter), who was named with James and John as a church leader in verse 9, were challenged by Paul in the second portion of this chapter. While visiting Antioch, Peter had eaten with the Gentile converts, thus demonstrating his acceptance of them as fellow believers and his understanding that justification did not come through adherence to the Law. However, when others arrived from Jerusalem, he withdrew from that practice, "fearing them which were of the circumcision" (verse 12). As a result, some were confused as to the standing and acceptance of Gentile believers, including Barnabas. Thus, it was necessary for Paul to confront Peter publicly regarding his actions (verse 14).

In verse 16, Paul stated the critical point that he would continue to argue in chapters 3 and 4: that a person is not justified by the works of the Law, but by faith in Jesus Christ.

Paul's statement in verse 20 that he had been "crucified with Christ" introduces one of the Apostle's most significant theological concepts. He taught that when a believer allows the sin nature to be put to death, that individual enters into Christ's death. Dying to self, the believer becomes relationally one with Christ, as long as he remains in Christ.

AMPLIFIED OUTLINE

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- II. Paul's Gospel defended
 - B. Recognized by the Jerusalem council (2:1-10)
 - 1. Presentation of his Gospel (2:1-2)
 - 2. Legalistic interference (2:3-5)
 - 3. Approval from the leaders (2:6-10)
 - C. Revealed by Paul's rebuke of Peter (2:11-21)
 - 1. Peter's practice (2:11-13)
 - 2. Paul's pronouncement (2:14-21)
 - a. The Law for Jews (2:14-15)
 - b. The grace-through-faith principle (2:16)
 - c. The Law brought condemnation (2:17-20)
 - d. Christ liberates from the Law (2:21)

A CLOSER LOOK

1. Whom did Paul identify as "pillars" (church leaders) in verse 9?

2. In the same verse, what did Paul mean by his statement that these church leaders extended the "right hand of fellowship"? Why was this action so important?

3. What are some ways we can make sure that Christ continues to live in us?

CONCLUSION

The great message of Paul's Gospel is that salvation comes by grace through faith in Jesus Christ, and not through any efforts of our own.

1. El Nathan, *Christ Liveth In Me*, Public Domain.
2. Hy Pickering, *Twice-Born Men: True Conversion Records of 100 Well-Known Men in All Ranks of Life*, London: Pickering & Inglis, p.193-194.



Galatians 3:1-29

DEVOTIONAL FOCUS

“Is the law then against the promises of God? God forbid: for if there had been a law given which could have given life, verily righteousness should have been by the law. But the scripture hath concluded all under sin, that the promise by faith of Jesus Christ might be given to them that believe.” (Galatians 3:21-22)

In our focus verses, Paul stressed to the Galatians that man is unable to obtain a right standing with God through his own efforts. If obedience to religious teaching could have brought an assurance of eternal life, then “righteousness should have been by the law.” However, deliverance from the bondage of sin can be obtained only through faith in Jesus Christ.

Nearly two thousand years after Paul penned the words of our key verses to the Galatians, Herbert Barrett joined the ranks of individuals who have proved them true. He testified, “Known as a moral man, I was considered a good example for others to follow. I never swore and never used tobacco. The only thing I ever stole was a watermelon, and even then my pride led me to try and thank the man for it rather than say I had done wrong! Those people who thought so highly of me had no idea of the sin in my heart. I was a miserable man who wanted to do right.

“Heaven and Hell were very real places to me. I hoped that someday I would make it to Heaven, but that hope was so far off it didn’t bring much happiness or peace to my heart. I hated sin, but though I belonged to four churches over a period of fourteen years, no one was able to tell me how to stop sinning. The only hope those preachers offered to me was to do my best, so I gritted my teeth, clenched my fists, and said I *would* live to please God—but I never could do it. Finally, I became so discouraged that I threw up my hands and said, ‘I give up. I’m not going to any more churches. There is no reality there.’

“Oh, how thankful I am that God knew my heart and that He did not give up on me. When I stopped trying to please God in my own strength, He sent the answer I longed for. Three precious women visited my wife and me in our home in Eugene, Oregon. The smile of Heaven was on their faces, and they told of things God had done for them. It sounded marvelous! I asked them, ‘How can I get such an experience?’ They said, ‘Just be honest. God will help you.’ That was quite a challenge to me, and I told them I would go to one of their meetings.

“I praise God for that day. God put a little faith in my heart, and when I knelt at the altar and began to pray, something happened; I heard from Heaven! Jesus met me there, and in the twinkling of an eye, He saved my soul. He changed my heart and gave me a love and a hope that is steadfast and sure. When I stood up from the altar, I was different. God’s glory flooded my soul. From that day until this, there has been no more struggle to serve God!”

Herbert Barrett found by experience the truth that Paul taught—that only faith in the provision made at Calvary by Jesus Christ can free us from the bondage of sin. The most earnest efforts to live righteously in our own strength will fail. The Word of God reveals our unrighteousness as sinners before God, but it is repentance and faith in Jesus’ death that sets us free!

BACKGROUND

In the first two chapters of this epistle, Paul had defended the authority of his message. In chapter 3, he addressed the spiritual error that was overtaking the Galatians: their growing belief that obedience to the Mosaic Law was necessary for justification.

In verses 1-5, Paul rebuked the Galatians, calling them “foolish.” The Greek word from which this is derived has a connotation of senselessness and indicates a failure to use one’s powers of perception rather than an implication of mental deficiency. Revealing his surprise and indignation at the Galatians’ blindness to spiritual reality by a series of sharp questions, the Apostle pointed to their own experience as proof that justification was by faith rather than by adherence to the “works of the law” (specifically, circumcision).

Paul went on with his rebuttal of a works-based relationship with God by using Abraham as an example (see verses 6-9). The Judaizers, who were Jews by birth, looked to Abraham as their spiritual ancestor, so Paul chose their patriarch to illustrate obtaining a right standing before God by faith, rather than by works. Paul asserted that Abraham’s experience shows that God accounts (reckons or considers) individuals as righteous because of faith in Him.

In verses 10-14, Paul described characteristics of the Law of Moses. The phrase “of the works of the law” (verse 10) refers to those who thought that fulfilling the commands of the Law made them righteous before God. Paul quoted from Deuteronomy 27:26 to show that the Law could not justify, but could only condemn. According to the Law, the only way to stand approved before God was to fulfill it in every detail; the one who did not do so was cursed. Paul went on

to state that Christ “hath redeemed us from the curse of the law” (verse 13). *Redeemed* means “purchasing out of” or “buying back.” By His death, Jesus paid the price to liberate humanity from the curse of sin and the judgment of the Law.

Verses 15-29 deal with the purpose of the Law. First, Paul emphasized the unchanging nature of God’s covenant with Abraham (verses 15-18). The Law could not annul (make invalid) the covenant that God had made previously with Abraham. That covenant was unchanging (see Genesis 17:7), nor did it contain any provisionary “if.” Since the inheritance promised to Abraham was offered on the basis of God’s promise alone, it would continue to stand sure.

Paul went on by explaining that the Law was “added because of transgressions” (verse 19)—its purpose was to point out sin and show man the impossibility of pleasing God through obedience to the Law’s requirements alone. “Till the seed should come” is a reference to Christ, who was the promised descendant of Abraham. Jesus did not revoke the Law of Moses; He said that He came to fulfill the Law, not destroy it (see Matthew 5:17). While serving a purpose during its era, the Law was no longer the way of approaching God. Verses 24-25 liken the Law to a schoolmaster (tutor or custodian). The Apostle pointed out that once individuals come to Jesus Christ in faith, they no longer live under the directions of the schoolmaster, though they remember the instruction. The chapter concludes with the Apostle’s explanation of the believers’ position as sons of God through faith (verses 26-29).

AMPLIFIED OUTLINE

Hannah’s Bible Outlines
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- III. Paul’s Gospel defined
 - A. The principle of faith established (3:1-14)
 - 1. The experience of the Galatians (3:1-5)
 - 2. The example of Abraham (3:6-9)
 - 3. The explanation of the Law’s character (3:10-14)
 - B. The priority of the promise established
 - 1. The permanence of the promise (3:15-18)
 - 2. The purpose of the Law (3:19-22)
 - 3. The position under the Law and in Christ elaborated
 - a. Position under the Law (3:23-24)
 - b. Position in Christ (3:25-29)

A CLOSER LOOK

1. In verse 7, whom did Paul identify as the children of Abraham?

2. What do you think Paul meant by his assertion in verse 11 that “the just shall live by faith”?

3. In verse 28, Paul alludes to the unity that exists between those who are “all one in Christ Jesus.” What are some ways we can exhibit unity with other believers?

CONCLUSION

The Galatian believers were being led away from the truth of the Gospel that proclaims justification by faith in Christ, rather than by keeping the Law. In our day as well, it is important to understand that human effort will never bring righteousness.

NOTES



DEVOTIONAL FOCUS

“But when the fullness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons.”
(Galatians 4:4-5)

Have you ever experienced a situation when the perfect timing of an event seemed nothing short of miraculous? A number of years ago, a Christian man from Taiwan, Hse-Sheng Kuan, visited Portland, Oregon, as Chief Officer on board the ship *Grand Integrity*. He was invited to services by the people of our church and became acquainted with several of them. After the ship left Portland and started its voyage back across the Pacific Ocean, a crew member discovered a bomb on board. There was an explosion that resulted in the death of the captain and another officer. Brother Kuan lost his eyesight and was severely burned, and several other crewmen were also injured.

Brother Kuan was the highest-ranking surviving officer trained in navigation, so responsibility defaulted to him. He asked the bosun, the highest-ranking member of the deck crew, to bring his Bible to him. Putting his hands on the Bible, he prayed for God’s help, and then instructed the bosun in how to bring the ship the four hundred miles back to Astoria, Oregon, the closest port city. A Coast Guard vessel met the ship there, and the injured men were hospitalized. Eventually, Brother Kuan was transferred to Portland for an operation that doctors hoped would save the sight in one eye.

Months later, while he was recuperating in a care home, the church headquarters was notified about another Chinese seaman who had visited our church in Tacoma, Washington, and was in a hospital in Portland. A couple from the Portland church was asked to visit that man. Not knowing if he could speak English, the couple asked Brother Kuan to accompany them. When they came to the door of the man’s hospital room, they noticed a white-haired Caucasian woman visiting with the ill crewman, and she was speaking in Chinese. After listening for a few moments, Brother Kuan said in surprise, “She is speaking my dialect!” He and the woman began talking, and after a moment, they embraced each other with joy. Later, he explained that this woman had been his teacher at a mission school in mainland China when he was just a young boy!

That “chance” meeting changed the course of Brother Kuan’s life. His former teacher worked with immigration officials in the United States to arrange for

his wife and their three children to emigrate from Taiwan to Portland. The family was reunited, and she went on to help them get their citizenship, and to assist in finding employment in Portland for both Brother Kuan and his wife.

Think of the amazing timing of this incident. What but a divine hand could have arranged for Brother Kuan to go to a hospital where he had never been, to visit a man he had never met, at the precise moment when he would meet an acquaintance of decades earlier who had the connections needed to assist his family in beginning a new life in the United States?

While Brother Kuan’s experience was life changing for him and his family, our key verse today tells of a divinely orchestrated event that impacted not just one family, but all of humanity. More than two thousand years ago, “when the fullness of the time was come,” God sent His Son Jesus to this earth to be our Savior. For centuries, the Jewish people had been wondering when their Messiah would come. The moment of Jesus’ birth was not random; it was pre-ordained and precisely timed by God. Everything was set in place for the prophecies of the ages to be fulfilled. Jesus came at the exact right time in the divine plan, and His arrival brought the possibility of a whole new life—both here and hereafter—for all people everywhere.

Sometimes we may wonder why events happen as they do. We may not understand the challenges that come our way, but we can trust the One who knows every detail of our lives and has the power to orchestrate events to fit His divine plan. He is in control, and we can rest confidently in the knowledge that His plan—even in times when circumstances are painful or perplexing—is a good plan!

BACKGROUND

In chapter 4, Paul continued his explanation of spiritual liberty that he had begun in chapter 3 by describing the difference between slaves and sons. He reminded the Galatians that they had previously been promoted from servitude to sonship (verses 1-7), and described their choice to return to enslavement (verses 8-11). He then made a personal appeal for them to have an attitude like his toward the Law (verses 12-20), and concluded with an illustration of the two sons of Abraham—Ishmael, born of a slave (Hagar), and Isaac, born of a free woman (Sarah).

Paul referenced a familiar custom to illustrate the slavery of the Jews under the Law. It was customary in that era to place a minor boy under the supervision of a senior servant until a time designated by the father.

The child's position during that period was no different than that of a servant in that he received instruction and correction from the senior servant. In both Jewish and Greek cultures, there were specific coming of age ceremonies in which a boy was recognized as being a man with legal rights as an heir.

In the Roman culture, however, it was left to the father's discretion as to when the boy was mature, with sufficient knowledge to manage his responsibilities as an adult. The "fullness of the time" in verse 4 refers to that designated time appointed by the father. The time had come when the Law, allegorically that senior servant, had completed the child's instruction and now mankind was to be brought into a more mature relationship with God, though built upon what had been learned under the Law's tutelage.

The celebration of sonship described in verses 6-7 is highlighted by the use of the word "Abba" in relation to God the Father. "Abba" was an Aramaic affectionate term for "father" that had been adopted into the vocabulary of Greek-speaking Christians. It was used in the intimate setting of the home, and reflective of the close union between God and His children.

The present tense of the verb "turn" in Paul's question in verse 9 indicates that the Galatians were in the process of reversing direction, and reveals the Apostle's incredulity that they could wish to go back to the enslaving aspects of the Law. The specific aspects of the Law that the Galatians were turning back to related to circumcision, as well as the observance of Jewish festivals and prescribed fasts (verse 10).

Paul's statement that "ye have not injured me at all" (verse 12), was meant to set straight any assumption that his strong words were spoken out of personal hurt caused by the rejection of his prior teaching. This was not the case; Paul wanted the Galatians to see the danger of turning back for their own sakes, not for his.

In verses 17-20, the Apostle made the point that not all religious zeal is from God. He warned that the false teachers who claimed religious authority "would exclude you, that ye might affect them." The word translated *exclude* literally means "to lock up." Paul wanted the Galatian converts to know that the motive of the false teachers was self-serving. If the Galatians turned away from the liberty of the true Gospel, they would again be in religious bondage.

Verses 21-31 are an instructive allegory based on Abraham's two sons, with the two mothers, Hagar and Sarah, representing the two covenants. Paul developed the allegory by presenting a set of contrasts. The old covenant, which originated at Mt. Sinai, was characterized by slavery (illustrated by Hagar); the new covenant, coming from "the Jerusalem which is above" (verse 26), is characterized by liberty (illustrated by Sarah). Ishmael was born "after the flesh" according to the normal means of human conception; Isaac's miraculous birth established him as the child of promise. The

bondswoman and her son (representing those depending upon the works of the Law) would inherit nothing; the heir of the free woman (representing those delivered from the requirements of the Law through faith in Christ) would inherit all things. Paul concluded his illustration in verse 31 by stating that "we are not children of the bondswoman, but of the free."

AMPLIFIED OUTLINE

Hannah's Bible Outlines
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- III. Paul's Gospel defined
 - B. The priority of the promise established
 - 3. The position under the Law and in Christ elaborated
 - c. Illustration (4:1-7)
 - (1) Infancy under the Law (4:1-3)
 - (2) Adulthood in Christ (4:4-7)
 - C. The personal entreaty of Paul (4:8-31)
 - 1. In light of their retrogression (4:8-11)
 - 2. In light of their reception of Paul (4:12-20)
 - a. The attitude of the Galatians (4:12-16)
 - b. The aim of the legalists (4:17)
 - c. The affection of Paul (4:18-20)
 - 3. In light of an Old Testament illustration (4:21-31)
 - a. The historical situation (4:21-23)
 - b. The allegorical interpretation (4:24-27)
 - c. The practical application (4:28-31)

A CLOSER LOOK

1. According to verses 4-5, what was God's purpose in sending His Son?

2. In verse 5, Paul referred to "the adoption of sons." What are the legal implications of adoption, and what rights do adopted children possess?

3. What are some blessings and privileges you enjoy as a child of God and joint heir with His own Son?

CONCLUSION

Paul was concerned that the Galatians were moving away from the liberty of the Gospel, so he used every persuasive power he had to encourage them to live in the freedom that was theirs, and not be reshackled by placing their faith in the strictures of the Law.



DEVOTIONAL FOCUS

“Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage.” (Galatians 5:1)

Liberty is a valuable state that is often obtained initially by hardship and bloodshed, and one that must be defended to be maintained.

“Give me liberty, or give me death!” These words are attributed to Patrick Henry when he was speaking to the Second Virginia Convention on March 23, 1775. Some of those who heard him quoted him as saying, “Is life so dear, or peace so sweet, as to be purchased at the price of chains and slavery? Forbid it, Almighty God! I know not what course others may take; but as for me, give me liberty, or give me death!” The men who heard him were persuaded to pass a resolution to raise a militia in the colony of Virginia. Other colonies had already begun gathering troops, and before long the Revolutionary War began. Henry’s words became the battle cry of those engaged in the efforts for American independence. Later, Thomas Jefferson wrote, “It is not now easy to say what we should have done without Patrick Henry. He was before us all in maintaining the spirit of the Revolution.”⁷¹ Henry’s words sparked the action that resulted in political liberty for the people of the United States.

Centuries before Patrick Henry’s time, the Apostle Paul wrote today’s focus verse, which is also a challenge—a spiritual challenge. The purpose of his letter to the Galatians was to help them understand that they could have spiritual liberty by faith in Jesus Christ and a dedication of their lives to Him. Some Jewish proponents of the Law were telling these believers that they must be circumcised and observe other requirements that had been established before Jesus came. Paul told them that doing so would make them slaves of the Law. He wanted them to “stand fast” and maintain their liberty in Christ.

Today, salvation from sin still brings spiritual liberty, but that freedom must be cherished and protected. Liberty is not the license to live in our own ways. Paul urged his readers to live under the guidance of the Spirit of God, which would cause them to serve one another in love. That is the key to spiritual victory. In verse 25 he said, “If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit.” The word translated *walk* is a military expression that means “to march.” If we march spiritually at the direction of the Holy Spirit, we will have true liberty.

BACKGROUND

Today’s text tells of the liberty in the Gospel and contrasts the works of the flesh with the fruit of the Spirit.

Verse 1 provides a summing up of the Apostle Paul’s statements in the previous chapters—if the Galatians chose to follow the Law, making that the basis of their salvation, they would be taking on a “yoke of bondage,” and their liberty in Christ would be ended.

Paul went on to address circumcision in verses 2-12. He indicated that if the Galatian Christians accepted circumcision as an essential step for salvation, it would be necessary for them to keep the whole Law. The consequence would be to disregard what Christ died to offer. In strong language, Paul told them there were not two ways to obtain justification; to accept the Law as the method for salvation was to reject Christ.

Paul stated in verse 6 that salvation comes by “faith which worketh by love.” This would cause a person to do right because of love, rather than trying to do good because of the rules of the Law. The Galatians had been doing well in following God (verse 7) until a few people came in and hindered them with erroneous teachings. Paul believed these new Christians would heed his warning and cling to the way of faith. Those who troubled them would receive judgment.

Beginning with verse 13, Paul provided a description of liberty in Christ. Liberty is not living without restraint, for that would provide an opportunity for the enemy to try to lead a person back into sin. *Occasion* in verse 13 was a military term that meant “a base of operations.” The protection against the attempts of the enemy was explained to be voluntary submission to one another in love—*agape* love with concern for the welfare of others. The requirements of the Law are fulfilled by having God’s love exemplified in a Christian’s life.

In verses 16-18, Paul exhorted the Galatians to “walk in the Spirit,” by which he meant that they were to live and act under the control of the Holy Spirit. As a result of walking in the Spirit, they would “not fulfill the lust of the flesh.” The words *lust* and *lusteth* in this passage mean “strong desire” and do not necessarily have a moral inference, but rather refer to any human desire. However, a person who is led by the Spirit is spiritually minded and lives to please God, not the flesh.

Beginning at verse 19, the Apostle contrasted the “works of the flesh” and the “fruit of the Spirit.” The first four works of the flesh—adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness—refer to sensual practices. At the time of this writing, all these types of immorality

were condoned and openly participated in by many of the nobility, academics, religious leaders, and common people.

The next two—idolatry and witchcraft—relate to religious practices. Idolatry is worshipping something other than God. In Paul’s time it was common for people to worship images as well as the gods symbolized by those images, and often the worship was accompanied by immorality. The word *pharmakeia* was translated as “witchcraft.” It was the practice of magic including the use of drugs and medicine to deceive and control.

The next eight works of the flesh deal with relationships between people—hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies, and envyings. The word *hatred* could be translated “enmity” and denotes hostility. *Variance* means strife or contention. *Emulations* in this text refers to jealousy and a desire to surpass others. *Seditions* could be translated “divisions” or “dissensions,” and *heresies* refers to factions or dissenting groups. *Envyings* indicates ill will or bitterness that would deprive others of good things.

The last three listed are murders, drunkenness, and revellings. In this context, “revellings” refers to carousing or excessive pleasure seeking. The phrase “and such like” indicates that Paul could have listed many other works of the flesh, but these were enough to make the point that these evils would not be in the lives of those who walked in the Spirit.

In contrast, verses 22-23 give the evidence that grows in the lives of those who are controlled by the Spirit. The fruit of the Spirit cannot be produced by human power. The first three—love, joy, and peace—are inner characteristics reflecting a person’s relationship with God. The next three—longsuffering, gentleness, and goodness—are qualities related to a believer’s dealings with others. The last three—faith, meekness, and temperance—are inner attitudes. “Meekness” in this text indicates controlled strength, humility, and gentleness. “Temperance” is self-control made possible by the Spirit.

There is no law against having the fruit of the Spirit, and no law can produce it in a life. It comes from living under the control of God’s Spirit.

AMPLIFIED OUTLINE

Hannah’s Bible Outlines
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- IV. Paul’s Gospel practiced
 - A. In liberty (5:1-12)
 - 1. The improper ground of acceptance (5:1-4)
 - 2. The proper ground of acceptance (5:5-6)
 - 3. The problem of the Galatians (5:7-10)
 - 4. The persecution of Paul (5:11-12)
 - B. In Love (5:13-15)
 - 1. Liberty is not license (5:13)
 - 2. Liberty results in love (5:14)
 - 3. Legalism results in strife (5:15)

- C. In the Spirit (5:16-26)
 - 1. The command (5:16)
 - 2. The conflict (5:17-18)
 - 3. The contrast (5:19-23)
 - 4. The conclusion (5:24-26)

A CLOSER LOOK

1. What are the nine characteristics of the fruit of the Spirit?

2. What did Paul mean when he said the Galatians were to “walk in the Spirit”?

3. How have you witnessed the fruit of the Spirit demonstrated?

CONCLUSION

Paul’s epistle challenges us today to be controlled by God’s Spirit. If we are, His love will flow through us to others and the fruit of the Spirit will be evident in our lives.

NOTES

- 1. Evan Andrews, “Patrick Henry’s ‘Liberty or Death’ Speech,” *HISTORY*, August 22, 2018, <https://www.history.com/news/patrick-henrys-liberty-or-death-speech-240-years-ago>



Galatians 6:1-18

DEVOTIONAL FOCUS

**“And let us not be weary in well doing: for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not.”
(Galatians 6:9)**

It was spring, and planting season was upon us. My young grandson and I were browsing the aisles at a home and garden center while waiting for his grandpa to purchase supplies needed for a yard project. We passed by a colorful display of seed packets, and paused to study the variety of herbs and vegetables that could be grown by someone willing to invest the time and effort.

Our grandson had shown an interest in gardening, so on a whim, I told him, “You pick out a packet of seeds and Grandma will buy them for you.” Of course, that offer precipitated a much more in-depth scrutiny of the options available. Should he choose a Rainbow carrot mix? How about that Carnival radish blend . . . or Kentucky Wonder beans . . . or Sugar Ann snap peas . . . or Tiny Tim cherry tomatoes . . . Grandpa made his purchase and came to find us, so a final decision was required. We went home with our young farmer excitedly clutching a packet of giant pumpkin seeds in his hand.

I will admit, I was a bit skeptical about whether we would ever see pumpkins in the backyard, giant or otherwise. However, my grandson surprised me. He was diligent about caring for those pumpkin seeds! His grandpa helped him poke the seeds into small peat containers filled with potting mix, and in time, the first tiny green seedlings appeared. Each time we went to their house, we were invited to see how the baby plants were doing in their “home” on a windowsill. Eventually, Grandpa determined that the seedlings were big enough to be transplanted into larger pots, and finally into the soil along the side of the house. The two of them accomplished those tasks together.

I thought that the “out of sight, out of mind” cliché might prove true when it came to baby pumpkin plants, but once again I was wrong. Our grandson tended those plants like they were his own children! Daily he would get a cup from the kitchen, carefully fill it with water, and head out to the side yard to give his plants a drink. Evidently the plants appreciated his loving care, because they grew. A number of weeks later, we had blossoms . . . and then, at last, some tiny pumpkins. Then there were frequent trips to the side yard so we could see “how big the pumpkins are getting.” And they DID get big! Eventually, our grandson

harvested a respectable number of good-sized pumpkins, and happily sold them (via his mom’s Facebook post about his entrepreneurial offerings), netting a nice little sum to put in his piggybank. His efforts had paid off!

In the context of Paul’s counsel about caring for one another in the household of faith, the Apostle admonished the Galatian church members to not be weary in well doing because “in due season we shall reap, if we faint not.” Paul was encouraging them to keep on doing what is right and to trust God for the results, even when there was no immediate evidence that results would occur.

The “law of the harvest” applies to our efforts to support, comfort, encourage, and edify each other in the Gospel, just as it does to raising giant pumpkins. Our grandson learned that the harvest does not come immediately after the seeds are sown; he had to be patient and keep on providing what was necessary for his plants to grow. In the same manner, we must learn not to lose heart as we invest ourselves in doing good for others. Some day we will reap a harvest of blessings for our efforts!

BACKGROUND

Continuing his explanation of life in the Spirit which he had begun in chapter 5, Paul proceeded in the first part of chapter 6 to offer practical examples of how that love would be exemplified (verses 1-10). He admonished the saints in Galatia to keep the message of the Cross foremost (verses 11-16), and concluded his epistle with the customary apostolic benediction and farewell (verses 17-18).

In verses 1-5, Paul addressed the matter of restoring one who had been overtaken by sin. The verb “restore” in verse 1 is used elsewhere to signify resetting a broken bone or mending a torn net. Here, it means to repair or mend in a spiritual sense. Those who had succumbed to sin were not to be ignored, excused, or destroyed; the goal was restoration. The tense of the verb indicates that this would be accomplished over time, rather than by a single act. The Apostle did not prescribe specific methods of restoration, as these would vary according to the individual circumstances. However, he did lay out the manner in which it should be done: the erring one was to be restored “in the spirit of meekness,” thus demonstrating one aspect of the fruit of the Spirit that he had described in the previous chapter. Those who were doing the restoration were admonished to maintain a careful guard over their own personal integrity.

The term “burdens” in the command to “bear . . . one another’s burdens” (verse 2) could refer to any type of heavy load, but in this context it alludes to the shame of one who had failed spiritually. The assertion in verse 5 that “every man shall bear his own burden” could seem to contradict verse 2. However, a different Greek word is translated as “burden” in this verse. The meaning of verse 5 is that every individual is personally responsible for the welfare of his own soul.

In verses 6-10, the Apostle took up the subject of doing good for others, with a particular emphasis upon those in the fellowship of believers. The command in verse 6 to “communicate unto him that teacheth” implies a partnership in which the one who is taught gives material and financial support to those who teach (see also Romans 15:27). Paul was making the point that those who instruct and encourage the family of God spiritually should be supported by the family of God financially.

Paul followed up his point in verse 6 by referring to an agricultural principle in verse 7: what is planted will determine the type of harvest. He wanted the Galatians to understand that Christians will be rewarded if they invest material resources in spiritual endeavors. In contrast, the one who “soweth to his flesh”—who invests his resources in satisfying his own personal desires in ways not approved by God—will find that what he reaps is valueless and decaying. Paul challenged the Galatian believers not to become disheartened and slack in their efforts, pointing out that if they would continue, they would “reap” the glorious harvest of eternal life.

The Apostle closed his epistle by pointing out that he had written at least the conclusion of this letter himself, rather than dictating it to a scribe (verse 11). This may have been to emphasize his passion regarding the situation, or to validate the fact that what had been written was indeed a message from him. He noted that those who were opposing him and insisting upon circumcision were doing so in order to avoid the stigma associated with the Cross of Christ. In verse 14-15, he gave a completely opposite perspective, stating that he was determined to “glory” (to exalt in or boast) in the Cross of Jesus Christ, and concluding that the only thing of real importance was to be a new creation through faith in Christ.

AMPLIFIED OUTLINE

Hannah's Bible Outlines
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- IV. Paul’s Gospel practiced
 - D. In service (6:1-16)
 - 1. Concern for the weak brother (6:1-5)
 - 2. Concern for sowing to the Spirit (6:6-10)
 - 3. Concern for the centrality of the Cross (6:11-16)
- V. Conclusion (6:17-18)
 - A. The brand-marks of Jesus (6:17)
 - B. The benediction (6:18)

A CLOSER LOOK

1. When did Paul say that we were to do good unto all men? (see verse 10)

2. In verse 9, the Apostle encouraged the Galatian believers not to become “weary in well doing.” What are some aspects of our Christian lives where we will need to persevere?

3. What are some specific ways we can “glory” in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, as Paul said he did? (see verse 14)

CONCLUSION

We want to continue doing right, even when we do not see immediate results. There is a spiritual reward awaiting those who do.

NOTES



Overview for Romans

Author: Paul the Apostle

To Whom Written: The Church at Rome

Purpose: Paul's purpose was to introduce himself to this group of believers whom he had never met and to systematically explain the plan of salvation: the facts of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, the relationship between Christ and the Law, and that justification by faith is offered to Jew and Gentile alike through Jesus Christ. He also desired to enlist the support of the Roman Christians for his next missionary outreach, as Rome would be the natural base for such an endeavor because of its strategic location and political importance.

Key Verses: "For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek. For therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith: as it is written, The just shall live by faith" (Romans 1:16-17).

Date Written: Composed in approximately A.D. 57, the epistle was dictated to Tertius (Romans 16:22) and delivered by Phebe, a deaconess who lived in Cenchrea, the eastern port of Corinth (Romans 16:1).

Setting: Paul wrote the Epistle from Corinth to the Christians at Rome at the conclusion of his third missionary journey and culmination of his ministry in the eastern area of the Mediterranean. He was preparing to travel to Jerusalem and deliver relief money which had been gathered for impoverished believers in that city. Once his mission there was complete, he intended to visit Rome as he began a trip that would inaugurate his missionary effort toward the west and reach the end of the known world: Spain.

There is no Biblical indicator of the origin of the church at Rome, but it possibly sprang from the testimony of individuals who had been witnesses to Pentecost in Jerusalem (see Acts 2:9-11). At the time of this writing, neither Paul nor any of the other

Apostles had visited Rome. Since travel was common during that era, many people had migrated to the capital city from around the Roman Empire, and the church was comprised of both Gentile and Jewish Christians (see Romans 1:13 and 4:1).

Rome was a powerful, wealthy, and influential city, and many of its philosophies and practices were in opposition to the Christian faith, so the believers there faced many challenges. Even within the church there were differing perspectives, for while Gentile Christians came from a background of idolatry and unbelief, those with a Jewish heritage were rooted in the Mosaic Law. Paul wanted those of both backgrounds to understand that God's purpose was for all nationalities to be united in the Body of Christ.

Special Features: Paul's epistle to the Romans is his most theological and organized presentation of the Gospel, and is the longest of the Pauline epistles.

Summary: Paul began his epistle by stating unequivocally that Jesus Christ was the fulfillment of what God had "promised afore by his prophets in the holy scriptures" (Romans 1:2)—the God-ordained summation of the symbolism of the ancient rituals and of the glowing anticipations of prophets through the ages. The Apostle incorporated numerous Old Testament examples such as Adam, Abraham and Sarah, Moses, and David as illustrations of the timeless principles of God's working with man.

Themes developed in Romans include the righteousness of God, the unrighteousness of all mankind, the death of Jesus Christ as a sacrifice for the sins of the world, justification through faith in Christ, sanctification as the remedy for the struggle with inbred sin, and the victorious life in the Spirit. The Apostle also reviewed Israel's unbelief and rejection of God, and the Gentiles' place in God's overall plan of redemption. He explained the fruits of God's righteousness that were to be exemplified in the lives of believers, and concluded his epistle with an outline of his personal plans and some final exhortations and greetings.

Timeline

Many of these dates are approximate, as reference materials differ slightly.

Jesus crucified; Pentecost; Church begun A.D. 30	Stephen martyred; Paul's conversion 35			Peter's ministry in Asia Minor 47	Jerusalem council 50	PAUL IMPRISONED (CAESAREA) 57-59	PAUL'S HOUSE ARREST 60-62	James (Jesus' brother) martyred 62	Peter & Paul martyred 67/68?	Jude martyred 72						
	PAUL IN CILICIA & SYRIA 35-46			PAUL'S MISSIONARY JOURNEYS 46-48	50-52	53-57	Paul's trip to Rome 59			Rome destroys Jerusalem 70						
			Holy Spirit falls on Gentiles 41	James (the Apostle) martyred; Peter imprisoned 44	Galatians; James 49	1 & 2 Thessalonians 51/52	1 & 2 Corinthians 55	Romans 57	St. Mark 58/60	Ephesians; Colossians; Philemon 60	Philippians 61	St. Matthew; St. Luke 61/64	1 Timothy; Titus; 1 Peter 64	Jude 65	Acts; 2 Peter; 2 Timothy 66/68	Hebrews 68

Outline

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A complete amplified outline of this book is available on our website at www.apostolicfaith.org.

- I. Introduction (1:1-17)
 - A. Greetings to the Romans (1:1-7)
 - B. Paul's concern for the believers in Rome (1:8-15)
 - C. Theme (1:16-17)
- II. God's plan of salvation (1:18—11:36)
 - A. The need: the human race is universally guilty (1:18—3:20)
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DEVOTIONAL FOCUS

“For therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith: as it is written, The just shall live by faith.” (Romans 1:17)

Martin Luther (1483–1546) is considered to be one of the most influential figures in Christian church history. Luther spent his early years as a Catholic monk and theological scholar. He was very zealous in his efforts to please God, engaging in fasting, long sessions of prayer, numerous pilgrimages, constant confession, and even flogging himself as a religious discipline. He frequently went many hours without sleep and endured frigid cold without proper cover in an effort to prove his sincerity. As he later commented, “If anyone could have earned Heaven by the life of a monk, it was I.”

In spite of Luther’s efforts, however, he could not find peace with God. It seemed that the more he tried to do for God, the more he became convinced of his own sinfulness. He was increasingly terrified of the wrath of the Almighty and this became a terrible burden upon his soul.

In 1515, while preparing a lecture on Paul’s epistle to the Romans, Luther read the words of our focus verse, “For therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith: as it is written, The just shall live by faith.” He spent long hours pondering this passage. At last God opened his eyes to the understanding that salvation was not obtained by fearing God or being enslaved by religious practices. Rather, it was a gift of God’s grace, received by faith in God’s promise to forgive sins for the sake of Christ’s death upon the Cross at Calvary.

This understanding marked a major change in Martin Luther’s life. He began looking at the church’s teachings with new eyes. In 1517, he composed a document calling into question some of the basic tenets of Roman Catholicism, including the practice of selling “indulgences”—a rampant practice by the Roman Catholic Church of collecting payment for absolution from punishment for some specific types of sins. His *Ninety-five Theses* set forth two central beliefs: that the Bible rather than the pope is *the* religious authority, and that salvation must be received through faith in Jesus Christ, rather than by deeds.

In 1521, Luther was summoned to appear before the Roman Emperor in Worms, Germany. Luther assumed the purpose was for another debate, but in reality, it was a trial at which he was asked to recant

his views. He responded with the now-famous words, “Unless I can be instructed and convinced with evidence from the Holy Scriptures or with open, clear, and distinct grounds of reasoning . . . then I cannot and will not recant, because it is neither safe nor wise to act against conscience.” Then he added, “Here I stand. I can do no other. God help me! Amen.”

By the time an imperial edict calling Luther “a convicted heretic” was issued, he had escaped into hiding. However, word of Luther’s courageous actions and his teachings spread, and ultimately were the catalyst for the Protestant Reformation of the 16th century—an event that had an incalculable effect on world history.

The truth that Paul the Apostle declared in today’s text, and that Martin Luther came to recognize as the way to peace with God, is still changing lives today. There is only one way to a right relationship with God—through faith in Jesus Christ. By trusting in what Jesus did at Calvary to obtain our salvation and repenting of sin, our relationship with God is made right. Thank God for His wonderful plan of salvation!

BACKGROUND

These opening verses of Paul’s epistle to the Christians in Rome can be divided into three sections: the Apostle’s introduction and greetings (verses 1-7), an expression of his feelings toward these believers who had no personal knowledge of him but whom he had long desired to visit (verses 8-15), and his initial statement regarding the content of his message (verses 16-17).

The title “Apostle” generally was used as a designation for the twelve men whom Christ appointed to be with Him (see Mark 3:14). However, Paul asserted in verse 1 that he was not only a “servant of Jesus Christ,” but that he had been “called to be an apostle.” The word translated “called” means more than merely being invited, but includes the sense of being appointed—Paul had not assumed the office himself, but was set apart to it by the authority of Christ. The Judaizing teachers (Jewish Christians who taught the necessity of circumcision) of the time disputed Paul’s claim to apostleship, so he seemingly deemed it necessary to declare his credentials at the outset of this letter in which the teachings of the Judaizers would be overthrown.

The Apostle continued by showing the connection between the old covenant (given through Abraham, Moses, and David) and the Gospel of Jesus Christ (verses 2-6). In support, he pointed out that Christ

had been predicted by Old Testament prophets, that His Davidic descent was a fulfillment of prophetic utterances, and that His divine nature was proved by His resurrection from the dead. Paul then addressed his epistle to the church at Rome, and gave the apostolic salutation conferring grace and peace (verse 7).

Paul went on to commend the faith of the Roman believers and to state his purpose in wanting to come to their city. He related three specific desires: that he would be a spiritual blessing to them, that he would receive fellowship and comfort from them, and that his visit would result in spiritual fruit (verses 11-13). The Greek word translated “comforted” in verse 12 has a sense of “encouraged” rather than the provision of consolation or solace.

In the final two verses of our text, Paul presented a core statement of what he meant by “the gospel,” asserting that it was “the power of God unto salvation.” His message established the universality of sin, the impossibility of man rescuing himself, God’s provision of Jesus Christ as the means of mankind’s salvation, and the necessity of faith to receive the offered blessing. The word translated “power” from the Greek *dunamis* expresses strength and potency; the English word “dynamite” is a derivative of the same Greek word.

Paul stated what he felt about this Gospel with the restrained expression, “I am not ashamed . . .” The Apostle was well aware of what was arrayed against him: the traditions of the ages, the philosophies of a powerful and materialistic society, and bitter hatred and prejudice. However, he refused to be deferential or apologetic in the face of these opposing forces, and without hesitation proclaimed that the Gospel of Jesus Christ is a life-changing agent for everyone who believes.

AMPLIFIED OUTLINE Compiled for the *Daybreak & Discovery* series

- I. Introduction (1:1-17)
 - A. Greetings to the Romans (1:1-7)
 - B. Paul’s concern for the believers in Rome (1:8-15)
 - C. Theme (1:16-17)

A CLOSER LOOK

1. According to verse 11, what did Paul long to impart to the believers at Rome, and why?

2. Why do you think Paul said he was a “debtor” to the Greeks and the Barbarians, to the wise and to the unwise (verse 14)?

3. What are some ways our lives can demonstrate that we are “not ashamed of the gospel of Christ”?

CONCLUSION

Our own efforts or attempts to be righteous will never be enough. There is only one way to have a right relationship with God, and that is through faith in His Son, Jesus Christ, and the price He paid at Calvary for our redemption.

NOTES



Romans 1:18 through 2:9

DEVOTIONAL FOCUS

**“For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold the truth in unrighteousness.”
(Romans 1:18)**

In the first chapter of Paul’s epistle to the Romans, the Apostle put forth a foundational truth of the Gospel of Jesus Christ: that all have sinned and are deserving of the wrath of God. Jean-Jacques Rousseau, a philosopher and writer of the 1700s, found that truth unpalatable. Rousseau was a notoriously ungodly and blasphemous man who lived in open licentiousness for decades. He ultimately wrote a twelve-volume autobiography covering the first fifty-three years of his life, titling it, *The Confessions of Jean-Jacques Rousseau*. However, this massive “confession” was no outpouring of genuine humility or remorse for his vile manner of living. Rather, it was Rousseau’s attempt to explain and justify his misdeeds. His premise was that in spite of his sinful behavior, he was fundamentally a good and honest being, and better than other men. He even addressed God himself in his opening words, stating, “Power eternal! Assemble round thy throne an innumerable throng of my fellow-mortals, let them listen to my confessions, let them blush at my depravity, let them tremble at my sufferings; . . . and, if he dare, aver, I was better than that man.”¹

Rousseau was just one of countless ungodly people throughout history who have done their best to excuse sin. They have contested the authority of God, rebelled against His judgments, and attempted to “hold [suppress] the truth in unrighteousness.” God will not tolerate this! Our focus verse makes it clear that God’s wrath—a holy response to what is unholy—will be poured out upon all who oppose the truth.

In today’s society, God’s wrath is deemed harsh and intolerant. People ask, “How can a good God send people to Hell?” or “Why would a good God allow the evil we see in our world?” It seems that God’s character is on trial, and people feel free to set themselves up as His judge. However, man’s opinions do not change the truth: God’s wrath is in perfect accord with God’s justice. How could an infinitely righteous God respond in any other way to unrighteousness? How could the purity of God react in any other way to impurity? God’s perfect moral nature can never be soiled by complicity with man’s guilt.

Paul was not cautious about addressing this topic with the Romans, and in our focus verse he began

laying the groundwork for his case against man’s unrighteousness. He pointed out in verse 20 that man is without excuse for his rejection of God, because God has revealed Himself to man in His Creation. There certainly is enough visible evidence of God in the world around us to lead humanity to acknowledge and glorify the Creator, so refusal to do so is deliberate rejection. As a result, the wrath of God is being poured out. God has given the rebellious over to the consequences of their sins—a process with dreadful repercussions that are more and more manifest in our society today.

Let’s not be confused by the loud voices around us which question God’s authority and rebel against His judgments. Our eternal destiny hinges upon whether we acknowledge God or reject Him!

BACKGROUND

Verse 18 begins Paul’s explanation of the unrighteousness and guilt of all mankind—a theme which continues through chapter 3. In today’s text, the Apostle delineated God’s condemnation and wrath toward the ungodly, pointing out why they were without excuse, and describing the inevitable downward spiral of sin. He began chapter 2 with a condemnation of the moralist who judges others.

Paul stated that God’s wrath (holy revulsion) against the ungodly was because they had ignored the knowledge of God as revealed in nature (verses 18-20). The verb translated *hold* in the assertion that they “hold the truth in unrighteousness” has the meaning of “suppress,” “restrain,” or “stifle.” Furthermore, the unrighteous had suppressed the revelation of God to their conscience, and were not grateful for the good things that came from His hand (verses 21-23). This rejection of God plunged them deeper and deeper into darkness, in which they exalted their own reasoning and ultimately created their own images of deity.

In verses 24-32, the Apostle described God’s response to this rejection of fundamental light: He “gave them up” or turned them over to the outcome of their sins, which was “uncleanness” (or sexual aberration) and degradation. The phrase “gave them up” is used again in verse 26, where Paul explained that because the unrighteous accorded more honor to things that were created than to the One who created them, God “gave them up” to “vile affections” (or sexual perversions) which included homosexuality. Although homosexuality is often defined in contemporary society as a lifestyle choice or physiological inclination, this passage clearly indicates that homosexual activity is a

sin, and that it is a result of mankind denying and disobeying God.

In verse 28, Paul repeated for the third time and with dreadful emphasis that God “gave them over” to a “reprobate mind” because of their revolt against Him. In verses 29-32, he followed up with an inventory of vile and depraved behaviors, and concluded that even though godless men knew that those who did such things were “worthy of death,” they still condoned such activities.

In chapter 2, Paul expanded on the deplorable condition of the ungodly to stress that the moralist who judged another individual, in so doing acknowledged that a standard of righteousness existed. Therefore he too was “inexcusable” and would not escape judgment for rejecting God’s goodness and longsuffering. The Apostle asserted that God would judge “according to truth” (verse 2), and would “render” (recompense or deliver) to every man according to his deeds (verse 6).

AMPLIFIED OUTLINE Compiled for the Daybreak & Discovery series

- II. God’s plan of salvation
 - A. The need: the human race is universally guilty
 - 1. The heathen are guilty (1:18-32)
 - a. Light is given (1:18-20)
 - b. Light is rejected (1:21-23)
 - c. Depravity is the result (1:24-32)
 - 2. The unconverted are guilty though moral (2:1-9)

A CLOSER LOOK

1. According to verse 21, what happened to the foolish hearts of those who failed to glorify God?

2. How should we respond to the manifestation of God in the natural world around us?

3. In the world today, we are surrounded by ungodly worldviews and lifestyles that are in total contradiction to the teachings of God’s Word. What are some steps we can take to resist the pressure to conform to ungodly perspectives?

CONCLUSION

Paul was straightforward in his exposure of sin and his assertion of universal guilt. We too must take care never to minimize or excuse what God deems as unrighteousness.

NOTES

1. Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *The Confessions of Jean-Jacques Rousseau*, London :1903, accessed through <http://www.gutenberg.org/files/3913/3913-h/3913-h.htm>, April 12, 2019.



Romans 2:10 through 3:20

DEVOTIONAL FOCUS

“What then? are we better than they? No, in no wise: for we have before proved both Jews and Gentiles, that they are all under sin; as it is written, There is none righteous, no, not one.” (Romans 3:9-10)

Recently a friend drew my attention to the wording on three T-shirts. The first shirt was imprinted with the words, “Oldest Child: I Make the Rules.” The second read, “Middle Child: I’m the Reason We Have Rules,” and the third, “Youngest Child: The Rules Don’t Apply to Me.” She laughed and commented that the words on the shirts were totally applicable to her three children.

That caused me to reflect on our family, and I quickly realized that the T-shirt wording rang true regarding our kids as well. Our oldest daughter always felt it was her privilege to boss her siblings, and all of our older children insist that the youngest child in our family, another daughter, enjoyed multiple advantages they never had.

Perceptions of “privilege” and “advantage” are probably as old as mankind itself. Sometimes such perspectives are completely faulty, but at other times they are partially or entirely valid. In our text today, the Apostle Paul recognized that the Jews did indeed have a unique advantage among the peoples of the earth. They were God’s chosen nation: the ones to whom He had revealed details of His nature and His requirements for human behavior.

However, the unique advantage of the Jews had produced in them a feeling of superiority. Because they were recipients of a fuller knowledge of God and His ways, they deemed all Gentiles as “heathen.” They were confident that they were well equipped to be “a light of them which are in darkness, an instructor of the foolish” (Romans 2:19-20). Yet, they had failed lamentably to apply their knowledge of God’s requirements to their own lives.

In our focus verses, Paul forcibly asserted that despite the Jews’ privileged position, they were still guilty before God. Although they knew the Law well, that did not make them righteous. Along with the Gentiles, they stood condemned before God because they had rejected Him and failed to follow His commandments. There is no partiality with God!

Many people today feel that their religious actions and activities make them better than their contemporaries who make no pretense of interest in religion.

However, that assumption is as faulty as the Jews’ assumption of superiority. Empty ritual will never suffice in God’s sight. There is only one answer to human guilt—we are justified only when we come to God in humility and genuine repentance.

The message that Paul proclaimed to the Romans is still valid today. God in His great mercy has made a provision for our sins through the Gospel of Jesus Christ. But we must come to Him in His way!

BACKGROUND

The word “law” appears many times in this portion of Paul’s epistle. In some instances, the Apostle was referring not only to the Mosaic Law but to the whole previous revelation of God which made known God’s will as to man’s conduct.

Today’s text begins with Paul’s statement that the righteous would be rewarded with glory, honor, and peace (in contrast to the previously described retribution which would befall the ungodly). The Apostle went on to assert that God’s moral law applied to all (verses 11-16). He then pointed to the guilt of the Jews who assumed they were accepted by God because they were recipients of the Mosaic Law, in spite of their breaking it (verses 17-29). In verses 1-8 of chapter 3, the Apostle anticipated arguments against his teachings and offered rebuttals. Finally, in verses 9-20 he restated a key principle of the Gospel: that all mankind is sinful and while the Law brought a knowledge and understanding of sin, no one can be justified by works.

The word *respect* in Paul’s statement, “There is no respect of persons with God” (Romans 2:11), could be defined as “partiality” or “favoritism.” Paul was pointing out that God does not adjust His dealings with man based upon whether the individual is a Jew or Gentile. Although the Gentiles did not possess the Old Testament instruction, moral principles were written upon their consciences. Condemnation was not based upon race but upon revelation, and Jew and Gentile alike would one day stand before God in judgment.

Paul pointed to the guilt of the Jews in Romans 2:17-29. The term “Jew” as used in 2:17 is synonymous with “Hebrew” or “Israelite.” However, the designation “Jew” typically refers to the religion of the descendants of Jacob, while “Hebrew” is a racial designation and “Israelite” is a nationality. Paul made clear that in spite of the religious practices of the Jews, they were breaking the commandments of God and thus were guilty; this substantiated his point that true religion is not found in observance of outward rituals but in moral obedience.

Having shown the dangers of assuming privilege, Paul posed hypothetical questions in Romans 3:1-8 to ensure that his readers understood there were, in fact, some advantages to a Jewish heritage. The primary advantage was that “unto them [the Jews] were committed the oracles of God” (Romans 3:2). The word “oracles” referred to the Scriptures, which were delivered initially in a verbal form. Paul responded to each of his theoretical questions, beginning two of his responses with an exclamation of recoiling abhorrence, “God forbid.”

Verses 9-20 restate that all of humanity is sinful. After delineating at some length the differences between the Jews and Gentiles, Paul declared that in spite of distinctions of nationality, belief, and culture, all mankind is “under sin.” *Under* in this case means “to be dominated by or subjugated to the authority of,” so Paul was making it clear that without exception, the human race is dominated and controlled by the sin nature. Verses 9-20 have the sense of a legal accusation, with verse 20 introducing two new pieces of information about the Law: the impossibility of man being “justified” by self-effort, and the fact that the Law reveals the true nature of sin.

AMPLIFIED OUTLINE Compiled for the Daybreak & Discovery series

- II. God’s plan of salvation
 - A. The need: the human race is universally guilty
 - 3. God’s law applies to all (2:10-16)
 - 4. The Jews are guilty (2:17—3:20)
 - a. Knowing the Law, they break it (2:17-29)
 - b. Having the advantage of the Law, they did not believe (3:1-8)
 - 5. Recap: all are guilty (3:9-20)

A CLOSER LOOK

1. What did Paul say bore witness to the Gentiles regarding the “work of the law written in their hearts”? Romans 2:15

2. Why do you think Paul stressed so strongly that every person is sinful and condemned before God?

3. Perhaps those who grew up in Christian homes could be compared to the Jews of Paul’s day in that they are religiously privileged. What are some ways to check and be sure you are living up to what you know?

CONCLUSION

No matter how an individual or group of people sees themselves, the human race without exception has a predisposition to evil and rebellion against God.

NOTES



Romans 3:21 through 4:25

DEVOTIONAL FOCUS

**“Where is boasting then? It is excluded. By what law? of works? Nay: but by the law of faith. Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith without the deeds of the law.”
(Romans 3:27-28)**

A number of years ago, I became acquainted with Tillie Nelson, a lovely older lady who was affectionately called “Aunt Tillie” by many in our church family. Aunt Tillie was a petite woman, but her grammatical expertise and editorial prowess were mighty; she was legendary in our circles for her abilities and quick wit. She was also kind and unfailingly gracious in sharing her knowledge with others. In fact, her whole life testified to a vibrant personal relationship with Christ.

As I became familiar with Aunt Tillie’s story, I learned this had not always been the case. While she came from a good family and had attended church from the time she was a little girl, she lived for many years with a mere profession of Christianity. A refined and well-educated woman, she had taught Sunday school and been active in organizations to benefit youth. She read her Bible and prayed regularly, and even had accepted a call to the mission field and spent six years teaching in India. When she returned home, she served in her church as Welfare Secretary, taught a Bible class, and organized a Young Woman’s Missionary Society. In fact, her life revolved around her religious “works.” However, deep in her heart, she was dissatisfied. She felt that a Christian should not do some of the things she was doing, but she was unable to give them up.

She accepted a position as private secretary to her brother, who was a member of the United States Congress, and about that time, two of her brother’s sons were converted during a service at an Apostolic Faith Church. The change in their lives was so dramatic that Aunt Tillie’s brother urged her to visit our annual camp meeting convention in Portland, Oregon, to investigate.

During those camp meeting services, Aunt Tillie began searching her heart and comparing her life with the Word of God. She related, “What an astonishing discovery I made! The Lord revealed to me that I merely had a profession of Christianity. What was I to do? Should I confess that I was not saved, after having been a missionary and active in Christian work for years? How could I possibly admit that while I

was trying to convert others, I was not converted myself? Yet, I knew I would be a coward if I did not do so. One night I knelt at the altar of prayer and pleaded guilty before God, as a sinner. I could not keep back the tears. I asked His forgiveness, and reached out to Him in faith. He was gracious to me and saved my soul. How good it was to have at last a salvation that I knew about!”

Aunt Tillie’s experience illustrates the point made by the Apostle Paul in today’s text: justification is not obtained through religious works or “deeds of the law,” but through faith in Jesus Christ. Our redemption was purchased at a tremendous cost—the Blood of Jesus Christ. We are justified in God’s sight when the righteousness of Christ is freely imparted to us on the basis of His sacrifice at Calvary.

If salvation could be earned by good deeds, Aunt Tillie surely would have merited it, but all of her efforts in the name of God could not provide the peace and assurance her soul craved. That came through faith in Jesus Christ, and she lived for the rest of her days with heartfelt appreciation for redemption through Jesus’ Blood.

Do you have an assurance in your heart that you have been justified and your sins forgiven? Come to God the way Aunt Tillie came, in repentance and faith. It’s the only way!

BACKGROUND

Having established the sinfulness of man and his inability to obtain a right standing before God through his own efforts or merit, in this portion of text Paul proclaimed God’s solution: justification through Christ Jesus, to be received by faith. In verses 21-26 of chapter 3, the Apostle summarized the purpose of the Law and introduced his readers to grace—a concept unexplored to this point in his epistle. He continued in verses 27-31 by presenting several conclusions about righteousness based upon what he had just written. Chapter 4 is a sidebar in which Paul defended his teaching of justification by faith apart from the works of the Law, citing the example of Abraham to illustrate and support his position.

Verses 21-26 of chapter 3 include several important truths upon which the Gospel rests. These include Paul’s view of the purpose of the law, which was to drive home to men’s consciences the conviction of sin, and to point forward (along with the prophets) to a more perfect revelation of God’s righteousness.

Romans 3:21-23 is a summation of the universal nature of the remedy God offers in Christ Jesus for

the universal sinfulness of mankind. The Apostle used athletically oriented words in verse 23 to make his point: the word “sinned” (from the Greek *hamartano*) in his statement “all have sinned and come short of the glory of God” expresses the idea of an arrow landing short of the target, or a runner lagging behind in a race.

Verses 24 and 25 contain three words which are key in Paul’s explanation of the Gospel: “justified,” “redemption,” and “propitiation.” The word “justified” has the sense of being judicially pardoned by an act of God’s grace and thus declared righteous and absolved from the penalty of sin. “Redemption” implies liberation from a state of captivity through a ransom price paid—in this case, the price was Christ’s death on Calvary. “Propitiation” expresses the concept of a substitutionary and atoning sacrifice, indicating that through Christ’s death, the wrath of God against unrighteousness is appeased or satisfied.

A series of questions in verses 27-31 provide the framework for three conclusions regarding righteousness: that righteousness by faith negates boasting, that righteousness by faith is for all, and that righteousness by faith does not annul the Law but fulfills it.

Knowing that those steeped in Judaism would point to Abraham as a rebuttal of his teaching of justification through faith apart from the works of the Law, in chapter 4 Paul presented an analysis of how Abraham was made righteous. The Apostle pointed out that it was not by works (verses 1-8), nor by the requirements of the Law such as circumcision (verses 9-12), but by faith (verses 13-25). In verse 3 he quoted from Genesis 15:6 to substantiate his assertion that Abraham’s trust in God’s promises was what was “counted unto him” (accredited to his account) as righteousness. In verses 7-8, he quoted David’s opening words from Psalm 32, which express the joy of justified people.

AMPLIFIED OUTLINE Compiled for the *Daybreak & Discovery* series

- II. God’s plan of salvation
 - B. God’s remedy
 - 1. Justification by faith (remission of past sins)
 - a. Provided by Blood of Jesus (3:21-26)
 - b. Obtained by faith (3:27-31)
 - c. Abraham an example (4:1-25)
 - (1) Not by works (4:1-8)
 - (2) Not by circumcision (4:9-12)
 - (3) Not by the Law (4:13-25)

A CLOSER LOOK

1. How many times in Romans 3:21-31 did Paul use the phrase “by faith” or “through faith”? Why do you think he stressed this point by repetition?

2. Why is it futile to put confidence in the rituals or observances of religion as the basis for salvation?

3. What are some ways our attempts to do good *prior* to being justified differ from the righteous life we live *after* being justified?

CONCLUSION

Good works will never give us a right standing before God. We can only be justified through faith in Jesus Christ and His Blood that was shed for our redemption.

NOTES



DEVOTIONAL FOCUS

“Therefore as by the offence of one judgment came upon all men to condemnation; even so by the righteousness of one the free gift came upon all men unto justification of life.” (Romans 5:18)

Most of us probably keep a dollar amount in mind when we select gifts. Recently, I searched the internet to find out the most expensive present ever given. Included in a list of the top ten most valuable gifts was one of the oldest and most famous gems in the world: the Kohinoor Diamond. While the diamond has a long and somewhat mysterious history, most sources agree that it was given to Queen Victoria of the British Empire in 1851 by an Indian Maharaja, Duleep Singh.

The monetary value of this one-of-a-kind stone can only be estimated because the diamond is so unique. However, to get an approximate idea of its worth, another famous diamond just one-quarter the size of the Kohinoor was sold in China several decades ago for a price of \$46 million. Currently, the Kohinoor is the most prized item of the British Crown Jewels collection, and its value is estimated to be between three and four billion United States dollars.

While a dollar amount of that magnitude is almost impossible to fathom, God gave mankind a far more precious gift—the gift of justification through His Son, Jesus Christ. Forgiveness of sin is without doubt the *ultimate* gift! Its value, though not measured in dollars, is far beyond anything we can grasp with our finite minds. Not only does it dramatically change our lives here on earth, but it will last throughout eternity.

In our focus verse, Paul referenced this beautiful truth by pointing to the contrast between Adam and Christ and noting that just as Adam’s act of transgression brought death to all mankind, Jesus’ act of righteousness brought the free gift of justification and everlasting life to all mankind. Every individual around the globe is offered the opportunity to obtain a right relationship with God through the atoning sacrifice of Jesus at Calvary. Unworthy as we know ourselves to be, His shed Blood will avail for our sins if we come to Him in repentance and true faith.

At the time of this writing, our world’s population was estimated to be 7,696,833,300. (It’s more now, as you read this sentence.) Jesus offers “justification of life” to every one of those people. We can never put a price on God’s gift, but pondering its magnitude and value can help us to better appreciate what He has provided for us.

BACKGROUND

After declaring in previous chapters the awfulness of the human condition, and presenting Abraham as an example of justification by faith, in the first part of chapter 5 Paul set forth the benefits of justification by faith (verses 1-11). In the remainder of the chapter, he used a comparison of Adam and Christ to establish that just as one sin in the Garden of Eden brought condemnation and death to all, one Sacrifice on the Cross made justification and life available for all.

Verses 1-11 relate the effects and blessings of justification by faith. In verses 1-2, Paul pointed out the threefold blessings of being justified: one has peace with God, access by faith into His grace, and a spirit of rejoicing based on hope. The “peace” the Apostle referred to was not merely a feeling of tranquility, but meant reconciliation with God—the state which results when the antagonism and separation between God and man is abolished through faith in Christ’s sacrifice on the Cross.

Paul presented three important concepts in verses 1-2: the Christian’s *place* (he is given “access” into grace); the Christian’s *attitude*, (one of firm confidence, “wherein we stand”); and the Christian’s *means* of realizing that ideal (“through our Lord Jesus Christ” and “by faith”). In view of this, the Apostle stated that Christians could rejoice in the hope of sharing the glory of God. In verses 3-5, he identified hope as the result which follows when trials are patiently endured. Since first-century Christians lived in an atmosphere where persecution and suffering was prevalent, they needed to understand the benefit of enduring.

The word *commendeth* in verse 8 is significant. While one meaning is “to establish or prove; to make certain,” in this usage it includes the sense of “recommending” or setting forth in such a way as to appeal to the heart. God commended His love toward man in His giving of His Son, not because man was good enough, but because God loved him enough.

Up to this point in his epistle, Paul had examined two foundational doctrines: the condemnation of mankind, and the remedy of justification through Jesus Christ. Beginning with verse 12 and to the end of the chapter, Paul drew a comparison between Adam and Christ in their relation to the human family. He made the point that just as sin and death reigned over humanity as a result of one man’s sin, justification and life came to humanity through one Man’s death.

The word “sin” in verses 12 and 20 is the Greek word *hamartia*. It alludes to a governing principle in

which the human will rises up in revolt against the will of God, rather than a single act of transgression, which is a different Greek word (*parabasis*). The word “figure” in verse 14 (from the Greek *typos*) means “type”; while Adam was an individual, he represented all of mankind (in fact, his name in Hebrew meant “mankind”). Thus, when he sinned, the entire race of man was corrupted with the governing principle of sin, though individual guilt is ascribed only on the basis of personal transgression.

AMPLIFIED OUTLINE Compiled for the *Daybreak & Discovery* series

- II. God’s plan of salvation
 - B. God’s remedy
 - 1. Justification by faith (remission of past sins)
 - d. Effects and blessings of justification by faith (5:1-11)
 - e. Differences between Adam and Christ (5:12-21)

A CLOSER LOOK

1. How did God show His love for us (verses 6-8)?

2. What do the words “when we were enemies” (verse 10) indicate?

3. Jesus died for us; what are our responsibilities to receive justification through Him?

CONCLUSION

Christ died for us while we were sinners, and by His sacrificial death made the free gift of justification by faith available to all.

NOTES



DEVOTIONAL FOCUS

“But God be thanked, that ye were the servants of sin, but ye have obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine which was delivered you. Being then made free from sin, ye became the servants of righteousness.” (Romans 6:17-18)

The concept of freedom means different things to different people.

Citizens of the United States of America celebrate independence on July 4, looking back to that date in 1776 when the founding fathers declared the thirteen American colonies to be independent of the British monarchy. They deemed their new nation to be self-governing, and felt that God had endowed them with that right, viewing independence from British rule as freedom.

Freedom was a deeply appreciated blessing to the Chris Botofan family when they arrived in Portland, Oregon, on July 5, 1979, and stepped into an Apostolic Faith camp meeting which was in progress. To them, freedom looked like liberty from the oppression they had felt in Communist Romania until just a few months earlier when they left for America. They had a view of freedom which perhaps cannot be fully appreciated by those who have not lived under that type of regime.

Some years ago, two prisoners who escaped from a maximum security institution in New York State were in the news. The inmates were able to cut through the walls of their cells, cross a catwalk to a network of utility tunnels, and cut into a pipe leading to a manhole outside the facility’s walls. Can you imagine how those men must have schemed and planned to make that happen? They had one thing on their minds: escape to freedom! As they crawled four hundred feet through the pipe and approached the manhole cover, adrenalin would have been flowing. No doubt they thought, *We’ve almost made it! We’re almost free!* However, their joy was short lived. As soon as they crawled out, they began to encounter problems. Their get-away vehicle was not waiting for them, and before long they were on the run. They were “free” for a number of days, but their attempt did not end well. While these two convicts viewed escape from confinement as freedom, what they experienced was not true freedom.

In our focus verses, the Apostle Paul pointed out what true freedom is—being delivered and set free from the bondage and power of sin. Sin harms and destroys; freedom is healing and wholeness of the

inner man. Sin brings guilt; freedom brings a clear conscience. Sin causes condemnation and fear; freedom results in peace with God and having no fear of death or eternity.

Those who have made Jesus the Lord of their lives are no longer enslaved by sin—they have the power to live victoriously without sin. They are truly free! Is that your experience today? It can be!

BACKGROUND

In Romans 6, Paul addressed several foundational doctrines of the Gospel including the nature of sin and its penalty, living without sin, the significance of water baptism, and the necessity of sanctification. The chapter divides naturally into two sections, the first concerning what it means to be free from sin (verses 1-11), and the second focusing on how believers live as servants of righteousness (verses 12-23).

Paul’s opening question in verse 1 in effect asked, “Since we are justified, should we continue in sin in order to reveal how great grace is?” His purpose was to reject the false assumption that salvation by grace allows one to continue in sin, so he provided the answer: a resounding “God forbid.”

The Apostle followed his own emphatic rejection with another question, “How shall we, that are dead to sin, live any longer therein?” The tense used in the original Greek in the phrase “that are dead to sin,” points to a particular moment in time, indicating that justification is an instantaneous experience.

Paul’s reference in verses 3-5 to being “buried with him [Christ] by baptism into death” and “planted together in the likeness of his death” makes two points related to water baptism. First, the word “burial” presupposes that death has already occurred, teaching that baptism is for believers—those who have already died to sin. Baptism does not take away sin; rather, it bears public witness to a new life in Christ which has already begun. In Rome at that time, submitting to Christian baptism was a clear statement that the believer had died to his old life and was from that point on committed to being identified with the followers of Christ. Second, the verbs “buried” and “planted” both speak to immersion as being the form of baptism practiced by the Early Church. The action of being submerged in water symbolizes dying to sin and being buried with Christ. The action of coming up out of the water illustrates arising to newness of life, just as Christ arose to new life at His resurrection.

Beginning with verses 6-7, Paul addressed the subject of sanctification, stating that “our old man is

crucified” that the “body of sin [carnality, the sin nature, or the old man] might be destroyed.” The Greek word translated “sin” in these verses (*harmartia*) implies an inward condition of sin out of which acts of sin originate. As a result of the crucifixion and death of the old man, the justified individual is “freed from sin”—the inclination or bent toward sinning is eradicated. The Greek word in verse 6 translated *destroyed* (*karatgeo*) means “abolish or eradicate,” and thus conclusively proves that the sin nature is not merely suppressed but is done away with at sanctification. Though sin no longer reigns, the justified and sanctified person still must maintain his experiences by living “unto God” (verse 10).

The second portion of the chapter (verses 12-23) contains an exhortation regarding how a justified person is to live as a servant of righteousness: he is to present himself to God in an act of total consecration and to refuse to allow sin to govern him. In essence, the Apostle challenged the believers at Rome, “Put every part of your body and every power of your redeemed nature at the disposal of God.” The word “yield” occurs five times in verses 13-19, and suggests a transfer of ownership. The result of yielding is described in verse 22: the believer will have “fruit unto holiness, and the end everlasting life.”

In verse 15, Paul asked a question similar to the one with which the chapter opened: “What then? shall we sin, because we are not under the law, but under grace?” Once again, his emphatic answer, “God forbid,” is proof that it is God’s will for every Christian to live victoriously without sinning. In verse 18 he reiterated, “Being then made free from sin, ye became the servants of righteousness.” The word *free*—used three times in chapter 5 and six times in this chapter—means “to liberate; to exempt from moral, ceremonial, or mortal liability.”

Verse 23 warns that “the wages of sin is death.” Sin that is not repented of will lead to eternal separation from God and eternal punishment.

AMPLIFIED OUTLINE Compiled for the Daybreak & Discovery series

- II. God’s plan of salvation
 - B. God’s remedy
 - 2. Entire sanctification (freedom from inbred sin)
 - a. Freed from sin (6:1-11)
 - b. Now submit to righteousness (6:12-23)

A CLOSER LOOK

1. In verse 11, what did Paul indicate believers were to be dead to? What do you think this means?

2. How would you explain the significance of water baptism, based upon Paul’s allusion to it in verses 3-5?

3. What are some ways we can yield our members as “instruments of righteousness unto God” (verse 13)?

CONCLUSION

While people view freedom in different ways, salvation is what brings true freedom. Freedom from the captivity of sin allows us to offer ourselves as obedient and willing servants of the Lord Jesus Christ.

NOTES



DEVOTIONAL FOCUS

“For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh,) dwelleth no good thing: for to will is present with me; but how to perform that which is good I find not. For the good that I would I do not: but the evil which I would not, that I do.” (Romans 7:18-19)

The early part of the eighteenth century was a dark time in Christian history, as people drifted from their religious steadfastness and became indifferent toward spiritual values. The world stood in dire need of spiritual awakening, and God had His man for the occasion—John Wesley, a preacher who once had written the words of our focus verses in his journal as he agonized over the unrest in his soul.

John Wesley grew up in a home where his father was a pastor and his mother a studious Christian with a steadfast commitment to teach her children about God. At five years of age, Wesley nearly died when the family home burned. Afterward his mother said he was “a brand plucked from the burning.” All his life, he knew that he had been spared for a purpose.

From the time he was a child, Wesley knew much about church theology and endeavored to serve God. However, there was acute dissatisfaction in his soul; he felt something was lacking within. Although he began preaching as a young man and was diligent in attempting to spread Christianity, he continued to struggle. His journal writings reveal his inner conflict. One entry reads, “Every day I was constrained to cry out, ‘What I do, I allow not; for what I would I do not, but what I hate, that I do.’ . . . I was indeed fighting continually, but not conquering.” Like the Apostle Paul, the *desire* to do right was in Wesley’s heart, but the *power* to do right was lacking.

However, on May 24, 1738, in a meeting on Aldersgate Street in London, England, Wesley felt his heart “strangely and wondrously warmed.” He testified to others that at last he had assurance that not only had God “taken away my sin, even mine” but He had also “saved me from the law of sin and death.” In his whole subsequent career, he never ceased to preach not only the doctrine of justification by faith, but also the experience of entire sanctification—a second definite and instantaneous work of grace subsequent to salvation that makes the believer holy in heart and eradicates the sin nature, enabling him to live the Christian life without inner conflict.

It is not necessary to continue in the life of defeat that Paul portrayed in Romans 7. Paul experienced the

solution. It began for him on the road to Damascus when he was struck to the ground by a bright light and heard a Voice from Heaven. In the Book of Romans, the Apostle described the power the nature of sin exerts over the life and the resulting guilt. He also revealed that deliverance from that “body of death” is available through Christ Jesus our Lord.

Paul the Apostle and John Wesley understood the two-fold nature of sin—both committed sins and the carnal nature of sin with which all are born. They both taught that when an individual repents of committed sins and comes to Christ in faith, he is forgiven and justified by God. They both taught that though individuals are dominated by the inbred sin nature, their hearts can be liberated through salvation and cleansed through the experience of sanctification.

Paul’s epistles to the Romans and other Gentile believers were vital to the spread of Christianity in the time of the Early Church. Wesley’s teachings stirred a holiness revival that swept the British Isles and moved across the Atlantic to America in the 1800s. And justification by faith and deliverance from the sin nature through sanctification still bring victory today!

BACKGROUND

In Romans 7, the Apostle Paul described himself when he was a religious sinner, and the conflict that raged within while he was in that condition. Prior to his Damascus road experience, he had wanted to do right, but the power to do right was lacking because it was overcome by a stronger prevailing force: the nature of sin. In verses 1-6 of this chapter, Paul addressed freedom from the Law, and in 7-13 he reviewed the function of the Law. In the last part of the chapter, he described his frustration with his inability to live up to the demands of the Law.

In verses 1-6, Paul substantiated the point he had made in Romans 6:14—that Christians are not under the Law but under grace. In that verse, he had used the analogy of slavery to illustrate that the person living under the Law is dominated by sin; in this substantiation of his point, he used the analogy of marriage to illustrate emancipation from the Law.

A married woman is legally bound to her spouse, but when the husband dies, the law of marriage no longer applies. Just as death dissolves the binding connection between husband and wife, so believers are freed from the Law through the death of Christ—when Jesus died on the Cross, the Law ceased to be in effect. The believer thus becomes “dead to the law” and is freed to become united with Christ.

In view of the comparison he had drawn in verses 1-6, Paul next faced the logical question, “Is the law sin?” (verse 7). He proceeded in verses 8-13 to explain that the purpose of the Law was to reveal sin. In verse 9, Paul appears to be speaking of his own experience prior to having any real understanding of what sin was. However, though he once lived without condemnation, in time he was confronted by the Law and became aware of his own sinful behavior and its moral implications; Paul expressed this by saying that he “died” a spiritual death. One theologian of the 1800s described that death in this way: “Sin worked in himself the true death of the soul, in separation from God, in the extinction of good and noble capacities, in the atrophying of all that was best in himself, in the death of joy and peace.”¹ Paul became separated from God, and burdened down by the guilt and condemnation of sin.

In verses 14-25, Paul described the awful failure of his former efforts to break free from the dominion of sin. Although he had recognized that the Law was “holy” (verse 12) and “spiritual” (verse 14) because it was from God, he had been unable to overcome the tyranny of his carnal nature. While the Law had stirred up his conscience, it could not purify his heart nor create the obedience which it enjoined.

Having described with intensity the futility of trying to live right while still in bondage to the carnal nature, Paul ended this section with a final question, “Who shall deliver me from the body of this death?” (verse 24). Then he burst forth with the exclamatory answer, “I thank God through Jesus Christ.” In the next chapter Paul goes on to describe victory over the former controlling force of the sin nature.

AMPLIFIED OUTLINE Compiled for the *Daybreak & Discovery* series

- II. God’s plan of salvation
 - B. God’s remedy
 - 2. Entire sanctification (freedom from inbred sin)
 - c. Delivered from the Law (justified) (7:1-13)
 - d. Carnal nature (7:14-25)

A CLOSER LOOK

1. What three words did Paul use in verse 12 to describe the commandments of God?

2. How did the Law create in Paul a vivid awareness of sin?

3. In verse 11, Paul asserted that sin “deceived” him. What are some ways we can guard against the deceitfulness of sin?

CONCLUSION

The best of intentions and the most strenuous of efforts are no match for the nature of sin with which we are born. However, God provides victory through the experiences of justification and sanctification.

NOTES

1. Alexander Maclaren, “Expositions of the Holy Scriptures, Romans – Corinthians”, Public Domain Books, Kindle, Location 1590.



DEVOTIONAL FOCUS

“There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit.” (Romans 8:1)

Lowell Montgomery was a longtime minister of the Apostolic Faith Church in Portland, Oregon. Although he suffered from serious physical challenges in his later years, he was known for his cheerful attitude, and his perpetual smile was an encouragement to everyone with whom he came in contact. It was hard to imagine that “Brother Monty,” as we called him, ever could have been a tight-fisted, proud, and unhappy man, but according to his testimony, that was the case. And what condemnation rested on his heart once God revealed to him his true spiritual condition!

Brother Monty testified about initially resenting any implication that he needed salvation. He recounted, “I told the young man who invited me to an Apostolic Faith service, ‘I do not smoke cigarettes, drink, carouse around, or play cards.’ (The truth is, I was too cheap to do any of those things.) I was not a thief, and I did my work faithfully. I thought I was all right.” However, when he finally agreed to attend a church service, Brother Monty heard testimonies that opened his eyes to the truth about his spiritual condition. He said, “I found out I was not so good; there was sin in my life. I had a covetous heart. Everything I got hold of, I wanted to keep, and I did keep it! I deprived my little wife of things she easily could have had. When she would ask me for something, I would say, ‘Do you need it?’ Because of my covetousness, our home was nearly broken up.

“That Sunday night, though, I left church feeling condemned. The next morning, someone asked how I liked the service and I replied, ‘I didn’t like it at all. I didn’t like the singing, the testimonies, or the preaching, and I am not going back!’ He said to me, ‘You might like it better next time.’”

God’s people prayed for the young couple, and the Holy Spirit began to strive with their hearts. Brother Monty came back to church with his wife but refused to yield to God even though he was under heavy conviction. The condemnation in his heart made him miserable and unhappy. He recalled, “One time I went out to my car after church, put my head on the steering wheel, and cried like a baby. My wife said, ‘If you want to go pray, I will wait here,’ but I would not humble myself to do it. However, the night finally came when I bent my knees at the altar of

prayer and asked God to have mercy on me, a sinner. The enemy of my soul said, ‘You can’t get it.’ I got up to go, but I couldn’t find an empty aisle to get out so I went back to the altar and dropped on my knees once more. There I said, ‘Lord, sink or swim, live or die, I’ll serve You.’ In a moment of time, God saved my soul.”

Brother Monty ended his testimony by saying, “My wife and I would not have stayed together much longer if I had not gotten saved, but the Lord saved both of us and restored our love for each other. Today we have a happy home, and have enjoyed many years of serving the Lord together. I will never cease to thank God for the day that condemnation was lifted and God put peace into my heart!”

In our focus verse, Paul spoke of the condemnation (a verdict of wrongdoing before God) that rests upon the life of an unsaved individual. Justification, the remedy for that condemnation, occurs when God cancels the guilt and forgives the transgressions of a sinner. That was what Brother Monty experienced on the memorable day he finally yielded to God.

Justification takes more than accepting Christ, joining a church, or even striving to live by certain Christian principles. The first step toward receiving this experience is realizing the need for it. When a sinner comes to God with genuine sorrow for committed sins and confesses them, God will forgive. Pardon is granted, condemnation is gone, and the “Spirit itself beareth witness” (Romans 8:16), assuring the new believer that he has been justified by God.

Today, are you living under condemnation? God still offers justification to those who are burdened by sin. Like Brother Monty, you can be forgiven and have peace with God.

BACKGROUND

Having described in Romans 7 the futility of trying to be religious while still in bondage to the carnal nature, in this chapter Paul went on to describe victory over the former controlling force. In verses 1-13 he explained the power over indwelling sin which comes through entire sanctification, and in verses 14-39, the believer’s assurance in Christ.

When the Apostle asserted in Romans 8:1, “There is therefore now no condemnation . . .” he was looking at the totality of sin: both committed sins and the carnal nature of sin with which all humanity is born. The phrase “no condemnation” refers to more than mere judicial acquittal; it also indicates deliverance from the condition described in Romans 7:7-25 (the

disposition and sinful inclination of the flesh). Once freed from the dominion of sin, the believer is enabled by the Spirit of God to live in the righteousness provided by God.

Verses 2-4 bring out the conflict between two opposing forces: man lives either under the control of carnality or under control of the Spirit of God. In verse 3, Paul alluded to “what the law could not do,” pointing out again that the Law had no power to change the heart. He indicated in verse 4 that the Law is “fulfilled” (satisfied or made possible) in the lives of those who “walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit.”

The Apostle further explained life in the Spirit in verses 5-11, in which the “flesh” and the “Spirit” refer to two contrasting ways of life. In verse 13, he warned that living in the Spirit does not eliminate the possibility of sinning, but mortifying (putting to death) the deeds of the flesh does empower one to live without sinning.

Verses 14-17 address the topic of adoption and the believer’s eternal co-inheritance with Christ. In the Roman culture of Paul’s day, an adopted son could be chosen to carry on the name of his father and inherit his estate; though grafted into the family through a legal process, he had no lesser standing than a biological child. The form of address used in verse 15, “Abba,” was an intimate way of referring to the father equivalent to our word “daddy” or “papa.” The statement in verse 16 that “the Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit” implies a joint affirmation between the Spirit of God and the human spirit (or conscience) rather than a divine declaration to the human spirit.

In verses 18-30, Paul encouraged the believers in Rome to take courage from both the assistance of the Spirit and the thought of the glory which awaited them in the age to come. The word “infirmities” in verse 26 includes the whole range of human frailties: scars from past experiences, limited perspectives, temperamental differences, mistakes and faults, physical weariness, and stresses. While the carnal nature is eradicated at sanctification, human weakness remains; this is the area where spiritual growth occurs.

Paul’s assertion in verse 28 that God works out all things for good does not mean that every incident that occurs in this world is good, but that every detail fits into His eternal purpose for our ultimate good.

Foreknowledge and predestination are topics Paul alluded to in verses 29-30. God chose all humanity to be made righteous by His grace (see John 3:16), but His foreknowledge identifies individuals He knows will respond with repentance and faith. The word *predestinate* in verse 30 means “to predetermine.” God’s predetermined purpose for all mankind is that everyone should be “conformed to the image of his Son,” but each person must choose whether or not he wants to be a participant in God’s perfect plan. Those

who choose to participate are identified in verse 33 as “God’s elect.”

In verses 31-39, Paul describes the victory of believers. The chapter ends with the Apostle’s question in verse 35, “Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?” and his triumphant response in verses 37-39 that no external forces can deprive those who are “more than conquerors” of God’s presence.

AMPLIFIED OUTLINE Compiled for the *Daybreak & Discovery* series

- II. God’s plan of salvation
 - B. God’s remedy
 - 2. Entire sanctification (freedom from inbred sin)
 - e. Power over sin (entire sanctification) (8:1-14)
 - f. Assurance in Christ (8:15-39)
 - (1) Children of God (8:15-17)
 - (2) Glory ahead (8:18-25)
 - (3) Help of the Spirit (8:26-30)
 - (4) Triumph in difficulties (8:31-39)

A CLOSER LOOK

1. What is the “hope” mentioned in Romans 8:24-25?

2. Romans 8:38-39 promises that no external force can separate us from the love of God. What can cause a Christian to become separated from Christ (i.e. backslide)?

3. In light of Romans 8:28, how could you respond to an unbeliever who questions, “If there really is a loving God, why does He allow terrible things to occur in the world, even to Christians?”

CONCLUSION

Those who yield their lives to God have the guilt and penalty of sin removed from their lives and are free to live a life without His condemnation.



DEVOTIONAL FOCUS

“And not only this; but when Rebecca also had conceived by one, even by our father Isaac; (for the children being not yet born, neither having done any good or evil, that the purpose of God according to election might stand, not of works, but of him that calleth;) it was said unto her, The elder shall serve the younger.” (Romans 9:10-12)

Sibling rivalry in a family with five children takes many forms, as my husband and I have learned. In our five—three girls and two boys—ongoing banter revolves around the fact that our oldest daughter is adopted. She is fond of teasing her younger brothers and sisters, “Mom and Dad *chose* me! They just had to take what they got when you came along!”

Today’s focus verse speaks of “the purpose of God according to election.” The Greek word translated *election* means “divine selection” or “chosen.” I will never forget the day we chose our daughter. A couple who had adopted twelve Korean children attended one of our church services, and my husband and I spent some time chatting with them afterward as his parents were living in Korea at the time as missionaries. Since the two of us had talked about adopting a Korean child sometime in the future, we also were understandably intrigued when this couple brought their twelve children with them into church!

We found that they had been longtime sponsors of a small orphanage in Seoul, South Korea, where children in need of a home were cared for by a foster mother. They casually mentioned that there was one little girl left in the home at that time: a three-year-old with whom they had a special bond—in fact, she had been named after their own birth daughter, Nena. While several couples had been interested in adopting this little girl, the couple wanted her to be placed in a Christian home. When my husband and I saw little Nena’s picture, our hearts were captured in an instant. God opened doors in a miraculous way, confirming to us that adopting Nena was His plan for the two of us. Eight months later, our daughter arrived from Korea and entered our home and our hearts.

In our text, Paul focused on the thought of election and God’s sovereignty. Abraham, the father of the Jewish people, had many sons. Paul illustrated divine sovereignty by pointing to God’s plan that the Messianic line would come through Abraham’s son Isaac, and Isaac’s younger son, Jacob. They were chosen! Why was Isaac selected instead of his older

brother, Ishmael? Why was Jacob chosen instead of his older brother, Esau? We don’t know, but we understand that it was God’s right to choose.

At times, we may not understand why God operates the way He does. Situations may come in our lives that do not make sense to us, but God has the right to do what He wishes in order to accomplish His purpose. However, we can be clear about one thing: God has chosen each one of us to be recipients of His salvation. Whether we understand why or not, we have been chosen! Our part is simply to respond with repentance and faith, and then we can enjoy all the blessings that come with being part of God’s family.

BACKGROUND

In chapter 8, Paul had completed his description of how God’s righteousness was manifested in Christ, and the provision for victory over the power of indwelling sin. However, he seemingly was concerned his readers might conclude that God’s plan of justification apart from the Law meant that God had rejected the Jews. So in chapter 9, he began a three-chapter segment explaining Israel’s role in God’s plan. In brief, chapter 9 deals with election and divine sovereignty, chapter 10 with rejection and human responsibility, and chapter 11 with restoration and universal blessing.

The Apostle opened chapter 9 by expressing his grief at the Jews’ downfall and concern for his fellow Israelites (verses 1-5). His statement in verse 3 that he could wish himself “accursed from Christ for my brethren” is similar to that of Moses when he offered to have his name blotted out of God’s book in order that Israel be saved (see Exodus 32:30-33).

In verses 6-13, Paul noted that although Israel failed, God’s promises did not. He gave an illustration of God’s sovereignty by pointing to the patriarch Abraham. God ordained that the Messianic line would come through Isaac, the son of promise, rather than through Abraham’s eldest son, Ishmael, who was the son of the bondwoman, Hagar. He made it clear that the true children of God are the children of promise (those who believe in the God of Abraham), not the children of flesh (those who merely descended from Abraham).

In verses 14-18, the Apostle expanded the concept of God’s sovereignty, explaining that it was God’s right to reward faith and judge unbelief. In verse 17, Paul referred to Exodus 9:16, where God foretold that Pharaoh would be raised up to display His power and declare His name.

Paul used a hypothetical question and the example of the potter’s right to determine the shape of a clay vessel to show God’s sovereign right to make such choices (verses 19-21). His point was that it is not God’s failure when one resists His will, though God uses that resistance to accomplish His purpose.

Paul went on to establish that it is God’s right to turn from the unbelieving Jews to believing Gentiles. He quoted two Old Testament prophets to prove that, as foretold by Hosea (Osee), the children of promise are both Jews and Gentiles rather than Jews only. However, according to Isaiah (Esaias), only a remnant of Israel would be included (verses 24-29).

The Apostle concluded in verses 30-33 that the Gentiles, who had no knowledge of the Law, had received by faith the righteousness which God imparts. By contrast, although the Jews were recipients of the Law, they lacked faith and therefore Christ became a “stumblingstone and rock of offense” to them, as foretold by Isaiah (see Isaiah 28:16).

AMPLIFIED OUTLINE Compiled for the *Daybreak & Discovery* series

- II. God’s plan of salvation
 - C. Illustrated by Israel’s history
 - 1. Israel had not believed in the past (9:1-29)
 - a. Paul’s burden for the Jews (9:1-5)
 - b. Promises obtained by faith, not by bloodline (9:6-13)
 - c. In sovereignty, God shows mercy (9:14-18)
 - d. God is just and His purposes inscrutable (9:19-29)
 - e. Redemption dependent on faith (9:30-33)

A CLOSER LOOK

1. What did Paul say was in his heart when he thought of his kinsmen, the Jews?

2. What do you think Paul meant when he said, “For they are not all Israel, which are of Israel” (verse 6)?

3. What are some ways we can submit to the divine sovereignty of God?

CONCLUSION

Although we may not always understand how and why God works as He does, we can rejoice in the fact that we have been chosen to be a part of His family.

NOTES



DEVOTIONAL FOCUS

“For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved. How then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? and how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher?” (Romans 10:13-14)

Many of us are blessed to live in countries where religious freedom is a core value and the individual’s right to live according to his or her conscience is protected. It saddens us to hear in the news of Christian brothers and sisters around the world who could well face execution for the decision to become a follower of Christ. When we read about places where the Gospel is forcibly prohibited, we might assume there is little hope for acceptance of the Gospel of Jesus Christ in these regions. Recently, however, I read a book that opened my eyes to how the Holy Spirit is awakening hearts in some of the darkest parts of the world.

One account that mesmerized me was the story of Hassan, a Christian in Cairo, Egypt, who has a deep burden for his Muslim friends and neighbors. For several years, Hassan tried to weave Christ into conversations with them, but it seemed there was no interest.

One night he was rudely awakened by a gun being thrust to his forehead. A masked kidnapper harshly ordered him to get up and rushed him through Cairo’s darkened streets. Hassan was sure he was on his death march—in spite of his efforts to evangelize discreetly, someone must have turned him in.

Arriving at a deserted building, Hassan’s abductor forced him to climb five flights of stairs at the back and then jump to the roof of an adjoining abandoned warehouse, with pavement fifty feet below. Then his assailant roughly pushed him toward a hatchway. As he scrambled through the opening, Hassan supposed that was his last moment on earth. He whispered a brief prayer, saying, “Jesus, into Your hands I commit my spirit.”

Hassan found himself in a dim room lit by a single candle. Ten Muslim men stood in a circle around him, and he fully expected to be executed immediately. The man who had kidnapped him spoke first and explained that they were all imams—worship leaders of Muslim communities who were charged with enforcing obedience to the Qur’an. Then, to Hassan’s astonishment, he went on to say that each of the imams had experienced a dream about Jesus and had privately become a Christian!

The imam went on, “We each prayed to Jesus for His help to learn what it means to be His follower. Over time, He brought us together, and you can imagine our amazement when the Holy Spirit revealed that there are other imams who have found Jesus as well. Now we meet here three times a week at night to pray for our families and for the people in the mosques to find Jesus too. We know you follow Christ; He led us to you.” He went on, “I’m very sorry I had to frighten you with the mask and the gun, but I knew it was the only way to get you here. It was just too dangerous any other way. I apologize. But now our question is, will you teach us the Bible?”¹

How amazing that in a society so vehemently opposed to Christianity, people are braving death to turn from their lifelong beliefs and embrace the teachings of Jesus Christ! As I ponder this, I realize that my reaction is probably similar to that of Christians in Paul’s day who were amazed to learn that Gentiles—“heathens” who did not even believe in a Messiah—could receive the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Though all mankind is guilty before God, Paul plainly asserted that “*whosoever* shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved” (emphasis added).

People will not call on Christ’s name unless they have been moved to believe in Him, but God is faithful to reach out to every individual. How comforting it is to know that even in areas of the deepest spiritual darkness, the light of Jesus penetrates. Let’s allow the Lord to increase our faith, broaden our perspectives, and help us to pray earnestly that the Gospel of Jesus Christ will find entrance into the hearts of people everywhere!

BACKGROUND

In chapter 10, Paul continued his three-chapter summary of Israel’s role in God’s plan, explaining that while the nation had the opportunity to respond to the Gospel of Christ, they had rejected it. He emphasized that man’s responsibility regarding salvation is based on the fact that the Gospel is offered to all, both Jew and Gentile.

Though Paul was the Apostle to the Gentiles, his love for his Jewish kinsmen was expressed in verses 1-5, as he made clear his sorrow and concern for his unsaved brethren. As a nation, the Jews possessed a great deal of religious zeal, but their zeal was “not according to knowledge”—they rejected God’s righteousness while trying to make themselves acceptable to Him through the Law of Moses and traditions which they themselves had instituted.

In verse 3, the ignorance Paul referenced was not an academic lack, but a failure by the Jews to grasp the importance of information available to them in the Scriptures they studied so zealously. The word translated “establish” in Paul’s declaration that they endeavored to “establish their own righteousness” indicated the Jews’ self-righteous pride in their own efforts. They were not truly seeking to live up to the commandments of the Law, but rather to prove their own worthiness.

In verses 6-13, Paul focused on the availability of the message of God’s righteousness. He explained that having righteousness through Christ does not cause one to doubt the incarnation or resurrection. It does not lead to the questions, “Who shall ascend into heaven . . . to bring Christ down from above?” (incarnation) nor, “Who shall descend into the deep . . . to bring up Christ from the dead?” (resurrection). Faith means believing in both.

Righteousness through Christ is offered to all who believe and call on Him. Paul had previously established the universal guilt of mankind by teaching in Romans 3:23 that “all have sinned.” In verse 13 of chapter 10, the Apostle pointed to the universal salvation offered to mankind by stating that “whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.” Even ethnic differences had no impact on salvation, for the Apostle asserted that there is “no difference” between Jew and Greek (or Gentile).

Israel’s inexcusable rejection of the Gospel is the topic of the final verses of this chapter. Although God’s promise was for “whosoever,” Israel for the most part had refused to “call upon the name of the Lord.” Paul presented a series of questions in verses 14-15 to determine where the fault lay. God had provided preachers who proclaimed the Gospel, and Israel had received the message, but failure occurred because of unbelief. Paul substantiated his conclusion in verse 16 by quoting the prophet Isaiah (see Isaiah 53:1).

Anticipating that some might question whether all Jews had heard the Gospel message, in verses 18-19 Paul adopted the language of Psalm 19:1-4 as a reminder that it had gone “unto the ends of the world.” In the final verse, the Apostle pictured the pleading love of God to the Jewish people, who continued to stubbornly refuse to accept God’s proffered grace.

AMPLIFIED OUTLINE Compiled for the *Daybreak & Discovery* series

- II. God’s plan of salvation
 - C. Illustrated by Israel’s history
 - 2. Israel rejected Christ (10:1-21)
 - a. Zeal for the Law (10:1-5)
 - b. Should have believed (10:6-13)
 - c. Refusal to believe (10:14-21)

A CLOSER LOOK

1. According to verse 9, what are the two requirements for receiving salvation?

2. What are some of the ways that people today try to “establish their own righteousness” (verse 3)?

3. How can we have a part in fulfilling the responsibilities implied in the four questions posed in Romans 10:14-15?

CONCLUSION

God is still working in our world today, even in cultures that appear to be unreceptive and hostile to the Gospel.

NOTES



Romans 11:1-36

DEVOTIONAL FOCUS

“I say then, Hath God cast away his people? God forbid. For I also am an Israelite, of the seed of Abraham, of the tribe of Benjamin.” (Romans 11:1)

Lara Rosen, a Jewish woman in one of our Apostolic Faith congregations, tells how God’s love reached out to her and answered the questions that troubled her searching heart. She testifies, “I am a Jew. Raised by two Jewish parents, I was taught to believe the Jewish religion. However, the observance of Sabbath and other traditions did not possess any value for me. While at times I went through the motions of being ‘religious’ by attending temple, I did not feel any comfort, love, joy, or happiness. Finally, I stopped doing even that.

“All along I was looking for peace and happiness. However, even when I went to parties and had a good time socializing, the fun I had and the joy I felt were gone when I got home. I would realize that I hadn’t progressed at all in my search. I would be left with an empty feeling inside, and knew I wanted something more.

“One winter, I began to take a hard look at myself, and was very disappointed with what I saw. While I had never considered myself a bad person, many of the things I had chosen to take part in left hurt inside. To make matters worse, I recognized that those things could have had a lasting effect on my life. The pain I felt became so severe that all I could do was cry.

“Then I remembered a friend. She is a Christian, and I knew she found comfort through the Bible and prayer. Since it worked for her, I thought I would give it a try. I happened to have a Bible, so I read chapter 15 from the Book of Luke. The following day, I decided that I really needed to talk about this problem with my friend. It was a Friday evening and there was a service at her church. We decided that I would go to church with her and then we would go out afterward to talk. I wasn’t exactly thrilled about going to church, but reluctantly said yes, hoping that I would feel better after talking with her.

“God works in mysterious ways. The preacher that night read Luke 15, the very chapter I had read the night before. Having no real knowledge of the New Testament, that made an impact on me. After the service, when my friend and I went out, again it seemed all I could do was cry. The pain had built up inside of me so much that in my mind there was no

solution. I had made my mistakes and now I was to suffer the consequences. My friend, however, had another answer. She began telling me about salvation, explaining that the only way to peace was through Jesus Christ. She said I needed to get right with Him, and I decided to try that.

“Not knowing how to pray, my prayer was simple, but Jesus came into my life and made a real change. All the pain disappeared and I felt so new, so alive! I had never believed in Jesus Christ. In fact, I was adamantly against Him, but that night He made a believer out of me. He saved my soul and gave me everything I had been longing for: calming peace, happiness, love, and lasting security.

“Jesus is just as real to me today. I am simply amazed at how He has taken care of both the big and little problems in my life. He is so good to me. He comforts me, encourages me, and is my Friend. I do not want anything to come between us because nothing the world has to offer could have filled the void in my life that Jesus filled in a moment.”

Today’s text opens with Paul’s rhetorical question, “Hath God cast away his people?” The Apostle’s answer was a resounding “God forbid.” Though Israel had rejected God, Paul made it clear that there would always be a remnant of Israel in the Church. God still loved the Jewish people. Lara Rosen is living proof of Paul’s assertion. She found her Messiah, and in Him, the peace and healing her heart was longing for. Someday, as Paul went on to state, Israel as a whole will receive their Messiah and will be God’s own people once again.

We serve a God whose mercy is extended to all. Paul closed this chapter with a heartfelt outpouring of praise for the mercy that is extended to both Jew and Gentile: “O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out!”

BACKGROUND

In this final segment of Paul’s three-chapter explanation of Israel’s role in God’s plan, the Apostle focused on Israel’s eventual restoration, and concluded that the Jew’s rejection of God resulted in the extending of the Gospel message to the Gentiles.

Paul began chapter 11 by posing an anticipated question: had the Jews’ rejection caused God to completely abandon His chosen people? In verses 1-10, Paul cited three examples to show that despite Israel’s continued disobedience, God had not terminated His relationship with them. First, Paul asserted that his

own personal relationship with God was proof that God’s mercy was still extended to Jews. Next, he pointed to the faithfulness of God and asserted that He would not disavow the promises made to Abraham, Moses, and David. Finally, he referenced the bleak national situation during the time of Elijah which caused the prophet to feel he was the only believer left, yet God had preserved seven thousand men who had “not bowed the knee to the image of Baal.”

The theme of verses 11-24 is the Gentile opportunity which occurred after the Jewish rejection of the Gospel. Paul explained that God’s purpose in turning away from Israel was a desire to provoke them to jealousy as the Gentiles embraced what the Jews had refused. The “fullness” of Israel in verse 12 alluded to a coming restoration that will amount to a virtual resurrection from the dead. The Apostle looked ahead to the day when Israel will once again be the people of God, this time through faith in the shed Blood of Jesus Christ.

Paul used a dual illustration in verse 16 to show the eventual unity between Jews and Gentiles. His statement that “if the firstfruit be holy, the lump [mass of dough] is also holy” was a reference to the ancient tradition of giving God the first cake baked from the first wheat of the harvest (see Numbers 15:19-20). If that cake was acceptable to God, the whole of the harvest would be acceptable. Paul was likening the “firstfruit” to Israel, and the “lump” to the Gentiles. The second illustration—that of the root and branches—made the same point and was based upon the common Old Testament picture of Israel as a vine. Because the root (Israel) and the branches (the Gentile Christians) are all one plant, if the root is holy the branches are also holy. Paul expanded the metaphor in verses 17-18, warning the Gentiles that just as God did not spare the Jews when they lapsed into unbelief, neither would He preserve them unless they stood fast by faith.

In verses 25-32 the Apostle expanded on God’s promises of restoration for Israel. He foretold that after “the fulness of the Gentiles be come in,” that “all Israel” would be saved. The word “fulness” refers to the time when all Gentiles who will choose to believe on Christ have done so. The “mystery” (verse 25) is because the events foretold have not yet taken place; they will occur in the last days. The last part of verse 26 and verse 27 are a quote from Isaiah 59:20-21.

Paul ended this section with an outpouring of praise for the wisdom and knowledge of God (verses 33-36). In spite of human stubbornness and rejection, God’s eternal purpose would be fulfilled, and for this Paul articulated his overwhelming admiration.

AMPLIFIED OUTLINE

Compiled for the *Daybreak & Discovery* series

- II. God’s plan of salvation
 - C. Illustrated by Israel’s history
 - 3. Israel’s hope (11:1-36)
 - a. Some will understand and believe (11:1-10)
 - b. Way opened for the Gentiles (11:11-24)
 - c. Israel will be saved (11:25-32)
 - d. Doxology (11:33-36)

A CLOSER LOOK

1. What Old Testament prophet did Paul use as an example to support his assertion that God always has a remnant of individuals who are faithful to Him?

2. Why do you think God did not cut Israel off entirely when they rejected Him?

3. Verses 7-8 bring out that Israel’s sin resulted in spiritual blindness and the “spirit of slumber.” What are some evidences that this is also the spiritual condition of most people in our world today?

CONCLUSION

Although the Jewish people rejected their Messiah and failed in their role as the instrument of God’s blessing to the Gentiles, God did not forsake them. He has mercy toward all—both Jew and Gentile—who turn to Him in faith.

NOTES



DEVOTIONAL FOCUS

“Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, whether prophecy, let us prophesy according to the proportion of faith; or ministry, let us wait on our ministering; or he that teacheth, on teaching; or he that exhorteth, on exhortation: he that giveth, let him do it with simplicity; he that ruleth, with diligence; he that sheweth mercy, with cheerfulness.” (Romans 12:6-8)

Some time ago, my wife and I decided to arrange some plantings to cover the old retaining wall at our home. We chose to use a shrub called rosemary, which has blue flowers and would droop over the edge of the wall. We began with two plants, but that was not enough, so we went to various sources to get more. We ordered from a catalog and purchased some from local nurseries, thinking that all *Rosmarinus officinalis* would be the same. However, we found that was not the case.

Searching the internet for information about this plant, I learned there are 13,150 varieties within the species, bearing names such as *Lockwood de Forest*, *Collingwood Ingram*, and *Gorizia*. There is now a hedge of *Rosmarinus officinalis* covering the top of our retaining wall, all of the same “species,” but several different “varieties.” They all look a little different.

We did not know nor really care about the history of rosemary or its many uses, but my internet search revealed that it is a kind of mint, and the leaves can be used for seasoning lamb, chicken, or stew. The oil is used in tonics, liniments, and toiletry products. When dried, the leaves are used in sachets, as a moth repellent, and also may be brewed as tea to soothe stomachaches and headaches.

Our hedge provides a spiritual object lesson. Born-again Christians are all of the same “species,” but there is a huge variety in callings and abilities. Paul began to list them in today’s focus verses, noting that believers have “gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us.” One Christian alone cannot fill all the jobs the Lord has for His people to do, and our roles in His service will differ. Some are called to preach, others to teach, some to lead, and so forth.

The important point is not what our calling *is*, but rather whether or not we are *fulfilling* that call. We want to be diligent and cheerful as we serve God. When we each do our parts, God can make the end result beautiful—just like the hedge that covers our home’s retaining wall.

BACKGROUND

Paul’s use of the word “therefore” at the beginning of chapter 12—in essence meaning, “in view of all I have stated previously”—is pivotal in his epistle to the Romans. Having concluded his discourses concerning the ruin of fallen man due to sin and the remedy provided through Jesus’ death on the Cross (chapters 1-8), and God’s dealings with the nation of Israel (chapters 9-11), in chapter 12 the Apostle transitioned to a focus on practical application, instructing his readers regarding the basics of Christian behavior.

The Apostle began by expressing in verse 1 the need for justified individuals to completely consecrate themselves to God. The word *present* is translated elsewhere as “yield” and expresses the concept of placing the whole person (the instrument by which man offers service) at the disposal of God. The aorist tense of the Greek verb translated as “present” indicates a specific action occurring at a distinct point in time. In contrast to Old Testament sacrifices which were slain, the sacrifice Paul described was to be “living.” The sacrifice was to be “holy,” or set apart for God’s use, and as such, would be “acceptable” (well-pleasing) to God.

In verse 2, Paul related how a consecration of this nature would affect behavior, using one negative and two positives to make his point. He stated that believers were not to be “conformed” to the world, but rather were to be “transformed.” The Greek word translated “transformed” (*metamorphoo*, from which the English word *metamorphosis* is derived) implies a radical, organic change. At the same time, consecration was to be an ongoing activity and manner of living; the verb form of the phrase “be ye transformed” has the sense of continuing on. This was to be accomplished through the ongoing process of “renewing” the mind.

In verses 3-8, the Apostle pointed to humility as the immediate effect of surrender to God. Self was not to be exalted, and any “gifts” (abilities) God had given were not to be viewed as a reason for personal pride. He stressed the necessity for corporate fellowship and unity, asserting that “we, being many, are one body in Christ.” The word *prophecy* in verse 6 means “inspired speech” rather than prediction of future events. The word *ministry* in verse 7 means “service” and can refer either to all Christian service in general, or to the specific act of providing for material needs.

Paul went on to emphasize that inward transformation was to be evidenced in love of the brethren. In the remainder of this chapter (and through chapter 13), his primary emphasis was how the transformed life



Romans 13:1-14

DEVOTIONAL FOCUS

“Owe no man any thing, but to love one another: for he that loveth another hath fulfilled the law.” (Romans 13:8)

True love to God is shown by fulfilling God’s requirements, and one aspect of that is obeying God’s mandate to love others. Rees Howell (1879-1950), founder of The Bible College of Wales, learned that lesson early in his walk with the Lord. After his conversion in America in 1904, Rees returned to his birthplace in Wales during the great revival in that country. There he consecrated himself and all his resources to the Lord’s use, and received the infilling of the Holy Ghost.

Shortly after Rees received the Holy Ghost, the Spirit placed a burden on his heart for a man named Jim Stakes. This man was a drunkard and had such a terrible reputation around Rees’ hometown that the common saying was, “What Jim Stakes would not do, the devil himself could not do.” It caused quite a sensation during the revival when Jim was converted. However, a short time later, as Rees Howell was in prayer one morning, God laid a burden upon his heart for that man. “I had never before known such a conflict for a soul in the spiritual realm,” Rees said later. He realized that the devil was attacking Jim, and knew if Satan could get this new believer back, it would greatly hinder the revival fires that had been kindled. “I saw that it was a conflict between God and the devil for a soul,” Rees related, “and I told the Lord I would do anything if He would keep him.”

That evening there was a knock on Rees’ door, and there stood Jim Stakes. He told Rees that at 10:00 that morning—the very hour when Rees had been praying—God had showed him he should come to see Rees Howell. “Are you in trouble?” Rees asked. Jim acknowledged that he was in dire financial straits; he was two years behind in his rent and that morning the bailiffs had marked his furniture and were coming to fetch it.

Two years of rent was a lot of money, but after just a moment’s hesitation, Rees told Jim that he would give him one year’s rent, and he knew a man whom he believed would cover the other year. As Rees went upstairs to get the money, the Holy Spirit spoke to him, “Didn’t you tell Me this morning that you would give *all* you had to save him? Why are you only giving him half? Did not the Saviour pay *all* your debt and set you free?”

Immediately, Rees turned and ran back down the stairs. He told Jim, “I am sorry I told you I would only give one year’s rent. I am to give you two years’ rent, and all you need beside. I am to deliver you in such a way that the devil can’t use this situation any longer to get at you.” Rees would later say, “The moment I said that, the joy of Heaven came down!” When Jim went home and told his wife what had happened, she too was touched by the Spirit of God, and was converted.¹

In our focus verse, Paul stated a moral principle: that followers of Christ owe a debt of love to others, for “he that loveth another hath fulfilled the law.” Rees Howell was under no legal obligation to meet the need of Jim Stakes. No one in his town would have expected him to do so; in fact, they might even have cautioned him against it. After all, how could Rees be certain the man would not use the money to go back to his old ways? However, Rees was constrained by the Holy Spirit to meet Jim Stakes’ need. Love enabled him to respond in obedience and fulfill his “obligation” to the man whose soul hung in the balance.

Loving others may not mean spending hours on our knees for a single soul . . . but it might. It may not always require a financial outlay . . . but it might. It may not mean accepting and caring for one looked down on by society . . . but it might. Will we surrender ourselves fully, as Rees Howell did, and be willing to let God love others through us, no matter what the personal cost?

BACKGROUND

Continuing his instruction concerning the transformed life, in chapter 13 Paul expounded upon the Christian’s responsibilities as citizens in secular society. In verses 1-7, the Apostle outlined principles related to submitting to authority. In verses 8-10, his exhortation dealt with the Christian’s responsibilities toward unbelievers.

Since it was God who granted the power held by governmental rulers, Paul instructed the Roman Christians to submit to “the powers that be.” Specifically, this submission was to manifest itself through payment of taxes and demonstrating respect for those in authority.

Paul’s view that secular authorities are given their responsibilities by God is highlighted by the word “ordained” in verse 1. This comes from the same Greek word translated as “appointed” in Paul’s description of his encounter with the Lord on the Damascus Road, where he was told, “Arise, and go unto Damascus; and there it shall be told thee of all things which are

appointed for thee to do” (Acts 22:10, emphasis added). To Paul, the “ordaining” of governmental leaders merited the same word that was used in the “appointing” of religious duties.

Verses 3-4 substantiate the Apostle’s earlier teaching regarding man’s innate sinfulness. He taught that human authority is necessary in preserving an orderly environment, for unless an authority is present to punish evil and reward good, man will pursue his own self-centered course to the detriment of society as a whole.

The word “tribute” in verse 6 refers to a tax or assessment on persons or property; the word “custom” in verse 7 refers to a duty levied, such as on exported or imported goods. Verse 8 points out that while secular debts to others must be discharged, followers of Christ have an indebtedness which can never be eliminated: the duty of loving others.

Five of the six Commandments concerning relationships with others are referenced in verse 9, and summarized by the Apostle’s statement in verse 10 that “love worketh no ill to his neighbor.” His point was that when love is properly demonstrated, the requirements of the Law are adequately met.

In verse 14, Paul taught that a sanctified walk involves both positive and negative actions. In order to maintain moral purity, Christians were instructed both to “put on” the Lord Jesus (experience His cleansing and live in His righteousness) and to abstain from making provision to fulfill the lusts of the flesh (they were not only to reject sin, but also to avoid situations that could lead to sin).

AMPLIFIED OUTLINE Compiled for the *Daybreak & Discovery* series

- III. The results of salvation
 - B. Live holy under government (13:1-7)
 - C. Live holy in society (13:8-14)

A CLOSER LOOK

1. To whom or what does Paul say every soul is to be subject?

2. How would you explain verse 7 in your own words?

3. Based on verse 8, what are some specific, tangible ways we can fulfill our obligation to love others?

CONCLUSION

While we can never repay the tremendous debt of love we owe to God, we are called to keep His commandment to love others freely and sacrificially.

NOTES



Romans 14:1-23

DEVOTIONAL FOCUS

“But why dost thou judge thy brother? or why dost thou set at nought thy brother? for we shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ.”
(Romans 14:10)

When I was young, I was a member of the local 4-H Club. We raised and showed livestock and received training in many related areas, including the handling and care of our animals, animal nutrition, and the like. In another aspect of the program, we were instructed in how to judge animals—how to identify the characteristics of superior quality and ideal conformation in particular breeds. We even entered judging competitions at county fairs and livestock exhibitions where our judging was judged! The evaluation of our efforts let us know how well we were doing in discerning the best attributes, and this helped us when raising and showing our own animals.

Judging never focused on the negative. We were not looking to point out deficiencies, and no animal was ever awarded a ribbon for “Worst in Show.” We looked for the *best* qualities rather than the poorest. By focusing on the commendable, it was not difficult to see what characteristics we should strive for in our own animals.

In today’s focus verse, Paul pointed out that one day we will all stand before the judgment seat of Christ, so we should live our lives with that judgment day in view. Here on earth, we are not to be judges of one another. We should not focus on the flaws or shortcomings of others, but on making certain that our own lives and daily interactions will meet with the approval of the Lord. It will be much more spiritually beneficial for us to observe and strive to emulate the godly qualities in those around us than to censure or look down on those we feel are falling short in some way.

Since one day “every one of us shall give account of himself to God” (verse 12), it is a worthwhile exercise for us to judge ourselves—to thoughtfully evaluate how we are doing in our walks with God. Paul made it clear that critical or self-righteous attitudes have no place in a Christian’s life, so self-examination can be helpful. Are we respecting those with whom we come in contact? Do we encourage others, especially those who are “weak” in the faith, treating them with charity and forbearance? Do we have a humble and teachable spirit? Are we careful not to do anything that might be a “stumbling block” to our brothers and sisters in the Lord?

Our attitude toward others is a reflection of our inward character. It is up to us to make sure we conform to God’s quality expectations. Let’s purpose with God’s help to make this our focus and our goal.

BACKGROUND

In this chapter Paul addressed the relationship that weak and strong believers were to have with each other. The words “weak” and “strong” represent two tendencies of mind: one that is hyper-sensitive, possibly even to one’s own detriment, and the other that is more liberal, even to the point of being insensitive to the potential impact on others.

In the first part of this chapter, Paul admonished the strong to be cautious and protective in their dealings with the weak, and for the weak not to be judgmental of those who were doing things that God did not expressly forbid (verses 1-4). The Apostle’s instruction in verse 1 for the strong in faith to receive those who were weak but “not to doubtful disputations” meant that the strong were not to pass judgment on the weaker believer’s perspective, nor to contend with him about an insignificant detail.

In order to make his point clear, in verses 2-3 Paul presented an example of contrasting opinions regarding the lawfulness of eating certain meats. Apparently some of the Roman believers (perhaps those who had been delivered from idolatry) felt it was wrong to eat meat in case it had been offered to pagan gods, so they consumed only vegetables. Paul recognized that since idols were inanimate objects and the meat had nutritional value, there was no spiritual reason for believers to abstain from eating it. However, those who supported either position were not to disparage those with an opposite perspective. Paul asserted that each individual was accountable for himself before God, so believers were to be true to their own consciences.

In verses 5-6, the Apostle offered a second example based upon differing opinions related to Jewish festivals. Though the Roman Christians, who came from a wide variety of cultural backgrounds, had varying viewpoints regarding how and when such days should be observed, Paul instructed them to decide on the basis of honoring God. They were not to judge those who held a different view, since both were doing what they felt the Lord required and He was the Judge (verses 10-12).

The limits of liberty and the importance of not causing a weak brother to violate his own conscience is the emphasis of the last half of the chapter, where Paul cautioned against putting a stumbling block in

another brother's way. Seemingly harmless behaviors had the potential to confuse others whose consciences did not permit such acts. Therefore, Paul stated that spiritually mature individuals should be willing to forego personal liberties in order to maintain peace and build up their weaker brethren (verses 13-23).

Paul's counsel, "Let not then your good be evil spoken of" (verse 16) means that Christians were not to allow good intentions to become objects of misunderstanding. His admonition, "For meat destroy not the work of God" (verse 20) conveys a similar thought: convictions were fine but they were not to be cherished and upheld so strenuously that unity would be impacted, or that a weaker Christian would be led to imitate a behavior that his own conscience condemned.

The word "damned" in verse 23 does not mean eternal perdition, but rather indicates that one who violated his own conscience would experience a sense of personal guilt.

It should be noted that the liberty which Paul espoused in this chapter was not a casual disregard for distinctions between right and wrong. He was referring solely to inconsequential matters such as ceremonial observances and differences of opinion.

AMPLIFIED OUTLINE Compiled for the *Daybreak & Discovery* series

- III. The results of salvation
 - D. Liberty: don't judge (14:1-12)
 - E. Liberty: don't offend (14:13-23)

A CLOSER LOOK

1. In verse 19, what does Paul say we are to "follow after"?

2. Based on verse 13, what might be examples of "stumbling blocks" for others?

3. What are some actions we could take to encourage spiritually vulnerable believers?

CONCLUSION

We must be careful not to adopt the attitude of a judge in our relationships with others—that is God's role! Our focus should be on making sure our own attitude is always one of encouragement and support for others.

NOTES



Romans 15:1-33

DEVOTIONAL FOCUS

“We then that are strong ought to bear the infirmities of the weak, and not to please ourselves. Let every one of us please his neighbour for his good to edification.” (Romans 15:1-2)

William Borden put today’s focus verses into practice. Born in 1887 to a wealthy family, he enjoyed the privileges that money can bring, but he made choices that surprised many people. When he was seven years old, his mother took him to the Moody Church in Chicago, and there he committed his life to God. At sixteen, after he graduated from high school, his parents sent him on an around-the-world trip. His travels impressed upon him a burden for souls. A friend indicated that to be a missionary would be “throwing himself away,” but Borden wrote in the back of his Bible, “No reserves.”

Following his trip, Borden entered Yale University. One of his classmates wrote: “He came to college far ahead, spiritually, of any of us. He had already given his heart in full surrender to Christ and had really done it. We who were his classmates learned to lean on him and find in him a strength that was solid as a rock.”¹ While he was a freshman, Borden and a friend began praying together in the morning. Before long they were joined by another student, and then another. At the end of that year, 150 students met weekly for Bible study and prayer. By Borden’s senior year, one thousand students were in those groups. He also established the Yale Hope Mission in an effort to help those bound by alcohol and other addictions.

When Borden graduated from Yale, he was offered high-paying jobs, but declined. He wrote in his Bible, “No retreats.” He had a particular burden for the Muslim people in China. With the goal of going there as a missionary, he went to Egypt to learn Arabic. In Egypt, however, he contracted spinal meningitis and died within a month. He was twenty-five years old. Before he died, he wrote in his Bible, “No regrets.”

William Borden had chosen not to please himself, but to “please his neighbor for his good to edification.” He left a legacy of challenge and encouragement, and was a testimony of the joy found in full surrender and service to God.

We also will make choices about whether or not to please ourselves. Our options will not be the same as William Borden’s, but there will be times when we can take the way of self-denial. Opportunities to assist, to encourage, or to help bear the load of the weak

will come. The situations may seem small or unimportant, but will we do what we can?

BACKGROUND

In chapter 15, Paul continued his theme of how those who are strong are to bear with the infirmities of the weak. The first part of this chapter contains the Apostle’s closing statement concerning the Christian’s exercise of liberty within the Body of Christ. Two major topics dominate this portion of text: pleasing others instead of oneself (verses 1-3), and praising God in unity and harmony (verses 4-13). These verses represent Paul’s formal conclusion to his entire epistle to the Romans. Beginning with verse 14, he began to draw the epistle to a close with final remarks concerning his apostleship and plans to see the Roman believers.

In verses 1-3, Paul focused on the importance of pleasing others. He pointed to three ways this was to be done: by putting first the good of others, by working toward the edification of others, and by pleasing others as Christ himself had done. Throughout chapter 14, Paul had focused on the Christian’s relationship to fellow believers, frequently using the term “brother.” However, in Romans 15:2, the Apostle laid aside this designation and began to employ the term “neighbor,” thus broadening the application of his teaching on love and liberty. He went on to remind the Roman believers of the value of the Old Testament Scriptures, and offered up a prayer for their unity so that with one mind and one mouth they could glorify God (verses 4-6).

In verses 7-12, Paul made an appeal for Jews and Gentiles to accept each other. Utilizing a series of quotations from the Old Testament, the Apostle reinforced his assertion that both Jews and Gentiles were part of the family of God, and that the inclusion of the Gentiles was predicted by divine inspiration. (See Psalm 18:49 in connection with verse 9; Deuteronomy 32:43 in connection with verse 10; Psalm 117:1 in connection with verse 11; and Isaiah 11:10 in connection with verse 12). Paul then offered a brief benediction, praying that God would fill the Roman Christians with joy and peace in believing, so that they would abound in hope with the help of the Holy Spirit (verse 13). He clearly was assured that as those of opposing perspectives grew spiritually, the differences within the congregation would dwindle.

Verse 14 marks the transition to Paul’s conclusion to his epistle in which he gave a series of personal greetings and words of encouragement. Recognizing the Romans’ own qualifications in the faith, he still felt his credentials as a “minister” to the Gentiles made it

appropriate to write to them as he did. Expressing his desire not to preach where Christ had already been preached, the Apostle related his intention to stop over in Rome on his way to Spain. However, first he planned to take a contribution from the saints in Macedonia and Achaia to the poor saints in Jerusalem. Realizing that such a trip would entail danger, he asked to be remembered in their prayers, and concluded with a brief but characteristic benediction invoking the peace of God toward them all.

AMPLIFIED OUTLINE Compiled for the *Daybreak & Discovery* series

- III. The results of salvation
 - F. Live holy by strengthening others (15:1-6)
 - G. Live holy in fellowship (15:7-13)
- IV. Conclusion
 - A. Paul’s purpose for the letter (15:14-21)
 - B. Travel plans (15:22-33)

A CLOSER LOOK

1. In verse 4, what did the Apostle Paul say brings hope?

2. How is it possible to have the unity described in verses 5-6?

3. What are some ways we might “bear the infirmities of the weak”?

CONCLUSION

We want to be alert for opportunities to help and edify others. God will be with us to give wisdom and guidance in this as we seek to follow Him.

NOTES

1. Southern Nazarene University, *No Reserves. No Retreats. No Regrets*, Southern Nazarene University, <https://home.snu.edu/~hculbert/regret.htm>, accessed April 22, 2019.



DEVOTIONAL FOCUS

“I commend unto you Phebe our sister, which is a servant of the church which is at Cenchrea: that ye receive her in the Lord, as becometh saints, and that ye assist her in whatsoever business she hath need of you: for she hath been a succourer of many, and of myself also.” (Romans 16:1-2)

Perhaps to amuse a small child you have intertwined your fingers and said, “Here’s the church, and here’s the steeple. Open the doors and see all the people.” It’s an entertaining rhyme. However, it makes a valid point: in order to have a church, there must be people—people who are doing what they can to share the Gospel. Phebe was such a person. The Apostle Paul said, “She hath been a succourer of many.” “Succourer” means assistant, so we know Phebe had reached out to help others.

All of us know people like that. Edna Janzen was one of those who helped others in many ways. She would testify, “I was brought up in a good home. However, having a good upbringing and going to church did not automatically make me a Christian. For years, I rebelled against all that my parents taught me. I was a good student, at the head of my class in school, and read many books. I began reading things that put doubts into my mind as to the truth of the Bible and the fundamentals I had learned. Sad to say, I got to where I refused to go to church. When I was fifteen years old, I became severely sick. My throat was so badly swollen I could hardly breathe, and I was painfully conscious of every breath I drew.

“Once I was better, I realized the debt I owed to God for sparing my life. I did not expect to enjoy being a Christian, but I surrendered to God. What a surprise it was when the burden of sin rolled away! A whole new life opened up for me. I had new desires, new friends, and a new disposition. How I have loved the Lord from that time on!”

After Edna graduated from high school, she worked for the State government in Salem, Oregon. Then she felt the Lord definitely call her to work in the church office in Portland. It was a bit of a struggle to make that consecration to fulltime service, but she did. She also found a niche in the church orchestra and Sunday school work, along with any other place of service she could fill. She was faithful to pray with others, became the official photographer of church events, transported elderly sisters to and from church services, corresponded with people from around the

world, served as a youth camp counselor, and loved to travel to branch churches to fellowship with other Christians. She worked in our headquarters office for over fifty years and was the office manager part of that time.

In her elderly years, Edna testified, “It has been a wonderful life. Of course there have been hard times, periods of self-discipline, of yielding to the molding of God, but if I had it to do over, I would do the same. And the best is yet to come: I’m looking forward to seeing Jesus and I want to hear Him say, ‘Well done.’”

We can be sure that Edna has heard those words now that she has gone to Heaven. No doubt Phebe heard the Lord give her that same commendation. It can be the reward of each of us. God does not require that we be dramatic, exceptionally gifted, rich, or superbly qualified. He only asks that we submit to His will and be faithful in what we can find to do. His Church is made up of just such people!

BACKGROUND

In this concluding portion of his epistle, Paul sent instructions, greetings, warnings, and a final benediction to the Romans. The abundance and variety of salutations—addressed to Jews and Gentiles, slaves and free, men and women, and those from both upper and lower classes—illustrates the unifying bond of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Though Paul had never been to Rome, these were individuals with whom he had enjoyed fellowship and shared spiritual labors in the past. At some point they had relocated to Rome, joining the body of Christian believers in that city.

In verses 1-2, Paul introduced Phebe, a deaconess from the church in Cenchrea, the eastern seaport city of Corinth. Since Phebe was traveling independently, she was likely a widow. Her name is Greek and reflects an idolatrous background, but she had converted to Christianity and become a beloved laborer in the Corinthian church. She presumably was the bearer of Paul’s epistle to the Romans, as only government officials were allowed to convey letters through the imperial postal system.

The Apostle greeted Priscilla and Aquila (verses 3-5), a couple who were greatly instrumental in the spread of the Gospel. This couple first met Paul in Corinth, where they had fled as a result of Roman persecution because Aquila was a Jew (see Acts 18:2-3). While pursuing their trade as tentmakers, they became friends with Paul, and the Apostle lived and worked with them while founding the Corinthian church. When Paul left Corinth for Ephesus, he took Aquila

and Priscilla with him, and there they established a church in their home (see 1 Corinthians 16:9) and ministered to the eloquent preacher Apollos (Acts 18:24-26). The circumstances Paul alluded to when he said they “laid down their own necks” for him (verse 4) are unknown.

More greetings are given in verses 5-16. Notable among these are Paul’s words to the households of Aristobulus and Narcissus (verses 10-11). The reference to “households” likely means that the Christians whom Paul addressed were slaves, and the wording indicates that only a portion of each household were Christians. Neither master is included in the greeting, so presumably they were not believers. (Historians suggest that Aristobulus may have been the grandson of Herod the Great and brother of Herod Agrippa I; Narcissus may have been the wealthy freedman named Tiberius Claudius Narcissus who was later executed by Nero’s mother.) These facts indicate that the great message of the Gospel of Jesus Christ had found its way into every level of the Roman Empire, and that the Christian faith was able to thrive even in conditions of slavery.

Tryphaena and Tryphosa, mentioned in verse 12, were probably sisters and maybe twins, based on the fact that the Apostle coupled their similar names together. Their names mean “luxurious” and “delicate” and may indicate the kind of lifestyle from which these women came.

In verse 12, Persis’ name indicates a Persian origin; she may have been brought to Rome as a slave. Little is known about her beyond the Apostle’s comment that she “labored much in the Lord.” The word “labored” is translated as “wearied” in the description of Jesus sitting by the well in Samaria. It is translated “toiled” in the account of the fishermen by the Sea of Galilee who toiled all night but caught nothing. The three words combined present a descriptive picture of a woman who worked with dedication to the limit of her power.

The “holy kiss” mentioned in verse 16 was a customary way of greeting fellow Christians. The descriptive adjective “holy” established that this kiss was different than the common signal of affection between friends, and also set it apart from the evil kiss of betrayal that Judas gave Jesus (see Luke 22:48).

Paul gave a final warning against those who would cause divisions between Christian brethren, for above all else, the Apostle wanted to ensure the Roman Christians’ continued obedience in the Lord (verses 17-20). Paul’s companions at Corinth added their greetings in verses 21-24. Then Paul closed his epistle with praise to God for the revelation of the Gospel which was leading to the obedience of faith among all nations (verses 25-27).

AMPLIFIED OUTLINE Compiled for the Daybreak & Discovery series

IV. Conclusion

- C. Greetings to friends in Rome (16:1-16)
- D. Warnings (16:17-20)
- E. Greetings from believers in Corinth (16:21-23)
- F. Final benediction (16:24-27)

A CLOSER LOOK

1. Why did Paul give thanks to Priscilla and Aquila (verses 3-4)?

2. What do you think it means to be “wise unto that which is good, and simple concerning evil” (verse 19)?

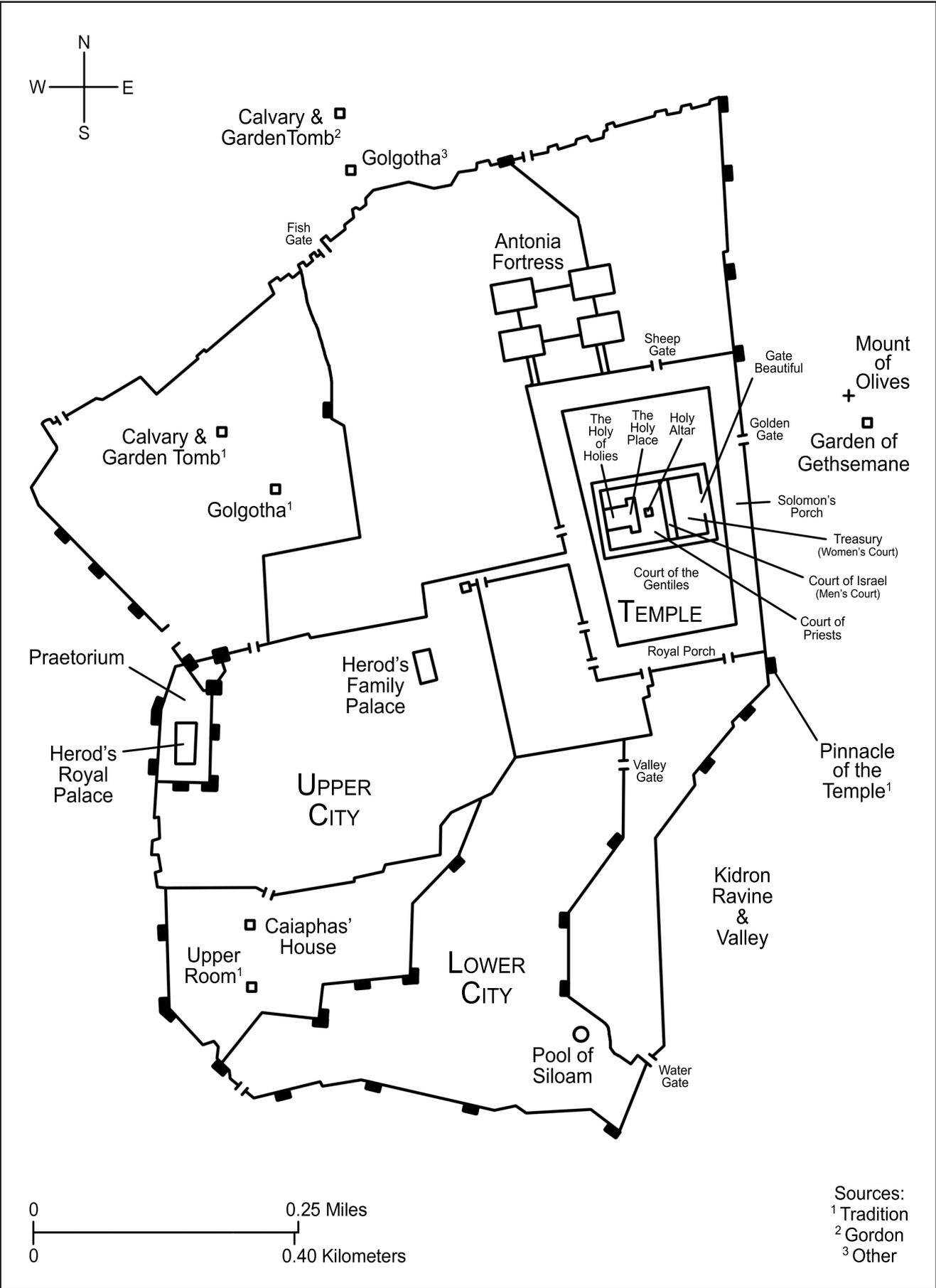
3. Like the congregation in Rome, every church has many personalities. How can those be channeled together to bring glory to God?

CONCLUSION

As members of God’s Church, we want to faithfully do our part, whatever that may be. It may seem small or unimportant to us, but God notes those who reach out and assist others.

NOTES

New Testament Jerusalem



A Traditional View of Passion Week

PALM SUNDAY



- Jesus makes His Triumphal Entry into Jerusalem on a donkey. The crowd waves branches, shouts “Hosanna,” and puts garments and branches in the road.

(Matthew 21:1-11)

MONDAY

- Jesus cleanses the Temple, overturning the money changers’ tables and declaring, “My house shall be called the house of prayer.”

(Matthew 21:13)



TUESDAY

- Jesus teaches the disciples and Jewish leaders with parables.

(Matthew 21:23)

WEDNESDAY

- Judas plots to betray Jesus to the priests for 30 pieces of silver.

(Matthew 26:14-16)



THURSDAY

- Jesus celebrates the Passover Feast and institutes the Lord’s Supper and Foot Washing ordinances.

(Matthew 26:26-28 • John 13:1-17)



- Jesus prays in Gethsemane.
- Judas betrays Jesus with a kiss.
- Jesus is arrested and taken to Caiaphas.

(Matthew 26:36-46)

(Matthew 26:47)

(Matthew 26:57)

FRIDAY

- Early in the morning, Jesus endures a Jewish trial.
- Before daybreak, Peter denies Jesus three times.
- Jesus stands before Pontius Pilate, is sent to Herod, and is sent back to Pilate.

(Matthew 26:59-68)

(Matthew 26:58, 69-75)

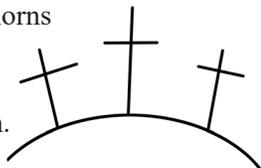
(Matthew 27:1-2 • Luke 23:6-11)

- Soldiers crown Jesus with thorns and mock Him.

(Matthew 27:29-31)

- Jesus is crucified at 9:00 a.m.

(Mark 15:25)



- There is darkness from noon to 3:00 p.m.
- The veil in the Temple is torn from top to bottom.
- Jesus’ body is buried in a borrowed tomb.

(Matthew 27:45)

(Matthew 27:51)

(Matthew 27:57-60)

SATURDAY

- Jesus’ body remains in the tomb.

(Matthew 27:62-66)



EASTER SUNDAY¹

- Soldiers guarding the tomb become as dead men because of an earthquake and an angel who rolls away the tombstone.

(Matthew 28:2-4)

- The women in a group (Mary Magdalene in advance of the others) approach the sepulcher.
- Mary Magdalene, seeing the stone removed and hastily concluding that the body has been removed, runs for Peter and John, thus separating herself from the rest of the women.

(John 20:2)

- The other women arrive at the sepulcher and see two angels. They depart to tell the disciples.

(Matthew 28:5, 8 • Mark 16:5 • Luke 24:4, 9)

- While the women are gone, Peter and John run to the sepulcher, find it empty, and leave.

(Luke 24:12 • John 20:2-10)

- Mary Magdalene, having followed Peter and John to the sepulcher, stands outside weeping. After they depart, she sees two angels and then Jesus. According to His command, she departs to carry His message to the disciples.

(Mark 16:9-10 • John 20:11-18)

- The women on their way—before their arrival at the abode of the disciples, but after the appearance of Jesus to Mary Magdalene—see Jesus.

(Matthew 28:9)

- All the women, including Mary Magdalene, unite in relating their story to the incredulous disciples.

(Matthew 28:9 • Luke 24:10)

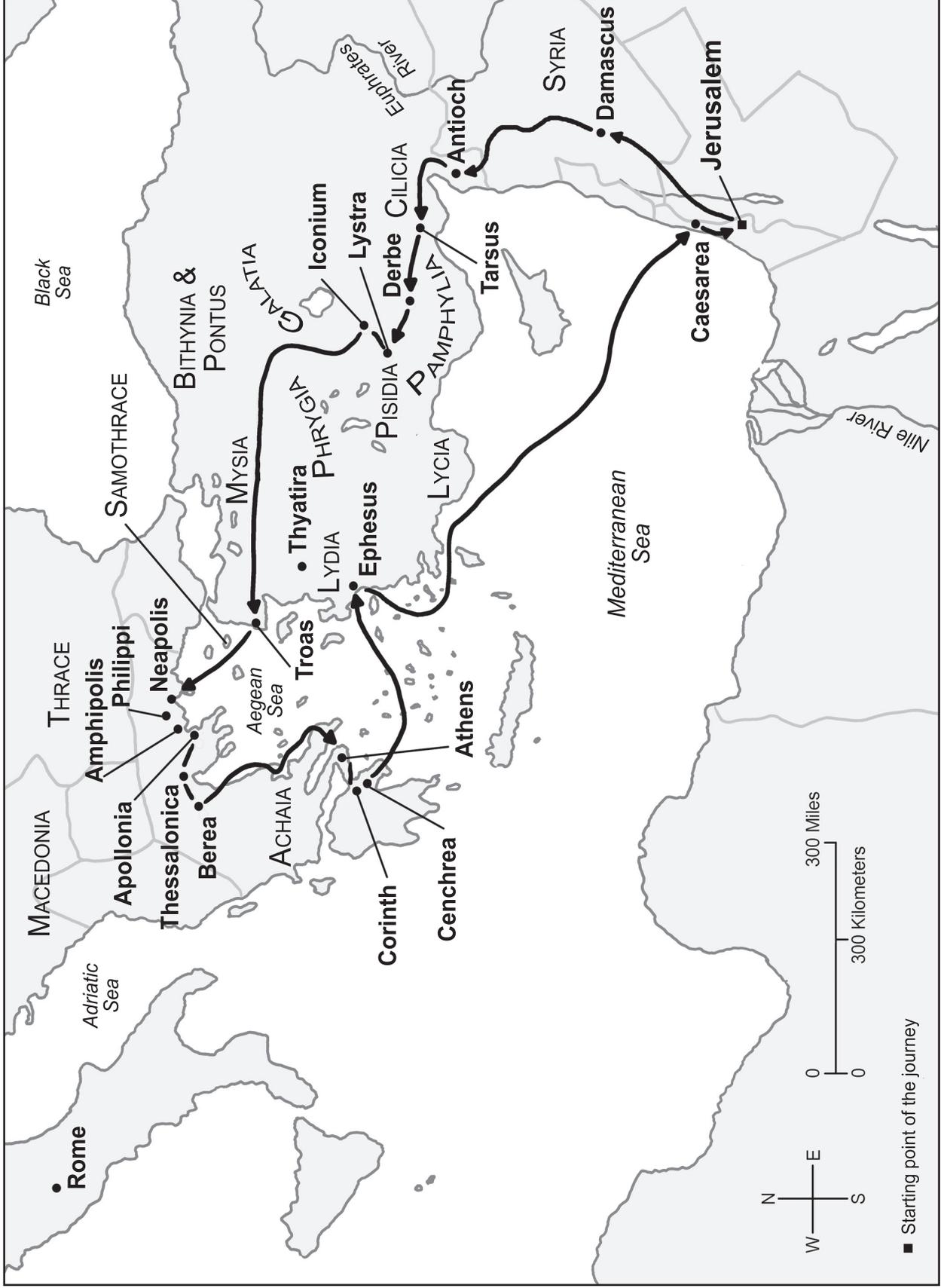
- Jesus appears to the disciples: to Peter, to Cleopas and another follower on the road to Emmaus, and then to a group of disciples in Jerusalem.

(Luke 24:13-36)

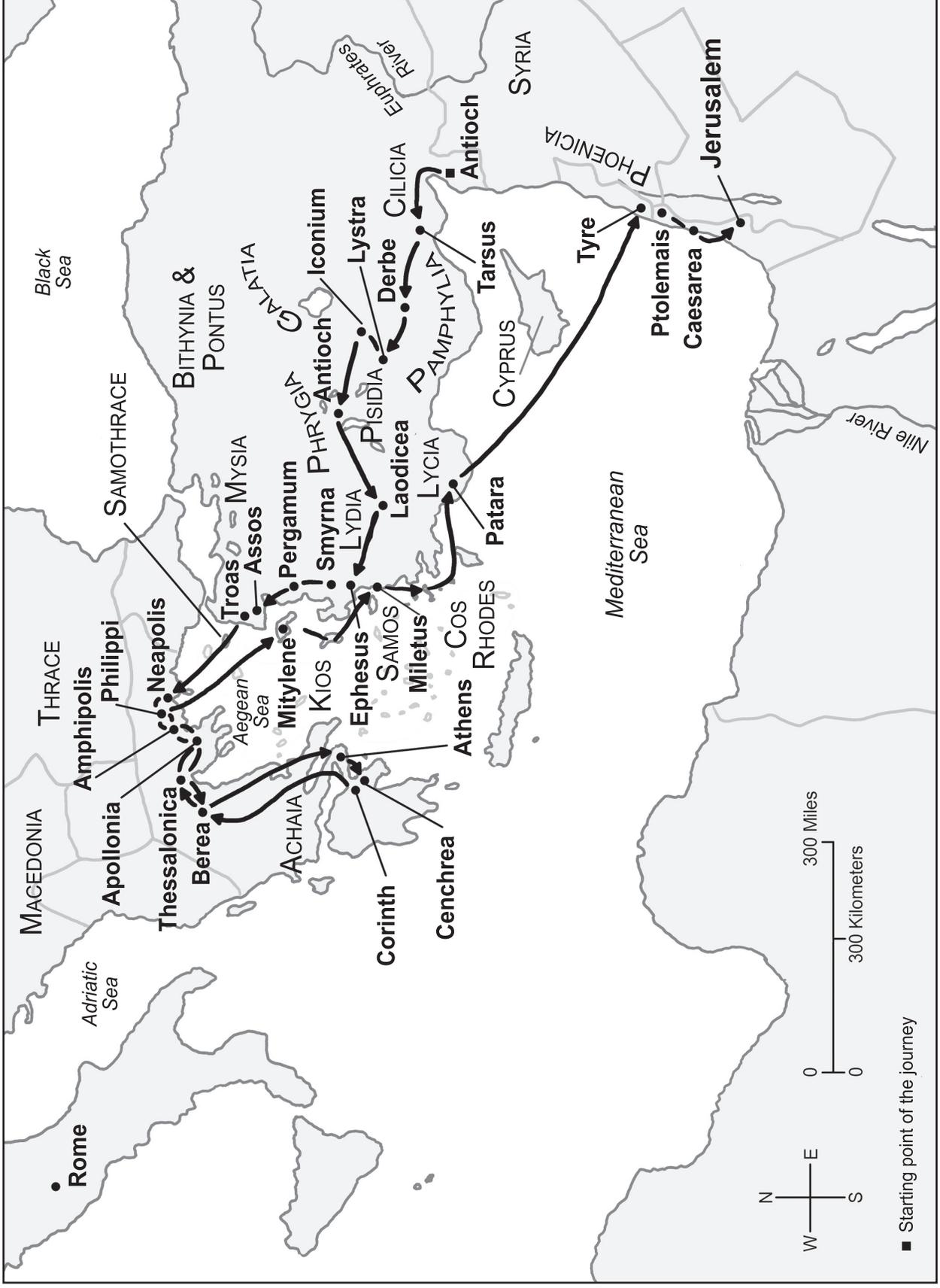


1. D.D. Whedon, *Commentary on The Gospels: Luke-John*, p. 408

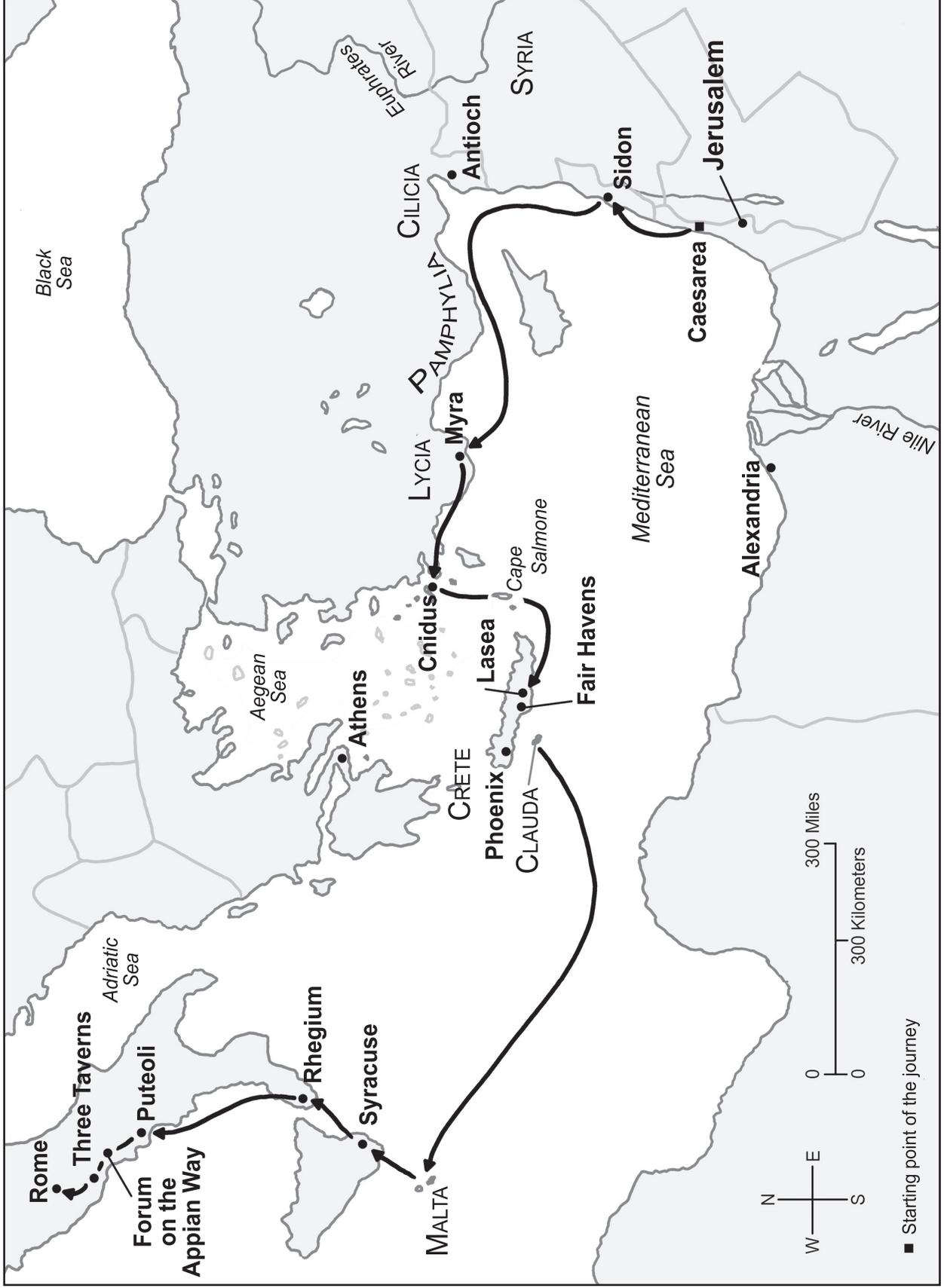
Paul's Second Missionary Journey



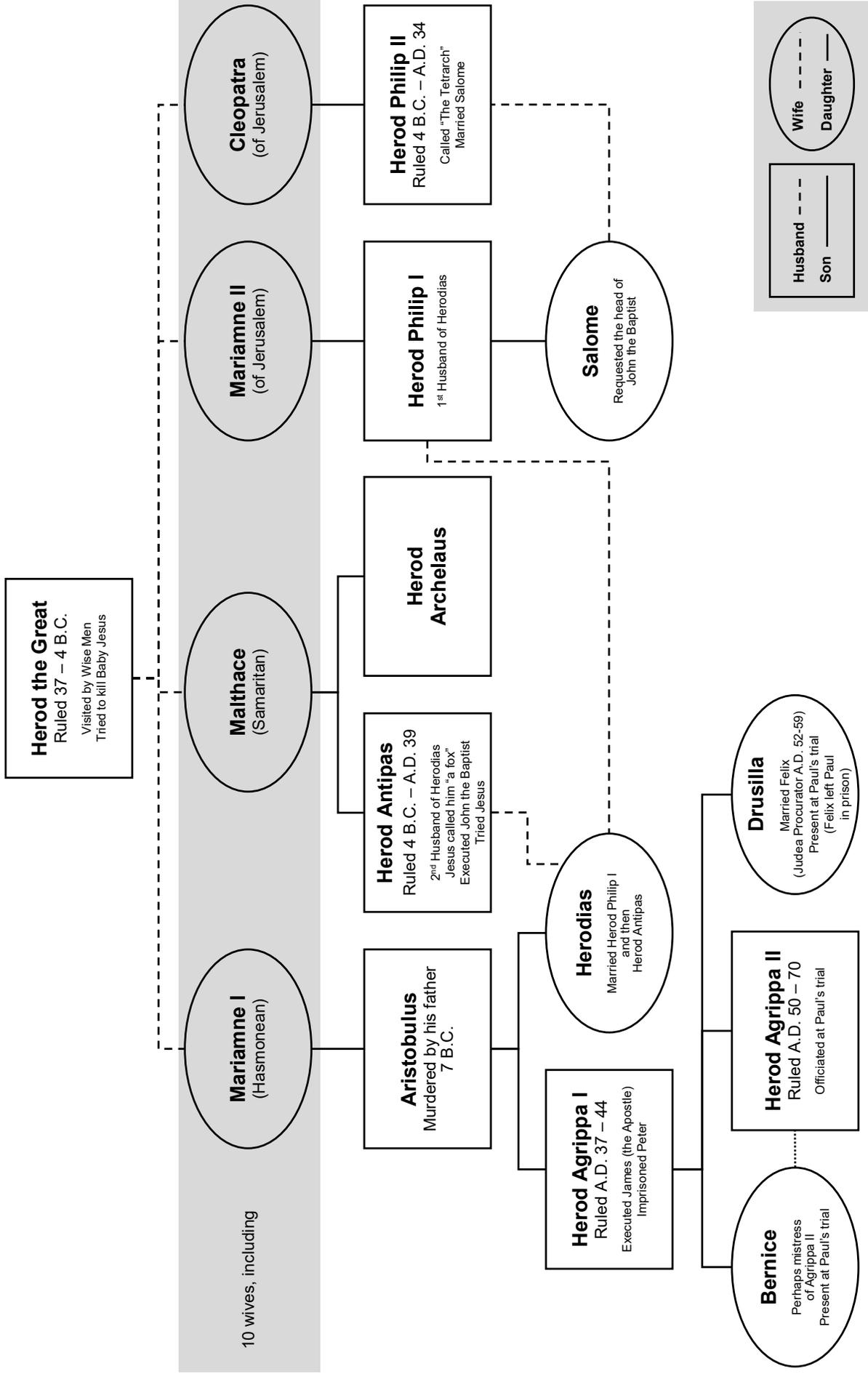
Paul's Third Missionary Journey



Paul's Journey to Rome



The Family of Herod the Great



Contrasting Calvinism and Arminianism

Within the broad scope of Christian theology, Arminianism and Calvinism share both history and many Biblical doctrines. However, they offer radically different interpretations of Scriptures related to salvation through Jesus Christ. In addition, there are a variety of approaches under the general headings of Calvinism and Arminianism; proponents on both sides are not in universal agreement regarding how they apply these doctrines.

Calvinism, which is built upon the religious teachings of John Calvin (1509-1564), emphasizes the sovereignty of God and the salvation of the elect (those He has predetermined will be saved) by God's grace alone.

Arminianism is based upon the original beliefs of the theologian Jacobus Arminius (1560-1609), but can also include teachings of John Wesley and others. The Apostolic Faith subscribes most closely to the Wesleyan view of Arminianism.

In his written works, Arminius quotes from Christian theologians dating back to the first century who taught that grace is extended to all, but that man, by his own free will, may turn toward or away from the faith. He also demonstrated that there were Christian leaders in every age since the time of Christ who taught that man can and should live holy in this life.

Following is a chart that briefly states the five main points of difference between Calvinistic teaching and Arminian teaching.

CALVINISM	ARMINIANISM
<p>Total Depravity: Man is born with a depraved nature and lacks a free will. God draws to repentance only those He has predetermined for salvation.</p>	<p>Free Will: Man is born with a depraved nature but has a free will. God draws all to repentance, but man can choose to repent and be regenerated, or resist and perish.</p>
<p>Unconditional Election: God has chosen only certain individuals for salvation. The elect are those God has predetermined will be saved.</p>	<p>Conditional Election: God has chosen all humanity for salvation. The elect are those who respond to His offer of salvation with repentance and faith.</p>
<p>Limited Atonement: When Christ gave His life upon the Cross, atonement was made available but only for the elect.</p>	<p>Unlimited Atonement: When Christ gave His life upon the Cross, atonement was made available for everyone. However, atonement avails only for those who choose to accept Christ's provision.</p>
<p>Irresistible Grace: Grace is extended only to the elect. God's call cannot be resisted and always results in conversion.</p>	<p>Resistible Grace: Grace is extended to all. Man is free to accept or reject God's call. Conversion results when man believes and receives God's offered grace.</p>
<p>Perseverance of the Saints: Saved individuals retain their salvation to the end because they are preserved by God. No saved person will ever be lost; once an individual is saved, he is always saved.</p>	<p>Assurance and Security: Saved individuals can retain their salvation to the end through continued obedience and faithfulness to God. However, saved individuals can forfeit their salvation by turning away from God.</p>