

The Weekly Word
March 18-24 2019

Happy March, I so enjoy the days growing longer! We continue our reading of Acts.
Happy reading...
Grace and Peace, Bill

To hear the Bible read click this link... <http://www.biblegateway.com/resources/audio/>.

Monday, March 18: Acts 14- Paul the example...

Paul blows me away. His dedication to the Gospel coupled with his absolute trust in God amazes me. On the one hand Paul moves in power, healing the lame and doing other miracles. On the other hand he willingly accepts hardship and persecution for the faith. Verses 19 and 20 cause my jaw to drop

Then some Jews came from Antioch and Iconium and won the crowd over. They stoned Paul and dragged him outside the city, thinking he was dead. But after the disciples had gathered around him, he got up and went back into the city. The next day he and Barnabas left for Derbe.

Paul is stoned and left for dead, just imagine that for a moment. But apparently he was only 'mostly dead' and when he is revived he goes back into the city for the night and then leaves the next day. They move on to the next city and Paul begins preaching again.

Paul is almost dead one day and preaching Jesus the next. AMAZING.

Paul will not be deterred from his apostolic calling. Jesus suffered so when Paul suffers it is just a fact of following Jesus. It is part and parcel of being an apostle of Jesus. Where the Savior trod; Paul will gladly tread.

Paul is such an inspiration.

Paul challenges me deeply... and he challenges the theology so prevalent in our world that following Jesus means prospering and living comfortably.

Rather than deal with this latter prosperity theology, I return to the example of Paul, the Christ-follower who gave all he had to advance the Gospel. And this drives my continued ponderings and prayer

God, Paul lived so far beyond where I live. I know I am not Paul and I have a different calling. For one thing I have a family, I also live in the 21st century not the 1st. Despite the differences, Lord, Paul pushes me to live more fully devoted to You, Jesus.

Thank You, Lord, for Paul. Help me to grow to be more like him as he sought to be like You. I pray this in Jesus' name and for the sake of the Gospel. Amen and amen.

Tuesday, March 19: Acts 15- Repair...

I'd like to think everything was perfect back in the early days of the church. I'd like to believe God moved and people obeyed; it was that simple. And while it was certainly true that God moved (and He still does to this day), people didn't obey any more perfectly back then than we do today.

A controversy springs up because people from Judea went to Antioch declaring that a person needed to be circumcised to be saved. The leaders of Jerusalem didn't send these people. They stormed in 'on their own.'

Then at the end of the chapter the dynamic duo, Paul and Barnabas, get into a rough over a helper, John Mark. So heated was their spat that they split company and went their separate ways. At least the Gospel remained intact when the duo split.

These problems weren't the first the early church encountered and they won't be the last. People are people and we are imperfect.

Stepping back I see that the early church worked to iron out problems, especially theological ones. They gathered key voices, talked and prayed, from which an answer about needing or not needing circumcision emerged. Their example continues to offer a good process when problems arise today or in any era.

Regarding the personal issue between Paul and Barnabas, this is not the last word on the matter, fortunately. Apparently Paul reconciles with John Mark later in life (see 2Tim 4:11). There are indications that Paul and Barnabas also reconciled but there is not one single verse to point to.

What is comforting and challenging for me is that these people reconciled. The Gospel works when people will work at the Gospel. The Holy Spirit within a person can help us overcome our human frailties and live as Jesus would have us live.

The gentle nudge of the Holy Spirit to me is to examine my web of relationships to see which ones need repair...

Holy Spirit, grant me grace and strength and Your wisdom to repair broken relationships for the sake of Your glory and advancement of Your kingdom. I pray in Jesus' name.

Wednesday, March 20: Acts 16- Pray for dedication...

Yesterday I noted that Paul and the other early Christians are all imperfect people. Imperfect as they may be, they are also valiant committed ambassadors for Jesus.

Paul is traveling the world, following the lead of the Spirit and proclaiming Jesus wherever he goes. Nothing deters him from spreading the name of Jesus. Paul is so zealous that God has to close doors before him, in order to keep Paul heading where He wants Paul to go.

Some of us, like me, are less zealous "God, if you open a door I will go through it." Not Paul. He is like, "Okay, God, I'm going. Stop me if You need to, but I am going to spread Your name."

I am sitting here, shaking my head, literally, at the veracity and boldness of Paul.

Paul is also able to draw others into the work of evangelism. Timothy, an adult male, is willing to be circumcised in order to partner with Paul in the work of evangelism. And then when their time in Philippi goes 'south,' Timothy accepts flogging and imprisonment as part of the calling to spread the name of Jesus.

Wow! As I think about this I am impressed by Paul. When he recruits people to the task of mission/evangelism Paul doesn't cloak the invitation in some kind of triumphalism. He obviously told Timothy hardships were part of the deal. And Timothy accepts, such was the persuasiveness of Paul.

I love Luke's line describing their time in prison. *About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the other prisoners were listening to them (25).*

Welcome to ministry, Timothy... beaten with rods and thrown into prison they are singing and praying as a means of witness to other prisoners! That is dedication to the cause.

It is at this point that the Spirit seems to nudge me, "Pray for dedication to the cause of Christ..."

Lord, it is a little intimidating praying for dedication to Your cause after reading the likes of Timothy and Paul. Still I set my nervousness aside and pray... Lord, give me unwavering dedication to Your Gospel. Fire me up for the sharing of the Gospel come what may. I pray this in Jesus' name. Amen

Thursday, March 21: Acts 17- Dedicated...

Reading about Paul today the word DEDICATED keeps flashing through my thoughts.

Paul was certainly dedicated to advancing the mission of Jesus.

Paul was also dedicated to bringing along the next generation; he is always traveling with a younger associate. I am sure these younger men functioned as an aide to Paul; still Paul was mentoring and training them.

Paul was dedicated to reaching people of every culture. In Thessalonica and Berea he went directly to the synagogue. In Athens, after going to the synagogue, Paul goes right into the heart of the Greek culture, the Areopagus, to debate with learned Greeks.

In Romans 1:16 Paul writes, *For I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes: first to the Jew, then to the Gentile.* This is how Paul lived... Paul was dedicated to the mission of Jesus. I pray it is true of me as well.

Lord, I am praying for increased dedication to Your cause, Oh Christ. Through the example of Paul and other men and women of the New Testament and history, spur me on to deeper and deeper dedication to you and Your cause, Oh Lord. I pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

Friday, March 22: Acts 18- Disciples making disciples...

Matthew's Gospel ends with Jesus commanding the disciples to make disciples. And that is precisely what we see happening in this chapter. Paul meets Pricilla and Aquila and discipled them in the way of Jesus. They travel for a bit with Paul and are discipled by him. Then Pricilla and Aquila meet Apollos whom they disciple and teach the way of Jesus more clearly.

Paul's discipleship 'tree' now has three branches, Pricilla & Aquila, Apollos and himself. That's how discipleship is supposed to work. One person brings another along in the faith who in turn brings others along in the faith.

This causes me to wonder about my discipleship legacy. Who have I discipled to the point that they are now discipling other?. I am not sure I have been very good at this in my life...

Lord, in the years I have left, show me who and how to disciple.. I pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

Saturday, March 23: Acts 19- God watches over His Church...

It is not exactly spiritually deep, but I kept thinking that the world of Paul was a wild world. The Christian faith was still in its infancy and only becoming codified as to what Christians believed. As Paul rolls into Ephesus he meets some "disciples," but they certainly needed straightening out theologically. One might even wonder if they were truly disciples, but Luke does not use the word disciple loosely in his writings. Still these disciples needed to be taught some crucial elements of the faith... like the Holy Spirit and baptism in Jesus' name!

As the Christian faith was forming and growing the world around them was a wild place, with gods and temples. As we saw in Ephesus, a city could be whipped into a riotous frenzy when gods were invoked.

There was no telling what might set some people off.

On the one hand it was a world where people were passionate about their religious beliefs and were willing to dialogue and talk about faith and religion. That certainly is different from today where it seems that religion is a taboo subject in certain circles of life.

On the other hand the passion of people seems to spill quite readily into riot and violence.

It was a wild time to be in the church and to be sent out by God to do mission and evangelism in the world. Professing faith came with costs... recall all those people burning their former non-Christian religious scrolls. Faith could cost one personally. Also, persecution of believers was not uncommon. It was a crazy tumultuous time.

As I stew and chew on this I found myself even more amazed how God protected His church. The Lord watched over His people. He gave the church time to sort out the faith, to figure out what it means to follow Jesus and to come to an understanding that it could be passed down from generation to generation.

As I think about the church today... I see God is still holding her together and He is seeing His church advance in some places that are hostile to the Gospel, just like in the ancient world.

God's name will spread and the nudge I am feeling from the Lord is, "Will I help spread His name and fame, or will I grow comfortable in my faith not caring that others come to know Him???"

Lord, may it never be so, that I grow complacent in my faith and stop being an agent in advancing Your kingdom to the ends of the earth. I pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

Sunday, March 24, 2019, Sunday Worship

If any of my thoughts or the Bible readings spark questions send an email reply and I will do my best to answer all questions from people on the list... I will answer personal questions privately; general questions will be answered in a subsequent email installment.

If you are reading along with me from the Living Hope website you can send questions or request being placed on the weekly email list by emailing Lisa at office@LivingHopeCT.org.

Click here for a link to my sermons on the web. Sermons are generally posted within 2 days.