

The Weekly Word
August 20-26, 2018

August is speeding by and so is Acts as we read a chapter a day. Happy reading...
Grace and Peace, Bill

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

Monday, August 20: Acts 10- Obedience...

The mission of God to witness to Jesus to the ends of the earth is gaining momentum. In chapter 8 persecution scatters Christ-followers throughout Judea and Samaria. In chapter 9 we learn of Saul's conversion and read of God's Word to him, *This man is my chosen instrument to proclaim my name to the Gentiles and their kings and to the people of Israel* (Acts 9:15).

Now in chapter 10 we read of Peter's dramatic vision and his travel to Cornelius where Gentiles encounter the Lord Jesus. Although not the first Gentile, we already read of Philip and the Ethiopian eunuch (Acts 8:26), Peter's account is most certainly a break-through moment in the early church.

Peter, by his own admission, has been scrupulous in following the traditions of the Jewish faith not eating unclean food or venturing into Gentile homes (14 & 28). However, believing God has directed him to go, Peter obediently goes to see Cornelius. Absolute obedience.

I reflect for a few moments on the obedience of Peter.

In response to a God-given vision and the internal witness of the Spirit, regarding the understanding of the vision coupled with the corroborating invitation of Cornelius' delegation inviting Peter to come and speak, Peter goes without question. Even though a vision, internal witness and circumstances form a strong foundation for discerning God's will, Peter must overcome life-long habits, instinct and religious training to be obedient to God's radical call to consort with Gentiles.

I sense it is significant for the early church that Peter is the one leading the way. A lesser apostle may not have had the clout to steer the entire faith into converting and accepting Gentiles. Still God goes the extra mile by accompanying the conversion of Gentiles at Cornelius' house with manifestations similar to Pentecost confirming that this is a work of God Almighty!

Stepping back I am drawn to Peter's absolute obedience despite personal costs. I wonder if I have the drive to obedience that Peter had. I haven't ever had the confluence of dramatic callings that Peter had on this day, but I certainly have had promptings. And my history of obedience is mixed... I have much growth still to go in my life.

Lord, what training must I undergo to grow in obedience? Work in me, Lord. I am Yours. Through Jesus Christ, my Lord, I pray. Amen.

Tuesday, August 21: Acts 11- Partners in life and ministry...

As I read these two very different accounts, I wondered where God might speak. How would God use today's chapter to enter my life and speak to me?

I read and re-read, wondering. I pondered and thought and looked at the text. Slowly my heart was drawn to verse 25: *Then Barnabas went to Tarsus to look for Saul.*

Hmm... when the task becomes too large to whom do you turn?

The task of discipling new believers in Antioch was too much for Barnabas alone. So remembering Paul, Barnabas went and found him and brought him to Antioch to help disciple the burgeoning church in the city. They labored for a year.

Is there a place for single-handed ministry? Well, although Jesus sent out disciples two by two, we also see the Spirit using Philip alone when he spoke to the Ethiopian eunuch. But this confirms my opening observation. If/when a ministry task gets too big for you alone, do you have someone to turn to for help? Do I have fellow believers I could call for help?

I have a number of people I can turn to for prayer and encouragement. But do I have someone who would come alongside if I asked? I don't know. Depending upon the ask, maybe yes, probably no.

Is God showing me a deficiency in my spiritual life???

How about you?

Speak, Lord, my heart is open... Amen.

Wednesday, August 22: Acts 12- God can do way more...

Having read the chapter and begun my contemplation, Proverbs 3:5-6 came immediately to mind. *Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways submit to him, and he will make your paths straight.*

Peter was doing lots of trusting. Herod was flexing his muscle, having put James to death, Peter's neck was on the chopping block. Peter certainly knew it. *And the church was earnestly praying to God for him* (5). Those words remind me that prayer is FAR more than an emotional exercise. Prayer taps into the very might and power of God. And for Peter, God moved miraculously.

Part of the report that gets me comes when Peter reaches Mary's house. When the servant Rhoda heard Peter and told the gathering they said, *"You're out of your mind"...* (15). The people who were earnestly praying for Peter couldn't believe he was at their door!

A smile comes to my face...

Maybe they were praying for Peter to have peace. Maybe they were praying that Herod would have mercy. We don't know. In all likelihood, God did immeasurably more than they asked or imagined (see Ephesians 3:20).

How often do I limit God by what I have faith to imagine? Still the smile grew on my face because my lack of faith does not automatically limit God. God can and may still do more than I ask. Halleluiah!

I serve, we serve, a mighty God!!!

Oh, God, release Your power and might in signs and wonders and promptings and angelic visits and ... any immeasurably more that You care to release. In Jesus' name and for Your glory. Amen and Amen.

Thursday, August 23: Acts 13- A man after God's own heart...

In the midst of Paul's long statement leading to Jesus and God's message of the Gospel, I found myself strangely drawn to God's comment describing David, King of Israel, *'I have found David son of Jesse, a man after my own heart; he will do everything I want him to do'* (22).

David wasn't perfect, far from it in fact. Still God calls him *a man after my own heart*. I love that description. I don't know of a higher complement God could pay a human.

That phrase is a call to me... become a man of whom God could say, here is *a man after my own heart*.

I am heartened to know that a person does not need to be perfect to be *a man after my own heart*, because if perfection was required an epitaph like that would be out of reach for me or any of us. I know I am not there; still that phrase draws me to God. Oh, to be God's man, a person longing to be in tune with God,

God's estimation of David grows richer, *he will do everything I want him to do*. I suspect that this trait shows how David is a man after God's own heart. David lived to obey God and to do the Lord's bidding.

And this second line gives a basic roadway to becoming *a man after God's own heart*... do what God wants you to do.

Oh, God, I pray for strength to do what You want, to be Your man and to live a life that pleases You. In Jesus' name and for the sake of advancing Your name around the globe, I pray. Amen.

Friday, August 24: Acts 14- A menagerie of thoughts...

Paul and Barnabas have been on a whirlwind ministry tour. Oh, how the Lord has used them planting churches and advancing His reign in the world.

When the duo began their trip it was Barnabas and Saul (Paul). Now in almost every reference it is Paul and Barnabas. I realize this is a subtle shift in the account, still it indicates a significant change. Paul becomes the primary spokesman (12).

I thought about Barnabas. It is not easy when the person one is mentoring takes the lead from the former mentor. Yet, reading between the lines of the text, Barnabas accepts this change with grace. I suspect this is another incidence of Barnabas being a 'son of encouragement.' He understands his place and is grateful to see Paul become all God has made him to be.

Now with prominence comes pressure. According to verse 19, Paul is stoned but there is no mention of this happening to Barnabas. Leadership is not all it is cracked up to be. Leaders often take BIG hits. I cannot imagine being stoned and enduring what Paul endured! I'd leave town too.

Lastly I was drawn in by the warm welcome when the duo returned home. *From Attalia they sailed back to Antioch, where they had been committed to the grace of God for the work they had now completed. On arriving there, they gathered the church together and reported all that God had done through them and how he had opened a door of faith to the Gentiles. And they stayed there a long time with the disciples (26-28).*

Reports from the 'field' always encourage me when they happen in my church. Apparently they had similar affects in Paul's day. I loved the words *they stayed there a long time with the disciples*. I imagined the church blessing Barnabas and Paul and pouring into them restoring strength for future ministry.

Lord I pray that the church today refreshes and restores the men and women it sends out to mission fields around the world. I pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.

Saturday, August 25: Acts 15- Simplicity of the gospel...

When a dispute arose concerning whether or not Gentiles needed to become Jews in order to be saved, the apostles and elders met prayed, discussed and decided, no they do not. Peter captured the sentiment saying,

"Brothers, you know that some time ago God made a choice among you that the Gentiles might hear from my lips the message of the gospel and believe. God, who knows the heart, showed that he accepted them by giving the Holy Spirit to them, just as he did to us. He did not

discriminate between us and them, for he purified their hearts by faith. Now then, why do you try to test God by putting on the necks of Gentiles a yoke that neither we nor our ancestors have been able to bear? No! We believe it is through the grace of our Lord Jesus that we are saved, just as they are” (7-11).

His last line is powerful... *We believe it is through the grace of our Lord Jesus that we are saved, just as they are.*

Ahh, the grace of God and the simplicity of the Gospel.

It is through Jesus, belief in Jesus, not human-made rules, that we are saved.

Believing in Jesus is the great divide in human life. One either believes and follows Him or does not.

Tomorrow I get to gather with a room full of believers as we center our thoughts, our hearts, our minds, and our praise and worship of Jesus, the Father, and the Holy Spirit. Oh, what a joy!
Jesus, thank You for the reminder that You are it. Belief in You bring salvation. Amen and Amen.

Sunday, August 26, 2018, 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 PCOG website you can send questions or request being placed on the weekly email list by emailing Lisa at office@pcogonline.org.

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