

The Weekly Word
August 27-September 2, 2018

This week we cross into September. We will continue our journey through Acts as we follow Paul, lover of Jesus. Happy reading...
Grace and Peace, Bill

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

Monday, August 27: Acts 16- Serving Jesus...

I am supposing that Paul had some kind of magnetism about him. As I read today I saw how he draws people to himself. At the end of chapter 15 we learn that Silas has become his traveling companion. Then as today's chapter opens Timothy joins Paul's troop. Timothy was even willing to be circumcised before he traveled with Paul (1-3). Finally in verse 11, Luke uses the pronoun 'we' describing the sail from Troas. There may even be others since verse 6 references 'traveling companions.'

Since I can't go back in time, I will never know what it was about Paul that drew people to work alongside of him. I don't even know if it was Paul or the opportunity to advance the Gospel that drew people to travel with Paul. I am reminded of Romans 16 where Paul lists many people, noting their service for the Gospel and to him. Reading this chapter and seeing this troop of companions, I understand better how he had such a long list of fellow workers in Romans 16.

Thinking about all Paul endured for the Gospel and given what many of his companions went through while serving alongside Paul, there had to be more than personal magnetism that drew people to work with him. In this chapter Silas is flogged alongside of Paul (22). I am not convinced that Paul's personality alone would account for Silas continuing with Paul after the severe beating. This leads me to think that there was a 'higher calling' than simply hanging with Paul. The 'higher calling' must have been Jesus Himself.

I pondered my willingness to suffer for Jesus. I hope, I pray I would... I have never been tested in that manner. My hope and prayer is that I would willingly give everything for the sake of Jesus, my Savior and Lord.

Oh, God, I pray for the faith and endurance to serve You faithfully like Paul and his many companions did. I pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.

Tuesday, August 28: Acts 17- Reactions to the gospel...

I was struck by the vehemence of the opposition to the Gospel in Thessalonica. I have seen this kind of reaction to Jesus before, consider the Jewish leaders in Jerusalem for example. The Gospel elicits strong reactions!

Some of the opposition is built on its theme of resurrection. Some people simply cannot accept the concept of resurrection. But more often it is the Gospel's challenge to the way of life people are living.

In yesterday's reading a riot ensued and Paul and Silas were beaten because casting out of the demon in the slave girl meant that her owner's revenue source stopped. The opposition was financially motivated. In Thessalonica jealousy was the root of opposition (5). It is not clear to me what exactly they were jealous about. Maybe that Paul was taking people away from the synagogue... thus jealousy over his success. Maybe they were jealous of the Jewish faith and

didn't want to see people leaving it. Maybe the shrinking congregation meant less prestige for the leaders and they were jealous for their roles and power, etc.

What I am recognizing is that the Gospel, for a myriad of reasons, often creates strong reactions in people. Now I love the positive strong reactions when people throw themselves on the mercy of Jesus and put their faith and trust in Him. But I am never quite prepared for equally strong negative reactions. As I think about my discomfort with the negative reactions, much sadly, is due to the fact that I feel assaulted. I like being liked and I don't like being rejected.

I feel ashamed by these reactions. Yes, people may be rejecting me, but really the one they are rejecting is Jesus. Rejecting Jesus is by far the more costly rejection. Still their rejection of Jesus does not seem to affect me as much as their rejection of me...

And it saddens me that I am more concerned with self than Jesus.

Oh, Lord, You have exposed another weakness and sin-hold in my life. I am still. I am silent before You, making my confession that at times I make an idol of my own self. Forgive me, Lord, and cleanse me. I pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

Wednesday, August 29: Acts 18- Care of missionaries...

A curious piece of Paul's travel log attracted my attention. *When he landed at Caesarea, he went up to Jerusalem and greeted the church and then went down to Antioch. After spending some time in Antioch, Paul set out from there and traveled from place to place throughout the region of Galatia and Phrygia, strengthening all the disciples (22-23).*

What caught my attention was Paul's stop at his home base of Antioch. This was the church that first sent Paul and Barnabas out. It received his reports with joy and then sent him out again. Now Paul stops there again. It reminds me of missionaries who stop home on furlough. Missionaries stop home to give an update and be refreshed so they can head out again.

I find myself thinking about and praying for missionaries my family and my church support... Peter & Miriam, Jamie, Nicky, and Kevin. Most are in really tough lands where hostility abounds. When they stop 'home' we offer them a lifeline, a brief time of rest when their bodies can decompress and hopefully allow the stress to leak out of them before they return to the fray of ministry in a foreign land.

This role of refreshing those, whom God has called and sent, is a vital ministry and one often overlooked. Too often we put burdens on our returning missionaries beyond giving a report. Hmm...

Lord God, I pray for my church and Your Church, that we would honor those called to cross-cultural mission work. Also, that we would pray for and support them and that we would give them space to revive when they are home. Too often I fear we make them work too hard when they are home rather than refresh them. Show me, Lord, if I am to do something about this. I pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

Thursday, August 30: Acts 19- Following Jesus and the use of money...

Reading through Paul's time in Ephesus, I realized those early years for the church were an interesting time. The faith was so new and there was much confusion that needed to be figured out. Disciples who only had baptism of John. Wow.

Provisionally God sent Paul to correct the errors in understanding.

We today are blessed that the church over the centuries has cleared up the basic teachings of the faith! The Apostles' and Nicene Creeds are concise statements of the faith. They are not everything, but they lay the firm foundation.

Where my heart went however was to the problems that erupted in Ephesus. The genesis of the riot was money.

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

Faith in Jesus was disrupting the idol making business so the idol manufacturers prompted a riot. This isn't the first time that financial reasons pushed people to try to disrupt the faith.

I cannot conceive of faith in Jesus disrupting a respected industry in my community.

I began to ponder a larger question, "Does faith in Jesus change or limit the way Christ-followers handle money, finances and riches?" This is a broad question to which I believe the answer is 'yes'.

Jesus bids us to grow in charity, helping those in need and advancing the Gospel around the globe. Giving money away will affect our finances. I do believe God blesses us as we live for Him. His blessings, however, may not be directly financial. Additionally, I suspect that there are some investments that would not please the Lord, no matter how great their returns.

All of this leads me to consider my use of the money and resources God has granted me as His steward. Am I using His money wisely and in ways that bring Him glory and cause Him to smile? I hope so... I pray so.

Lord, You have blessed me with money and income. I pray that my use of Your gifts is honoring and pleasing to You. Show me, Lord, where I am faithful and where I still need to grow in maturity and wisdom. I pray in Jesus' name, Amen

Friday, August 31: Acts 20- Fully devoted?...

Whenever I come to this chapter I am always impressed by the words spoken to the Ephesian elders. During today's read the words that caught me come from verse 24. *However, I consider my life worth nothing to me; my only aim is to finish the race and complete the task the Lord Jesus has given me—the task of testifying to the good news of God's grace.* It is the middle section that put its claws into me: ***my only aim is to finish the race and complete the task the Lord Jesus has given me...***

Oh, God, my heart jumps. Would that I could speak those words as I live the remainder of my life.

I know I am not there yet. My life is divided for example... I am a husband, father, and grandfather. Each of these come with responsibilities that take time and resources. While I desire to bring all things captive to my faith, sometimes I wonder if these responsibilities divert me from completing the tasks Jesus has for me. At the same time I also know that God wants me to execute these responsibilities with faith and grace.

I also know that personally, selfishness rises up within me and diverts me from the things of Jesus.

I return to my prayer...

Oh, God, my heart jumps. My heart desires that these words could be my words as I move through the remainder of my life. I pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.

Saturday, September 1: Acts 21- I never could have imagined...

Would I suffer for Jesus?

If people warned me that danger and arrest were imminent if I completed a particular trip, could I, would I continue if I believed the Lord had told me to go? Would I joyfully accept the Lord's plan for my life if I knew it included imprisonment, torture and possibly death?

The amazing thing is Paul accepts all this and does so in a way that honors the Lord. He didn't disregard the prophetic warning of people, rather he said that he knew danger lurked and he was ready to suffer and even die for the Lord. *Then Paul answered, "Why are you weeping and breaking my heart? I am ready not only to be bound, but also to die in Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus" (13).*

Life has come full circle for Paul. The first time we meet him, Paul is among those who are arresting and stoning Stephen in Jerusalem. Now he comes to the city to be arrested himself! Ah, the will of God.

I am sure he could never have imagined how his life would unwind.

That is one way I am like Paul. I could never have imagined how my life would unfold. Jesus grabbed a hold of my life my sophomore year in college while I was studying engineering. I had no inkling that God would lead me into pastoral ministry. I never could have imagined that God would lead me to a teaching ministry in Africa. I never could have imagined that I would serve on an international ministry board, even less serve as board president.

God's journey is nothing that I ever expected.

As I sit smiling at the workings of the Lord I find myself wondering where the Lord will take me the next 30 years or as many as the Lord will give me before for my homecoming in eternity.

Life with Jesus is never boring and always rewarding. There have been difficult days and exhausting days and blissful days. Through all of them there is a joy, a deep-set joy, knowing that the Lord is walking with me and leading me.

Oh, the wonder and joy of serving Jesus... where oh where will He lead me in the future!?

Lord Jesus, I am Yours, use me today, use me tomorrow, use me the rest of my life—every day of the rest of my life—to make Your name known near and far.

Oh, the places I will go as I follow Your will. In Jesus' name I pray. Amen.

Sunday, September 2, 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.

Click [here](#) for a link to my sermons on the web. Sermons are generally posted within 2 days.