THE SPREAD OF THE GOSPEL

COMMENTARY ON BOOK OF ACTS

THE ACTS OF THE RESURRECTED JESUS CHRIST PERFORMED BY HIS CHOSEN APOSTLES THROUGH THE POWER OF THE PROMISED HOLY SPIRIT

Paul Apple (July 2011)

For each section:

- Thesis statement … to focus on the big idea
- Analytical outline … to guide the understanding
- Devotional questions … to encourage life application
- Representative quotations … to stimulate deeper insight

Acts 1:8 "*you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem; and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth*."

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OVERVIEW OF BOOK OF ACTS

INTRODUCTION:
Moving the red box from the Gospels to the one remaining historical book = Acts.

Title: The Acts of the Resurrected Jesus Christ Performed by His Chosen Apostles Through the Power of the Promised Holy Spirit

Authorship: Hopefully you have not forgotten the background information from our study two weeks ago on the Gospel According to Luke. Because Acts is the second half of his two part historical work.
You can see from the opening Prologue in **1:1-5** that Luke is continuing to write to Theophilus and taking up the account right where he had left off:

> *The first account I composed, Theophilus, about all that Jesus began to do and teach, [2] until the day when He was taken up, after He had by the Holy Spirit given orders to the apostles whom He had chosen. [3] To these He also presented Himself alive, after His suffering, by many convincing proofs, appearing to them over a period of forty days, and speaking of the things concerning the kingdom of God. [4] And gathering them together, He commanded them not to leave Jerusalem, but to wait for what the Father had promised, "Which," He said, "you heard of from Me; [5] for John baptized with water, but you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now."*

So the story begins not with a flurry of activity but with a season of **waiting** – waiting for the promised Holy Spirit who would provide the empowerment for the fulfillment of the Great Commission.

They had options:

- Could have gone back to their secular professions – fishing, whatever business had supported their family
- Could have prematurely launched their ministry efforts
- Could have stood in place star gazing after they saw Jesus ascend back to heaven

Flash back to the end of Luke's Gospel: **24:44-53**

> *Now He said to them, "These are My words which I spoke to you while I was still with you, that all things which are written about Me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled." [45] Then He opened their minds to understand the Scriptures, [46] and He said to them, "Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and rise again from the dead the third day; [47] and that repentance for forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in His name to all the nations, beginning from Jerusalem. [48] "You are witnesses of these things. [49] "And behold, I am sending forth the promise of My Father upon you; but you are to stay in the city until you are clothed with power from on high." [50] And He led them out as far as Bethany, and He lifted up His hands and blessed them. [51] And it came about that while He was blessing them, He parted from them. [52] And they returned to Jerusalem with great joy, [53] and were continually in the temple, praising God.*

You cannot underestimate the **dramatic transformation** of the band of disciples that can be attributed to a large part to their new fold understanding of the OT Scriptures. (John MacArthur) Yes, they were impacted by the **reality of the resurrection of their leader**. So where they had been fearful, and confused about His suffering and death, and in hiding, now we see them transformed into a bold witnessing force that is going to impact the world in spreading the good news about Jesus and God's plan of redemption. Certainly their empowerment is going to be dependent on **the coming of the Promised Holy Spirit.** But just as importantly they already have been revitalized by this new understanding of the prophetic presentation of the Messiah throughout the pages of OT scripture. What they had failed to understand during the earthly ministry of Christ, had now been made plain to them and they quickly became experts in those OT passages.

Remember their earlier confusion regarding the declarations of Jesus that He needed to suffer and die in Jerusalem:

> **Luke 9:43-45** *And they were all amazed at the greatness of God. But while everyone was marveling at all that He was doing, He said to His disciples, [44] "Let these words sink into your ears; for the Son of Man is going to be delivered into the hands of men." [45] But they did not understand this statement, and it was concealed from them so that they might not perceive it; and they were afraid to ask Him about this statement.*
>
> **Luke 18:31-34** *And He took the twelve aside and said to them, "Behold, we are going up to Jerusalem, and all things which are written through the prophets about the Son of Man will be accomplished. [32] "For He will be delivered to the Gentiles, and will be mocked and mistreated and spit upon, [33] and after they have scourged Him, they will kill Him; and the third day He will rise again." [34] And they understood none of these things, and this saying was hidden from them, and they did not comprehend the things that were said.*

But then the resurrected Jesus speaks to the two disciples on the road to Emmaus

> **Luke 24:25-27** *And He said to them, "O foolish men and slow of heart to believe in all that the prophets have spoken! [26] "Was it not necessary for the Christ to suffer these things and to enter into His glory?" [27] And beginning with Moses and with all the prophets, He explained to them the things concerning Himself in all the Scriptures.*

And then as we just saw at the end of **Chap. 24**, Jesus gave the same extended OT lesson to the larger group of disciples. What a transformation this new illumination provided.

As you read thru Acts you will be struck by how often they **quote from the OT** and draw their arguments from their historical Jewish roots. They drew great confidence from their understanding of God's redemptive plan begun way back in **Gen. 3:15** and now being worked out in their own witness to the death and resurrection of the Messiah.

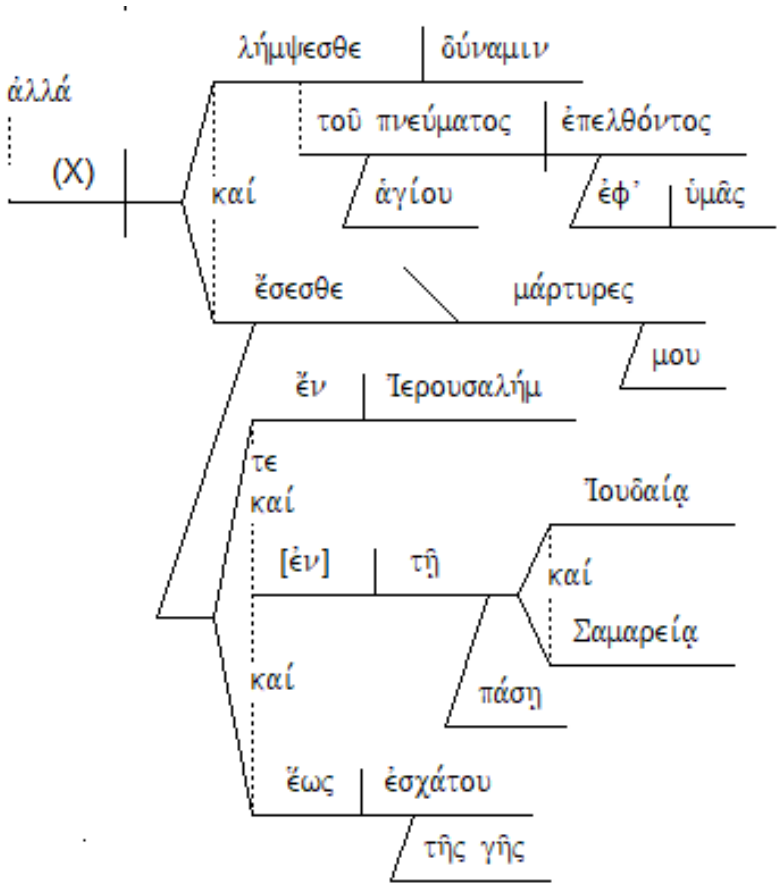
Do you want to be a bolder witness today for Jesus? Study those OT prophecies regarding the person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ. Gain a deeper understanding of the unfolding of God's kingdom agenda and redemptive purpose.

WHY STUDY THIS BOOK OF ACTS?

- To give proper emphasis to the **balanced presentation of the gospel** – including the crucifixion, resurrection and ascension of Jesus Christ – making sure that our gospel presentation is accurate, focused and impactful
- To fire up our passion to fulfill the **Great Commission Mandate** and to prepare us for persecution as we identify with Jesus Christ and aggressively proclaim Him
- To provide a balanced perspective on the ongoing ministry of the **Holy Spirit**
- To understand the **transitional nature** of the early church and discern what examples of methodology should be considered as normative for today – especially informing our ecclesiology regarding the structure and the operation of the local church
- To encourage us to support ongoing **missionary activity** throughout the world
- To give us confidence that the Sovereign Lord is **successfully building His church** against all opposition and is active in the world today through His church

When it comes to the structure of the book, just like last week when we studied the Gospel of John, all we need to do is to diagram one **key verse** from the book: **Acts 1:8**

> "*But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth.*"



Look at some of the Greek words used here – words where you are familiar with their English translation. [power (dynamite), Holy Spirit; witnesses (martyrs)]

Warren Wiersbe: "*Witness*" is a key word in the book of Acts and is used twenty-nine times as either averb or a noun. A witness is somebody who tells what he has seen and heard (**Acts 4:19-20**). When you are on the witness stand in court, the judge is not interested in your ideas or opinions;he only wants to hear what you know. Our English word *martyr* comes from the Greek word translated "*witness*," and many of God's people have sealed their witness by laying down their lives.

It's all about **empowerment for witnessing** as the gospel spreads from its beginnings in Jerusalem, then through Judea and Samaria, and finally to reach all throughout the earth as the story ends in Rome, the capital city of the world empire at that time.

This is a book about church growth – surprising and powerful and transformative church growth.

The **structure of the book** mirrors the structure of the key verse as it tracks the spread of the gospel.

2 Major Threads governing the outline:

- Geographical spread of the gospel – switch from Jerusalem to Antioch as center of operations
- Progression in terms of the central figures – from Peter to Paul

Look at the contrast between the two parts of the Book:

Chaps 1-12	**Chaps 13-28**
Jerusalem the center	Antioch the center
Jewish focus	Gentile focus
Peter – central figure	Paul – central figure
Peter imprisoned	Paul imprisoned

(1:1-11) Prologue – The Mission and Empowerment of the Church
Promise of the Holy Spirit and Ascension of Jesus

Illustration

A sailboat may be beautifully built, but without wind it goes nowhere.
The disciples had truth, training, and commission—
but until the Spirit came, they had no movement.
The Holy Spirit is the wind in the sails of the church.

I. (1:12 – 8:3) The Origin of the Christian Church in Jerusalem – Leadership of Peter

A. (**1:12-26**) Foundation for the Church —

- Preparation in Prayer in the upper room in Jerusalem – the city that will be the headquarters for the infant church
- Preparation in Replacing Judas with Matthias to complete the 12 Foundational Apostles

B. (**2:1-47**) Filling of the Church — The Coming of the Holy Spirit in Powerful Proclamation – Emphasis on the Holy Spirit — Peter's initial sermon showing continuity with OT prophecy
This is the foretaste of what Joel prophesied about – the complete fulfillment will take place in the end times **(2:16**)
C. (**3:1 – 5:42**) Fortification of the Church — Apostolic Ministry Focusing on Peter and John
- Healing of the lame man becomes a platform for proclaiming Jesus – miracles are not an end in themselves but serve to point to Christ and glorify Him
- Opposition begins immediately – arrests, threats, intimidation
- Principle: "*We must obey God rather than men*"

D. (**6:1 – 8:3**) Fulfillment in the Church of God's Progressive Plans — Jewish Persecution of the Church Confirms the Nation in Unbelief (Until Times of Gentiles Fulfilled) – Focusing on Stephen and his martyrdom

Transition: (8:1-3) The Persecution of the Church by Saul – Leads to spread of the church to Judea and Samaria

And Saul was in hearty agreement with putting him to death. And on that day a great persecution arose against the church in Jerusalem; and they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles. [2] And some devout men buried Stephen, and made loud lamentation over him. [3] But Saul began ravaging the church, entering house after house; and dragging off men and women, he would put them in prison.

Illustration

The church is like a fire.
Persecution was intended to extinguish it,
but instead it acted like wind on flame.
The more opposition came,
the brighter the gospel burned.

II. (8:4 – 12:25) The Early Development of the Christian Church in Judea and Samaria – Transition from Peter to Barnabas and Saul

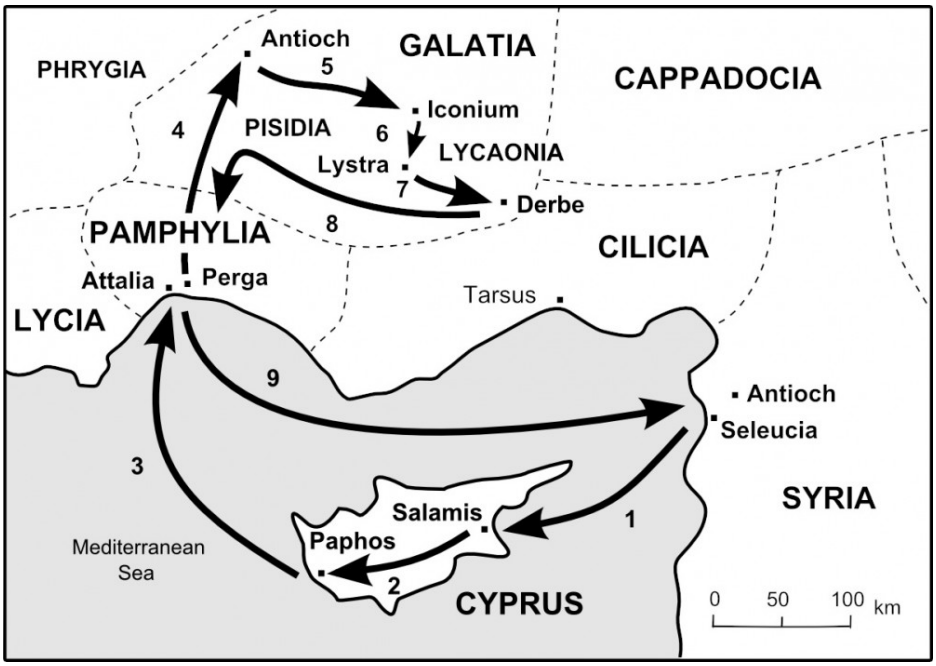
This section shows God breaking barriers:
- Geographic barriers
- Ethnic barriers
- Religious barriers

A. (**8:4-40**) New Territory for Expansion — Ministry Outreach of Philip the Evangelist
B. (**9:1-31**) New Leadership for the Church — Conversion and Initial Ministry of Paul = Apostle to Gentiles
C. (**9:32 – 11:18**) New Mindset of Accepting Gentiles on Equal Footing with Jews – Healing Ministry of Peter With a Changed Perspective Towards Gentiles – Interaction with Cornelius
D. (**11:19 – 12:25**) New Center of Operations — Teaming of Saul and Barnabas to Bring Relief to Persecuted Brethren in Judea from New Headquarters in Antioch

Transition: (12:24-25) Successful Mission and Return of Barnabas and Saul to Antioch

III. (13:1 – 21:16) The Spread of the Christian Church to the Ends of the Earth – Missionary Journeys of Paul

A. (**13:1 – 15:35**) Paul's First Missionary Journey and Jerusalem Council (47-48 AD)
[maps taken from Ralph Wilson]



B. (**15:36 – 18:22**) Paul's Second Missionary Journey (50-53 AD)

C. (**18:23 – 21:16**) Paul's Third Missionary Journey (57 AD)

(22:1 – 28:31) Epilogue

A. (**21:1 – 26:32**) The Defense of the Church

Paul appears before:

- the Jewish council
- Felix
- Festus
- Agrippa

Again and again, Paul turns trials into testimony.
Instead of defending himself only, he proclaims Christ.
This is a remarkable section. Chains do not silence him.

Illustration

A courtroom is usually a place of accusation. For Paul, it became a pulpit.
The very place meant to stop the gospel became a stage for it.

Application

Sometimes your greatest witness comes in hardship.
Hospitals, legal trouble, grief, workplace opposition— all can become pulpits.
Acts teaches: Your trial may be your testimony platform.

B. (**27:1 – 28:31**) Paul's Journey to Rome – The Unstoppable Nature of the Church

Paul survives:

- Storms
- Shipwreck
- Snake Bite
- Imprisonment

Yet he arrives in Rome – the gospel reaches the heart of the empire.

The book ends abruptly – No conclusion to Paul's trial and imprisonment?
Why? Because the mission of the church is still continuing – You and I have been handed the baton of witnessing by the power of the Holy Spirit – declaring the same gospel message of the crucified and resurrected Lord Jesus Christ

> **4:12** "*And there is salvation in no one else; for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men, by which we must be saved*."

This is an **exclusive message**. This is God's one and only plan for redemption. This message must be proclaimed to the ends of the earth today.

As you read through the book of Acts, what jumps out at you is the **amazing spread of the gospel**. You have the multiplication of disciples; and then that morphs exponentially to the multiplication of entire churches. Let's track briefly the starting point and then how the Christian church progresses:

We should expect to find strong opposition to church growth as Satan is active in trying to thwart God's purposes. So from a natural perspective, church growth will look surprising.
But remember that Christ has promised to successfully build His church – even the gates of Hell will not be able to stand against God's ordained church program (**Matt. 16:18**).

1:15 – We start in Jerusalem with a gathering of the Apostles and initial disciples totaling only **120 people** – hardly a force that you would expect could have a world-wide impact.

2:41 – Response to the powerful preaching of Peter on the Day of Pentecost --
So then, those who had received his word were baptized; and there were added that day about three thousand souls. A healthy start --
Required the miracle of foreign languages so that all of the pilgrims from outlying regions that had gathered in Jerusalem to celebrate the Feast of Pentecost were able to understand the message in their own language

2:47 – In addition the Lord was daily adding converts as the church pursued their discipleship activities – So the body of believers keeps growing – but all contained in Jerusalem

4:4 – We see initial opposition in the form of imprisonment of Peter and John, but the growing movement cannot be stopped.

> *But many of those who had heard the message believed; and the number of the men came to be about five thousand*.

4:33 – Characterization of their bold preaching – Growth always attributed to the power of the Holy Spirit and the grace of God

> *And with great power the apostles were giving witness to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and abundant grace was upon them all.*

5:12-16 – Abundant healing miracles at the hands of the apostles

And at the hands of the apostles many signs and wonders were taking place among the people; and they were all with one accord in Solomon's portico. [13] *But none of the rest dared to associate with them; however, the people held them in high esteem.* [14] *And all the more believers in the Lord, multitudes of men and women, were constantly added to their number;* [15] *to such an extent that they even carried the sick out into the streets, and laid them on cots and pallets, so that when Peter came by, at least his shadow might fall on any one of them.* [16] *And also the people from the cities in the vicinity of Jerusalem were coming together, bringing people who were sick or afflicted with unclean spirits; and they were all being healed.*

Now there are so many additions to the church that the historian Luke has given up trying to count them**.** **5:28** – *they filled Jerusalem with their teaching*

Look at Gamaliel's advice – **5:39** -- *if it is of God, you will not be able to overthrow them; or else you may even be found fighting against God.*

6:1 – another reference to the disciples increasing in number – created a logistical problem in the distribution of food to the needy widows; required increased organization and administration; huge task for the church leaders of staying on point to indoctrinate these young disciples

6:7 – made inroads into the Jewish priesthood -- *And the word of God kept on spreading; and the number of the disciples continued to increase greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests were becoming obedient to the faith.*

8:7 -- Scattering of the church due to persecution – so we see them preaching now in Samaria -- *For in the case of many who had unclean spirits, they were coming out of them shouting with a loud voice; and many who had been paralyzed and lame were healed*. – Connection between physical healing and spiritual healing

8:12 – those responding to the preaching of Philip -- *But when they believed Philip preaching the good news about the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were being baptized, men and women alike.* **Vs. 25** – continued to preach *to many villages of the Samaritans*

9:31 – Summary statement -- *So the church throughout all Judea and Galilee and Samaria enjoyed peace, being built up; and, going on in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, it continued to increase*. – Unique combination of the attributes of Peace, Fear, and Comfort (or strengthening / encouragement)

9:42 Many believed in Joppa -- *And* [Peter's raising up of Tabitha = Dorcas in Greek] *became known all over Joppa, and many believed in the Lord.*

Chap. 10 – the gift of the Holy Spirit poured out on all the Gentiles associated with Cornelius who had believed the gospel message – Jews forced to conclude that *God has granted to the Gentiles also the repentance that leads to life* (**11:18**) – Both faith and repentance are only possible by means of the grace of God and according to His sovereign will

11:21 *a large number* [of Greeks in Antioch] *who believed turned to the Lord* --

11:24 *considerable numbers were brought to the Lord* – once again you had a huge indoctrination project to teach such considerable numbers – Paul ministered there for a year (**11:26**)

Chap. 12 – persecution led by Herod – had James the brother of John put to death with a sword (**12:2**); also imprisoned Peter whom the Lord miraculously freed
12:23-24 -- *And immediately an angel of the Lord struck him because he did not give God the glory, and he was eaten by worms and died. [24] But the word of the Lord continued to grow and to be multiplied.* Quite a contrast between Satan's agenda and God's blessing

13:48-49 – focus of the gospel turning towards the salvation of the Gentiles -- *And when the Gentiles heard this, they began rejoicing and glorifying the word of the Lord; and as many as had been appointed to eternal life believed. [49] And the word of the Lord was being spread through the whole region.* **Sovereignty of God** in salvation magnified

14:1 large number believing in Iconium

16:5 -- *So the churches were being strengthened in the faith, and were increasing in number daily.*

17:4 – at Thessalonica -- *And some of* [the Jews] *were persuaded and joined Paul and Silas, along with a great multitude of the God-fearing Greeks and a number of the leading women.*

17:12 – at Berea -- *Many of them therefore believed, along with a number of prominent Greek women and men.*

19:20 – People renouncing the practice of magic to embrace the gospel -- *So the word of the Lord was growing mightily and prevailing.*
28: 24 right up until his final ministry while imprisoned in Rome you had the contrasting responses to Paul's same message: *And some were being persuaded by the things spoken, but others would not believe.*

So we have seen the results of the preaching of the gospel – multitudes being saved; churches being planted and strengthened and then multiplying
How do you explain such success? What was the early church's model for church growth? Compare that to the methodology of church growth experts today?
What should we be putting into practice in our ministry and what in Acts should we see as transitional and not normative for our day? These are the questions we want to probe in the remainder of our study this morning.

2:42 – Provides an <u>initial summary</u> of 4 key essentials of a healthy church:

1. Indoctrination – A Learning Church
"*to the apostles' teaching*"

Importance of doctrine and theology – Massive indoctrination program begun at Pentecost with baby believers who had a hunger to hear God's message
Aspect of submission to teaching God has provided; important to study on our own as well; but we need teaching from gifted leaders
Look at the access we have to the apostles' teaching; so many opportunities to learn and grow
Not for knowledge sake but for growth and ministry

2. Integration of Fellowship – A Loving Church

"*and to fellowship,*"

Sharing their new common life in Jesus Christ (**1 John 1:1-4**); Includes the sharing of their material possessions to meet the needs of others

3. Intimacy of Worship (integrated with fellowship) – **A Liturgical Church** (not high liturgy!) – Communion Service – simplicity of the elements of bread and wine

"*to the breaking of bread*" **Acts 20:7; 1 Cor. 11**

The observance of the **Lord's Supper** at the close of their agape meal; we gather together to remember the death and resurrection of Christ and look forward to His coming again;
Did not just see each other on Sundays … but during the week as well; spent a lot of time together; not burdensome

4. Intercessory Prayer – a Looking-to-the-Lord Church

"*and to prayer.*"

Acts 1:14 – a focus right from the start
The Privilege of Prayer
The Expectation of God answering our prayers
Perseverance in prayers – takes a long time for many requests – maintain the fervency

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[You could look at Mark Dever: The Nine Marks of a Healthy Church

Mark #1: Expositional Preaching
Mark #2: Biblical Theology
Mark #3: The Gospel
Mark #4: A Biblical Understanding of Conversion
Mark #5: A Biblical Understanding of Evangelism
Mark #6: A Biblical Understanding of Church Membership
Mark #7: Biblical Church Discipline
Mark #8: A Concern for Discipleship and Growth
Mark #9: Biblical Church Leadership]

I have my own 9 Marks:

1) **Focus on the Gospel Message** – Preach Jesus Christ – His Crucifixion and especially His **Resurrection**

Read thru the book of Acts and look for every reference to the resurrection of Jeus – that was at the heart of much of their argumentation

Proper understanding of:

- Conversion
- Faith and Repentance
- Process of Evangelism

So many misrepresentations today of the gospel message.

John MacArthur: They had a **transcendent message** – It is the word of truth that gives life – they preached Christ – crucified and risen from the dead and Christ as Lord -- went everywhere without regard for what culture it went to – look at all the cultures represented at Pentecost – same message preached to them all – same call to repent and believe the gospel – because they all had a universal problem = sin and universal need for deliverance and need of the one and only Savior – if the message isn't valid anywhere and everywhere in the world, then it isn't valid anywhere

Our mandate is the same as the apostles and the early church
What is relevant is not the changing trends of culture but the **unchanging Word of God.**

Summary of the message of the gospel:

- **13:39** – Paul – through Him everyone who believes is delivered from bondage
  and through Him everyone who believes is freed from all things, from which you could not be freed through the Law of Moses.
- **15**:11 -- Peter – saved thru grace – the way that people naturally think about salvation is false because men approach salvation from a works orientation
  But we believe that we are saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus, in the same way as they also are.

2) Preach Expositionally relying on the Authority of God's Word

You find a large number of gospel presentations in Acts of varying length. About 10 full sermons; Other brief statements; as well as some summaries. A lot of Exposition of OT prophetic passages and applications drawn from the OT history of the nation of Israel.
Look at how preachers today like to focus in on the **felt needs** of their congregation and design **topical messages** that are more like the self help books you would find in any bookstore.

- How to deal with anxiety
- How to be successful and productive
- How to live a fulfilling life
- How to improve your marriage
- How to better manage your time

I am not saying that these would not be helpful lessons, but their topical nature makes these messages more **man-centered** than God-centered. To make healthy and strong disciples, you need a consistent diet of expositional messages that edify and provide theological depth.

Your theology needs to dictate your methodology not the other way around.

3) Develop Mature Disciples who will Multiply and Persevere even in the face of Persecution

You might think that persecution would kill a new church movement. Not so. Proved to be an effective strategy for church growth. In fact God was behind the initial persecution of the believers in Jerusalem that drove them out to bring the gospel to Judea and Samaria. **(8:1-4)**

Some church growth advocates think that you should be overly cautious against saying anything that would **offend** your audience. So they even tone down critical doctrines like sin and repentance and judgment. That was not the pattern of the NT apostles. They went so far as to directly charge the Jews with guilt for the crucifixion of Jesus – They did not fear any persecution that might arise. They understood what it meant to take up the cross and follow their Master. They gloried in the preaching of the cross.

> **2:22-23** -- *Men of Israel, listen to these words: Jesus the Nazarene, a man attested to you by God with miracles and wonders and signs which God performed through Him in your midst, just as you yourselves know-- [23] this Man, delivered up by the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God, you nailed to a cross by the hands of godless men and put Him to death.*

Such preaching made people **uncomfortable** … but it brought conviction of sin – **vs. 37**

> *Now when they heard this, they were pierced to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, "Brethren, what shall we do?"*

The comfort of unbelievers was not the goal of the apostolic preaching.

One of the leading voices of the Seeker Church movement has lamented that his approach was not effective in maturing believers along the path of true discipleship:

> Bill Hybels — admission that the model failed to produce disciples
> "We made a mistake."
> "Some of the stuff that we have put millions of dollars into… wasn't helping people that much."
> This is especially striking because it is not a critic speaking.
> It is the movement's own leading architect.
> The deeper concern is that the methodology proved effective at **gathering crowds** but less effective at **forming mature believers**.

4) Understand the Nature of the Church Assembly

Here is where we truly must differ with the approach taken by the Seeker Church Movement. They design their services to attract unbelievers – allowing for a pragmatic approach – Asking <u>what works</u> rather than <u>what do we see modeled in the Scriptures</u>. There was nothing the first century church did just to attract large numbers of spectators or to feed a lust for entertainment.

It is a false presupposition to think that unbelievers are not so much rejecting Christ as they are rejecting traditional church culture. Therefore, if we can conduct some surveys and get to know our target audience and design a culture that is acceptable to them, gospel results will follow. What you end up with is a large number of unbelievers in your church assembly.

The apostles maintained a **commitment to a regenerate congregation** – a church is an assembly of true believers and true worshipers – not designed for unbelievers; the called out gathered

people of God who come together to worship and be edified. Your church practices will look different based on your church composition and goals. Yes we want unbelievers to come in and observe and be impacted, but not at the expense of sacrificing the critical functions that edify believers. So NO, don't limit your sermons to 20 minute collections of funny stories. Don't minimize prayer. Don't neglect the practice of communion, etc.

5) Practice Church Discipline when necessary to Protect the Purity of the Church

Look at the Extreme discipline of Ananias and Sapphira; This instilled the fear of the Lord in the congregation. Not exactly a seeker friendly approach.

Matt. 18 – first instruction given by the Lord to the church – you must confront sin; put out unrepentant sinners; **vs. 13** – ideal situation – you don't want unbelievers comfortable in the presence of believers; yet there was respect for the character of the church; **vs. 14** – multitudes were constantly added! Church discipline is actually a strategy for church growth just as we saw with persecution. Some of these things we learn from the scriptural examples are counter-intuitive.

6) Distinguish between Transitional and Normative.
For example: is it required that we meet in houses since that is largely what we see in the book of Acts? Is it wrong to have church buildings?

Or a better example: how do you explain the sign gifts of healing and tongues and instances in Acts where it seems like the gift of the Holy Spirit comes as a secondary act?

[cf. article by John Piper –
https://www.desiringgod.org/messages/are-signs-and-wonders-for-today]

One view argues that signs and wonders (like healings) were designed by God to help people recognize and believe in the Son of God and then to vindicate the authority of his apostles as they laid the foundation for the church with their inspired teachings and writings. After the apostles died and their writings were gathered in the New Testament, the place of signs and wonders was past, and we should not seek them today.

The other view argues that signs and wonders should be sought and performed today in Jesus' name. The reason we don't see so many is because of how little expectancy there is in the church. But God is at work doing a new thing in our day awakening the church to the reality of these things.

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7) Follow the Biblical Model for Church Leadership
You have to first understand the biblical model. Many Christian preachers and institutions don't think there is any biblical model.

Two things make up leadership: **example and instruction**. You teach and you model what you teach. It is critical in the life of a church that those who are in leadership are qualified. It's not about personality, money, business skill – it's all about spiritual qualification and sound doctrine. The church grows under the influence of godly leaders.

Chap. 6 – we are instructing thousands of people; that must be the priority of the apostles; we can't take over this food problem; select seven men to distribute the food – what would you think might be their qualifications? Even this task is qualified in a **spiritual way** – men of good reputation, full of the Spirit and of wisdom – first deacons –
Result – vs. 7 – church kept growing

Look at how both the missionary teams and the establishment of leaders in the local churches planted by the apostles – both emphasized the plurality of leadership. The church was never intended to be a one-man-focused hierarchical leadership style. The model is servant leadership. And the way to ensure that is the mutual teamwork of a plurality of elders working together under the Head of the Church – the Chief Shepherd – our Lord Jesus Christ.

The Book of Acts gives repeated evidence that leadership in the early church was shared, plural, and team-oriented, rather than centered in one man as the sole authority over a local congregation. This becomes one of the strongest biblical patterns for local church leadership. Here are the clearest examples:

1) The Jerusalem church was led by a **team of apostles**
At the birth of the church, leadership was never vested in one individual.
In **Acts 2–5**, the church in Jerusalem is consistently led by the apostles (plural).
"the apostles' teaching" (**Acts 2:42**)
"the apostles were performing many signs and wonders" (**Acts 2:43**)
"the apostles gave testimony" (**Acts 4:33**)
Even though figures like Peter often emerge as spokespersons, Luke consistently emphasizes corporate leadership.
This is an important principle: prominent voices may exist without creating a one-man leadership model.

2) **Acts 6** — leadership problems were solved by a **leadership team**
When the church faced the widow-care crisis, the response was collective discernment.
"the twelve summoned the congregation" (**Acts 6:2**)
The apostles function together, then appoint seven qualified men to share ministry responsibility.
This is a major teamwork model:

- shared diagnosis of the problem
- shared decision making
- delegated leadership
- complementary roles
- No single apostle acts alone.
- This passage strongly shows that healthy growth required distributed leadership.

3) **Acts 11:30** — the first explicit mention of elders is plural
This is one of the clearest verses.
"*sending it in charge of Barnabas and Saul to the elders*" (**Acts 11:30**)
Notice Luke does not say the elder.
The relief offering from Antioch is delivered to elders (plural) in Judea.
This is the first explicit elder reference in Acts, and it is already plural.

4) Sending out of Barnabas and Saul by church at Antioch

5) **Acts 14:23** — **elders appointed in every church**
This is perhaps the strongest text.
"*They had appointed elders for them in every church*" (NASB)
The grammar is important:
church = singular
elders = plural
In each local church, Paul and Barnabas appoint multiple elders.
Different words are used to refer to the same leaders:

- **Elders** – maturity and wisdom
- **Pastors / Shepherds** – teaching, nurturing, edifying
- **Bishops / Overseers** – administrative aspect

This appears to be Paul's missionary pattern.
It is hard to argue from Acts that Paul established single-pastor churches as the normative structure.

6) **Acts 15** — the Jerusalem Council models shared leadership
This chapter is a major example of teamwork in leadership.
The doctrinal crisis over circumcision is not settled by one leader.
Instead:
"*the apostles and the elders came together*" (**Acts 15:6**)
This is a council of leaders:
apostles
elders
the church body
There is discussion, testimony, scriptural reasoning, and a corporate decision.
Even though James speaks prominently near the end, the final conclusion is **communal:**
"it seemed good to the apostles and the elders, with the whole church" (**Acts 15:22**)
This is one of the clearest anti–one-man leadership passages in the New Testament.

7) **Acts 20:17** — the Ephesian church had multiple elders
Paul summons: "*the elders of the church*" (Acts 20:17)
Again:
one church in Ephesus
multiple elders
Then in **verse 28** he addresses them all:
"*the Holy Spirit has made you overseers*"
This shows plurality not only in title but in **shepherding responsibility**.

They collectively pastor the flock.

8) **Acts 21:18** — Jerusalem still led by multiple elders
Later in Acts: "*Paul went in with us to James, and all the elders were present*"
Again, James may be prominent, but he is not portrayed as a lone ruler.
He functions among a recognized body of elders.

Leadership principles Acts teaches
From these examples, Acts presents several leadership principles:
1. Shared wisdom and responsibility
Plural elders provide broader discernment.
"*in abundance of counselors there is victory*" (**Prov. 11:14**)

2. Mutual Accountability
Shared leadership protects the church from authoritarianism and blind spots.
No one leader is beyond correction.

3. Complementary gifting
Different leaders bring different strengths:
- teaching
- shepherding
- administration
- mercy ministry
- mission strategy

Acts 6 especially models this. As does the church at Antioch in Acts 13.

4. Leadership multiplication
Church growth in Acts always seems to require more leaders, not more dependence on one leader. Look at how Antioch can send out missionary teams of qualified leaders and yet still have enough leaders to carry on the local ministry. They did not have to go recruit a new Senior Pastor.
Growth and plurality go together.

Important balance
Acts does show leading personalities:
- Peter in early chapters
- James in Jerusalem
- Paul on missionary journeys

But prominence is not the same as hierarchy.

Acts distinguishes between:
- lead voices
- sole authority

The first is common.
The second is not the normal pattern.

8) Be Missionary Minded with a Great Commission Emphasis

How do you stop from despairing of this great task = to all the world?? It seems like we should just give up – Encouragement – **behind it all is God**
It's God who calls – **2:39** – all whom the Lord our God will Call – those are the ones who will end up calling on the Lord for salvation

11:18 – God is the one who grants repentance to life to the Gentiles
13:48 – God is the one who appoints people to eternal life
14:27 – it is God who opens the door to faith to the Gentiles
Even in particular cases –

- Note how Luke talks about the conversion of Lydia – **16:14** – *the Lord opened Lydia's heart* to respond to Paul's message

9) Rely on Prayer and the Empowerment of the Holy Spirit by the Grace of God

The Spirit empowers:

- preaching
- courage
- guidance
- mission
- miracles

FINAL ILLUSTRATION
Imagine dropping a stone into a still pond.
The impact creates ripples that move outward.
That is Acts.
The resurrection is the stone.
Pentecost is the first ripple.
The church continues the expanding circles.
And the ripples are still moving.

OUTLINE OF ACTS

THE SPREAD OF THE GOSPEL

THE ACTS OF THE RESURRECTED JESUS CHRIST PERFORMED BY HIS CHOSEN APOSTLES THROUGH THE POWER OF THE PROMISED HOLY SPIRIT

Key Verse: **Acts 1:8**
"*you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be My witnesses*:
I. (1:1 – 8:3) *both in Jerusalem,*
II. (8:4 - 12:25) *and in all Judea and Samaria,*
III. (13:1 – 21:16) *and even to the remotest part of the earth.*"
IV. (21:17 – 28:28) Final trials and arrival at Rome
(28:30-31) Epilogue

2 Major Threads governing the outline:
- Geographical spread of the gospel – switch from Jerusalem to Antioch as center of operations
- Progression in terms of the central figures – from Peter to Paul

I. (1:1 – 8:3) Origin of the Christian Church in Jerusalem – Leadership of Peter and Founding of the Church

A. (1:1-26) Foundation for the Church -- Commissioned to Witness – Preparations for Pentecost – Emphasis on **Jesus Christ** and His Instructions – Home base in Jerusalem
1. (1:1-5) Commissioned to Witness – Prologue
(1:1a) Introduction: Connection to the Gospel of Luke
a. (1:1-2) The Acts of the Resurrected Jesus Christ
b. (1:2b-4a) The Acts of the Chosen Apostles
c. (1:4b-5) The Acts of the Promised Holy Spirit
2. (1:4-11) Commissioned to Witness – Final Instructions -- Great Commission Mandate
a. (1:4-5) Commanding them to wait for the empowerment of the Holy Spirit
b. (1:6-8) Correcting their understanding of the nature and focus of their mission
c. (1:9-11) Communicating the urgency and ultimate success of their mission
3. (1:12-26) Commissioned to Witness – Final Preparations – 2 Key Areas
a. (1:12-14) Strengthen your spiritual relationships – Draw close to God and to your partners in gospel ministry
b. (1:15-26) Submit to God's sovereign plan – Which involves following the blueprint of God's revelation

B. (2:1-47) Filling of the Church -- The Coming of the Holy Spirit in Powerful Proclamation – Emphasis on the **Holy Spirit** -- Peter's initial sermon showing continuity with OT prophecy
1. (2:1-4) Arrival of the Day of Pentecost – Powerful Proclamation in Tongues
2. (2:5-13) Analysis of the Day of Pentecost – Proclamation of the Greatness of God
3. (2:14-36) Authentication of Jesus as the Promised Messiah and Head of the Church
a. (2:14-24) Emphasis on the Prophetic Fulfillment of the Messianic Age
b. (2:22-32) Emphasis on the Resurrection of Jesus Christ
c. (2:33-36) Emphasis on the Ongoing Activity of the Exalted Jesus Christ
4. (2:37-42) Application of the Salvation Message – Importance of Repentance and Water Baptism
5. (2:43-47) Assembly Life – Church community should be a happening place

C. (3:1 – 5:42) Fortification of the Church -- Apostolic Ministry Focusing on **Peter and John**

1. (3:1-26) Sign Miracles Validate Gospel Proclaimers -- Open the Door for Gospel Preaching and Re-Offer of the Kingdom
    a. (:1-10) Healing by the Power of Christ
    b. (:11-16) Preaching the Glory of Christ
    c. (:17-26) Offering the Blessing of Christ and His Kingdom
2. (4:1-22) Source of Authority Established for Gospel Proclaimers
    a. (:1-12) Exclusivity of the Gospel
    b. (:13-22) Obeying God Rather than Man
3. (4:23-31) Sovereignty of God Emphasized in Corporate Prayer as the Key to Boldness for Gospel Proclaimers
4. (4:32 – 5:11) Spiritual Hypocrisy in the Church Condemned
5. (5:12-42) Spiritual Power Prevails in Persevering Gospel Preaching – Despite Futile Opposition

D. (6:1 – 8:3) Fulfillment in the Church of God's Progressive Plans -- Jewish Persecution of the Church Confirms the Nation in Unbelief (Until Times of Gentiles Fulfilled) – Focusing on **Stephen**

1. (6:1-15) Stephen's Introduction and Ministry – Profile of Spirit Filled Christian Servant
2. (7:1-53) Stephen's Defense before the Sanhedrin – OT Survey of Failures of Nation of Israel
    a. (7:1-8) God's Dealings with Abraham – Full of Faith
    b. (7:9-16) God's Dealings with Joseph – Full of Wisdom
    c. (7:17-43) God's Dealings with Moses – Full of Power
    d. (7:44-50) God's Dealings with respect to a Tabernacle / Temple
    e. (7:51-53) Application to Sanhedrin
3. (7:54-60) Stephen's Martyrdom

Transition: (8:1-3) Persecution of the Church by Saul – Leads to spread of church to Judea and Samaria

II. (8:4 – 12:25) Early Development of the Christian Church in Judea and Samaria – Transition from Leadership of Peter to Barnabas and Saul

A. (8:4-40) New Territory for Expansion -- Ministry Outreach of Philip the Evangelist

1. (:4-24) Charlatans like Simon the Sorcerer Exposed – Inroads into Samaria
2. (:25-40) Conversion of Ethiopian eunuch – Inroads into Judea

B. (9:1-31) New Leadership for the Church -- Conversion and Initial Ministry of Paul = Apostle to Gentiles

1. (:1-19) God's Surprising Choice for Ministry – Conversion of Saul in Damascus – Role of Ananias
2. (:19-30) Challenges in Initiating New Ministries – Paul in Damascus and Jerusalem
3. (:31) Progress Report: Peace and Growth throughout all Judea and Galilee and Samaria

C. (9:32 – 11:18) New Mindset of Accepting Gentiles on Equal Footing with Jews – Healing Ministry of Peter With a Changed Perspective Towards Gentiles

1. (9:32-43) Two Examples of Church Growth in Remote Cities of Judea
    a. (:32-35) Aeneas Healed – Church Growth in Lydda and Sharon
    b. (:36-43) Dorcas Restored to Life – Church Growth in Joppa
2. (10:1 – 11:18) Gospel Comes to Gentiles Without Partiality – Conversion of Household of Cornelius

D. (11:19 – 12:25) New Center of Operations -- Teaming of Saul and Barnabas to Bring Relief to Persecuted Brethren in Judea from New Headquarters in Antioch

1. (11:19–30) Church at Antioch Sending Team of Barnabas and Saul to Aid Brethren in Judea
2. (12:1-23) Persecution in Jerusalem by Herod

Transition: (12:24-25) Successful Mission and Return of Barnabas and Saul to Antioch

III. (13:1 – 21:16) Spread of the Christian Church to the Ends of the Earth – 3 Missionary Journeys of Paul and the Jerusalem Council

A. (13:1 – 14:28) Paul's First Missionary Journey
   1. (13:1-12) Missionary Manual – Missionaries are sent out to rescue lost souls from the domain of darkness with the truth of God's Word
      a. (13:1-3) Deployment Process
      b. (13:4-12) Battle for Souls
   2. (13:13) Impact of Desertion on Christian Ministry
   3. (13:14-41) Jewish Gospel – 7 Step Gospel Presentation
      a. (13:14-16a) The Approach – The Missionary Mindset
      b. (13:16b) The Address – The Missionary Cultural Sensitivity
      c. (13:17-22) The Authentication of the Message – The Missionary Apologetic
      d. (13:23-25) The Announcement of the Arrival of the Savior – The Missionary Focus
      e. (13:26-29) The Awakening of Guilt – The Missionary Hard Truth
      f. (13:30-37) The Awakening of Hope – The Missionary Good News
      g. (13:38-41) The Application – The Missionary Invitation
   4. (13:42 – 14:7) Contrasting Responses to the Gospel –
      a. (13:42-52) 3 Stages of the Response to Paul's Preaching in Antioch
         (1) (13:42-44) Initial Hunger – Result: Continuing in Grace
         (2) (13:45-49) Digested Response – Result: Spreading the Gospel
         (3) (13:50-52) Long Term Impact – Result: Rejoicing in the Holy Spirit
      b. (14:1-7) 3 Stages of the Response to Paul's Preaching in Iconium
         (1) (14:1) Initial Positive Response – Both Jews and Gentiles
         (2) (14:2-4) Heated Debate Due to Opposition Instigated by Jealous Jews
         (3) (14:5-7) Long Term Impact – Persecuted Preachers Advance the Word of God Despite Organized Opposition
   5. (14:8-18) Three Keys to God Receiving the Glory
      a. (14:8-10) Miracle of Healing – Faith in Jesus Christ Accomplishes the Impossible
      b. (14:11-13) Mistake of Hero Worship – Fickle Crowds Worship the Human Instruments
      c. (14:14-18) Ministration of Humility – Faithful Ministers of the Gospel Redirect Misplaced Praise
   6. (14:19-28) Three Persistent Activities of Pioneer Missionaries
      a. (14:19-20a) Stay on Course … Never Quit … Persevere
      b. (14:20b-23) Stress the Fundamentals
         (1) Expanding to New Frontiers
         (2) Evangelizing the Territory
         (3) Edifying the Young Believers to the Point of Effective Discipleship
         (4) Encouraging Maturity and Perseverance in the Faith
         (5) Enlightening Converts Regarding the Reality of Suffering
         (6) Effecting Plurality of Elder Church Shepherding
         (7) Exemplifying Spiritual Disciplines
         (8) Entrusting Them to the Lord
      c. (14:24-28) Share Their Vision and Give God the Glory

B. (15:1-35) Jerusalem Council – Uniting Christian Jews and Gentiles
   1. (15:1-21) Combating Legalism
      a. (15:1) The Potentially Divisive Issue – What is the Relationship Between Salvation and the OT Law of Moses?
      b. (15:2) The Wise Forum for Resolution – Centralized Church Council of Recognized Spiritual Leaders
      c. (15:3-4) The Undeniable Facts – How is God Working in This Age?
      d. (15:5) The Stubborn Confusion – Blind Loyalty to Legalistic Thinking

e. (15:6-21) The Convincing Testimony and Judgments

2. (15:22-35) Partnership in the Gospel – Positive Example

C. (15:36 – 18:23) Paul's Second Missionary Journey

1. (15:36-41) Partnership in the Gospel – Negative Example – Split Between Paul and Barnabas
2. (16:1-5) Adding Timothy to the Missionary Team – 3 Stages in Timothy's Integration
   a. (16:1-2) Preparation – Promising Recruit
   b. (16:3) Commissioning – Precautionary Ritual
   c. (16:4-5) Service – Progress Report
3. (16:6-15) Macedonian Call and Salvation of Lydia –
   2 Sovereign Initiatives that are Essential for Gospel Fruit
   a. (16:6-10) Opening Doors
   b. (16:11-15) Opening Hearts
4. (16:16-40) Dealing with Satanic Forces
   a. (16:16-24) Dealing with Demonic Religious Profiteering
      (1) (16:16-18) Action = Exorcising Demons
      (2) (16:19-24) Reaction = Enraging Deceivers – 5 Characteristics of Enraged Deceivers
         (a) (:19a) They <u>Increase</u> Their Wealth by Exploitation and Greed
         (b) (:19b) They <u>Intimidate</u> the Righteous with Strong Arm Tactics
         (c) (:20-21) They <u>Invent</u> Malicious Lies and False Charges
         (d) (:22-23a) They <u>Inflict</u> Cruelty from the Protection of a Mob Mentality
         (e) (:23b-24) They <u>Inflate</u> Their Egotistical Sense of Power and Jurisdiction
   b. (16:25-40) Deliverance From the Shackles of Satan and Sin
      (1) (16:25-34) Deliverance Spreads the Joy of Salvation to New Converts
      (2) (16:35-40) Deliverance Sparks Public Rebuke and Private Reassurance
5. (17:1-15) Tale of Two Cities – Truth vs Tradition
   a. (17:1-10a) Trouble in Thessalonica – Jealousy for the Security of Man's Traditions
   b. (17:10b-15) Truth Seekers in Berea – Passion for the Truth of God's Word
6. (17:16-34) No Room for Tolerance About Who God Is
   a. (17:16-23) The Approach in Athens
   b. (17:24-29) The Argument – Based on the Uniqueness of God – 6 Distinctive Truths About God
      (1) (:24a) God is Unique as Our Powerful Creator
      (2) (:24b) God is Unique as the Lord of Heaven and Earth
      (3) (:24c) God is Unique in His Transcendence
      (4) (:25) God is Unique in His Self-Existence / Self-Sufficiency – Sustainer of All
      (5) (:26) God is Unique in His Providential Governance
      (6) (:27-28) God is Unique in His Immanence, in His Self-Revelation and in His Redemptive Purposes
   c. (17:30-34) The Application and Response – Exposing Worthless Religious Philosophy
      (1) (17:30-31) The Application – Imminency of Judgement Demands Immediate Repentance Because the Judge is the Resurrected Jesus
      (2) (17:32-34) The Response – 3 Different Responses to the Message of the Resurrection
7. (18:1-11) Encouragement in Corinth – 4 Compass Points of Your Ministry Mindset
   a. (18:1-4) Ministry Identity – Encouragement from New Ministry Partners
   b. (18:5-6) Ministry Focus -- Encouragement from Old Ministry Partners and Financial Supporters
   c. (18:7-8) Ministry Momentum – Encouragement from New Converts
   d. (18:9-11) Ministry Perseverance – Encouragement from God Himself
8. (18:12-23) Ministry Cycle
   a. (18:7-11) Calling – Aggressive Ministry
   b. (18:12-13) Crisis – Unprovoked Attack
   c. (18:14-17) Climax of Deliverance – Providential Deliverance
   d. (18:18-23) Cycle Renewed – Ministry Expansion – Transition to 3rd Missionary Journey

D. (18:23 – 21:16) Paul's Third Missionary Journey

1. (18:24-28) Nine Characteristics of the Ideal Preacher Exemplified by Apollos
   a. (18:24a) Polished Speaking Ability
   b. (18:24b) Powerful Bible Expert
   c. (18:25a) Faithful Disciple
   d. (18:25b) Passionate for the Lord
   e. (18:25c) Accurate Teacher
   f. (18:26a) Bold and Courageous in Ministry
   g. (18:26b) Humble and Teachable
   h. (18:27a) Commended by the Brethren
   i. (18:27b-28) Effective in Ministry = Summary
2. (19:1-7) Dispensational Progression From John's Baptism to Christian Baptism
   a. (19:1) Transitional Period Between OT and NT Saints
   b. (19:2-4) Two Key Questions Exposing the Incomplete Faith of These Disciples of John the Baptist
   c. (19:5-7) Normal Application of Christian Baptism Accompanied by Unusual Special Sign Gifts
3. (19:8-20) The Power of the Word and Works of God
   a. (19:8-10) The Power of the Word of God
   b. (19:11-20) The Power of the Works of God
4. (19:21-41) Quieting Opposition to Christianity in Ephesus
   a. (19:21-22) Transition – Commitment to Ministry – Strategic Planning
   b. (19:23-27) Conflict in Ephesus – The Reason for the Riot
   c. (19:29-34) Chaos in Ephesus – 9 Characteristics of a Mob Mentality
      (1) (:28a) Anger
      (2) (:28b) Backlash
      (3) (:29a) Confusion
      (4) (:29b) Frenzy
      (5) (:29c) Scapegoat Targeting
      (6) (:30-31) Volatile Atmosphere
      (7) (:32) Incoherent Noise
      (8) (:33) Squelched Dialogue
      (9) (:34) Rallying Cry
   d. (19:35-41) Calming in Ephesus – Rational Plea for Abandoning the Riot
5. (20:1-6) Journey to Greece and then to Troas
6. (20:7-12) Raising of Eutychus – Divine Object Lesson Regarding Resurrection
   a. (20:7-8) The Circumstances Surrounding the Object Lesson – the Message of the Gospel is that Light has Come into the World
   b. (20:9) The Condition Requiring New Life – the Message of the Gospel is that Rejection of the Light Leads to Death
   c. (20:10) The Contact with God That Results in New Life – the Message of the Gospel is that God Saves by Raising the Dead to New Life
   d. (20:11-12) The Celebration and Comfort Associated with New Life – the Message of the Gospel is that our New Life Should Revolve Around Worship and Fellowship and Edification and Testimony
7. (20:13-16) Journey from Assos to Miletus
8. (20:17-38) Farewell Pastors' Conference at Ephesus – Pastoral Ministry Must Follow Apostolic Pattern
   a. (20:17-21) Pastoral Track Record of a Consistent, Humble, Caring, Persevering, Fruitful Proclamation of the Gospel of the Grace of God
   b. (20:22-24) Pastoral Commitment to Finish the Course of Ministry Whatever the Personal Cost in a Manner Highlighting the Gospel of the Grace of God
   c. (20:25-27) Pastoral Testimony of a Clear Conscience in Ministry Due to Faithfully Communicating the Whole Counsel of God

d. (20:28-32) Pastoral Warning Against False Teachers Who Will Seek to Lead the Sheep Astray – 4 Motivations for Elders to Guard Against False Teachers:
(1) (:28) Because of Your Divine Commissioning – Stewardship Responsibility
(2) (:29-30) Because of Their Aggressive Attacks – Sneak Attacks
(3) (:31) Because of the Apostolic Shepherding Model – Shepherding Model
(4) (:32) Because of God's Powerful Resources – Sanctifying Grace

e. (20:33-35) Pastoral Example of Self Support and Sacrificial Giving – 3 Exhortations to Spiritual Leaders to Prefer and Pursue Self Support in the Ministry:
(1) (:33-34a) Self Support -- Work Hard to Meet Your Own Needs
(2) (:34b-35a) Sacrificial Giving – Work Hard to Help Others
(3) (:35b) Superior Standing – Work Hard to Enjoy the Blessing of Giving

f. (20:36-38) Prayerful, Tearful, Emotional Farewell

9. (21:1-16) Facing Danger at Jerusalem
a. (21:1-7) Warning Delivered by Disciples Along the Journey
b. (21:8-14) Warning Delivered by Agabus at Caesarea
c. (21:15-16) Arrival at Jerusalem

IV. (21:17 – 28:31) Paul's Final Trials and Journey to Rome – Providentially Delivered and Brought to Rome

A. (21:17 – 23:22) Deliverance from Jews at Jerusalem Via Roman Governor Claudius Lysias
1. (21:17-40) Trouble at Jerusalem
a. (:17-26) Attempts to Avoid Offense
b. (:27-40) Attack Against Paul by Violent Jewish Mob
2. (22:1-30) Testimony before Jewish Mob
a. (22:1-21) Four Stages of Paul's Personal Testimony
(1) (:3-5) Committed to Persecuting Christians as a Jewish Zealot
(2) (:6-11) Confronted by Jesus Himself on Damascus Road
(3) (:12-16) Converted and Commissioned Under the Tutelage of Ananias
(4) (:17-21) Commanded by Jesus to Leave Jerusalem to Evangelize the Gentiles
b. (22:22-30) Reaction to Paul's Testimony
3. (23:1-11) Providentially Delivered from the Jewish Sanhedrin
4. (23:12-22) Providentially Delivered from the Jewish Conspiracy

B. (23:23 – 26:32) Deliverance from Roman Governors
1. (23:23-35) Claudius Lysias Passes Paul Along to Roman Governor at Caesarea
2. (24:1-27) Paul at Caesarea before Felix – Unjustly Charged / Characterized / Confined
a. (24:1-9) Unjustly Charged – Felix Holds Court
b. (24:10-21) Unjustly Characterized – Felix Hears Paul's Defense
c. (24:22-27) Unjustly Confined – Felix Hides from the Truth
3. (25:1 – 26:32) Paul before Governor Festus and King Agrippa
a. (25:1-12) Paul Appeals to Caesar before Governor Festus
b. (25:13-27) Paul Gains Audience with King Agrippa and Bernice
(1) (25:13-22) Festus Explains Paul's Case to King Agrippa
(2) (25:23-27) Paul Brought Before King Agrippa and Bernice
c. (26:1-32) Paul's Testimony Before King Agrippa
(1) (26:1-11) Pre-Conversion Testimony of Life as a Strict Pharisee
(2) (26:12-18) Conversion Testimony Leading to His Commissioning
(3) (26:19-23) Gospel Witness of the Need for Repentance and Faith on the Part of All People
(4) (26:24-32) Concluding Interactions – Seeking Converts

C. (27:1-44) Deliverance from Forces of Nature – Voyage and Shipwreck of Paul
1. (27:1-8) Divine Providence Sets Our Course –

Difficult Journey by Sea Towards Final Destination

2. (27:9-20) Divine Providence Can Throw Us a Curve that Points Towards Hopelessness – Desperate Situation Due to Huge Storm at Sea
3. (27:21-44) Divine Providence Validates Our Calm and Courageous Faith – Dangerous Ordeal but Safe on Land at Last

D. (28:1-10) Deliverance from Religious Superstition -- Paul in Malta

1. (28:1-6) God Protects His Servants – Escaping Viper Venom at Malta – Islanders Consider Paul First Cursed … Then a God
2. (28:7-10) God Provides for His Servants and Blesses Their Ministry – Islanders Show Paul Respect by Supplying Him for Final Journey

E. (28:11-16) Arrival in Rome at Last!
God Keeps His Promises to His Servants

F. (28:17-28) Final Testimony to Jews and Transition of Gospel Proclamation to Gentiles

(28:30-31) EPILOGUE -- GOD OPENS DOORS FOR GOSPEL PROCLAMATION TO ALL

TEXT: Acts 1: 1-3

TITLE: INTRODUCTION TO ACTS: COMMISSIONED TO WITNESS

BIG IDEA:
LUKE CHRONICLES: THE ACTS OF THE RESURRECTED JESUS CHRIST PERFORMED BY HIS CHOSEN APOSTLES THROUGH THE POWER OF THE PROMISED HOLY SPIRIT

INTRODUCTION:
We have just finished the **Book of Nehemiah**. You can download the completed pdf file from our church website: www.solidrockmd.org We learned much from the mission of Nehemiah as he pursued God's kingdom purposes for his day and time – involving rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem and reviving the people spiritually.

Today we are going to begin a study of the **Book of Acts** and focus on the mission of the church for today. For the life of Christ we have the Synoptic Gospel accounts of Mat, Mark, Luke and John. But for the important **transition time** of the founding of the church and the spread of the gospel through the efforts of first Peter centered in Jerusalem and then Paul as the special Apostle to the Gentiles, we only have the one historical document of the Book of Acts. That concept of "transition time" is very important. This is a **bridge period of time** – the gospel of the kingdom is still being offered first to the Jews in the early chapters – there is still the presentation of the now risen and ascended Messiah to God's chosen people. There is still the offer of the coming kingdom if they will repent and embrace the promised Messiah. But there is a transition as they continue to reject (not individually, but as a nation) and now the coming of the future king will be linked to the completion of the fullness of the times of the Gentiles. As a transition book, we will see some things that are not normative for this church age. But we will also learn much from studying the initial missionary journeys about how the head of the church wants us to build His church.

Key Verse: Acts 1:8 "*you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem; and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth*." You can outline the book along these geographic lines. Not sure how far we will take this study before we interrupt and go down a different path … but we are at least committing to the first section. Look at the contrast between the two parts of the Book

Chaps 1-12	**Chaps 13-28**
Jerusalem the center – Jewish focus	Antioch the center – Gentile focus
Peter – central figure	Paul – central figure – Apostle to the Gentiles
Peter imprisoned	Paul imprisoned

We should gain confidence from studying this book; we should get excited about the power of God working through His people; we should learn much about witnessing; we should learn much about church methodology; we should draw closer to the person of Jesus Christ Himself as we see His continued activity right now in the world – understanding the significance of His resurrection and ascension and current role at the right hand of God.

Title of the Book:

Stott: The most accurate (though cumbersome) title, then, which does justice to Luke's own

statement in verses 1 and 2, would be something like "The Continuing Words and Deeds of Jesus by his Spirit through his Apostles."

Bock: "The Acts of the Sovereign God through the Lord Messiah Jesus by His Spirit on Behalf of the Way."

LUKE CHRONICLES: THE ACTS OF THE RESURRECTED JESUS CHRIST PERFORMED BY HIS CHOSEN APOSTLES THROUGH THE POWER OF THE PROMISED HOLY SPIRIT

CONNECTION TO THE GOSPEL OF LUKE

"*The first account I composed, Theophilus,*"
Τὸν μὲν πρῶτον λόγον ἐποιησάμην ὦ Θεόφιλε

A. Who is Luke?

Identified as the **author** by the "we" passages in Acts (other travelling companions can be ruled out like Silas and Timothy) and by church tradition and by the link to the gospel he wrote

1. **Historian**

Luke 1:1-4 "*Inasmuch as many have undertaken to compile an account of the things accomplished among us, 2 just as those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and servants of the word have handed them down to us, 3 it seemed fitting for me as well, having investigated everything carefully from the beginning, to write it out for you in consecutive order, most excellent Theophilus; 4 so that you might know the exact truth about the things you have been taught*."

This should be regarded as the preface to both Luke and Acts since the author considered his work to be a historical unity.

Things "*accomplished*" or "fulfilled" as prophecied in the OT – that would apply more to the life of Christ than the events of Acts

Luke was not an eyewitness to the extent that the apostles were – excellent at research; interviewing the eyewitnesses; compiling and checking the fact

All about accuracy and truth and reliability – not dry and dull history here – exciting events

2. **Physician** – educated; could certainly distinguish miracles from medical works of healing; understood the significance of the miracles which Christ performed – pointing to Him as the Messiah; previewing His power when He comes to establish His kingdom on earth; and those miracles performed early on by the apostles to authenticate their new message; also lived through the transition of seeing those miracles becoming less prominent as the foundation of the church was laid and now others came along to build the superstructure

3. **Gentile – Col. 4:11, 14** – in that list of greetings, distinguished from those who were of the circumcision; probably the only Gentile writer of any book of the bible; possibly a native of Antioch

4. **Traveling Companion of Paul**

B. Who is Theophilus? – "*lover of God*" or "*friend of God*"

MacArthur: (on Luke 1:3) "*most excellent*" – This was a title used to address governors (Ac 23:26; 24:3; 26:25). This sort of language was reserved for the highest dignitaries, suggesting that Theophilus was such a person.

Important figure; probably wealthy; from the ruling class; ¼ of NT addressed personally to him
May have supported financially the project of researching and writing and distributing these scrolls. Was he a believer already or someone that Luke was trying to impact with the Gospel message?
Good generic name for each of us as we receive this revelation – want to grow as lovers of God, as friends of God, as those who understand the mind of God and obey Him

C. What was the Emphasis of the Gospel of Luke?

The Works and Words of Jesus

Matt: Jesus as King of the Jews **Mark**: Christ the Servant **John**: Son of God
Presentation of Jesus as the **Son of Man** – a title that points to Him as the promised Messiah; perfect man of righteousness

Daniel 7:13-14 *"I kept looking in the night visions, And behold, with the clouds of heaven One like a Son of Man was coming, And He came up to the Ancient of Days And was presented before Him. 14 "And to Him was given dominion, Glory and a kingdom, That all the peoples, nations, and men of every language Might serve Him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion Which will not pass away; And His kingdom is one Which will not be destroyed*."

I. (:1-2) THE ACTS OF THE RESURRECTED JESUS CHRIST

A. Synergy Between the Works and the Words of Christ

"*about all that Jesus began to do and teach,*"
περὶ πάντων ὧν ἤρξατο ὁ Ἰησοῦς ποιεῖν τε καὶ διδάσκειν,

No disconnect between how Jesus lived and what He taught
No hypocrisy when it comes to Christ
Christians are often discredited at this point – when their actions don't match their words
Doctrine must impact behavior – that is why doctrine is so practical

Lloyd-Jones: The starting point, the fundamental thing, is that Christianity is about **Jesus.** Christianity is not a teaching – it is a person. It is not merely a moral outlook that is to be applied in the realm of politics. You start with a **historical person.**

Boice: Christianity is a historical religion. It is a religion that is not based primarily on an idea or philosophy. Most of the religions of the world can exist apart from their founder. You do not have to have a historical Buddha to have Buddhism. All you have to have are Buddhist teachings. So also with many other religions. This is not the case with Christianity. If you take away the history – if you reduce it, as some have tried to do, to a religion of mere ethics or ideas – Christianity evaporates. This is because Christianity is indissolubly linked to the life and accomplishments of Christianity's founder.

And the life of Jesus continues today and must impact me today!

B. Significance of the Ascension – Huge Turning Point in History

"*until the day when He was taken up,*"
ἄχρι ἧς ἡμέρας ἐντειλάμενος

1. Proof of the Resurrection of Jesus Christ
   Testimony to the resurrection is theme of the Gospel message in Acts
   Significance of where Jesus is today
   Approval of God signified in this "taking up" – cf. Enoch

Look at the testimony of John in his gospel – presenting Jesus as the eternal Son of God who existed from all time and came down from heaven to enter this world via the virgin birth – a totally unique situation; here now he is returning to his heavenly home

2. Progressive Revelation now advancing to a new era
   Emphasis on the Holy Spirit – could not be given until Jesus returned to the Father

Stott: Here Luke tells us how he thinks of his two-volume work on the origins of Christianity, which constitutes approximately one quarter of the New Testament. He does not regard volume one as the story of Jesus Christ . . . and volume two as the story of the church of Jesus Christ . . . For the contrasting parallel he draws between his two volumes was not between Christ and his church, but **between two stages of the ministry of the same Christ**. . . Thus Jesus' ministry on earth, exercised personally and publicly, was followed by his ministry from heaven, exercised through his Holy Spirit by his apostles. Moreover, the watershed between the two was the ascension. Not only did it conclude Luke's first book and introduce his second (Acts 1:9), but it terminated Jesus' earthly ministry and inaugurated his heavenly ministry.

C. Spirit Mediated Special Instructions to His Chosen Apostles
   "*after He had by the Holy Spirit given orders to the apostles whom He had chosen.*"
   τοῖς ἀποστόλοις διὰ πνεύματος ἁγίου οὓς ἐξελέξατο ἀνελήμφθη.

3 Main Players all referenced in this phrase

Apostles = envoy, delegate or ambassador, sent out with a message and carrying the authority of the sender

We have our marching orders for this age --- how obedient are we?
We must be a people who are **Mission-Oriented** – cf. The Great Commission Church

Stott: Luke has used the same verb *eklegomai* in his account of Jesus' calling and choice of the Twelve, "*whom he also designated apostles*", and he is about to use it again when two men are proposed to fill the vacancy left by Judas and the believers pray "*Lord, . . . show us which of these two you have chosen*" (24). Significantly, the same verb is also used later in connection with Paul. The risen Lord describes him to Ananias as "*my chosen instrument to carry my name before the Gentiles* . . . " (9:15), and Ananias conveys this message to Paul: "*The God of our fathers has chosen you . . . You will be his witness* . . . " (22:14-15). It is thus emphasized that all the apostles (the Twelve, Matthias and Paul) were neither self-appointed, nor appointed by any human being, committee, synod or church, but were directly and personally chosen and appointed by Jesus Christ himself.

We have been chosen to bear fruit as well

II. (:2b-4a) THE ACTS OF THE CHOSEN APOSTLES

A. Foreordained Privilege

"*to the apostles whom He had chosen*"

Will be looking later in the chapter about the replacement chosen for Judas = Matthias; how does the apostle Paul play into this equation?

"Training of the Twelve" – good name for book about the apostles – look at all that Jesus invested in preparing these men for the pioneering work of spreading the gospel to the ends of the earth

B. Fabulous Proofs – incredible, astonishing, wonderful, marvelous

1. Convincing Presentations

"*To these He also presented Himself alive, after His suffering, by many convincing proofs,*"
οἷς καὶ παρέστησεν ἑαυτὸν ζῶντα μετὰ τὸ παθεῖν αὐτὸν ἐν πολλοῖς τεκμηρίοις,

Appearances – not constantly for that 40 day period, but a number of distinct appearances
Bock: Kistemaker lists ten appearances of Jesus: to the women at the tomb, Mary Magdalene, the Emmaus disciple, Peter in Jerusalem, ten disciples, eleven disciples, seven disciples fishing in Galilee, eleven disciples in Galilee, the five hundred, and James the Lord's brother
1 Cor. 15 details many of these

Death described as "His suffering" – we can never minimize what took place

Bock: As the apostles return to Jerusalem, they can be assured that the suffering of Jesus did not end the story of the kingdom but was part of God's program. Jesus is raised, alive, and ready to bestow the blessing they need to carry out the mission he will give them. . . There will be a day when Jesus returns from heaven to complete what God has started through him. The introduction to Acts not only highlights key themes of the book; it also proclaims with assurance that God's program is on track.

Blaiklock: The fact of the **resurrection** was to be the solid foundation of the apostles' faith and the chief ingredient of their early message.
Read the Book of Acts looking for any reference to the resurrection of Jesus Christ

People are constantly demanding **proof** for Christianity – look at how these men were transformed by the gospel; empowered to accomplish an amazing work in the short timeframe of their lifespan; if they were testifying to a lie – if they had not seen the risen Christ – what a fraud! Liar, Lunatic, or Lord – those are the options -- (today they add a fourth choice: Legend)

2. Multiple Appearings

"*appearing to them over a period of forty days,*"
δι᾽ ἡμερῶν τεσσεράκοντα ὀπτανόμενος αὐτοῖς

to different people and different groups of people at different times and in different settings

3. Authoritative Teaching

"*and speaking of the things concerning the kingdom of God.*"
καὶ λέγων τὰ περὶ τῆς βασιλείας τοῦ θεοῦ·

Only the one sent from heaven could speak with knowledge and authority on such a topic

What are some of these things concerning the kingdom of God?

Bock: God's promised rule that comes with Jesus' messianic program and activity . . . appears thirty-two times in Luke and six times in Acts (1:3; 8:12; 14:22; 19:8; 28:23, 31).

Theme of Renewed offer of the kingdom of God to the Jews before turning to the Gentiles with the gospel

J Sidlow Baxter: They were to witness to Him (1) as being indeed the Messiah-King of Israel, the crucified but now risen Deliverer of His people, the predestined King of the long-promised "kingdom of heaven": and (2) as the personal Saviour, from the guilt and power and eternal penalty of sin, of all who believe upon Him, through His atoning death and resurrection. They were to present the offer of the King and the kingdom, just as the Lord Himself had done up to the time of His crucifixion; only now there was a wonderful new factor in the message – that of the Cross, the atonement for "the sin of the world," and the good news of personal salvation by faith on the Lord Jesus, the Christ of Israel and now the Saviour of the world.

C. Final Preparation – Wait in Jerusalem for the gift of the promised Holy Spirit

1. Call for Staging

"*And gathering them together,*"
καὶ συναλιζόμενος

2. Trigger for Deployment

"*He commanded them not to leave Jerusalem, but to wait for what the Father had promised,*"
παρήγγειλεν αὐτοῖς ἀπὸ Ἰεροσολύμων μὴ χωρίζεσθαι ἀλλὰ περιμένειν τὴν ἐπαγγελίαν τοῦ πατρὸς

Jerusalem = dangerous place to wait

10 day period of **waiting upon God**; must have been difficult to wait when they were primed for action; importance of faith in the promises of God

What has our experience been in terms of waiting upon God?

OT prophecies of the coming of the Holy Spirit: Joel 2:28ff, Is. 32:15; Ezk. 36:27
Jesus' promises of the coming of the Holy Spirit: John 14:16, 26; 15:26; 16:7

III. (:4b-5) THE ACTS OF THE PROMISED HOLY SPIRIT

A. Holy Spirit Baptism Promised by God the Father and Testified to by Jesus Christ

"*but to wait for what the Father had promised, "Which," He said, "you heard of from*

Me;"
ἣν ἠκούσατέ μου,

B. Holy Spirit Baptism Preferred Over the Water Baptism of John
"*for John baptized with water, but you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit*"
ὅτι Ἰωάννης μὲν ἐβάπτισεν ὕδατι, ὑμεῖς δὲ ἐν πνεύματι βαπτισθήσεσθε ἁγίῳ

Parallel to John 3 – born again (born from above) by water and the spirit

Does this establish a pattern for this age that the baptism with the Holy Spirit should be an event subsequent to one's conversion? Importance of understanding the **transitional nature** of the Book of Acts

1 Cor. 12:13 "*For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body*"

C. Holy Spirit Baptism Coming Soon as a New Phenomenon
"*not many days from now.*"
οὐ μετὰ πολλὰς ταύτας ἡμέρας.

Specific timetable in mind; Father knows; we must be watching and ready
Dramatic upcoming event of Pentecost

CONCLUSION:
These opening verses distinguish Jesus Christ from the founder of every other religion. His life on earth was only the beginning of His spiritual ministry. That ministry continues today under His direction by His appointed apostles through the power of the Holy Spirit whom He has sent – because of the historical fact of His resurrection and ascension into heaven.

We are called to be witnesses today – not something complicated – tell people that Jesus is still alive and at work in our lives and wants to work in their lives as well.

Look at the impact of a faithful individual in witnessing for Christ: a couple of key heroes of the faith went home this week – having finished the course of their witness to Christ:

- **Alan Tibbels** – Sandtown Habitat for Humanity – what type of impact could this man have? Became a quadriplegic 25 years ago after a terrible accident on a church basketball floor – his life must have been over?? For nearly 21 years, Mr. Tibbels was the force behind Sandtown Habitat for Humanity, an organization that built and renovated nearly 300 homes in one of the city's most blighted areas. What the newspaper accounts fail to emphasize is his consistent witness to his Lord and Savior.

- **John Wooden** – legendary coach of the UCLA college basketball team; 99 years of testifying to the importance of godly character

As we begin this study of ACTs, think about what type of testimony and impact you should be having for Christ. But it must start with first obeying the gospel message of repentance from your sins and faith in the crucified and resurrected Lord Jesus Christ.

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DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

1) Why did God insert a 10 day waiting period in between the Ascension and Pentecost?

2) As you read through Acts, what are some historical details that may not be normative for the current church age? (in light of the transitional nature of this bridge period in time)

3) How many references to the Resurrection and/or the Ascension can you find in the Book of Acts?

4) What types of "convincing proofs" to the historical truth of Christianity can be supplied from this account in Acts?

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QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Stott: Luke repeatedly makes three points of political apologetic. First, Roman officials were consistently friendly to Christianity, and some had even become Christians . . . Secondly, the Roman authorities could find no fault in either Jesus or his apostles. . .

In the third place, the Roman authorities conceded that Christianity was a *religion licita* (a lawful or licensed religion) because it was not a new religion (which would need to be approved by the state) but rather the purest form of Judaism (which had enjoyed religious freedom under the Romans since the second century BC). The coming of Christ was the fulfilment of Old Testament prophecy, and the Christian community enjoyed direct continuity with the Old Testament people of God.

This, then was Luke's political apologetic. He produced evidence to show that Christianity was harmless (because some Roman officials had embraced it themselves), innocent (because Roman judges could find no basis for prosecution) and lawful (because it was the true fulfilment of Judaism). . .

Of course in a secondary sense all the disciples of Jesus can claim that he has chosen us, revealed himself to us, commissioned us as his witnesses, and both promised and given us his Spirit. Nevertheless, it is not to these general privileges that Luke is referring here, but to the special qualifications of an apostle – a personal appointment as an apostle by Jesus, an eyewitness experience of the historical Jesus, an authorizing and commissioning by Jesus to speak in his name, and the empowering Spirit of Jesus to inspire their teaching. It was primarily these uniquely qualified men through whom Jesus continued "*to do and to teach*", and to whom Luke intends to introduce us in the Acts.

Lloyd-Jones: **Christianity – The Only Hope**
This Gospel is the only hope in the world today. . . G. K. Chesterton reminded us, "Christianity has not been tried and found wanting; it has been found difficult and not tried." That is the simple truth. The world, speaking generally, has never tried Christianity. It has talked a lot about it, but it has not really tried it. . . Need to examine the origin of the Christian church . . . the question of authority is primary and fundamental . . . Christianity is a phenomenon of

history. It is a fact.

Boice: Luke's history opens up and embraces the entire church age. At the beginning, we are in contact with the risen Christ and a world of miracles. This is a world we have very little contact with today. But then, as the book progresses, we have the feeling that it becomes increasingly like the kind of world we know. At the end, we find the Christians bearing witness, just as we are called to bear witness, and being persecuted, just as we are often persecuted. As we study this book we find sound principles of church growth and see the way in which temptation and trials are overcome by the grace of God.

Dr. John Whitcomb: **The Ascension of Christ**
Psalm 68 – 1,000 years before Christ came, there was prophecy of resurrection and ascension of Christ; **Ps. 110:1** – Jesus will come back to earth and all His enemies will become His footstool; **Is. 52:13** – introductory paragraph – "*He will be very high*" – He will ascend to the third heaven, the right hand of God; He was not defeated on the cross; He was a success, a victor, not a victim of circumstances; He was in total control of everything; **Luke 24:50-52** – worshiped with great joy; Lord was accessible to them in a new and wonderful way through the Holy Spirit; that is why they were not fearful or depressed;

A gradual and magnificent ascension; somewhat similar to Elijah who departed in his chariot of fire and was seen by Elisha; coming back to the exact same spot = Mt of Olives; cosmic and spectacular return; not out in the wilderness or in some hidden chamber; every eye will seem him (TV??); these 11 men were witnesses to this ascension; **John 6:62** – Jesus constantly emphasized His coming ascension; **13:1, 3; 16:28** – Jesus was in constant anticipation of His soon return to His heavenly Father; **17:13** – that is my deepest joy

TEXT: Acts 1: 4-11

TITLE: FINAL INSTRUCTIONS –
COMMISSIONED TO WITNESS – GREAT COMMISSION MANDATE

BIG IDEA:
THE APOSTLES WERE COMMISSIONED TO WITNESS BY THE POWER OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

INTRODUCTION:
Why did Jesus leave us here on this earth? Why didn't Jesus just save us and take us to be with Him in heaven? Why did He leave behind His chosen apostles? There is a Great Commission for each believer.

We are all familiar with the Great Commission recorded in Matt. 28; different version in each of the gospels

Ray Pritchard: Just before he returned to heaven, Jesus explained to his disciples what they were to do after his departure. What he said to them, he also says to us. He left us on the earth that we might be his witnesses. In heaven there will be no witnesses because in heaven seeing is believing. There the Lamb will be the light and he will need no lesser lights, but in this dark world we are the only light he has. On earth we are his witnesses. He does not send angels to proclaim his name and he does not write the gospel in lightning across the skies. He uses people like us to convince other people like us to believe in him. We are God's witnesses—his evidence if you will—to convince an unbelieving world. If we do not do our part, God has no other plan.

Think about the role of a coach – maybe before a big match like a crucial World Cup game. You try to give just a few final instructions that will stick in the players' minds and help focus their efforts. Even more important are the final instructions of someone who is departing and will no longer be around to provide insight and counsel.

Illustration: Instructions Mr. Nic gave on his deathbed in the hospital to many of the youth he had impacted spiritually.

3 FINAL INSTRUCTIONS IN THE COMMISSIONING PROCESS OF THE APOSTLES

I. (:4-5) COMMANDING THEM TO WAIT FOR THE EMPOWERMENT OF THE HOLY SPIRIT BEFORE BEGINNING THEIR MISSION
You can't do anything successfully for God without being plugged into the proper power source; it must all be of God's grace and power for Him to receive all of the glory

A. Holy Spirit Baptism Promised by God the Father and Testified to by Jesus Christ – It's Worth Waiting For

"*but to wait for what the Father had promised, "Which," He said, "you heard of from Me;*"
ἣν ἠκούσατέ μου,

1. Promised by God the Father in the OT

Significant OT passages: associated with kingdom blessing

- **Is. 32:15** "*until the Spirit is poured out upon us from on high*" – followed by descriptions of the kingdom of justice and righteousness that would be ushered in
- **Is. 44:3** "*For I will pour out water on the thirsty land and streams on the dry ground; I will pour out My Spirit on your offspring and My blessing on your descendants"*
- **Ezek 36:27** – start in vs. 22 – doing all of this to exalt the Lord in the eyes of all the nations
- **Joel 2:28** "*It will come about after this that I will pour out My Spirit on all mankind*"

Characteristics of the Promises of a loving father – Good Father's Day message:

- Extravagant, Gracious – Father delights to give good gifts to his children – not a scrooge or stingy – gift of the Holy Spirit is something special
- Reliable – Father always keeps His word
- Exclusive – Not intended for everyone; therefore they are special
- Encouraging -- Nurtures Hope; helps you get through difficult times

MacArthur: You say, "Now what is the promise of the Father?" Well, listen and I'll read it to you. In **Luke 11:13**, here's the promise of the Father...just listen: "If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Heavenly Father give" what? "The Holy Spirit to them that asks." What is the gift of the Father? What is it? It's the Holy Spirit. Wait for the promise of the Father.

Stedman: Aaron's rod that budded, which was kept in the Ark of the Covenant; the candlestick in the tabernacle; these were pictures of the Holy Spirit, illuminating the mind and heart. The cruse of oil from which the widow poured which never became empty, was a picture of the flowing of the oil of the Spirit in a life. The two olive trees of Zechariah which dripped oil from their branches into the bowls of the golden lampstand, this is a picture of the Holy Spirit. Ezekiel's river that came pouring out from under the throne of God, growing deeper as it went, is a wonderful picture of the flow and power of the Spirit-filled life. These men of old, reading these and studying them, gradually understood what it meant to be filled with the Spirit and experienced it by faith.

2. **Announced by John the Baptist**: Matt. 3:11; Mark 1:8; Luke 3:16; John 1:33; Acts 11:16

3. **Testified to by Jesus Christ in His Earthly Ministry** – the Gospel Accounts

- **John 14:16-17** "*I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may be with you forever; that is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it does not see Him or know Him, but you know Him because He abides with you and will be in you*."

- **John 14:26** "*But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all that I said to you*."

- **John 15:26-27** "*When the Helper comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, that is the Spirit of truth who proceeds from the Father, He will testify about Me, and*

you will testify also, because you have been with Me from the beginning."

- **John 16:7** "*But I tell you the truth, it is to your advantage that I go away; for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you; but if I go, I will send Him to you*."
Why would we want to act without **our Helper**? Why do we thing we can go things in the flesh? The activity of evangelism with the opposition it arouses drives us back to dependence upon the Holy Spirit's power.

B. Holy Spirit Baptism Preferred Over the Water Baptism of John –
It's Worth Waiting For – Something far greater (not disparaging baptism of John)

"*for John baptized with water, but you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit*"
ὅτι Ἰωάννης μὲν ἐβάπτισεν ὕδατι, ὑμεῖς δὲ ἐν πνεύματι βαπτισθήσεσθε ἁγίῳ

1. Understand the Water Baptism of John the Baptist –
what were its characteristics and its limitations?

Dipped, immersed, identified with, united with

[Parallel to John 3 – born again (born from above) by water and the spirit]

- physical vs spiritual
- local, administered by John vs God
- external vs internal
- symbolic vs changing the substance
- anticipatory vs fulfillment
- view towards repentance of sins vs actual cleansing and power for ministry

2. Understand the Holy Spirit Baptism --
what were its characteristics and its advantages?

Kent: The preposition "*with*" is the Greek *en*, the same one translated "*by*" in 1 Cor. 12:13, and denotes instrument in both places.

Does this establish a pattern for this age that the baptism with the Holy Spirit should be an event subsequent to one's conversion? Importance of understanding the **transitional nature** of the Book of Acts

1 Cor. 12:13 "*For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body*"

Bock: The baptism of John the Baptist was an eschatological, preparatory washing. Participation in it meant that one was ready for God to come. The gift of the Spirit, however, was the sign that the Messiah had come and the new era had begun.

C. Holy Spirit Baptism Predetermined to Arrive Soon as a New Phenomenon --
It's Worth Waiting For – Everything under God's sovereign control

"*not many days from now.*" – comes according to God's timetable
οὐ μετὰ πολλὰς ταύτας ἡμέρας.

Specific timetable in mind; Father knows; we must be watching and ready
Dramatic upcoming event of Pentecost

II. (:6-8) CORRECTING THEIR UNDERSTANDING OF THE NATURE AND FOCUS OF THEIR MISSION

A. (:6) Confusion Regarding the Timing of the Coming Messianic Kingdom on Earth

"*And so when they had come together, they were asking Him, saying, 'Lord, is it at this time You are restoring the kingdom to Israel?'*"
Οἱ μὲν οὖν συνελθόντες ἠρώτων αὐτὸν λέγοντες· κύριε, εἰ ἐν τῷ χρόνῳ τούτῳ ἀποκαθιστάνεις τὴν βασιλείαν τῷ Ἰσραήλ;

- a topic for group clarification

- no confusion regarding the expectation of an earthly, Messianic kingdom centered in Israel – this would have been the time for Jesus to set them straight; to present the amill position with clarity and force

- desire to know the exact time of fulfillment – naturally curious; hungry for the kingdom; no desire to suffer and persevere and serve – Let's go straight to glory

Kent: It is obvious from their question that the kingdom referred to was the one which the Jews looked for Messiah to establish (Isa. 9:6-7; 11:10-12). . . The reason why the disciples must not concern themselves with pinpointing the inaugurating of Israel's restored kingdom was that they had a new task to perform. They were to be Christ's witnesses after the empowering of the Holy Spirit had occurred. They were to testify to the person of Christ, his teachings, his sacrificial death and his resurrection.

Stott: It appears, then, that Jesus' two main topics of conversation between his resurrection and his ascension were the kingdom of God and the Spirit of God. It seems probably that he also related them to each other, for certainly the prophets had often associated them. When God establishes the kingdom of the Messiah, they said, he will pour out his Spirit; this generous effusion and universal enjoyment of the Spirit will be one of the major signs and blessings of his rule; and indeed the Spirit of God will make the rule of God a living and present reality to his people.

B. (:7) Confusion Regarding Their Sphere of Knowledge and Extent of Control

"*He said to them, "It is not for you to know times or epochs which the Father has fixed by His own authority;*"
εἶπεν δὲ πρὸς αὐτούς· οὐχ ὑμῶν ἐστιν γνῶναι χρόνους ἢ καιροὺς οὓς ὁ πατὴρ ἔθετο ἐν τῇ ἰδίᾳ ἐξουσίᾳ,

Too many people spend way too much attention and focus on all of the controversial details regarding the timing of end time events. Some people go overboard to the point of predicting specific dates for the return of Christ.

C. (:8a) Connection Between the Baptism of the Holy Spirit and Power for Proclamation

"*but you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you;*"

ἀλλὰ λήμψεσθε δύναμιν ἐπελθόντος τοῦ ἁγίου πνεύματος ἐφ᾽ ὑμᾶς

Key: Do you see yourself as a person ministering with divine power? Need to change the way you view yourself

1. Recipients of this Power – *but you*

2. Gift of this Power – *shall receive*

3. Nature of this Power – dynamite
   Applied to the Proclamation of the Gospel

Boice: The Greek word *dynamis* entered the English language when the Swedish chemist and engineer Alfred Bernhard Nobel (1833-96) made the discovery that became his fortune. He discovered a power stronger than anything the world had known up to that time. He asked a friend of his who was a Greek scholar what the word for "explosive power" was in Greek. His friend answered, "*Dynamis*." Nobel said, "Well, I am going to call my discovery by that name." So he called his explosive power "dynamite."

Boice: Jesus taught that when we receive the power of the Holy Spirit, the result will not be miracles, signs, or healings, but witnessing.

Are you a Dynamite Christian?? **2 Cor. 4:1-7** is key

4. Mediator of this Power – *Holy Spirit*

5. Occasion of Receiving This Power --

Application of this power:
- Guidance / giving opportunities to witness; divine appointments
- Boldness in witnessing
- Helping us in what to say and how to answer questions
- Most importantly: Effectiveness in ministry vs frustration – power to change lives

D. (:8b) Clarity Regarding the Nature and Scope of the Great Commission

1. The Nature of the Great Commission
   "*and you shall be My witnesses*"
   καὶ ἔσεσθέ μου μάρτυρες

Wiersbe: "*Witness*" is a key word in the book of Acts and is used twenty-nine times as either a verb or a noun. A witness is somebody who tells what he has seen and heard (Acts 4:19-20). When you are on the witness stand in court, the judge is not interested in your ideas or opinions; he only wants to hear what you know. Our English word *martyr* comes from the Greek word translated "*witness*," and many of God's people have sealed their witness by laying down their lives.

1 John 1:1-4 – nature of this ministry of testifying and being a witness – objective presentation of the facts

2. The Scope of the Great Commission

"*both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth."*
ἔν τε Ἰερουσαλὴμ καὶ [ἐν] πάσῃ τῇ Ἰουδαίᾳ καὶ Σαμαρείᾳ καὶ ἕως ἐσχάτου τῆς γῆς

Touissant: "end" of the earth -- looks to Rome, the proud center of world civilization in the Apostolic Age, a significant distance from Jerusalem (more than 1,400 miles, as the crow flies).

III. (:9-11) COMMUNICATING THE URGENCY AND ULTIMATE SUCCESS OF THEIR MISSION

A. (:9) A Sight Worth Seeing – the Amazing Ascension of Jesus Christ –
We have Good News to Proclaim to Others

"*And after He had said these things, He was lifted up while they were looking on, and a cloud received Him out of their sight.*"
Καὶ ταῦτα εἰπὼν βλεπόντων αὐτῶν ἐπήρθη καὶ νεφέλη ὑπέλαβεν αὐτὸν ἀπὸ τῶν ὀφθαλμῶν αὐτῶν.

The apostles certainly had a lot of eyewitness experiences to tell to others …
We certainly have a lot of personal experience with the transformation power of Jesus Christ to tell to others

Kent: This cloud was probably the Shekinah, the divine cloud of glory which rested above the tabernacle in the days of Moses, signifying the presence of the Lord (Exod. 40:34).

B. (:10-11a) A Challenge Worth Considering –
We Must Focus on Our Mission

"*And as they were gazing intently into the sky while He was departing, behold, two men in white clothing stood beside them; and they also said, 'Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into the sky?'"*
καὶ ὡς ἀτενίζοντες ἦσαν εἰς τὸν οὐρανὸν πορευομένου αὐτοῦ, καὶ ἰδοὺ ἄνδρες δύο παρειστήκεισαν αὐτοῖς ἐν ἐσθήσεσι λευκαῖς, οἳ καὶ εἶπαν· ἄνδρες Γαλιλαῖοι, τί ἑστήκατε [ἐμ]βλέποντες εἰς τὸν οὐρανόν;

God is challenging His children today with the urgency of the Great Commission – Much of our life is spent in futile pursuits – pictured here as star gazing …

Wiersbe: Angels play an important role in the ministry described in Acts, just as they do today, even though we cannot see them (see Acts 5:19-20; 8:26; 10:3-7; 12:7-10, 23; 27:23).

C. (:11b) A Reunion Worth Remembering –
We Look Forward to a Victorious Future

"*This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come in just the same way as you have watched Him go into heaven."*
οὗτος ὁ Ἰησοῦς ὁ ἀναλημφθεὶς ἀφ᾽ ὑμῶν εἰς τὸν οὐρανὸν οὕτως ἐλεύσεται ὃν τρόπον ἐθεάσασθε αὐτὸν πορευόμενον εἰς τὸν οὐρανόν.

Many reunions come and go with little impact on our life

Victory is guaranteed; Jesus will return and usher in His kingdom –
Acts 3:19-21 "*Therefore repent and return, so that your sins may be wiped away, in order that* ***times of refreshing*** *may come from the presence of the Lord, and that He may send Jesus, the Christ appointed for you, whom heaven must receive until the* ***period of restoration of all things*** *about which God spoke by the mouth of His holy prophets from ancient time*."
2 clear descriptions of the millennial kingdom which is still to follow

Lenski: His presence at God's right hand means that He is more effectually present with His people on earth "*all the days, even unto the consummation of the age*" (Matt. 28:20). He "*ascended far above all the heavens, that he might fill all things*" (Eph. 4:10).

CONCLUSION:

- Commanded to wait for empowerment – Holy Spirit power is key
- Corrected regarding nature and focus of our mission – Worldwide evangelism
- Communicated urgency and ultimate success – Get busy; Jesus is coming back

Jeff Strite: Theologically many people accept the idea that God's Holy Spirit can live within us, but they don't think that Spirit does very much… and thus they miss out on the miracle of what that Holy Spirit can mean for us. It's easy to see how this can happen. There are a lot of churches that teach things about the Holy Spirit that are bizarre and unbiblical… however, we shouldn't allow those bad teachings or any other distraction to cause us to forget uniqueness that God's Spirit can have in our lives. . . It's my belief that part of our frustration in our witnessing can come from not understanding the pivotal role that the Holy Spirit can play in helping us share our faith. . .

Illustration:
A skeptic promised British preacher Alexander Maclaren (1826-1910) that he would attend his church for four Sundays on which Maclaren would be presenting the main tenets of Christianity. The skeptic listened intently to Maclaren's sermons. After the fourth message he presented himself for church membership, saying he had received Christ as his Savior.
Maclaren was delighted and could not resist the impulse to ask which of the four sermons brought him to this decision. The skeptic replied, "Your sermons, sir, were helpful, but they were not what finally persuaded me." He said that after church one Sunday as he was helping an elderly lady on a slippery walk, she looked up into his face and said, "I wonder if you know my Savior, Jesus Christ. He is everything in the world to me. I would like you to know Him too."

"*Not by might nor by power, but by my Spirit*," *says the LORD Almighty*. **Zec 4:6**

Bock: In sum, there is one central application for the unit: the church is called to engage in mission to the world, knowing that Jesus's return is assured. In major part, it is for mission that the Spirit is sent.

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DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

1) How important a role does the Holy Spirit play in your life?

2) What do you typically associate with the power of the Holy Spirit?

3) How could the apostles have been so confused about the timing of the coming of the Messianic kingdom to earth?

4) What practical value can we gain from the reality of the Ascension and the assurance of the return of Jesus Christ?

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QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Stott (quoting Longenecker): four requisites for this mission: a mandate to witness, the ascended Lord who directs the mission, the central role of the apostles for the task, and the coming of the Spirit to empower them.

Deffinbaugh: What a beautiful way to dovetail a two-fold response to this pressing question of the disciples. While they were not to be overly concerned about the timing of the restoration of the Kingdom to Israel, they were assured of its certainty and its splendor. What a gracious event the ascension was. It served as an assurance to the disciples that their hopes would be realized.

Stedman: Here in this introduction we have all the elements that make up the book of Acts: a risen Lord whose life is made available through the coming of the Spirit, and who will come again in power and great glory, but with whom we are yet in instant communication by means of the miracle of prayer. That is the book of Acts. That is the life of the church. These are what make any group of Christians have an impact, and exercise a vital revolutionary force in the age in which they live. May God grant that this will be our experience.

Longenecker: Luke insists that the Christian mission must be based on the ascended and living Lord who directs his church from heaven and who will return to consummate what he has begun. Rather than the missionary enterprise being a stopgap measure substituted by some sub-apostolic Christian theologians for the unrealized hope of the kingdom of God, Luke's position is, as Oscar Cullmann says, "that missions are an essential element in the eschatological divine plan of salvation. The missionary work of the Church is the eschatological foretaste of the Kingdom of God, and the Biblical hope of the end constitutes the keenest incentive to action."

Bruce: This work would be a work of witness-bearing – a theme which is prominent in the apostolic preaching throughout Acts (cf. Chs. 2:32; 3:15; 5:32; 10:39; 13:31; 22:15, etc.). An OT prophet had called Israel to be God's witnesses in the world (Isa. 43:10; 44:8); the task which Israel as a nation had not fulfilled was taken up by Jesus, as the perfect Servant of the Lord, and passed on by Him to His disciples. The close relation between God's call to Israel in those Isaianic passages, "*Ye are my witnesses*," and Christ's words to His apostles, "*ye shall be my witnesses*," will be appreciated the more if we consider the implications of Paul's quotation of Isa. 49:6 in Acts 13:47. There the heralds of the gospel are described as being a light to the Gentiles, bearing God's salvation "*unto the uttermost part of the earth*"; here "the uttermost part

of the earth" and nothing short of that is to be the limit of the apostolic witness.

Steven Cole: Jesus told the disciples not to leave Jerusalem, but to wait for the promise of the Father, which they had heard from Him (John 14-16). The Pentecostals teach that we need to wait for a dramatic experience with the Holy Spirit, which they call the baptism of the Spirit. But they fail to see that Pentecost was a unique, sovereign act of God in history. The reason Jesus told the disciples to wait in Jerusalem was that in God's timetable, the pouring out of the Holy Spirit was to coincide with the Jewish Feast of Pentecost, fifty days after Passover. Pentecost, also called the Feast of Weeks, was a time for Israel to offer to God the first fruits of their harvest (Lev. 23:15-21; Num. 28:26-31; Deut. 16:9-12). By His resurrection from the dead, Jesus became the first fruits of those who have died (1 Cor. 15:20, 23). Through the new birth, brought about by the Holy Spirit, we become the first fruits of His creation (James 1:18).

Before the Day of Pentecost, the Holy Spirit empowered many of God's people, but He did not permanently indwell every believer (Exod. 31:3; Ps. 51:11). John the Baptist had prophesied that Jesus would baptize His followers with the Holy Spirit (Luke 3:16; John 1:33). The word "baptize" meant to immerse a person in water or to deluge him with it (I. Howard Marshall, Acts [IVP/ Eerdmans], p. 58). It has the main meaning of being totally identified with something, in this case, the Holy Spirit. The passive "be baptized with" indicates that God did the baptizing; the disciples merely received it. With reference to sending the Holy Spirit, Jesus told the disciples that the Spirit "abides with you, and will be in you" (John 14:17). On the Day of Pentecost, the disciples received the permanent indwelling of the third person of the Trinity, the Holy Spirit.

In the Book of Acts, this initial reception of the Spirit's indwelling follows the pattern of Acts 1:8. In Acts 2, the believers in Jerusalem receive the Holy Spirit. In Acts 8 and 10, the new believers in Judea and Samaria receive the Spirit. In Acts 19, believers in Ephesus (the remotest parts of the earth) receive the Spirit. Since then, every Christian receives the baptism of the Holy Spirit at the moment of salvation (1 Cor. 12:13; Rom. 8:9; Gal. 3:2-5). . .

To carry on Jesus' work, He has left us with these tools: (1) the solid foundation of His resurrection and the message of His kingdom; (2) the sufficient power of His Holy Spirit; (3) the sharp focus of the Great Commission; and, (4) the sure hope of His coming again. They are simple and yet powerfully effective tools.

TEXT: Acts 1: 12-20

TITLE: FINAL PREPARATIONS

BIG IDEA:
FINAL PREPARATIONS EQUIP THE APOSTLES TO LAUNCH THEIR GREAT COMMISSION MINISTRY UPON THE ARRIVAL OF HOLY SPIRIT POWER

INTRODUCTION:

We have a tendency to jump into things too quickly; to launch new ministries and new projects without **adequate preparation**. How long did God prepare Moses in the wilderness?? 40 years! That number 40 is special in Scripture for a time of testing and preparation. Jonah 3:4 -- Nineveh was given 40 days to repent before God would send judgment. Look at the 40 day period that Christ was tempted in the wilderness after His public baptism – relied on Scripture; communed with the Father; preparation for ministry. Then Christ spent 40 days up to His Ascension giving **Final Instructions** to the apostles (Remember last week's text – 2 instructions by Christ Himself and then one by the two angels upon the Ascension of Chris)t. Jesus commanded the apostles to wait in Jerusalem until the coming of the Holy Spirit. But that indefinite short term of waiting (not many days) was not to be wasted time. Turns out it was a 10 day period. Jesus knew that there still were a couple of final preparations that were needed to equip the apostles to launch their Great Commission ministry.

2 KEY AREAS OF FINAL PREPARATON FOR LAUNCHING THE APOSTOLIC GREAT COMMISSION MINISTRY

I. (:12-14) STRENGTHEN YOUR SPIRITUAL RELATIONSHIPS – DRAW CLOSE TO GOD AND TO YOUR PARTNERS IN GOSPEL MINISTRY

A. (:12) Be in the Place Where God Wants You to Be = Jerusalem for the Apostles

"*Then they returned to Jerusalem from the mount called Olivet, which is near Jerusalem, a Sabbath day's journey away.*"

This is a matter of obedience – Jerusalem was certainly a dangerous place for them to set up ministry headquarters

They had options:

- Could have gone back to their secular professions – fishing, whatever business had supported their family
- Could have prematurely launched their ministry efforts
- Could have stood in place star gazing

Very short distance – *a Sabbath day's journey* – about one half of a mile
MacArthur: This measurement was derived from tradition based on Israel's encampments in the wilderness. The tents farthest out on the camp's perimeter were 2,000 cubits from the center tabernacle – the longest distance anyone had to walk to reach the tabernacle on the Sabbath.

Bock: **Zech 14:4** has the Messiah descend to the Mount of Olives. Thus the locale carries eschatological overtones and is an appropriate place to have discussed Jesus's return.

"In that day His feet will stand on the Mount of Olives, which is in front of Jerusalem on the east; and the Mount of Olives will be split in its middle form east to west by a very large valley"

Submitting to God's agenda and timetable for your life
Will end up being a strategic place for the ministry that God has customized for you

B. (:13) Build Close Relationships With Your Fellow Spiritual Leaders

"*And when they had entered, they went up to the upper room, where they were staying; that is, Peter and John and James and Andrew, Philip and Thomas, Bartholomew and Matthew, James the son of Alphaeus, and Simon the Zealot, and Judas the son of James.*"

Kent: The use of the definite article in the Greek text points to a particular upper room, perhaps the same one where the last supper with Jesus had occurred. In any case it was the headquarters of the believers in Jerusalem, for the imperfect tense form "*they were abiding*" denotes their habitual activity.

They were living together in very close quarters during this very important time awaiting activation for ministry by the coming of the promised Holy Spirit – at least they made this room their headquarters – might not have all been able to live here – we find both men and women gathered here; but probably sleeping in some type of barracks situation – talk about having to put up with a snoring problem

Counting – you will find list of 11 since Judas has gone rogue (Illustration of "Accounting" – counting big numbers)
Bartholomew also called Nathanael (Jn. 1:45-49)
This James is different than the half-brother of Christ who wrote the book of James – called James the lesser; obviously this Judas who remained was different than Judas Iscariot

Very strong personalities; very different temperaments; yet one in mind and spirit
All personally chosen by Jesus Christ and equipped for the upcoming ministry to play a vital role in the building of His church; some enjoyed a closer bond with Jesus than others and were included in the most intimate settings – such as the Transfiguration – but all had witnessed the Ascension into heaven

Certainly this time deepened their already close bonds and created a unity of purpose and a resolve to faithfully fulfil their calling as apostles; they had known failure before; but they had also experienced the forgiveness of their Master and His final encouragement to them; preparing to minister as a team that respected one another and valued the contribution each would make

C. (:14a) Bathe Your Ministry Preparations in Corporate Prayer

"*These all with one mind were continually devoting themselves to prayer*"

Combine this description of how they spent their time during this 10 day period with **Luke 24:53** "*were continually in the temple praising God*" – thus some try to conclude that the upper room must have been in the temple – but probably not – Prayer not restricted to making request but would include praise and worship as well; split their time apparently between the more public arena of the temple and this more private setting in the upper room

1. United in Prayer – BAGD: prayed with one mind or purpose or impulse – favorite word of Luke's – uses it ten times (only once elsewhere in NT) – emphasis here is on corporate prayer rather than private prayer – we are unbalanced in this area – although the model of Jesus certainly shows that He spent considerable time alone in prayer

2. Persevering in Prayer – **Col. 4:2** "*Devote yourself to prayer*"

Wiersbe: quoting John Bunyan: Prayer is a shield to the soul, a sacrifice to God, and a scourge to Satan.

What were they praying about?

- Remember the simple acrostic about keeping our prayers balanced around 4 different themes: **ACTS** – adoration, confession, thanksgiving, supplication
- The things pertaining to the kingdom of God – "*Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done*"
- The coming of the promised Holy Spirit in power

Stott: We learn, therefore, that God's promises do not render prayer superfluous. On the contrary, it is only his promises which give us the warrant to pray and the confidence that he will hear and answer.

- The preparation of hearts for the gospel message they were about to deliver
- Boldness in testifying to Jesus Christ

D. (:14b) Broaden Your Partnership to All Who Know Jesus Well

"*along with the women, and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with His brothers.*"

Shows the significant role that women played in the gospel ministry; they were present and involved and participating in a vital way right from the beginning

Luke 8:2,3 – these had followed Jesus on a regular basis;
"*The twelve were with Him, and also some women who had been healed of evil spirits and sicknesses: Mary who was called Magdalene, from whom seven demons had gone out, and Joanna the wife of Chuza, Herod's steward, and Susanna, and many others who were contributing to their support out of their private means*."

Mark 15:40-41 – the women had been singled out as those who remained at the scene of the cross as Jesus breathed His last breath --
"*There were also some women looking on from a distance, among whom were Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James the Less and Joses, and Salome. When He was in Galilee, they used to follow Him and minister to Him; and there were many other women who came up with Him to Jerusalem*."

MacArthur: Doubtless they included Mary Magdalene, Mary the wife of Clopas, the sisters Mary and Martha, and Salome. Some of the apostles' wives also may have been present. . . Jesus' half-brothers, named in Mk 6:3 as James, Joses, Judas, and Simon.

Just because they were not included in the role of leadership as an apostle did not diminish their personal worth or their ministry contribution

Spiritual relationships take precedence over family relationships – note how Jesus pointed out

earlier the priority of spiritual relationships … brothers of Jesus did not believe early on; but were subsequently won over (**John 7:3-5**)
"*Who is my mother and who are my brothers*?" **Matt. 12:46-50** – are we true disciples? Are we doing the will of God?

Strengthen your spiritual relationships:

- By **patient obedience** -- Be in the place where God wants you to be; doing what God wants you to be doing during this period of waiting and preparation
- By **privileged communion** among leaders -- Build close relationships with your spiritual leaders
- By **persevering prayer** -- Bathe your upcoming ministry in prayer
- By **partnership bonding** -- Broaden your partnership among the key disciples

II. (:15-26) SUBMIT TO GOD'S SOVEREIGN PLAN – WHICH INVOLVES FOLLOWING THE BLUEPRINT OF GOD'S REVELATION

A. (:15-20) Sin is No Surprise or Threat to God's Sovereign Plan -- God's Sovereign Plan for the Launch of the Great Commission Ministry Took Into Account the Apostasy of Judas –

During this short waiting period the apostles had to come to grips with the reality that one of their core group – Judas Iscariot – had tragically defected and become the worst traitor imaginable; What did this mean for their mission? Jesus had promised them 12 thrones in the Millennial kingdom – everything had been geared around a leadership group that mirrored the 12 tribes of Israel … now they were down to 11; Did the opposition and treachery of Judas in any way threaten or compromise the sovereign plan of God?

1. (:15) God Prompts Leaders to Exercise Discernment and Take Initiative
   "*And at this time Peter stood up in the midst of the brethren (a gathering of about one hundred and twenty persons was there together), and said,*"

Not an indication in any way that Peter had some type of **hierarchical** pope status or authority over the other apostles; but someone had to take the initiative
In fact the relationship that is emphasized here is one of "*brethren*" -- brothers and sisters in the Lord – not even emphasizing his apostolic authority over the other disciples who had gathered here

2. (:16a) God Fulfills Every Promise He Makes (down to the most minute detail) – All Scripture is Inspired and Reliable (no matter how long the fulfillment seems delayed)
   "Brethren, the Scripture had to be fulfilled, which the Holy Spirit foretold by the mouth of David"

Much we can learn here about the inspiration of Scripture
David = mouthpiece of God
Holy Spirit actively directing the process
Inerrancy in all details must be maintained

3. (:16b-17) God's Purposes are Never Thwarted by the Treachery of His Enemies
   "*concerning Judas, who became a guide to those who arrested Jesus. 'For he was*

counted among us, and received his portion in this ministry.'"

Problem: How could Jesus have chosen someone to be one of the chosen 12 who turned out to be a traitor?

a. Began in position of privilege and trust and provision – a true insider

b. Apostasized to become a tool of Satan rather than a servant of God
name forever linked to treachery; to being a traitor; a friend who turns on you and sells you out; what a legacy

Issue of reconciling God's Sovereignty with Human Responsibility – **Acts 2:23** "*this Man, delivered over by the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God, you nailed to a cross by the hands of godless men and put Him to death*."

Whitcomb: His betrayal was predestined; Did Judas have a choice? Yes; you can't harmonize predestination and human responsibility; "*No man can come unless the Father draws him; but whosoever comes I will in no wise cast out*." Judas made a choice against the Savior; Have you made one against Him?

4. (:18-20) God's Judgments Are Legendary – The High Price of Wickedness
"*(Now this man acquired a field with the price of his wickedness; and falling headlong, he burst open in the middle and all his bowels gushed out. And it became known to all who were living in Jerusalem; so that in their own language that field was called Hakeldama, that is, Field of Blood.) For it is written in the book of Psalms, 'Let his homestead be made desolate, And let no man dwell in it'; and, 'His office let another man take.'*"

Kent: The field which Judas obtained with the blood money was actually purchased by the priests (Matt. 27:6-8). They probably purchased it in Judas' name since it was legally his money.

Stott: Both (Matt and Luke) say that Judas died a miserable death, that a field was bought with the money paid him (thirty silver coins), and that it was called "The Field of Blood." The apparent discrepancies concern how he died, who bought the field and why it was called "Blood Field." . . .
Why did the field purchased come to be known as "The Field of Blood?" Matthew's answer is that it had been bought with "blood money;" Luke gives no explicit reason, but implies that it was because Judas' blood had been spilled there. Evidently different traditions developed (as so often happens) as to how the field got its name, so that different people called it "Blood Field" for different reasons.

Quoting **Psalms 69:25; 109:8**

Fruits of wickedness are very clear – what do you get at the end of the day? Is it worth it?

Transition: Some commentators believe that Peter overstepped here and was in error in this selection process. They want to have Paul included as the 12th apostle and therefore believe

there is no space for Matthias.
[Rest of this material covered in next message]

B. (:21-26) God's Will (His Sovereign Plan) Can Be Discovered and Implemented -- God's Sovereign Plan for the Launch of the Great Commission Ministry Filled the 12th Apostolic Slot with God's Choice –
Man looks on outward appearance but God looks on the heart

CONCLUSION: FINAL PREPARATIONS

- Strengthen your Spiritual Relationships
- Submit to God's Sovereign Plan

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DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

1) What contributed to the unity of the church in its formative stages?

2) Are the activities of prayer and praise and worship of primary importance in our Christian fellowship or just appendages to other priorities?

3) How could Judas have been such a wicked apostate and yet the apostles could not discern this during their intimate times of fellowship and ministry?

4) What do we learn in this passage about the process of determining the will of God in important ministry decisions?

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QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Dr. Sinclair Ferguson: **The Waiting Community --**
Now they are moving into a different stage of fellowship with Him; Ascension was a final farewell; cf. the Transfiguration account; the coming of the cloud = pictorial representation of God coming in His glory to take His son home; Jesus is exalted; going to the right hand of God in order to receive the kingdom; could these two men be Moses and Elijah – the law and the prophets bearing testimony one more time; holy huddle of 120 gathered together and kept on praying; as the Lord prepares His people to bring the gospel to their community there is a pattern here of devoted, consistent prayer; you can't understand Acts chapter 2 apart from chapter 1; the **Guidance of Jesus for the Church** – Peter is a different man now; he begins to put into practice the lessons he had learned in the past 6 week seminar with Christ; seeing the OT scriptures in light of how they reveal the Messiah; Jesus was not taken by surprise by betrayal of Judas; both of these names are names of tremendous honor; only the Lord knows the heart; very language Luke had used in his gospel for the choosing of the twelve; praying to the Lord Jesus for direction; we look to Jesus to defend His church and build His church by the power of His word

and faithfulness of His chosen leaders; You defend your church; You reform your church; you ready your church for the next stage;
3 essential pieces in place for church to move forward and receive baptism of Holy Spirit:

- Obedient to Word of God = fruit of His work in us
- Fellowship defended and reformed by the Son of God = fruit of His work for us
- Engaged in intercession for Holy Spirit giving blessing = our cry to Him to keep His glorious promise to take the gospel to the ends of the earth – pleading for the divine blessing

Jesus turns to His Father and says "they are ready now; let's pour out the Spirit upon them"

Dr. John Whitcomb: **The Apostles of Jesus**
Let's see what God has planned for the apostles of Jesus Christ; **Rev. 21:14**ff – that's the church; the foundation stones will be made of precious stones – vs. 19 – very impressive – around that city are 12 gates named after 12 tribes of Israel; Gentiles is another group – God maintains the distinction between these 3 groups: Gentile believers and Israelite believers and the church – all saved the same way – by grace through faith as illumined by the Holy Spirit based on the merits of Jesus and His blood shed on the cross; **Ephes. 2:19ff** talking about Gentile Christians joined with Jewish believers having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets – Christ is the cornerstone; **Ephes. 4:7ff** – gave some as apostles and prophets … why did He give these special gifted people to His body and bride – for the equipping of the saints; Apostles were special people (not the most brilliant or spiritual) who had qualification of having been with Jesus in His ministry = witnesses of everything He had said and done; the basis of our salvation not just the testimony of two or three – but 12 men;
Acts 1 – let's take a closer look at these apostles – 40 days of preparation for ministry just as Jesus tested for 40 days in the wilderness = significant number; *gathering them together* = eating together = proof He had a real body; visible confirmation of bodily resurrection; can't launch out in our own strength; we are very different from Israel in the function of worship (not in the method of salvation);
Concentric circles of privilege and opportunity for believers based on how close they drew near to Jesus – 500 saw Him after resurrection, the 70, the 12, the 11 born again apostles, the three who were very specially privileged; John wanted to be closest to Jesus – outlived them all and wrote final book of Bible = Revelation – keep coming closer to Jesus; we all have opportunities to respond to Jesus;
Consistent groupings of apostles – presented this way all the time; going to be the foundation of the church forever, symbolized by precious jewels in the New Jerusalem; look who else was with them; the women travelled with them constantly; Luke 8 provided food and other needs; last mention of Mary in the NT; did you know that Jesus had 4 half brothers? By Mary and Joseph; also had half sisters; **Mark 14:21** –David is a picture of Jesus in the OT; apostles had no clue which one would betray Jesus; you can't always judge by outward appearances; Luke 22:28 you stood with me in my trials; they are transition men who saw two different dispensations in their lifetime; extent of ministry of John the Baptist – everywhere Paul went he found disciples of John the Baptist; Why wasn't the Apostle Paul the 12th apostle?? He didn't qualify – had to be with Jesus publicly from time of his baptism to his resurrection; Acts 14 – Paul and Barnabas were apostles in broader sense; two men were put forth as qualified; Prov. 16 – casting of lots – Jewish way to determine the will of God on special decisions to be made; now that we have the indwelling Holy Spirit and canon of Scripture, no more casting of lots to determine the will of God; but God honored this; Why do we never hear any more about Matthias … or about some of the other apostles?

TEXT: Acts 1: 21-26

TITLE: FINAL PREPARATIONS

BIG IDEA:
FINAL PREPARATIONS EQUIP THE APOSTLES TO LAUNCH THEIR GREAT COMMISSION MINISTRY UPON THE ARRIVAL OF HOLY SPIRIT POWER

INTRODUCTION:

Think of soldiers being deployed to the battlefield. They have finished their training. They finally receive their orders regarding their specific mission. They are in a state of readiness to perform their mission.

2 KEY AREAS OF FINAL PREPARATON FOR LAUNCHING THE APOSTOLIC GREAT COMMISSION MINISTRY

[Review from last week (:12-20)]

I. (:12-14) STRENGTHEN YOUR SPIRITUAL RELATIONSHIPS – DRAW CLOSE TO GOD AND TO YOUR PARTNERS IN GOSPEL MINISTRY

II. (:15-26) SUBMIT TO GOD'S SOVEREIGN PLAN – WHICH INVOLVES FOLLOWING THE BLUEPRINT OF GOD'S REVELATION

A. (:15-20) Sin is No Surprise or Threat to God's Sovereign Plan -- God's Sovereign Plan for the Launch of the Great Commission Ministry Took Into Account the Apostasy of Judas

Transition: Some commentators believe that Peter overstepped here and was in error in this selection process. They want to have Paul included as the 12th apostle and therefore believe there is no space for Matthias.

Argument based on:

- Text that speaks of 12 stones representing the 12 tribes of Israel – can't have 13 stones – Rev. 21:14 – promised by Jesus in Matt. 19:28
- Prominence of Apostle Paul – how could he not be included on the same level with the other 11? But others in the NT are called apostles and not included in the 12.
- Never hear of Matthias again … but never hear of several other of the apostles again either.
- Peter's personality is prone to acts of presumption
- Try to disparage the practice of casting of lots as a pagan methodology
- Does the command "Wait" imply taking no administrative action as well?

Refutation:

- Presented here in positive fashion – in contrast look at how seriously the sin of Ananias and Sapphira is dealt with
- First act of obedient apostles could not be a major blunder without some indication in the text

- Transitional nature of the early mission of the apostles – a reoffer of the kingdom to the Jews – only after the repeated rejection did Christ raise up Paul as the Apostle to the Gentiles – even though that was in His eternal plan
- Would bring into serious question the efficacy of prayer and the ability of the apostles to rightly discern the will of God when they were seeking it sincerely – [would seriously change my application for today's message]
- Paul did not meet the requirement of having personally been present during the earthly ministry of Christ
- Paul never argued that he should be included in this elite group: 1 Cor. 15:5,8
- Foundational nature of the apostles – there from the beginning of the building of the church; Paul is in a special category

Fundamental Principle: interpret the unclear in light of the clear; don't make problems where none exist; take the clear, simple sense of the passage whenever possible; don't complicate things unnecessarily

Bruce: The idea that Paul was divinely intended to be the twelfth, and that the apostles here wrongly anticipated God's plan, betrays a misunderstanding of the unique character of Paul's apostleship.

Since we believe this to be a positive example – what can we learn for our situation today?

[Today's Text]
B. (:21-26) God's Will (His Sovereign Plan) Can Be Discovered and Implemented – God's Sovereign Plan for the Launch of the Great Commission Ministry Filled the 12th Apostolic Slot with God's Choice --
Man looks on outward appearance but God looks on the heart

In fact: **Must be** discovered and implemented – Context here is discovering God's choice for spiritual leadership – Apostles as the foundation of the church – but for us today:
Whom does God want to be the undershepherds serving under the Chief Shepherd?

Some Christians are **virtual agnostics** when it comes to the Will of God – What's the use … I don't know what God wants me to do; I don't see God giving any clear direction to His church …What's it matter what choices I make??

Look at the **theology of the hymns** we sing – do we really believe what we are singing:

"He leadeth me, O blessed thought! O words with heav'nly comfort fraught! What e'er I do, where'er I be, still 'tis God's hand that leadeth me … by His own hand He leadeth me

"All the way my Savior leads me; What have I to ask beside? Can I doubt His tender mercy, who through life has been my guide? Heav'nly peace, divinest comfort, Here by faith in Him to dwell! For I know, whate'er befall me, Jesus doeth all things well"

"Guide me, O Thou great Jehovah, pilgrim through this barren land; I am weak, but Thou art mighty; hold me with Thy pow'rful hand; Bread of heaven, Bread of heaven, feed me till I want no more"

1. (:21-22) God's Choice for Spiritual Leadership Must Meet God's Revealed Standards

- Meshes with His Revealed Criteria of Qualifications
- Meshes with His Revealed Definition of Role and Responsibilities

God Embraces the Next Man Up Philosophy – Without Compromising on the Necessary Qualifications

> *"It is therefore necessary that of the men who have accompanied us all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us-- beginning with the baptism of John, until the day that He was taken up from us-- one of these should become a witness with us of His resurrection."*
>
> Δεῖ οὖν τῶν συνελθόντων ἡμῖν ἀνδρῶν ἐν παντὶ χρόνῳ ἐν ᾧ εἰσῆλθεν καὶ ἐξῆλθεν ἐφ᾽ ἡμᾶς ὁ κύριος Ἰησοῦς, ἀρξάμενος ἀπὸ τοῦ βαπτίσματος Ἰωάννου, ἕως τῆς ἡμέρας ἧς ἀνελήφθη ἀφ᾽ ἡμῶν, μάρτυρα τῆς ἀναστάσεως αὐτοῦ γενέσθαι σὺν ἡμῖν ἕνα τούτων.

Key Question: Why was it "*necessary*"? This solves the whole issue
"*therefore*" – look in the previous context to see what it is there for = points back to fulfillment of specific prophecy – application to Judas being made by the Holy Spirit

[Aside: Note how the apostles under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit and the use of the gift of prophecy interpreted OT passages and applied them to present day events is not a good pattern for us who must be more circumspect in our interpretation and application – this is a major difference between the hermeneutics of the amills and the premills]

"*Let another man take his office*" – <u>clear instructions</u>

> <u>a. One Primary Qualification</u>: Participation in the earthly ministry of Christ along with the other apostles – beginning back at the baptism of John up until the Ascension
> Does not mean that you personally had to see Jesus baptized by John … but from that time period characterized by John's preparation ministry …
>
> - Involves a certain level of experience
> - Involves a certain level of knowledge
>
> <u>b. One Primary Function</u>: Witness of the resurrection in ministry partnership with the other 11 apostles – read through Acts to see the emphasis on this witness to the resurrection
>
> - Involves a certain level of ability

Look at all of the problems that arise in our local churches when we fail to emphasize the revealed qualifications for spiritual leadership … or we fail to focus on the intended functionality

2. (:23) **God's Choice for Spiritual Leadership Must Be Recognizeable and Acceptable to the Existing Disciples** –
Identification of the "they" = 120 disciples involved in the evaluating who met the qualifications
Acts 6 – input from the congregation in selection of deacons

Acts 14:23 – who is involved here in the ordaining decision? Derivation of word involves stretching forth the hand – does not necessarily imply some type of congregational voting; word is used in general sense of ordaining, appointing

> "*And they put forward two men, Joseph called Barsabbas (who was also called Justus), and Matthias.*"
>
> Καὶ ἔστησαν δύο, Ἰωσὴφ τὸν καλούμενον Βαρσαβᾶν, ὃς ἐπεκλήθη Ἰοῦστος, καὶ Ματθίαν.

Barsabbas = "*son of the Sabbath*" – probably born on the Sabbath

Maybe these were the only two men that met these qualifications
Someone does not just pop up out of nowhere; you don't put someone into leadership without close personal knowledge of their character and qualifications; this is not something you audition for with a couple of preached sermons

Certainly not a popularity contest
But not ignoring or minimizing the input and discernment of the entire body of believers; not every input will be a mature one or a valid one; but still should be considered and evaluate

3. (:24-26) God's Choice for Spiritual Leadership Must Become Evident Through a Process of Sincerely Seeking God's Will

5 Principles Regarding the Selection Process of Church Officers:

a. (:24a) Involves a Commitment to Persevering Prayer
"*And they prayed,*" Καὶ προσευξάμενοι

Discerning God's will in any area always starts with a study of biblical principles and with persevering prayer – we come before God in humility; in recognition of our limitations; in a desire to embrace His will

b. (:24b) Involves a Recognition of the Surpassing Knowledge and Sovereign Wisdom of Jesus in providing guidance for the church
"*and said, "Thou, Lord, who knowest the hearts of all men, show which one of these two Thou hast chosen*"

εἶπον, Σὺ κύριε καρδιογνῶστα πάντων, ἀνάδειξον ὃν ἐξελέξω, ἐκ τούτων τῶν δύο ἕνα

Ministry roles appointed by the Head of the Church; we just recognize the giftedness and character and free up for ministry

We must settle in our minds the important question of who is in charge of the church of Jesus Christ – too many times men get too big in their understanding of their own calling and giftedness and imagine that in some practical sense they are in charge of God's church; we are prone to act presumptuously; to pridefully imagine that we know the hearts of men and can make such decisions; even leaders as influential as the original apostles recognized their limitations and submitted to the Headship of Jesus Christ; you don't see Peter taking charge in the sense of

dictating which individual should be chosen as the replacement for Judas

Do we really believe that Jesus can guide us and that we are just undershepherds with delegated authority?

Heart and character issues take precedence over intellect and natural abilities

Reference to God the Father or to the Lord Jesus Christ here?? Difficult to say for sure
[Bock: Usually the Father performs the action and Jesus mediates in Acts –]
But possibly addressing Jesus directly here as the one who needs to personally choose the 12th apostle as He had done with the other 11 – cf. vs. 21 "*the Lord Jesus*"

c. (:25a) Involves an Understanding of the Nature of the Specific Office
"*to occupy this ministry and apostleship*"

λαβεῖν τὸν κλῆρον τῆς διακονίας ταύτης καὶ ἀποστολῆς

Longenecker: probably a hendiadys (i.e. two connotative words connected by a conjunction that are used to express a single complex idea normally expressed by an adjective and a substantive noun), with the definite article tying the two elements together, and is best translated as "*this apostolic ministry*."

The importance of the particular role –
The qualifications … as we have discussed –
How this role is different from other roles -

Transition: an understanding of the nature of <u>ministry</u>

d. (:25b) Involves a Dedication to Servant type leadership vs Greed and Self Promotion
"*from which Judas turned aside to go to his own place.*"

ἐξ ἧς παρέβη Ἰούδας, πορευθῆναι εἰς τὸν τόπον τὸν ἴδιον.

Contrast **John 14:2-3** – Ultimate destiny is in view; Christ preparing a place for His disciples; Judas rejected Christ and turned aside (apostasy) to go to his own place

Longenecker: likely a euphemism for "to go to hell" which shows spiritually the awfulness of Judas's fate

You are able to recognize the genuine by having a good understanding of the counterfeit; what was it that led Judas to reject this apostolic ministry and make a choice to betray Jesus – to go his own way instead of submitting to God's Sovereign Plan?

e. (:26) Involves a Confidence in the Selection Process which God will bless
"*And they drew lots for them, and the lot fell to Matthias; and he was numbered with the eleven apostles.*"

Καὶ ἔδωκαν κλήρους αὐτῶν, καὶ ἔπεσεν ὁ κλῆρος ἐπὶ Ματθίαν, καὶ

συγκατεψηφίσθη μετὰ τῶν ἕνδεκα ἀποστόλων.

Process of discerning God's will by the drawing of lots was common in the OT for very special circumstances; but last time it is referred to in the Scriptures – Transition in how one determines the will of God – no longer rolling the dice
Prov 16:33 "*The lot is cast into the lap, but its every decision is from the Lord*."
(Lev. 16:8 – method prescribed by God for choosing a scapegoat in the Day of Atonement ritual)
Kent: Usually stones were used, either a white and a black one, or stones on which the names of the candidates were written.

Our process today will be different – not the drawing of lots – but these 5 principles still apply;

- We enjoy the completed canon of God's revelation
- We enjoy the guidance from the indwelling Holy Spirit
- We enjoy the counsel of many godly people who have gone before us

CONCLUSION: FINAL PREPARATIONS

- Strengthen your Spiritual Relationships
- Submit to God's Sovereign Plan

Stott: The stage is now set for the Day of Pentecost. The apostles have received Christ's commission and seen his ascension. The apostolic team is complete again, ready to be his chosen witnesses. Only one thing is missing: the Spirit has not yet come. Though the place left vacant by Judas has been filled by Matthias, the place left vacant by Jesus has not yet been filled by the Spirit. So we leave Luke's first chapter of the Acts with the 120 waiting in Jerusalem, persevering in prayer with one heart and mind, poised ready to fulfil Christ's command just as soon as he has fulfilled his promise.

Apostles are now ready for the Spirit in all of His power to be poured out upon them so that they might testify to Christ with great effectiveness

* * * * * * * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Longenecker: We need not insist that the Christians believed that the primary reference of these two psalms was to Judas, as if no one could have understood them prior to the betrayal. What they seem to be saying, however, is that just as the psalmist's portrayals of "The Servant of the Lord and the Righteous Sufferer" can on the basis of the Semitic concept of corporate solidarity be applied to God's Messiah, Jesus, the Servant and Righteous Sufferer, so the retribution spoken of as coming upon false companions and wicked men in general is especially applicable to Judas, who above all other men was false. So Peter quotes Psalm 69:25 in a Christian context and applies it to Judas's defection. In itself, of course, this verse gives no justification for replacing Judas – in fact, it even opposes it. Therefore Peter goes on to cite Psalm 109:8 on the Jewish exegetical principle of analogous subject in order to defend the legitimacy of replacing a member of the apostolic band. . . The twelvefold witness was required if early Jewish Christianity was to represent itself to the Jewish nation as the culmination of Israel's hope and

the true people of Israel's Messiah. The "remnant theology" of Late Judaism made it mandatory that any group that presented itself as "the righteous remnant" of the nation, and had the responsibility of calling the nation to repentance and permeating it for God's glory, must represent itself as the true Israel, not only in its proclamation, but also in its symbolism.

Wiersbe: When the apostle James was martyred, he was not replaced (Acts 12). Why? Because the official witness to Israel was now completed, and the message was going out to Jews and Gentiles alike. There was no more need for twelve apostles to give witness to the twelve tribes of Israel.

Max Doner: **Selecting Church Leaders**

No more critical task than the selection of leaders; determine the spiritual welfare and direction of the church; church never rises above the quality and character of its leaders; look at OT history of the character of the kings and priests and impact on their spiritual prosperity; godly men have been a great help to us in our past; We would expect God to give us some guidelines for their selection – by way of precept (direct teaching) and by way of example; 1 Tim. 3; Titus 1; 1 Pet. 5; Here we have a passage of example; also Acts 6 and 14; an example of the method and means whereby church leaders may be selected; there are some unique features in this situation:

- Selection of an apostle rather than an elder or deacon
- Selection was done before the outpouring of the Holy Spirit and before the establishment of normal local church principles

Must be sensitive to these unique features; look beyond the specifics and grasp the general principles;

A combination of factors that demonstrate 2 principles relative to selection of church leaders

I. There is a distinctly human element in the selection of church leaders

People are involved for 2 reasons:

- Because candidates for office must meet the proper qualifications; this requires human evaluation (:21-22)
    - Must have a proper degree of experience – not a novice; not a Johnny come lately; not someone who happened on the scene in the last few days of the ministry of Jesus; demonstrated faithfulness and consistency; someone proven over the long haul; faced problems and dealt with them; knows when to take a stand and when to be flexible; a proven character over the long term
    - Must have a proper degree of knowledge – he knew the life and ministry of Christ from the beginning to its finish; must be well acquainted with the doctrines and doings of Christ; must not be gaping areas of ignorance; not to say they will have a perfect, full and complete knowledge; John 17:7; be a diligent student of the Word; can recognize and refute error; absolutely committed to truth; set forth a positive presentation of the truth and polemical defense of the truth
    - Must have a proper degree of ability (:22) – to be a witness this person must have the ability to convey the message in an accurate and credible and believable fashion; not a mere figurehead; ability in the area of preaching; is the teaching balanced, clear, applied accurately; in the area of counseling – does this person have wisdom? Would I be comfortable going to this person for advice; in the area of ruling? Is he kind and yet firm? Is he power hungry or does he desire to be a servant; does he have enough humility to work well

with others; does he operate on the basis of principle or expediency?

- Because candidates must be chosen by the congregation and this requires human decision (:23) – "*they appointed two*" – Context of vs. 15-16 shows that the disciples are the "they" involved here; selection of church leaders was not dictated from the top down but from the bottom up; Acts 6:2-3 repeats this pattern – getting the input of the congregation; Acts 14:23 repeats the same pattern [seems that the apostles came back through and selected and ordained the elders] – "select by the raising of hands"?? Cooperation between existing church leaders and congregation based on the biblical qualifications;

II. There is a distinctly divine element in the selection of church leaders (:24-26)

Sought and recognized the need for divine guidance; In order to accomplish this they cast lots; there was only room for one to serve because there was a fixed number of apostles needed; we can evaluate the external qualifications but only God Himself knew who should fit into that position because He sees the heart; human knowledge and evaluation has its limits; Ephes. 4:11; Acts 20:28 "over which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers" – God chooses church leaders;

2 Errors to be avoided in the selection of church leaders:

1) The error of carnal presumption – we will choose the man we want – mere political, human process; no prayer or waiting upon God

2) The error of pious mysticism – we have no voice at all in the selection of church officers; God put me here; therefore I have no accountability to the people of God

Church leaders need both a call of men and a call of God

How does this apply to us today? No business casting lots today; How do we know whom God has chosen?? How God has equipped that person with gifts and graces for the proper and godly execution of the office; when we see the equipping we need to recognize and ratify that person

TEXT: Acts 2: 1-4

TITLE: THE COMING OF THE HOLY SPIRIT – PART 1 -- IN POWERFUL PROCLAMATION

BIG IDEA:
THE COMING OF THE HOLY SPIRIT ATTESTED BY SIGN MIRACLES IMPACTS THE WHOLE WORLD WITH THE SUPERNATURAL PROCLAMATION OF GOD'S MIGHTY DEEDS

INTRODUCTION:

It is appropriate that as we celebrate the beginning of our nation on this holiday weekend, we also celebrate today the beginning of the Christian church as we study Acts chapter 2. [Fireworks] Something very special is happening on this occasion. You remember the anticipation on the part of the disciples as they obeyed the command of their Lord to wait in Jerusalem for the coming of the Holy Spirit. Think of all of the times we have eagerly waited for something only to find that the experience ended up being disappointing – not measuring up to our expectations. Well the disciples certainly were not disappointed on this occasion.

The history of the Christian church begins here – although many would deny that. Reformed theologians (whom I love dearly and share much in common) would argue, based on the common means of salvation (by grace through faith based on the redemption accomplished by Jesus Christ), that the church is simply an extension of Israel – not some separate entity; that the body of Christ contains believers of all ages. Certainly there is a commonality of faith and identity as the people of God. Certainly the means of salvation is the same. But God is doing something radically new and different here as He creates the church. God has a different program for the nation of Israel and for the bride of Christ. That is why as you proceed through Acts you see a variety of different groups incorporated into this new body of Christ – it was not enough to be faithful disciples of John the Baptist – you needed to be incorporated into this new body of believers by the baptism of the Holy Spirit. Remember John the Baptist was referred to not as the bride but as simply the friend of the bridegroom (John 3:29). Christ prophesied that all who come after John will be greater than John (Matt. 11:11) the greatest prophet who had ever lived – but greater in what sense?? in the sense of participating in the New Covenant program of God – something far superior than the Old Covenant program. Christ said He was going to build His church (future tense); this would require Him going away and sending His Holy Spirit – here we see the fulfillment of those promises.

The history of the Christian church begins here -- not with some significant acts by significant men; but with sovereign acts by an all powerful God who is living and active and continues to perform great works here on this earth and especially in the hearts and lives of people; the transforming power of God at work

Wiersbe: the early church had the power of the Holy Spirit energizing its ministry. They were a people who were ignited by the Spirit of God. [quote from Vance Havner]

This was such a special event that God provided significant **sign miracles** to accompany the arrival of the Holy Spirit and to attest to the validity of this new message of the gospel of Jesus

Christ. Therefore, there is much in this passage that will not characterize the normal experience of believers today. However, the power of the Holy Spirit for the proclamation of the gospel is for us and derives back from this birth of the church on the day of Pentecost.

(:1) THE SETTING

A. (:1a) SIGNIFICANCE OF THE DAY OF PENTECOST HISTORICALLY

"*And when the day of Pentecost had come,*"
τὴν ἡμέραν τῆς πεντηκοστῆς

Lev. 23:15-17 ff
The second of the three great Jewish feasts where the nation was required to gather in Jerusalem – **Passover** (picturing Redemption) followed closely by the Feast of Unleavened Bread (Picturing the removal of sin and the communion and fellowship that would then be enjoyed) , secondly the **Feast of Weeks**, then thirdly the **Feast of Tabernacles or Booths** (pointing to the establishment of Messiah's kingdom on earth)

The Feast of Weeks was essentially a harvest celebration – grain harvest lasted 7 weeks from the waving of the first sheaf of grain; means 50th; comes 50 days after Passover; nation required to gather in Jerusalem so it provided the perfect audience for the initial proclamation of the gospel of Jesus Christ; offering of first fruits was made (Lv 23:20);

B. (:1b) SIGNIFICANCE OF THIS SPECIAL DAY OF PENTECOST

"*they were all together in one place.*"
Καὶ ἐν τῷ συμπληροῦσθαι . . . ἦσαν πάντες ὁμοῦ ἐπὶ τὸ αὐτό.

Wiersbe: Passover pictures His death as the Lamb of God (John 1:29; 1 Cor. 5:7), and the Feast of Firstfuits pictures His resurrection from the dead (1 Cor. 15:20-23). Fifty days after Firstfruits is the Feast of Pentecost, which pictures the formation of the church. At Pentecost, the Jews celebrated the giving of the law, but Christians celebrate it because of the giving of the Holy Spirit to the church. Priest waved 2 loaves of bread – uniting Jews and Gentiles into one body of the church – another representation of first fruits

Longenecker: By the stress on Pentecost as the day when the miracle took place, he is also suggesting (1) that the Spirit's coming signals the essential difference between the Jewish faith and commitment to Jesus, for whereas the former is Torah centered and Torah directed, the latter is Christ centered and Spirit directed – all of which sounds very much like Paul.

Holy Spirit came as first fruits of inheritance of believers
Ephes 1:14 "*having also believed, you were sealed in Him with the Holy Spirit of promise, who is given as a pledge of our inheritance, with a view to the redemption of God's own possession, to the praise of His glory*"
Remember the concern of the apostles: Will it be worth it in the end to have left everything to follow Jesus? Here is the assurance of our final destiny – we are co-heirs of Jesus Christ and will enter into glory with Him – The possession of the promised Holy Spirit is our guarantee – **Don't disregard your guarantee!** You don't buy an expensive new product and then throw out the warranty. You safeguard that warranty – you might need it.

You see the Holy Spirit in His effects – transforming your life

"*they*" – reference to just the 12 apostles (2:14) or all 120 disciples (1:15)

- They all needed this baptism of the Holy Spirit
- They all were typically gathered together to pray – but you would need a big area for 120 people to be sitting down
- When you look at all of the messages conveyed in so many languages, it may have required more than just the 12 apostles

What "*place*" is the setting here?

- The temple – because you need a large area that could accommodate a crowd
- The same upper room of the house where they were gathered to pray back in chap 1

[House could refer to the temple – Acts 7:47?? Wiersbe] Probably a large house that could accommodate the 120 disciples – might have been the same as in Acts 1

John 16:14 – Key function of the Holy Spirit is to **glorify Christ** – Must keep that in mind as we explore this wonderful phenomenon of speaking in tongues

I. (:2-4) THE EXPERIENCE OF THE COMING OF THE HOLY SPIRIT IN POWER

A. The Experience Was Startling

1. Startling in its Timing -- The Holy Spirit Came Suddenly

   "*And suddenly*" immediately; at once

   καὶ . . . ἄφνω

What types of events can come on you *suddenly*? God in His Providence controls the timing of all events

Calamity -- Proverbs 1:27 When your dread comes like a storm, And your calamity comes on like a whirlwind, When distress *and* anguish come on you.

Death -- Ecclesiastes 9:12 Moreover, man does not know his time: like fish caught in a treacherous net, and birds trapped in a snare, so the sons of men are ensnared at an evil time when it suddenly falls on them.

Earthquake -- Acts 16:26 and suddenly there came a great earthquake, so that the foundations of the prison house were shaken; and immediately all the doors were opened, and everyone's chains were unfastened.

John 3:8 – look at how the wind operates and why it is such a good symbol for the working of the Holy Spirit – "*The wind blows where it wishes and you hear the sound of it, but do not know where it comes from and where it is going; so is everyone who is born of the Spirit.*"
New Birth attributed to the coming of the Holy Spirit upon the individual --
What is unusual in this context is that you have genuine believers who have not received the permanent indwelling of the Holy Spirit – Does that mean that for all believers today they should seek an experience of Spirit baptism at a point sometime after salvation? NO – You must understand the timing here – the transitional nature of God starting something new

2. Startling in its Source -- The Holy Spirit Came from Heaven

   "*there came from heaven*"

   ἐγένετο . . . ἐκ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ

This was something miraculous; **supernatural**; God was at work; doing something very special

Just as Jesus Christ had come down from heaven and then returned to the Father; we must recognize that the Holy Spirit came from heaven; People feel lonely; they feel that God doesn't care about them; doesn't know what's going on in their life; God so loved the world He sent His Son from heaven so that you might believe and enter into a personal relationship with the living God; now He sends His Holy Spirit; you do not need to be alone

The source of a gift often gives an indication of its worth; you open up your gift packages and you discover an LL Bean box – that means something – here you have a gift with heavenly wrapping – Awesome!

B. The Experience Was Impressive and Powerful – 2 Key Symbols

1. The Holy Spirit Came Audibly in Power – Symbol of Wind
   "*a noise like a violent, rushing wind and it filled the whole house where they were sitting*" Not an actual wind – a noise, a sound of any sort (not a distinct voice)

   ἦχος ὥσπερ φερομένης πνοῆς βιαίας καὶ ἐπλήρωσεν ὅλον τὸν οἶκον οὗ ἦσαν καθήμενοι

Word for wind and spirit is the same – even sounds a bit like wind --

The wind is a powerful force that spreads rapidly – think of the noise that people associate with a tornado – like a locomotive engine coming right through your house
violent – Acts 27:14 Paul on the voyage to Rome experienced a sudden, violent windstorm
Ezek 37:9-10; John 3:8 – breath and wind associated with giving of life

Boice: That sounds very much like the story of the Spirit of God hovering over the waters of the earth at creation. So the suggestion is that here, in Acts, we have a new creation – as important (more important in many ways) as the original creation of the heavens and the earth. That heaven and earth are destined to pass away, but what is done by the Spirit at Pentecost is eternal. Again, the account in Acts sounds like **Genesis 2**, where God breathes life into man. Pentecost is a life-breathing experience. The account is also like **John 3**, where Jesus told Nicodemus, "*You must be born again*." Obviously the coming of the Holy Spirit as a violent wind was meant to symbolize the coming of the creative power of God to inaugurate a new era in which men and women should be brought to spiritual life. [Also **Is. 2:22** – contrasts man who is limited to breath in his nostrils vs God who is source of all breath and life]

Recalls Shekinah glory at time of establishment of Messianic kingdom – **Ezek 43:1-5**
"*His voice was like the sound of many waters*" – Auditory component

notice that they were sitting – not rolling around on the floor in some type of out of body ecstatic experience; fully under control – but now going to be controlled by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven
emphasis of filling is one of domination and control

2. The Holy Spirit Came Visibly in Power – Symbol of tongues of fire
   "*And there appeared to them tongues as of fire*" Not actual fire
   καὶ ὤφθησαν αὐτοῖς . . . γλῶσσαι ὡσεὶ πυρὸς

You didn't get burned by this phenomenon; it didn't make you hot – but it was spectacular

Let the fireworks begin!
Fire often symbolizes the divine presence – Ex. 3:2-6; God described as an all consuming fire;
Fire is a powerful force that spreads rapidly –
"it only takes a spark to get a fire going; and soon all those around will warm up in its glowing; that's how it is with Christ's love"
Tongues – speaks to the emphasis on communication to others; Holy Spirit given for expression; we grieve the Holy Spirit when we restrict or inhibit that expression; don't argue that you have an introverted personality; you have an extroverted Holy Spirit!

Matt. 3:11 – *He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire* – fire used in that context in a negative sense of judgment; here it is used in a positive sense and coupled with the image of tongues because of the emphasis on powerful proclamation of testimony to the risen Christ

"O for a thousand tongues to sing our great Redeemer's praise"

C. The Experience Was Personally and Profoundly Life Changing

1. The Holy Spirit Came to Rest on Each Believer in His Personal Presence
   "*distributing themselves, and they rested on each one of them*"
   διαμεριζόμεναι . . . καὶ ἐκάθισεν ἐφ᾽ ἕνα ἕκαστον αὐτῶν,

Pres Participle middle voice – dividing themselves
Remember dove resting on Christ and voice from heaven after His baptism

No believer left out here; not some elite group separate and distinct from lower class citizens of heaven

Longenecker: This seems to suggest that, though under the old covenant the divine presence rested on Israel as a corporate entity and upon many of its leaders for special purposes, under the new covenant, as established by Jesus and inaugurated at Pentecost, the Spirit now rests upon each believer individually. In other words, though the corporate and individual aspects of redemption cannot actually be separated, the emphasis in the proclamation of redemption from Pentecost onward is on the personal relationship of God to the believer through the Spirit, with all corporate relationships resulting from this.

2. The Holy Spirit Came to Fill Each Believer and Permanently Indwell
   "*And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit*"
   καὶ ἐπλήσθησαν πάντες πνεύματος ἁγίου

<u>Distinction between Baptism of the Holy Spirit and Filling</u>
Wiersbe: The baptism of the Spirit means that I belong to His body; the fullness of the Spirit means that my body belongs to Him. The baptism is final; the fullness is repeated as we trust God for new power to witness. The baptism involves all other believers, for it makes us one in the body of Christ (Eph. 4:1-6); while the fullness is personal and individual. These are two distinct experiences and they must not be confused.

Acts 11:15-16 – points back to this original experience of the baptism of the Holy Spirit; so here the baptism and the filling are used almost synonymously – although the baptism occurs once and then multiple experiences of filling should follow – in fact believers are commanded to be filled with the Spirit – in the same sense or different sense?? This was a sovereign act of God

D. The Experience Was Impactful on Others -- The Holy Spirit Came to Give Expression to Powerful Utterances in Known Foreign Languages – Impressive Sign Miracle

"*and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit was giving them utterance.*"
καὶ ἤρξαντο λαλεῖν ἑτέραις γλώσσαις καθὼς τὸ πνεῦμα ἐδίδου ἀποφθέγγεσθαι αὐτοῖς.

Utterance – ability to speak out
Is the gift of tongues for believers today?

Boice: if you ask whether a person is "*Spirit-filled*," the only way to answer the question is by determining whether or not he or she speaks often and effectively about Jesus. It is not by whether he or she speaks in an unintelligible language or does miracles. The question is, Does he or she testify to Jesus Christ, and does God bless that testimony in the conversion of men and women?

Look forward: explanation of gift of tongues as we see it in operation; focus is on proclaiming the mighty deeds of God

CONCLUSION:
Have you experienced the Holy Spirit? Not in the audible and visible sense of a roaring wind and tongues of fire but in His inward power to change your life and empower your testimony and ministry for Jesus Christ?

Have you received this **precious gift from heaven** so that you have been baptized into the body of Christ?

Is the Holy Spirit using you to **impact the lives of others**?

On this July 4th as we remember our privileged heritage as members of this great nation of ours, let us also think back to the day of Pentecost and the start of a vastly more important organization of people – the church as the body of Jesus Christ – indwelt by the powerful Spirit of God.

* * * * * * * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

1) As you study the OT feasts, what symbolism do you see regarding eschatological fulfillment by the Messiah?

2) Why is the emphasis here on the filling of the Holy Spirit rather than explicit reference made to the baptism of the Holy Spirit? (cf. 1:5)

3) Were the tongues at Pentecost the same as those at Corinth in 1 Cor. 14?

4) Why the emphasis on all speaking in tongues when in 1 Cor.12-14 it is made plain that not all

receive the gift of speaking in tongues?

* * * * * * * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Wiersbe: Pentecost was a reversal of the judgment at the Tower of Babel when God confused man's language (Gen. 11:1-9). God's judgment at Babel scattered the people, but God's blessings at Pentecost united the believers in the Spirit. At Babel, the people were unable to understand each other, but at Pentecost, men heard God's praises and understood what was said. The Tower of Babel was a scheme designed to praise men and make a name for men, but Pentecost brought praise to God. The building of Babel was an act of rebellion, but Pentecost was a ministry of humble submission to God. What a contrast!

Whitcomb: **The Miracles of Pentecost**

Creation of the true church is one of the greatest miracles God ever accomplished; interpretative challenges; many Christians confused about things in this chapter; Was this actually the birth of the church? They (reformed theologians) believe the church began back in the OT since there is only one people of God; no other distinct body; When did the church begin? On the day of Pentecost; ultra dispensationalists think the church began later; the Lord has been preparing us for something of colossal, cosmic significance that is about to happen; something very special; the Spirit of God is going to create this church; 120 people going to experience spiritual baptism, immersion, identification with Jesus Christ – brought into a new body, a new organism, the church;

Why the day of Pentecost? 7 weeks after feast of First Fruits when Christ arose on that first Sunday; a joyful time; God launching His church when there would be an enormous number of Jews in Jerusalem

What were the miracles here? Definition: miracle, sign, wonder = a special rare spectacular work of God that absolutely defies explanation or denial – God's Providence is the normal outworking of His plan as He works through natural laws and processes to accomplish His purposes; Pentecostal movement, charismatic movement, signs and wonders movement take a very different view: If God did signs and miracles in the days of the early church then why doesn't He do them today? Issue is not His power or ability but His purposes for these sign miracles; Bible always places these physical miracles in secondary position to the inward spiritual miracles of conversion and character transformation; miracles of Jesus were temporary in their effect vs "the greater works which you shall do" – not intended to permanently solve anyone's problem; God is not performing sign miracles in this post apostolic era; even the apostle Paul saw these sign miracles ceasing – had no healing powers at the end of his ministry; cast off deadly serpent on island of Miletus; had accomplished their temporary purpose of attracting attention to the miracle worker to hear the message from God they brought; Word of God is our priority in ministry

Sign miracles on the Day of Pentecost – they did happen and were spectacular but are not happening today; after the Rapture of the church all kinds of spectacular sign miracles start occurring on earth (Rev. 11) – both divine and demonic miracles; it was a sound of a wind, not a wind itself; like fire – looked like a little candle flame on each person's head; Matt 3:11 is for unbelievers – nothing to do with Pentecost; the filling followed the baptism; you don't get re-baptized throughout your Christian life; Was this the point at which these people became believers? No – they lived in transition period – they were already believers; they experience something that brings them into the body of Christ; a new dispensation; John the Baptist

anticipated this – no man ever born greater than John – but everyone in the church is positionally in a higher program and privilege than OT saints; "I am a friend of the bridegroom" – "He must increase, I must decrease" – I am not part of the bride; **Acts 18** – Apollos preaching about Jesus –but only understood what John the Baptist had said – led into the fuller story – became Spirit baptized and incorporated into the church; **Acts 19** – 12 men who also needed Spirit baptism; no born again person in this transition period rejected the full message when they heard it;

1 Cor. 12:12, 13 – we fit into this just as the Corinthian believers did; What happens when you are born again today? If you are unsaved you do not have the Holy Spirit at all; all or nothing; only one way you can get into this one body; **Acts 11:16-18** – note he does not quote "with fire" here; we experienced what they experienced and we are all now in the one body – so the church began on the Day of Pentecost; don't make distinction now between Jew and Gentile, between kosher food and non-kosher;

Third sign miracle = speaking in tongues = foreign languages; people who were not academically qualified to be multi-lingual; God reversing the curse of Tower of Babel; 6,000 people groups today with their own language and culture all over the world; Great Commission sounds like impossible task – but not when Jesus is present; church very negligent in fulfilling this commission because we don't trust in Christ; Israel will someday succeed in this worldwide witness (Rev 7:9) = 72,000 two men gospel teams – fruit of their ministry; Rev 5:9 – Jesus finally wins

Sinclair Ferguson: **The Pentecostal Church**

Lord Jesus began to reign on the day of His Resurrection; rose over sin and Satan and death; soon after ascended to right hand of heavenly Father; but on the day of Pentecost He celebrated His coronation by a lavish and unrepeated display of extraordinary gifts; elements of this day that are not repeated in experience going forward; apostles preached the gospel by way of languages they had never themselves learned; this gospel intended to extend to the ends of the earth; we are able to share in the blessings brought at this day; Kuyper illustration: new water supply celebrated in big event … but every time a new home is built it is connected to this water supply; emphasis in this message: what was repeatable about this day

1) When the Spirit comes, He comes to empower His disciples for witness – they already were witnesses of Jesus – but they needed power; What does it mean to be filled with the Holy Spirit – your heart overcome with such love and admiration and faith that you want to stand up and speak about Him; consequence always the same = spoke about Jesus with boldness and people responded in both positive and negative ways; without the Spirit your words will fall to the ground; just sounds in the air;

2) When the Spirit comes to empower for witness, He exalts the Lord Jesus Christ

Acts 2:22-23; Christ must be glorified and exalted in our heart;

3**) When the Spirit comes, He brings conviction of sin (:37)**

His words went through me like a knife;

4) When the Spirit comes, He comes to create a living challenge

Effects: devotion to Lord Jesus and to one another

TEXT: Acts 2: 5-13

TITLE: THE COMING OF THE HOLY SPIRIT IN POWERFUL PROCLAMATION – PART 2

BIG IDEA:
THE COMING OF THE HOLY SPIRIT ATTESTED BY SIGN MIRACLES IMPACTS THE WHOLE WORLD WITH THE SUPERNATURAL PROCLAMATION OF GOD'S MIGHTY DEEDS

INTRODUCTION:

As we continue this week to reflect on the miracle of Pentecost – the coming of the Holy Spirit in great power – I want to focus on the **greatness of our God**. Often we are so self-absorbed with our own set of problems and what we want God to do for us in our situation that we lose sight of the greatness of God and what He wants to accomplish on a grand scale. His purposes are not limited to my personal needs. His purposes are not limited to Solid Rock Community Church and its struggles. His purposes are not limited to the United States of America and its moral deficiencies. His purposes are not limited to any one race of people. The Great Commission reflects God's worldwide scope of kingdom expansion. If we are going to be in tune with the heart of God we must have a heart for worldwide missions.

How Great is God in your thinking? Are you overwhelmed with a sense of awe and amazement at His providential workings as He carries out His grand scheme in history? Does your heart overflow with a good theme – with worship and praise to your God? Are we filled with the Holy Spirit today in the sense of **Ephes 5:19** "*speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody with your heart to the Lord; always giving thanks for all things in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to God, even the Father*."

Last week – Part 1: (:1-4)
(:1) THE SETTING
I. (:2-4) THE EXPERIENCE OF THE COMING OF THE HOLY SPIRIT IN POWER
A. The Experience Was Startling
B. The Experience Was Impressive and Powerful – 2 Key Symbols: Wind / Tongues of Fire
C. The Experience Was Personally and Profoundly Life Changing
D. The Experience Was Impactful on Others

God in His greatness is doing something huge at Pentecost

This week – Part 2: (:5-13)
II. (:5-13) THE EXPLANATION BY THE ASSEMBLED CROWD OF FOREIGN JEWS
[Next week – God's own explanation through His spokesman Peter]
Simple outline – **Who, What, Where, Why , When, How** (not necessarily in that order) – but dissect this spectacular event like an investigative reporter – Imagine that you are at the scene, circulating among the crowd, interviewing people, Asking the basic questions – First:
A. Who Heard This Phenomenon of Speaking in Tongues?
1. Speaking in Tongues was Directed to a Jewish Audience
"*Now there were Jews*" -- talked about the Feast context last week

Ἦσαν . . . Ἰουδαῖοι

City was filled to overflowing; no vacancies; tents and temporary dwellings set up everywhere; people entertaining out of town visitors; hustle and bustle of a lot of activity; Jerusalem was a happening place

Sign of judgment to unbelieving Israel – **1 Cor. 14:21,22 –** God is switching gears in His kingdom focus and now bringing this kingdom message to the world instead of working exclusively through the Jewish nation. Represents a huge transition.

MacArthur: Upon hearing the apostles speaking in known foreign languages the Jews should have known that the judgment prophesied and historically fulfilled first by the Assyrians and then by the Babylonian captivity was about to fall on them again for their rejection of Christ, including the destruction of Jerusalem (A.D. 70) as it had happened in 586 B.C. under Babylonian power. . . The blessing of that sign was that God would build a new nation of Jews and Gentiles to be His people (Gal. 3:28) to make Israel jealous and someday repent (see **Ro 11:11, 12, 25-27)**.

2. Living in Jerusalem – at least staying there for the important annual feast
   "*living in Jerusalem,*"
   δὲ εἰς Ἰερουσαλὴμ κατοικοῦντες

Stedman: Josephus, the Jewish historian who lived at this time, tells us that oftentimes the city of Jerusalem (which normally had a population of 150,000) would be swollen in numbers to well over a million. The city was packed and the suburbs were filled, and out on the hillsides were many camps of pilgrims.

3. Devout in their Devotion to God – faithful Israelites – not yet believers in Christ
   "*devout men,*"
   ἄνδρες εὐλαβεῖς
   many of them trapped in a sense of self righteousness like the Pharisees of Christ's time; but very religious

4. Representatives of Every Nation
   "*from every nation under heaven.*"
   ἀπὸ παντὸς ἔθνους τῶν ὑπὸ τὸν οὐρανόν.

This sign miracle could be viewed as a reversal of the judgment that took place at the Tower of Babel. Remember the Lord's worldwide charge to Noah after the flood: "*Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth*." Instead the people in pride determined to make a great name for themselves and resist being scattered over the face of the earth. The multiplication of languages facilitated God's worldwide mission.

Wiersbe: Pentecost was a reversal of the judgment at the Tower of Babel when God confused man's language (Gen. 11:1-9). God's judgment at Babel scattered the people, but God's blessings at Pentecost united the believers in the Spirit. At Babel, the people were unable to understand each other, but at Pentecost, men heard God's praises and understood what was said. The Tower of Babel was a scheme designed to praise men and make a name for men, but Pentecost brought praise to God. The building of Babel was an act of rebellion, but Pentecost

was a ministry of humble submission to God. What a contrast!

B. Where and Why Did They Happen to Hear?

"*And when this sound occurred, the multitude came together,*"
γενομένης δὲ τῆς φωνῆς ταύτης συνῆλθεν τὸ πλῆθος

God got their attention; stimulated their curiosity; gathered them together;
This was a big-time event; Set the stage for initial sermon by Peter

Does God have your attention? He uses a variety of means to get our attention:

- Trials, difficulties, hardships, pressures
- Silence
- Humbling us in a variety of ways so we need to seek His face

Sometimes it is a lot less painful to just pay attention to God rather than force Him to go to extra lengths to get our attention

C. What Did They Hear? A Message from God about His Greatness in their Native Language (not some unintelligible language of angels or ecstatic utterances)
A message that was relevant to them and accessible to them

1. The Communication Via Known Foreign Languages

"*because they were each one hearing them speak in his own language.*"
ὅτι ἤκουον εἷς ἕκαστος τῇ ἰδίᾳ διαλέκτῳ λαλούντων αὐτῶν.

"*saying, 'Why, are not all these who are speaking Galileans? And how is it that we each hear them in our own language to which we were born? Parthians and Medes and Elamites, and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the districts of Libya around Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, Cretans and Arabs—*

λέγοντες· οὐχ ἰδοὺ ἅπαντες οὗτοί εἰσιν οἱ λαλοῦντες Γαλιλαῖοι; καὶ πῶς ἡμεῖς ἀκούομεν ἕκαστος τῇ ἰδίᾳ διαλέκτῳ ἡμῶν ἐν ᾗ ἐγεννήθημεν; Πάρθοι καὶ Μῆδοι καὶ Ἐλαμῖται καὶ οἱ κατοικοῦντες τὴν Μεσοποταμίαν, Ἰουδαίαν τε καὶ Καππαδοκίαν, Πόντον καὶ τὴν Ἀσίαν, Φρυγίαν τε καὶ Παμφυλίαν, Αἴγυπτον καὶ τὰ μέρη τῆς Λιβύης τῆς κατὰ Κυρήνην, καὶ οἱ ἐπιδημοῦντες Ῥωμαῖοι, Ἰουδαῖοί τε καὶ προσήλυτοι, Κρῆτες καὶ Ἄραβες,

we hear them speaking in our own tongues"
ἀκούομεν λαλούντων αὐτῶν ταῖς ἡμετέραις γλώσσαις

Word from which we get "dialect" in the English

MacArthur: Galileans – inhabitants of the mostly rural area of northern Israel around the Sea of Galilee. Galilean Jews spoke with a distinct regional accent and were considered to be unsophisticated and uneducated by the southern Judean Jews. When Galileans were seen to be speaking so many different languages, the Judean Jews were astonished. . . The listing of specific countries and ethnic groups proves again that these utterances were known human languages.

2. The Content of the Speaking in Tongues? Very important!
   "*of the mighty deeds of God."*
   τὰ μεγαλεῖα τοῦ θεοῦ.

Nothing small about our God – But does this mighty God intervene in our lives here on earth? You bet He does!

Reflect on the Mighty Deeds of God:

- Mighty deeds of Creation – *the heavens declare the glory of God* … 7 Wonders of the ancient world pale in comparison to God's mighty deeds
  - Great Pyramid of Giza
  - Hanging Gardens of Babylon
  - Statue of Zeus at Olympia
  - Temple of Artemis at Ephesus
  - Mausoleum of Maussollos at Halicarnassus
  - Colossus of Rhodes
  - Lighthouse of Alexandria
- Mighty deeds of Forming me in all of my uniqueness – *I will give thanks to Thee, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made; Wonderful are Thy works, And my soul knows it very well.* – Ps. 139:14
- Mighty deeds of His New Creation – 2 Cor 5:17 "*Therefore if any man is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come*."
- Mighty deeds of Judgment – Tower of Babel and Noah's Flood
- Mighty deeds of His dealings with His covenant People – Nation of Israel
- Mighty deeds of the Giving of His Law – revelation to guide His people
- Mighty deeds of the coming of the promised Messiah – His incarnation by virgin birth
- Mighty deeds of Christ accomplished during His earthly ministry
- Mighty deeds of His death and resurrection and ascension
- Mighty deeds continuing now by the Holy Spirit as recorded in this Book of Acts

Reflect on the Greatness of our Lord Jesus Christ:

- As a **Great Light** to the nations who were in darkness – Matt. 4:16
  - Are you walking in light or in darkness?
- As the **Great Shepherd** (Heb 13:20) who loves and tenderly cares for His sheep
  - Are you trusting Him as your Shepherd?
- As the **Great Physician** (Mark 2:17)who heals all of our spiritual diseases
  - Do you turn to Him for healing and restoration?
- As a **Great Prophet** (Luke 7:16) – come down from heaven to communicate the message of God
  - Are you listening to the Word of God and obeying it?
- As our **Great High Priest** (Heb. 10:21)who sympathizes with our weaknesses and represents us to God; our Advocate; our Mediator; the one who is our Propitiation – satisfying God by paying the penalty for our sins as the Great Lamb of God
  - Are you drawing near to God through the great high priest who sits at the right hand of God the Father?
- As our **Great King** (Matt. 5:35) who will come again to rule in majesty and dominion over all the earth and the people of every nation
  - Is your life submitted to this great king?

- As our **Great God** and blessed hope – **Titus 2:13** "*looking for the blessed hope and the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Christ Jesus*"
    - Are you living in holiness in anticipation and expectation of the return of Jesus Christ?

What is our response:
Psalm 71:19 "*For Thy righteousness, O God, reaches to the heavens, Thou who hast done great things; O God, who is like Thee*? "

Psalm 145:3 "*God is great and highly to be praised, and His greatness is unsearchable*"

Psalm 150:2 "*Praise Him for His mighty deeds; Praise Him according to His excellent greatness*. "

Mary's song of praise – **Luke 1:46-55** "*For the Mighty One has done great things for me*"
Is this our testimony??

Song of Moses – repeated at the end of the age – **Rev 15:3-4**
"And they sang the song of Moses the bond-servant of God and the song of the Lamb, saying, 'Great and marvelous are Thy works, O Lord God, the Almighty; Righteous and true are Thy ways, Thou King of the nations. Who will not fear, O Lord, and glorify Thy name? For Thou alone art holy; For all the nations will come and worship before Thee, For Thy righteous acts have been revealed.'"

D. How Did They React?

1. Emotionally? How did it make them feel?

"*and were bewildered,*"
καὶ συνεχύθη

"*And they were amazed and marveled*"
ἐξίσταντο δὲ καὶ ἐθαύμαζον

"*And they all continued in amazement and great perplexity,*"
ἐξίσταντο δὲ πάντες καὶ διηπόρουν,

Stedman: Notice the reaction Dr. Luke records of this crowd. There are, first, two words he uses for astonishment -- they were *amazed* and bewildered. Twice he indicates that they were amazed. The word in Greek is a word that means literally, "to push out of their senses." It is exactly what we say when we use the modern phrase, **"they blew their minds**." That is exactly what he said. It blew their minds as they heard this phenomenon occurring. And linked with that, Luke says, they were *bewildered*. Now the word is not quite accurately translated here. It is really a word which means they were "hit hard, stunned." **They were staggered by this amazing thing**. They heard these Galilean peasants speaking these languages and they were staggered by it, especially since they easily recognized the languages they were speaking.

Then we have two more words that indicate puzzlement: They wondered, and they were perplexed. Those are suggestive words. "*Wondered*" means **they sought for a solution**. They began to ask themselves, what is behind all this. They began to think through, why does this occur? The second word means literally, "thoughts running through their minds." They were *perplexed*, they **had various thoughts running through their minds**. That in turn gave way to two expressions that are recorded of this crowd which are very interesting to note. They indicate

the two divisions that always occur when something is suddenly sprung on people. When the human mind is confronted with the new thing it reacts in one of two ways, as in this case.

First, they said to one another, "What does this mean?" i.e., they began to inquire, What is behind this? What is the purpose of it? Why does this occur? That represents the group of open minds that are always ready to investigate further before coming to a conclusion. But there was another group who immediately dismissed the phenomenon with the infantile reaction of mockery, ridicule. They looked at the disciples and said, "Yes, they're drunk! That explains it. They've been getting into the new wine." Thus they dismissed it with ridicule. All this sets the stage for Peter's explanation, and, in the next few verses, we have a wonderful message delivered by the apostle on this occasion. . .

2. Intellectually? How Did They Interpret the Phenomena?
    a. Confusion / Ignorance / Searching / Inquiring – No reasonable explanation
        "*saying to one another, 'What does this mean?'*"
        ἄλλος πρὸς ἄλλον λέγοντες· τί θέλει τοῦτο εἶναι;

    b. Mocking / Dismissing – Trying to dismiss what they could not explain
        "*But others were mocking and saying, 'They are full of sweet wine.'*"
        ἕτεροι δὲ διαχλευάζοντες ἔλεγον ὅτι γλεύκους μεμεστωμένοι εἰσίν.

Lenski: The great bulk of the hearers were sensible; they stopped with their question, gave no hasty answer, were willing to wait for the true and satisfactory answer. They were in the presence of a great miracle that transcended all reason and all experience and deeply felt the effect of it.

CONCLUSION:
It was a **vision of the Greatness of God** that awoke the great Princeton theologian Jonathan Edwards from spiritual lethargy:

Jonathan Edwards was suddenly converted, as by a flash of light, in the moment of reading a single verse of the New Testament. He was at home in his father's house: some hindrances kept him from going to church one Sunday with the family. A couple of hours with nothing to do sent him listlessly into the library: the sight of a dull volume with no title on the leather back of it piqued curiosity as to what it could be: he opened it at random and found it to be a Bible: and then his eye caught this verse: "*Now unto the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only wise God, be honor and glory for ever and ever, Amen*!"

He tells us in his journal that the immediate effect of it was awakening and alarming to his soul: for it brought him a most novel and most extensive thought of the vastness and majesty of the true Sovereign of the universe. Out of this grew the pain of guilt for having resisted such as a Monarch so long, and for having served Him so poorly. And whereas he had hitherto had slight notions of his own wickedness and very little poignancy of acute remorse, now he felt the deepest contrition. – C. H. Robinson

Next week we will see that Peter's sermon had this same effect on multitudes of the Jews – piercing their hearts and confronting them with their lost condition – opening the door for him to testify to the grace gift of salvation from this perverse generation through the Lord Jesus Christ.

Let's never lose sight of the greatness of our God.

* * * * * * * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

1) Does my heart reflect God's passion for worldwide missions?

2) How has God gotten my attention in the past?

3) What passages help me to reflect on the greatness of God?

4) What type of mocking responses do we see to the gospel message?

* * * * * * * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Whitcomb: **The Miracles of Pentecost**

What were the miracles here? Definition: miracle, sign, wonder = a special rare spectacular work of God that absolutely defies explanation or denial – God's Providence is the normal outworking of His plan as He works through natural laws and processes to accomplish His purposes; Pentecostal movement, charismatic movement, signs and wonders movement take a very different view: If God did signs and miracles in the days of the early church then why doesn't He do them today? Issue is not His power or ability but His purposes for these sign miracles; Bible always places these physical miracles in secondary position to the inward spiritual miracles of conversion and character transformation; miracles of Jesus were temporary in their effect vs "the greater works which you shall do" – not intended to permanently solve anyone's problem; God is not performing sign miracles in this post apostolic era; even the apostle Paul saw these sign miracles ceasing – had no healing powers at the end of his ministry; cast off deadly serpent on island of Miletus; had accomplished their temporary purpose of attracting attention to the miracle worker to hear the message from God they brought; Word of God is our priority in ministry

Sign miracles on the Day of Pentecost – they did happen and were spectacular but are not happening today; after the Rapture of the church all kinds of spectacular sign miracles start occurring on earth (Rev. 11) – both divine and demonic miracles; it was a sound of a wind, not a wind itself; like fire – looked like a little candle flame on each person's head; Matt 3:11 is for unbelievers – nothing to do with Pentecost; the filling followed the baptism; you don't get re-baptized throughout your Christian life; Was this the point at which these people became believers? No – they lived in transition period – they were already believers; they experience something that brings them into the body of Christ; a new dispensation; John the Baptist anticipated this – no man ever born greater than John – but everyone in the church is positionally in a higher program and privilege than OT saints; "I am a friend of the bridegroom" – "He must increase, I must decrease" – I am not part of the bride; **Acts 18** – Apollos preaching about Jesus –but only understood what John the Baptist had said – led into the fuller story – became Spirit baptized and incorporated into the church; **Acts 19** – 12 men who also needed Spirit baptism; no born again person in this transition period rejected the full message when they heard it;

1 Cor. 12:12, 13 – we fit into this just as the Corinthian believers did; What happens when you are born again today? If you are unsaved you do not have the Holy Spirit at all; all or

nothing; only one way you can get into this one body; **Acts 11:16-18** – note he does not quote "with fire" here; we experienced what they experienced and we are all now in the one body – so the church began on the Day of Pentecost; don't make distinction now between Jew and Gentile, between kosher food and non-kosher;

Third sign miracle = speaking in tongues = foreign languages; people who were not academically qualified to be multi-lingual; God reversing the curse of Tower of Babel; 6,000 people groups today with their own language and culture all over the world; Great Commission sounds like impossible task – but not when Jesus is present; church very negligent in fulfilling this commission because we don't trust in Christ; Israel will someday succeed in this worldwide witness (Rev 7:9) = 72,000 two men gospel teams – fruit of their ministry; Rev 5:9 – Jesus finally wins

Dan Broadwater: **God's Spirit, Poured out to the Nations**

What has God done for us at Pentecost? Poured out upon His followers His Spirit for the sake of the lost nations. 120 all together in one place; People from all over the world were present; When Christ was on earth He ministered personally face to face; how is He going to minister after His Ascension? This is the launching of a new era; through His representatives as they empowered by His Spirit to speak to the nations; How dramatically different from the modern Pentecostal movement; Different in sound; different in vision; different in language that was spoken as a result; cf. difficulty of learning a new foreign language (using flash cards to memorize the vocabulary); God wanted to get the attention of the world; doing it in a big way; if you want to get someone's attention, do something spectacular; What are they going to be doing in the Book of Acts; proclaiming the wonders of God through Jesus Christ to the world; telling their stories of how Christ had transformed them; Beginning their witness campaign; foreshadowing of what we see in book of Revelation with people from every nation praising God; What were they saying? Vs. 11 – the wonders of God are incredible; the heavens declare the wonders of God; have to live 80 lifetimes to get to the first star in outer space; awesome; breathtaking; cf. the Grand Canyon; speaks of what God did not only in creation … but in history; what was Jesus doing in those last 40 days on earth; Christ would give up His life to redeem me

Ray Stedman: **What is This?**

Whenever the true gift of tongues is manifest it will always be characterized by these four marks. The Holy Spirit always moves in line with the Word of God: First, as we have clearly seen, the biblical gift of tongues is always known languages, spoken somewhere on earth. They may be unknown to the people hearing them, as in the fourteenth chapter of First Corinthians, but they are spoken somewhere. They are not "unknown tongues"; the word "unknown" does not occur in First Corinthians 14 in the Greek language. They are known languages, spoken somewhere. Second, they are addressed to God as praise and worship. They are not messages intended for men. Tongues is not a means of preaching the gospel. The early Christians did not preach the gospel in tongues in the New Testament; they praised God in tongues, they worshipped God in these strange languages. Paul confirms this in his treatise on tongues in First Corinthians 14. He says there,

For one who speaks in a tongue speaks not to men but to God; {1 Cor 14:2a RSV}

This exposes the falseness of those occasions during which a message is conveyed in tongues to those who are present, or some prediction is made, or some attempt is made to proclaim a truth for the benefit of the people present. These are false, says the New Testament, for he that speaks

in a tongue does not speak to men but in worship and praise to God. The third mark is very clear in this Pentecost incident. The gift of tongues is intended to be manifested publicly and never privately. Again Paul confirms this in 1 Corinthians 12:7:

To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. {1 Cor 12:7 RSV}

The gifts are not for private blessing; they are for the common good. In chapter fourteen he insists that if tongues, which is intended for another use, be exercised in the church, then it must be interpreted, otherwise it is of no value whatsoever. It is not designed for individual benefit; it is for the edifying of others. This was perfectly evident on the day of Pentecost. The miracle occurred for the benefit of the thousands of Jews who had gathered in from the four corners of the earth. There is no record in the New Testament of the private use of tongues.

This leads to the last sign which is also clearly evident at Pentecost and is definitely referred to by Paul in First Corinthians 14: The biblical gift of tongues is a sign to unbelievers, and not to believers. It is amazing how many Pentecostal writers will deal with First Corinthians, Chapter 14, and totally ignore Verse 22. They will not face the fact that Paul quotes an Old Testament prophet, the prophet Isaiah. Isaiah had predicted to the people of Israel that there would come a day when God would send to them men speaking strange tongues. And, says Isaiah, when you hear these you will know that the hour has struck when God turns from his limited ministry to Israel and begins to send the message out to all peoples everywhere. That is the reason why the tongues were given. It was a sign to unbelievers that the gospel was now going out to the whole Gentile world. Wherever you find tongues occurring in the New Testament you will always find unbelievers present, because tongues is a sign to them and not to believers.

Phil Newton: **What is Pentecost All About?**

The promise of the Spirit coming to indwell the one who believed in Christ marked a new epoch in history. Now, God Himself would not only come redemptively to man, but would indwell him, satisfying him with the constant flow of living waters. This was the Messianic age, a new era in which all of the glorious promises of the Old Testament prophets would be fulfilled. As Isaiah, Ezekiel, Joel and other prophets pointed out, the coming of Messiah would bring about a new relationship to God through His Spirit. . .

Everyone did not appreciate what they saw and heard. While some asked questions, others mocked, accusing the disciples of being "full of sweet wine," which was wine made from grain. How does the church respond to both questions and mocking? That is what we face in our day, so we need to learn from the apostolic pattern.

We are to preach Jesus Christ! There are so many things substituted today for the preaching of the gospel of Christ. Rather than confronting the age, we seem to want to coddle it and pet it. Peter's message, on behalf of the entire group of believers, shows that the Christian message is still best presented in the preaching of the Word of God.

Steven Cole: **The Meaning of Pentecost**

The meaning of Pentecost is God’s equipping His church with the power of His Spirit so that He will be glorified among the nations.

God’s purpose at Pentecost was to equip His church with the mighty power of the Holy Spirit so that we would be His witnesses to all the nations, resulting in His eternal glory. I want you to ask yourself these questions as you think about this purpose:

(1) *Is my focus on God's glory in all things? Did I even think about that as I went through my week? Did it determine how I resisted temptation or how I spoke to others?

(2) *Is my passion that the nations would glorify God through the gospel? If my heart is not on world missions, it is not in tune with God's heart.

(3) *Is my daily life consciously dependent on the Holy Spirit? Would I have missed Him if He had withdrawn from me this past week? Do I lean on Him for purity of life and power to obey God?

(4) *Is my daily desire to bear witness of Christ to those who are lost and perishing? The power of the Spirit isn't given just to make me happy. It is given to make me holy so that my life and my words bring glory to God as I bear witness to His saving grace. That should be the meaning of Pentecost for you and me.

TEXT: Acts 2: 14-24

TITLE: THE COMING OF THE HOLY SPIRIT IN POWERFUL PROCLAMATION – PART 3 – THE AUTHENTICATION OF JESUS AS THE PROMISED MESSIAH

BIG IDEA:
THE COMING OF THE HOLY SPIRIT ATTESTED BY SIGN MIRACLES IMPACTS THE WHOLE WORLD WITH THE SUPERNATURAL AUTHENTICATION OF JESUS AS THE PROMISED MESSIAH

INTRODUCTION:
One of the earliest TV game shows was **"To Tell the Truth."** The show featured a panel of four celebrities attempting to correctly identify which of 3 contestants was truly who he said he was. So the show would begin with the 3 contestants each identifying themselves as the same individual -- "I am Sam Jones". The moderator would then read a brief statement describing some unique occupation or experience of Sam Jones. The true character was joined by two imposters who pretended to be that same central character. The celebrity panelists questioned the three contestants; the two imposters were allowed (if not encouraged) to lie, but the central character was sworn "to tell the truth". The panelists voted at the end of the show secretly for #1, #2 or #3. Then the moderator concludes by asking "Will the real Sam Jones please stand up."

How do you prove your identity? We live in the age of identity theft. What type of authentication can you offer that you really are who you say you are? You might point to your birth certificate; your social security number; your driver's license; your passport – all documents that might lend some degree of credibility. Someone arrested just this past week because they were using the credentials of a dead man – caught because they had the wrong eye color. You might point to the testimony of those who know you personally: your parents, your family, your neighbors, your co-workers.

As we continue this week to reflect on the miracle of Pentecost – the coming of the Holy Spirit – keep in mind the primary mission of the Holy Spirit = to testify to Jesus Christ and exalt Him. How can you be sure that Jesus of Nazareth is who He claimed to be? How can you be sure that the only path to fellowship with the eternal God is by becoming a disciple of Jesus Christ? How can you be sure that repentance of sins and faith in Jesus Christ will grant you the free gift by the grace of God of forgiveness of sins and eternal life and a rich inheritance in glory? It all comes down to **the authentication of the person of Jesus Christ**. Who is He really? **Who is this Jesus of Nazareth?** Who did He claim to be? Who do you recognize Him to be? Who does God say that He is?

[Last week: The reaction and explanation of the Jewish crowd of these Pentecost events]

What made it difficult for the Jews to believe that Jesus was the Messiah?

- Humble beginnings – born in a stable; came from Nazareth
- Was opposed by the religious hierarchy and establishment
- Did not establish a political kingdom that was impressive and domineering
- Ended up being crucified = a humiliating death fit only for criminals

I. (:14-15) NATURAL EXPLANATIONS EASILY REFUTED

What are we to make of this impressive and powerful event – this speaking in known foreign languages of the mighty deeds of God?

A. (:14a) Authoritative Interpretation by the Chosen Apostles of Jesus Christ

"*But Peter, taking his stand with the eleven, raised his voice and declared to them:*"
Σταθεὶς δὲ ὁ Πέτρος σὺν τοῖς ἕνδεκα ἐπῆρεν τὴν φωνὴν αὐτοῦ καὶ ἀπεφθέγξατο αὐτοῖς·

Had to raise his voice to be heard by the large crowd – if 3,000 responded, you can imagine the huge crowd that must have assembled; no microphone system – just some strong lungs

Here we see the ministry of the chosen apostles beginning; once more Peter functioning as spokesman for the group; This is the first sermon of the Christian era – gives us insight into a number of key elements of preaching – we will see that Christian sermons must be:

- Authoritative proclamation -- Today's culture shies away from any type of authoritative declaration -- *speak forth, pronounce* – not everyday speaking but more of a formal and public discourse; to speak one's opinion plainly – required boldness – especially in the face of potential persecution by the Jews
- Consistent with the experience of the preacher; no hypocrisy; must walk the talk
- Biblically based – quite a number of different texts used by Peter – yet also characterized by reasonable argumentation
- Christ centered – especially keying on the crucifixion and resurrection
- Application focused – requires a response from the hearers

B. (:14b) Attention Getting of the Target Jewish Audience in Jerusalem

"Men of Judea, and all you who live in Jerusalem, let this be known to you, and give heed to my words."
ἄνδρες Ἰουδαῖοι καὶ οἱ κατοικοῦντες Ἰερουσαλὴμ πάντες, τοῦτο ὑμῖν γνωστὸν ἔστω καὶ ἐνωτίσασθε τὰ ῥήματά μου.

So easy for people to miss the point of God's object lessons – despite clear revelation

C. (:15) Absurdity of Natural Explanations Exposed

"For these men are not drunk, as you suppose, for it is only the third hour of the day;"
οὐ γὰρ ὡς ὑμεῖς ὑπολαμβάνετε οὗτοι μεθύουσιν, ἔστιν γὰρ ὥρα τρίτη τῆς ἡμέρας,

9 AM = the hour for prayer in the temple for the Jews during this important religious feast; would not be found drunk at this time

Blaiklock: Scrupulous Jews drank wine only with flesh, and, on the authority of Ex. xvi. 8, ate bread in the morning and flesh only in the evening. Hence wine could be drunk only in the evening.

Longenecker: Unfortunately, this argument was more telling in antiquity than today.

Man's wisdom always falls far short of explaining the ways of God – yet man is quick to offer his wild explanations – anything is better than the truth which makes one accountable to God – cf. the Darwinian explanation of origins – No design involved, just chance mutations – that is

how we developed from some simple cell that originated from who knows where – what kind of explanation is that?? Yet people readily accept it over God's revealed explanation

Control of the Holy Spirit vastly different from losing control to a drunken state of inebriation

II. (:16-21) SUPERNATURAL EXPLANATION CONSISTENT WITH OT PROPHECY OF THE LAST DAYS

A. (:16) Understand the Message of the OT Prophet Joel

"*but this is what was spoken of through the prophet Joel:*"
ἀλλὰ τοῦτό ἐστιν τὸ εἰρημένον διὰ τοῦ προφήτου Ἰωήλ·

THE DEVASTATION OF THE COMING DAY OF THE LORD (PREFIGURED IN THE LOCUST PLAGUE AND SEVERE DROUGHT) SHOULD PROMPT HEARTFELT REPENTANCE THAT WILL LEAD TO GOD'S GRACIOUS PROMISES OF RESTORATION AND BLESSING

"*Yet even now, declares the Lord, Return to Me with all your heart, and with fasting, weeping and mourning; and rend your heart and not your garments. Now return to the Lord your God, for He is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger, abounding in lovingkindness and relenting of evil.*" (2:12-13)

The message is one of certain future judgment; judgment that will be far more devastating than the historic foretaste of the locust plague – Karen was telling the story the other night of driving across Texas and encountering a horde of tarantulas – all over the ground – over a mile of them – not a pleasant sight – let's not get a flat tire here
Yet the message is one of the mercy and grace of God if we will but repent
The focus is going to be on the outpouring of the Holy Spirit as we shall see

B. (:17a) Understand the Timeframe of the Last Days = Messianic Age

"'*And it shall be in the last days,' God says,*"
καὶ ἔσται ἐν ταῖς ἐσχάταις ἡμέραις, λέγει ὁ θεός,

Has the Messiah come to earth? **We are in the last days!**
I John 2:18 – whole Christian era is characterized "*the last hour*" by John; we are waiting for the wrap-up of God's program for the nation of Israel – does not seem that way to us in 2010

1 Tim. 4:1 – "*But the Spirit explicitly says that in later times some will fall away from the faith, paying attention to deceitful spirits and doctrines of demons***"**

1 Peter 4:7 "*The end of all things is near*"

Piper: Are we living in the last days? Now let me answer the first question by quoting several biblical passages. **Hebrews 1:1–2**, "In many and various ways God spoke of old to our fathers by the prophets; but in these last days he has spoken to us by a Son." **1 Peter 1:20**, "Christ was foreknown before the foundation of the world but was made manifest at the last of the times for your sake." **1 Corinthians 10:11**, "These things happened to them as a warning, but they were written down for our instruction, upon whom the end of the ages has come." In all these texts the "last days" or the last times or end of the ages came when Jesus came. The coming of the Messiah was the beginning of the end—the beginning of the "last days."

Longenecker: God has inaugurated, Peter proclaims, the long-awaited "*last days*" here and now, and we know this because of the reinstitution of prophecy. Other signs, to be sure, were part of Joel's vision, but Peter does not stress them. His emphasis is entirely on prophecy as the sign of the inauguration of the last days. Even though he might have had his own personal expectations, Peter leaves all else for God to work out in the Messianic Age that had been inaugurated.

You have prophecy playing a significant role in the foundation of the church; then there will be a renewed emphasis on prophesying during those final days leading up to the Second Coming of Jesus Christ – it is the outpouring of the Holy Spirit – demonstrated here in tongues speaking on the day of Pentecost – that makes possible this prophetic movement that distinguishes this new era of God's working = the last days = the Messianic Age

C. (:17b-18) Promise of the Universal Outpouring of the Holy Spirit in Those Days – Eschatological Promises in Anticipation of National Repentance and Restoration

> "*That I will pour forth of My Spirit upon all mankind; And your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, And your young men shall see visions, And your old men shall dream dreams; Even upon My bondslaves, both men and women, I will in those days pour forth of My Spirit And they shall prophesy.*"
>
> ἐκχεῶ ἀπὸ τοῦ πνεύματός μου ἐπὶ πᾶσαν σάρκα, καὶ προφητεύσουσιν οἱ υἱοὶ ὑμῶν καὶ αἱ θυγατέρες ὑμῶν καὶ οἱ νεανίσκοι ὑμῶν ὁράσεις ὄψονται καὶ οἱ πρεσβύτεροι ὑμῶν ἐνυπνίοις ἐνυπνιασθήσονται· καί γε ἐπὶ τοὺς δούλους μου καὶ ἐπὶ τὰς δούλας μου ἐν ταῖς ἡμέραις ἐκείναις ἐκχεῶ ἀπὸ τοῦ πνεύματός μου, καὶ προφητεύσουσιν.
>
> (Joel 2:28-29)
>
> "*It will come about after this*
> *That I will pour out My Spirit on all mankind;*
> *And your sons and daughters will prophesy;*
> *Your old men will dream dreams,*
> *Your young men will see visions.*
> *Even on the male and female servants*
> *I will pour out My Spirit in those days*."
>
> Time reference – **Acts 2** at Pentecost = partial fulfillment
> "*this is that*" – not referring to entire paragraph from Joel
> Complete fulfillment right before Second Coming
> Look at **Is. 61** as quoted by Christ in **Lk. 4:21**
> Promise of the Spirit associated with New Covenant

"*pour out*" – like a torrential downpour on a scorched and thirsty earth

- No limitation as to gender
- No limitation as to age
- No limitation as to economic class or status

Stedman: Peter's explanation is very simple. This, he said, is what Joel declared would happen. It is, therefore, neither unexpected nor unexplained. It is what Joel predicted. The key to this passage from Joel is the phrase, **all flesh**. "I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh." If you read

the prophecy as it occurs in the second chapter of Joel, you will find that, before this passage, the prophet had predicted that the Lord would visit his people. He would come to them and would live in their midst. Then, as the prophet puts it, "afterward" (after this visitation) "I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh." The contrast is between the visitation of God to Israel, and the pouring out of the Spirit upon all peoples everywhere -- Gentiles as well as Jew. The emphasis of this section is that now the good news about Jesus Christ is to go out to the Gentiles as well as the Jews. Up to this point it had been confined to the Jewish nation. Jesus had said more than once, "I have come only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel," {Matt 10:6, 15:24}. But he had also said, "Other sheep have I which are not of this fold; these also I must bring that there may be one flock," {cf, John 10:16}. Now Peter announces that the time has come when God would pour out his Spirit upon all flesh, Jews and Gentiles alike. Not only all people everywhere, but all kinds of people -- young men, young women, male and female. "Your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions." Note the emphasis upon youth. God is saying that in this age of the Spirit, leadership, effectiveness, and power will not be limited to grey hairs, but also young men and young women shall speak and lead -- shall see visions and prophesy. Even servants, menservants and maidservants, obscure people, insignificant people, upon them God would pour out his Spirit; and they would prophesy. All classes are affected by this. . .

It is important also to notice that in this quotation of Joel there is **no mention at all of tongues**. Is that not strange? Peter says, "This is that which was spoken of by the prophet Joel," but Joel does not mention tongues. Instead he refers to another gift of the Spirit, the gift of prophecy. Prophecy is the ability, in power, to declare the Word of God, to tell forth the Word of God. It will be manifested by young men and old, even servants and obscure people. They shall be equipped by the Spirit to tell forth the Word of God with power. That will be the mark of the age, he says. The emphasis is not upon tongues at all, not even upon gifts, but upon the Spirit who gives the gifts. The age will begin, Peter says, with the pouring out of the Spirit. It will end, Peter indicates, by the sun being turned into darkness, and the moon into blood. . .

Wiersbe: Peter did not say that Pentecost was the **fulfillment** of the prophecy of Joel 2:28-32, because the signs and wonders predicted had not occurred. However, Peter was led by the Spirit to see in the prophecy an application to the church. "This is the same Holy Spirit that Joel wrote about. He is here!" Such an announcement would seem incredible to the Jews, because they thought God's spirit was given only to a few select people (see Num. 11:28-29). But here were 120 of their fellow Jews, men and women, enjoying the blessing of the same Holy Spirit that had empowered Moses, David, and the prophets.

D. (:19-20) Promise of Cosmic Signs Before the Day of the Lord

"*And I will grant wonders in the sky above, And signs on the earth beneath, Blood, and fire, and vapor of smoke. 'The sun shall be turned into darkness, And the moon into blood, Before the great and glorious day of the Lord shall come.*"

καὶ δώσω τέρατα ἐν τῷ οὐρανῷ ἄνω καὶ σημεῖα ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς κάτω, αἷμα καὶ πῦρ καὶ ἀτμίδα καπνοῦ. ὁ ἥλιος μεταστραφήσεται εἰς σκότος καὶ ἡ σελήνη εἰς αἷμα, πρὶν ἐλθεῖν ἡμέραν κυρίου τὴν μεγάλην καὶ ἐπιφανῆ.

(Joel 2:30-31)

"*I will display wonders in the sky and on the earth,*
Blood, fire and columns of smoke.

The sun will be turned into darkness
And the moon into blood
Before the great and awesome day of the Lord comes."

Has not happened yet; cf. Joel 2:10

Had **earthquake** this week – but not these types of cosmic signs yet

Some people claim that such events were fulfilled back at the time of the crucifixion when the earth became dark for 3 hours – Again that was a prefiguring but not the ultimate fulfillment of this prophecy which is directly connected to that eschatological day of the Lord yet future

E. Promise of Deliverance to Those Who Repent and Call on the Lord –
Leads to Application

"*And it shall be, that everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.*"
καὶ ἔσται πᾶς ὃς ἂν ἐπικαλέσηται τὸ ὄνομα κυρίου σωθήσεται.

(Joel 2:32)

"*And it will come about that whoever calls on the name of the Lord*
Will be delivered;
For on Mount Zion and in Jerusalem There will be those who escape,
As the Lord has said,
Even among the survivors whom the Lord calls."

Tremendous promise: **Rom. 10:8-13** – salvation available to all; you cannot argue that you are doomed because you are not one of the elect; Matt 7 – some will call on the name of the Lord in spirit of hypocrisy and self righteousness; you must humbly call in repentance and genuine faith; Passage leads right into the urgency for world missions

Piper: In the Old Testament the Spirit of God is the presence of God in the world to reveal himself by some action or word. Therefore when Joel says that God will pour out his Spirit on all flesh, he means that God will draw near to men and women and make himself known and felt in a powerful way. There is a great difference between perceiving a lake at a distance and being immersed in the lake. So there is a great difference between experiencing God as a distant object of knowledge and being immersed in his presence. The picture of a worldwide pouring compels us to think of being soaked and saturated and swept along by the Spirit of God. Joel wanted his readers to anticipate an unmistakable flood-tide of God's presence.

When God draws near to a person by his Spirit, he does so to reveal himself. He aims to be known as *God*, not as a psychic phenomenon or some indescribable fantasy. Therefore when he pours himself on us by his Spirit, he stirs up in us true images and conceptions of his beauty and power and mercy and truth and holiness and greatness, and he quickens our affections to respond properly to all that we see. It is unthinkable that a person could be, as it were, soaked by the presence of the infinite and holy God and not be moved deeply. If you are not often moved deeply by the self-revealing presence of the Judge of the world and the Lover of your soul, then pray for the fulfilling of Joel 2:28 in your experience, and set your gaze firmly on God's beauty in Scripture.

III. (:22-24) APPLICATION AUTHENTICATES THE MESSIANIC CREDENTIALS OF JESUS THE NAZARENE

(:22a) Call for Attention: *"Men of Israel, listen to these words:*

Ἄνδρες Ἰσραηλῖται, ἀκούσατε τοὺς λόγους τούτους·

Remember the function of the Holy Spirit: to glorify Jesus Christ

A. (:22b) Jesus – Attested to by God with Miracles and Wonders and Signs

"*Jesus the Nazarene, a man attested to you by God with miracles and wonders and signs which God performed through Him in your midst, just as you yourselves know—*"

Ἰησοῦν τὸν Ναζωραῖον, ἄνδρα ἀποδεδειγμένον ἀπὸ τοῦ θεοῦ εἰς ὑμᾶς δυνάμεσι καὶ τέρασι καὶ σημείοις οἷς ἐποίησεν δι᾽ αὐτοῦ ὁ θεὸς ἐν μέσῳ ὑμῶν καθὼς αὐτοὶ οἴδατε,

Kent: The works of Jesus on earth substantiated that Jesus is the Messiah and Lord. By miracles (*dunamesi*, deeds of great power viewed here as supernatural), and wonders (*terasi*, acts which produced wonderment and awe among the beholders) and sign (*semeiois*, deeds and words which served as credentials or proofs of his person and mission), Jesus had shown that he was sent of God.

Bock: Peter details what God did through Jesus. God accredited him, showed him to be victorious, gave him authority, and calls those who hear the gospel to respond to him.

2 Cor. 12:12 – note how Paul pointed to God's divine validation of the apostles

B. (:23) Jesus – Not Invalidated by the Manner of His Death -- Crucified by Godless Men in Accordance with the Sovereign, Prophetic Plan of God

"*this Man, delivered up by the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God, you nailed to a cross by the hands of godless men and put Him to death.*"

τοῦτον τῇ ὡρισμένῃ βουλῇ καὶ προγνώσει τοῦ θεοῦ ἔκδοτον διὰ χειρὸς ἀνόμων προσπήξαντες ἀνείλατε,

Suffering and humiliating death of Jesus Christ was no surprise to God or stumbling block to His prophetic program regarding the Messianic promises

Lloyd-Jones: Now the apostle's argument is that the events on the day of Pentecost would not have happened were it not for those facts. Were it not that our Lord had risen from the dead and appeared to His disciples, nothing would have happened. Peter was claiming that this Jesus of Nazareth is the only begotten Son of God and that such a claim is proved by His resurrection from the dead. . . Jesus' life, death, and resurrection were fulfillments of prophecy. This was the basis of Peter's message, and I suggest to you that it is unanswerable. . . He is a living God who gives revelation, gives knowledge, and imparts information.. . Peter also made this striking point: In those revelations that God gave to the prophets, He was revealing that He has a great plan and purpose with respect to this world. That is the message of Christianity.

C. (:24) Jesus – Attested to by God by Legitimately Raising Him from the Dead

"And God raised Him up again, putting an end to the agony of death, since it was impossible for Him to be held in its power."

ὃν ὁ θεὸς ἀνέστησεν λύσας τὰς ὠδῖνας τοῦ θανάτου, καθότι οὐκ ἦν δυνατὸν κρατεῖσθαι αὐτὸν ὑπ᾽ αὐτοῦ.

Kent: Peter was well aware that most of his audience, though willing perhaps to admit the miraculous deeds of Jesus, would reject his messiahship because he had been executed as a criminal. Therefore, he showed from Psalm 16:8-11 that Messiah's death was included in the will of God and was predicted in Scripture (even though men who killed him were not excused from guilt for they were called "*wicked*").

Stott: "*Agony*" means literally "*birth pains*", so that his resurrection is pictured as a regeneration, a new birth out of death into life.

MacArthur: Because of His divine power (Jn 11:25; Heb 2:14) and God's promise and purpose (Lk 24:46; Jn 2:18-22; 1 Co 15:16-26), death could not keep Jesus in the grave.

CONCLUSION:

Peter's audience was faced with a crucial choice after hearing this first Christian sermon. Did they believe that Jesus was truly the Messiah, the Son of God, the Lord of all – crucified and now risen from the dead. Did they believe that Jesus told the truth in the claims He made about coming from heaven and returning to the Father to send the Holy Spirit? Did they believe Peter's explanation of this phenomenon of Pentecost and the pouring out of the Holy Spirit? If so they must respond in repentance and faith to the truth of the gospel.

We are called to take this same message of the person of Jesus Christ to a world that largely has no expectation of a coming Messiah; to a world that is lost in darkness and sin; to a world that desperately needs someone to stand up and tell the truth that is powerful to save. How can we who know the Savior keep quiet? Will the real witnesses to the true identity of Jesus of Nazareth please stand up and proclaim the truth!

* * * * * * * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

1) How could Peter have turned around so dramatically from denying the Lord to now being so bold to preach to the Jews in Jerusalem?

2) How could Peter use this OT passage by way of application when all of the elements had not yet been fulfilled?

3) What is the difference in emphasis between speaking in tongues and prophesying?

4) Why was it impossible for death to hold Jesus captive?

* * * * * * * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Boice: **Model Sermon of Peter that saved 3,000 Souls**
1) Biblical sermon – look at the use of the OT quotations
2) Christ-centered sermon
3) Fearless sermon
4) Eminently reasonable sermon

Bock (quoting Dodd): notes the following themes that appear throughout the speeches in Acts, though not in every speech:
(1) the age of fulfillment has come;
(2) it has come through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus;
(3) the resurrection exalted Jesus;
(4) the Holy Spirit is the sign of the church's power;
(5) the messianic age's consummation comes in Jesus' return; and
(6) God calls for repentance and offers forgiveness, the Holy Spirit, and his promise

Stedman: **Where the Action Is – What is This?**
We are used to sirens today. We do not pay much attention to them. But imagine the effect in Jerusalem when this mighty air raid alarm was suddenly sounded, and the people did not know what it meant. They came rushing together into the temple. When they arrived, they were additionally bewildered, "because each one heard them speaking in his own language." What they heard when they got there was the strange sound of certain men and women, evidently peasants by their dress, from Galilee, who were speaking in over sixteen different languages. It was quite evident that these people were not educated. It was difficult for any to believe that these peasants could have learned these languages. This was long before the days of the art of linguistics, and it was very difficult to learn a language. There were no tourist guides available by which you could stammer through a language, but you had to go live in a country before you could learn the language. Yet here were untrained men and women speaking these languages. . .

What Peter did not say is as important as what he did say. He said this is what Joel predicted, but he did not use the phrase which is usually used in the New Testament concerning an Old Testament prophecy. He did not say, "Thus is fulfilled what was said by the prophet Joel." From other Scriptures we learn that Joel's prophecy has yet to be fulfilled in a greater way. Once again God will visit his people at the second return of Jesus Christ. Then, after his return, the Spirit will be poured out again. When Peter quotes this passage he changes the word which Joel used, "afterward," to the phrase, "in the last days." Thus Peter is adapting this to the present age of the Spirit which begins, he says, with the pouring out of the Spirit of God.

Piper: The meaning of our time is threefold: It is the FINAL time. It is a time for FULLNESS. It is a time for reaching all FLESH with the gospel—old and young together.

<u>5 Ways in which God Endorses Jesus:</u>

1. By Working Signs and Wonders Through Him

2. By Planning His Death for the Sins of His People

3. By Raising Him from the Dead

4. By Exalting Him and Subjecting All Enemies to Him

5. As One Worthy to Receive and Pour Out the Spirit

Bordwine: Peter says that Joel predicted the events which were coming to pass on this day. What have we already learned about the events of this day? We've already learned that the Spirit came to the disciples according to God's promise and the promise of the Savior. We've already learned that the appearance of tongues as of fire over the heads of the disciples was a sign of divine presence and divine equipping. We've already learned that this manifestation of the tongues phenomenon constituted a sign to the Jews that God was preparing to judge them even as He began to make Himself known to the Gentiles. Now, with that reminder, hear Peter again: "this is what was spoken of through the prophet Joel." This means that however we interpret this prophecy from Joel, we cannot come up with a conclusion that excludes the facts we already know.

Dr. Whitcomb – **The Pentecostal Sermon**
Peter only 50 days earlier had denied the Lord! Only 9 in the morning = hour of prayer in the temple; Joel is stating something that other prophets had already said: Is. 44:3; *pour out* speaks of abundance and vast generosity; Gal. 3:14 – blessing might come to the Gentiles; church grafted in to Abrahamic Covenant – Rom. 11; John 7:39; difficulty is that not everything that Joel said would happen ended up happening on Day of Pentecost; in fact Joel did not reference speaking in tongues; application to present situation = the pouring out of the Holy Spirit; prophesying = speaking forth directly from God (not limited to predicting future events); we don't have prophets today; essential for foundation of the church; had direct revelation from God; miracle of prophesying extended to youth and women – but not authoritative teaching and administrative leadership in the church; long parenthetical period of the church before the Day of the Lord and the millennial kingdom; need temple before Jewish nation can operate once again as a theocracy – that is coming soon; miracles of Jesus were undeniable – never claimed to be fake – just that the supernatural source was Satan; but demons don't do those type of compassionate and merciful deeds; What more could Jesus have done to validate His Messianic claims?

Derek Thomas: **The "This is That" Sermon**
1. Peter has a conviction about the Bible
2. Peter has a conviction about divine providence

However tempting it may be for us to run along the lines of all kinds of philosophical explanations when evil things happen – that God doesn't know, or that God's hands are tied, or whatever it may be in the modern and current fads – Peter is absolutely sure and categorical: God was in this; God planned this; that things happen because God wills them to happen. They happen because He wills them to happen before they happen. Things happen because He wills them to happen in the way that they happen. Things don't happen and take God by surprise. He has a confidence, a certainty, a conviction not only about the Bible, but a conviction about providence, a conviction about history, a conviction about where he is at this moment in time on this Day of Pentecost, with all of what lies before him.

3. Peter has a conviction about Jesus

He has a conviction, do you see, about Jesus, and that the Holy Spirit has come because Jesus has been exalted, because Jesus is at the right hand of God. And what he wants to say is that what Pentecost is essentially about is – well, it's not about the Holy Spirit essentially. Well,

that's a strange thing to say, isn't it, that Pentecost isn't about the Holy Spirit? But do you see what Peter is saying? The Spirit is the representative agent of Jesus Christ. He's the ongoing ministry of Jesus Christ. It's not that there was a ministry of Jesus but now there's a ministry of the Spirit. The Spirit in the New Testament is often called the Spirit of Christ, the Spirit sent by Christ, the Spirit who indwelt Christ, the Spirit who understands everything there is to understand about Jesus Christ.

4. Peter has a conviction about salvation
5. Peter has a conviction of urgency

MacArthur: Dreams (Ge 20:3; Da 7:1) and visions (Ge 15:1; Rev 9:17) were some of God's most memorable means of revelation since they were pictorial in nature. . . Most frequently [in the NT] they were used to reveal apocalyptic imagery (cf. Eze, Da, Zec, Rev). They were not considered normal in biblical times, nor should they be so now. The time will come, however, when God will use visions and dreams during the Tribulation period as predicted by Joel 2:28-32.

TEXT: Acts 2: 22-32

TITLE: THE COMING OF THE HOLY SPIRIT IN POWERFUL PROCLAMATION – PART 4 – THE AUTHENTICATION OF JESUS AS THE PROMISED MESSIAH BY THE RESURRECTION – GOD RAISED HIM UP AGAIN

BIG IDEA:
THE COMING OF THE HOLY SPIRIT ATTESTED BY SIGN MIRACLES IMPACTS THE WHOLE WORLD WITH THE SUPERNATURAL AUTHENTICATION OF JESUS AS THE PROMISED MESSIAH BY HIS RESURRECTION FROM THE DEAD

INTRODUCTION:
One of the main arguments by those opposed to the death penalty is that there is a terrible possibility of executing an innocent person. Can you imagine how you would feel if you pulled the switch and terminated the life of an innocent person? We have been studying the first sermon of the Christian church – the explanation given by Peter back on the Day of Pentecost regarding the outpouring of the Holy Spirit in such dramatic fashion. In addressing his targeted Jewish audience he lays the blame for the crucifixion of the most innocent man who ever lived directly at their feet.

His goal is not to alienate the crowd or stir up similar persecution against himself and the other 11 apostles. His goal is to bring conviction of sin and a sense of need of the deliverance that can only be provided by the true Messiah – the one promised in OT prophecy and now sent to earth to accomplish their salvation. It is interesting to see how Peter approaches this skeptical audience. He makes a very logical, reasoned argument – not just some emotional plea. And yet he is not here to refute all of their wild speculations and rabbit trail philosophical digressions. He knows that he has one very powerful trump card to play – an ace in the hole that cannot be refuted. That trump card is the reality of the bodily resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ. A resurrection that he can personally testify to because he has seen the risen Lord on numerous occasions.

The resurrection of Jesus Christ must be the pivotal point in our presentation of the gospel to lost sinners. It constitutes the Supreme Court from which there can be no appeal to any higher authority. Once you have played this trump card the burden is on the listener to respond. How do you deal with the reality of the resurrection? Do you deny it? We live in the year A.D. 2010 – our very calendar marked by the life and ministry of Jesus Christ here on this earth. We rub shoulders with people who claim their life has been transformed by a personal relationship with this very Jesus who is alive today. As Christian disciples we do not follow some dogmas of an historical religious founder but we live by the power of the Holy Spirit to please our living Lord.

Such a life should be supremely **joyful** and **hopeful** as we are secure regarding our eternal destiny. *How blessed is the man* says the psalmist. We are the ones who have discovered true happiness in life. How happy is your life? How secure are you regarding your eternal destiny?

THE COMING OF THE HOLY SPIRIT ATTESTED BY SIGN MIRACLES IMPACTS THE WHOLE WORLD WITH THE SUPERNATURAL AUTHENTICATION OF JESUS AS THE PROMISED MESSIAH BY HIS RESURRECTION FROM THE DEAD

3 DRAMATIC IMPLICATIONS OF THE RESURRECTION

I. (:22-24) THE RESURRECTION PUTS GOD'S STAMP OF AUTHENTICATION ON JESUS THE NAZARENE AS THE PROMISED MESSIAH

It establishes Jesus Christ as both Christ and Lord – He is who He said He was – ends all debate on this subject – looked at these verses briefly last week – but they are important for today's flow of thought as well – the whole sermon of Peter is tightly constructed – just takes us several weeks to work through it

(:22a) Call for Attention: *"Men of Israel, listen to these words:*

Ἄνδρες Ἰσραηλῖται, ἀκούσατε τοὺς λόγους τούτους·

Parallel expression to **vs. 29**: *Men brothers* – Peter speaking as one of them – not as an outsider; he understands their thought process; what makes them react the way they do to the gospel message about Jesus of Nazareth

A. (:22b) Jesus – Attested to by God in Earthly Ministry by Miracles and Wonders and Signs

> "*Jesus the Nazarene, a man attested to you by God with miracles and wonders and signs which God performed through Him in your midst, just as you yourselves know—*"
>
> Ἰησοῦν τὸν Ναζωραῖον, ἄνδρα ἀποδεδειγμένον ἀπὸ τοῦ θεοῦ εἰς ὑμᾶς δυνάμεσι καὶ τέρασι καὶ σημείοις οἷς ἐποίησεν δι᾽ αὐτοῦ ὁ θεὸς ἐν μέσῳ ὑμῶν καθὼς αὐτοὶ οἴδατε,

John 18:5, 7 – "*Jesus the Nazarene*" -- the man the Jews sought to execute

This passage is all about God attesting to the authentication of Jesus – now the apostles as God's appointed spokesmen are bringing that message to the world

These are things that intellectually you already know – you witnessed the miracles and wonders and signs. You saw the numerous healings; you experienced the divine power over the laws of nature; you heard the powerful teaching; you witnessed the love and compassion and mercy of a sinless life. The question now is one of your heart – will you continue to love your sin or be humbled by God and moved to repentance and faith?

B. (:23) Jesus – Attested to by God in Predetermined Death By Crucifixion

> "*this Man, delivered up by the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God, you nailed to a cross by the hands of godless men and put Him to death.*"
>
> τοῦτον τῇ ὡρισμένῃ βουλῇ καὶ προγνώσει τοῦ θεοῦ ἔκδοτον διὰ χειρὸς ἀνόμων προσπήξαντες ἀνείλατε,

MacArthur: Before Peter can ever talk to them about where they need to be, he's got to show them where they are. And just in that subtle little statement that carries itself through Acts, "you have killed Him, God has raised Him," is implied that constant dichotomy. And that constant issue that every man on the face of the earth must face. That he is a rebel against God.

This simple statement gets right to the heart of the problem = **the pride of man**. Are you willing to admit your rebellion against God? God has an agenda, a will, a path of righteousness and holiness that He has prescribed. You have your own agenda and will and path of sinful pleasure that you choose to follow. Do you want the narrow road that leads to heaven or the broad way that leads to destruction? You cannot enter that salvation gate without stooping low in humility as a little child.

C. (:24) Jesus – Attested to by God in Righteous Resurrection that Broke the Power of Death

> *"And God raised Him up again, putting an end to the agony of death, since it was impossible for Him to be held in its power.*"
>
> ὃν ὁ θεὸς ἀνέστησεν λύσας τὰς ὠδῖνας τοῦ θανάτου, καθότι οὐκ ἦν δυνατὸν κρατεῖσθαι αὐτὸν ὑπ᾽ αὐτοῦ.

Message = *God raised Him up again* -- this will be repeated in our passage today as the central point – that trump card that Peter plays time and time again

Your sins put Him to death	. . .	God raised Him up again
Your pride put Him to death	. . .	God raised Him up again
Your selfishness put Him to death	. . .	God raised Him up again

Spurgeon: **Bonds Which Could Not Hold**
PETER is here speaking of the risen Christ, whom God had raised up, "having loosed the pains of death." So it is clear that whatever those pains were, our blessed Lord Jesus Christ felt them—He felt them much more than His followers do, for, in His death-agony, He was left without the sustaining help of God and the light of His Father's Countenance was hidden from Him. His death was a bitter one, indeed! He took the deepest draughts of wormwood and gall, for He had to "taste death for every man," whatever that mysterious expression may mean. We must never imagine that there was about Christ's death anything which took away from its bitterness. There was much that increased it, but nothing that diminished it. He was bound, as with strong cords, by the pains of death. All His powers were, for a time, fettered. He was held captive and He did really die. After death, He was buried. But there was this remarkable fact about His dead body—it saw no corruption. In the case of ordinary corpses, corruption begins very speedily. In a climate like that of Jerusalem, it is very quick in doing its work of dissolving the mortal fabric. But, although our Lord did truly die, no taint of corruption came upon His precious body.

Why was it impossible that the bonds of death should hold Christ? There are several reasons:
1) The first is that Christ had in Himself the inherent power to die, and to live again . . .
2) Next, the dignity of His Person rendered it impossible that He should be held by the cords of death, apart from the consent of His own will, = His Deity . . .
3) His redeeming work was done. . .
4) He had His Father's promise that He should not. . .
5) Because each of His offices (as high priest, King and Redeemer) is everlasting, ordained of God in perpetuity—therefore He must rise from the dead.

II. (:25-28) THE RESURRECTION OF THE MESSIAH TRANSFORMED DEATH INTO A DOORWAY TO A JOYFUL AND HOPEFUL ETERNAL OUTCOME

Chiastic Structure: A B B A / Joy Hope Hope Joy – quoting from Psalm 16
How do we know this is a Messianic Psalm? – Holy Spirit says so – language goes way beyond the experience of King David who is a type of the promised King to come who would reign for eternity

Constable: God's presence with David made him happy and hopeful.

A. Joyful Eternal Outcome – Emphasis on the Present

1. Joy in the Presence of God – for all Eternity
   "For David says of Him, 'I was always beholding the Lord in my presence;'"

   Δαυὶδ γὰρ λέγει εἰς αὐτόν· προορώμην τὸν κύριον ἐνώπιόν μου διὰ παντός,

2. Joy in Strength and Security
   "*For He is at my right hand, that I may not be shaken.*"

   ὅτι ἐκ δεξιῶν μού ἐστιν ἵνα μὴ σαλευθῶ.

"*Right hand*" – position of power and strength
Lenski: as advocates used to sit at the right side of the clients they supported . . . so as not to be made to toss to and fro in uncertainty and in fear

"*Shaken*" -- Agitate, shake as by winds or storms; cause to waver or totter; disturb

Psalm 62:2 "*He only is my rock and my salvation, My stronghold; I shall not be greatly shaken*."

3. Joy on the Inside and on the Outside -- in Heart and Expression
   "*Therefore my heart was glad and my tongue exulted;*"

   διὰ τοῦτο ηὐφράνθη ἡ καρδία μου καὶ ἠγαλλιάσατο ἡ γλῶσσά μου,

Lenski: His heart, in the Scriptures always the center of the personality, was filled with gladness, the same verb that is used for making merry at a celebration in **Luke 15:32**; and his tongue jubilated, exulted in songs and expressions of praise.

The mouth should speak out of the overflow of the heart

4. Joy in Understanding God's Wisdom
   "*Thou hast made known to me the ways of life;*"

   ἐγνώρισάς μοι ὁδοὺς ζωῆς,

Proverbs 14:12 "There is a way *which seems* right to a man, But its end is the way of death."
(Also **16:25**)

Psalm 16:11 Thou wilt make known to me the path of life; In Thy presence is fulness of joy; In Thy right hand there are pleasures forever.

5. Joy in the Presence of God – Abundant and Sufficient
   "*Thou wilt make me full of gladness with Thy presence.*"
   πληρώσεις με εὐφροσύνης μετὰ τοῦ προσώπου σου.

Transition: Prov. 10:28 "*The hope of the righteous is gladness, But the expectation of the wicked perishes.*" The unsaved can make plans; they can have expectations of a bright and glorious future; but when it comes to their eternal destiny, they end up perishing in the lake of fire.

B. Hopeful Eternal Outcome – Emphasis on the Future

1. Hope for the Body – Physical part of man

"*Moreover my flesh also will abide in hope;*"

ἔτι δὲ καὶ ἡ σάρξ μου κατασκηνώσει ἐπ᾽ ἐλπίδι,

Paul's earthly ministry was motivated by hope in the resurrection – a Certain Hope and expectation – not speculative prediction but assurance of things not yet seen (Heb. 11)

Acts 24:14-16 *"But this I admit to you, that according to the Way which they call a sect I do serve the God of our fathers, believing everything that is in accordance with the Law, and that is written in the Prophets; [15] having a hope in God, which these men cherish themselves, that there shall certainly be a resurrection of both the righteous and the wicked. [16] "In view of this, I also do my best to maintain always a blameless conscience both before God and before men."*

Lenski: This hope of David's has solid reality under it and thus cannot end in disappointment as do the hopes of the ungodly which have no other foundation than the desires of the ungodly themselves. Jehovah, who has ever been at David's right to keep him from being shaken by doubt and by fear, will never forsake him at the time of death. His hope is sure.

2. Hope for the Soul / Spirit – Immaterial part of man

a. For the Soul

"*Because Thou wilt not abandon my soul to Hades,*"

ὅτι οὐκ ἐγκαταλείψεις τὴν ψυχήν μου εἰς ᾅδην

Bock: Hades is the Greek equivalent of Gehenna or Sheol, the place where the dead are gathered for judgment . . . Being in hades stands in contrast here to being in God's presence and expresses the threat that death represents.

Lenski: Here *soul* is in contrast with *flesh* and not with *spirit* and thus refers to the soul as the entire immaterial part of man which in life animates the body and also contains the spirit and personality. Thus body and soul constitute the entire human being. When *psyche* and *pneuma* are paired, the former refers to the immaterial part only as animating the body (translated "*life*"), the latter to the same immaterial part as representing the *ego* or personality and as being able to receive impressions from the divine *Pneuma* or Holy Spirit.

b. For the Spirit

"*Nor allow Thy Holy One to undergo decay.*"

οὐδὲ δώσεις τὸν ὅσιόν σου ἰδεῖν διαφθοράν.

Bock: "*Holy One*" is used seventy-seven times in the LXX. It can refer to a priest (Deut. 33:8), to the pious, or to the faithful. A reference to the faithful is the term's most common usage, especially in the Psalter. In Ps. 16, however, it is a reference to a specific person, as the singulars in the psalm show.

"*Decay*:" that destruction which is effected by the decay of the body after death

III. (:29-32) THE RESURRECTION OF THE MESSIAH WAS ANTICIPATED BY OT PROPHECY, ACCOMPLISHED BY GOD AND NOW ATTESTED TO BY MANY WITNESSES

A. Anticipated by OT Prophecy -- David

1. David Speaking as a Patriarch -- was not speaking about himself

> *"Brethren, I may confidently say to you regarding the patriarch David that he both died and was buried, and his tomb is with us to this day.*"
>
> Ἄνδρες ἀδελφοί, ἐξὸν εἰπεῖν μετὰ παρρησίας πρὸς ὑμᾶς περὶ τοῦ πατριάρχου Δαυὶδ ὅτι καὶ ἐτελεύτησεν καὶ ἐτάφη, καὶ τὸ μνῆμα αὐτοῦ ἔστιν ἐν ἡμῖν ἄχρι τῆς ἡμέρας ταύτης

Parallel expression to earlier form of address: "*Men of Israel*"

Spoke with boldness and confidence; no fear

Messiah not just a founder of a religion; not just the foundation stone upon which all is built; He is risen and alive today to function as the Head of His church; very different than a patriarch figure

Key: Check the tombs and see who has risen and is worthy to be followed; become a disciple of the risen Messiah

2. David Speaking as a Prophet = mouthpiece of God

> *"And so, because he was a prophet,*"
>
> προφήτης οὖν ὑπάρχων

3. David Speaking as a Promise Keeper -- Confident of God's Promises

> "*and knew that God had sworn to him with an oath to seat one of his descendants upon his throne*"
>
> καὶ εἰδὼς ὅτι ὅρκῳ ὤμοσεν αὐτῷ ὁ θεὸς ἐκ καρποῦ τῆς ὀσφύος αὐτοῦ καθίσαι ἐπὶ τὸν θρόνον αὐτοῦ,

Piper: We know that God gave David a promise (in 2 Samuel 7:12-16) that one of his own posterity would be the everlasting king of Israel -- the Son of David, the Messiah (Isaiah 9:6-7). David must have often thought of this wonderful thing -- that in his own body, as it were, there was a King whose reign would never end.

Bock: Peter's point is that the exercise of messianic authority is on display now in the Spirit's present distribution, as verses 32-36 declare.

4. David Speaking as a Predictor -- of the Future Resurrection of Christ

> "*he looked ahead and spoke of the resurrection of the Christ,*
>
> προϊδὼν ἐλάλησεν περὶ τῆς ἀναστάσεως τοῦ Χριστοῦ

a. Victory Over Spiritual Death – No Hope

> "*that He was neither abandoned to Hades,*"

ὅτι οὔτε ἐγκατελείφθη εἰς ᾅδην

b. Victory Over Physical Death – No Hope
"*nor did His flesh suffer decay.*"

οὔτε ἡ σὰρξ αὐτοῦ εἶδεν διαφθοράν.

Favorite argument of Peter's – apparently a favorite argument of Paul's as well: **Acts 13:34-41**

"it stinketh" – body of Lazarus -- cf raccoon that died in our driveway; talk about maggots …where do they come from and how do they multiply so quickly?

Who says the OT does not speak of the resurrection? Very clear prophetic word from the patriarch David, himself a type of Christ

1 Cor. 15:53-57 "*For this perishable must put on the imperishable, and this mortal must put on immortality.* [54] *But when this perishable will have put on the imperishable, and this mortal will have put on immortality, then will come about the saying that is written, "Death is swallowed up in victory.* [55] *"O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?"* [56] *The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law;* [57] *but thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.*"

B. Accomplished by God
"This Jesus God raised up again,

τοῦτον τὸν Ἰησοῦν ἀνέστησεν ὁ θεός,

<u>Message = *God raised Him up again*</u>

Many false Messiahs and false claims; must be able to recognize the authentic Jesus

C. Attested to by Many Witnesses
"*to which we are all witnesses.*"

οὗ πάντες ἡμεῖς ἐσμεν μάρτυρες·

Stott: Thus the spoken testimony of the apostles and the written prediction of the prophets converged. Or, as we would say, the Old and New Testament Scriptures coincided in their witness to the resurrection of Christ.

Scott Bayles: When Peter said "*we are all witnesses*," he probably waved him arm, indicating the other eleven Apostles. The Law of Moses said that "*The facts of the case must be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses*" (Deuteronomy 19:5 NLT). The case for Christ was established not by just two or three witnesses, but twelve men and at least a half dozen women. Peter's audience was looking, but at twelve men of unimpeachable character who personally had nothing to gain and everything to lose by preaching Jesus Christ. Even if you reject the miracles, the prophesies and everything else the Bible says, you've still got to deal with the testimony of twelve men who say they saw Jesus come back from the dead. They believed it with all their hearts and they died for their belief. How else can we explain that?

CONCLUSION:

God raised Him up again! Resurrection is key to our personal Christian faith and witness to others.

Think of the Humpty Dumpty nursery rhyme: Humpty Dumpty sat on a wall. Humpty Dumpty had a great fall. All the king's horses and all the king's men. Couldn't put Humpty together again. How about the power of God to put your life back together – in fact to impart new spiritual life; in fact to raise your body from the dead and grant you eternal existence in the presence of God?

Illustration: We have a lot of **"Jigsaw Christians"** these days: Every time they're faced with problems, they go to pieces.

Has Jesus made you whole? Are you living a life of joy and hope?

Illustration: "There are no hopeless situations; there are only people who have grown hopeless about them." - Clare Boothe Luce

Play the **trump card** as you witness to others about the resurrected and reigning Lord Jesus Christ. There is no answer to the reality of the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

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DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

1) What was Jesus experiencing in the 3 days between death and resurrection?

2) How can we cultivate right now a sense of joy in the presence of God?

3) Despite all of the bluster of the world as they blindly chase after pleasure and achievement and a lasting legacy, the utter hopelessness of their life apart from Christ should affect believers in what ways?

4) Why not just play the trump card of the resurrection instead of trying to argue people into the kingdom of God?

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QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Phil Newton: **But God Raised Him Up Again**

The resurrection of Jesus Christ tends to make many religious and not-so-religious people squirm or even angry. Consider what the resurrection implies: Jesus Christ, the Son of God was indeed crucified, and then in three days was bodily resurrected; that puts Him in a unique category among all humanity (He must be who He claims to be-God Incarnate); that also demands response to His call for repentance and faith. If the bodily resurrection is true then everything

that Jesus Christ and His followers claimed concerning Him has validity. The gospel message is then, the most important truth for every person. The certainty of the resurrection, therefore, will not let men ignore or slide by their need for faith in Christ.

Stott: the psalm is "in reality a believer's testimony regarding both his present faith and his future hope. Having taken refuge in God (verse 1), he has found in Him his greatest good (verses 2, 6, 7) and is convinced that even death cannot rob him of that true life which consists of fellowship with God (verses 11, 12)…
Peter himself in his first letter (1 Peter 1:10-12) explained that the prophets did not fully understand to what the Spirit of Christ within them was referring when predicting Christ's sufferings and subsequent glory. We need not therefore assert that David was making a deliberate and conscious prophecy of the resurrection of Jesus which was fully intelligible to himself. It is enough to say that, caught up by the Spirit of prophecy, he was led to write words about the conquest of death and the fulness of life and joy in the presence of God, which would be finally fulfilled not in his own experience but in that of his illustrious descendant."

Spurgeon: **Bonds Which Could Not Hold**
Why was it impossible that the bonds of death should hold Christ? There are several reasons. The first is that Christ had in Himself the inherent power to die, and to live again. I will not enlarge upon this Truth of God, but simply give you our Lord's own Words concerning it. "Therefore does My Father love Me, because I lay down My life, that I might take it again. No man takes it from Me, but I lay it down of Myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it up again. This commandment have I received of My Father." . . .

Next, the dignity of His Person rendered it impossible that He should be held by the cords of death, apart from the consent of His own will, for, though Jesus Christ was truly Human—and let that blessed fact never be forgotten—yet His Humanity was in so close an alliance with the Godhead that, though we do not say that the Humanity did really become Divine, yet, "Jesus Christ Himself" is altogether Divine and is to be worshipped and adored in the completeness of His blessed Person. And, therefore, that flesh, which He took upon Himself for our sake, was lifted up, exalted, ennobled, by being taken into mysterious unity with His Deity. It could not be that a body in which dwelt the fullness of the Godhead could be held by thin bonds of death—He who slept in Joseph's tomb was the Son of God! It was He who is without beginning of days or end of years. It is He with whom Jehovah took counsel when He laid the foundations of the heavens and built all worlds, for "without Him was not anything made that was made." It was not, therefore, possible that He should be held by the bonds of death. Marvelous condescension, not human weakness, brought Him into the sepulcher— it was by His own free will that He was laid in the tomb and, consequently, He had but to exert His royal prerogative and He could rise again from the dead whenever He pleased.

Those two reasons might be sufficient to prove the assertion I made concerning our Lord, but I want you to notice, with delight, a third one. It was not possible that the dead Christ should be held by the bonds of death any longer than the third morning because His redeeming work was done. Remember—and oh, how well some of you know it, and how gladly do you welcome it!—that the reason why Jesus died was because He took the sin of His people upon Himself and, being found in the sinner's place, He had to suffer the sinner's doom, which was death. But after He had endured the penalty, that is, after He had died and remained the appointed time in the tomb, how could He be held any longer in the grave? After He had said, "It is finished," and after

the predestinated hours for a full examination of His work before the Throne of God had passed, why should He be detained any longer? He was the Hostage for our debt, but when the debt was paid, who could keep Him in durance vile? Having borne the penalty, He was free forever and so, as Paul writes, "Christ, being raised from the dead dies no more; death has no more dominion over Him." In that He has satisfied all the claims of the Law of God, what hand can arrest Him, what power can hold Him captive? He died for our sins, but He rose again for our justification! And His rising proved that all His people were accounted righteous in the sight of God! It was not possible, while there was a just God in Heaven, that Christ should remain in the tomb. As His work was done, justice demanded that He should be let go—
"And now both the Surety and sinner are free!"

In the next place, it was not possible that Christ should remain in the tomb because He had His Father's promise that He should not. I have already reminded you that David, speaking by Inspiration, had said, "You will not leave My soul in Hades" (the abode of departed spirits) "neither will You suffer Your Holy One to see corruption." That promise must be kept, so it was not possible that Christ should remain in the grave beyond the appointed period. Indeed, this was part of the Father's purpose and plan—and an essential part of the great work of the redemption of His elect—that He who died should rise again. And what is in Jehovah's plan and purpose, none shall ever gainsay. When He opens the door, no man is able to shut it. And where He shuts it, no man can possibly open it. Even Nebuchadnezzar, when he came to his right mind, said concerning the Most High, "None can stay His hand, or say unto Him, What are You doing?" So, when the Father had purposed and decreed that His Son, Jesus Christ, should not be held any longer by the bonds of death, it was not possible for Him to be detained!

Remember, too, dear Friends, that there is a fifth reason for Christ's deliverance that is to be found in the perpetuity of His offices. You scarcely need for me to remind you that our Lord Jesus Christ was a Priest, but not after the order of the Aaronic priests, for they died and there was an end of them so far as their priesthood was concerned. But to Christ it was said, "You are a Priest forever after the order of Melchisedec." But a man cannot be a priest when he is dead! Therefore, since Christ's is a Melchisedec priesthood, He, "is made, not after the law of a carnal commandment, but after the power of an endless life." And, in order that He might have that endless life, it was necessary that He should rise from the dead—His Melchisedec priesthood required it. Next, Jesus was King as well as Priest. You know what sort of a King He was, for it is written, "Your Throne, O God, is forever and ever." Now Christ must reign. It is also written that "He must reign till He has put all enemies under His feet." But a dead king cannot reign and, therefore, Christ must rise from the tomb. He must have death under His feet, for death is one of His enemies. But if He had not risen from the dead, He would have been under the feet of death, and that could never be. So that both His priestly and kingly offices required that He should rise from the grave. Yes, and so did His office as our Redeemer, for when He undertook to become our next of kin and to redeem us, it was essential that He should continue to live, or else that ancient cry of the Patriarch Job would not have remained true, "I know that my Redeemer lives." Therefore, Jesus must rise from the dead. I cannot stay to go further into this argument, but if you will think it over yourselves, you wil1 see that because Jesus Christ is "the same yesterday, and today, and forever"—because each of His offices is everlasting, ordained of God in perpetuity—therefore He must rise from the dead.

But, to come to the close of this part of our subject, it was not possible, in the very nature of things, for Christ to be held by the bonds of death. If He had been, think what the consequences

to us would have been, for, first, we should have had no assurance of our own resurrection! The blessed hope that those who have been called away from us and whose bodies we have committed to the earth, shall rise again, would have been without any substantial foundation. "But now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the first fruits of them that slept." When you get the first fruits of a harvest, you feel certain that the rest of it will be garnered in due time. So Christ has risen as the first of a great host and we, thus, have an assurance which otherwise we could not have had, but which is essential to the comfort of Christians. Only imagine what would have been the consequences to us if that assurance had not been ours. There would have been no evidence of our justification. I might have said, "Yes, Christ took my debt, but how do I know that He paid it? Christ bore my sins, but how do I know that He put them away?" So, if He had never risen from the dead, we would have had no proof that we were justified. Then, too, if He had never risen and gone up to Heaven in His human body, we would not have had anyone to take possession of Heaven on our behalf. Now we have "a Man in possession." We have a wondrous Representative before the Throne of God who has taken possession and grip of the Divine estates. What a joy it is to us to know that He is there to represent us before God! Further, if Christ's body had remained in the grave, there could have been no reign of Christ, and no sitting down at the right hand of God as there now is. He would have been in Heaven in the same respect as He is here as God—but there would have been no visible appearance of the representative Man, and the once-crucified Redeemer—and the ransomed ones could not have sung, "For You were slain and have redeemed us to God by Your blood," for He would not have been there to hear the song! They might have remembered the Sacrifice on Calvary, but He, as the Lamb that had been slain, wearing the marks of His priesthood and death, would not have been there.

Ray Stedman: **Jesus the Christ**
The second movement of Peter's address is the revelation of the background of prediction. Here are these manifested events [ministry, crucifixion, resurrection], which they could not deny, set before this crowd. But there is also a pattern of prediction to which they are linked which tremendously enhances the power of the apostle's argument. He quotes now from David . . .

The point Peter is making here by this quotation from the sixteenth Psalm is not merely that David had predicted that Jesus would rise from the dead, it is also that David had declared that the resurrection was absolutely necessary in view of the life Jesus had lived. David foresaw Jesus saying, "I saw the Lord always before me, for he is at my right hand that I may not be moved." That is a life lived in continual dependence upon the power and authority of the Father. . .

Steven Cole: **A Life of Joy and Gladness**
Everyone wants to be happy. The Rolling Stones complained years ago that they couldn't get any satisfaction, but clearly satisfaction was their goal. Sixteen centuries ago, Augustine observed, "I am not alone in this desire [for happiness], nor are there only a few who share it with me: without exception we all long for happiness… They may all search for it in different ways, but all try their hardest to reach the same goal, that is, joy" (Confessions, X, 21, cited by John Piper, The Legacy of Sovereign Joy [Crossway Books], p. 70).

Probably you could explain all human behavior as a search for joy or happiness or satisfaction, although most search in the wrong place. People get married and pursue a certain career because they hope to find happiness through these things. They divorce and change careers for the same reason. People commit sexual immorality because they think that it will bring them happiness. They steal because they think that having material possessions will satisfy. Murderers kill

because they think that they will be happier if they get rid of an enemy or take what belongs to the other person. Even suicidal people hope that death will bring relief from their problems.

One of Satan's most successful lies is that God is a cosmic killjoy who wants everyone to be miserable. People view God as a great sadist in the sky, who gets perverse delight in making His creatures miserable. But even a casual reading of the Bible reveals that, to the contrary, God is a being who has great joy and that everyone who comes to know Him enters into the only true and lasting joy possible.

The Psalms overflow with joy and gladness. Jesus told the disciples that He spoke to them so that His joy would be in them and their joy would be made full (John 15:11). The fruit that the Holy Spirit produces in the believer is first love, then joy (Gal. 5:22). God has promised eternal, lasting joy for us in heaven (Rev. 21:4). The Puritans had it right when they said, "The chief end of man is to glorify God and enjoy Him forever." So, rather than discouraging us from seeking joy and gladness, the Bible rather exhorts us to seek it, but to seek it in the right place. God Himself is the source of all joy and gladness. If we seek joy in God, we will find eternal satisfaction.

God wants us to be growing in His joy and gladness.

While true joy and gladness come from God, our text breaks it into three sources: Joy and gladness come from knowing God's presence; from being conformed to God's holiness; and, from the hope of God's raising our bodies so that we can eternally dwell with Him. . .

That is the key to joy and gladness, daily to cultivate a sense of God's presence. Then, even if we go through trials, we will not lose our joy, because God is with us. Jonathan Edwards expressed it well in a sermon, "God the Best Portion of the Christian" (The Works of Jonathan Edwards [Banner of Truth], 2:106):

> Hence we may learn, that whatever changes a godly man passes through, he is happy; because God, who is unchangeable, is his chosen portion. Though he meet with temporal losses, and be deprived of many, yea, of all his temporal enjoyments; yet God, whom he prefers before all, still remains, and cannot be lost. While he stays in this changeable, troublesome world, he is happy; because his chosen portion, on which he builds as his main foundation for happiness, is above the world, and above all changes. And when he goes into another world, still he is happy, because that portion yet remains.… But how great is the happiness of those who have chosen the Fountain of all good, who prefer him before all things in heaven or on earth, and who can never be deprived of him to all eternity!

Freddy Fritz: **He Descended Into Hell**

I. The Origin of the Phrase—"He Descended Into Hell"

It is surprising to find that the phrase "he descended into hell" was not found in any of the early versions of the Apostles' Creed. It first appeared in the Fourth Formula of Sirmium, the so-called Dated Creed of 359 AD. It was not until about 650 AD that it was commonly found in widespread use in the Apostles' Creed.

Now, Rufinus, who wrote a commentary on the Apostles' Creed in about 404 AD, did not think that it meant that Christ descended into hell, but understood the phrase simply to mean that Christ was "buried." In other words, he took it to mean that Christ "descended into the grave." (The Greek form of the Apostles' Creed uses the word hades, which can mean just "grave," not gehenna, which means "hell, the place of punishment").

As one continues to survey the use of the Apostles' Creed, it seems that when the phrase "he descended into hell" began to be more commonly used, it may have been in versions (now lost to us) that did not have the expression "and buried." In other words, the creed used only one of the two expressions to signify Christ's burial. But later when "he descended into hell" was used in a version of the creed that already had the phrase "and buried," some other explanation had to be given to it. This mistaken insertion of the phrase after the words "and buried" was apparently done around 650 AD—led to all sorts of attempts to explain "he descended into hell" in some way that did not contradict Scripture.

Some have taken the phrase "he descended into hell" to mean that Christ suffered the pains of hell while on the cross. John Calvin, for example, says that "Christ's descent into hell" refers to the fact that he not only died a bodily death but that "it was expedient at the same time for him to undergo the severity of God's vengeance, to appease his wrath and satisfy his just judgment." . . .

But is this a satisfactory explanation of the phrase "he descended into hell"? While it is true that Christ suffered the outpouring of God's wrath on the cross, this explanation does not really fit the phrase in the Apostles' Creed. It does not explain in which way Christ "descended." And furthermore, the statement (and interpretation) seems artificial and unnecessary after "was crucified, died, and was buried." . . .

II. Possible Biblical Support for "He Descended Into Hell"

Support for the idea that Christ descended into hell has been found in primarily five passages: Acts 2:27; Romans 10:6-7; Ephesians 4:9; 1 Peter 3:18-20; and 1 Peter 4:6. . . .

Acts 2:27

The word translated "hell" is the Greek word hades. It is the Greek translation of the Hebrew word sheol. Both words simply refer to the "grave" or "the place of the dead." Therefore, the New International Version gives the preferable translation: "Because you will not abandon me to the grave, nor will you let your Holy One see decay." This translation is preferable because the context emphasizes that Christ's body rose from the grave, unlike David's, which remained in the grave and decayed. Peter is using David's Psalm to show that Christ's body did not decay—he is therefore unlike David, who "died and was buried, and his tomb is here to this day" (vs. 29). . .

Ephesians 4:9

Here Paul writes: "What does 'he ascended' mean except that he also descended to the lower, earthly regions?" Those who use this passage to support the idea that Christ descended into hell view "the lower, earthly regions" as equivalent to hades. But this is a doubtful interpretation. Paul is arguing that the ascent of Christ presupposes a descent. And the opposite of the ascension of Christ, in this context, is the incarnation of Christ. That is, in fact, the understanding of the NIV Translators.

And so Ephesians 4:9 teaches that Christ first descended to earth, and then he later ascended into heaven.

1 Peter 3:18-20

The most satisfactory explanation of this passage seems to be one proposed (but not really defended) by Augustine long ago. The passage refers not to something Christ did between his death and resurrection, but to what he did through the Spirit at the days of Noah. When Noah was building the ark, Christ, through the Spirit in Noah, preached to the disobedient all around him.

This view gains support from two other statements. In 1 Peter 1:11, Peter says that "the Spirit of Christ" was speaking through the Old Testament prophets. This suggests that Peter could readily have thought that the "Spirit of Christ" was speaking through Noah as well. Then in 2 Peter 2:5, he calls Noah a "preacher of righteousness," using the noun (keryx) that comes from the same verb "preached" (ekeryxen) in 1 Peter 3:19. So it seems likely that when Christ "preached to the spirits in prison" he did so through Noah in the days before the flood.

III. Biblical Opposition to "He Descended Into Hell"

In addition to the fact that there is little if any biblical support for a descent of Christ into hell, there are several texts that argue against the possibility of Christ's going into hell after his death.

A. John 19:30

The cry of Jesus on the cross, "It is finished" (John 19:30) strongly suggests that Christ's suffering was finished at that moment and so was his alienation from the Father because of his bearing our sin. This implies that he would not descend into hell, but would go at once into the Father's presence.

B. Luke 23:43

Second, Jesus' words to the thief on the cross, "Today you will be with me in paradise" (Luke 23:43), imply that after Jesus died his soul went immediately into the presence of the Father in heaven, even though his body remained buried in the tomb.

C. Luke 23:46

Finally, the cry, "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit" (Luke 23:46), also suggests that Christ expected (correctly) the immediate end of his suffering and estrangement, and the welcoming of his spirit into heaven by God the Father (similar to Stephen's cry in Acts 7:59).

These texts indicate, then, that Christ experienced in his death the same things believers today experience when they die: his dead body remained in the earth and was buried (as ours will be), but his spirit passed immediately into the presence of God in heaven (just as ours will).

Then, on the first Easter morning, Christ's spirit was reunited with his body and he was raised from the dead—just as Christians who have died will (when Christ returns) be reunited to their

bodies and raised in their perfect resurrection bodies to new life.

This truth has great encouragement for us: we need not fear death, not only because eternal life lies on the other side for the believer in Christ, but also because we know that our Savior himself has gone through exactly the same experience we will go through. He has prepared—even sanctified the way—and we follow him with confidence each step of that way. This is much greater comfort regarding death than could ever be given by any view of a descent into hell.

Pat Damiani: **How to Focus Our Faith on the Resurrection**
1. Ponder the proof
2. Seize the significance
    Jesus is Lord
    Jesus is the Christ
3. Render my response

John Piper: **The Gladness of the Risen God**

I begin this morning with three questions for you to answer silently in your own mind.

- First, do you want to be happy?
- Second, do you want your happiness to be partial or full?
- Third, do you want your happiness to stop or to last as long as you last? . . .

In Acts 1:3 Luke tells us that "Jesus presented himself alive after his passion by many proofs, appearing to his apostles during forty days, and speaking of the kingdom of God." For forty days he sought to prove to his followers that he really was alive,

- that his body was new and indestructible,
- that his death for sinners was validated,
- that his teaching was true,
- that his fellowship would be permanent,
- and that his cause would triumph in the world. . .

In other words, what we see from this text is that God's goal for Jesus Christ beyond the grave was that he might fill him with gladness. So he didn't abandon his soul to Hades or let his flesh see corruption. He raised him from the dead to make him full of happiness for ever and ever.

And what is the essence of this happiness?

Verse 28 says, "Thou wilt make me full of gladness with thy presence." Which means that we end this l3-week series on the pleasures of God where we began -- with God the Son and God the Father delighting in each other's presence. "Thou wilt make me full of gladness with thy presence."

But what does Jesus experience in the presence of God? What are the pleasures in God's right hand?

The first thing that comes to mind is glory. Jesus had prayed in John 17:5, "Father, glorify me in your own presence with the glory which I had with you before the world was made." Jesus had laid down his glory in order to suffer for us. Now he is eager to take it up again. . .

Jesus didn't just happen upon this gladness beyond the grave; he pursued it with all his might. Hebrews 12:2 says, "For the joy that was set before him he endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of God."

In other words, Jesus was able to endure the cross because he knew it was leading to the Father's presence where there is "fullness of joy" and to the Father's right hand where there are "pleasures for evermore". . .

But there's more that has to do with us. If all Jesus wanted was the glory and gladness that he had with his Father before the world was, why did he come into the world in the first place? The Bible says, Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners like you and me (1 Tim. 1:15).

But someone might say, I thought you said he was pursuing his own joy. You said he wanted to be glorified by the Father. Which is it? Does he want his own glory and his own gladness or does he want ours? This has been the key question of this whole series on the pleasures of God. Is he for us or for himself?

Listen to his own answer one last time from John 17:24, "Father, I desire that they also, whom you have given me, may be with me where I am, to behold my glory which you have given me. . . before the foundation of the world."

Yes he is for himself because he longs for the glory and the gladness of his Father's presence. And yes he is for us, because he wants us with him there.

The message of Easter is doubly wonderful.

It is wonderful to see the suffering Son coming home to the Father. What a reunion that must have been when Creator embraced Creator and said, "Well done Son. Welcome home." What a wonderful thing to see the bloody Passover Lamb of Good Friday crowned with glory and honor, and handed the scepter of the universe!

But it is also wonderful to hear Jesus say, "I want others to be with me, Father. I want others to share my glory. I want my gladness in your glory to overflow like a mountain spring and become the gladness of others. I want my joy in you to be in them and their joy to be full for ever and ever."

On Easter Sunday morning Jesus blew the lock off the prison of death and gloom and returned to the gladness of God. With that he put his sanction on the pursuit of happiness. And he opened the way for sinners to find never-ending satisfaction at the fountain of the glory of his grace.

From the right hand of God he speaks to everyone of us today and invites us to the never-ending banquet: "I am the bread of life; he who comes to me shall not hunger, and he who believes in me shall never thirst (John 6:35). . . I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and whoever lives and believes in me shall never die. Do you believe this?" (John 11:25-26).

TEXT: Acts 2: 33-36

TITLE: THE COMING OF THE HOLY SPIRIT IN POWERFUL PROCLAMATION – PART 5 – THE AUTHENTICATION OF JESUS AS BOTH LORD AND CHRIST – FOCUS ON THE ONGOING ACTIVITY OF THE EXALTED JESUS

BIG IDEA:
THE OUTPOURING OF THE HOLY SPIRIT – SENT DIRECTLY BY THE EXALTED JESUS -- IMPACTS THE WHOLE WORLD WITH THE SUPERNATURAL AUTHENTICATION OF JESUS AS BOTH LORD AND CHRIST

INTRODUCTION:
Logical arguments lead to logical conclusions. Peter not only serves as the supreme example of the ultimate Christian preacher but also as the supreme example of a brilliant lawyer. Remember Tom Cruise in "A Few Good Men" – he showed his lawyering skill by **making an argument** in court that resulted in the exposure of the truth and the indictment of Jack Nicholson. His argument capitalized on emotion and the understanding of human personality and motivation … but it was still a **logical argument**. We have been studying the tightly constructed historical narrative by Luke regarding the events and significance of the Day of Pentecost:

Review: Four parts to our study so far:
2:1-4 **The Experience** of the Coming of the Holy Spirit in Power
- Startling – came suddenly – even though they were obediently waiting in Jerusalem
- Impressive and Powerful – sound like a rushing wind; tongues of fire
    - Two powerful forces of nature that spread rapidly
- Personally and Profoundly Life Changing
- Impactful on Others

2:5-13 **The Explanation** by the Assembled Crowd of Foreign Jews
- Communication in known foreign languages regarding the mighty deeds of God
- Varying initial reactions – Amazed, Astonished, Perplexed, Mocking . . .

2:14-24 **The Supernatural Explanation** rendered by God's spokesman the Apostle Peter
- Consistent with OT Prophecy – Joel 2 – "*this is that*" – not complete fulfillment
- Authenticating the Messianic credentials of Jesus
    - His Life = Attested to by God with miracles and wonders and signs
    - His Death = no surprise but part of God's sovereign, predetermined plan
    - His Resurrection = key; Death could not hold Jesus; God raised Him up

2:22-32 **Three Dramatic Implications of the Resurrection**
- Puts God's Stamp of Authentication on Jesus the Nazarene as the promised Messiah
- Transformed Death into a Doorway to a Joyful and Hopeful Eternal Outcome
- The Resurrection of the Messiah was Anticipated by OT Prophecy, Accomplished by God and now Attested to by Many Witnesses

THE OUTPOURING OF THE HOLY SPIRIT – SENT DIRECTLY BY THE EXALTED JESUS -- IMPACTS THE WHOLE WORLD WITH THE SUPERNATURAL AUTHENTICATION OF JESUS AS BOTH LORD AND CHRIST

2 LOGICAL CONCLUSIONS FROM THIS OUTPOURING OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

I. (:33-35) DRAWING CONCLUSION #1 – THE SUPERNATURAL SOURCE OF THE OUTPOURING OF THE HOLY SPIRIT IS THE EXALTED JESUS CHRIST

"*Therefore*" -- οὖν Passage structured around 2 occurrences of this powerful little connector
How do you explain this phenomenon of the speaking in tongues?

Wiersbe: If the Holy Spirit is in the world, then God must have sent Him. Joel promised that one day the Spirit would come, and Jesus Himself had promised to send the gift of the Holy Spirit to His people (Luke 24:49; John 14:26; 15:26; Acts 1:4). But if Jesus is dead, He cannot send the Spirit; therefore, He must be alive. Furthermore, He could not send the Spirit unless He had returned to heaven to the Father (John 16:7); so, Jesus has ascended to heaven! To back up this statement, Peter quoted Psalm 110:1, a verse that certainly could not be applied to David.

A. Revelation of the Source of the Gift of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost

1. The Out Pouring of the Holy Spirit was Dependent on the Ascension of Jesus
    a. Elevated to the Position of Ultimate Power – Where is Jesus now?

"having been exalted to the right hand of God,"

τῇ δεξιᾷ τοῦ θεοῦ ὑψωθείς,

Bruce: the place of supremacy over the universe, in fulfillment of His own assurance to His judges: "*From henceforth shall the Son of man be seated at the right hand of the power of God*" (**Luke 22:69** – testimony to His Deity).

Strange word to apply to a humiliating death on the cross:
George Flattery: The exaltation of Christ preceded the outpouring of the Spirit. Peter uses a Greek word (*hupsotheis*) which means "*having been exalted*" or "*having been lifted up*." Using various forms of this word, Jesus spoke several times (John 3:14; 8:28; 12:32-34) of His being lifted up. He was referring to the manner in which He would die. As Peter uses the word, the exaltation of Christ has to do with the resurrection, the ascension, and the seating of Christ at the right hand of the Father (Acts 2:32-33; 5:30-31). Jesus was exalted (lifted up) both literally and in the sense of being honored and seated in power.

1) Place of Consummated Accomplishment: (message of Hebrews)

Hebrews 1:3 And He is the radiance of His glory and the exact representation of His nature, and upholds all things by the word of His power. When He had made purification of sins, He sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high;

Hebrews 8:1 Now the main point in what has been said *is this*: we have such a high priest, who has taken His seat at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens

Hebrews 10:12 but He, having offered one sacrifice for sins for all time, sat down at the right hand of God,

Hebrews 12:2 fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

2) Place of Enjoyment of the Presence of God and Access to All Spiritual Blessings:

Acts 7:55 But being full of the Holy Spirit, he gazed intently into heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God;

Ephesians 1:20 which He brought about in Christ, when He raised Him from the dead, and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly *places*,

Colossians 3:1 If then you have been raised up with Christ, keep seeking the things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God

3) Place of Majesty and Dominion and Victory and Power:

Exodus 15:6 "Thy right hand, O LORD, is majestic in power, Thy right hand, O LORD, shatters the enemy.

1 Peter 3:22 who is at the right hand of God, having gone into heaven, after angels and authorities and powers had been subjected to Him.

Psalm 98:1 *A Psalm*. O Sing to the LORD a new song, For He has done wonderful things, His right hand and His holy arm have gained the victory for Him.

Psalm 118:16 The right hand of the LORD is exalted; The right hand of the LORD does valiantly.

4) Place of Deliverance and Salvation and Protection:

Psalm 20:6 Now I know that the LORD saves His anointed; He will answer him from His holy heaven, With the saving strength of His right hand.

Psalm 18:35 Thou hast also given me the shield of Thy salvation, And Thy right hand upholds me; And Thy gentleness makes me great.

Psalm 44:3 For by their own sword they did not possess the land; And their own arm did not save them; But Thy right hand, and Thine arm, and the light of Thy presence, For Thou didst favor them.

Acts 5:31 "He is the one whom God exalted to His right hand as a Prince and a Savior, to grant repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins.

5) Place of Security and Happiness:

Psalm 16:8 I have set the LORD continually before me; Because He is at my right hand, I will not be shaken.
Psalm 16:11 Thou wilt make known to me the path of life; In Thy presence is fulness of joy; In Thy right hand there are pleasures forever.

Psalm 17:7 Wondrously show Thy lovingkindness, O Savior of those who take refuge at Thy right hand From those who rise up *against them*.

6) Place of Favor and Privileged Access and Compassionate Intercession:

1 Kings 2:19-20 "So Bathsheba went to King Solomon to speak to him for Adonijah. And the king arose to meet her, bowed before her, and sat on his throne; then he had a throne set for the king's mother, and she sat on his right. Then she said, 'I am making one small request of you; do not refuse me.'"

Romans 8:34 who is the one who condemns? Christ Jesus is He who died, yes, rather who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who also intercedes for us.

7) Place of Knowledge and Righteousness and Power:
Psalm 21:8 Your hand will find out all your enemies; Your right hand will find out those who hate you.

Psalm 45:4 And in Thy majesty ride on victoriously, For the cause of truth and meekness *and* righteousness; Let Thy right hand teach Thee awesome things.

Psalm 48:10 As is Thy name, O God, So is Thy praise to the ends of the earth; Thy right hand is full of righteousness.

Illustration: Reading book by George Stephanopoulos – knew what a privilege it was to serve at the right hand of the most powerful man in the world – the President of the United States – Bill Clinton -- "All Too Human – A Political Education"

> "When it comes to White House offices, it's not the size that counts. Location, location, location. Proximity, like celebrity, is a source and sign of power. The closer you are to the president, the more people believe he listens to you. The more people believe he listens to you, the more information flows your way. The more information flows your way, the more the president listens to you. The more the president listens to you, the more power you have."

Think of the power of Jesus at the right hand of God.

a. Elevated to the Position of Ultimate Power – Where is Jesus now?

b. Endowed with the Promised Gift of Ultimate Power – What is He doing?
"*and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit,*"

τήν τε ἐπαγγελίαν τοῦ πνεύματος τοῦ ἁγίου λαβὼν παρὰ τοῦ πατρός,

Bock: Jesus functions as the "middle" figure in God's blessing, as the Father directs to and through him. This is not so much subordinationism as associative work in the capacity of a mediator who shares God's presence and glorious position.

2. The Out Pouring of the Holy Spirit was Executed by Jesus Himself
"*He has poured forth this*" = Key declaration in the passage

ἐξέχεεν τοῦτο

Jesus is alive and directing the affairs of this new Christian church – what does this mean for us?

To give in abundance; to bestow generously

Another passage speaks of God the Father pouring out the Holy Spirit upon His beloved:
Titus 3:4-7 *But when the kindness of God our Savior and His love for mankind appeared, He saved us, not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness, but according to His mercy, by the* ***washing of regeneration*** *and* ***renewing*** *by the Holy Spirit, whom He poured out upon us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, that being justified by His grace we might be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life.*

3. The Out Pouring of the Holy Spirit was Undeniable

"*which you both see and hear.*"

ὃ ὑμεῖς [καὶ] βλέπετε καὶ ἀκούετε.

a. What they saw = tongues of fire

b. What they heard = sound like a mighty rushing wind; speaking in tongues

Peter could bear witness to the resurrection and ascension; but all present could bear witness to the power and effects of the ministry of the Holy Spirit

B. Recognition of the Deity of Jesus Christ by Virtue of His Heavenly Exaltation

1. Ascension Applied to Jesus – not David

"For it was not David who ascended into heaven,"

οὐ γὰρ Δαυὶδ ἀνέβη εἰς τοὺς οὐρανούς,

2. Lordship Applied to Jesus – by David

"*but he himself says: 'The Lord said to my Lord,*'"

λέγει δὲ αὐτός· εἶπεν [ὁ] κύριος τῷ κυρίῳ μου·

3. Honor and Power Recognized by God the Father

"Sit at My right hand,"

κάθου ἐκ δεξιῶν μου,

4. Dominion and Kingdom Reign Promised by God the Father

"*Until I make Thine enemies a footstool for Thy feet.*"

ἕως ἂν θῶ τοὺς ἐχθρούς σου ὑποπόδιον τῶν ποδῶν σου.

Matt. 22:41-45 – Jesus applies the same prophecy to Himself – establishes His Deity

Those who are not friends of the Lord are His enemies – quite a harsh sound to this Jewish audience who viewed themselves as privileged children of Abraham and close friends of God

It establishes Jesus Christ as both Christ and Lord – He is who He said He was – ends all debate

Future complete subjugation: **1 Cor. 15:20-28**

II. (:36) DRAWING CONCLUSION #2 – <u>THE SOVEREIGN SIGNIFICANCE</u> OF THE OUTPOURING OF THE HOLY SPIRIT IS THE AUTHENTICATION OF JESUS AS BOTH LORD AND CHRIST

"*Therefore*" -- οὖν

What is God trying to accomplish?

A. Flip-Flopping of Israel's Sacrosanct Agenda

"let all the house of Israel know for certain" Assuredly, with assurance

ἀσφαλῶς γινωσκέτω πᾶς οἶκος Ἰσραὴλ

Lenski: Any other deduction is false to both the facts and the prophecies.

There can no longer be any doubt about the facts. No room for doubt or uncertainty about who Jesus is. True beyond a shadow of a doubt.
They have imagined themselves to be protected by God; bloated in their own self righteousness; looking down with disdain at the Gentiles; holding to a fierce sense of nationalistic pride and prejudice

B. Fulfillment of God's Kingdom Agenda – God Established Jesus as Lord and Christ

"*that God has made Him both Lord and Christ*"

ὅτι καὶ κύριον αὐτὸν καὶ χριστὸν ἐποίησεν ὁ θεός,

Not making him something He had not been previously but establishing him as Lord and Christ in the eyes of everyone.

Longenecker: The verb translated "*made*" has sometimes been taken as implying an adoptionist Christology, as though Jesus became ontologically what he was not before. But in functional contexts, *epoiesen* has the sense of "*appointed*" (cf. 1 Sam 12:6 LXX; 1 Kings 12:31 LXX; Mark 3:14; Heb 3:2), and it is in just such a context that Peter uses it here. He is proclaiming not an adoptionist Christology but a functional one with ontological overtones – viz, that the resurrection of Jesus from the dead is God's open avowal that the messianic work has been accomplished and that Jesus now has the full right to assume the messianic title; that the exaltation of Jesus is the proclamation of his lordship, which God calls all to acknowledge. . .

"*Lord*" came to have particular relevance to the church's witness to Gentiles just as "*Messiah*" was more relevant to the Jewish world. So in Acts Luke reports the proclamation of Jesus "*the Christ*" before Jewish audiences both in Palestine and among the Diaspora, whereas Paul in his letters to Gentile churches generally uses Christ as a proper name and proclaims Christ Jesus "*the Lord*."

1. Significance of Jesus as Lord

You don't want Jesus to rule your life?? Then you don't want Jesus period! You don't want to be a Christian; you don't want to be His disciple. Lordship is the only relationship Jesus offers.

Stedman: "Lord" means ruler of all things, king over all men, the One who holds the key to life and death, heaven and hell, in his hands. All power in heaven and in earth is committed unto him. And there is no authority or power that exists which does not take its direction and its limitation from him. "Christ," of course, means "Messiah." We say the words, "Jesus Christ," and many of us think that Jesus is his first name, and Christ his last. But that is not the case. Jesus is his name; Christ is his title. Christ means Messiah -- the promised One, the Deliverer, the only hope that mankind has ever had. Suddenly all this made perfect sense to this multitude. The full

force of Peter's arguments thudded home, and they realized that they were in a very precarious position. This One whom he had proven, by indisputable evidence, to be Lord, was the One they had crucified 50 days earlier.

2. Significance of Jesus as Christ = Messiah = Anointed One = Prophet, Priest, King

Are you going to listen to the teachings of Jesus as the authoritative Word of God and obey them"

Are you going to worship the Father through the one Mediator He has appointed, our great high priest who offered up Himself as the Lamb of God, the only sufficient sacrifice for our sins"

Are you going to submit to Jesus as the anointed King who will return to earth to establish His physical kingdom and rule over all nations?

Bruce: He was exalted not only as Messiah, but as Lord. The first apostolic sermon leads up to the first apostolic creed: "*Jesus is Lord*" (cf. Rom. 10:9; 1 Cor. 12:3; Phil. 2:11) – "*Lord*" not only as the bearer of a courtesy title, but as bearer of "*the name which is above every name*" (Phil. 2:9). To a Jew, there was only one name "*above every name*" – the Ineffable Name of the God of Israel, represented in synagogue reading and in the LXX text by the title "*Lord*." And that the apostles meant to give Jesus the title "*Lord*" in this highest sense of all is indicated by the way in which they do not hesitate on occasion to apply to Him passages of OT scripture referring to Jehovah. Indeed, in this very context it may well be that the promise "that whosoever shall call on the name of Jehovah shall be delivered" (Joel 2:32) is viewed as being fulfilled in those members of Peter's audience who repentantly invoke Jesus as Lord.

BBC Pulpit Ministry: Despite the pluralism of our day, despite the high level of biblical ignorance, we must proclaim that Jesus is Lord and Christ. He is the rightful King over every aspect of our lives, and Savior who brings us into right relationship with God.

C. Frustration of Israel's Killing Agenda – Jews wanted Jesus Dead

"*-- this Jesus whom you crucified."*

τοῦτον τὸν Ἰησοῦν ὃν ὑμεῖς ἐσταυρώσατε.

God wanted Him to die also – but for a far different reason; and on a temporary basis

Great contrast between how men treated Jesus and how God treated Him. You have killed your promised Messiah.

What does man bring to the table to contribute to his own salvation and to establish a right relationship with God? Nothing

CONCLUSION:

Are you willing to submit to Jesus as both Lord and Christ? There can be no salvation apart from repentance of sin. Our next message will examine this required response of repentance from sin.

Do you believe that Christ is right now at the right hand of God the Father and actively exercising power and influence over what happens here on earth and in our lives today? The Head of the Church is actively shepherding His flock. He has poured out the Holy Spirit to give us power and direction in fulfilling the Great Commission He has left for us.

THE SUPERNATURAL SOURCE OF THE OUTPOURING OF THE HOLY SPIRIT IS THE EXALTED JESUS CHRIST

THE SOVEREIGN SIGNIFICANCE OF THE OUTPOURING OF THE HOLY SPIRIT IS THE AUTHENTICATION OF JESUS AS BOTH LORD AND CHRIST

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DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

1) What is the significance of Jesus now seated at the right hand of God the Father?

2) How can you visualize the relationships among the Trinity where the Father gives the gift of the Holy Spirit to God the Son?

3) Who today is in that category of being enemies of Jesus Christ?

4) Why is it so important for Peter to emphasize their moral culpability in the crucifixion of Jesus?

* * * * * * * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Longenecker: Jesus was acknowledged and proclaimed Lord and Christ not just after his resurrection but **because** of his resurrection. In Jewish thought, no one has a right to the title Messiah till he has accomplished the work of the Messiah – in fact, in all of life accomplishment must precede acclamation. During his earthly ministry, as that ministry is portrayed in all the Gospels, Jesus was distinctly reluctant to accept titular acclaim, probably because his understanding of messiahship had to do with suffering and because his concept of lordship had to do with vindication and exaltation by God. But now that Jesus has accomplished his messianic mission in life and death and has been raised by God and exalted "*at his right hand*," the titles Lord and Christ are legitimately his. This theme of function and accomplishment as the basis for titular acclaim is a recurring note in the Christological statements elsewhere in the NT (cf. Rom 1:4; Phil 2:9-11; Heb 2:14; 1 John 5:6).

Bock: The speech thus shows how God's activity through Jesus stands at the core of the Christian message. Jesus's resurrection means far more than merely that there is life after death. It is a vindication of Jesus's life and mission, a demonstration that Jesus lives and still rules, and a reflection that Jesus is a unique person, sharing the precious presence and glory of God in a

unique way. Christ's death led to Christ's victory and rule. The reality of the resurrection transformed the apostles from those who were timid to those who were bold to share Jesus with others. Peter also makes clear that the sin of rejecting God's unique messenger stands at the base of why Jesus had to die and that forgiveness and the Spirit are what the gospel offers, as the next unit will show. The Spirit's central place in the promise of God also is highlighted here. The Spirit is the evidence that Jesus is raised and reigns with God. The believer's changed life is a testimony to Jesus's current activity in the world and enables the mission. So God works through the Son and gives the Spirit. Undergirding the salvation message is the united work of Father, Son, and Spirit.

Saucy: Peter's statement that Jesus is presently at 'the right hand of God,' in fulfillment of Psalm 110:1, has been a focal point of disagreement between dispensational and nondispensational interpreters. Traditional dispensationalists have understood this as teaching the present session of Christ in heaven before his return to fulfill the Davidic messianic kingdom promise of a literal reign on earth. They are careful to distinguish between the Davidic throne and the position that Christ presently occupies in heaven at the right hand of God (Ac 2:30).

Non-dispensationalists, by contrast, see Peter's statement as a clear indication that the New Testament has reinterpreted the Davidic messianic prophecies. The messianic throne has been transferred from Jerusalem to heaven, and Jesus 'has begun his messianic reign as the Davidic king.

Piper: So you see, the real issue the Charismatics raise for us is not the issue of tongues. In itself that is relatively unimportant. The really valuable contribution of the Charismatic renewal is their relentless emphasis on the truth that receiving the gift of the Holy Spirit is a real, life-changing experience. Christianity is not merely an array of glorious ideas. It is not merely the performance of rituals and sacraments. It is the life-changing experience of the Holy Spirit through faith in Jesus Christ the Lord of the universe.

D. Mark England: **Jesus Exalted**
Now is the time of salvation; God has sent His Spirit; You may have killed the promised Messiah but death could not hold Him; God raised Him up; Exalted Him to the right hand of God; instead of being uninvolved He is at the very point of power and influence; God is exercising His role solely and completely through Jesus Christ; Ephes. 1:20; crowned with glory and honor – Heb.; Phil. 2:9; 1 Pet. 3:22; the Spirit was given to Jesus to send so that there would be no doubt in anyone's mind that Jesus is Lord; "*rivers of living water*"

TEXT: Acts 2: 37-42

TITLE: THE COMING OF THE HOLY SPIRIT IN POWERFUL PROCLAMATION – PART 6 – HOW CAN A CONVICTED SINNER BE SAVED?

BIG IDEA:
THE OUTPOURING OF THE HOLY SPIRIT – SENT DIRECTLY BY THE EXALTED JESUS -- DEMANDS THE RESPONSE OF REPENTANCE AND BAPTISM

INTRODUCTION:

Context: Testimony has just been delivered to support the claim that Jesus of Nazareth has risen from the dead and is both **Christ** and **Lord.** What does it mean in your life for Jesus to be both Christ and Lord?

The audience has been brought face to face with their **sin** against a holy God and the **guilt** and **shame** and **judgment** associated with that sin. These are some heavy words – words that the modern church thinks we can avoid or sugarcoat. But the reality is that apart from man being humbled to experience the depths of his lost condition, he has no need for a Savior.

Peter is going to answer for us the most important question a person can ask: "**How can a convicted sinner be saved**?" His answer will be biblical and balanced – rooted in God's sovereignty and yet placing the responsibility and accountability squarely on the shoulders of the individual. No one will be able to argue that God did not make a legitimate universal offer of a gracious free gift of salvation.

We affirm two truths: all those who contritely and humbly desire to be saved will be saved AND only those who have been appointed by God's elective decree and awakened by His effectual call will have such a desire.

THE SEVEN FUNDAMENTAL INSIGHTS REGARDING SALVATION

You must understand God's message in these seven areas to grasp the answer to the all-important question: "**How can a convicted sinner be saved**?"

I. (:37) THE PREREQUISITE OF SALVATION = CONVICTION OF SIN

A. Conviction of Sin Requires Insight Into Man's Condition from **Understanding God's Word**

"*Now when they heard this,*"
Ἀκούσαντες δὲ

"*Faith comes from hearing and hearing by the Word of Christ*" **Rom. 10:17**

Word of God is still the method that God uses to bring conviction of sin; need to get the Word out; Satan does not want the Word to get out; wants us to use other methods

Charles Spurgeon often warned against the invitation system, even in his public preaching to the lost. It was not uncommon to hear him warn,

- "God has not appointed salvation by enquiry-rooms. . . . For the most part, a wounded conscience, like a wounded stag, delights to be alone that it may bleed in secret."

The role of the preacher is to exhort men and women to faith in Christ. That is all. And that is enough. God is well able to do everything else. . .

"Sometimes we are inclined to think that a very great portion of modern revivalism has been more a curse than a blessing, because it has led thousands to a kind of peace before they have known their misery; restoring the prodigal to the Father's house, and never making him say, 'Father, I have sinned.' How can he be healed who is not sick? or he be satisfied with the bread of life who is not hungry? The old-fashioned sense of sin is despised, and consequently a religion is run up before the foundations are dug out. Everything in this age is shallow. Deep-sea fishing is almost an extinct business so far as men's souls are concerned. The consequence is that men leap into religion, and then leap out again. Unhumbled they come to the church, unhumbled they remained in it, and unhumbled they go from it."

http://www.biblicalstudies.com/bstudy/ecclesiology/altar.htm

B. Conviction of Sin Can Only Be Produced in the Heart **by the Holy Spirit**

"*they were pierced to the heart,*"
κατενύγησαν τὴν καρδίαν

"*For the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart*." **Heb 4:12** διϊκνούμενος as moving into and through something producing a marked effect *go through, thoroughly penetrate*

But Holy Spirit is able to produce conviction
Emotional response will not be the same with each individual

"*pierced*" – sharp pain or a stab, often associated with emotion; literally *be pierced through, be stabbed, be pricked deeply*; idiomatically, of the sharp pain felt in the heart from conviction or remorse; to experience acute emotional distress, implying both concern and regret – only NT usage

"*He, when He comes, will convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment*"
John 16:9

Parable of the Soils – only one type of soil is that good soil where the gospel seed takes root and grows to a healthy, sustaining plant –
Many obstacles to a heart that is prepared to respond to God's Word
- Hard, stubborn heart
- Preoccupied heart – too many other concerns

Are we allowing the Holy Spirit to pierce our heart in areas where we need to respond to Him in repentance and faith in our spiritual growth? Or have we shut down; tuned out the Holy Spirit; developed a calloused conscience … how sensitive are we to the Holy Spirit?

C. Conviction of Sin Prepares the Heart to Respond to the Gospel Message of God's Grace

"*and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, 'Brethren, what shall we do?'*"

εἶπόν τε πρὸς τὸν Πέτρον καὶ τοὺς λοιποὺς ἀποστόλους· τί ποιήσωμεν, ἄνδρες ἀδελφοί;

Asking the right question; Peter is going to respond by telling them how they can be saved; All of the apostles united in the same message; divine plan of salvation – not invented by each preacher

"*Men brothers*" – as sinners we have more in common than not; no room for arrogance or disdain – same address Peter had used earlier **2:29** – now they are on common ground before the cross

he doesn't say: There is nothing you can do. God is sovereign and there is nothing you can do but beg him that perhaps He will give you a shot at salvation … Look at the wrong emphasis in the inquiring movement – moaning and groaning; long travail of seeking God …
Balance: not saved by some human decision of the will; saved by Spirit of God; but called to make a decision of the will – Not works to repent of sins and transfer trust to Jesus Christ

II. (:38a) THE PROCESS OF SALVATION (FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF HUMAN RESPONSIBILITY) = 2 KEY STEPS (not conditions)

Many ways to examine the process of salvation:

- Can look at the Order of Salvation from the divine perspective – God must first grant life before man is able to repent and believe – that is not the emphasis here
- Can look at the nature of the New Birth experience itself; what takes place at conversion
  John 3 and interaction of Jesus with Nicodemus
- Can look at the Human Responsibility to repent and believe and then follow through with baptism to demonstrate that your change of mind is genuine and results in a change of action = that is the emphasis here

A. Repentance

"*And Peter said to them, 'Repent,*'" <u>One word answer</u> to life's deepest question
Πέτρος δὲ πρὸς αὐτούς· μετανοήσατε, [φησίν,]

A change of mind that leads to a change in action; a turning of direction is involved
Parallel later in **vs. 41** with "*receiving the word*" = responding in faith
Faith and Repentance are two sides of the same coin; where one exists, the other does also
Not just a change of mind about who God is .. but a sin component to this repentance

Not a new message – look at **Jonah's message to Nineveh** – need for repentance because of their great wickedness **3:10** "*When God saw their deeds, that they turned from their wicked way; then God relented concerning the calamity which He had declared He would bring upon them. And He did not do it*."

Ministry and Message of <u>John the Baptist</u> had prepared the way for this gospel response of repentance and water baptism; what happened when the hypocritical Pharisees came to participate: Brood of vipers; bring forth fruits worthy of repentance –
Not everyone who professes repentance is a genuine believer

Difference between worldly sorrow and godly repentance – **2 Cor. 7:10** "*For the sorrow that is according to the will of God produces a repentance without regret, leading to salvation, but the*

sorrow of the world produces death."

B. Water Baptism – talking about immersion in water
"*and let each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ*"
καὶ βαπτισθήτω ἕκαστος ὑμῶν ἐπὶ τῷ ὀνόματι Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ

Seems to us **strange** to include such an emphasis here on water baptism – we hurry up and add all types of caveats – does not mean this … emptying this command of its force

Can't say that it is talking about Holy Spirit Baptism – obviously, water baptism is in view = symbol of that reality that has occurred spiritually

Not advocating baptismal regeneration – **Acts 3:19** -- repentance; but not minimizing baptism either -- what about all of the people that were sprinkled as infants and have never been baptized? Are they saved? **Mark 16:16**
Yes, if they have made a true confession of faith in Christ and identified with Him .. but still does not minimize the importance of the act – only 2 ordinances Christ left for His church – baptism and Lord's Supper

Wiersbe: the people in the home of Cornelius received the Holy Spirit before they were baptized (**Acts 10:44-48**)

Cleansing symbolism of baptism – **1 Pet 3:21** "*not as the removal of dirt from the body but as an appeal to God for a clear conscience*" – emphasis is on the attitude behind the act -- Bock

Not a people movement – everyone must individually repent and be baptized – parents cannot do it for their children – another blow against infant baptism; testimony of your own conscience to identification with Jesus Christ

Exclusivity of the gospel promise – only through the name of Jesus Christ – no other name under heaven by which we can be saved – look at how people waffle on this key point when pressed (Joel Osteen TV interview with Larry King)

Alexander: by his authority, acknowledging his claims, subscribing to his doctrines, engaging in his service, and relying on his merits

Taking step to identify with Jesus in His death, burial and resurrection; commitment to have Jesus as the new authority in your life; entrance into path of discipleship
Rom. 10: Confess with your mouth
Look at other responses to this question of What must I do to be saved?
- Response of **Jesus** to rich young ruler in **Matt. 19:16-26** – "*Teacher, what good thing shall I do that may obtain eternal life*?" Different starting point; works orientation; heart not pierced with conviction of sin; trying to convict him of his sinfulness – Go, keep the commandments … "*Go and sell your possessions and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me*"
- Account of **Philip** preaching Christ (His crucifixion and resurrection) to the Ethiopian eunuch in **Acts 8:26-40;** Response -- "*I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God*" – let's move on to take the next step of water baptism

- Paul evangelizing the Philippian jailor – **Acts 16:30-31** "*What must I do to be saved? Believe in the Lord Jesus and you will be saved, you and your household*" – baptism immediately follows

Stott: What the gospel demands is a radical turn from sin to Christ, which takes the form inwardly of repentance and faith, and outwardly of baptism. For submission to baptism in the name of the Christ we have formerly repudiated gives public evidence of penitent faith in him. Additionally, by this same repentance, faith and baptism we **change allegiance**, as we are transferred into the new community of Jesus

III. (:38b) THE PURPOSE OF SALVATION = REMISSION OF SINS

"*for the forgiveness of your sins;*"
εἰς ἄφεσιν τῶν ἁμαρτιῶν ὑμῶν

eis – usually describes purpose or direction; (some want to translate: "with a reference to")

Toussaint: take the clause "*and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ*" as parenthetical. The verb "*repent*" is plural and so is the pronoun "*your*" in the clause "*so that your sins may be forgiven*". Therefore the verb "*repent*" must go with the purpose of forgiveness of sins. On the other hand the imperative "*be baptized*" is singular, setting it off from the rest of the sentence.

Mark 1:4 "John the Baptist appeared in the wilderness preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins." Uses *eis* here as well – connection is directly to the repentance rather than the symbolism of the baptism

This is the issue – How are you going to deal with your sin problem? They don't just go away on their own. *The wages of sin is death*. That is the reality. The OT sacrifices were just a type of the sacrifice of the Lamb of God that provides complete remission of sins = "sending away"

Most people want to try to build up some type of brownie points or goodwill points to try to balance off the sins they have committed – but you must find forgiveness and remission of sins

Not just a passing over of sins but actual forgiveness, cancellation of debt, of guilt, of punishment; sending away; pardon

Leviticus 16:26 "*And the one who released the goat as the scapegoat shall wash his clothes and bathe his body with water; then afterward he shall come into the camp*." **16:20-22** symbolism of releasing the goat and sending the sins away – activities of high priest on annual Day of Atonement

Deuteronomy 15:1 "*At the end of every seven years you shall grant a remission of debts*."

Matthew 26:28 "*for this is My blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for forgiveness of sins*."

Mark 1:4 "*John the Baptist appeared in the wilderness preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins*."

Luke 4:18 "*The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me, Because He anointed Me to preach the gospel to the poor. He has sent Me to proclaim release to the captives, And recovery of sight to the blind, To set free those who are downtrodden*, -- focusing on the results of forgiveness of sins

Luke 24:47 "*and that repentance for forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in His name to all the nations, beginning from Jerusalem*." – universal offer of salvation

Acts 5:31 "*He is the one whom God exalted to His right hand as a Prince and a Savior, to grant repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins*." – talks of repentance as a grace gift

Acts 10:43 "*Of Him all the prophets bear witness that through His name everyone who believes in Him receives forgiveness of sins*." -- here speaks of faith instead of repentance

Acts 26:18 "*to open their eyes so that they may turn from darkness to light and from the dominion of Satan to God, in order that they may receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among those who have been sanctified by faith in Me*." – good definition of repentance

Ephesians 1:7 "*In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of His grace*," – Parallel to redemption

Colossians 1:14 "*in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins*."

IV. (:38c-39) THE PROMISE OF SALVATION

A. Consisting in the Gracious Gift of the Holy Spirit

"*and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.*"
καὶ λήμψεσθε τὴν δωρεὰν τοῦ ἁγίου πνεύματος.

2 gifts – forgiveness of sins and now gift of Holy Spirit – not just something for the privileged few; the apostles; or the 120 disciples

Longenecker: This primary gift includes a variety of spiritual gifts for the advancement of the gospel and the welfare of God's people. But first of all, it has to do with what God's Spirit does for every Christian in applying and working out the benefits of Christ's redemptive work.

Pretty **important gift** as we see from the dramatic events of the Day of Pentecost
Once again, we have tended to minimize the reality of the presence of the Holy Spirit in our lives.

Grace Gift

Receive this gift right **now** = downpayment that we will receive all we are promised for glory

Emphasis on being called to **Holiness** – talking about the Holy Spirit

B. Universally Offered in This New Church Age – to Jews and Gentiles

"For the promise is for you and your children, and for all who are far off,"
ὑμῖν γάρ ἐστιν ἡ ἐπαγγελία καὶ τοῖς τέκνοις ὑμῶν καὶ πᾶσιν τοῖς εἰς μακράν,

The opportunity for salvation is present today; right before you; you cannot make some lame excuse that you were shut out from any opportunity to receive the promise; you cannot blame God or His sovereign election
Same method of receiving the promise applies all over the world and down through the ages

Toussaint: those who are far off = Gentiles (cf. Ephs. 2:13, 17, 19)

C. Made Effectual by the Sovereign Election and Calling of God
"*as many as the Lord our God shall call to Himself.*"
ὅσους ἂν προσκαλέσηται κύριος ὁ θεὸς ἡμῶν.

Doctrine of the effectual calling; but don't isolate this from the universal offer of salvation and the need to take personal action to repent and be baptized

V. (:40) THE PROCLAMATION OF SALVATION

A. Manner of Proclamation
1. Witnessing
"*And with many other words he solemnly testified*"
ἑτέροις τε λόγοις πλείοσιν διεμαρτύρατο

2 Kings 17:13 Yet the LORD **warned** Israel and Judah, through all His prophets *and* every seer, saying, "Turn from your evil ways and keep My commandments, My statutes according to all the law which I commanded your fathers, and which I sent to you through My servants the prophets." (2Ki 17:13 NAS)

Giving a solemn warning; to be emphatic in stating an opinion; to insist
this salvation issue is serious business; dealing with eternal destiny; we have something to testify; cannot remain quiet; can approach it from many directions

2. Persuading / Exhorting – try to close the deal
"*and kept on exhorting them,*"
καὶ παρεκάλει αὐτοὺς

Imperfect active – ongoing activity, not just a one-shot appeal; call to one's side
We are appealing primarily not to the emotions but to the will; so intellectual understanding is a prerequisite and then there must be a call to commitment

B. Message of Proclamation
"*saying, 'Be saved from this perverse generation!'*"
λέγων· σώθητε ἀπὸ τῆς γενεᾶς τῆς σκολιᾶς ταύτης.

Nothing unique about the perverseness of this present generation – In fact people at time of Christ were even more culpable because they did not respond to the personal presence of Christ and His preaching on earth – cf. references to Sodom and Gomorrah not being as liable

Wiersbe: apostles looked on the nation of Israel as a "*crooked generation*" that was under condemnation (Matt. 16:4; 17:17; Phil. 2:15). Actually, the nation would have about forty years before Rome would come and destroy the city and the temple and scatter the people.

Luke 9:41 – look at the characterization Christ made of this generation – "*You unbelieving and perverted generation, how long shall I be with you and put up with you*?"

"*perverse*" – crooked, bent, dishonest, unscrupulous; bent sideways; twisted; tangled; turned away from the truth

Proverbs 21:8 "*The way of a guilty man is crooked, But as for the pure, his conduct is upright*."

Philippians 2:15 "*that you may prove yourselves to be blameless and innocent, children of God above reproach in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you appear as lights in the world*,"

literally, of an object on the potter's wheel *become misshapen*; figuratively *pervert, corrupt, distort* (AC 13.10); passive, of the truth *be perverted, be distorted* (AC 20.30); in a moral sense *be depraved* (LU 9.41);

VI. (:41) THE PERSONAL APPLICATION OF SALVATION

A. Immediate Connection Between Faith and Obedience -- Two Step Process

1. Exercise of Personal Faith in Word of God = Response of Repentance that was demanded

"*So then, those who had received his word*"
οἱ μὲν οὖν ἀποδεξάμενοι τὸν λόγον αὐτοῦ

receive gladly, welcome – after understanding what was said – only NT usage

Bock: "*Receive*" goes along with "*call on the name of the Lord*" (v. 21) and "*repent*" (v. 38). Each expression points to a different dimension of the embrace of the gospel that saves.

2. Obeying Christ in Water Baptism

"*were baptized;*"
ἐβαπτίσθησαν

B. Integration Into the Visible Church

"*and there were added that day about three thousand souls.*"
καὶ προσετέθησαν ἐν τῇ ἡμέρᾳ ἐκείνῃ ψυχαὶ ὡσεὶ τρισχίλιαι.

Nothing wrong with counting baptisms; seems to be the initial step of integration into the visible church; that is why we can make it a prerequisite

Why don't we see such dramatic response in our situation?

Lot of baby believers to nurture and disciple – how did they accomplish this task?

Stott: commitment to the Messiah implied commitment to the Messianic community

VII. (:42) THE PERSEVERANCE OF SALVATION = EVIDENCE OF THE REALITY OF CONVERSION AND MEANS OF HEALTHY GROWTH

A. The Focus of Perseverance – 1 Concentrated Mindset

"*And they were continually devoting themselves*"
Ἦσαν δὲ προσκαρτεροῦντες

- Daily not just weekly interaction;
- intimate not just superficial interaction

B. The Focus of Perseverance = 4 Ongoing Christian Commitments = Marks of a Healthy, Growing Church – What should we be focusing on as a church?

1. Indoctrination – A Learning Church

"*to the apostles' teaching*"
τῇ διδαχῇ τῶν ἀποστόλων

Importance of doctrine and theology – Massive indoctrination program begun at Pentacost with baby believers who had a hunger to hear God's message

Aspect of submission to teaching God has provided; important to study on our own as well; but we need teaching from gifted leaders

Look at the access we have to the apostles' teaching; so many opportunities to learn and grow

Not for knowledge sake but for growth and ministry

2. Integration of Fellowship – A Loving Church

"*and to fellowship,*"
καὶ τῇ κοινωνίᾳ,

Sharing their new common life in Jesus Christ (**1 John 1:1-4**); Includes the sharing of their material possessions to meet the needs of others – will be studying this in depth next week

Toussaint: The omission of "and" between "*fellowship*" and "*to the breaking of bread and to prayer*" indicates the last two activities are appositional to fellowship.

3. Intimacy of Relationships – both horizontally and vertically – including **Worship** – A Liturgical Church (not high liturgy!) – Communion Service – simplicity of the elements of bread and wine

"*to the breaking of bread*" Acts 20:7; 1 Cor. 11
τῇ κλάσει τοῦ ἄρτου

The observance of the Lord's Supper at the close of their agape meal; we gather together to remember the death and resurrection of Christ and look forward to His coming again;
Did not just see each other on Sundays … but during the week as well; spent a lot of time together; not burdensome

4. Intercessory Prayer – a Looking-to-the-Lord Church

"*and to prayer.*"
καὶ ταῖς προσευχαῖς.

Acts 1:14 – a focus right from the start

The Privilege of Prayer
The Expectation of God answering our prayers
Perserverance in prayers – takes a long time for many requests – maintain the fervency

Ongoing ministry of Christ as our great High Priest and Advocate before the throne of the Father

Rom. 12:12; Col. 4:2

CONCLUSION:
Have you responded to the message of salvation? Repent; receive the Word; be baptized – you need God's gifts of the remission of sins and the promise of the indwelling Holy Spirit

Are we focusing as a church on the most fundamental areas that will ensure our healthy growth and ministry success?

* * * * * * * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

1) When was the last time you experienced conviction of sin from the Holy Spirit and how did you respond?

2) How significant was baptism in your experience?

3) Do you struggle with holding on to the guilt and shame of some of your sins even though you have received complete forgiveness through Jesus Christ?

4) How does the time you spend in various activities reflect what it is that you are completely devoted to?

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QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Longenecker: Peter's answer to the people's anguished cry presents interpreters with a set of complex theological problems that are often looked upon only as grist for differing theological mills. But Peter's words came to his hearers as the best news they had ever heard – far better, indeed, than they deserved or could have hoped for. So today these words remain the best of good news and should be read as the proclamation of that news and not as just a set of theological problems.

Longenecker: The Jews generally looked on baptism as a rite only for Gentile converts (i.e., proselytes), not for one born a Jew. It symbolized the break with one's Gentile past and the washing away of all defilement. So when Jews accepted baptism in the name of Jesus on hearing Peter's message, it was traumatic and significant for them in a way we in our mildly Christianized culture have difficulty understanding.

MacArthur: [on The Altar Call]: Preachers who are gifted communicators, and who are articulate, and who use the emotional techniques, and the sad stories, and the tear jerking

approaches, and who get the mood music playing behind the scene, and can create the kind of manipulative environment, can effect in people behavior changes and even alter their basic values--and never need to use the Word of God. But what is the result? What is the ultimate result? Is it true regeneration? Of course not! The only legitimate tool is the Scripture. The only legitimate bridge to change--is the mind. Lifton also says in this article, In an excellent article on attitude change, in the "Handbook of Social Psychology, Volume 3" psychologist William McGuire suggests that human attitude change may be broken down into at least five steps of levels (this is interesting). This is the process people go through when they change attitudes: ATTENTION, COMPREHENSION, YIELDING, RETENTION, and ACTION.

Stott: Here, then is a fourfold message – two events (Christ's death and resurrection), as attested by two witnesses (prophets and apostles), on the basis of which God makes two promises (forgiveness and the Spirit), on two conditions (repentance and faith, with baptism). We have no liberty to amputate this apostolic gospel, by proclaiming the cross without the resurrection, or referring to the New Testament but not the Old, or offering forgiveness without the Spirit, or demanding faith without repentance. There is a wholeness about the biblical gospel.

Dr. John Whitcomb: **The First Church**
First sermon brought colossal response. Perfectly timed event in terms of numbers of Jews present for the feast. Holy Spirit had just arrived for a special ministry (had been active throughout time), but something new now = Spirit baptism. Unique to church age for body and bride of Christ. Baptism (especially infant baptism) has given many people false assurance that they are fine with God. Opposite extreme is abandoning the importance of water baptism. Cor. 1:13 – Why did Paul not spend his time baptizing legitimate believers? Don't want people boasting about who baptized them. Non-baptized believer not offered as an option in the NT. The Tri-Unity of the Godhead under new attack today because of Islam. Acts 10:44-45 – Peter saw Gentiles receiving the gift of the Holy Spirit. You don't have to become a Jew anymore to become acceptable to God and go to heaven. Peter didn't modify his message to get such a great response (cf. mega churches who adapt the message and make it user friendly). Never revel in the fact that you are in a small church – better be for a good reason – for taking a stand for the truth and paying the price. Enormous responsibility – 12 apostles become parents of 3,000 new Christian babies in one day. God is concerned with what you are being taught immediately upon responding to the gospel. 2 Tim. 3:16 – Scripture is profitable first of all for doctrine. Massive indoctrination program led to unity – if you did not subscribe to apostolic doctrine you were excommunicated. Then came fellowship based on the truth; powerful dynamic of prayer. **Acts 20:7** speaks of breaking of bread – a communion of the saints. 1 Cor. 11:20 – agape feast of love that was characteristic of early church. Doing everything they can to implement the detailed instructions of Jesus. Most of these simple practices became horribly adulterated and corrupted within a few centuries.

Gil Rugh: **God's Church is Cross Cultural**
Church is always trying to adjust to reach the culture of their day; Need to remind ourselves that nothing has changed from when God established the church 2000 years ago; God's purposes and methodology have not changed. Growth and development come from being nurtured on the Word of God … today we need to be devoted to apostolic teaching as well. The message has not changed. Church is to be the pillar and support of the truth. Teach the truth to faithful men who will teach others also. 2 Pet. 3:14 – "*in which are some things hard to understand*" -- don't distort or twist the Scriptures. Spirit of God gives us understanding. Focal point for the church needs to be the Word of God. Bound together in a new relationship -- Spiritual relationship we

have in Christ supercedes our physical family relationship. This is an eternal bond. 2 Cor. 13:14 – "*the fellowship of the Holy Spirit*" binds us together in a supernatural way. "*Do not forsake the assembling of yourselves together*" to encourage one another in service for the Lord. People today claim to be so busy that they are happy to cut back on time spent with the saints. Importance of communion service -- We are gathered together around the death of Christ. We are not a social organization or an entertainment center. We are here about serious business. Devotion to prayer – **Acts 1:14**. Prayer is limited to believers – those who have Jesus Christ as their great high priest have access to God; otherwise God hates the prayers of unbelievers. Don't believe in common prayer across religious boundaries. Prayer is a great privilege. You have to have a high priest who has offered an acceptable sacrifice to be the go-between. Rom. 12:12; Col. 4:2.

TEXT: Acts 2:43-47

TITLE: CHURCH COMMUNITY SHOULD BE A HAPPENING PLACE – SNAPSHOT OF THE FIRST CHRISTIAN CHURCH

BIG IDEA:
CHURCH VIBRANCY AND GROWTH SHOULD BE REFLECTED IN SUSTAINED MOMENTUM IN EXPERIENCING THE BLESSING OF GOD --
4 CONTRIBUTORS TO CHURCH MOMENTUM

INTRODUCTION:
When you drive through small towns across America and look at the signs on the various churches, invariably you will spot a name like: The **First Christian Church** of XXX; The First Baptist Church … Seems a bit presumptuous after so many hundreds of years of church history to call yourself the First of anything … but this morning we are truly studying a Snapshot of the First Christian Church period – the church formed by the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost. God provided an **incubator** type of environment to protect the life and health of this new born church. They are quickly headed for hard times and severe persecution … but the snapshot we look at this morning is one of joyful celebration of their new life in Christ and their fellowship together by the Holy Spirit.

As we noted earlier in our study of Acts, because this is an historical record of a **transitional time** – the establishing of the NT church – we need to carefully analyze what should be normative for our times and what might be special for just these transition times. Keep that concern in mind as we work through these verses.

We see a church gaining some important **momentum** here – the type of momentum that gets you over the hump and enables you to exist long-term as a viable entity. There are important lessons for us … because we are struggling to gain that same type of momentum – not the numbers talked about here – but the display of some contributors to church momentum that will be essential for our long term viability. Today we will be asking ourselves some hard questions. We need to take the next steps forward as a local church. Our Lord intends for us to grow in the context of church community – not as isolated believers. We need that strength and encouragement that comes from community.

This early church was definitely **a happening place**. It was exciting and alive with divine activity.
CHURCH VIBRANCY AND GROWTH SHOULD BE REFLECTED IN SUSTAINED MOMENTUM IN EXPERIENCING THE BLESSING OF GOD --

Let's look together at:
4 CONTRIBUTORS TO CHURCH MOMENTUM

I. (:43) SUSTAINED CREDIBILITY
We have to be convinced that God is at work in our midst before others will be convinced. People are bound to be skeptical. The questions come fast and furious: Who are you to start a church? Who vetted your leaders? Are your leaders even legitimate in terms of meeting the NT

qualifications for elders? Where is the evidence that God wants you to be involved in this work? Are you just being presumptuous and employing wishful thinking? These are hard questions – we certainly expected more growth and evidence than what we have seen to date.
Let's look at the early church – Credibility was not a problem for them.
As the church grew, many false leaders would arise and seek to create a following for themselves; seek to become popular and powerful; seek to exploit people for money and selfish ambition – We need to make sure that our motives are pure and our Credibility comes from God

2 Key Ingredients to this Sustained Credibility:

A. Awe = Recognition that God is Performing an Amazing Work

"*And everyone kept feeling a sense of awe;*"

ἐγίνετο δὲ πάσῃ ψυχῇ φόβος,

The word φόβος – in the sense of reverential awe of God is used here …

When you got up this morning and thought about today's worship service, were you overcome with a sense of awe – a conviction that the Almighty God is at work in our midst and we are in the center of His kingdom building will and Great Commission Plan?

Or would our outlook be characterized by <u>other types of feelings</u>:

- Maybe **complacency and boredom** – things just continue along as every other Sunday and I have no great expectation that God is doing anything special

- Maybe feelings of **duty and obligation** – Sunday has rolled around again, so I guess I had better show up and check the box

- Maybe a sense of **uneasiness and anxiety** – Are we really doing what God wants?

These believers in Jerusalem were all united in this sense of awe – I think of the chorus"

You are beautiful beyond description
Too marvelous for words
Too wonderful of comprehension
Like nothing ever seen or heard
Who can grasp you infinite wisdom
Who can fathom the depth of your love
You are beautiful beyond description
Majesty enthroned above

And I stand, I stand in awe of you
I stand, I stand in awe of you
Holy God to whom all praise is due
I stand in awe of you.

Probably refers mainly **to believers** (since that is the context from vs. 42), but with spill-over impact on the watching, unbelieving community (especially since the designation of "*all those who believed*" could be viewed as a subset of the "*everyone*" referred to here) – cf. **3:10** for specific example of impact on the non-believing community

Imperfect verb ἐγίνετο used twice in this verse – at the start and at the end of the verse – bracketing the two results of Awe and Authentication

This is a happening place!

MacArthur: Now this word awe is reserved for special times in Scripture. It's reserved for those times when people's minds are struck with an awe that is based on something divine that they can't explain. And there are Many good illustrations of its use one classic one is in **Luke 7:11**, "And it came to pass the next day that He went into a city called Nain and many of His disciples went with Him and much people", this is Jesus, "When He came near to the gate of the city behold there was a dead man being carried out the only son of his mother and she was a widow", here comes a funeral procession marching along and they've got the guy in his little bier thing, casket, "And when the Lord saw her He had compassion on her and said unto her, Weep not", don't cry - I love this, "And He came and touched the bier and they that bore him stood still. And He said, Young man I say unto thee Arise". Can you imagine what that must have caused, the reaction? "And he that was dead sat up and began to speak." Just imagine what that must have caused. And He said, "And He delivered him to his mother, **and there came a fear on all**". Now that doesn't mean they were afraid. It says in the next statement, "And they glorified God". You see, it's that idea that **God is doing something**. And they said, "There's a prophet come to our place". It is being unable to explain the divine that leaves you in a sense of awe.

We need to take time to stop and reflect – What is God doing in our midst?
Do we have that sense of awe which is essential to Sustained Credibility – essential for ourselves and essential to impact others who are watching what is going on here?
Most people will not join anything until the momentum factor has been clearly and visibly demonstrated. It takes great faith and vision to be on the pioneering side of any movement.

So one key ingredient to Credibility is this sense that God is at work … The miracle of Chap. 3 will further enhance this sustained sense of **Awe**
another is **Authentication**

B. Authentication of the Message, Methodology and Ministers of this Movement

"*and many wonders and signs were taking place through the apostles.*"

πολλά τε τέρατα καὶ σημεῖα διὰ τῶν ἀποστόλων ἐγίνετο.

You need to understand WHY these wonders and signs were happening:

- Not because God's intention was to heal everyone and fix everyone's physical hardships – the Apostle Paul could not even fix his own physical affliction
- Not because God put a supreme value on showy, flashy spectacular miracles – He has always been most concerned about the quiet inward transformation of the heart

Why did Jesus perform signs and miracles such as those recorded in the Gospel of John?

"*these have been written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing you may have life in His name*." **John 20:31**

These wonders and signs had a specific purpose for this time and place in God's program of redemption – authenticating the message, methodology and ministers of the New Covenant – this infant church movement

- The Message – the gospel united Jew and Gentile into one new body of Christ
- The Methodology – primarily the preaching of the Word of God and the forming of local church bodies organized around divinely authenticated leaders
- The Ministers of this movement – all believers as priests; all spiritually gifted to make significant contributions; but still certain ones designated as leaders

Wrong to expect these wonders and signs today without the same need to authenticate; all believers were not performing these signs

Longenecker: Note reference to the phraseology of Joel's prophecy from **2:19** and Peter's characterization of ministry of Jesus in **2:22**

2 Cor. 12:12; Heb. 2:3-4

No apostles in today's church – that is very important

Where did the Apostle Paul point to for his Authentication?

"*my message and my preaching were not in persuasive words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power*" **1 Cor. 2:4**

How does this Authentication take place today? By conformity and consistency to the revealed Word of God –

Is. 8:19-20 "*When they say to you 'Consult the mediums and the spiritists who whisper and mutter,' should not a people consult their God? Should they consult the dead on behalf of the living? To the law and to the testimony! If they do not speak according to this word, it is because they have no dawn [no light*]"

Acts 17:11 remember the commendation of the Christians at Berea: "*Now these were more noble-minded than those in Thessalonica, for they received the word with great eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily to see whether these things were so*" – Check it out!

2 Cor. 4:2 "*but we have renounced the things hidden because of shame, not walking in craftiness or adulterating the word of God but by the manifestation of truth commending ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God*" – True to the Word of God

MacArthur: Now, of course, when the word was finally completed in the Scripture, the age of miracles as such ceased. If five people come into this building and they all teach five different things I can tell very quickly who's teaching the truth. I compare him with the book. Right? I don't need miracles anymore I have the standard right here.

We need **Credibility** – in our own eyes . . . in the eyes of others around us – gain it in 2 ways:

- Maintaining sense of **Awe** – God is at work
- Maintaining consistency with Word of God – our **Authentication**

2nd Contributor to Church Momentum:

II. (:44-45) SOLIDARITY IN SACRIFICIAL SHARING

A. (:44) Solidarity

"*And all those who had believed were together, and had all things in common;*"

πάντες δὲ οἱ πιστεύοντες ἦσαν ἐπὶ τὸ αὐτὸ καὶ εἶχον ἅπαντα κοινὰ

1. Solidarity of Place

How together are we? Gathered together in the same place -- America is a nation of proud individualists – we don't need help from anyone else; we stand on our own; we no longer live in communities – we might live close together in townhouses … but we don't even know our neighbors

We call ourselves Solid Rock Community Church – but we struggle trying to establish that sense of community – of being together

Talking about spending time together – significant time; quality time; quantity time – did not forsake the assembling of themselves together; not just a once a week experience

Our Solidarity starts with our **common faith** in the Lord Jesus Christ – "*who had believed*" = Aorist participle rather than Present Participle??? Depends on the text you use – pointing back to moment of conversion of repentance and initial faith – but certainly they were abiding in this state of believing as well -- most basic characterization of Christians -- this is not some variable spiritual pilgrimage where every person tries to find his own way to God – we are knit together in one body – the body of Christ by one Spirit – celebrating the high calling Paul details in Ephes 4 – "*being diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit, just as also you were called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all who is over all and through all and in all*."

Illustration: A young fellow who was fed up with church went to see this wise old Christian in his cabin to get some advice. He told him all the things that were bothering him about church, and how he felt that he would be better off without the company of other Christians. As he was speaking, the old man silently took the fire tongs and removed a red-hot glowing coal from the middle of the fire and set it on the hearth. The coal glowed for a while, but eventually dimmed and turned black. He let it sit there a while and then took the tongs and places the coal back in the middle of the fire. Within seconds the coal was glowing red hot once again. The young man took the wordless lesson and left determined to stay with church. Just as coals soon burn out when they are removed from the company of other coals, we will not last long in the faith if we are removed from true fellowship.

2. Solidarity of Possessions

Had all things in common --

Not talking about communal pooling of all resources, elimination of private property and living in some type of communal state; they still owned houses, etc. Sold their possessions as needed according to perceived need and their ability to meet that need; not holding tightly to their own possessions but embracing the concept of Christian stewardship

B. (:45) Sacrificial Sharing

"*and they began selling their property and possessions, and were sharing them with all, as anyone might have need.*"

καὶ τὰ κτήματα καὶ τὰς ὑπάρξεις ἐπίπρασκον καὶ διεμέριζον αὐτὰ πᾶσιν καθότι ἄν τις χρείαν

εἶχεν·

Characteristics of this radical form of sharing:

- Voluntary – motivated by Christian love
- Distribution based on financial need
- Special Circumstances dictated that this was a temporary situation
    - Look later in Acts and you see disciples still had personal property **11:27-30** 5:4 problem with Ananias was lying; he had the right to hold on to the proceeds from the sale of property or choose not to sell it at all

But don't want to mitigate the force of this example – we need to be balanced between responsibility to bear our own burden (taking care even of our extended family) and taking on responsibility for those in the church who have legitimate financial needs

Toussaint: The selling of property and the common possession of the proceeds may imply that the early church expected the Lord to return soon and establish His kingdom. This may explain why the practice was not continued. ???

Boice: The early Christians shared their possessions, not because they were communists or socialists – not because they were forced to share their things – but for a far better reason. They shared their goods because they were generous, and they were generous because they had learned generosity from God. God had been generous with them. So because God had been generous with them, they were determined to be generous with one another.

III. (:46-47a) SANCTIFIED COMMUNITY – EXPRESSED IN CHURCH WORSHIP AND FELLOWSHIP

Sanctified = Set apart from the world and set apart to God

A. (:46a) Consistent and Unified Worship

"*And day by day continuing with one mind in the temple,*"

καθ᾽ ἡμέραν τε προσκαρτεροῦντες ὁμοθυμαδὸν ἐν τῷ ἱερῷ,

"*day by day*"
Christians were not content to just be one another once a week for services; they were a true community – meeting as often as possible – both informally and for teaching and worship times

"*with one accord*" – 11 of 12 NT usages are in book of Acts! The unity of the early church simply amazing; they acted as a true body, directed by one mind to accomplish the same goal With one purpose; by common consent

Must understand the Jewish background of this first church; not continuing to participate in the sacrifices … but found the temple to offer space for daily prayers and worship as well as a platform for proclamation

B. (:46b) Joyful and Genuine Fellowship

"*and breaking bread from house to house, they were taking their meals together with gladness and sincerity of heart,*"

κλῶντές τε κατ᾽ οἶκον ἄρτον, μετελάμβανον τροφῆς ἐν ἀγαλλιάσει καὶ ἀφελότητι καρδίας

We have developed our church model predominantly around structured services whereas we need a balance between structured and unstructured times of fellowship and worship

Stott: And certainly it is always healthy when the more formal and dignified services of the local church are complemented with the informality and exuberance of home meetings. There is no need to polarize between the structured and the unstructured, the traditional and the spontaneous. The church needs both.

Toussaint: One of the subthemes of Acts is **joy**, because a victorious church is a joyful one. (5:41; 8:8, 39; 11:23; 12:14; 13:48, 52; 14:17; 15:3, 31; 16:34; 21:17)

Tony Miano: The Greek word for "sincerity of heart" has an interesting origin. It literally means "simplicity" and comes from the root word that means, "free from rocks" (Robertson, v. 3, p. 39-40). As John MacArthur has said, "There were no stones of selfishness in their hearts" (p. 89). Although it didn't always remain that way (the church in Jerusalem would eventually have its share of problems), in the early days of the church their fellowship was simple. It wasn't bogged down by agendas, ulterior motives, and "What's in it for me." Their fellowship was healthy, reverent, and pleasing to God.

C. (:47a) Vertical and Horizontal Blessing

"*praising God, and having favor with all the people.*"

αἰνοῦντες τὸν θεὸν καὶ ἔχοντες χάριν πρὸς ὅλον τὸν λαόν.

They spent their time blessing God and God spent His time blessing them

Unity comes from everyone praising God rather than promoting self

Again this is a snapshot in the time … later God would not lead them in such easy, pleasant pastures … they would be maligned and attacked – in both circumstances, God is accomplishing His sovereign purposes; we need to stay constant in our activity of **praising God**

Favor = grace

"*Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven*." That is what was happening in this early church.

Bock: In sum, Luke affirms the internal fellowship, intimacy, and engagement of the community. This positive activity is accompanied by joy and glad hearts, and their worship and praise of God are ongoing. But this is not an isolated, private club or a hermetically sealed community. Their reputation with outsiders also is good. This good reputation apparently impacts their witness.

Prov. 16:7 "*When a man's ways are pleasing to the Lord, He makes even his enemies to be at peace with him*." Something winsome and attractive about these believers

IV. (:47b) SOVEREIGN GROWTH – BASED ON LIFESTYLE OF WITNESSING

"*And the Lord was adding to their number day by day those who were being saved.*"

ὁ δὲ κύριος προσετίθει τοὺς σῳζομένους καθ᾽ ἡμέραν ἐπὶ τὸ αὐτό.

The good hand of God prospering us

We do not have the ability to add people to God's church

We are privileged to even play a role in the process:
1 Cor. 3:5-9 – we can plant and water but we are mere men; it is God who gives the increase

God is in the business of building His church – so additions should be the norm – should be our expectation to see fruit

Stott: He did not add them to the church without saving them (no nominal Christianity at the beginning), nor did he save them without adding them to the church (no solitary Christianity either). Salvation and church membership belonged together; they still do.

CONCLUSION:
If you don't have these 4 contributors to church momentum, you tend to stall out
I. (:43) SUSTAINED CREDIBILITY
II. (:44-45) SOLIDARITY IN SACRIFICIAL SHARING
III. (:46-47a) SANCTIFIED COMMUNITY – EXPRESSED IN CHURCH WORSHIP AND FELLOWSHIP
IV. (:47b) SOVEREIGN GROWTH

Ps. 127:1 "*Unless the Lord builds the house they labor in vain who build it*" – not said by Solomon to discourage the nation but to encourage them to focus their hopes for experiencing blessing and prosperity on the Lord; we need to seek the Lord's face for these 4 contributors to church momentum … but we also need to be opening our wallets to share, witnessing as we have opportunity, joining together in glad fellowship and praising the Lord for what He is doing in our midst

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DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

1) How does God establish His authority today and authenticate the genuine ministers of His gospel message?

2) Is your church fellowship permeated by a spirit of awe and joy and gladness and sincere worship?

3) In what ways does God give His people favor with the unbelieving community?

4) How do you demonstrate that you value community over isolation?

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QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Mark Chanski: **Awe / Sharing / Additions** (Reformed Baptist Church of Holland MI)
We hear of your Spirit's moving in past days and ask that you would work in our day. Picture of protecting and nurturing a new-born baby; as time goes on, some of the overly protective measures are removed in order to allow child to progress to maturity; As earthly father treats new-born child, so heavenly Father treats new-born church. Favored them with a blessed climate of undisturbed peace and protection and prosperity so they could grow and take root.

6 Initial Blessings Enjoyed by the New Born Church
I. A Sense of Internal Awe (:43a)
Their hearts have been softened; blinders have been taken off by the Spirit; they saw things clearly like in Isaiah 6. 1 Cor. 14:25;
[Piper: they had a joyful but trembling sense of awe; sadly that is not our experience today. . . For us today He is tame, distant and silent.]
Casual and relaxed is all the rage today; we are too laid back. Contributes to carnal mindedness. We should not feel comfortable all the time, but God exposing our hearts (secrets of heart laid bare). Living in the presence of God. **Heb. 12:28**ff "*with reverence and awe because our God is a consuming fire*" -- sense that God is truly among us

II. A Sense of External Awe – a second dimension of the fear for those who observed them; the outsiders; Jerusalem had been a hotbed of animosity against Jesus and His followers; little church surrounded by blood-thirsty beasts that would devour her; **Gen. 9:2** – same type of fear on those around those emerging from the Ark; Lord provided a safe incubator for early growth of NT church; a time of respite, a honeymoon period so church could gain her legs before onslaught of persecution;
Packer: God is very gentle with very young Christians . . . encourages them . . . establishes them in the life . . . but as they grow stronger and are able to bear more God exposes them to a tougher school . . . overwhelm us with a sense of our inadequacy to drive us to cling to Him more closely; season of pampering vs exercising so we reach maturity in Christ; don't fret when you encounter troubles; **Acts 9:30**ff – when we need times of respite God will bring them again

III. A Spirit of Sharing (:44-45)
Outpouring of the Spirit; reciprocated in outpouring of generosity; people realized they had experienced such great blessing; needed to take care of about 3200 believers; not accomplished by miracles of multiplying the loaves here but opening of purses, pantries, barns, real estate holdings, etc.; Is socialism the economic system urged in the Bible? No ownership of private property … that is not what is being taught here at all; based on coercion and confiscation of property (violation of 8th commandment); money and property belong not to you but to the govt which has the right to reach into your pocket and coerce your giving to others; but this sharing was voluntary and results from Christian love; **2 Cor. 8:9; 1 Tim. 6:17-18 –** doesn't command them to give away all their wealth – open up your purses with hearts struck with generosity of Christ; not stingy hands that need to be pried open; generations of deadbeats in the UK that refuse to work and are subsidized by socialist system; Repudiation of socialism must not permit us to hide from impact of radical generosity that is called for here; endangers our lifestyle of self-indulgent personal leisure and selfishness; we are called to be radical in our generosity; Spirit of God poured out on us does not just bring orthodox doctrine and joyful singing but opening of our purses

IV. An Appetite for Fellowship (:46)
These early converts would be puzzled at how reluctant we are to assemble together as believers; longing for more opportunities; look at our relationships

V. A Favor with Outsiders (:47a)
Prov. 16:7; clearly something winsome and attractive about these new believers: gladness, sincerity of heart, sharing, praising of God …
Cf. fruit flies drawn to ripe fruit
Matt. 15:16 – something sweet and delightful about Christians; not sour faced
Ps. 21:2 – What expressions do we have on our faces?

VI. A Saving of Souls (:47b)
Many additions; they had some tools that we did not have – like Peter healing lame man; but look at the intensity and passion of their brotherly love; gladness in the Christian church; you want to be fishers of men? Most attractive lure is to love one another within the body of Christ; this verse is not about our strategizing to evangelize – more about Lord's sovereign initiative; He must give the increase; we need to recover the excitement of Pentecost; shackles of sin must be cut by the Lord – cannot be won by our persuasion or eloquence

Dan Brooks: **Marks of a Healthy Church** -- Heritage Bible Church
Small group of 120 has already exploded into a fellowship of over 3000. Jesus continuing His work of building His church
1. (:43) Church that continues to display the power of God – led to fear, amazement – not just some impressive people that are doing a great work; God is at work; these signs and wonders are the fingermarks of God – to verify and authenticate that divine authority is at work in these messengers; the kingdom message is real; stand in awe; there will always be scoffers despite clear evidences of divine power (such as the speaking in tongues)
2. (:44-45) Church that is sharing its resources – selling and distributing; this was not merely a one-time event; ongoing interaction with the members of the body; recognition of need – how can I help? **Rom. 12:13; Titus 3:14** "*meet pressing needs*"; **Phil. 4:19**
God gives not according to our need but according to His riches; we serve a generous God; we have to learn to give after the pattern of God; does not come naturally; indication of depth of care and mutual love at work in the fellowship; an evidence of the power of God at work; "your needs are my needs; my needs are your needs; how can we mutually provide for one another?"
Deacons make sure we are alleviating the needs of people in the church; how can we provide immediate relief??
3. (:46) Church remains together – as many as possible in one place at one time; personal commitment to the community; Persisting together takes commitment; reflection of their heart; they find it easy to make time to be together; both public assemblies and private gatherings characterized by joy and affection; glad hearts – exuberant joy; hearts that have no guile or duplicity but pure in their intention; a sincere affection; a regard or appreciation for one another because of what God is doing

Steven Cole: **Snapshot of a Healthy Church** -- Flagstaff Christian Fellowship
A healthy church is marked by continual devotion to the Lord, to His people, and to His work in the world.

Many years ago, John Stott met a group of Christian students in Argentina who had visited all of the Protestant churches in their city, but could not find any that satisfied them. They had dropped out of the church. He asked them what they were looking for that they could not find. He was startled when, without realizing what they were doing, they went down the list of Acts 2:42 in order. They said that they wanted a church where the pastor faithfully expounded the Bible and related it to where they lived. They were looking for warm, loving, caring, supportive fellowship. They sought a sense of the living God and His greatness in worship. And, they were looking for compassionate outreach (in Christianity Today [6/12/81], p. 21).

No church is perfect and none will come close this side of heaven. But as we continually devote ourselves to the Lord through His Word and through worship, as we devote ourselves to the fellowship of His people, and as we devote ourselves to His work in the world, He will use us to glorify Himself. I challenge you to be fervent in your devotion to the Lord and to His church, so that He uses us to reach many in this city and around the globe for His glory.

Guzik: The Jews had a tremendous custom of hospitality during any major feast like Pentecost; all visitors were received into private homes, and no one could charge for giving a bed or a room to a visitor or for supplying their basic needs. The Christians took this tremendous feast-time hospitality and made it an everyday thing.

Thomas Constable: In the ancient Near East eating together reflected a common commitment to one another and deep fellowship. A meal shared together was both a mark and a seal of friendship. In contemporary pagan religions the meal formed the central rite of the religion because it established communion between the worshippers and between the worshippers and their god. In Judaism too eating some of the offerings of worship symbolized these things, especially the peace offering.

MacArthur: Well, what produced that joy? Well, part of it was produced in verse 46 by singleness of heart, unity brings joy doesn't it? When we're one we're experiencing joy. And then verse 47, they had one mind praising God. Did you know that everybody, watch this, if everybody's involved in praising God and giving Him all the glory then everybody's one with everybody else. It's when somebody says - No, God, I want the glory, then you've got problems. That's why the Bible says watch out for those who seek the pre-eminence. Who does the pre-eminence belong to? It belongs to Jesus Christ and to God. You'll never have any conflict in a church until people begin to seek the pre-eminence but as long as we're all singly committed to praising God and exalting the Savior then we're one with each other. If you're concerned with praising yourself you're never going to be happy because you'll never be able to praise yourself sufficiently because you're not worth praise Did you get that? There's no joy in praising yourself because you wind up the only one involved. There's joy in praising God and seeing what happens as a result. And they had joy because they put their sights on the glory of God and gave Him the praise. Joy comes from unity. Unity comes from everybody praying, everybody praising God. Get it? Joy comes from unity. Unity comes when we all care about God's glory and not our own.

Brian Bill: In a book by Miraslav Volk called Exclusion and Embrace, he says that there are really only two options available to us in relationships. We can embrace people, take them by the hand, do life with them and open our heart to them. Or, we can exclude people, to grow cold and distant and to shut people out of our life.

TEXT: Acts 3: 1-10

TITLE: HEALING BY THE POWER OF CHRIST

BIG IDEA:
THE AWESOME POWER OF JESUS CHRIST HEALS BROKEN PEOPLE IN SPECTACULAR FASHION

INTRODUCTION:
How crippled were you before you came to know the power of Jesus Christ in your life? What have you experienced of the strength of the shackles of sin; the destruction of its bondage in your life; the broken relationships with God and with those around you? How has pride and selfishness and lust and anger and anxiety and impatience imprisoned you and kept you outside of the place of God's blessing for you? What sense of desperation and failure and hopelessness have you experienced? The healing power of Jesus Christ can only be appreciated against such a black backdrop. That is why the miracle of healing in Acts 3 should be so exciting to us today. Maybe we still have an area of our life that is still broken and still needs the healing power of God and His gracious restoration to healthy functioning.

As we study the transformation of this pitiful cripple, we need to see our own spiritual conversion and praise the Lord for His amazing grace in our lives. We also need to have compassion for the broken condition of those around us who are far worse off than just a physical cripple – they are lost in the bondage of sin and separated from the life of God.

Acts 2 prepared us for the study of these signs and miracles that took place in the early church through the apostles.

2:43 "*Everyone kept feeling a sense of awe; and many wonders and signs were taking place through the apostles*."

Kent: Luke picked this miracle because it produced the first conflict between the church and outsiders. Until this time the church had been enjoying the favor of all the people (2:24).

Remember that the impact of signs and miracles goes way beyond the physical picture. There is a purpose of God in authenticating the authority of the risen and exalted Jesus Christ and pointing people to the corresponding spiritual work of transformation that is offered in Jesus' name.

OVERVIEW OF CHAP. 3:
THE SIGN MIRACLES OF THE APOSTLES HIGHLIGHT THE GLORY OF CHRIST TO ATTRACT PEOPLE TO THE BLESSING OF DELIVERANCE FROM SIN
I. 3:1-10 Healing by the Power of Christ – THE AWESOME POWER OF JESUS CHRIST HEALS BROKEN PEOPLE IN SPECTACULAR FASHION
II. 3:11-16 Preaching the Glory of Christ
III. 3:17-26 Offering the Blessing of Christ and His Kingdom

(:1) THE OCCASION

"*Now Peter and John were going up to the temple at the ninth hour, the hour of prayer.*"
Πέτρος δὲ καὶ Ἰωάννης ἀνέβαινον εἰς τὸ ἱερὸν ἐπὶ τὴν ὥραν τῆς προσευχῆς τὴν ἐνάτην.

A. Partnership in Ministry

Wiersbe: Peter and John are often found together in Scripture. They were partners in the fishing business (Luke 5:10); they prepared the last Passover for Jesus (Luke 22:8); they ran to the tomb on the first Easter Sunday morning (John 20:3-4); and they ministered to the Samaritans who believed on Jesus Christ (Acts 8:14). Now that they were filled with the Holy Spirit, the apostles were no longer competing for greatness, but were at last working faithfully together to build the church (Ps. 133).

Jerry Shirley: However, they were quite different from one another…Peter was outgoing and gregarious, always had something to say…never hesitated to give his opinion…sometimes it seemed like the only time he'd open his mouth was to change feet!/quite outspoken. But, John was contemplative and reflective…tender, referring to himself as the disciple whom Jesus loved!/at last supper, he leaned on Jesus' chest.

B. Priority of Corporate Worship and Prayer

Psalm 55:17 – Jews had 3 times of prayer throughout the day – here it is 3 pm.
Kent: Twice daily the priest offered incense in the holy place of the temple, and devout Israelites would gather outside for prayers.

Have you ever been involved in a fellowship group where you met daily for prayer? Creates a strong bond of community – to say nothing of the power of answered prayer

I. (:2-3) HOPELESS RESIGNATION -- BROKEN PEOPLE HAVE RESIGNED THEMSELVES TO A MISERABLE EXISTENCE

A. Life Dominating Brokenness

"*And a certain man who had been lame from his mother's womb was being carried along,*"
καί τις ἀνὴρ χωλὸς ἐκ κοιλίας μητρὸς αὐτοῦ ὑπάρχων ἐβαστάζετο,

4:22 – man was over **40 years old** at the time of this healing; no way to escape his plight; did not have the hope that he might wake up tomorrow and face a brighter future

Look at the **parallel to Original Sin and Total Depravity** – often Scriptures use physical ailments to symbolize the deeper-seated problem of spiritual sin – He was born into this condition; could not rescue himself; no track record of health and victory; no way to break out of his condition; could be very bitter and despondent

The farthest thing from being self-sufficient; could not get from Point A to Point B; totally dependent on the help of others – but they could not give him the help he truly needed either

Knew nothing of health and fitness – pitiful situation; fortunate to have some friends or family to help him out – but their resources had long ago been exhausted; he was a burden; dead weight;

no contribution to society

Stott: Luke's medical interest seems to be betrayed in the brief clinical history he gives. It was a congenital case, he tells us.

B. Located Strategically but Ironically (marked by paradox and incongruity)

"*whom they used to set down every day at the gate of the temple which is called Beautiful,*"
ὃν ἐτίθουν καθ᾽ ἡμέραν πρὸς τὴν θύραν τοῦ ἱεροῦ τὴν λεγομένην Ὡραίαν

This was the spot for his **best opportunity**; probably had been working this gate for years; a well-known, recognizable figure

Symbolism of being **shut out of God's presence and power** – could get close to the temple but could not participate in worship; unclean

Misshapen human body that did not function properly propped up at the gate called **Beautiful**

Zeisler: So we see that the lame beggar's experience was a metaphor for the experience of most of the folks in the world. If you could read the hearts of the people you interact with, most have oriented themselves toward a place where God is. They can see the marble and gold shining in the sunlight at a distance. They know that God cares enough to name a place for himself and to invite people to come. And they have made some effort to go. They've gotten as far as the city, or as far as the courtyard of the Gentiles, or as far as the courtyard of the women. But at some point the gate was not an entrance but a barrier, and they couldn't go any farther. They didn't know how to answer the questions of their own brokenness and fear and inadequacy.

Jerry Shirley: The contrast of v. 2—Gate beautiful…historians tell us this was the eastern gate, made of Corinthian brass, overlaid w/ gold and silver…the sun would rise over the eastern mtns. And this entrance to the temple was dazzlingly brilliant! And worth a fortune…but laying at it is this man who is marred, disfigured, distorted, outcast. This gate is wealth, this man is woe. Loveliness/lameness

Our culture is full of broken and miserable people who are just trying to get through the day: Chuck Swindoll tells about a man who went to see a psychiatrist because he was extremely depressed. The psychiatrist just could not get him to snap out of it. So he said to the man, "Tonight I want you to go to the circus in town because they have a clown named the Great Rinaldi, he is the funniest clown I have ever seen. Whenever I go to see the Great Rinaldi it always lifts my spirits." The man responded. "You don't understand doctor, I am the Great Rinaldi."

C. Limited Expectations – Seeking Alms – Not seeking Deliverance

"*in order to beg alms of those who were entering the temple. And when he saw Peter and John about to go into the temple, he began asking to receive alms.*"
τοῦ αἰτεῖν ἐλεημοσύνην παρὰ τῶν εἰσπορευομένων εἰς τὸ ἱερόν· ὃς ἰδὼν Πέτρον καὶ Ἰωάννην μέλλοντας εἰσιέναι εἰς τὸ ἱερόν, ἠρώτα ἐλεημοσύνην λαβεῖν

Don't even realize their Deepest Needs; looking for the wrong answers
Rev. 3:17-18

'Because you say, "I am rich, and have become wealthy, and have need of nothing," and you do not know that you are wretched and miserable and poor and blind and naked, I advise you to buy from Me gold refined by fire, that you may become rich, and white garments, that you may clothe yourself, and that the shame of your nakedness may not be revealed; and eye salve to anoint your eyes, that you may see.

Resigned to his sad state in life; simply looking to sustain life

II. (:4-8) HEALING POWER -- THE HEALING POWER OF JESUS CHRIST IS FAR MORE VALUABLE THAN ANYTHING WE COULD IMAGINE

A. (:4-5) The Prerequisite of Healing = Compassion and Mercy extended

And Peter, along with John, fixed his gaze upon him and said, "Look at us!" And he began to give them his attention, expecting to receive something from them.
ἀτενίσας δὲ Πέτρος εἰς αὐτὸν σὺν τῷ Ἰωάννῃ εἶπεν· βλέψον εἰς ἡμᾶς. ὁ δὲ ἐπεῖχεν αὐτοῖς προσδοκῶν τι παρ᾽ αὐτῶν λαβεῖν.

You can never truly help someone without the insight and concern associated with the Compassion of Jesus Christ – He could be in a crowd and yet focus His attention on a single individual and their specific needs; did not turn away from the poor and the helpless and the pitiful – so easy to avert the eyes and not take any responsibility for pain and suffering around us; Peter and John could have looked the other direction and hurried by – they were busy people; they had their priorities; why take time to stop and get involved in a messy situation?

B. (:6-7) The Power of Healing = Application of authority and power of Jesus Christ

But Peter said, "I do not possess silver and gold, but what I do have I give to you: In the name of Jesus Christ the Nazarene-- walk!" And seizing him by the right hand, he raised him up; and immediately his feet and his ankles were strengthened.
εἶπεν δὲ Πέτρος· ἀργύριον καὶ χρυσίον οὐχ ὑπάρχει μοι, ὃ δὲ ἔχω τοῦτό σοι δίδωμι· ἐν τῷ ὀνόματι Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ τοῦ Ναζωραίου [ἔγειρε καὶ] περιπάτει. 7 καὶ πιάσας αὐτὸν τῆς δεξιᾶς χειρὸς ἤγειρεν αὐτόν· παραχρῆμα δὲ ἐστερεώθησαν αἱ βάσεις αὐτοῦ καὶ τὰ σφυδρά,

1. Poverty of Wealth – *silver and gold* cannot buy what you need the most

Why didn't Peter and John have silver and gold?
Riches in an evangelist are cause for questioning motives – be careful of leaders who enrich themselves at the expense of others; they are not acting as your servant but exploiting you
Material riches not the fundamental resource needed for spiritual ministry

The lame man simply wanted to be supported in the condition that he was in. God wanted to completely change his condition.

2. Free Offer of Deliverance – not on the basis of works or merit – must come as a free gift; we must be opportunistic in looking for divine appointments to enrich others

How precious and valuable is the gospel to us??
Prov. 8 – talks about seeking the Wisdom that comes from God and valuing it beyond silver and gold
Later we find that **faith** played a vital role – Was it Peter and John's faith or that of the cripple?

3. Authority and Power associated with the Name of Jesus

Other people might identify negative characteristics with one whose origins stem from Nazareth; we must not shrink back from identification with Jesus;
Age of the Messiah has come – miracles prophesied in Isaiah 35
He is resurrected and exalted and reigning – directing the activities of His church on earth;
Command: "*Walk*" – just like Jesus commanding the dead Lazarus to *come forth* from the tomb (John 11)

4. Nature of the Healing

- divinely initiated and accomplished – sovereign miracles
- no contribution on the part of the broken person
- immediate; sudden; often unexpected
- complete healing that lasted

MacArthur: When God decides to do a supernatural miracle, if you want to check Him in the word of God, you'll find they always had four characteristics. They were sovereign, they were supernatural, they were sudden, and they were completely sufficient.

C. (:8) The Proof of Genuine Healing

1. Complete Restoration to full health and functioning

"*And with a leap, he stood upright and began to walk;*"
καὶ ἐξαλλόμενος ἔστη καὶ περιεπάτει

2. Emotional and Spiritual Rejoicing – full participation in worship and praise

"*and he entered the temple with them, walking and leaping and praising God.*"
καὶ εἰσῆλθεν σὺν αὐτοῖς εἰς τὸ ἱερὸν περιπατῶν καὶ ἁλλόμενος καὶ αἰνῶν τὸν θεόν.

III. (:9-10) HALLELUJAH IMPACT -- THE POWER OF GOD GETS PEOPLE'S ATTENTION

A. Regarding The Transformation

"*And all the people saw him walking and praising God;*"
καὶ εἶδεν πᾶς ὁ λαὸς αὐτὸν περιπατοῦντα καὶ αἰνοῦντα τὸν θεόν·

No doubt about what had happened; no trumped up, phony miracle
Remember the 10 lepers that Jesus healed – how many came back to give thanks?

B. Remembering the Predicament

"*and they were taking note of him as being the one who used to sit at the Beautiful Gate of the temple to beg alms,*"
ἐπεγίνωσκον δὲ αὐτὸν ὅτι αὐτὸς ἦν ὁ πρὸς τὴν ἐλεημοσύνην καθήμενος ἐπὶ τῇ ὡραίᾳ πύλῃ τοῦ ἱεροῦ

Easy to recognize the man

C. Reacting with Awe – Wonder and Amazement

"*and they were filled with wonder and amazement at what had happened to him.*"
καὶ ἐπλήσθησαν θάμβους καὶ ἐκστάσεως ἐπὶ τῷ συμβεβηκότι αὐτῷ.

Bock: *thambos* appears three times in the NT, all in reaction to miraculous actions (Luke 4:36; 5:9). The term *ekstasis* for amazement appears seven times in the NT – Mark 5:42 (miracle of Jairus' daughter); Luke 5:26 (a paralytic); Acts 3:9; 10:10; 11:5; 22:17 ("vision"); the verb is in Luke 2:47; 8:56; 24:22; Acts 8:9, 11, 13; 9:21; 10:45; 12:16). This term describes someone emotionally impacted by an experience.

Look at Power of God expressed in Nature – supposed to get people's attention
Rom. 1
Psalm 19

Look at Power of God expressed in Healing Miracles – not supposed to focus attention on the healer who is just the channel

Look at Power of God expressed in Changed Lives – supposed to be evident = markedly different than pre-conversion days

CONCLUSION:
What mighty works do you see Jesus doing in His church today?

THE AWESOME POWER OF JESUS CHRIST HEALS BROKEN PEOPLE IN SPECTACULAR FASHION
How are we doing in reaching out to broken people with the compassion of Jesus Christ?

Maybe you are resigned to living in bondage to sin in some are of your life – not turning your eyes on Jesus to deliver you with His healing power; Don't ever imagine that you are too broken for Jesus to restore – not talking about Humpty Dumpty – talking about the power of the risen Lord Jesus Christ – Do you acknowledge your bankruptcy? Do you want healing? Are you willing to trust in Him?

Let's rejoice with leaping in our hearts as we praise Him for His mercy and deliverance

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DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

1) Do we remember our broken pre-conversion state and see the brokenness of those around us?

2) Do we have confidence in the power of the gospel as something real and life-changing that we can offer to others?

3) Is our level of praise and rejoicing commensurate with the magnitude of our deliverance from bondage to sin?

4) Do we attract attention to the power and authority of Christ or do our good works just attract attention to ourselves?

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QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Wiersbe: The emphasis in Acts 3 and 4 is on the name of the Lord Jesus (Acts 3:6, 16; 4:7, 10, 12, 17-18, 30). A name, of course, implies much more than identification: it carries with it authority, reputation, and power. When somebody says, "You can use my name!" you sincerely hope the name is worth using. . . The great concern of the first Christians was that the name of Jesus Christ, God's Son, be glorified . . .

Bruce: It was marvelous enough, to be sure, but it was more than a marvel: it was a sign. For the two apostles had not cured him by any power of their own; it was when they invoked the name and authority of Jesus Christ of Nazareth that he sprang up and found his feet for the first time in his life. . . public confirmation of His authority to forgive sins as well as to heal the sick (Mark 2:10 f.). . . mark of the advent of the messianic age. **(Isa. 35:6**). That which Jesus' personal mighty works had signified was corroborated by this mighty work performed through His disciples: He was indeed Lord and Messiah.

Martyn Lloyd-Jones: Here is the tonic, there is the place to get refreshment, where we feel the life of God pulsating in the early Christian church . . . There is always the danger that we should think of Christianity as something abstract and intellectual. Though we must know the theory and have the understanding, we must never forget that first and foremost the Christian faith deals with life and living; it is the most revolutionary power the world has ever known. A dead church is a contradiction in terms. . . the church is life, and it is power, and it is vigor. All of this is perfectly illustrated and exemplified for us in this story in Acts 3. Here is the church in action, the church facing the world.

Lessons learned from this miracle which also served as a teaching parable:
1) Picture of humanity in a state of sin and helplessness – man's total inability to conquer the devil and temptation and sin
2) The world is unable to help us – only can offer alms
3) The world expects the wrong things from the church
4) The church's condition is to address the bankrupt condition of the soul – offering forgiveness of sins and spiritual life through Jesus Christ

Picture of justification by faith – It is all of grace. It is the gift of God, the action of the risen Christ, and He has all power. He is a miracle-worker. He will give you His own life, and He will do it now. He postulates nothing in you except that you see your need. He does not ask you to produce any works. He does not ask you to produce anything that can in any way recommend you to Him. He says, "They that are whole have no need of the physician, but they that are sick: I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance" (Mark 2:17). Are you paralyzed? Are you hopeless? He is life. He is power. He can give you everything that you need, and He will give it to you at once.

Dr. John Whitcomb: **The Re-Offer of the Kingdom (3:1-16)**
What did the Apostle Peter and John know about the New Testament Church? Chap. 3 is a very Jewish chapter; when the greatest crowds would be there; team ministry is an established guideline from God; Jesus sent out teams presenting the kingdom message; 144,000 witnesses will be sent out in pairs; John was closest to Jesus and Peter was most outspoken; confronting Israel with a re-offer of the millennial kingdom; self-cursed nation; his case is really hopeless; requested a hand-out; considered to be a legitimate way for a cripple to sustain himself; name of

Jesus not a mere label but power center; **Reason** why he was healed was not just that Peter lifted him up but vs. 16 points to faith in His name = the beggar believed; by God and yet by faith; not everyone Jesus healed believed; cf. the healing of the 10 lepers; no period of convalescence; instantaneous and marvelous healing; **Isa. 35** – foretaste of the kingdom – how can we know the kingdom has actually arrived on the earth; when the kingdom comes everyone will know it has arrived; the kingdom had arrived in the person of the king Himself; Christ-like kingdom activities taking place here; not happening today; we will see people eternally transformed by responding to the power of the Word of God applied by the Spirit of God

Dan Brooks: **The Wonder of Spiritual Healing**
Wonders and Signs -- It is God who is at work; fingermarks of God; indications of His grace and power; false Christs will arise to perform signs and wonders that will deceive many; need to evaluate the prophets on the content of their message; what does God do with this miracle? Amazes the people and attracts a crowd; Effect of the sign miracles and healings:
1. verifies Christ's divine authority -- seeing His authority on earth in His exaltation; not the authority of Peter exercised here; invokes authority of Christ;
2. verifies Christ's divine attributes – they haven't changed; seen through the apostles; seeing a man in a pitiful condition; Peter speaks with compassion of Christ for the poor and suffering; truly a good deed done to a crippled man
3. verifies Christ's divine activity – 4:10; Peter deflects attention to Christ and His power; 4:29-30 Christ is active in the church; Christ remains active in us and through us while we do it; not just delegating the Great Commission
4. Christ authenticates His identity as healing verifies His kingdom message – calling these people to repent (true change of heart towards God) and turn again (be converted)

Joel Dykstra: **A Lame Man Walks in the Power of Jesus' Name**
Introduction: Wouldn't it be nice if these types of wonderful miracles could happen today in our church? There are some churches that claim these things; But that doesn't mean that the power of Jesus is not at work among us; See the miracle beyond just the physical aspects; see the more profound power of Jesus name that transforms lives; it is to be praised; we are to stand amazed also; gospel message becomes ordinary to us
1. The poverty of this man (:1-2) – alms = offerings brought to give to those less fortunate; beggar expected to receive gifts; not entirely sure which particular gate is referenced here; overlaid with material that made it shine; appear worthy and expensive and valuable; having to receive from the wealth of others; kept outside of the temple; unable to experience the power of the living God; can't enter into the presence of the Lord; poor spiritually; see ourselves as this man; like him we are also born hobbled, crippled spiritually; the closest we can come is outside of His temple; look at man outside of the Garden of Eden – you may not experience the blessing of this place; we don't see the brokenness of those around us
2. The power of the Lord's name (:3-8) – Peter and John stop and fix their gaze on this beggar; this man doesn't see what could be provided for him; amazing grace; wonderful miracle; all in the authority of the resurrected and ascended King; power to deliver from sin and brokenness that keeps us from enjoying God's blessings; you first must understand how your sin shackles you in so many ways – then this passage ought to thrill your heart; a lame man walks; the authority of Jesus Christ is greater than the bonds of sin; we experience a very real deliverance; sometimes we become cynical and jaded and sarcastic and bitter in this life; imagine that life should be pain free – not talking about that type of existence; need to be renewed in our confidence in Jesus Christ; it wasn't Peter's power that saved this man
3. The praise of the people (:9-10) – How can this be? They stand amazed; Praise our God for

the strength and deliverance He provides; this beggar would no more go back and sit in his former spot than a sinner should return to his wickedness

Steven Cole: God's miraculous gift of salvation should cause us to praise Him with exuberant joy so that others will marvel at His mighty power.
There are three lessons for us to consider:
1. Salvation is a miraculous gift from Jesus, not a human self-improvement project.
A. The human race has been spiritually lame from birth due to the fall.
B. There is nothing that spiritually lame people can do to heal their spiritual condition.
C. God heals the spiritually lame by His mighty power, as His free gift, apart from our merit or works.
D. When God saves our soul, He always gives us far more than we expect.

2. God's salvation should cause those who have received it personally to praise Him with exuberant joy.
A. Salvation fills us with exuberant joy because it is received unexpectedly.
B. Salvation fills us with exuberant joy because it is received instantly.
C. Salvation fills us with exuberant joy because it is received completely.

3. The exuberant joy of our salvation should provide an entrance for the gospel with others.

Guzik: There is a story about a humble monk walking with a Roman Catholic cardinal at a time in the Middle Ages when the Roman Catholic church was at its zenith of power, prestige and wealth. The cardinal pointed to the opulent surroundings and said to the monk, "We no longer have to say, silver and gold I do not have." The monk replied, "But neither can you say, In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk."

TEXT: Acts 3: 11-16

TITLE: PREACHING THE GLORY OF CHRIST

BIG IDEA:
FAITH IN THE NAME OF JESUS CHRIST MAGNIFIES THE GLORY OF CHRIST (BY UNLEASHING DIVINE POWER THAT BRINGS GREAT BLESSING)

INTRODUCTION:
The greatest mistake God's servants can make is to receive the glory and praise from men that is only due to Jesus Christ. Some people don't seem genuine when they are deflecting the praise to Jesus. Any sense of pride or personal boasting in spiritual ministry will make this an awkward situation. Maybe one of the reasons that God does not use us more is that we need to improve in this area of giving God all of the glory for what He accomplishes. But God calls upon us to exercise great faith in the name of His Son; to expect great works of divine power; and to use those occasions to direct the glory and praise to Jesus Christ alone.

OVERVIEW OF CHAP. 3:
THE SIGN MIRACLES OF THE APOSTLES HIGHLIGHT THE GLORY OF CHRIST TO ATTRACT PEOPLE TO THE BLESSING OF DELIVERANCE FROM SIN
I. 3:1-10 Healing by the Power of Christ – THE AWESOME POWER OF JESUS CHRIST HEALS BROKEN PEOPLE IN SPECTACULAR FASHION
II. 3:11-16 Preaching the Glory of Christ – FAITH IN THE NAME OF JESUS CHRIST MAGNIFIES THE GLORY OF CHRIST (BY UNLEASHING DIVINE POWER THAT BRINGS GREAT BLESSING)
III. 3:17-26 Offering the Blessing of Christ and His Kingdom –

FAITH IN THE NAME OF JESUS CHRIST MAGNIFIES THE GLORY OF CHRIST (BY UNLEASHING DIVINE POWER THAT BRINGS GREAT BLESSING)

3 FOCAL POINTS OF PETER'S SECOND SERMON

I. (:11-12) A JEALOUS GOD -- ANY GLORYING IN MAN IS MISDIRECTED
A. Historical Survey
This principle of acknowledging our dependence upon God and giving Him all of the glory has been true throughout history.

Ex. 34:14 "*His Name is Jealous*"

Isaiah 42:8 *"I am the LORD, that is My name; I will not give My glory to another, Nor My praise to graven images."*

Is. 48:11 "*My glory I will not give to another*"

Zech 4:6 "*Not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit, says the Lord of hosts*."

Experience of **John the Baptist**: "*He must increase, but I must decrease*" **John 3:30**

Experience of the **Apostle Paul**: just an earthen vessel used by God – "*we have this treasure in earthen vessels, so that the surpassing greatness of the power will be of God and not from ourselves*" – **2 Cor. 4: 7**

Experience of **Apostle John** interacting with angel:
Rev 19:10 "*And I fell at his feet to worship him. And he said to me, "Do not do that; I am a fellow servant of yours and your brethren who hold the testimony of Jesus; worship God. For the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy*."

B. (:11) Misdirected Amazement

1. On the Part of the Healed Lame Man

"*And while he was clinging to Peter and John,*"
Κρατοῦντος δὲ αὐτοῦ τὸν Πέτρον καὶ τὸν Ἰωάννην

κρατέω Pres act participle; To take hold of forcibly, seize, grasp; take into one's possession (like arrest, apprehend); hold on to; retain possession of

Not saying there was anything wrong in the lame man's reaction here – the healing had just taken place; but I think this offers a nice picture for an important spiritual lesson

Divine blessing should cause us to cling to Jesus Christ – this lame man who had been miraculously healed was still learning to transfer his dependence totally over to the Savior

Look at how some disciples end up with a version of spiritual hero worship ….

No room for Ministry Super Heroes
- Not out to make a name for themselves or attract a following for themselves
- Not out to make others dependent on themselves
- Not communicating that they are the only channel through which God brings blessing

Priesthood of all believers – all have direct access to Jesus Christ; each one gifted with spiritual gift for ministry; we encourage each other to strengthen ourselves in the Lord and step out in faith in His name

Some people always look to some other well-respected believer to do the difficult tasks:
- I could never counsel someone – What about the sufficiency of the Word and of the Spirit?
- I could never witness in that situation
- I need the top dog to come and pray for me

2. On the Part of the Crowd of Assembled Jews

"*all the people ran together to them at the so-called portico of Solomon, full of amazement.*"
συνέδραμεν πᾶς ὁ λαὸς πρὸς αὐτοὺς ἐπὶ τῇ στοᾷ τῇ καλουμένῃ Σολομῶντος ἔκθαμβοι.

Constable: A covered porch supported by a series of columns surrounded the outer temple courtyard, the Court of the Gentiles. The eastern portion of this porch bore the name Solomon's portico "because it was built on a remnant of the foundations of the ancient temple." Peter

addressed the curious throng from this convenient shaded area, where Jesus had formerly taught (John 10:23).

Utterly astonished; full of amazement – at what?? Were they driven to their knees to worship Jesus Christ and proclaim His glory and majesty and power?
Apparently not because Peter felt obligated to offer some Apostolic Correction

Remember the words of Christ: One greater than the temple is here
Matt. 12:6 "*But I say to you, that something greater than the temple is here*."
Matt. 12:42 "*greater than Solomon*"

C. (:12) Apostolic Correction

1. Not by the Power of Men

"*But when Peter saw this, he replied to the people, "Men of Israel, why do you marvel at this, or why do you gaze at us, as if by our own power*"
ἰδὼν δὲ ὁ Πέτρος ἀπεκρίνατο πρὸς τὸν λαόν· ἄνδρες Ἰσραηλῖται, τί θαυμάζετε ἐπὶ τούτῳ ἢ ἡμῖν τί ἀτενίζετε ὡς ἰδίᾳ δυνάμει

Men of Israel -- They were men of the Covenant, of the church fathers, of the prophets, of the OT scriptures – they should not have needed correction in this regard – just as Jesus felt compelled to upbraid Nicodemus in John 3: "*Are you the teacher of Israel and do not understand these things*?" They should have been living their life in an understanding of the demonstration of the power of God and how He operates through those who place their faith in Him

The fruit that God brings about through our spiritual ministry is not due to the **power** of our abilities or experience or knowledge

2. Not by the Piety of Men

"*or piety we had made him walk?*"
ἢ εὐσεβείᾳ πεποιηκόσιν τοῦ περιπατεῖν αὐτόν;

Bock: "*piety*" occurs ten times in the Pastorals and four times in 2 Peter in addition to this reference; refers to someone of good character

The fruit that God brings about through our spiritual ministry is not due to the **piety** of our godly character … so that God in essence owes us some type of response

Guzik: Many "healers" today who would never claim to heal in their own power still give the impression that healing happens because they are so spiritual, so close to God, or so godly. Peter knew that it was all of Jesus and nothing was of him.

MacArthur: So what he does then is take their wonder and their confusion and focus it on Christ. He puts a disclaimer on himself and John. We didn't do it. And he puts the attention on some other source. And it must be divine. What are you marveling at? God's always been working among you. This is God's doing in effect. Which is hard for them to understand since they didn't believe that Jesus was of God. Yet it was obviously done in Jesus' name wasn't it? They knew miracles were done by...notice the two words in verse 12, miracles were done by power and holiness. That had always been their knowledge. **It took a holy power to do miracles.**

Look at the answer that Christ gave to His disciples when they complained that they were unable to perform the necessary spiritual ministry: **Matt. 17:20** "*because of the littleness of your faith*" We are so careful to guard against the excesses of charismatic healing ministries that we neglect the importance of cultivating great faith to expect the Head of the Church to act with power and decisiveness to bring deliverance to the lives of those we touch – We should be confident that God wants to use us to be a savour of life unto life and of death unto death – the nature of the results are in His sovereign disposition – but in either case He is working powerfully as we exercise faith in His name

Let's make sure we don't Miss the Point and direct any of the glory or praise to Man

II. (:13-15) JEWISH GUILT -- CONTRAST BETWEEN GOD GLORIFYING JESUS BY THE RESURRECTION AND THE JEWS KILLING THE PRINCE OF LIFE

Showing the Jews the great Inconsistency in their actions

MacArthur: Now in this the theme is Jesus. And He's **presenting Jesus by six names**, six different titles of the 208 that He has. And at the same time in a majestic explosion of the beauties of Jesus through all these names and we could spend a sermon on each name easily or more than one on each name, but as he presents these six names, at the same time he presents six statements about each name. So that it's not just a name, but it's a name and a statement. For example, you see he calls Him servant rather than Son and we'll talk about that in a moment. **Servant**, **Jesus**, **Holy One**, **Just**, **Prince of Life**, and then down in verse 18, **Christ**. Those are **six names**.

Chiastic structure

A. God Glorifying Jesus by the Resurrection

1. Continuity with God's Historical Activity

> *"The God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the God of our fathers, has glorified His servant Jesus,"*
> ὁ θεὸς Ἀβραὰμ καὶ [ὁ θεὸς] Ἰσαὰκ καὶ [ὁ θεὸς] Ἰακώβ, ὁ θεὸς τῶν πατέρων ἡμῶν, ἐδόξασεν τὸν παῖδα αὐτοῦ Ἰησοῦν

Stott: what was new in Jesus nevertheless enjoyed a direct continuity with the Old Testament.

Bock: God glorified his servant. This reverses the normal pattern associated with glory. God is the one usually glorified.

MacArthur: You see, he is directing his message to Israel. And so he uses all his real terms. God is also the God of all men, but God is especially the God of covenant promise with Israel. And since he's talking about Messiah and since he wants to convince these Jews that Jesus is their Messiah and that they are in rebellion against God and have executed their own Messiah then he chooses messianic terms. So he begins by identifying God as the God of Israel. Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and our Fathers. . .
Now this is not a term foreign to the Jewish mind, because in the Old Testament, Messiah was said to be a **servant**. Speaking to Jews and speaking about a servant, a Jew would have

immediately thought of the great sweeping passage of Scripture from Isaiah 40 clear through Chapter 53 in which Isaiah speaks of the servant. But let me just pull two passages. Isaiah 42:1 and listen to this. Here is a messianic passage and here Messiah's called a servant. "Behold my servant whom I uphold. Mine elect in whom I so delighteth. I have put my spirit him, he shall bring forth justice to the nations." Here's a prophecy regarding Messiah. He is called what? Servant. Servant.
And you go over to Isaiah Chapter 52 and you run right into the same thing again in that most classic and wonderful passage which we love. "Behold," verse 13, Isaiah 52, "Behold my servant shall deal prudently." Then he goes on to talk about his servant. Then in Chapter 53, he describes the servant doesn't he? "Despised, rejected of men, the man of sorrows, acquainted with grief. He is born our griefs, carried our sorrows, wounded for our transgressions. All we like sheep have gone astray." That great passage on the suffering servant, right? And then he kind of ends it up by saying "Therefore will I divide him a portion with the great and divide the spoil with the strong, because he hath poured out his soul unto death." There it says Messiah will be a servant who will die.

Look at example of Jesus in serving the disciples in **John 13**

Look at verses speaking of the Father glorifying the Son – **John 5: 23** "*so that all will honor the Son even as they honor the Father*"

MacArthur: **Jesus** comes from the Old Testament name Joshua. It's the very same word. And Joshua is really an important word. It means salvation of the Lord. Or the Lord is salvation. Or it means Jehovah Savior. That's what it means. It has a deity connotation. The full meaning is Savior God. That's what Jesus means. And that's why it says "Thou shalt call His name Jesus, for He shall save." That's the point. That's what Jesus means. That's what the name means. Joshua in the Old Testament overcame the enemies of God's people. And though there were very many and though they were very strong and though they had cities walled to heaven and chariots of iron, yet in the name of Jehovah as captain of the Lord's hosts, Joshua defeated them.
And even so does our glorious Joshua, our Jesus, smite sin and all the powers of darkness to save His people to utterly destroy their spiritual enemies. And Joshua, the son of Nun the Old Testament Joshua, caused the people, it says, to serve the Lord all His days, but he couldn't save them. And when he died, they went astray, but our Jesus, the New Testament Savior preserves His people in holiness forever and is able to keep them from falling and present them faultless.

2. Climax in the Victorious Event of the Resurrection of Jesus Christ

"*the one whom God raised from the dead, a fact to which we are witnesses.*"
ὃν ὁ θεὸς ἤγειρεν ἐκ νεκρῶν, οὗ ἡμεῖς μάρτυρές ἐσμεν.

Where do you look to see God manifesting His divine power?
What is the ultimate authentication of the glory which God the Father has set on His Son?
Read through Acts from the standpoint of following the importance placed on the resurrection

B. Jews Killing the Prince of Life

1. Delivered Him Up

" *the one whom you delivered up,*
ὃν ὑμεῖς μὲν παρεδώκατε

Treachery, traitor-like behavior
How are you living as faithful disciples of Jesus Christ?

2. Disowned Him

and disowned in the presence of Pilate, when he had decided to release Him. "But you disowned the Holy and Righteous One,
καὶ ἠρνήσασθε κατὰ πρόσωπον Πιλάτου, κρίναντος ἐκείνου ἀπολύειν· ὑμεῖς δὲ τὸν ἅγιον καὶ δίκαιον ἠρνήσασθε

Means to deny

Should have been proud to be identified with Jesus Christ

Pilate tried 3 times to release Jesus; overruled by the Jews

MacArthur: **Luke 4:33**. "And in the synagogue there was a man who had a spirit of an unclean demon and cried out." Listen to what the demon says, "I know thee who thou art the Holy One." Oh the demon knew that. The demon knew what Israel didn't even know. It's a shocking kind of thing, isn't it?

The Old Testament declared Messiah by that name. That's another messianic title for Him, just as is Savior, Joshua, and servant. In **Psalm 16:10**, listen, it's a messianic passage talking about the Messiah's resurrection. "For thou will not leave my soul in hell, neither will thou permit thine," what, "Holy One to see corruption." Messiah was called the Holy One and Peter said, but you denied the Holy One. And you didn't know what demons know. Oh that's how twisted they were. They took the Holy One sinless without blemish harmless, undefiled and they denied Him. The one consecrated to God is their Messiah, they denied.

What are you doing to demonstrate your identification with Jesus Christ; to own Him before a wicked world?

3. Demanded a Murderer as Opposed to the Life-Giver

and asked for a murderer to be granted to you, (Barabbas)
καὶ ἠτήσασθε ἄνδρα φονέα χαρισθῆναι ὑμῖν,

Could say that "Jesus died for me" – doctrine of substitutionary death

4. Designated Him for Execution

but put to death the Prince of life,
τὸν δὲ ἀρχηγὸν τῆς ζωῆς ἀπεκτείνατε

Whitcomb: How is this even possible?? Added a human nature to His divine nature and became a God-man in order to be able to die; also had to be willing to die (dedication to the will of the Father); Jews crucified Jesus in ignorance – preached message of **Repentance** – we are special people; we hate you for proclaiming that we are innately sinful and need drastic change in our relationship to God; "Father, forgive them for they really don't know who I am;" Basis for re-offer of the kingdom

Kent: designates him as the one whose victory over death has made him the forerunner or leader of others. His resurrection qualified him for this title, he is now the "Prince" who provides salvation and assurance of resurrection life (the same title is employed in Heb. 2:10 and 12:2).

MacArthur: Jesus the originator of life. Do you know that He made that claim. Listen to the word of God. **John 1**, "All things are made by Him. Without Him was not anything made that was made in Him was," what, "life." And in **John 11:25**, don't you love that, where He says this. He says to Mary and Martha at the home of Lazarus, "I am the resurrection and," what, "and the life." **John 14:6**, "I am the way, the truth, the life." And John in **1 John 5:11**, "This is the record that God hath given unto us, eternal life and this life is in His Son." He was the life giver. He's the only one who can provide life and that's the point of **Ephesians 2**. "You were dead in sin, but He made you alive together with Christ."

Constable: Peter called Jesus the Servant (Gr. *paida*) of the Lord, the subject of messianic prophecy (Isa. 42:1; 49:6-7; 52:13; 53:11; cf. Mark 10:45); the Holy One, a title of Messiah (Ps. 16:10; Isa. 31:1; cf. Mark 1:24; 1 John 2:20); the Righteous One (Isa. 53:11; Zech. 9:9; cf. 1 John 2:1); and the Prince (Author) of Life (Ps. 16; cf. John 1:1-18; Col. 1:14-20; Heb. 1:2-3; 2:10; 12:2). Peter pointed out three inconsistencies in the Jews' treatment of Jesus and contrasted their treatment of Him with God's. They had condemned Him when Pilate was about to release Him (v. 13). They rejected the Holy and Righteous One out of preference for a murderer, Barabbas (v. 14; Luke 23:18-19). Furthermore they executed the Author of Life whom God raised from the dead, of which the apostles were witnesses (v. 15). Prince or Author of Life presents Jesus as the resurrected Messiah who gives life that overcomes death.

Bock: 2 possibilities:
1) the first among many, the one who shows and rules the way; leads to life versus one who removes it = Leader, *Prince*, Originator
2) the one who makes life possible = *Author*

III. (:16) JESUS-FOCUSED GLORY -- FAITH IN THE NAME OF JESUS WORKS

A. Faith in Jesus is What Truly Matters

> *"And on the basis of faith in His name, it is the name of Jesus*
> καὶ ἐπὶ τῇ πίστει τοῦ ὀνόματος αὐτοῦ . . . τὸ ὄνομα αὐτοῦ

Whose faith is referenced here? Definitely faith required on the part of Peter and John to look to the Lord for His work of healing
But what about the lame man … any faith involved on his part??
Bock: The lame man's response to his healing shows that he did respond to what God had done and was thankful for it.

Emphasis is more on the **object of the faith** = *the name of Jesus* – His person and authority and power

B. Faith in Jesus Can Make You Whole

> "*which has strengthened this man whom you see and know; and the faith which comes through Him has given him this perfect health in the presence of you all.*"
> τοῦτον ὃν θεωρεῖτε καὶ οἴδατε, ἐστερέωσεν, καὶ ἡ πίστις ἡ δι᾽ αὐτοῦ ἔδωκεν
> αὐτῷ τὴν ὁλοκληρίαν ταύτην ἀπέναντι πάντων ὑμῶν.

Hymns:

- All hail the power of Jesus' name! Let angels prostrate fall
- What can wash away my sins? Nothing but the blood of Jesus
- Trust and Obey – for there's no other way
- Jesus paid it all, all to Him I owe; sin had left a crimson stain, He washed it white as snow.
- When I survey the wondrous cross, on which the Prince of glory died, my richest gain I count but loss and pour contempt on all my pride.
- O for a thousand tongues to sing my great Redeemer's praise, the glories of my God and King, the triumphs of His grace.

CONCLUSION:

Acts 4:12 "*And there is salvation in no one else; for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men, by which we must be saved*."

In light of such an exclusive plan of salvation, we should not be amazed that **God is a Jealous God; He will not share His glory with man**

> "*By grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God, not as a result of works, so that no one may boast*"

It doesn't make any sense to Reject Jesus Christ once you understand who He is:

- God's Servant – Plan was always for Suffering to Precede Glory
- Jesus – the only one who can Save
- Holy One --
- Just – Always does what is right
- Prince of Life – Risen from the dead; can impart spiritual life
- Christ = Promised Messiah

Jews were guilty but were being given a second chance to embrace their King; we all are guilty as well and need to respond while there is still opportunity

Faith in Jesus Christ truly works – whatever your brokenness; Jesus can make you whole
FAITH IN THE NAME OF JESUS CHRIST MAGNIFIES THE GLORY OF CHRIST (BY UNLEASHING DIVINE POWER THAT BRINGS GREAT BLESSING)

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DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

1) Are you making disciples of Jesus Christ or are you making people dependent on your ministry?

2) Do you expect God to respond to you because of your ministry success or personal piety?

3) Are you owning Jesus Christ in every way possible or rejecting Him in some sense?

4) Are you walking by faith in the name of Jesus Christ and experiencing the blessing of divine power?

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QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Calvin: And yet doth he not simply reprove them because they wonder; for that was altogether profitable and worthy praise; but because they do wickedly ascribe unto men that praise which is due to the work of God. As if he should say, Ye do amiss, in that you stay in us, and stand gazing upon us, whereas you ought rather to look upon God and Christ. Therefore, this is to be amazed evilly, when as our minds do stay in men. And we must note that he condemneth the respect of men; as if, saith he, we by our own power and virtue had done this. Therefore there is an error and corruption in this, if we attribute that unto the godliness and power of men which is proper to God and Christ. And, as concerning power, no man will deny that it cometh of God; yet when they have confessed this in one word, they do not cease to take from God his right, to the end they may adorn the creatures with that which they take from him

Steven Cole: To Proclaim the Gospel we must Exalt the Lord Jesus –

- To Exalt Jesus, we must deflect all glory away from ourselves

We are just the clay vessels that the Potter uses for His own purposes. To take any credit for anything that God does through us is to rob Him of the glory rightly due to His name. As Paul tells the proud Corinthians (1 Cor. 4:7), "What do you have that you did not receive? And if you did receive it, why do you boast as if you had not received it?" If someone praises you for something that you have done, there is nothing wrong with saying, "Thank you." The person means it as an encouragement, and it is proper to thank them for their kind words. But if they go on and on, or if there is any danger that you are robbing God of glory, you should say, "Thank you for your encouragement, but the Lord should get all the glory. He alone enabled me to minister to you."

- To exalt Jesus, we must tell people who Jesus is and what He has done

The Jews had a holy reverence for the name of God, so much so that they would not even dare pronounce it. In the Hebrew Bible, whenever they got to the name, "Yahweh," they would say, "Adonai," which means "Lord." "The name" became a way of referring to God. Peter here exalts the name of Jesus. . . Peter also calls Jesus "the Holy and Righteous One" (3:14). Jesus was without any sin of His own. Thus He could offer Himself as the substitute for sinners, without needing to make atonement for His own sins. Only God is truly holy and righteous. In his first sermon, Peter quoted from Psalm 16:10, where David declares that God will not allow His Holy One to undergo decay (Acts 2:27). On another occasion, Peter affirmed his belief that Jesus is "the Holy One of God" (John 6:68-69). Even the demons recognized Jesus as the Holy One of God (Luke 4:34). "Righteous" focuses on the fact that Jesus had done no wrong (Isa. 53:9; John 8:46). . . Peter also refers to Jesus as "the Prince of life" (Acts 3:15). The word "prince" means the leader or the author or originator. It is used in this sense in Hebrews 2:10, where Jesus is called "the author of [our] salvation," and in Hebrews 12:2, where He is called "the author and perfecter of faith." He originates our salvation and our faith and He brings it to completion. As the Prince or Author of life, He originates life, both physical and spiritual. He

declared that He is the life (John 14:6). He said, "For just as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, even so the Son also gives life to whom He wishes" (John 5:21).

Deffinbaugh: The guilt of the people of Jerusalem is described by means of a series of contrasts. Let me point out a few of them.

First, Peter contrasted the glorification of God's servant in His resurrection and ascension with his audience's disowning of Him as their Messiah:

Second, Peter contrasted Pilate's desire to release Jesus because he felt he was innocent, with their insistence that He be put to death, convinced He was guilty, and thus worthy of death:

Third, Peter contrasted the One whom they wished to crucify with the one they wished to release:

Fourth, they dealt with Jesus, who was the promised "prophet like Moses," as though He were a false prophet.

Paul Tautges: **Why God Glorifies Jesus**
All the glory must go to God; The doctrine of the Trinity is an amazing truth – one God eternally existing in 3 persons; each is equal in essence and power; but is distinct in function; Mystery of submission: Son to the Father and the Spirit to the Son; Phil. 2 – one day the Father will cause the Son to receive all of the glory from the nations of the world;
Setting of Sermon: miraculous healing of the lame man; power of Christ flowing through Peter to this man;
I. (:11) The Amazement of the People
Covered area near one of the entrances to the temple; the very place that the Lord Jesus taught His disciples that He was the Good Shepherd; John 10:22; sovereignty of God in healing; Jesus undoubtedly saw this same man who was in the audience and heard the discourse of the Good Shepherd; yet it was a year later Jesus chose to heal him through Peter; Jesus does what He does for His glory; we don't always understand why God doesn't heal when we want him to heal; God has another plan for your trial; He has work He wants to accomplish that requires the pressure and pain of that affliction; miraculous healings cannot be planned by man; they are the choice of a sovereign God; you cannot coerce a sovereign God into healing; He chooses to heal when and how and why He wants to; cf. schedule of Benny Hinn healing crusades; cf. World magazine article – WallWatchers tracks financial accountability of various ministries; cf. Dateline report in 2002 – home worth $10M – he defended it as a "parsonage", a "wise investment". Another example = TBN – Trinity Broadcasting Network;
II. (:12-16) The Answer of Peter
Don't look at us; look at Jesus Christ; **3 Reasons God glorifies Jesus:**
<u>1. (:12-14) The death of Jesus fulfilled God's promise (of a suffering servant)</u>
I am preaching to you of the same God you have always heard of;
The one whom you surrendered up and denied, this is the one God glorified;
Luke 12:9 – you will be denied as a consequence; you have crucified your Messiah; Luke 23:13 – the denial of Jesus by the Jews; Peter jogging their memories; they willingly and willfully chose a murderer in place of the Messiah God had sent to them; they were held morally responsible for their choice even though it was within the sovereign plan of God
<u>2. (:15) The resurrection of Jesus originates spiritual life</u>
<u>3. (:16) The name of Jesus saves on the basis of faith</u>

TEXT: Acts 3: 17-26

TITLE: OFFERING THE BLESSING OF CHRIST AND HIS KINGDOM

BIG IDEA:
RECEIVING THE PROMISED BLESSING OF CHRIST AND HIS KINGDOM HINGES ON REPENTANCE

INTRODUCTION:
This second sermon of Peter in Acts 3 deals with a much bigger issue than the offer of personal salvation. That is certainly part of the focus -- and living where we are now in this church age that certainly tends to be our focus. But Peter is raising the issue of **the offer of the Messianic Kingdom** to God's covenant people, the Jews. That is why it is so important to understand the transitional nature of the Book of Acts. This is not a sermon that we would preach in the same way to our audience.

Look back with me to what we have studied earlier from Acts 1. Remember that John the Baptist had preached a similar message of *repentance for the kingdom of God is at hand*. But the Jews failed to recognize Jesus as their Messiah and rejected God's kingdom offer. But look what was still on the mind of Christ after His Ascension as He gave final instructions to His apostles:

1:3 "*speaking of the things concerning the kingdom of God*" – He wanted them to know that the ignorance and rejection by men did not change the plans of God – God is faithful to keep all of the OT promises related to the nation of Israel and to the coming kingdom. You don't have to throw in the towel and spiritualize these promises or come up with some type of convoluted allegorical interpretation. The plain literal, grammatical sense of Scripture works just fine. Jesus is looking forward to returning and ushering in that 1000 year period of peace and righteousness on earth …

So it was natural for the disciples to ask "*Lord, is it at this time You are restoring the kingdom to Israel*" **1:6** The only issue is the timing, not the reality of the particulars. Then we see the *outpouring of the Holy Spirit* in chap. 2 characterized as being consistent with what we would expect to see in the last days right before the establishment of the kingdom on earth as Joel had prophecied. We see that Jesus is seated right now at the right hand of God UNTIL God the Father *makes your enemies a footstool for your feet*. **2:35** You see Jesus understood that the kingdom had not yet arrived in its full physical expression on earth – but it's coming for sure!

So just like the miracle of the speaking in tongues amazed the people and got their attention for Peter's first sermon, so the healing of the lame man in Chap. 3 served as both an object lesson for the Messiah healing the brokenness of man as well as the attention-getter for this marvelous offer of the kingdom to the Jewish people. What love and patience and mercy and longsuffering on the part of God to make such a fantastic offer to the same people that had killed His precious Son. But that is what Christ had alluded to in **Matt. 22:1-10 –** multiple offers of the Messianic Kingdom with all its associated blessings

We cannot forget that Jesus came first to preach to the Jews – remember the Canaanite woman in **Matt. 15:21-28** expressing her desire that Jesus heal her demon-possessed daughter. Jesus replied "*I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel*." But the woman persisted and

noted that "*even the dogs feed on the crumbs which fall from their masters' table*." Jesus responded to her great faith. It is only later in Acts that we see the gospel going indiscriminately to both Jew and Gentile after the renewed rejection and persecution of the church by the Jews.

How is that people can reject such a fantastic offer? Peter wants to make the gracious offer . . . but at the same time deliver the solemn warning that they had better not presume upon God's goodness and patience. The time to respond in genuine repentance is now. There can be no enjoyment of the forgiveness of sins and no participation in the kingdom of God apart from repentance.

RECEIVING THE PROMISED BLESSING OF CHRIST AND HIS KINGDOM HINGES ON REPENTANCE

Don't forget that Jesus is speaking here to "*Men of Israel*" 3:12; whom he identifies as "*brethren*" = fellow countrymen in **vs. 17**

OVERVIEW OF CHAP. 3:
THE SIGN MIRACLES OF THE APOSTLES HIGHLIGHT THE GLORY OF CHRIST TO ATTRACT PEOPLE TO THE BLESSING OF DELIVERANCE FROM SIN
I. 3:1-10 Healing by the Power of Christ – THE AWESOME POWER OF JESUS CHRIST HEALS BROKEN PEOPLE IN SPECTACULAR FASHION
II. 3:11-16 Preaching the Glory of Christ – FAITH IN THE NAME OF JESUS CHRIST MAGNIFIES THE GLORY OF CHRIST (BY UNLEASHING DIVINE POWER THAT BRINGS GREAT BLESSING)
III. 3:17-26 Offering the Blessing of Christ and His Kingdom – RECEIVING THE PROMISED BLESSING OF CHRIST AND HIS KINGDOM HINGES ON REPENTANCE

I. (:17-18) INDICTMENT -- REJECTION OF THE BLESSING OF CHRIST AND HIS KINGDOM ATTRIBUTED TO IGNORANCE
[Rebellion because of Ignorance because of Blindness]
A. Perpetuated Ignorance and Rejection of Jesus as Messiah by the Jews
> *"And now, brethren, I know that you acted in ignorance, just as your rulers did also.*"
> Καὶ νῦν, ἀδελφοί, οἶδα ὅτι κατὰ ἄγνοιαν ἐπράξατε ὥσπερ καὶ οἱ ἄρχοντες ὑμῶν·

Case of the blind leading the blind (**Matt. 15:14** "*Let them* [the offended religious leaders] *alone*; *they are blind guides of the blind. And if a blind man guides a blind man, both will fall into a pit*") – they followed their rulers right over the cliff of ignorance of God's Messianic plan for the ages – Important to be following leaders that can exercise discernment

Bock: Ignorance cannot provide an ultimate excuse, especially now that Peter has revealed God's program to them. Their sin of not recognizing Jesus as Messiah and of killing him can still be forgiven if they respond. . . Rulers are seen as a driving force behind Jesus's death in Luke 23 (Acts 3:17-18; 4:5-10, 26; 7:27, 35; 13:27-28; 14:5-7; 16:19-21; 23:5)

The problem cannot be attributed to some lack of revelation on God's part or the obscurity of that revelation

They stumbled over the cross (**1 Cor. 1:22-24**) – could not stomach a suffering Messiah – so

Peter goes right to the heart of their objection and proves that the sufferings of Christ were consistent with OT prophecies and should have been expected – **further intensifying their guilt** for rejecting Jesus

Kent: The **offense of the cross** was the great obstacle to Jewish acceptance of Jesus as the Christ.

B. Prophetic Inspiration and Fulfillment Regarding the Sufferings of Christ – Christ as the Suffering Servant

> *"But the things which God announced beforehand by the mouth of all the prophets, that His Christ should suffer, He has thus fulfilled.*"
> ὁ δὲ θεός, ἃ προκατήγγειλεν διὰ στόματος πάντων τῶν προφητῶν παθεῖν τὸν χριστὸν αὐτοῦ, ἐπλήρωσεν οὕτως.
>
> 1. God has been revealing rather than hiding the truth; Prophecy of future events self authenticates the Scriptures
>
> 2. God's message was a consistent one – "*by the mouth of all the prophets*"
>
> 3. The point that especially tripped them up was the aspect of the Suffering of Christ before entering into His glory – this was a necessity and it was literally and completely fulfilled; giving us indication of how prophecies about His Second Coming in glory will be fulfilled

Defined as "*His Christ*" – it is idolatry to make Christ after you own imagination – how you would like Him to be – this is God's promised anointed one – His program of redemption; don't try to tell God how to do things – Job had to learn that lesson – "Life is not fair" (Illustration from work) – "*I know that You can do all things, and that no purpose of Yours can be thwarted*" – ended up repenting in dust and ashes (**Job 42:1-6**)

Just like Jesus took the two men on the road to Emmaus after His resurrection and carefully explained to them the OT prophecies:
Luke 24:25-27 "*And He said to them, 'O foolish men and slow of heart to believe in all that the prophets have spoken* [you can't just pick and choose what portions you want to believe]! *Was it not necessary for the Christ to suffer these things and to enter into His glory?' Then beginning with Moses and with all the prophets, He explained to them the things concerning Himself in all the Scriptures*."

How can the Jewish nation recover from such a heinous crime – the rejection of God's Christ? Peter knew about denying Jesus 3 times but repenting and returning and experiencing great blessing

Once you understand that God will fulfill all of His warnings as well as His promises … you feel the sense of urgency to repent – the wrath of God is hanging over you; it is imminent; it is on the way; it could be fulfilled at any time –

So Peter moves quickly from the **Indictment** to the **Invitation**

II. (:19-21a) INVITATION -- REPENTANCE BRINGS FORGIVENESS OF SINS AND PROMISED KINGDOM BLESSINGS

A. Call for both Personal and National Repentance

1. Repent

"Repent therefore"
μετανοήσατε οὖν

Wiersbe: Peter was actually calling for national repentance, for the nation through its leaders had denied its Messiah and condemned Him to die. The declaration is that, if the nation repented and believed, the Messiah would return and establish the promised kingdom. The nation did not repent – and certainly God knew this would happen – so the message eventually moved from the Jews to the Samaritans (Acts 8) and to the Gentiles (Acts 10).

To "*repent*" means to have a heartfelt change of mind about sin, to agree with God about the ugliness of their disobedience to God, about the rightness of His standard, about the realit of their own sin. Repentance involves a sorrow over the harmful effects of sin toward God, toward others, and toward self. It involves a decision to turn from sin and to Christ. Just as we receive Christ by repentance and faith we need to continue to walk in the same way as we grow.

2. Turn

"*and return,*"
καὶ ἐπιστρέψατε

Is. 59:20 "*A Redeemer will come to Zion, and to those who turn from transgression in Jacob*"

Message of **Zechariah**: "*Return to Me that I may return to you*" 1:3 The Lord remembers and will again choose Israel; read **1:1-6** -- HISTORY PROVES THAT THE LORD'S URGENT CALL TO REPENTANCE MUST BE RESPONDED TO RIGHT NOW

Running from God only brings sadness and destruction

- **Cain** – banished from the Garden of Eden – separation – no record of him repenting and returning
- **Jonah** – impacted the lives of others – stormy seas and certain destruction
- **Prodigal Son** – thought he knew better how to enjoy life and get the most out of life
- **Apostle Paul** – Lord caught up with him on Road to Damascus – Why are you persecuting me?

B. Promise of Forgiveness of Sins – Sins must be dealt with

"*that your sins may be wiped away,*"
εἰς τὸ ἐξαλειφθῆναι ὑμῶν τὰς ἁμαρτίας,

Isaiah 43:25 – "*I, even I, am the one who wipes out your transgressions for My own sake, and I will not remember your sins*."

Isaiah 44:21-22 – "*Remember these things, O Jacob, and Israel, for you are My servant; I have formed you, you are My servant, O Israel, you will not be forgotten by Me. I have wiped out your transgressions like a thick cloud and your sins like a heavy mist. Return to Me, for I have redeemed you.*"

Kent: If Jesus really was the Messiah, where was the Messianic kingdom? Peter's answer was that his hearers must repent in order that their sins might be blotted out. Only then would Jesus Christ return from heaven to bring "*seasons of refreshing*" and "*times of restoration*".

Stott: *Exaleipho* means to wash off, erase, obliterate. It is used in the book of Revelation both of God who wipes away our tears and of Christ who refuses to erase our name from the book of life. William Barclay explains the allusion: "Ancient writing was upon papyrus, and the ink used had no acid in it. It therefore did not bite into the papyrus as modern ink does; it simply lay upon the top of it. To erase the writing a man might take a wet sponge and simply wipe it away.

C. Promise of National Restoration and Messianic Blessing – Christ as the Coming King

1. Far Purpose – Times of Refreshing

"*in order that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord;*"
ὅπως ἂν ἔλθωσιν καιροὶ ἀναψύξεως ἀπὸ προσώπου τοῦ κυρίου

Repentance brings refreshing in our relationship with God – picture someone weighed down with sin and guilt and shame like the pilgrim with the burden on his back in Pilgrim's Progress; spiritually thirsty and worn out – what a joy to enter into times of refreshing

Ps. 72:6-7 "*May He come down like rain upon the mown grass, like showers that water the earth. In his days may the righteous flourish, and abundance of peace till the moon is no more.*"

2. Second Coming of Messiah with Universal Restoration

"*and that He may send Jesus, the Christ appointed for you, whom heaven must receive **until** the period of restoration of all things*"
καὶ ἀποστείλῃ τὸν προκεχειρισμένον ὑμῖν χριστὸν Ἰησοῦν, ὃν δεῖ οὐρανὸν μὲν δέξασθαι ἄχρι χρόνων ἀποκαταστάσεως πάντων

Is. 49:8-13

Restoration is needed because things are out of whack – not good as God had created everything

- Twisted and perverted – Need to be straightened; set right
- Corrupted and tainted – Need to be purified
- Broken and dysfunctional – Need to be healed and restored

III. (:21b-26) INSTRUCTION -- REVELATION FROM THE JEWISH PROPHETS SHOULD HAVE PREPARED THEM TO RECEIVE THE PROMISED BLESSING OF CHRIST AND HIS KINGDOM

(:21) **Introduction:**

"*about which God spoke by the mouth of His holy prophets from ancient time.*"
ὧν ἐλάλησεν ὁ θεὸς διὰ στόματος τῶν ἁγίων ἀπ᾽ αἰῶνος αὐτοῦ προφητῶν.

A. (:22-23) **Revelation from Moses** (the greatest Prophet) – **Solemn Warning – Obey or Be Judged – Christ as the Anointed Prophet-Leader**

"Moses said, 'The Lord God shall raise up for you a prophet like me from your brethren; to Him you shall give heed in everything He says to you. 'And it shall be that every soul that does not heed that prophet shall be utterly destroyed from among the people.'"

Μωϋσῆς μὲν εἶπεν ὅτι προφήτην ὑμῖν ἀναστήσει κύριος ὁ θεὸς ὑμῶν ἐκ τῶν ἀδελφῶν ὑμῶν ὡς ἐμέ· αὐτοῦ ἀκούσεσθε κατὰ πάντα ὅσα ἂν λαλήσῃ πρὸς ὑμᾶς. [23] ἔσται δὲ πᾶσα ψυχὴ ἥτις ἐὰν μὴ ἀκούσῃ τοῦ προφήτου ἐκείνου ἐξολεθρευθήσεται ἐκ τοῦ λαοῦ.

Bock: This verb *anastesei* may well have a wordplay built around it (also Acts 13:33). It means to bring someone onto the scene of history but could in this context allude to resurrection

Simple exhortation – Obey or be judged – should have learned that from our earthly parents

B. (:24) **Revelation from All the Prophets** – Beginning with **Samuel** – **Great Expectations**

"And likewise, all the prophets who have spoken, from Samuel and his successors onward, also announced these days."

καὶ πάντες δὲ οἱ προφῆται ἀπὸ Σαμουὴλ καὶ τῶν καθεξῆς ὅσοι ἐλάλησαν καὶ κατήγγειλαν τὰς ἡμέρας ταύτας.

Bruce: Samuel was the prophet who anointed David as king and spoke of the establishment of his kingdom (I Sam. 13:14; 15:28; 16:13; 28:17), and the promises made to David found their highest fulfillment in Jesus.

Stott: It is impressive that Peter regards the many and varied strands of Old Testament prophecy as a united testimony.

We should have great expectations as we await the Second Coming of Christ

C. (:25-26) **Revelation from the Patriarchs** – Beginning with **Abraham** – **Covenantal Privilege – But Hinged on Repentance and Conversion – Christ as the Promised Seed of Abraham**

"It is you who are the sons of the prophets, and of the covenant which God made with your fathers, saying to Abraham, 'And in your seed all the families of the earth shall be blessed.' "For you first, God raised up His Servant, and sent Him to bless you by turning every one of you from your wicked ways."

ὑμεῖς ἐστε οἱ υἱοὶ τῶν προφητῶν καὶ τῆς διαθήκης ἧς διέθετο ὁ θεὸς πρὸς τοὺς πατέρας ὑμῶν λέγων πρὸς Ἀβραάμ· καὶ ἐν τῷ σπέρματί σου [ἐν]ευλογηθήσονται πᾶσαι αἱ πατριαὶ τῆς γῆς. ὑμῖν πρῶτον ἀναστήσας ὁ θεὸς τὸν παῖδα αὐτοῦ ἀπέστειλεν αὐτὸν εὐλογοῦντα ὑμᾶς ἐν τῷ ἀποστρέφειν ἕκαστον ἀπὸ τῶν πονηριῶν ὑμῶν.

Jesus called "His Christ" in vs. 18; now called "*His Servant*"

Bock: The appeal to old promises is important. It shows that although this community is a seemingly new entity, it is rooted in old promises. In the ancient world, for a religion to be old was a virtue because it meant that the religion had the benefit of experience. Peter's appeal to the past is a form of legitimization for the new community.

CONCLUSION:

We have only seen 2 sermons from Acts and already we see a pattern in the apostolic preaching:

- They hit hard on sin and brought home the conviction of guilt and the need for deliverance – **Strong Indictment** here – due to Rejection of the Messiah
- They proclaimed the glory of Christ in every respect – here seen as the *Suffering Servant*,

the *Coming King*, the *anointed Prophet-Leader* and the *promised Seed of Abraham*
- They called for repentance and faith as the only way to receive forgiveness of sins and blessing – **Gracious Invitation** – but don't presume on God's goodness and patience
- They looked forward to that Second Coming of Christ with all of the blessing that would bring – **Detailed Instruction** – unfolding the whole Revelation of the counsel of God

The things which God announced beforehand by all the prophets about the Second Coming will all be fulfilled just as we have seen with respect to Christ's Suffering and Death and Resurrection and Ascension. Even so Come, Lord Jesus.

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DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

1) How did the OT law deal differently with those who had acted in ignorance instead of defiant rebellion in the light of full knowledge?

2) How many prophecies can you find in the OT related to the suffering of the Messiah? What details are depicted that might have been surprising?

3) How does God deal with our sins? What examples do we see of great blessing resulting from repentance?

4) What involvement will we have in the *times of refreshing* and *period of restoration* spoken about here? What does the OT promise about this coming Messianic age? Do you really think that we are currently living in these times?

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QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Dr. John Whitcomb: **The Re-Offer of the Kingdom of the Messiah**
Matt. 22:1 This re-offer was predicted by Jesus; They made light of the re-offer; persecution resulted; Judgment of AD 70; the end of the theocracy of Israel on earth; Very ominous -- genuine offer confirmed by sign miracles rejected once again; Peter appealed to Moses to show what happens to people who reject such an offer -- **Deut. 18**; Fulfilled prophecy is mark of genuine revelation; The children of the prophets should have been familiar with the message of the prophets; **Gal. 3:16** – singular seed points to world-wide blessing through Christ; What a magnificent offer; Israel was distinctive in its privileges to hear the Messianic and covenantal promises; "*Salvation is of the Jews*" – John 4; change later in Acts = Gentiles being saved without first becoming Jews: **Acts 13:46**; **Rom. 1:16** "*to the Jew first*"; all that has changed especially since AD 70 judgment

MacArthur: **Necessity of Repentance – Five Results of Israel's Repentance**
Repentance therefore is based on the two things: their deed toward Christ and their attitude toward Him and God's deed toward them in grace and the offer of forgiveness . . .
Be converted. That's an act of God. To begin with you turn around from sin exercise faith in Jesus Christ and God changes you into His child. So both repentance and faith make up the total

which is conversion. Now Peter makes a simple appeal then; turn around, change your mind and let God change you. . .

Now as I said, it would have been a very fair thing in some sense for God to have judged Israel at this moment finally but He did not. And it reminds me of the occasion in the life of Jeremiah, there were forty years of Jeremiah's ministry. And Jeremiah's ministry was a ministry of judgment He was announcing the destruction of Jerusalem and God kept delaying it for all these forty years in grace. And interesting that is a parallel of what we have here for Jesus being crucified -- judgment could have come but judgment didn't come for forty years later. It was not until 70 AD that Jerusalem was sacked and destroyed and Judaism as such was wiped out. And God gave the same period of grace that He gave in Jeremiah's day a **period of forty years**.

There are five things that will happen if Israel repents.
1) Number one, <u>their sins will be forgiven.</u>

2) Second reason. Not only will your sins be forgiven but the kingdom will come.

The word *times* is *kairos* this has to do with a fixed, set or predetermined time.

The Jew has been hassled throughout all its history. The Jew has been moved. Israel has been pushed and shoved all over the world mercilessly persecuted and abused, tragically treated. And even today, one of the most despicable things in existence is anti-Semitism. The Jews have been mistreated all through the years partly due to the fact of their own failure to recognize God and so God has chastised them in this way. Which gives no right to any man ever to be abusive to Israel but rather to love Israel like the apostle Paul said, "*My heart's desire and prayer is for Israel*". But Israel has been under the judgment of God because of sin and they have been pushed and shoved and abused throughout all the years. And Israel is longing for the time when they can go somewhere and **rest.**

Isaiah chapter 11 describes a little of it. It's a wonderful description, "*Rest shall be glorious*" Also **Isaiah 35**

It is the very same word in the noun form that is used in **Acts 1:6** when the disciple said, "*When will thou restore the kingdom to Israel*?" When are you going to give back what is ours? Here there is the time when things are given back. Not some things but what? All things are going to be given back to the God who rightfully owns them. That's the kingdom. And in the kingdom the curse is removed and all these things are placed back in the control of God. Now, that's the kingdom and he says it can't come until you repent

It's not a new offer. It's not a re-offer it's just the same standing offer Repent and you can still have the kingdom even though you executed the King He took the execution of the King and turned it to glory anyway.

3) <u>The Messiah will return.</u>

4) <u>Judgment may be avoided</u>

5) <u>Promised blessing will be realized</u> -- verse 25

Jim Sevastio: **Heeding God's Final Prophet**
Two approaches to presenting the gospel: Wooing and Warning; What will happen to you if you neglect so great a salvation? You will die in your sins; solemn warnings; promises of mercy and forgiveness but also warnings; What will happen to us if we don't listen to God's great prophet; cannot treat the grace of God lightly; primarily warning today

1. A Firm Prophecy Fulfilled (:22) – Deut. 18 prophecy
2. A Sure Privilege Announced
3. A Certain Promise Spoken
4. An Inescapable Warning Declared

David Harrell: **Repentance and the Promised Kingdom**
Now that God has sovereignly summoned this group to hear the message, Peter preaches the gospel of God's grace;
1. The Constant of Bible Prophecy (:17-18) -- something fixed, immoveable, unalterable, unchangeable, you can take it to the bank; ignorance is no excuse; this was the pattern of the Jews down through history; no surprise to God that Messiah was rejected by His own people; not some fanciful allegory or meaningless spiritualization where it is anyone's guess as to what God means; interpret in literal and grammatical way;
2. The Cleansing of Repentance (:19) – **Luke 3:3ff** – ministry of John the Baptist – baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins; Jews were familiar with this theme of repentance; symbolic rite that pictured internal reality; **Is. 40:3-5**; Peter's message of repentance was nothing new for his audience; clean up the roads in anticipation of the king coming; prepare the highway to your heart; high places of self exaltation must be leveled; humble repentance; all of the twisted, perverted, warped attitudes and beliefs and habits have to be straightened out; clear away all of the debris and trash in your life; deal aggressively with every aspect of your life; God grants repentance leading to the knowledge of the truth; ultimately repentance part of the regenerative work of God; Jews didn't think they needed to repent; thought they were pretty good; today: gross distortion of gospel of Jesus Christ with respect to doctrine of repentance today – far too offensive to call seekers to repentance; real problem is what is left out; no understanding of being spiritually dead; no concept of being under the wrath of God and controlled by bondage of sin; without repentance there is no salvation; change one's mind and purpose; turn from one direction and go another; not resolution of reformation; not just contrition (feeling sorry for something you have done and the results); a voluntary change empowered by the Spirit of God; accompanied by fear of God; pleading for mercy; **2 Cor. 7:9ff** – nature of genuine repentance; 2 reasons why people refuse to repent: love their sin or don't see their sin; **Col. 2:14**
3. The Certainty of the Messianic Kingdom (:20-26)

TEXT: Acts 4:1-12

TITLE: THE ONLY NAME THAT COUNTS – ONLY ONE ROAD TO GOD

BIG IDEA: THE EXCLUSIVITY OF THE GOSPEL --
SALVATION ONLY COMES BY FAITH IN THE POWER OF THE RESURRECTED JESUS

INTRODUCTION:
Some people are name droppers … "I know so-and-so." Or maybe: "I know someone who knows so-and-so." There is only one name that counts = Jesus Christ; not religious pluralism where it is believed that many roads lead to God

But here are some well known personalities who profess to believe in Jesus for salvation, but listen to how they waffle on the controversial question of the exclusivity of the gospel … Are there other ways to God than through faith in Jesus Christ?

Exclusivity of the Gospel -- Look at waffling statements regarding that exclusivity –
1) Larry King interview with Joel Osteen:

KING: But don't you think if people don't believe as you believe, they're somehow condemned?

OSTEEN: You know, I think that happens in our society. But I try not to do that. I tell people all the time, preached a couple Sundays about it. I'm for everybody. You may not agree with me, but to me it's not my job to try to straighten everybody out. The Gospel is called the good news. My message is a message of hope, that's God's [message] for you. You can live a good life no matter what's happened to you. And so I don't know. I know there is condemnation, but I don't feel that's my place. . . . . [Later in the interview]

KING: What if you're Jewish or Muslim, you don't accept Christ at all?

OSTEEN: You know, I'm very careful about saying who would and wouldn't go to heaven. I don't know . . .

KING: If you believe you have to believe in Christ? They're wrong, aren't they?

OSTEEN: Well, I don't know if I believe they're wrong. I believe here's what the Bible teaches and from the Christian faith this is what I believe. But I just think that only God will judge a person's heart. I spent a lot of time in India with my father. I don't know all about their religion. But I know they love God. And I don't know. I've seen their sincerity. So I don't know. I know for me, and what the Bible teaches, I want to have a relationship with Jesus.

2) President George W. Bush – interviewed by prominent news anchor:

News Anchor: Do Christians and non-Christians, do Muslims go to heaven in your mind?

Bush: Yes they do. We have different routes of getting there. . . I don't get to decide who goes to heaven . . .

3) President Obama: President Obama's brand of Christianity leaves enough leeway to cause confusion and concern among evangelicals.

"My particular set of beliefs may not be perfectly consistent with the beliefs of other Christians," Obama told *Newsweek*. "There's the belief, certainly in some quarters, that if people haven't embraced Jesus Christ as their personal savior, they're going to hell."

In a discussion with Franklin Graham, Mr. Obama explained,

"I do not believe that my mother, who never formally embraced Christianity as far as I know, went to hell."

http://www.standingforgod.com/2010/08/obamas-nebulous-christianity/

4) Television interview of Billy Graham by Robert Schuller. Part 1, an approximately 7-minute-long broadcast in Southern California on Saturday, May 31, 1997. The following is an exact transcript* of an excerpt close to the end of this broadcast.

Schuller: Tell me, what do you think is the future of Christianity?

Graham: Well, Christianity and being a true believer--you know, I think there's the Body of Christ. This comes from all the Christian groups around the world, outside the Christian groups. I think everybody that loves Christ, or knows Christ, whether they're conscious of it or not, they're members of the Body of Christ. And I don't think that we're going to see a great sweeping revival, that will turn the whole world to Christ at any time. I think James answered that, the Apostle James in the first council in Jerusalem, when he said that God's purpose for this age is to call out a people for His name. And that's what God is doing today, He's calling people out of the world for His name, whether they come from the Muslim world, or the Buddhist world, or the Christian world or the non-believing world, they are members of the Body of Christ because they've been called by God. They may not even know the name of Jesus but they know in their hearts that they need something that they don't have, and they turn to the only light that they have, and I think that they are saved, and that they're going to be with us in heaven.

Schuller: What, what I hear you saying that it's possible for Jesus Christ to come into human hearts and soul and life, even if they've been born in darkness and have never had exposure to the Bible. Is that a correct interpretation of what you're saying?

Graham: Yes, it is, because I believe that. I've met people in various parts of the world in tribal situations, that they have never seen a Bible or heard about a Bible, and never heard of Jesus, but they've believed in their hearts that there was a God, and they've tried to live a life that was quite apart from the surrounding community in which they lived.

Schuller: I'm so thrilled to hear you say this. There's a wideness in God's mercy.

Graham: There is. There definitely is.

Is JESUS really the Only Name that Counts??

THE EXCLUSIVITY OF THE GOSPEL -- SALVATION ONLY COMES BY FAITH IN THE POWER OF THE RESURRECTED JESUS

Must exercise faith in the name of Jesus Christ – Must understand who Jesus really is

Not saying there is one denomination that leads to God – but One Gospel; one Savior

3 KEYS TO MAINTAINING THE EXCLUSIVITY OF THE GOSPEL

I. (:1-4) DON'T KEEP QUIET -- DESPITE INTIMIDATION/INCARCERATION – PERSECUTION CANNOT STOP GROWING ALLEGIANCE TO JESUS CHRIST – FOCUS ON THE EVANGELICAL APOSTLES

A. (:1-3) The Proclamation of the Gospel Incites Persecution from the Counterfeit Religious Establishment

1. Aggressive Proclamation

"*And as they were speaking to the people,*"
Λαλούντων δὲ αὐτῶν πρὸς τὸν λαὸν

Bold and Dangerous mission for Peter to be openly proclaiming Christ in the heart of traditional Judaism – right at the locale of the temple in Jerusalem; why didn't he leave the Jews alone – if all roads lead to God, let them just be sincere and things will turn out OK for them in the end . . . Different strokes for different folks . . .
Peter knew they were **doomed** apart from faith in Jesus as their Messiah

2. Angry Persecution from the Counterfeit Religious Establishment

"*the priests and the captain of the temple guard, and the Sadducees, came upon them, being greatly disturbed*"
ἐπέστησαν αὐτοῖς οἱ ἱερεῖς καὶ ὁ στρατηγὸς τοῦ ἱεροῦ καὶ οἱ Σαδδουκαῖοι, διαπονούμενοι

nobody likes to be exposed as being in error;
remember the antagonism of **the Sadducess** to any emphasis on resurrection – largely a rationalistic party that rejected supernatural elements like angels and denied any physical resurrection (**Acts 23:8**); ruling class of wealthy aristocrats; politically aligned themselves with Romans and feared any uprising over this new teachings – especially with its kingdom emphasis

Kent: temple captain was the head of the Levitical police force which maintained order in the temple. The Romans allowed the Jews to police the temple themselves. The captain ranked next to the high priest in authority within the temple precincts.

Watch out for that evangelist who is always popular; everybody says nice things about him; he never faces angry opposition; probably more of a politician and a man-pleaser than a true evangelist

We should expect opposition; angry opposition

* * * * *

MacArthur: It is a strong word, and it means "*thoroughly pained*." The group of men that wanted to stop Peter and John were in terrible mental anguish. Their anguish wasn't based on sorrow; it was based on indignation and wrath. The same Greek word for grieve appears in **Acts 16:18**, where Paul had the same anguish when he saw a woman in Philippi under the power of an evil spirit. The priests, Sadducees, and the captain of the Temple were all very disturbed about what Peter and John were doing. They felt that way for three reasons:

1. THEY DOUBTED THE COMPETENCY OF THE PREACHERS

a. They Were "Unlearned"

b. They Were "Ignorant"

Not only were Peter and John ignorant regarding Jewish theology, but they were commoners as well. That's what the word "ignorant" implies. The Temple officials and religious leaders were saying, "Who are these uneducated amateurs?" The fact that Peter and John were from Galilee was repugnant to them. They thought Peter and John had no right to stand up in the Temple and teach doctrines contrary to what was taught by the teachers in the Temple. The religious leaders were angry because Peter and John's theology disagreed with their own. They wanted to protect themselves, so they knew something had to be done about Peter and John.

2. THEY DISLIKED THE CORE OF THE PREACHING

The Temple officials and religious leaders were angry because of what Peter and John were teaching. They didn't want to hear preaching about Jesus. They had determined that Jesus was a blasphemer, but Peter was saying that the Jews had killed their own Messiah (Ac. 3:13-15). If you tried to tell that to a congregation of Jewish people today, you would get a strong reaction. Peter proclaimed Jesus as Messiah, and he indicted the whole nation of Israel for not recognizing Him. As a result, some of the people in the Temple got angry.

3. THEY DESPISED THE CONTENT OF THE PREACHING

* * * * *

John 15:18-19 – Jesus promised there would be persecution; **1 Pet. 2:21**; **2 Tim. 3:12**
Matthew 10:16, 17; Mark 13:9

3. Apostolic Preaching that was Christ-Focused and Resurrection-Oriented

"*because they were teaching the people and proclaiming in Jesus the resurrection from the dead.*"
διὰ τὸ διδάσκειν αὐτοὺς τὸν λαὸν καὶ καταγγέλλειν ἐν τῷ Ἰησοῦ τὴν ἀνάστασιν τὴν ἐκ νεκρῶν,

Teaching the people was the domain of the priests; they didn't like someone else stepping in to perform that role; Where were your credentials? Your ordination? Your official endorsement by the religious establishment? not concerned for **the Truth**, but maintaining their position of power and prominence

4. Abusive Policing that Assumed Their Guilt and Treated Them Unfairly

"*And they laid hands on them, and put them in jail until the next day, for it was already evening.*"
καὶ ἐπέβαλον αὐτοῖς τὰς χεῖρας καὶ ἔθεντο εἰς τήρησιν εἰς τὴν αὔριον· ἦν γὰρ ἑσπέρα ἤδη.

Apparently they were able to interact and preach for 3 hours (from 3-6 pm) and then were interrupted and taken into custody and thrown into jail for the night

Lenski: The Jewish law forbade trials at night, a law that was most flagrantly violated in the case of Jesus but was here observed.

B. (:4) The Proclamation of the Gospel Stimulates Abundant Faith in Jesus Christ

"*But many of those who had heard the message believed; and the number of the men came to be about five thousand.*"
πολλοὶ δὲ τῶν ἀκουσάντων τὸν λόγον ἐπίστευσαν καὶ ἐγενήθη [ὁ] ἀριθμὸς τῶν ἀνδρῶν [ὡς] χιλιάδες πέντε

Look at parallel passage in **Matt. 21:23-32** "*By what authority are You doing these things, and who gave You this authority? . . . the tax collectors and prostitutes will get into the kingdom of God before you*."

Math teacher verse – Greek word from which we get "*arithmetic*"

MacArthur: The number of males that came to believe was five thousand. There are two Greek words for men: One is anthropos, which means "man" in a generic sense. The other word is andros, which means "male"--as opposed to female. It is the latter word that appears in Acts 4:4. So, the total number of men that became believers was five thousand.

Rom. 10:17 "*So faith comes from hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ*."

II. (:5-7) DON'T BACK DOWN – DESPITE INTIMIDATION/INQUISITION – POMPOSITY OF WORLDLY POWER REFUSES TO ACKNOWLEDGE THE POWER AND AUTHORITY OF JESUS CHRIST -- FOCUS ON THE ELITE ESTABLISHMENT (OF RELIGIOUS BIG SHOTS)

These same principles that relate to maintaining the exclusivity of the gospel are going to apply on a lower level to new Christian doctrines that are introduced into the church against the opposition of the established leadership (e.g. Anabaptist controversy; plurality of elder issue) – we all have a sin nature and can manifest these same tendencies – although not to the degree that we will see here

A. (:5-6) Religious Big Shots Protect Their Turf

"*And it came about on the next day, that their rulers and elders and scribes were gathered together in Jerusalem; and Annas the high priest was there, and Caiaphas and John and Alexander, and all who were of high-priestly descent.*"
Ἐγένετο δὲ ἐπὶ τὴν αὔριον συναχθῆναι αὐτῶν τοὺς ἄρχοντας καὶ τοὺς πρεσβυτέρους καὶ τοὺς

γραμματεῖς ἐν Ἰερουσαλήμ, καὶ Ἄννας ὁ ἀρχιερεὺς καὶ Καϊάφας καὶ Ἰωάννης καὶ Ἀλέξανδρος καὶ ὅσοι ἦσαν ἐκ γένους ἀρχιερατικοῦ,

Big Convention – by invitation only; these were the religious elite leaders and rulers; the Sanhedrin – composed of 70 members plus the high priest who served as president

Caiaphas was Annas' son-in-law – both had figured prominently in trial and condemnation of Jesus; **Nepotism** – gain a place of prominence and get your family in there with you

Kent: The usual meeting place of the Sanhedrin was in the Chamber of Hewn Stone, probably situated west of the temple area.

B. (:7a) Religious Big Shots Presume to be the Supreme Court

"*And when they had placed them in the center, they began to inquire,*"
καὶ στήσαντες αὐτοὺς ἐν τῷ μέσῳ ἐπυνθάνοντο·

Control freaks – they set the stage to be very intimidating; this was their home turf; sat on a raised stage in a semi-circle; position of dominance; healed man was present there with Peter and John

Deut. 13:1-5 – set the procedures for investigating such a miracle

Peter had backed down and denied Jesus 3 times before His crucifixion – remember incident before the servant of the high priest; found that experience to be bitterly disappointing; now he is offered the opportunity to recant … but his loyalty is firm

C. (:7b) Religious Big Shots Philosophize When They Should Be Submitting to Divine Authority – Asking Key Question – but it had already been answered!

"By what power, or in what name, have you done this?"
ἐν ποίᾳ δυνάμει ἢ ἐν ποίῳ ὀνόματι ἐποιήσατε τοῦτο ὑμεῖς;

Religious power; establishment power – We didn't authorize this!

Sarcasm, contempt, bitterness – not dealing in an objective and reasonable sense but responding very emotionally; pre-determining the issue; making presumptive judgments rather than investigating the truth

III. (:8-12) DON'T WAFFLE – IDENTIFICATION OF DISTINCTIONS – PERSON OF JESUS CHRIST ALONE CAN ACCOMPLISH SALVATION – FOCUS ON THE EXCLUSIVE SAVIOR

A. (:8) Recognize Divine Authority – God's Authority Takes Precedence Over Man's Authority – Authoritative Proclamation Declares God's Wisdom to Man's Impotence

"*Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them, "Rulers and elders of the people,*"
Τότε Πέτρος πλησθεὶς πνεύματος ἁγίου εἶπεν πρὸς αὐτούς· ἄρχοντες τοῦ λαοῦ καὶ πρεσβύτεροι,

Contrast between unlearned Peter and these high powered rulers and elders

Respectful address – despite their error

B. (:9) Leverage Good Works -- Mercy Always Triumphs Over a Critical Spirit

"*if we are on trial today for a benefit done to a sick man, as to how this man has been made well,*"
εἰ ἡμεῖς σήμερον ἀνακρινόμεθα ἐπὶ εὐεργεσίᾳ ἀνθρώπου ἀσθενοῦς ἐν τίνι οὗτος σέσωται,

council should have been spending their time investigating problems – not good deeds of mercy and restoration

Martyn Lloyd-Jones: All the greatest benefits that humanity has ever known have come through this Gospel. Good deeds! Where did hospitals come from? The Christian church. Where did education come from? The Christian church. Where did relief for the poor and suffering come from? The Christian church. Look at the great missionary enterprise. Look at the light that has been taken to the dark places of the earth. . .

Look at the unreasonableness of it all. If the apostles had hit the lame man on the head, I could understand why the authorities threw them into prison. But fancy throwing them into prison because they had healed a man! What is it that makes people do such things? There is only one answer: It is the blindness and the deadness that is ever produced by prejudice. Something in human nature is malignant.

C. (:10) Preach Jesus Christ – Crucified and Raised from the Dead and Exercising Healing Power Today

"*let it be known to all of you, and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ the Nazarene, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead-- by this name this man stands here before you in good health.*"
γνωστὸν ἔστω πᾶσιν ὑμῖν καὶ παντὶ τῷ λαῷ Ἰσραὴλ ὅτι ἐν τῷ ὀνόματι Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ τοῦ Ναζωραίου ὃν ὑμεῖς ἐσταυρώσατε, ὃν ὁ θεὸς ἤγειρεν ἐκ νεκρῶν, ἐν τούτῳ οὗτος παρέστηκεν ἐνώπιον ὑμῶν ὑγιής.

Nobody could dispute the reality of the healing miracle
Made his case to the leaders; made his case to the general public – same need for the one and only Savior – only one name counts
"the Nazarene" – reference of rejection; you could not have treated Him any worse
How can you not believe in the physical resurrection? This complete and miraculous restoration to health is a proof of the resurrection of Christ (who alone can accomplish such a feat) and a foretaste of the coming resurrection for all
How's your spiritual health?? Come to the Savior, the Great Physician

Martyn Lloyd-Jones: The world is refusing the only thing that can put it right. This statement applies as much to individuals as to international politics. If there is trouble in your life; if you feel you have gone to pieces, and all your prospects have been shattered; if you think that you have made a mess of life and that you are a failure – then I urge you, consider the Gospel with all your being. Ask God the Holy Spirit to give you the ability to listen with a far greater intensity than ever before. Here is something that can put you right.

D. (:11) Expose Errors of Discernment – Religious Elite Have a Bad Track Record

"He is the stone which was rejected by you, the builders, but which became the very corner stone.
οὗτός ἐστιν ὁ λίθος, ὁ ἐξουθενηθεὶς ὑφ᾽ ὑμῶν τῶν οἰκοδόμων, ὁ γενόμενος εἰς κεφαλὴν γωνίας.

Had already done this in vs. 10 above – they had chosen to crucify the one that God wanted to exalt
(Remember how the sons of Jesse had been scrutinized as to which should become king; Samuel overlooked David – but that was God's choice)
Reference to Messianic prophecy of Ps. 118:22 – Jesus had applied this passage to himself before His death – **Mark 12:10**

Rom. 9:33

E. (:12) Drive Home the Message of Exclusivity

"And there is salvation in no one else; for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men, by which we must be saved."
καὶ οὐκ ἔστιν ἐν ἄλλῳ οὐδενὶ ἡ σωτηρία, οὐδὲ γὰρ ὄνομά ἐστιν ἕτερον ὑπὸ τὸν οὐρανὸν τὸ δεδομένον ἐν ἀνθρώποις ἐν ᾧ δεῖ σωθῆναι ἡμᾶς.

- You need to understand the problem of man's lost condition to understand the qualifications of the one and only Savior
  - Not just providing good moral teaching – that won't deal with my sins
  - Not just providing a good example of how to live – that won't deal with my sins
- You need to understand the purpose of God's revelation in unfolding for us His unique and exclusive plan of salvation
- You need to understand the necessity of coming to God through Jesus Christ for salvation

Obama at some point has characterized Islam as a "revealed religion" – like Christianity – nothing could be further from the truth

Bruce: If the rulers persisted in their repudiation of Jesus, no such deliverance could be hoped for from any other quarter or by the power of any other name . . . The course of duty and wisdom for the rulers was therefore clear; if they refused it and persisted in their present attitude, they would involve their nation as well as themselves in destruction.

Ps. 121:1-2 "*I will lift up my eyes to the mountains; from where shall my help come? My help comes from the Lord, who made heaven and earth*."

Ps. 20:7 "*Some boast in chariots and some in horses, but we will boast in the name of the Lord our God*"

CONCLUSION:
We live in a pluralistic age – one that claims tolerance for all religions – but actually is particularly intolerant towards any claim of exclusive truth.
People will react against this message of exclusivity with a number of common objections:

Josh McClellan: Are there really many roads to God – the question of religious pluralism -- Commonly asked questions:
1) What if someone is sincere in their belief? Would God really send them to hell?
2) Isn't it arrogant for one group to claim that they have the right answer?
3) Is there anything right in other religions?
4) If only one religion is right, why are there so many religions?
5) What about all of the people who never did or never will hear about Jesus?
http://joshmcclellan.wordpress.com/2009/01/03/are-there-really-many-roads-to-god-the-question-of-religious-pluralism/

Look at the serious problems faced by Christianity if we waffle on this issue of Exclusivity:

- Crucifixion not really essential
- Evangelism and Foreign Missions could be viewed as detrimental – increases the light which people have; therefore increases their accountability
- Makes Christ and the Apostles liars since they clearly taught this principle:

    - "*For the gate is small and the way is narrow that leads to life, and there are few who find it.*" **Matt. 7:14**
    - "*I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through Me.*" **John 14:6**
    - "*If any man is preaching to you a gospel contrary to what you received, he is to be accursed!*" **Gal. 1:6-9**

Don't Be Quiet
Don't Back Down
Don't Waffle

* * * * * * * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

1) What should we conclude about our testimony if we never face any angry opposition?

2) Why would the religious leaders ask the apostles a question which they had already publicly answered?

3) What are the practical implications of the exclusivity of the gospel message?

4) How do these same principles apply to not compromising in other areas of biblical conviction?

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QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Mark Farrow: Here's how the great Southern Gospel quartet, The Imperials, expressed this concept in their unique song, "Old Buddha" [not politically correct … but then look how the OT

prophets made fun of the idols of their day]

Well, old Buddha was a man
And I'm sure that he did well,
But I pray for his disciples
Lest they end up in hell,
And I'm sure that old Mohammed
Was sure he knew the way,
But it won't be Hari Krishna
We stand before on judgment day.

Chorus:
No, it won't be old Buddha
That's sitting on the throne,
And it won't be old Mohammed
That's calling me home,
And it won't be Hari Krishna
That plays that trumpet tune,
And we're going to see the Son,
Not Reverend Moon!

Well, I don't hate anybody,
So please don't take me wrong,
But there really is a message
In this simple song,
See, there's only one way — Jesus,
If eternal life's your goal,
And meditation of the mind,
It won't save your soul.
http://www.lamblion.com/xfiles/publications/magazines/Lamplighter_MayJun10_Roads.pdf

MacArthur: **How to Handle Persecution**
Today, Satan usually directs persecution not to a person's physical body, but to his ego. He focuses on pride, the desire for acceptance, or the desire for status. That's very effective. Satan doesn't often threaten a Christian by saying, "If you witness, I'll cut your head off." He threatens a believer by saying, "If you witness, you might lose your job, your status--or someone might think you are strange." The techniques Satan uses today have a tremendous effect in a subtle way. He has found that it is very effective to kill the church by making it complacent, indolent, fat, rich, and socially oriented. The church has watered down its theology to accommodate the world. That is a more successful form of persecution than having all Christians boiled in oil!

How to handle persecution:
- Be submissive to persecution
- Be filled with the Holy Spirit
- Be bold and use opportunities to preach the gospel

Ron Ritchie: We are living in the age of the Spirit, whom God has put within us to give us power to be witnesses of Jesus Christ. Notice that this entire episode in the temple began with a good work, through the love and compassion of the disciples for a lame man. God then took that good

work and turned it into a testimony for his namesake; and out of that testimony came persecution, and out of persecution 5,000 men came to salvation in Jesus. Would you want to live any other way? Life would be so dull and monotonous without the Holy Spirit within us. When you are walking in the Spirit you can anticipate these kinds of events. God will use you for his honor and glory.

John Piper: **There is Salvation in No One Else**
If you compare the kingdom of God to a building, then the builders are the religious leaders. They examined the stone called Jesus of Nazareth to see if he could be a brick in the wall of truth. They said No and rejected him and threw him out as unusable. But God, the main architect, came along and saw the stone lying in the grave and picked him up and made him not only a brick in the wall, but the head of the corner—the chief stone in the building. Men rejected Jesus as a merely local menace with no significance beyond the killing hill of Golgotha. But God has made Jesus the universal head over all his house. As **Acts 2:36** says: "*God has made him both Lord and Christ*." . . .

Sometimes people will say, "Yes, Jesus is the only source of salvation, but you don't have to know him in order to benefit from the salvation he offers. In other words, if you are a faithful Muslim or Hindu or Jew or animist, you will be saved by Jesus. There is salvation in no one else, but you don't have to believe on him in order to be saved by him."

But that is not what Peter meant. Peter focused on the NAME of Jesus. "*There is no other NAME under heaven by which we must be saved*." He is saying something more than that there is no other source of saving power that you can be saved by under some OTHER name. The point of saying, "There is no other NAME," is that we are saved by calling on the name of the Lord Jesus. His name is our entrance into fellowship with God. The way of salvation by faith is a way that brings glory to the name of Jesus. Peter says in **Acts 10:43**, "*Every one who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name*." The name of Jesus is the focus of faith and repentance. In order to believe on Jesus for the forgiveness of sins, you must believe on his name. That is, you must have heard of him and know who he is as a particular man who did a particular saving work and rose from the dead.

Bob Deffinbaugh: **Truth or Consequences**
There is no specific charge made against the apostles. Rather, the "trial" seems to be more of a "fishing expedition" in which the religious leaders seek to find some transgression of the law or of their traditions, giving them a handle on the situation. There is plenty of innuendo and a great deal of intimidation evident here. Perhaps they can at least succeed in scaring these men into giving up their activities. . .

The issue is a familiar one—that of the authority of the apostles. How often Jesus was challenged in the same way. As the highest religious body in the land, this group felt they should authorize all teaching and ministry in their midst, especially that which was done in the precincts of the temple. Just who did these two "nobody's" think they were, going into the temple as if they owned the place, doing and teaching whatever they wished? There is a clear indication that any ministry performed required their approval, which was not granted. There may also be the inference that the power by which the miracle was performed (a miracle which they could not deny) was other than the power of God.38 If they could establish any demonic involvement, they would have a case against these men.

TEXT: Acts 4: 13-22

TITLE: OBEYING GOD RATHER THAN MAN

BIG IDEA:
SUPERNATURAL POWER OF JESUS CHRIST CANNOT BE EFFECTIVELY OPPOSED – CHRISTIAN TESTIMONY CANNOT BE SILENCED

INTRODUCTION:
Persecution has never been effective in stopping the growth of Christianity and the spread of the gospel. In fact the opposite has proven true: Persecution has always created a climate of growth for Christianity down through church history. Satan's tactics have not changed; and God continues to demonstrate that it is impossible to effectively silence Christian testimony. That was true back in the first century church with Peter and John and it remains true today in the many places around the globe where physical persecution is inflicted.

Tactics of the Enemy:
1) Threatening the Preachers -- example of Peter and John we will study today

2) Killing the Missionaries
Karen Watson was one of our young missionaries to Iraq. On March 15, 2004, she was killed by unknown assailants. Later an envelope was found that said, "Open in case of death." Inside was a letter that said in part: "Dear Pastor Phil and Pastor Roger, You should only be opening this in the event of death. When God calls there are no regrets. I tried to share my heart with you as much as possible, my heart for the nations. I wasn't called to a place; I was called to Him. To obey was my objective, to suffer was expected, His glory my reward,. . .
The missionary heart: Cares more than some think is wise; Risks more that some think is safe; Dreams more than some think is practical; Expects more than some think is possible. I was called not to comfort or to success but to obedience. . . . There is no Joy outside of knowing Jesus and serving Him. I love you two and my church family. In His care, Salaam, Karen"
http://bbcelders.wordpress.com/2007/05/20/sermon-notes-acts-41-22-acts-sermons-8/

3) Burning the Bibles
a. We are familiar with the fact that the English Reformer William Tyndale was burned at the stake for his labours in seeking to provide a faithful translation of the Scriptures in the English language. In fact, Rome persecuted the translation and circulation of the Scriptures in all the countries of the European Reformation. The persecution was particularly fierce, however, in England and Scotland. The threat of being put to death as a heretic did not extend merely to translating the Scriptures into the English language, but also even to reading or possessing such a translation or any part of it.

As Tyndale translated and published portions of Scripture in English it was eagerly taken up and read. Although many thousands of copies of Tyndale's translation were printed, so fierce was the persecution that only one complete copy of the first edition has survived the systematic destruction ordered by the Romanist clerics. Tyndale knew that the Roman Catholic authorities would go far beyond destroying the printed copies of his translation: 'In burning the New Testament, they did none other thing than I looked for; no more shall they do if they burn me also, if it be God's will it shall so be. Nevertheless in translating the New Testament I did my

duty and so do I now…'.
http://www.fpchurch.org.uk/News/view.php?id=26

b. Read articles about how Christians right now are being killed in Somalia and how bibles are being burned in Pakistan …. And other atrocities and acts of persecution … the media chooses to ignore most of these incidents

Why are we fearful about bearing witness for the Lord Jesus Christ? Why do we need encouragement to be courageous and speak our convictions? We face more subtle forms of mockery and rejection. But we need to be equally convinced that Jesus is alive and powerful and victorious in working through us today.

SUPERNATURAL POWER OF JESUS CHRIST CANNOT BE EFFECTIVELY OPPOSED – CHRISTIAN TESTIMONY CANNOT BE SILENCED --

FOUR FAILURES OF THE FUTILE ATTEMPTS OF CHRISTIAN PERSECUTORS

I. (:13-14) NO REFUTATION -- IMPRESSIVE SUPERNATURAL POWER CANNOT BE REFUTED – EVEN BY THE PERSECUTORS OF CHRISTIANITY – WHAT CAN BE SAID TO REFUTE THE POWER OF JESUS?

A. Observing the Boldness (and Effectiveness) in Witnessing Impresses

"*Now as they observed the confidence of Peter and John,*"
Θεωροῦντες δὲ τὴν τοῦ Πέτρου παρρησίαν καὶ Ἰωάννου

Even in the Business world the importance of confidence is recognized: Sales tips magazine: approach the customer with Confidence

What contributed to their **confidence** – find out that they spent time with Jesus; been transformed by the power of God so that they were progressively becoming more and more like Jesus – could speak the truth with authority and conviction like He did; did not rely on their own natural abilities … so were not dismayed by their own deficiencies; believed in the power and presence of Jesus – who had promised to give them the words to speak when they faced such tense situations – had been commanded by Jesus to preach this message (1:8); not even afraid of death; confident in their resurrection

Martyn Lloyd-Jones: **Courageous Christianity** – Because the Christian faith is supernatural, we do not need to be clever to understand it or put it into practice. This is the remarkable thing. You may call it the paradox of the Christian message. Here we have the profoundest truth in the world about everything to do with men and women, life, living, death, the cosmos, and God. Yet this truth is never arrived at as the result of intellectual effort. . . So being a Christian does not depend upon us, but entirely upon God and His power and what He has done in the person of His only begotten, dearly beloved Son. You see God at work in these disciples. Look at the way they could stand and reason before this great council and confute them.

B. Understanding the Bankruptcy of Natural Ability Impresses

1. No Formal Theological Education

"*and understood that they were uneducated*"

καὶ καταλαβόμενοι ὅτι ἄνθρωποι ἀγράμματοί εἰσιν

We get English word "grammatical" – not that they were illiterate; but not formally schooled in the Rabbinical system

2. No Professional Training
"*and untrained men,*"
καὶ ἰδιῶται,

Stott: laymen or unprofessional; common, ordinary folks – nothing special in the way of brilliance and debating skill

We have same prejudice against laymen in Christian circles today – people want to protect their turf; Remember it is God who gives out the credentials and the enablement and the giftedness; Seminaries have their role but we don't want the lack of a degree to be a disqualification for effectively developing and using your spiritual gift

Same charge leveled against Jesus by the Jews: **John 7:15** "*How has this man become learned, having never been educated?*" – Jesus pointed them back to the ultimate authority and empowering and enlightening of His Heavenly Father (Matt. 7:28-29; Luke 20:19-26)

C. <u>Marveling</u> at the Bond to Jesus Christ Impresses

"*they were marveling, and began to recognize them as having been with Jesus.*"
ἐθαύμαζον ἐπεγίνωσκόν τε αὐτοὺς ὅτι σὺν τῷ Ἰησοῦ ἦσαν,

Most important credential for Christian leadership – spending intimate time with Jesus – close bond of fellowship and communion; genuine disciple in the way you live; in what you teach; becoming more like Jesus

D. <u>Seeing</u> the Resurrected Phenomenon Leaves Persecutors with no Answer

"*And seeing the man who had been healed standing with them, they had nothing to say in reply.*"
τόν τε ἄνθρωπον βλέποντες σὺν αὐτοῖς ἑστῶτα τὸν τεθεραπευμένον οὐδὲν εἶχον ἀντειπεῖν.

New creature in Jesus Christ
Sanhedrin had thought that this confrontation with the apostles would be a piece of cake; a pushover; ends up with them having nothing to say

Boice: It is hard to miss that Luke used this word "*standing*" intentionally, for emphasis, and perhaps for irony. He could have said merely, "They could see the man who had been healed with them." But this was a man who previously couldn't stand. And there is this too. The Greek word for "*resurrection*" is *anastasis*. The basic part of *anastasis*, *stasis*, is the word for "*standing*." To the Greek mind resurrected people were people who were standing up, as opposed to dead people, who were lying down. So there was a sense in which this "*resurrected*" man was a symbol of the very gospel Peter and the others were proclaiming.

Longenecker: But even the miraculous is not self-authenticating apart from openness of heart

and mind; and the Sadducees' preoccupation with protecting their vested interests shut them off from really seeing the miracle that occurred.

Toussaint: The apostles were thus experiencing what Christ had promised (Matt. 10:19-20; Luke 12:11-12; 21:12-15).

Sanhedrin needs to come up with a plan of action; this business about Jesus and the resurrection has proven to be more of a pain than they bargained for

II. (:15-17) NO RECOURSE -- INTIMIDATING SCHEMING PERSECUTORS SEEK TO PUT A LID ON CHRISTIAN TESTIMONY – WHAT CAN BE DONE TO STOP THE SPREAD OF CHRISTIANITY?

A. (:15-16) The Problem Faced by God's Enemies

"*But when they had ordered them to go aside out of the Council, they began to confer with one another, saying, "What shall we do with these men? For the fact that a noteworthy miracle has taken place through them is apparent to all who live in Jerusalem, and we cannot deny it.*"

κελεύσαντες δὲ αὐτοὺς ἔξω τοῦ συνεδρίου ἀπελθεῖν συνέβαλλον πρὸς ἀλλήλους λέγοντες· τί ποιήσωμεν τοῖς ἀνθρώποις τούτοις; ὅτι μὲν γὰρ γνωστὸν σημεῖον γέγονεν δι᾽ αὐτῶν πᾶσιν τοῖς κατοικοῦσιν Ἰερουσαλὴμ φανερὸν καὶ οὐ δυνάμεθα ἀρνεῖσθαι·

Bock: "*Noteworthy*" – refers to an obvious, unusual event, a manifest miracle; points to God's activity

Boice: frustration of the leaders – They had eliminated Jesus, but his influence was still with them – and spreading.

B. (:17) The Pressure of a Gag Order

"*But in order that it may not spread any further among the people, let us warn them to speak no more to any man in this name.*"

ἀλλ᾽ ἵνα μὴ ἐπὶ πλεῖον διανεμηθῇ εἰς τὸν λαὸν ἀπειλησώμεθα αὐτοῖς μηκέτι λαλεῖν ἐπὶ τῷ ὀνόματι τούτῳ μηδενὶ ἀνθρώπων.

Kent: They decided therefore to issue a restraining order prohibiting further speaking of any sort in the name of Christ. The threat was an absolute restriction: they must henceforth speak to no one regarding the message of Christ. It now became illegal to preach the gospel, whether in mass meeting or by personal encounter.

Different if employer warns you against taking work time to distract people and to witness excessively in a way that cuts into your productivity at your job

Bock: One of the effects of hardheartedness is that it not only blocks the individual from responding to God but also can influence others in the same direction.

III. (:18-20) NO REAL AUTHORITY - IRREPRESSIBLE SUBMITTED PREACHERS RECOGNIZE GOD'S AUTHORITY OVER MAN'S – GREAT COMMISSION CANNOT BE OVERRULED!

A. (:18) Bogus Command

"*And when they had summoned them, they commanded them not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus.*"
Καὶ καλέσαντες αὐτοὺς παρήγγειλαν τὸ καθόλου μὴ φθέγγεσθαι μηδὲ διδάσκειν ἐπὶ τῷ ὀνόματι τοῦ Ἰησοῦ.

What did God leave us here on this earth to do?

B. (:19) Appeal to Ultimate Authority

"*But Peter and John answered and said to them, 'Whether it is right in the sight of God to give heed to you rather than to God, you be the judge;*'"
ὁ δὲ Πέτρος καὶ Ἰωάννης ἀποκριθέντες εἶπον πρὸς αὐτούς· εἰ δίκαιόν ἐστιν ἐνώπιον τοῦ θεοῦ ὑμῶν ἀκούειν μᾶλλον ἢ τοῦ θεοῦ, κρίνατε·

Don't make this appeal lightly; if there is a way to comply with the orders of the government without compromising our obedience to God, we need to comply – no matter how painful or uncomfortable or undesirable – this is a very unique circumstance where Civil Disobedience is not only allowed by Required

Remember the counsel of Peter in his epistles about obeying unjust rulers – **1 Pet. 2:13-14**
"*Submit yourselves for the Lord's sake to every human institution, whether to a king as the one in authority, or to governors as sent by him for the punishment of evildoers and the praise of those who do right*."

Remember the example of **Daniel** who would not bow down to King Nebuchadnezzar and disobeyed the edict of the king – did it openly; did it with full acceptance of the consequences; was not trying to foster political rebellion; was not physically fighting the King

Remember the Great Commission

Longenecker: But where that established authority stood in opposition to God's authority, thus becoming in effect demonic, the early believers knew where their priorities lay and judged all religious forms and functions from a Christocentric perspective.

C. (:20) Necessity of Proclaiming Christ

"*for we cannot stop speaking what we have seen and heard."*
οὐ δυνάμεθα γὰρ ἡμεῖς ἃ εἴδαμεν καὶ ἠκούσαμεν μὴ λαλεῖν.

Testimony of Martin Luther – ordered by the Roman Catholic Church to cease preaching a gospel of salvation by grace alone by faith alone; need to add a works component to that message:

"I cannot and will not recant anything, for to go against conscience is neither right nor safe. Here I stand, I can do no other, so help me God. Amen. "

IV. (:21-22) NO RESOLUTION -- IMPRESSIVE SUPERNATURAL POWER FRUSTRATES PERSECUTORS WHILE BRINGING GREAT GLORY TO GOD – GLORY OF GOD CANNOT BE SQUELCHED!

A. Impotence Facing the Frustrated Persecutors -- All Bark and No Bite – nothing they could do

> "*And when they had threatened them further, they let them go*"
> οἱ δὲ προσαπειλησάμενοι ἀπέλυσαν αὐτούς,

Nobody likes to be brought face to face with their own lack of power and helplessness

In later confrontations they add more specific terms to their threat – beatings, etc. **Acts 5:40** – at this point they are all words with no action
The apostles had just called their bluff; exposed them as being without any authority as compared to the supreme authority of God; exposed them as not being legitimate spiritual leaders and not speaking for God at all … all they could do was make empty threats and let them go

B. Irony Facing the Frustrated Persecutors -- Hands Tied Politically

> "*(finding no basis on which they might punish them) on account of the people, because they were all glorifying God for what had happened;*"
> μηδὲν εὑρίσκοντες τὸ πῶς κολάσωνται αὐτούς, διὰ τὸν λαόν, ὅτι πάντες ἐδόξαζον τὸν θεὸν ἐπὶ τῷ γεγονότι·

Searching for some grounds on which to hold these men and punish them – but their popularity made that impossible

Exactly what they did not want to happen was taking place and there was nothing they could do about it – How ironic!
They wanted to shut up any mention of Jesus – but everybody was talking about the great miracle and attributing it to the power of Jesus Christ and making the connection to His deity – resulting in glorifying God

C. Illustration of God's Power Facing the Frustrated Persecutors

> "*for the man was more than forty years old on whom this miracle of healing had been performed.*"
> ἐτῶν γὰρ ἦν πλειόνων τεσσεράκοντα ὁ ἄνθρωπος ἐφ᾽ ὃν γεγόνει τὸ σημεῖον τοῦτο τῆς ἰάσεως.

Could not deny this obvious miracle; it was clearly a work of mercy and compassion; could not be criticized in any way

CONCLUSION:

How are we doing in being **bold** and **courageous** to testify to what we have experienced of Jesus Christ and His power in our lives?
Not difficult to be a witness – just need to speak up – doesn't mean that we won't experience any fear … just that we will be faithful and trust God and be more concerned with pleasing Him

SUPERNATURAL POWER OF JESUS CHRIST CANNOT BE EFFECTIVELY OPPOSED – CHRISTIAN TESTIMONY CANNOT BE SILENCED --

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DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

1) What contributed to the tremendous confidence of Peter and John?

2) What factors need to be considered before participating in any form of civil disobedience?

3) When have you been confronted with the hard choice of whether to obey God rather than submit to the pressure of man?

4) How do the enemies of the gospel try to confuse the issues and raise smokescreens to disguise the fact that they have no real answer for a resurrected Jesus Christ?

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QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Bock: These first-century Spirit-filled men knew their calling and would not be deterred. They would serve and preach God's way through Jesus, the only one through whom salvation comes. They show that suffering is not to be feared, nor is it necessarily an indication of failure. In fact, it may well come with the territory of sharing the need for Jesus in a world that seeks self-sufficiency (John 15:20). God has not called them to preach a gospel without sacrifice. If Jesus, the servant and example, experienced sacrifice and rejection by many, should those who follow him expect anything different? Those who minister with an appreciation of this truth and let God use his people as his vessels will not fear being poured out in whatever manner God calls for.

Wiersbe: All of us need to follow Peter's example and make our decisions on the basis of "Is it right?" and not "Is it popular?" or "Is it safe?" However, we must be sure that we have the clear teaching of the Word of God on our side before we take a stand against the authority of the government. Peter knew what the Lord had commanded the believers to do (**Acts 1:8**), and he was going to obey Him at any cost.

Martyn Lloyd-Jones:
Reasons for the defiance of the authorities here by the apostles:
1) Lord had commanded them to preach; they understood the message; they had been personally transformed by the gospel and power of Christ; they had compassion for the lost condition of the people; Have to give an account before judgment seat of Christ
2) Not to preach would have made life not worth living; "*To me to live is Christ*"
3) They were no longer afraid of death

How can Unbelief and Rejection be explained?
1) Look at the spirit of **prejudice** that animated these Sanhedrin leaders; antagonistic; defensive; goes beyond unbelief to outright persecution; claim to be objective and open-minded and scientific when they are exactly the opposite
2) **Unreasonableness** of unbelief – rejecting facts (resurrection of Jesus, healing of lame man), not opinions or theories; these things were "seen and heard;" What is your objection in terms of reason? Look at the results in terms of transformed lives; Look at the persistence of the church

down through the ages; Look at what the Christian church has accomplished for good in the world
3) Look at the **bankruptcy** of unbelief – just making dogmatic arrogant assertions with no basis; Can be explained only on the basis of the Fall having blinded and corrupted man's thinking; You need to judge for yourself and be prepared to receive the consequences of your action. If you reject Jesus, you will probably be popular in the schoolroom tomorrow morning, or in the bar, or in the office, or in the factory. But people there are not your judges; God is your judge, and you will have to explain to Him

Dan Broadwater: **Embracing and Sharing the Story**
This text has to do with courage; Drucker: no organization can depend on genius; must enable common men to do uncommon things; Christians seem to be speaking less and less; Fear has very little to do with courage and whether or not God is eager to use you to speak in spite of your fears; Story begins with two men having great courage; How do we move from fear to boldness and courage; How do we get courage in us? Hanging out with Jesus; Regular, ordinary people; 1 Cor. 1:25; God is not real interested in higher institutions of learning; going into battle, God says: "You have too many; cut some down so you depend on Me;" If you think you are too small to have an impact, try going to bed with a mesquite in the room; God using these men to speak against the professionals of the religious establishment; Christian courage can be courageous

Clark Tanner: **The Confidence of Peter and John**
Peter and John and the others stood before thousands, and then stood before those who would most strongly oppose them in those early days, and were able to say, not with cockiness or self-aggrandizing, but in cheerful courage and freedom of speech, 'we must obey God rather than men', because their confidence was established on what they knew in their hearts to be true, based on their own investigation and examination over a period of more than three years, and confirmed by the witness and testimony of the Holy Spirit in them, who points to truth and exposes error.

CONFIDENCE MISPLACED

In sharp contrast were the Pharisees and the Sadducees, whose confidence was in self and the knowledge that self can gain, which is always, being subject to the sin nature, colored and confined by man's prejudices, preconceptions and previous input from others.

They had a religion without power. The cold, dead letter of the Law. Their pride was in their tenacious study and adherence to the Law and their study of the prophets, and although Christ was on every page of those scrolls, they couldn't see it, and they weren't about to let anyone change their thinking.

Confidence, misplaced, is like bungee jumping off an 80 foot cliff with a 90 foot cord.
What good does it do me to have confidence in error? None. Worse, it is dangerous to me and my relationships with others.

The Master's Bible Church: **The Power of Conviction**
Convictions are non-negotiable beliefs that can powerfully impact a world of preferences;
I. (:13-14) The Sanhedrin's Problem – Jesus was a nuisance that would not go away; like trying to stomp out an oil fire; the more you stomp on it the more it spreads; Look at their

reaction:
1. Observed – our word *theater* – nothing more than an amusing spectacle for them; a couple of unlearned men trying to debate with their high-powered leaders; "*Confidence*" = no equivocation, no hesitation; freedom in speaking;
2. Understanding – scribes were expert at debate; this will be fun; we will easily put these guys down;
3. Marveling – Not only were Peter and John confident but pretty competent also
4. Recognizing them as having been with Jesus – now fun was over for the Sanhedrin; Jesus was back, personified in these two ordinary fishermen from Galilee; "*Jesus appointed 12 that they might be with Him*"; Luke 6:40; shared convictions and confidence and power of Jesus; they were so much like Jesus; pesky lame man made it difficult for them to refute what the apostles were saying; opponents left with absolutely nothing to say = their enormous problem; they had to come up with a plan

II. (:15-16) The Sanhedrin's Plan to Solve Their Problem = Threaten them with Threats
Need solution for this thorny, unpleasant problem; coming together for counsel was a wise thing for them to do; did not even consider the option of repentance and embracing Christ; they had immersed themselves in the darkness of deception; used word for sign miracle; they refused to believe in Jesus to whom this sign pointed; how could they have so lost touch with reality? **John 3:19** – they were under God's judgment; let us threaten them with a threat – meaningless, but it was all they had; Acts 5:40 they get more severe and threaten them with a beating; here nothing specific threatened; their helpless ability to control the situation; they had to stop the incriminating truth that they had killed the Messiah; used medical terms that referred to cancer; the truth that Jesus had returned from the dead and was saving people was viewed by the Sanhedrin as a cancer

III. (:17-20) The Sanhedrin's Perplexity -- Difficulty for compromisers to deal with those who refuse to compromise; they don't understand that type of conviction approach; speak and teach both refer to public communication; if apostles had complied, church history would have gone a different route; church would have collapsed; everything hinged on willingness of apostles to be witnesses for Jesus; even to do so when they received threats like this; they had no intention of obeying the Sanhedrin – told them this while still in their custody; apostles had no other option – God = highest authority; Sanhedrin never gave an answer – it was obvious and they didn't dare say to disobey God; they were on horns of a dilemma; Peter had indicted them for being at odds with the God they claimed to serve; "*We cannot stop speaking*" – direct command from Christ; witnesses have a very easy job; need to be faithful witnesses; example of Martin Luther – commanded to no longer teach salvation by grace alone, by faith alone; you have to include works in there: "Unless I am convicted by Scripture …. I will not recant …"

IV. (:21-22) The Sanhedrin's Paralysis – Impotent; unable to take any sort of official action against Peter and John; "*not finding the how we might punish them*" so that the people won't react against us; needed an excuse or at least a reason for doing it; checkmated by Peter and John; no possibility of faking his healing
http://www.mastersbible.com/MP3s/18Acts4.13-22.mp3

TEXT: Acts 4:23-31

TITLE: CHURCH PRAYER THE KEY TO MISSIONARY POWER

BIG IDEA:
PERSECUTION UNITES THE CHURCH TO PRAY TO THE SOVEREIGN GOD FOR SPIRIT-FILLED MISSIONARY POWER

INTRODUCTION:
Like my family, you have probably attended many missionary conferences. You have heard the reports of those who served on the foreign field in pioneering efforts, blazing a trail for the reception of the gospel of Jesus Christ. You have heard of the difficulties and opposition which they faced. You have been challenged to support the missionaries – not only financially – but even more importantly – in prayer for specific needs. You have encouraged these missionaries to continue to persevere and proclaim the Gospel with boldness and courage.

Here is the account of the very first missionary conference. But the people involved had much more than just an academic interest. They had skin in the game. Peter and John had not yet crossed cultural lines; they were still ministering in Jerusalem – preaching the fact and significance of the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus Christ and even being used by God to perform works of healing. Now they had encountered the initial rumblings of intimidation and persecution. Dragged before the Sanhedrin, they were commanded to stop preaching in the name of Jesus. They were threatened with severe consequences if they refused to cease and desist. How would these apostolic leaders respond to this challenge? The people listening to Peter and John had feared for their safety – uncertain of how things would turn out before the Sanhedrin. Now they needed confidence and boldness to fulfill the Great Commission.

PERSECUTION UNITES THE CHURCH TO PRAY TO THE SOVEREIGN GOD FOR SPIRIT-FILLED MISSIONARY POWER

3 MISSIONARY ACTIVITIES WHEN CONFRONTED WITH PERSECUTION:
Each introduced by a short connective clause that gives the reason or occasion for that activity:

(:23) "*And when they had been released,*" leads to **Missionary Playback**
(:24) "*And when they heard this,*" leads to **Missionary Prayer**
(:31) "*And when they had prayed,*" leads to **Missionary Power**

I. (:23) MISSIONARY PLAYBACK (REPORT) UNEDITED
The Reason for the Missionary Activity (the Occasion) = After Release from Unfriendly Custody

"*And when they had been released,*"
Ἀπολυθέντες δὲ

A. The Reunion = The Christian Community

"*they went to their own companions,*"
ἦλθον πρὸς τοὺς ἰδίους

This group probably included more than just the other apostles – not sure how many believers were gathered together – probably praying for a successful outcome for Peter and John; sense of excitement and anticipation when you are in the front lines of trying to reach people for Jesus Christ; apart from being immersed in the activity of witnessing, the church quickly loses its vitality

Look at how Jesus regarded those in the family of God as "His own"
John 13:1 *"Now before the Feast of the Passover, Jesus knowing that His hour had come that He should depart out of this world to the Father, having loved His own who were in the world, He loved them to the end.*"

Genuine believers view people as being in either the camp of the unsaved or the believing Christian community – unbelievers do not look at the world in that type of dichotomy

B. The Report = Blow by Blow Account
"*and reported all that the chief priests and the elders had said to them.*"
καὶ ἀπήγγειλαν ὅσα πρὸς αὐτοὺς οἱ ἀρχιερεῖς καὶ οἱ πρεσβύτεροι εἶπαν.

Carrying back word from a happening

We have all heard missionary reports where the details had been edited to make the situation appear as positive and encouraging as possible

Did not sugar coat things; did not put some type of spin on what was said. They were able to deal with the reality of the threats because they trusted in a higher authority.

They were in a partnership – a fellowship of gospel ministry – and everybody was interested in the details

Notice their response: not wringing their hands in anxiety; not spending time speculating what course of action they should take or how would things play out

II. (:24-30) MISSIONARY PRAYER UPLIFTED

(:24a) The Reason for the Missionary Activity = After Hearing the Intimidating Threats
"*And when they heard this,*"
οἱ δὲ ἀκούσαντες

A. (:24b) Prayer for Missionary Success Directed in Unity to the Creator of the Universe – Addressed to Sovereign God of Historic Creation
"*they lifted their voices to God with one accord and said, 'O Lord, it is Thou who didst make the heaven and the earth and the sea, and all that is in them,*'"
ὁμοθυμαδὸν ἦραν φωνὴν πρὸς τὸν θεὸν καὶ εἶπαν· δέσποτα, σὺ ὁ ποιήσας τὸν οὐρανὸν καὶ τὴν γῆν καὶ τὴν θάλασσαν καὶ πάντα τὰ ἐν αὐτοῖς,

"*With one accord*" -- With one mind, one purpose, by common consent – Acts 1:14; 2:46; 5:12

Recall Hezekiah's prayer in **Is. 37:16-20**

(Exod.20:11; Neh. 9:6; Ps. 146:6; Isa. 37:16)

Kent: "*despot*" = absolute ruler

Stott: a term used of a slave owner and a ruler of unchallengeable power. The Sanhedrin might utter warnings, threats and prohibitions, and try to silence the church, but their authority was subject to a higher authority still, and the edicts of men cannot overturn the decrees of God.

Bock: The Greek term does not have the negative connotation of the English.

Importance of maintaining Biblical view of Origins -- **Creation** – look at how evolution drains passages like this of this force and application

Deffinbaugh: Jeremiah chapter 32 contains a rather striking parallel to our text. Here Jeremiah is thrown into jail by Zedekiah, king of Judah, for prophesying that Jerusalem and Israel would fall to the Babylonians. The people of Israel were instructed not to resist this (32:1-6). In response to all that happened, Jeremiah prayed, beginning with these words:

"'*Ah Lord God! Behold, Thou hast made the heavens and the earth by Thy great power and by Thine outstretched arm! Nothing is too difficult for Thee, …*'" (**Jeremiah 32:17**).

The key phrase, based on the fact that God is the Creator of the heavens and the earth is this: "**Nothing is too difficult for Thee."** To Jeremiah and to the other Old Testament saints who found assurance in the fact that God is the Creator, the bottom line was simply that He who could create all things could also control them. Here he was predicting the downfall of Jerusalem, just as the apostles would do centuries later. And just as the king was persecuting Jeremiah, so the political and religious authorities were persecuting the apostles. And just as Jeremiah prayed to the Creator of the heavens and the earth, so did the early church.

B. Prayer for Missionary Success Based on Prophetic Historical Perspective and Providential Fulfillment
– Addressed to Sovereign God of Prophetic Revelation

1. (:25-26) Prophecy of Opposition to Christ – Emphasis on the Futility of the Opposition vs. the Supremacy of Christ

> "*who by the Holy Spirit, through the mouth of our father David Thy servant, didst say, 'Why did the Gentiles rage, And the peoples devise futile things? The kings of the earth took their stand, And the rulers were gathered together against the Lord, and against His Christ.*"
>
> ὁ τοῦ πατρὸς ἡμῶν διὰ πνεύματος ἁγίου στόματος Δαυὶδ παιδός σου εἰπών· ἱνατί ἐφρύαξαν ἔθνη καὶ λαοὶ ἐμελέτησαν κενά; [2]παρέστησαν οἱ βασιλεῖς τῆς γῆς καὶ οἱ ἄρχοντες συνήχθησαν ἐπὶ τὸ αὐτὸ κατὰ τοῦ κυρίου καὶ κατὰ τοῦ χριστοῦ αὐτοῦ.

"*rage*" – literally of the actions of a high-spirited horse; snort and neigh; stomp; Breeder's Cup races yesterday – filly Zenyatta was undefeated in 19 races – finally beaten by a nose … see all of these horses prance around before being loaded into the gate; some high-spirited, difficult to control majestic animals;

figuratively: be arrogant, be insolent; to rave; to be incensed;

"*devise futile things*" -- Plot empty things, conspire; empty, futile, without results
The Lord laughs at their futile opposition; He was not worried by the empty words of the Sanhedrin; the rulers of this earth owe their next breath to the master of the universe; they are but dust

Why do we arrogantly think we can oppose God and His plan of salvation? Why do we try to run our lives without submitting to His rule? Why do we think that our rebellion will go unchecked? Why do we rage and waste our life in futile pursuits? The end game is no surprise – God has revealed to us what will take place in the future. We have already seen the fulfillment of the prophecies relating to the first coming of Christ.

Bock; "*Messiah*" points to Davidic messianic authority especially as it relates to the arrival in power of the kingdom and the defeat of evil. "*Servant*" points to one who, like David, obeyed God and was fully at his disposal, and it points to his suffering as well. Just as David had enemies, as Ps. 2 notes, so did Jesus. Both figures, however, were God's chosen and anointed.

Wiersbe: Psalm 2 describes the revolt of the nations against the Lord and His Christ. The psalm originally grew out of the crowning of a new king in Israel, perhaps David, but its ultimate message points to the King of Kings, Jesus Christ. Whenever a new king was enthroned, the vassal rulers around were required to come and submit to him, but some of them refused to do this. God only laughed at their revolt, for He knew that they could never stand up against His King.

-- Addressed to Sovereign God of Historical Fulfillment

2. (:27-28) Fulfillment of Opposition to Christ – Emphasis on the Sovereignty of God

> "*For truly in this city there were gathered together against Thy holy servant Jesus, whom Thou didst anoint, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, along with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel,* ***to do whatever Thy hand and Thy purpose predestined to occur."*** **[this is key portion]**
>
> συνήχθησαν γὰρ ἐπ᾽ ἀληθείας ἐν τῇ πόλει ταύτῃ ἐπὶ τὸν ἅγιον παῖδά σου Ἰησοῦν ὃν ἔχρισας, Ἡρῴδης τε καὶ Πόντιος Πιλᾶτος σὺν ἔθνεσιν καὶ λαοῖς Ἰσραήλ, ποιῆσαι ὅσα ἡ χείρ σου καὶ ἡ βουλή [σου] προώρισεν γενέσθαι.

"*Thy hand*" – in the sense of power and control

"*predestined*" – **Rom. 8:29-30;**
1 Corinthians 2:7 *"but we speak God's wisdom in a mystery, the hidden wisdom, which God predestined before the ages to our glory;*"

Deffinbaugh: The reference to Herod harks back to the account in **Luke 23:7-12**, where Pilate, learning that Jesus is a Galilaean, performs a diplomatic courtesy by referring him to Herod. Luke is the only one of the four evangelists who gives Herod a role in the passion narrative.

C. Prayer for Missionary Success Seeks Specific Enablements

1. (:29a) Caring Protection -- Awareness of the Dangerous Circumstances

> "*And now, Lord, take note of their threats,*"

καὶ τὰ νῦν, κύριε, ἔπιδε ἐπὶ τὰς ἀπειλὰς αὐτῶν

"*take note*" -- fix one's glance upon; concern oneself with
Jeremiah 48:19 "*Stand by the road and keep watch, O inhabitant of Aroer; Ask him who flees and her who escapes And say, 'What has happened?*'

Identification of the sufferings of the apostles with the sufferings of Christ

Bock: The request is that God take notice of the situation, as God did of Elizabeth's disgrace when she was childless (**Luke 1:25** – only other NT usage). . . The community leaves to God the moral judgment of the opponents and their actions. It does not pray explicitly for opponents to be crushed, nor does it seek to be spared opposition. It asks to face the opposition and suffering faithfully.

2. (:29b) Confident Proclamation

"*and grant that Thy bond-servants may speak Thy word with all confidence,*"
καὶ δὸς τοῖς δούλοις σου μετὰ παρρησίας πάσης λαλεῖν τὸν λόγον σου,"

This is the task that has been left to us – boldness, openness of speech, not holding anything back, no reluctance or shame

Phillips Brooks: "Pray to be stronger men and women. Do not pray for tasks equal to your powers. Pray for powers equal to your tasks"

3. (:30) Charismatic Performances

"*while Thou dost extend Thy hand to heal, and signs and wonders take place through the name of Thy holy servant Jesus.*"
ἐν τῷ τὴν χεῖρά [σου] ἐκτείνειν σε εἰς ἴασιν καὶ σημεῖα καὶ τέρατα γίνεσθαι διὰ τοῦ ὀνόματος τοῦ ἁγίου παιδός σου Ἰησοῦ.

Answered in **5:12**

Stott: Certainly the thrust of the Bible is that miracles clustered round the principal organs of revelation at fresh epochs of revelation, particularly Moses the lawgiver, the new prophetic witness spearheaded by Elijah and Elisha, the Messianic ministry of Jesus, and the apostles, so that Paul referred to his miracles as "*the things that mark an apostle*."

III. (:31) MISSIONARY POWER UNLEASHED

The Reason for the Missionary Activity = After Praying to the Sovereign God

"*And when they had prayed,*"
καὶ δεηθέντων αὐτῶν

Not some quick shout-out; not some period of meditation without any conscious thought; this was an extended season of intelligent and audible prayer that had a beginning point and now an ending point; they have addressed the God they knew personally and had laid out very specific requests

The Results – Specific Answers
Do we expect answers from our prayers??

Illustration:
Shortly after Dallas Theological Seminary was founded in 1924, it almost came to the point of bankruptcy. All the creditors were going to foreclose at noon on a particular day. That morning they met in the president's office for prayer that God would provide. In that prayer meeting was a man by the name of Harry Ironside. When it was his turn to pray, he said, "Lord, we know that the cattle on a thousand hills are Thine. Please sell some of them and send us the money." While they were praying a tall Texan stepped up to the business office and said, "I just sold two carloads of cattle in Ft. Worth. I've been trying to make a business deal but it fell through and I feel compelled to give the money to the seminary. I don't know if you need it or not, but here's the check!" The secretary took the check and knowing how critical things were financially, went to the door of the prayer meeting and timidly tapped. When she finally got a response, the president took the check out of her hand. It was exactly the amount of the debt! When he looked at the name, he recognized the cattleman and turning to Dr. Ironside said, "Harry, God sold the cattle!"
http://www.sermoncentral.com/sermons/the-key-to-victory-in-the-church-bruce-howell-sermon-on-prayer-adoration-43140.asp?Page=2

A. Impressive Power – Lord has Power to Protect – Fear Him / Not Man
"*the place where they had gathered together was shaken,*"
ἐσαλεύθη ὁ τόπος ἐν ᾧ ἦσαν συνηγμένοι,

outward indication of the Spirit's presence; more than just a natural earthquake; supernatural phenomenon that indicated the presence of the living and all-powerful God

Bock: The shaking of the place of prayer is an unusual sign of confirmation (in the OT: **Isa. 6:4**; **Exod. 19:18** – Sinai quakes at God's presence).

How does God manifest His power when we pray as a church?

B. Inward Power – Charismatic Performances Rooted in Holy Spirit
"*and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit,*"
καὶ ἐπλήσθησαν ἅπαντες τοῦ ἁγίου πνεύματος

Kent: an operation of the Spirit which enabled them to perform their ministries at full effectiveness

This sovereign, special filling that extended to the whole community of believers is similar but not identical to the command to individual believers in Ephes. 5:18 to make it their responsibility to have their lives controlled by the Holy Spirit – not identical experiences

Similar to the experience at Pentecost … a fresh filling of the Spirit accomplished by sovereign initiative of God … but not a second baptism

C. Impactful Power – Confident Proclamation
"*and began to speak the word of God with boldness.*"

καὶ ἐλάλουν τὸν λόγον τοῦ θεοῦ μετὰ παρρησίας.

Imperf. Tense – continued, ongoing activity of speaking

CONCLUSION:

Norris Harris: **Illustration**:

I read that in a certain cotton factory, the management had sign posted everywhere that said, "If you get your threads tangled, Send for the Boss." There was a new worker who got her threads tangled, so she tried to untangle the threads herself. But the more she tried to untangle them, she only made the problem worse. Then when she recognized she couldn't handle the problem, she sent for boss. So, he came in and looked at her tangled threads and asked her why she didn't send for him when her threads first got tangled? She said she had done her best to untangle them herself. But he told her, "No you didn't. Because doing your best was sending for me."

Many times we get our Threads Tangled. We can't handle our Problems. The more we try to unknot our tangles, the knottier they get. We just can't handle Our Problems! No matter how small the problem is, we can't handle it; all we can do is mess it up. That's why the Lord says "In all your ways acknowledge Him, and He will direct your path." Whenever a problem comes up, **Send For the Boss**!

Are we tuned in to the Report of God's saving activity through His servants?
Are we dedicated to praying for the spread of the gospel?
Are we speaking the Word of God with power and confidence and boldness?

*** * * * * * * * * ***

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

1) How does prayer serve to alleviate our fears and anxieties and embolden us to witness for Christ?

2) Do we follow a consistent pattern of unified, corporate prayer that has powerful effects?

3) Are we confident in God's sovereign overruling of all of history so that the details of our circumstances fall under His governance?

4) Do we tend to pray more for deliverance from pressure or boldness to use our circumstances to proclaim God's truth?

* * * * * * * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Bock: In sum, this prayer is an expression of complete dependence on God, a recognition of his sovereignty, a call for God's justice and oversight in the midst of opposition, for an enablement for mission, and for the working of his power to show that God is behind the preaching of the name of Jesus in healing and signs. The prayer has roots in Hezekiah's prayer in **Isa. 37:16-20**.

It is a mark of success for the community that in preaching the word its members have walked the path of Jesus and have suffered rejection. The reliance on God, the resting in God's justice, the willingness to suffer persecution, the desire to preach Jesus, and the call to God to show himself – all are signs of a healthy community. The presence of rejection and opposition is not a surprise, nor is it sought, but suffering is embraced when it comes from God. Turning to God leads to boldness.

Wiersbe: Characteristics of this great and powerful prayer

- Arose out of witness and service to the Lord; sense of danger and urgency
- United prayer meeting
- Based solidly on the Word of God
- Did not ask to have their circumstances changed, but asked for empowerment to accomplish what God had already determined to do

Steven Cole: The Bible clearly affirms the absolute sovereignty of God. Nothing happens apart from God's ordaining it to happen. The Baptist Confession of Faith of 1689 (rewritten in modern English as A Faith to Confess [Carey Publications], p. 20) puts it this way:

> From all eternity God decreed all that should happen in time, and this He did freely and unalterably, consulting only His own wise and holy will. Yet in so doing He does not become in any sense the author of sin, nor does He share responsibility for sin with sinners. Neither, by reason of His decree, is the will of any creature whom He has made violated; nor is the free working of second causes put aside; rather is it established. In all these matters the divine wisdom appears, as also does God's power and faithfulness in effecting that which He has purposed.

Some try to argue that God foreknows everything, including our salvation, but He did not foreordain everything. What happens comes from man's free will. But this passage (along with many others) clearly refutes that notion. As Calvin points out (Calvin's Commentaries [Baker], Acts, 1:187), Luke adds the word "hand" here to make the point that this event was not only governed in a passive way by God's purpose, but also actively by His power. God predestines all things, even the evil deed of crucifying His anointed one, Jesus. And yet He is in no way responsible for the evil that the men who murdered Jesus committed. They intended it for evil, and they will be judged according to the evil intent of their hearts. But God sovereignly overruled it to accomplish His eternal purpose, remaining untainted by their sin.

G. Campbell Morgan: Being let go they came to their own company, a company of those who in all probability during the hours of their imprisonment had been in prayer for them, perhaps with a great deal of fear in their hearts. . . They knew that the hostility that was stirred against them was determined and definite and daring; that as it had stopped at nothing in order to silence the voice of the Supreme Teacher, so now it would stop at nothing in order to silence the voices of those who were repeating what He had said, with the added argument and force of their declaration of His resurrection. . . These were the things in which they believed: the sovereignty of God, the wisdom of God, the active government of God; and these convictions concerning God, inspired their prayer. . . convictions concerning Jesus: His sinlessness, His Messiahship, and His accomplishment through Death of the Will of God. . . These men were filled with a new consciousness, and a new actuality of the presence and power of the Spirit; with the result that they went out, and spoke the Word of God with boldness.

John Hamby: **When a Church Prays**

I. (:23-24) Prayer as a Response to God

A. They were thankful for God's deliverance

B. They were united in their desires

II. (:24-28) Prayer as Recognition of God

A. Recognized His Sovereignty as the God of Creation

B. Recognized His Sovereignty as the God of Revelation

C. Recognized His Sovereignty as the God of History

III. (:29-31) Prayer as a Request of God

A. They prayed to have the chance to continue to serve

B. They prayed with the expectation of results

Martyn Lloyd-Jones: The ultimate object of the Christian faith is to bring us all to a **knowledge of God**. If we have not come to this knowledge, then, to say the very least, our Christianity is defective. These early Christians had a living, vital knowledge of God. In their extremity they went to Him with an amazing assurance. There was no panic, nothing frantic, nothing excitable about them; they were as cool as could be, and in this quiet confidence they spoke to God and knew Him.

- Knew God as the living God
- Knew God as the all-powerful God, the sovereign Lord of the whole universe; the one who continues to control and sustain all things
- Knew God as the one who has revealed Himself not only in a general sense in nature but in very specific detail in the Bible; value of prophecy
- Knew God as the one orchestrating all of history
- Knew God as the one who revealed Himself in the person of Jesus Christ
- Knew God as a result of a personal experience that continues to transform their lives

The trouble with the world is their fatal ignorance of God. They are motivated by rebellion against God's laws and enmity against His person. They delude themselves with a sense of self-confidence and thus act in complete futility in opposing God's kingdom.

The Son of God is holding out His hand to you know. "*Kiss the Son*," my friend. Give up your rebellion, submit yourself to Him, take the oath of allegiance, and trust Him. In your bewilderment, in your confusion, in your unhappiness, simply believe that Jesus of Nazareth is the eternal Son of God and that He came into the world to save you. Accept His message, believe the Gospel as it is, become a little child, and surrender yourself to Him. Trust Him to save you, trust Him to keep you, trust Him to share His eternal glory with you. Then immediately begin to serve Him. "*Serve the Lord with fear*" and begin to "*rejoice with trembling*" (v. 11). Then you will agree with the last statement in this old psalm: "*Blessed are all they that put their trust in Him*."

TEXT: Acts 4:32 – 5:11

TITLE: NO PLACE FOR SPIRITUAL HYPOCRISY IN THE CHURCH

BIG IDEA:
THE INTEGRITY OF CHURCH FELLOWSHIP REQUIRES SEVERE JUDGMENT OF SPIRITUAL HYPOCRISY

INTRODUCTION:
Halloween has been over for a number of weeks … but many people in the church of Jesus Christ are still wearing a variety of masks. The word *hypocrisy* comes from the Greek ὑπόκρισις (hypokrisis), which means "play-acting"; or "wearing a mask;" saying one thing and doing something else.

"God has given you one face, and you make yourself another." – William Shakespeare

Daily Bread Illustration: Have you checked the labels on your grocery items lately? You may be getting less than you thought. According to *U.S. News & World Report*, some manufacturers are selling us the same size packages we are accustomed to, but they are putting less of the product in the box. For example, a box of well-known detergent that once held 61 ounces now contains only 55. Same size box, less soap.

How something is wrapped doesn't always show us what's on the inside. That's true with people as well. We can wrap ourselves up in the same packaging every day -- nice clothes, big smile, friendly demeanor -- yet still be less than what we appear to be.

Robert Redford was walking one day through a hotel lobby. A woman saw him and followed him to the elevator. "Are you the real Robert Redford?" she asked him with great excitement. As the doors of the elevator closed, he replied, "Only when I am alone!"

Mark Twain: We're all like the moon, we have a dark side we don't want anyone to see.

What is the main thrust of this passage?

- Is this passage primarily about being generous with your material possessions?
- Is it primarily about the importance of telling the truth?
- It is really about the more **fundamental issue of being authentic rather than a spiritual hypocrite**

THE INTEGRITY (AUTHENTICITY, GENUINENESS) OF CHURCH FELLOWSHIP REQUIRES SEVERE JUDGMENT OF SPIRITUAL HYPOCRISY

2 CONTRASTING EXAMPLES RELATING TO THE ISSUE OF SPIRITUAL HYPOCRISY IN THE CHURCH

I. (4:32-37) POSITIVE EXAMPLE – THE INTEGRITY OF CHURCH FELLOWSHIP MARKED BY ABUNDANT GRACE EVIDENCED IN GENEROSITY

A. (:32a) Unity of Believers

"*And the congregation of those who believed were of one heart and soul;*"
Τοῦ δὲ πλήθους τῶν πιστευσάντων ἦν καρδία καὶ ψυχὴ μία,

Fascinating that in the early church we see all believers at almost the same maturity level – it is as if once they are saved they immediately walk in obedience to the truth – where are the ones who are out of step?? Where are the ones walking on the edge between loyalty to Christ and friendship with the world? you certainly don't see this same unity later on in the church at Corinth, etc. What snuck into the church and robbed it of its pristine purity??

Are we united in our faith and in the practical demonstration of our love to one another?

B. (:32b) Sharing of Material Possessions (**Acts 2:43-47**)

"*and not one of them claimed that anything belonging to him was his own; but all things were common property to them.*"
καὶ οὐδὲ εἷς τι τῶν ὑπαρχόντων αὐτῷ ἔλεγεν ἴδιον εἶναι ἀλλ᾽ ἦν αὐτοῖς ἅπαντα κοινά.

This passage makes us **uncomfortable** – especially those of us who have been blessed by God with an abundance of material possessions; what is more important to us? Our fellow brothers and sisters in Christ or our possessions??

Bock: Community life means both mission and mutual care.

Are we actively meeting the needs of one another and sacrificially sharing rather than hoarding what God has entrusted to us?

C. (:33a) Powerful Proclamation of the Gospel – Priority over Material Possessions

"*And with great power the apostles were giving witness to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus,*"
καὶ δυνάμει μεγάλῃ ἀπεδίδουν τὸ μαρτύριον οἱ ἀπόστολοι τῆς ἀναστάσεως τοῦ κυρίου Ἰησοῦ,

Matt. 6:33

Ignored the intimidation and ban of the Sanhedrin

Are we witnessing with the power of the Holy Spirit?

D. (:33b-37) Evidence of Abundant Grace

1. (:33b- 35) General Statement

"*and abundant grace was upon them all. For there was not a needy person among them, for all who were owners of land or houses would sell them and bring the proceeds of the sales, and lay them at the apostles' feet; and they would be distributed to each, as any had need.*"

χάρις τε μεγάλη ἦν ἐπὶ πάντας αὐτούς. οὐδὲ γὰρ ἐνδεής τις ἦν ἐν αὐτοῖς· ὅσοι γὰρ κτήτορες χωρίων ἢ οἰκιῶν ὑπῆρχον, πωλοῦντες ἔφερον τὰς τιμὰς τῶν πιπρασκομένων

καὶ ἐτίθουν παρὰ τοὺς πόδας τῶν ἀποστόλων, διεδίδετο δὲ ἑκάστῳ καθότι ἄν τις χρείαν εἶχεν.

2 Cor. 8:9 "*For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sake He became poor, so that you through His poverty might become rich*."

Note the confidence in the integrity of the apostles; they didn't have any financial oversight board with elaborate checks and balances; it would have been easy for a Judas to have robbed the church treasury; but these were men of impeccable character

Are we experiencing abundant grace?

2. (:36-37) Specific Example – Generosity of Joseph

"*And Joseph, a Levite of Cyprian birth, who was also called Barnabas by the apostles (which translated means, Son of Encouragement), and who owned a tract of land, sold it and brought the money and laid it at the apostles' feet.*"

Ἰωσὴφ δὲ ὁ ἐπικληθεὶς Βαρναβᾶς ἀπὸ τῶν ἀποστόλων, ὅ ἐστιν μεθερμηνευόμενον υἱὸς παρακλήσεως, Λευίτης, Κύπριος τῷ γένει, [37] ὑπάρχοντος αὐτῷ ἀγροῦ πωλήσας ἤνεγκεν τὸ χρῆμα καὶ ἔθηκεν πρὸς τοὺς πόδας τῶν ἀποστόλων.

"*son of*" = Jewish way to denote a person's character: (OT expression "*Son of Belial*")
What a testimony when the apostles are applauding you for your spirit of encouragement – think of the spiritual gift which God has graced you with to bless others – you should be known as the "Son of Powerful Edification" … "Daughter of tender mercy" . . . "Daughter of gracious hospitality" . . . "Son of passionate Soul Winning" . . . "Son of Administrative Organization" . . .

Are we encouraging the believers around us?

Wiersbe: His noble act apparently filled Ananias and Sapphira with envy so that they attempted to impress the church with their giving and ended up being killed.

II. (5:1-11) NEGATIVE EXAMPLE – THE LEAVEN OF SPIRITUAL HYPOCRISY MUST NOT BE ALLOWED TO CORRUPT THE PURITY OF THE CHURCH OF JESUS CHRIST

A. (:1-2) The Deceitful Deed – Pretending to be Spiritual

"*But a certain man named Ananias, with his wife Sapphira, sold a piece of property, and kept back some of the price for himself, with his wife's full knowledge, and bringing a portion of it, he laid it at the apostles' feet.*"

Ἀνὴρ δέ τις Ἀνανίας ὀνόματι σὺν σαπφίρῃ τῇ γυναικὶ αὐτοῦ ἐπώλησεν κτῆμα καὶ ἐνοσφίσατο ἀπὸ τῆς τιμῆς, συνειδυίης καὶ τῆς γυναικός, καὶ ἐνέγκας μέρος τι παρὰ τοὺς πόδας τῶν ἀποστόλων ἔθηκεν.

"*But*" – introducing a contrast; mild connective used here (would have expected *alla* rather than *de*)

All about keeping back things for himself rather than freely sharing with others

Problem: not that they decided to give less than 10% of the purchase price … but trying to **impress everyone** with a higher level of spirituality and commitment than they really had.

Cf. account of Achan in the OT in book of Joshua
Stott: In both narratives an act of deceit interrupts the victorious progress of the people of God. Word has connotation of to misappropriate; same word used in LXX of Achan's theft (**Josh. 7:1**), and in its only other New Testament occurrence it means to steal (**Tit. 2:10**). . . guilty of embezzlement; financial fraud

Wiersbe: It is worth noting that the Lord judges sin severely at the beginning of a new period in salvation history. Just after the tabernacle was erected, God killed Nadab and Abihu for trying to present "*false fire*" to the Lord (Lev. 10). He also had Achan killed for disobeying orders after Israel had entered the Promised Land (Josh. 7). While God was certainly not responsible for their sins, He did use these judgments as warnings to the people, and even to us (1 Cor. 10:11-12).

Cf. teacher laying down the law the first few days in class

But still wanted to look good in the sight of others

What portion did he bring?? Maybe he only kept back a tenth – tithed a tenth to himself – couldn't keep too big a percentage or the theft would be obvious – some people probably knew what property he had owned – wasn't it enough to give the Lord 90%

If you haven't given the Lord 100% you haven't given Him what He requires – concept of **stewardship** is key; are you making decisions based on the reality that it is the Lord's money??

* * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * *

Christ's condemnation of Hypocrisy:

By far, of all preachers and prophets of the Bible, Jesus had the most to say about hypocrisy and hypocrites. Since He didn't mince any words on the subject, but directly confronted the religious hypocrites of His day (the scribes and Pharisees), they hated Him intensely - eventually having Him arrested on trumped up charges. Here is a list of some of the hypocrisy that Jesus spoke against:

- Giving to the poor to be recognized by others (Sermon on the Mount)
  - "So when you give to the poor, do not sound a trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, so that they may be honored by men. Truly I say to you, they have their reward in full." (*Matthew 6:2*)

- Praying in public to be recognized as "God's man"
  - "When you pray, you are not to be like the hypocrites; for they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and on the street corners so that they may be seen by men. Truly I say to you, they have their reward in full." (*Matthew 6:5*)
    "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, because you devour widows' houses, and

for a pretense you make long prayers; therefore you will receive greater condemnation." (*Matthew 23:14*)

- Letting everybody know you are fasting to get recognition by others
  - "Whenever you fast, do not put on a gloomy face as the hypocrites do, for they neglect their appearance so that they will be noticed by men when they are fasting. Truly I say to you, they have their reward in full." (*Matthew 6:16*)

- Complaining about other's behavior when yours is even worse.
  - "You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your brother's eye." (*Matthew 7:5*)
  "Or how can you say to your brother, 'Brother, let me take out the speck that is in your eye,' when you yourself do not see the log that is in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take out the speck that is in your brother's eye. (*Luke 6:42*)

- Pretending to honor God through lip service only
  - "You hypocrites, rightly did Isaiah prophesy of you: 'THIS PEOPLE HONORS ME WITH THEIR LIPS, BUT THEIR HEART IS FAR AWAY FROM ME. 'BUT IN VAIN DO THEY WORSHIP ME, TEACHING AS DOCTRINES THE PRECEPTS OF MEN.'" (*Matthew 15:7-9*)

  And He said to them, "Rightly did Isaiah prophesy of you hypocrites, as it is written: 'THIS PEOPLE HONORS ME WITH THEIR LIPS, BUT THEIR HEART IS FAR AWAY FROM ME. (*Mark 7:6*)

- Testing other people to try to make yourself look superior
  - But Jesus perceived their malice, and said, "Why are you testing Me, you hypocrites?" (*Matthew 22:18*)
  "Shall we pay or shall we not pay?" But He, knowing their hypocrisy, said to them, "Why are you testing Me? Bring Me a denarius to look at." (*Mark 12:15*)

- Deceiving people from knowing God
  - "But woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, because you shut off the kingdom of heaven from people; for you do not enter in yourselves, nor do you allow those who are entering to go in." (*Matthew 23:13*)

- Repressing the poor and widows
  - "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, because you devour widows' houses, and for a pretense you make long prayers; therefore you will receive greater condemnation." (*Matthew 23:14*)

- Teaching proselytes to be hypocrites
  - "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, because you travel around on sea and land to make one proselyte; and when he becomes one, you make him twice as much a son of hell as yourselves." (*Matthew 23:15*)

- Tithing (giving to the church), but neglecting justice and mercy
  - "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you tithe mint and dill and cummin, and have neglected the weightier provisions of the law: justice and mercy and faithfulness; but these are the things you should have done without neglecting the others." (*Matthew 23:23*)

- **Doing everything for show, while really being self-indulgent and unrighteous**
  - "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you clean the outside of the cup and of the dish, but inside they are full of robbery and self-indulgence." (*Matthew 23:25*)
    "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs which on the outside appear beautiful, but inside they are full of dead men's bones and all uncleanness." (*Matthew 23:27*)
    "So you, too, outwardly appear righteous to men, but inwardly you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness." (*Matthew 23:28*)
    "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you build the tombs of the prophets and adorn the monuments of the righteous... Therefore, behold, I am sending you prophets and wise men and scribes; some of them you will kill and crucify, and some of them you will scourge in your synagogues, and persecute from city to city" (*Matthew 23:29*, *34*)

- Treating stock animals better than fellow human beings
  - But the Lord answered him and said, "You hypocrites, does not each of you on the Sabbath untie his ox or his donkey from the stall and lead him away to water him? (*Luke 13:15*)

- Being able to analyze the weather, but unable to distinguish between right and wrong
  - "You hypocrites! You know how to analyze the appearance of the earth and the sky, but why do you not analyze this present time? And why do you not even on your own initiative judge what is right?" (*Luke 12:56-57*)

http://www.godandscience.org/apologetics/why_are_christians_hypocrites.html

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Wiersbe: Ananias means "*God is gracious*," but he learned that God is also holy, and Sapphira

means "*beautiful*," but her heart was ugly with sin.

Understand: Everybody must fight this natural tendency towards spiritual hypocrisy – often spiritual leaders are the worst offenders

B. (:3-10) The Divine Discipline – Exposing and Judging the Hypocrisy

1. Disposition of Ananias (:3-6)

a. (:3-4) Hypocrisy is a Futile Attempt to Fool God

"*But Peter said, 'Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit, and to keep back some of the price of the land? While it remained unsold, did it not remain your own? And after it was sold, was it not under your control? Why is it that you have conceived this deed in your heart? You have not lied to men, but to God.*"'

εἶπεν δὲ ὁ Πέτρος· Ἀνανία, διὰ τί ἐπλήρωσεν ὁ σατανᾶς τὴν καρδίαν σου, ψεύσασθαί σε τὸ πνεῦμα τὸ ἅγιον καὶ νοσφίσασθαι ἀπὸ τῆς τιμῆς τοῦ χωρίου; οὐχὶ μένον σοὶ ἔμενεν καὶ πραθὲν ἐν τῇ σῇ ἐξουσίᾳ ὑπῆρχεν; τί ὅτι ἔθου ἐν τῇ καρδίᾳ σου τὸ πρᾶγμα τοῦτο; οὐκ ἐψεύσω ἀνθρώποις ἀλλὰ τῷ θεῷ.

<u>6 Lessons we learn here about Spiritual Hypocrisy:</u>

- **Spiritual Hypocrisy is energized by Satan**
  Filled with Holy Spirit or with Satan – concept of influencing and controlling your decisions; devil is actively at work attacking God's program of building His church; look at how many people use as the excuse for not becoming a Christian that there are so many hypocrites in the church – They are correct! But just because there are a lot of counterfeit $20 bills, I'm not going to rip my good ones up
- **Spiritual Hypocrisy is a matter of the Heart** – so it can't be fixed by education, by self help programs; all about trying to manipulate the externals to mask what is truly in your heart; need the Spirit of God to give you a new heart;
  Ps. 51:6 God desires "*truth in the innermost being*"
- **Spiritual Hypocrisy never fools God** – it is **Futile** -- even if temporarily it impresses men – characterized here as a lie against God – what arrogance; How God hates it; Man looks on the external appearance and is easily impressed; God looks at the heart and sees us for who we really are; that is why we all need the grace of God and His forgiveness; must care more about what God thinks than what others think of us;
  note the clear support for the Deity of the Holy Spirit here
- **Spiritual Hypocrisy is always connected with other sins** – Here: Greed, covetousness, envy – wanted to keep control of their possessions – spend it on their own selfish lusts; security reasons; etc. – but not motivated by unselfish love for others
- **Spiritual Hypocrisy is intentional** – not an accident; not forced; not caused by environmental factors; here you have an overt conspiracy between a man and his wife; remedy is intentional repentance and faith – no other way to remove the stain of guilt and the judgment of God; requires the new birth that only God can accomplish
- **Spiritual Hypocrisy is a serious offense** – look at how harshly God judged it; many people read this story and can't get over the shock factor – What's the big deal?

b. (:5-6) Hypocrisy Will be Judged Severely

"*And as he heard these words, Ananias fell down and breathed his last; and great fear came upon all who heard of it. 6 And the young men arose*

and covered him up, and after carrying him out, they buried him."

ἀκούων δὲ ὁ Ἀνανίας τοὺς λόγους τούτους πεσὼν ἐξέψυξεν, καὶ ἐγένετο φόβος μέγας ἐπὶ πάντας τοὺς ἀκούοντας. ἀναστάντες δὲ οἱ νεώτεροι συνέστειλαν αὐτὸν καὶ ἐξενέγκαντες ἔθαψαν.

What if God judged hypocrisy in the church this severely today???

Ushers summoned for an unusual task

Were these two **believers** who were disciplined by death or **unbelievers**?? Only God knows -- Boyer: The fact of lying to the Holy Spirit is more easily understood of Christians indwelt by the Spirit than of unbelievers who have no relation to God and certainly have no special relationship to the Holy Spirit.

2. Disposition of Sapphira (:7-10)
    a. (:7-9) Hypocrisy is a Futile Attempt to Fool God

"*Now there elapsed an interval of about three hours, and his wife came in, not knowing what had happened. 8 And Peter responded to her, 'Tell me whether you sold the land for such and such a price?' And she said, 'Yes, that was the price.' Then Peter said to her, 'Why is it that you have agreed together to put the Spirit of the Lord to the test? Behold, the feet of those who have buried your husband are at the door, and they shall carry you out as well.*'"

Ἐγένετο δὲ ὡς ὡρῶν τριῶν διάστημα καὶ ἡ γυνὴ αὐτοῦ μὴ εἰδυῖα τὸ γεγονὸς εἰσῆλθεν. ἀπεκρίθη δὲ πρὸς αὐτὴν Πέτρος· εἰπέ μοι, εἰ τοσούτου τὸ χωρίον ἀπέδοσθε; ἡ δὲ εἶπεν· ναί, τοσούτου. ὁ δὲ Πέτρος πρὸς αὐτήν· τί ὅτι συνεφωνήθη ὑμῖν πειράσαι τὸ πνεῦμα κυρίου; ἰδοὺ οἱ πόδες τῶν θαψάντων τὸν ἄνδρα σου ἐπὶ τῇ θύρᾳ καὶ ἐξοίσουσίν σε.

Why an interval of 3 hours?? Time for them to bury Ananias – not a traditional ceremony – his wife was not even informed or present; what was Sapphira doing during this time?? Looking forward to the praise and acclaim of the church

She figured the best bet was to stick to the same story she and her husband had agreed upon

Do you really want to test whether God knows your heart??? Taking a big risk to think you can lie and try to hide something from your Creator

Great verse for women's lib movement – true equality of the sexes in this historical example; same offense; same penalty; no sexist favoritism on the part of the Judge of all the Earth

    b. (:10) Hypocrisy Will be Judged Severely

"*And she fell immediately at his feet, and breathed her last; and the young men came in and found her dead, and they carried her out and buried her beside her husband.*"

ἔπεσεν δὲ παραχρῆμα πρὸς τοὺς πόδας αὐτοῦ καὶ ἐξέψυξεν· εἰσελθόντες δὲ οἱ

νεανίσκοι εὗρον αὐτὴν νεκρὰν καὶ ἐξενέγκαντες ἔθαψαν πρὸς τὸν ἄνδρα αὐτῆς

Talk about being slain in the Spirit – not your holy laughter and rolling in the aisles type of experience here

Guzik: As much as anything, the lesson of Ananias and Sapphira is that we presume greatly on God when we assume that there is always time to repent, time to get right with God, time to get honest with Him. Any such time given by God is an undeserved gift that He owes no one; we should never assume it will always be there.

C. (:11) The Desired Effect

"*And great fear came upon the whole church, and upon all who heard of these things.*"
καὶ ἐγένετο φόβος μέγας ἐφ᾽ ὅλην τὴν ἐκκλησίαν καὶ ἐπὶ πάντας τοὺς ἀκούοντας ταῦτα.

Great fear – where have I tried to impress others with my spirituality??
God takes sin seriously … do we?

First mention of *ekklesia* in Acts
Constable: This was a common word that writers often used to describe assemblies of people that congregated for political and various other types of meetings. The word "church," like the word "baptism," can refer to more than one thing. Sometimes it refers to the body of Christ as it has existed throughout history, the universal church. Sometimes it refers to Christians living in various places during one particular period of time (e.g., the early church). Sometimes it refers to a group of Christians who live in one area at a particular time, a local church. Here it seems to refer to the local church in Jerusalem.

You can bet that a lot of people heard about these things

George Barkman: **5 Reasons for discipline in the church:**

- Purity = remove contamination from unconfessed sin; Remove the leaven (1 Cor. 5); Healthy body of Christ
- Perspective = Bring everybody back into the right perspective = seriousness of sin from God's perspective
- Preventive measure = keeps others from sinning
- Perception of the world = Testimony of the church to outside world; outside world afraid to fake being a Christian; lines are clearly drawn; understanding that identification with Christ means a commitment to a life of holiness
- Power for the church to continue to grow and prosper

Yet few churches practice any form of church discipline – Result: the church is rampant with spiritual hypocrisy

CONCLUSION:

Illustration: A rather pompous-looking deacon was endeavoring to impress upon a class of boys the importance of living the Christian life. "Why do people call me a Christian?" the man asked. After a moment's pause, one youngster said, "Maybe it's because they don't know you."

Ralph Waldo Emerson: "Every man alone is sincere. At the entrance of a second person,

hypocrisy begins."

George Herbert: Steal the hog, and give the feet for alms.

NO PLACE FOR SPIRITUAL HYPOCRISY IN THE CHURCH

THE INTEGRITY (AUTHENTICITY, GENUINENESS) OF CHURCH FELLOWSHIP REQUIRES SEVERE JUDGMENT OF SPIRITUAL HYPOCRISY

Heb. 4:13 "*There is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are open and laid bare to the eyes of Him with whom we have to do*."

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DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

1) How would the apostles characterize you if they were to name you "Son of . . ." or "Daughter of . . ." ?

2) When we see practical needs in the church are we prompted to give sacrificially?

3) What are some situations where you have been tempted to present yourself as more impressive than you really are?

4) Does your church practice effective church discipline?

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QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Andre Gide: "The true hypocrite is the one who ceases to perceive his deception, the one who lies with sincerity"

George MacDonald: Half of the misery in the world comes from trying to *look*, instead of trying to *be*, what one is not.

Source Unknown: One blistering hot day when they had guests for dinner, Mother asked 4-year old Johnny to return thanks. "But I don't know what to say!" the boy complained. "Oh, just say what you hear me say" his mother replied. Obediently the boy bowed his head and mumbled, "Oh Lord, why did I invite these people over on a hot day like this?"

Stott: We noted at the beginning of chapter 3 that, as soon as the Spirit came upon the church, Satan launched a ferocious counter-attack. Pentecost was followed by persecution. An alternative for this section might be "The strategy of Satan." His strategy was carefully developed. He attacked on three fronts. His first and crudest tactic was physical violence; he tried to crush the church by persecution. His second and more cunning assault was moral corruption or compromise. Having failed to destroy the church from outside, he attempted through Ananias and Sapphira to insinuate evil into its interior life, and so ruin the Christian fellowship. His third and subtlest ply was distraction. He sought to deflect the apostles from

their priority responsibilities of prayer and preaching by pre-occupying them with social administration, which was not their calling. If he had been successful in this, an untaught church would have been exposed to every wind of false doctrine. These then were his weapons – physical (persecution), moral (subversion) and professional (distraction).

Gregory Barkman: **Hypocrites in the Church**
Barnabas: warm and loving and encouraging spirit; certain amount of acclaim that went to him for his generosity; not a mandatory thing; strictly voluntary; wonderful sense of love and care and concern for their brethren in Christ; as needs arose people responded; wanted the same acclaim but were not willing to pay the same price; persecution on the outside not affecting the spiritual growth of the church; devil doing his best to oppose the church – now switches his tactics to attack on the inside; forward progress of church might be stopped by hypocrisy; 2 different acts played out with same three scenes for Ananias and Sapphira

- Hypocritical Deceit (:1-2,7)
- Public Exposure (:3-4,8-9)
- Divine Judgment (:5-6,10-11)

Different heart attitude but trying to act the same on the outside; but it was all a show, a pretense, a lie; concocted a plan; pretending to do the same thing as Barnabas did; chap. 4 filled with the Holy Spirit = controlled by the Word of God; vs. controlled by sinful desires: covetousness, pride, deceit, hypocrisy; You thought you were lying just to Peter and just to the church, but you were lying to God, to the Holy Spirit; immediate judgment; no opportunity to enjoy the money they kept back; no opportunity to repent; no time for a flowery eulogy – he preached his own funeral; judged on the spot by Almighty God
Sapphira came in expecting to hear the applause of the church; making a grand entrance; all of the attention would be upon her; smug in her hypocrisy; unaware she is a widow; hardened in her deceit; given an opportunity to tell the truth; what a sad distortion of God's plan for unity in marriage; don't yield to sin in order to be united to your mate;
Result of all this was very helpful to the church; believers had a new fear of God; unbelievers impacted as well; people on the outside afraid to join the church – don't join for show, for business reasons, for social reasons … against the modern church growth movement; no righteous fear of the church of God or of the God of the church today; the thing that confuses people about the gospel is hypocrisy – that's what the devil uses to keep people from coming to the church; God's appointed leaders stand before the people in the place of God; required to stand for the truth; not playing to the popularity of the people; a church that will not discipline its members will not experience the power of God;

Steven Cole: A 12-year-old boy was waiting for his first orthodontist appointment and was a bit nervous. Apparently he wanted to impress the dentist. On the patient questionnaire, in the space marked "Hobbies," he had written, "Swimming and flossing" (Reader's Digest [8/94], p. 112).
That's a humorous example of how we're all prone to hypocrisy. But spiritual hypocrisy is not humorous; it's a dangerous and deadly sin. The hypocrisy of professing Christians has served as an excuse for many to disregard the claims of Christ, saying, "The church is full of hypocrites." The hypocrisy of Christian leaders has caused many believers to stumble. While Jesus was tender with many notorious sinners, He used scathing language to denounce those guilty of religious hypocrisy.

MacArthur: The church is not perfect. It's not intended to be perfect. It is a hospital for the spiritually sick, who know they're sick. We're not here because we think we're well, we're here because we know we're sick. The church is not what Henry Knox Sherrill once said, when he said, "The church is a nice, clean refrigerator, designed to keep a few select souls from spoiling." That is not the church. The church is imperfect, always has been.

Those of you who have read English history, no doubt have been fascinated by Cromwell. Once a painter was commissioned to paint the portrait of the great Cromwell. And Cromwell, as you may remember, was disfigured by many warts on his face, and was, to put it mildly, quite ugly to look at. The painter, hoping to please Cromwell, left all the warts out of the portrait. When it was delivered to Cromwell, he saw the painting. Biographer records, quote, he said, "Take it away and paint it the warts." . . .

That's the kind of testimony the world should have. I don't want to digress on that point, simply to make it. The message we should be sending to the world is not that we tolerate sin, but that we don't. And that we preach that there is, by the grace of God, a means for complete forgiveness. That's the message. We would like the world to know that sin is a killer, and we have a message of forgiveness.

TEXT: Acts 5:12-42

TITLE: THE UNSTOPPABLE GOSPEL

BIG IDEA:
POWERFUL OPPOSITION TRIES IN VAIN TO SILENCE THE PROCLAMATION OF JESUS CHRIST

INTRODUCTION:

The intensity of the persecution against the new gospel message picks up in this section. The Sadducees just can't tolerate the emphasis on the resurrection of Jesus Christ and their guilt for their role in putting him to death. We are tackling a longer narrative portion this morning – beginning at 5:12 and working through the end of the chapter – over 30 verses – that's a record for me. The apostles have had a taste of jail time earlier. Here they experience a miraculous release but still have to appear before the dreaded Sanhedrin court for another grilling. Despite additional threats and even a severe beating, they continue to persevere in their public preaching ministry.

The **Proclamation** of Jesus Christ is inevitably linked to **Persecution** in some form. But the gospel will ultimately emerge victorious and accomplish its purpose of bringing God's elect to saving, eternal faith. There is no stopping the spread of the gospel. That should be an encouragement to us this morning.

POWERFUL OPPOSITION TRIES IN VAIN TO SILENCE THE PROCLAMATION OF JESUS CHRIST

Different Reactions to the **Impact of Jesus Christ** = the **Proclamation** of Jesus Christ and its Associated **Persecution**:

I. (:12-16) THE IMPACT OF JESUS CHRIST ON THE WATCHING WORLD:
- ATTRACTS THE ATTENTION AND FEAR OF THE WATCHING WORLD
- ADDS NEW BELIEVERS INTO THE CHURCH COMMUNITY
- APPROPRIATES OPPORTUNITIES FOR DELIVERANCE AND BLESSING

A. (:12) Summary of the Powerful Impact of Jesus Christ

"*And at the hands of the apostles many signs and wonders were taking place among the people; and they were all with one accord in Solomon's portico.*"
Διὰ δὲ τῶν χειρῶν τῶν ἀποστόλων ἐγίνετο σημεῖα καὶ τέρατα πολλὰ ἐν τῷ λαῷ. καὶ ἦσαν ὁμοθυμαδὸν ἅπαντες ἐν τῇ στοᾷ Σολομῶντος,

these works of power were not being done in secret; no disputing the reality of the miracles or the connection to the power of Jesus Christ through His appointed apostles

emphasis on unity as we have seen before

Kent: It was an ideal spot for their meetings, being at the religious center of the city and

providing in that vast concourse an opportunity for multitudes of interested people to learn of the church without having to commit themselves prematurely. The performance of signs and wonders by the apostles in this public setting gave the greatest possible exposure to the Christian movement.

B. (:13-16) 3 Different Reactions on the Watching World

1. (:13) Attracts their Attention and Fear

"*But none of the rest dared to associate with them; however, the people held them in high esteem.*"
τῶν δὲ λοιπῶν οὐδεὶς ἐτόλμα κολλᾶσθαι αὐτοῖς, ἀλλ᾽ ἐμεγάλυνεν αὐτοὺς ὁ λαός.

Identification of "*the rest*" –

- Believers other than the apostles – we have been stressing the unity of the church
- Unbelievers -- both phrases refer to "*the people*"

Unbelievers feared associating themselves with the believers because they saw that half-hearted commitment or spiritual hypocrisy was dealt with severely.

2. (:14) Adds New Believers into the Church Community

"*And all the more believers in the Lord, multitudes of men and women, were constantly added to their number;*"
μᾶλλον δὲ προσετίθεντο πιστεύοντες τῷ κυρίῳ, πλήθη ἀνδρῶν τε καὶ γυναικῶν,

Stott: This paradoxical situation has often recurred since then. The presence of the living God, whether manifest through preaching or miracles or both, is alarming to some and appealing to others. Some are frightened away, while others are drawn to faith.

3. (:15-16) Appropriates Opportunities for Deliverance and Blessing

"*to such an extent that they even carried the sick out into the streets, and laid them on cots and pallets, so that when Peter came by, at least his shadow might fall on any one of them. And also the people from the cities in the vicinity of Jerusalem were coming together, bringing people who were sick or afflicted with unclean spirits; and they were all being healed.*"

ὥστε καὶ εἰς τὰς πλατείας ἐκφέρειν τοὺς ἀσθενεῖς καὶ τιθέναι ἐπὶ κλιναρίων καὶ κραβάττων, ἵνα ἐρχομένου Πέτρου κἂν ἡ σκιὰ ἐπισκιάσῃ τινὶ αὐτῶν. συνήρχετο δὲ καὶ τὸ πλῆθος τῶν πέριξ πόλεων Ἰερουσαλὴμ φέροντες ἀσθενεῖς καὶ ὀχλουμένους ὑπὸ πνευμάτων ἀκαθάρτων, οἵτινες ἐθεραπεύοντο ἅπαντες.

Tremendous healing ministry – restricted only by the presence of Peter and the apostles – healing only took place in their presence; healing each and every one – no failures, no lack of power; look how many lives were being touched – each person healed had his own network of relatives and friends – that's how the gospel should spread so effectively – each person whose life is transformed has his own network of relatives and friends and associates (school mates, fellow workers, neighbors, etc.)

MacArthur: The streets of Jerusalem were an incredible sight. Everywhere there were beds occupied by rich and poor alike, all waiting for the apostles to move through town. The inhabitants of Jerusalem actually believed that Peter's shadow could heal. Some ancient peoples

believed that a man's shadow carried his influence, so parents would place their children into the shadow of great men and snatch them away from the shadow of someone they disliked. The text doesn't say that Peter's shadow healed anyone, only that the people believed so. Their actions display a tremendous respect for Peter. Great miracles indeed occurred.

II. (:17-25) THE IMPACT OF JESUS CHRIST ON THE JEALOUS RELIGIOUS ESTABLISHMENT – ATTEMPT TO SILENCE THE MOVEMENT -- INITIAL ATTEMPT AT IMPRISONING THE APOSTLES BACKFIRES IN CONTINUED PROCLAMATION OF THE GOSPEL

A. (:17) Controlled by Jealousy

"*But the high priest rose up, along with all his associates (that is the sect of the Sadducees), and they were filled with jealousy;*"
Ἀναστὰς δὲ ὁ ἀρχιερεὺς καὶ πάντες οἱ σὺν αὐτῷ, ἡ οὖσα αἵρεσις τῶν Σαδδουκαίων, ἐπλήσθησαν ζήλου

wanted to protect their privileged professional role of the religious elite;
resented the growing popularity of the apostles;
threatened by the power and efficacy of the demonstrated healing ministry;
no answer to the claims of the resurrection of Jesus Christ or the references to biblical prophecies;
at a loss to refute the bible interpretations of OT passages

Jealousy is a powerful emotion

John Hamby: Today's text will show that the high priest and his associates were enraged with the apostles for several reasons. **First, the apostles denied their doctrine**. Their preaching on the resurrection of Jesus was in direct conflict with the Sadducees teaching that denied everything supernatural. **Secondly, the apostles defied their authority**. They had given the apostle strict instruction to cease all preaching and teaching in the name of Jesus. That the apostle continued to do so was a slap in the face to their authority. **Third, the apostles denounced their spirituality**. By holding them responsible for the death of Jesus they found them guilty of sin and in need of repentance. **Finally, the apostles were a danger to their domination of the people.** The high priest and his associates, the Sadducees were filled with jealousy as they observed the growing popularity and success of the apostles. As they watched the crowds coming to hear the apostles preach and see them working miracles grew larger. They witnessed how the people held the apostles in high honor, and at the same time felt their own influence shrinking. Something had to be done!!!
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B. (:18) Aggressive in Trying to Confine the Problem

"*and they laid hands on the apostles, and put them in a public jail.*"
καὶ ἐπέβαλον τὰς χεῖρας ἐπὶ τοὺς ἀποστόλους καὶ ἔθεντο αὐτοὺς ἐν τηρήσει δημοσίᾳ

Surprising response to a ministry of compassion and healing; they were helping people; they were standing up for righteousness; they were model citizens – who could be against them?
The problem was not what they were doing … but what they were teaching

This was their second offense; this same body, the Sanhedrin, had commanded them earlier to stop preaching in the name of Jesus; the first time you get off with a warning; the second time you expect that the hammer of judgment will fall

C. (:19-21a) Powerless Against the Divine Mandate to Proclaim the Person of Jesus Christ

> "*But an angel of the Lord during the night opened the gates of the prison, and taking them out he said, 'Go your way, stand and speak to the people in the temple the whole message of this Life.' And upon hearing this, they entered into the temple about daybreak, and began to teach.*"
>
> Ἄγγελος δὲ κυρίου διὰ νυκτὸς ἀνοίξας τὰς θύρας τῆς φυλακῆς ἐξαγαγών τε αὐτοὺς εἶπεν· πορεύεσθε καὶ σταθέντες λαλεῖτε ἐν τῷ ἱερῷ τῷ λαῷ πάντα τὰ ῥήματα τῆς ζωῆς ταύτης. ἀκούσαντες δὲ εἰσῆλθον ὑπὸ τὸν ὄρθρον εἰς τὸ ἱερὸν καὶ ἐδίδασκον.

"*Angel of the Lord*" – probably not a reference to Christ here – look at Acts 9 where it is indicated very clearly that Christ is involved
Didn't just open one gate, but multiple gates – maybe they were held in multiple cells;

Lesson: God holds the keys to whatever prison may be giving you problems, may be enslaving you, may be persecuting you; He has angels sufficient to minister grace and deliverance to you – whatever the depth of your dungeon

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Illustration: A story appeared Moody Bible Institute's devotional magazine *Today in the Word*, (October, 1991, p. 18), the story of John Paton, who was a missionary in the New Hebrides Islands.
•One night hostile natives surrounded the mission station, intent on burning out the Patons and killing them.
•Paton and his wife prayed during that terror-filled night that God would deliver them.
•When daylight came they were amazed to see their attackers leave.
•A year later, the chief of the tribe was converted to Christ. Remembering what had happened, Paton asked the chief what had kept him from burning down the house and killing them. The chief replied in surprise, "Who were all those men with you there?"
•Paton knew no men were present--but the chief said he was afraid to attack because he had seen hundreds of big men in shining garments with drawn swords circling the mission station.

This story sounds eerily like the story of Elisha and his servant in **2 Kings 6**, when the King of Syria sends an army to capture Elisha.
•Elisha's servant wakes up early in the morning and sees chariots and horses surrounding their home.
•He runs to Elisha and says, we're surrounded! We're dead!" Elisha says, oh no, we outnumber them (servant; two of us?). Elisha prays, "Lord, open his eyes!" And we learn, "*Then the Lord opened the servant's eyes, and he looked and saw the hills full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha*." (v. 17).

The point is, "If we could only see the angels. If we would only see all the chariots."
•Maybe we would face life with more confidence in God. Confidence that God is in control.
-- Mark Strauss www.sermoncentral.com
* ** * * * * * * *

Go, tell it on the mountains – not in some cave – be very public in your proclamation

Didn't lose even one day of preaching time – started at daybreak – couldn't wait to get back to the front line action; understood their calling and their mission

D. (:21b-23) Oblivious to God's Effectual Opposition

"*Now when the high priest and his associates had come, they called the Council together, even all the Senate of the sons of Israel, and sent orders to the prison house for them to be brought. But the officers who came did not find them in the prison; and they returned, and reported back, saying, 'We found the prison house locked quite securely and the guards standing at the doors; but when we had opened up, we found no one inside.'*"

Παραγενόμενος δὲ ὁ ἀρχιερεὺς καὶ οἱ σὺν αὐτῷ συνεκάλεσαν τὸ συνέδριον καὶ πᾶσαν τὴν γερουσίαν τῶν υἱῶν Ἰσραὴλ καὶ ἀπέστειλαν εἰς τὸ δεσμωτήριον ἀχθῆναι αὐτούς. οἱ δὲ παραγενόμενοι ὑπηρέται οὐχ εὗρον αὐτοὺς ἐν τῇ φυλακῇ· ἀναστρέψαντες δὲ ἀπήγγειλαν λέγοντες ὅτι τὸ δεσμωτήριον εὕρομεν κεκλεισμένον ἐν πάσῃ ἀσφαλείᾳ καὶ τοὺς φύλακας ἑστῶτας ἐπὶ τῶν θυρῶν, ἀνοίξαντες δὲ ἔσω οὐδένα εὕρομεν.

We clearly see God's sense of humor in this story. The impressive courtroom is called to order; the officials cannot produce the prisoners. They are found – not hiding out or trying to escape – but performing the very activity of preaching publicly that had landed them in jail in the first place.
Ironic that the enemy has no clue what is taking place in the warfare; they go through the motions but are powerless to accomplish their objectives
How could they find the gates "*locked quite securely*" when the angel had opened multiple gates?

E. (:24) Perplexed by Their Inability to Contain the Situation and Perplexed Regarding the Ultimate Outcome

"*Now when the captain of the temple guard and the chief priests heard these words, they were greatly perplexed about them as to what would come of this.*
ὡς δὲ ἤκουσαν τοὺς λόγους τούτους ὅ τε στρατηγὸς τοῦ ἱεροῦ καὶ οἱ ἀρχιερεῖς, διηπόρουν περὶ αὐτῶν τί ἂν γένοιτο τοῦτο.

Worried for their own lives if the prisoners could not be produced.

F. (:25) Embarrassed and Angered by the Blatant Disregard of Their Intimidating Tactics

"*But someone came and reported to them, 'Behold, the men whom you put in prison are standing in the temple and teaching the people!'*"
παραγενόμενος δέ τις ἀπήγγειλεν αὐτοῖς ὅτι ἰδοὺ οἱ ἄνδρες οὓς ἔθεσθε ἐν τῇ φυλακῇ εἰσὶν ἐν τῷ ἱερῷ ἑστῶτες καὶ διδάσκοντες τὸν λαόν.
Their worst fears are realized

III. (:26-32) THE IMPACT OF JESUS CHRIST ON MEN OF BIBLICAL INSIGHT AND CONVICTION (THE APOSTLES) -- THE FOLLOWUP ATTEMPT AT SQUELCHING THE PROCLAMATION OF CHRIST ENDS IN SIMILAR FUTILITY

A. (:26-28) The Test – Low-Key Re-Arrest

Then the captain went along with the officers and proceeded to bring them back without violence (for they were afraid of the people, lest they should be stoned). And when they had brought them, they stood them before the Council. And the high priest questioned them, saying, 'We gave you strict orders not to continue teaching in this name, and behold, you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching, and intend to bring this man's blood upon us.'"

Τότε ἀπελθὼν ὁ στρατηγὸς σὺν τοῖς ὑπηρέταις ἦγεν αὐτοὺς οὐ μετὰ βίας, ἐφοβοῦντο γὰρ τὸν λαὸν μὴ λιθασθῶσιν. Ἀγαγόντες δὲ αὐτοὺς ἔστησαν ἐν τῷ συνεδρίῳ. καὶ ἐπηρώτησεν αὐτοὺς ὁ ἀρχιερεὺς λέγων· [οὐ] παραγγελίᾳ παρηγγείλαμεν ὑμῖν μὴ διδάσκειν ἐπὶ τῷ ὀνόματι τούτῳ, καὶ ἰδοὺ πεπληρώκατε τὴν Ἰερουσαλὴμ τῆς διδαχῆς ὑμῶν καὶ βούλεσθε ἐπαγαγεῖν ἐφ᾽ ἡμᾶς τὸ αἷμα τοῦ ἀνθρώπου τούτου.

- Had defied their authority
- Hated the name of Jesus and what He represented – especially the emphasis on the resurrection
- Threatened by the growing popularity of this new movement
- Did not like the blame laid at their feet for the crucifixion of this popular Messianic figure

B. (:29-32) The Testimony – Clear, Confrontational, Convicting

"*But Peter and the apostles answered and said, 'We must obey God rather than men. The God of our fathers raised up Jesus, whom you had put to death by hanging Him on a cross. He is the one whom God exalted to His right hand as a Prince and a Savior, to grant repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins. And we are witnesses of these things; and so is the Holy Spirit, whom God has given to those who obey Him.'"*

ἀποκριθεὶς δὲ Πέτρος καὶ οἱ ἀπόστολοι εἶπαν· πειθαρχεῖν δεῖ θεῷ μᾶλλον ἢ ἀνθρώποις. ὁ θεὸς τῶν πατέρων ἡμῶν ἤγειρεν Ἰησοῦν ὃν ὑμεῖς διεχειρίσασθε κρεμάσαντες ἐπὶ ξύλου· τοῦτον ὁ θεὸς ἀρχηγὸν καὶ σωτῆρα ὕψωσεν τῇ δεξιᾷ αὐτοῦ [τοῦ] δοῦναι μετάνοιαν τῷ Ἰσραὴλ καὶ ἄφεσιν ἁμαρτιῶν. καὶ ἡμεῖς ἐσμεν μάρτυρες τῶν ῥημάτων τούτων καὶ τὸ πνεῦμα τὸ ἅγιον ὃ ἔδωκεν ὁ θεὸς τοῖς πειθαρχοῦσιν αὐτῷ.

Same answer given as before – what consistency – Principle of obeying the Highest Authority; then Peter uses this occasion as a platform to repeat many of the same themes of his earlier messages;
Emphasis on the nation of Israel still prominent – no way that you can say that Israel is now the church; clear distinction
Distinction between those who possess the blessing of the gift of the Holy Spirit and those who do not

IV. (:33-40) THE IMPACT OF JESUS CHRIST ON THOSE CONTROLLED BY NATURAL EMOTION AND THOSE CONTROLLED BY HUMAN REASON

A. (:33) Those Controlled by Natural Emotion

"*But when they heard this, they were cut to the quick and were intending to slay them.*"
Οἱ δὲ ἀκούσαντες διεπρίοντο καὶ ἐβούλοντο ἀνελεῖν αὐτούς

Extremely passionate; quick to react; shoot first and then ask questions

B. (:34-40) Those Controlled by Human Reason or Religious Tradition

> "*But a certain Pharisee named Gamaliel, a teacher of the Law, respected by all the people, stood up in the Council and gave orders to put the men outside for a short time. And he said to them, 'Men of Israel, take care what you propose to do with these men. \For some time ago Theudas rose up, claiming to be somebody; and a group of about four hundred men joined up with him. And he was slain; and all who followed him were dispersed and came to nothing. After this man Judas of Galilee rose up in the days of the census, and drew away some people after him, he too perished, and all those who followed him were scattered. And so in the present case, I say to you, stay away from these men and let them alone, for if this plan or action should be of men, it will be overthrown; but if it is of God, you will not be able to overthrow them; or else you may even be found fighting against God.' And they took his advice; and after calling the apostles in, they flogged them and ordered them to speak no more in the name of Jesus, and then released them.*"
>
> ἀναστὰς δέ τις ἐν τῷ συνεδρίῳ Φαρισαῖος ὀνόματι Γαμαλιήλ, νομοδιδάσκαλος τίμιος παντὶ τῷ λαῷ, ἐκέλευσεν ἔξω βραχὺ τοὺς ἀνθρώπους ποιῆσαι [35] εἶπέν τε πρὸς αὐτούς· ἄνδρες Ἰσραηλῖται, προσέχετε ἑαυτοῖς ἐπὶ τοῖς ἀνθρώποις τούτοις τί μέλλετε πράσσειν. πρὸ γὰρ τούτων τῶν ἡμερῶν ἀνέστη Θευδᾶς λέγων εἶναί τινα ἑαυτόν, ᾧ προσεκλίθη ἀνδρῶν ἀριθμὸς ὡς τετρακοσίων· ὃς ἀνῃρέθη, καὶ πάντες ὅσοι ἐπείθοντο αὐτῷ διελύθησαν καὶ ἐγένοντο εἰς οὐδέν. μετὰ τοῦτον ἀνέστη Ἰούδας ὁ Γαλιλαῖος ἐν ταῖς ἡμέραις τῆς ἀπογραφῆς καὶ ἀπέστησεν λαὸν ὀπίσω αὐτοῦ· κἀκεῖνος ἀπώλετο καὶ πάντες ὅσοι ἐπείθοντο αὐτῷ διεσκορπίσθησαν. καὶ τὰ νῦν λέγω ὑμῖν, ἀπόστητε ἀπὸ τῶν ἀνθρώπων τούτων καὶ ἄφετε αὐτούς· ὅτι ἐὰν ᾖ ἐξ ἀνθρώπων ἡ βουλὴ αὕτη ἢ τὸ ἔργον τοῦτο, καταλυθήσεται, εἰ δὲ ἐκ θεοῦ ἐστιν, οὐ δυνήσεσθε καταλῦσαι αὐτούς, μήποτε καὶ θεομάχοι εὑρεθῆτε. ἐπείσθησαν δὲ αὐτῷ καὶ προσκαλεσάμενοι τοὺς ἀποστόλους δείραντες παρήγγειλαν μὴ λαλεῖν ἐπὶ τῷ ὀνόματι τοῦ Ἰησοῦ καὶ ἀπέλυσαν.

Pharisee giving some cautionary council to the Saduccees
Gamaliel an impressive figure – like an Ivy League professor; Apostle Paul sat under his teaching; how did he sum up the benefit?? Worthless to him – some real holes and blind spots in his counsel -- but correct on the central point: It is futile to try to fight against God; God is unstoppable
Cites 2 historical examples to support his point

Mark Strauss: When I teach the book of Acts at Bethel I treat this verse as almost **the theme verse of Acts.** (Amazing, On the lips of an unbeliever!)
The theme of Acts is **the unstoppable Gospel**. The steamroller of the Gospel.
•Nothing can stop it: Persecution can't; prison can't; shipwreck can't; snakebite can't. Not even murder can.
•That is the greatest proof of all that God is in this movement. Because **God is unstoppable.**
•Do you have big problems? God's bigger.

If they wanted to make sure they were not actually fighting against God, they needed to give more diligence to investigate the truthfulness of the claims of the apostles; check out their message; seek wisdom from God – but they were not interested in the truth

In sports you call certain teams, **a team of destiny** … because despite the adversity or the

challenge, they are unstoppable -- maybe Auburn is that team this year – behind 24-0 – somehow they rally to win – Boise State may have thought they were that team – but their own placekicker stopped them … God is unstoppable! That is the message for today

Stott: Gamaliel thus sketched their histories in parallel. Both men **appeared**, advanced claims and won a following. But then each **was killed**, all his followers were scattered, and his movement faded away.

Kent: The soundness of Gamaliel's advice may be questioned. It is, of course, true that ultimately God's program will emerge victorious, and human schemes will perish. It is also true that many times hasty action is foolish because it is taken before all the facts are known. Nevertheless, one cannot always judge from short-term results whether an enterprise is God's work or not, and we may not have time enough to wait for the final issue. The measure is not the pragmatic one of apparent success, but its conformity to the revealed will of God. Present temporary failures (or successes) may not be final.

Neutrality to the gospel is never an option – If you do not fully embrace Christ you stand in opposition to His command to repent and believe and follow Him. You can't sit on the fence and just watch how the game of life plays out.

V. (:41-42) THE IMPACT OF JESUS CHRIST ON THE GOSPEL PROCLAIMERS (THE APOSTLES) -- THE PRIVILEGE OF PROCLAIMING CHRIST MOTIVATES JOYFUL PERSEVERANCE IN PROCLAMATION

A. (:41) The Impact on Their Attitude – Joyful in Suffering

"*So they went on their way from the presence of the Council, rejoicing that they had been considered worthy to suffer shame for His name.*"
Οἱ μὲν οὖν ἐπορεύοντο χαίροντες ἀπὸ προσώπου τοῦ συνεδρίου, ὅτι κατηξιώθησαν ὑπὲρ τοῦ ὀνόματος ἀτιμασθῆναι,

sharing in the fellowship of suffering
authenticity – they were the same people in front of the Sanhedrin as they were in the privacy of their homes as they were in the public forum of the temple

a little different Thanksgiving celebration than what we experienced this past week

B. (:42) The Impact on Their Activity – Persevering in Proclamation

"*And every day, in the temple and from house to house, they kept right on teaching and preaching Jesus as the Christ.*"
πᾶσάν τε ἡμέραν ἐν τῷ ἱερῷ καὶ κατ᾽ οἶκον οὐκ ἐπαύοντο διδάσκοντες
καὶ εὐαγγελιζόμενοι τὸν χριστόν Ἰησοῦν.

Both in public discourse and in private tutelage

No watering down of the message
No softening of the impact
No diversion from the essentials

CONCLUSION:
There is no stopping the proclamation of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Many powerful leaders in the past have attempted to squash Christianity – none have succeeded. The only question is whether the gospel message will be effective in your heart to draw you to saving faith. Will it prove to be an aroma of life that gives you life or a stench of death that confirms you in your path of sin and rebellion. You cannot sit on the fence. You must respond with either faith or unbelief.

For believers, we must persevere in our mission of proclaiming Christ to the world. We know that God is unstoppable. We know that the proclamation of the gospel cannot be silenced. We know that God will be victorious in the end. Will we participate in the joy of sharing the sufferings of Christ and being identified with Him?

* * * * * * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

1) What are some examples of things that are unstoppable? How valuable is it to invest energy trying to stop those things?

2) Why does God guide us into situations of danger and suffering?

3) When are we correct to invoke the principle that we must obey God rather than man?

4) How are we doing in persevering in the gospel proclamation?

* * * * * * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Bock: The undercurrent to the passage is that nothing will be able to stop the advance of the gospel message. Divine leading and protection are on the apostles' side. The opposition may persecute them but will never crush them. The application to the readers of Acts is that they can be strong in their support of Jesus. Another note is that the effective preaching of the word brings respect from some, even if it does not always yield faith. This respect can also be a source of protection in the context of persecution. The new community may be under pressure and persecution, but it is to be obedient to God's call and leading.

Boice: **Suffering Disgrace for Christ's Name**
Luke alternates between a picture of the church by itself – a portrait of the believers alone in their fellowship, in which he talks about their life, witness, and joy – and a portrait of the church as it exists in its relationship to the world. This second portrait increasingly deals with persecution. [Need a balance between fellowship and aggressive outreach.] . . .

Boice: C. H.Dodd distinguished *kerygma* from *didache*, which means "*teaching*." The latter word refers mostly to ethical instruction, the kind of thing we find in the Sermon on the Mount and large portions of the New Testament letters. *Kerygma,* by contrast, refers to the basic gospel facts. These facts include: Christ's death for sins, his burial, his resurrection, his ascension to

heaven, and his appearance in his resurrected form to chosen witnesses. We find perhaps the clearest example of this proclamation pattern in 1 Corinthians 15. But it is also found elsewhere and is the basic structure for the four Gospels. It is precisely what we find in Peter's short sermon to the Sanhedrin:

- The **crucifixion**: "*whom you had killed by hanging him on a tree*" (v. 30)
- The **resurrection**: "*God . . . raised Jesus from the dead*" (v. 30)
- The **ascension**: "*God exalted him to his own right hand as Prince and Savior*" (v. 31)
- The **witnesses**: "*We are witnesses of these things*" (v. 32)

[You must begin with *kerygma* before laying upon people the burden of the ethical instruction.]

Wiersbe: **Four Different Responses to God's Truth**

1. The Council: Attacking the Truth (:5:17-28)
2. The Apostles: Affirming the Truth (5:29-32)
3. Gamaliel: Avoiding the Truth (5:33-39)
4. The Church: Announcing the Truth (5:40-42)

MacArthur: **5 Keys to Effective Evangelism**

1. Purity (:12b-14)
2. Power (:12a, 15-16)
3. Persecution (:17-28)
4. Persistence (:29-32)
5. Productivity (:33-42)

Jimmy Chapman:

A. They proclaimed a PERSON - death, resurrection, and exaltation of Christ

As Peter and John had done before (4:10), the whole group of disciples pointed to the religious leaders' guilt in crucifying Jesus Christ.

They point to the death of Christ, using rather graphic language: "The God of our fathers raised up Jesus, whom ye slew and hanged on a tree. Him hath God exalted."

B. They proclaimed a PARDON -forgiveness of Sins

Because of who Christ is and what He has done on the cross, God mercifully offers forgiveness of sins to undeserving sinners.

C. They proclaimed a PRESENT -the gift of the Holy Spirit

Those who obey the gospel of Christ, which calls for our repentance and faith in Christ, will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. This blessed third Person of the Trinity comes as the divine paraclete to dwell within us, to comfort us, to empower us, to strengthen us, to fill us for service and usefulness to God. He does not dwell in everyone, but only those who are truly born again.

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TEXT: Acts 6: 1-15

TITLE: PROFILE OF A SPIRIT-FILLED CHRISTIAN SERVANT (Two part message)

BIG IDEA:
SPIRITUAL LEADERSHIP REQUIRES A SPIRIT-FILLED SERVANT WHO IS FULL OF GRACE, FAITH, POWER AND WISDOM IN REFLECTING THE GLORY OF GOD

(:1-7) INTRODUCTION:
There is a lot of interest today in the activity of **Profiling** the criminal mind. It is interesting that in certain arenas it is not politically correct to use this tactic of profiling. But if you are looking for a serial killer apparently the value of this discipline is recognized. TV shows are dedicated to this relatively new discipline in law enforcement. I just read a book by Pat Brown – who grew herself into a national expert in this arena by using the media to feature her commentaries on specific cases of interest. She started out as a homeschooling housewife in this area of Prince Georges County and studied the subject on her own. She read over 400 books on the subject. She would immerse herself in a case and make a number of observations that would guide the detectives in their search for the perpetrator of the crime. Or she would open up a cold case and try to breathe new life into the investigation.

As we come to Chapters 6-7 and the account of Stephen, the first martyr in the Christian church, we see that Luke is essentially Profiling a Spirit-filled Christian servant. What does one look like? How does one act? How would we recognize one? What would be his qualifications?

Surprising that first Christian martyr was not one of the heavy hitters = one of the initial 12 apostles

Focus here is on Stephen

Contrast between **Spirit-filled Christian servant** – pictured in life of Stephen – and those who are always **resisting the control of the Holy Spirit** and living lives of selfish rebellion
7:51-53 "*You men who are stiff-necked and uncircumcised in heart and ears are always* ***resisting the Holy Spirit****; you are doing just as your fathers did. Which one of the prophets did your fathers not persecute? And they killed those who had previously announced the coming of the Righteous One, whose betrayers and murderers you have now become; you who received the law as ordained by angels, and yet did not keep it.*"

Passage is about **Spiritual Leadership** … that is why it is about **Servant mindset**
Matt. 20:26-28 "*It is not this way among you, but whoever wishes to become great among you shall be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you shall be your slave; just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many*."

FOUR DIMENSIONS TO THE PROFILE OF A SPIRIT-FILLED CHRISTIAN SERVANT

I. (:1-7) CHARACTER OF SPIRIT-FILLED CHRISTIAN SERVANT = FULL OF GRACE AND FAITH (HISTORICAL EXAMPLE OF ABRAHAM 7:1-8) – WHO IS HE ON THE INSIDE? AUTHENTIC SERVANT OR SELF-SERVING?

A. (:1) Spiritual Leaders Must Be Deal Effectively with Problems in the Flock

> "*Now at this time while the disciples were increasing in number, a complaint arose on the part of the Hellenistic Jews against the native Hebrews, because their widows were being overlooked in the daily serving of food.*"
>
> Ἐν δὲ ταῖς ἡμέραις ταύταις πληθυνόντων τῶν μαθητῶν ἐγένετο γογγυσμὸς τῶν Ἑλληνιστῶν πρὸς τοὺς Ἑβραίους, ὅτι παρεθεωροῦντο ἐν τῇ διακονίᾳ τῇ καθημερινῇ αἱ χῆραι αὐτῶν.

All believers are disciples – ridiculous to try to create some type of artificial two-tiered system

Constable: This is the first mention of the word "*disciple*" in Acts where it occurs 28 times. The word appears about 238 times in the Gospels but nowhere else in the New Testament.

Support of widows is very important to God – who undertakes to provide for them – ideally through immediate family … and then through the church family; older Jews may have migrated back to the Jerusalem area with a longing to be buried in that locale … your ministry to support your aging parents is valuable – not a very high profile ministry; remember how your parents cared for you as an infant – not much benefit returned to them initially …. Now it is our turn to serve

2 Key Threats here:
1) Dissension that would harm the church's unity and health and testimony
2) Distraction of the apostles from their primary calling of the ministry of the Word and prayer
The solution will be teamwork with the proper exercise of all the gifts by the entire body

Kent: the Jerusalem believers were of two groups, and there had been friction between these groups since long before the Christian era. Both groups were Jews. The "*Hebrews*" were native Palestinian Jews who spoke Aramaic and used the Hebrew Scriptures. The "*Hellenists*" were Greek-cultured Jews, many of whom had returned to Palestine in their later years. These spoke Greek regularly, used the LXX as their Scripture, and were sometimes resented by their Hebrew brethren.

So you have the "King James only" contingent over against those who swear by the New American Standard version . . .

Stott: [distinction goes beyond just language difference to a cultural mindset] In this case, the *Hellenistai* not only spoke Greek but thought and behaved like Greeks, while the *Hebraioi* not only spoke Aramaic but were deeply immersed in Hebrew culture.

John Hamby: How could the leaders have dealt with the problem in the church?
(1) They could have Ignored the Problem.
(2) They could have Resented the Problem. They could have taken the criticism personally and reacted with resentment.
(3) They could have Over-reacted to the Problem.
http://www.sermoncentral.com/sermons/the-complications-of-multiplication-john-hamby-sermon-on-church-general-31681.asp?Page=3

B. (:2,4) Spiritual Leaders Must Maintain the Priorities Consistent with Their Giftedness

> "*And the twelve summoned the congregation of the disciples and said, 'It is not desirable for us to neglect the word of God in order to serve tables.*"
> προσκαλεσάμενοι δὲ οἱ δώδεκα τὸ πλῆθος τῶν μαθητῶν εἶπαν· οὐκ ἀρεστόν ἐστιν ἡμᾶς καταλείψαντας τὸν λόγον τοῦ θεοῦ διακονεῖν τραπέζαις.
>
> "*But we will devote ourselves to prayer, and to the ministry of the word.*"
> ἡμεῖς δὲ τῇ προσευχῇ καὶ τῇ διακονίᾳ τοῦ λόγου προσκαρτερήσομεν.

Nothing wrong with serving tables – in fact we are going to appoint some very spiritually qualified leaders to oversee this important practical and necessary ministry – but meeting the physical needs of the saints still is a lower priority than meeting the spiritual needs of the saints – different roles based on our giftedness and calling; must have the right people plugged into the right roles

Stedman: Now, it would be very easy to read that as though the apostles were saying, "We're too good to serve tables. After all, we're apostles. Let's pick out seven flunkies who can do that, while we devote ourselves to the tremendously spiritual work of prayer and preaching the word." But if you read it that way you completely misread this passage because that is not what they did at all.

1. Priority of the Ministry of the Word of God

How can the congregation free the right people up to pursue this most important function? – same word for ministry used here as for the different form of ministry in vs. 1

2. Priority of Devotion to Prayer

Stott: The devil's next attack was the cleverest of the three. Having failed to overcome the church by either persecution or corruption, he now tried distraction. If he could preoccupy the apostles with social administration, which though essential was not their calling, they would neglect their God-given responsibilities to pray and to preach, and so leave the church without any defence against false doctrine.

Hiebert (quoted by Constable):

> "Prayer is the most powerful and effective means of service in the Kingdom of God . . . It is the most dynamic work which God has entrusted to His saints, but it is also the most neglected ministry open to the believer."
>
> "The Bible clearly reveals that believing prayer is essential for the advancement of the cause of Christ. It is the essential element for Christian victory . . ."
>
> "We may marvel at the spiritual power and glorious victories of the early apostolic church, but we often forget that its constant prayer life was the secret of its strength . . ."
>
> "If the church today would regain the spiritual power of the early church it must recover the truth and practice of prayer as a vital working force."

C. (:3) Spiritual Leaders Must Delegate Ministry Responsibilities to Qualified Spirit-Filled Servants

1. Qualified by Personal Association
   "*But select from among you, brethren,*"
   ἐπισκέψασθε δέ, ἀδελφοί,

   Not just recommended by others
   Fully participating in fellowship and ministry already

2. Qualified to Function as a Team
   "*seven men*"
   ἄνδρας ἐξ ὑμῶν ἑπτά

3. Qualified in the Eyes of the Watching World
   "*of good reputation,*"
   μαρτυρουμένους

   Just like requirement for elders

4. Qualified by the Control of the Holy Spirit = **Key to passage**
   "*full of the Spirit*"
   πλήρεις πνεύματος

5. Qualified by Practical Wisdom
   "*and of wisdom,*"
   καὶ σοφίας,

   Good judgment; can make wise decisions; can implement the vision

6. Qualified by Willingness and Availability to Oversee the Work
   "*whom we may put in charge of this task.*"
   οὓς καταστήσομεν ἐπὶ τῆς χρείας ταύτης,

   Not to perform all of the work … but to effectively manage the ministry
   This was a big task – maybe 20,000 – 30,000 disciples by this time

D. (:5a) Spiritual Leaders Should Solicit Buy-In From the Flock

"*And the statement found approval with the whole congregation;*"
καὶ ἤρεσεν ὁ λόγος ἐνώπιον παντὸς τοῦ πλήθους

Steven Cole: Note also the blend between apostolic direction and congregational participation. The apostles did not choose these seven men; they delegated that job to the congregation after giving the necessary qualifications. The congregation brought the seven back to the apostles, who validated the choice by praying and laying hands on them. Later, Paul appointed elders in every church to have oversight. He gave us the qualifications to recognize elders (1 Tim. 3:1-7; Titus 1:5-9). The church is not a democracy, but wise elders will involve the congregation on important decisions. The entire church must be functionally under the headship of Jesus Christ, seeking to honor Him and follow His will.

E. (:5b) Spiritual Leaders Must Be Genuinely Walking by Faith and Controlled by the Holy Spirit

"*and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit, and Philip, Prochorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas and Nicolas, a proselyte from Antioch.*"

καὶ ἐξελέξαντο Στέφανον, ἄνδρα πλήρης πίστεως καὶ πνεύματος ἁγίου, καὶ Φίλιππον καὶ Πρόχορον καὶ Νικάνορα καὶ Τίμωνα καὶ Παρμενᾶν καὶ Νικόλαον προσήλυτον Ἀντιοχέα,

That is how you recognize additional spiritual leaders
Stephen and Philip are the only ones mentioned later in the book of Acts – emphasis here is on the introduction of Stephen

Faith in what?

- Personal dependence on Jesus Christ:
  - For forgiveness of sins and entrance into heaven
  - For power for living a life of freedom from sin
  - For provision of personal needs
  - For direction and guidance in his life
- Belief in the revealed Word of God and especially the Promises of God:
  - Promise of the Presence and Protection of God – **Matt. 28:20**
    - "*lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age*"
  - Promise of the Power of God for ministry and effective witnessing – **Acts 1**
    - "*you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you*"
  - Promise of Participation in great works
    - **John 14:12-14** "*Truly, truly, I say to you, he who believes in Me, the works that I do, he will do also; and greater works than these he will do; because I go to the Father. Whatever you ask in My name, that will I do, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If you ask Me anything in My name, I will do it*."
  - Promise of the Personal Return of Jesus Christ and coming Kingdom
    - **John 14** "*Do not let your heart be troubled; believe in God, believe also in Me. In My Father's house are many dwelling places; if it were not so, I would have told you for I go to prepare a place for you. If I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself, that where I am, there you may be also*."

Stedman: The glory of this church was that they were conscious of the superintendency of the Holy Spirit -- so aware that the Lord Jesus himself, by means of the Spirit, was the head of the church. He was apportioning gifts, giving certain ministries to various individuals and sending them out, giving the orders. All through this book of Acts you can see tremendous manifestation of the direction of the Holy Spirit. It is the Spirit that sends Philip down to Gaza in Chapter 8. It is the Spirit that arrests Saul on his way to Damascus. It is the Spirit that allows the persecution that sends the disciples down to Samaria. Through this whole book of Acts the Spirit of God is at work. . . .
Spirituality is dependence on the activity of God. It is the fact that you recognize God is within you and that he intends to work through you, and you expect him to do it. That is what makes you spiritual. Its opposite is carnality. A carnal Christian is one who counts on something within himself. He says, "I've got what it takes. Just give me a chance, I'll show you what I can do for

Christ. What a tremendous thrill it must be for Jesus to have me on his team! Look at all the qualifications I have! Look at my ability, look at all the experience I have. You can count on me, I can do it." That is a carnal Christian. He may be very zealous, very dedicated, impressively so. He may be ready to give up his sleep, his wealth, and his girlfriend or what have you. But he is still carnal because he is not resting on Christ, he is not relying on the work of God, as does the spiritual man. These men had to be spiritual men.

Spoken of as the background for the first deacons in the church –

MacArthur: These were not deacons in terms of the later church office (1 Ti 3:8-13), although they performed some of the same duties. Stephen and Philip (the only ones of the 7 mentioned elsewhere in Scripture) clearly were evangelists, not deacons. It seems, therefore, that a permanent order of deacons was not established at that time. The 7 men chosen by the church all had Gr. Names, implying they were all Hellenists. [but not necessarily because many Palestinian Jews also had Greek names like the apostle Philip – Kent] The church, in a display of love and unity, may have chosen them to rectify the apparent imbalance involving the Hellenistic widows. . . Stephen's martyrdom became the catalyst for the spread of the gospel beyond Palestine (8:1-4; 11:19). Philip also played a key role in the spread of the gospel (cf. 8:4-24, 26-40). Nothing certain is known of the other 5. According to some early traditions, Prochorus became the Apostle John's amanuensis when he wrote his gospel and Nicolas was a **Gentile convert** to Judaism from Antioch.

F. (:6) Spiritual Leaders Must Make Decisions in the Context of Prayer

"*And these they brought before the apostles; and after praying, they laid their hands on them.*"

οὓς ἔστησαν ἐνώπιον τῶν ἀποστόλων, καὶ προσευξάμενοι ἐπέθηκαν αὐτοῖς τὰς χεῖρας.

Never assume anything or act presumptuously – look at what happened in the history of Israel when they failed to seek the Lord in prayer and wait upon His leading

Kent: Hands were laid on them, symbolizing probably the blessing of God as well as their official identification as the duly appointed functionaries. Nothing mystical was conveyed by the action, however, for they were "*full of the Spirit*" prior to their being chosen.

Constable: Laying hands on someone symbolized the bestowal of a blessing (Gen. 48:13; et al.). It also represented identification with the person (Lev. 1:4; 3:2; et al.), commissioning as a kind of successor (Num. 27:23), and granting authority (8:17-19; 9:17; 13:3; 19:6; 1 Tim. 4:14; 5:22; Heb. 6:2). Here commissioning for a task is in view (cf. 13:1-3) rather than formal ordination, which came later in church history. Prayer accompanied this ceremony on this occasion, as was customary.

Some people would argue that this passage supports not needing to follow the organizational structure that we see in the early NT church – cf. Constable:

> "the early church was willing to adapt its organizational structure and administrative procedures to minister effectively and to meet needs. It did not view its original structure and practices as binding but adapted traditional structures and methods to facilitate the proclamation of the gospel and the welfare of the church. In contrast, many churches today try to duplicate the form and functions of the early church because they feel bound to follow these."

However, I would respond that where the structure is presented as normative (for example: offices of elders and deacons) we do need to adopt the pattern. There certainly is freedom as well … but not to contradict any of the important principles (male leadership, multiple team leadership, etc. You would not want to appoint a bishop over multiple churches as the early church ended up evolving towards.). Yes, a new church does not have to begin with a fully developed structure of deacons, etc. … but it should be launched under the direction of at least a plurality of elders as opposed to a non-Biblical model of a one-man pastorate. Better to have no formal authority and work towards the biblical model than to begin with an unbalanced structure that will be difficult to correct later.

G. (:7) Spiritual Leaders Desire to See Spiritual Results

1. Impact of the Word

   "*And the word of God kept on spreading;*" = Theme of Book of Acts
   Καὶ ὁ λόγος τοῦ θεοῦ ηὔξανεν

2. Increase in the number of disciples

   "*and the number of the disciples continued to increase greatly in Jerusalem,*"
   καὶ ἐπληθύνετο ὁ ἀριθμὸς τῶν μαθητῶν ἐν Ἰερουσαλὴμ σφόδρα,

3. Inroads Into Spiritual Strongholds

   "*and a great many of the priests were becoming obedient to the faith.*"
   πολύς τε ὄχλος τῶν ἱερέων ὑπήκουον τῇ πίστει.

Cost them their job working in the temple – were they supported as leaders in the new movement??
\
Kent: These were hardly the Sadducean aristocrats, but were most likely common priests, many of whom were godly men who were open to the gospel (cf. Zacharias, Luke 1).

Here faith is spoken of in objective sense as the body of truth concerning Jesus Christ
Robertson: Here meaning the gospel, the faith system as in **Romans 1:5**; **Galatians 1:23**; **Jude 1:3**, etc. Here the word means more than individual trust in Christ.

Takes great **faith** to live this way

Piper: But what Stephen had to deal with was that the dismantling of the old temple system did not happen overnight. It was happening gradually. This puts a whole new slant on **Acts 6:7** from last week's text, where it says, "*A great many priests were obedient to the faith*." What that really means is: a great many priests came to believe that they were out of a job. A great many priests came to believe that Jesus is the one and only high priest now, and will never die, and all Christians are priests in his service.

* * * * * * * * * Conclusion to Part 1:
Illustration: D. L. Moody was to have an evangelistic campaign in England. An elderly pastor protested, "Why do we need this 'Mr. Moody'? He's uneducated, inexperienced, etc. Who does he think he is anyway? Does he think he has a monopoly on the Holy Spirit?"
A younger, wiser pastor rose and responded, "No, but the Holy Spirit has a monopoly on Mr. Moody."
Stephen was also a man who the Holy Ghost had a monopoly on.

* * * * * * * * *

(:8-15) **INTRODUCTION** to Part 2:

A guy dies, arrives at the Pearly Gates, and (as always in stories like this), St. Peter is there and asks him to relate a good deed he had done. He thinks for a moment then says, "Well, there was the time I was driving down a road when I saw a group of hoodlums harassing a girl. I stopped my car, grabbed a tire iron, and walked up to the leader of the gang. He was huge—6 foot 4 inch, 260 pounds, with a studded leather jacket, tattoos, and a chain running from his nose to his ears. As I approached him, the others circled me and told me to get lost or I'd be next. So I grabbed the leader's chain, ripped it out of his face, and smashed him over the head with the tire iron. Then I yelled at them, 'Leave this girl alone! You're acting like a bunch of animals! Go home before I teach you a lesson in pain!'"

St. Peter, impressed, says, "Wow! When did you do all that?"

"Oh [looking at his watch], about three minutes ago."

Sometime you get killed for doing what is right, don't you? Stephen the first Christian martyr – but remembered as an exemplary Spirit-filled Servant – Some would look at the life of Stephen and say, "What a waste! Snuffed out in the prime of life" – But here we are in 2010 still learning lessons from his Spirit-filled testimony – What an impact by a man of God!

SPIRITUAL LEADERSHIP REQUIRES A SPIRIT-FILLED SERVANT WHO IS FULL OF GRACE, FAITH, POWER AND WISDOM IN REFLECTING THE GLORY OF GOD

FOUR DIMENSIONS TO THE PROFILE OF A SPIRIT-FILLED CHRISTIAN SERVANT

[Last message dealt with Dimension #1 – vv. 1-7]

II. (:8) CONDUCT (MINISTRY) OF SPIRIT-FILLED CHRISTIAN SERVANT = FULL OF GRACE AND POWER – (HISTORICAL EXAMPLE OF MOSES 7:17-43) – WHAT WORKS DOES HE PERFORM? GREAT OR FAKE?

A. Spirit-Filled Ministries Highlight the Grace of God

"*And Stephen, full of grace*"
Στέφανος δὲ πλήρης χάριτος

Stephen was certainly **full of it**:

- "*full of the Spirit and of wisdom*" :3
- "*full of faith and of the Holy Spirit*" :5
- "*full of grace and power*"

Sadly, too many of us are full of ourselves

Graciousness, attractiveness, charm
Grace - a special manifestation of the divine presence, activity, power, glory, and favor of God

Not a works-oriented, performance-oriented believer; but one who appreciated the grace of God in his life; divine favor blessing his efforts in a supernatural sense

Both received grace and lived in the realm of grace and demonstrated grace towards others

2 Cor. 12:9 – "*And he said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness. Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me*."

Lenski: the Lord singled out Stephen as his instrument through whom He wrought miracles when and where the Lord desired.

B. Spirit-Filled Ministries Are Sourced in Divine Power

"*and power,*"
καὶ δυνάμεως

nothing weak or lame about Stephen's ministry
could minister in boldness and confidence

C. Spirit-Filled Ministries Produce Great Works

"*was performing great wonders and signs*"
ἐποίει τέρατα καὶ σημεῖα μεγάλα

D. Spirit-Filled Ministries Connect with Needy People

"*among the people.*"
ἐν τῷ λαῷ.

III. (:9-14) CONTROLLING AGENT OF SPIRIT-FILLED CHRISTIAN SERVANT = FULL OF GRACE AND WISDOM – DEMONSTRATED IN MEEKNESS (HISTORICAL EXAMPLE OF JOSEPH 7:9-16) -- WHAT WORDS DOES HE SPEAK? TRUTH OR BLASPHEMY?

Quote: In every believer the Holy Spirit is resident, but what He wants to be is President! [call the shots, be in full control!]

A. (:9) God's Servant Ambassadors for the Truth Face Strong Opposition

"*But some men from what was called the Synagogue of the Freedmen, including both Cyrenians and Alexandrians, and some from Cilicia and Asia, rose up and argued with Stephen.*"
ἀνέστησαν δέ τινες τῶν ἐκ τῆς συναγωγῆς τῆς λεγομένης Λιβερτίνων καὶ Κυρηναίων καὶ Ἀλεξανδρέων καὶ τῶν ἀπὸ Κιλικίας καὶ Ἀσίας συζητοῦντες τῷ Στεφάνῳ,

Lenski: in 61 B.C., Pompey had taken many hundreds of captive Jews who were then sold as slaves. Numbers of them and of their descendants gained their liberty and were considered Romans. They were rapidly Hellenized. . . numbers of these freedmen migrated to Jerusalem

Toussaint: The members of this synagogue were from three divergent areas – North Africa (Cyrene and Alexandria were two of its leading cities), Asia (the western portion of modern-day Turkey), an Cilicia. Possibly this was the assembly Paul attended because Tarsus was located in the province of Cilicia.

How must the servant of God respond under such pressure and attack?

With meekness and gentleness; not being contentious; but not backing down either

Not just serving tables; taking a verbal stand for the truth as well; standing up on the front lines and taking some shots from the enemy

People wanted to pick a fight verbally with Stephen

B. (:10) God's Servant Ambassadors for the Truth Excel in Wisdom and Spirit-Filled Power

"*And yet they were unable to cope with the wisdom and the Spirit with which he was speaking.*"
καὶ οὐκ ἴσχυον ἀντιστῆναι τῇ σοφίᾳ καὶ τῷ πνεύματι ᾧ ἐλάλει.

Seek God's wisdom to effectively do what He calls you to do**. James 3:17** "*But the wisdom that comes from heaven is first of all pure; then peace-loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial and sincere.*"

C. (:11-14) God's Servant Ambassadors for the Truth Are Falsely Charged with Trumped up Charges

"*Then they secretly induced men to say, 'We have heard him speak blasphemous words against Moses and against God.' And they stirred up the people, the elders and the scribes, and they came upon him and dragged him away, and brought him before the Council. And they put forward false witnesses who said, 'This man incessantly speaks against this holy place, and the Law; for we have heard him say that this Nazarene, Jesus, will destroy this place and alter the customs which Moses handed down to us.*'"

τότε ὑπέβαλον ἄνδρας λέγοντας ὅτι ἀκηκόαμεν αὐτοῦ λαλοῦντος ῥήματα βλάσφημα εἰς Μωϋσῆν καὶ τὸν θεόν. συνεκίνησάν τε τὸν λαὸν καὶ τοὺς πρεσβυτέρους καὶ τοὺς γραμματεῖς καὶ ἐπιστάντες συνήρπασαν αὐτὸν καὶ ἤγαγον εἰς τὸ συνέδριον, ἔστησάν τε μάρτυρας ψευδεῖς λέγοντας· ὁ ἄνθρωπος οὗτος οὐ παύεται λαλῶν ῥήματα κατὰ τοῦ τόπου τοῦ ἁγίου [τούτου] καὶ τοῦ νόμου· ἀκηκόαμεν γὰρ αὐτοῦ λέγοντος ὅτι Ἰησοῦς ὁ Ναζωραῖος οὗτος καταλύσει τὸν τόπον τοῦτον καὶ ἀλλάξει τὰ ἔθη ἃ παρέδωκεν ἡμῖν Μωϋσῆς.

Reminds us of the trumped up trial of Jesus and the false witness that were brought forth to accuse Him wrongly (John 2:19-22; Matt. 26:61; 27:40)

Bruce: Whatever form of words Stephen used which gave rise to the charge that he said Jesus the Nazarene would destroy the temple, it seems plain that he had not only repeated the words which Jesus Himself had spoken, but also grasped and expounded their inner meaning. The apostles and many of the rank and file of the Jerusalem church might continue to attend the temple services and be looked upon as devout and observant Jews; Stephen saw that the work of Christ logically involved the abrogation of the whole temple order and its supersession by a new edifice not made with hands, and yet within the main stream of OT revelation. Jesus Himself had said, "*one greater than the temple is here*" (Matt. 12:6); these and other sayings of His about the temple were apparently preserved by the early church in Jerusalem, but it was Stephen who appreciated their full force. The gospel meant the end of the sacrificial cultus and all the ceremonial law. These were the outward and visible signs of Jewish particularism, and could not be reconciled with the universal scope of the Christian message of salvation accomplished. This

was the argument, pressed by Stephen in synagogue debate, which formed the real basis of the case for the prosecution.

1. Attacking Moses (and therefore God)

2. Attacking the Temple – "*this holy place*"

Piper: What Jesus meant when he said, "*Destroy this temple and in three days I will raise it up*," was that he himself was taking the place of the temple—by dying for sin once for all, and by rising from the dead to reign as the everlasting priest and Lord of glory. When I die, the temple system dies. And when I rise, I am the temple. I am the sacrifice for sins. I am the priest and go-between with God. I am the presence and radiance of his glory. The temple is finished.

3. Attacking the Law

4. Attacking their Expectations regarding the Promised Messiah by promoting Jesus the Nazarene

5. Attacking Jewish Traditions

Guzik: Why would they make such accusations? Because Stephen was clearly teaching that Jesus was greater than Moses; that Jesus was God; that Jesus was greater than the temple; that Jesus was the fulfillment of the law; and that Jesus was greater than their religious customs and traditions.

Tyler Edwards: His sermon in Acts 7 is one of the most brilliant sermons in the entire book of Acts. So much so that you almost don't notice what Stephen is really doing when he speaks. Stephen was on trial for four forms of blasphemy: Blasphemy against Moses, against God, against the Temple, and against the Law. What Stephen is doing here is using Jewish history to make a legal defense against the charges brought against him while at the same time pointing all of the things he was accused of blaspheming toward Christ.

Piper: If the Messiah is coming down from heaven, with forgiveness and advocacy and glory, and the light of God shining upon him, then the first thing that will be seen is his shadow on the earth. And so it was in the sacrifices and priestly service of the old temple. But as the reality gets closer the shadow becomes smaller, and when the reality lands on its shadow, it swallows it up entirely and it is no more. But that does not mean that the reality was against the shadow, or that it blasphemed the shadow. It fulfilled the shadow. And in that sense destroyed the shadow.

IV. (:15) COUNTENANCE OF SPIRIT-FILLED CHRISTIAN SERVANT = FULL OF GRACE AND GLORY – REFLECTING THE DIVINE PRESENCE (HISTORICAL EXAMPLE OF JOSHUA, DAVID, SOLOMON 7:44-50) – WHAT DOES HE LOOK LIKE AS HE IMPACTS OTHERS? LIGHT OR DARKNESS?

"*And fixing their gaze on him, all who were sitting in the Council saw his face like the face of an angel.*"

καὶ ἀτενίσαντες εἰς αὐτὸν πάντες οἱ καθεζόμενοι ἐν τῷ συνεδρίῳ εἶδον τὸ πρόσωπον αὐτοῦ ὡσεὶ πρόσωπον ἀγγέλου.

Whitcomb: What does our face look like when we are falsely accused? **Phil. 1:28**
Love and concern for our accusers? Peace and confidence in God?
Remember how Christ acted before His accusers
Moses came down from the Mount with a glowing face – he needed a veil covering his face until the light faded out (Ex. 34:29-30)
Cf. Jesus on Mount of Transfiguration – face like the shining sun; a rare time in His earthly existence when humans were allowed to see his glory

A. Angels Reflect Light Rather Than Darkness
Light of God's revelation and truth

B. Angels Reflect Peace and Tranquility rather than Anxiety and Fear

C. Angels Reflect the Presence of God—His Glory and Majesty and Preeminence

Kent: The enigmatic statement that Stephen's face had the appearance of an angel's may indicate a supernatural glow, similar to that of Moses when he came down from the mount (Exod. 34:29-35). The vision of Christ which he received later in the council makes the comparison with Moses somewhat similar, although the unusual appearance of Stephen's face seems to have begun before the vision, whereas in the case of Moses it came afterward. Saul of Tarsus was probably Luke's source for this report.

Lenski: We must recall the promise of Jesus given to the disciples that at their trials before tribunals the Holy Spirit would inspire them (Matt. 10:19, 20; Mark 13:11-13; Luke 12:11; 21:14, 15). This was Stephen's supreme hour. That Spirit now filled him to such an extent that his countenance shone with supernatural radiance, light, and power, which were comparable only to those that appear on an angel's countenance. The Sanhedrists gazed in astonishment. They were struck by this phenomenon – struck but not moved.

CONCLUSION:
How would a profiler characterize your character and conduct?
What is the controlling power behind your life?
Does your countenance reflect someone who spends time in the presence of God?

SPIRITUAL LEADERSHIP REQUIRES A SPIRIT-FILLED SERVANT WHO IS FULL OF GRACE, FAITH, POWER AND WISDOM IN REFLECTING THE GLORY OF GOD

He giveth more grace when the burdens grow greater
He sendeth more strength when the labors increase
To added affliction He addeth His mercy
To multiplied trials His multiplied peace
His love has no limit, His grace has no measure
His power has no boundary known unto men
For out of His infinite riches in Jesus
He giveth, and giveth, and giveth again!"

(the more you need the more you get!)

- Think a moment about a water-saturated sponge. If we push down with our finger even slightly, water runs out onto the table. We immediately know what fills the interior pockets of the sponge. The same is true of ourselves. We can tell what fills us on the inside by what comes out under pressure. (Robert Schmidgall)

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Preview of Chapter 7
(7:1-50) Historical Summary – Argument before the Sanhedrin: History of Nation of Israel – God's Gracious Covenant Dealings with His People – Tradition proves rebellion against God rather than smug self righteousness
A. (:1-8) Founding of Nation – Story of Abraham – Election and Faith and Covenant Promises and Privilege
B. (:9-16) Story of Joseph – Mistreatment yet Deliverance and Blessing and Provision
C. (:17-43) Story of Moses – Leadership out of Egypt into the Promised Land – people resisting that leadership and rebelling = bulk of the verses – Stephen accused of speaking against the law of Moses
D. (:44-50) Rapid scan from Joshua to David to Solomon
Entrance into the Promised Land; Victory over enemies; Building of the Temple
- You don't own God or have Him under any obligation

(7:51-53) Key – Always Resisting the Holy Spirit
Condemning words spoken by Stephen – pulled no punches
Is it surprising today that God's people are resisting the Holy Spirit and not fully embracing His revelation and His program?

(7:54-60) First Christian Martyr – Stephen – Spirit-filled Servant

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DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

1) What are some of the benefits of organization and structure within the local church context?

2) What types of needs do you see that are being neglected or mismanaged in the church? Can you be of any help to improve the situation?

3) How can we encourage all believers to share in the load of responsibilities according to their giftedness rather than overtaxing a few key individuals?

4) How would people describe your countenance and the overall impact you have on them?

* * * * * * * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Stott: We do a great disservice to the church whenever we refer to the pastorate as "the ministry", for example when we speak of ordination in terms of "entering the ministry". This use of the definite article implies that the ordained pastorate is the only ministry there is. But *diakonia* is a generic word for service; it lacks specificity until a descriptive adjective is added, whether "pastoral", "social", "political", "medical" or another. All Christians without exception being followers of him who came "*not to be served but to serve*", are themselves called to ministry, indeed to give their lives in ministry.

Mike Wilkins: There was discrimination going on. When it brought to the attention of the Apostles, they realized two things –one that the situation was not right, and two, that they were being pulled two ways in their ministry – toward their calling to prayer and the teaching of the word, and toward the very important ministry of caring for the poor in their midst. To deal with both these issues they invited the church to select seven men from among them who had good reputations, were full of the Spirit, and of wisdom. These men would look after the administration of the care of the poor, and the Apostles would devote themselves to prayer and the teaching of the Word.

Stephen places the accusations into context. They have accused him of blaspheming God by speaking against the temple – Stephen doesn't go after their lie, he goes after their bad theology. To equate the temple with God is folly.

He starts at the beginning of the nation –Abraham. The God of Glory appears to Abraham in Mesopotamia of all places, when the whole family was still worshiping idols. And then again God comes to Abraham at Haran after his father's death and calls him into the land of Canaan. He promises the land to Abraham's people, but he never gives him a stitch of it, and he lives much of his life there with no legitimate heirs to continue the hope! The covenant that he gives him is a covenant of circumcision – a mark on the people that they are the people of God – God resides with a people, not a building!

Then he takes us to Joseph who gets sold into slavery by his brothers – the patriarchs by whom the tribes of Israel are named. In Slavery in the pagan country of Egypt, God was with Joseph giving him the wisdom to become ruler of Egypt under Pharaoh. God needed no building to work through Joseph.

When the people were enslaved, God raised up Moses, marked him to be a leader and savior of his people from infancy. Moses steps into leadership in two ways – when an Israelite is being beaten by his Egyptian master, Moses steps in to save him, and in the process, kills the Egyptian. Stephen says "Moses thought that his own people would realize that God was using him to rescue them, but they did not. Then Moses tries to settle a dispute between two Israelites. The one in wrong pushes Moses aside and says "Who made you ruler and judge over us? Do you want to kill me like you did the Egyptian? Moses runs off to Midian. Forty years later, God speaks to him through a burning bush on a mountain, no-where near the hill the temple stood on. God declared that spot to be holy ground – not because there was a building on it, but because He was there.

When Moses finally leads the people out of Egypt, God gives them the plans for a Tabernacle – a tent that will be a sign of his presence, and will be a place for the people to meet with God. It

does not contain the presence of God, but it is a place to experience his presence.

Later, when David wants to build a permanent temple for God, God allows his son Solomon to build it. Solomon's temple was not the one standing while Stephen was speaking, this was a much larger temple built by Herod, but the people still held the first temple in highest regard. . .

Basically, God says, you can build me a house, but it cannot contain me – I am bigger than any structure or building you can make – I made the very building materials you will use!

Stephen doesn't argue with their accusation that he spoke against the temple (although he did not). Instead he shows them that the temple should not be equated with the presence of God – by doing this that had reduced the God of the universe to a territorial spirit, and were engaging in Idolatry by worshiping the building, not the God that they were to meet there.

Their other accusation was that Stephen spoke against the Law.
Again he doesn't argue with the accusation – it would be fruitless since it would be many voices against his one. Instead he says "you're one to talk"

You have always rejected God's leaders and their words . . .

Even though they had the very presence of God with them, they still turned to idols; they still refused to obey the Law even though it was given from God himself.

And then Stephen goes for the jugular. – he says not only did your forefathers not obey the law and reject Moses – you rejected and killed the very one he prophesied about! . . .

This is what Stephen said to the people of his day – God is not constrained to buildings, and structures, by being so caught up in the creation and your own opinions about it, you missed what God is doing and what he has done in Jesus Christ.
http://www.sermoncentral.com/sermons/saint-stephen-mike-wilkins-sermon-on-people-in-acts-53758.asp

Gary Bennett: Though Stephen, in his speech did refer to the accusations made against him, it is more significant that he chose to not make a direct defence of his position and beliefs. Instead, he focuses on Israel's history and the evidence of God's past workings to vindicate his faith. His speech revolves around three premises:

1. GOD'S WAYS ARE ABOVE MAN'S
2. GOD MANIFESTS HIS GOODNESS EVERYWHERE
3. RESISTING THE HOLY SPIRIT --
Stephen's final point is how the Sanhedrin's predecessors have always been more concerned with maintaining the law and increasing their influence and power base than in responding to the Holy Spirit. . . His speech contains no opportunities for redemption. It is not a call for repentance, but is instead a confirmation of the condemnation the authorities have chosen for themselves by rejecting the Holy Spirit's illumination and guidance.
http://www.sermoncentral.com/sermons/stephen--climax-of-conflict-in-jerusalem-gary-bennett-sermon-on-people-in-acts-55547.asp?Page=4

Paul Fritz: **How the Holy Spirit Develops Essential Traits Within Leaders**

1. The Holy Spirit develops genuine trust and obedience in leaders without turning them into unthinking puppets. Paul wrote, "Now it is required that those who have been given a trust must prove faithful." (I Cor. 4:2) Ask the Lord to help you grow in greater trust and obedience to the Lord without becoming a mere figurehead.

2. The Holy Spirit builds leaders up in their knowledge, wisdom and understanding without making them arrogant. David wrote, "He guides the humble in what is right and teaches them His way." (Psa. 25:9) Ask the Lord to help you grow in knowledge, wisdom and understanding without become prideful.

3. The Holy Spirit gives leaders courage to make difficult decisions without becoming dictatorial. God told Joshua, "Be strong and courageous. Do not be terrified; do not be discouraged, for the Lord your God will be with you wherever you go." (Josh 1:9) Ask the Lord to help you grow in your courage without becoming dictatorial, demanding or autocratic.

4. The Holy Spirit supplies leaders with discipline to accomplish organizational goals without becoming insensitive to people's needs. Paul wrote, "For God did not give us a spirit of timidity, but a spirit of power, of love and of self-discipline." (2 Tim. 1:7) Ask God for the discipline to see your goals through to the end without becoming insensitive, callous or indifferent to people's needs.

5. The Holy Spirit furnishes leaders with problem-solving abilities without bogging them down in daily palavers. Dr. Luke wrote, "The Grecian Jews complained against the Hebraic Jews because their widows were being overlooked... So the twelve gathered all the disciples together and said, "It would not be right for us to neglect the ministry of the word of God in order to wait on tables. Brothers, choose seven men from among you who are known to be full of the Spirit and wisdom. We will turn this responsibility over to them and will give our attention to prayer and the ministry of the word." (Acts 6:2-4) Ask the Lord to give you special problem-solving abilities without getting bogged down in lower priority ministries.

6. The Holy Spirit assists leaders in raising the funds needed for their ministries without allowing them to become greedy. Paul wrote, "My God will supply all you need according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus." (Phil. 4:19) Ask the Lord to help you raise the funds you need for your organization without falling into the temptation of loving money.

7. The Holy Spirit creates in leaders communication skills to teach their people God's truth without becoming Pharisaical. Jesus said, "The Spirit of truth will guide you into all truth." (John 16:13) Ask the Lord to give you special communicational skills to teach your people God's truth without becoming like the Pharisees who emphasized law more than grace or love.

8. The Holy Spirit grants decisiveness to leaders without allowing them to become too rigid. Many leaders vacillate in their decisions according to the popular opinions of the day. Jesus endured great opposition yet it was said of Him, "As the time approached for Him to be taken up to heaven, Jesus resolutely set out for Jerusalem." (Luke 9:51) Ask the Lord to help you not waver in your decisions or stance for God's truth while remaining flexible, adaptable, and compassionate to the concerns of your people.

9. The Holy Spirit issues teachable leaders with a healthy sense of humor without allowing them

to become flippant. Solomon wrote, "A cheerful heart is good medicine, but a crushed spirit dries up the bones." (Prov. 17:22) Ask the Lord to give you a cheerful attitude during tense times without becoming frivolous.

10. The Holy Spirit grants leaders the full measure of each of the fruits of the Spirit: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, gentleness, faithfulness and self-control without allowing them to become sanctimonious. Ask the Lord to keep you filled with the fruits of the Spirit without becoming too pious.

11. The Holy Spirit refines leader's desires for any expression of the works of the flesh: sexual immorality, impurity, debauchery, idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions, envy, drunkenness, orgies and the like. (Gal. 5:19-21) Ask the Lord to help you to be so filled with the Spirit's fruits that you are cleansed from all works of the flesh.

12. The Holy Spirit creates in leaders a greater holiness and hunger for the Lord and His word without allowing them to be too self-righteous or distant. Paul wrote, "For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain." (Phil. 1:21) Ask the Lord to give you a greater hunger and thirst for the Lord and His word without becoming so self-righteous that no one will want to come near you.

13. The Holy Spirit bestows upon great leaders God's vision for their organization without allowing them to become a dreamer, speculator or puffed up in their self importance. Paul wrote, "Knowledge makes one arrogant, but love edifies." (I Cor. 8:1) Ask the Lord to give you His vision without turning you into a dreamer, a speculator or someone who is so future minded that they are not concerned about present needs.

Steven Cole: **Solving Problems in the Church**
To solve problems in the local church, both leaders and people must be spiritual people in submission to God's Word.
7 Principles for Problem Solving in the church:
1. Spiritual people orient everything in their lives to God through prayer and God's Word.
2. Even spiritual people have problems.
3. Spiritual people are committed to harmony expressed through diversity.
4. Often problems in the church can be explained and resolved by understanding spiritual gifts.
5. Spiritual leaders must maintain their focus on prayer and the ministry of God's Word.
6. Leaders at every level must be spiritually qualified.
7. A growing organism requires new levels of organization in order to solve problems.
http://www.fcfonline.org/content/1/sermons/012801M.pdf

Piper: The Ministry of the Word

1. The ministry of the Word is a ministry of study.
2. The ministry of the Word is a ministry of prayer.
3. The ministry of the Word is a ministry of suffering.
4. The ministry of the Word is a ministry of joy.

The minister of the Word must not choose between study and prayer. Study without prayer is the

work of pride. Prayer without study is presumption. This is what the Proverbs teach: "If you cry out for insight and raise your voice for understanding (that's prayer), and if you seek it like silver and search for it as for hidden treasures (that's study), then you will understand the fear of the Lord and find the knowledge of God" (Proverbs 2:3–5).

Dr. John Whitcomb: **The Church Organized and Empowered**
First church in Jerusalem composed exclusively of born-again Jews; Suddenly a crisis occurs; up to now it seems that things have gone very smoothly; what leadership: 12 apostles under the direction of the Holy Spirit; but we just saw the spiritual hypocrisy of Ananias and Sapphira; people were horrified to see how God handled church people who were duplicitous; God purged and humbled and purified the church and then another spurt of growth took place; these cycles repeat themselves because of our pride; Maybe 4-5 years have passed since the Day of Pentecost; maybe 20,000 disciples by now; nothing compared to the millions of Jews that gathered there for the holy festivals; Grecians = Jews that had come from the Diaspora – spread out over all the world; many Greek speaking Jews in Alexandria – LXX translation prepared; looked down on by the native Hebrew speaking Jews of the Holy Land; you were contaminated by the environment you came out of; we are the pure Jews; arrogance, pride, etc. Even in the local church those distinctions became points of dissension and friction. Perception of favoritism – don't know whether it was true; this group was being marginalized and despised and neglected in this particular administration of the food to needy widows; excommunicated, ostracized, subject to loss of possessions; needed to be specially cared for; issue was one of survival; a sharing in common of possessions; precarious and vulnerable state of widows; were taken advantage of; This could have torn the church apart; apostles was very exclusive group of men; importance of entire church involved in decision making process; significance of this Gentile proselyte; very gracious solution; religious apostate structure: the higher up the fewer true believers; not only apostles could perform miracles but Stephen; if you can't win the argument then just attack the person; Book: *From Fish to Gish* – arguing against evolutionary scientists on college campuses; **Mark 14:56** – two witnesses must agree and have consistent story – but not word-for-word or you get suspicious that story was concocted;

TEXT: Acts 7: 1-8

TITLE: ISRAEL SURVEY PART 1 – GOD'S DEALINGS WITH ABRAHAM AND THE PATRIARCHS – GOD'S SOVEREIGN ELECTION AND EFFECTUAL CALLING

BIG IDEA:
THE GOD OF GLORY CONTINUES TO INITIATE NEW SPIRITUAL RELATIONSHIPS BY GRACE THROUGH FAITH IN A MANNER CONSISTENT WITH BUT NOT LIMITED TO HIS DEALINGS WITH ABRAHAM

What are the chances you will miss Christmas this year? Saturday will come and go and you will somehow just miss it? The Sanhedrin had not only missed the coming of Christ, but after His resurrection they continued to cover up and deny the historical reality of His appearing.

The account of Stephen appearing before the angry Sanhedrin in Acts chapter 7 marks a pivotal watershed in God's dispensational dealings with His people. You know what a **watershed** is. You see the sign on the highway: marks a great divide between the waters flowing in one direction or the other. We have seen how Peter attempted to re-offer the kingdom to the Jewish nation if they would only repent and trust in the risen Lord Jesus. But they persisted in their rejection and rebellion. So at this point Stephen -- rather than defending himself against the false charges of speaking blasphemy against Moses and God, and trying to tear down the Law and the temple and the Jewish traditions – actually presents God's final indictment against the nation of Israel. God is now going to switch directions and take this new gospel message directly to the despised Gentiles. The Jews could not abide this change in approach and the loss of their favored status – even though God was not permanently setting them aside.

They have proven by their actions that they follow in the footsteps of their OT brethren who consistently resisted the work of the Holy Spirit and persecuted God's appointed messengers. As Stephen faced death himself, his mind was not spinning out of control in panic; instead he calmly reviews with these Jewish religious leaders the history of their stubborn arrogance and self righteousness. They had failed to respond in faith to God's gracious initiation. They thought they could confine God to a box of a physical connection to the temple in Jerusalem.

So Stephen gives a brief historical theology of four different epochs of God's interactions with His chosen nation. We will look at the first of these this morning in 7:1-8 – dealing with God's sovereign election and effectual calling with respect to Abraham and the patriarchs. [Good opportunity for us to get back into the OT some.] The Sanhedrin wrongly took confidence in their spiritual lineage – thinking that God was limited to dealing with the physical descendants of Abraham and those who would become proselytes of their pattern of temple worship centered in the holy city of Jerusalem. But they proved to be ignorant of God's intentions of bringing about the fulfillment of the law and the OT types in the person of His Son Jesus Christ who came to fully reveal grace and truth.

THE GOD OF GLORY CONTINUES TO INITIATE NEW SPIRITUAL RELATIONSHIPS BY GRACE THROUGH FAITH IN A MANNER CONSISTENT WITH BUT NOT LIMITED TO HIS DEALINGS WITH ABRAHAM

(:1-2a) INTRODUCTION:

"*And the high priest said, 'Are these things so?' And he said, 'Hear me, brethren and fathers!'*"
Εἶπεν δὲ ὁ ἀρχιερεύς· εἰ ταῦτα οὕτως ἔχει; ὁ δὲ ἔφη· Ἄνδρες ἀδελφοὶ καὶ πατέρες, ἀκούσατε.

Motivation of Caiaphas – same judge present for railroading of Jesus – not a genuine interest in the truth but out to convict Stephen; yet his response is gracious and respectful; no hope of a fair trial;

Stott: What Stephen did was to pick out four major epochs of Israel's history, dominated by four major characters. First he highlighted Abraham and the patriarchal age (7:2-8); then Joseph and the Egyptian exile (9-19); thirdly Moses, the Exodus and the wilderness wanderings (20-44); and lastly David and Solomon, and the establishment of the monarchy (45-50). The connecting feature of these four epochs is that in none of them was God's presence limited to any particular place. On the contrary, the God of the Old Testament was the living God, a God on the move and on the march, who was always calling his people out to fresh adventures, and always accompanying and directing them as they went.

Boice: His speech is a transition speech that paves the way for presenting the gospel to the Gentiles, which begins in the very next chapter of Acts.

5 INTERACTIONS BETWEEN GOD AND ABRAHAM HIGHLIGHTING GRACE AND FAITH

Pattern: God Initiates by Grace / Man Responds by Faith

Man of Faith / Friend of God – Stephen is actually faithfully following in the footsteps of Father Abraham as opposed to these religious leaders who think that they can box God in to some type of local deity tied only to their physical temple

Wiersbe: Abraham was the founder of the Hebrew nations, and his relationship to God was one of grace and faith. God had graciously appeared to him and called him out of heathen darkness into the light of salvation, and Abraham had responded by faith. Abraham was saved by grace, through faith, and not because he was circumcised, kept a law, or worshipped in a temple. All of those things came afterward (see **Rom. 4**; **Gal. 3**). He believed the promises of God and it was this faith that saved him.

I. (:2b) GOD OF GLORY / MAN OF VISION

"*The God of glory appeared to our father Abraham when he was in Mesopotamia, before he lived in Haran,*"

Ὁ θεὸς τῆς δόξης ὤφθη τῷ πατρὶ ἡμῶν Ἀβραὰμ ὄντι ἐν τῇ Μεσοποταμίᾳ πρὶν ἢ κατοικῆσαι αὐτὸν ἐν Χαρρὰν

A. God of Glory Graciously Appears – Revelation is the key – God appears to man – Amazing; Immanuel – God actually comes and dwells with man -- Amazing "ophthalmology" – from Greek word for "*appeared*"

1. Eternal Perspective of God of Glory – sees the end from the beginning
   Stephen condemning the Jewish leaders for their limited perspective

2. Universal Scope of God's Program for Man – not just about the nation Israel

Stephen condemning the Jewish leaders for their nationalistic prejudice and arrogance; God not limited by geography to one special holy land;
God was with Abraham wherever he went – not tied to the land or the temple

At the time Abraham and his family were worshipping other gods (**Joshua 24:2**); call in Haran was a confirmation of earlier call when he was in **Ur** (**Gen. 12:1**)
Abraham was a very **unlikely choice** – just as David was not the obvious choice for Samuel when he came looking for the man God wanted anointed as king; family of idolaters living in a pagan land

Psalm 29:3 – "*God of glory*" – absolute supremacy of God over everything

Stott: His glory is his self-manifestation, and Stephen is about to give details of how he made himself known to Abraham.

MacArthur: Glory is the fullness of the manifestation of all that God is. The glory of God is the composite of all His attributes. We can talk about the God of love, the God of justice, the God of grace, the God of wisdom, the God of righteousness, the God of wrath, the God of power, or the God of any other element of His divine nature. But we can just say, "*The God of glory*," and that would encompass every single thing that God ever is. That's the most comprehensive expression. Therefore, Stephen is saying, "I believe in God in the fullest conceivable sense possible."

B. Man of Vision Sees by Faith – Response is Required

1. Sees God's Person – Do you see who God is?

2. Sees God's Plan – Do you see what God sees?

Illustration: Once you see what God sees you can never go back and not see it again – cf. Federal Express logo on their delivery trucks – you see the arrow – had to be pointed out to me … now it screams out

II. (:3-4) GOD OF SOVEREIGN DIRECTION / MAN OF MISSION

"*and said to him, 'Depart from your country and your relatives, and come into the land that I will show you.' Then he departed from the land of the Chaldeans, and settled in Haran. And from there, after his father died, God removed him into this country in which you are now living.*"

καὶ εἶπεν πρὸς αὐτόν· ἔξελθε ἐκ τῆς γῆς σου καὶ [ἐκ] τῆς συγγενείας σου, καὶ δεῦρο εἰς τὴν γῆν ἣν ἄν σοι δείξω. τότε ἐξελθὼν ἐκ γῆς Χαλδαίων κατῴκησεν ἐν Χαρράν. κἀκεῖθεν μετὰ τὸ ἀποθανεῖν τὸν πατέρα αὐτοῦ μετῴκισεν αὐτὸν εἰς τὴν γῆν ταύτην εἰς ἣν ὑμεῖς νῦν κατοικεῖτε,

A. God of Sovereign Direction Graciously Commands

1. Based on Divine Election

2. Based on Effectual Calling

3. Based on Providential Leading/Pushing

B. Man of Mission Obeys by Faith

1. Forsaking Personal Comfort and Security

Key to obedience is obeying when you cannot see what the consequences will be
God tested Abraham severely in the incident with sacrificing Isaac

2. Needing Divine Push to Reach God's Goals

III. (:5) GOD OF PROMISE / MAN OF FUTURE POSSESSION

"*And He gave him no inheritance in it, not even a foot of ground; and yet, even when he had no child, He promised that He would give it to him as a possession, and to his offspring after him.*"

καὶ οὐκ ἔδωκεν αὐτῷ κληρονομίαν ἐν αὐτῇ οὐδὲ βῆμα ποδὸς καὶ ἐπηγγείλατο δοῦναι αὐτῷ εἰς κατάσχεσιν αὐτὴν καὶ τῷ σπέρματι αὐτοῦ μετ᾽ αὐτόν, οὐκ ὄντος αὐτῷ τέκνου.

A. God of Promise Graciously Talks Big

Boice: This statement [that Abraham remained a pilgrim in Canaan] must have been meant as a rebuke to these settled leaders of the people. They were in the land God had given. It was a blessing. But they were too much at home in the land. They had forgotten that, wonderful as possession of the land of promise was, they were nevertheless only to be pilgrims in it as Abraham had been. Without this orientation, they lacked the spiritual depth that characterized their ancestor. Abraham, we are told in Hebrews, was not looking for an earthly city, but "*to the city with foundations* [the heavenly city], *whose architect and builder is God*" (**Heb. 11:10**). These rulers had ceased to look forward. They were looking back, and they had taken the things of the world and the blessings of the world to be permanent. They had allowed God's temporal blessings to eclipse their sense of God's presence.

B. Man of Future Possession Hopes Big by Faith

Promise was really directed to his offspring – Big Problem = Abraham had none!

IV. (:6-7) GOD OF JUDGMENT / MAN OF REDEMPTION

"*But God spoke to this effect, that his offspring would be aliens in a foreign land, and that they would be enslaved and mistreated for four hundred years. 'And whatever nation to which they shall be in bondage I Myself will judge,' said God, 'and after that they will come out and serve Me in this place.*'"

ἐλάλησεν δὲ οὕτως ὁ θεὸς ὅτι ἔσται τὸ σπέρμα αὐτοῦ πάροικον ἐν γῇ ἀλλοτρίᾳ καὶ δουλώσουσιν αὐτὸ καὶ κακώσουσιν ἔτη τετρακόσια· καὶ τὸ ἔθνος ᾧ ἐὰν δουλεύσουσιν κρινῶ ἐγώ, ὁ θεὸς εἶπεν, καὶ μετὰ ταῦτα ἐξελεύσονται καὶ λατρεύσουσίν μοι ἐν τῷ τόπῳ τούτῳ.

A. God of Judgment Graciously Disciplines His Children But Destroys His Enemies

1. God Allows His Children to Suffer Greatly

2. God Does Not Forget or Forsake His Children

3. God Ultimately Judges the Instruments He Uses for Disciplining His Children

4. God Desires Our Worship and Service

Chris Vogel: Stephen then makes a play on words in v7. Quoting from **Exodus 3:12** he refers to "*this place*." Up to this point "this place" in the discussion of Acts refers to the temple on Mt. Zion, but the context of Exodus refers to Mt. Sinai. **The goal of God's promise was not the land, but the relationship. The place that is important to God is the place where God meets his people.**

B. Man of Redemption Responds to Deliverance with Service by Faith

Do we grasp the depth of our bondage – what original sin and total depravity mean in our own situation?
Have we appreciated the precious value of our redemption?
Do we live as those delivered from the power of sin?
How are we serving God in the place where He has put us right now?

V. (:8) GOD OF COVENANT FAITHFULNESS / MAN OF CIRCUMCISION

"*And He gave him the covenant of circumcision; and so Abraham became the father of Isaac, and circumcised him on the eighth day; and Isaac became the father of Jacob, and Jacob of the twelve patriarchs.*"

καὶ ἔδωκεν αὐτῷ διαθήκην περιτομῆς· καὶ οὕτως ἐγέννησεν τὸν Ἰσαὰκ καὶ περιέτεμεν αὐτὸν τῇ ἡμέρᾳ τῇ ὀγδόῃ, καὶ Ἰσαὰκ τὸν Ἰακώβ, καὶ Ἰακὼβ τοὺς δώδεκα πατριάρχας.

A. God of Covenant Faithfulness Graciously Acts Unconditionally

Abrahamic covenant – only God passed through the path between the bloody pieces of the slaughtered animals
Gen. 15:17-18 "*It came about when the sun had set, that it was very dark, and behold, there appeared a smoking oven and a flaming torch which passed between these pieces. On that day the Lord made a covenant with Abram*" symbolizing the presence of God

God has never wavered in His faithfulness and covenant loyalty to His chosen people; although He has set Israel aside for a time, He will yet draw them to Himself in national repentance, give them possession of the promised land and usher in His Messianic Kingdom

B. Man of Circumcision Blessed on Conditional Basis by Faith

Probably not the sign of the covenant that Abraham would have chosen – fortunately we don't have to circumcise our own baby boys – Jewish faith was pretty messy and bloody in a lot of

respects – we lose much of that emphasis

Gen. 17:24 "*Now Abraham was ninety-nine years old when he was circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin*"

Jewish leaders loved everything that their circumcision represented – their connection to Abraham and the patriarchs; their connection to Moses and the law; their connection to Jerusalem and the temple – Circumcision was a badge of great honor; spoke of God's loyal covenant love to His chosen people; but they missed the point of all of God's revelation which pointed to the fulfillment of everything in the person of the promised Messiah Jesus Christ

No individual blessing apart from faith in God and His promises

CONCLUSION:

Maybe this passage can be a **watershed** in your relationship to the God of glory. There is no grandfathering in of spiritual relationships based on the faith of your parents or those who have gone before you. God still initiates new spiritual relationships by His grace; but you must personally respond in faith.

Illustration: Shopping at Columbia Mall on Friday … in parking lot passed a young couple; possibly dating; the girl was chewing on the guy; "Takes two people to have a conversation!"

1) What type of **Vision** do you have for God and His program for this age?
2) Are you living as one sold out to the **Great Commission** that Jesus commanded for today?
3) Are you more concerned with what new **possessions** you will unwrap on Christmas day or is your hope set on the future realization of the **promises** of God?
4) Do you appreciate your **redemption** from future judgment and from bondage to serving sin?
5) Are you living a **circumcised** life of separation from the world and dedication to the worship and service of God?

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DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

1) Are we always respectful to authority figures – even when they are blatantly mistreating us?

2) In what ways have we demonstrated ourselves to be stubborn and stiff-necked in resisting the Holy Spirit in some area or not heeding God's messengers?

3) What lessons and encouragement towards courage and boldness in witnessing can we glean from this account?

4) Can we look back on our life and account many examples of God's interactions with us in terms of grace and faith?

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QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Kent: the Jews were fond of historical retrospection, and with good reason. In view of the remarkable dealings of God with their nation in the past, it is small wonder that in times of adversity Jews often found comfort in tracing their history to see God's mercy, and to find encouragement for greater trust. Psalms 78 and 107 are other examples of this practice. Stephen, however, was not trying to find encouragement for himself, but was endeavoring to show how the Christian message was fully consistent with and the culmination of OT revelation.

The speech also stressed the fact that historically God had to contend continually with a disobedient people, even among the patriarchs who sold Joseph to Egypt. According to Stephen, the important thing was to see God's purposes, not man's actions which were often sinful and contradictory to God's will. . .

Applying these historical precedents to his audience, Stephen accused them of having the same rebellious nature as their fathers. Their ancestors had persecuted the prophets who foretold Christ's coming, and when Christ came this Sanhedrin had killed him. Their hardness of heart showed them to be no better spiritually than uncircumcised gentiles.

Stott: We cannot miss Stephen's emphasis on the divine initiative. It was God who appeared, spoke, sent, promised, punished and rescued. From Ur to Haran, from Haran to Canaan, from Canaan to Egypt, from Egypt back to Canaan again, God was directing each stage of his people's pilgrimage. . .

Change is painful to us all, especially when it affects our cherished buildings and customs, and we should not seek change merely for the sake of change. Yet true Christian radicalism is open to change. It knows that God has bound himself to his church (promising that he will never leave it) and to his word (promising that it will never pass away). But God's church means people not buildings, and God's word means Scripture not traditions. So long as these essentials are preserved, the buildings and the traditions can if necessary go. We must not allow them to imprison the living God or to impede his mission in the world.

Wiersbe:
(:1-8) They misunderstood their own spiritual roots
(:9-36) They rejected their God-sent deliverers
(:37-43) They disobeyed their law
(:44-50) They despised their temple
(:51-53) They stubbornly resisted their God and His truth

Toussaint:
1) There is progress and change in God's program.
2) The blessings of God are not limited to the land of Israel and the temple area.
3) Israel in its past always evidenced a pattern of opposition to God's plans and His men.

Baxter: We see, then, that the outrage against Stephen is, in a fourfold way, a pivotal event in the Acts. It marks (1) the final trial of the nation at the capital, (2) the official Jewish rejection of the renewed offer of the kingdom, (3) the first outward movement of evangelism, (4) the emerging of a new strategic centre.

Thus, the main outcome and central significance of this first part of the Acts is: THE RENEWED REJECTION OF THE KINGDOM OFFICIALLY AT THE CAPITAL

George Ladd: The purpose of this speech was to show from Israel's history that the possession of the Temple had been neither a necessity for nor a guarantee of the true worship of God. And this served to substantiate Stephen's main point that now that Messiah had come the Jewish worship in the Temple in Jerusalem was superseded.

Dr. John Whitcomb: **Stephen, the First Martyr**
First Christian to die was not Stephen, but Ananias – under opposite circumstances; the longest sermon in the book of Acts; Luke got his notes from Saul of Tarsus who was there and heard every word, a brilliant man; Luke was Paul's personal physician to patch him up after each stoning and keep him going; Luke = one of the greatest historians of the ancient world, writing under inspiration; God doesn't have to have a temple in Jerusalem in order to do marvelous things; you can't confine God to this box; only property Abraham owned in the promised land was burial plot for Sarah; look at how God tested Abraham; **land, blessing and seed** promised to him; trust God on the basis of His Word only (not on the basis of tangible, rational thought); Ishmael circumcised on 13th year = Muslim model; Destruction of your temple, nation, theocracy, kingship was what they deserved;

John Piper: **The Story of a Stiff-Necked People**
So God's mercy begins with choosing Abraham out of all the peoples on the earth to inherit the promised land; and God's patience begins by giving Abraham an extra push to get all the way to the promised land when he had settled half way in Haran.

Combination of encouragement and warning; So what was Stephen's defense? He had been charged with speaking against Moses and the law, and against God and the temple. His defense is that history proves the opposite: it is Israel as a people that have stiffened their neck against God and resisted the Holy Spirit. They persecuted the prophets of God, and they killed Jesus the Son of God, and now they are about to kill a man "*full of faith and the Holy Spirit*." They are the ones who need to give an account, not Stephen.

Steven Cole:
1. Israel's history reveals God's sovereign, abundant grace. Stephen demonstrates clearly that God initiated the process of calling out a people for His name and that He continued to pour out His grace on these people in spite of their own rebellion.
2. Israel's history reveals their own stubborn, rebellious propensity to reject God's gracious dealings with them.
3. Israel's history reveals their pattern of limiting worship to a sacred place, rather than to a sacred Person, who made all that is.

Chris Vogel: **Unexpected Grace**
The trouble was the people loved the symbol of God's affection for them so much that they missed the substance of his love for them. The hung on the illustration and missed out on the reality. Rather than allowing the Law to point them to their need of a Savior, Jesus Christ, they used the law unlawfully to encourage their own law keeping as good enough to please God. Rather than the temple sacrifices pointing them to Christ's death, the presence of God in the temple reminding them of God's presence on the basis of Jesus our High Priest, they saw the temple as a badge of honor, of God's special love for them. Keeping the Law and temple, but

missing Christ is a tragedy. . .

God is not imprisoned in the walls of his temple, he is not a caged animal for the enjoyment of his people. He is boundless in calling whomever he will. In v2 – his call goes out to one who lived in Mesopotamia. You don't get much more outside the box than that. The way Stephen describes God's work shows his grace. God does not just call out to Abraham from the comfort and safety of Mt. Zion, "Abram, come over here, I want you!" Rather God appears, in all his glory, in the pagan land of Mesopotamia. The idea of God doing this would be repulsive to the Jews.
Remember, in Genesis this is the land of rebellion against God as the tower of Babel is built. Throughout the Old Testament this land is the capital of idolatry. But God goes into that unlikely place to call a people

Jonathan Teram: We must note a few things about his defense right away. First, as we know, Stephen goes through a very long review about Israel's history. Second, it seems like Stephen hardly defends himself. For this reason, some skeptics have said that this defense is not genuine but rather is just Luke inserting another argument for Christianity. What those skeptics fail to note is that though Stephen does not defend himself per say, he does answer his accusations and prove that they are false. At that brings us to the third thing about Stephen's defense---why does Stephen give this long speech about Israel's history to learned rabbis who already knew Israel's history? The answer is that Stephen emphasizes two aspects of Israel's history that were relevant to the problem at hand. 1) The Israelite people had "a habit" of rejecting God's chosen leaders. 2) The temple or any other "place" could not contain God's glory. When we look at Stephen's defense with those two points in mind, we realize that this is an extraordinarily powerful sermon!
http://www.wilmettechurchofchrist.org/Sunday/Acts/Acts7v1-8v1a.pdf

Kevin Maples: **The Church is Built on Faith**

1. God called His people to respond in faith, long before the temple existed.

a. The God of glory should never be confused with a building.
b. Abraham came to God through faith, not through the temple.

2. God is not bound to a place.

a. Abraham was not in Jerusalem when God called him.
b. Jesus told the woman at the well that Jerusalem would no longer be the central place of worship:
c. David wrote of the omnipresence of God.
d. Jonah learned the hard way that God is everywhere–on land, at sea, and under the sea.
e. Stephen preached in verses 47 and 48:
f. Does this mean the temple should not have been built? No. It means that the temple had a purpose until the death of Jesus on the cross and at that moment the temple became obsolete.

***3.* God is constantly working in history.**

a. Abraham's place in God's plan was to look forward to the promise.
b. The Exodus demonstrates that God's plan extends beyond Jerusalem.
c. The fulfillment of God's promise to Abraham declares the faithfulness of God.

http://www.livingwiththecross.org/home/140004400/140004721/The%20Church%20on%20Fire.%20Part%2021.%20Lessons%20from%20Abraham.%20Part%201.%20The%20Church%20is%20Built%20on%20Faith.%20Acts%207.1..8.pdf

TEXT: Acts 7: 9-16

TITLE: ISRAEL SURVEY PART 2 – GOD'S DEALINGS WITH JOSEPH – WISDOM TO TRIUMPH OVER UNJUST SUFFERING

BIG IDEA:
THE GOD OF FAITHFUL DELIVERANCE GRANTS FAVOR AND WISDOM TO THOSE LIKE JOSEPH WHO ENDURE UNJUST SUFFERING FOR GOD'S ULTIMATE GLORY

INTRODUCTION:
On this week after Christmas – the day after we celebrate the birth of our Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ – what is the world saying today about Jesus? Are they all excited? They are saying Nothing! They have moved on; to most people Jesus is simply irrelevant. To others, they give some lip service to His claims but persist in rejecting Him in their heart. No different than the fickle crowd who sang Hosannas and spread out palm branches before His triumphal entry into Jerusalem and then turned around a week later and showed their true heart condition as they cried out with one voice as an angry mob to "Crucify Him."

Stephen in Acts 7 stands before an angry Sanhedrin Council that wants to put a cap on any promotion of Jesus and His resurrection and His coming kingdom. They have brought forward trumped up witnesses to charge Stephen with blasphemy against God; with speaking against Moses and the law and the temple and Jewish worship in general. But who is truly following in the footsteps of the revered patriarchs of old? Is it the members of the Sanhedrin in all of their pompous pride or is it actually Stephen who is following the path of a disciple of Jesus Christ?

Stephen has entered into a quick **OT survey course** to provide some answers and to turn the tables and issue God's indictment against self righteous leaders. Last week we reviewed the **faith of Abraham**. That took us about half way through the book of Genesis. Today we will blitz through the rest of Genesis -- looking at the **wisdom of Joseph** in triumphing over unjust suffering. [After this the pace will pick up considerably – studying the ministry of Moses and then jumping forward to the days of David and Solomon with the emphasis on the temple.] Being filled with faith and with wisdom are two of the characteristics of a **Spirit-Filled Christian servant** as we saw in our earlier profile of Stephen. The path blazed by Joseph was a type of much of what Jesus came to fulfill and also a pattern for the disciples of Jesus -- like Stephen -- to follow as well.

THE GOD OF FAITHFUL DELIVERANCE GRANTS FAVOR AND WISDOM TO THOSE LIKE JOSEPH WHO ENDURE UNJUST SUFFERING FOR GOD'S ULTIMATE GLORY

FOUR STEP PROGRESSION IN THE SUFFERING AND EXALTATION OF JOSEPH AND JESUS (WITH APPLICATION TO STEPHEN AND THE SANHEDRIN)

I. (:9a) REJECTION -- THE STING OF UNJUST SUFFERING HURTS DEEPLY

- **JOSEPH: REJECTION BY HIS BROTHERS AND ENSLAVED IN EGYPT**
- **JESUS: REJECTION OF THE MESSIAH AT HIS FIRST COMING BY HIS OWN PEOPLE**
- **APPLICATION TO STEPHEN and the SANHEDRIN**

A. Rejection Motivated by Jealousy – an Unjust Attack by Close Relatives

"*And the patriarchs became jealous of Joseph*"
Καὶ οἱ πατριάρχαι ζηλώσαντες τὸν Ἰωσὴφ

Albert Barnes: dissatisfied with the favour which their father Jacob showed Joseph, and envious at the dreams which indicated that he was to be raised to remarkable honour above his parents and brethren, **Genesis 37:3-11**.

Calvin: by a nefarious and impious conspiracy . . . They boasted proudly of their fathers; he showeth what manner [of] persons the chief of them were; to wit, murderers of their brother,

How much did Joseph suffer? **Psalm 105: 17-21**
Don't want to minimize his suffering – **Gen. 42:21** – "*saw his distress when he pleaded with us*"

Emotional ups and downs –

Trying to please his father Jacob

Looks like his brothers are going to kill him – what about the insight the Lord had given him in his previous dreams: sheaves of wheat; sun, moon and 11 stars bowing down to him (Gen. 37)

Stripped of his multi-colored tunic – symbolic of all of the privilege and promise of his young life (37:23)

Ends up being sold into Egypt

Rises to position of responsibility in Potiphar's household

Wrongly thrown into prison for resisting sexual advances of his wife

Ignored by the wine taster after giving him a dream reading

Finally rescued by God and exalted

His prison stint in Egypt was not country club existence

What role did God intend for Joseph to play in the overall scheme of things?

Some lessons from the undeserved suffering of Joseph:

- Patriarchs are not without sin – Sanhedrin boasting in their physical descent
- Family jealousy is the worst kind – Family should protect you
- Collusion is impossible to fight – Mob mentality – difficult for voice of restraint
- Joseph had been trying to please his father – but subjected to severe suffering and rejection

MacArthur: These same individuals Stephen was addressing, only a few months prior, had also sold somebody for envy...Jesus. **Mark 15:10** says, "*For he [Pilate] knew that the chief priests had delivered Him for envy*." And Judas sold Him "*for thirty pieces of silver*" (**Mt. 26:15**). Just beginning to drive home the convicting knife, Stephen says,"Yes, it's historical. Your forefathers sold Joseph, the chosen one of God, because they envied him." I don't doubt for a minute that some of them began to think back to Jesus, because they knew Stephen represented Jesus; they knew he represented Jesus Christ.

Jesus – rejected by His own people – **John 1**
Even his own brothers failed to believe in Him during his earthly ministry (**John 7:5**) – must have been tough growing up as the half-brother of Jesus – never did anything wrong

The stone which the builders rejected – became the chief cornerstone
Is. 53:3 "*He was despised and forsaken of men, a man of sorrows and and acquainted with grief*"

B. Rejection Manifested by Jail Time in Egypt – Consignment to a Hopeless Pit
"*and sold him into Egypt.*"
ἀπέδοντο εἰς Αἴγυπτον.

Does provide time for reflection for "The Dreamer"

Strange place for God's promises to take root and be fulfilled --
Stott: We note at once, that, if Mesopotamia was the surprising context in which God appeared to Abraham (7:2), Egypt was the equally surprising scene of God's dealings with Joseph. Six times in seven verses Stephen repeats the word "*Egypt*", as if to make sure that his hearers have grasped its significance.

You cannot limit God's blessing to some small geographical box of nationalistic pride

Don't allow rejection and suffering to make you bitter; don't be surprised by it; don't question God's timetable for deliverance

II. (:9b-10) RESCUE -- THE FAVOR OF GOD EXCEEDS OUR EXPECTATIONS –

- **JOSEPH**
- **JESUS – RESURRECTION OF THE MESSIAH AND EXALTATION**
- **APPLICATION TO STEPHEN and the SANHEDRIN**

4 EXPERIENCES OF GOD'S FAVOR

A. (:9b) God's Presence
"*And yet God was with him,*"
καὶ ἦν ὁ θεὸς μετ᾽ αὐτοῦ

In contrast to pattern of rejection of God's choice by those who did not have discernment

Greatest antidote to Loneliness – spending quality time alone with God for an extended time and proving God to be sufficient and faithful in meeting your deepest spiritual and emotional needs – as well as your basic physical needs

- Alone with God in the pit before being sold into Egypt
- Alone with God in prison – waiting for deliverance and an opportunity to use the wisdom and administrative skill God had given to him

John 3:2 gives good import to this phrase "*no one can do these signs that You do unless God is with him.*"

- For Protection and Power
- For granting favor and providential blessing
- For granting effectiveness

Important promise appended to the Great Commission
We know God will never leave us or forsake us

Hope in God's Presence with His people – wherever they are – rather than hope in God's blessing on just those within the confines of Jerusalem and surrounding area

B. God's Deliverance

"*and rescued him from all his afflictions,*"
καὶ ἐξείλατο αὐτὸν ἐκ πασῶν τῶν θλίψεων αὐτοῦ

Ps. 50:14-15 "*Offer to God a sacrifice of thanksgiving, and pay your vows to the Most High; and call upon Me in the day of trouble; I shall rescue you, and you will honor Me.*"

C. God's Wisdom

"*and granted him favor and wisdom in the sight of Pharaoh, king of Egypt;*"
καὶ ἔδωκεν αὐτῷ χάριν καὶ σοφίαν ἐναντίον Φαραὼ βασιλέως Αἰγύπτου

Especially wisdom to interpret dreams

When Solomon could request anything from God he wished, he chose wisdom. I Kings 3-4
"*Behold I have given you a wise and discerning heart*"

Luke 2: 40, 52
"*The child continued to grow and become strong, increasing in wisdom; and the grace of God was upon Him.*"
"*And Jesus kept increasing in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men.*"

D. God's Exaltation

"*and he made him governor over Egypt and all his household.*"
καὶ κατέστησεν αὐτὸν ἡγούμενον ἐπ᾽ Αἴγυπτον καὶ [ἐφ] ὅλον τὸν οἶκον αὐτοῦ.

Heb. 12:2

Unbelievable privilege for a foreigner; he was still fairly young as well
What a surprising role that goes beyond our expectations for success for Joseph

III. (:11-14) RESTORATION -- THE PROVIDENCE OF GOD TRANSFORMS EVIL INTO GOOD

- **JOSEPH**
- **JESUS – RESTORATION OF ISRAEL AFTER SPIRITUAL FAMINE DURING THE TIMES OF THE GENTILES AND THE TRIBULATION**
- **APPLICATION TO STEPHEN and the SANHEDRIN**

Gen. 50:20 "*As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good in order to bring about this present result, to preserve many people alive.*"

Key verse for understanding the life of Joseph
All about the divine perspective – that is why James 1 teaches us important lessons about asking for wisdom when we face various trials – we need God's perspective on the situation
The testing of your faith produces Endurance

A. Desperate Circumstances Create Divine Opportunities

1. (:11) Desperate Circumstances Exhaust Our Resources

"*Now a famine came over all Egypt and Canaan, and great affliction with it; and our fathers could find no food.*"

ἦλθεν δὲ λιμὸς ἐφ᾽ ὅλην τὴν Αἴγυπτον καὶ Χανάαν καὶ θλῖψις μεγάλη, καὶ οὐχ ηὕρισκον χορτάσματα οἱ πατέρες ἡμῶν.

2. (:12) God Cracks Open the Window of Divine Opportunity

"*But when Jacob heard that there was grain in Egypt, he sent our fathers there the first time.*"

ἀκούσας δὲ Ἰακὼβ ὄντα σιτία εἰς Αἴγυπτον ἐξαπέστειλεν τοὺς πατέρας ἡμῶν πρῶτον.

1 Cor. 10:13 "*No temptation has overtaken you but such as is common to man; and God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will provide the way of escape also, so that you will be able to endure it*."

Remember suffering of Job and the tremendous restoration God provided

Stott: It is difficult for us to imagine, and indeed Stephen does not mention, how traumatic this descent into Egypt must have seemed to Jacob. He surely knew that in an earlier famine the Lord had specifically forbidden his father Isaac to "*go down to Egypt*", telling him instead to remain in the promised land. Did this ban include Jacob too? It was doubtless to allay Jacob's qualms that at Beersheba, near the border between Canaan and Egypt, God told him in a night vision not to be afraid to "*go down to Egypt*", for he would go down with him, bless him there and ultimately bring him back.

B. God's Wisdom Promotes Forgiveness and Renewed Fellowship

1. (:13) God's Wisdom Promotes Forgiveness

"*And on the second visit Joseph made himself known to his brothers, and Joseph's family was disclosed to Pharaoh.*"

καὶ ἐν τῷ δευτέρῳ ἀνεγνωρίσθη Ἰωσὴφ τοῖς ἀδελφοῖς αὐτοῦ καὶ φανερὸν ἐγένετο τῷ Φαραὼ τὸ γένος [τοῦ] Ἰωσήφ.

Joseph wanted to test his brothers … did not make it easy for them up front
But Joseph could have chosen to exact revenge against his hateful brothers; he was in a position of strength and they were now vulnerable

James 3:13-18 Remember: Charlie preached on divine wisdom – Joseph proved to be filled with just this type of wisdom – the type that made peace with his undeserving brothers – much to

their surprise and relief

2. (:14) God's Wisdom Promotes Renewed and Overflowing Fellowship

"*And Joseph sent word and invited Jacob his father and all his relatives to come to him, seventy-five persons in all.*"

ἀποστείλας δὲ Ἰωσὴφ μετεκαλέσατο Ἰακὼβ τὸν πατέρα αὐτοῦ καὶ πᾶσαν τὴν συγγένειαν ἐν ψυχαῖς ἑβδομήκοντα πέντε.

What a blessed reunion – and the means God used to sustain the nation through a very difficult physical trial; the glory of God and the carrying out of His earthly program was ultimately at stake

Wiersbe: On supposed discrepancy in number between **70 people** in the household of Jacob (Hebrew text for Gen. 46:27 and Ex. 1:5) vs. **75** (LXX Greek translation). In their count, the translators included Joseph's grandchildren (1 Chron. 7:14-15, 20-25). No real contradiction.

Toussaint: One of the most widely accepted solutions is to recognize that the Hebrew text includes Jacob, Joseph, and Joseph's two sons, Ephraim and Manasseh (a total of 70), but that the Septuagint omits Jacob and Joseph but includes Joseph's seven grandchildren (mentioned in 1 Chron. 7:14-15, 20-25). This is supported by the Hebrew in Genesis 46:8-26 which enumerates 66 names, omitting Jacob, Joseph, and Joseph's two sons.

Chris Vogel: We should not miss the subtlety of connection here. Joseph, granted wisdom by God to care for the needs of those hungry in Egypt and in Canaan is but a pointer to Jesus who likewise cared for the bodies and souls of those who came to him. It should not come as a surprise then that Stephen too **distributed food to those in need** and that the too is said to wise (Acts 6:3,5,8).

Can't restore and exalt ourselves – God must make it happen

IV. (:15-16) REST -- THE FORGIVENESS EXTENDED BRINGS PEACEFUL RESOLUTION

- **JOSEPH**
- **JESUS – REST IN THE MESSIANIC KINGDOM IN THE PROMISED LAND**
- **APPLICATION TO STEPHEN and the SANHEDRIN**

"*And Jacob went down to Egypt and there passed away, he and our fathers. And from there they were removed to Shechem, and laid in the tomb which Abraham had purchased for a sum of money from the sons of Hamor in Shechem.* "

καὶ κατέβη Ἰακὼβ εἰς Αἴγυπτον καὶ ἐτελεύτησεν αὐτὸς καὶ οἱ πατέρες ἡμῶν, καὶ μετετέθησαν εἰς Συχὲμ καὶ ἐτέθησαν ἐν τῷ μνήματι ᾧ ὠνήσατο Ἀβραὰμ τιμῆς ἀργυρίου παρὰ τῶν υἱῶν Ἐμμὼρ ἐν Συχέμ.

Future rest remains for us – but for now, much work to still do

- The patriarchs ended up their lives in a state of peaceful resolution – family conflicts

resolved on the basis of forgiveness – everything traced all the way back to Abraham – the father of the nation

- Buried in the promised land – despite all of their struggles and trials and sojourns in Egypt because of the great famine

Heb. 11:21-22

Jeff Hughes: [Heb. 11:21-22]

iv. Both of these men died showing their great faith. Jacob, who dies, blessing each of his sons, and also the sons of Joseph.

v. Joseph, looking ahead to the promises that God gave to his great-grandfather, Abraham, concerning the deliverance of the nation of Israel from Egypt gives his sons instructions to bring his bones back to Canaan when he dies.

vi. All of these men were carried back to Canaan for burial. They believed God, and looked to the **promise of the land to come**, that would come, as history bears out.

vii. Today, you can go over to Israel and see the cave and the field that Abraham bought, in faith of the promises that God gave him.

viii. Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Rebecca, and Leah are all later buried in the same **Cave of Machpelah.**

ix. The cave was uncovered several years ago beneath a massive building, revealing artifacts from the Early Israelite Period (some 30 centuries old)

x. Upon the capture of Hebron in the 1967 war, the Chief Rabbi of the Israel Defense Forces, the late Major-General Rabbi Shlomo Goren, was the first Jew to enter the Cave of Machpelah for thousands of years.

xi. A cave that Abraham bought, in faith, during a journey of faith, following the promises of God.

http://www.sermoncentral.com/sermons/stephens-message-pt-1--journeys-of-faith-jeff-hughes-sermon-on-examples-of-faith-57881.asp?page=8

Significance of Shechem:

Constable: In Stephen's day Shechem was in Samaritan territory. He reminded the Sanhedrin that their ancestral deliverer was buried in the land that orthodox Jews despised and avoided. This was another instance of helping them see that they should not think that the only place God worked was in the Promised Land. Stephen had already referred to Mesopotamia as where God had revealed Himself to Abraham (v. 2).

Stott: There were two patriarchal burial grounds in Canaan. The first was the field and cave of Machpelah near Hebron, which Abraham bought from Ephron the Hittite; the second was a plot of ground near Shechem, which Jacob bought from the sons of Hamor.

Bock: Stephen's key point is that burial took place in the promised land, although in Samaria, and the move was an act of faith that God would keep his word.

CONCLUSION: Last week we learned about Spirit-filling from the faith of Abraham; this week Stephen points us to the profile of Joseph --

41:38 Joseph = a man in whom the Spirit of God resides

41:39 full of wisdom

Are you resting in the **wisdom of God** this morning?

Can you suffer **unfair rejection** in expectation that God will rescue you in His way and in His timing and bring about the type of resolution that brings Him ultimate glory? (1 Peter)

May we not be stubborn and arrogant like the Sanhedrin leaders – making God after our own image; making idols out of physical things like the land and the temple – expecting that God will give us a free pass because of some superstition or ancestral connection

Did you see Jesus in this passage and appreciate how He suffered for you, the just for the unjust so that He might reconcile you to a holy God?

May we truly experience God's peace and rest.

* * * * * * * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

1) Where have you experienced jealousy and rejection and suffering?

2) When God has rescued you, how have you honored Him for His faithfulness?

3) How has God transformed evil into good in your life?

4) Does the prospect of future rest motivate you for present work and service?

* * * * * * * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Kent: The burial of Jacob and his sons is stated with marked differences from the OT. Stephen seems to say that Jacob and his sons were buried in the tomb that Abraham bought from the sons of Hamor. The OT states that Jacob was buried at Hebron in the cave of Machpelah which Abraham bought from Ephron (Gen. 23:1-20; 49:29-33; 50:13). It is possible to understand Acts 7:16 to refer only to the sons of Jacob, not Jacob himself, and to this the OT offers no contradiction, for it says nothing about the burial place of the sons. The OT reports, as does Stephen, that Joseph was buried at Shechem (Gen. 33:19; Josh. 24:32), but it relates the purchase to Jacob, not Abraham. Some explain this as an instance of telescoping in which two events are compressed into one. [like the two calls of Abraham] The expanded thought would be: Abraham and Jacob bought burial sites from Ephron in Hebron and Hamor in Shechem. Others suggest that Abraham actually may have made the original purchase and Jacob later had to re-purchase the plot. Abraham was in Shechem, and must have needed to acquire some property to erect his altar (Gen. 12:6, 7).

Boice: I noticed when I was studying Genesis some years ago that although Joseph is a remarkable illustration of the Lord Jesus Christ in the way he was mistreated, was sent into a foreign land, and there became the salvation of his people, nowhere in the Bible is Joseph ever made a direct type of Christ. The New Testament never says, as it does in Moses' case, for example, that Jesus is the second Joseph, or something like that. But if ever there is a place where that comparison is at least in the background, even though it may not be said openly, it is here. The point Stephen is making is that all through their history, the Jewish people persecuted

and killed the prophets sent to them, just as Joseph's brothers persecuted Joseph. And, of course, that is what the leaders had done in the case of Jesus Christ. They had killed him.

Wiersbe: I have combined the sections dealing with Joseph and Moses because these two Jewish heroes have this in common: **they were both rejected as deliverers the first time, but were accepted the second time.** Joseph's brethren hated their brother and sold him into servitude, yet later he became their deliverer. They recognized Joseph "*at the second time*" (Acts 7:13) when they returned to Egypt for more food. Israel rejected Moses when he first tried to deliver them from Egyptian bondage, and he had to flee for his life (Ex. 2:11-22). But when Moses came to them the second time, the nation accepted him and he set them free (Acts 7:35).

These two events illustrate how Israel treated Jesus Christ. Israel rejected their Messiah when He came to them the first time (John 1:1), but when He comes again, they will recognize Him and receive Him (Zech. 12:10; Rev. 1:7). In spite of what they did to His Son, God has not cast away His people (Rom. 11: 1-6). Israel today is suffering from a partial spiritual blindness that one day will be taken away (Rom. 11:25-32). Individual Jews are being saved, but the nation as a whole is blind to the truth about Jesus Christ.

Constable: The form of Stephen's defense was common in his culture, but it is uncommon in western culture. He reviewed the history of Israel and highlighted elements of that history that supported his contentions. He built it mainly around outstanding personalities: Abraham, Joseph, Moses, and, to a lesser degree, David and Solomon. The first section (vv. 2-16) deals with Israel's patriarchal period and refutes the charge of **blaspheming God** (6:11). The second major section (vv. 17-43) deals with Moses and the Law and responds to the charge of **blaspheming Moses** (6:11) and **speaking against the Law** (6:13). The third section (vv. 44-50) deals with the temple and responds to the charge of speaking against the temple (6:13) and saying that Jesus would destroy the temple and alter Jewish customs (6:14). Stephen then climaxed his address with an indictment of his hard-hearted hearers (vv. 51-53). Longenecker believed Stephen's main subjects were **the land** (vv. 2-36), **the Law** (vv. 37-43), and **the temple** (vv. 44-50), plus a concluding indictment (vv. 51-53). . .

From Egypt the chosen people eventually returned to the Promised Land. God had been with them out of the land, and He now returned them to the land. Believers in Jesus will end up in the final resting place of Jesus, heaven.

Shechem was of special interest to Stephen. The Israelites buried Joseph's bones there after their initial conquest of the land (Josh. 24:32). Stephen's allusion to this event was his way of concluding this period of Israel's history. Moses wrote that Jacob, not Abraham, had purchased the tomb from Hamor in Shechem (Gen. 33:19; cf. 23:16; 50:13). This is probably a case of attributing to an ancestor what one of his descendants did (cf. Heb. 7:9-10). In the ancient Near Eastern view of things, people regarded an ancestor as in one sense participating in the actions of his descendants (Gen. 9:25; 25:23; cf. Mal. 1:2-3; Rom. 9:11-13). Abraham had purchased Joseph's burial site in the sense that his grandson Jacob had purchased it (cf. Heb. 7:9-10). Stephen probably intended that his reference to Abraham rather than to Jacob would remind his hearers of God's faithfulness in fulfilling the promises God gave to Abraham. He did this in one sense when Israel possessed Canaan under Joshua's leadership. Israel will experience the ultimate fulfillment of God's land promises to Abraham when she enters rest under Jesus' messianic rule in the Millennium.

Two other explanations of this apparent error are these. Stephen telescoped two events into one: Abraham's purchase from Ephron in Hebron (Gen. 23:1-20), and Jacob's purchase from Hamor in Shechem. Second, Abraham really did purchase the plot in Shechem, though Moses did not record that (cf. Gen. 12:6-7), and Jacob repurchased it later because the Canaanites had retaken it.

MacArthur: **The Disclosure Of God's Messiah** (vv. 9-16)

There are all kinds of ways in the Old Testament that the Messiah is presented. Two major ways are through prophecy that is verbal predictive, and prophecy that is in the form of a type, or nonverbal picture. In other words, certain prophecies verbally point to Christ: "For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given..." (Isa. 9:6a), or, "But thou, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though thou be little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of thee shall He come forth unto Me that is to be ruler in Israel..." (Mic. 5:2a), or, "...Behold, the virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call His name Immanuel [Heb. `God with us']" (Isa. 7:14b). On the other hand, an example of the kind of prophecies we call types would be the slain lambs in the Old Testament, which pictured the final sacrifice of the Messiah, the Lamb of God. Even Noah's ark is a picture of the salvation of Christ. And Joseph is a classic type of Christ. He paints the picture of Jesus Christ so explicitly that nobody could miss it.

1. REJECTION (v. 9a)

"And the patriarchs, moved with envy, sold Joseph into Egypt..."

2. EXALTATION (vv. 9b-10)

"...but God was with him, and delivered him out of all his afflictions, and gave him favor and wisdom in the sight of Pharaoh, king of Egypt; and he made him governor over Egypt and all his house."

Do you remember what happened to Joseph? His brothers sold him to the Midianites, who took him down to Egypt, where he was sold as a servant to Potiphar (Gen. 39). In the meantime, Potiphar's wife, who had her eye on Joseph, got him in a compromising situation, trying to seduce him. But Joseph's pure heart wisely motivated him to flee the temptation...he took off running. Unfortunately, she had grabbed his coat, which was used as incriminating evidence. When she falsely accused Joseph of having made advances toward her, he was thrown in prison. Do you know on what basis Jesus was arrested and tried? By false accusation. The Jewish leaders had a mock trial and brought forth false witnesses (Mt. 26:59-62). And analogous to Joseph, who was released and exalted to the place of authority next to Pharaoh, God raised Christ from the grave and exalted Him to His right hand. Joseph is a picture of Jesus, who similarly was lifted from the lowest kind of humility to the loftiest exaltation. The picture even reflects the similarities of rejection: Joseph, rejected by Israel, his brothers, was accepted by Gentiles in Egypt; and Jesus, rejected by Israel, founded His church among Gentiles.

3. STARVATION (v. 11)

"Now there came a famine over all the land of Egypt and Canaan, and great affliction; and our fathers found no sustenance."

After Joseph had gone to Egypt, famine came, and his family back in Canaan, which had for the most part rejected him as their leader, found no sustenance. In a similar fashion, when Israel rejected Jesus Christ, it fell into a spiritual famine, which still exists to this day. Canaan's famine is a type of Israel's blindness today, a nation without any true spiritual sustenance at all.

4. RECEPTION (vv. 12-13)

"But when Jacob heard that there was grain in Egypt, he sent out our fathers first. And at the second time Joseph was made known to his brethren; and Joseph's kindred was made known unto Pharaoh."

When is Jesus going to be made known unto Israel? It wasn't at His First Coming, so it will have to be at His Second Coming. It's the same type again: the first time rejected and sold for envy; the second time accepted. Israel will

accept Christ as its Messiah in the same way that the brothers of Joseph humbly accepted him at the second meeting when he revealed himself to them.

5. SALVATION (vv. 14-16)

a. **Its Extent** (v. 14)

"Then sent Joseph, and called his father, Jacob, to him, and all his kindred, threescore and fifteen souls."

All of Jacob's family, the entire nation of Israel at that time, came when Joseph called them. This pictures the fact that at the Second Coming when Jesus is revealed, "all Israel shall be saved" (Rom. 11:26a). Again we see Christ perfectly typified in the life of Joseph.

b. **Its Entrance** (vv. 15-16)

"So Jacob went down into Egypt, and died, he and our fathers, and were carried over into Shechem, and laid in the sepulcher that Abraham bought for a sum of money of the sons of Hamor, the father of Shechem."

This is a picture of Israel entering into the Kingdom relationship. They were buried in the Promised Land--Jacob at Hebron in the cave of Machpelah (Gen. 23:16-17) and the rest of them in Shechem (Josh. 24:32).

In a brief presentation of Joseph's life, Stephen is really presenting Christ. And from his audience's frame of reference, they would begin to see the intended similarities. They knew Christ died and that He was believed to have risen from the dead--they just didn't want to buy it. They had to know it--the evidence was overwhelming. The relationship between the two becomes even stronger as Stephen continues.

Chris Vogel:
Joseph was the son of Jacob and Rachel. Rachel, Jacob's favorite wife, was barren, while her sister and household servants gave Jacob many children. But after years and numerous kids, finally Rachel gave birth to Joseph, who soon became Jacob's favorite son. Jacob lavished attention on Joseph and Joseph was not the bit bashful in letting his older brothers know he was the special child. It didn't help that little Joe loved to tell his brothers about his dreams of his personal greatness and their subservience to him. The brothers, jealous of the punk decided to kill him. But not wanting to miss a chance to make some money and to avoid the horrible stigma of fratricide, they sold him as a slave to their cousins, the Ishmaelites, who in turn sold him into slavery in Egypt. But all was not lost for Joseph there, as Potiphar, the captain of Pharaoh's guards, purchased him, making him his household manager. The only problem in the house was Potiphar's wife, who took a liking to Joseph and tried to seduce him. When he refused to succumb to her wiles, she trumped up charges of rape, Joseph was quickly thrown in jail. In time, Joseph's skill in telling dreams was his ticket out of jail as he successfully interpreted Pharaoh's dream. His wisdom and skill help Egypt through a horrible famine, a famine which soon brought Joseph's brothers back into the picture as they were in search of some food. In time, Joseph made himself known to his brothers, who retrieved their aged father, Jacob from Canaan. The entire family relocated in the suburbs of Egypt. After 400 years, some of the time under the kind protection of Pharaoh and then later suffering under another Pharaoh's maniacal scheme to destroy them, Moses led them back to Canaan, where Jacob was finally buried.

As we unpack this story and see how Stephen uses it, we can learn how we too are to read and understand God's Word. Does Stephen use the story as a moral lesson, instructing his hearers how they should live? Is the goal practical application by which the hearers can change their lives? Or does he use the familiar stories to another end?

http://www.cornerstone-pca.com/sermon_manuscripts_cornerstone_presbyterian_church/article22630.htm

TEXT: Acts 7: 17-29

TITLE: ISRAEL SURVEY PART 3 – GOD'S DEALINGS WITH MOSES – POWER IN WORDS AND DEEDS

BIG IDEA:
THE GOD OF COVENANT LOYALTY PREPARES HIS CHOSEN DELIVERER TO DEMONSTRATE REDEMPTIVE POWER IN WORDS AND DEEDS DESPITE INITIAL REJECTION

INTRODUCTION:
The **Providence of God** is an amazing thing for us to study. God's Providence involves His loving care over His people as He sovereignly fulfills His good purposes – including protection, provision and prospering in accordance with God's ultimate glory. We find that God does not act as we would expect. His ways are far different than our plans and expectations. His timetable is far different than what we would prefer. He allows for the most precarious and desperate situations and yet comes through every time. The opposition and schemes of Satan can never thwart God's providential working.

Stephen's OT history lesson before the Sanhedrin has already covered the outworking of the Providence of God in highlighting the faith of Abraham and the wisdom of Joseph. Now he moves on to the account of Moses where he spends much more time – probably because the false charges against Stephen accused him of failure to respect both the ministry of Moses and the law which he mediated.

Acts 6 presented Stephen as a profile of a Spirit-filled servant of Jesus Christ. Now the review of Israel's history in Acts 7 picks up on those same characteristics of the working of the Holy Spirit. We are going to be reminded of the power of Moses in words and deeds. I think for many of us the concept of being filled by the Holy Spirit has always been somewhat mystical – I mean what does this term really mean in our everyday life? This historical survey has helped to make that more concrete for me. Faith, wisdom and power are spiritual attributes that have relevance to how I live throughout the week.

The life of Moses is divided here into 3 very distinct 40 year periods.

1. **Potential** for leadership developed in Egypt – Moses comes to realize his very special Calling – He is the ultimate **Somebody** – tremendous potential
2. **Postponement** in the desert – allowing for intensified preparation – He is humbled in God's post grad program of loneliness and obscurity – wrestling with the reality that apart from God's working he is a **Nobody** – learning to wait upon God
3. **Power** in Redemptive Deliverance – but still incorporating another 40 year delay of wandering in the wilderness before entry into the promised land – functioning as a powerful **Servant of God** – as with Joseph, we see Moses as a type of the ultimate Redeemer, Jesus Christ – who experiences rejection as well but demonstrates supreme power in words and deeds

We will look at the first two of these periods this week and then the third period next week.

5 LESSONS FROM GOD'S PROVIDENTIAL PREPARATION OF MOSES:

I. (:17-19) PROMISE THREATENED -- GOD'S PROMISE OF A GREAT NATION INHERITING THE LAND THREATENED WITH EXTINCTION

A. (:17) God's Promise Advancing – but in Egypt

> "*But as the time of the promise was approaching which God had assured to Abraham, the people increased and multiplied in Egypt,*"
>
> Καθὼς δὲ ἤγγιζεν ὁ χρόνος τῆς ἐπαγγελίας ἧς ὡμολόγησεν ὁ θεὸς τῷ Ἀβραάμ, ηὔξησεν ὁ λαὸς καὶ ἐπληθύνθη ἐν Αἰγύπτῳ

God's people in bondage in Egypt for 400 years, but the time had come for God to deliver His people and have them possess the promised land; they have grown from a small group of 75 to a mass of over 2 million people – on any scale that qualifies as increasing and multiplying

Remember that God's promise included both a people for Abraham and a promised land – bringing blessing to the whole world.

Again, we pointed out last week the emphasis on God providentially working **in Egypt** – away from the temple site in Jerusalem that was so highly idolized by the Sanhedrin – God cannot be restricted to some local nationalistic geography.

God has always had a very precise timetable for His redemptive purposes – far different from the spurious timetable of Harold Camping, a Christian commentator for Family Radio Worldwide who apparently has come up with yet another projected date for the second coming of Christ –

> "Beyond the shadow of a doubt, May 21, 2011 will be the date of the Rapture and the day Of judgment,"
> http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2011/01/04/may-21-2011-judgment-day_n_804166.html

Don't believe it!

But pay attention to God when He says *the time of the promise is approaching* ….

Gal. 4:4 "*But when the fullness of the time came, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the Law, so that He might redeem those who were under the Law, that we might receive the adoption as sons*."

Rom. 5:6 "*For while we were still helpless, at the right time, Christ died for the ungodly*."

B. (:18) God's Program Challenged by New Tyrant

> "*until there arose another king over Egypt who knew nothing about Joseph.*"
> ἄχρι οὗ ἀνέστη βασιλεὺς ἕτερος [ἐπ᾽ Αἴγυπτον] ὃς οὐκ ᾔδει τὸν Ἰωσήφ.

Nobody around anymore to champion their cause and defend them
Promises of protection by men can be empty; like the peace treaties of today that aren't worth the paper they are written on
But God's memory is perfect – keeps all of His promises

C. (:19) God's People Threatened with Extinction

"*It was he who took shrewd advantage of our race, and mistreated our fathers so that they would expose their infants and they would not survive.*"

οὗτος κατασοφισάμενος τὸ γένος ἡμῶν ἐκάκωσεν τοὺς πατέρας [ἡμῶν] τοῦ ποιεῖν τὰ βρέφη ἔκθετα αὐτῶν εἰς τὸ μὴ ζῳογονεῖσθαι.

Ex. 1:13-14 speaks of the mistreatment of the Jews; very severe abuse and oppression; they were crying out to their God for a long time for relief; look at how the Jews have been mistreated down through history and yet still they exist as a nation -- Remarkable

This enmity between the world and the people of God has its roots all the way back in the Garden of Eden where God promised "*I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her seed; He shall bruise you on the head, and you shall bruise him on the heel*" (**Gen. 3:15**)

Many attempts down through history where Satan tries to exterminate the line through which the promised Messiah would come; that is why when you get to the crucial genealogies of Matthew and Luke that it is so impressive when you think through all the sovereign providential arrangements required to bring about the birth of the Messiah

Cf. King Herod who arose at time of Christ and tried to exterminate the Jewish race by killing the infant males **Matt. 2:13-23** -- Mary and Joseph warned to flee and take the Christ child down into Egypt, of all places

II. (:20-22a) PROTECTION PROVIDED -- GOD'S CHOSEN DELIVERER PROVIDENTIALLY PROTECTED AND NURTURED

A. (:20) Protection at Birth

"*And it was at this time that Moses was born; and he was lovely in the sight of God; and he was nurtured three months in his father's home.*"

Ἐν ᾧ καιρῷ ἐγεννήθη Μωϋσῆς καὶ ἦν ἀστεῖος τῷ θεῷ· ὃς ἀνετράφη μῆνας τρεῖς ἐν τῷ οἴκῳ τοῦ πατρός,

Josephus: "strikingly handsome"

What a difficult period of time for the Hebrew Moms; how much dared they press the envelope; remember the support of the midwives who found ways to get around the command of Pharaoh – these Hebrew women give birth before we can even get there …

Moses was nursed at home for the first three months but then the danger of discovery was just too great and he was set adrift along the reeds of the Nile in his own little ark with his sister observing from nearby … what a providential deliverance God arranged!

Heb. 11:23 "*By faith Moses, when he was born, was hidden for three months by his parents, because they saw he was a beautiful child; and they were not afraid of the king's edict.*" Strong spiritual lineage

Basket made out of papyrus – perhaps from an Egyptian belief that the plant is a protection from

crocodiles; talk about being exposed

B. (:21) Protection During Childhood Development

"*And after he had been exposed, Pharaoh's daughter took him away, and nurtured him as her own son.*

ἐκτεθέντος δὲ αὐτοῦ ἀνείλατο αὐτὸν ἡ θυγάτηρ Φαραὼ καὶ ἀνεθρέψατο αὐτὸν ἑαυτῇ εἰς υἱόν.

Lenski: Both verbs are middle: "*she took him up for herself*," i.e., appropriated him, and "*nourished him up for herself for her own son*," i.e., adopted him. . . Moses became a member of Pharaoh's own family.

Remember that the mother of Moses was now paid to come in and nurse the infant Moses in the house of Pharaoh; able to impart to him the crucial Jewish catechism and establish him in the faith

What a position of privilege for the leadership preparation of Moses

What a contrast between how Moses was treated by this Egyptian royal family – taken in as one of their own – vs. how he was initially rejected by his own people

C. (:22a) Privilege of Superior Education

"*And Moses was educated in all the learning of the Egyptians,*"
καὶ ἐπαιδεύθη Μωϋσῆς [ἐν] πάσῃ σοφίᾳ Αἰγυπτίων,

Bock: Recounting a major figure's birth, upbringing, and education is a frequent way to describe the person's childhood (Acts 22:3).

Not just some dumb guy with a shepherd's staff; very sophisticated education; good preparation for writing the Pentateuch; distinguished himself in every way; took advantage of his opportunities; was extremely responsible and diligent in his studies

Presented as a **positive thing** here – yet not as something you can rely on apart from faith in the wisdom of God

Bruce: Stephen expresses himself with more moderation than other Hellenistic Jews, who represent Moses as the father of all science and culture and as the founder of Egyptian civilization. [inventor of alphabetic writing; proficient in arithmetic, geometry, poetry, music, philosophy, astrology, and all branches of learning. Josephus describes him as unique in wisdom, stature and beauty]

III. (:22b) <u>POWER DEMONSTRATED</u> -- GOD'S CHOSEN DELIVERER FILLED WITH THE SPIRIT AS EVIDENCED BY DIVINE POWER IN WORDS AND DEEDS

"*and he was a man of power in words and deeds.*"
ἦν δὲ δυνατὸς ἐν λόγοις καὶ ἔργοις αὐτοῦ

strong, mighty, able, powerful
"God is able to do . . ."

Bock: (*dunatos* in Acts 2:22-24 [of Jesus]; 7:22; 11:17 [Peter's inability to resist God]; **18:24 [Apollos, mighty in Scripture]**; 20:16 [able to get to Jerusalem]; 25:4-5 [men of authority]; also Luke 24:19.)

So Moses providentially was well equipped and trained to be a leader.

Luke 24:19 *And He said to them, "What things?" And they said to Him, "The things about Jesus the Nazarene, who was a prophet mighty in deed and word in the sight of God and all the people,*

2 Corinthians 12:10 *Therefore I am well content with weaknesses, with insults, with distresses, with persecutions, with difficulties, for Christ's sake; for when I am weak, then I am strong.*

Deut. 18:18 *I will raise up a prophet from among their countrymen like you, and I will put My words in his mouth, and he shall speak to them all that I command him.*

Heart of our passage for today – stresses the most important characteristic of this Moses; this power will be played out before Pharaoh and his court when God sends the various plagues that lead to the deliverance of His people

Some people are all show – they talk a big game – remember the apostle Paul was accused of being mighty in words when he was absent but weak when he was present; he responded by claiming that he would be mighty in their presence as well in terms of exercising church discipline – they better get their act together

IV. (:23-28) PEOPLE BLINDED -- GOD'S CHOSEN DELIVERER REJECTED BY HIS OWN PEOPLE -- TWO INCIDENTS REVOLVING AROUND MOSES' AWARENESS OF HIS UNIQUE DIVINE CALLING VS THE BLINDNESS OF GOD'S PEOPLE

A. (:23-24) Incident #1 – Intervening to Protect Hebrew from Oppressive Egyptian

> "*But when he was approaching the age of forty, it entered his mind to visit his brethren, the sons of Israel. And when he saw one of them being treated unjustly, he defended him and took vengeance for the oppressed by striking down the Egyptian.*"
>
> Ὡς δὲ ἐπληροῦτο αὐτῷ τεσσερακονταετὴς χρόνος, ἀνέβη ἐπὶ τὴν καρδίαν αὐτοῦ ἐπισκέψασθαι τοὺς ἀδελφοὺς αὐτοῦ τοὺς υἱοὺς Ἰσραήλ. καὶ ἰδών τινα ἀδικούμενον ἠμύνατο καὶ ἐποίησεν ἐκδίκησιν τῷ καταπονουμένῳ πατάξας τὸν Αἰγύπτιον.

Is Moses acting here without a call or direction from God?? (Lenski) –
The emphasis is not on Moses doing anything out of place, but on his own people rejecting his righteous efforts.
Many sermons go a different direction here – stressing that Moses was acting on his own in his murderous, rash behavior; lesson in self-will vs waiting upon God's timing and direction for the fulfillment of your calling – here, Stephen is careful not to say anything negative about Moses – his point is that the Jewish people were wrong to fail to discern the leader that God had provided for them – next vs – verse 25 is the key

MacArthur: God put in his heart a desire to help his people, calling him, in effect, to be their

deliverer. In fact, the word "visit" implies one who is looking kindly upon someone else with an intent to help them.

"*Visit*" = to intervene on behalf of someone – part of the promise given by Joseph to the Jews – to free us from our slavery

B. (:25) Blindness Towards God's Program

"*And he supposed that his brethren understood that God was granting them deliverance through him; but they did not understand.*"

ἐνόμιζεν δὲ συνιέναι τοὺς ἀδελφοὺς [αὐτοῦ] ὅτι ὁ θεὸς διὰ χειρὸς αὐτοῦ δίδωσιν σωτηρίαν αὐτοῖς· οἱ δὲ οὐ συνῆκαν.

You blind fools – Christ is infinitely greater than Moses – **Hebrews 3:5-6** – contrast between Moses functioning as a servant but Christ as a Son over the house of God

God must open our eyes so that we might see the Savior – **Matt. 11:25-26**
Moses assumed that they would get it … but they did not …

Blindness in part has happened to the nation of Israel – **Rom. 11:8-10, 25** – partial hardening or blindness

Reflected in the attitude of the Sanhedrin towards Jesus and now towards Stephen

Bock: The Jews of Moses's time, however, lacked understanding about a divine call to Moses. Here is the beginning of a charge from Luke that the fathers missed their deliverer (7:52) and failed to understand what God was doing in saving. (This idea will be repeated with a double use of the same verb at the end of Acts [28:26-27], when Paul cites Isa. 6:9.) This second example of rejection of God's messenger expands on the earlier action against Joseph. There they judged wrongly and God delivered. Here they do not even respond to a deliverance. These remarks anticipate 7:33-38 and form a typology to Jesus (also Heb. 11:24-26). Many Jews failed to recognize Jesus as Savior as well.

C. (:26-28) Incident #2 – Intervening to Encourage Peace among Jewish Brethren

"*And on the following day he appeared to them as they were fighting together, and he tried to reconcile them in peace, saying, 'Men, you are brethren, why do you injure one another?' But the one who was injuring his neighbor pushed him away, saying, 'Who made you a <u>ruler</u> and <u>judge</u> over us? You do not mean to kill me as you killed the Egyptian yesterday, do you?'* "

τῇ τε ἐπιούσῃ ἡμέρᾳ ὤφθη αὐτοῖς μαχομένοις καὶ συνήλλασσεν αὐτοὺς εἰς εἰρήνην εἰπών· ἄνδρες, ἀδελφοί ἐστε· ἱνατί ἀδικεῖτε ἀλλήλους; ὁ δὲ ἀδικῶν τὸν πλησίον ἀπώσατο αὐτὸν εἰπών· τίς σε κατέστησεν ἄρχοντα καὶ δικαστὴν ἐφ᾽ ἡμῶν; μὴ ἀνελεῖν με σὺ θέλεις ὃν τρόπον ἀνεῖλες ἐχθὲς τὸν Αἰγύπτιον;

Question of **Source of Authority** will be definitively answered by God

Luke 19:14 "*We do not want this man to reign over us*"
People do not want Christ to rule over them; they prefer autonomy – man was already living in slavery to Egyptians – did not recognize his own bondage and need for deliverance
Christ is Judge of all the earth

Bock: The more important background is Luke's association of peace with Jesus (Luke 1:79; 2:14, 29; Acts 10:36).

Guzik: Stephen's message is plain: "You have rejected Jesus, who was like Moses yet greater than him, and you deny that Jesus has any right to be a ruler and a judge over you."

V. (:29) PREPARATION INTENSIFIED -- GOD'S CHOSEN DELIVERER EXILED TO FORTY YEARS OF TESTING AND FURTHER PREPARATION

A. Fugitive -- Savior Calling Replaced Temporarily by Self Preservation

"*And at this remark Moses fled,*"
ἔφυγεν δὲ Μωϋσῆς ἐν τῷ λόγῳ τούτῳ

reminds one of David's life of fleeing from those pursuing him – even from Absalom his own son

B. Forgotten Failure -- Humbling Exile as Alien in Foreign Land

"*and became an alien in the land of Midian,*"
καὶ ἐγένετο πάροικος ἐν γῇ Μαδιάμ,

Our existence on earth is described as a pilgrimage anyway, rather than as a place where we put down roots and take security; but how much more vulnerable when we are chased out of our home country and away from all relatives to live in **obscurity** and **isolation**

Humble job tending the flocks – a far cry from the privileged position he had enjoyed in the royal courts of Egypt

You can learn a lot by just toiling away faithfully in obscurity

Bruce: There he in turn, like his patriarchal ancestors, became "*a sojourner in a foreign land*" (Ex. 2:22) – a fact which he acknowledged when he called his first-born son Gershom ("*a sojourner there*"). But Moses' exile was part of the divine plan; it was there in north-west Arabia, "*in the wilderness of Mount Sinai*," that the angel of God appeared to him in the burning bush, and the voice of God addressed him.

C. Father -- Family is Training Ground for Leadership

"*where he became the father of two sons.*"
οὗ ἐγέννησεν υἱοὺς δύο.

Different focus – on leadership in the home, rather than leadership of the nation for now

Look at the names of his two sons

Lenski: Moses needed not only the forty years of Egyptian schooling but forty more of desert schooling in order to make him the man God wanted.

CONCLUSION:

The Sanhedrin needed this historical reminder of the life of the prophet they respected supremely – Moses who proved to be powerful in words and deeds

The Sanhedrin needed to be put in their place; to be shown that they are no different than the Jewish people of old who were **blinded** to God's program and to the identity of God's providentially provided deliverer … Their response to Jesus Christ today is "**Who are you to judge us and rule over us?**?"

Hopefully we have embraced our own sinfulness and lost condition apart from God's Redeemer; as we gather before the Lord's table it is in grateful submission to our Savior – the one we acknowledge as the Judge of all the earth – who has judged our sin by taking it upon himself and dying for us on the cross; and the resurrected one to whom we have submitted as our Lord and Ruler; the one who came after Moses and fulfilled the typology – proving to continue to function today in His church as **supremely powerful in words and deeds**

Hebrews points out how superior the ministry of Jesus is to that of Moses:

Acts 13:38 has that same emphasis "*Therefore let it be known to you, brethren, that through Him forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you, and through Him everyone who believes is freed from all things, from which you could not be freed through the Law of Moses*."

* * * * * * * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

1) How are the tactics of Satan the same today as they were back in the days of Moses?

2) How is it that we can see God's program at times so clearly while others are blinded?

3) Was Moses wrong to try to intervene at this point in time and seek to be a deliverer and mediator of peace for the Jewish people?

4) What types of lessons have you learned in times of obscurity and isolation?

* * * * * * * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Longenecker: But here Stephen's primary emphasis is on God's providential and redemptive action for his people apart from and outside of the land of Palestine, of which Stephen's hearers made so much:

(1) God's raising up of the deliverer Moses *in Egypt* (vv. 17-22);
(2) his provision for the rejected Moses *in Midian* (v. 29);
(3) his commissioning of Moses *in the desert near Mount Sinai* – the place God himself identified as being "holy ground," for wherever God meets with his people is holy ground though it possesses no sanctity of its own (vv. 30-34); and
(4) Moses' resultant action in delivering God's people and doing "wonders and miraculous signs" for forty years *in Egypt, at the Red Sea, and in the desert*. . . .
Makes the point that no place on earth – even though given as an inheritance by God himself – can be claimed to possess such sanctity or be esteemed in such a way as to preempt God's further working on behalf of his people. By this method Stephen was attempting to clear the way for the proclamation of the centrality of Jesus in the nation's worship, life, and thought.

Boice: By now we should be getting Stephen's drift, and we may suspect that the Sanhedrin was beginning to get his point as well. Stephen was saying: This neat little hold you think you have on God, this little thing that makes God Jewish and not the God of the Gentiles as well is a corrupt thing, and it is corrupting you. If you were faithful to your tradition, if you were guided by what your Scriptures tell you, you would know that God is the God of all people and that you, just because you have been given special privileges, have the enormous responsibility of being a witness to them.

Lenski: Here the act of Moses is entirely beneficent. For he intends to look upon "*his brethren*," his own blood and kin, "*the sons of Israel*," the heirs of God's covenant. Both terms are highly significant. Although he was reared and had grown to manhood in the pagan court, Moses had not become an Egyptian in heart and soul. These enslaved Israelites were his real brethren, he was one of them. Yes, one of them as "*the sons of Israel*," not merely nationally but spiritually. Moses had not lost his faith, he shared Israel's hopes and Israel's spirit. The fact that they were nothing but slaves did not alienate him. One wonders at the man. How had he escaped all the idolatry in the midst of which he had been reared? How had the faith of Israel been put into his heart and been preserved there?

MacArthur: **Stephen – A Profile in Courage**
1. THE PROMISE OF A DESTINY (:17a)
2. THE PERSECUTION OF THE DESCENDANTS (vv. 17b-19)
3. THE PROVISION OF A DELIVERER (vv. 20-28)
    a. The Appearance of Moses (v. 20a)
    b. The Adoption of Moses (vv. 20b-21)
    c. The Abilities of Moses (v. 22)
    d. The Avenging of Moses (vv. 23-28)
        1) His Desire (v. 23)
        2) His Deliverance (vv. 24-25)
            a) The Rescue (v. 24)
            b) The Rejection (v. 25)
        3) His Distrust (vv. 26-28)
            a) The Rescue (v. 26)
            b) The Response (vv. 27-28)
4. THE POSTPONEMENT OF DELIVERANCE (vv. 29-34)

Frank Allen: **He showed that the servant of God must stand alone (7:1-39).**
This was true of Abraham. He had to leave his own country in order to worship God properly

and without interference. He walked by faith, went where God told him to go, did what God wanted him to do, and his faith was rewarded.

Joseph had to stand alone. He was rejected and sold by his brethren. God cared for him and kept him in all his affliction and loneliness and made him a great blessing to his people and to the world.

Moses had to stand alone. Even his own people did not understand his mission and at first rejected him as their leader. He was an exile for forty years in the wilderness. But Moses whom they refused God sent to be a ruler and deliverer.

The greatest leaders of Israel had been persecuted and had been forced to **stand alon**e. The inference was that they should not now condemn Stephen though he stood alone in the midst of the Sanhedrim.

The day has not yet passed when the servant of God must stand alone. Not often, at least in our land, is one likely to be subjected to persecution in the form of bodily injury as in ancient times, we are thankful that day has gone. But the day of the majority taking the wrong side and the minority taking the right side has not passed. The day when men will be hated and deserted of friends when they stand uncompromisingly for the right has not passed.

"Dare to be a Daniel:
Dare to stand alone:
Dare to have a purpose firm:
Dare to make it known."

http://www.baptistbiblebelievers.com/LinkClick.aspx?fileticket=fww4mKJbudk%3d&tabid=162&mid=534

Dr. John Whitcomb: **Stephen, the First Martyr**
No basis whatsoever for rejecting this man of God = Moses; why wasn't he immediately appreciated by his people? Sent off to the desert for post grad study in the wilderness in humility; Who do you think you are? Just what the Jews said to Jesus;

Mark Gibson: **Christ, the Deliverer** [excellent insights into parallels to Christ]
3 Purposes: understand the history, redemptive historical hermeneutics, application to us – went down as 75 people; came out as over 2 million people; grew under hard times; the Egyptians are the seed of the serpent – trying to eradicate the godly line; nothing happens by chance or accident; God's timetable is not our timetable; this was a difficult time for God's people; God is not tied to one place on the earth (the piece of real estate where the temple was built); those whom God raises up as deliverers for His people are often rejected by those same people; I'll turn you in if you don't leave me alone; dealing directly with the accusation that he blasphemed against Moses; you are the ones blaspheming God; How do we see Christ in this part of the Bible? Moses' early preparation for what God was sending him to do;
http://www.sermonaudio.com/playpopup.asp?SID=10503195415

Joey Nelson: Life Story of Moses
The First Forty Years – Moses Learned that he was a Somebody.
The Second Forty Years – Moses Learned he was a Nobody.

The Third Forty Years – Moses Learned that God can do great things with a Nobody

[Looking at the middle period:]
Explanation: I'm arguing this morning that the most critical time in the life story of Moses was that period of forced obscurity in the desert where he was alone and broken, discouraged and defeated. The wilderness humbled him and made him sensitive to God.

Definition: Obscurity - the quality or condition of being unknown. It's life outside the limelight. It's serving without recognition. It's having something to offer, but having to offer it on a smaller stage. . . Oh, he was educated and trained, but he was full of self-will. The word Moses has for you is "surrender." You need obscurity to build your character.

Explanation: There is a breaking and remaking process that every leader must go through – where our character is hammered out on the anvil of obscurity. Until we experience that, we are loose cannons, and we hurt a lot of people needlessly. In self-will, Moses murdered before his obscure place. After his forty years of obscurity, he let God call the shots.

Swindoll writes to leaders: "God is preparing you as His chosen arrow. As yet your shaft is hidden in His quiver, in the shadows…but at the precise moment at which it will tell with the greatest effect, He will reach for you and launch you to that place of His appointment (Growing Strong…531)."

Are you anxious to get on with your life? In obscurity, God teaches us to wait on His timing so that we can be in His will. The word Moses has for you is "wait." In his period of obscurity, Moses was simply father, husband, and shepherd. Do your best at these primary roles and let God take care of the open doors. He will arrive at the right time, the best time. He will not abandon you. You don't have to elbow your way through the system or through life. So often, we demand immediate results and resort to any measure to produce them. It took Moses forty years of waiting and it may take you a while, but God is faithful.

Are you almost suffocating from loneliness? In obscurity, God nudges you closer so that you can really get to know Him and draw on His power. The word Moses has for you is "solitude." God had reduced him to a simple love for Himself.

"There are only two things to look at in the Sinai – sand and rocks. No plant life, no lakes or rivers. As a result, it's a lonely place, a place where time stands still and where God began to stretch and strengthen Moses in ways he never imagined (Swindoll, Moses…study guide, 39)."

Application: How do we often respond to the schoolroom of obscurity – the desert place (Moses Study Guide):
1. "I don't need it." Usually, pride stands in our way and we fight obscurity. What is it going to take for you to stop, turn aside, and consider what God might be saying to you?
2. "I'm tired of it." We can start to resent it.
3. "I embrace it." Settle into a pattern of self-discovery and seeking God and see what God does with that. Stop resisting and start resting. Today is the day for your God encounter.
http://www.sermoncentral.com/sermons/life-story-of-moses-joey-nelson-sermon-on-moses-91107.asp

Jim Davis: **Great Men are not Born, they are Made**

Have you ever noticed that resumes only list a person's accomplishments? Resumes never list our failures. It would be more encouraging to others to allow them to see our struggles with our failures. We hear many share their stories of success, but how many share their stories of failure? We are too concerned about what others will think about us to share our failures.

God shares the failures of great persons in the Bible. He wants to encourage us by helping us realize they were as human as we are. Noah got drunk, Abraham lied, Jacob was a cheat, Joseph was arrogant, and Moses was a murderer. You can't get more human.

Every painful memory of Egypt reminded Moses of his greatest failure. Those memories are so vivid. He knows that he has failed in the calling he thought was so real. Now he doubts his calling and loses a sense of God's purpose for his life. So he finds a new purpose. He loses himself in a self-chosen occupation as a shepherd. There was only one problem. That was not where God wanted him to be. Now Moses is not only out of the will of God, he is also not in the place where God wants him to be. He has missed his calling because of a lack of understanding.

Waiting on God is the hardest thing in life. When we get tired of waiting we begin to force our own will and own way upon others. We begin to push and strain and dump emotional garbage to get things moving in the direction we think they should go. We usually end up in disaster. Moses was further away from God than he had ever been because he wanted to accomplish too much on his own too soon.

As we study the life of Moses it is evident that he lost a sense of God's purpose for his life. We may be exactly where God has placed us, but we must also be living within God’s will. Trying to force human solutions upon others may cause us to lose a sense of God's purpose when we fail. We think God should honor our battle plans when we should be honoring his battle plans. Our plans won’t work.

After forty years Moses probably had finally pushed the thoughts of Egypt and the sense of God’s purpose into the dark recesses of his mind. Now he has a new life and a new family. During his forty years in Midian Moses had cleaned up his resume. However, Moses learned that he couldn't hide his failures without them coming back to haunt him. He had hid the Egyptian he murdered in the sand, but it came back to haunt him. He had hid himself in Midian for forty years, but God's purpose continued to haunt him. After forty years of silence God spoke to Moses.

How many times during that 40 years in Midian do you think Moses rehearsed his failures in his mind? Each time he rehearses the failures, his bitterness and resentment was enlarged. He knew that he had sincerely tried to no avail. He had probably convinced himself that his sincerity was the all-important ingredient to success. He believed that his sincerity would make his battle plans work. He had sincerely given his all. What else could he do but put the whole bitter experience behind him and forget it? But God wouldn't let him forget Heaven's set purpose for His life. Moses is brought face to face with what God ordained him to do. God faces Moses in the burning bush.

Lessons:

Your greatest hindrance in fulfilling God’s plan for your life is yourself.
You must sense that God has a purpose for your life.
You must understand God’s will for your life.

You must wait upon God's timing for your life.
You must obey God's plan for your life.
Then you will experience the availability of God's power for your life.
http://focusongod.com/Moses-01.htm

Stedman: But Stephen was saying, "Have you forgotten that Moses was a failure the first eighty years of his life? Have you forgotten that when Moses was learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians and was acting on the basis of the human knowledge and resources he possessed, that he fell flat on his face? And that when he tried to deliver his people, instead of becoming to them a missionary, as he thought God had appointed him, he became a murderer and had to flee. Instead of being a deliverer he became a refugee. Have you forgotten about Moses? He was a failure when he did not act by faith."

TEXT: Acts 7: 30-43

TITLE: OWNING OR DISOWNING GOD'S APPOINTED REDEEMER

BIG IDEA:
CLEAR CONTRAST: WILL YOU OWN OR DISOWN GOD'S APPOINTED REDEEMER?

INTRODUCTION:
We say that we own Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior … but what evidence is there to support our claim? The Sanhedrin claimed to be the pillars of spiritual leadership for the entire nation of Israel, yet Stephen in Acts 7 exposes them as frauds and charlatans. It is Stephen that is truly following in the footsteps of the patriarchs; that is truly embracing God's great prophet Moses as well as the prophet that would come after Moses = the Lord Jesus Christ.

Matt. 10:32-33 "*Therefore everyone who confesses Me before men, I will also confess him before My Father who is in heaven. But whoever denies Me before men, I will also deny him before My Father who is in heaven*."

CLEAR CONTRAST: WILL YOU OWN OR DISOWN GOD'S APPOINTED REDEEMER?

I. (:30-34) GOD OWNS MOSES AS HIS APPOINTED REDEEMER FOR ISRAEL – 5 CREDENTIALS FOR GOD'S APPOINTED REDEEMER:
True in the case of Moses …. True in the case of Jesus Christ
A. (:30a) Credential of Enduring Extreme Testing –
The Wilderness Battle

Moses: "*And after forty years had passed,*"

Καὶ πληρωθέντων ἐτῶν τεσσεράκοντα

Christ: Tested by Satan in the wilderness for forty days and forty nights

Moses was not truly ready until after this difficult 40 year period. Needed to be humbled and dependent on the power of God.
God is not in a hurry; He prepares each of His servants in a unique way for their unique divinely appointed task. Moses had acted impulsively in trying to step up to the plate and function as the deliverer of God's people. His efforts did not end well – partly because of the blindness of God's people (Stephen's emphasis here) but also due to his acting impulsively rather than waiting submissively upon God for His timing.

God is preparing you in some way. May take a long time to humble us. Still using us during this period of preparation …. But maybe there is a larger task God has in mind for us down the road. It is a constant spiritual battle to remain faithful and obedient when it doesn't appear like God is doing anything huge in our circumstances.

God is preparing to send his special Redeemer

B. (:30b) Credential of Commissioning Theophany –
The Burning Bush Miracle

Moses: "*an angel appeared to him in the wilderness of Mount Sinai, in the flame of a burning thorn bush.*" – later God will appear to Moses on Mt Sinai for giving of the law

ὤφθη αὐτῷ ἐν τῇ ἐρήμῳ τοῦ ὄρους Σινᾶ ἄγγελος ἐν φλογὶ πυρὸς βάτου.

Christ: He Himself is God Incarnate – sent down from Father in heaven; come in the flesh to fully reveal God; John 1

This was not just one of the created angels. This was the special and unique angel of the Lord – says that God spoke to Moses out of the bush – preincarnate Christ at work as in other places in the OT = God Himself holding a special meeting with Moses – truly a divine appointment; what a privilege for God to appear to Moses – it looked like he was out of the game; far from the promised land; obscurity; loneliness; a Nobody shepherd going about his daily tasks;
God reveals Himself to us every time we open up our hearts to His revelation in His Word; God meets with us and speaks with us – this is the Living Word of God

Lenski: This angel is always the specific revelation and personification of God himself. . . This was not an ordinary fire but a miracle of God.

Remember the tongues of fire on Day of Pentecost

Bock: no place was too desolate for God's presence

Nothing unusual about something burning in the desert; but a miracle that the thorn bush is not consumed = something you would normally use for kindling – burns easily and quickly –
Self existence of God; dependent on nothing outside of Himself; eternally existent one;

God is preparing to send His special Redeemer

C. (:31-32a) Credential of Approving, Authoritative Divine Voice –
The Great I AM

Moses: "*And when Moses saw it, he began to marvel at the sight; and as he approached to look more closely, there came the voice of the Lord: 'I am the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham and Isaac and Jacob.*'"

ὁ δὲ Μωϋσῆς ἰδὼν ἐθαύμαζεν τὸ ὅραμα, προσερχομένου δὲ αὐτοῦ κατανοῆσαι ἐγένετο φωνὴ κυρίου· ἐγὼ ὁ θεὸς τῶν πατέρων σου, ὁ θεὸς Ἀβραὰμ καὶ Ἰσαὰκ καὶ Ἰακώβ.

Christ: Voice of God commending Jesus at His baptism – **Matt. 3:17** "*This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased*"; voice on Mt of Transfiguration; angel at Ascension

Covenant keeping God – faithful to His promise to Abraham

God is preparing to send His special Redeemer

D. (:32b-33) Credential of Recognizing and Responding to the Holiness of God – The Sandals Test

Moses: "*And Moses shook with fear and would not venture to look. But the Lord said to him, 'Take off the sandals from your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground.*"'

ἔντρομος δὲ γενόμενος Μωϋσῆς οὐκ ἐτόλμα κατανοῆσαι. εἶπεν δὲ αὐτῷ ὁ κύριος· λῦσον τὸ ὑπόδημα τῶν ποδῶν σου, ὁ γὰρ τόπος ἐφ᾽ ᾧ ἕστηκας γῆ ἁγία ἐστίν.

Christ: **John 1:27** "*It is He who comes after me, the thong of whose sandal I am not worthy to untie.*" Testimony of John the Baptist
Holiness of Christ; sinless; spotless lamb of God; perfect sacrifice for sin – the just died for the unjust; took upon Himself our sin in His own body on the cross

Stott: This statement was central to Stephen's thesis. There was holy ground outside the holy land. Wherever God is, is holy.

How do you respond to the holiness and majesty and righteousness of God? Not in some casual, flippant attitude – but in holy fear and trembling – Moses did not run forward to hug the burning bush (not a good idea); respond in obedience as God's servant; recognize your sinfulness and huge gap between great God and small little me

Lenski: This is an Oriental idea: to remove the sandals in the presence of a superior, to walk in bare feet in any sanctuary.

God is preparing to send His special Redeemer

E. (:34) Credential of Loving Compassion for the Deliverance of God's People – The Commitment to Action

Moses: "'*I have certainly seen the oppression of My people in Egypt, and have heard their groans, and I have come down to deliver them; come now, and I will send you to Egypt.*"'

ἰδὼν εἶδον τὴν κάκωσιν τοῦ λαοῦ μου τοῦ ἐν Αἰγύπτῳ καὶ τοῦ στεναγμοῦ αὐτῶν ἤκουσα, καὶ κατέβην ἐξελέσθαι αὐτούς· καὶ νῦν δεῦρο ἀποστείλω σε εἰς Αἴγυπτον.

Christ: **Matt. 9:36** "*Seeing the people, He felt compassion for them*"
Luke 19:10 "*For the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost*." – went about healing people; look at the early healing ministry of the apostles – Who was really interested in meeting the deep needs of the people? It wasn't the Sanhedrin

God sees the suffering and heartache of His people; His is concerned for our circumstances; He hears our groans and sighs and cries for help and deliverance; Just as He has delivered us spiritually from the power and bondage of sin He will deliver our bodies from their suffering and give us a new body appropriate for glory

God is preparing to send His special Redeemer – How will he be received???

II. (:35-43) ISRAEL DISOWNS MOSES AS THEIR APPOINTED REDEEMER

A. (:35-38) Pattern of Rejecting God = a bad track record; poor discernment; blindness

1. (:35) Rejection of Divine Rule

> *"This Moses whom they disowned, saying, 'Who made you a ruler and a judge?' is the one whom God sent to be both a ruler and a deliverer with the help of the angel who appeared to him in the thorn bush.*
>
> **Τοῦτον** τὸν Μωϋσῆν ὃν ἠρνήσαντο εἰπόντες· τίς σε κατέστησεν ἄρχοντα καὶ δικαστήν; **τοῦτον** ὁ θεὸς [καὶ] ἄρχοντα καὶ λυτρωτὴν ἀπέσταλκεν σὺν χειρὶ ἀγγέλου τοῦ ὀφθέντος αὐτῷ ἐν τῇ βάτῳ.

(Luke 1:68 – prophecy of Zacharias – "*He has visited us and accomplished redemption for His people and raised up a horn of salvation for us*"; 2:38 – came to accomplish "*the redemption of Jerusalem*"; Hebrews 9:12; Titus 2:14 – "*Who gave Himself for us to redeem us from every lawless deed, and to purify for Himself a people for His own possession, zealous for good deeds*.")

Repetition of phrase "*this one*" *(houtos* -- five times) to point out the identity of the one rejected by Israel

Bock: This ongoing, divinely given status of Moses as the sent one is underscored by the use of the perfect-tense verb *apestalken*. This point is made more emphatic when one realizes that all the verbs around this perfect tense are aorists.

Sent by God – answers the key question of source of authority
Do you really want Jesus to rule over you?

2. (:36) Rejection of Divine Power

> *"This man led them out, performing wonders and signs in the land of Egypt and in the Red Sea and in the wilderness for forty years.*"
>
> **οὗτος** ἐξήγαγεν αὐτοὺς ποιήσας τέρατα καὶ σημεῖα ἐν γῇ Αἰγύπτῳ καὶ ἐν ἐρυθρᾷ θαλάσσῃ καὶ ἐν τῇ ἐρήμῳ ἔτη τεσσεράκοντα.

What a tremendous leader – had over 2 million people following him

3 specific groupings of powerful miracles (wonders and signs):

- before Pharaoh in Egypt – ended in death of first born
- at the crossing of the Red Sea – ended in Egyptian army drowning in Red Sea
- in the wilderness for forty years – ended with complaining, unbelievers dying off

What type of **judgment** awaits the Sanhedrin and Jerusalem and the temple for the rejection of divine power?
Do you really tremble before Jesus as the judge who will soon return to hold you accountable?

3. (:37) Rejection of Divine Revelation – Moses = prototype of great Prophet who would come

> *"This is the Moses who said to the sons of Israel, 'God shall raise up for you a*

prophet like me from your brethren."

οὗτός ἐστιν ὁ Μωϋσῆς ὁ εἴπας τοῖς υἱοῖς Ἰσραήλ· προφήτην ὑμῖν ἀναστήσει ὁ θεὸς ἐκ τῶν ἀδελφῶν ὑμῶν ὡς ἐμέ.

Bock: *for all of you* – Dative of Advantage

Longenecker: Moses pointed beyond himself and beyond the instruction that came through him to another whom God would raise up on the future and to whom Israel must give heed and that, therefore, Israel cannot limit divine revelation and redemption to the confines of the Mosaic law.

John 6:14 says, "*Then those men, when they had seen the miracle that Jesus did, said, This is of a truth that prophet that should come into the world*."

How are you responding to God's great revelation of Himself in the person of His Son Jesus? He is the one mediator between God and man

4. (:38) Rejection of Divine Law – Moses = Mediator of the Law

"This is the one who was in the congregation in the wilderness together with the angel who was speaking to him on Mount Sinai, and who was with our fathers; and he received living oracles to pass on to you."

οὗτός ἐστιν ὁ γενόμενος ἐν τῇ ἐκκλησίᾳ ἐν τῇ ἐρήμῳ μετὰ τοῦ ἀγγέλου τοῦ λαλοῦντος αὐτῷ ἐν τῷ ὄρει Σινᾶ καὶ τῶν πατέρων ἡμῶν, ὃς ἐδέξατο λόγια ζῶντα δοῦναι ἡμῖν,

Stephen shows great respect for the law, just as he has for the ministry of Moses

Same angel of the Lord who was in the burning bush was with Moses on Mt Sinai at the giving of the Law
Word of God is not dead … but living

Lenski: The fifth "*this one*" brings out this mediatorship of Moses which made him the type of the eternal mediator.

B. (:39-43) Pattern of Embracing Idolatry

1. (:39) Embracing Worldliness = a Heart Reversal to Enmity Against God

"And our fathers were unwilling to be obedient to him, but repudiated him and in their hearts turned back to Egypt,"

ᾧ οὐκ ἠθέλησαν ὑπήκοοι γενέσθαι οἱ πατέρες ἡμῶν, ἀλλὰ ἀπώσαντο καὶ ἐστράφησαν ἐν ταῖς καρδίαις αὐτῶν εἰς Αἴγυπτον

Prefer the bondage and suffering of sin to the freedom of living for God and pursuing a life of righteousness; bad choice – Hebrews – Moses refused to choose the pleasures of this world back in Egypt but instead chose to suffer with the children of Israel and walk by faith

Are you a friend of the world or a friend of God?? Can't be both – world is at enmity with God

2. (:40-41) Embracing Self Made Idols over the One True God

"*saying to Aaron, 'Make for us gods who will go before us; for this Moses who led us out of the land of Egypt-- we do not know what happened to him.' And at that time they made a calf and brought a sacrifice to the idol, and were rejoicing in the works of their hands.*"

εἰπόντες τῷ Ἀαρών· ποίησον ἡμῖν θεοὺς οἳ προπορεύσονται ἡμῶν· ὁ γὰρ Μωϋσῆς **οὗτος,** ὃς ἐξήγαγεν ἡμᾶς ἐκ γῆς Αἰγύπτου, οὐκ οἴδαμεν τί ἐγένετο αὐτῷ. καὶ ἐμοσχοποίησαν ἐν ταῖς ἡμέραις ἐκείναις καὶ ἀνήγαγον θυσίαν τῷ εἰδώλῳ καὶ εὐφραίνοντο ἐν τοῖς ἔργοις τῶν χειρῶν αὐτῶν.

One of the lowest points of Israel's history; cannot trust in the invisible God; cannot be patient for God's timetable; prefer idols made by their own hands like the nations around them; how could Aaron have facilitated such idolatry??

Lenski: the contemptuous use of *outos*

Bruce: The invisible presence of God was not enough for them; they craved for something that they could see. When Moses was absent, communing with God on Mount Sinai, they persuaded Aaron to manufacture "*gods that shall go before us*."

Imperfect tense – ongoing, continual rejoicing and celebration
Bock: Usually this verb was used of worship for Yahweh at feasts, so this use is particularly cutting (Lev. 23:40; Deut. 12:7, 12, 18). The association of idols with the work of human hands is also common in the OT and Judaism (Isa. 40:19-20; 44:9-17; Ps. 115:4; Hos. 8:5)

Making merry – same verb used in story of the Prodigal in Luke 15:23

3. (:42) Embracing the Creation over the Creator – Worshipping Sun, Moon, Stars

"But God turned away and delivered them up to serve the host of heaven; as it is written in the book of the prophets, 'It was not to Me that you offered victims and sacrifices forty years in the wilderness, was it, O house of Israel?"

ἔστρεψεν δὲ ὁ θεὸς καὶ παρέδωκεν αὐτοὺς λατρεύειν τῇ στρατιᾷ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ καθὼς γέγραπται ἐν βίβλῳ τῶν προφητῶν· μὴ σφάγια καὶ θυσίας προσηνέγκατέ μοι ἔτη τεσσεράκοντα ἐν τῇ ἐρήμῳ, οἶκος Ἰσραήλ;

Bruce: [quoting W. Manson] In other words, what Amos meant, according to Stephen, was not that God had not commanded sacrifices and oblations, but that Israel had diverted its offerings and its sanctuary to idolatrous purposes.

Cf. **Rom. 1:24-28** for the type of judgment that occurs when God takes his hands off and allows sinners to suffer the hardening brought about by their own sin

Constable: The Israelites turned from Moses to idolatry, and in this their high priest, Aaron, helped them. Consequently God gave them over to what they wanted (cf. Rom. 1:24). He also purposed to send them into captivity as punishment (**Amos 5:25-27**).

MacArthur: Did you know that God also did that with Israel? In **Hosea 4:17** we find the shocking words, "*Ephraim is joined to idols; let him alone*." God said, "I've had it!" and so He

let them continue worshiping idols, something they did from the time of the wilderness wandering all the way to the Babylonian Captivity. Because they refused to worship Him, God allowed the Israelites "*to worship the host of heaven*." This is a reference to all the stars and planets that the Egyptians worshiped.

4. (:43) Embracing Forms of Pagan Worship

> "*You also took along the tabernacle of Moloch and the star of the god Rompha, the images which you made to worship them. I also will remove you beyond Babylon.*"
>
> καὶ ἀνελάβετε τὴν σκηνὴν τοῦ Μόλοχ καὶ τὸ ἄστρον τοῦ θεοῦ [ὑμῶν] Ῥαιφάν, τοὺς τύπους οὓς ἐποιήσατε προσκυνεῖν αὐτοῖς, καὶ μετοικιῶ ὑμᾶς ἐπέκεινα Βαβυλῶνος.

Kent: Stephen's quotation of **Amos 5:27** differs from the OT. Both the Hebrew text and the LXX say "*Damascus*." The prophet Amos was foretelling the exile of the northern kingdom under the Assyrians which would take them beyond Damascus. More than a century later, the southern kingdom was captured because of her similar disobedience to God and was deported to Babylon. Stephen has merely substituted this phrase in order to use this Scripture to cover the judgment of God on the entire nation.

Bock: The point is that such idolatry is a pattern of Israelite behavior and that it results in national judgment.

Longenecker: The inescapable inference from Stephen's words is that Israel's shameful behavior and God's drastic response to it find their counterparts in the nation's rejection of Jesus.

CONCLUSION:

God's presentation of Jesus Christ as the divinely appointed redeemer is clear. There is no other salvation except through Jesus Christ. There is one name under heaven through whom you must be saved. Threat of God's judgment is clear throughout this passage.

CLEAR CONTRAST: WILL YOU OWN OR DISOWN GOD'S APPOINTED REDEEMER?

* * * * * * * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

1) How does your life reflect whether you own or disown Jesus Christ?

2) What are the signs of worldliness in the church today?

3) How are we recognizing and responding to the holiness of God in our casual society?

4) Is God justified in giving over confirmed idolaters to the pursuit of even greater depravity?

* * * * * * * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Lenski: The trouble lay not with Stephen and his treatment of Moses, it lay with the treatment Moses received from Israel at the beginning and continued to receive, yea, was receiving right now from Stephen's accusers and judges. Stephen's defensive is turning into an offensive. Not he is on trial, but his judges are. Stephen, however, is not judging them, he is letting God's Word, Moses himself, do that just as Jesus did in **John 5:45-47**. . . This repudiated Moses who was made the old covenant mediator is the very type of Jesus who was also repudiated by the Jews and yet was made the everlasting Mediator.

Constable: It was in Midian, after 40 years, that God appeared to Moses in the burning bush. The angel that appeared to Moses was the Angel of the Lord, very possibly the preincarnate Christ (vv. 31-33; cf. Exod. 3:2, 6; 4:2; John 12:41; 1 Cor. 10:1-4; Heb. 11:26). God commanded Moses to return to Egypt as His instrument of deliverance for the Israelites. God revealed Himself and His Law outside the Holy Land.

MacArthur: If Jesus had been our Messiah, all of those great Jewish leaders would have known He was our Messiah--we wouldn't have missed it." That's one of the things that Jews argue about even today. With all of the great rabbis and teachers of the past, they conclude that they wouldn't have missed the Messiah. But Stephen says, in effect, "Guess what? You missed Moses, and you missed Joseph, too. Both of them were not even accepted by you until the second time around." (In like manner, when will the Jews accept Jesus? The second time around.) Though Stephen's audience didn't want to take responsibility for their forefathers' mistakes, Stephen nevertheless indicts them with their own history, saying, "*...ye do always resist the Holy Spirit; as your fathers did, so do ye*" (**Ac. 7:51b**). Stephen powerfully says, "You're right on schedule. It always takes two times to get through to you! This Moses, whom you rejected, is the very deliverer that God chose to lead you."

Jeff Hughes: **Conclusion to Stephen's Message**
The Israelites turned back to Egypt, and the bondage that they were in there. The question we need to ask ourselves though, as we study this verse is – Where am I running? Am I running toward God, am I seeking Him and serving Him, or, am I running off in my own direction? The Israelites longed to go back to their old lifestyle in Egypt. They wanted their idols and ceremonies, instead of this new God. They longed for the easier life of slavery rather than the more difficult life of faith.

i. The **parallels between the life of Moses and the life of Jesus** are amazing. Moses was born to a humble man and his wife, and a king was out to kill him at his birth, just like Jesus.
ii. Moses was rejected by the nation of Israel the first time he came to them, and Jesus was too. Moses was a shepherd, Jesus called His followers His sheep; He was a shepherd, too.
iii. Moses delivered his people from the oppression and bondage of slavery in Egypt by the power of God. Jesus delivered His people from the bondage of sin and death because He was God.
iv. One more parallel I want us to look at in the life of Moses compares to the church, though.
v. For the first 40 years, Moses was born, and was educated. He felt called of God, and tried to deliver the children of Israel himself. Like this, from the beginning, man worshipped God in preparation of the Savior to come, but they got it all wrong. They tried to worship God on their own terms, and turned what should have been a relationship into cold dead religion.

vi. For the next 40 years, Moses was rejected by the Israelites, and he fled and hid out in Midian, tending sheep that were not his own at first and later adding his own. God met him there, and sent him to Egypt to free the people.
vii. Like this, Jesus came and proclaimed the gospel to the Israelites, and he was rejected. The apostles were rejected, and for the most part, during the church age, the sheep were not Jews, they were gentiles. But, God would send Jesus back to redeem the people of Israel.
viii. For the last 40 years, Moses comes and delivers the people and leads them to the Promised Land. When Jesus returns, the Jewish nation will see Him for who He is, and embrace Him as their Savior, and they will be taken up to heaven, which is the ultimate Promised Land.

D. Mark England: **Who Speaks Against Moses and the Law?**
Followers of Christ are the ones who truly understand the promise God made to Abraham; the ones who truly understand the law that Moses gave; truly faithful to promises of God to bring His people to a holy dwelling place; recites the history they are all familiar with; How will the Sanhedrin respond to this recitation of common events? They will feel accused by these words; Stephen's faithfulness will cost him his life; did not surprise him . . .

God working with Moses for 40 years in Midian; learns a lot about himself; youthful pride and arrogance all beat out of him; chasing after sheep; fighting off wild animals; humbled greatly; now God will call him and use him; he will do things God's way; this was a miracle; an appearance of Jesus in a pre-incarnate state to Moses; What do you do when that bush speaks to you and identifies itself as the God of Abraham; Moses could not run away; did not dare to look; Remember who I am – approach me in respect for my might and power; what makes a place holy is not the place itself but the presence of God; people must properly recognize God; Moses tried to argue out of this position of leadership; God maintains that He is sending Moses; the power is from God; God made him ruler and redeemer; Moses did not create the law but was the law giver in the sense of being the mediator of the law; Sanhedrin had corrupted the understanding of the law;

All the sins that Israel would commit as a nation were all based on that same fickle, unbelieving heart that evidenced itself in the wilderness; rejecting God for the things they could make with their hands, the things they could see with their eyes; they wanted to live by their own laws; end up falling into greater wickedness; they rejected God so God rejected them and cast them out of the land; Amos speaking to the N kingdom to Israel … but Stephen rightly understood that the same sins led Judah to be exiled to Babylon; we have ideas about God that suit us that are not in conformity to God's revelation of Himself; a confusion of who God is; a departure from what God reveals Himself to be; Which God do we serve? The one that Moses proclaimed or the one we have created out of our own imagination? Who is Jesus? Do you love Him? Do you believe in Him? Is He your All in All, your Hope, your righteousness?
http://www.sermonaudio.com/playpopup.asp?SID=61107165626

Timothy Dane: **Stephen's Defense**
1. (:1-15) not a blasphemer against God; everything you believe about the patriarchs I believe as well; has an extremely high reverence for God – life of **Abraham**
2. (:9-16) I don't resist God's Word; if you look back into the history of Israel you see that our forefathers had a history of resisting God; when God sent redeemer in times of trouble, the Jews rejected that one – life of **Joseph**; brothers became jealous
3. (:17-43) I do not resist God's Word – nation kept resisting God's will; life of **Moses**; Philo credits Moses with all types of things – pure exaggerations; Moses claimed not to be a very good

speaker; brilliant man but brought low during these shepherd years; Moses understood that God was going to use him to deliver the nation in some way; fled because his people were not going to receive him as a leader; God's grace still with Moses and the nation; communicating God's will to man; Ex. 3 and Judges 6; this guy was God's man;
4. (:44-50) The spiritual leaders = Sanhedrin – suffering from spiritual confusion – thinking that the temple guarantees you God's presence and favor; God's work not confined to one place
5. Death of Stephen
http://www.sermonaudio.com/playpopup.asp?SID=111604202222

Prof. David McKay: **Moses' Mission (:30-38)**
The Lord's time comes; Moses is called and commissioned;
1. Moses Meeting with God – God is not in a hurry; sends Moses to do his great life's work; Lord makes no mistakes in preparing His people for service; God meets with Moses in a very dramatic way; nothing unusual about something burning in the desert – but this bush was not consumed! The angel of the Lord – not a created angel but God Himself; spoke to Abraham in Gen. 22; God Himself; 3:31 "*he heard the Lord's voice*"; "*God called to him from within the bush*"; comes to give his servant a special task; working before His incarnation as Jesus of Nazareth; mediator between God and man; presence of God is always awe-inspiring; no place for casualness and flippancy but godly fear and trembling; conscious of our smallness and sinfulness;
2. Moses Commissioned by God – God keeps all His promises; knows the need of His oppressed people; He is listening to their groans; has bound Himself in covenant love to this people for all of their sin and complaining and idolatry; task of leadership; picture and foreshadowing of work of Messiah; **Ps. 19:14** – "*my Redeemer*";
3. Moses Speaking for God --
http://www.sermonaudio.com/playpopup.asp?SID=2141012493610

TEXT: Acts 7: 44-50

TITLE: LESSON FROM THE TABERNACLE AND THE TEMPLE – DON'T THINK YOU CAN BOX GOD IN – WORSHIP IN SPIRIT AND TRUTH

BIG IDEA:
THE MAJESTIC CREATOR OF ALL CANNOT BE CONFINED TO ANY PHYSICAL DWELLING PLACE MADE BY MAN OR DEPENDENT ON ANYTHING HIS CREATION HAS TO OFFER

INTRODUCTION:
This is the final OT history lesson from Israel's past —summing up a long period of time from the days of Moses to King David. Stephen has already covered the life of **Abraham** – a man full of the Spirit and of grace and especially of **faith**. He took us through the difficult experiences of **Joseph** – a man blessed with **wisdom** to understand how God could take something that man intended for evil and turn it around for good. He walked us through the challenges faced by **Moses** – God's chosen redeemer who was rejected at various times by his own people but a leader through whom God demonstrated great **power**. We have come to a better understanding of what it means to be **filled by the Spirit of God** and how Stephen fits that profile.

Now we come to lessons related to the **tabernacle and the temple** that will speak directly to the root spiritual problem of the Sanhedrin leaders. Stephen had been charged with speaking against the temple – the sacred dwelling place of God and speaking against the whole worship system of the Jews. He is not only concluding his defense but he is going on the offense big time as he turns the tables and brings an indictment against his judges. They have put their trust in a superstitious and ritualistic sense in their close connection to the temple in Jerusalem.
Indictment: **Matt. 22:29** "*You are mistaken, not understanding the Scriptures nor the power of God*."

But now that Christ had come as the fulfillment of the OT sacrificial system, the true Great High Priest, the purpose of the temple in God's program had been fulfilled. It would soon be destroyed in judgment. The veil in the temple had been ripped apart from top to bottom. God was moving on … but the Sanhedrin leaders were not – they wanted to box God in and control Him so that they could take security in some type of automatic blessing due to their association with the temple in Jerusalem.

For **background** we need to understand the teaching of Jesus in **John 4:19-24** where he corrects a similar error on the part of the Samaritan woman at the well. *Worship in spirit and in truth*

THE TRANSCENDENT GOD DICTATES THE NATURE OF HIS DWELLING PLACE – NATURE OF TRUE WORSHIP
Where are you going to find God? How should you be approaching God in worship?
In what country – not tied to the United States
In what denomination – be very careful not to think you have your arms around God
In what church . . .

I. (:44-47) TWO EXAMPLES OF GOD DICTATING THE NATURE OF HIS DWELLING PLACE – NATURE OF TRUE WORSHIP

A. (:44-45) Example of the Tabernacle in Days of Moses and Joshua … Until David

1. (:44a) Remote Location -- Not restricted to Jerusalem

> *"Our fathers had the tabernacle of testimony in the wilderness,"*
> Ἡ σκηνὴ τοῦ μαρτυρίου ἦν τοῖς πατράσιν ἡμῶν ἐν τῇ ἐρήμῳ

Stephen continues to show his **respect for the Jewish fathers** – "*Our fathers*" – his argument revolved around key historic figures: Abraham, Joseph, Moses – showed he followed in their footsteps but also did not cover over the sins of the people – their idolatry, their unbelief, their stubbornness – Sanhedrin had rose colored glasses when looking at history very selectively

Called the *tabernacle of testimony* – had the two tablets of the law in the ark of the covenant within the tabernacle; also called the tent of meeting – where the Almighty God met with His people and gave revelation and gave direction

Stephen emphasized many examples of God working outside of the borders of Jerusalem and the promised land – here in the *wilderness*

Stott: The God of Israel is a pilgrim God, who is not restricted to any one place. . . God's presence cannot be localized, and no building can confine him or inhibit his activity. If he has any home on earth, it is with his people that he lives. He has pledged himself by a solemn covenant to be their God. Therefore, according to his covenant promise, wherever they are, there he is also.

2. (:44b) Divinely Directed Pattern – Not designed by man – God must be worshiped in the matter in which He decrees

> "*just as He who spoke to Moses directed him to make it according to the pattern which he had seen.*"
> καθὼς διετάξατο ὁ λαλῶν τῷ Μωϋσῇ ποιῆσαι αὐτὴν κατὰ τὸν τύπον ὃν ἑωράκει·

great exhaustive **detail** given by God on Mt Sinai for the blueprint of the tabernacle – read through the chapters at the end of Exodus – why did God give so much detail?

Tabernacle filled with the **Glory of God** – this is a big deal – **Ex. 40:34-38**

God is **very particular** about the directions He has given about how to worship:

- Look at judgment on Cain – this problem traced all the way back to the beginning
- look at judgment on those who offered strange fire (**Num. 3:4** Nadab and Abihu) – something God had not commanded; adding something to the worship that was not authorized by God
- look at judgment on those who mishandled the ark of the covenant – **2 Sam. 6:6** "*But when they came to the threshing floor of Nacon, Uzzah reached out and took hold of it, for the oxen nearly upset it. And the anger of the Lord burned against Uzzah, and God struck him down there for his irreverence*" – David was upset with God's judgment

What's the big deal you say about practicing baptism or observing the Lord's Supper??

If it is important to God it should be important to you.

We must worship God in truth – according to what God has revealed in His Word about how He must be approached and worshiped; we cannot make up our own rules; pattern of NT worship is very important to us; not called to invent something new but to reproduce what Christ and the apostles wanted to see as the practice of all the churches

Cf. parallel of passing along the Scriptures as we have received them; teaching the whole counsel of God
Cf. parallel of ministering after the pattern of the apostles and Paul – not charged with being inventive but being faithful to the pattern of what a NT church should look like and how it should function

3. (:45) Associated with God's Power and Blessing for Many Generations

"*And having received it in their turn, our fathers brought it in with Joshua upon dispossessing the nations whom God drove out before our fathers, until the time of David.*"
ἣν καὶ εἰσήγαγον διαδεξάμενοι οἱ πατέρες ἡμῶν μετὰ Ἰησοῦ ἐν τῇ κατασχέσει τῶν ἐθνῶν, ὧν ἐξῶσεν ὁ θεὸς ἀπὸ προσώπου τῶν πατέρων ἡμῶν ἕως τῶν ἡμερῶν Δαυίδ,

You can worship in the right way … in truth …. But you must also have God's power and presence and blessing – you must be worshiping in the Spirit

Presence of God should bring much blessing and victory and deliverance and prosperity and peace and dominion

For hundreds of years this mobile tabernacle was all that Israel had – and yet they clearly enjoyed God's presence and blessing

Sanhedrin was all about trying to be right in their interpretation of the law and understanding of the system of worship – but they had erred greatly – added in human regulations; made worship a burden; did not know anything of the person or power of the God they claimed to worship; just ritual and outward show

B. (:46-47) Example of the Temple Built by Solomon Rather Than David

1. (:46) Man's Initiative Rejected

"*And David found favor in God's sight, and asked that he might find a dwelling place for the God of Jacob.*"
ὃς εὗρεν χάριν ἐνώπιον τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ ἠτήσατο εὑρεῖν σκήνωμα τῷ οἴκῳ Ἰακώβ.

Even the greatest man that you could imagine = David
"*you did well that it was in your heart*" – **1 Kings 8:18**
Motivation was the best – looked around and compared his nice palace to the temporary tabernacle and felt that God deserved a permanent temple – but God did not want or need a permanent home on earth in a structure made by man

2. (:47) God's Initiative the Determining Factor

"*But it was Solomon who built a house for Him.*"

Σολομὼν δὲ οἰκοδόμησεν αὐτῷ οἶκον.
Progression from mobile tabernacle to temporary palace to understanding the transcendence of God

[Temple of Herod's day was not even the same edifice as the glorious one built by Solomon … even Zerubbabel's less glorious temple was long gone; Sanhedrin had put exaggerated emphasis on the temple]

Once again, God made known the details for the construction of the temple

Look at the beautiful cathedrals over in Europe – as if beautiful stained glass windows and ornate artwork and sculpture could somehow compensate for a lack of spiritual vibrancy …..
Lenski: How, by whom, and in what spirit temples are to be built Solomon and **Isa. 66:2b** show us. But to build temples and churches, to make them grand and imposing, to fill them with crowds for great services while hearts are without contrition, obdurate before God's Word, is to treat God as an idol to whom we may dictate as we please, to invent what his will and word is to be to suit our own perverted hearts. That is the kind of house many still build, a place where they offer rest to the Highest.

Solomon understood that God was not limited in any way by this new temple:
1 Kings 8:27 "*But will God indeed dwell on the earth? Behold, heaven and the highest heaven cannot contain You, how much less this house which I have built*!"

II. (:48-50) DIVINE CORRECTION OF MISCONCEPTIONS REGARDING HIS DWELLING PLACE = HOW TO APPROACH GOD IN WORSHIP

A. (:48-49a) God is Too Transcendent to be Confined to Human Made Structures – Since God Reigns Over All

"However, the Most High does not dwell in houses made by human hands; as the prophet says: 'Heaven is My throne, And earth is the footstool of My feet;

ἀλλ᾽ οὐχ ὁ ὕψιστος ἐν χειροποιήτοις κατοικεῖ, καθὼς ὁ προφήτης λέγει· ὁ οὐρανός μοι θρόνος, ἡ δὲ γῆ ὑποπόδιον τῶν ποδῶν μου·

Transcendence of God – God is distinct from the world, does not need it and exceeds the grasp of any created intelligence in the world; much greater and far above His creation; independent of it
Eph. 4:6 speaks of both transcendence and immanence of God -- "*one God and Father of us all, who is above all and through all and in all*"

Must capture sense of the greatness of God; He is a transcendent God

Roman Catholic mass: Transubstantiation is the teaching that during the Mass, at the consecration in the Lord's Supper (Communion), the elements of the Eucharist, bread and wine, are transformed into the actual body and blood of Jesus and that they are no longer bread and wine, but only retain their appearance of bread and wine.
The "**Real Presence**" is the term referring to Christ's actual presence in the elements of the bread and the wine that have been transubstantiated.
http://carm.org/transubstantiation

Must understand the significance of the body of Christ in this whole temple discussion: Remember confusion over the teaching of Jesus which was viewed as an assault against the temple: **John 2:18-22** The new temple is Christ Himself – His body made up of both believing Jews and Gentiles – great turning point – gospel going to be introduced to the Gentiles; God doing something new here

B. (:49b-50) God Needs Nothing From Man -- Since God Created All Things
What kind of house will you build for Me?' says the Lord; 'Or what place is there for My repose? 'Was it not My hand which made all these things?'"

ποῖον οἶκον οἰκοδομήσετέ μοι, λέγει κύριος, ἢ τίς τόπος τῆς καταπαύσεώς μου; [50] οὐχὶ ἡ χείρ μου ἐποίησεν ταῦτα πάντα;

Huge correction here – this was the point the Sanhedrin stumbled over – they had put themselves in the position of Supreme Court justices who were actually over the Creator Himself – need to re-orient their thinking and become a footstool; need to worship and submit to the Creator

How vast is heaven? How big is our view of God?

Don't act in presumption
What does God need from us? What ministry does God need from us??

Jesus went back to heaven to build a home for us for eternity – does not need us to build a home for Him; we could never accomplish this

Apostle Paul drove home these same lessons to his audience at Athens in **Acts 17:25-31**

CONCLUSION: Where does God dwell today?
God dwells with His people – we are the temple of God – blessed with direct access to God; able to worship Him in spirit and in truth -- **1 Pet. 2:4-5**

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DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

1) In what ways did the tabernacle and the temple point forward to fulfillment in Jesus Christ?

2) How did the Jews desecrate the temple through their idolatry and place false security in it as almost a lucky charm?

3) How has our Christian culture lost sight of the Transcendence of God?

4) In what ways do we try to put God in a box or limit Him or control Him according to our desires?

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QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Wiersbe: The witnesses accused Stephen of seeking to destroy the temple, but that was exactly what the Jewish nation did! Moses built the tabernacle and God's glory graciously dwelt in the Holy of Holies (**Ex. 40:34-38**). Solomon built the temple, and once again God's glory came in (**1 Kings 8:10-11**). But over the years, the worship at the temple degenerated into mere religious formality, and eventually there were idols placed in the temple (**2 Kings 21:1-9**; **Ezek. 8:7-12**). Jeremiah warned people against their superstitious faith in the temple and told them that they had turned God's house into a den of thieves (**Jer. 7:1-16**). . .

Even Solomon recognized the truth that God did not live in buildings (**1 Kings 8:27**), and the prophet Isaiah made it even clearer (**Isa. 66:1-2**). We really make nothing for God, because everything comes from Him, and how can the Creator of the universe be contained in a man-made building (**Acts 17:24**)? The Jewish defense of their temple was both illogical and unscriptural.

Bruce: Evidently Stephen does not consider that the building of Solomon's temple was an adequate fulfillment of God's promise that David's son would build Him a house. It is plain that the early Christians interpreted the parallel promise, that this son of David would have his throne established for ever, as fulfilled in Christ (**Luke 1:32** f).

It was in Christ, too, that the promise of a new house, built for the name of God was truly fulfilled. It was directly after His entry into Jerusalem, hailed as the son of David, that He went into the temple and ejected from the court of the Gentiles the trespassers whose presence and activity there prevented it from fulfilling its proper purpose . . . The new temple is Christ Himself, but the corporate Christ, the Redeemer of God's elect along with His elect, of Gentile and Jewish derivation alike. And the work of building began with His resurrection: "*he spake of the temple of his body*" when He promised to raise up the new temple in three days (**John 2:20** f.). If we are right in tracing some such intention in Stephen's language here, it underlines the relevance of this speech as a theological introduction to Luke's narrative of the Gentile mission.

Boice: The place this speech occupies in Acts leads me to think Stephen is saying that the day of the temple was passing. It had been built by Solomon. It had been a blessing. That was all very good. But it was passing away now simply because the Lord Jesus Christ had come. He was the real temple. Besides, those who believe on him themselves become temples of the Holy Spirit as the living God comes to dwell in them. . . This speech has prominence in Acts because it marks the closing of the Jewish mission and is an indication of the opening to the Gentile communities.

Longenecker: Stephen's assertion is that neither the tabernacle nor the temple was meant to be such an institutionalized feature in Israel's religion as to prohibit God's further redemptive activity or to halt the advance of God's plan for his people.

Bob Deffinbaugh: **The First Martyr – Taking God for Granite**
I confess that this is a play on words, but it is one that represents an important truth. The law of Moses was written on stone. The temple, too, was made of stone. In one sense, the Jews had made the law of Moses (as they interpreted it) and the temple an idol. Their "god" was a god of their making, rather than the One who made all things (**Acts 4:24**). They made stone (granite?) their "god." Thus, they took God for granite, or perhaps we should say they took granite for their

god. . .

Unbelieving Jews could not stand to hear anything about the coming destruction of the temple. As the Law of Moses (or rather the traditions the Jews had made up themselves and attributed to Moses) had become an idol to the Hellenistic, Greek-speaking Jews who opposed Stephen, so had the temple. They assumed that to have the temple was to have the assurance of God's presence among them and His blessings. . . As our Lord Jesus told the woman at the well, worship is not a matter of finding the right place, but of finding the right person (John 4:20-26). They have an exaggerated view of the importance of the temple.

MacArthur: Though David had desired to build the Temple, God had other plans, for it was actually David's son whom God allowed to do it. Now, there is an interesting possibility why the mention of Solomon building the Temple is just briefly stated in passing: Stephen could be implying the transitory nature of the Temple that the Jews had so revered. In a sense, it's almost an indictment, because the Temple that Solomon had built had been destroyed. The Jews had essentially put all their eggs in one basket--their security was the Temple. They were guilty of worshiping the building, rather than the God who had chosen to dwell there. In fact, even Zerubbabel's Temple was gone and Stephen's opponents were only familiar with Herod's. It's as if Stephen is saying, "You guys are talking about the Temple that God built, and this isn't even it! If you're accusing me of speaking against this Temple, keep in mind that this isn't the Temple that God built anyway. The one that He ordained was built by Solomon. And even Solomon's Temple was only temporary, because God Himself allowed it to be destroyed as part of His plan. So you can't put God in a box."

John Piper: What was the root evil in all this resistance to God's will? Why did they resist the Holy Spirit (v. 51)?

I found the key in a parallel phrase in verse 41 and verse 48. In verse 41 Stephen says that they offered sacrifices to the idol and "*rejoiced in the works of their hands*." And in verse 48 he says, "*The Most High does not dwell in houses made with hands*."

The root evil in many in Israel was that they derived their joy—their fulfillment, their meaning, their sense of significance—from what they could achieve with their own hands. Verse 41: "*They rejoiced in the works of their hands*." They wanted a kind of god and a kind of worship in which they could demonstrate their own power and their own wisdom and their own righteousness and their own morality and their own religious zeal. They got their joy from what they could achieve and not from God. Especially not from a God so free and so great and so sovereign and so self-sufficient that he gets all the credit for everything good, and won't let himself be limited or controlled by anybody's man-made temple.

The temple in Jerusalem had become for many in Israel a symbol of what they could achieve—the work of their hands. And therefore the worship there had become a subtle form of self-worship—all very religious, using all the right language, but coming from uncircumcised hearts and stiff, unsubmissive, self-exalting necks.

D. Mark England: **Where Does God Live?**
Stephen going on the offensive; turning the charges against him around to indict the Sanhedrin leaders; showing respect for history of Israel but showing the sin involved as well; the Jews have not been faithful; strong undercurrent of rebellion and unbelief; don't cherry pick your history

and ignore the bad parts; Salvation found in Jesus Christ apart from the temple; **Deut. 12:5**; Was the tabernacle really kept in honor during that time? Remember vs. 42-43; Did our fathers really honor God in their worship? In time of Judges tried to use the tabernacle as a lucky charm and paraded it before them in battle; You can't use God as a lucky rabbit's foot; the temple had become a place of idolatry; **1 Pet. 2:4f**; God dwells with His people;

Prof. David McKay: **True Worship**

We have been made for fellowship with God – to worship and serve Him; greatest privilege is free access into His presence; We must worship as God Himself requires;

1. The Tabernacle in the Wilderness

These men knew the OT history; but could not see its significance and application to themselves; here was the place where the Lord was pleased to meet with His people; had been made as God directed; Moses received blueprint for the tabernacle up on Mt. Sinai; reproduce the pattern God had already given; not what they thought by their wisdom that God might like; pattern given in exhaustive detail; God wills to be worshiped in the way that He prescribes; God decrees how He will be worshiped; the tent of meeting; worship in truth according to God's word and in Spirit in the blessing of God's presence and power;

2. The Temple in Jerusalem

Not necessary to have one fixed sanctuary; don't forget there were many years when the people did not have a fixed temple; David had a worthy goal; but it wasn't God's will; You are a warrior, a man of blood; the Lord decreed how it would be; God gave David the plan but wanted Solomon to build it;

The Temple not designed to be permanent but a pointer to fulfillment in Jesus Christ;

Temple was place of sacrifice; Jesus offered perfect sacrifice for sins; end of whole sacrificial system; priesthood replaced by great High Priest of Jesus Christ; not a message the Sanhedrin wanted to hear; temple has fulfilled its purpose and its days are over; God is doing a new thing; **Eph. 2:21**; our church buildings are not temples;

3. The Greatness of God

Jer. 7 – temple had become a lucky charm; thought they had some type of lock on God; we have God on our side; thought of Him as their possession; instead of God possessing them, they possessed God; religion of superstition and foolish attachment; infinite, eternal, almighty God; not a God they could control; trusted in the ritual; true worship requires a biblical view of God = His greatness and majesty and holiness and righteousness;

TEXT: Acts 7: 51-53

TITLE: INDICTMENT OF RELIGIOUS PHONIES FOR RESISTING THE HOLY SPIRIT

BIG IDEA:
3 CHARGES DIRECTED AGAINST RELIGIOUS PHONIES FOR RESISTING THE HOLY SPIRIT

INTRODUCTION:
Stephen had been charged with a number of very serious offenses – against God, against Moses, against the temple, against the law, against the whole Jewish system of worship. Now he concludes his defense by leveling very similar charges against the religious leaders of the Sanhedrin. He shows how they are nothing but a bunch of hypocrites – religious phonies who should be exposed and called to repentance. Your standing is actually worse than that of ignorant pagans who make no bones about their denial of the one true God. You actually claim to be following in the footsteps of Jewish men of faith; to be upholding and promoting the law of God; to be offering up worship according to God's direction. In actuality, you are a bunch of fakes. Stephen doesn't pull any punches here; not trying for the diplomacy award; not interested in being politically correct or popular; in the face of his own execution he offers up these words that stung the Sanhedrin to the core

I. (:51a) YOU ARE RELIGIOUS PHONIES BECAUSE YOU OPPOSE GOD'S RULE

A. Root Problem is Stubborn Pride and Rebellion

"*You men who are stiff-necked*
Σκληροτράχηλοι

"*stiff-necked*" -- figuratively, of resistance against changing one's behavior, stiff-necked, headstrong, stubborn; obstinate

Problem of physical stiff neck – very limiting; try to turn around to back up the car; approach of chiropractor – takes very violent manipulation therapy to try to restore the full range of motion; most difficult patients are those who fight the therapy; situation tends to get worse over time, not better

Ex. 32:7-10 involves a corruption of self; turning aside from the way which God commanded; substituting idols for the one true God; an obstinate people – makes God very angry; puts them in danger of judgment

MacArthur: **Deut. 9:6** – "*a stubborn people*" – lit. "hard of neck." An expression for the stubborn, intractable, obdurate, and unbending attitude of Israel.

Jer. 17:23 "*Yet they did not listen or incline their ears, but stiffened their necks in order not to listen or take correction*."

Stott: an epithet which both Moses and the prophets had applied to Israel (Ex. 32:9; 33:3, 5; 34:9; Dt. 9:6, 13; 10:16; 31:27; 2 Ch. 30:8; Je. 17:23)

Remedy: **Deut. 10:12-22** – Get back on the path of fearing and obeying God who loves you so deeply and has your best interests at heart; "So circumcise your heart, and stiffen your neck no longer" – show your repentance by works of justice and righteousness to the needy

B. Heart and Mind Closed to God

"*and uncircumcised in heart and ears*"
καὶ ἀπερίτμητοι καρδίαις καὶ τοῖς ὠσίν

they don't want to hear the truth of the Word of God because their hearts don't want to put it into practice; they love their wicked lifestyle in chasing after the pleasures of this world; they look with contempt on those pagan Gentiles in the surrounding nations who do not have the physical sign of circumcision; but they are far worse – despite their election and privilege they have despised the covenant relationship and closed their hearts to God

What are we doing to remove the wax of sin from our ears so that we are in a position to hear the Words of God?
What are we doing to prepare our hearts to be open and receptive to what God has to say?

Wiersbe: Their ears did not hear the truth, their hearts did not receive the truth, and their necks did not bow to the truth. As a result, they killed their own Messiah!

Lenski: bearing the covenant sign only outwardly and not inwardly in its intended force

Jeremiah 6:10 "*To whom shall I speak and give warning that they may hear? Behold, their ears are closed and they cannot listen. Behold, the word of the Lord has become a reproach to them; they have no delight in it*."

What type of delight do you take in the Word of the Lord?
How developed are your listening skills?
Do you heed the warning of God's Word or do you foolishly choose to stubbornly rebel and face the consequences of God's judgment?
Indictment: **Jer. 5:20-31**

Leviticus 26:41 "*I also was acting with hostility against them, to bring them into the land of their enemies-- or if their uncircumcised heart becomes humbled so that they then make amends for their iniquity,*"

(Lv. 26:41; Dt. 10:16; 30:6; Je. 6:10; 9:26; Ezk. 44:7)

not physical Israel who will inherit the promises but those who are circumcised in heart

Kent: Their hardness of heart showed them to be no better spiritually than uncircumcised gentiles.

1 Cor. 7:19 "*Circumcision is nothing, and uncircumcision is nothing, but what matters is the keeping of the commandments of God*."

C. Will Opposed to God's Direction

"*are always resisting the Holy Spirit;*"

ὑμεῖς ἀεὶ τῷ πνεύματι τῷ ἁγίῳ ἀντιπίπτετε

Not only oppose God in your attitudes … but also in your actions – this is a strong word

resisting, opposing – strong word = fall against an enemy

Bock: The third hapax in this verse is *antipiptete*. This present-tense verb means to oppose or resist something continually, a point emphasized even more with the adverb *aei*, always. The verb's force here is iterative; they are opposing God again and again (Wallace).

full of the Holy Spirit means being fully under His control; direction; guidance – very sensitive and submissive

In what ways can we resist the Holy Spirit?

- Doing things which our conscience informs us are against the path of holiness;
  - Welcome the tugging of the Spirit upon your conscience; don't let your conscience become hardened or calloused
- Not doing what the Holy Spirit prompts us to do – speaking a kind word; helping someone and showing practical love, taking opportunities to boldly witness, developing and using our spiritual gift

Positive command: walking by the power of the Holy Spirit

Walvoord: The ministry of the Spirit, however, is not automatic and is not effective without cooperation on the part of the individual, hence the command in **1 Thessalonians 5:19**, "*Quench not the Spirit.*" . . . Quenching is a concept used in relation to extinguishing or suppressing a fire . . . Hence, it may be concluded that quenching the Holy Spirit is to suppress, stifle, or otherwise obstruct the ministry of the Spirit to the individual. In a word it is saying *no* and replacing the will of the Spirit with the will of the individual. This, in brief, is the whole issue of morality – whether man will accomplish what he wants to do or whether his life is surrendered and yielded to the will of God. . . **Ephesians 4:30** "*Grieve not the Holy Spirit of God, whereby ye are sealed unto the day of redemption.*" This command directs our attention first of all to the fact that the Holy Spirit is a person who has intellect, sensibility (feeling), and will. The Holy Spirit has feelings and is sensitive to the presence of sin in the life of a believer. Rebellion against the direction of the Holy Spirit in the life constitutes an offense to His holy character and can result in great loss to the individual believer.

How sensitive and submissive are you to the Holy Spirit?

II. (:51b-52) YOU ARE RELIGIOUS PHONIES BECAUSE YOU OPPOSE GOD'S REPRESENTATIVES – THOSE CONVICTING MESSENGERS REJECTED AFTER THE PATTERN OF YOUR FATHERS

A. Condemned by Your Religious Heritage – How Ironic – they boasted in that heritage

"*you are doing just as your fathers did.*"

ὡς οἱ πατέρες ὑμῶν καὶ ὑμεῖς.

We would hope that our fathers would set a godly example and that it would be to our advantage to live after their role model; but in this case then nation of Israel has a very poor track record – in a very specific area of conduct: How did they respond to the prophets sent by God to bring a word of conviction and warning?

Constable: Note that Stephen had previously associated himself with "*our fathers*" (vv. 2, 11-12, 15, 19, 39, 44-45), but now he disassociated himself from the Sanhedrin by referring to "*your fathers*." "Our fathers" were the trusting and obeying patriarchs, but "your fathers" were the unresponsive apostates. The Jews' ill treatment of their prophets was well known and self-admitted (cf. 2 Chron. 36:15-16; Neh. 9:26; Jer. 2:30). They had consistently resisted God's messengers to them, even killing the heralds of God's Righteous One (cf. 3:14; 1 Kings 19:10, 14; Neh. 9:26; Jer. 26:20- 24; Luke 6:23; 11:49; 13:34; 1 Thess. 2:15; Heb. 11:36-38).

B. Consistent Pattern of Persecution

1. Persecution of all of the OT Prophets

"*Which one of the prophets did your fathers not persecute?*"
τίνα τῶν προφητῶν οὐκ ἐδίωξαν οἱ πατέρες ὑμῶν;

(repeating charge made by Jesus; Matt. 23:31; Lk. 6:23; 11:49ff; 13:34)

Bock: (1 Kings 18:4, 13; 19:10, 14; Jer. 2:30; 26:20-24; 2 Chron. 24:20-21) . . . Jewish tradition held that Jeremiah was stoned to death and Isaiah was sawn in two.

Bruce: But did not the Jews of later days reprobate their ancestors' behavior towards the prophets? Yes indeed; "If we had been in the days of our fathers," they said, "we should not have been partakers with them in the blood of the prophets" (Matt. 23:30). They paid tribute to the prophets' memory and built monuments in their honour. But Jesus assured them that even so they were still true sons of their fathers, maintaining the same hostility to the messengers of God (Matt. 23:29-37); and Stephen now repeated the charge. Their fathers had killed the messengers in days gone by who foretold the advent of the Righteous One; they themselves had gone still farther and handed over the Righteous One Himself to violent death.

2 Chron. 36:15-16
Neh. 9:26 -- "*But they became disobedient and rebelled against You, and cast Your law behind their backs and killed Your prophets who had admonished them so that they might return to You, and they committed great blasphemies*."

Not a very cushy job to be a prophet in the OT; not easy to be a faithful preacher today; why do we expect to be rewarded in this life for faithfulness??? Not a biblical concept; we think we deserve better from God; look at the path of our Master

Moses – rejected his leadership

Elijah – **1 Kings 19** – depressed to the point of wishing to be dead after his confrontation with King Ahab; fleeing from Jezebel and hiding in the cave – lamenting the reward of a faithful prophet – God asks him why is he hiding there? **19:10** "*I have been very zealous for the Lord, the God of hosts; for the sons of Israel have forsaken Your covenant, torn down Your altars and killed Your prophets with the sword. And I alone am left; and they seek my life, to take it away.*"

Elisha – probably had it better than most – when the young lads mocked him: "Go up, you baldhead; go up, you baldhead" he called down a curse upon them and two female bears came out of the woods and tore up forty-two lads of their number" – 2 Kings 2:23-25 – when you mess with God's messengers sometimes you get your punishment sooner rather than later

Isaiah – Tradition says he was martyred in the reign of Manasseh; sawed him in half

Jeremiah – spent a lot of dark days in the pit

Tenney: In his call to service Jeremiah was also prepared for the fact that he would need to withstand much opposition. He was warned that the kings of Judah, the princes, the priests, and the common people would be against him as the Lord's messenger. Not only was he promised divine protection, but he was assured that God would make him like a fortified city to stand successfully against them. This divine assurance must have taken on realistic significance during the period from 609-586 B.C. when he was subjected to persecution and suffering as others were martyred or exiled.

2. Persecution of those Announcing the Coming of the Promised Messiah

"*And they killed those who had previously announced the coming of the Righteous One,*"
καὶ ἀπέκτειναν τοὺς προκαταγγείλαντας περὶ τῆς ἐλεύσεως τοῦ δικαίου,

Example of John the Baptist – King Herod served up his severed head on a platter at the request of his wife Herodias

Example of treatment of Stephen and the Apostles – about to get stoned

A flood of persecution is about to be unleashed on the leaders of this new Christian movement

C. Condemned by Your Own Opposition to Jesus Christ Right Now

"*whose betrayers and murderers you have now become;*"
οὗ νῦν ὑμεῖς προδόται καὶ φονεῖς ἐγένεσθε

In step with Judas Iscariot – lays murder of Jesus right at their feet; not very diplomatic

Lenski: By hiring the traitor Judas the whole Sanhedrin made itself "*betrayers*" of the Righteous One; and by forcing Pilate to crucify him they became his "*murderers*."

How do you respond to those who preach divine words of conviction and repentance?

III. (:53) YOU ARE RELIGIOUS PHONIES BECAUSE YOU OPPOSE GOD'S REVELATION – HIS HOLY STANDARDS AS REVEALED IN HIS WORD

A. Publicly Professing to Receive and Value God's Word

"*you who received the law as ordained by angels,*"
οἵτινες ἐλάβετε τὸν νόμον εἰς διαταγὰς ἀγγέλων

Highest possible commendation of the law

"angels" = messengers of God – rejected as well

B. Blatantly Disobeying and Disrespecting God's Word

"*and yet did not keep it.*"
καὶ οὐκ ἐφυλάξατε.

Lips profess obedience but heart is far from God
James 1 – hearers of the Word but not doers

Matt. 15:6-9 they had substituted their own human traditions for the law of God.

Bruce: And now in these last days, when God had spoken to them through no angel but by the promised Messiah Himself, it had with even greater decisiveness rejected Him.

How do you respond to the holy standards of the Word of God?

CONCLUSION:

Scott Cox: End of sermon – interesting Invitation! Sang 3 verses of "*Just as I am*" and there was a great response to the sermon?? No, they killed him.

What is your response to God's tugging at your heart?
To God's messengers who bring convicting words of correction?
To God's Word which sets forth His holy standards?

Are you masquerading as a religious phony or are you genuinely committed to love and respect and obey and serve your Master? Your Creator? Your Heavenly Father? Your coming Judge?

* * * * * * * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

1) In what ways would someone be limited physically by a stiff neck and how does this translate to spiritual lessons?

2) Where have you resisted the Holy Spirit in your life? What were the consequences?

3) What type of opposition do God's messengers face today when they bring convicting words of rebellion and judgment?

4) Why is it significant that angels were present at the giving of the law by God to Moses?

* * * * * * * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Stott: Stephen's speech was not so much a self-defence as a testimony to Christ. His main theme was positive, that Jesus the Messiah had come to replace the temple and fulfil the law, which both bore witness to him. As Calvin put it, "No harm can be done to the temple and the law,

when Christ is openly established as the end and truth of both."

Bock: In effect, Stephen asks, "Do you appreciate your own history enough not to repeat its mistakes?"

The periscope explains how Judaism and Christianity began to grow apart. The new faith emphasized a view of the law as promise, a view that pointed to one to come, that is, to Jesus. Here was a view that relativized the importance of the temple but along lines already set forth in divine disclosures. God was not limited to one locale. Here was a Jew who saw in Israel's past a great deal of unfaithfulness, which served as a basis for suggesting the need for renewal. The new faith was actually being more faithful to the promise and law than the older faith was! Stephen's audience did not want to hear any of this. . . The martyrdom that emerged out of Stephen's speech was an indicator that the future held a parting of the ways for these two groups. But it was not Jesus's disciples who sought the division. The reaction of most in the nation to the message brought about the separation. The gospel was for all, especially those in Israel, but the rejection by those in the nation made it necessary for the new community to go its own way.

Longenecker: His repeated use of the second person plural pronoun in vv. 51-53 shows his desire to disassociate himself from the nation in its recurrent refusal of God throughout its history . . . Perhaps he jabbed with a finger at his accusers – though even a blind man would have felt his verbal blows

Abraham Kuyper: When a sinner is given over to a reprobate mind, the Lord allows him the desire of his heart. He had opened for him another way; but the sinful heart's desires and inclinations bend in a different direction. At first, divine Love, watching over him, prevents him from gratifying these desires. And for this he would thank God, if his heart were right. But he murmurs at this loving interference of his heavenly father, and seeks the means to obtain what God so far denies him. A painful tension is the result: on the one hand, the sinner bent upon the execution of his evil intentions; and on the other, God, who temporarily prevents this by withholding the opportunity. But when the sinner persists in his evil course and sears his conscience, then God finally withdraws His loving care; the tension ceases; He lets the sinner have his desire; and the latter, given over to a reprobate mind, revels in the gratification of his unholy passions; and, instead of mourning in repentance before the holy God, enjoys his victory.

Scott Cox: **Resisting the Holy Spirit**
This sin committed here by unbelievers … but can be committed by believers as well. Stephen ("crown") was victorious even though he was killed. A man full of God. Longest recorded sermon in book of Acts.
1. What kind of people are guilty of this sin?
Begins with an inward aversion to God and outward identification with God. These were not heathens … but church members. But there was a problem inside with their hearts.
"*Stiff-necked*" – oxen would not submit to the wooden yoke; agriculture term; thick headed; stubborn pride; self will; unsubmissive spirit; I know what the Bible says but this is my life and nobody is going to tell me what to do.
"*Uncircumcised*" – great insult to this group; sign of the covenant; they prided themselves in this; symbol of the New Covenant is baptism; calling us "unbaptized heathens" – their heart has never been changed; not really loving God or seeking after Him; won't listen to God's Word or delight in it; dull of hearing; heard a lot of sermons but their lives never changed; tuning God out;

2. What is involved in resisting the Holy Spirit?

Active resistance; very aggressive word; fall upon; attacking; there is anger in this word; hostility; stubbornness; how do you express hostility against a spirit you can't see and can't get your hands on? How does this manifest itself? They attack the people that the Holy Spirit uses; they killed the instrument that God sent to convict and warn them; How do people resist the Holy Spirit today? Same way; don't want to receive the truth; like someone who tells them doctrine that makes them feel good; wouldn't even have a TV show today; in the last days preachers will tell people what they want to hear and not what they desperately need to hear; they couldn't win an argument with Stephen so they conspired against him; falsely accused him; you kill people with your tongue; devour one another; Spirit of God will not always strive with man; conviction gives you the opportunity to repent; at some point God will harden your hearts and be done with you

http://www.sermonaudio.com/playpopup.asp?SID=31506164357

Greg Barkman: Beacon Broadcast – **Stiff necked and Uncircumcised**

Applying truth in a searching and convicting way; Rejection should not be surprising; the fact that the majority reject this message is no evidence that the message is false; Stephen only interested in telling the truth regardless of the cost – strange idea in our day; you can always find fault with the messenger – too harsh; etc. Test is whether the message is true; you will be held accountable by God;

1) unwilling to submit -- Israel was unwilling to hear the truth; you won't bow before the Lord of glory and submit to the yoke of his authority; people come to the Word as critics – deciding what they like to accept and what they choose to reject; Relationship is God is Master and we are servant; God is Father and we are child; we owe obedience and respect;

2) unwilling to hear the truth – you need a heart that is receptive; someone else has to circumcise our heart; but you have a responsibility to present yourself for that inward spiritual working; uncircumcised heart is proud and stubborn – similar analogy to stiff-necked; speaks of an attitude of wanting to be in control; "Speak, Lord, for thy servant heareth"; talked about their attitudes and their actions which grow out of attitudes

TEXT: Acts 7: 54 – 8:3

TITLE: SETTING SAIL IN DIFFERENT DIRECTIONS –
VOICE OF THE MARTYRS STILL SPEAKS

BIG IDEA:
PERSECUTION (WITH ITS MOB MENTALITY) SHARPENS OUR VISION OF THE GLORY OF GOD AND FLAMES THE FANATICISM OF UNGODLY EXTREMISTS

INTRODUCTION:
What kind of a world was it back in the early church when a godly man like Stephen could be stoned to death? What type of religious persecution of Christians do we see in our time – at the hands of fanatical, ungodly extremists? News briefs from Voice of the Martyrs website:

Iran: Government Cracks Down

Since Christmas, more than 70 Christians have been arrested in Iran in a large, well-coordinated strike. Most of those arrested belong to the house church movement. Many were released from custody . . .

Indonesia: House Churches Closed

On Dec. 12, seven house churches were forcibly closed in West Java, Indonesia, by Muslim extremists who claimed the buildings were being used for "illegal church meetings . . .

Afghanistan: Christian Imprisoned

On Jan. 3, a judge told Shoaib Assadullah that if he did not renounce Christ within one week he would face up to 20 years in prison or even be sentenced to death. Shoaib was arrested on Oct. 21 . . .

Laos: Pastor Continues Meetings

On Jan. 4, 2011, at 7 p.m., district police arrested Pastor Wanna at his home in Nakoon Village, Laos. They also arrested 10 other believers as they ate a meal together in Pastor Wanna's home . . .

PERSECUTION (WITH ITS MOB MENTALITY) SHARPENS OUR VISION OF THE GLORY OF GOD AND FLAMES THE FANATICISM OF UNGODLY EXTREMISTS

2 LANDMARK EVENTS IN THE GROWTH OF THE EARLY CHURCH – DEPARTURE OF STEPHEN AND ARRIVAL ON THE SCENE OF SAUL
Tremendous **contrasts** presented here: Setting sail in different directions

- Between Spirit-controlled Stephen and the out-of-control, angry mob;
- and between Stephen and Saul -- One is full of the Holy Spirit; the other becomes the leader in persecuting the church of Jesus Christ
-

I. (7:54-60) EXECUTION (MARTYRDOM) OF STEPHEN – PERSECUTION (WITH ITS MOB MENTALITY) SHARPENS OUR VISION OF THE GLORY OF GOD --
2 Snapshots Contrasting Sanhedrin and Stephen:

A. (:54-56) 1st Snapshot -- Mob of Earthly Rage vs. Man of Heavenly Vision
1. (:54) Mob of Earthly Rage

"*Now when they heard this, they were cut to the quick, and they began gnashing their teeth at him.*"
Ἀκούοντες δὲ ταῦτα διεπρίοντο ταῖς καρδίαις αὐτῶν καὶ ἔβρυχον τοὺς ὀδόντας ἐπ᾽ αὐτόν.

"*Now when they heard this*" – Review of last week's stinging indictment against religious phonies – they oppose **God's Rule, God's Representatives and God's Revelation**
Possibly cut short this long sermon by Stephen – maybe he would have gone on to say more about Jesus and the resurrection

2 Images conveying the strong emotion of being infuriated and enraged

- *cut to the quick* -- divide with a saw; emotionally cut in half; painfully wounded; infuriate; [only passive in the NT] be infuriated, be enraged (Imperfect passive) – convicted and angry at being blamed for killing the Righteous One

Acts 5:33 – same reaction against Peter and the apostles when they replied that they should obey God rather than man – but stopped that time by the counsel of Gamaliel

- *gnashing their teeth* -- grind the teeth, be furious; Job 16:9; **Ps. 35:16** "*Like godless jesters at a feast, they gnashed at me with their teeth … Rescue me from their ravages, my only life from the lions*" – Stott: snarling like wild animals

this activity of frustration commonly associated with Hell
[word for "teeth" = English "orthodontist"]

"*at him*" – their fury was personally directed against Stephen

2. (:55-56) Man of Heavenly Vision

"*But being full of the Holy Spirit, he gazed intently into heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God; and he said, 'Behold, I see the heavens opened up and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God.*'"
ὑπάρχων δὲ πλήρης πνεύματος ἁγίου ἀτενίσας εἰς τὸν οὐρανὸν εἶδεν δόξαν θεοῦ καὶ Ἰησοῦν ἑστῶτα ἐκ δεξιῶν τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ εἶπεν· ἰδοὺ θεωρῶ τοὺς οὐρανοὺς διηνοιγμένους καὶ τὸν υἱὸν τοῦ ἀνθρώπου ἐκ δεξιῶν ἑστῶτα τοῦ θεοῦ.

Let's break down some of these phrases and look more closely at Stephen's remarkable vision:

"*full of the Holy Spirit*" – this has been the emphasis in this section and provides the major contrast to the Sanhedrin members – Hopefully we have learned much over the past months about our responsibility to be controlled by the Holy Spirit; this fullness seems to have some special moments of intensification like we find here in Stephen's experience as he breathes his last breaths on earth

look intently, fix one's eyes Lk 4:20 – eyes of those in the synagogue fixed on Jesus as He explained Messianic prophecy from the book of Isaiah; Ac 13:9; **2 Cor 3:7, 13**. Israelites could not look intently on the face of Moses as he came down from Mt Sinai and shone with the reflected glory of God -- Gingrich

So important not to be overwhelmed by the circumstances – cf. Peter getting out of the boat and walking on water to meet Jesus – where are we gazing intently today??

Glory of God:
1. *brightness, radiance, splendor* Lk 9:31f; Ac 22:11; 1 Cor 15:40f. *Glory, majesty* as ascribed to God and heavenly beings Ac 7:2; Ro 1:23; 1 Cor 2:8; Phil 3:21; Col 1:11; Hb 1:3; Js 2:1; Rv 15:8; with connotation of *power* Ro 6:4. *Reflection* 1 Cor 11:7. *Magnificence, splendor* of kings, etc. Mt 4:8; 6:29; Rv 21:24, 26.—**2.** *fame, renown, honor, prestige* J 5:41, 44; 8:54; 12:43; Ro 3:23; 1 Th 2:6, 20. *Praise* as enhancement of reputation Lk 2:14; Ac 12:23; Ro 11:36; 1 Cor 10:31; Phil 2:11; Rv 19:7. -- Gingrich
Our ultimate concern should be the glory of God – that He have the preeminence in all things; that He be praised and magnified for who He is and what He has done

"*opened up*" – used in spiritual sense of God opening up the eyes, mind and heart of people to see and understand spiritual truths –
Mk 7:34; Lk 2:23; 24:31, 45; Ac 7:56; 16:14. *Explain, interpret* Lk 24:32; Ac 17:3.* -- Gingrich

Bock: points to a revelatory experience . . . Usually in the NT means that the perception of a person is opened up, but disclosure is also often an additional point of the verb

Look at all of the spiritual insight that God has opened up to us in His Word; what a privilege; we have far more that will be shown us in the future

"*Son of Man*"
Bock: "*Son of Man*" – only time the exact title shows up outside the Gospels. This was Jesus's favorite self-designation. Late in his ministry, he used the title to refer to the one with judgment authority from the right hand of God (Matt. 26:64; Mark 14:62; Luke 22:69) . . . So Stephen declares that he sees a judging Jesus standing beside God. The crucified Jesus is both alive and at work. . . If Jesus is a judge, then he is Stephen's advocate and witness. The vision means that heaven stands opposed to the Jewish reaction to Stephen.

Toussaint: repeats the claim Christ made at His trial before the high priest (Mark 14:62).

Constable: This was a title of the Messiah that implied the universal aspect of his rule that Daniel used (**Dan. 7:13-14**).

"*standing at right hand*"
[Perf act participle] -- Come up, stand, appear Mt 27:11; Mk 13:9; Lk 24:36; Ac 10:30; 11:13. *Resist* Eph 6:11, 13, *Stand firm, hold one's ground* Mt 12:25f; Mk 3:26; Ro 14:4a; Eph 6:14; Rv 6:17. Pf. and plupf. *I stand, I stood* Mt 27:47; Lk 23:10; J 7:37; Ac 1:11. *Be, exist* Mt 12:46f; 26:73; Lk 18:13; J 11:56; Ac 7:55f; 21:40; Rv 18:10. Fig. *stand, stand firm* Ro 11:20; 1 Cor 7:37; 2 Ti 2:19. *Stand* or *be* Ro 5:2; 1 Cor 15:1; 2 Cor 1:24 -- Gingrich

Stott: Why standing?? He had stood up either as his heavenly advocate or to welcome his first martyr
Jesus is alive, active, in position of power to plead our case, ready to welcome us to glory

B. (:57-60) 2nd Snapshot: Violent Lynch Mob in a Frenzy vs Gracious Servant of the Lord at Perfect Peace

1. (:57-59a) Violent Lynch Mob in a Frenzy

"*But they cried out with a loud voice, and covered their ears, and they rushed upon him with one impulse. And when they had driven him out of the city, they began stoning him, and the witnesses laid aside their robes at the feet of a young man named Saul. And they went on stoning Stephen*"
κράξαντες δὲ φωνῇ μεγάλῃ συνέσχον τὰ ὦτα αὐτῶν καὶ ὥρμησαν ὁμοθυμαδὸν ἐπ᾽ αὐτὸν καὶ ἐκβαλόντες ἔξω τῆς πόλεως ἐλιθοβόλουν. καὶ οἱ μάρτυρες ἀπέθεντο τὰ ἱμάτια αὐτῶν παρὰ τοὺς πόδας νεανίου καλουμένου Σαύλου, καὶ ἐλιθοβόλουν τὸν Στέφανον ἐπικαλούμενον καὶ λέγοντα· κύριε Ἰησοῦ, δέξαι τὸ πνεῦμά μου.

Sanhedrin saw these words of the vision of Stephen as utter blasphemy and so responded violently

cry out, scream wordlessly Mt 14:26; 27:50; Mk 5:5; 9:26; Lk 9:39; Ac 7:57; Rv 12:2. -- Gingrich
expressing raw emotion and violent intent – like football players revving themselves up for their gladiator combat – not trying to communicate intelligently; here trying to drown out the convicting words of Stephen

ridiculous image of adult men *covering their ears* so they could not hear Stephen

set out, rush (headlong) Mt 8:32; Mk 5:13; Lk 8:33; Ac 7:57; 19:29. -- Gingrich
Cole: The Greek word for "*rushed*" is used of the herd of demon-possessed swine rushing off the cliff into the ocean after Jesus cleansed the Gerasene demoniac.

with one mind or *purpose* or *impulse* Ac 1:14; 4:24; 8:6; 15:25; 19:29; Ro 15:6; *together* Ac 5:12. -- Gingrich

drive out, expel lit. *throw out* more or less forcibly Mt 9:25, 34; 21:12, 39; 25:30; Lk 9:40; 11:20; J 2:15; Ac 9:40. -- Gingrich

Debate over whether this was a legitimate legal proceeding or a mob action:
Stott: Yet it had a small semblance of justice, since according to the law, the first to begin stoning the condemned person must be "*the witnesses*", which means his accusers, whether in Stephen's case these were the false witnesses of 6:13 or Sanhedrin members.

2. (:59b-60) Gracious Servant of the Lord at Perfect Peace

"*as he called upon the Lord and said, 'Lord Jesus, receive my spirit!'And falling on his knees, he cried out with a loud voice, 'Lord, do not hold this sin against them!' And having said this, he fell asleep.*"
θεὶς δὲ τὰ γόνατα ἔκραξεν φωνῇ μεγάλῃ· κύριε, μὴ στήσῃς αὐτοῖς ταύτην τὴν ἁμαρτίαν. καὶ τοῦτο εἰπὼν ἐκοιμήθη.

Kent: Stephen followed the example of his Savior in praying for his slayers, as well as for himself. Part of the answer to his prayer was the conversion of Saul, whose presence at the scene was noted by Luke.
Augustine: The church owes Paul to the prayer of Stephen.

Barclay: However hard he tried Saul could never forget the way in which Stephen had died. The blood of the martyrs even thus early had begun to be the seed of the Church.

F. F. Bruce: "*fell asleep*" -- an unexpectedly beautiful and peaceful description of so brutal a

death

No limbo, no purgatory, no soul sleep taught in the Bible

Pray for those who abuse you – Luke 6:27-28

Wiersbe: A heckler once shouted to a street preacher, "Why didn't God do something for Stephen when they were stoning him?" The preacher replied, "God did do something for Stephen. He gave him the grace to forgive his murderers and to pray for them!" A perfect answer!

Stoning seems so archaic … we have so many more sophisticated weapons today that radical zealots and ungodly fanatics can use in their acts of terrorism … yet just turn on the TV yesterday and you see the piles of stones and bricks in the streets of Egypt as the prepared ammunition for the next riot … just as we piled up our snowballs as kids …. Here you have grown men and women preparing to do battle with stones in an angry, mob fashion – the heart of man has not changed

PERSECUTION (WITH ITS MOB MENTALITY) SHARPENS OUR VISION OF THE GLORY OF GOD

Transition: while persecution provides a climate that ultimately proves healthy for the church of Christ; it also provides a climate that brings out the worst in fanatical extremists

II. (8:1-3) EMERGENCE OF SAUL – PERSECUTION FLAMES THE FANATICISM OF UNGODLY EXTREMISTS

A. (:1a) Ungodly Extremists Have Lost Their Moral Compass

"*And Saul was in hearty agreement with putting him to death.*"
Σαῦλος δὲ ἦν συνευδοκῶν τῇ ἀναιρέσει αὐτοῦ.

Should be a sobering thing to execute another human being and take the life that God has created; not something that should be carried out with the frenzy of a vigilante, mob mentality
No coercion here; Saul readily supported this rash action and was a contributing player

B. (:1b) Persecution Can Accomplish God's Plan for Church Growth

"*And on that day a great persecution arose against the church in Jerusalem; and they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles.*"
Ἐγένετο δὲ ἐν ἐκείνῃ τῇ ἡμέρᾳ διωγμὸς μέγας ἐπὶ τὴν ἐκκλησίαν τὴν ἐν Ἰεροσολύμοις, πάντες δὲ διεσπάρησαν κατὰ τὰς χώρας τῆς Ἰουδαίας καὶ Σαμαρείας πλὴν τῶν ἀποστόλων.

Boice: here for the first time we find persecution not only of the leaders but also of the membership of the church at large. . .
There are different words for "*scattered*" in Greek. One means *dispersed* so that the item is gone from that point on, like scattering a person's ashes on the ocean's waves. That is not the word used here in verses 1 and 4. The word used here means scattered in order to be planted. It is exactly like the Hebrew word *jezreel*, meaning "scattered" but also "planted." It is what God did with Israel, scattering the Jews throughout the world because of their sin; but he also brought them back and planted them in their land.

Bock: We have moved from a warning (4:21) to a flogging (5:40) to martyrdom (7:58-60) to persecution.

Remember the key verse (1:8) describing the movement of the gospel from Jerusalem to the ends of the earth – here we see a major step forward in that divinely planned progression; God's **promised power** went along with this persecution

C. (:2) Moderating Voices Have Only Superficial Impact -- Aside

"*And some devout men buried Stephen, and made loud lamentation over him.*"
συνεκόμισαν δὲ τὸν Στέφανον ἄνδρες εὐλαβεῖς καὶ ἐποίησαν κοπετὸν μέγαν ἐπ᾽ αὐτῷ.

Not everyone was part of this frenzied mob scene; voice of moderation and reason – but could accomplish nothing in terms of stemming the tide of anger and violence; yet they did what they could to give Stephen a decent burial

Longenecker: certain devout Jews who were open to the Christian message volunteered to ask for Stephen's body and bury him, much as Joseph of Arimathea did for Jesus (cf. Luke 23:50-53).

Remember the instructions Jesus gave to His disciples about Fear – Don't fear men; the worst they can do is kill the body – that ends up in the grave (dust to dust); Fear God who can cast the soul into hell

D. (:3) Fanaticism Expresses Itself in Extreme Cruelty

"*But Saul began ravaging the church, entering house after house; and dragging off men and women, he would put them in prison.*"
Σαῦλος δὲ ἐλυμαίνετο τὴν ἐκκλησίαν κατὰ τοὺς οἴκους εἰσπορευόμενος, σύρων τε ἄνδρας καὶ γυναῖκας παρεδίδου εἰς φυλακήν.

Learn a lot about the evil side of Saul in this passage; no wonder he marveled at the grace of God in saving him, the chiefest of sinners, the one who led in the persecution of the church

harm, damage, ruin, destroy; impf. ἐλυμαίνετο *he was trying to destroy* -- Gingrich

These men and women had families who experienced great loss

Toussaint: The word for "*destroy*" (used only here in the NT) appears in the Septuagint in Psalm 80:13 about wild boars that destroy a vineyard. Saul's zeal was so great against Christians that it was as if he were wildly raging against them.

Cole: Saul later described his own behavior as being "*furiously enraged at them*" (**26:11**).

Examples down through church history – every conceivable type of torture and cruel death you could imagine – detailed in Fox's Book of Martyrs;
Story of John Huss

CONCLUSION: Final applications:

- Persecution is inevitable for the godly; don't be surprised by it; Prepare!

- Persecution accomplishes God's overall goals for the health and growth of His church
- We can fortify ourselves by studying the grace that God provided to His servants who gave the ultimate sacrifice down through church history
- We should have solidarity and prayer support for our brothers and sisters who are under direct attack
- We should be confident in our ultimate victory as we focus on the vision of heavenly glory and the Advocacy on our behalf by the Righteous One

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DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

1) How do you explain the rage and extreme fanaticism of religious zealots today?

2) What will help you today to turn your eyes upon Jesus and gaze intently into His wonderful face so that the things of earth become strangely dim in the light of His glory and grace?

3) Would it be a good thing for persecution to come to the church in the United States?

4) Are you bearing fruit by your testimony to Jesus Christ in the place where you have been scattered to in order to fulfill the Great Commission?

* * * * * * * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Kent: Was this a legal execution by the Sanhedrin? Those who think so point to its performance outside the city (Lev. 24:14; Num. 15:35), and the fact that the witnesses did the stoning (Deut. 17:7). The mention of Saul as "consenting" (8:1) might possibly be understood as participating in a formal vote. There are good reasons, however, for understanding this as more of a lynching than a legal act. Verse 57 reads more like a spontaneous outburst than a formal vote. Furthermore, Jewish law at this time specified that capital cases must have a second trial at least one day later. In addition, Rome did not allow the Sanhedrin to execute prisoners (note the case of Jesus), and it is difficult to imagine how the Sanhedrin expected to avoid serious trouble with Rome if this were a deliberate and formal execution. Finally, the sort of burial given to Stephen (8:2) was not allowed after legal executions. It seems best, therefore, to regard it as mob violence, with the Sanhedrin forming the mob which took the life of the first Christian to seal his witness with his blood.

Steven Cole: From reading many stories of those who have given their lives for the cause of Christ, I have concluded that God gives special grace to them in their dying moments. The Czech martyr, Jan Hus, whose statue and church we saw in Prague, was promised safe passage to discuss his criticisms against the Catholic Church. But they betrayed him and burned him at the stake. He died, not cursing at his persecutors for their deception and brutality, but singing praise to God as the flames consumed his flesh.

The story has been repeated thousands of times. At the head of the list stands Stephen, the first Christian martyr. Our word "martyr" is a transliteration of the Greek word for "witness." By their lives and by their deaths, the martyrs have borne witness for "Jesus Christ, the faithful witness" (Rev. 1:5). Stephen's death is the only death scene and martyrdom described in detail in the New Testament, except for that of Jesus Christ.

Bruce: [quoted by Cole]: Stephen's understanding of the exalted role of Jesus was even more advanced than that of the apostles, who were still continuing to go to temple worship, join in the Jewish rituals, and limit their preaching to the Jews. He points out that the Daniel passage means that "Messiah's sovereignty is to embrace all nations without distinction," thus effectively doing away with the Jewish temple worship (pp. 166-167). He writes, "And the presence of Messiah at God's right hand meant that for His people there was now a way of access to God more immediate and heart-satisfying than the obsolete temple ritual had ever been able to provide." (p. 166).

Spurgeon: [quoted by Cole]: Dying Christians are not troubled with questions as to the deity of Christ. Dear friends, Unitarianism may do to live with, but it will not do to die with, at least for us. At such a time we need an almighty and divine Savior; we want "God over all, blessed forever" to come to our rescue in the solemn article. So Stephen called upon Jesus, and worshipped him. He makes no mention of any other intercessor. O martyr of Christ, why didst thou not cry, "Ave Maria! Blessed Virgin, succor me"? Why didst thou not pray to St. Michael and all angels? Ah, no! The abomination of saint and angel worship had not been invented in his day, and if it had been he would have scorned it as one of the foul devices of hell. There is one Mediator between God and man, the man Christ Jesus. He invoked Christ, and no one else.

MacArthur: By the time that comes out, the council is in a frenzy. But contrasted to their fury and rage is the majestic calm of Stephen. He serenely stands there, absolutely in control and sustained by the Lord, while his opponents are emotionally torn into shreds. It is this picture of contrast that weaves itself through these few verses. Essentially, it is the contrast between a hostile, Christ-hating world, and a gentle, loving, Spirit-filled servant of God, who confronts that world. The world gives its worst, a Christian shows his best. Stephen had boldly confronted the world, saying the things that needed to be said, even though they were painful and he knew they could cost him his life. But he said them because he was expendable for the sake of the truth. They killed him, but God glorified him. . .

The council reacted as all people do to judgment--they got mad. The storm of their fury began to break on Stephen's head. In their madness they were speechless with rage, unable to even find words to give vent to their burning hatred. All they could do in their frenzy was grind their teeth as an expression of impotent rage and extreme frustration.

I don't think this was a sudden outburst. I think it was a response that increased in intensity as Stephen continued to speak, never dying away until Stephen lay before them a horribly mangled and blood-spattered corpse. These dignitaries had never quite faced such a prisoner as Stephen: He spoke like a judge, not a prisoner. He seemed to be an accuser, rather than the accused. He hit the nail of conviction right on the head. They didn't want anybody to expose their sins, and so they reacted satanically. You'll remember that Herod imprisoned John the Baptist because John had pointed to Herod's sin and rebuked him for it. Likewise, the Pharisees had Jesus nailed to a cross because He denounced and exposed their hypocrisy. The Jews reacted in the same manner

toward the Apostles, and Stephen was no different...he was just one of a multitude of people who have died in exposing the sins of others.

I believe that there's a special work of the Holy Spirit for a Christian in a crisis. For this reason, I believe we do not have to fear getting into tough situations when we boldly face the world for Christ. I believe it is just at that point that the Spirit of God is doubly poured out upon you. You say, "Where do you get that idea?" If you know me very well, you know I got it out of a verse somewhere. In this case, 1 Peter 4:14a says, "If ye be reproached for the name of Christ, happy are ye; for the Spirit of glory and of God resteth upon you...." In other words, there's some special divine intervention of the Spirit of God when the world attacks the believer. Have you ever heard anybody talk about dying grace? In the numerous accounts I have read regarding the death of Christians who have been martyred for the cause of Christ from the early church right on through to the present day, I have never read of a Christian who died a raving, screaming maniac, have you? There is something that God does in the willing death of a believer in the face of persecution, which grants to him the adequacy to die, while giving God the glory. I think that is what God bestowed upon Stephen in a double sense. And because God can bestow it upon you as well, don't ever shirk from being bold in the world for fear that you don't have the resources to handle the situation, for it's at that point that God pours out a double portion of His Spirit to make you adequate. I believe that when we really confront the world and are totally helpless at their mercy, that God intervenes.

TEXT: Acts 8:4-24

TITLE: SPIRITUAL POWER CANNOT BE BOUGHT – MERCHANDISING THE GOSPEL CONDEMNED

BIG IDEA:
RELIGIOUS CHARLATANS (LIKE SIMON THE SORCERER) VALUE FAME AND FORTUNE BUT HAVE NO ACCESS TO THE GENUINE POWER OF GOD

INTRODUCTION:
You can buy a lot of things in life. The rich and the powerful realize this. They are used to getting preferential treatment. Throw a big tip this direction and you get taken care of. If you get in trouble with the law it sure helps to be able to buy the best lawyers. If you need to broker a certain deal, the movers and shakers know how to get together behind closed doors and get the deal done. Sometimes some of your assets get frozen – as in the case of former Egyptian President Mubarek. That's a problem. Don't feel sorry for him -- it looks like he still has plenty left.

But we all know that the most important things in life cannot be bought. God is no respecter of persons in terms of showing partiality and He has designed the world so that in certain respects one's money and influence don't make a difference. We think of health; of various trials; of relationships -- especially of one's spiritual relationship to God and His power and blessing and favor.

Today we are going to study the case of one of the most famous religious charlatans of all time – **Simon Magus** (meaning the great in Latin, or the Magician in Greek) – we call him **Simon the Sorcerer**. We don't use the term *sorcery* very much – it refers to the use of power gained from the assistance of evil spirits. So we are going to see that Simon can do some magical feats – but the power comes from the demonic world. He is not bashful about trying to advance his standing and influence. He is very ambitious – especially where fame and fortune are involved. In fact his very name *Simon* has come over to the English language as *simony* to mean the buying of church office or some type of religious favor. He attempts to use his money and influence to buy spiritual power from the apostles.

There are plenty of religious charlatans attempting to merchandize the gospel today. They are all over the TV and radio airwaves. Surprisingly, they seem to have no trouble attracting a huge following. They promise great blessings and harvest incredible sums of money from the naïve and the deceived. But where they stumble is in their failure to connect with the genuine power of God.

RELIGIOUS CHARLATANS (LIKE SIMON THE SORCERER) VALUE FAME AND FORTUNE BUT HAVE NO ACCESS TO THE GENUINE POWER OF GOD

FOUR DYNAMICS RELATED TO SPIRITUAL POWER

I. (:4-8) MULTIPLYING SPIRITUAL POWER IN THE NEW REGION OF SAMARIA

Gospel ministry is all about reproduction: one convert tells all of their family and friends and contacts and then the spiritual power just mushrooms; like multi-level marketing without any money involved – The great power of this principle of reproduction is that it is distributed – not centralized around one personality figure

A. (:4-5) Green Field -- New Frontier for the Proclamation of Jesus Christ = Samaria

"*Therefore, those who had been scattered went about preaching the word. And Philip went down to the city of Samaria and began proclaiming Christ to them.*"

Οἱ μὲν οὖν διασπαρέντες διῆλθον εὐαγγελιζόμενοι τὸν λόγον. Φίλιππος δὲ κατελθὼν εἰς [τὴν] πόλιν τῆς Σαμαρείας ἐκήρυσσεν αὐτοῖς τὸν Χριστόν

1. *Scattered* to accomplish God's kingdom purposes

Transition from last week's message: Persecution sharpens our focus on the glory of God (martyrdom of Stephen) and flames the fanaticism of ungodly extremists (emergence of Saul)

2. Sense of mission: *preaching the Word / proclaiming Christ*

This should be our major focus; cannot deviate from this or try to substitute some other methodology; involves an authoritative presentation of truth; no moral relativism here or many paths lead to God or let's just share our uninformed imaginations about religion

You cannot truly preach the Word without proclaiming Christ; you cannot accurately and powerfully proclaim Christ without preaching the Word

Bock: The imperfect verb *ekeryssen*, *began proclaiming*, probably has an ingressive force, pointing to Philip's entry into his mission.

3. Spiritual Giftedness of Philip the Evangelist -- title in **21:8-9** (Magnificent Seven)

Not the apostle; they had remained in Jerusalem (8:1); but one of the seven chosen by the Jerusalem church to provide practical care for the widows; good one to follow after Stephen – his four virgin daughters referred to as prophetesses; owned a house; able to offer hospitality to others – did a lot more than distribute food

Note how the outline of Acts revolves around 2 key factors:

- geographical spread of the gospel;
- highlighting key players

Longenecker: It is not too difficult to imagine what would have happened had the apostles at Jerusalem first been the missionaries to Samaria. Probably they would have been rebuffed, just as they were rebuffed earlier in their travels with Jesus when the Samaritans associated them with the city of Jerusalem (cf. Luke 9:51-56). But God in his providence used as their evangelist the Hellenist Philip, who shared their fate (though for different reasons) of being rejected at Jerusalem; and the Samaritans received him and accepted his message.

4. Significance of region of Samaria

Kent: Jesus had once spent two days at Sychar, just seven miles away (John 4:40). Philip's preaching to the Samaritans indicated a growing awareness in the church that the gospel was

intended for others than Jews only. The Samaritans were greatly despised by the Jews because of their impure blood lines and their religious deviations from orthodox Judaism. Following the fall of the northern kingdom in 722 B.C, the largely depopulated region was resettled by colonists brought in by the Assyrians from various parts of their empire (II Kings 17:24). They intermarried with the Jews who had been left behind and the "Samaritans" were their descendants. The rebuilding of the temple and the walls at Jerusalem brought opposition from the Samaritans, and eventually a rival temple was built on Mt. Gerizim. Ever since, the Jews had "*no dealings with the Samaritans*" (John 4:9), and the feeling was reciprocated. Thus for Philip to share his faith with the Samaritans was a most uncommon act.

Constable: The Samaritans accepted only the Pentateuch as authoritative and looked for a personal Messiah who would be like Moses.

Cole: When Jesus sent out the twelve, He gave them orders not to go into the cities of Samaria (Matt. 10:5), which was probably just fine with them. But in Acts 1:8, He lifted that restriction. . The point for us is twofold: First, God wants to reach all people, even those whom we may not naturally like. . . Second, while we may need to be sensitive to certain cultural differences, we don't change the message to fit different cultures.

- No Prejudice
- No Compromise

B. (:6-7) Glorious Results – very impressive

"*And the multitudes with one accord were giving attention to what was said by Philip, as they heard and saw the signs which he was performing. For in the case of many who had unclean spirits, they were coming out of them shouting with a loud voice; and many who had been paralyzed and lame were healed.*"

προσεῖχον δὲ οἱ ὄχλοι τοῖς λεγομένοις ὑπὸ τοῦ Φιλίππου ὁμοθυμαδὸν ἐν τῷ ἀκούειν αὐτοὺς καὶ βλέπειν τὰ σημεῖα ἃ ἐποίει. πολλοὶ γὰρ τῶν ἐχόντων πνεύματα ἀκάθαρτα βοῶντα φωνῇ μεγάλῃ ἐξήρχοντο, πολλοὶ δὲ παραλελυμένοι καὶ χωλοὶ ἐθεραπεύθησαν·

- The truth gets people's attention – has the ring of reality to it; tone of authority; makes sense; consistency to the message; all hangs together; touches me where I live
- Especially when accompanied by powerful signs and healings; changed lives; people were impacted at the point of their suffering; delivered from bondage

C. (:8) Great Joy – contrasted with climate of persecution in Jerusalem

"*And there was much rejoicing in that city.*"

ἐγένετο δὲ πολλὴ χαρὰ ἐν τῇ πόλει ἐκείνῃ.

Joy should characterize our Christian fellowship; when someone becomes a new Christian it is an occasion of great joy for them personally, for the one witnessing to them and for the church as a whole

- Once I was lost but now I am found
- Once I was blind but now I can see
- Once I was in bondage but now I am free

II. (:9-13) MIMICKING SPIRITUAL POWER NOT NEARLY AS IMPRESSIVE AS THE REAL THING

GOOD NEWS AND ASSOCIATED SIGN MIRACLES MORE IMPRESSIVE THAN MAGIC ARTS

A. (:9-11) Counterfeit Exploitation by Simon the Magician

Now there was a certain man named Simon, who formerly was practicing magic in the city, and astonishing the people of Samaria, claiming to be someone great; and they all, from smallest to greatest, were giving attention to him, saying, "This man is what is called the Great Power of God." And they were giving him attention because he had for a long time astonished them with his magic arts.

Ἀνὴρ δέ τις ὀνόματι Σίμων προϋπῆρχεν ἐν τῇ πόλει μαγεύων καὶ ἐξιστάνων τὸ ἔθνος τῆς Σαμαρείας, λέγων εἶναί τινα ἑαυτὸν μέγαν, ᾧ προσεῖχον πάντες ἀπὸ μικροῦ ἕως μεγάλου λέγοντες· οὗτός ἐστιν ἡ δύναμις τοῦ θεοῦ ἡ καλουμένη μεγάλη. προσεῖχον δὲ αὐτῷ διὰ τὸ ἱκανῷ χρόνῳ ταῖς μαγείαις ἐξεστακέναι αὐτούς.

Type of magic: not sleight of hand magic tricks but using the power of Satan and his demons to keep men in spiritual bondage while impressing them with miracle-type counterfeits

Key Differentiator in evaluating spiritual ministries – distinguishing the genuine from the counterfeit: Very simple litmus test:

"*claiming to be someone great*" called "*the Great Power of God*" vs
"*He must increase but I must decrease*"

Seeking attention and popularity and recognition vs
Pointing people to Jesus Christ and His sufficiency

Making people dependent on your ministry vs
Making people dependent on Jesus Christ and the power of the Holy Spirit

Gathering a following to himself; exercising counterfeit power

Stedman: All false faith exalts personalities, makes much over men. It involves the inflation of an individual, usually by self-aggrandizement. These individuals are always egocentric, always pointing to themselves, exalting themselves, and using religious terminology to make a great deal over themselves. That is the quality of counterfeit Christianity. Genuine Christianity makes nothing of the individual. "We preach not ourselves," says the Apostle Paul, "but Christ Jesus as Lord and ourselves your servants, for Jesus' sake," {cf, 2 Cor 4:5}. But here we have a man who exalts himself.

Barclay: There were many astrologers and soothsayers and magicians, and in a credulous age they had a great influence and made a comfortable living. There is little to be surprised at in that when even the twentieth century has not risen above fortune-telling and astrology, as almost any popular newspaper or magazine can witness. It is not to be thought that Simon and his fellow-

practitioners were all conscious frauds. Many of them had deluded themselves before they deluded others and believed in their own powers.

MacArthur: Simon had used his sorcery to capture the minds of these people. The word bewitched means astonish them or dupe them or brought them under his control. He had actually captured these people. Now mark this down, these sorceries actually happened. He actually did supernatural things and it's still being done today. These things were really being pulled off and because of them people's minds were being captured to the control of Simon. And he announced to everybody that he was some great one, some great power of God.

Look at America's fascination with astrology … with fortune telling . . . interest in the occult … look at the movies that claim to be entertainment and go places and delve into things that we need to steer clear of. The devil's world is a dangerous place – we wrestle "*against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places*" **Ephes. 6:12**

Illustration: Séance first week at college

Anti-Christ will come and impress the world – counterfeit wonders

B. (:12-13) Genuine Power of the Gospel of Jesus Christ

1. (:12) Many Genuine Converts

> "*But when they believed Philip preaching the good news about the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were being baptized, men and women alike.*"
>
> ὅτε δὲ ἐπίστευσαν τῷ Φιλίππῳ εὐαγγελιζομένῳ περὶ τῆς βασιλείας τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ τοῦ ὀνόματος Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ, ἐβαπτίζοντο ἄνδρες τε καὶ γυναῖκες.

- Faith alone – no works involved in salvation; by faith alone, by grace alone
  Philip reaping the harvest that Christ had talked about in John 4

Cole: "The good news about kingdom of God" does not just refer to the future millennial kingdom, when Jesus will literally reign on earth. The kingdom of God is the realm where God is King. Thus it refers both to the millennium and to the rightful lordship of Jesus over all creation, especially over the hearts of people right now.

MacArthur: There are times when people are ready; the Spirit of God has done the pre-evangelism for you. In the case of the Samaritans, they knew enough that all they needed to hear was that the Messiah was here and then whatever went from there. But in our case in dealing with a pagan world, I think we need to be ready to teach people the Word of God, to be able to teach them who God is, what man is, God's plan for the ages. All of these things are basic before Christ makes any sense

- Focus is not on Philip but on the kingdom of God and the person and character of Jesus Christ

- Follow thru of Baptism -- not infant baptism – baptism always associated with belief in the good news

2. (:13) <u>One Wannabe Convert</u>

"*And even Simon himself believed; and after being baptized, he continued on with Philip; and as he observed signs and great miracles taking place, he was constantly amazed.*"

ὁ δὲ Σίμων καὶ αὐτὸς ἐπίστευσεν καὶ βαπτισθεὶς ἦν προσκαρτερῶν τῷ Φιλίππῳ, θεωρῶν τε σημεῖα καὶ δυνάμεις μεγάλας γινομένας ἐξίστατο.

Stott: New Testament language does not always distinguish between believing and professing to believe.

Boice: Peter employs the same words Jesus used for him when Peter had objected to Jesus' washing his feet in the Upper Room. Jesus said, "*Unless I wash you, you have no part with me*" (John 13:8). Strong words. Still Peter was not an unbeliever; he was just out of the will of God. So I say that it is possible, just possible, that Simon was a believer. Nevertheless, this seems rather to be a case of one who had been exposed to strong preaching, was impressed by the miracles, and wanted to tap into the evident blessings of the gospel, but who did not have that genuine change of heart that would have meant that he was born again. We can apply the story either way.

Wiersbe: His faith was like that of the people of Jerusalem who witnessed our Lord's miracles (John 2:23-25).

Bock: The evangelist has greater power than the magician. Jervell points out the parallel to Moses's power, which is greater than that of Pharaoh's magicians. Is the attachment Simon has to Philip a sincere attachment to the gift of God or a quest to enhance his personal power? The next part of the event will elaborate that question.

Morgan: Men may come very near, they may be intellectually convinced of the supremacy of Jesus; they may even decide that they will adopt His ethical ideal; they may go so far as to determine that they will imitate the perfection of His example. But these things do not make men Christians.

Remember: **John the Baptist** had pretenders coming to him for baptism as well; there will always be false professors of faith

III. (:14-19) <u>MINISTERING SPIRITUAL POWER</u> STIRS ENVY AND EXPOSES IMPURE MOTIVES

God is the one who sovereignly gives the Holy Spirit and the spiritual gifts
Role of the Apostles – verification / identification / unity of body of Christ

A. (:14-17) Transitional Process in Receiving the Holy Spirit vs. What is Normative for Church Age

"*Now when the apostles in Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent them Peter and John, who came down and prayed for them, that they might receive the Holy Spirit. For He had not yet fallen upon any of them; they had simply been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. Then they began laying their hands on them, and they were receiving the Holy Spirit.*"

Ἀκούσαντες δὲ οἱ ἐν Ἰεροσολύμοις ἀπόστολοι ὅτι δέδεκται ἡ Σαμάρεια τὸν λόγον τοῦ θεοῦ, ἀπέστειλαν πρὸς αὐτοὺς Πέτρον καὶ Ἰωάννην, οἵτινες καταβάντες προσηύξαντο περὶ αὐτῶν ὅπως λάβωσιν πνεῦμα ἅγιον· οὐδέπω γὰρ ἦν ἐπ᾽ οὐδενὶ αὐτῶν ἐπιπεπτωκός, μόνον δὲ βεβαπτισμένοι ὑπῆρχον εἰς τὸ ὄνομα τοῦ κυρίου Ἰησοῦ. τότε ἐπετίθεσαν τὰς χεῖρας ἐπ᾽ αὐτοὺς καὶ ἐλάμβανον πνεῦμα ἅγιον.

Significance of sending John – at one time he had wanted to call down fire upon the Samaritans (Luke 9:51-56)

Stott: *received the word of God* – This is more than a matter-of-fact statement; it seems to be almost a technical expression by which Luke signals an important new stage in the advance of the gospel. He has used it in reference to the Day of Pentecost when three thousand Jews "*accepted his* [Peter's] *message*" (2:41). He uses it here of the first Samaritans who "*accepted the word of God*". And he will use it again after the conversion of Cornelius, when the apostles heard that "*the Gentiles also had received the word of God*" (11:1). Further, in all three developments Peter played a decisive role, using the keys of the kingdom (though Luke does not refer to this) to open it successively to Jews, Samaritans and Gentiles.

Kent: Even Peter and John did not question their faith, for they preached nothing further to them. Hence it must not have been the regenerating work of the Holy Spirit which was lacking, but the external manifestations which accompanied the Spirit's arrival at Pentecost. This was a period of transition from the OT dispensation to the NT era, and these believers at Samaria were in a position similar to the believers at Jerusalem prior to Pentecost. . .
The schism which had plagued the Jews and Samaritans would doubtless have been carried over into the church, unless some method should be devised to preserve the unity of the church.

Bock: These are the only three places the Spirit is bestowed through the laying on of hands (19:6; 9:17). Each is a case where doubts might exist about the experience's authenticity. It is an exceptional activity, as there are many places where people believe, and the laying on of hands is not described. Acts 2:38-39 declares the normative pattern. Marshall notes that on other occasions joy accompanies the Spirit not charismatic experience (13:52; 16:34; 1 Thess. 1:6).

Different ministries of the Holy Spirit; these people had been regenerated, but they had not yet experienced the baptism of the Holy Spirit into the one body of Christ and the giving of the spiritual gifts -- Stedman

B. (:18-19) Transparent Power Play – Trying to Exchange Money for Power

"*Now when Simon saw that the Spirit was bestowed through the laying on of the apostles' hands, he offered them money, saying, 'Give this authority to me as well, so that everyone on whom I lay my hands may receive the Holy Spirit.*"'

ἰδὼν δὲ ὁ Σίμων ὅτι διὰ τῆς ἐπιθέσεως τῶν χειρῶν τῶν ἀποστόλων δίδοται τὸ πνεῦμα, προσήνεγκεν αὐτοῖς χρήματα λέγων· δότε κἀμοὶ τὴν ἐξουσίαν ταύτην ἵνα ᾧ ἐὰν ἐπιθῶ τὰς χεῖρας λαμβάνῃ πνεῦμα ἅγιον.

Constable: By his request Simon had revealed that he hoped he could buy God's gifts, namely, the Holy Spirit and the ability to impart the Holy Spirit to others. Peter corrected him harshly. God's gifts are gifts; people cannot purchase them because God gives them freely and

sovereignly. Simon had much to learn about the grace of God. Peter told him God would not grant the ability he sought because his heart was not right with God. Simon wanted to be able to bring glory to himself rather than to God.

MacArthur: Now, when Simon saw this, I suppose his attitude was, "If you can't lick 'em, join 'em." He was impressed by Philip's preaching, and he wanted that power so that he could hold the people. If Philip had a power that surpassed his, he wanted that power. And so we see he had a wrong view of supernatural power. He saw supernatural power as a way to fulfill his own ambition, rather than as a way to transform his sinful life. And he sought Christ for his own gain and his own good and his own purposes

IV. (:20-24) MERCHANDIZING SPIRITUAL POWER CONDEMNED AS EVIL AND FUTILE

A. (:20-21) Condemnation: Spiritual Power is Not for Sale – Check Your Motives

> "*But Peter said to him, 'May your silver perish with you, because you thought you could obtain the gift of God with money! You have no part or portion in this matter, for your heart is not right before God.*"

> Πέτρος δὲ εἶπεν πρὸς αὐτόν· τὸ ἀργύριόν σου σὺν σοὶ εἴη εἰς ἀπώλειαν ὅτι τὴν δωρεὰν τοῦ θεοῦ ἐνόμισας διὰ χρημάτων κτᾶσθαι· οὐκ ἔστιν σοι μερὶς οὐδὲ κλῆρος ἐν τῷ λόγῳ τούτῳ, ἡ γὰρ καρδία σου οὐκ ἔστιν εὐθεῖα ἔναντι τοῦ θεοῦ.

Stott: Ever since that day, the attempt to turn the spiritual into the commercial, to traffic in the things of God, and especially to purchase ecclesiastical office, has been termed "*simony*."

Cf. practice of buying indulgences to get out of time in purgatory

Cole: Peter's rebuke of Simon was not seeker-sensitive! The literal Greek is, "May your silver and you go to hell!"

Illustration: Spurgeon, the Prince of Preachers, preached to huge audiences in England. One of his contemporaries in the world of entertainment was P. T. Barnum – the prominent circus campaigner. Barnum was always looking for another promotion to draw a crowd and bring more money into his pockets. He heard about Spurgeon and the great crowds coming out to hear him…he sent him a telegram with an offer of a large sum of money to come and preach in his circus tents. [Barnum figured that he would make a huge sum off the increased admissions money] Spurgeon sent a short reply: Dear Mr. Barnum, you'll find my answer in **Acts 8:20.**

B. (:22-23) Command: Seek Forgiveness

> "*Therefore repent of this wickedness of yours, and pray the Lord that if possible, the intention of your heart may be forgiven you. For I see that you are in the gall of bitterness and in the bondage of iniquity.*"

> μετανόησον οὖν ἀπὸ τῆς κακίας σου ταύτης καὶ δεήθητι τοῦ κυρίου, εἰ ἄρα ἀφεθήσεταί σοι ἡ ἐπίνοια τῆς καρδίας σου, εἰς γὰρ χολὴν πικρίας καὶ σύνδεσμον ἀδικίας ὁρῶ σε ὄντα.

Kent: OT terminology descriptive of most serious offenses (**Deut. 29:18, 20**).

MacArthur: He's no Christian. God saw his defiled heart and Peter could see it, too. His faith could not save. He had a wrong view of self. He had a wrong view of salvation. He had a wrong view of the Spirit. And then, fourthly, he had a wrong view of sin.

Still an opportunity for Simon to become a genuine believer; key is repentance; but his response was pathetic

C. (:24) Cry for Absolution: Pray for Me

> "*But Simon answered and said, 'Pray to the Lord for me yourselves, so that nothing of what you have said may come upon me.*"'
>
> ἀποκριθεὶς δὲ ὁ Σίμων εἶπεν· δεήθητε ὑμεῖς ὑπὲρ ἐμοῦ πρὸς τὸν κύριον ὅπως μηδὲν ἐπέλθῃ ἐπ᾽ ἐμὲ ὧν εἰρήκατε.

Boice: he was not being pious at all but rather disobedient. His words were what we could call in colloquial English "a cop-out." He was refusing to do what he had been told he should do and was passing the buck to Peter. Do you do that? Do you pass the buck for your spiritual growth to other people?

Kent: The consistent testimony of church tradition associates Simon Magus with heresy. Justin Martyr, who lived about 100 years later in Samaria, said Simon became a Gnostic.

CONCLUSION:

Are we playing our role in **multiplying spiritual power** through our proclamation of Jesus Christ? Are we preaching the Word and witnessing to others in the place where God has planted us?

Are we discerning to recognize those who are attempting to **mimic spiritual power** without submitting to the Lordship of Jesus Christ? Are we exposing these frauds and warning others? Are we pointing others to dependency on Jesus Christ rather than seeking a name for ourselves?

Do we understand the transitional nature of these events in the early church or are we confused about how **God ministers spiritual power** and sovereignly gives the Holy Spirit and spiritual gifts today at the time of conversion so that there is no Second Blessing of subsequent baptism of the Holy Spirit?

Do we stand with the apostles in condemning any type of **merchandising of spiritual power**?

The bottom line: SPIRITUAL POWER CANNOT BE BOUGHT

* * * * * * * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

1) What type of religious charlatans do you see merchandising their wares today?

2) Are we faithfully proclaiming Christ in the field in which we have been planted?

3) How can we make baptism more meaningful and link its practice more closely to the time of our conversion?

4) How does understanding the possibility of false profession of faith impact how we teach the doctrine of assurance of salvation and counsel new converts?

* * * * * * * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Barclay: Simon was impressed with the visible effects of the laying on of hands and he tried to buy the ability to do what the apostles could do. Simon has left his name on the language for *simony* still means the unworthy buying and selling of ecclesiastical offices. Simon had two faults.

(i) He was not interested in bringing the Holy Spirit to others so much as in the power and prestige it would bring to himself. This exaltation of self is ever the danger of the preacher and the teacher. It is true that they must kindle at the sight of men; but it is also true – as Denney said – that we cannot at one and the same time show that we are clever and that Christ is wonderful.

(ii) Simon forgot that certain gifts are dependent on character; money cannot buy them. Again, the preacher and the teacher must take warning. "Preaching is truth through personality." To bring the Spirit to others a man must be not a man of wealth but one who himself possesses the Spirit.

Boice: The Holy Spirit is not an "it." The Holy Spirit is a Person. He is God. When we get that clearly in mind, then we can see that the object of our relationship to the Holy Spirit is not that we might have more of him so that we can use him, but rather that he might have more of us and use us. Simon did not understand this, and neither do many believers today.

Bock: In sum, Luke has shown that Christianity has nothing to do with magic. Even more, those engaged in magic can see the divine power residing among the apostles. In addition, the Spirit cannot be bought. The gospel moves out of Jerusalem, but there are obstacles of misunderstanding to overcome. Anyone who accepts the gift of God can come into salvation. The Spirit is neither controllable nor subject to purchase; the Spirit comes by God's direction, as a gift, and is to be received as such.

Dr. John Whitcomb: **The Scattered Scattering**
What were the other apostles doing during this time? Prominent role for Stephen and Philip in the spread of the church; Book of Acts is only a tiny little segment of all that God was doing during this time; Jesus went around claiming to be the preeminent one = with the Father; Simon lied about himself; Careful what we say and think about ourselves; cf. claims of Antichrist; Simon was impressed because of the miracles, but did not have saving faith; cf. Nicodemus; think of how many Americans at some point in their life claimed to have believed in some sense; Simon saw an opportunity (James 2:14); Why did Peter and John have to go up to give official approval to these new believers who did not have to become Jewish proselytes first; Why didn't Saul have to have apostolic special approval? He was 100% Jew himself; How could a pure 100% Gentile (total outer fringe of believers) become fully certified believer? No evidence that

tongues were spoken here – Simon "*saw*" evidence of Holy Spirit; Not too late for Simon to repent and respond to the gospel; Simony a colossal problem in Middle Ages; you could buy all sorts of ecclesiastical offices; Reformation provoked by people being pressured to buy indulgences to help build St Peter's Cathedral in Rome; Preaching to gain recognition is simony; Serving in the church to advance to a higher position is simony; anytime we seek spiritual powers or gifts for our own recognition or advancement of self is simony; seeking spiritual gifts for the promotion of oneself is simony; seeking to be godly so that others will think we are godly is simony; we all have a fallen nature and are susceptible to Satan's temptations; trying to obtain God's power or blessing illegitimately; Simon's response was pathetic; I don't want to get hurt

Cole: Those who take the Book of Acts as normative, rather than as a transitional book from the Old Covenant to the New, have caused much confusion. They claim (based on this and a few other passages in Acts) that not all believers receive the Holy Spirit at salvation, and that we must have a subsequent experience where we receive the Spirit, accompanied by speaking in tongues. But the clear teaching of the New Testament is that after this transitional period, all believers receive the Holy Spirit through faith at the moment of salvation (Gal. 3:2-5). He seals us as a pledge of our inheritance (Eph. 1:13; 4:30). He dwells in our bodies (1 Cor. 6:19). He baptizes us all into the body of Christ, so that we all drink from the same Spirit (1 Cor. 12:13). He gives spiritual gifts to every Christian according to His sovereign will (1 Cor. 12:4- 30). Paul says that if anyone does not have the Spirit, he does not belong to Christ (Rom. 8:9).

So why didn't the Samaritans receive the Holy Spirit until Peter and John came and laid hands on them? I think that God withheld the giving of the Spirit so that the early church would not be split into a Jewish section and a rival Samaritan section. The Samaritan believers had to be subject to the authority of the apostles, even if they didn't naturally like the Jews. The Jewish apostles and other believers had to accept the Samaritans' salvation as genuine, as evidenced by the gift of the Holy Spirit, even if they weren't naturally inclined to put the Samaritans on the same level as the Jews. But the point is, this is an exceptional passage, not a pattern for us to follow. The norm is spelled out clearly in the epistles. True believers receive the Holy Spirit at the moment of salvation.

Stedman: I remember a few years ago attending a service put on by one of the famous (or infamous) faith healers of our day, a man who has milked millions of dollars from earnest Christians by the faith healing racket. I attended this meeting just to hear what he was saying. He began preaching what I thought sounded like a good gospel message. He started out well, took his text from the Scripture, began to develop it well, and I began to settle back and say to myself, "I've been wrong about this man!" -- until he came to the conclusion! Rather than giving an invitation to the thousands who were present to come to know Jesus Christ, this is what he said: "If you want to know God, then have faith in my prayers. If you want to meet God, believe that my prayers will lead you to God. Come forward and kneel here, and I'll pray for you." The whole direction of his message was toward himself and his prayer.

That is false Christianity. It always attempts to interject a mediator between a believer and his God. But, "There is one mediator between God and man, the man Christ Jesus," {1 Tim 2:5}; no other. Counterfeit Christianity tries to insert a priesthood of one sort or another, a mediator, someone great, someone who has an "in" with God, someone who has a special channel to God that other people don't have. When you hear that sort of thing, you know that you are hearing again the same kind of false Christianity that appeared here in the book of Acts.

Deffinbaugh: I find it interesting that Simon the magician did not express a desire to obtain the power that was demonstrated by the signs and wonders performed by Philip. He was very eager, however, to obtain the power that he saw as a result of the laying on of hands by Peter and John. What was the difference? While Luke tells us that Philip cast out demons and healed those who were paralyzed and lame (Acts 8:7), he does not tell us exactly what happened when Peter and John laid their hands on the new believers. Something rather spectacular must have occurred, or Simon would not have been so eager to obtain this power. I think it is safe to speculate that something happened that was similar to Pentecost, as described in Acts 2:1-4. We do know that when the apostles laid their hands on these Samaritan believers, they received the Holy Spirit (Acts 8:17).

Jerry Shirley: **Counterfeit Christianity**
Did you know that the Bible strictly forbids having anything to do w/ sorcery and the like: such as astrology, horoscopes, fortunetelling, psychics, tarot cards, palm reading, séances, Ouija boards, spirit-channeling, divinations, enchantments, incantations, witchcraft, wizardry, charms, spells, or anything else invented by the occult world… The Bible forbids involvement in these things! God goes so far as to call these things an abomination. Deut. 18:10-12
http://www.sermoncentral.com/sermons/counterfeit-christianity-jerry-shirley-sermon-on-repentance-69994.asp

TEXT: Acts 8:25-40

TITLE: EVANGELISTIC DIVINE APPOINTMENTS

BIG IDEA:
SPIRIT-LED EVANGELISTIC DIVINE APPOINTMENTS CAPITALIZE ON PREPARED HEARTS

INTRODUCTION:
Our lives are heavily organized around our appointments. In the olden days of pen and pencil we used the Daily Planners; now we track our appointments on our blackberries and other mobile devices. We hate interruptions; we want to be in control and keep everything restricted to its appointed time. We get irritable when our schedule gets messed up; leaves no room for spontaneity or surprise engagements; we are too busy to listen to what the Holy Spirit wants us to do!

Now I am not advocating that we throw organization and discipline out the window. We must be practical about how to wisely live our lives. But we must balance our desire for order and organization with an open mind to whatever divine appointments the Holy Spirit might have in mind for us – totally outside of the sphere of our own agenda.

We have been studying the evangelism ministry of Philip.
Last week: Spirit-Led Evangelistic Divine Appointments Confront **False Faith**;
Today in the story of the Ethiopian eunuch we see **Genuine Faith** contrasted with false faith of Simon the Sorcerer; Sovereignty of God at work in a prepared heart

Jeff Hughes -- Illustration:
In 1912, 39 year old, Rev. John Harper a Scottish preacher was making a transatlantic trip to preach at the Moody Church in Chicago. As fate would have it the vessel he chose was the Titanic. We all know the story about the disaster but do you know the story of John Harper? Harper like many others ended up in the water, and as people desperately tried to survive in the chilled waters, Harper swam to them.

The minister asked people in the water if they knew Jesus. Eventually, Harper approached a passenger clinging to a jagged piece of wood and he pleaded for the man to trust Christ. The minister was completely exhausted at this point. As he succumbed to the conditions and went under the water to his death, Harper said, "*Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved*."

A few years later at a meeting of survivors of the Titanic, the final man who encountered John Harper told the group that he had been saved twice that night. First, he had accepted Christ as his personal Savior because of Harper's efforts. And, of course, he had been rescued from the deep Atlantic seas. He said "Alone in the night with two miles of water under me I believed, I am John Harpers' last convert."

John Harper's goal, his focus was not on himself. Even in his dying moments, all he thought about was the people around him and their spiritual condition.

PROGRESSION OF SPIRIT-LED DIVINE APPOINTMENTS IN THE DAILY PLANNER OF AN EVANGELIST

I. TRANSITION: (:25) PUBLIC DIVINE APPOINTMENTS THROUGHOUT SAMARIA – CONSISTENT PATTERN OF PREACHING THE GOSPEL IN MISSIONARY OUTREACH

> "*And so, when they had solemnly testified and spoken the word of the Lord, they started back to Jerusalem, and were preaching the gospel to many villages of the Samaritans.*"
>
> Οἱ μὲν οὖν διαμαρτυράμενοι καὶ λαλήσαντες τὸν λόγον τοῦ κυρίου ὑπέστρεφον εἰς Ἰεροσόλυμα, πολλάς τε κώμας τῶν Σαμαριτῶν εὐηγγελίζοντο.

- **Philip was gifted as an evangelist;**
- **he was available to be used by God;**
- **he was obedient to the leading of the Holy Spirit;**
- **he was skilled in the use of God's Word to preach the gospel and stay on target;**
- **he was effective by God's sovereign power**

Transition: Last engagement was with Simon the Sorcerer – involved *solemnly* testifying

What an awesome responsibility to proclaim the whole counsel of God; not to soften the message of warning and judgment; not to be a man-pleaser

Don't forget the content of the gospel message – 1 Cor. 15 – we need this every day in our lives

Geography Lesson – working North of Jerusalem; now focus is going to switch to South of the city

Everybody can't be a missionary going to faraway places
Everybody can't be a street preacher or talk to large crowds

But every Christian needs to preach the gospel and witness to those around him

Impressive revival taking place in Samaria … but God had other plans for Philip

II. (:26-29) PRIVATE DIVINE APPOINTMENT WITH THE ETHIOPIAN EUNUCH ON DESERT ROAD FROM JERUSALEM TO GAZA – CONTROLLED BY THE SPIRIT TO PERFORM UNEXPECTED MISSIONS (UNUSUAL INSTRUCTIONS)

> "*But an angel of the Lord spoke to Philip saying, 'Arise and go south to the road that descends from Jerusalem to Gaza.' (This is a desert road.) And he arose and went; and behold, there was an Ethiopian eunuch, a court official of Candace, queen of the Ethiopians, who was in charge of all her treasure; and he had come to Jerusalem to worship. And he was returning and sitting in his chariot, and was reading the prophet Isaiah. And the Spirit said to Philip, 'Go up and join this chariot.*"'
>
> Ἄγγελος δὲ κυρίου ἐλάλησεν πρὸς Φίλιππον λέγων· ἀνάστηθι καὶ πορεύου κατὰ μεσημβρίαν ἐπὶ τὴν ὁδὸν τὴν καταβαίνουσαν ἀπὸ Ἰερουσαλὴμ εἰς Γάζαν, αὕτη ἐστὶν ἔρημος. καὶ ἀναστὰς ἐπορεύθη. καὶ ἰδοὺ ἀνὴρ Αἰθίοψ εὐνοῦχος δυνάστης Κανδάκης βασιλίσσης Αἰθιόπων, ὃς ἦν ἐπὶ πάσης τῆς γάζης αὐτῆς, ὃς ἐληλύθει προσκυνήσων εἰς Ἰερουσαλήμ, ἦν τε ὑποστρέφων καὶ

καθήμενος ἐπὶ τοῦ ἅρματος αὐτοῦ καὶ ἀνεγίνωσκεν τὸν προφήτην Ἠσαΐαν. εἶπεν δὲ τὸ πνεῦμα τῷ Φιλίππῳ· πρόσελθε καὶ κολλήθητι τῷ ἅρματι τούτῳ.

Events in this section prove that this transitional historical period is not intended to be normative

Those who are led by the Spirit of God are the true sons of God – Rom. 8

Most unlikely spot (desert road) for such a significant and strategic meeting – became founder of the church of Jesus Christ in Africa

MacArthur: There were two roads from Jerusalem to Gaza, and the Spirit commands Philip to take the one that was seldom used.

Boice: When Philip was given this call, he did not know what God was going to do with him. I am sure it did not make sense to him to leave what he was doing and go to the desert near Gaza. But that is what God had told him to do; so he did it. Whenever it comes to a choice between our way of thinking and what God says, you know as well as I do that there is no real choice. We must do what God says. If you read the Bible and what you read does not seem to make sense to you but you understand what it is telling you to do, well, you had better do it. That is the only way you or anybody else will find blessing.

Background for Jewish faith being introduced to land of Ethiopia = account of Queen of Sheba visiting Solomon

Bruce: The king of Ethiopia was venerated as the child of the sun and regarded as too sacred a personage to discharge the secular functions of royalty; these were performed on his behalf by the queen-mother, who regularly bore the dynastic title Candace.

Queen must have trusted this high level official completely – in charge of all her treasures; not sure how much her husband trusted her (if she had one) – made this man a eunuch

Hughes: If this man was a physical eunuch though, such people were not allowed into the temple, by Old Testament law. This man could not have been a full fledged Jewish proselyte; he could only have been what the Jews called "God-fearers". People who could go to synagogues, pray, and read scriptures, but nothing else.

Had the precursor to the Nook and was reading his electronic document

Bumpy ride in a chariot – what kind of shocks did they have

III. (:30-35) PURPOSE OF DIVINE APPOINTMENTS: CALLING PEOPLE TO REPENTANCE AND FAITH BY PREACHING JESUS FROM THE WORD OF GOD

"*And when Philip had run up, he heard him reading Isaiah the prophet, and said, 'Do you understand what you are reading?' And he said, 'Well, how could I, unless someone guides me?' And he invited Philip to come up and sit with him. Now the passage of Scripture which he was reading was this: 'He was led as a sheep to slaughter; And as a lamb before its shearer is silent, So He does not open His mouth. In humiliation His judgment was taken away; Who shall relate His generation? For His life is removed from*

the earth.' And the eunuch answered Philip and said, 'Please tell me, of whom does the prophet say this? Of himself, or of someone else?' And Philip opened his mouth, and beginning from this Scripture he preached Jesus to him."

προσδραμὼν δὲ ὁ Φίλιππος ἤκουσεν αὐτοῦ ἀναγινώσκοντος Ἡσαΐαν τὸν προφήτην καὶ εἶπεν· ἆρά γε γινώσκεις ἃ ἀναγινώσκεις; ὁ δὲ εἶπεν· πῶς γὰρ ἂν δυναίμην ἐὰν μή τις ὁδηγήσει με; παρεκάλεσέν τε τὸν Φίλιππον ἀναβάντα καθίσαι σὺν αὐτῷ. ἡ δὲ περιοχὴ τῆς γραφῆς ἣν ἀνεγίνωσκεν ἦν αὕτη· ὡς πρόβατον ἐπὶ σφαγὴν ἤχθη καὶ ὡς ἀμνὸς ἐναντίον τοῦ κείραντος αὐτὸν ἄφωνος, οὕτως οὐκ ἀνοίγει τὸ στόμα αὐτοῦ. Ἐν τῇ ταπεινώσει [αὐτοῦ] ἡ κρίσις αὐτοῦ ἤρθη· τὴν γενεὰν αὐτοῦ τίς διηγήσεται; ὅτι αἴρεται ἀπὸ τῆς γῆς ἡ ζωὴ αὐτοῦ. ἀποκριθεὶς δὲ ὁ εὐνοῦχος τῷ Φιλίππῳ εἶπεν· δέομαί σου, περὶ τίνος ὁ προφήτης λέγει τοῦτο; περὶ ἑαυτοῦ ἢ περὶ ἑτέρου τινός; ἀνοίξας δὲ ὁ Φίλιππος τὸ στόμα αὐτοῦ καὶ ἀρξάμενος ἀπὸ τῆς γραφῆς ταύτης εὐηγγελίσατο αὐτῷ τὸν Ἰησοῦν.

Chariots of Fire – movie – here you have a runner who is faster than Eric …

How can I show Christ to this person; How can I be a blessing

Won't be coming as a lamb the second time

Essential to open our mouths

Content focused on the person of Jesus Christ

Cole: Don't underestimate the power of God's Word to bring people to salvation! As 1 Peter 1:23 explains, "For you have been born again not of seed which is perishable but imperishable, that is, through the living and enduring word of God." James 1:18 states, "In the exercise of His will He brought us forth by the word of truth…." Paul tells Timothy that from childhood he has "known the sacred writings which are able to give you the wisdom that leads to salvation" (2 Tim. 3:15). God's Word is powerful to save sinners.

IV. (:36-38) PREDESTINED RESULTS OF DIVINE APPOINTMENTS: CONFIRMING FAITH IN JESUS BY BAPTIZING NEW CONVERT

"*And as they went along the road they came to some water; and the eunuch said, 'Look! Water! What prevents me from being baptized?'* [*And Philip said, 'If you believe with all your heart, you may.' And he answered and said, I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God.'*] *And he ordered the chariot to stop; and they both went down into the water, Philip as well as the eunuch; and he baptized him.*"

ὡς δὲ ἐπορεύοντο κατὰ τὴν ὁδόν, ἦλθον ἐπί τι ὕδωρ, καί φησιν ὁ εὐνοῦχος· ἰδοὺ ὕδωρ, τί κωλύει με βαπτισθῆναι; καὶ ἐκέλευσεν στῆναι τὸ ἅρμα καὶ κατέβησαν ἀμφότεροι εἰς τὸ ὕδωρ, ὅ τε Φίλιππος καὶ ὁ εὐνοῦχος, καὶ ἐβάπτισεν αὐτόν.

Textual problem with v. 37

Very surprising?? to find abundant water here in the desert – enough for a dunking session

Constable: The road on which this conversation took place crossed several stream beds that empty water from the higher elevations into the Mediterranean Sea during the wetter months.

Even though the land generally was desert, water was not entirely absent at some times of the year.

No arm twisting here by Philip

No sprinkling or pouring – dunking took place

Don't be bashful about closing the deal

Sovereign results not up to you -- Might be savor of life unto life or death unto death

Deffinbaugh: Since signs and wonders were not the explanation for the conversion of the eunuch, to what do we attribute his conversion? I think the answer is: the Word of God, the Spirit of God, and the testimony of this man of God. The eunuch's heart was already prepared when Philip encountered him. He must have had a fair knowledge of the Jewish faith, enough to prompt him to travel a long distance to worship in Jerusalem. He must have paid a high price for his copy of Scripture. The Spirit of God not only prompted Philip to make the journey to meet the eunuch, He also opened the heart of the eunuch to receive Stephen's exposition of the Word.

I think the point is clear. Signs and wonders were necessary to accredit the apostles as God's authoritative spokesmen (2 Corinthians 12:11-13; Hebrews 2:1-4). But they are not necessary for the on-going work of evangelism.10 The conversion of Simon, based heavily on signs and wonders, is certainly not described as being superior to the conversion of the eunuch, which was not prompted by such miracles. Put differently, the conversion of the eunuch was every bit as miraculous as that of Simon and the Samaritans. Signs and wonders are thus portrayed as optional, and not as requirements, for evangelism.

V. (:39-40) TRANSITION: PERSEVERANCE IN CONTINUING ON TO THE NEXT DIVINE APPOINTMENTS IN VARIOUS CITIES

> "*And when they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord snatched Philip away; and the eunuch saw him no more, but went on his way rejoicing. But Philip found himself \at Azotus; and as he passed through he kept preaching the gospel to all the cities, until he came to Caesarea.*"
>
> ὅτε δὲ ἀνέβησαν ἐκ τοῦ ὕδατος, πνεῦμα κυρίου ἥρπασεν τὸν Φίλιππον καὶ οὐκ εἶδεν αὐτὸν οὐκέτι ὁ εὐνοῦχος, ἐπορεύετο γὰρ τὴν ὁδὸν αὐτοῦ χαίρων. Φίλιππος δὲ εὑρέθη εἰς Ἄζωτον· καὶ διερχόμενος εὐηγγελίζετο τὰς πόλεις πάσας ἕως τοῦ ἐλθεῖν αὐτὸν εἰς Καισάρειαν.

Expression: spirit someone away; "snatched" – used in 1 Thess 4:17 of church being snatched up in the Rapture

Talked about the great rejoicing associated with new birth

Urgency – much work to be done; they both had to move on to what God had for them next
Keep on preaching the gospel

Joy tied to relationship with the Lord

Not dependent on relationship to Philip

Significance of Caesarea

CONCLUSION:

Illustration from Wiersbe: In October 1857, J. Hudson Taylor began to minister in Ningpo, China, and he led a Mr Nyi to Christ. The man was overjoyed and wanted to share his faith with others.

"How long have you had the good tidings in England?" Mr. Nyi asked Hudson Taylor one day. Taylor acknowledged that England had known the gospel for many centuries.

"My father died seeking the truth," said Mr. Nyi, "Why didn't you come sooner?" Taylor had no answer to that penetrating question.

How long have you known the gospel?

How far have you shared it personally?

John Oxenham

Not for one single day
Can I discern my way,
But this I surely know—
He who gives the day
Will show the way,
So I securely go.

What **divine appointments for evangelism** will the Holy Spirit direct you to this coming week?

* * * * * * * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

1) How can I tell whether the Holy Spirit is prompting me to have a discussion about the gospel with someone?

2) What are the implications of the sovereignty of God in evangelism and worldwide missions?

3) How important should baptism be for a new convert?

4) How can you tell whether people are dependent on your ministry or directly dependent on the Lord?

* * * * * * * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Boice: John Stott calls attention to the differences between the two samples we know of Philip's evangelism. In the first case, he spoke to people of mixed race, part Jewish, part Gentile. In the second case, he evangelized a pure-blooded Ethiopian who was wealthy and of great influence. Two very different cases. But the message was one and the same message, because there is only

one gospel of Jesus Christ.

Wiersbe: Philip's experience ought to encourage us in our own personal witness for the Lord. To begin with, God directed Philip to the right person at the right time. You and I are not likely to have angels instruct us, but we can know the guidance of the Holy Spirit in our witnessing, if we are walking in the Spirit and praying for God's direction.

Cole: **How God Evangelizes the World**
God evangelizes the world through obedient Christians who explain the gospel to seeking souls. The story reflects four elements in the conversion of a soul: (1) the Holy Spirit's initiative and preparation; (2) the Word of God penetrating the minds and hearts of sinners; (3) the obedient Christian who explains the gospel message; and, (4) the response of obedient faith in the person hearing the message. . .

God's target is the world. Foreign missions was not something that the church or some brilliant strategist cooked up. It is God's program. He commanded Philip to evangelize this Gentile man from Ethiopia. Someone has observed that in Acts 8 we see the conversion of a son of Ham; in Acts 9, a son of Shem (Paul); and, in Acts 10, a son of Japheth (the Roman centurion). These represent the three divisions of humanity after the flood.

Constable: It was not uncommon for men in high Near Eastern government positions to be castrated. This prevented them from impregnating royal women and then making claims on the throne. However the word "eunuch" (Gr. eunouchos) appears often in the Septuagint (e.g., of Potiphar, Gen. 39:1) and in other Greek writings describing a high military or political figure. This eunuch may, therefore, not have been emasculated but simply a high official. Some scholars believe he was both.388 Luke repeatedly referred to him as a eunuch (vv. 27, 34, 36, 38, 39). . .

This is an excellent example of the Spirit of God using the Word of God through a man of God to bring salvation to the elect of God (cf. 1 Pet. 1:23-25). Note also the parallels between this story and the one in Luke 24 about Jesus walking with two disciples on the road to Emmaus.

MacArthur: . . . the sovereign work of the Spirit, the submissive will of a man but the searching worship of the Ethiopian . . . So the presentation that saves is constructed on Scripture, centered on the Savior, third concerned with salvation.

Phil Newton: **A True Faith Revealed**
Sovereignty implies the ruling or governing of the universe by the holy wisdom and power of God. It is an absolute authority, not simply imagined. One of the big questions facing Christianity is whether or not God is actually sovereign. There has been a strong movement among some theologians, who claim to be evangelical, to deny the omniscience of God and the exercise of His sovereignty. Essentially, these theologians give a little sovereignty to God and the rest to man. God is viewed as knowing only what He has decided, not what man will decide in the future. They claim that God knows most everything, but there remains some "details" unknown to God until they actually happen [The Coming Evangelical Crisis, ed. John Armstrong, 142-143].

Try telling this to Philip! He saw the sovereignty of God at work in the salvation of the Ethiopian eunuch, both from the perspective of the circumstances which led to his witness and the inner working of the Holy Spirit in preparing the eunuch to receive the gospel of Christ. Just as God sovereignly worked in the eunuch's salvation, He sovereignly works in ours as well. . .

What does it mean to proclaim a gospel message that is centered upon Jesus Christ? This can essentially be divided into two parts. First, we much explain the Person of Jesus Christ to the sinner. He needs to understand that Jesus Christ is God Himself. That is the greatness of the gospel, that God Himself came to be the Savior of sinners. God did not send an angel or someone of His creation to do this work, but God Himself came. But we could not look at God, for God is a spirit (John 4:24) and no man has seen God or can look upon God in His pristine glory (John 1:18). So God became a man to dwell among us and reveal Himself to us. The Apostle John goes into great detail on this in the prologue to his Gospel (1:1-18) and in the prologue to his first epistle (1:1-4). He insists that we understand that Jesus was not a figment of the imagination, but one who was seen, heard, and handled of the Word of Life (I John 1:1). This same Word of life was clothed in flesh, retaining all of His deity, yet divesting Himself of His radiant glory and prerogatives as God, to dwell among us (John 1:14) as a man. And as a man he fulfilled all of the demands of the Law on our behalf (Romans 10:4).

Second, we must explain to the unbeliever what Jesus Christ did, that is, His Work. You cannot talk about His work unless you go to the cross. For it was at the cross that the purpose of Christ coming to earth was realized. As I pointed out, Jesus fulfilled the demands of the law for us so that His righteousness might become ours. But divine justice toward sinners was not satisfied merely at the righteousness of Christ in obeying the law. God's justice demanded a just punishment for the sin and rebellion of man that offended the holiness of God. So, the perfect, spotless Lamb of God went to the cross to bear our sins and satisfy God's justice and wrath (John 1:29; I John 2:2). At the cross, as all of the Old Testament sacrifices had foreshadowed, the Son of God died a bloody death as the eternal substitute for sinners. There our redemption took place! There God's justice was completed so that our Lord could cry on the cross, "It is finished!" There sinners were justified or declared to be legally righteous through the satisfaction of Jesus Christ (propitiation--Rom. 3:21-28) as our substitute. God demonstrated the efficiency of Jesus' atoning death when He raised Him from the dead.
http://www.southwoodsbc.org/sermons/acts_08.26-40.php

Deffinbaugh: I also see the sovereignty of God in the way He worked strategically through key individuals. The other day, my friend, Fred Smith, was discussing the concept of the “key log.” Logs are sometimes transported to a lumber mill by way of a river. At times, the logs will “jam,” forming a kind of dam, thus preventing the logs from moving downstream. In a log jam, there is usually a “key log,” a log that, if removed, will impact all the others, clearing the jam. You might say that the “key log” is the strategic log.

I believe we see God at work strategically in the Book of Acts moving “key logs” so that others were greatly impacted. God frequently multiplies the impact of the gospel by raising up or making use of strategic people. We have seen several strategic people in the last few chapters of Acts (chapters 6-8 in particular). God raised up two men – Stephen and Philip – from among the seven “deacons” who were appointed to oversee the care of the widows in Jerusalem. Stephen played a key role in the proclamation of the gospel, both by his preaching, and by his martyrdom. Philip also played a crucial role in evangelizing Samaria, as well as in pointing the Ethiopian eunuch to Jesus. The Ethiopian eunuch must have played a strategic role in taking the gospel to Ethiopia. God placed him in a very influential position, and this would have made him a strategic person in the spread of the gospel in his country. God also used Simon as a “key log” or strategic person. Because he had a very large following, his decision to follow Jesus must have caused

others to listen to Philip's preaching with interest. Saul is perhaps the most strategic person of all. His conversion is the watershed of Gentile evangelism in the Book of Acts.

TEXT: Acts 9:1-19

TITLE: GOD'S SURPRISING CHOICE FOR KEY MINISTRY – THE CONVERSION AND COMMISSIONING OF THE APOSTLE PAUL

BIG IDEA:
SURPRISING (AND DRAMATIC) CONVERSION OF SAUL (CHIEF OF SINNERS) HIGHLIGHTS GOD'S SOVEREIGN GRACE IN PREPARATION FOR EMPOWERED MINISTRY IN THE FACE OF GREAT SUFFERING

INTRODUCTION:

Chapters 9 and 10 report two very remarkable and significant conversions: that of Saul and that of Cornelius. The story about Saul must be especially important to the Lord because it is repeated in the personal testimony Paul offers in Acts chapter 22 and chapter 26 as he makes his defense before various officials. This story forms the basis for the remainder of the events of the Book of Acts as we will trace the missionary journeys of the one who came on the scene as the chief persecutor of the followers of the Way.

GOD'S SURPRISING CHOICE FOR KEY MINISTRY – THE CONVERSION AND COMMISSIONING OF THE APOSTLE PAUL

Think of **God's surprising choices** down through the ages:

- Abraham – Jewish nation from a family immersed in idolatry in the land of Ur
- Jacob – a conniving deceiver who schemed to snatch the birthright away from his twin brother Esau
- Rahab – a harlot of Jericho who by faith hid the spies and ended up as the mother of Boaz being included in the genealogy of the Messiah – what privileged service
- Gideon's small band of chosen warriors – who fought the enemy with trumpets and torches – showing that God chooses to display His power through weakness
- David – the runt of the litter; the youngest of the children of Jesse – all of whom were paraded past Samuel and rejected with the statement: "The Lord has not chosen these" (1 Sam. 16:10) but David was revealed to be the sovereign choice of God for the kingship of the nation
- Each of the Apostles (fishermen, tax collector) – not the educated or the rich or the famous or the movers and shakers

SURPRISING (AND DRAMATIC) CONVERSION OF SAUL (CHIEF OF SINNERS) HIGHLIGHTS GOD'S SOVEREIGN GRACE IN PREPARATION FOR EMPOWERED MINISTRY IN THE FACE OF GREAT SUFFERING

There will be elements of the miraculous in this account where we acknowledge that God is not commonly working in this way today as He initiates the salvation of His elect. But we will also see many common elements that will teach us much about our own **conversion** and **commissioning** to serve our Lord Jesus Christ today.

I. (:1-2) NATURAL DEPRAVED VISION – SELF SUFFICIENCY AS SAUL LIVES TO ATTACK GOD'S KINGDOM PURPOSES – MISSION OF MURDER

A. Violent Opposition

"*Now Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord,*"
Ὁ δὲ Σαῦλος ἔτι ἐμπνέων ἀπειλῆς καὶ φόνου εἰς τοὺς μαθητὰς τοῦ κυρίου,

Establishing his pre-conversion state = not a seeker, but fully engaged in hateful persecution of believers
Not someone you would expect to respond to the gospel message
Certainly familiar with the message – had God's choicest servants witnessing to him as he cast them into prison and condemned them to martyrdom – not a problem of the intellect – a brilliant man trained in the best education of the times at the feet of Gamaliel

MacArthur: literally "breathing in" in the Greek. The idea is not that he's expelling air, but that he's inhaling it--he lives in an aura of threat and slaughter, breathing the very air of slaughter. He is totally encompassed--his whole life-style and life's breath is threat and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord. It is all that occupied him--he is consumed in it. The consuming passion of his very existence was to exterminate every Christian he could find.

Stott: This, then, was the man (more wild animal than human being) who in a few days' time would be a converted and baptized Christian. But he was in no mood to consider the claims of Christ. His heart was filled with hatred and his mind was poisoned by prejudice. In his own language later, a "*raging fury*" obsessed him (26:11, RSV). If we had met him as he left Jerusalem and (with the benefit of hindsight) had told him that before he reached Damascus he would have become a believer, he would have ridiculed the idea. Yet this was the case. He had left out of his calculations the sovereign grace of God.

B. Religious Collusion

"*went to the high priest, and asked for letters from him to the synagogues at Damascus,*"
προσελθὼν τῷ ἀρχιερεῖ ᾐτήσατο παρ᾽ αὐτοῦ ἐπιστολὰς εἰς Δαμασκὸν πρὸς τὰς συναγωγάς,

expanding his geographic range – Christianity spreading to city 120 miles north of Jerusalem; about a 6 day journey

gives new meaning to concept of **Pauline Epistles** (Gk word from which we get epistle)

the Jewish believers at this early juncture still had some connection to the synagogue – Saul was going to identify them and root them out and take them as prisoners

along with the high priest, he was a religious fanatic who was filled with zeal and passion to try to serve God … but was acting in spiritual ignorance; complication of political vs religious jurisdiction for these supposed offenses of blasphemy and treason

C. Lifestyle Identification

"*so that if he found any belonging to the Way, both men and women,*"
ὅπως ἐάν τινας εὕρῃ τῆς ὁδοῦ ὄντας, ἄνδρας τε καὶ γυναῖκας,

Refs to "*the Way*" – 19:9, 23; 22:4; 24:14, 22; disciples of Christ; living a transformed lifestyle; pursuing path of holiness and performing good works; pilgrim existence on earth

Our transformed lives should be evident to the world; should not be difficult to identify those who freely claim to be disciples of Jesus Christ

D. One Way Ticket to Judgment

"*he might bring them bound to Jerusalem.*"
δεδεμένους ἀγάγῃ εἰς Ἰερουσαλήμ.

Not dealing with violent criminals who are a threat – yet he slapped the cuffs on these righteous individuals; guilty until proven innocent
Think of the disruption of families; the children left behind without parents
Pre-cursor to the type of ethnic scourge conducted under the hateful leadership of Adolf Hitler

Our natural vision like Saul's is totally depraved – we cannot think God's thoughts or value what God values; we are blinded to spiritual truth; we are consumed with our own agenda; we are walking down a path that is 180 degrees opposed to God's kingdom purposes; we are on Satan's team whether we realize it or not; we imagine that we are independent and self sufficient, but God can strike us down in an instant and bring us to an end of ourselves

II. (:3-9) NO VISION – BANKRUPT AND DYING TO SELF AS THE LORD COMMANDS SUBMISSIVE OBEDIENCE – REDUCED TO HELPLESSNESS

A. (:3) Blinded by the Brilliant Light of God's Glory – Sovereign Initiation of Salvation

"*And it came about that as he journeyed, he was approaching Damascus, and suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him;*"
Ἐν δὲ τῷ πορεύεσθαι ἐγένετο αὐτὸν ἐγγίζειν τῇ Δαμασκῷ, ἐξαίφνης τε αὐτὸν περιήστραψεν φῶς ἐκ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ

God can intervene and disrupt man's agenda at any point He pleases

Kent: It is clear from other Scripture that he also saw Jesus at this time (9:17, 27; 22:14; 26:16; 1 Cor. 9:1; 15:8) . . . his question should be understood as a request for this divine personage to identify himself. When this Lord of glory identified himself as Jesus, Saul's persecuting hatred was turned to faith, for he had been confronted with the basic concepts needed for salvation.

MacArthur: Biblical evidence that Saul saw the resurrected Jesus:

(1) 1 Corinthians 15:8 -- "And last of all He was seen of me also, as of one born out of due time."

(2) 1 Corinthians 9:1 -- "Am I not an apostle? Am I not free? Have I not seen Jesus Christ, our Lord?..." Sure he saw Him. He saw Him right there on the road to Damascus.

(3) Acts 9:17 -- "And Ananias went his way, and entered into the house; and putting his hands on him said, Brother Saul, the Lord, even Jesus, that appeared unto thee in the way...." Ananias acknowledges the fact that Jesus appeared to Saul and that he saw Him.

(4) Acts 9:27 -- "But Barnabas took him, and brought him to the apostles, and declared unto them how he had seen the Lord in the way...."

(5) Acts 22:14 -- "And he said, The God of our fathers hath chosen thee, that thou shouldest know His will, and see that Just One, and shouldest hear the voice of His mouth."

Very important to understand that God takes the initiation in our salvation. We are the responders in repentance and faith.
Saul had been denying that Jesus was alive. He had been living in the realm of darkness.

B. (:4) Startled by a Divine Voice of Personal Accusation – Bringing Conviction of Sin

"*and he fell to the ground, and heard a voice saying to him, 'Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?'*"
καὶ πεσὼν ἐπὶ τὴν γῆν ἤκουσεν φωνὴν λέγουσαν αὐτῷ· Σαοὺλ Σαούλ, τί με διώκεις;

Blinding light – think of driving into the sun – windshield obscured by the grime from the snow; sun reflecting off the road and directly into your eyes; struggling to see the car ahead of you; now magnify that experience many times over; you would be fearful to take another step – you cannot see where you are going

Forced down to the position appropriate for humility and worship – lying prostrate on the ground; the high and mighty Saul no longer so full of himself and his importance

Searching words as he heard his name called out twice (think of the voice that Samuel heard as he lay in bed in the house of Eli – being called and commissioned for service)

Ask yourself this same key question of <u>motivation</u> – Why would you ever reject the God who has demonstrated such love for your?? Why would you choose to be a rebel and live outside of the blessings of God's family and kingdom – What are you thinking??

Pursue, persecute -- Concept of the Body of Christ – our solidarity with our persecuted brethren

Obviously did not understand who Jesus really was

C. (:5-6) Enlightened Regarding His Accountability to the Divine Jesus

"*And he said, 'Who art Thou, Lord?' And He said, 'I am Jesus whom you are persecuting, but rise, and enter the city, and it shall be told you what you must do.*"
εἶπεν δέ· τίς εἶ, κύριε; ὁ δέ· ἐγώ εἰμι Ἰησοῦς ὃν σὺ διώκεις· ἀλλὰ ἀνάστηθι καὶ εἴσελθε εἰς τὴν πόλιν καὶ λαληθήσεταί σοι ὅ τί σε δεῖ ποιεῖν.

"*I am Jesus*" – words that would have cut Saul to his core; nothing like finding out your life has been a complete waste – you have been investing your time and energy in things that are counter productive; you are in a position of deserved condemnation – but not a hopeless state

"*but rise*" = grace and mercy and patience of the Lord – rather than destroying Saul; if God could show such grace and mercy to Saul, how much more He can save anyone today who will respond to His call to obey the gospel

Entering the city on different terms

Toussaint: The words, "*It is hard for thee to kick against the pricks*" (KJV) are not in the better and earlier Greek manuscripts. But this statement is found in **Acts 26:14**.

There is a transfer of control of life that is taking place here – Saul was used to giving orders to others

D. (:7) Experience Verified by His Traveling Companions

"*And the men who traveled with him stood speechless, hearing the voice, but seeing no one.*"
οἱ δὲ ἄνδρες οἱ συνοδεύοντες αὐτῷ εἱστήκεισαν ἐνεοί, ἀκούοντες μὲν τῆς φωνῆς μηδένα δὲ θεωροῦντες.

Longenecker: 9:4, 7; 22:9; 26:14 while the whole group traveling to Damascus heard the sound from heaven, only Saul understood the spoken words

E. (:8) Guided Blindly Into the City of Damascus – Helpless state

"*And Saul got up from the ground, and though his eyes were open, he could see nothing; and leading him by the hand, they brought him into Damascus.*"
ἠγέρθη δὲ Σαῦλος ἀπὸ τῆς γῆς, ἀνεῳγμένων δὲ τῶν ὀφθαλμῶν αὐτοῦ οὐδὲν ἔβλεπεν· χειραγωγοῦντες δὲ αὐτὸν εἰσήγαγον εἰς Δαμασκόν.

Charles Spurgeon: I have no doubt that on the way to Damascus he rode a very high horse. But a few seconds sufficed to alter the man. How soon God brought him down!

F. (:9) Weakened by Prolonged Blindness and Fasting

"*And he was three days without sight, and neither ate nor drank.*"
καὶ ἦν ἡμέρας τρεῖς μὴ βλέπων καὶ οὐκ ἔφαγεν οὐδὲ ἔπιεν.

Focus was switching from the visible, natural realm to the invisible, spiritual realm
Remember the temptation account of Jesus in the wilderness – the lesson that "*Man shall not live by bread alone*" but the importance of obedience to the revealed Word of God

Chris Tiller: When Saul lost his sight for three days, more was going on than a physical reaction to a really bright light. The Lord was letting Saul know just how blind he had been…that his rejection of Jesus was the result of blindness…that his zealousness in persecuting the church was the result of blindness…that even his devotion to the Law was a blind devotion.

Stott: Does Luke intend us to regard Saul's conversion as typical of Christian conversion today, or as exceptional? . . . Nevertheless, it is clear from the rest of the New Testament that other features of Saul's conversion and commissioning are applicable to us today. For we too can (and must) experience a personal encounter with Jesus Christ, surrender to him in penitence and faith, and receive his summons to service. Provided that we distinguish between the historically particular and the universal, between the dramatic outward accompaniments and the essential inward experience, what happened to Saul remains an instructive case study in Christian conversion. Moreover, Christ's display of "unlimited patience" towards him was meant to be an encouraging "example" to others. . . He who had expected to enter Damascus in the fullness of his pride and prowess, as a self-confident opponent of Christ, was actually led into it, humbled and blinded, a captive of the very Christ he had opposed. There could be no misunderstanding what had happened. The risen Lord had appeared to Saul. It was not a subjective vision or

dream; it was an objective appearance of the resurrected and now-glorified Jesus Christ. The light he saw was the glory of Christ, and the voice he heard was the voice of Christ. Christ had interrupted his headlong career of persecution and had turned him round to face in the opposite direction.

Understand doctrine of Holy Spirit drawing people to Jesus Christ – working in hearts prior to the new birth – At what point was Saul born again?? We do not need to point to the specific verse – it happened during this interaction with the resurrected Jesus

III. (:10-19) NEW SPIRITUAL VISION – CONVERTED AND EMPOWERED (THROUGH THE AFFIRMATION OF ANANIAS) TO LIVE FOR THE LORD – COMMISSIONED FOR SPIRITUAL SERVICE

A. (:10) Availability of Ananias

> "*Now there was a certain disciple at Damascus, named Ananias; and the Lord said to him in a vision, 'Ananias.' And he said, 'Behold, here am I, Lord.*"
> Ἦν δέ τις μαθητὴς ἐν Δαμασκῷ ὀνόματι Ἀνανίας, καὶ εἶπεν πρὸς αὐτὸν ἐν ὁράματι ὁ κύριος· Ἀνανία. ὁ δὲ εἶπεν· ἰδοὺ ἐγώ, κύριε.

Not an apostle or even one of the seven from Acts 6; shows prominent role of every disciple; Also important because Saul was going to be an apostle directly commissioned by the Lord Jesus – not subject in any way to the Twelve

Kent: the choice of Ananias for this task made it clear that Saul of Tarsus was not dependent upon the Twelve, and also that an apostle was not required for bestowing the Spirit (as might have been concluded from the case in Samaria).

B. (:11-12) Surprising Instructions

> "*And the Lord said to him, 'Arise and go to the street called Straight, and inquire at the house of Judas for a man from Tarsus named Saul, for behold, he is praying, and he has seen in a vision a man named Ananias come in and lay his hands on him, so that he might regain his sight.*"
> ὁ δὲ κύριος πρὸς αὐτόν· ἀναστὰς πορεύθητι ἐπὶ τὴν ῥύμην τὴν καλουμένην Εὐθεῖαν καὶ ζήτησον ἐν οἰκίᾳ Ἰούδα Σαῦλον ὀνόματι Ταρσέα· ἰδοὺ γὰρ προσεύχεται καὶ εἶδεν ἄνδρα [ἐν ὁράματι] Ἀνανίαν ὀνόματι εἰσελθόντα καὶ ἐπιθέντα αὐτῷ [τὰς] χεῖρας ὅπως ἀναβλέψῃ.

Very specific directions

Significance of Saul praying – what was he praying about for 3 days? Probably confessing his sins!

C. (:13-14) Hesitancy of Ananias

> "*But Ananias answered, 'Lord, I have heard from many about this man, how much harm he did to Thy saints at Jerusalem; and here he has authority from the chief priests to bind all who call upon Thy name.*"
> ἀπεκρίθη δὲ Ἀνανίας· κύριε, ἤκουσα ἀπὸ πολλῶν περὶ τοῦ ἀνδρὸς τούτου ὅσα κακὰ τοῖς ἁγίοις σου ἐποίησεν ἐν Ἰερουσαλήμ· καὶ ὧδε ἔχει ἐξουσίαν παρὰ τῶν ἀρχιερέων δῆσαι πάντας τοὺς ἐπικαλουμένους τὸ ὄνομά σου.

Remember the hesitancy of Jonah – but by contrast, Ananias expressed his reservations but still obeyed the clear command

D. (:15-16) Assurance of Divine Commissioning

1. Based on Sovereign Election

"*But the Lord said to him, 'Go, for he is a chosen instrument of mine*"
εἶπεν δὲ πρὸς αὐτὸν ὁ κύριος· πορεύου, ὅτι σκεῦος ἐκλογῆς ἐστίν μοι οὗτος

People commonly **stumble over this concept of Sovereign election** –

- they want to use that as some type of argument against the need for aggressive evangelism – "God will save whoever He wishes so my efforts at evangelism are not really needed"

- or they use it as an excuse to dismiss their responsibility – "I can only be saved if God comes down and slays me like he did Paul on the road to Damascus … so what does it matter what I think or how I respond or don't respond to the gospel" –

Paul did not draw such faulty applications from his own experience – notice his testimony repeated in **Acts 26:12-18**

- Believed fervently in the necessity of missions and aggressive evangelism – **Rom. 10**
- Offered the gospel freely on a universal basis putting the obligation of response on the individual – don't try to pull back the curtain and look at what God is doing behind the scenes – respond to the opportunity that is before you

2. Focused on Proclaiming Jesus

"*to bear My name*"
τοῦ βαστάσαι τὸ ὄνομά μου

3. Targeted Towards All People

Gentiles and Jews
Kings and all classes
"*before the Gentiles and kings and the sons of Israel;*"
ἐνώπιον ἐθνῶν τε καὶ βασιλέων υἱῶν τε Ἰσραήλ·

4. Destined for Great Suffering

"*for I will show him how much he must suffer for My name's sake.*"
ἐγὼ γὰρ ὑποδείξω αὐτῷ ὅσα δεῖ αὐτὸν ὑπὲρ τοῦ ὀνόματός μου παθεῖν.

No gospel of health and wealth and prosperity offered to Saul (**2 Cor. 11:24-27**)

Lord wasn't kidding as we learn from the long list of hardships and persecutions that Paul later endured

E. (:17) Accepting Obedience – Risked his life in faithful obedience

"*And Ananias departed and entered the house, and after laying his hands on him said, 'Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus, who appeared to you on the road by which you were coming, has sent me so that you may regain your sight, and be filled with the Holy Spirit.*'"
Ἀπῆλθεν δὲ Ἀνανίας καὶ εἰσῆλθεν εἰς τὴν οἰκίαν καὶ ἐπιθεὶς ἐπ᾽ αὐτὸν τὰς χεῖρας εἶπεν· Σαοὺλ

ἀδελφέ, ὁ κύριος ἀπέσταλκέν με, Ἰησοῦς ὁ ὀφθείς σοι ἐν τῇ ὁδῷ ᾗ ἤρχου, ὅπως ἀναβλέψῃς καὶ πλησθῇς πνεύματος ἁγίου.

"*Brother Saul*" – what words of comfort and assurance – Saul is regarded as in the family of God; full forgiveness and acceptance; clean slate

Key focus in Acts on the **filling of the Holy Spirit**; baptism in the Holy Spirit took place here or earlier

F. (:18-19) Miraculous Deliverance

"*And immediately there fell from his eyes something like scales, and he regained his sight, and he arose and was baptized; and he took food and was strengthened.*"
καὶ εὐθέως ἀπέπεσαν αὐτοῦ ἀπὸ τῶν ὀφθαλμῶν ὡς λεπίδες, ἀνέβλεψέν τε καὶ ἀναστὰς ἐβαπτίσθη καὶ λαβὼν τροφὴν ἐνίσχυσεν.

Baptized by Ananias – no special ordination or credentials needed to baptize

CONCLUSION:

What a truly amazing conversion story! Saul moved through the stages of **Natural Depraved Vision** to come to an end of himself with **No Vision** and then be granted **New Spiritual Vision** by the Sovereign Grace of God. Centuries later another prominent servant of God would be chosen for significant ministry: John Bunyan – whose autobiography title captured the theme we have been studying this morning: *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners*. As you reflect on your experience of conversion and commissioning to privileged service in the Body of Christ, hopefully you have a deeper sense of your own unworthiness and of God's amazing grace.

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DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

1) How do you distinguish here between the pre-conversion drawing ministry of the Holy Spirit and the timing for the new birth?

2) What was Saul praying about for those 3 days?

3) Who is allowed to baptize new converts and in what type of setting?

4) What ministry has the Lord chosen you to perform with His power and blessing?

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QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Longenecker: Luke lays emphasis on Ananias's hesitancy, not just to humanize his narrative, but also to impress on his readers the magnitude of the change in Saul's life and to highlight the heaven-ordained nature of his later Christian mission:

(1) that instead of a persecutor, he is Christ's "*chosen instrument*";
(2) that instead of a concern for Israel alone, his mission is "*to carry my [Jesus'] name before the Gentiles and their kings and before the people of Israel*"; and
(3) that instead of prominence and glory, it is necessary for him "*to suffer for my [Jesus'] name*."
In highlighting these features of being a "*chosen instrument*," sent to "*the Gentiles*," and to "*suffer for my [Jesus'] name*," Luke has, in effect, given a theological précis of all he will portray historically in chapters 13-28 – a précis that also summarizes the self-consciousness of Paul himself as reflected in his own letters.

Boice: The ninth chapter of Acts contains Luke's account of the conversion of his friend Saul. But the story is told twice more, once in chapter 22 and again in chapter 26. These later accounts are not mere summaries of Saul's conversion. They are full accounts, each with its own particular emphasis. It is significant in so short a book attempting to cover the expansion of Christianity from its small beginnings in Jerusalem to a religion that filled the whole empire that the tale of one man's conversion should be so greatly emphasized.

MacArthur: It is fitting that Saul's conversion was very unique because he was such a unique person--by birth, a Jew; by citizenship, a Roman; by education, a Greek; and by grace, a Christian. He was missionary, theologian, evangelist, pastor, organizer, leader, thinker, statesman, fighter for truth, and at the same time, lover of souls. . . Along with the universities in Athens and Alexandria, the one in Tarsus ranked in the top three. . .

Some people say that salvation is a process. I say that is wrong. Salvation is an instantaneous miracle. The process of conviction only leads up to the instant miracle. If you are looking for a changed life, the only way you will ever find it is by personal faith in Jesus Christ. That is where Saul began. The positional transformation took place and he was a new man. Then there were some practical things in his life that needed to be adjusted as the transformation continued. The transformation is a process of being conformed to Jesus Christ that will finally be completed when we see Him face to face. So, the transformed life begins with faith in the Savior. . .

The Holy Spirit was bestowed upon Saul without the laying on of hands by the Apostles. On every other occasion in the book of Acts, when a new group of people received salvation, they never received the Holy Spirit until the Apostles came to lay hands on them. Whether it was the Samaritans, the Gentiles, or the disciples of John, in each case they were saved and then they received the Spirit when the Apostles laid hands on them (Ac. 8:17; 10:44-45; 19:1-6). Why? His Unique Commission: Saul was in no way under the authority of the Apostles. Why? He himself was an Apostle. So God did not subject Saul to other authority. It is true that he was not an original Apostle, but nevertheless, he was an equal. Therefore, the other Apostles weren't necessary to bring the Holy Spirit to him.

Gary Vanderet: William Barclay describes Ananias as "one of the forgotten heroes of the church." We never hear of Ananias again, but his sensitivity to God's voice allowed him to be a part of a great work of God. Both his words and actions are very moving. Imagine laying your hands on someone who was bent on arresting you! At the same time he addresses him as "Brother Saul." Those are words of forgiveness! Ananias probably knew some of the believers who had been killed by Saul. . .

Conversion comes a result of a divine initiative.
Christ is always the hunter, the initiator. He brings us to the place where we acknowledge our

need for him. Even if we are trying to get away from him he pursues us with his love. He is the hound of heaven. He chooses us. The Lord told Ananias, "This man is my chosen instrument to bear my name." And Saul would gladly proclaim Christ for the rest of his life. He would later write to the Ephesian church: "For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love he predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will" (Eph 1:4-5, NIV).

And yet we also see, as John Stott points out, that God's sovereign grace is gentle. Gradually and nonviolently, Jesus pricked Saul's mind and conscience with his goads. Then he revealed himself by the light and the voice, not to overwhelm him, but to enable him to make a free response. God's sovereign grace doesn't crush our personality. In fact, it does the opposite: it enables us to be truly human. Sin imprisons us. God's grace frees us from pride and self-centeredness and enables us to repent and believe.

Conversion involves a surrender to the Lordship of Christ.
Conversion, at its root, is not so much a decision or commitment, though certainly both are involved; it's a surrender to the lordship of Christ. Conversion is a revolutionary change of government that results in a radical change of behavior. It is a change from thinking that you can run your own life to an acceptance that God holds the plan in his hands, and he has the right to tell you what to do.

Conversion involves a personal encounter with Jesus Christ.
We all meet Jesus in different ways. None of us here has been blinded by a light and knocked to the ground. Jesus has not appeared to any one of us. None of us has heard his actual voice. But if we are converted we have met him and entered into a personal relationship with him. Jesus himself said, "This is eternal life: that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent" (John 17:3, NIV).
http://www.pbcc.org/sermons/media/1243.pdf

3 ROOKIE REQUIREMENTS FOR INITIATING EFFECTIVE MINISTRY

SAUL INITIATING MINISTRY

I. (:19-25) IN DAMASCUS **II. (:26-30) IN JERUSALEM**

(:19) **Requirement #1: Integration Into the Church** **(:26-28a)**
Accepted on the Team

1. Integration Stumbling Blocks

Ananias 2. Integration Sponsor Barnabas

3. Integration Success

(:20-22) **Requirement #2: Involvement in Key Ministry** **(28b-29a)**
Playing a Key Role on the Team

1. Boldly Proclaiming the Sovereign Deity of Jesus

2. Befuddling the Masses with a Transformed Life by the Grace of God

3. Building Maturity by Focusing on the Sufficiency of the Promised Messiah

(:23-25) **Requirement #3: Improvising Expedient Contingency Plan** **(:29b-30)**
The Team has Your Back

1. Insidious Plot

2. Intelligence Radar

3. Improvised Escape Route

TEXT: Acts 9:19-30

TITLE: INITIATING NEW MINISTRIES

BIG IDEA:
INITIATING NEW MINISTRIES INVOLVES BIG TIME CHALLENGES

INTRODUCTION:
In studying the conversion of Saul, we saw the initiation of the Sovereign God at work. Salvation is wholly a work of God by His amazing grace. He draws us to Himself and makes it possible for us to respond in repentance and faith. He removes us from bondage to Satan and makes us His own precious child. He baptizes us into the body of Jesus Christ by His Holy Spirit so that we are members one of another. Yes He does all of this somehow without compromising our personal accountability to respond to the gospel command. He does not believe for us; we must actively trust Him.

When it comes to ministry we must take some initiative. Yes God is still at work in putting us in the right situation; Yes God is the one who has gifted us. Yes we can do nothing apart from the grace of God. But we must take the initiative or nothing happens. God gives us opportunities and we must act to take advantage of them. We must step out in faith and bear testimony to our Savior. We must open our mouth and proclaim the truth.

Today we will study Saul's rookie ministry in two key cities: **Damascus** (the oldest continuously inhabited city in the world) and **Jerusalem**. I always go back to sports analogies and certainly for it being the offseason, the NFL has managed to dominate the news. First there were the activities last week at the combine where the incoming rookies got to show off their talents to try to improve their draft position. Then there is all the rhetoric and positioning about the labor situation. It is quite an adjustment for a rookie to step up to the highest level of competition and become a valued, contributing member of his new team.

Imagine a hated rival switching teams – it happens more now than it used to. There is a lot more player movement with the salary cap. Imagine the Ravens acquiring Heinz Ward or the Steelers recruiting Ray Lewis …. At least they would come to their new team with a lot of veteran respect …

But Saul entered into Christian ministry as a raw rookie – and one who formerly had a highly visible position of persecuting the church of Jesus Christ. How would he be received? How would he establish an effective ministry?

INITIATING NEW MINISTRIES INVOLVES BIG TIME CHALLENGES
- From within the church – issue of acceptance; embracing the ministry; credibility
- From outside the church – opposition and persecution

3 ROOKIE REQUIREMENTS FOR INITIATING EFFECTIVE MINISTRY

I. (:19-25) SAUL INITIATING MINISTRY IN DAMASCUS
A. (:19) Requirement #1: Integration Into the Church – Cautious Church – Acceptance Into the Church – Becoming a member of the Team

"*Now for several days he was with the disciples who were at Damascus,*"

Ἐγένετο δὲ μετὰ τῶν ἐν Δαμασκῷ μαθητῶν ἡμέρας τινὰς

1. Integration Stumbling Blocks – Skepticism and Fear

Must have been difficult for Saul to be so alone in his young faith; regarded as a traitor by the Jews who were so consumed with hatred for the Christians; isolated by the believing community until they had enough trust to accept him fully into their midst

You have to gain the confidence of people

What stumbling blocks do we put up for new believers? What cliques that make it hard for them to fit in?

2. Integration Sponsor = Ananias – reluctant at first to play this role but obedient to the insistent command of God

Wouldn't we love to have a sponsor – someone who would go around to the Christian community and testify to the validity of the biblical model that we are advocating … you hate to have people who are attacking you – maybe even hoping you fail

3. Integration Success = emphasis in this paragraph – first two steps had been addressed in previous paragraph; it must have been a joy for him to fully join in with the believing community

B. (:20-22) Requirement #2: Involvement in Key Ministry – Confident Claims -- Aggressive Evangelism – Playing a Key Role on the Team

1. (:20) Boldly Proclaiming the Sovereign Deity of Jesus

"*and immediately he began to proclaim Jesus in the synagogues, saying, 'He is the Son of God.*"

καὶ εὐθέως ἐν ταῖς συναγωγαῖς ἐκήρυσσεν τὸν Ἰησοῦν ὅτι οὗτός ἐστιν ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ θεοῦ.

Amazing that he so quickly sets the example; in his new conversion zeal he cannot be restrained from proclaiming Christ

Guzik: It is true that young Christians shouldn't hastily be put in positions of authority in the church (**1 Timothy 3:6**), but you don't need a position of authority to serve the Lord!

MacArthur: Now Saul preached immediately, and he preached that Jesus is the Son of God. The content of Saul's proclamation (Gk. kerugma) was teaching, or doctrine (Gk. didache). It didn't include his testimony...and he had a testimony that wouldn't quit. He could have told a story that would have made their hair stand on end. He could have produced a colossal testimony. He could have said, "Let me tell you what happened to me on the road to Damascus," and related all the circumstances surrounding his conversion.

There is nothing wrong with your testimony, it's just that your testimony is relatively

inconsequential in relation to the importance of the presentation of who Christ is. Your testimony as a supplement to the gospel is fine, but your testimony as the witness itself isn't enough. All good preaching and witnessing is doctrinal. Unfortunately the church has gone overboard on the testimonies of people and their experiences. I'm afraid that we have created a subjective approach to Christianity.

2. (:21) Befuddling the Masses with a Transformed Life by the Grace of God

"*And all those hearing him continued to be amazed, and were saying, 'Is this not he who in Jerusalem destroyed those who called on this name, and who had come here for the purpose of bringing them bound before the chief priests?'*"

ἐξίσταντο δὲ πάντες οἱ ἀκούοντες καὶ ἔλεγον· οὐχ οὗτός ἐστιν ὁ πορθήσας εἰς Ἰερουσαλὴμ τοὺς ἐπικαλουμένους τὸ ὄνομα τοῦτο, καὶ ὧδε εἰς τοῦτο ἐληλύθει ἵνα δεδεμένους αὐτοὺς ἀγάγῃ ἐπὶ τοὺς ἀρχιερεῖς;

3. (:22) Building Maturity by Focusing on the Sufficiency of the Promised Messiah

"*But Saul kept increasing in strength and confounding the Jews who lived at Damascus by proving that this Jesus is the Christ.*"

Σαῦλος δὲ μᾶλλον ἐνεδυναμοῦτο καὶ συνέχυννεν [τοὺς] Ἰουδαίους τοὺς κατοικοῦντας ἐν Δαμασκῷ συμβιβάζων ὅτι οὗτός ἐστιν ὁ χριστός.

* * * Constable: Perhaps Saul's sojourn in Arabia occurred between verses 21 and 22 or between verses 22 and 23.

C. (:23-25) Requirement #3: Improvising Expedient Contingency Plan – Close Call -- Assisted Escape – The Team has Your Back

1. (:23, 24b) Insidious Plot

"*And when many days had elapsed, the Jews plotted together to do away with him,*" . . .

"*And they were also watching the gates day and night so that they might put him to death;*"

Ὡς δὲ ἐπληροῦντο ἡμέραι ἱκαναί, συνεβουλεύσαντο οἱ Ἰουδαῖοι ἀνελεῖν αὐτόν· . . . παρετηροῦντο δὲ καὶ τὰς πύλας ἡμέρας τε καὶ νυκτὸς ὅπως αὐτὸν ἀνέλωσιν·

Stott: We know from **Galatians 1:17-18** that these "*many days*" actually lasted three years, and that during this period Saul was in Arabia. He need not have travelled far, because at that time the north-west tip of Arabia reached nearly to Damascus. But why did he go to Arabia? Some think he went on a preaching mission, but others suggest more cogently that he needed time to be quiet, and that Jesus now revealed to him those distinctive truths of Jewish-Gentile solidarity in the body of Christ which he would later call "*the mystery made known to me by revelation*", "*my gospel*" and "*the gospel . . . I received by revelation from Jesus Christ*". Some have even conjectured that those three years in Arabia were a deliberate compensation for the three years with Jesus which the other apostles had had but Saul had not.

2. (:24a) Intelligence Radar

"*but their plot became known to Saul.*

ἐγνώσθη δὲ τῷ Σαύλῳ ἡ ἐπιβουλὴ αὐτῶν.

We see that Paul's preaching had some converts and he made some disciples; one of them must have alerted him to the dangers

3. (:25) Improvised Escape Route

"*but his disciples took him by night, and let him down through an opening in the wall, lowering him in a large basket.*"

λαβόντες δὲ οἱ μαθηταὶ αὐτοῦ νυκτὸς διὰ τοῦ τείχους καθῆκαν αὐτὸν χαλάσαντες ἐν σπυρίδι.

Kent: "*his disciples*" – Saul's preaching had already won some adherents in Damascus

Talk about becoming a *basket case*!
Not a cowardly option, but an expedient and practical choice; don't recant in the face of persecution … but don't just naively accept it without attempting to avoid it and move on to other strategic ministry

A humbling and disgraceful experience for one used to a position of leadership and authority

Some people might argue that you should never leave a church situation – stay at all costs; God will work things out in the long run; but you have to be strategic about what you are doing as well

II. (:26-30) SAUL INITIATING MINISTRY IN JERUSALEM

A. (:26-28a) Requirement #1: Integration Into the Church – Cautious Church – Acceptance Into the Church – Becoming a member of the Team

1. (:26) Integration Stumbling Blocks – Skepticism and Fear

And when he had come to Jerusalem, he was trying to associate with the disciples; and they were all afraid of him, not believing that he was a disciple."

Παραγενόμενος δὲ εἰς Ἰερουσαλὴμ ἐπείραζεν κολλᾶσθαι τοῖς μαθηταῖς, καὶ πάντες ἐφοβοῦντο αὐτὸν μὴ πιστεύοντες ὅτι ἐστὶν μαθητής.

Suspected of now trying to infiltrate the church by the Trojan horse methodology
Imperfect – repeated attempts to connect with the church

2. (:27) Integration Sponsor = Barnabas

"*But Barnabas took hold of him and brought him to the apostles and described to them how he had seen the Lord on the road, and that He had talked to him, and how at Damascus he had spoken out boldly in the name of Jesus.*"

Βαρναβᾶς δὲ ἐπιλαβόμενος αὐτὸν ἤγαγεν πρὸς τοὺς ἀποστόλους καὶ διηγήσατο αὐτοῖς πῶς ἐν τῇ ὁδῷ εἶδεν τὸν κύριον καὶ ὅτι ἐλάλησεν αὐτῷ καὶ πῶς ἐν Δαμασκῷ ἐπαρρησιάσατο ἐν τῷ ὀνόματι τοῦ Ἰησοῦ.

"*son of encouragement*" – took the initiative to knit Paul into the body of believers

Bock: "*took hold of him*" – taking him under his wing

Required some careful vetting; a rehearsal of his genuine conversion experience and transformed life

3. (:28a) Integration Success

"*And he was with them moving about freely in Jerusalem,*"

We know he spent 2 weeks there (**Gal. 1:18**)
Who are you **with** throughout the week?

B. (:28b-29a) Requirement #2: <u>Involvement in Key Ministry</u> – Confident Claims -- Aggressive Evangelism – Playing a Key Role on the Team

"*speaking out boldly in the name of the Lord. And he was talking and arguing with the Hellenistic Jews;*"

καὶ ἦν μετ᾽ αὐτῶν εἰσπορευόμενος καὶ ἐκπορευόμενος εἰς Ἰερουσαλήμ, παρρησιαζόμενος ἐν τῷ ὀνόματι τοῦ κυρίου, ἐλάλει τε καὶ συνεζήτει πρὸς τοὺς Ἑλληνιστάς,

Kent: This was the very work in which Stephen had engaged before his death. What must have been Saul's feelings as he took up the same task which once he had helped to interrupt?

C. (:29b-30) Requirement #3: <u>Improvising Expedient Contingency Plan</u> – Close Call -- Assisted Escape – The Team has Your Back

1. (:29b) Insidious Plot

"*but they were attempting to put him to death.*"

οἱ δὲ ἐπεχείρουν ἀνελεῖν αὐτόν.

Constable: Evidently Saul continued evangelizing in Jerusalem until it became obvious to the other believers that he must leave immediately or suffer death as Stephen had. They probably envisioned a recurrence of the persecution of the disciples that followed Stephen's martyrdom.

2. (:30a) Intelligence Radar (cf. 22:17-21)

"*But when the brethren learned of it,*"

ἐπιγνόντες δὲ οἱ ἀδελφοὶ

In Damascus, we see Saul himself getting wind of the plot; here the intelligence is gathered by the believing community
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3. (:30b) Improvised Escape Route

"*they brought him down to Caesarea and sent him away to Tarsus.*"

κατήγαγον αὐτὸν εἰς Καισάρειαν καὶ ἐξαπέστειλαν αὐτὸν εἰς Ταρσόν.

Stott: his home town, where he stayed incognito for the next seven or eight years
We forget about the lonely periods of isolation and training in the life of Saul

CONCLUSION:
Having seen all of these difficulties and challenges … **why bother initiating new ministries**??
Let someone else take the risk and put up with the headaches and the frustration.
It always gets back to being a faithful servant of Jesus Christ – and being genuinely concerned to bring the gospel to the lost who so desperately need it. 2 Cor. 3-4 – the Lord knows how the construction should take place. The Apostle Paul gives us the example to follow. Let's be careful to build in the right fashion.

"*Let a man regard us in this manner as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God. In this case, moreover, it is required of stewards that one be found trustworthy*." **2 Cor. 4:1-2**

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DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

1) How can we help new believers to be knit into the local church?

2) Why doesn't Luke make a big deal out of the private time that Saul spent in Arabia?

3) How can we keep from growing bitter if we find ourselves rejected by other Christians?

4) How can we improve our skills at presenting Jesus as Son of God and Messiah?

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QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Stott: It is not only that converts must join the Christian community, but that the Christian community must welcome converts, especially those from a different religious, ethnic or social background. There is an urgent need for modern Ananiases and Barnabases who overcome their scruples and hesitations, and take the initiative to befriend newcomers. . .
Early ministry of Saul was Christ-centered, driven by the Spirit, courageous, and costly. We would note that the church's members also nurtured it, as they encouraged his calling and cared for him when persecution grew to dangerous levels.

Wiersbe: There seems to be a contradiction between Acts 9:27 and Galatians 1:18-19. How could Barnabas introduce Saul to "*the apostles*" (plural) if Peter was the only apostle Saul met? Dr. Luke is obviously using the word "apostle" in the wider sense of "spiritual leader." Even Galatians 1:19 calls James, the brother of the Lord, an apostle, and Barnabas is called an apostle in acts 14:4 and 14. In his epistles, Paul sometimes used "apostle" to designate a special

messenger of agent or the church (Rom. 16:7; 2 Cor. 8:23; Phil. 2:25, original Greek). So, there really is no contradiction; it is the leaders of the Jerusalem church that Saul met.

Steven Cole: Saul began proclaiming, "Jesus is the Son of God." This is the only time that this title appears in Acts (but see 13:33). For the Jews, it was a clear reference to Jesus' deity. John 5:18 states that they were trying to kill Jesus because He "was calling God His own Father, making Himself equal with God." Near the end of His ministry, Jesus baited the Pharisees with the question of how the Messiah could be both David's son and David's Lord, implying both His own Sonship and deity (Luke 20:41-44). Jesus stated the uniqueness of His relationship with the Father when He said, "All things have been handed over to Me by My Father, and no one knows who the Son is except the Father, and who the Father is except the Son, and anyone to whom the Son wills to reveal Him" (Luke 10:22). At Jesus' trial, the high priest asked, "Are You the Christ, the Son of the Blessed One?" Jesus replied, "I am; and you shall see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of power, and coming with the clouds of heaven" (Mark 14:61-62). People need to know that Jesus is uniquely God's Son, one with the Father (John 10:30). He cannot save sinners if He is only a great man.

Saul also confounded the Jews by proving that this Jesus is the Christ (9:22). When he went back to Jerusalem, Saul took up with the Hellenistic Jews where Stephen had left off. Scripture was the basis for his arguments. F. F. Bruce says that the word "proving" means literally "putting together," and adds, "here it implies that the prophetic Scriptures were put alongside their fulfilment, in order to prove that Jesus was the Messiah of whom they spoke" (The Book of Acts [Eerdmans], pp. 203-204, footnote 42). In this regard, Saul had a great advantage over many new believers in our culture, in that he knew the Old Testament Scriptures very well even before he was saved. But that should motivate all of us to devour God's Word, so that we can make a defense from Scripture for the hope that is within us, that Jesus is God's Anointed One, sent to this earth as the Savior of all who will trust in Him.

Constable: No one persecutes a man who is ineffective and who obviously does not matter. George Bernard Shaw once said that the biggest compliment you can pay an author is to burn his books. Someone has said, 'A wolf will never attack a painted sheep.' Counterfeit Christianity is always safe. Real Christianity is always in peril. To suffer persecution is to be paid the greatest of compliments because it is the certain proof that men think we really matter.

MacArthur: Now, what was Saul doing in Arabia? Well, God sent him there, and there are several things to consider. Arabia in that day was a little different than the Arabia we know today. It was farther north and was called Nabataen Arabia. It is very likely that at this particular time in history Nabataen Arabia actually included the city of Damascus. So, Damascus would have been on the very frontier of Arabia, which laid to the east.

Nabataen Arabia was ruled by a king by the name of Aretas (2 Cor. 11:32). Aretas had a governor in Damascus, who was in charge of the garrison that guarded the city. Now, Aretas lent his soldiers to the Jews in order to catch Saul. Why did Aretas want to lend a garrison of soldiers to stand at the gates to capture Saul? The only answer I can come up with is that Saul must have irritated Aretas. Saul irritated all kinds of unbelievers because everywhere he went, he preached Christ. That's why I can't believe he didn't preach for the three years he was in Arabia. I think he was barely through with one lesson before the Holy Spirit was saying, "Hang on, Saul. I have one more point before you leave." He was preaching Christ all over Nabataen Arabia to such an extent that Aretas was just as irritated as the Jews. So they came together to try to eliminate Saul.

Steve Shepherd: **How to Treat a New Christian**
As a new Christian, Saul had several basic needs which all new Christians have. Let's consider what we can do to meet these needs.
1- He had a need for acceptance
2- He had a need for understanding
http://www.sermoncentral.com/sermons/how-to-treat-a-new-christian-steve-shepherd-sermon-on-christian-love-47405.asp

Duane Smith: **Church Support**
four areas of support that need to be present if we are going to be a good church – we need to
a. Furnish Strengthening
b. Provide Protection
c. Offer Friendship
d. Encourage Ministry
http://www.sermoncentral.com/sermons/church-support-duane-smith-sermon-on-church-general-126227.asp

Dr. John Whitcomb: **The Scattered Subdued**
Any strength to do God's work must come from above; not conjured up by ourselves; only time in book of Acts where Jesus is called "*the Son of God*;" Jews knew what that meant; Not that someone came later (like Jehovah's Witnesses) but equal with God; John 5 and 10; has the same nature as God; 3 years went by during which time he went off to Arabia; this confirms his calling that he will suffer much; **2 Cor. 11:32** where Paul is describing his sufferings talks about this in more detail; son of Consolation – gracious, humble, loving, encouraging brother; Maybe Saul had helped beat the apostles up back in Acts 4; spent 2 weeks with Peter in Jerusalem; Casarea – where Roman governor of area lived as well as Philip; Don't hear from Saul for 10 more years;

Brent England: **The Great Escapes**
People think church is boring and dull; "No church, no problem;" George Barna puts emphasis on universal church but discounts importance of local church; local church not as important anymore; even Paul did not practice the Lone Ranger model; God uses the church to protect Paul from his enemies; Chap. 9 – **Paul is Saved, Sealed, Sent**; Matthew Henry: "When God gives great grace he often exercises it with great trials." Paul enters into persecution as a new convert just recently entered into ministry; these new enemies used to be Paul's closest friends; such disgrace and humiliation to have to flee the city in this way; "tried to join the disciples" – imperfect – repeated attempts; see church standing up for Paul to help him; he meets death sentence whether ministering to Jews or to Hellenists; the wicked resort to violence when they have nothing left to say to Paul

TEXT: Acts 9: 31

TITLE: PROGRESS REPORT OF FIRST CHRISTIAN CHURCH

BIG IDEA:
PEACE AND GROWTH = THE IDEAL CONDITIONS FOR ANY NT CHURCH

INTRODUCTION:

In any large organization it is necessary to communicate the state of the union via periodic progress reports. We do this at our company where the CEO comes around to each branch location a couple of times a year and delivers an update regarding areas where we have been successful and areas where we need to improve. We might update people regarding the competition or give new information regarding our own products and services. We take our strategic plan and measure our performance so that there is accountability. In our country, our President does this in a formal sense via the State of Union address to Congress and in more of an informal sense via press conferences and opportunities for Q&A.

The church needs to assess itself as well. How are we doing in terms of accomplishing the mission of the church? In Acts, the Holy Spirit delivers periodic snapshots describing the status and growth of the first Christian church. 9:31 is one of those progress reports – but there have already been a number of others: 2:41; 2:47; 4:4; 6:7; **9:31**; 12:24; 16:5; 19:20

Learning much about the power of the Holy Spirit as He mediates the presence of Jesus Christ who is alive and active in directing the affairs of His church.

2 main verbs in this verse – reflect dual emphasis on peace and growth

Bock: These summaries function like triumphant choral refrains in the book, as they ring out with joy over what God is doing.

PEACE AND GROWTH = THE IDEAL CONDITIONS FOR ANY NT CHURCH

I. THE EXTERNAL RELATIONAL CONDITIONS SUPPORT PEACE AND EDIFICATION

A. The Church's Solidarity Comes from Unity

"*So the church*"
Ἡ μὲν οὖν ἐκκλησία

Note the use of the singular here by Luke – NKJV wants to translate "*the churches*" plural; but in the Greek it is singular; Luke uses the singular for a reason

Speaking of the saints -- not of any building

B. The Church's Success Can be Measured Geographically

"*throughout all Judea and Galilee and Samaria*"
καθ᾽ ὅλης τῆς Ἰουδαίας καὶ Γαλιλαίας καὶ Σαμαρείας

Picture on a **map** where these three important regions are;
Remember **1:8** – we have seen the church make inroads into Samaria; but this is the first reference to the spread into Galilee

C. The Church's Status is Now Peace Rather Than Persecution

"*enjoyed peace,*"
εἶχεν εἰρήνην

No church enjoys an atmosphere of **strife** –

- Whether conflict from within
- Or persecution inflicted by the world

Jeffery Anselmi: Peace is not just the absence of war or conflict, it is instead something deeper. Peace involves the presence and positive blessings and spiritual blessings from God.

John 14:27 "*Peace I leave with you; My peace, I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Do not let your heart be troubled, nor let it be fearful*."

Let's quickly **review** some of the more volatile experiences of the early church:

- Had to choose a new apostle because of defection of one of their own
- Peter and John being arrested and threatened and warned
- Then all of the apostles were warned and beaten by religious leaders
- Consider death of Ananias and Sapphira for lying
- Consider opposition from religious leaders
- Tension because of widows being neglected
- Stephen being executed
- Christians displaced and forced to abandon property and home because of mad man on the loose hunting them down = Saul

Stacy Johnson

We have seen the church endure persecution and actually flourish under these difficult conditions. Now that the chief persecutor of the church has been converted there is some relief … but more importantly something else has changed = the political climate because the conditions are now described as peaceful. Not talking here about internal peace with God – but about the external conditions facing the church – circumstances over which they had no control.

Stacy Johnson: a change in the Roman empire – a new emperor arose; he removed Pilate as the governor of this area; also removed high priest Caiaphas; gave authority to Herod Agrippa to rule over Palestine = grandson of Herod the Great; political changes that caused the Jews to temporarily cease their persecutions; God controls human governments;

D. The Church's Stability Depends on Edification

"*being built up;*"
οἰκοδομουμένη

image of a house being built up
Ephes. 4 describes how the church works together to promote the building up of itself into maturity in Jesus Christ; strengthening

1 Cor. 12-14 emphasizes the priority of edification; importance of continuing in the apostles teaching – emphasis on the Word of God

Heb. 10:24-25 "*and let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds, not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the day drawing near*"

Barnabas = "*son of encouragement*"

Cannot effectively pursue the evangelism of the Great Commission without the building process of discipleship that is inherent in the same Great Commission

II. THE INTERNAL SPIRITUAL DYNAMICS SUPPORT CONSISTENT GROWTH

A. Two Key Internal Dynamics

1. The Fear of the Lord – Keeps You Straight -- **Accountability**

"*and, going on in the fear of the Lord*"
καὶ πορευομένη τῷ φόβῳ τοῦ κυρίου

References from Book of Proverbs regarding the fear of the Lord:
1:7 "*The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge*"
8:13 "*The fear of the Lord is to hate evil; Pride and arrogance and the evil way and the perverted mouth, I hate*."
10:27 "*The fear of the Lord prolongs life; but the years of the wicked will be shortened*."
14:2 "*He who walks in his uprightness fears the Lord, but he who is devious in his ways despises Him*."
14:26-27 "*In the fear of the Lord there is strong confidence, and his children will have refuge. The fear of the Lord is a fountain of life, that one may avoid the snares of death*."
16:6 "*and by the fear of the Lord one keeps away from evil*."
19:23 "*The fear of the Lord leads to life, so that one may sleep satisfied, untouched by evil*."
22:4 "*The reward of humility and the fear of the Lord are riches, honor and life*."

Don't be man-pleasers, driven by the fear of men

2. The Comfort of the Holy Spirit – Keeps You Strong – **Assurance -- Empowerment**

"*and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit,*"
καὶ τῇ παρακλήσει τοῦ ἁγίου πνεύματος

We have seen in Acts how important the ministry of the filling of the Holy Spirit is

Calling someone alongside to help; here the Helper is none other than the Paraclete Himself, the Holy Spirit

2 Cor. 1

Cultivate these two resources

B. One Key Measurement: Numerical Growth

"*it continued to increase.*"

ἐπληθύνετο.

Passive – "*was being multiplied*" = work of God

Don't want to focus just on numerical growth – this verse has emphasized some other very important factors and conditions; but don't want to understate the importance of numerical growth either

Fastest growing denominations in the U.S. church scene: Mormons, Jehovah's Witnesses and Seventh Day Adventists
Why isn't the truth growing as rapidly?

Next week: two examples of church growth in various cities in response to divine miracles

CONCLUSION:

What's the **Progress Report** look like for Solid Rock? We certainly have been blessed with conditions of external peace and safety – nothing restricts our privilege of openly worshiping the Lord. We have no physical persecution associated with witnessing. We are challenged by our own prosperity. But we need to move forward in dependence upon the Lord. How are we doing in terms of our internal spiritual dynamics -- walking in the fear of the Lord and leaning on the ministry of the Holy Spirit to comfort and empower us? We desire to see the Lord bless by daily adding to His church those He intends to save.

* * * * * * * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

1) How does the church tend to do in times of peace when there is prosperity vs. poverty?

2) What factors in our modern culture tend to mitigate the force of the fear of God?

3) How does the Holy Spirit help you as your Paraclete?

4) What geographic areas of today's church are seeing the most new converts?

* * * * * * * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Stacy Johnson: **The State of the Church – Progress Report**
Business Leaders must periodically share the state of the company with its shareholders or investors. The President must deliver to Congress the State of the Union address. Even the Holy Spirit from time to time will announce through His servant Luke a picture of the health and well being of the first Christian Church in the Book of Acts. Summary statement in v. 31.
Earlier summaries or progress reports: 2:41; 2:47; 4:4; 6:7; **9:31**; 12:24; 16:5; 19:20 – brief snapshots inserted throughout the narrative of the Acts of the Apostles; we get a general overview of the welfare of the church – Impressive report in 9:31 – Would be great as a report card for your children from school; Look at all the church had overcome in its first 10 years; a lot

of reasons why it should not have grown based on what it had already experienced

- Had to choose a new apostle because of defection of one of their own
- Peter and John being arrested and threatened and warned
- Then all of the apostles were warned and beaten by religious leaders
- Consider death of Ananias and Sapphira for lying
- Consider opposition from religious leaders
- Tension because of widows being neglected
- Stephen being executed
- Christians displaced and forced to abandon property and home because of mad man on the loose hunting them down = Saul
- NT not completed yet
- No mention of student ministries or Sunday Schools or youth groups or nurseries
- They had no building in which they could all gather; no bulletins; no Powerpoints
- They had no air conditioning
- Think about their music – only had the Psalms – wordy, long – not very catchy
-

Luke Identifies 5 Realities that Contributed to the Church's Health at that Time:

1. The Church enjoyed a Time of Peace

The word "church" is singular – we have one church in 3 different large locations; first time region of Galilee has been mentioned by Luke; influence has spread throughout this whole area; Why was the church enjoying peace at this moment?

a. in our context: God had taken care of the chief persecutor of the church – not by killing him but by saving him

b. outside context of the text but we see some of the results of this in book of Acts – a change in the Roman empire – a new emperor arose; he removed Pilate as the governor of this area; also removed high priest Caiaphas; gave authority to Herod Agrippa to rule over Palestine = grandson of Herod the Great; political changes that caused the Jews to temporarily cease their persecutions; God controls human governments; but not a time of Prosperity! That would be way more devastating than persecution

2. The Church was being Built Up

Not a building program with brick and mortar; transformation rather than construction; strengthened, edified; What would cause the church to be stronger? 2:42 = key ingredients; biblical instruction, worship, fellowship, evangelism, prayer; wanted young believers to feed on the pure milk of the Word; being grounded in the things of God

3. The Church was Living in the Fear of the Lord

This concept bothers a lot of people today; earthquake – is CA prepared for the big one?; Wrong question; Why give attention to the ground shaking without recognizing the power of the Holy God who causes the ground to shake?? Prov. 1 "beginning of wisdom" ; Prov 8 – will cause one to hate evil; Prov 10 will prolong life; Prov 14 provide strong confidence; Prov 16 prompts one to flee and depart from evil; Prov 19 will lead to a satisfying life; Prov 22d a way of life and a way of honor; The church dreaded to do anything that might bring displeasure to God; God cares about what I am doing; the fear of man was being suppressed = shows why they would witness so boldly

4. The Church was Receiving Comfort from the Holy Spirit (the Comforter)

Enjoying harmony, unity, singlemindedness; one purpose and goal; would increase the church's ability to cope with any circumstance; stability; this season of peace would change but

the church could then face any obstacle or opposition

5. The Church was Increasing in Number

Numerical realities are in view here; the new members class was full; because the church was not silent in its witness; because it was healthy; the former persecutor was speaking boldly about Jesus Christ to the Jews; Are you comfortable when you remain silent?
http://www.sermonaudio.com/playpopup.asp?SID=82808132411

Terry Trivette: **The Biblical Church Growth Movement**

INTRODUCTION:

- look at books in the Christian bookstore regarding church growth;

The modern church growth movement was sparked in the 1960's, when a new breed of evangelicals began to analyze and then strategize the way in which churches sought to reach new people.

I. THE PATH FOR GROWTH IS A SOVERIEGN ONE

- encountered painful challenges
- experienced many changes

II. THE PROCEDURE FOR GROWTH IS A SPIRITUAL ONE

This verse seems to suggest that when it comes to authentic church growth, the spiritual is more important than the practical. The first steps a church should take toward growth involve the lives of its members; not a list of new methods.

It is no coincidence that the word "*edified*" comes before the word "*multiplied*" in this verse. The local church has been established by Christ for the development of saints, not the drawing of spectators.

every step was measured and considered in light of the authority and rule of Jesus Christ.

III. THE POWER FOR GROWTH IS A SUPERNATURAL ONE

Zech 4:6

Ministry of exhortation and encouragement

CONCLUSION:

1. Every church should have a desire to grow. If we understand the Great Commission, and if we care about those who are dying without Christ, then we should be passionate about church growth.

2. However, our zeal for growth must not overrule our commitment to the Word of God and the Lordship of Christ. We want to grow, but not simply for the sake of having a big crowd on Sunday.

3. We want growth, and we want it to be biblical growth. We want the Lord Jesus to lead us through whatever challenges and changes are necessary to get us to the place where we can see the Spirit of God do a work that can't be explained as anything we've done.

4. We want to be multiplied, and when it happens we want to be able to say, "To God be the glory, great things He hath done."
http://standandspeak.org/index.php?page=latest-sermons

Stott: five characteristics – peace (free from external interference), strength (consolidating its position), encouragement (employing *paraklesis*, the special ministry of the Holy Spirit, the Paraclete), growth (multiplying numerically) and godliness (*living in the fear of the Lord*).

David Bayly: After this the emphasis switches; this is summary statement of the early church; a metric for assessing where we are; What does the Word of God teach about the power of the Holy Spirit? How are we doing in receiving and walking in the power of the Holy Spirit; Scripture speaks of the fruit of the H.S. and the gifts of the H.S. – important for us to know much of the power of the H.S.; early church operating in the full power of the H.S. – all 8 cylinders operating effectively; we fall far short of the description here; Galilee under a different tetrarch than Judea; church being built up like a house being raised up on its foundation; good things happening everywhere you look; the fruit of God's presence is felt; connection between power of the Holy Spirit being poured out and many people coming to a knowledge of the Lord; cf. Protestant Reformation; beginning of missionary movement; influx of gospel in Korea; in early days of America; days of George Whitfield (Great Awakening) and Jonathan Edwards; we are living in an era where there are pockets of the lamp glowing and other places where the light is flickering; Are we seeing the world transformed? Recipe for Renewal in this passage – two works of the Holy Spirit that are spoken of here

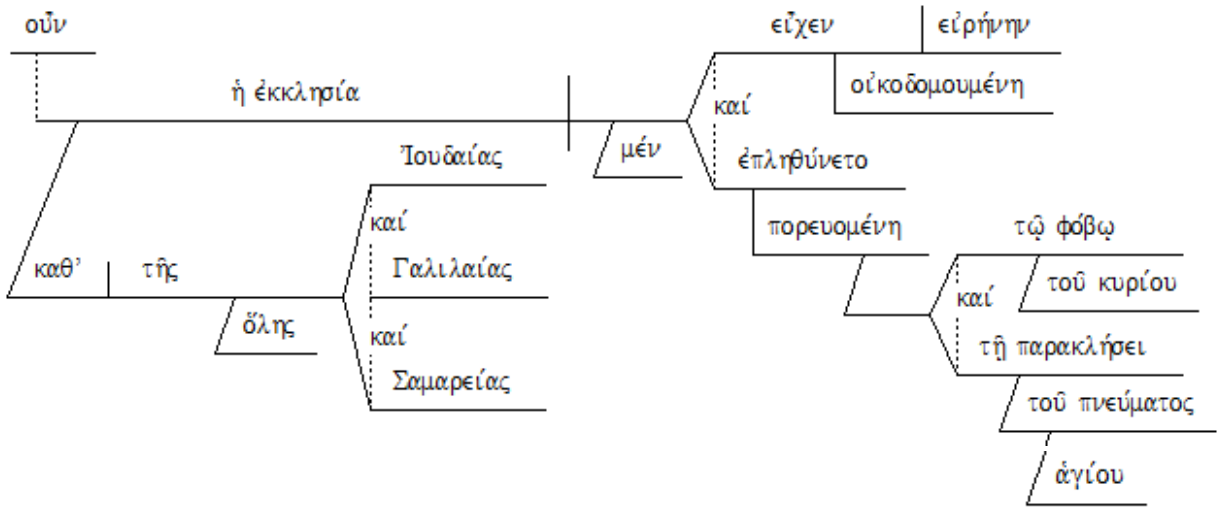
I. Walking in the Fear of the Lord – when the Holy Spirit comes He will make us aware of our sin and His righteousness and of judgment; there is a dangerous future ahead; where does that fear come from?

- The miracles that are taking place through the work of the apostles – but these did not cause the result of the fear of the Lord .. people can continue on unchanged;
- the judgment of God reflected in incident of Ananias and Sapphira; great fear fell on the church – but this was not the same fear experienced in 9:31 – we could be a decade beyond that incident; seems almost like a different era;
- The source of an abiding fear of God is the preaching of the gospel – very simple outline and focus – giving of Law under Moses; prophecies of the coming Savior appointed by God; speak of Christ; we saw Him and know Him = basis of apostolic claim; you put Him to death – He died for you; and God raised Him from the dead; He's coming back again; That story drives people to their knees in fear; Jesus died to save you from your sins implies the wrath of God -- "I fought the law and the law won!" –

II. Walking in the Comfort of the Holy Spirit – How does He comfort them? Great pouring out of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost; gives us Hope; crying "*Abba, Father*" – Gal. 4; gives us victory over sin; enables our prayers; intercedes for us; this God who will cast men into hell because of their sins has made you His beloved children; privilege beyond he mind to comprehend

http://my.ekklesia360.com/Clients/sermonaudioplayer.php?CMSCODE=EKK&siteid=996&sermonid=221671&useSkin=skin_plain.xml&CMS_LINK=http://my.ekklesia360.com&width=350&height=140

ACTS 9:31



So [connective]

POINT I

1C
Enjoyed — Peace
Being built up 1D

1A
Church — and
the

Continued to increase 2B POINT II

Going on
In the fear of the Lord
2A and
In the comfort of the H.S.

1B
Throughout all
Judea
and
Galilee
and
Samaria

TEXT: Acts 9: 32-43

TITLE: HEALING LEADS TO GOSPEL PENETRATION

BIG IDEA:
THE MIRACULOUS HEALING MINISTRY OF JESUS CHRIST OPENS THE DOOR FOR GOSPEL PENETRATION

TWO EXAMPLES OF CHURCH GROWTH AS THE GOSPEL CONTINUED TO IMPACT THE REMOTE CITIES OF JUDEA

INTRODUCTION:

In the case of the early church we are going to see the **effects of the miraculous healing ministry of Jesus Christ** in terms of physical healings. In our times we want to think of the same effects that the healing ministry of Jesus Christ can have in a spiritual sense. As Jesus transforms lives, there should be corresponding opportunities for gospel penetration into new hearts. Jesus is alive today and impacting the lives of people – radically transforming them just as he did physically in using Peter in these two different cities. Change is possible – Don't give up and think that things have to remain the way they are today in your life ….

We are going to see in this passage how Peter **imitates the ministry of his Master** – being used to perform 2 dramatic miracles that remind us of the miracles of Christ; remember these Acts of the Apostles are still Acts performed by the resurrected Jesus Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit

Stott: shows parallel between these 2 miracles and those performed by Jesus (following in prophetic tradition of Elijah and Elisha – 1 Kings 17) – Aeneas is reminiscent of that other paralytic, who lived in Capernaum. As Jesus had said to him, "*Get up, take your mat and go home*," so Peter said to Aeneas, "*Get up and tidy up your mat*" (34). And the raising of Tabitha recalls the raising of Jairus' daughter. Because the people were weeping noisily, Peter "*sent them all out of the room*", just as Jesus had done. Further, the words spoken to the dead person were almost identical. Indeed . . . if Peter spoke Aramaic on this occasion, only a single letter would have been different, for Jesus had said *Talitha koum*!, whereas Peter would have said *Tabitha koum*!.

Switch in focus – putting Paul aside for a few chapters to concentrate on **Peter's ministry**; you have the conversion of the Apostle to the Gentiles and then the conversion of the first Gentile; the ministry of Peter in the maritime plain of Palestine – why this focus geographically here?

- Concluding ministry to the Jews in the region around Jerusalem and Palestine?
- Setting the stage for the conversion of Cornelius and taking the gospel to the Gentiles?

Some type of transition is in view here – Remember Peter was given the **keys of the kingdom** – opening new people groups up to the privilege and reality of entrance into the kingdom in this new dispensation – where entrance into the kingdom involves being baptized by the Holy Spirit into the body of Christ – the church – Day of Pentecost; Acts 8 – Philip's preaching in Samaria – but Peter called to come pray for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit
Remember overall theme of Acts which is to document the spread of the gospel and the growth of the early NT church

THE MIRACULOUS HEALING MINISTRY OF JESUS CHRIST OPENS THE DOOR FOR GOSPEL PENETRATION

TWO EXAMPLES OF CHURCH GROWTH AS THE GOSPEL CONTINUED TO IMPACT THE CITIES OF JUDEA

I. (:32-35) CHURCH GROWTH IN LYDDA AND SHARON -- AENEAS HEALED (Compare Mark 2:1-12; Luke 5:17-26 – Healing of the Paralytic)

A. Sovereign Appointment – Occasion for the Healing

> "*Now as Peter was traveling through all those regions, he came down also to the saints who lived at Lydda. There he found a man named Aeneas*"
>
> Ἐγένετο δὲ Πέτρον διερχόμενον διὰ πάντων κατελθεῖν καὶ πρὸς τοὺς ἁγίους τοὺς κατοικοῦντας Λύδδα. εὗρεν δὲ ἐκεῖ ἄνθρωπόν τινα ὀνόματι Αἰνέαν

Stott: Peter is introduced as engaged in an **itinerant** ministry . . . Previously, when persecution had broken out, the apostles had deemed it prudent to remain in Jerusalem (8:1b). Now that the church was enjoying a time of peace (31), however, they felt free to leave the city. Peter's purpose was not only to preach the gospel, but also to *visit the saints* (32b), in order to teach and encourage them.

Think of the **sacrifice** involved in an itinerant ministry – one that was modeled after the life of Christ who said that even foxes had their own den to go back to in the evenings, but the Son of Man owned no home for comfort and security – no place to lay his head other than what the Father providentially provided each night

Church planted by gospel witness from those who had been at Jerusalem for Pentecost as well as those who had fled because of persecution; some contact from Philip the evangelist as well

Guzik: Acts 9:32 and 41 mention the *saints* in Lydda and Joppa; this is the first time Christians are called *saints* in Acts. When the Bible calls Christians *saints*, the idea isn't of a super-perfect people; the idea is of a people who are **different**. Saints are set apart from the world at large; they are distinctive.

How did we live this past week in a way that was different?? How did we demonstrate that we are saints??

Lydda: Largely a Gentile city about 25 miles NW from Jerusalem; day's journey by foot from Joppa; Intersection of highways from Egypt to Syria and from Jerusalem to the coast

Aeneas was probably a Hellenistic Jew (since big deal is made about Cornelius in terms of bringing the gospel to the Gentiles) and possibly saved (since Peter is visiting the saints specifically – not just the city as a whole) or more probably not saved (since he is called merely a certain *man* rather than a *disciple* and the parallel miracle of Christ related to saving a man from his sins)

Application: Peter was **available** for whatever sovereign appointments the Master might have for the purpose of ministry

Are you available for sovereign ministry appointments?

B. Severe Affliction – Obstacles to the Healing

"*who had been bedridden eight years, for he was paralyzed*."

ἐξ ἐτῶν ὀκτὼ κατακείμενον ἐπὶ κραβάττου, ὃς ἦν παραλελυμένος.

What a **pitiful existence** – no modern medical aids like wheelchairs to help him get around; no entertainment diversions to help him pass the monotonous time – like TV and movies on DVR; just day after day living without hope of any change; should stir compassion in our hearts – but usually leads to avoidance – let's not think about people in this type of sorry state

Yet remember the compassion and tender mercy of the Great Physician; the Good Shepherd who would stop to minister to such ones; not viewing them as an inconvenient interruption to his more important ministries

Wiersbe: burden to himself and others with no prospects of being healed

Stedman: Here we have a paralysis of the body. For eight years it held this man impotent, unable to fulfill life as God intended human life to be lived. He was paralyzed; he could not move. That can happen to the spirit as well. In fact it does happen to many. It very likely has happened to some of you here this morning. Some of you are suffering from **paralysis of the will**, from paralysis of the spirit. There are things you have been wanting to do, knowing that you ought to do them. For years you have been saying, "Oh, I wish I could do that. I'd like to. Someday I want to do it." But you never have. You are suffering from paralysis of the will because you are looking to your own resources. You are expecting that somehow you will get some new sensation or feeling and when you feel motivated then you will do it.

Do you understand the reality of Total Depravity?

C. Supernatural Authority – Ordering of the Healing – Healing of the Body

"*Peter said to him, 'Aeneas, Jesus Christ heals you; get up and make your bed.' Immediately he got up*."

καὶ εἶπεν αὐτῷ ὁ Πέτρος· Αἰνέα, ἰᾶταί σε Ἰησοῦς Χριστός· ἀνάστηθι καὶ στρῶσον σεαυτῷ. καὶ εὐθέως ἀνέστη.

Luke 5:17-26

Peter not a faith healer after the order of charlatans of the modern day – ministry conducted in submission to the power of Jesus Christ and His sovereign disposition

Illustration: Faith-healer A. A. Allen came through West Virginia with his traveling show, which included jars containing bodies that Allen said were demons he had exorcised from sick people. (Skeptics said they were frogs.) At Wheeling, Allen vanished—and later was found dead of alcoholism in a San Francisco hotel room, his pockets crammed with cash. Marjoe Gortner, the sometime boy evangelist, wrote that Allen advised him how to tell when a revival was over: "When you can turn people on their head and shake them and no money falls out, then you know God's saying, 'Move on, son.'"
http://www.trincoll.edu/depts/csrpl/RINVol2No1/Freethinker.htm

Key point: healings were not in response to the faith of the individuals involved

Chan Wei Guan: All the biblical evidence points to the fact that God's healing is not dependent upon the faith of those who were healed. By this, I do not mean that none of these people exercised faith in trusting Jesus' ability to heal. On the contrary, many in fact did believe that Jesus could heal and the successful healing by Christ eventually led them to believe that Jesus is the Christ – He is God. However, the Bible did not make it a requirement that God must heal when the sick exercised faith by trusting Him.
Purposes of divine healing:

a) God heals that He may be glorified.
b) God heals that His messengers and messages may be authenticated.
c) God heals that He may convict men of their sinfulness.

http://shaddai-baptist.com/Acts_files/Acts18.pdf

Peter directed all of the focus to the person of Jesus Christ – not to himself
Once again the healing was instantaneous and complete and sustained
The healing led to the activity of assuming one's personal responsibilities

Do you believe in the power of Jesus Christ to save and change lives?

D. Salvation Acceptance – Objective of the Healing

"*And all who lived at Lydda and Sharon saw him, and they turned to the Lord*."

καὶ εἶδαν αὐτὸν πάντες οἱ κατοικοῦντες Λύδδα καὶ τὸν Σαρῶνα, οἵτινες ἐπέστρεψαν ἐπὶ τὸν κύριον.

Man was not healed just so he could enjoy a new and healthy life; his healing was designed to impact a wide range of people for the glory of God; creating a **people movement** of new allegiance to the Lord Jesus Christ

Stott: referencing Calvin – when Scripture mentions *all*, it is not embracing, to a man, the whole of whatever it is describing, but uses "*all*" for many, for the majority, or for a crowd of people.

Toussaint: Three times in Acts, Luke used the words *turned to the Lord* to refer to salvation (9:35; 11:21; 15:19)
You cannot genuinely believe without turning from sin in repentance to live a life of faith in the Lord Jesus; you become a follower, a disciple
Don't tell me you want to become a Christian but you do not want to turn away from your sin

The harvest is ripe with people who are ready to turn to the Lord – we need to reach them with the gospel message that has the power to radically transform their lives just as the Lord was able to physically heal this paralytic – turned him into a walking, running, hopping up and down enthusiastic witness to the living reality of the power of Jesus Christ

II. (:36-43) CHURCH GROWTH IN JOPPA -- DORCAS RESTORED TO LIFE (Compare Mark 5:34-43; Luke 8:54-55)

A. (:36, 38-39a) Sovereign Appointment – Occasion for the Healing

"*Now in Joppa there was a disciple named Tabitha (which translated in Greek is called Dorcas); this woman was abounding with deeds of kindness and charity which she continually did*."

Ἐν Ἰόππῃ δέ τις ἦν μαθήτρια ὀνόματι Ταβιθά, ἣ διερμηνευομένη λέγεται Δορκάς· αὕτη ἦν πλήρης ἔργων ἀγαθῶν καὶ ἐλεημοσυνῶν ὧν ἐποίει.

"*Since Lydda was near Joppa, the disciples, having heard that Peter was there, sent two men to him, imploring him, 'Do not delay in coming to us.' So Peter arose and went with them*."

ἐγγὺς δὲ οὔσης Λύδδας τῇ Ἰόππῃ οἱ μαθηταὶ ἀκούσαντες ὅτι Πέτρος ἐστὶν ἐν αὐτῇ ἀπέστειλαν δύο ἄνδρας πρὸς αὐτὸν παρακαλοῦντες· μὴ ὀκνήσῃς διελθεῖν ἕως ἡμῶν. ἀναστὰς δὲ Πέτρος συνῆλθεν αὐτοῖς·

Wiersbe: Joppa located on the seacoast about 10 miles from Lydda; it is the place from which the prophet Jonah embarked when he tried to flee from God (Jonah 1:1-3). Jonah went to Joppa to avoid going to the Gentiles, but Peter in Joppa received his call to go to the Gentiles!

Longenecker: the only natural harbor on the Mediterranean between Egypt and Ptolemais… Its rival in NT times was Caesarea, thirty miles to the north, which Herod the Great, because the people of Joppa hated him, built into a magnificent new port city and provincial capital

Only NT usage of feminine form of word for *disciple*

Dorcas, gazelle = symbolizing grace and beauty

Lenski: Luke emphasizes the abundance: "*full*" of good works and alms deeds "*which she kept doing*" (durative imperfect). She reaped a rich harvest. She did not tire, discouragements were overcome, she continued faithful in her service to the end.

Practical gift of sewing!

B. (:37, 39b) Severe Affliction – Obstacles to the Healing

"*And it happened at that time that she fell sick and died; and when they had washed her body, they laid it in an upper room.*"

ἐγένετο δὲ ἐν ταῖς ἡμέραις ἐκείναις ἀσθενήσασαν αὐτὴν ἀποθανεῖν· λούσαντες δὲ ἔθηκαν [αὐτὴν] ἐν ὑπερῴῳ.

"*When he arrived, they brought him into the upper room; and all the widows stood beside him, weeping and showing all the tunics and garments that Dorcas used to make while she was with them*."

ὃν παραγενόμενον ἀνήγαγον εἰς τὸ ὑπερῷον καὶ παρέστησαν αὐτῷ πᾶσαι αἱ χῆραι κλαίουσαι καὶ ἐπιδεικνύμεναι χιτῶνας καὶ ἱμάτια ὅσα ἐποίει μετ᾽ αὐτῶν οὖσα ἡ Δορκάς

Totally **unable to help herself** – she is dead; no efforts at self improvement; requires the sovereign power of God at work

Constable: When she died, the believers sent to Peter asking him to come. Apparently they expected him to raise her back to life as Jesus had done since they did not bury her but washed and laid her body in an upper room.

C. (:40-41) Supernatural Authority – Ordering of the Healing – Raising of the Dead

"*But Peter sent them all out and knelt down and prayed, and turning to the body, he said, 'Tabitha, arise.' And she opened her eyes, and when she saw Peter, she sat up. And he gave her his hand and raised her up; and calling the saints and widows, he presented her alive.*"

ἐκβαλὼν δὲ ἔξω πάντας ὁ Πέτρος καὶ θεὶς τὰ γόνατα προσηύξατο καὶ ἐπιστρέψας πρὸς τὸ σῶμα εἶπεν· Ταβιθά, ἀνάστηθι. ἡ δὲ ἤνοιξεν τοὺς ὀφθαλμοὺς αὐτῆς, καὶ ἰδοῦσα τὸν Πέτρον ἀνεκάθισεν. δοὺς δὲ αὐτῇ χεῖρα ἀνέστησεν αὐτήν· φωνήσας δὲ τοὺς ἁγίους καὶ τὰς χήρας παρέστησεν αὐτὴν ζῶσαν.

Kent: He may not have known God's will in the matter at first, so he prayed, and we must conclude that the subsequent raising was an answer to prayer.

Same word used in the raising up by God of Jesus in the resurrection

Shows that the source of Peter's healing power was from the Lord

D. (:42-43) Salvation Acceptance – Objective of the Healing

"*It became known all over Joppa, and many believed in the Lord. And Peter stayed many days in Joppa with a tanner named Simon.*"

γνωστὸν δὲ ἐγένετο καθ' ὅλης τῆς Ἰόππης καὶ ἐπίστευσαν πολλοὶ ἐπὶ τὸν κύριον. Ἐγένετο δὲ ἡμέρας ἱκανὰς μεῖναι ἐν Ἰόππῃ παρά τινι Σίμωνι βυρσεῖ.

Kent: Jews felt an abhorrence for members of the tanning trades. Such workmen handled skins from ceremonially unclean animals, and were thus regarded as Levitically impure. Tanners usually resided outside of town to be near sufficient water and also because their operations were so malodorous. Peter's disregard of Jewish scruples in this instance may indicate his broadening outlook, and is an interesting preface to the events of Acts 10.

CONCLUSION:

Ron Rasmussen: Messengers carried the message, but the main focus was not the messengers. Miracles confirmed the message, but the main focus was not the miracles. Ministry conveyed the message, but it was not primarily about the ministry. It's all about **the message**!

http://preacherstudy.com/members/onetrack.html

- Are you available for sovereign ministry appointments?

- Do you understand the reality of Total Depravity?

- Do you believe in the power of Jesus Christ to save and change lives?

* * * * * * * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

1) How is your life as a saint different and distinctive from the unbelievers in the world around you?

2) What did you turn away from when you turned to the Lord in salvation?

3) What examples do you see around you of believers that have dedicated themselves to good works of kindness and charity to those in need?

4) How has the power of the gospel impacted the lives of those unsaved who live in your social contexts?

* * * * * * * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Lenski: The idea is not that miracles as such work faith, but miracles are seals of the Word and attestations of its power and thus aid in producing faith. They are such seals to this day, for, once affixed to the Word, they remain there and need no repetition, and there is no need of new seals as though those affixed by the Lord had lost their validity.

Boice: Christianity calls people to turn from sin and respond to Jesus Christ is saving faith. But if they have done that, it then calls them to serve others also. Before the coming of Jesus Christ there were no hospitals it the world . . . Before the coming of Jesus Christ there were no orphanages in the world . . . There were no disaster relief organizations in the world before the coming of Jesus Christ . . . There were not even any great schools in the ancient world. There was education, of course … but there was nothing like common education. There was no concern for those who did not have means or were not from wealthy families . . . It is Christians who have gone into the cities of the world and have hunted out the poor, the young, the sick, the uneducated, and have brought them into schools to train them and give them skills that enabled them to be something other than destiny would seem to have chosen for them.

Constable: **THE EXTENSION OF THE CHURCH TO SYRIAN ANTIOCH 9:32—12:24**
As Jerusalem had been the Palestinian center for the evangelization of Jews, Antioch of Syria became the Hellenistic center for Gentile evangelization in Asia Minor and Europe. The gospel spread increasingly to Gentiles, which Luke emphasized in this section of Acts. He recorded three episodes: Peter's ministry in the maritime plain of Palestine (9:32-43), the conversion of Cornelius and his friends in Caesarea (10:1—11:18), and the

founding of the Antioch church (11:19-30). Luke then looked back to Jerusalem again to update us on what was happening there (12:1-23). He concluded this section with another summary statement of the church's growth (12:24).

The Master's Bible Church (Sedona, AZ): **Imitator of Christ** – in a variety of ways
Peter ("*you*" singular) had been given the **keys of the kingdom** by Christ; unique role; unlocked the church in a sense; on day of Pentecost; in Acts 8 he visited the Samaritans; in Acts 10 Peter unlocked the gates of the kingdom to the Gentiles; does this by imitating the example that Jesus had set for him; learning from his master; heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse the lepers . . .
1) be holy like Christ -- *like the holy one who called you be holy in all your behavior*;
2) radiate the goodness of the kingdom -- John 8:12; Matt. 5:14 be the *light of the world*; people see in us what the kingdom of God is like
3) make ourselves available to help and minister to those in need

In Imitating Christ as Peter did, we must **become available to others** just as Peter was:
I. Available to a Sinner – 9:32-35 Aeneas
Peter has become an itinerant minister; it was not just about the destination, but the journey; looking for opportunities to minister; where are the saints? Took faith and patience on Peter's part to go where the Lord wanted him to go; 1 Cor. 9:5 – took his wife along on this ministry; Lord, where and to whom would you have me minister today? Son of man did not own a place of His own; giving up the comfort of our home is quite a sacrifice; trusting the Lord to open up a home for me each night; most missionaries are children of other missionaries; Peter understood the magnitude of that type of sacrifice; Matt. 19:27 – there better be something in it for us and it had better be pretty good; Peter found this man = happened upon this man by apparent accident but by providential design; this man was an unbeliever; 10 times in Acts – refers to an unbeliever – "*a certain man*" – ended up ministering to this non-Christian; Peter seeing if there was anything he could do to help; either a Greek pagan or a Hellenistic Jew; Peter healed him as a sign of spiritual healing – you never really see a believer getting healed by Jesus or one of the apostles – 3 exceptions – people who are raised from the dead – Lazarus, Tabitha and Eutychus; Luke 8 – enabled them to experience the wonders of the kingdom of God; giving them a little taste of that; Luke 10:8; not for improving the quality of life of those in the church; Peter is imitating his master; Luke makes verbal connections; similarity is more than coincidental; Peter is carrying on ministry of Christ; you have a man whose sins have not yet been forgiven;
Sharon is a beautiful coastal plain; area where Philistines used to be; very fertile place; a barometer or gauge of God's blessing on Israel; flourished when Israel was faithful to the Lord; Is. 33:9 – Israel's enemies have ravished Sharon for her idolatry; Is. 65:10 will flourish in the kingdom; Is. 35:6 "*the lame will leap like a deer*" = sign of the coming of the kingdom and the king;

II. Available to a Saint – Dorcas – 9:36-42
Intl Airport is in Joppa so you fly into there today; common to name little girls after a delicate animal; antelope, doe; Eph. 2:10; Col. 1:10 – saved to perform good works; Prov. 31:20; reached out extending her hands to the poor; probably never preached a sermon in her life or led anything; wash a body in preparation for burial; but usually Jews buried people same day they died; in this case that did not happen; stored it in upper room – like room used for Last Supper; holding out same faint hope that Peter might come and raise her back to life; Jesus had raised Lazarus and then Jairus; John 14:12 – *greater works than these shall he do*; no guarantee – Peter had not brought Stephen back to life; what have we got to lose – worth a shot; Hurry up! We see the availability of Peter; Jewish mourners are loud – depth of grief over loss of dear sister in

Christ; these were not hired mourners; widows lived on edge of poverty and destitution; Peter just try to do something; see what the Lord will allow you to do; put the women out; wanted time to pray and sense will of God; dependent on the Lord; Peter had seen Christ spend whole nights in prayer; Luke 8:51; Peter had seen the pattern of his master; under any other circumstances would have been ridiculous to talk to a corpse; joyous reunion; people glorifying God by believing in His Son Jesus Christ; Tabitha must have become a real celebrity; not merely an act of benevolence but an extending of the kingdom of God; further authenticating God's messengers and the message of the gospel

III. Available to an Outcast – 9:43 Simon the Tanner –
Jews viewed tanners as unclean people; always touched dead bodies of animals to strip hides off and turn it into leather; in chap. 10 Peter will be commanded to kill and eat unclean animals; this will be enormous struggle for him; we are in a new dispensation now; stop thinking of yourself as an OT Jew but now as a NT Christian; just the beginning of that transition; will be accepting unclean Gentiles into the church on equal footing with Jews; exercise in overcoming lifelong prejudice; 1 Cor. 9:20-22; issue is trying to save some; don't let prejudice get in the way; Luke 19:5 – story of Zaccheus – Jesus staying in house of unclean man; To whom am I available for the purpose of ministry?
http://www.mastersbible.com/Sermons.htm

Brian Janssen (First Presbyterian Church of Hospers – PCA): **Saved for Goodness Sake**
Peter was simply imitating the goodness of the Lord as he had seen this same kindness performed by Jesus on many occasions. Gal. 6:9-10; 1 Pet. 2:12

Chris Vogel (Cornerstone Presbyterian Church): **Changed by God's Grace**
These two brief accounts of healings illustrate the radical transforming power of the gospel . . . As the initial wave of persecution has died down, the Apostle Peter moves beyond the borders of Judea into the outlying countryside of Palestine. As an itinerant minister, Peter confronts: disease and death, Gentile alienation and inclusion, political tyranny. But what happens when Peter confronts disease and death powerfully illustrates for us today how the gospel will transform and will change us. . .

While paralysis today would be a deplorable condition, God graciously has guided our culture to provide for such people. But in that day, without ADA, motorized wheel chairs, physical therapists and good medical care, he would be confined to bed in home until the day he died. . .

Many of us have been saying "Arise and make your bed," to our teenagers with little result, so we know that was indeed a great miracle. This simple act shows his recovery is complete, he is cured. The change affects not only Aeneas, but the entire region as well as they turn to the Lord.
Applications:
- We are unable to change
- God takes pleasure to change us
- God's change results in action

John Piper: **Jesus Still Turns Things Around**
One of the most devastating feelings in the Christian life is fatalism—the feeling that this is the way it is going to be forever and nothing is going to change it and that's that. This is the way I am; this is the way my spouse is; this is the way my kids are; this is the way work is (or no work); this is the way our small group is; this is the way society is—and that's that. It's been this

way for so long; it's just not going to change. It will go on this way forever and probably get worse and that's that.

But one of the messages of the book of Acts is that this is emphatically not true. Jesus Christ is not dead and he is not distant and he is not silent and he is not weak and he is not uninterested in the world and the progress of his mission and in your life. He is alive and what he began to do in his earthly life he is continuing to do. He is full of surprises for churches and for nations and for families, and for individual people.

TEXT: Acts 10:1-35

TITLE: AVOID SPIRITUAL PROFILING

BIG IDEA:
JESUS CHRIST OPENS THE DOOR OF GOD'S GRACE TO ALL MEN ON AN EQUAL FOOTING WITHOUT RESTRICTION

INTRODUCTION:
Whether we realize it or not, we are all guilty from time to time of spiritual profiling. By spiritual profiling I mean determining based on our own prejudices who seems to be a better prospect for the gospel message. We tend to gear our ministry outreach to those who are most like us. That is why missionary outreach to people of other cultures is such a special challenge.

Last week I was at a business dinner at the Inner Harbor at the Rusty Scupper (my favorite spot when work is picking up the tab because of the beautiful view). The topic of the MD legislature voting on same sex marriage came up and one of my dinner partners shot me a quick question out of the blue: "What does the Bible say about such people?" (meaning homosexuals) I replied that God clearly stated that He created man and woman and intends for them to function in those clearly defined but separate roles. I could see that this answer pleased him – from a profiling standpoint he viewed himself as morally and spiritually differentiated from this segment of society. But I went on to state briefly that we all have the same sin problem – just different manifestations -- and the same need for the Savior because the ground is level at the foot of the cross. I think that extra insight surprised and unsettled him.

[Note the connection between Pride and Prejudice in the classic novel by Jane Austen.]

Probably no greater gulf has existed between two groups of people than how the Jews of the first century viewed the uncircumcised Gentiles. This distinction was not based just on human prejudice. God had clearly chosen the Jewish nation descended from Abraham and Isaac and Jacob to be His beloved people. Gentiles were not excluded from the kingdom but their access was restricted to coming to God by way of becoming Jewish proselytes. **Ephes. 2:11-13**

Stott: It is difficult for us to grasp the impassable gulf which yawned in those days between the Jews on the one hand and the Gentiles (including even the "god-fearers") on the other. Not that the Old Testament itself countenanced such a divide. On the contrary, alongside its oracles against the hostile nations, it affirmed that God had a purpose for them. By choosing and blessing one family, he intended to bless all the families of the earth. . . The tragedy was that Israel twisted the doctrine of election into one of favoritism, became filled with racial pride and hatred, despised Gentiles as "dogs", and developed traditions which kept them apart. No orthodox Jew would never enter the home of a Gentile, even a God-fearer, or invite such into his home.

The event of the cross and the rending of the veil from top to bottom opened up access to God on an equal footing – something difficult for those steeped in Jewish nationalistic pride to understand or accept. Much of the NT deals with this merging of both Jew and Gentile into one body without distinction. Important subject – takes up a lot of space in Acts 10-11

JESUS CHRIST OPENS THE DOOR OF GOD'S GRACE TO ALL MEN ON AN EQUAL FOOTING WITHOUT RESTRICTION

4 ACTS IN THIS DRAMA OF PROCESSING THE VISION OF GOD'S UNRESTRICTED GRACE – FOLLOWED BY THE PUNCHLINE

I. (:1-8) VISION OF ACCEPTANCE – DIRECTED TO THE OUTSIDER – PREPARATION OF CORNELIUS --
ANYONE WHO SEEKS GOD CAN BE GRANTED ACCESS TO GOD – BUT ONLY THROUGH JESUS CHRIST

A. (:1-2) Introduction to Cornelius – God's Choice for this critical Jew-Gentile Union

1. His Home in Caesarea

"*Now there was a certain man at Caesarea named Cornelius,*"

Kent: Caesarea was the residence of the Roman procurator of Judea and was the capital of the province.

Stott: garrison city named after Augustus Caesar … boasting a splendid harbor built by Herod the Great.

2. His Occupation

"*a centurion of what was called the Italian cohort,*"

Matt. 8:5-13 – interaction of Jesus with another centurion who was a man of faith
(**Luke 7:1-10)**

Constable: Every reference to centurions in the New Testament is positive (Matt. 8:5-10; 27:54; Mark 15:44-45; Acts 22:25-26; 23:17-18; 27:6, 43).

Courage and loyalty were definitely two of his traits; understanding of authority

3. His Religious Reputation

None of these characteristics are sufficient for salvation or in any way earn salvation; but in the case of Cornelius they are presented as positive and preparatory for receiving additional light. The Holy Spirit has been working in his heart to draw him to the Savior.

a. Man of Piety – "*a devout man*"

relationship with God was important to him – but not saved **11:14**

"*a certain man*" -- not a *disciple*

Kent: adherents to Judaism to a limited extent (i.e. "proselytes of the gate"). They attended synagogue worship, acknowledged the God of Israel, and complied with some Jewish customs. They were not circumcised, however, and thus were regarded by Jews as not full "proselytes of righteousness."

b. Man who Feared God – "*and one who feared God*"

following the light that he had; but needed fuller knowledge of God

Holy Spirit works in heart in preparation and drawing person to God

c. Man who Led His Household in Worship – "*with all his household,*"
genuine and sincere in his religious commitment

d. Man who was Generous in His Giving and in Good Works –
"*and gave many alms*"

e. Man who understood the importance to God of the Jewish people
"*to the Jewish people*"

f. Man of Prayer
"*and prayed to God continually.*" Requesting more light

Despite all of this devotion, he was still a man who needed the saving message of Jesus Christ and the gospel of God's grace and forgiveness

B. (:3-6) Vision of Cornelius

1. Timestamp – 3 pm -- "*About the ninth hour of the day*"

2. Clarity of the Vision – no confusion – "*he clearly saw in a vision*"
Sovereignly initiated by God; not something he was seeking or conjuring up

3. Messenger = "*an angel of God who had just come in to him,*"
Not the Lord Jesus Christ in this instance
What a privilege to receive a message from God

4. Personalization – "*and said to him, 'Cornelius!'*"
God deals with us as individuals; Good Shepherd knows each sheep by name

5. Attention and Alarm – Divine visitation often has initial reaction of Fear
"*And fixing his gaze upon him and being much alarmed, he said, 'What is it, Lord?'*"

6. Reassurance and Recognition of Attempts at Worship
"*And he said to him, 'Your prayers and alms have ascended as a memorial before God.'*"
God is aware of all we think and say and do

7. Instructions Regarding Retrieving Simon Peter
"*And now dispatch some men to Joppa, and send for a man named Simon, who is also called Peter; he is staying with a certain tanner named Simon, whose house is by the sea.*"

Difficult for Cornelius not to go himself; allowed him to collect his family and Friends; interesting that Peter is already crossing the lines of Jewish prejudice by lodging at the home of a tanner

C. (:7-8) Response of Cornelius

"*And when the angel who was speaking to him had departed, he summoned two of his servants and a devout soldier of those who were in constant attendance upon him, and after he had explained everything to them, he sent them to Joppa.*"

Delegation of 3 key loyal people; took immediate action; expected the mission to be successful

This is a great message for those like Cornelius that see themselves as outsiders – God cares about you

II. (:9-16) <u>VISION OF CHANGE</u> – DIRECTED TO THE INSIDER – PREPARATION OF PETER --
THE NEW COVENANT DRASTICALLY CHANGES THE SPIRITUAL LANDSCAPE – WHAT IS UNCLEAN AND WHAT IS HOLY OR CLEANSED?

And on the next day, as they were on their way, and approaching the city, Peter went up on the housetop about the sixth hour to pray. 10 And he became hungry, and was desiring to eat; but while they were making preparations, he fell into a trance; 11 and he beheld the sky opened up, and a certain object like a great sheet coming down, lowered by four corners to the ground, 12 and there were in it all kinds of four-footed animals and crawling creatures of the earth and birds of the air. 13 And a voice came to him, "Arise, Peter, kill and eat!" 14 But Peter said, "By no means, Lord, for I have never eaten anything unholy and unclean." 15 And again a voice came to him a second time, "What God has cleansed, no longer consider unholy." 16 And this happened three times; and immediately the object was taken up into the sky.

Stott: The primary question was how God would deal with Peter. How would he succeed in breaking down Peter's deep-seated racial intolerance? The principal subject of this chapter is not so much the conversion of Cornelius as the conversion of Peter.

God is sovereignly orchestrating the timetable of all of these detailed events
Peter seeks a place free of distractions where he can be alone for extended time of prayer
Do you ever get distracted from praying by hunger?
Do you ever get distracted from praying by your mind drifting off elsewhere?

<u>Purpose of the OT dietary laws</u>

Cf. Lev. 11 for OT dietary laws regarding clean vs unclean animals
Possibly had some value for health purposes
But main objective was to maintain distinction between Jews and Gentiles – not allow syncretism or blending; could not participate in Gentile feasts; protect against contamination with Gentile idolatry

<u>Times have radically changed</u> – God removing barriers to Jew-Gentile interaction

Message repeated to Peter 3 times – remember his threefold denial and then the Lord's threefold interrogation of whether he really loved Him

Tough for Peter to change how he viewed Gentiles – What areas of prejudice do you wrestle with?

III. (:17-23) JEW HOSTING GENTILES -- VISION REQUIRES CLARIFICATION AND DIVINE CONFIRMATION

A. (:17-20) Divine Timing and Clarification Helps Mitigate Human Perplexity

> "*Now while Peter was greatly perplexed in mind as to what the vision which he had seen might be, behold, the men who had been sent by Cornelius, having asked directions for Simon's house, appeared at the gate; and calling out, they were asking whether Simon, who was also called Peter, was staying there. And while Peter was reflecting on the vision, the Spirit said to him, 'Behold, three men are looking for you. But arise, go downstairs, and accompany them without misgivings; for I have sent them Myself.*"

Stott: The key expression *meden diakrinomenos* in 10:20 and *meden diakrinanta* in 11:12 is usually translated "without hesitation" (RSV) or "without misgiving" (JBP, NEB), but it could mean "making no distinction" (11:12, RSV), that is, "making no gratuitous, invidious distinction between Jew and Gentile.

B. (:21-22) Divine Direction to Cornelius Reviewed as Confirmation

> "*And Peter went down to the men and said, 'Behold, I am the one you are looking for; what is the reason for which you have come?' And they said, 'Cornelius, a centurion, a righteous and God-fearing man well spoken of by the entire nation of the Jews, was divinely directed by a holy angel to send for you to come to his house and hear a message from you.*"

C. (:23) Welcoming Hospitality and Prompt Obedience

> "*And so he invited them in and gave them lodging. And on the next day he arose and went away with them, and some of the brethren from Joppa accompanied him.*"

Big step to invite them in – don't overlook what a huge thing this was for Peter

Took six Jewish men as witnesses along with them and made the trip back to home of Cornelius

IV. (:24-33) GENTILE HOSTING JEWS -- VISION LEADS TO CHANGED THINKING AND ANTICIPATION OF REVELATION

A. (:24-25) Dramatic Meeting Between Cornelius and Peter

24 And on the following day he entered Caesarea. Now Cornelius was waiting for them, and had called together his relatives and close friends. 25 And when it came about that Peter entered, Cornelius met him, and fell at his feet and worshiped him.

Larger crowd than Peter may have anticipated – Cornelius concerned for the salvation of his relatives and closest friends

Meeting gets off on the wrong foot

Constable: In the great St. Peter's Cathedral in Rome, there is a huge statue of Peter, where people come and kiss the toe of the statue. This is undue and inappropriate reverence towards any man or angel. We might almost wish that Peter would visit the cathedral named after him and set those people straight!

B. (:26-29) Perspective of Peter – Changed Thinking

26 But Peter raised him up, saying, "Stand up; I too am just a man." 27 And as he talked with him, he entered, and found many people assembled. 28 And he said to them, "You yourselves know how unlawful it is for a man who is a Jew to associate with a foreigner or to visit him; and yet God has shown me that I should not call any man unholy or unclean. 29 "That is why I came without even raising any objection when I was sent for. And so I ask for what reason you have sent for me."

Stott: Peter had come to see that it was entirely inappropriate either to worship somebody as if divine (which Cornelius had tried to do to him) or to reject somebody as if unclean (which he would previously have done to Cornelius). Peter refused both to be treated by Cornelius as if he were a god, and to treat Cornelius as if he were a dog.

C. (:30-33) Perspective of Cornelius – Anticipation of Revelation

30 And Cornelius said, "Four days ago to this hour, I was praying in my house during the ninth hour; and behold, a man stood before me in shining garments, 31 and he said, 'Cornelius, your prayer has been heard and your alms have been remembered before God. 32 'Send therefore to Joppa and invite Simon, who is also called Peter, to come to you; he is staying at the house of Simon the tanner by the sea.' 33 "And so I sent to you immediately, and you have been kind enough to come. Now then, we are all here present before God to hear all that you have been commanded by the Lord.

Stott: It was a remarkable acknowledgement that they were in God's presence, that the apostle Peter was to be the bearer of God's word to them, and that they were all ready and open to listen to it. No preacher today could ask for a more attentive audience.

(:34-35) CONCLUSION OR PUNCHLINE: VISION UNDERSTOOD AND OBEYED – NO FAVORITISM IN SALVATION

And opening his mouth, Peter said: "I most certainly understand now that God is not one to show partiality, but in every nation the man who fears Him and does what is right, is welcome to Him.

Ἀνοίξας δὲ Πέτρος τὸ στόμα εἶπεν· ἐπ᾽ ἀληθείας καταλαμβάνομαι ὅτι οὐκ ἔστιν προσωπολήμπτης ὁ θεός,
35 ἀλλ᾽ ἐν παντὶ ἔθνει ὁ φοβούμενος αὐτὸν καὶ ἐργαζόμενος δικαιοσύνην δεκτὸς αὐτῷ ἐστιν.

Constable: "*Opening his mouth*" is a phrase that typically introduces something very important (cf. 8:35; 18:14; Matt. 5:2; 13:35).

Kent: "*face taker*" – God does not save men on the basis of their individual appearance or race. The same thought occurs in the OT: Deuteronomy 10:17; II Chronicles 19:7; Job 34:19. John 10:16

Stott: no racial barrier to Christian salvation

Did God show favoritism to the Jews in OT times?

Yes, in the sense of the privileges that applied to the Jewish nation
No, in terms of allowing Gentiles to enter the kingdom as well

Not a statement that divine election no longer applies

Not presenting a **works approach** to salvation – understanding that repentance and faith lie at the heart of conversion; emphasizing here that God does not restrict the gospel based on any type of favoritism or prejudice; Access to God is open to all on an equal footing – Jew has no advantage over the Gentile; all believers are baptized into one body of Jesus Christ

Who are we to show partiality?? Our society is all about **making distinctions**:

- Black vs white
- Men vs women
- Skilled vs unskilled
- Rich vs poor
- Young vs old
- Professional vs blue collar
- Healthy vs handicapped
- Educated vs uneducated

We are not to try to anticipate who is a good prospect for receiving the gospel and who is not – don't fall into the trap of spiritual profiling; understand that with God there is no partiality – proclaim the message of saving grace to everyone

"*in every nation the man who fears Him and does what is right, is welcome to Him*"

Gal. 2:11-15 – Peter not completely over this struggle with prejudice
Message of Galatians 3 – especially vs. 26-29

* * * * * * * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

1) Are you able to identify any prejudices in your thinking or in that of your church community?

2) Do you know people who think they are unsavable – destined to be excluded from God's kingdom?

3) Should churches be established just to minister to a specific ethnic and cultural group to the exclusion of others?

4) Is your hospitality limited to just certain types of people?

* * * * * * * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Barclay: In the Roman military set-up there was first of all the **legion**. It was a force of six thousand men and therefore was roughly equal to a division. In every legion there were ten **cohorts**. A cohort therefore had six hundred men and comes near to being the equivalent of a battalion. The cohort was divided into **centuries** and over each entry there was a *centurion*. The century is therefore roughly the equivalent of a company. The parallel to the centurion in our military organization is a company sergeant-major.

Bock: The two concepts of food and of table fellowship as signs of accepting Gentiles are related, for associating with Gentiles and eating what they may have prepared as hosts would in normal Jewish thinking entail the probably risk of uncleanness. . . By making unclean food clean, God is showing how table fellowship and acceptance of Gentiles are more easily accomplished in the new era.

Wiersbe: It is interesting to see how religious a person can be and still not be saved. Certainly, Cornelius was sincere in his obedience to God's law, his fasting, and his generosity to the Jewish people. . . The difference between Cornelius and many religious people today is this: he knew that his religious devotion was not sufficient to save him. . . Cornelius was asking God to show him the way of salvation.

MacArthur: There's one key left in Peter's hand that hasn't yet been put in a door and turned, and that's the...the key that opens the church to include the Gentiles. And so Peter is about to unlock that last door, and that's gonna be a tough key for Peter to turn, because he has been raised a whole lifetime engrained with Jewish traditions, engrained with legalism, and super-nationalism. And it's an almost intolerant kind of engraining, so that there isn't any room for Samaritans, and there isn't any room for Gentiles, who were considered to be unclean. . .

And so Peter is gonna have to have a little bit of preparation before he's gonna be able to stick this key in and turn it. A strict Jew wouldn't have anything to do with a Gentile. In fact, a strict Jew wouldn't even be the guest in a Gentile's house, nor would he have a guest in his house, since Gentiles were unclean. The scribal law said, "The dwelling places of Gentiles are unclean." And, in fact, here's an interesting footnote just to kinda...to get a thought on this that is perhaps specific. It was considered that the dust or the dirt from a Gentile country was defiled and, if anybody happened to have some Gentile country dirt on their feet and tracked it into Israel, it remained defiled. It never mingled with Israel soil. It just stayed there continuously defiling the land. Consequently, whenever they left the Gentile country, they would always do what became a very famous phrase in the Bible. They would always shake off the dust off their feet so as not to track any Gentile pollution back into Israel; and I think it's interesting, too, that in Matthew 10:14, you remember that Jesus sent out the 70; and He said, "You go two by two, and if anybody doesn't hear your Gospel, shake off the dust from off your feet." In other words, treat them as though they were Gentile, unclean. That's what he meant. . .

Now, the Gentiles retaliated. They had their own thing going, too, believe me. The Jews were a...were a scorn to them. They were a constant theater of laughter for them. The circumcision, the Sabbath day rest, the worship of an invisible God, the...the abstinence from certain foods, the dietary laws and all of the things the Jews went through, that was a mockery...a point of mockery for the Gentile. So for centuries, they had been butting heads, you see; and all of a sudden, Christ came along and said, "Now, I'm gonna take Jews and Gentile. I'm gonna make one new man."

And, in theory, it was great; and in theology, it was great; and by His power He could do it; but it was a tough thing for the Jew to swallow and to practically really make it happen. . .

What have we seen in the preparation of the receiver over here? We've seen 1) God chose him. 2) God responded to his open heart. 3) God prepared the soil with the proper information and instruction. 4) God promises more light. "He shall tell thee what thou oughtest to do." 5) God asks for the obedience of faith. Meanwhile, He prepares the messenger, Peter, down in Joppa. . . God not only prepares the receiver and prepares the messenger, but He ordains the divine timing for just the moment, and old Peter had his vision, the thoughts were there. Before he could wake up, bang on the door, there the guys were. . .

There was, for example, the court of the Gentiles, which was the extremity. Gentiles could come in the outer court. Then there was the court of the women. Women could only come into the next level. Then the court of the Israelites, as the men entered into that. Then the court of the priests. Then the holy place, then the Holy of Holies. So the sequence just kept everyone out. Well, the Gentiles were clear on the outside...and the fantastic statement of what...that Paul is saying is simply this: the wall that always separated in the temple the Gentile from the Jew, Jesus Christ has smashed. In fact, if you wanna know the truth, when Jesus Christ died, He just took a bulldozer and bulldozed the whole temple and left the Holy of Holies standing free and clear. And every man can enter directly in the Holy of Holies. That's what the writer of Hebrews says. "Let us come boldly into His presence." The veil is ripped. It's rent in twain.

Steven Cole: **Breaking Down Our Prejudice**
The ancient Greeks divided up the human race into two categories: Greeks and barbarians. The barbarian was literally a man who could not speak Greek, and so his words sounded to the Greek ear like “bar bar.” One Greek historian asked rhetorically, “How can men who can only bark ever rule the world?” Prejudice is not eradicated with brilliance, since Aristotle believed that the world’s climate maintained the difference between Greeks and barbarians. He explained that those who lived in the cold lands to the north had plenty of courage and spirit, but little skill and intelligence. Those who lived in the warm south had plenty of skill, intelligence, and culture, but little spirit and courage. Only the Greeks lived in a climate designed by nature to produce the perfectly blended character (Aristotle, Politics [7:7:2], cited by William Barclay, Flesh and Spirit [Baker], pp. 40-41).
1. We all are prone to prejudice.
2. God is gracious to gently break us of our prejudice so that He can work through us.
3. God’s purpose is to spread the gospel through us so that He will be glorified among the nations.
4. When God confronts our prejudice, we must yield in obedience to Him.
5. When we yield to the Lord and put to death our prejudice, He will use us mightily in His service.

Constable: Modern missionaries have told stories of similar seekers after God. After they penetrated some remote tribe and preached the gospel, the natives explained how they had previously worshiped the God the missionary preached and had prayed for more light. Romans 3:11 means that no one seeks God unless God draws him or her to Himself, which is what God did with Cornelius.

Chan Wei Guan: **God Has No Prejudice in Salvation**

1. “Human nature is particularly prone to pride” – This sentence begins Jane Austen’s famous novel, Pride and Prejudice. This book is a perceptive examination of the relationship between the social classes in Britain in the early 1800s with the middle class’s upwardly mobile aspirations to progress rubbing against the upper class’s efforts to keep them “in their place”.

2. I am not preaching against pride today. It is prejudice which I am going to talk about. Pride and prejudice are close kins and they are intimately related to one another. A critic of the novel said that a person’s pride is found on social prejudice and his initial prejudice is rooted in the pride of our quick judgment.

3. Have you wondered what the original meaning of ‘prejudice’ is? It is said that “the word prejudice was originally neutral. It meant judgment formed beforehand, which might be favorable or unfavorable. Yet so predominantly do men form harsh judgments before knowledge, that prejudice came to mean injurious.”

God sent an angel to tell Cornelius to go and send for Peter because he had the message of God. God used men to witness the Gospel; God did not use the holy angels. The holy angels cannot understand what sin is; they cannot understand why Jesus Christ, the Son of God whom they adored and worshipped, had to die for humanity. They just do not know how to open their mouth and tell a sinner, “Let me explain to you what sin is?” It is beyond them. It is easier for a sinner to tell another sinner what sin is just as it is easier for a beggar to tell another beggar where to find food.

http://shaddai-baptist.com/Acts_files/Acts19.pdf

TEXT: Acts 10: 34-43

TITLE: GENTILE GOSPEL

BIG IDEA:
THE GOSPEL OF PEACE THROUGH JESUS CHRIST BRINGS FORGIVENESS OF SINS TO ANYONE WHO BELIEVES – EVEN UNCIRCUMCISED GENTILES

(:34-35) INTRODUCTION: NO PARTIALITY IN SALVATION

> "*And opening his mouth, Peter said: 'I most certainly understand now that God is not one to show partiality, but in every nation the man who fears Him and does what is right, is welcome to Him.'*"
>
> Ἀνοίξας δὲ Πέτρος τὸ στόμα εἶπεν· ἐπ᾽ ἀληθείας καταλαμβάνομαι ὅτι οὐκ ἔστιν προσωπολήμπτης ὁ θεός, ἀλλ᾽ ἐν παντὶ ἔθνει ὁ φοβούμενος αὐτὸν καὶ ἐργαζόμενος δικαιοσύνην δεκτὸς αὐτῷ ἐστιν.

Some verses are so important that even though you are doing a verse-by-verse and paragraph-by-paragraph preaching through the text, they must be included in two sermons. These two verses are the crucial bridge – the transition in Peter's interaction with Cornelius and his household. Last week we learned that "**Jesus Christ Opens the Door of God's Grace to All Men on an Equal Footing Without Restriction.**" We continue that same theme as Peter delivers his watershed address with the emphasis on "**No Partiality in Salvation**."

This was a tough pill for the proud, nationalistic Jews to swallow. Surely you can't be talking about the uncircumcised Gentiles? Peter's response is a great summary of the Gospel message. When it comes to witnessing and explaining the gospel to unbelievers, most of us are familiar with a few common tools: maybe we have used Evangelism Explosion; probably the Romans Road comes to mind; perhaps we have a presentation focused around John 3 and the story of Nicodemus or maybe we go to 1 Cor. 15 for a listing of the fundamental points of the gospel. I am going to suggest that we could just as easily center our witnessing around this passage which lays out the Gospel of Peace through Jesus Christ.

Bock: The phrase "*in every nation*" is placed forward in the Greek sentence for emphasis (Rom. 3:29).

THE GOSPEL OF PEACE THROUGH JESUS CHRIST BRINGS FORGIVENESS OF SINS TO ANYONE WHO BELIEVES – EVEN UNCIRCUMCISED GENTILES

Some people have a **defeatist attitude** and have resigned themselves to thinking that they are beyond the long arm of God's grace. Somehow they are in a category of sin and depravity where God has written them off and they cannot possibly receive forgiveness of sins. This message speaks to those despondent folks and encourages believers to bring the Good News of God's saving grace to everyone without prejudice.

Who doesn't want **Peace**? Peace in their relationship with God instead of enmity and wrath and condemnation. Peace in their wrestling against the bondage of sin so that they experience victory and joy rather than defeat and despair. Peace in their relationships with others because

they have learned how to humble themselves and set aside their own rights and renounce selfishness and pride in order to be a channel for the love of Jesus Christ to others.
Great message for **Easter Week**!!

(:36) SUMMARY: THE PROCLAMATION OF THE GOSPEL OF PEACE THROUGH JESUS CHRIST

A. Authoritative Message from God

"*The word which He sent*"
τὸν λόγον [ὃν] ἀπέστειλεν

Everything starts with an understanding of divine revelation – if you don't believe that God has spoken or you don't think He speaks with authority – then who cares about the content of the message!

Logos = name for Jesus in John 1; John the Baptist sent to bear witness as forerunner

Word for *sent* is same word from which we get *apostle* – one who is sent to bear witness as an authoritative messenger of God

B. Dispensational Distinctives

"*to the sons of Israel,*" -- distinct from the church
τοῖς υἱοῖς Ἰσραὴλ

God worked through the nation of Israel in a special way in the OT – and still will complete His plan for the nation – involves many precious promises – but not there is a dispensational switch as the gospel comes on an equal footing to the Gentiles (**Romans 9-11**)

Message of salvation came to the Gentiles through the Jews

C. Heart of the Gospel Message

"*preaching peace through Jesus Christ*"
εὐαγγελιζόμενος εἰρήνην διὰ Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ,

What do we all want? Peace – yet enmity exists between God and man since Adam
Who alone can give us Peace?
How do we obtain that Peace?

Is. 9:6 "*For a child will be born to us, a son will be given to us; and the government will rest on His shoulders; and His name will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Eternal Father, Prince of Peace*." – Prophecy of the coming Messiah

Luke 2:14 "*Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among men with whom He is pleased.*" – Song of the multitude of angels at the birth of Christ

John 14:27 "*Peace I leave with you; My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you.*"

Rom. 5:1 "*Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ*"

Col. 1:20 "*and through Him to reconcile all things to Himself, having made peace through the blood of His cross*"

Bock: This is the concept of *shalom* from the OT (Pss. 29:11; 72:7; 85:8-10; Prov. 3:17; Isa. 48:18; 54:10; Ezek. 34:25-29), a well-being of relationship between the person and God, which now seems to express itself in peace between people as well (Eph. 2:11-22). The idea of preaching peace recalls OT ideas (Isa. 52:7; Nah. 1:15).

Piper: We have peace with God only when his anger at us because of our sins is put away, and replaced by peace.

D. Lordship of Christ

"*(He is Lord of all) —*"
οὗτός ἐστιν πάντων κύριος,

Don't make any mistake about His dominion and rule (Rom. 10:12; Acts 2:36).

Wiersbe: not just Lord of Israel. From the very founding of the nation of Israel, God made it clear that the blessing would be from Israel to the whole world (Gen. 12:1-3).

No Peace if Jesus is not Lord – the flesh wages war against the Spirit; the kingdom of God is at enmity with the kingdom of Satan; you cannot be a friend of the world and a friend of God – you must be submitted to the Lordship of Jesus Christ to experience the precious peace He came to offer

Piper: He is universal Ruler. He is not a mere local prophet or a tribal deity or a Jewish teacher. He is Lord of the universe and everything in it—Lord of all.

This salvation is available to all without restriction

FOUR FUNDAMENTAL THEMES OF GOSPEL WITNESS

I. (:37-39a) WITNESSES TO THE LIFE AND MINISTRY OF JESUS OF NAZARETH

A. Geographic Focus: Judea / Galilee / land of the Jews / Jerusalem

"*you yourselves know the thing which took place throughout all Judea, starting from Galilee,*"
ὑμεῖς οἴδατε τὸ γενόμενον ῥῆμα καθ᾽ ὅλης τῆς Ἰουδαίας, ἀρξάμενος ἀπὸ τῆς Γαλιλαίας

"*both in the land of the Jews and in Jerusalem.*"
ἔν τε τῇ χώρᾳ τῶν Ἰουδαίων καὶ [ἐν] Ἰερουσαλήμ.

Theology rooted in History

B. Starting Point for Ministry = Ministry of John the Baptist

"*after the baptism which John proclaimed.*"
μετὰ τὸ βάπτισμα ὃ ἐκήρυξεν Ἰωάννης,

this passage bracketed by the baptism administered by John and then the baptism of the household of Cornelius

History has a Chronology

C. Humanity of Jesus = Jesus of Nazereth
"*You know of Jesus of Nazareth,*"
Ἰησοῦν τὸν ἀπὸ Ναζαρέθ,

Nothing hidden or secretive about His life

Fulfilled OT prophecies every step of the way

D. Divine Anointing of Jesus
"*how God anointed Him with the Holy Spirit and with power,*"
ὡς ἔχρισεν αὐτὸν ὁ θεὸς πνεύματι ἁγίῳ καὶ δυνάμει,

Word for Messiah = Anointed one

Holy Spirit always associated with power in the book of Acts
Is. 61 reference – read by Jesus in the synagogue in Luke 4:18

Enablement is the focus here

Happened at baptism by John – "*This is my beloved Son*"

E. Ministry of Good Works and Healing and Righteousness
"*and how He went about doing good, and healing all who were oppressed by the devil;*"
ὃς διῆλθεν εὐεργετῶν καὶ ἰώμενος πάντας τοὺς καταδυναστευομένους ὑπὸ τοῦ διαβόλου,

the diabolical one

Yet look at all of the opposition and persecution – especially from religious leaders

Piper: Jesus is stronger than the devil. Jesus rescues people who are oppressed and harassed and tormented and tempted by the devil. Peter lifts up this truth. He wants Cornelius and his family—and us—to know this and believe it and experience it. When the Holy Spirit comes, he comes to make Jesus real as a deliverer from satanic oppression.

We do not think much about the power of the devil and how he presently is oppressing people

F. Key Enablement
"*for God was with Him.*"
ὅτι ὁ θεὸς ἦν μετ᾽ αὐτοῦ.
Do you have the sense that God is with you and enabling your ministry?

Gen. 39:2 "*The Lord was with Joseph, so he became a successful man.*"

G. Apostolic Witnesses
"*And we are witnesses of all the things He did*"
καὶ ἡμεῖς μάρτυρες πάντων ὧν ἐποίησεν

What don't you understand or believe about the life and ministry of Jesus Christ?

II. (:39b-41) WITNESSES TO THE DEATH AND RESURRECTION OF THE SON OF GOD

A. Crucifixion of Jesus

"*And they also put Him to death by hanging Him on a cross.*"
ὃν καὶ ἀνεῖλαν κρεμάσαντες ἐπὶ ξύλου,

Bock: an allusion to Deut. 21:22-23 and the cursed death that Jesus experienced from the Jewish point of view (Acts 5:30 and Gal. 3:13 are other uses of this phrase).

B. Resurrection of Jesus

"*God raised Him up on the third day*"
τοῦτον ὁ θεὸς ἤγειρεν [ἐν] τῇ τρίτῃ ἡμέρᾳ

Parallel to Jonah

C. Post Resurrection Appearances

"*and granted that He should become visible,*"
καὶ ἔδωκεν αὐτὸν ἐμφανῆ γενέσθαι,

God did not have to provide this additional verification; could have taken His Son directly back to heaven

D. Apostolic Witnesses

"*not to all the people, but to witnesses who were chosen beforehand by God, that is, to us, who ate and drank with Him after He arose from the dead.*

οὐ παντὶ τῷ λαῷ, ἀλλὰ μάρτυσιν τοῖς προκεχειροτονημένοις ὑπὸ τοῦ θεοῦ, ἡμῖν, οἵτινες συνεφάγομεν καὶ συνεπίομεν αὐτῷ μετὰ τὸ ἀναστῆναι αὐτὸν ἐκ νεκρῶν·

Reminds you of the detailed listing in **1 Cor. 15**
Fact that God does not show partiality does not mean that God does not choose specific individuals for specific purposes – no contradiction here; everyone not chosen to be one of the apostles – only a select band of 12; wider circle than that saw Jesus in His post resurrection appearances – but only those chosen by God

What don't you understand or believe about the death and resurrection of the Son of God?

III. (:42) WITNESSES TO THE COMING AGAIN OF THE JUDGE OF ALL MEN

"*And He ordered us to preach to the people, and solemnly to testify that this is the One who has been appointed by God as Judge of the living and the dead.*"

καὶ παρήγγειλεν ἡμῖν κηρύξαι τῷ λαῷ καὶ διαμαρτύρασθαι ὅτι οὗτός ἐστιν ὁ ὡρισμένος ὑπὸ τοῦ θεοῦ κριτὴς ζώντων καὶ νεκρῶν

Here comes the Judge! Standing at the door – Don't be a man pleaser or be driven by peer

pressure

Great Commission reference – "laos" – usually a reference to the Jewish people

Matt. 10:32-36 "*Do not think that I came to bring peace on the earth; I did not come to bring peace, but a sword*."

All judgment has been entrusted to the Son – **John 5:24-29**

What don't you understand or believe about the Second Coming of the Judge of all the earth?

IV. (:43) WITNESSES TO THE AVAILABILITY OF SALVATION THROUGH FAITH IN JESUS CHRIST

> *"Of Him all the prophets bear witness that through His name everyone who believes in Him receives forgiveness of sins."*
>
> τούτῳ πάντες οἱ προφῆται μαρτυροῦσιν ἄφεσιν ἁμαρτιῶν λαβεῖν διὰ τοῦ ὀνόματος αὐτοῦ πάντα τὸν πιστεύοντα εἰς αὐτόν.

Toussaint: This message of forgiveness of sins (cf. 2:38; 5:31; 13:38; 26:18) through faith in the Messiah was spoken of by the prophets (e.g., Isa. 53:11; Jer. 31:34; Ezek. 36:25-26).

Finishes at the same point where he had started the message – God shows no partiality – no restriction regarding what type of person can be saved – only Believe in Jesus for the forgiveness of sins

What don't you understand or believe about the free offer of God's abundant grace?

What type of witnesses are we to God's grace and power and love and salvation?
Ephes 6:15 "*having shod your feet with the preparation of the gospel of peace*" – we put on the armor of God for a purpose – that we might play our role as witnesses to the reality of Jesus Christ and His claims on the life and loyalty of every person

CONCLUSION:

The Good News of the gospel is that Jesus Christ can bring **Peace** to you today. He came the first time – not to bring judgment but to offer salvation. God makes this offer without prejudice. He excludes no group of people and shows no partiality. Whoever will believe will be saved.

But the warning is that this same Jesus is coming again as *Judge of the living and the dead*. It will be too late then to take advantage of God's gracious offer of forgiveness of sins and fellowship with Him for all eternity. The wrath of God will fall on all without prejudice or discrimination as well. There will be no excuses or special exceptions.

MacArthur: Why does a man wanna live in rebellion against God when he can have peace with God? Why does a man wanna live in rebellion with himself when he can have peace with

himself? Why does a man wanna live in rebellion with his family and his friends when he can have peace? It's all available. In fact, that's what we're here to tell ya. In 2 Corinthians chapter 5, listen to these verses. "And all things are of God, who hath reconciled us to Himself." In other words, He's made peace with us. We were cut off. The gulf was there, but Jesus threw the bridge down and across it we came, and we made peace with God. He says, "He has reconciled the world to Himself by Jesus Christ. To wit, God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto Himself."...

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DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

1) When we proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ, do we give emphasis to the *peace* that it brings?

2) Would others looking at our life characterize our activities as "*going about doing good*"?

3) Look at the emphasis placed on **witnessing** – are we giving testimony to the reality of Jesus Christ on a consistent basis?

4) Do people around us have a sense of Jesus as Judge and what the implications are of Him in that role?

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QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Longenecker: Peter's sermon in Cornelius's house concerns (1) a new revelational understanding of God's message of peace, (2) which is given the sons of Israel as its primary recipients, but (3) which also includes Gentiles under the rubric of Christ as "Lord of all," with "all" understood personally as connoting Christ's lordship over both Jews and Gentiles.

Constable: Since God is not one to show partiality (cf. Deut. 10:17; 2 Chron. 19:7; Job 34:19), certainly Christians should not do this either. Peter proceeded to prove that God deals with all people equally through His Son (cf. vv.36, 38, 42, 43), not on the basis of their race (cf. John 10:16). Whenever Christians practice racial discrimination they need to reread Acts 10. . .

Note how Peter stressed the universal benefit of Jesus' ministry in this message to Gentiles; it was for Gentiles as well as Jews. Not only is Jesus Lord of all (v. 36), but He went about healing all (v. 38). Furthermore He is the Judge of all (v. 42) to whom all the prophets bore witness (v. 43a), and God forgives all who believe in Him (v. 43b).

MacArthur: **The Why, Who and How of the Resurrection**
Cornelius really had no Jewish links. He had no Jewish heritage. He was a Gentile. Peter preaches to him the straight forward simple gospel. In so doing he tells us the significance of the resurrection. It's a simple message from Peter. It's not complicated. It's not hard to understand. And yet it cannot be improved upon. It would be enough really to read it and leave and have it make its impression, but we are behooved to give you the understanding of it and that we will endeavor to do this morning. . . [emphasis on the resurrection as in earlier sermons in Acts]

Why this good news is good news. **Who** makes it possible. **How** can I participate in it.

Why? Verse 34 through 36 gives us the answer. Three reasons are given for the gospel. Three reasons why this is good news. Number one, God is partial to no one. Number two, God welcomes sinners. Number three, God makes peace with them. That just steps you through the reasons for the gospel. God is an impartial judge who receives sinners and makes peace with them. In other words, you can have a relationship with God in which He ceases to be your judge and becomes your friend, your deliverer, your Savior. You need that because you are under judgment and so was I and so are all who have not come to God through Christ. . .

Who makes this possible? It says it in verse 36, "Through Jesus Christ." Who is He? Just in case you might ask, He is Lord of all, He is not a Jewish comedian, He is not a mystic, He is not a political insurrectionist, He is Lord of all. And to call Him anything less than that is blasphemous. He is Lord of all. He is God of very God. So Peter clearly indicates the who of salvation. Who can accomplish this if all of us have fallen short, if all of us are in sin, if there's no way that we can be reconciled to God on our own and yet God wants us, how can it happen, who is going to make the reconciliation possible? And the answer is Jesus Christ. . .

And you say, "**How** do we receive it?" "Through His name everyone who believes in Him receives forgiveness of sins." The only hope to escape hell, the only hope to escape the judge and His impartial divine judgment is to have your sin forgiven. The Old Testament prophets spoke about this. Isaiah said He shall bear their iniquities. Jeremiah said, "I will forgive their iniquities and remember their sin no more." Zechariah said, "In that day there shall be a fountain open to the house of David and all the inhabitants of Jerusalem for sin and for cleansing." Micah said, "Who is a pardoning God like You who gives grace?" The prophets predicted that one would come who would forgive sin. And that one came and died, paid the penalty for your sin and consequently your sins having been paid for God can forgive. Somebody else took your place.

What does it take? It says simply in verse 43, "Everyone who believes in Him." Believes in Him in what sense? Believes in that which is revealed about Him, that He is God incarnate, came into the world, did good, was filled with the Holy Spirit and power. Showed His power over Satan. Died on a cross and rose again, ascended to heaven, sits at the right hand of the Father. If you believe in Him and trust Him as your Savior, He forgives your sins...no longer your judge.

If you say, "I'd like to believe, I'm struggling." Pray the prayer the man in the New Testament prayed, "Lord, I believe, help my unbelief." By the way, Cornelius and his whole household believed that day two thousand years ago. How about you?

Steven Cole: **Salvation for All Who Believe**
Peter's sermon and its surprising result teach us five lessons:
1. Salvation is not based on national identity nor is it based on good works.
The application for us is that people from every racial and national background are on equal footing when it comes to receiving the gospel. They don't have to become "Americanized" to become Christians. They can keep cultural traditions that do not violate Scripture. They can sing songs that fit with their culture, even if they don't sound like American hymns. They can dress in their native styles, as long as they are modest. American missionaries need to be careful not to imply that to become a Christian is to

become an American. God forbid!
2. Salvation centers on the person and work of Jesus Christ.
3. Salvation spreads to others through the faithful proclamation of God's appointed witnesses.
4. Salvation comes to everyone who believes in the name of Jesus.
To believe in Jesus means that I no longer rely on anything in myself to commend myself to God. Rather, I trust only in what Jesus did on the cross as my hope for forgiveness of sins and eternal life.
5. Salvation results in obvious evidence in those who receive it.

Kevin Maples: **A Humble and Faithful Witness**
Peter gives us an excellent example of being a faithful witness. As believers we are called by God to be messengers not authors. And any glory that comes from delivering this message belongs to God not to us. We all need to follow Peter's example and faithfully and humbly pass along the gospel that has been entrusted to us.
http://kevinmaples.blogspot.com/2008/07/humble-and-faithful-witness-sermon-acts.html

Dr. Whitcomb: **I Can't, But I Had Better**
A Gentile could now become a genuine Christian without becoming a Jew. Now Hebrew Christians are relatively rare – especially in Jerusalem. . . A third Pentecost takes place . . . Peter's mouth under God's control is a wonderful instrument. . . *anointed* means enabled, empowered just as Spirit does for us today; The whole bible is structured chronologically – right in the middle is 3 days and 3 nights . . . chronology is the backbone of history; apart from history no theology; this event happened in real time; ate the piece of fish to confirm the genuineness of His resurrection body; Acts 1:4 – *eating together with them* – not just a theophany as He was in the OT; commanded us to preach to the Jewish people; Acts 17 – Jesus will be the judge;

TEXT: Acts 10:44 – 11:18

TITLE: DON'T STAND IN GOD'S WAY

BIG IDEA:
WHEN GOD'S WAYS DON'T MAKE SENSE TO YOU, REJECT HUMAN PREJUDICE IN FAVOR OF DIVINE CONFIRMATION OF GOD'S WILL

INTRODUCTION:
There are lots of times in life when God's ways don't make sense to us as believers. Even though we have a personal relationship with Jesus Christ; even though we sincerely want to submit to God's will . . . there are times when we face circumstances that just don't seem to add up to us. That is because we still view the world through a grid that includes our own fallen human traditions and prejudices that are hard to cast off.

Maybe we argue with God about why He doesn't do something in a certain way or according to our timetable. Why do we or our loved ones continue to struggle with severe health issues? Why do the wicked prosper? Why does God save this person whom we struggle to accept … or not save this person whom we have prayed for over a long period of time? Why can't a find a better job? Why doesn't God bring me a marriage partner? Why does God allow my marriage partner to act in such and such a way? Why don't my teachers understand me? Why are people attacking me or speaking ill of me?

There are all sorts of issues that can cause us to debate with God. We know that God's ways are not our ways … but we still struggle with embracing God's will and seeing the hand of His goodness in His providential dealings with us.

Job struggled mightily: his situation was so bleak that his wife counseled him to curse God and die. His friends tried to convince him that some awful sin must have led to his dire circumstances. Job started to talk back to God and was stopped short:

"*Then the Lord said to Job, 'Will the faultfinder contend with the Almighty*?'" (**40:1-2)** Job came to understand that he needed to cease striving against the Almighty and His mysterious ways:

"*I know that You can do all things, and that no purpose of Yours can be thwarted.. . Therefore I have declared that which I did not understand, things too wonderful for me, which I did not know*" (**42:1-6)**

David debated with God constantly – just read through the Psalms and watch how his emotional state cycled through seasons of doubt and questioning and despair to the heights of joy and intimate fellowship.

"*Teach me Your way, O Lord; I will walk in Your truth: Unite my heart to fear Your name*." (**86:11**)

Remember God's rebuke to **Jonah** when the reluctant prophet did not share God's heart of compassion and mercy for the wicked Ninevites – even when they responded with repentance to God's warning of judgment: "Do you have good reason to be angry?" (**4:4, 9**)

Specific Issue: Should the Jewish believers accept the salvation of these Gentiles as legitimate?

WHEN GOD'S WAYS DON'T MAKE SENSE TO YOU, REJECT HUMAN PREJUDICE IN FAVOR OF DIVINE CONFIRMATION OF GOD'S WILL

I. (10:44-48) CONFIRMATION OF GOD'S ACCEPTANCE OF BELIEVING GENTILES – DIRECTED TO PETER AND THE DELEGATION FROM JOPPA

A. (:44-46) Confirmed by Holy Spirit Baptism = Accepted by God Into the Universal Church = Gentile counterpart to Pentecost\

"*speaking these words*" = message of Acts 10

THE GOSPEL OF PEACE THROUGH JESUS CHRIST BRINGS FORGIVENESS OF SINS TO ANYONE WHO BELIEVES – EVEN UNCIRCUMCISED GENTILES

Not a message that was easy for Peter to accept – but God removed the prejudice in his heart and changed his thinking; now he was going to be used by God to help the change the hearts of the rest of the believing Jewish community – starting with his delegation of 6 witnesses that he had brought to the house of Cornelius

1. The Baptism of the Holy Spirit is Sovereignly associated with Faith in Jesus Christ as proclaimed in the Gospel

> "*While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit fell upon all those who were listening to the message.*"
>
> Ἔτι λαλοῦντος τοῦ Πέτρου τὰ ῥήματα ταῦτα ἐπέπεσεν τὸ πνεῦμα τὸ ἅγιον ἐπὶ πάντας τοὺς ἀκούοντας τὸν λόγον.

Not a subsequent post-conversion experience that should be sought by believers to elevate them to another plane of spirituality – although in these transitional passages we cannot take the order of events as the definitive argument for what is normative

We learn elsewhere that all believers are baptized by the Holy Spirit into the body of Christ at the moment of salvation and that if you do not have the Holy Spirit, you do not have Jesus Christ and you are not saved; we also learn that the Spirit is not given by measure – in other words it is not that you receive some minimal dose of the Holy Spirit at salvation and need to have that augmented later on with some dramatic experience of the baptism of the Holy Spirit

John 3 teaches us that God controls the movement of His Spirit – not man – He blows when and where He wills

Gal. 3:2 " *did you receive the Spirit by the works of the Law, or by hearing with faith*?"

Kent: The Holy Spirit is thus God's provision to men when they truly believe in Christ. Faith is the common denominator in all of the instances described in Acts, and any differences should be considered in the light of historical factors that existed.

2. God's Ways Can Surprise and Amaze Us when they stand in contrast to our prejudices and traditional understanding

> "*And all the circumcised believers who had come with Peter were amazed, because the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out upon the Gentiles also.*"
>
> καὶ ἐξέστησαν οἱ ἐκ περιτομῆς πιστοὶ ὅσοι συνῆλθαν τῷ Πέτρῳ, ὅτι καὶ ἐπὶ τὰ ἔθνη ἡ δωρεὰ τοῦ

ἁγίου πνεύματος ἐκκέχυται·

defined here as "*the gift of the Holy Spirit*"

Should we be surprised that God can surprise us and amaze us?? He is God! There are many surprising aspects to His divine will and the outworking of His providential ways to accomplish His sovereign purposes

Ezekiel 36:26 – God had prepared them for this surprise

"*Moreover, I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; and I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will be careful to observe My ordinances*."

But this promise was not only to the Jews – but "*I have other sheep, which are not of this fold; I must bring them also, and they will hear My voice; and they will become one flock with one shepherd*." (**John 10:16**) (Is. 56:8; John 11:52; Ephes 2:13-18)

3. The Baptism of the Holy Spirit can be accompanied with the special confirmatory sign of speaking in unknown foreign languages (tongues) – when a new people group is being brought into the body of Christ

"*For they were hearing them speaking with tongues and exalting God.*"

ἤκουον γὰρ αὐτῶν λαλούντων γλώσσαις καὶ μεγαλυνόντων τὸν θεόν.

We should expect that the gift of tongues practiced here should be identical to the tongues seen in Acts 3 – for the whole point is that what happened to the believing Jews at Pentecost was now happening in the same fashion to these Gentiles – we know that those were known foreign languages and not ecstatic utterances (or some type of angelic language)

Here you can tell that is the case because there was intelligence involved in terms of actual words that had meaning and could be understood to be *exalting God*

"*they were hearing them*" – implies understanding what was being said

So perhaps the 6 Jewish believers (circumcised ones) that Peter brought with him as witnesses had different backgrounds in terms of languages which they could speak – what a confirmation of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit to hear these Gentile believers praising God in these different languages

God has obviously accepted these Gentiles as legitimate believers – How can the believing community not do the same? Even though God's ways surprise us, we must put aside our prejudices and traditional thinking and embrace God's will and submit to it

That will solve all of our wrestling with God about Why are you doing this or not doing that …

Second Confirmation involving Peter and his delegation of believing Jews:

B. (:47-48) Confirmed by Water Baptism = Accepted by the Brethren Into the Visible Church

1. Denial of Water Baptism for any true believer = Standing Against the Purposes of God

"*Then Peter answered,'Surely no one can refuse the water for these to be baptized who have received the Holy Spirit just as we did, can he?*'"

τότε ἀπεκρίθη Πέτρος· μήτι τὸ ὕδωρ δύναται κωλῦσαί τις τοῦ μὴ βαπτισθῆναι τούτους, οἵτινες τὸ πνεῦμα τὸ ἅγιον ἔλαβον ὡς καὶ ἡμεῖς;

- shows the importance of water baptism – don't minimize it – immersion = standard practice and the best symbolism

- shows that water baptism is subsequent to salvation – don't make it part of the means of salvation – don't give it undue importance

Is our fellowship more restrictive and more exclusive than what God intended?
How about if we set up standards for church inclusion and membership that would prohibit Jesus Christ from being a member?? That would be a sad state of affairs

2. Water Baptism Symbolizes our Identification with Jesus Christ and obedience to His discipleship

"*And he ordered them to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ.*"
προσέταξεν δὲ αὐτοὺς ἐν τῷ ὀνόματι Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ βαπτισθῆναι.

We are called to be transformed and to become like Jesus Christ; we are disciple of Jesus Christ – not of some human teacher
Who can perform baptisms?? Did not require the apostle Peter – appears that his six companions administered the baptisms – the administrator and his credentials are never the emphasis

3. New Believers Appreciate Fellowship and Hunger to be Taught the Word

"*Then they asked him to stay on for a few days.*"
τότε ἠρώτησαν αὐτὸν ἐπιμεῖναι ἡμέρας τινάς.

Stott: The gift of the Spirit was insufficient; they needed human teachers too. And Peter's acceptance of their hospitality demonstrated the new Jewish-Gentile solidarity which Christ had established.

II. (11:1-18) CONFIRMATION OF GOD'S ACCEPTANCE OF BELIEVING GENTILES – DIRECTED TO THE BELIEVING JEWS IN JERUSALEM

A. (11:1-3) Point of Contention = Intimate Fellowship with Gentiles

Now the apostles and the brethren who were throughout Judea heard that the Gentiles also had received the word of God. And when Peter came up to Jerusalem, those who were circumcised took issue with him, saying, "You went to uncircumcised men and ate with them."

Ἤκουσαν δὲ οἱ ἀπόστολοι καὶ οἱ ἀδελφοὶ οἱ ὄντες κατὰ τὴν Ἰουδαίαν ὅτι καὶ τὰ ἔθνη ἐδέξαντο τὸν λόγον τοῦ θεοῦ. Ὅτε δὲ ἀνέβη Πέτρος εἰς Ἰερουσαλήμ, διεκρίνοντο πρὸς αὐτὸν οἱ ἐκ περιτομῆς [3] λέγοντες ὅτι εἰσῆλθες πρὸς ἄνδρας ἀκροβυστίαν ἔχοντας καὶ συνέφαγες αὐτοῖς.

"*received the word of God*" = salvation = same point of reference for baptism of Holy Spirit

What should have been an occasion for great joy and unity was perverted into potential for strife and division
Toussaint: Eating with someone was a mark of acceptance and fellowship (cf. 1 Cor. 5:11).

"*took issue with him*" – point of contention; debate; serious difference of opinion; went against their personal convictions

Great model for resolving differences of perspective in the church

B. (11:4-17) Review of the Historical Facts and Their Confirmatory Significance --
<u>10 Steps to Confirm God's Way or to Resolve Sincere Differences:</u>

1. (:4) <u>Analytical Approach</u> – orderly, logical, chronological explanation of events
"*But Peter began speaking and proceeded to explain to them in orderly sequence, saying,*"
Ἀρξάμενος δὲ Πέτρος ἐξετίθετο αὐτοῖς καθεξῆς λέγων·

2. (:5a) <u>Prayerful Posture</u> – maintaining normal spiritual disciplines
"*I was in the city of Joppa praying;*"
ἐγὼ ἤμην ἐν πόλει Ἰόππῃ προσευχόμενος

3. (:5b-6) <u>Spiritual Sight / Insight</u> – Seeing the Divine Picture
"*and in a trance I saw a vision, a certain object coming down like a great sheet lowered by four corners from the sky; and it came right down to me, and when I had fixed my gaze upon it and was observing it I saw the four-footed animals of the earth and the wild beasts and the crawling creatures and the birds of the air.*"

καὶ εἶδον ἐν ἐκστάσει ὅραμα, καταβαῖνον σκεῦός τι ὡς ὀθόνην μεγάλην τέσσαρσιν ἀρχαῖς καθιεμένην ἐκ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ, καὶ ἦλθεν ἄχρι ἐμοῦ. εἰς ἣν ἀτενίσας κατενόουν καὶ εἶδον τὰ τετράποδα τῆς γῆς καὶ τὰ θηρία καὶ τὰ ἑρπετὰ καὶ τὰ πετεινὰ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ.

4. (:7-10) <u>Repeated Revelation</u> – Hearing the Word of the Lord and Obeying
"*And I also heard a voice saying to me, 'Arise, Peter; kill and eat.' But I said, 'By no means, Lord, for nothing unholy or unclean has ever entered my mouth.' But a voice from heaven answered a second time, 'What God has cleansed, no longer consider unholy.' And this happened three times, and everything was drawn back up into the sky.*"

ἤκουσα δὲ καὶ φωνῆς λεγούσης μοι· ἀναστάς, Πέτρε, θῦσον καὶ φάγε. εἶπον δέ· μηδαμῶς, κύριε, ὅτι κοινὸν ἢ ἀκάθαρτον οὐδέποτε εἰσῆλθεν εἰς τὸ στόμα μου. ἀπεκρίθη δὲ φωνὴ ἐκ δευτέρου ἐκ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ· ἃ ὁ θεὸς ἐκαθάρισεν, σὺ μὴ κοίνου. τοῦτο δὲ ἐγένετο ἐπὶ τρίς, καὶ ἀνεσπάσθη πάλιν ἅπαντα εἰς τὸν οὐρανόν.

5. (:11) <u>Providential Proof</u>
"*And behold, at that moment three men appeared before the house in which we were staying, having been sent to me from Caesarea.*

καὶ ἰδοὺ ἐξαυτῆς τρεῖς ἄνδρες ἐπέστησαν ἐπὶ τὴν οἰκίαν ἐν ᾗ ἦμεν, ἀπεσταλμένοι ἀπὸ Καισαρείας πρός με

6. (:12a) <u>Sensitivity to the Holy Spirit</u>
"*And the Spirit told me to go with them without misgivings.*"

εἶπεν δὲ τὸ πνεῦμά μοι συνελθεῖν αὐτοῖς μηδὲν διακρίναντα.

7. (:12b) Objective Outside Counsel

"*And these six brethren also went with me, and we entered the man's house.*"

ἦλθον δὲ σὺν ἐμοὶ καὶ οἱ ἓξ ἀδελφοὶ οὗτοι καὶ εἰσήλθομεν εἰς τὸν οἶκον τοῦ ἀνδρός.

Value of Peter taking along witnesses so it would not just be his word regarding what happened in the house of Cornelius

8. (:13-14) Angelic Announcement – not always available!

"*And he reported to us how he had seen the angel standing in his house, and saying, 'Send to Joppa, and have Simon, who is also called Peter, brought here; and he shall speak words to you by which you will be saved, you and all your household.*"

ἀπήγγειλεν δὲ ἡμῖν πῶς εἶδεν [τὸν] ἄγγελον ἐν τῷ οἴκῳ αὐτοῦ σταθέντα καὶ εἰπόντα· ἀπόστειλον εἰς Ἰόππην καὶ μετάπεμψαι Σίμωνα τὸν ἐπικαλούμενον Πέτρον, ὃς λαλήσει ῥήματα πρὸς σὲ ἐν οἷς σωθήσῃ σὺ καὶ πᾶς ὁ οἶκός σου.

9. (:15) Physical Phenomena – nothing but the facts

"*And as I began to speak, the Holy Spirit fell upon them, just as He did upon us at the beginning.*"

ἐν δὲ τῷ ἄρξασθαί με λαλεῖν ἐπέπεσεν τὸ πνεῦμα τὸ ἅγιον ἐπ᾽ αὐτοὺς ὥσπερ καὶ ἐφ᾽ ἡμᾶς ἐν ἀρχῇ.

10. (:16) Prophetic Promise

"*And I remembered the word of the Lord, how He used to say, 'John baptized with water, but you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit.*"

ἐμνήσθην δὲ τοῦ ῥήματος τοῦ κυρίου ὡς ἔλεγεν· Ἰωάννης μὲν ἐβάπτισεν ὕδατι, ὑμεῖς δὲ βαπτισθήσεσθε ἐν πνεύματι ἁγίῳ.

(:17) CONCLUSION:

"*If God therefore gave to them the same gift as He gave to us also after believing in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I that I could stand in God's way?*"

εἰ οὖν τὴν ἴσην δωρεὰν ἔδωκεν αὐτοῖς ὁ θεὸς ὡς καὶ ἡμῖν πιστεύσασιν ἐπὶ τὸν κύριον Ἰησοῦν Χριστόν, ἐγὼ τίς ἤμην δυνατὸς κωλῦσαι τὸν θεόν;

When we stubbornly persist in debating with God and questioning His Ways, we stand in God's Way – sort of like God standing in Balaam's way when he stubbornly tried to go his own way – not a very smart move on our part
Numbers 22:22-35; 2 Pet. 2:15-16
Don't be dumber than a donkey!
Don't be more arrogant than an ass!

Kent: By rehearsing the incident with considerable detail, Peter made it clear that this extension of the gospel to the gentiles was not some idea of his own to enlarge the church, but was God's

doing from beginning to end.

Lenski: In v. 12 the six brethren from Joppa appear in Jerusalem with Peter. This makes it unlikely that Peter waited so long a time before going back to Jerusalem, or that he first toured Galilee. It is most probable that the interval did not extend beyond two or three weeks, and that thus these six brethren from Joppa were still in Peter's company.

Lenski: Peter asks his critics whether they thought that he was able to prevent God from dealing with these Gentiles as he did. Two questions are fused into one: "Who was I?" and, "Was I able?" The very idea that Peter might hinder God in this bestowal is preposterous. Did his critics intend to claim that he should have attempted that? The question asked them involves also whether they would so hinder God.

C. (11:18) Peaceful and Logical Resolution

1. Requires Patient and Respectful Listening

"*And when they heard this,*"
Ἀκούσαντες δὲ ταῦτα

No jumping to conclusions; knee jerk decisions

2. Elevates Calm Logic Above Passionate Emotion

"*they quieted down,*"
ἡσύχασαν

3. Pursues the Unified Goal of Glorifying God

"*and glorified God,*"
καὶ ἐδόξασαν τὸν θεὸν

4. Embraces Convictions that are Consistent with the Heart and Will of God

"*saying, 'Well then, God has granted to the Gentiles also the repentance that leads to life.'*"
λέγοντες· ἄρα καὶ τοῖς ἔθνεσιν ὁ θεὸς τὴν μετάνοιαν εἰς ζωὴν ἔδωκεν.

We arrive at a peaceful resolution when we submit to the God who makes the rules instead of trying to enforce our own prejudices and agenda

CONCLUSION:

- God does not owe us an explanation of all of His ways.
- Recognize that our perspective is tainted by prejudice and tradition.
- Be sensitive to accepting all those whom God has accepted without reservation.
- Seek confirmation for God's ways – but with priority on God's revelation.
- But then embrace God's ways and be willing to change your thinking and obey.

* * * * * * * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

1) What are the implications here for churches that project themselves as monolithic – only attempting to reach one slice of society?

2) How does God work in people's minds and hearts to remove prejudice and open up our thinking to new possibilities and new methodologies?

3) What observations from this passage support the sovereignty of God with respect to salvation?

4) Should all believers expect to experience a similar Pentecost-type outpouring of the Holy Spirit accompanied by speaking in tongues?

* * * * * * * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Stott: This story also poses awkward questions to those who insist on a two-stage Christian initiation, since it is certain that Luke is describing Cornelius' conversion, and not a second, post-conversion baptism of the Spirit. For Peter preached the gospel to him, and Cornelius is said to have repented (11:18) and believed (15:7, 9). What he experienced is also called interchangeably either "*receiving*" the gift of the Spirit (10:45, 47; 11:17) or being "*baptized*" with the Spirit (11:16). In fact, Cornelius' water-baptism signified and sealed the total salvation (11:14) which God had given him, including both the forgiveness of sins and the gift of the Spirit (10:43, 45), as on the Day of Pentecost (2:38).

Stott: **The Power of the Gospel** – Luke has now recounted the conversions of Saul and Cornelius. The differences between these two men were considerable. In race Saul was a Jew, Cornelius a Gentile; in culture Saul was a scholar, Cornelius a soldier; in religion Saul was a bigot, Cornelius a seeker. Yet both were converted by the gracious initiative of God; both received forgiveness of sins and the gift of the Spirit; and both were baptized and welcomed into the Christian family on equal terms. This fact is a signal testimony to the power and impartiality of the gospel of Christ, which is still "*the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes; first for the Jew, then for the Gentile*."

Bock: The argument is that if God can sovereignly distribute to the Gentiles the same promised Spirit of the new era that Jews received, then how could Peter hinder their inclusion in the blessings of the people of God?

Boice: Prejudice dies hard. But we need to learn from these early lessons regarding the scope of God's grace in the gospel. Often we find it difficult to believe that God can accept other people without these others first becoming like us. Yet God does accept them. And it is good he does, because if he did not, you and I would never have become Christians. We would have been excluded. The only reason we are believers is that God does not show favoritism. That is why we are "in." Therefore, we must not show favoritism ourselves. We must reach out to everyone, and we must not count it a threat when God brings into our fellowship somebody who from our perspective just doesn't seem to fit. What matters is not whether other people fit in with us. What matters is that they have been accepted by God.

Steven Cole: **How God Changes Our Thinking**

A lot of pastors just skip over these verses, since they repeat the story of chapter 10. But whenever Scripture repeats something, we need to take notice. There is an important lesson here that we might be prone to miss. Our text shows how God changed the thinking of these Christians on a matter that was essential for the spread of the gospel.

To accomplish His sovereign purpose in salvation, God has to change the wrong thinking of His people.

1. God's sovereign purpose includes the salvation of some from every nation for His glory.

1) Concerning God's purpose, it is fundamental to understand that salvation is God's program and God's doing, but He uses us in the process.

2) If you are not in some way involved in getting the gospel to the nations, you're not involved in God's purpose.

3) The local church should be as racially diverse as the local population.

2. We all bring wrong thinking into the Christian life.

Spurgeon (C. H. Spurgeon Autobiography [Banner of Truth], 1:164) said that we're all by nature born Arminians, so that at first we think that we came to the Lord ourselves. Only later we learn from God's Word that He first sought us. Part of the process of sanctification is God's transforming our minds (Rom. 12:2) as we begin to assimilate the truths of His Word. Here are three ways that Peter's critics in Jerusalem were thinking wrongly:

1) Wrong thinking: human traditions are more important than salvation.

2) Wrong thinking: the church should consist of "my kind" of people.

3) Wrong thinking: God has to do things my way.

3. God changes our wrong thinking so that we can be His instruments in His work.

1) God changes us as we seek to walk with Him.

2) God changes us by jarring us through uncomfortable circumstances.

3) God changes us by repeating the lesson until it sinks in.

4) God changes us by appealing to our thinking with His Word of truth.

5) God changes us by getting us to see that He is sovereign and we are not.

6) God changes us so that He can use us in greater ways to fulfill His sovereign purpose in saving the lost.

MacArthur: We want an exclusive fellowship. We want the fellowship of the pure. The pure are those who think like we do; and we want the fellowship of the deserving, those who would be so gratified to have your presence around; and we usually manage somehow within the framework of our structure to screen out anybody who doesn't enhance our image, strengthen our viewpoint, boost our pride, reinforce our prejudice, or feed our ego; and we...we sort of clannishly group in these little kind of identifying circles; and it's amazing how difficult it is for us, who are in another circle, to break into another circle, or for us to feel at home. . .

When you believe, the moment that you believe, the moment you put your faith in Christ, you, at that very instant, receive the presence of the Spirit of God within you. You don't wait for it. You don't get it. You don't do 49 spiritual pushups and you earn it. It is given to you at the moment

you believe. That is absolutely clear in Scripture, and I'll begin by Ezekiel 36 to show you how clear it really is.

Ezekiel 36:26, listen. Here is the promise of God, Ezekiel 36:26, that far back. "A new heart also will I give you." Now, that's salvation. The man needs a new heart, because the old one is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked, so he needs a new heart. That's salvation. "And a new Spirit will I put within you." Notice, salvation and the Spirit are connected at the same moment. "I'll take away the stony heart of your flesh, and give you a heart of flesh." Listen, "I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you shall keep Mine ordinances and do them." . . .

In the Book of Acts, on the three occasions where tongues are mentioned, they come to an entire group at once. They are a corporate, church-founding group conversion phenomenon in Acts, and they never occur subsequently in the Book of Acts in the experience of any one individual...Therefore, they had a place as assigned to the Jews of the equality of other groups in the unity of the church. . .

Henry George was running for the mayor of New York, the office of mayor, and he was called to a mass meeting at the Cooper Institute to speak to the working men. The chairman of the meeting gave him a flowery introduction with a typical kind of political rhetoric; and he concluded by saying, "The friend of the working man." As soon as Mr. George rose to his feet, he said, slowly and emphatically, "I would like to announce that I am not the friend of the working man." Stunned silence ensued. A strange kind of bewilderment, and then he went on. "Nor am I the friend of capital. I am for men simply as men, regardless of any accidental or superfluous distinctions of race, creed, color, class, function, or employment. I am for men."

And that, in a sense, is what Jesus always said. He was not and is not the Jews' friend nor the Gentiles' friend, nor the friend of the rich, nor the friend of the poor, nor the friend of the higher up or the friend of the prostitute. He is the friend of sinners, and that includes all of us. I hope you're the friend of sinners, and that includes all of 'em.

TEXT: Acts 11:19-26

TITLE: ABUNDANT HARVEST OF GENTILE BELIEVERS

BIG IDEA:
CATCHING GOD'S VISION FOR GENTILE CONVERSIONS LEADS TO EXPLODING CHURCH GROWTH

INTRODUCTION: John 4:35 – "*Behold, I say to you, lift up your eyes and look on the fields, that they are white for harvest*."

Stott: **Expansion and Opposition**
The inclusion of the Gentiles is to be Luke's main theme in the rest of Acts, and with chapter 13 he begins to chronicle Paul's missionary exploits. Before this, however, he gives his readers two vignettes, which form a transition between the conversion of the first Gentile (through Peter) and the systematic evangelization of Gentiles (by Paul). The first (11:19-30) depicts the expansion of the church northwards, as a result of evangelistic activity by anonymous missionaries. The scene is Antioch, and Paul figures in the story, although Barnabas is more prominent. The second (12:1-25) depicts opposition to the church by King Herod Agrippa I, who concentrates his attack on members of the apostolic circle. The scene is Jerusalem, and Peter occupies the centre of the stage. In fact, this is Luke's final Peter-story before his leadership role is taken over by Paul, and Jerusalem is eclipsed by the goal of Rome.

(:19) OCCASION – By way of contrast – Most People are Slow to Embrace God's Vision for the Moment (bogged down by traditional thinking)

> "*So then those who were scattered because of the persecution that arose in connection with Stephen made their way to Phoenicia and Cyprus and Antioch, speaking the word to no one except to Jews alone.*"
>
> Οἱ μὲν οὖν διασπαρέντες ἀπὸ τῆς θλίψεως τῆς γενομένης ἐπὶ Στεφάνῳ διῆλθον ἕως Φοινίκης καὶ Κύπρου καὶ Ἀντιοχείας μηδενὶ λαλοῦντες τὸν λόγον εἰ μὴ μόνον Ἰουδαίοις.

Kent: This passage takes the reader back in time to the events of Acts 8:1, 4, and describes what was occurring in the north at the same time that the happenings in Samaria, Caesarea, and that general region were taking place. . . major cities of Phoenicia = Tyre and Sidon . . . Antioch was the third largest city in the Roman Empire at this time (after Rome and Alexandria).

Bruce: The city's reputation for moral laxity was enhanced by the cult of Artemis and Apollo at Daphne, five miles distant, where the ancient Syrian worship of Astarte and her consort, with its ritual prostitution, was carried on

MacArthur: Antioch was gross to put it mildly. The people lived for their pleasures. One writer said that life there was a perpetual festival of vice revolving around the baths, brothels, the amphitheatre and the circus. And so it was an evil place.

Like the infield at the Preakness – the Kegasus marketing creature = drunken mascot

Deffinbaugh: For many of these saints were handicapped by their (one) language and culture,

and even those who were not were brought up as saints to believe that the gospel was for the Jews alone. No wonder Luke portrays the prejudice of Peter and the Jerusalem apostles and saints just prior to this account of the "tight-lipped" saints who were scattered from Jerusalem.

CATCHING GOD'S VISION FOR GENTILE CONVERSIONS LEADS TO EXPLODING CHURCH GROWTH --

(HUGE NUMBERS OF NEW GENTILE BELIEVERS IN THE CHURCH AT ANTIOCH)

3 STAGES OF EXPLODING GROWTH OF CHURCH AT ANTIOCH

I. (:20-21) INITIAL GROWTH – EVANGELISTIC MINISTRY OF UNNAMED PERSECUTED JEWS

A. (:20) <u>Pioneer Evangelism</u> Among the Gentiles

"*But there were some of them, men of Cyprus and Cyrene, who came to Antioch and began speaking to the Greeks also, preaching the Lord Jesus.*"

Ἦσαν δέ τινες ἐξ αὐτῶν ἄνδρες Κύπριοι καὶ Κυρηναῖοι, οἵτινες ἐλθόντες εἰς Ἀντιόχειαν ἐλάλουν καὶ πρὸς τοὺς Ἕλληνιστὰς εὐαγγελιζόμενοι τὸν κύριον Ἰησοῦν

Constable: The Ethiopian eunuch and Cornelius, who were both Gentiles, had taken the initiative in reaching out to Jews and had obtained salvation. Now believing Jews were taking the initiative in reaching out to Gentiles with the gospel.

Unknown heroes of evangelism and church planting – not the big names we have been used to hearing about in Acts

Deffinbaugh: Those who preached Christ to the Gentiles were men of Cyprus and Cyrene. Barnabas, for example, was from the island of Cyprus (4:36). Simon, who carried the cross of our Lord (Luke 23:26) was a Cyrenian. Lucius too was a Cyrenian (Acts 13:1). There is one thing which we can safely and confidently conclude from what Luke has told us: those who proclaimed the gospel to the Gentiles were Hellenistic Jews. . .
THESE SAINTS SURPASSED THEIR PEERS, THEIR TEACHERS, AND EVEN THE APOSTLES, BECAUSE THEY DID NOT LET THE LIMITATIONS OF THEIR LEADERS BE THEIR OWN.

Cyprus = island not far from Antioch; Cyrene = city in N. Africa

Longenecker: it seems fair to say that Luke did not look on the Greeks in v.20 as simply Gentiles unaffected by the influence of Judaism and that he did not view the Hellenistic Christians' approach to them as preempting the uniqueness of Paul's later Gentile policy.

Antioch = strategic center of operations to launch future missionary journeys; development of church there – what it would look like – would be the template for a NT church that would be duplicated throughout the world

B. (:21a) <u>Powerful Enablement</u> of the Lord – His Providential Favor and Blessing

"*And the hand of the Lord was with them,*"
καὶ ἦν χεὶρ κυρίου μετ᾽ αὐτῶν,

pictures God's power (cf. Isa. 59:1; 66:14).

MacArthur: It means two things: first of all it means **power.** The hand of the Lord means power. In Exodus 14:31, the Bible says, "And Israel saw that great work, which the Lord had done." And the word work is the word hand. It expresses power and the Egyptians were shocked at what God had done. They said, "Look it is the finger of God." His hand extended means power. But it always means **power with blessing**. There may be something happening in it, but ultimately He's blessing. It may be something of an evil nature initially, but blessing is the end of it. And it's more qualified in Ezra. Ezra 7:9, Ezra 8:18, **Nehemiah 2: 2,8, 18**. All of that in there you can read sometime not now. But in that passage you have the statement, "*The good hand of the Lord*." And it's repeated at least four or five times. The hand of the Lord then means **blessing**.

C. (:21b) <u>Penetrating Effects</u> of the Gospel – Huge Numbers of Converts

"*and a **large number** who believed turned to the Lord.*"
πολύς τε ἀριθμὸς ὁ πιστεύσας ἐπέστρεψεν ἐπὶ τὸν κύριον.

Huge numbers involved – this is the emphasis in each of the three sections of this text; God is sovereignly by His Spirit doing something BIG here

Combination of Faith and Repentance

Tousssaint: The clause "*believed and turned to the Lord*" does not necessarily refer to two separate actions. The Greek construction (an aorist participle with an aorist finite verb) often indicates that the two actions are simultaneous. This clause, then, means, "in believing, they turned to the Lord."

Possible to know the facts about Jesus are true but not to turn from your sin to put your confidence in Him

II. (:22-24) SUSTAINED GROWTH – ENCOURAGEMENT MINISTRY OF BARNABAS

A. (:22) Investigation of Gentile Conversions

"*And the news about them reached the ears of the church at Jerusalem, and they sent Barnabas off to Antioch.*"

Ἠκούσθη δὲ ὁ λόγος εἰς τὰ ὦτα τῆς ἐκκλησίας τῆς οὔσης ἐν Ἰερουσαλὴμ περὶ αὐτῶν καὶ ἐξαπέστειλαν Βαρναβᾶν [διελθεῖν] ἕως Ἀντιοχείας

Could not have chosen a better man for the job; had a large heart – inclusive rather than exclusive mindset; as indicated by his name, he excelled at encouraging others

Bruce: Barnabas himself was a Cypriote Jew by birth, like some of those who had begun to preach the gospel to the Antiochene Gentiles, and his sympathies would in any case be wider than those of Jewish Christians who had never set foot outside Judea.

Journey of over 300 miles to the north

B. (:23-24a) Verification and Encouragement of Gentile Conversions

1. Evidence of Grace of God in Transforming Gentiles

"*Then when he had come and witnessed the grace of God,*"
ὃς παραγενόμενος καὶ ἰδὼν τὴν χάριν [τὴν] τοῦ θεοῦ,

How does the grace of God become visible so that you can witness it??
One thing to be back in Jerusalem and hear about it; another to come and personally witness it

2. Excitement Experienced Personally by Barnabas

"*he rejoiced*"
ἐχάρη

different reaction than those who were skeptical; who wanted to question what was happening; who did not want to believe that Gentiles could be received into fellowship on an equal basis

3. Encouragement to New Converts to Persevere

"*and began to encourage them all with resolute heart to remain true to the Lord;*"
καὶ παρεκάλει πάντας τῇ προθέσει τῆς καρδίας προσμένειν τῷ κυρίῳ,

Importance of Abiding in Christ; clinging to Christ – **John 15**; **1 John 2:24-28**
Continue in the word of God

Wiersbe: The same grace that saves us can also keep us (1 Cor. 15:10; Heb. 13:9 "*it is good for the heart to be strengthened by grace*").

4. Example of Godly Character = His Qualifications for this Ministry

a. His Overall Reputation

"*for he was a good man,*"
ὅτι ἦν ἀνὴρ ἀγαθὸς

b. His Spiritual Dynamic

"*and full of the Holy Spirit*"
καὶ πλήρης πνεύματος ἁγίου

Stephen had been described in this same manner

c. His Orientation of Faith

"*and of faith*"
καὶ πίστεως.

Piper: At the very beginning of the Christian life we receive the Holy Spirit by trusting in the truth of the gospel (Galatians 3:2). Then as the Christian life goes on and there is need again and again to be strengthened and filled with the Spirit, this too happens by faith in the word of God's promise (Galatians 3:5). One of the practical fruits or products of this Spirit-filled faith is goodness (Galatians 5:22).

C. (:24b) Multiplication of Gentile Conversions – **Huge Numbers** of Converts

"*And **considerable numbers** were brought to the Lord.*"

καὶ προσετέθη ὄχλος ἱκανὸς τῷ κυρίῳ.

Guzik: This is the plan for church growth spoken of in **Ephesians 4:11-16**. Leaders in the church dedicate themselves to building strong, healthy Christians. As the saints are equipped for the work of the ministry, they grow into maturity, and do their ministry, and it causes growth of the body.

MacArthur: a giant multitude; a massive multitude

Stott: The verb for "*added*" in verse 24 has become for Luke an almost technical word for church growth. He used it twice in relation to the Day of Pentecost, first of the three thousand who were added that day (2:41) and then of the daily additions which followed (2:47). Later he wrote of "*more and more men and women*" believing in the Lord and being added to the church (5:14), while in Syrian Antioch "*a great number of people*" were added (11:24).

III. (:25-26) MATURING GROWTH – EDIFICATION MINISTRY OF BARNABAS AND SAUL

A. (:25-26a) New Partner in Ministry – Maturity Requires Effective Leadership

"*And he left for Tarsus to look for Saul; and when he had found him, he brought him to Antioch.*"

ἐξῆλθεν δὲ εἰς Ταρσὸν ἀναζητῆσαι Σαῦλον, καὶ εὑρὼν ἤγαγεν εἰς Ἀντιόχειαν.

Constable: Barnabas had earlier sponsored Saul in Jerusalem (9:27). Now Barnabas brought Saul to Antioch, a distance of about 90 miles, where they ministered together for a year teaching and leading the church. This was probably in A.D. 43, ten years after the death and resurrection of Jesus and the day of Pentecost.

MacArthur: the original word "suggests a laborious search on Barnabas' part."

Bruce: Saul appears to have been disinherited for his Christian confession and could no longer be found at his ancestral home.

B. (:26b) New Program of Systematic Church Indoctrination – Huge Numbers – Maturity Feeds on Sound Doctrine

"*And it came about that for an entire year they met with the church, and taught* ***considerable numbers;***"

ἐγένετο δὲ αὐτοῖς καὶ ἐνιαυτὸν ὅλον συναχθῆναι ἐν τῇ ἐκκλησίᾳ καὶ διδάξαι ὄχλον ἱκανόν,

What type of program does the church need to focus on?? Teaching, indoctrination – you can't get too much of it – as long as you are applying it and living it out on the spiritual battlefield

What methods and programs are effective to disciple young believers and cause them to grow deep roots so that they will be fruitful??

C. (:26c) New Name – Maturity Creates Differentiation from Outsiders

"*and the disciples were first called Christians in Antioch.*"

χρηματίσαι τε πρώτως ἐν Ἀντιοχείᾳ τοὺς μαθητὰς Χριστιανούς.

Possibly term of derision initially; non believers can put up with believers who blend in and look like the world – they can't stand those who look like Jesus Christ in how they live – but maybe not – Boice thinks it just was characteristic of the one whom they could not stop talking about

Kent: In all likelihood the name "*Christians*" was first coined by outsiders, inasmuch as the church called itself "brethren," "disciples," "those of the Way," or "those who were believing." . . . The name consists of the title "Christ" with the suffix "-ian" denoting an adherent.

Eusebius: [the famous early church historian] describes a believer named Sanctus from Lyons, France, who was tortured for Jesus. As they tortured him cruelly, they hoped to get him to say something evil or blasphemous. They asked his name, and he would only reply, "I am a Christian." "What nation do you belong to?" He would answer, "I am a Christian." "What city do you live in?" "I am a Christian." His questioners began to get angry: "Are you a slave or a free man?" "I am a Christian" was the only reply. No matter what they asked about him, he would only answer, "I am a Christian." This made his torturers all the more determined to break him, but they could not, and he died with the words "I am a Christian" on his lips. (Eusebius, Church History)

Toussaint: The significance of the name, emphasized by the word order in the Greek text, is that people recognized Christians as a distinct group. The church was more and more being separated from Judaism.

Deffinbaugh: But now we are dealing with Gentiles, pure pagans. They were not Jewish, and when they came to faith in the Lord Jesus they did not go to the synagogue nor did they associate with the Jews. They were very different and distinct from the Jews, and their faith did not make them Jewish. These people had no identity. What would you call this new group of people, this large body of people, who had been saved, but were not a part of any established religion? They needed a name, a name which depicted their essential uniqueness and which characterized them. The name which that city coined was the name "Christians." The one thing which characterized every one of these new believers was their faith in Christ, their belonging to Him, and so they were appropriately named Christians.

CONCLUSION:
What is God's Vision for today? Are we catching God's Vision for Today?

* * * * * * * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

1) What is most important from God's perspective in terms of His Vision for today?

2) Where do we see the church limited by traditional thinking and failing to embrace God's vision for today?

3) What was Saul doing in the years since his conversion?

4) How has the designation of "Christians" become watered down in our day?

* * * * * * * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Bob Deffinbaugh: Not only are Gentiles saved, but an entire Gentile city—Antioch—is impacted with the gospel, an impact which will continue to grow long after the lives and ministries of men like Barnabas and Saul. It is, in fact, this church at Antioch which God ordained to be the launching pad for the gospel to many nations. It is from Antioch that Barnabas and Saul (Acts 13:1), soon to become "Paul and Barnabas" (Acts 13:4ff.), will be sent for as missionaries. It is also Antioch which will play an interesting role with Jerusalem. It will be ministered to by those from Jerusalem, and it will, in turn, minister financially to those in Judea. It will also be the church in Antioch which will respond to the heretical teaching of some from Judea, by sending Paul, Barnabas, and others to Jerusalem where the so-called "Jerusalem Council" will be convened which will make a landmark decision concerning the gospel and the Gentiles.

Piper: **6 Demonstrations of Barnabas' Goodness and Faith:**
1. His Empathy to Outsiders
2. His Submission to God's Call Through the Church
3. His Vision of God's Grace in an Imperfect Church
4. His Joy over God's Grace in Other's Lives
5. His Exertion for the Saints' Perseverance
6. His Trustworthiness with Other People's Money

[Grace of God made visible] -- God's Grace in My Own Life

I want to bear testimony that it has been true in my own life as well. The grace of God has become visible by turning sorrow into substance. I've told you several times how the years between the eighth grade in high school and my sophomore year in college were clouded by my inability to speak in front of any group. I would tremble so bad I could hold nothing in my hands. My heart would race so fast and hard I could see it move under my shirt. My throat and shoulders would tighten up so bad I literally could not get the words out in any normal way. It was terribly humiliating and kept me from many activities.

But do you know what the grace of God was doing in those awful days? Only a prophet could have known then what I know now: God was making a preacher. I believe he clogged my mouth so that he could fill my heart. He broke me again and again and made me desperate to find in him something I could not get from other people. He cut me off from the fast track of popularity and drove me into his Word looking for some kind of explanation for why my hundreds of prayers (e.g., just to give a one minute report on a 3 x 5 card in Sunday School) were not answered.

But now I know better. He was answering my prayers. I wouldn't see it clearly for about 20 years. But he was making a preacher. He was doing it the way nobody else would do it—because his ways are not our ways. And now I see all the embarrassment and all the humiliation and all the loneliness and all the crying out to God as sheer gift, and my standing in this pulpit today as the visibility of grace. If Eugene Lawrence, my old pastor from 30 years ago at White Oak

Baptist Church, could sit where you sit today, he would say like Barnabas in this text, "I have seen the grace of God and I am glad."

Paul Powell once said "Many churches today remind me of a laboring crew trying to gather in a harvest while they sit in the tool shed. They go to the tool shed every Sunday and they study bigger and better methods of agriculture, sharpen their hoes, grease their tractors, and then get up and go home. Then they come back that night, study bigger and better methods of agriculture, sharpen their hoes and grease their tractors and go home again. They come back Wednesday night, and again study bigger and better methods of agriculture, sharpen their hoes, grease their tractors, and get up and go home. They do this week in and week out, year in and year out, and nobody ever goes out into the fields to gather in the harvest."

Jimmy Chapman: **Marks of a Christian**
I. Christians Should be Known for their DECLARATION OF THE GOSPEL (19-21)
THEY SPEAK OUT!
II. Christians Should Be Known For Their DEMONSTRATION OF GRACE (22-26)
THEY STAND OUT!
III. Christians Should Be Known Their DEDICATION TO GIVING (27-30)
THEY SHELL OUT!
www.sermoncentral.com

John Greer: **Marks of a NT Church**
The Acts of the Holy Spirit in the times of the apostles and in the experience of first century – Sovereign independence of the Spirit of God; entrance of the gospel into the Gentile world; independent of what was taking place in household of Cornelius – without any human connection; preached with marvelous and lasting results; Holy Spirit does not need man although He does use man; entire city felt impact of the might of the Holy Spirit; became center of Gentile Christianity; base of operations from which Paul was sent out on his 3 missionary journeys; shows us what a NT church ought to be; we want to resemble the church of the NT;

The Formation of the Church at Antioch – unlikely city given its moral decadence; city of great beauty because of its architecture; center of commerce and trade because of its location; notorious for sin for its frivolity and every kind of vice; gathering place for Roman soldiers and Phoenician merchants; bent on sensual pleasure; the Lord does work in unlikely places; look at early cities and association with sin (Enoch, Babel);
2 outstanding factors in the formation:

- the power in its formation
- the preaching in its formation

Unknown preachers from Jerusalem = gospel refugees; but they had the power of the Lord upon them; Luke 1:66 – John the Baptist (1:15 – filled with Holy Spirit); look at references in Ezra = impossible situation from human standpoint (7:6, 9); we need the hand of God upon us again; Priority of Evangelistic Preaching – don't let music ministry push it inside; don't adopt other methods; we are here to preach Christ (not to tell stories and jokes); people don't want preaching we are told; Edifying Preaching; the same group that was evangelized was taught and discipled; not abandoned; Saul is God's man to the Gentiles; unselfishness of Barnabas; the church can only become strong and be effective as it is edified; reaction today against doctrine

- Consider its membership:
  - converted membership;
  - called Christians = Christ's ones;

- consecrated people vs. 23 – cleave unto the Lord;
- Christlike

http://www.sermonaudio.com/playpopup.asp?SID=102509725562

TEXT: Acts 11:27 – 12:25

TITLE: UNSTOPPABLE ADVANCE OF GOD'S KINGDOM

BIG IDEA:
KINGDOM GROWTH CANNOT BE HALTED BY DIFFICULT PHYSICAL CIRCUMSTANCES OR BY INTIMIDATING PERSECUTION

INTRODUCTION:
Sometimes we get discouraged in the spiritual warfare and forget that we are on the winning team. God is Sovereign. Even when it looks like circumstances are against us and the wicked are prospering, God is still accomplishing His Kingdom agenda. One conviction we should bring away from studying the Book of Acts is that God's Word, His Gospel message is unstoppable. Look at the small beginnings of just a handful of ordinary people – people without any wealth or worldly power and influence – and look at how God worked to advance His Kingdom.

The key verse in our story for today is another one of those progress reports that Luke gives –
12:24: "*But the word of the Lord continued to grow and to be multiplied.*"
This will be even more surprising and impressive when we see the difficult circumstances facing the church.

TWO POTENTIAL OBSTACLES TO CHURCH GROWTH:

Our section is bracketed on the front and back end by references to the missionary team of **Barnabas and Saul** (11:30, 12:25). They are providing the connectivity between the Jewish church in Jerusalem which is in need of financial assistance and under intense persecution from King Herod and the new Gentile church at Antioch which will become the center of missionary operations from Chap. 13 onwards. Two different stories are told in this long section – we cannot even be sure if Luke is presenting things in strict chronological order or with more of an emphasis on thematic structure. But these two stories relate two potential obstacles to church growth.

I. (11:27-30) WORLDWIDE POVERTY --
KINGDOM GROWTH CANNOT BE HALTED BY DIFFICULT PHYSCIAL CIRCUMSTANCES BECAUSE BRETHREN UNITE IN CARING FOR THE PHYSICAL NEEDS OF THE CHURCH FAMILY

A. **(:27-28a) Prophetic Alert** – Hard Times on the Horizon

Now at this time some prophets came down from Jerusalem to Antioch. And one of them named Agabus stood up and began to indicate by the Spirit that there would certainly be a great famine all over the world."

Ἐν ταύταις δὲ ταῖς ἡμέραις κατῆλθον ἀπὸ Ἰεροσολύμων προφῆται εἰς Ἀντιόχειαν. ἀναστὰς δὲ εἷς ἐξ αὐτῶν ὀνόματι Ἄγαβος ἐσήμανεν διὰ τοῦ πνεύματος λιμὸν μεγάλην μέλλειν ἔσεσθαι ἐφ᾽ ὅλην τὴν οἰκουμένην,

Remember aloofness of Jewish believers towards Gentiles earlier

Toussaint: Though going north, they went "down" because Jerusalem is on a much higher elevation than Antioch.

Increasing interaction between church at Jerusalem and new church at Antioch; becoming more of a unified community of believers

Bock: we see the emergence of another key community, engaged in mission, instruction, discipleship, and caring for other communities in need, Word and deed again are side by side. The summary could hardly do a better job of showing a vibrant church at work, performing the essential tasks of a community so visibly that outsiders note who its members are. As always, it is responsiveness to divine direction and vision that leads to this effective ministry.

Gift of Prophecy – where are the prophets today? Harold Camping?? Included prediction as well as proclamation of Word of God

Foundational argument
Needed in terms of progressive revelation
Transition phase

Agabus -- good biblical name that no one seems to have picked up on and used; not a one trick pony – played another big prophetic role in **21:10** – object lesson using Paul's belt – "*In this way the Jews at Jerusalem will bind the man who owns this belt and deliver him into the hands of the Gentiles*."

Serious global ("inhabited earth" = Roman empire) calamity approaching – **how will people respond**??

- Scoffing and ignoring the warning – overlooking that these prophets were inspired by the Holy Spirit – that's what the bulk of people do every day with God's inspired Word
- Trying to escape the trial by human means … but this will be a worldwide problem – no place to run and hide
- Natural response would be hoarding – now that you have put me on alert, I will make sure to protect myself and my family

B. **(:28b) Poverty Actualized** – Promised by way of warning; now fulfilled
"*And this took place in the reign of Claudius.*"

ἥτις ἐγένετο ἐπὶ Κλαυδίου.

A.D. 41-54 = reign of Roman emperor Claudius

Fulfillment of this prophecy stated very matter of factly – but must have been the occasion of much difficulty for the saints – especially those in Jerusalem that were already endangered by persecution

Down through history the saints have experienced many difficult trials. Look at the personal physical struggles of people like Joni Eareckson Tada – where her circumstances became her platform for bringing greater glory to God. That is the message of **James 1** that we are to count it all joy when we fall into various trials ….

Trials are not the excuse to retreat from the spiritual battle; to close our mouths; to sit on the sidelines and refuse to give testimony to the providential grace and wisdom of our wonderful God and Savior Jesus Christ

C. **(:29-30a) Personal Action** – Unselfishly sacrificing to meet the need
"*And in the proportion that any of the disciples had means, each of them determined to send a contribution for the relief of the brethren living in Judea. And this they did,*"

τῶν δὲ μαθητῶν, καθὼς εὐπορεῖτό τις, ὥρισαν ἕκαστος αὐτῶν εἰς διακονίαν πέμψαι τοῖς κατοικοῦσιν ἐν τῇ Ἰουδαίᾳ ἀδελφοῖς·

A number of principles stand out in this portion:

- Disciples had varying amounts of resources – not as if all had donated all their worldly possessions to some common pool for distribution by the leaders
- Proportionate response was what was appropriate (**2 Cor. 8-9**) – **1 Cor. 16:2; 2 Cor. 9:7**
- Personal commitment on a voluntary basis – not group coercion
- Principle of those who have been blessed in a spiritual fashion have the responsibility to share in physical sense of support – **Gal. 6:6** "*The one who is taught the word is to share all good things with the one who teaches him*"
- Also the principle that in general we are to bear the burdens of each other to move towards a situation where no one is in desperate need – **Gal. 6:2** "*Bear one another's burdens, and thereby fulfill the law of Christ*."
- Shows the genuineness of the conversion of the Gentile believers
- Intentions alone don't get the job done; you have to have the implementation and follow through

D. **(:30b) Presbyterian Administration** – Oversight of spiritual leaders
"*sending it in charge of Barnabas and Saul to the elders.*"

ὃ καὶ ἐποίησαν ἀποστείλαντες πρὸς τοὺς πρεσβυτέρους διὰ χειρὸς Βαρναβᾶ καὶ Σαύλου.

Confidence the young church had in Barnabas and Saul – equally comfortable fulfilling role as verbal communicators of truth and as social workers to meet practical needs of the people

Development of a ministry team that would travel all over the region in the years ahead

- Preparation; building of confidence; would pick up John Mark

First mention of governing structure of Jerusalem church being structured around elders

Toussaint: Though there is some question about it, this famine visit in 11:27-30 is probably the same one referred to in Galatians 2-1-10.

Some circumstances are beyond the resources of the church to provide any assistance; need to use our weapon of fervent prayer to have an impact

II. (12:1-23) WORLDLY PERSECUTION – KINGDOM GROWTH CANNOT BE HALTED BY INTIMIDATING PERSECUTION BECAUSE ANGELIC INTERVENTION SHOWS WORLDLY POWERS WHO IS REALLY IN CONTROL – IT IS FOOLISH TO FIGHT AGAINST GOD

A. (:1-5) Man-Handling Man-Pleasers Resort to Powerful Persecution = FUTILITY OF OPPOSING GOD

"*Now about that time Herod the king laid hands on some who belonged to the church, in order to mistreat them. And he had James the brother of John put to death with a sword. And when he saw that it pleased the Jews, he proceeded to arrest Peter also. Now it was during the days of Unleavened Bread. And when he had seized him, he put him in prison, delivering him to four squads of soldiers to guard him, intending after the Passover to bring him out before the people. So Peter was kept in the prison, but prayer for him was being made fervently by the church to God.*"

Κατ᾽ ἐκεῖνον δὲ τὸν καιρὸν ἐπέβαλεν Ἡρῴδης ὁ βασιλεὺς τὰς χεῖρας κακῶσαί τινας τῶν ἀπὸ τῆς ἐκκλησίας. ἀνεῖλεν δὲ Ἰάκωβον τὸν ἀδελφὸν Ἰωάννου μαχαίρῃ. ἰδὼν δὲ ὅτι ἀρεστόν ἐστιν τοῖς Ἰουδαίοις, προσέθετο συλλαβεῖν καὶ Πέτρον,- ἦσαν δὲ [αἱ] ἡμέραι τῶν ἀζύμων- ὃν καὶ πιάσας ἔθετο εἰς φυλακὴν παραδοὺς τέσσαρσιν τετραδίοις στρατιωτῶν φυλάσσειν αὐτόν, βουλόμενος μετὰ τὸ πάσχα ἀναγαγεῖν αὐτὸν τῷ λαῷ. ὁ μὲν οὖν Πέτρος ἐτηρεῖτο ἐν τῇ φυλακῇ· προσευχὴ δὲ ἦν ἐκτενῶς γινομένη ὑπὸ τῆς ἐκκλησίας πρὸς τὸν θεὸν περὶ αὐτοῦ.

Kingdom of this world pitted against kingdom of God – battle rages

Saul knew what it was to fight against Jesus = the futility of it all; also knew what it was to be forgiven

Eight day combined feast: Passover plus 7 days of unleavened bread –

Herod Agrippa I = **ultimate politician** – "the fool who fights God" – characterized thus by MacArthur

- Sensitive to the popularity polls and tried to gain favor however he could
- Driven by expediency in his actions
- No problem abusing his power without concern for justice and righteousness
- Cruel in his treatment of those who posed any type of threat to his status
- Puffed up in the pride of his own power and importance to think that he could oppose God

Stott: He must have been well informed about Jesus and his followers, for his uncle Antipas had known and tried Jesus (Lk 23:7ff).

Wiersbe: This evil man was the grandson of Herod the Great, who ordered the Bethlehem children to be murdered, and the nephew of Herod Antipas, who had John the Baptist beheaded.

Kent: This was Peter's third arrest (4:3, 5:18), and remembrance of his previous deliverance from prison (5:19), may have caused extra precautions to be taken. He was put in the care of four squads of four soldiers each. Usual procedure would call for them to serve three-hour watches, with two soldiers chained to the prisoner and two guarding the door.

Matt. 20:22 – Jesus prophecied that James and John would drink of the cup of suffering in

identification with their master
MacArthur: And so it fulfilled the prophecy. Isn't it interesting of all the apostles he picked out to kill he picked the one that Jesus said would suffer. Men think they're so smart. All they're doing is just carrying out the plans of God.

Longenecker: Agrippa's policy was the *Pax Romana* through the preservation of the status quo. He supported the majority within the land and ruthlessly suppressed minorities when they became disruptive. He viewed Jewish Christians as divisive and felt their activities could only disturb the people and inflame antagonisms. So he arrested some of the believers in Jesus and had James, one of Jesus' original disciples, beheaded by the sword.

B. (:6-11) Angelic Assistance Provides Divine Deliverance = <u>FULFILLMENT OF GOD'S SOVEREIGN PURPOSES</u>

"*And on the very night when Herod was about to bring him forward, Peter was sleeping between two soldiers, bound with two chains; and guards in front of the door were watching over the prison. And behold, an angel of the Lord suddenly appeared, and a light shone in the cell; and he struck Peter's side and roused him, saying, 'Get up quickly.' And his chains fell off his hands. And the angel said to him, 'Gird yourself and put on your sandals.' And he did so. And he said to him, 'Wrap your cloak around you and follow me.' And he went out and continued to follow, and he did not know that what was being done by the angel was real, but thought he was seeing a vision. And when they had passed the first and second guard, they came to the iron gate that leads into the city, which opened for them by itself; and they went out and went along one street; and immediately the angel departed from him. And when Peter came to himself, he said, 'Now I know for sure that the Lord has sent forth His angel and rescued me from the hand of Herod and from all that the Jewish people were expecting.*"

Ὅτε δὲ ἤμελλεν προαγαγεῖν αὐτὸν ὁ Ἡρῴδης, τῇ νυκτὶ ἐκείνῃ ἦν ὁ Πέτρος κοιμώμενος μεταξὺ δύο στρατιωτῶν δεδεμένος ἁλύσεσιν δυσὶν φύλακές τε πρὸ τῆς θύρας ἐτήρουν τὴν φυλακήν. καὶ ἰδοὺ ἄγγελος κυρίου ἐπέστη καὶ φῶς ἔλαμψεν ἐν τῷ οἰκήματι· πατάξας δὲ τὴν πλευρὰν τοῦ Πέτρου ἤγειρεν αὐτὸν λέγων· ἀνάστα ἐν τάχει. καὶ ἐξέπεσαν αὐτοῦ αἱ ἁλύσεις ἐκ τῶν χειρῶν. εἶπεν δὲ ὁ ἄγγελος πρὸς αὐτόν· ζῶσαι καὶ ὑπόδησαι τὰ σανδάλιά σου. ἐποίησεν δὲ οὕτως. καὶ λέγει αὐτῷ· περιβαλοῦ τὸ ἱμάτιόν σου καὶ ἀκολούθει μοι. καὶ ἐξελθὼν ἠκολούθει καὶ οὐκ ᾔδει ὅτι ἀληθές ἐστιν τὸ γινόμενον διὰ τοῦ ἀγγέλου· ἐδόκει δὲ ὅραμα βλέπειν. διελθόντες δὲ πρώτην φυλακὴν καὶ δευτέραν ἦλθαν ἐπὶ τὴν πύλην τὴν σιδηρᾶν τὴν φέρουσαν εἰς τὴν πόλιν, ἥτις αὐτομάτη ἠνοίγη αὐτοῖς καὶ ἐξελθόντες προῆλθον ῥύμην μίαν, καὶ εὐθέως ἀπέστη ὁ ἄγγελος ἀπ᾽ αὐτοῦ. Καὶ ὁ Πέτρος ἐν ἑαυτῷ γενόμενος εἶπεν· νῦν οἶδα ἀληθῶς ὅτι ἐξαπέστειλεν [ὁ] κύριος τὸν ἄγγελον αὐτοῦ καὶ ἐξείλατό με ἐκ χειρὸς Ἡρῴδου καὶ πάσης τῆς προσδοκίας τοῦ λαοῦ τῶν Ἰουδαίων.

Note how soundly Peter slept the night before his expected execution

He knew that Jesus had promised him that he would live to be an old man and end his life crucified on a Roman cross (**John 21:18-19**) – should have been expecting deliverance in some fashion

More angelic activity today than we realize

- God's ministering spirits to protect us and minister to our needs (Heb. 13:2)
- Are we to imagine that they are inactive and not fulfilling their role today??
- Certainly involved in praise and worship – but interested in how the church goes about submitting to authority and worshiping the Sovereign God

- Song "Jesus take the wheel" – God cares for us

Stott: the destructive power of Herod and the saving power of God are contrasted . . . The situation looked extremely bleak, even hopeless. There appeared to be no possibility of Peter's escape. What could the little community of Jesus, in its powerlessness, do against the armed might of Rome?

Wiersbe: This deliverance too place at Passover season, the time of year when the Jews celebrated their exodus from Egypt. The word *delivered* in **Acts 12:11** is the same word Stephen used when he spoke about the Jewish exodus (**Acts 7:34**). Peter experienced a new kind of "*exodus*" in answer to the prayers of God's people.

C. (:12-17) Powerful Praying Brings a Rejoicing Report = <u>FUNCTION OF FERVENT PRAYER</u>

"*And when he realized this, he went to the house of Mary, the mother of John who was also called Mark, where many were gathered together and were praying. And when he knocked at the door of the gate, a servant-girl named Rhoda came to answer. And when she recognized Peter's voice, because of her joy she did not open the gate, but ran in and announced that Peter was standing in front of the gate. And they said to her, 'You are out of your mind!' But she kept insisting that it was so. And they kept saying, 'It is his angel.' But Peter continued knocking; and when they had opened the door, they saw him and were amazed. But motioning to them with his hand to be silent, he described to them how the Lord had led him out of the prison. And he said, 'Report these things to James and the brethren.' And he departed and went to another place.*"

συνιδών τε ἦλθεν ἐπὶ τὴν οἰκίαν τῆς Μαρίας τῆς μητρὸς Ἰωάννου τοῦ ἐπικαλουμένου Μάρκου, οὗ ἦσαν ἱκανοὶ συνηθροισμένοι καὶ προσευχόμενοι. κρούσαντος δὲ αὐτοῦ τὴν θύραν τοῦ πυλῶνος προσῆλθεν παιδίσκη ὑπακοῦσαι ὀνόματι Ῥόδη, καὶ ἐπιγνοῦσα τὴν φωνὴν τοῦ Πέτρου ἀπὸ τῆς χαρᾶς οὐκ ἤνοιξεν τὸν πυλῶνα, εἰσδραμοῦσα δὲ ἀπήγγειλεν ἑστάναι τὸν Πέτρον πρὸ τοῦ πυλῶνος. οἱ δὲ πρὸς αὐτὴν εἶπαν· μαίνῃ. ἡ δὲ διϊσχυρίζετο οὕτως ἔχειν. οἱ δὲ ἔλεγον· ὁ ἄγγελός ἐστιν αὐτοῦ. ὁ δὲ Πέτρος ἐπέμενεν κρούων· ἀνοίξαντες δὲ εἶδαν αὐτὸν καὶ ἐξέστησαν. κατασείσας δὲ αὐτοῖς τῇ χειρὶ σιγᾶν διηγήσατο [αὐτοῖς] πῶς ὁ κύριος αὐτὸν ἐξήγαγεν ἐκ τῆς φυλακῆς εἶπέν τε· ἀπαγγείλατε Ἰακώβῳ καὶ τοῖς ἀδελφοῖς ταῦτα. καὶ ἐξελθὼν ἐπορεύθη εἰς ἕτερον τόπον.

Combat Powerful Persecution with Powerful Praying

Kent: The church used its only available weapon – prayer. The praying was fervent and continual, even though the church as a whole was astonished when God answered. Nevertheless the spiritual power which prayer unleashed was more than a match for Herod.

Wiersbe: Never underestimate the power of a praying church! "The angel fetched peter out of prison," said the Puritan preacher Thomas Watson, "but it was prayer that fetched the angel."

D. (:18-23) Pompous Pride Leads to Tables Turned – <u>FURY OF GOD'S PUNISHING WRATH</u>

"*Now when day came, there was no small disturbance among the soldiers as to what could have become of Peter. And when Herod had searched for him and had not found him, he examined the guards and ordered that they be led away to execution. And he went down from*

Judea to Caesarea and was spending time there. Now he was very angry with the people of Tyre and Sidon; and with one accord they came to him, and having won over Blastus the king's chamberlain, they were asking for peace, because their country was fed by the king's country. And on an appointed day Herod, having put on his royal apparel, took his seat on the rostrum and began delivering an address to them. And the people kept crying out, 'The voice of a god and not of a man!' And immediately an angel of the Lord struck him because he did not give God the glory, and he was eaten by worms and died."

Γενομένης δὲ ἡμέρας ἦν τάραχος οὐκ ὀλίγος ἐν τοῖς στρατιώταις τί ἄρα ὁ Πέτρος ἐγένετο. Ἡρῴδης δὲ ἐπιζητήσας αὐτὸν καὶ μὴ εὑρών, ἀνακρίνας τοὺς φύλακας ἐκέλευσεν ἀπαχθῆναι, καὶ κατελθὼν ἀπὸ τῆς Ἰουδαίας εἰς Καισάρειαν διέτριβεν. Ἦν δὲ θυμομαχῶν Τυρίοις καὶ Σιδωνίοις· ὁμοθυμαδὸν δὲ παρῆσαν πρὸς αὐτὸν καὶ πείσαντες Βλάστον, τὸν ἐπὶ τοῦ κοιτῶνος τοῦ βασιλέως, ἠτοῦντο εἰρήνην διὰ τὸ τρέφεσθαι αὐτῶν τὴν χώραν ἀπὸ τῆς βασιλικῆς. τακτῇ δὲ ἡμέρᾳ ὁ Ἡρῴδης ἐνδυσάμενος ἐσθῆτα βασιλικὴν [καὶ] καθίσας ἐπὶ τοῦ βήματος ἐδημηγόρει πρὸς αὐτούς, ὁ δὲ δῆμος ἐπεφώνει· Θεοῦ φωνὴ καὶ οὐκ ἀνθρώπου. παραχρῆμα δὲ ἐπάταξεν αὐτὸν ἄγγελος κυρίου ἀνθ' ὧν οὐκ ἔδωκεν τὴν δόξαν τῷ θεῷ, καὶ γενόμενος σκωληκόβρωτος ἐξέψυξεν

Remember Haman's plot in book of Esther
Remember lesson learned by Nebuchadnezzar in book of Daniel

Kent: Josephus has a parallel description which agrees in essential points. He describes how Agrippa was struck with severe abdominal pain and was carried into the palace where he died five days later. The expression "*eaten of worms*," is similar to Josephus' description of the death of Herod the Great, and of the death of Antiochus Epiphanes mentioned in II Maccabees 9:9.

Wiersbe: The world still lives for praise and pleasure. Man has made himself his own god (Rom. 1:25). The world still lives on the physical and ignores the spiritual (see 1 John 2:15-17). It lives by force and flattery instead of faith and truth, and one day it will be judged.

(:24-25) CONCLUSION / TRANSITION

"*But the word of the Lord continued to grow and to be multiplied.*"

Ὁ δὲ λόγος τοῦ θεοῦ ηὔξανεν καὶ ἐπληθύνετο.

Keep preaching the Word, in season and out of season – whether people have a favorable reaction or whether they reject the gospel – whether we are a fragrance of life unto life or of death unto death.

"*And Barnabas and Saul returned from Jerusalem when they had fulfilled their mission, taking along with them John, who was also called Mark.*"

Βαρναβᾶς δὲ καὶ Σαῦλος ὑπέστρεψαν εἰς Ἰερουσαλὴμ πληρώσαντες τὴν διακονίαν, συμπαραλαβόντες Ἰωάννην τὸν ἐπικληθέντα Μᾶρκον.

Stott: One cannot fail to admire the artistry with which Luke depicts the complete reversal of the church's situation. At the beginning of the chapter Herod is on the rampage – arresting and persecuting church leaders; as the end he is himself struck down and dies. The chapter opens with James dead, Peter in prison and Herod triumphing; it closes with Herod dead, Peter free,

and the word of God triumphing. Such is the power of God to overthrow hostile human plans and to establish his own in their place. Tyrants may be permitted for a time to boast and bluster, oppressing the church and hindering the spread of the gospel, but they will not last. In the end, their empire will be broken and their pride abased.

cf. Saddam Hussein and Osama bin Laden – look at how they functioned as cruel tyrants for a time and abused many people but came to such shameful deaths – to say nothing of the judgment faced by the God who says "*Vengeance is Mine*." Some people complain about that aspect of God's character – but it would idolatry to make god after our image or thinking – learn who God is and what He hates and appreciate Him and glorify Him for that.

KINGDOM GROWTH CANNOT BE HALTED BY DIFFICULT PHYSICAL CIRCUMSTANCES OR BY INTIMIDATING PERSECUTION

> *God is still on the throne, Almighty God is He*
> *And He cares for His own through all eternity*
> *So let come what may – Whatever it be – I can only say*
> *That I have God on my side!*

* * * * * * * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

1) How are the prayer meetings of the early church different from our prayer meetings today?

2) Why did the Lord deliver Peter but allow James to be beheaded?

3) What do we believe is the extent of angelic ministry and even intervention in our world today?

4) How can we improve in the area of giving God the glory for all He accomplishes?

* * * * * * * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Kent: The first persecution of the church had been instigated by the temple authorities – the priests and Sadducees (4:1). Later the most popular of the religious parties, the Pharisees, joined in attacking the church under the relentless leadership of Saul of Tarsus (8:1, 3). With the entrance of Herod Agrippa I into active persecution, the political interests of Palestine joined the fray, and opposition to the church was thus practically universal in the land of the Jews.

Stott: a well-known (even the principal) meeting place of the Jerusalem believers. The Mary to whom it belonged is known only as the mother of John Mark, a cousin of Barnabas . . . Some commentators have speculated that this house of Mary contained the "large upper room, furnished and ready", which Mark himself mentions as the place where Jesus ate the Passover with the Twelve before his arrest, trial and crucifixion. Perhaps it was also the house where the Twelve lived, and they and others met to pray, during the ten days between the Ascension and Pentecost (1:12-14). It was certainly spacious, for it had an outer entrance or vestibule where

Peter knocked, and presumably a courtyard between this and the main house.

Steven Cole: **The Unstoppable Gospel**:
Since God is almighty, no force can stop the spread of His gospel according to His purpose.

1. Although God is almighty, He does not prevent the untimely deaths of some of His choicest servants (12:1-4).
2. Since God is almighty, He can easily deliver His servants from humanly impossible situations if it is His will (12:5-19).
3. Since God is almighty, He can easily remove the most powerful and proud human leaders when it is His time to do so (12:20-23).
4. Since God is almighty, His gospel cannot be stopped by any opposition (12:24-25).

Horton: suggests three reasons for the delay in executing Peter:
(1) Herod wanted to show how scrupulously he observed the Passover;
(2) he wanted to wait until the pilgrim crowds went home, fearing a riot;
(3) he wanted to wait until he had the full attention of the Jewish population.

Parallel account of Josephus: The ancient Jewish historian Josephus also describes the death of Herod in gory detail (Antiquities, XIX.8.2).
"He put on a garment made wholly of silver, and of a contexture truly wonderful, and came into the theatre early in the morning; at which time the silver of his garment, being illuminated by the fresh reflection of the sun's rays upon it, shone out after a surprising manner, and was so resplendent as to spread a horror over those that looked intently upon him; and presently his flatterers cried out, one from one place, and another from another (though not for his good), that he was a god . . . A severe pain also arose in his belly, and began in a most violent manner . . . when he had been quite worn out by the pain in his belly for five days, he departed this life."

MacArthur: the lesson that kept hitting me, as I read it over and over again, was the stupidity of fighting God. God has made a universe that reflects His nature and is built on His law, and a man is a fool to live against the grain of that nature and that law. For a man to live in war against his creator is stupidity. For a man to live in violation of all the laws of a universe infinitely more vast than that man just doesn't make sense, and yet most men live their whole life long fighting God, God's law, God's plans. And it doesn't make any sense at all.

For centuries men have clenched their fists and gritted their teeth in the face of God, and they do it today. They pit their own will against the will of God. Solomon stated how futile it was in Proverbs 21:30. These are the words that he said: "There is no wisdom nor understanding nor counsel against the Lord." And what he meant by that was anybody who goes against God is a fool. There's no wisdom in that. That shows you don't understand and there's no wise counsel in that. Nothing can stand against God and yet men foolishly slam their own wills against the will of God like shattering eggs against granite and all you have is the strewn refuse of lives broken against a God that cannot be violated. . .

You can't fight God. It does not work. You can't find one man in history, one man in the revelation of God that ever fought against God and won. It can't be done. That's only in Genesis that shows us the hopeless stupidity of fighting God. You can go from there on into Exodus and you'll find another that tried to fight God and he's the first of a long line of a certain type of people who tried. Pharaoh, the first of many kings, who tried to fight God and I think the

Scripture over and over and over and over talks about kings and rulers fighting God as opposed to individuals. And the reason for that is this: the most powerful of men are unable to fight God and win. It's one thing when a man like myself or like one of us fights God, but when a monarch of the world fights God that means he's amassing all of human power against God and yet he is defeated as well. . .

I'm going to show you three reasons in this chapter why a man's a fool to fight God. Three reasons: number one, here we go, because **God's power cannot be contested**. God's power cannot be contested. You can pit all your strength against the power of God and you aren't even beginning to touch His nature, His person, or to alter His plans. His power cannot be contested. A man is a fool to fight God because **God's punishment can't be avoided**. The third reason a man is a fool to fight God lastly in those last two verses. **Because God's purposes can't be frustrated.**

TEXT: Acts 13: 1-12

TITLE: MISSIONARY MANUAL

BIG IDEA:
MISSIONARIES ARE SENT OUT TO RESCUE LOST SOULS FROM THE DOMAIN OF DARKNESS WITH THE TRUTH OF GOD'S WORD

INTRODUCTION:
Acts is primarily a **Missionary Manual** – it is all about the spread of the gospel to the ends of the earth through God's appointed ambassadors for truth. Unfortunately we have a tendency not to refer to the manual and to come up with our own strategies for missions. There are many principles from this passage that would apply to some of the common questions that people ask about:

- How do you know whether you are called to be a foreign missionary?
- How do you get to the mission field?
- What is the primary role of a missionary?
- What type of involvement should the local church have?

You can draw many analogies from warfare since there is a spiritual war going on for the souls of men. This account of Paul's early missionary journey parallels Peter's experience with Simon the Sorcerer and shows that both Peter and Paul were on the same page with respect to church ministry.

I. THE DEPLOYMENT PROCESS – GETTING TO THE FIELD
II. THE BATTLE FOR SOULS – HARVESTING THE CROP

I. (:1-3) IN THE DEPLOYMENT PROCESS, THE HOLY SPIRIT CALLS AND SENDS THROUGH SPIRITUAL GIFTEDNESS AND THE AGENCY OF THE CHURCH –

A. (:1) Missionaries Prepare for Service by Developing and Exercising Their Giftedness

"*Now there were at Antioch, in the church that was there, prophets and teachers:*"

Ἦσαν δὲ ἐν Ἀντιοχείᾳ κατὰ τὴν οὖσαν ἐκκλησίαν προφῆται καὶ διδάσκαλοι

In addition to the prophets who had visited from Jerusalem (11:27)—5 resident prophets; had ministered there for at least a year
Fab Five: ethnic and cultural diversity

1. "*Barnabas*" -- ὅ τε Βαρναβᾶς

4:36 "*a Levite from Cyprus*"

MacArthur: A Spirit-filled Jew trained in the Old Testament, a resident Old Testament scholar with a pure Christian character. He was highly respected and highly loved, a warm-hearted man, a marvelously capable teacher, a comforter.

2. "*Simeon who was called Niger*" -- καὶ Συμεὼν ὁ καλούμενος Νίγερ

Jewish name and then Latin name meaning "black" – probably from Africa
Stott: just conceivably none other than Simon of Cyrene who carried the cross for Jesus and who must have become a believer, since his sons Alexander and Rufus were known the Christian community. (Mk. 15:21; Rom. 16:13)

3. "*Lucius of Cyrene*" -- καὶ Λούκιος ὁ Κυρηναῖος,
Latin name – originally from N Africa

4. "*Manaen who had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch*"
Μαναήν τε Ἡρῴδου τοῦ τετραάρχου σύντροφος
Herod Antipas (son of Herod the Great), the murderer of John the Baptist
Kent: means "*companion*" and was a title of honor given to boys who were reared at court with princes as their companions in education.

Bruce: What a commentary on the mystery and sovereignty of divine grace that, of these two foster-brothers, one should attain honour as a Christian leader, while the other should be best known for his shameful behavior in the killing of John the Baptist and in the trial of Jesus!

5. "*Saul*" -- καὶ Σαῦλος.
Came from Tarsus in Cilicia

Local church needs to develop its bench strength; multiple prophets and teachers all free to exercise their gifts; not squeezed out and forced to go elsewhere because of the egos involved; true partnership in the gospel; true team ministry

Bloom where you are planted; then the Lord can transplant you

Longenecker: The Greek particle *te* (untranslatable) was used in antiquity to connect word pairs, coordinate clauses, and similar sentences, thereby often distinguishing one set of coordinates from another. [first three would be prophets and last two would be teachers]??

B. (:2-3) Missionaries – in Partnership with Local Church Leaders -- Perceive and Respond to the Call of the Holy Spirit

> "*And while they were ministering to the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, 'Set apart for Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.' Then, when they had fasted and prayed and laid their hands on them, they sent them away.*"
>
> Λειτουργούντων δὲ αὐτῶν τῷ κυρίῳ καὶ νηστευόντων εἶπεν τὸ πνεῦμα τὸ ἅγιον· ἀφορίσατε δή μοι τὸν Βαρναβᾶν καὶ Σαῦλον εἰς τὸ ἔργον ὃ προσκέκλημαι αὐτούς. τότε νηστεύσαντες καὶ προσευξάμενοι καὶ ἐπιθέντες τὰς χεῖρας αὐτοῖς ἀπέλυσαν.

"*ministering*" -- word for liturgical – perform religious duties, minister, serve
MacArthur: to serve in a priestly manner. To serve in terms of worship, I suppose we could say. A worshipping kind of service . . . viewing everything you do as an offering to God . . . Fasting is a way to express intensity. Fasting is a way to express devotion and vigilance and passion.

"*to the Lord*" **Acts 16:15** "*And when she and her household had been baptized, she urged us, saying, "If you have judged me to be faithful* ***to the Lord****, come into my house and stay." And she prevailed upon us.*"

Local church is the primary sending agency; not independent missionary boards

Principle of team ministry – we have not done a good job of modeling that

These are God's workers; they don't belong to the other leaders; they don't even belong to the church; God owns them, commissions them, directs them

Concept of the Call of God in terms of a **Vocation** – needs some careful analysis
Was Paul called to be a tentmaker??

Kent: Apparently Barnabas and Saul had already known the Spirit's will, but they did not act unilaterally, apart from the church's knowledge and blessing.

Laying on of hands – did not confer any special power;
Kent: It was rather the recognition by the church that God had called them, and it symbolized the identification of the Antioch church with these workers and the bestowal of their blessing.

Bruce: by this means the church of Antioch, through its leaders, expressed its fellowship with Barnabas and Saul and recognized them as its delegates or "apostles."

II. (:4-12) IN THE BATTLE FOR SOULS, TRUTH WINS OUT OVER SATANIC DECEPTION AND OPPOSITION

A. (:4) Missionaries Expand the Church by Pioneering New Works

"*So, being sent out by the Holy Spirit, they went down to Seleucia and from there they sailed to Cyprus.*"

Αὐτοὶ μὲν οὖν ἐκπεμφθέντες ὑπὸ τοῦ ἁγίου πνεύματος κατῆλθον εἰς Σελεύκειαν, ἐκεῖθέν τε ἀπέπλευσαν εἰς Κύπρον

Seleucia was a seaport 16 miles from Antioch

Remember Paul's objective: to go to minister in virgin territory
Takes faith to leave your comfort zone and go out to new challenges – not knowing what obstacles you will face

Barclay: Cyprus was a Roman province, famous for its copper mines and its shipbuilding industry.
Bock: It exported wood and copper, was relatively dry in climate, and is the third largest island in the Mediterranean. It is 140 miles long and 60 miles wide.

B. (:5a) Missionaries Elevate the Word of God as the Authoritative Source for Truth

"*And when they reached Salamis, they began to proclaim the word of God in the synagogues of the Jews;*

καὶ γενόμενοι ἐν Σαλαμῖνι κατήγγελλον τὸν λόγον τοῦ θεοῦ ἐν ταῖς συναγωγαῖς τῶν Ἰουδαίων.

Social work is not their first priority

Surprising to find that they first go to the Jewish synagogues … we have been studying about the transition to taking the gospel to the Gentiles

C. (:5b) Missionaries Enlist Faithful Helpers in Key Roles

"*and they also had John as their helper.*"

εἶχον δὲ καὶ Ἰωάννην ὑπηρέτην.

"*helper*" -- one who acts under orders of another to carry out his will, assistant, helper
Cousin to Barnabas (Col. 4:10); his mother's home in Jerusalem was a chief gathering place for the believers

D. (:6-7) Missionaries Encounter Prepared Hearts

"*And when they had gone through the whole island as far as Paphos, they found a certain magician, a Jewish false prophet whose name was Bar-Jesus, who was with the proconsul, Sergius Paulus, a man of intelligence. This man summoned Barnabas and Saul and sought to hear the word of God.*"

Διελθόντες δὲ ὅλην τὴν νῆσον ἄχρι Πάφου εὗρον ἄνδρα τινὰ μάγον ψευδοπροφήτην Ἰουδαῖον ᾧ ὄνομα Βαριησοῦ [7] ὃς ἦν σὺν τῷ ἀνθυπάτῳ Σεργίῳ Παύλῳ, ἀνδρὶ συνετῷ. οὗτος προσκαλεσάμενος Βαρναβᾶν καὶ Σαῦλον ἐπεζήτησεν ἀκοῦσαι τὸν λόγον τοῦ θεοῦ

Barclay: Paphos was infamous for its worship of Venus, the goddess of love. . . These were intensely superstitious times and most great men, even an intelligent man like Sergius Paulus, kept private wizards, fortune tellers who dealt in magic and spells

90 mile journey across the island to Paphos

Bar-Jesus = "son of salvation" (cf. confrontation of Peter with Simon Magus in chap. 8)

Rackham: In the Greek world it was the custom for philosophers, rhetoricians, or religious propagandists, to travel about from city to city and give public orations. By this means they often secured permanent professorships. So when Sergius Paulus heard of Barnabas and Saul, he took them for similar professors, and having an interest in these matters he summoned them to give a declamation before his court.

E. (:8) Missionaries Experience Satanic Opposition

"*But Elymas the magician (for thus his name is translated) was opposing them, seeking to turn the proconsul away from the faith.*"

ἀνθίστατο δὲ αὐτοῖς Ἐλύμας ὁ μάγος, οὕτως γὰρ μεθερμηνεύεται τὸ ὄνομα αὐτοῦ, ζητῶν διαστρέψαι τὸν ἀνθύπατον ἀπὸ τῆς πίστεως.

"*turn away*" – Aorist, active infinitive; literally, of an object on the potter's wheel become misshapen; figuratively pervert, corrupt, distort (AC 13.10); passive, of the truth be perverted, be distorted (AC 20.30); in a moral sense be depraved (LU 9.41);

Bock: often used of preventing someone from embracing the truth (Num. 15:39; 32:7; Ezek. 13:18; Luke 23:2; and esp. Paul's countercharge in v. 10).

Piper: the way you make crooked the straight paths of the Lord is to get in the way of people

coming to faith.

F. (:9-11) Missionaries Expose Satanic Darkness

> *"But Saul, who was also known as Paul, filled with the Holy Spirit, fixed his gaze upon him, and said, 'You who are full of all deceit and fraud, you son of the devil, you enemy of all righteousness, will you not cease to make crooked the straight ways of the Lord? And now, behold, the hand of the Lord is upon you, and you will be blind and not see the sun for a time.' And immediately a mist and a darkness fell upon him, and he went about seeking those who would lead him by the hand.*"
>
> Σαῦλος δέ, ὁ καὶ Παῦλος, πλησθεὶς πνεύματος ἁγίου ἀτενίσας εἰς αὐτὸν εἶπεν· ὦ πλήρης παντὸς δόλου καὶ πάσης ῥᾳδιουργίας, υἱὲ διαβόλου, ἐχθρὲ πάσης δικαιοσύνης, οὐ παύσῃ διαστρέφων τὰς ὁδοὺς [τοῦ] κυρίου τὰς εὐθείας; καὶ νῦν ἰδοὺ χεὶρ κυρίου ἐπὶ σὲ καὶ ἔσῃ τυφλὸς μὴ βλέπων τὸν ἥλιον ἄχρι καιροῦ. παραχρῆμά τε ἔπεσεν ἐπ᾽ αὐτὸν ἀχλὺς καὶ σκότος καὶ περιάγων ἐζήτει χειραγωγούς.

Kent: He doubtless had both names from childhood. Previously in predominantly Jewish surroundings the name "Saul" had been used. Now in a gentile governor's court it was likely that the apostle had introduced himself by the name "Paul," and the author uses this name consistently in the rest of the book because Paul from here on is primarily ministering as the apostle to the gentile world.

Stott: his boldness, outspokenness and power in condemning Elymas were all from God … Elymas guilty of causing "*perversion*" (*diastrepho*, 8, 10), instead of "*conversion*" (*epistrepho*, 9:35; 11:21; 14:15).

Morgan: The severest words of the Bible, Old and New Testaments, are reserved for those who stand between men and truth, for those who stand between men and God . . . It must be the heart that loves Sergius Paulus that speaks in anger to Elymas the sorcerer."

Stott: Paul must have remembered the day not many years previously when he himself had been blinded, albeit by the glory of the Lord, and been led by the hand into Damascus.

G. (:12) Missionaries Evangelize Successfully

> "*Then the proconsul believed when he saw what had happened, being amazed at the teaching of the Lord.*"
>
> τότε ἰδὼν ὁ ἀνθύπατος τὸ γεγονὸς ἐπίστευσεν ἐκπλησσόμενος ἐπὶ τῇ διδαχῇ τοῦ κυρίου.

Amazed, astonished, overwhelmed – Pres pass participle; deeply impressed; shaken to the core

Stott: Luke surely intends us to view Sergius Paulus as the first totally Gentile convert, who had not religious background in Judaism. Paul's direct approach to Gentiles was "the great innovative development of this first missionary journey." – Longenecker

* * * * * * * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

1) Should we apply emotional pressure on young people for commitment to missionary service?

2) What role should fasting play in our decision making process?

3) When are we justified to speak harshly as Paul does to Elymas here?

4) Does the concept of a divine calling apply to our secular professions as well?

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QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Stott: Would it not be true to say both that the Spirit sent them out, by instructing the church to do so, and that the church sent them out, having been directed by the Spirit to do so? This balance will be a healthy corrective to opposite extremes. The first is the tendency to individualism, by which a Christian claims direct personal guidance by the Spirit without any reference to the church. The second is the tendency to institutionalism, by which all decision-making is done by the church without any reference to the Spirit. Although we have no liberty to deny the validity of personal choice, it is safe and health only in relation to the Spirit and the church. There is no evidence that Barnabas and Saul "volunteered" for missionary service; they were "sent" by the Spirit through the church. Still today it is the responsibility of every local church (especially of its leaders) to be sensitive to the Holy Spirit, in order to discover whom he may be gifting and calling.

Bock: In this case, the community, sensing God's clear direction, put its weight behind an outreach far beyond its own walls. God loves churches that look beyond their own needs. . . Everything about acts shows us that its impetus is toward the church's call in mission. We build churches not just to go in for worship but also to go out with God's heart for people.

Stedman: **The Strategy of the Spirit**
The missionary call of Barnabas and Saul, recorded in the thirteenth chapter of the book of Acts is replete with practical helps in a problem that bothers many Christians: How to recognize the guidance of God, how to know the directions of life, and to find the will of the Holy Spirit in these matters. . .

Now, I do not know how he spoke. It may have been through a prophetic utterance of one of these prophets as they were gathered together worshipping and ministering, (performing their gifts). Or it may well have been that he spoke as he speaks to many today in what we have learned to call "insistent unanimity," i.e., a deep conviction shared by everyone in the group that the Spirit of God desires a certain thing. This is the way he has led us many times here at Peninsula Bible Church. We have felt a deep, insistent sense that the Spirit was moving in a certain direction, and everyone shared it. Whenever we have had this sense of unanimity we have taken it as the leading of the Holy Spirit, and subsequent events have invariably proved it to be true. This is often the way God works. He spoke to men who were already at work doing what they knew. You can steer a ship or a car if it is moving, but it is very difficult to steer it when it is sitting still. God loves to see people at work at what they know to do, and then he will give them further direction. Notice also two elements of the Spirit's sovereign choice: He chose the men, and He chose the work. . .

They went to Cyprus, landed at Salamis, and began to preach. Obviously they expected God to be with them and to open doors everywhere they went. This is the way the Holy Spirit commonly operates. No one is to wait for orders covering everything he does.

John Piper: **The Straight Paths of the Lord**
The book of Acts is a constant indictment of mere maintenance Christianity. It's a constant goad and encouragement and stimulation to fan the flame of Advent—"*The Son of Man has come to seek and to save the lost.*" . . .
God makes persecution a launching pad for missions; he takes Herod out of the way; he strikes Elymas blind. He carries his advent emissaries forward along the straight paths of faith.

Steven Cole: **Into the Battle**
When we share the gospel, we engage the enemy of souls in spiritual combat, so we must be prepared for spiritual battle.
Introduction:
1) Luke is establishing the validity of direct witness to the Gentiles.
2) Luke is establishing the credibility of Paul as an apostle.
- First, Paul was clearly called and sent out by the Holy Spirit, with the full backing of the church in Antioch (13:1-4).
- Second, Paul performed the signs of an apostle, namely the ability to do miracles (see 2 Cor. 12:12).
- Third, we will see in the material to follow that Paul's preaching was identical to Peter's.
- Fourth, Luke establishes Paul's apostolic credentials by signaling the shift from "Barnabas and Saul" to "Paul and Barnabas."
-

1. When we share the gospel, we engage the enemy of souls in spiritual combat.
Note three tactics of the devil:
A. The devil holds people in spiritual blindness.
B. The devil uses deceit, fraud, and opposition to righteousness to carry out his evil designs.
C. The devil uses selfish motivation to keep people in spiritual deception.

2. We must be prepared to do spiritual battle.
A. To do spiritual battle, be filled with the Holy Spirit.
B. To do spiritual battle, confront false prophets or spiritual error when you sense the Spirit's prompting.
C. To do spiritual battle, reach out to those who show an interest in the things of God.
D. To do spiritual battle, present the teaching of God's Word on the gospel clearly.
E. When you do spiritual battle, do not mistake opposition or apathy to the message as failure on your part.

Rich Dunbar: **Three Things that Satan Sees that We Ought to See**
1. Satan sees those who are sent. V. 4
2. Satan sees those who are seeking. V. 7
3. Satan sees those who will stand in the way. V.8
http://www.sermoncentral.com/sermons/three-things-satan-sees-that-we-ought-to-rich-dunbar-sermon-on-discipleship-79217.asp

TEXT: Acts 13:13

TITLE: THE IMPACT OF DESERTION ON CHRISTIAN MINISTRY

BIG IDEA:
PAINFUL DESERTION MUST NOT DISCOURAGE US FROM PURSUING KINGDOM GOALS

INTRODUCTION:
Monday we celebrated Memorial Day (seems like a long time ago) = remembering the ultimate sacrifice of those soldiers who gave their lives to fight for the freedoms that we enjoy today; those men and women are remembered for their loyalty and their faithfulness and their courage and their noble deeds. Today we come to one verse in our study through Acts – **13:13** -- that addresses the topic of the opposite type of behavior = that of Desertion. The only thing worse than a deserter would be a traitor who actively leaves to fight on the opposite side. But we want to consider today the subject of **Desertion** – of **Abandonment** – somebody who takes off from their commitments and leaves others in the lurch.

There are a number of different Contexts or Arenas for Desertion:

- **Family Context**
  - Having a spouse desert the other partner – *God hates divorce*—
    - At times a spouse may feel they have been deserted emotionally; partner is there in body but there is no companionship and intimacy
    - I can't say that I can identify with the depth of your pain, but God can.
  - Having a parent desert a child or a child desert a parent – very destructive since the basic family unit is the foundation for society – (What if I were to decide this afternoon that I am tired of my present responsibilities and want to start a new life … I go and cash out my bank account and take off for parts unknown – leaving my family to fend for themselves) – sounds incredible, but family members turn their back on their own flesh and blood every day – look at how Absalom went after his father David
  - What about apostasy in the context of our spiritual family relationship?

- **Friendship Context** – not having your back but abandoning you when times get tough (cf. **Proverbs 17:17** "*A friend loves at all times, and a brother is born for adversity*" Fortunately in Jesus Christ we have "*a friend who sticks closer than a brother*" – **Prov. 18:24**); or rejecting you to run in different circles with a different set of friends; look at the tough time that Job had when his friends did not understand what God was doing in his life and gave him hurtful counsel; On the positive side – look at the enduring relationship between David and Jonathan – nothing in this world could separate them

- **Sports/Business Context** – Look at all the flack directed against Labron James for his Decision to jump ship from the Cleveland Cavaliers and try to form his own championship alliance with the Miami Heat – even though this is largely a business decision – he is still largely viewed as a deserter. Happens all the time in the business world as well.

- **Military context** – How serious is it when troops go AWOL; when they desert their comrades on the battlefield? Court martial treats this as a serious offense

- **Ministry context** – this is what we have with John Mark leaving the missionary team of Paul and Barnabas; remember Jonah bailing on his call to preach the Word to the Gentiles in Nineveh; He had to learn the lesson that you cannot run and hide from God; you remain accountable to the One who is Omnipresent and Omniscient; but Mark was part of a team – partners in gospel ministry

Those left behind in these various contexts or arenas can easily become discouraged and even depressed

PAINFUL DESERTION MUST NOT DISCOURAGE US FROM PURSUING KINGDOM GOALS

I. DESERTION IS PAINFUL – look at 2 Examples

A. Example of the Apostle Paul

1. Acts 13:13 – John Mark – not told why he abandoned ship and went home to Jerusalem; a crucial time in the infancy of the missionary movement; his assistance was urgently needed; he even had a family relationship to Barnabas as a cousin

Now Paul and his companions put out to sea from Paphos and came to Perga in Pamphylia; and John left them and returned to Jerusalem. (**Acts 13:13**)
Ἀναχθέντες δὲ ἀπὸ τῆς Πάφου οἱ περὶ Παῦλον ἦλθον εἰς Πέργην τῆς Παμφυλίας, Ἰωάννης δὲ ἀποχωρήσας ἀπ᾽ αὐτῶν ὑπέστρεψεν εἰς Ἱεροσόλυμα.
To leave, abandon with emphasis on possible lack of concern over what has been left behind

How do we know that this leaving on the part of John Mark was viewed as negative by the missionary team? Look at the descriptive words used a couple of chapters later:

But Paul kept insisting that they should not take him along who had deserted them in Pamphylia and had not gone with them to the work. (**Acts 15:38**)
Παῦλος δὲ ἠξίου, τὸν ἀποστάντα ἀπ᾽ αὐτῶν ἀπὸ Παμφυλίας καὶ μὴ συνελθόντα αὐτοῖς εἰς τὸ ἔργον μὴ συμπαραλαμβάνειν τοῦτον.

Not told the reason or motivation in the heart of John Mark
- Maybe he did not like the Gentile focus of the ministry – returns to his Jewish roots in Jerusalem
- Maybe he was more loyal to his cousin Barnabas than to Paul who was becoming more prominent in the leadership team
- Maybe he had not counted the cost before entering into this missionary commitment and found that he was homesick; didn't like the travel
- Maybe the life of faith was too challenging – the possibility of persecution; the uncertainty over finances; the denial of various creature comforts
- Maybe he just didn't have the work ethic to keep up with Paul and Barnabas and all of their expectations for the junior member of their team

It doesn't matter – the bottom line is that he deserted them – didn't fulfill his commitment to partner with them in the important work of proclaiming the gospel to those who had never heard the good news

Remember what Jesus said about those who make excuses for not following through on their commitment to discipleship – to following Him wholeheartedly: "*No one, after putting his hand to the plow and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God*." **Luke 9:62**

The Apostle Paul experienced a lot of rejection and desertion in his ministry – familiar with the pain and the potential for discouragement:

2. Philippians 2:19-22 – only Timothy is *kindred spirit* with Apostle Paul

3. 2 Tim. 4:9-15 – Demas chose the pleasures of this present world -- "*Only Luke is with me*" – Apostle Paul abandoned by so many Christian workers

Loyalty and faithfulness proven in the hard times

B. Example of the Lord Jesus

1. John 6:66-69-- During His ministry, pretend disciples would constantly fall away They "*withdrew*" = they deserted Jesus; unwilling to take up the cross of discipleship; the demands of allegiance to Jesus were viewed as too severe; His truth and teaching were too difficult to receive and apply – people preferred to live life on their own terms

2. At the cross, His disciples had scattered and abandoned Him – look at the threefold denial by Peter who was afraid to testify to his identity as a follower of Jesus

3. Psalm 22:1 -- On the cross, the Father abandoned Jesus in the ultimate sense "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" – the agony of His grief over this desertion by the Father because of being made sin for us far exceeded the agony of His physical suffering

Beyond our comprehension – due to the precious unity the Divine Trinity enjoyed from all of eternity past

Believers will never experience something this devastating

But those who choose to live without God's rule over their lives will one day experience that terrible wrath of God against sin for themselves and will suffer for all eternity the ultimate desertion of God – right now you enjoy many benefits from God's common grace = the rain falls on the just and the unjust in today's world; but in Hell that will not be the case

Why is Desertion so Painful?

- **Emotional Hole** in your gut – not easily filled; you get used to the role that person plays in your life in terms of companionship

- **Mental Insecurities** -- What's wrong with me? What did I do wrong that they abandoned me? Why don't they like me?

- **Unfulfilled Expectations** – I was counting on that person for X

- **Loss of Productivity** – you cannot accomplish as much or perform the work as easily

as when your team was complete

II. DESERTION IS PROVIDENTIAL -- Due to the Wisdom and Sovereign Plan of God

Wrong Ways to Respond:

- **Vengeance, retaliation** – wishing that bad things would happen to them for the pain they have caused you
- **Bitterness, hatred** – turning it over and over in your mind and allowing it to eat away at you
- **Writing them off; Dismissing them**
- **Self Pity, ministry paralysis**

Godly way to respond: Should drive us closer to God in dependency – clinging to the character of God as our great anchor and comfort and source of strength

A. Apply the great exhortations of Scripture – Rest in Divine Providence

1. Rom. 8:28 "*And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose*"

Do you really believe this? Hold on to the **Goodness of God**

Look at the example of Joseph – abandoned by all 11 of his brothers – **Gen. 50:19-20** "*Do not be afraid, for am I in God's place [to execute vengeance]? As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant if for good in order to bring about this present result, to preserve many people alive*."

2. James 1:2 "*Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials*"

Do you really practice this? Hold on to the **Faithfulness of God**

B. Appropriate the All Sufficient Resources of our Savior God – Focus on Divine Priorities = Ministry = Kingdom Goals

1. Resource of the Love of God – He is able to be to us all that we need in terms of intimacy and companionship and security

Psalm 27:10 "*For my father and my mother have forsaken me, but the Lord will take me up*."

Is. 49:14-16 "*But Zion said, 'The Lord has forsake me, and the Lord has forgotten me.' 'Can a woman forget her nursing child and have no compassion on the son of her womb? Even these may forget, but I will not forget you. Behold, I have inscribed you on the palms of My hands; your walls [of Jerusalem] are continually before Me*.'"

Psalm 68:5-6 "*A father of the fatherless and a judge for the widows, is God in His holy habitation. God makes a home for the lonely*"

Confidence in the love of God gives me the boldness and freedom to love others aggressively

2. Resource of the Power of God --

Phil. 4:13 "*I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me*" – in terms of an abundance of support or in terms of being left on my own to just depend on Christ

Paul's missionary journeys were going to be successful either with or without the help of John

Mark – the key is always the power of God; when someone abandons you there is no decrease in your access to the power of God

Confidence in the power of God gives me the boldness and freedom to use my spiritual gift aggressively for the advancement of His kingdom

[Just briefly mention a couple of other points]

III. DESERTION DOES NOT HAVE TO BE PERMANENT – Look at 2 Examples

A. Example of John Mark

2 Tim. 4:11 "*Pick up Mark and bring him with you, for he is useful to me for service*."
Ended up writing the Gospel record -- mainly from the perspective of Peter

Difficulty: we don't know if the desertion will be permanent or not
"*Hope deferred makes the heart sick*"

B. Example of the Prodigal Son – Luke 15:11-32

"*But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and felt compassion for him, and ran and embraced him and kissed him*" – Wonderful reception for those who repent and return and seek forgiveness and restoration

God of Second Chances

IV. DESERTION IS PROHIBITED BY GOD IN RELATIONSHIP WITH HIS BELOVED ELECT CHILDREN – Look at 2 sides to that relationship

God won't let it happen!

A. God's Grace Keeps Us Faithful and Abiding in Him

Perseverance of the Saints actually = Preservation of the saints

B. God Promises Never to Leave or Forsake Us

Message of Book of Hosea -- **GOD DEMONSTRATES HIS LOYAL LOVE THROUGHOUT THE REPEATED CYCLES OF UNFAITHFULNESS, DISCIPLINE AND RESTORATION**

(**Hos. 2:19-20**) New Permanent Covenant Relationship – God will never abandon His people

> "*I will betroth you to Me forever; yes, I will betroth you to Me in righteousness and in justice, in lovingkindness and in compassion, and I will betroth you to Me in faithfulness*."

CONCLUSION:

Look at the precious story of Ruth and her loyalty to Naomi for the opposite to desertion:
Ruth 1:16-18 "*Do not urge me to leave you or turn back from following you; for where you go, I will go, and where you lodge, I will lodge. Your people shall be my people, and your God, my God. Where you die, I will die, and there I will be buried. Thus may the Lord do to me, and worse, if anything but death parts you and me*."

Lam. 2:22-23 "*The Lord's lovingkindnesses indeed never cease, for His compassions never fail. They are new every morning; Great is Your faithfulness.*"

Dealing with the pain by drawing close to God
Moving on and focusing on the work at hand
Having to make do with diminished resources but still having the same divine resources
Still opportunity for forgiveness and second chances

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DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

1) On what occasions have you felt deserted and abandoned and let down by someone? How did it affect you spiritually?

2) Are there any people who might feel that you abandoned them in some context? Do you need to address any issues with those people?

3) Do we have God's heart of forgiveness and restoration when it comes to giving those who have failed a second chance at ministry and an opportunity to prove themselves again?

4) What are some steps we can take to strengthen the bonds of loyalty and partnership in our ministry contexts to hopefully prevent any desertion or abandonment?

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QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

LONELINESS

I. Representative Biblical usages

A. Old Testament
1. Hebrew word *badad* - "isolated, separated, apart, alone"
Gen. 2:18 - "it is not good for man to be alone"
2. Hebrew word *yahid* - "solitary, isolated, lonely"
Ps. 25:16 - "I am lonely and afflicted"

B. New Testament
1. Greek word *eremos* - "abandoned, solitary, lonely"
Lk. 4:42 - "He departed and went to a lonely place"

II. Defining loneliness

A. Our created condition as human beings
1. Created as social creatures, relational beings; we need each other; "no man is an island" - Gen. 2:18 - "not good for man to be alone"
2. God-given needs and desires for love, acceptance, belonging, relating, companionship, friendship with other men and God.

B. Differentiating some terms
1. Aloneness - being separated from other people.
a. It is healthy to be alone sometimes.
b. Can be alone and not lonely. Some personalities prefer.
2. Solitude - choosing to withdraw and be alone
a. to retreat - Lk. 4:42; Jn. 6:15
b. to rest and relax - Matt. 6:31,32
c. to pray - Matt. 14:13,23; Mk. 1:35
d. to hear from God - Dan. 10:8
e. to be silent - Lam. 3:28
3. Loneliness - a psychological state of mind or feeling of being excluded or estranged from other people and/or God.
a. Not necessarily related to physical situations of aloneness or solitude. Possible to be lonely in a crowd.
b. Our need for relational interactive socialization is not satisfactorily fulfilled.
(1) may be unfulfilled God-given desires
(2) may be unfulfilled selfish indulgence of God-given desires
c. Often a feeling of isolation, separation, detachment from companionship, fellowship, intimacy, or community.
d. May be sense of separation or fear of being forsaken by God.

C. Contemporary social situation
1. Ours has been called the "lonely society"
2. Some have indicated that 75-90% of adult Americans suffer from chronic loneliness.

III. Circumstances in which loneliness may be experienced. May feel lonely when...

A. guilt causes you to feel separated
1. from God - Ps. 25:16
2. from other men - Gen. 27:1-29; 32:24; 33:1-17
B. you feel rejected, abandoned, deserted by others - Jn. 16:32; II Tim. 4:16,17
C. you are voluntarily or forcefully removed from safe, secure environment
D. you experience the "let down" after a spiritual victory - I Kings 19:10,14
E. previous successes or popularity have subsided
F. you have suffered a defeat
G, you are too busy chasing "success" to relate to others.
H. you are "burned out" after having tried to achieve by self-effort - Jn. 8:29
I. you are separated from the group by leadership responsibilities - "lonely at the top" - Numb. 11:14,17; Deut. 1:9,12; Matt 26:38-40
J. you have suffered the loss of a loved one by death or divorce
K. you are fearful and timid - I Jn. 4:18
L. you feel inferior, unworthy, self-condemnation, insecure
M. you are physically removed or separated from those you know and love.
N. others reject or ostracize you for being different, or for nonconformity
O. you fail to resolve conflict and misunderstanding; estrangement
P. you fail to communicate; avoidance; repression; stuff emotions
Q. you have chosen to "stand alone" against world, sin, religion (Jere. 15:17)
R. others are not enthused about your interests or project.
S. you don't take the time to enjoy others and have fun together

T. you have been prejudged, stereotyped, pegged, put in a box
U. your particular talents and abilities and personality are not appreciated
V. you don't fit in - economically, intellectually, politically, religiously, etc.
W. you don't feel connected, bonded, able to relate -emotionally, spiritually
X. friends only relate on superficial level; won't get serious and real
Y. you have been excluded from a particular social grouping
Z. you feel like an outsider, the "odd man out"
AA. your present responsibilities (parenting, vocation, etc.) preclude or diminish the development of relationships
BB. you retire from your vocation and no longer relate to colleagues daily
CC. another person is regarded as your "life," & they can't meet all your needs
DD. you do not feel a sense of oneness, unity and intimacy with your mate
EE. you have refused to receive the love and intimacy of your mate - SoS 5:3-6
FF. you have been betrayed by a mate or a friend - Gen. 3:12
GG. you alienate others by your verbosity, accusations, insensitive comments
HH. you alienate others by using them in competitive or economic success
II. you alienate others by criticism, negativism, sarcasm, pessimism, hostility, cruelty,
JJ. you alienate others by your selfishness, egotism, or spiritual pride.
KK. you make work, projects, things, possessions more important than people.
LL. you feel you cannot perform up to expectations
MM. others are too preoccupied with their concerns to relate with you
NN. crisis arises and no one offers to listen or assist.
OO. you feel left behind by a fast-paced technological society
PP. children grow up, go to school, leave home
QQ. isolated due to injury; secluded or ignored due to age (Ps. 71:9,18)

IV. Dealing with loneliness

A. Secular solutions
1. Mental adjustment. Positive thinking. "Look on the bright side." "Be aggressive." Develop communication skills.
2. Activity. Involvement. Get busy. Change jobs. Join a club. Move. Travel. Have fun. Try something new. Be adventurous. Go to church. Volunteer. Get married, or remarried.
3. Results of such advice have sometimes led to workaholism, alcoholism, sexual promiscuity, various addictions, burn-out, increased loneliness, depression, suicide.

B. Biblical solutions
1. Regeneration, reconciliation with God. Col. 1:21,22
2. Confess known sins - I Jn. 1:9
3. Accept God's forgiveness - Eph. 1:7; Col. 1:14
4. Forgive others - Eph. 4:32
5. Recognize and affirm the presence of God in Christ - Josh. 1:9; Ps. 23; Isa. 41:10; 43:2; Matt. 28:20; Jn. 16:32; Heb. 13:5
6. Accept the work of the Comforter, the Paraclete, the Holy Spirit of Christ - Jn. 14:16,26; 15:26; 16:7
7. Participate in the fellowship and community of the Body of Christ, the Church - Heb. 10:25

8. Participate in the functional ministry of the Body of Christ in using your spiritual gifts - Rom. 12:4-6; I Cor. 12

http://www.christinyou.com/pages/loneliness.html

What to do when you are Deserted by Loved Ones

(Psalm 9:10 KJV)
And they that know thy name will put their trust in thee: for thou, Lord, hast not forsaken them that seek thee.

(Psalm 94:14 KJV)
For the Lord will not cast off his people, neither will he forsake his inheritance.

(Matthew 28:20 KJV)
Teaching them to observe all things what- soever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you alway, {even} unto the end of the world. Amen.

(Isaiah 62:4 KJV)
Thou shalt no more be termed Forsaken; neither shall thy land any more be termed Desolate: but thou shalt be called Hephzibah, and thy land Beulah: for the Lord delighteth in thee, and thy land shall be marr- ied.

(2 Corinthians 4:9 KJV)
Persecuted, but not forsaken; cast down, but not destroyed;

(1 Peter 5:7 KJV)
Casting all your care upon him; for he careth for you.

(Psalm 37:25 KJV)
I have been young, and {now} am old; yet have I not seen the righteous forsaken, nor his seed begging bread.

(Deuteronomy 4:31 KJV)
(For the Lord thy God {is} a merciful God;) he will not forsake thee, neither destroy thee, nor forget the covenant of thy fathers which he sware unto them.

(Isaiah 41:17 KJV)
{When} the poor and needy seek water, and {there is} none, {and} their tongue faileth for thirst, I the Lord will hear them, {I} the God of Israel will not forsake them.

(Psalms 91:14-15 KJV)
(14) Because he hath set his love upon me, therefore will I deliver him: I will set him on high, because he hath known my name. (15) He shall call upon me, and I will answer him: I {will be} with him in trouble; I will deliver him, and honour him.

(Psalm 43:5 KJV)
Why art thou cast down, O my soul? and why art thou disquieted within me? hope in God: for I shall yet praise him, {who is} the health of my countenance, and my God.

(Deuteronomy 31:6 KJV)
Be strong and of a good courage, fear not, nor be afraid of them: for the Lord thy God, he {it is} that doth go with thee; he will not fail thee, nor forsake thee.

(1 Samuel 12:22 KJV)
For the Lord will not forsake his people for his great name's sake: because it hath pleased the Lord to make you his people.
http://www.apostolic-churches.net/bible/sbs/deserted.html

TEXT: Acts 13:14-41

TITLE: THE JEWISH GOSPEL

BIG IDEA:
DO NOT REJECT THE MESSAGE OF GOD'S SOVEREIGN PROVISION OF SALVATION THROUGH JESUS CHRIST, THE SEED OF DAVID, IN HIS CRUCIFIXION AND RESURRECTION

INTRODUCTION:
Today you have the privilege of sitting under the preaching of the greatest expositor in NT church history – the Apostle Paul. As he begins his first missionary journey we find him still giving priority to taking the gospel to the Jews before moving on to the Gentiles. But this Jewish gospel he presents in detail in Acts 13 is the very same message we responded to and proclaim to others today. So you can look at today's message as more of a seminar in how to present the gospel message to others.

We are probably familiar with a number of formats for gospel presentation:

- Four Spiritual Laws –
  - God loves you and has a wonderful plan for your life …
- Evangelism Explosion – starts off with that exploratory question:
  - "If you were to die tonight and stand before God, why should He let you into His heaven?"
- Roman Road – quoting different verses through the Book of Romans
  - "*All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God*"
- Two Ways to Live – the Choice we all face
  - Our Way = reject God as your ruler and try to run life our own way
  - God's New Way = Submit to Jesus as our ruler and rely on His death and resurrection for forgiveness of sins and new life

[cf. Jesus' presentation to the Samaritan woman at the well in John 4; cf. Peter's earlier sermons]

Many of the principles we will be looking at this morning have been incorporated into those approaches.

SEVEN STEP GOSPEL PRESENTATION

I. (:14-16a) THE APPROACH -- LOOK FOR THE OPPORTUNITY TO PRESENT THE GOSPEL – THE MISSIONARY MINDSET

"*But going on from Perga, they arrived at Pisidian Antioch, and on the Sabbath day they went into the synagogue and sat down. And after the reading of the Law and the Prophets the synagogue officials sent to them, saying, 'Brethren, if you have any word of exhortation for the people, say it.' And Paul stood up, and motioning with his hand, he said,*"

Αὐτοὶ δὲ διελθόντες ἀπὸ τῆς Πέργης παρεγένοντο εἰς Ἀντιόχειαν τὴν Πισιδίαν, καὶ [εἰσ]ελθόντες εἰς τὴν συναγωγὴν τῇ ἡμέρᾳ τῶν σαββάτων ἐκάθισαν. μετὰ δὲ τὴν ἀνάγνωσιν τοῦ νόμου καὶ τῶν προφητῶν ἀπέστειλαν οἱ ἀρχισυνάγωγοι πρὸς αὐτοὺς λέγοντες· ἄνδρες ἀδελφοί, εἴ τίς ἐστιν

ἐν ὑμῖν λόγος παρακλήσεως πρὸς τὸν λαόν, λέγετε. Ἀναστὰς δὲ Παῦλος καὶ κατασείσας τῇ χειρὶ εἶπεν·

Remember the subject of our last message = the desertion of John Mark – yet the reaction was not one of discouragement and ministry paralysis but going on with determination and vision and expectancy that God would lead and bless

How do we make connection with the unsaved and get a turn up at the plate?

Antioch near Pisidia – not in Pisidia

Wiersbe: Paul and Barnabas traveled 100 miles north and about 3,000 feet up to get to this important city on the Roman road.

Paul and his team went to great lengths to bring the gospel to new cities; driven by the Great Commission Mandate

Kent: First of Paul's sermons to be recorded in any detail. It is similar to Stephen's in its employment of historical retrospect (a speech which Paul probably heard), and also is not unlike Peter's sermon at Pentecost in its interpretation of certain OT passages.

Stott: Luke will later give two samples of Paul's sermons to Gentiles, that is, to the pagans of Lystra and the philosophers of Athens. But now the whole atmosphere is Jewish. The day is the Sabbath, the venue is the synagogue, the lessons are from the Law and the Prophets, the listeners are "*men of Israel*", and the theme is how the God of the people of Israel has brought to Israel the Saviour Jesus, as he promised. Luke is evidently anxious to demonstrate that Paul's message to the Jews was substantially the same as Peter's; that Paul did not turn to the Gentiles until after he had offered the gospel to the Jews and been rebuffed; and that, far from being an innovator, Paul was declaring only what God had promised in Scripture and had now fulfilled in Jesus.

Do you have the Missionary Mindset? Are you actively looking for opportunities to present the gospel message? Look at how aggressive Paul was – not just relying on friendship evangelism – he found ways to make contact with new groups of people

II. (:16b) THE ADDRESS -- ESTABLISH COMMON GROUND WITH YOUR AUDIENCE – THE MISSIONARY CULTURAL SENSITIVITY

"*Men of Israel, and you who fear God, listen:*"

ἄνδρες Ἰσραηλῖται καὶ οἱ φοβούμενοι τὸν θεόν, ἀκούσατε.

Getting people to listen to the message is difficult; all we want is a hearing

You can't start out condemning them

III. (:17-22) THE AUTHENTICATION OF THE MESSAGE -- REVIEW THE HISTORICAL RECORD OF GOD'S CHARACTER AND EXERCISE OF SOVEREIGN GRACE – THE MISSIONARY APOLOGETIC

Stott: Paul's emphasis is on God's initiative of grace. For he is the subject of nearly all the verbs.

Some people have more background in the Scriptures and a better understanding of God than others

7 Sovereign Acts of God (and 1 hiccup): History lesson – can we agree on how God has acted in the past?

A. Initial Sovereign Choice of Israel

"*The God of this people Israel chose our fathers,*"
ὁ θεὸς τοῦ λαοῦ τούτου Ἰσραὴλ ἐξελέξατο τοὺς πατέρας ἡμῶν

A surprising choice and one they appreciated

[Here we might need to substitute our personal testimony = How has God proven Himself to be faithful and loving and wise and compassionate and sovereign in our experience?]

B. Sovereignly Prospered them in Time of Bondage in Egypt

"*and made the people great during their stay in the land of Egypt,*"
καὶ τὸν λαὸν ὕψωσεν ἐν τῇ παροικίᾳ ἐν γῇ Αἰγύπτου

Sounds like they were just enjoying a restful time at some luxury resort – not exactly the picture from their perspective – time of great affliction – yet also God prospered them and their flocks

Ex. 1:7 "*But the sons of Israel were fruitful and increased greatly, and multiplied and became exceedingly mighty, so that the land was filled with them*."

MacArthur: The growth of the nation (cf. 12:37) was phenomenal! It grew from 70 men to 603,000 males, 20 years of age and older, thus allowing for a total population of about 2 million (Nu 1:46) departing from Egypt. The seed of Abraham was no longer an extended family, but a nation. The promise that his descendants would be fruitful and multiply (Ge 35:11, 12) had indeed been fulfilled in Egypt.

C. Sovereignly Delivered them from Egypt

"*and with an uplifted arm He led them out from it.*"
καὶ μετὰ βραχίονος ὑψηλοῦ ἐξήγαγεν αὐτοὺς ἐξ αὐτῆς,

Despite Pharoah's opposition; Crossing of the Red Sea = miraculous deliverance and judgment

[Contrast unfaithfulness of God's people in each of these scenes with God's faithfulness]

D. Sovereignly Protected and Provided for them in the Wilderness

"*And for a period of about forty years He put up with them in the wilderness.*"
καὶ ὡς τεσσερακονταετῆ χρόνον ἐτροποφόρησεν αὐτοὺς ἐν τῇ ἐρήμῳ

E. Sovereignly Established them in the Promised Land

1. Destroying Enemy Nations – Remember crossing of Jordan and victory at Jericho
   "*And when He had destroyed seven nations in the land of Canaan,*"
   καὶ καθελὼν ἔθνη ἑπτὰ ἐν γῇ Χανάαν

against all odds

2. Giving Them Promised Inheritance of the Land

"*He distributed their land as an inheritance-- all of which took about four hundred and fifty years.*"

κατεκληρονόμησεν τὴν γῆν αὐτῶν ὡς ἔτεσιν τετρακοσίοις καὶ πεντήκοντα

Importance of the land

F. Sovereignly Provided Leadership via the Judges

"*And after these things He gave them judges until Samuel the prophet.*"

καὶ μετὰ ταῦτα ἔδωκεν κριτὰς ἕως Σαμουὴλ [τοῦ] προφήτου.

Cycle of disobedience – yet God remained gracious
Time after time God sent a leader to rescue His sinful people and protect them from extinction

G. Exposed the Foolishness of Man's Independent Initiative – Gave them what they wanted

"*And then they asked for a king, and God gave them Saul the son of Kish, a man of the tribe of Benjamin, for forty years.*"

κἀκεῖθεν ᾐτήσαντο βασιλέα καὶ ἔδωκεν αὐτοῖς ὁ θεὸς τὸν Σαοὺλ υἱὸν Κίς, ἄνδρα ἐκ φυλῆς Βενιαμίν, ἔτη τεσσεράκοντα,

How presumptuous of them to demand a form of governing after the pattern of the world and rejecting God's invisible theocracy; reign of Saul was disastrous

H. Sovereignly Raised up the Godly Leadership of King David

"*And after He had removed him, He raised up David to be their king, concerning whom He also testified and said, 'I have found David the son of Jesse, a man after My heart, who will do all My will.'*"

καὶ μεταστήσας αὐτὸν ἤγειρεν τὸν Δαυὶδ αὐτοῖς εἰς βασιλέα ᾧ καὶ εἶπεν μαρτυρήσας· εὗρον Δαυὶδ τὸν τοῦ Ἰεσσαί, ἄνδρα κατὰ τὴν καρδίαν μου, ὃς ποιήσει πάντα τὰ θελήματά μου.

God does the removing and the raising up of leaders

Point is to define the pedigree of the promised Messiah
David was type of Him who would come and reign in righteousness and peace
Obedience is the key to pleasing God – complete obedience

Climax: Building up to this point – no disagreement from the Jewish audience up to this point

IV. (:23-25) THE ANNOUNCEMENT OF THE ARRIVAL OF THE SAVIOR -- INTRODUCE THE HISTORICAL JESUS AS THE PROMISED GLORIOUS SEED OF DAVID -- ANNOUNCED BY JOHN THE BAPTIST AND ANTICIPATED BY THE BAPTISM OF REPENTANCE – THE MISSIONARY FOCUS

A. Jesus – the Promised Glorious Seed of David

"*From the offspring of this man, according to promise, God has brought to Israel a Savior, Jesus,*"

τούτου ὁ θεὸς ἀπὸ τοῦ σπέρματος κατ᾽ ἐπαγγελίαν ἤγαγεν τῷ Ἰσραὴλ σωτῆρα Ἰησοῦν,

It's all about Jesus – that is who we are presenting to people
This is what Paul wants to drive home

B. Jesus – the Permanent Solution for Sin

"*after John had proclaimed before His coming a baptism of repentance to all the people of Israel.*"
προκηρύξαντος Ἰωάννου πρὸ προσώπου τῆς εἰσόδου αὐτοῦ βάπτισμα μετανοίας παντὶ τῷ λαῷ Ἰσραήλ.

C. Jesus – the Preeminent Majestic King of Kings and Lord of Lords

"*And while John was completing his course, he kept saying, 'What do you suppose that I am? I am not He. But behold, one is coming after me the sandals of whose feet I am not worthy to untie.'*"
ὡς δὲ ἐπλήρου Ἰωάννης τὸν δρόμον, ἔλεγεν· τί ἐμὲ ὑπονοεῖτε εἶναι; οὐκ εἰμὶ ἐγώ· ἀλλ᾽ ἰδοὺ ἔρχεται μετ᾽ ἐμὲ οὗ οὐκ εἰμὶ ἄξιος τὸ ὑπόδημα τῶν ποδῶν λῦσαι.

Understand the supremacy of the person of Christ – need to see Him as the majestic Son of God

John the Baptist = greatest among men; yet tremendous gap between him and Christ

V. (:26-29) THE AWAKENING OF GUILT BY EXPLAINING THE TRAVESTY OF THE CRUCIFIXION – THE JUST BEING CONDEMNED IN PLACE OF THE UNJUST – THE MISSIONARY HARD TRUTH

"Travesty" = a debased, distorted, or grossly inferior imitation (i.e. of justice)

A. Jewish Opportunity to be First Responders

1. Based on their Connectivity – Renewing the Address
   a. Their connection to Paul
      "*Brethren,*"
      Ἄνδρες ἀδελφοί,

   b. Their connection to the Jewish nation
      "*sons of Abraham's family,*"
      υἱοὶ γένους Ἀβραὰμ

   c. Their connection to God – expanded to some Gentiles among them
      "*and those among you who fear God,*"
      καὶ οἱ ἐν ὑμῖν φοβούμενοι τὸν θεόν,

2. Based on their Privilege of Stewardship of the Gospel Message and Priority of Access
   "*to us the word of this salvation is sent out.*"
   ἡμῖν ὁ λόγος τῆς σωτηρίας ταύτης ἐξαπεστάλη.

B. Jewish Culpability in the Crucifixion of Jesus

"*For those who live in Jerusalem, and their rulers, recognizing neither Him nor the utterances of the prophets which are read every Sabbath, fulfilled these by condemning Him. And though they found no ground for putting Him to death, they asked Pilate that He be executed. And when they had carried out all that was written concerning Him, they took Him down from the cross and laid Him in a tomb.*"

οἱ γὰρ κατοικοῦντες ἐν Ἰερουσαλὴμ καὶ οἱ ἄρχοντες αὐτῶν τοῦτον ἀγνοήσαντες καὶ τὰς φωνὰς τῶν προφητῶν τὰς κατὰ πᾶν σάββατον ἀναγινωσκομένας κρίναντες ἐπλήρωσαν, καὶ μηδεμίαν αἰτίαν θανάτου εὑρόντες ἠτήσαντο Πιλᾶτον ἀναιρεθῆναι αὐτόν. ὡς δὲ ἐτέλεσαν πάντα τὰ περὶ αὐτοῦ γεγραμμένα, καθελόντες ἀπὸ τοῦ ξύλου ἔθηκαν εἰς μνημεῖον.

We awaken guilt by showing how our sins were the reason Jesus had to go to the cross

VI. (:30-37) <u>THE AWAKENING OF HOPE</u> BY EXPLAINING THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE RESURRECTION = AVAILABILITY OF FORGIVENESS OF SIN – <u>THE MISSIONARY GOOD NEWS</u>

A. The Reality of the Resurrection

"*But God raised Him from the dead;*"
ὁ δὲ θεὸς ἤγειρεν αὐτὸν ἐκ νεκρῶν,

Powerful statement

B. The Credibility of the Preachers = Witnesses of the reality of the resurrection

"*and for many days He appeared to those who came up with Him from Galilee to Jerusalem, the very ones who are now His witnesses to the people. And we preach to you*"

ὃς ὤφθη ἐπὶ ἡμέρας πλείους τοῖς συναναβᾶσιν αὐτῷ ἀπὸ τῆς Γαλιλαίας εἰς Ἰερουσαλήμ, οἵτινες [νῦν] εἰσιν μάρτυρες αὐτοῦ πρὸς τὸν λαόν. Καὶ ἡμεῖς ὑμᾶς εὐαγγελιζόμεθα

<u>5 Purposes of the post resurrection appearances of Jesus:</u>

- Proved the reality of His resurrection
- Renewed His fellowship with His beloved disciples
- Provided comfort and training for His preaching party
- Gave them instant credibility because of what they had witnessed
- Increased their motivation to bring the good news to the people

C. The Good News of Fulfilled Prophecy – 2 OT Quotes

the good news of the promise made to the fathers, that God has fulfilled this promise to our children in that He raised up Jesus, as it is also written in the second Psalm, 'Thou art My Son; today I have begotten Thee.' And as for the fact that He raised Him up from the dead, no more to return to decay, He has spoken in this way: 'I will give you the holy and sure blessings of David.' Therefore He also says in another Psalm, 'Thou wilt not allow Thy Holy One to undergo decay.' For David, after he had served the purpose of God in his own generation, fell asleep, and was laid among his fathers, and underwent

decay; but He whom God raised did not undergo decay."

τὴν πρὸς τοὺς πατέρας ἐπαγγελίαν γενομένην, ὅτι ταύτην ὁ θεὸς ἐκπεπλήρωκεν
τοῖς τέκνοις [αὐτῶν] ἡμῖν ἀναστήσας Ἰησοῦν ὡς καὶ ἐν τῷ ψαλμῷ γέγραπται τῷ δευτέρῳ· υἱός
μου εἶ σύ, ἐγὼ σήμερον γεγέννηκά σε. ὅτι δὲ ἀνέστησεν αὐτὸν ἐκ νεκρῶν μηκέτι μέλλοντα
ὑποστρέφειν εἰς διαφθοράν, οὕτως εἴρηκεν ὅτι δώσω ὑμῖν τὰ ὅσια Δαυὶδ τὰ πιστά. διότι καὶ ἐν
ἑτέρῳ λέγει· οὐ δώσεις τὸν ὅσιόν σου ἰδεῖν διαφθοράν. Δαυὶδ μὲν γὰρ ἰδίᾳ γενεᾷ ὑπηρετήσας τῇ
τοῦ θεοῦ βουλῇ ἐκοιμήθη καὶ προσετέθη πρὸς τοὺς πατέρας αὐτοῦ καὶ εἶδεν διαφθοράν· ὃν δὲ ὁ
θεὸς ἤγειρεν, οὐκ εἶδεν διαφθοράν.

VII. (:38-41) <u>THE APPLICATION</u> -- DRIVE HOME THE PERSONAL APPLICATION BY CALLING FOR A RESPONSE OF FAITH – APPEAL AND WARNING – <u>THE MISSIONARY INVITATION</u>

A. Do you understand the **Exclusivity of the Gospel** – True for all people; True for all time – no other options that work

"*Therefore let it be known to you, brethren, that through Him*"

γνωστὸν οὖν ἔστω ὑμῖν, ἄνδρες ἀδελφοί, ὅτι διὰ τούτου

Acts 4:12 "*And there is salvation in no one else; for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men by which we must be saved*."

B. Do you want **Forgiveness** and **Freedom** vs. Condemnation and Bondage? If there is no heart desire for these precious blessings, then the groundwork of awakening guilt must be revisited.

"*forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you, and through Him everyone who believes is freed from all things, from which you could not be freed through the Law of Moses.*"

ὑμῖν ἄφεσις ἁμαρτιῶν καταγγέλλεται, [καὶ] ἀπὸ πάντων ὧν οὐκ ἠδυνήθητε ἐν νόμῳ Μωϋσέως
δικαιωθῆναι, ἐν τούτῳ πᾶς ὁ πιστεύων δικαιοῦται.

Toussaint: **Acts 13:39** gives the thesis of Paul's <u>Epistle to the Galatians</u>, which was probably written shortly after his first missionary journey and before the Jerusalem Council (Acts 15).

Kent: Those who trusted in Moses alone would find in the judgment that they had no real forgiveness with God at all. Faith was necessary even in the OT period. The good news revealed in Christ is that man's debt has been paid by Christ's death, and full forgiveness is available to all who will trust him for it.

C. Do you understand the **Severe Consequences** of Rejection of the Gospel?

"*Take heed therefore, so that the thing spoken of in the Prophets may not come upon you: 'Behold, you scoffers, and marvel, and perish; For I am accomplishing a work in your days, A work which you will never believe, though someone should describe it to you.*'"

βλέπετε οὖν μὴ ἐπέλθῃ τὸ εἰρημένον ἐν τοῖς προφήταις· ἴδετε, οἱ καταφρονηταί, καὶ
θαυμάσατε καὶ ἀφανίσθητε, ὅτι ἔργον ἐργάζομαι ἐγὼ ἐν ταῖς ἡμέραις ὑμῶν, ἔργον ὃ οὐ μὴ
πιστεύσητε ἐάν τις ἐκδιηγῆται ὑμῖν.

Paul has already demonstrated that the predictions of the prophets have been fulfilled down to

the minute details – we saw this in the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus – much more we will see it at His second coming in judgment and wrath.
2 Thess 1:7-9 "*when the Lord Jesus will be revealed from heaven with His mighty angels in flaming fire, dealing out retribution to those who do not know God and to those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. These will pay the penalty of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power*"

Wiersbe: In Habakkuk's day, the "unbelievable work" God was doing was the raising up of the Chaldeans to chasten His people, a work so remarkable that nobody would believe it. After all, why would God use an evil pagan nation to punish His own chosen people, sinful though they might be? God was using Gentiles to punish Jews! But the "wonderful work" in Paul's day was that God was using the Jews to save the Gentiles!

You do not want to continue through life in the category of "*Scoffers*"
2 Pet. 3:3 "*Where is the promise of His coming*?"

Don't be afraid to ask for the order!

* * * * * * * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

1) Do we shy away from telling people the hard truth about the depth of their depravity and their need for salvation or do we actively look for opportunities to present the gospel?

2) Can we effectively use Scripture passages and quotes in our presentation of the gospel?

3) Do we give enough attention to the significance of the resurrection of Jesus Christ?

4) Do we stop at presenting just the information about the gospel message and fail to ask for the response of repentance and faith and issue a warning to those who reject?

* * * * * * * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Stott: Quoting Luther in his Preface to the Acts of the Apostles (1533):
It should be noted that by this book St Luke teaches the whole of Christendom . . . that the true and chief article of Christian doctrine is this: We must all be justified alone by faith in Jesus Christ, without any contribution from the law or help from our works. This doctrine is the chief intention of the book and the author's principal reason for writing it. On the other hand, over against the offer of forgiveness, Paul issues a solemn warning to those who reject it. He reminds his hearers of the prophets' denunciations. In particular, he quotes Habakkuk (Hab. 1:5), who predicted the rise of the Babylonians as instruments of divine judgment upon Israel (40-41).

Wiersbe: sermon divided into three parts, each of which is introduced by the phrase "men and brethren."
1. Preparation (:16-25)
2. Declaration (:26-37)

3. Application (:38-52

TEXT: Acts 13:42-52

TITLE: TRUTH DIVIDES -- CONTRASTING RESPONSES TO THE GOSPEL MESSAGE IN ANTIOCH

BIG IDEA:
THE BOLD PREACHING OF THE WORD OF GOD AND THE PERSON OF JESUS CHRIST EXCITES NEW CONVERTS AND ANGERS JEALOUS TRADITIONALISTS

INTRODUCTION:
As a seminary student, I always imagined what it would be like to have enthusiastic large groups of people calling out: "**Send the Light**" ! Bring to us that precious gospel message that offers forgiveness of sins through Jesus Christ and freedom from bondage so that we can live a transformed life. Teach us the significance of the crucifixion and resurrection of the Son of God. "*How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news of good things*!" [**Rom. 10:15** – Paul quoting **Isaiah 52:7**.]

But we all know **the reality** is quite different. It is the exception where there is hunger for the Word of God and a huge positive response to the gospel. "*The road is narrow that leads to life, and there are few who find it*" (Matt. 7:14). Our passage this morning is going to highlight some contrasting responses to the preaching of Paul and Barnabas. We will see extremes on both sides – Extreme passion and obedience and joy in the reception of the gospel and extreme jealousy and hatred and persecution in the rejection of the gospel.

Truth Divides! It does not bring all parties together in some type of spirit of tolerance. Revelation demands a response. A person cannot remain **neutral**. He is impacted with the savor of life unto life or death unto death. He is never the same person as before his exposure to the gospel message. As ambassadors for Jesus Christ and those called to fulfill the Great Commission, we must be **bold** to bring the same message to people who will have very different types of responses. It takes faith and courage to please the Lord rather than be a man-pleaser and be concerned about our own popularity and positive reception.

Illustration: [Interesting topic for the in-laws]
"*Do not think that I came to bring peace on the earth; I did not come to bring peace, but a sword. For I came to set a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law; and a man's enemies will be the members of his household*." (**Matt. 10:34-36**).

Last Week: What was the message Paul preached?
DO NOT REJECT THE MESSAGE OF GOD'S SOVEREIGN PROVISION OF SALVATION THROUGH JESUS CHRIST, THE SEED OF DAVID, IN HIS CRUCIFIXION AND RESURRECTION

Today: What type of contrasting responses did Paul receive?
THE BOLD PREACHING OF THE WORD OF GOD AND THE PERSON OF JESUS CHRIST EXCITES NEW CONVERTS AND ANGERS JEALOUS TRADITIONALISTS

3 STAGES OF THE RESPONSE TO PAUL'S PREACHING IN ANTIOCH:

1) Initial Hunger 2) Digested Responses 3) Long Term Impact

I. (:42-44) INITIAL HUNGER: CURIOUS SINNERS HUNGER TO HEAR THE WORD OF GOD – (WHILE INVITING OTHERS TO DO LIKEWISE) -- RESULT: CONTINUING IN GRACE

A. (:42) Hunger Longs for Nourishment

"*And as Paul and Barnabas were going out, the people kept begging that these things might be spoken to them the next Sabbath.*"

Ἐξιόντων δὲ αὐτῶν παρεκάλουν εἰς τὸ μεταξὺ σάββατον λαληθῆναι αὐτοῖς τὰ ῥήματα ταῦτα.

Priority of the preaching of God's Word emphasized in this story

Bock: This Greek verb is in the imperfect, portraying the requesting in a vivid, ongoing manner.

Curiosity factor – something new being presented

B. (:43) Humility Hopes on Grace

"*Now when the meeting of the synagogue had broken up, many of the Jews and of the God-fearing proselytes followed Paul and Barnabas, who, speaking to them, were urging them to continue in the grace of God.*"

λυθείσης δὲ τῆς συναγωγῆς ἠκολούθησαν πολλοὶ τῶν Ἰουδαίων καὶ τῶν σεβομένων προσηλύτων τῷ Παύλῳ καὶ τῷ Βαρναβᾷ, οἵτινες προσλαλοῦντες αὐτοῖς ἔπειθον αὐτοὺς προσμένειν τῇ χάριτι τοῦ θεοῦ.

Interested people could not wait for the formal meeting a week off; they wanted some private interaction immediately

Guzik: Continuing in grace is as important as beginning in grace; we must never leave it as the basic principle of our relationship with God. Far too many only think of grace as the introduction to the Christian life, but God wants grace to remain as the foundation for our life with Him.

Profession of faith comes easily … but genuine faith is proven out over time by our abiding in God's grace; remaining in the pathway of faith and discipleship

Not all of those professing immediate faith were genuine believers; Concept of **Abiding** that John wrote about in John 15 and 1 John

Message of grace stands in stark contrast to the performance-oriented message of the law – book of Galatians – Paul had just explained that adherence to the law could not provide forgiveness of sins and the freedom they longed for

Message of the gospel is all about the grace of God --

C. (:44) Harvesting Results From Preaching

"*And the next Sabbath nearly the whole city assembled to hear the word of God.*"

Τῷ δὲ ἐρχομένῳ σαββάτῳ σχεδὸν πᾶσα ἡ πόλις συνήχθη ἀκοῦσαι τὸν λόγον τοῦ κυρίου.

Lenski: What interested all these Gentiles was the fact that without becoming Jews and adopting the Jewish separative laws they could be received into the full communion of faith.

How did the word get out so quickly without all of our fancy multi media campaigns and promotional glitz?

II. (:45-49) DIGESTED RESPONSE: BELIEVING GENTILES GLORIFY THE WORD OF GOD – IN CONTRAST TO JEALOUS JEWS – RESULT: SPREADING THE GOSPEL

A. (:45) Jealous Jews

"*But when the Jews saw the crowds, they were filled with jealousy, and began contradicting the things spoken by Paul, and were blaspheming.*"

ἰδόντες δὲ οἱ Ἰουδαῖοι τοὺς ὄχλους ἐπλήσθησαν ζήλου καὶ ἀντέλεγον τοῖς ὑπὸ Παύλου λαλουμένοις βλασφημοῦντες.

Not all the Jews believed and not all the Jews opposed Paul's teaching … but the general summary of the reaction to the gospel divided across these ethnic lines
[not just speaking of the Jewish leaders here]
The Jews were already attendees at the synagogue weekly; the extra huge crowds represented the Gentle influx – you mean there is a message of hope and salvation here for me that does not require allegiance to the Jewish system of complex laws and regulations?

Contrast between people who make decisions based on **Conviction** vs **Tradition/Prejudice**

Bruce: the majority [of the Jews], including no doubt most of the leaders of the community, had no use for a salvation which was apparently open to Gentiles as much as to Jews. It was just this, indeed, which decided them against it.

Barclay: As has been said, "The Jews saw the heathen as chaff to be burned; Jesus saw them as a harvest to be reaped for God." And his Church must have a like vision of a world for Christ.

MacArthur: **Prejudice**. That's the only word you could ever use, prejudice. They did not like Gentiles belonging and receiving the same salvation and blessing of God and Messiah that they had. They couldn't handle that. It was prejudice. It was selfishness. It was personal privilege, Jewish superiority. That was the issue and so they got furious. The word "jealous" or "envious" expresses exactly the attitude. The same word is used in Acts 5:17 of the Jewish leaders in Jerusalem.

B. (:46-47) Progressing From Rejection by Jews to Opportunity with the Gentiles

"*And Paul and Barnabas spoke out boldly and said, 'It was necessary that the word of God should be spoken to you first; since you repudiate it, and judge yourselves unworthy of eternal life, behold, we are turning to the Gentiles. For thus the Lord has commanded us, I have placed You as a light for the Gentiles, That You should bring salvation to the end of the earth.*':

παρρησιασάμενοί τε ὁ Παῦλος καὶ ὁ Βαρναβᾶς εἶπαν· ὑμῖν ἦν ἀναγκαῖον πρῶτον λαληθῆναι τὸν

λόγον τοῦ θεοῦ· ἐπειδὴ ἀπωθεῖσθε αὐτὸν καὶ οὐκ ἀξίους κρίνετε ἑαυτοὺς τῆς αἰωνίου ζωῆς, ἰδοὺ στρεφόμεθα εἰς τὰ ἔθνη. οὕτως γὰρ ἐντέταλται ἡμῖν ὁ κύριος· τέθεικά σε εἰς φῶς ἐθνῶν τοῦ εἶναί σε εἰς σωτηρίαν ἕως ἐσχάτου τῆς γῆς.

Bold Preaching is theme that runs through Acts: courage to speak openly and frankly; 2:29; 4:13, 29, 31; 28:31 – verb form: 9:27-28; 14:3; 18:26; 19:8; 26:26

Stott: Certainly those who have believed in Jesus and received eternal life from his all ascribe the credit to God's grace, not to their own merit. The converse is not so, however. It is significant that in this very passage those who rejected the gospel are regarded as having done so deliberately, because they did not "*consider [themselves] worthy of eternal life*".

Bock: [Is. 49] Paul and Barnabas are now seen as an extension of the work of the Servant of the Lord, who was Jesus.

C. (:48-49) Believing Gentiles

"*And when the Gentiles heard this, they began rejoicing and glorifying the word of the Lord; and as many as had been appointed to eternal life believed. And the word of the Lord was being spread through the whole region.*"

Ἀκούοντα δὲ τὰ ἔθνη ἔχαιρον καὶ ἐδόξαζον τὸν λόγον τοῦ κυρίου καὶ ἐπίστευσαν ὅσοι ἦσαν τεταγμένοι εἰς ζωὴν αἰώνιον· διεφέρετο δὲ ὁ λόγος τοῦ κυρίου δι᾽ ὅλης τῆς χώρας.

Boice: How long does it take to start a church? Lot of intensive planning; demographics … answer might surprise you here – one week

Cole: God's glory is the beauty of His perfect attributes, and that glory shines supremely at the cross, where His perfect love and justice meet. Thus as we glory in His salvation, we will be filled with joy and want others to know and glorify Him. God's glory should be our supreme motive in sharing the gospel.

Wiersbe: The word translated *ordained* means "enrolled," and indicates that God's people have their names written in God's book (Luke 10:20; Phil. 4:3). But **Acts 13:49** is the human side of evangelism: if we do not preach the Word, then nobody can believe and be saved. It takes both (see 2 Thess. 2:13-14; Rom. 10:13-15).

Stedman: Now do not turn that around. That does not say, "and as many as believed were ordained to eternal life." You see, Paul began this message by showing them that God was active, trying to reach out to men. It is not men who are trying to find God; it is God who is trying to find men. And when men believe, they are simply responding to the activity of God who is already reaching out to them. Here were many who were ordained of God, and when they were thus ordained, they believed, they responded to God. You can never get away from this wonderful, mysterious combination of divine sovereignty and human responsibility.

III. (:50-52) LONG TERM IMPACT: PERSECUTED PREACHERS ADVANCE THE WORD OF GOD – (DESPITE ORGANIZED OPPOSITION) --
RESULT: REJOICING IN THE HOLY SPIRIT

A. (:50) Painful Persecution

"*But the Jews aroused the devout women of prominence and the leading men of the city,*

and instigated a persecution against Paul and Barnabas, and drove them out of their district."

οἱ δὲ Ἰουδαῖοι παρώτρυναν τὰς σεβομένας γυναῖκας τὰς εὐσχήμονας καὶ τοὺς πρώτους τῆς πόλεως καὶ ἐπήγειραν διωγμὸν ἐπὶ τὸν Παῦλον καὶ Βαρναβᾶν καὶ ἐξέβαλον αὐτοὺς ἀπὸ τῶν ὁρίων αὐτῶν.

Stott: the expulsion of the missionaries was probably violent. It is confirmed by Paul's own later statement that Timothy knew all about his persecutions and sufferings "*in Antioch, Iconium and Lystra.*" (**2 Tim. 3:10-11**)

B. (:51) Resilient Resolve

"*But they shook off the dust of their feet in protest against them and went to Iconium.*"

οἱ δὲ ἐκτιναξάμενοι τὸν κονιορτὸν τῶν ποδῶν ἐπ᾽ αὐτοὺς ἦλθον εἰς Ἰκόνιον,

leaving defilement behind

Kent: Shaking off the dust of their feet as a gesture of disapproval (in the manner Jesus had instructed his followers, Luke 9:5; 10:11), the missionaries went to Iconium, a city eighty miles distant.

Calvin: Therefore, it appeareth how intolerable the contempt of the word of God is in his sight; because, when as he commandeth that the dust of the feet be shaken off, it is as much as if he should pronounce that they are the bond-slaves of Satan, men past hope, and worthy to be banished from off the earth. Wherefore, let this so great;, severity teach us to reverence the gospel. Also the ministers of the word are taught with how great ferventness of zeal they must maintain the majesty of the word, that they do not coldly dissemble and wink at the contempt thereof.

C. (:52) Impactful Imprint

"*And the disciples were continually filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit.*"

οἵ τε μαθηταὶ ἐπληροῦντο χαρᾶς καὶ πνεύματος ἁγίου.

What did the missionary team leave behind?? The disciples had become imitators of them as they were imitators of Christ.

Bruce: but the converts whom they left behind in Pisidian Antioch, far from being discouraged by the expulsion of the men who had brought them the gospel, were (in spite of that expulsion and no doubt of some persecution which they themselves had to endure) filled with the joy that the good news imparted and with the Holy Spirit.

CONCLUSION:

- Initial Hunger
- Digested Responses
- Long Term Impact

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DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

1) How has the gospel message proven to be divisive within your extended family?

2) What are some examples in your own life of bold proclamation of the person of Christ and the word of God?

3) How can we be more effective as a light to those around us lost in the darkness of sin and ignorance and unbelief?

4) Are we characterized by being *continually filled with joy and the Holy Spirit*?

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QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Boice: I sometimes say I do not know how you can evangelize any other way, at least not in a thinking manner. Suppose it does not depend on God; suppose it depends on you. Suppose people are saved because you are eloquent or because you have the right answers or because you happen to be in the right place at just the right time – entirely apart from God's election. If that is true, it means that if you do not have the right answers, if you are not in the right place, if you do not present the gospel in just the right way, then these people will perish and it will be your fault. I do not know how anybody can live with that.

Wiersbe: Paul's final message in the synagogue declared that God had sent the Word to the Jews first (Acts 3:26; Rom. 1:16), but they had now rejected it. Therefore, Paul would now take the good news to the Gentiles, and he quoted Isaiah 49:6 to back up his decision. (Note also Luke 2:29-32.) He was ready to go to the ends of the earth to win souls to Christ.

Lenski: Paul states what thrusting away the Word really means. By doing so the Jews themselves act as judges in their own case. They do not want the Word, their judgment, therefore, is that they are not worthy of the eternal life which that Word brings. They, indeed, blasphemed that Word as Paul spoke it, they scorned it as though it were nothing; Paul and Barnabas lift it high by pointing to the life it brings. And they tell these scorners what they are really doing. In his grace, God regarded them worthy to receive that life through the Savior; they regard themselves unworthy. Whereas God intended to place them in the van, at the head of all the Gentiles, they put themselves entirely out of the procession. They have only themselves to blame.

Steven Cole: Since God is glorified in the salvation of His elect, He wants us boldly to proclaim the gospel, even though it divides people.

1. The glory of God in saving His elect should be our primary motive in proclaiming the gospel.

2. To see God's elect get saved, we must proclaim the gospel to them.

3. When we proclaim the gospel rightly, we should expect division.
Why do people oppose the wonderful news that God offers forgiveness of sins and justification apart from any human merit? The root reason is always pride. The gospel robs people of any ground for boasting. Another reason was jealousy (13:45). They wanted everyone to stay in their system of works, because they gained status by having everyone think how religious they were. When people repudiated their system of works and turned to the grace of God, it threatened their pride. Note that it was primarily the religious crowd that opposed Paul's message (13:45, 50; 14:2, 4, 5). Isn't it ironic that these religious Jews, who normally would keep themselves separate from the pagan Gentiles, would join together with them in order to fight against the gospel!

4. Whatever the response, we all must proclaim the gospel boldly until the ends of the earth have heard of God's salvation.
The gospel confronts every sinner with his sin. It confronts the religious sinner with his pride. It confronts the immoral sinner with his immorality. It confronts the greedy sinner with his love of money. It convicts every sinner of his guilt before the holy God. Then it offers to every sinner the free grace of God, who sacrificed His own Son as the just substitute for sinners. It shows that no sinner can save himself, but that God will save everyone who casts himself on Jesus alone. If we are saved, it is because God chose to save us, and all the glory goes to Him. If we are lost, it is because of our stubborn pride and disobedience. That message is divisive because it confronts human pride and glorifies God alone. It is the only message that we are to proclaim.

MacArthur: **The Troubling Gospel**
We expect this to happen if the gospel is clear cut and defined. It has to fraction. Christ said, "I came not to bring peace but a sword," and what He meant was the preaching of Christ doesn't bring everybody together in a big, lovey-dovey toleration. It fractures things. It splits. It cuts things apart.
1. the people were **pleased** – they wanted to hear more
2. the people were **persistent** –
3. they were **professing** –
the great temptation for a Jew was to make an intellectual ascent to Christianity and then under the pressure of his Judaism, under the pressure of his tradition, under the pressure of his friends, be pulled back into Judaism thus invalidating his faith. You see? And so he's saying, "I want to see that it's real by you continuing in grace."
4. they were **present** to hear the message the next week
If you were to study why people reject the gospel, you would never find, I don't think, anybody who would say, "I rejected the gospel because I pursued the facts fully, came to the intellectual conclusion that it's not true." I've never met anybody like that. People reject the gospel for many reasons but they're always the same. They love their sin. That's the umbrella that covers it all. Now that sin may have different things. It may be everything from sex to prejudice but it's always the same thing. They're not willing to sacrifice the ego and the established patterns that satisfy self and here, a whole group of people lost out on eternal heaven. They lost their Messiah. They lost their kingdom for something as stupid as prejudice against Gentiles...blind to the truth and blaspheming God, those who were God's own people. What a reaction.

TEXT: Acts 14:1-7

TITLE: TRUTH DIVIDES -- CONTRASTING RESPONSES TO THE GOSPEL MESSAGE IN ICONIUM

BIG IDEA:
THE BOLD PREACHING OF THE WORD OF GOD AND THE PERSON OF JESUS CHRIST EXCITES NEW CONVERTS AND ANGERS JEALOUS TRADITIONALISTS

INTRODUCTION:
Same Big Idea and Outline from last week fits this passage as well; just the sequence of events are repeated in a new geographical region

3 STAGES OF THE RESPONSE TO PAUL'S PREACHING IN ICONIUM:

1) **Initial Positive Response – both Jews and Gentiles**
2) **Heated Debate Due to Opposition Instigated by Jealous Jews**
3) **Long Term Impact**

I. (:1) INITIAL POSITIVE RESPONSE – BOTH JEWS AND GENTILES

"*And it came about that in Iconium they entered the synagogue of the Jews together, and spoke in such a manner that a great multitude believed, both of Jews and of Greeks.*"

Ἐγένετο δὲ ἐν Ἰκονίῳ κατὰ τὸ αὐτὸ εἰσελθεῖν αὐτοὺς εἰς τὴν συναγωγὴν τῶν Ἰουδαίων καὶ λαλῆσαι οὕτως ὥστε πιστεῦσαι Ἰουδαίων τε καὶ Ἑλλήνων πολὺ πλῆθος.

II. (:2-4) HEATED DEBATE DUE TO OPPOSITION INSTIGATED BY JEALOUS JEWS

A. (:2) Jealous Jews Poisoning the Gentiles

"*But the Jews who disbelieved stirred up the minds of the Gentiles, and embittered them against the brethren.*"

οἱ δὲ ἀπειθήσαντες Ἰουδαῖοι ἐπήγειραν καὶ ἐκάκωσαν τὰς ψυχὰς τῶν ἐθνῶν κατὰ τῶν ἀδελφῶν.

B. (:3) Divine Corroboration

"*Therefore they spent a long time there speaking boldly with reliance upon the Lord, who was bearing witness to the word of His grace, granting that signs and wonders be done by their hands.*"

ἱκανὸν μὲν οὖν χρόνον διέτριψαν παρρησιαζόμενοι ἐπὶ τῷ κυρίῳ τῷ μαρτυροῦντι [ἐπὶ] τῷ λόγῳ τῆς χάριτος αὐτοῦ, διδόντι σημεῖα καὶ τέρατα γίνεσθαι διὰ τῶν χειρῶν αὐτῶν.

C. (:4) Division Over Allegiance

"*But the multitude of the city was divided; and some sided with the Jews, and some with the apostles.*"

ἐσχίσθη δὲ τὸ πλῆθος τῆς πόλεως, καὶ οἱ μὲν ἦσαν σὺν τοῖς Ἰουδαίοις, οἱ δὲ σὺν τοῖς ἀποστόλοις.

III. (:5-7) LONG TERM IMPACT: PERSECUTED PREACHERS ADVANCE THE WORD OF GOD – DESPITE ORGANIZED OPPOSITION

A. (:5) Painful Persecution

"*And when an attempt was made by both the Gentiles and the Jews with their rulers, to mistreat and to stone them,*"

ὡς δὲ ἐγένετο ὁρμὴ τῶν ἐθνῶν τε καὶ Ἰουδαίων σὺν τοῖς ἄρχουσιν αὐτῶν ὑβρίσαι καὶ λιθοβολῆσαι αὐτούς,

B. (:6) Expedient Departure and Resilient Resolve

"*they became aware of it and fled to the cities of Lycaonia, Lystra and Derbe, and the surrounding region;*"

συνιδόντες κατέφυγον εἰς τὰς πόλεις τῆς Λυκαονίας Λύστραν καὶ Δέρβην καὶ τὴν περίχωρον,

C. (:7) Impactful Preaching Ministry

"*and there they continued to preach the gospel.*"

κἀκεῖ εὐαγγελιζόμενοι ἦσαν.

TEXT: Acts 14:8-18

TITLE: DON'T STEAL GOD'S GLORY

BIG IDEA:
ALL CREDIT FOR THE IMPOSSIBLE WORKS OF FAITH MUST BE DIRECTED BACK TO GOD ALONE

INTRODUCTION:

Who would think of trying to rob God of His glory? Of taking credit or praise to themselves for something that God has actually accomplished? Actually each of us in our pride struggles with that temptation every day. The human spirit longs for recognition and appreciation. We want others to think highly of us and to praise us for our accomplishments. We can easily identify with the motivation of those who erected the impressive Tower of Babel: "*let us make for ourselves a name*." (**Gen. 11:4**)

In one way or another our lips mimic the proud words of King Nebuchadnezzar: "*Is this not Babylon the great, which I myself have built as a royal residence by the might of my power and for the glory of my majesty?*" (**Dan. 4:30**) The danger is even more pronounced in the context of Christian ministry where the Holy Spirit gifts us in special ways to bring forth fruit that would be impossible for us to produce in any natural sense. But sometimes the praise of men gets misdirected to the instruments of God's sovereign disposition rather than back to the goodness of the living God who has graciously performed the impossible.

ALL CREDIT FOR THE IMPOSSIBLE WORKS OF FAITH MUST BE DIRECTED BACK TO GOD ALONE

THREE KEYS TO GOD RECEIVING GLORY
- **Miracle of Healing**
- **Mistake of Hero Worship**
- **Ministration of Humility**

I. (:8-10) MIRACLE OF HEALING -- FAITH IN JESUS CHRIST ACCOMPLISHES THE IMPOSSIBLE (MOVES MOUNTAINS)

Something worthy of praise and glory must first occur – Are we even aware and observant regarding what God is accomplishing in us and through us and around us?

A. (:8) God Specializes in Things Thought Impossible

"*And at Lystra there was sitting a certain man, without strength in his feet, lame from his mother's womb, who had never walked.*"

Καί τις ἀνὴρ ἀδύνατος ἐν Λύστροις τοῖς ποσὶν ἐκάθητο, χωλὸς ἐκ κοιλίας μητρὸς αὐτοῦ ὃς οὐδέποτε περιεπάτησεν.

Remember this account is written by Luke the physician

The world is full of broken people – that brokenness manifests itself in many forms

Adunatos – concept of impossible – **Matt. 19:26** "*With people this is impossible, but with God all things are possible*."

Look at how the healing of the lame was characteristic of the miracle ministry of the Messiah:

- OT Messianic Prophecy:

Is. 35:6 "*the lame will leap like a deer*" reflects the glory and majesty of God; brings great joy

- Healings of the lame by Jesus:

Matt. 11:5 (**Luke 7:22**) should have been evidence to John the Baptist that Jesus was truly the Messiah
Matt. 15:29-31
Matt. 21:14-16 Resentful reaction to the praise of Jesus: *Hosanna to the Son of David*
John 5:8-9

- Healings of the lame by Peter:

Acts 3:2-11 "*walking and leaping and praising God*"
Acts 9:32-35

Famous gospel chorus:

Got any rivers you think are uncrossable
Got any mountains you can't tunnel through
God specializes in things thought impossible
He does the things others cannot do.

B. (9-10a) Only Faith Can Make a Person Whole

"*This man was listening to Paul as he spoke, who, when he had fixed his gaze upon him, and had seen that he had faith to be made well, said with a loud voice, 'Stand upright on your feet.*'"

οὗτος ἤκουσεν τοῦ Παύλου λαλοῦντος· ὃς ἀτενίσας αὐτῷ καὶ ἰδὼν ὅτι ἔχει πίστιν τοῦ σωθῆναι, εἶπεν μεγάλῃ φωνῇ· ἀνάστηθι ἐπὶ τοὺς πόδας σου ὀρθός.

1. Faith is always a response to the message of the Word of God – *Faith comes by hearing and hearing by the Word of God*. **Rom. 10:17**

Imperfect tense – was listening as Paul was preaching – maybe over the course of a couple of days

2. No other alternative healing method

Lame man could not have purchased his healing
Lame man could not have worked for his healing or earned it in any way

3. Faith should inspire Boldness in Proclamation

This was not a miracle done behind closed doors
This was not some tentative trial by Paul where he wondered how things would turn out

We need to be walking by faith and not by sight; confident that faith can overcome the world; bold in our proclamation; assured that Jesus has our back as we live for Him

Luke 7:50 "*your faith has made you whole*"

C. (:10b) God's Works of Grace and Power are Irrefutable

"*And he leaped up and began to walk.*"

καὶ ἥλατο καὶ περιεπάτει.

Did much more than just stand up – imperfect tense for walk to stress the ongoing continuation of the action

You can imagine that he did not care about the criticism of opponents of the gospel – he knew his experience was true; he had been delivered, saved (just like the man in Acts 3 account)

Matt. 17:20 "*if you have faith the size of a mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there,' and it will move; and nothing will be impossible to you*"

Matt. 21:21 "*if you have faith and do not doubt, you will not only do what was done to the fig tree, but even if you say to this mountain, 'Be taken up and cast into the sea,' it will happen. And all things you ask in prayer, believing, you will receive*."

1 Cor. 13:2 speaks of the faith which can move mountains – still needs to be exercised in love

Are we tapped into the power of faith??

II. (:11-13) MISTAKE OF HERO WORSHIP – FICKLE CROWDS WORSHIP THE HUMAN INSTRUMENTS BLESSED BY GOD

Are we caught by surprise by the human tendency to rob God of His glory? We need to be on guard against this pitfall.

A. (:11) Misdirected Vision

"*And when the multitudes saw what Paul had done, they raised their voice, saying in the Lycaonian language, The gods have become like men and have come down to us.*"'

οἵ τε ὄχλοι ἰδόντες ὃ ἐποίησεν Παῦλος ἐπῆραν τὴν φωνὴν αὐτῶν Λυκαονιστὶ λέγοντες· οἱ θεοὶ ὁμοιωθέντες ἀνθρώποις κατέβησαν πρὸς ἡμᾶς,

Emphasis in this story is not on the man that was healed but on the strange reaction by the people of the city who witnessed this work of power
Saw the miracle but did not listen to Paul's message of the grace of God; interpreted their experience through their grid of superstition and idolatry
Apart from the Spirit of God, natural man fails to see straight; they take the natural events and apply the **wrong vision grid** – our assumptions will determine our world view; that influences how we interpret the reality around us

People love to create heroes to worship – making someone much more than what he really is

MacArthur: The strange reaction by the people of Lystra to the healing had its roots in local folklore. According to tradition, the gods Zeus and Hermes visited Lystra incognito, asking for

food and lodging. All turned them away except for a peasant named Philemon and his wife, Baucis. The gods took vengeance by drowning everyone in a flood. But they turned the lowly cottage of Philemon and Baucis into a temple, where they were to serve as priest and priestess. Not wanting to repeat their ancestors' mistake, the people of Lystra believed Barnabas to be Zeus and Paul to be Hermes. [Jupiter and Mercury are Roman equivalents.]

Stott: Apart from the literary evidence in Ovid two inscriptions and a stone altar have been discovered near Lystra, which indicate that Zeus and Hermes were worshipped together as local patron deities.

Vincent: In the speech of Lycaonia. The apostles had been conversing with them in Greek. The fact that the people now spoke in their native tongue explains why Paul and Barnabas did not interfere until they saw the preparations for sacrifice. They did not understand what was being said by the people about their divine character. It was natural that the surprise of the Lystrans should express itself in their own language rather than in a foreign tongue.

Fickle crowd: start off treating Paul and Barnabas as gods; then stone them as devils
"From Throning to Stoning" was title one preacher gave this message

Key Fallacy: Minimizing the vast distinction between God and man – *We are men like you*
We need to take this approach as we witness; avoid coming across as self righteous

B. (:12) Misdirected Praise – Power and Wisdom

"*And they began calling Barnabas, Zeus, and Paul, Hermes, because he was the chief speaker.*"

ἐκάλουν τε τὸν Βαρναβᾶν Δία, τὸν δὲ Παῦλον Ἑρμῆν, ἐπειδὴ αὐτὸς ἦν ὁ ἡγούμενος τοῦ λόγου.

Barnabas probably more impressive in physical stature and appearance

Dale Miller: EVERY CULTURE HAS A SUPERMAN. IN THIS CULTURE, IT WAS ZEUS AND HERMES. ZEUS WAS THE GOD OF THE GODS IN GREEK MYTHOLOGY. HE WAS THE GOD WHO GAVE ALL THE OTHER GODS THEIR JOBS. HE OVERSAW THE UNIVERSE. HE IS MOST OFTEN PICTURED STRIDING FORWARD WITH A LIGHTNING BOLT IN HIS HAND, OR SEATED IN MAJESTY. HERMES IS THE GREAT MESSENGER OF THE GODS IN GREEK MYTHOLOGY. . .

THE TRUE HEROS, ARE NOT THOSE WHO LEAP TALL BUILDINGS. THE TRUE HEROS ARE THOSE THAT HONOR THE TRUE GOD. THOSE WHO SPEAK THE TRUTH, EVEN WHEN IT MAY COST THEM. THE TRUE HEROS ARE THOSE WHO LOVE JESUS AND SERVE HIM.
YOU DONT NEED A SUPERMAN TO SAVE YOU. YOU NEED JESUS.

God's servants are merely conduits of His grace – ministering His healing power – trying to draw attention and dependency to God, not to themselves

C. (:13) Misdirected Sacrifice

"*And the priest of Zeus, whose temple was just outside the city, brought oxen and garlands to the gates, and wanted to offer sacrifice with the crowds.*"

ὅ τε ἱερεὺς τοῦ Διὸς τοῦ ὄντος πρὸ τῆς πόλεως ταύρους καὶ στέμματα ἐπὶ τοὺς πυλῶνας ἐνέγκας

σὺν τοῖς ὄχλοις ἤθελεν θύειν.

Picture the horse winning the Preakness and the garland of flowers put over him as a mark of victory

To the gates of the temple or of the city??

Longenecker: We can visualize the priest of Zeus bringing out sacrificial oxen [bulls] draped in woolen "wreaths" and preparing to sacrifice at an altar that stood in front of the Temple of Zeus, hard by the city gates. And as the idolatrous worship proceeded, Paul and Barnabas began to see that they were the object of it.

Illustration -- Stedman: Paul could have played to this attention and had a cushy experience:
I was recently in Hawaii where I again visited the wax museum in Honolulu and saw the diorama depicting the landing of Captain James Cook of the British Navy on the shores of Hawaii, at Kealakekua Bay. He was welcomed as the god, Lono, and he and his men were given anything and everything. Believe me, that means everything they wanted. They were attended day and night. But strangely, though Captain Cook thought this was wonderful and accepted their worship, one day as they were about to launch their boats and return to their ship, a native who was angry with him for some reason grabbed hold of the captain. Without thinking, Captain Cook swung at him and knocked him down. The native retaliated, hitting him on the head with a club, and the Captain groaned. When the natives heard this, one of them cried out, "He groans. He is not a god!" and they fell on him, and killed him. You can see a memorial at the site today. .

III. (:14-18) <u>MINISTRATION OF HUMILITY</u> – FAITHFUL MINISTERS OF THE GOSPEL REDIRECT MISPLACED PRAISE TO THE GOODNESS OF THE LIVING GOD

Are we aggressive in redirecting people's attention to the goodness of the living God and His gracious activity?
<u>Reaction</u> of Humble Servants of God when praise and worship is directed their way:

A. (:14-15a) Shock and Dismay

"*But when the apostles, Barnabas and Paul, heard of it, they tore their robes and rushed out into the crowd, crying out and saying, 'Men, why are you doing these things?'*"

Ἀκούσαντες δὲ οἱ ἀπόστολοι Βαρναβᾶς καὶ Παῦλος διαρρήξαντες τὰ ἱμάτια αὐτῶν ἐξεπήδησαν εἰς τὸν ὄχλον κράζοντες καὶ λέγοντες· ἄνδρες, τί ταῦτα ποιεῖτε;

Someone had to inform them about the significance of what was happening since they did not speak the native language – took them a little while to catch on

Lenski: The act of tearing the garment consisted in grasping the tunic at the neck with both hands and giving a downward pull and tearing a rent of four or five inches in the tunic. It was always the tunic which was worn next to the body that was thus torn and not the long, loose outer robe . . . The robe was made of heavy material that was too solid to be torn and hung loosely upon the body.

Matt. 26:65 – high priest responded in this way to demonstrate revulsion and horror at what he

thought were words of blasphemy

Wiersbe: How easy it would have been to accept this worship and try to use the honor as a basis for teaching the people the truth, but that is not the way God's true servants minister (2 Cor. 4:1-2; 1 Thess. 2:1-5).

B. (:15b) Setting the Record Straight

1. Argument from Man's Makeup

"*We are also men of the same nature as you,*"

καὶ ἡμεῖς ὁμοιοπαθεῖς ἐσμεν ὑμῖν ἄνθρωποι

Stott: although the substance of his message was invariable, he varied his approach and emphasis. The context within which he preached to the Jews in Antioch was Old Testament Scripture, its history, prophecies and law. But with the pagans in Lystra he focused not on a Scripture they did not know, but on the natural world around them, which they did know and could see.

The contradiction of the self-made man – we are incapable of changing ourselves in a transformational sense; we are who we are; we receive what we have by the gift of God

Instructed not to think of ourselves more highly than we ought to think

Paul's self evaluation: I am not worthy of Jesus Christ because I am the chief of sinners – could certainly identify with anyone in the town

2. Argument from Ministry Motivation

"*and preach the gospel to you in order that you should turn from these vain things to a living God,*"

εὐαγγελιζόμενοι ὑμᾶς ἀπὸ τούτων τῶν ματαίων ἐπιστρέφειν ἐπὶ θεὸν ζῶντα,

turn = change orientation – from the empty, useless, lifeless things

Guzik: That you should turn from these useless things: These were strong words from Paul to people who took their pagan worship seriously, but Paul wasn't afraid to confront this mob with the truth. And the truth was that their idolatry was wrong.

Lenski: contrast between "*useless ones*" and God "*living*" – The evidence for his living existence is before the eyes of even the pagan world

3. Argument from Majestic Might

"*who made the heaven and the earth and the sea, and all that is in them.*"

ὃς ἐποίησεν τὸν οὐρανὸν καὶ τὴν γῆν καὶ τὴν θάλασσαν καὶ πάντα τὰ ἐν αὐτοῖς·

How important is the **doctrine of Creation**?? So many evangelicals giving up valuable ground here; conference coming up on this subject – Why are we caving in to so-called science? Don't we see the bias of the academic community??

the sovereign of all creation demands the obedience and service of all

C. (:16-17) Spelling out the Goodness and Patience of God

"*And in the generations gone by He permitted all the nations to go their own ways; and yet He did not leave Himself without witness, in that He did good and gave you rains from heaven and fruitful seasons, satisfying your hearts with food and gladness.*"

ὃς ἐν ταῖς παρῳχημέναις γενεαῖς εἴασεν πάντα τὰ ἔθνη πορεύεσθαι ταῖς ὁδοῖς αὐτῶν· καίτοι οὐκ ἀμάρτυρον αὐτὸν ἀφῆκεν ἀγαθουργῶν, οὐρανόθεν ὑμῖν ὑετοὺς διδοὺς καὶ καιροὺς καρποφόρους, ἐμπιπλῶν τροφῆς καὶ εὐφροσύνης τὰς καρδίας ὑμῶν.

Toussaint: Up to the time of the church, God gave no direct revelation to the nations (i.e., Gentiles) so they were responsible only for their reactions to the general revelation discernible in Creation.

Lenski: The plural ["ways"] signifies that the Gentiles followed many different ways, their very multiplicity revealing that they were wrong ways. . . "rains" are mentioned because they came "from heaven" and thus from God.

Bruce: The providence of God in giving men rainfall and harvest is an OT theme (cf. Gen. 9:22), and the conjunction of "food and gladness" (v. 17; cf. Ch. 2:46) is a feature of OT language (cf. Ps. 4:7; Isa. 25:6; Eccl. 9:7); for the idea of the heart's being satisfied with food cf. Luke 21:34.

D. (:18) Sticking to Their Guns

"*And even saying these things, they with difficulty restrained the crowds from offering sacrifice to them.*"

καὶ ταῦτα λέγοντες μόλις κατέπαυσαν τοὺς ὄχλους τοῦ μὴ θύειν αὐτοῖς.

Look at the drive to have a visible hero to worship; so difficult to worship an invisible God

CONCLUSION:

Matt. 5:16 "*Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven.*"

* * * * * * * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

1) What types of brokenness do we see in the people around us in our daily life?

2) How do we respond when people heap praise and appreciation on us for our Christian ministry?

3) Do we approach people with the gospel from the starting point of where they are – with sensitivity and adapting the presentation to their background – or do we have a one-size-fits-all type of evangelism?

4) How can we remind people today of the general grace of God towards them and His goodness down through the ages?

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QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Steven Cole: **Marks of a Faithful Servant**
We should learn from and imitate Paul and Barnabas as faithful servants of Christ, no matter what the cost.

1. A faithful servant points people to the living God, not to himself.
In verse 16, Paul anticipates an objection from his audience: "We have served what you call 'vain idols' for centuries, and life has not been so bad. Why should we now turn from them to this God that you call 'the living God'?" Paul explains that in the generations gone by, God permitted the nations to go their own ways. In His patience, God did not destroy them in their sin. Although God did not give them His written revelation, as He did with the Jews, yet He did not leave Himself without a witness. He did good towards them, giving them rain and fruitful seasons, satisfying their hearts with food and gladness.

2. A faithful servant courageously keeps on proclaiming the gospel in spite of persecution.

3. A faithful servant strengthens and encourages other disciples, especially regarding the role of trials in the Christian life.

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Paul also implies the moral consequences of not recognizing the living Creator as God. Paul's call to conversion and his explanation of God's permissive will in allowing all nations to go their own way assume human accountability. He is explaining why in every past generation God did not act in judgment as he did in Noah's generation.

Paul's speech models elements that must be included in any strategy of effective witness to adherents of a non-Christian religion. We must assume common ground with the person, our humanity. We are both made in the image of God with an ability to reason and evaluate experience. We must have a flexibility of approach in presenting the gospel. We must be familiar enough with the person's religious beliefs to know what they are substituting for the one true God and his ways. We must correct them, but just as important, we must figure out how the gospel is "good news" so we may tell them how to truly fulfill their religious aspirations. Finally, we must witness with urgency, making the person aware of the consequences.

Ray Stedman: **Counterattack**
That is exactly the way the Christian life always works. It does not make any difference whether the problem is physical, emotional, or spiritual; you are going to be held in its bondage until you begin to obey the Word of God about it. When you make the effort to obey, God will set you

free. But he will never move until you obey. That is the way faith works. Most people are kept from seeing God at work in their lives because they keep waiting for God to do something, in order for them to believe. No, he has already done all that he is going to do in advance. When you believe what he says, then he will give you the power to be free. This miracle is a mighty parable of the many who have been spiritually lame, unable to take a step toward God, but who have been set free to do so by the gospel. It cracked the city wide open. The whole populace immediately took note of Paul and Barnabas in their midst. . .

The One Living God permits men free choice, and therefore allows evil. One of the problems about God faced by anyone in the world today is, "Why is there evil present among men?" This is a constant argument of humanists, and others. They say, "If your God is such a loving God, who loves man, why does he permit suffering? Why does he allow evil, and injustice, and war?" These pagans were quite aware of these arguments. They understood them and argued the same way. Paul is answering by saying, "What you must know is that God, in generations past, allowed all the nations to walk in their own way." In other words, he gave them free will. In order to permit free will, he must allow evil. That is Paul's argument, and it is unanswerable.

Spurgeon: I recollect the time when I was in that state. I can honestly say I did not doubt Christ. I then partly believed that he would save me. I knew he was worthy of my trust, and I did trust him as far as this, that I resolved, if I did perish, I would perish crying to him, and that if I was east away, it should be clinging to the cross. I believe I had "faith to be saved," and was for months in bondage, when there was no necessity that I should have been in bondage at all, for, when there is "faith to he saved," then the man only needs that gracious command—"Stand upright on thy feet," and forthwith he leaps out of his infirmity, and walks freely in the integrity of his heart.

Gil Rugh: **Battles on the Mission Field**
The sense of embattlement with the world is rapidly evaporating from mindset of many evangelicals. . . Penetration replaced separation … dangers of accommodation; softening the warning that God's wrath is on unbelievers . . . scandal of evangelical acculturation . . . there is a sharpness to the edge of the gospel that is presented in Acts; it cuts, divides, creates conflict; it is not a message that brings men and women together; the gospel causes conflict – impacts the heart and mind
4 topics covered by Paul:

- v. 15 we are just men like you
- You have to turn from worship of worthless idols to worship the living God, the creator
- v. 16 previous generations God had not given direct revelation to the Gentiles – new times have arrived of direct revelation to the Gentiles
- you have experienced the patience and goodness of God = general grace

John McCormack: LYSTRA, TOO, WAS IN THE PROVINCE OF GALATIA, ABOUT EIGHTEEN MILES SOUTHWEST OF ICONIUM. THIS WAS PAUL'S FIRST VISIT TO THIS CITY AND WAS VERY EVENTFUL. ON PAUL'S SECOND JOURNEY TO THIS CITY, HE ENLISTED TIMOTHY (16: 1-5). PAUL ALSO MADE A THIRD VISIT TO LYSTRA (18: 23).

TEXT: Acts 14:19-28

TITLE: FIRST CHRISTIAN MISSIONARY CONFERENCE

BIG IDEA:
PIONEER MISSIONARIES STAY ON COURSE, STRESS THE FUNDAMENTALS AND BRING BACK A GOOD REPORT

INTRODUCTION:

The definition of a **Pioneer**: "One who goes before, as into the wilderness, preparing the way for others to follow; as, pioneers of civilization; pioneers of reform." Today we are studying Paul and Barnabas as **Pioneer Missionaries**. They are just wrapping up their first missionary journey which took them one to two years and had them travel long distances by land and sea and get chased out of a number of prominent cities. They are returning to Antioch – their sending church, their partners in the gospel ministry who had commended them to this great work. We are going to see a glimpse into the First Christian Missionary Conference ever held.

This is an appropriate time for our church to consider this subject since we just mailed off a significant donation to **Abraham and Grace Thomas** – pioneering church planting ministries in southern India in the state of Kerala. Much of this area has been a Hindu stronghold. They were friends of ours from Grace Seminary who returned to India back in 1980 and have been faithfully discipling full-time workers, evangelizing various cities and planting churches in the area for over 30 years. They have lived by faith -- not sent out by any denomination or mission agency. The Lord has provided for all of their needs. Now they have an orphanage for 11 boys from broken homes as well. Truly an amazing story of God's grace and power in opening up doors for the gospel in India. They have over 60 full-time workers; 50/50 Project = supporting 50 workers with $50/month = enough for rental of their house. I don't even know how many churches – over 20 on the island of Sri Lanka alone.

Some of you may have been involved in Pioneering efforts in other areas – cf. homeschooling for Karen. You know of the difficulties and challenges and the rewards and satisfaction.

Do you really know what it takes to be a pioneer missionary? Can be a lonely, discouraging effort – often you can go long periods without seeing any results

3 PERSISTENT ACTIVITIES OF PIONEER MISSIONARIES

I. (:19-20a) PIONEER MISSIONARIES KEEP ON TICKING DESPITE BEING LEFT FOR DEAD – STAY ON COURSE -- NEVER QUIT -- PERSEVERE

A. Nagging Naysayers

"*But Jews came from Antioch and Iconium,*"
Ἐπῆλθαν δὲ ἀπὸ Ἀντιοχείας καὶ Ἰκονίου Ἰουδαῖοι

Image of the Energizer Bunny – you can't kill it
Paul had nine lives

They chased Paul from one city to the next – you would have thought they would have had

something better to do – but Paul could understand their passion and zeal because he had been the leader in persecuting the Christians

Ritchie: Some Jews had walked 68 miles from Antioch and Iconium just to get a shot at him in Lystra.

Yet look at the heart that Paul had for his countrymen that they would be saved – **Rom. 10:1**

B. Fickle Followers

"*and having won over the multitudes,*"
καὶ πείσαντες τοὺς ὄχλους

From Throning to Stoning in short period of time
Mob mentality – people just don't think for themselves

C. Painful Persecution

"*they stoned Paul and dragged him out of the city, supposing him to be dead.*"
καὶ λιθάσαντες τὸν Παῦλον ἔσυρον ἔξω τῆς πόλεως νομίζοντες αὐτὸν τεθνηκέναι.

Not any type of legal proceeding and execution but a frenzied lynching mentality
In case of Stephen – he was stoned and actually killed
Didn't carry his body out and dump it; they dragged him out – tore his body up

2 Cor. 11:25 "*once I was stoned*"

2 Cor. 4:9 "*struck down, but not destroyed*"

MacArthur: Matt. 5:17 *namidsoe* is used in terms of supposing something that is not true. Well Acts 16:27, Acts 17:29, Acts 21:29, verse Timothy 6:5, all those passages use it in the sense of supposing something that's wrong.

D. Resurrection Resiliency

"*But while the disciples stood around him, he arose and entered the city.*"
κυκλωσάντων δὲ τῶν μαθητῶν αὐτὸν ἀναστὰς εἰσῆλθεν εἰς τὴν πόλιν.

"*stood around him*" – possibly praying for his recovery; prayer circle in CAA; where was Barnabas??

You can knock them down, but they get right back up
No Quit in them

<u>Don't Quit</u>

"Success is failure turned inside out,
The silver tint of the clouds of doubt,
And you never can tell how close you are,
It may be near when it seems so far.
So stick to the fight when you're hardest hit,

It's when things seem worse,
That you must not quit."

Einstein quotes:

"It's not that I'm so smart, it's just that I stay with problems longer."
"In the middle of difficulty lies opportunity."
"I think and think for months and years. Ninety-nine times, the conclusion is false. The hundredth time I am right. "

More than just being patched up by a fight doctor – probably some type of supernatural healing took place

Motivation to enter back into the city?

- Finish the job
- Provide an example to encourage the other disciples – they still lived their
- Love for the unsaved

Barclay: The outstanding feature of this story is the sheer courage of Paul. When he came to his senses, his first act was to go right back into the city where he had been stoned. It was John Wesley's advice, "Always look a mob in the face." There could be no braver thing than Paul's going straight back amongst those who had tried to murder him. A deed like that would have more effect than a hundred sermons. Men were bound to ask themselves where a man got the courage to act in such a way.

II. (:20b-23) PIONEER MISSIONARIES KEEP HAMMERING AWAY AT THE FUNDAMENTALS OF CHURCH GROWTH – STRESS THE FUNDAMENTALS:

My former boss: nickname = the drill – tell the operations people what they need to do in terms of the fundamental and then keep hammering away so that they do it; you can never let up

A. Expanding to New Frontiers

"*And the next day he went away with Barnabas to Derbe.*"
Καὶ τῇ ἐπαύριον ἐξῆλθεν σὺν τῷ Βαρναβᾷ εἰς Δέρβην.

There is no pioneering work without leaving our comfort zone and going into new areas with the gospel message

Kent: Derbe was the home of Gaius who later became a companion of Paul (20:4).

B. Evangelizing the Territory

"*And after they had preached the gospel to that city*"
εὐαγγελισάμενοί τε τὴν πόλιν ἐκείνην

Did not show any favoritism; did not know in whose heart God was working; gave the command to repent and believe to everyone

C. Edifying the Young Believers to the Point of Effective Discipleship

"*and had made many disciples,*"
καὶ μαθητεύσαντες ἱκανοὺς

Never stopped at evangelism; always took the next steps to make disciples
No persecution mentioned in this location; Paul needed a break

D. Encouraging Maturity and Perseverance in the Faith

"*they returned to Lystra and to Iconium and to Antioch, strengthening the souls of the disciples, encouraging them to continue in the faith,*"

ὑπέστρεψαν εἰς τὴν Λύστραν καὶ εἰς Ἰκόνιον καὶ εἰς Ἀντιόχειαν [22] ἐπιστηρίζοντες τὰς ψυχὰς τῶν μαθητῶν, παρακαλοῦντες ἐμμένειν τῇ πίστει

Retracing their steps
Danger of returning to places where they had been persecuted and run out
Souls need strengthening
Souls need encouraging in the faith

How is this best accomplished?

E. Enlightening Converts Regarding the Reality of Suffering

"*and saying, 'Through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God.*'"
καὶ ὅτι διὰ πολλῶν θλίψεων δεῖ ἡμᾶς εἰσελθεῖν εἰς τὴν βασιλείαν τοῦ θεοῦ.

Why do you think this ministry effort is going to be painless?
Honest with them about the nature of Christian ministry
But setting before them the glories of the hope of the kingdom of God

1 Pet. 5:8-10 Be of sober spirit, be on the alert. Your adversary, the devil, prowls about like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. But resist him, firm in your faith, knowing that the same experiences of suffering are being accomplished by your brethren who are in the world. And after you have suffered a little while, the God of all grace, who called you to His eternal glory in Christ, will Himself perfect, confirm, strengthen, and establish you.

Constable: The "kingdom of God" evidently refers to the messianic kingdom. Entrance into it was still future for these disciples when the missionaries gave them this exhortation. Though Christians will not go through the Tribulation, we will experience tribulation before we enter the Millennium (2 Tim. 3:12).

F. Effecting Plurality of Elder Church Shepherding

"*And when they had appointed elders for them in every church,*"
χειροτονήσαντες δὲ αὐτοῖς κατ᾽ ἐκκλησίαν πρεσβυτέρους,

Consistent pattern in the newly formed NT churches – don't see any other form of church government; would have been easy to just appoint a Senior Pastor; they could have established some type of democratic system or congregational vote system; could have rolled up the administration of all the churches into some type of organized hierarchy with a single bishop at the top

Constable: I favor the view that Paul and Barnabas made the selections. The apostles had earlier

appointed elders in the Jerusalem church (11:30). [rather than by congregational vote]

G. Exemplifying Spiritual Disciplines

"*having prayed with fasting,*"
προσευξάμενοι μετὰ νηστειῶν

Importance of Prayer and Fasting
Not some quick prayer that they shot off; extended time of prayer

H. Entrusting Them to the Lord

"*they commended them to the Lord in whom they had believed.*"
παρέθεντο αὐτοὺς τῷ κυρίῳ εἰς ὃν πεπιστεύκεισαν.

Difficult for parents to let go and trust God
Focus of the faith of the disciples was not on the ones doing the work of discipling

III. (:24-28) PIONEER MISSIONARIES KEEP PROMOTING THE VISION OF WHAT GOD HAS CALLED THEM TO ACHIEVE – SHARE THEIR VISION AND GIVE GOD THE GLORY

A. (:24-25) Running the Race to Completion – Touching All the Bases

"*And they passed through Pisidia and came into Pamphylia. And when they had spoken the word in Perga, they went down to Attalia;*"

Καὶ διελθόντες τὴν Πισιδίαν ἦλθον εἰς τὴν Παμφυλίαν καὶ λαλήσαντες ἐν Πέργῃ τὸν λόγον κατέβησαν εἰς Ἀττάλειαν

Characteristic activity = speaking the Word

Attalia = port to sail over to Antioch

B. (:26) Returning to Home Base – Reconnecting with Missionary Partners

"*and from there they sailed to Antioch, from which they had been commended to the grace of God for the work that they had accomplished.*"

κἀκεῖθεν ἀπέπλευσαν εἰς Ἀντιόχειαν, ὅθεν ἦσαν παραδεδομένοι τῇ χάριτι τοῦ θεοῦ εἰς τὸ ἔργον ὃ ἐπλήρωσαν.

Ideal situation to be sent out and commended to the work

- Was Luther commended by the Catholic church (unbelievers you say)
- How about those who believed in believer baptism ??

Works of reformation are not going to find favorable commendation from traditionalists

C. (:27) Reporting Missionary Results -- Giving God the Glory

"*And when they had arrived and gathered the church together, they began to report all things that God had done with them and how He had opened a door of faith to the Gentiles.*"

παραγενόμενοι δὲ καὶ συναγαγόντες τὴν ἐκκλησίαν ἀνήγγελλον ὅσα ἐποίησεν ὁ θεὸς μετ᾽ αὐτῶν καὶ ὅτι ἤνοιξεν τοῖς ἔθνεσιν θύραν πίστεως.

The grace and power had come from God; the glory must be returned to Him alone
Communication from missionaries is crucial – they had a lot of stories to tell. They didn't have the advantage of slides shows or video clips or Powerpoint presentations, but they were very effective at using words to paint pictures.

Significant distinctive of their pioneering efforts: *God opening a door of faith to the Gentiles*

- Something new and distinctive with long term effects

Kent: Everything was explained, including no doubt how God had supplied their needs, directed them where to go, and protected them in spite of many dangers.

D. (:28) Recharging Spiritual Batteries – Ministry of Mutual Encouragement

"*And they spent a long time with the disciples.*"

διέτριβον δὲ χρόνον οὐκ ὀλίγον σὺν τοῖς μαθηταῖς.

Had been gone for over a year; probably spent at least a year back at home base
Notice that their approach to recharging their spiritual batteries was not to isolate themselves for long periods of time (yes, we all need time alone with the Lord each day), but they benefitted from the mutual encouragement ministry of being with the disciples. They could both be a blessing to others and receive a blessing from them.

Steven Cole: You can't give out more than you take in or you will run dry. I need time off each week and every year to recharge. I need adequate time to read and think and pray, or I begin to feel drained. Each of us is wired differently, but you need to know yourself and watch yourself so that you don't burn out. Schedule time each week and each year for renewal in body and soul.

Kent: In all likelihood it was during this period that Paul wrote the Epistle to the Galatians.

CONCLUSION:

Our Missionary Conference today at Solid Rock Community Church does not have the advantage of returning missionaries to personally bring us a report from the field. But as we continue to pray for Abraham and the work in India we can truly partner with ones who are performing that pioneering work of bringing the gospel to areas that desperately need it. Hopefully we can appreciate the tenacity of such pioneering missionaries and apply these principles to our own areas of ministry:

- Stay on course to the ministry vision despite opposition and obstacles
- Stress the fundamentals and don't get diverted to sideline issues
- Share the vision and give God the glory for all He accomplishes

* * * * * * * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

1) What types of pressures and temptations discourage you from sticking to the missionary task at hand?

2) In what sense has our church been *commended to the grace of God*?

3) How can we mutually encourage and strengthen one another?

4) Why is it important for missionaries to give a full report to their ministry partners and supporters?

* * * * * * * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Stott: These are the reasons why Paul believed that the churches could confidently be left to manage their own affairs. They had the apostles to teach them (through "the faith" and their letters), pastors to shepherd them, and the Holy Spirit to guide, protect and bless them. With this threefold provision (apostolic instruction, pastoral oversight and divine faithfulness) they would be safe.

Ron Ritchie: **We Have This Treasure in Earthen Vessels**
God wants Christians to penetrate communities and use every opportunity to witness for his name's sake. Paul's experience pictures for us the fact that God is willing to work with anyone who will show up and be available to be used by him. We are living in the age of the Spirit, which began on the day of Pentecost and will last until Jesus returns again. During this time, God will draw out from every community and from every generation a people for himself. So there are people all over the world waiting to hear this gospel. But there will be resistance to the message of the good news. Spiritual warfare will ensure that. The challenge for us is, do we want to be part of God's wonderful plan of redemption? If we do, we can be sure we will experience joy and adventure, but also suffering and heartache. When you wake up in the morning knowing you are a sinner saved by grace and knowing that Jesus has been raised from the dead and is now living within you, and that the Holy Spirit will minister through you, you will agree that the Christian life is life as God intended it to be lived. There is no other life worth living. May we be found by Christ, when he comes again, living in this way, being busy about our Father's business.

MacArthur: **Qualities of Great Missionaries**
It was one man, David Livingston, who so greatly influenced the continent of Africa toward God that Africa and Livingston are almost synonymous terms. It was one man, William Carey, responsible for the redemptive transforming power of Christ being effectively presented to the teeming millions in India. It was because of one man, William Booth, who gave himself completely go God's service that there started in the slums of London the beginnings of an evangelistic movement that encircled the globe known as the Salvation Army. It was CH Chapin who said on one occasion, "Not armies, not nations have advanced the race, but here and there in the course of the ages an individual has stood up and cast his shadow over the world." He's right, and the history of the church is no different. . .

1) The first thing that was such a key to their success was they were **ministering spiritual gifts**.

2) Secondly we saw they were successful because of **boldness**. There's no substitute for boldness because boldness is the ability to go through opposition, and if you don't go through opposition you never get anywhere because any time you try to do something for God, what's the first thing that happens? Opposition. So if you can't handle oppositions you can't handle anything and that's boldness, plowing through the opposition.

3) The third thing we saw that was so basic and so intrinsic to success was **Divine power**. . .

4) The fourth point that we saw in terms of features of a really successful work is **humility.** Jesus said that, "When a false prophet comes along he seeks his own glory. When a true prophet comes along he seeks the glory of him that sent him."

5) There's a **fifth thing** that we've studied and just continuing to review here, and that is **persistence**. I was reading this week some of the life of Robert Morisson of England who set his heart on going to China as a missionary and he studied Chinese in England and London. In 1807 he came to New York to get a ship around the Cape to go to China and he tried to get passage on a ship and he couldn't' get it because China didn't accept foreigners and nobody wanted to haul him over there and have to haul him all around because they couldn't unload him in China. Finally he booked passage and he landed in China. He got off, went in a warehouse, stayed in a French warehouse in the city of Canton near the docks and stayed there for six months. During those six months he learned to cook Chinese food and to dress in Chinese clothes and to kind of adapt himself in Chinese culture and he spent the time studying the Cantonese dialect. Preaching was illegal but he gathered over the next months and years a little group of people around him, never more than 10 in private, in hiding, and behind closed doors he endeavored to instruct them. Seven years after he landed in Canton he baptized his first convert. That's persistence, seven years.

Finally working all day and night, day after day, month after month, he finished the Book of Acts, translated it into Cantonese, and he succeeded in having it printed but an argument arose among the craftsman, Christian craftsman had a fight. They were the craftsman who by hand chiseled out of wood every character for his Book of Acts, and he was further going through the New Testament, and they had a big fight and the fight was so blatant that the authorities found out about it and put a stop to all his printing, and all the effort of all those months was halted. The printing was stopped; no more copies made, no future printing, no future preaching. He was forbidden from all of it. Say what did he do? He persisted, which is what he should've done, stayed on the job because he believed God was in it. He mastered the language and listen to this, he translated the entire Bible into Cantonese, a massive work.

He also accomplished a six-volume Chinese/English dictionary so that missionaries would not only have the Bible but they'd have the dictionary to learn the language. All of this in early 1800's, 27 years of a loneliness and self-sacrificing persistence, and he paved the way for every missionary that ever gave the Gospel to a person who spoke Cantonese since, and today there's an academy in free China Taiwan and it's called Morrison Academy and we haven't forgotten because he was persistent. Never preached to big crowds but he was persistent, and Paul was persistent.

6) Follow-up

- Confirmation -- Teaching doctrine
- Exhortation

- Man's Organization
- Commendation

7) Commitment

8) Praise to God

D. Mark England: **The Door That God Opened**
(San Diego Reformed Presbyterian Church)
Mob psychology; superstition running rampant; how hard is it to help people see the truth? Some people just won't hear. How fickle are people? Easily persuaded that Paul was preaching lies. Some times will love us for the wrong reasons and hate us for the wrong reasons. Don't trust in the acceptance of people. Still shocking to see how radical the shift is. Paul remembered this stoning incident – calling attention to God's providence and protection and rescue. Difficult to deal with rejection. Had to walk to Derbe – despite his injuries; committed to preaching the gospel. Found strength in the calling that God had given to him to overcome all obstacles. Forget my bruises and aches … How committed and faithful are we?? Are we too quick to take it easy on ourselves?

TEXT: Acts 15:1-21

TITLE: THE FIRST CHRISTIAN COUNCIL – COMBATING LEGALISM = THE ULTIMATE JOY KILLER

BIG IDEA:
SALVATION IS BY GRACE THROUGH FAITH WITH NO CONNECTION TO LEGALISTIC OBSERVANCE OF THE MOSAIC LAW

INTRODUCTION:
Some controversies are more important than others. Down through early church history there were a number of significant church councils that addressed some very important points of controversy. The most famous councils began after the Roman persecutions had ended and debated various heresies that threatened to have a divisive impact on the overall church. The importance of these councils is that the resulting judgments helped to clarify and reinforce some very important fundamental doctrines. They usually are in response to some specific false teacher who is advocating a harmful position.

325 A.D. Council of Nicea -- overseen by the Roman emperor Constantine, proclaimed the true manhood and true divinity of Jesus Christ and decreed the doctrine of the Trinity. It was from this Council that the Nicean Creed was formulated. The Council was held to counter the heresy of **Arius** who denied the divinity of the Holy Spirit.

431 A.D. Council of Ephesus -- held to counter the heresy of Nestorius. This Council reaffirmed the Church's doctrine of incarnation and its position that the Word of God was made man. Where **Nestorius** taught that in Jesus there were two separate persons, the Council decreed that in Jesus there was one person with two natures.

Today you might want to include some less formal types of evangelical councils that advocate for certain doctrines that have come under attack – such as groups that deal with the inerrancy of Scripture or Biblical Creationism, etc.

We are studying this morning the first Christian Council – commonly called the Jerusalem Council – which included representatives from the two major church centers of Jerusalem (very Jewish in orientation) and Antioch (which was becoming increasingly more Gentile in focus).

I. (:1) THE POTENTIALLY DIVISIVE ISSUE – WHAT IS THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN SALVATION AND THE OT LAW OF MOSES?
And some men came down from Judea and began teaching the brethren, "Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved."

Καί τινες κατελθόντες ἀπὸ τῆς Ἰουδαίας ἐδίδασκον τοὺς ἀδελφοὺς ὅτι, ἐὰν μὴ περιτμηθῆτε τῷ ἔθει τῷ Μωϋσέως, οὐ δύνασθε σωθῆναι.

What precipitated this conference? Some false teachers from Judea – were they truly Christians themselves?? Maybe not if they did not understand the nature of the gospel message – yet they

are described as believing Pharisees further down in the account – maybe some were instruments of Satan and some were just confused believers who needed correction

Kent: These may have been the "certain from James" whose insistence on kosher foods at Antioch led Peter, who was visiting there at the time, to act inconsistently and incur the rebuke of Paul (Gal. 2:11-14). Peter, of course, did not really share the views of these men, and is shown in Acts 15 to have the same basic viewpoint as Paul... [Two different visits involved] . . . Galatians was written from Antioch after the first missionary journey and after the problem of Judaizing had been introduced in Galatia and in Antioch, but shortly before the Jerusalem Council was held.
[Review the entire book of Galatians for more information on the Judaizers]

Teaching the brethren who were new Gentile believers in Jesus Christ – look at the <u>opportunity</u> in the church for people to teach – you don't overreact to this by setting up all types of hurdles and obstacles so that only the Senior Pastor can teach and control all of the doctrine in the church – that is not how you respond to this problem – you deal with the false teaching when it crops up

Not surprising that things should come to such a head, given what we have been learning about the first missionary journey of Paul and Barnabas. God had "*opened a door of faith to the Gentiles*" (**Acts 14:27**) and they were pouring into the church at rates that were now becoming disproportionate to the new Jewish converts.

What had begun as a trickle with the Ethiopian eunuch and then the house of Cornelius in Acts 10 was now becoming a flood – should have been an occasion for great joy – it was something that God was accomplishing -- not anything that Paul and Barnabas could bring about

Imagine the impact on these new converts – What do you mean that I am not really saved yet? Their joy was now replaced by doubt and confusion. That is always the effect of Legalism – it is the ultimate **Joy Killer**.

The issue at hand was the very gospel message itself – Paul and Barnabas had not been advocating circumcision for these Gentiles. They were not trying to make Jewish proselytes as if Christianity was just the final appendage to the overall Jewish system. They recognized the major new initiative that had begun at Pentacost: the Messiah had arrived and was now building His church:

"*For the Law was given through Moses; grace and truth were realized through Jesus Christ*." (**John 1:17**)

SALVATION IS BY GRACE THROUGH FAITH WITH NO CONNECTION TO LEGALISTIC OBSERVANCE OF THE MOSAIC LAW

Wiersbe: It is not surprising that there were people in the Jerusalem church who were strong advocates of the law of Moses but ignorant of the relationship between law and grace.

Stott: The trickle of Gentile conversions was fast becoming a torrent. . . Its unanimous decision liberated the gospel from its Jewish swaddling clothes into being God's message for all humankind, and gave the Jewish-Gentile church a self-conscious identity as the reconciled people of God, the one body of Christ. And although the whole Council affirmed it, Paul

claimed that it was a new understanding granted specially to him, the "mystery" previously hidden but now revealed, namely that through faith in Christ alone Gentiles stand on equal terms with Jews as "heirs together, members together, sharers together" in his one new community.

Stott: They were telling Gentile converts that faith in Jesus was not enough, not sufficient for salvation: they must add to faith circumcision, and to circumcision observance of the law. In other words, they must let Moses complete what Jesus had begun, and let the law supplement the gospel. The issue was immense. The way of salvation was at stake. The gospel was in dispute. The very foundations of the Christian faith were being undermined.

Our modern culture might argue: can't you just be **tolerant** – not everyone will see things the same way; why can't we all just get along; don't try to enforce your views on others; our culture smacks of moral relativism where there are no absolutes – yes, we can agree to disagree on the non-essentials … but when it comes to the heart of the gospel itself there can be no compromise: **Gal. 1:9** "*if any man is preaching to you a gospel contrary to what you received, he is to be accursed!*" Can't get much more dogmatic than that!

II. (:2) THE WISE FORUM FOR RESOLUTION – CENTRALIZED CHURCH COUNCIL OF RECOGNIZED SPIRITUAL LEADERS

And when Paul and Barnabas had great dissension and debate with them, the brethren determined that Paul and Barnabas and certain others of them should go up to Jerusalem to the apostles and elders concerning this issue.

γενομένης δὲ στάσεως καὶ ζητήσεως οὐκ ὀλίγης τῷ Παύλῳ καὶ τῷ Βαρναβᾷ πρὸς αὐτούς, ἔταξαν ἀναβαίνειν Παῦλον καὶ Βαρναβᾶν καί τινας ἄλλους ἐξ αὐτῶν πρὸς τοὺς ἀποστόλους καὶ πρεσβυτέρους εἰς Ἰερουσαλὴμ περὶ τοῦ ζητήματος τούτου.

Look at how Paul and Barnabas responded – they did not back down at all from this controversy; they maintained their Christian character in terms of being gentle and humble and speaking the truth in love, etc. – but the bottom line is they fired away with both guns blazing to highlight the distinction between the truth and this fundamental heresy – Satan always likes to confuse the issues – we really are saying almost the same thing …

No resolution was forthcoming; yet the church at Antioch was unwilling to just drop the matter; they felt that some position must be articulated that would maintain the unity of both the church at Jerusalem and their more Gentile-based work at Antioch which was the beach-head for the missionary journeys of Paul and Barnabas

Only 2 churches involved – **Antioch and Jerusalem** – not representatives from all the churches

Look at the respect accorded to the apostles and elders at Jerusalem; no formal denominational hierarchy; each church was autonomous and self-governed and yet there was full cooperation so that you had a sense of the universal body of Christ in action

But even Paul was not able to just lay down the law by himself and demand that all the churches get in line; there was respect for how the Holy Spirit would work in a cooperative type of discussion at the highest levels; these were men who were filled with the Spirit and who demonstrated the grace of Christian character; there was the expectation that God's wisdom

would prevail

III. (:3-4) THE UNDENIABLE FACTS – HOW IS GOD WORKING IN THIS AGE?

A. The Church is Fundamentally a Sending Agency

"*Therefore, being sent on their way by the church,*"

Οἱ μὲν οὖν προπεμφθέντες ὑπὸ τῆς ἐκκλησίας

Responsible to discern the will of God and encourage gifted leaders to take initiative in going out to accomplish God's work; the vision of individuals (sensing what God has called them to do) should mesh with the wisdom of the church in recognizing and encouraging and supporting that call

A church that never sends anyone out and is only concerned with its own internal growth is not accomplishing all of its mission for Christ

Being "*sent on their way*" involves commitment, fellowship, and financial support as well as prayers and continued concern for the results of the mission

B. The Work of God in Salvation Should Bring <u>Great Joy</u> to the Church as a whole

"*they were passing through both Phoenicia and Samaria, describing in detail the conversion of the Gentiles, and were bringing great joy to all the brethren.*"

διήρχοντο τήν τε Φοινίκην καὶ Σαμάρειαν ἐκδιηγούμενοι τὴν ἐπιστροφὴν τῶν ἐθνῶν καὶ ἐποίουν χαρὰν μεγάλην πᾶσιν τοῖς ἀδελφοῖς.

Building support for their position; no legal gag order

The facts were undeniable – look at what God had accomplished in converting these Gentiles; what role did circumcision and the Mosaic law play in these mighty works of transformation??

Look at the <u>joy</u> that comes from celebrating the truth of the **grace of God** vs the doubt and confusion and tension that comes from a **legalistic** approach

C. Fellowship between Churches Glorifies God for all that He is Accomplishing

"*And when they arrived at Jerusalem, they were received by the church and the apostles and the elders, and they reported all that God had done with them.*"

παραγενόμενοι δὲ εἰς Ἰερουσαλὴμ παρεδέχθησαν ἀπὸ τῆς ἐκκλησίας καὶ τῶν ἀποστόλων καὶ τῶν πρεσβυτέρων, ἀνήγγειλάν τε ὅσα ὁ θεὸς ἐποίησεν μετ᾽ αὐτῶν.

Public welcome to Paul and Barnabas and delegation from Antioch
Some private discussion; some public with the entire church involved

IV. (:5) THE STUBBORN CONFUSION – BLIND LOYALTY TO LEGALISTIC THINKING

But certain ones of the sect of the Pharisees who had believed, stood up, saying, "It is necessary

to circumcise them, and to direct them to observe the Law of Moses."

Ἐξανέστησαν δέ τινες τῶν ἀπὸ τῆς αἱρέσεως τῶν Φαρισαίων πεπιστευκότες λέγοντες ὅτι δεῖ περιτέμνειν αὐτοὺς παραγγέλλειν τε τηρεῖν τὸν νόμον Μωϋσέως.

Possible to be a Pharisee and be a believer – a literalist when it comes to interpreting the Word of God; trained in the OT;

Just a repetition of the central issue in the controversy – talking about the salvation of the Gentiles – "*it is necessary*" (not optional) -- now we have added another open-ended requirement to that of circumcision = "observe the law of Moses" – could involve a whole bunch of requirements – some biblical and some additional burdens added down through the ages by Jewish interpreters

Not enough for these folks to rejoice in what God has been doing – they want to make sure they can put the brand of Judaism on these converts so that the door to the gospel must open up to a process of embracing Judaism as a prerequisite to then ultimately being accepted into the church

V. (:6-21) THE CONVINCING TESTIMONY AND JUDGMENTS

A. (:6-7a) Process of Debate

And the apostles and the elders came together to look into this matter. And after there had been much debate,

Συνήχθησάν τε οἱ ἀπόστολοι καὶ οἱ πρεσβύτεροι ἰδεῖν περὶ τοῦ λόγου τούτου. Πολλῆς δὲ ζητήσεως γενομένης

Kent: 15:6 refers to the private session in which the leaders discussed the issue and settled upon the procedure to be pursued in presenting the case to the whole congregation. Verses 7-29 then describe the general session which followed.

Very important to spend the time and be objective in looking into important matters – perform the due diligence – look at the opportunity for much debate; not being intolerant – that is when you shut off all dialogue and don't allow people to have a voice – it is really the modern culture that is intolerant towards Christians – you are not allowed to express your truth claims and especially to advocate for the exclusive nature of the gospel

B. (:7b-11) Judgment of Peter –

4 Divine Initiatives that place Jews and Gentiles on equal footing and prove that salvation is by grace through faith apart from the keeping of the law

1. (:7b) Choosing Peter to bring the gospel message to Gentiles (as to the Jews)

> "*Peter stood up and said to them, 'Brethren, you know that in the early days God made a choice among you, that by my mouth the Gentiles should hear the word of the gospel and believe.*'"
>
> ἀναστὰς Πέτρος εἶπεν πρὸς αὐτούς· ἄνδρες ἀδελφοί, ὑμεῖς ἐπίστασθε ὅτι ἀφ᾽ ἡμερῶν ἀρχαίων ἐν ὑμῖν ἐξελέξατο ὁ θεὸς διὰ τοῦ στόματός μου ἀκοῦσαι τὰ ἔθνη τὸν λόγον τοῦ εὐαγγελίου καὶ πιστεῦσαι.

2. (:8) Giving Gentiles the Holy Spirit (as to the Jews)

"*And God, who knows the heart, bore witness to them, giving them the Holy Spirit, just as He also did to us;*"

καὶ ὁ καρδιογνώστης θεὸς ἐμαρτύρησεν αὐτοῖς δοὺς τὸ πνεῦμα τὸ ἅγιον καθὼς καὶ ἡμῖν

Gentiles had their own Pentecost

3. (:9) Cleansing the hearts of the Gentiles by faith (as with the Jews)

"*and He made no distinction between us and them, cleansing their hearts by faith.*"

καὶ οὐθὲν διέκρινεν μεταξὺ ἡμῶν τε καὶ αὐτῶν τῇ πίστει καθαρίσας τὰς καρδίας αὐτῶν.

If infant baptism were a valid doctrine and truly the replacement for circumcision, there would be some reference to it in this context; the argument from silence deals a death blow to the infant baptism position here

4. (:10-11) Removing the yoke of the law (from both Gentiles and Jews)

"*Now therefore why do you put God to the test by placing upon the neck of the disciples a yoke which neither our fathers nor we have been able to bear? But we believe that we are saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus, in the same way as they also are.*"

νῦν οὖν τί πειράζετε τὸν θεὸν ἐπιθεῖναι ζυγὸν ἐπὶ τὸν τράχηλον τῶν μαθητῶν ὃν οὔτε οἱ πατέρες ἡμῶν οὔτε ἡμεῖς ἰσχύσαμεν βαστάσαι; ἀλλὰ διὰ τῆς χάριτος τοῦ κυρίου Ἰησοῦ πιστεύομεν σωθῆναι καθ᾽ ὃν τρόπον κἀκεῖνοι.

Look at the Jewish history of failing to keep the law

C. (:12) Testimony of Barnabas and Paul

And all the multitude kept silent, and they were listening to Barnabas and Paul as they were relating what signs and wonders God had done through them among the Gentiles.

Ἐσίγησεν δὲ πᾶν τὸ πλῆθος καὶ ἤκουον Βαρναβᾶ καὶ Παύλου ἐξηγουμένων ὅσα ἐποίησεν ὁ θεὸς σημεῖα καὶ τέρατα ἐν τοῖς ἔθνεσιν δι᾽ αὐτῶν.

When the testimony of experience meshes with the testimony of God's Word there can be no reasonable objection

Wiersbe: These miracles were proof that God was working with them (Mark 16:20; Acts 15:4) and that they were God's chosen messengers (Rom. 15:18-19; Heb. 2:24)

D. (:13-21) Judgment of James

1. (:13) The Credibility of James

"*And after they had stopped speaking, James answered, saying, 'Brethren, listen*

to me"'
Μετὰ δὲ τὸ σιγῆσαι αὐτοὺς ἀπεκρίθη Ἰάκωβος λέγων· ἄνδρες ἀδελφοί, ἀκούσατέ μου.

Half brother of Jesus; leader in church at Jerusalem; especially respected by the Jewish believers; author of book of James

2. (:14a) The Support of Simeon (Jewish name for Peter)
"*Simeon has related*"
Συμεὼν ἐξηγήσατο

3. (:14b) The Divine Initiative
"*how God first concerned Himself about taking from among the Gentiles a people for His name.*"
καθὼς πρῶτον ὁ θεὸς ἐπεσκέψατο λαβεῖν ἐξ ἐθνῶν λαὸν τῷ ὀνόματι αὐτοῦ.

Wiersbe: It must have startled the Judaizers when James called these saved Gentiles "a people for his [God's] name," because for centuries the Jews had carried that honorable title (see Deut. 7:6; 14:2; 28:10).

4. (:15-18) The Support of the OT Prophets – quote from Amos 9:11-12
"*And with this the words of the Prophets agree, just as it is written, 'After these things I will return, And I will rebuild the tabernacle of David which has fallen, And I will rebuild its ruins, And I will restore it, In order that the rest of mankind may seek the Lord, And all the Gentiles who are called by My name,' Says the Lord, who makes these things known from of old.*"

καὶ τούτῳ συμφωνοῦσιν οἱ λόγοι τῶν προφητῶν καθὼς γέγραπται· μετὰ ταῦτα ἀναστρέψω καὶ ἀνοικοδομήσω τὴν σκηνὴν Δαυὶδ τὴν πεπτωκυῖαν καὶ τὰ κατεσκαμμένα αὐτῆς ἀνοικοδομήσω καὶ ἀνορθώσω αὐτήν, ὅπως ἂν ἐκζητήσωσιν οἱ κατάλοιποι τῶν ἀνθρώπων τὸν κύριον καὶ πάντα τὰ ἔθνη ἐφ᾽ οὓς ἐπικέκληται τὸ ὄνομά μου ἐπ᾽ αὐτούς, λέγει κύριος ποιῶν ταῦτα γνωστὰ ἀπ᾽ αἰῶνος.

Not discarding the OT promises to the Jewish people; strong support here for the dispensational, pre-mill position as opposed to amill
Since we know that in the future millennium kingdom God has plans to bring the Gentiles to a saving knowledge of Him it should not be surprising to see God call out Gentiles during this church age which is known as the time of the Gentiles

Kent: Amos has shown what will occur in the future for Israel. Peter had explained what God was doing in the meantime regarding salvation for gentiles.

Longenecker, quoted by Cole: There are several difficult interpretive issues in James' use of the quote from Amos 9:11-12. For one thing, he does not cite the Hebrew text, but rather the Greek Septuagint version, and even there he differs at several points. Perhaps he was citing it from memory and modifying it to give the sense of it as it related to his application. Also, it has been pointed out that James' citation agrees exactly with one of the Jewish Essene sect texts of Amos 9. If some of the scrupulous Jewish Christians in his audience came from this sect, James may have been showing them that their own version supported the inclusion of the Gentiles in God's purpose

Longenecker: James's major contribution to the decision of the council was to shift the discussion of the conversion of Gentiles from a proselyte model to an eschatological one. Isaiah had expected Gentile converts to come to Jerusalem to learn God's ways so that they might walk in them. But Isaiah also spoke of the Gentiles' persistence as nations whose salvation did not destroy their national identities (cf. Isa 2:4; 25:6-7). Likewise, Amos spoke of "the remnant of men" (LXX, DSS) in the last days when "David's fallen tent" would be rebuilt as being "all the Gentiles who bear my name" and whose continuance as Gentiles was understood. In the end times, James is saying, God's people will consist of two concentric groups. At their core will be restored Israel (i.e., David's rebuilt tent); gathered around them will be a group of Gentiles (i.e., "the remnant of men") who will share in the messianic blessings but will persist as Gentiles without necessarily becoming Jewish proselytes. It is this understanding of Amos's message, James insisted, that Peter's testimony has affirmed, the result being that the conversion of Gentiles in the last days should be seen not as proselytizing but in an eschatological context.

5. (:19-21) Final Resolution and Sensitivity

> "*Therefore it is my judgment that we do not trouble those who are turning to God from among the Gentiles, but that we write to them that they abstain from things contaminated by idols and from fornication and from what is strangled and from blood. 'For Moses from ancient generations has in every city those who preach him, since he is read in the synagogues every Sabbath.*"
>
> διὸ ἐγὼ κρίνω μὴ παρενοχλεῖν τοῖς ἀπὸ τῶν ἐθνῶν ἐπιστρέφουσιν ἐπὶ τὸν θεόν, ἀλλὰ ἐπιστεῖλαι αὐτοῖς τοῦ ἀπέχεσθαι τῶν ἀλισγημάτων τῶν εἰδώλων καὶ τῆς πορνείας καὶ τοῦ πνικτοῦ καὶ τοῦ αἵματος. Μωϋσῆς γὰρ ἐκ γενεῶν ἀρχαίων κατὰ πόλιν τοὺς κηρύσσοντας αὐτὸν ἔχει ἐν ταῖς συναγωγαῖς κατὰ πᾶν σάββατον ἀναγινωσκόμενος.

Don't be a Legalistic Joy Killer!

Longenecker: Since Jewish communities are to be found in every city, their scruples are to be respected by Gentile believers.

Kent: fornication was so widely practiced among pagans, even under the guise of religion, that an admonition to gentile Christians to pay particular attention to avoiding this sin was certainly not unwarranted.

MacArthur: You know the whole of Gentile worship was involved with sex. Prostitute priestesses, the whole thing was just one big orgy. And he says to them, you know one thing that you Gentile Christians are goin, have to do, is absolutely stay away from every single thing that smacks of the sexual idolatry that you came from originally. You see in Leviticus 18 God gave such a strict set of laws about marriage, about sexual relationships, this is never to be violated. And you know one of the things that just really' just was so hard for Jews to understand was Gentile fornication, sexual sin, everything from bestiality to homosexuality and everything in-between is included in the word porneia' fornication. And a Jew couldn't tolerate any of that, cause God had given such straight, stiff, stiff guidelines, and so he says to those Gentile Christians, you're goin' have to cut off anything that even smacks of it. They may have...they may have not done it, but they may have participated in things where it was being done.

Stott: All four requested abstentions related to ceremonial laws laid down in Leviticus 17 and 18,

and three of them concerned dietary matters which could inhibit Jewish-Gentile common meals . . . refers to all the irregular marriages listed in Leviticus 18, in particular to marriage within degrees of blood-relationship or affinity forbidden by the legislation of Leviticus 18.

Stott: the Jerusalem Council secured a double victory – a victory of truth in confirming the gospel of grace, and a victory of love in preserving the fellowship by sensitive concessions to conscientious Jewish scruples.

Michael Crawford: **Ways We Make It Difficult for People to Turn to God**

- Gospel Silence
- Gospel Error
- Gospel Eclipse
- Our Unrepentant Hypocrisy
- Our Selective Love
- Our Unbiblical Christian Culture
- When We Don't Compel Them or Invite Them to Come to God
- When the Church Doesn't Look Like It's God's
- When There Are No Good Samaritans in the Church
- When Our Faith is More Defined by Political Party, Ethnicity or Agenda

CONCLUSION:

SALVATION IS BY GRACE THROUGH FAITH WITH NO CONNECTION TO LEGALISTIC OBSERVANCE OF THE MOSAIC LAW

Nothing can be added to the five famous creeds of the reformers:
1. Sola Gratia – Salvation is by Grace alone – all other religions advocate some form of works
2. Sola Christo – Salvation is by Christ alone – what would you think of me taking a paint brush to a work of a famous painter to try to improve it?
3. Sola Fide -- Faith alone – not a matter of merit or works
4. Sola dei Gloria – to the glory of God alone – nothing for man to boast
5. Sola Scriptura – Scripture alone – our authority for our gospel message comes from the Word of God

* * * * * * * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

1) What are some modern day examples of groups that claim to believe in salvation by grace through faith and yet something additional as a requirement for salvation?

2) How would you refute the contention that practical unity is more important than agreement on doctrinal issues?

3) Where do we make concessions in the area of religious practice so as not to offend the consciences of our fellow brethren?

4) What are the eschatological implications of the argument that James puts forward from the

text in Amos 9?

* * * * * * * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Wiersbe: What were these legalists actually doing and why were they so dangerous? They were attempting to mix law and grace and to pour the new wine into the ancient brittle wineskins (Luke 5:36-39). They were stitching up the rent veil (Luke 23:45) and blocking the new and living way to God that Jesus had opened when He died on the cross (Heb. 10:19-25). They were rebuilding the wall between Jews and Gentiles that Jesus had torn down on the cross (Eph. 2:14-16). They were putting the heavy Jewish yoke on Gentile shoulders (Acts 15:10; Gal. 5:10 and asking the church to move out of the sunlight into the shadows (Col. 2:16-17; Heb. 10:1).

Wiersbe: The Judaizers did not understand how the Gentiles and the Jews related to each other in the church, or how the church fit into God's promise to establish a kingdom for Israel. The Old Testament declared both the salvation of the Gentiles (Isa. 2:2; 11:10) and the future establishing of a glorious kingdom for Israel (Isa. 11-12; 35; 60), but it did not explain how they related to each other. The legalists in the church were jealous for both the future glory of Israel and the past glory of Moses and the law. It seemed to them that their acceptance of the Gentiles as "spiritual equals" jeopardized the future of Israel.

MacArthur: Now this has been a difficult journey, it has been a record setting journey in the sense that it established a whole new, a whole new avenue for the church, a whole new approach, a whole new ministry, a whole new dimension. That is the invitation to pagans, to Gentiles, to heathen, non Jews, to enter into the fullness of the church of Jesus Christ, and in all of the attendant blessings promised Israel are theirs, equally . . .

To just run around the world hunting out Gentiles, and inviting them wholesale into the church, as equals was a mind blowing concept to the...more legalistic of the Jews and a little difficult for them to handle. And in, you know, in deference to these people it seemed a little bit unfair. . .

That is the thing the church has always dealt with, somebody taking basic grace and attaching something else to it. It's, it's...for some reason it seems very difficult for men to grasp absolutely free grace. It seems impossible for men to understand that they are saved by faith, plus nothing. On the grounds of Christ's perfect work. But the Bible is so explicit in teaching that you're saved by God's grace, through faith plus nothing, that is obviously what the Bible teaches and yet people want to add things. We have a whole world full of legalistic heads, always want to tack on something. I always say, tacking something on to the perfect work of Christ done on the cross, would be like me taking my pencil and going to touch up the Mona Lisa, I mean that's stupid, I'm not even an artist, and it doesn't need touching up, It's a masterpiece. Some people say, oh yes, you're saved by faith but, you must keep the Ten Commandments to hold your salvation. That's Herbert W. Armstrong, the church that's on the radio, Radio Church of God, or whatever it is, Ambassador College. Salvation by...by grace through faith, plus the Ten Commandments, you must keep those to stay saved.

Some say, yes you're saved by faith, but you must be baptized to get into heaven. A little rough on the thief on the cross. The Roman Catholic church says, yes you are saved by faith, and grace saves you, grace and faith, but grace is mediated through the sacraments, so you must take the

sacraments, they mediate grace, and you must partake of the Lord's supper for it mediates divine life. And then they say, yes you are saved by faith but the ark of salvation is the church, you must join the church. And so you've got all kinds of people adding on must's, to grace. Like children with crayons scribbling on Rembrandts, you know? . . .

And grace might be defined as this, it is God's free salvation, offered to men on the basis of what Christ did, and apart from what they might do . . .

one of the reasons that I think that this verse is here, is to show them that God has not set Israel aside, in Gentile salvation. You see what happens inevitably today in, in the big debate in theology is that you have on one pole dispensational theology which says, God still has a plan for Israel, you have on the other pole covenant theology which says, God has forfeited all of His plans for Israel, and resolves everything in the church, Israel is set aside, And so the debate goes, And you know the worst thing I could imagine would be to announce to Israel that they have nothing left, that God has taken away all the promises, my, if that's true then God's promises to Israel aren't good and if they aren't good then God doesn't keep His word and if God didn't keep his word to Israel, I'm not too secure in what He's promised me. God said to Israel, you'll have a kingdom and you'll reign with Me, and you'll be restored, and you'll be rebuilt, and you'll be in your land, and you'll have a kingdom, and beloved if that doesn't happen then God's word is suspect, and if God's word is suspect at one point, it's suspect at all points. And so I believe verse 16 is in there because those Jews needed to know they were not being replaced, by Gentiles. Yes, it is true God first did visit the nations, to take out of them a people for his name, yes but, after this,"I will return and build again the tabernacle of David, which is fallen down, and build it again it's ruins, and I will set it up." You know what that is? That's God's promise that in the midst of Gentile salvation, in the midst of the history of the church God has not forgotten Israel, And we believe that God is goin' set up a kingdom for Israel, in the future. . .

Here's one of the most important dispensational portions of Scripture because it gives us the chronology of God's history, you ready for this? Verse 1? the first thing, God's goin, visit the nations and take out of them a people for his name, that's the calling of the church, isn't it? What follows that? Verse 16, "After this I will return."

What follows the calling out of the church? The return of Christ. What follows the return of Christ? The restoration of Israel, I'll build the tabernacle of David, what follows all of that? Gentile world salvation, verse 17, There ya have eschatology, you wanta know what the order of events in the future is, there it is. I can't understand why people come along and say, God's through with Israel.

Steven Cole: **When Unity is Wrong (15:1-11)**

Unity is wrong when it compromises the doctrine of salvation by God's grace alone through faith in Christ alone.

There is a strong movement toward Christian unity in our day. In 1994, a number of evangelical and Roman Catholic leaders signed the document, "Evangelicals and Catholics Together," which sought to emphasize what Catholics and Evangelical Protestants believe in common, and to encourage greater cooperation between the two camps. In October, 1997 a second document, "The Gift of Salvation," was signed. According to one evangelical who signed it, the signers were committed to unity in the truth (Christianity Today online, 12/8/97, "Evangelicals and Catholics Together: a New Initiative"). But the Catholic Church has not budged an inch from their statements in the Councils of Trent that condemn those who hold to the doctrine of

justification by faith alone.

The Promise Keepers movement has also encouraged this movement toward unity between Catholics and Protestants. One of the seven promises that every Promise Keeper commits himself to is, "reaching beyond any racial and denominational barriers to demonstrate the power of biblical unity." Someone sent me a tape of a message that the popular author, Max Lucado, delivered at the 1996 Promise Keepers Pastors Conference in Atlanta. Lucado compares the church to a large ship, with Jesus at the helm. On board, the passengers are arguing over all sorts of doctrinal issues. He implicitly ridicules any doctrinal disputes as if they are petty and inconsequential, since we're all headed for the same destination on the same ship. At one point, he exclaims, "Wouldn't it be great if we didn't have the labels 'Methodist,' 'Presbyterian,' and 'Baptist'?" His audience of 40,000 pastors cheers. He continues, "Wouldn't it be great if we didn't have the labels 'Protestant' and 'Catholic'?" The pastors cheered again! He then urges every pastor who has ever criticized any other man's denomination to get up, find someone from that denomination, and ask his forgiveness before they all took communion together. If Martin Luther and John Calvin had been in the audience, Lucado would have had them asking forgiveness of the pope for criticizing the Roman Catholic Church!

The famous evangelist, Billy Graham, for many years has also played down any differences between evangelicals and Roman Catholics. He has said, "I have no quarrel with the Roman Catholic Church." Speaking of the difference between evangelicalism and Catholicism, he said, "I don't think the differences are important as far as personal salvation is concerned" (both quotes in Iain Murray, Evangelicalism Divided [Banner of Truth], p. 68).

Because of the powerful influence of Graham, of Promise Keepers, and of the evangelical leaders who signed the two evangelical- Roman Catholic accords, there is immense pressure on pastors today to drop all doctrinal differences and join together with all who call themselves "Christian." One evangelical leader dogmatically states, "It is sin to refuse to join in ecumenical dialogue and processes with other Christians who confess Jesus Christ as God and Savior. It is a sin to send our missionaries to other lands with long Christian traditions without first consulting with the churches already there." In the context, he is referring to countries where Roman Catholicism and the Orthodox Church are strong (Ron Sider, World Vision [April/May, 1994], p. 9).

1. Salvation is by God's grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone.
2. Salvation by keeping the law is impossible.
3. The difference between sound doctrine and false doctrine on the matter of salvation is the difference between eternal life and eternal condemnation.
4. To promote unity with those who teach a false way of salvation is to sin by compromising the gospel as revealed by God.

Many do not like messages like this one, because they stir up controversy, and we all like peace. I've had people leave the church over similar messages that I've preached in the past. But as John Calvin wrote, "The name of peace is indeed plausible and sweet, but cursed is that peace which is purchased with so great loss, that we suffer the doctrine of Christ to perish, by which alone we grow together into godly and holy unity" (ibid., p. 38).

J. C. Ryle, a 19th century Anglican bishop, wrote, Controversy and religious strife, no doubt, are odious things; but there are times when they are a positive necessity. Unity and peace are very

delightful; but they are bought too dear if they are bought at the expense of truth…. It is a pity, no doubt, that there should be so much controversy; but it is also a pity that human nature should be so bad as it is, and that the devil should be loose in the world. It was a pity that Arius taught error about Christ's person: but it would have been a greater pity if Athanasius had not opposed him. It was a pity that Tetzel went about preaching up the Pope's indulgences: it would have been a far greater pity if Luther had not withstood him. Controversy, in fact, is one of the conditions under which truth in every age has to be defended and maintained, and it is nonsense to ignore it (source unknown).

The Jerusalem Council teaches us that unity is wrong when it compromises the doctrine of salvation by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone. May we join Martin Luther in saying, "Here I stand; I can do no other. God help me. Amen."

Steven Cole: **When Concession is Right (15:12-35)**
Spiritual maturity requires discernment, so that we stand firm when it comes to essential truth; but, on matters not essential to the faith, where godly men may differ, we elevate love over our rights. In other words, as we saw last week, there are times when unity is wrong, namely when it compromises the essentials of the gospel of salvation by God's grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone. But, also, there are times when concession is right:
Concession is right when it does not compromise essential truth and it is done out of love to avoid offending others.

1. Concession is never right if it compromises essential truth from God's Word (15:12-18).
the bottom line is that James was using Scripture to support Peter's argument, that salvation for all people, Jew or Gentile, is by God's grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone. The quote from Amos and James' concluding comment support what Peter emphasized in verse 7, that the salvation of the Gentiles originated with God, not with man. It was not something that Peter or Paul and Barnabas dreamed up. God purposed to do it from eternity, and He revealed it through His prophets centuries before.

2. Concession is right when it is done out of love to avoid offending others (15:19-29).

3. Our authoritative guide for all faith and practice is God's Word, which should be taught and learned (15:30-35).

Alex Strauch: **Salvation by Grace Through Faith**
Rallying slogan of reformers; 5 slogans of grace:
1. Sola Gratia -- Grace alone –
2. Sola Christo – Christ alone
3. Sola Fide -- Faith alone – not a matter of merit or works
4. Sola dei Gloria – to the glory of God alone
5. Sola Scriptura – Scripture alone

The Mount Everest of the early church is chap. 15 of Acts; one of Luke's purposes is to explain what is the gospel and what is Christianity; what are the conditions for Gentiles to now come into the church and be recipients of salvation?
"*God had opened a door of faith to the Gentiles*" = background verse; Gentile churches planted by Paul and Barnabas on first missionary journey; this was threatening to some Jews

I. Debate over Conditions of the Gospel for the Gentiles
False teachers claimed to have authorization from the big wigs in Jerusalem; they are not really saved yet until they do this Jewish act to become part of the people of God; great dissension and debate; Luther: "the gospel always causes controversy"

What about modern day emphasis on tolerance; why should Paul dogmatically push his views here; this passage shows an amazing amount of tolerance
1. Def of Tolerance – a great virtue – the capacity for recognizing and respecting the opinions and practices of others; I voluntarily withhold any power to coerce others to embrace my convictions; enables us to live together in peace
2. Tolerance is a Christian virtue – Eph. 4 – "*showing tolerance for one another in love*"
3. There are issues and actions we do not tolerate and never should tolerate – nobody tolerates everything; we all agree there are things we should not tolerate; civil war over not tolerating slavery; Issue is what do we tolerate?
4. Tolerance and intolerance have become slogans to hurt other people in the cultural wars of today – charge religious people with this to marginalize them and cut them out of the debate; cf. charges against Dr. James Dobson; mean-spirited attacks against him in the media; hypocritical intolerance; not acceptable to argue for truth claims that are exclusive
5. If you will not accept the position of relativist (there is no absolute) and universalist today, you are branded as intolerant bigot; the moral relativist insists that his view is correct and shuts down all debate
6. Trying to convince other people to your position does not make you intolerant

II. Pushing the Controversy Back to Jerusalem
Threat of division between Jerusalem and Antioch; you cannot be saved apart from obeying OT Mosaic law

III. Apostolic Council
If you have debate, you have tolerance; Peter did not dictate people follow him blindly without interaction
Peter's Testimony (:7-11) –
1. God made a choice among you – refers back to conversion of Cornelius 9 years ago; that's history and God did it
2. God gave them the Holy Spirit – Gentiles had their own Pentacost – without circumcision and without baptism and without any other regulations
3. God made no distinction between Jews and Gentiles = revolutionary statement; cleansing was by faith, not by circumcision or law-keeping
4. Don't put God to the test by questioning the Almighty – Is He right about removing this distinction – are you smarter than God?? Look at our own Jewish history – we have not been effective at obeying the law ourselves
5. But we believe that we are saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus the same way they are also

See how the 5 slogans of grace are right here in this council

James Judgment: Scofield Bible says this is most important text for dispensationalism – God is taking from every tribe a people for His name sake right now during this church age (not universalism); church is the ekklessia = the called out community; after the church age the Lord Jesus will return when the very last member has been added to the church; He will come to this

earth and establish His kingdom; 1000 year millennial kingdom; God is bringing about these converts

TEXT: Acts 15:22-41

TITLE: STRIVING FOR PARTNERSHIP IN THE GOSPEL

BIG IDEA:
PARTNERSHIP IN THE GOSPEL MAINTAINS THE INTEGRITY OF THE MESSAGE AND STRENGTHENS BELIEVERS IN THE FAITH

INTRODUCTION:

Acts chapter 15 fills some of that transition gap between Paul's first and second missionary journey. If you think of missionaries you know who have come home from the field for a time of rest and deputation, Paul and Barnabas performed similar duties:

- Reporting back to the church at Antioch – good communication is always critical; you need for your partners in ministry to be engaged and to understand the challenges and the successes of what is happening out on the field
- Recharging their spiritual batteries in preparation for next missionary journey – nobody can go at full throttle all of the time (although Paul seems to have less of a need for vacation time than we see today); you need time to sit back and reevaluate your missionary strategy and objectives as well
- Resolving conflicts that threaten the progress of the gospel – We are going to look today at the interesting juxtaposition in these verses (22-41) of two very different types of conflicts that threaten to undermine partnership in the gospel; probably more common for preachers to keep these two incidents separate, but we are going to look at them together because of the similar outline points for these two different situations – both a Positive Example and a Negative Example:
    - Magnitude of the Issue involved
    - Unity vs Division involved in the resolution
    - Nature of the Communication
    - Results of the Resolution

PARTNERSHIP IN THE GOSPEL MAINTAINS THE INTEGRITY OF THE MESSAGE AND STRENGTHENS BELIEVERS IN THE FAITH

I. (:22-35) POSITIVE EXAMPLE – DOCTRINAL ISSUE – PARTNERSHIP OF JEWS AND GENTILES CEMENTED BY UNITED DECISION OF THE JERUSALEM COUNCIL

A. Magnitude of the Issue – *Review of 15:1-21* – the Heart of the Gospel Message – Salvation is by Grace Through Faith Apart from Circumcision or the Works of the Law

Everything in the Christian life is about the Grace of God – thinking about that this week – all of the pressures and challenges – "*Through many dangers, toils and snares, I have already come; Tis grace hath brought me safe thus far, and grace will lead me home.*"

Motivation

Consequences of a Division

B. (:22) United Decision

"*Then it seemed good to the apostles and the elders, with the whole church, to choose men from among them to send to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas-- Judas called Barsabbas, and Silas, leading men among the brethren,*"

Τότε ἔδοξε τοῖς ἀποστόλοις καὶ τοῖς πρεσβυτέροις σὺν ὅλῃ τῇ ἐκκλησίᾳ ἐκλεξαμένους ἄνδρας ἐξ αὐτῶν πέμψαι εἰς Ἀντιόχειαν σὺν τῷ Παύλῳ καὶ Βαρναβᾷ, Ἰούδαν τὸν καλούμενον Βαρσαββᾶν καὶ Σιλᾶν, ἄνδρας ἡγουμένους ἐν τοῖς ἀδελφοῖς,

How pleasant for brothers to dwell together in unity

Look how many leading men there were in the church at Antioch – a fertile ground for the development of church leaders and for the exercise of spiritual gifts

Verbal communication by letter is important – but look how they placed the priority on face-to-face communication – we must make sure we don't lose this emphasis in today's world of emailing and text messaging and tweeting – when you are together in person, the communication is so much more effective – how do you show someone you love them? Love letters are great – but they better bring back memories of love expressed in person or excite the anticipation of renewed face-to-face enjoyment – not enough to have a verbal relationship over the air waves

Kent: This would alleviate any possible criticism that the results of the Council were unfairly reported by Paul. Of the two chosen from Jerusalem, Judas is not otherwise known to us. He has the same surname as Joseph Barsabbas, the other candidate with Matthias for the vacant apostleship (1:23), and it is commonly supposed they were brothers. Silas is apparently the same person who is called Silvanus in the epistles (II Cor. 1:19; I Thess. 1:1; II Thess. 1:1; I Peter 5:12).

C. (:23-29) Conciliatory Communication

How can the new Gentile believers meet with the approval of the Jewish church at Jerusalem and enjoy fellowship on an equal footing?

1. (:23) Brotherly Tone

"*and they sent this letter by them, 'The apostles and the brethren who are elders, to the brethren in Antioch and Syria and Cilicia who are from the Gentiles, greetings.*'"

γράψαντες διὰ χειρὸς αὐτῶν· Οἱ ἀπόστολοι καὶ οἱ πρεσβύτεροι ἀδελφοὶ τοῖς κατὰ τὴν Ἀντιόχειαν καὶ Συρίαν καὶ Κιλικίαν ἀδελφοῖς τοῖς ἐξ ἐθνῶν χαίρειν.

2. (:24) Disassociation from the Troublemakers –

having presented themselves as authorized in some fashion by the church at Jerusalem

"*Since we have heard that some of our number to whom we gave no instruction have disturbed you with their words, unsettling your souls,*"

Ἐπειδὴ ἠκούσαμεν ὅτι τινὲς ἐξ ἡμῶν [ἐξελθόντες] ἐτάραξαν ὑμᾶς λόγοις

ἀνασκευάζοντες τὰς ψυχὰς ὑμῶν οἷς οὐ διεστειλάμεθα,

a. Their Deceptive Independence
from the church at Jerusalem – but not sponsored in any way or authorized by the church leadership

b. Their Destructive Insinuations
- *disturbed you with their words*
- *unsettling your souls*

3. (:25-27) United Delegation

"*it seemed good to us, having become of one mind, to select men to send to you with our beloved Barnabas and Paul, men who have risked their lives for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore we have sent Judas and Silas, who themselves will also report the same things by word of mouth.*"

ἔδοξεν ἡμῖν γενομένοις ὁμοθυμαδὸν ἐκλεξαμένοις ἄνδρας πέμψαι πρὸς ὑμᾶς σὺν τοῖς ἀγαπητοῖς ἡμῶν Βαρναβᾷ καὶ Παύλῳ, ἀνθρώποις παραδεδωκόσι τὰς ψυχὰς αὐτῶν ὑπὲρ τοῦ ὀνόματος τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ. ἀπεστάλκαμεν οὖν Ἰούδαν καὶ Σιλᾶν καὶ αὐτοὺς διὰ λόγου ἀπαγγέλλοντας τὰ αὐτά.

Bock: The key term in the letter is the repeated expression "*it seemed good*" (vv. 22, 25, and 28), pointing to the judgment they have all reached.

4. (:28-29a) Holy Spirit Wisdom

"*For it seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us to lay upon you no greater burden than these essentials: that you abstain from things sacrificed to idols and from blood and from things strangled and from fornication;*"

ἔδοξεν γὰρ τῷ πνεύματι τῷ ἁγίῳ καὶ ἡμῖν μηδὲν πλέον ἐπιτίθεσθαι ὑμῖν βάρος πλὴν τούτων τῶν ἐπάναγκες, ἀπέχεσθαι εἰδωλοθύτων καὶ αἵματος καὶ πνικτῶν καὶ πορνείας,

5. (:29b) Closing Exhortation

"*if you keep yourselves free from such things, you will do well. Farewell.*"

ἐξ ὧν διατηροῦντες ἑαυτοὺς εὖ πράξετε. ἔρρωσθε.

D. (:30-35) Result: Encouragement, Joy and Edification – It's All Good!

1. (:30-31) Encouraged by the Wise Decision to the Point of Rejoicing

"*So, when they were sent away, they went down to Antioch; and having gathered the congregation together, they delivered the letter. And when they had read it, they rejoiced because of its encouragement.*"

Οἱ μὲν οὖν ἀπολυθέντες κατῆλθον εἰς Ἀντιόχειαν, καὶ συναγαγόντες τὸ πλῆθος ἐπέδωκαν τὴν ἐπιστολήν. ἀναγνόντες δὲ ἐχάρησαν ἐπὶ τῇ παρακλήσει

Foolish decisions bring grief and heartache – cf. those in OT times who rejected wise counsel – **1 Kings 12:7-8** -- King Rehoboam rejecting the counsel of the older, experienced elders who had

served under Solomon

2. (:32) Encouraged by the Strengthening Ministry of the Word

"*And Judas and Silas, also being prophets themselves, encouraged and strengthened the brethren with a lengthy message.*"

Ἰούδας τε καὶ Σιλᾶς καὶ αὐτοὶ προφῆται ὄντες διὰ λόγου πολλοῦ παρεκάλεσαν τοὺς ἀδελφοὺς καὶ ἐπεστήριξαν,

This verse is my excuse for sometimes preaching too long!
If a short message is helpful … then a lengthy message must be even better!

3. (:33) Encouraged by Returning the Jerusalem Delegates Home in Peaceful Fellowship

"*And after they had spent time there, they were sent away from the brethren in peace to those who had sent them out.*"

ποιήσαντες δὲ χρόνον ἀπελύθησαν μετ᾽ εἰρήνης ἀπὸ τῶν ἀδελφῶν πρὸς τοὺς ἀποστείλαντας αὐτούς.

[*34 But it seemed good to Silas to remain there*]
Kent: Verse 34 is found in the Western text, and also in the Byzantine, but does not appear in the manuscripts usually regarded as most reliable. Apparently it was thought that Silas had to be retained in Antioch in order to accompany Paul on the next journey, in plain contradiction of verse 33. There is no problem, however, if we understand a reasonable period of time between the events of verses 33 and 40, sufficient for Paul to send for Silas before the next journey.

4. (:35) Encouraged by the Ongoing Ministry of Edification in Antioch

"*But Paul and Barnabas stayed in Antioch, teaching and preaching, with many others also, the word of the Lord.*"

Παῦλος δὲ καὶ Βαρναβᾶς διέτριβον ἐν Ἀντιοχείᾳ διδάσκοντες καὶ εὐαγγελιζόμενοι μετὰ καὶ ἑτέρων πολλῶν τὸν λόγον τοῦ κυρίου.

Amazing how many gifted teachers and preachers there were in the church at Antioch

II. (:36-41) NEGATIVE EXAMPLE – RELATIONAL ISSUE AND MINISTRY PHILOSOPHY – SPLIT BETWEEN PAUL AND BARNABAS OVER THE INCLUSION OF JOHN MARK ON THE MISSIONARY TEAM

A. (:36) Magnitude of the Issue –

"*And after some days Paul said to Barnabas, 'Let us return and visit the brethren in every city in which we proclaimed the word of the Lord, and see how they are.*'"

Μετὰ δέ τινας ἡμέρας εἶπεν πρὸς Βαρναβᾶν Παῦλος· ἐπιστρέψαντες δὴ ἐπισκεψώμεθα τοὺς ἀδελφοὺς κατὰ πόλιν πᾶσαν ἐν αἷς κατηγγείλαμεν τὸν λόγον τοῦ κυρίου πῶς ἔχουσιν.

Motivation: encourage brethren to persevere in persecution; protect them against heresy of Judaizers; renew fellowship; minister the Word

Consequences of a Division

B. (:37-38) Divided Discernment

"*And Barnabas was desirous of taking John, called Mark, along with them also. But Paul kept insisting that they should not take him along who had deserted them in Pamphylia and had not gone with them to the work.*"

Βαρναβᾶς δὲ ἐβούλετο συμπαραλαβεῖν καὶ τὸν Ἰωάννην τὸν καλούμενον Μᾶρκον· Παῦλος δὲ ἠξίου, τὸν ἀποστάντα ἀπ᾽ αὐτῶν ἀπὸ Παμφυλίας καὶ μὴ συνελθόντα αὐτοῖς εἰς τὸ ἔργον μὴ συμπαραλαμβάνειν τοῦτον.

Paul seems to have a solid argument – one that is not refuted; Barnabas seems to have more of a personal preference – perhaps influenced by his family relationship to Barnabas

No indication of repentance on the part of John Mark; even if there were Paul may have thought it wise for there to be a time period of further proving and testing before entrusting him again with so much responsibility – not saying that Paul was writing him off – just did not want to elevate him to this level of leadership again yet

C. (:39a) Contentious Communication

"*And there arose such a sharp disagreement that they separated from one another,*"

ἐγένετο δὲ παροξυσμὸς ὥστε ἀποχωρισθῆναι αὐτοὺς ἀπ᾽ ἀλλήλων,

After all they had been through together, how could such a serious rift develop now?

Painful to separate from former co-laborers in the gospel

Bock: *parosysmos*, when used negatively, describes anger, irritation, or exasperation in a disagreement

MacArthur: You know what the word is for departed asunder? It's only used one other time in the New Testament and that's **Revelations 6:14** when an apocalyptic disaster, the Heavens departed. So when they departed, they departed. There wasn't a lot of love there. They were a little bit bitter, and they blasted off in two directions and Barnabas took Mark and sailed to Cyprus.

D. (:39b-41) Result: Hurt Feelings but Maintaining Focus on Ministry –
Goal of Strengthening the Brethren

"*and Barnabas took Mark with him and sailed away to Cyprus. But Paul chose Silas and departed, being committed by the brethren to the grace of the Lord. And he was traveling through Syria and Cilicia, strengthening the churches.*"

τόν τε Βαρναβᾶν παραλαβόντα τὸν Μᾶρκον ἐκπλεῦσαι εἰς Κύπρον, Παῦλος δὲ ἐπιλεξάμενος Σιλᾶν ἐξῆλθεν παραδοθεὶς τῇ χάριτι τοῦ κυρίου ὑπὸ τῶν ἀδελφῶν. διήρχετο δὲ τὴν Συρίαν καὶ [τὴν] Κιλικίαν ἐπιστηρίζων τὰς ἐκκλησίας.

Is someone right and someone wrong in this dispute?? There seem to be indicators in the passage that Paul stands on stronger ground here – mainly arguments from silence so don't be dogmatic here:

- God had put this missionary team together
- Paul offered reasons for not taking John Mark; Barnabas did not
- Thinking of Barnabas was impacted by family relationship = cousins
- Church ended up commending Paul and Silas; don't seem to have commended the other team in the same fashion
- Don't hear any more about Barnabas in Acts (went to his home territory in Cyprus and tradition says he ministered there in relative obscurity) – of course you don't see ministry of Peter any more either

Having said all of that, there were probably wrong reactions on both sides
Having said that, God providentially overruled to create two powerful teams and to mentor both John Mark and Silas

Division turned into multiplication

Note that neither Barnabas or Paul felt it was appropriate to set off alone – they understood that partnership in the gospel ministry is essential

The grace of the Lord is what is key to spiritual success

What we need today are <u>stronger churches</u> –

- those would be churches that understand and feed on the Grace of God;
- those would be churches that understand the importance of partnership in the gospel

CONCLUSION: What applications can we make from these two examples dealing with striving for partnership in the gospel??

We need to protect the integrity of the gospel message at all costs. We cannot compromise the fundamentals of teaching people that salvation is by grace through faith in the person of Jesus Christ apart from any works or law keeping on our part. We need to go on and continue to live by grace as well.

In non-essential areas we must have a conciliatory spirit that is willing to make concessions regarding personal preferences – just as the Jerusalem Council advocated for the new Gentile converts regarding certain Jewish practices.

We need to value the partnership in the gospel which we have. Sometimes you don't realize the value of something until you lose it – that is true in marriage – think of the calamity of what is lost when a couple divorces; but this is also true in ministry. We need to appreciate what we have by way of partnership – regardless of how small our group may be.

We need to understand that we are all wired differently – even as Paul and Barnabas were; and we must seek to communicate in love and patience in a way that would help us to avoid splits over matters of personal preference or ministry practice. Yet understanding that the providence of God can overrule our sinfulness and brokenness to still bring good out of difficult times.

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DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

1) How was the early church able to develop so much male leadership so quickly?

2) When was the last time you rejoiced because of encouragement you received?

3) Why did they want to spend time revisiting cities where they had already established churches when there was so much virgin territory untouched by the gospel?

4) Would things have been different in the Paul-Barnabas conflict if they had bathed the decision in prayer and fasting and consultation with the church as they did in their initial calling to the mission field?

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QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Everett F. Harrison: The council accomplished five important things:
1. The gospel of divine grace was reaffirmed.
2. The unity of the church was safeguarded.
3. The evangelism of the Gentiles could proceed without hindrance. Most of Paul's churches were founded after the council and they were Gentile churches.
4. The Gentiles churches that had already been established were given encouragement (Acts 16:4-5).
5. The future of the church as a whole was guaranteed.

John Whitcomb: **Paul and Silas to Europe**
Amazing decision of the Jerusalem Council – God had overruled and brought about a wise decision that would bring great difficulty to the Jerusalem church. End up being shattered and scattered, but not annihilated; Paul is ready to launch out into another great mission tour; will move all the way into Europe; he will never again see Antioch his home church; Concerns as to why he wants to revisit Derbe and Lystra and Iconium: persecution by godless Jews; and now heresy by the Judaizers; Paul and Barnabas ended up disagreeing on mission policy; Paul would not endorse any missionary who is a proven failure; Barnabas: I am committed to the restoration of such a missionary if I know him well and have reason to believe he has changed; possible that they both were right; lessons on legitimate biblical separation – when and under what circumstances would we separate from other believers?? Occasional separations that are legitimate; both did the right thing for the right motives and God honored both of them
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Dr. Alan Cairns: **The Ruin of a Great Partnership**
Marked contrast between beginning and end of Acts 15; at the beginning you see decision of Jerusalem Council bringing great agreement and fellowship; at end apostolic agreement wrecked by a serious dispute; great work taking place in Antioch; greatest missionary team of Paul and Barnabas; Holy Spirit had said: "*separate unto me Barnabas and Saul*" – put them together for a very good reason; "*What God has joined together . . .* " -- John Mark let us down earlier and

betrayed the cause; they both dug their heels in; they were both adamant; tempers began to rise; strong and bitter words; out of control words; men saying things they ought not to have said; church stood back and looked on in disbelief; one of the saddest separations in the history of the work of God; they didn't become enemies, but their partnership ended; those two lives were ever after impoverished; they both felt the loss deeply; looks like the church sided with Paul more than Barnabas;

I. They Shared a Great Burden

Let's go see how the churches and brethren are doing; are they holding up under persecution; are they progressing holiness; are they withstanding the wiles of the devil; a very legitimate concern; How are you doing spiritually?? How is it with your soul, with your family, with the church?

II. They Shared a Great Blunder

Not a disagreement over any doctrine (not Calvinism over Arminianism; not even over eschatology); not over any great principle;

There was family involved; Barnabas put family before his work; personal feelings and pride got in the way; each of these great leaders worked himself into a position where he could not back down; neither realized what a great partnership they had until it was gone

III. They Shared a Great Blame

Both were partly right and both partly wrong; Barnabas might have still been stinging from public rebuke; genuinely humble man; real sweetness about him as an encourager; could see the grace of God in other people's lives and ministries and encourage it; encourager, consoler; Barnabas was just being Barnabas and Paul was just being Paul; you don't see fasting and praying and calling upon the wisdom of the church involved in this dispute

Realize what you have in your partnership as church or husband and wife; nurture it; cherish it; guard it;

John MacArthur: **Evangelism the Right Way**

I like Barnabas. My heart goes out to him and I'm glad he was a restoring guy and he did a marvelous work with Mark, and I believe God used him with Mark but I think Paul was right here and there's some reasons why. These are my reasons so take them for what they're worth.

One, Paul really was an apostolic authority over Barnabas and I feel that if Barnabas was truly the man that he should've been at that moment he would've submitted to Paul's apostolic authority. This is an issue I think is important. Paul was in terms of Christ the one who stood in rank next to Christ, and had Barnabas been what he should've been there would've been some submission.

Second reason. The Lord in the end - and since I believe in the sovereignty of God this is important - the Lord in the end did not have Mark go with Paul, did he? And it seems to me that that then was the plan of God that Mark not go originally. Now God of course had all of this within the framework of His plan but God did not plan for Mark to go and so it seems perhaps then that Barnabas was truly out of line in bringing Mark along or desiring to.

Third reason, verse 40. "Paul chose Silas and departed being commended by the brethren under the grace of God. The church definitely recognized the duo of Paul and Silas" and perhaps they had the mind of the Spirit on that and so they commended them. There is no such commendation of Barnabas and Mark. In fact you get the idea a little bit in verse 39 that they kind of hustled to

Cyprus.

Fourthly, I feel in my own mind that it was a lot better for Mark to go with Barnabas than it would've been for him to go along with him anyway. I think it would've been awfully tough on Mark to go along with Paul when he knew all the time that Paul didn't trust him, so I think the Spirit worked it out beautifully.

Barnabas later was commended by Paul, 1 Corinthians 9:6, Paul mentions him there. He held no continuing animosity, not Paul, not at all, and Mark, I mean Paul absolutely loved Mark but Paul was in Rome in jail and he wrote to Timothy and he says, "Timothy, come and be with me. Demas has forsaken me having loved the prison world. Luke alone is with me, and by the way when you come would you bring Mark, for he is profitable to me?" Now that's restoration, isn't it? That's the loving heart of Paul so Barnabas did a good job on Mark, really shaped him up, and Paul loved him. Mark wrote the Gospel of Mark and Mark was a companion of Peter, 1 Peter 5:13. . .

Steve Zeisler: **Overcoming Anger**
The last thing I would say about both the struggle at the beginning of chapter 15 and the one at the end of the chapter, is that they happened out in the open. The longer I live the clearer it is to me that the arguments that really destroy churches are the ones that happen in secret, politicking that goes on behind the scenes, in which no one ever admits anything is going wrong, but discord is sewn and sins and bad attitudes are covered up. Paul and Barnabas yelled at each other with people listening. The church had a public argument in Antioch, and they were able to go to Jerusalem and get it resolved, because they believed that God would work among them as long as they weren't hiding what they were doing. Secret resentments and discord are poison.

Ron Ritchie: **Concern for the Churches**
There is no further mention of either of these men in the rest of the book of Acts, but a study of the epistles reveals the fruit that Barnabas' action had in the life of his nephew. Paul makes reference to John Mark in two of his prison letters. First, in Colossians 4:10, the apostle writes ten years later, "If he [Mark] comes to you, welcome him" (4:10). Then in 2 Timothy, written fourteen years later from the same prison, the apostle says to Timothy, "Pick up Mark and bring him with you, for he is useful to me for service" (4:11). Mark was with Paul during the apostle's second imprisonment when he wrote to Philemon in 64 A.D. Another reference to Mark is included in Peter's first letter. Writing to the Galatian churches, Peter sends his greetings and those of "my son, Mark." This is the same Mark who wrote the gospel of Mark, which was Peter's account of the ministry of Jesus. Tradition holds that Mark was sent on a mission to Egypt, where he is said to have founded the church of Alexandria. There, as bishop of that church, Mark was said to have been martyred in the eighth year of Nero's reign, in 62 A.D.

Ray Pritchard: **When Christians Disagree**
Principle # 1: Though all Christians worship the same Lord we don't always agree on every point.
Principle # 2: On issues of deep personal conviction, our disagreements will sometimes be very sharp.
Principle # 3: Separation may ultimately be preferable to continual disagreement.
Principle # 4: God's word is sometimes advanced through disagreement.
Principle # 5: If we must separate from one another, let us do so with respect, not with rancor.
Rancor means anger or bitterness. I think if there is any place to criticize Paul and

Barnabas, it's right here. It seems to me that perhaps they went too far in their disagreement.

Let me give you three warning signs that you've crossed that line.

- Number one: When the issue becomes a controlling passion of your life.
- Number two: When you've started thinking about revenge against those who have hurt you. Perhaps you want to get even so you begin to spread rumors or tell stories or twist facts in order to make someone else look bad. At that point you've gone way over the line.
- Number three: When you begin to attack the person and not the problem. Attacking the problem means studying the issue, sorting out the good and bad points, thinking through other ways of looking at things, and so on. Attacking the person means losing your temper, questioning motives, and using intimidation to get your own way.
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Principle # 6: In Christ our ultimate goal should be eventual reconciliation and the restoration of friendship.
Principle # 7: In all things, our rules should be hold your convictions firmly yet graciously knowing that God may lead someone else differently than he has led you.

Phil Newton: **A Silver Lining in a Disagreement**
Barnabas - compassionate, tender, accepting, encouraging, sides with underdog, sanguine
Paul - uncompromising in work and deed, stable, analytical, strong work ethic, courageous, choleric
Personality should never become an excuse for a breach. We must learn from each other and to work with each other. . .

Lessons from disagreements:
a. Seek to avoid having a contentious, disagreeable spirit; "not contentious," "not pugnacious." There is an inevitability of disagreements in this life!
b. Seek peaceableness, Romans 12, Ephesians 4, but never peace at any price
c. Maintain your focus on your ministry because disagreements can be strategic diversions from the enemy!
d. Recognize God-given changes and directions. Though there may have been one or two at fault, God worked providentially to further His kingdom. J. A. Alexander, "It is equally admissible, and much more pleasant, to suppose that the 'paroxysm,' although directly caused by human frailty, was a providential means of sending out four men instead of two, on the same errand in different directions, so as at the same time to avoid collision and enlarge the field of missionary labor"
e. Seek to learn about self, ministry people, while guarding against an embittered spirit
The Lord works good, even from our weaknesses and failures (Romans 8:28).

TEXT: Acts 16:1-5

TITLE: BALANCING CONVICTION WITH ACCOMMODATION -- ADDING TIMOTHY TO THE MISSIONARY TEAM

BIG IDEA:
CULTURAL SENSITIVITY CONTRIBUTES TO CHURCH GROWTH -- INTEGRATION OF NEW TEAM MEMBERS MAY REQUIRE ACCOMMODATION TO CULTURAL PRACTICES

INTRODUCTION:
Some people are all about **Convictions**. They have no problem discerning right from wrong. They are not squeamish about taking a stand for what they believe. But if their convictions are not tempered with sensitivity towards others they tend to come across as "My way or the highway" type of intellectual bullies. Other people are all about **Accommodation**. They base their actions on how it will impact others. They don't want to create any offense. But without a solid anchor in biblical truth they come across as "wishy-washy." The Apostle Paul demonstrates the perfect balance between maintaining biblical convictions and yet being sensitive to the culture around him. There are those things worth fighting for and there are other matters where deference to personal preferences should be shown.

How sensitive are we to the culture around us in our harvest fields? We have all been sent out as ambassadors for Jesus Christ to represent our Lord and Savior to a world that is lost and is perishing. Yet too often Christians seem to have a lack of understanding and compassion for some of the cultural barriers that might cause people to shut their ears to the message of the gospel. Does it have to be all about our type of music; the order of service that is most comfortable to us; the amount of emotional expression or inhibition that we grew up with …

BALANCING CONVICTION WITH ACCOMMODATION -- ADDING TIMOTHY TO THE MISSIONARY TEAM

CULTURAL SENSITIVITY CONTRIBUTES TO CHURCH GROWTH -- INTEGRATION OF NEW TEAM MEMBERS MAY REQUIRE ACCOMMODATION TO CULTURAL PRACTICES

Today's message has a **Labor Day** slant to it as well. In business we are always trying to locate the right people to put on the right seats in the bus – very difficult to find good people; no one is indispensable; graveyard is full of indispensable people; life moves on; God provides for other qualified workers. We just saw Paul and Barnabas splitting up over whether John Mark should be included on the missionary team. Now we see how God sovereignly adds Timothy into the mix as an emerging new leader.

3 STAGES IN TIMOTHY'S INTEGRATION INTO THE MISSIONARY TEAM

I. (:1-2) PROMISING RECRUIT -- PREPARATION
II. (:3) PRECAUTIONARY RITUAL -- COMMISSIONING
III. (:4-5) PROGRESS REPORT -- SERVICE

I. (:1-2) PROMISING RECRUIT -- PREPARATION

A. (:1a) Church Itinerary

"*And he came also to Derbe and to Lystra.*"

Κατήντησεν δὲ [καὶ] εἰς Δέρβην καὶ εἰς Λύστραν.

1. Providential Route to Take

Providential route allows Paul to add Timothy to the team at the beginning of this second missionary journey

Travelled through the Salitian Gates = a fissure in the mountain-chain of Taurus, extending from north to south through a distance of eighty miles

MacArthur: Now where are they gonna go? They're gonna go to Galatia. How'd they go last time? Last time they went to Cyprus, remember? To the island, crossed the island, went north and came through this way. Who's already at Cyprus? Barnabas and Mark. No sense in going that way so they took off this way and they were gonna go to Galatia backwards. Do you know that the Holy Spirit had that whole thing laid out? Do you know why? Because as soon as they got into the back side of the plateau when they crossed the Salatian gates there was massive mountains and there was an area they had to climb through called the Salitian Gates to get into this plateau area and as soon as they had climbed into that area they came to these towns. They wouldn't have reached those towns until the end of their journey. Instead they reached them at the very beginning and you know who they met and the first one they came to? Verse 1, "They came to Derbe and Listra and behold a certain disciple was there named Timothy." God wanted to add another member to the team. If they had gone the other way they wouldn't have gotten him until the tour was over.

Application: God goes ahead of us and directs our steps; Next week as we look at the Macedonian Call we will see that the Holy Spirit is very active in allowing us to go through certain open doors as well as closing off other doors to us; we need to be sensitive to the Lord's leading

2. Courageous Route to Take

This was dangerous territory to revisit; Paul still had the scars from his earlier stoning and near death experience. I wonder what Silas was thinking when he was presented with the itinerary; but there were good reasons to put themselves into harm's way; these young believers needed encouragement and edification; they needed as well to hear the determination of the Jerusalem Council on this important issue affecting church relations between Jews and Gentiles

The place of greatest opposition is often the place of greatest opportunity

Application: The Lord can open doors for us in witnessing, but are we bold and courageous to take advantage of our opportunities??

Steven Cole: We read that Paul came to Derbe and to Lystra (16:1). That was a radically courageous thing to do! Lystra was where Paul had been stoned, dragged out of the city and thrown on the garbage heap as dead. If I were he, I would not be inclined to go back to Lystra.

But here, where he had suffered so terribly, and while he was still grieving over the falling out with Barnabas, God graciously brought into Paul's life this young man, Timothy, who would become like a faithful son to Paul. . . Just as witnessing the stoning of Stephen had made an indelible impression on Paul, so watching Paul get stoned had made a profound impression on young Timothy.

B. (:1b) Cultural Challenges – What made Timothy such a Promising Recruit??

"*And behold, a certain disciple was there, named Timothy, the son of a Jewish woman who was a believer, but his father was a Greek,*"

καὶ ἰδοὺ μαθητής τις ἦν ἐκεῖ ὀνόματι Τιμόθεος, υἱὸς γυναικὸς Ἰουδαίας πιστῆς, πατρὸς δὲ Ἕλληνος,

1. Already a Genuine Disciple

You cannot get the cart before the horse; someone must be a learner and a follower of Jesus Christ before they can be considered for leadership; they must have proven they know how to submit to spiritual leadership and take instruction and develop their gifts before they can be elevated to more responsibility; young man who was ready for the hardships of ministry and travel – Paul will later entreat Timothy to *keep the faith and a good conscience* and to fight the good fight against the enemies of Christ and of the cross – 1 Tim. 1:18-19

2. Godly Heritage and Training

Influence of godly mother and grandmother – saved under their ministry or under ministry of Paul? Had the Jewish background which would be a plus as Paul started his ministry in each city in the synagogue; well trained in the OT Scriptures

Henry Alford: He had probably been converted by Paul during his former visit, as he calls him his *son in the Lord*; 1 Cor. iv. 17; 1 Tim. i.2; 2 Tim. i.2; perhaps at Antioch in Pisidia, see 2 Tim. Iii. 10, 11. His mother was Eunice, his grandmother, Lois, -- both women of well-known piety.

3. Significant Cultural Challenge

Mixed parentage of Jew and Greek put Timothy in a special category;
Does not mention that his father was a believer; everybody knew his father was a Greek; they knew the religious tension that had been in his home; they would have known that he had never been circumcised; did he really embrace the Jewish culture?? Father had probably passed away by this time so his mother was a widow

MacArthur: Now people say, "How old was Timothy when this started?" The best guess would be between 16 and 25 years old. He was a young man and I think Paul enjoyed the opportunity to disciple young men. . . the particular imperfect tense that is used in relationship to Timothy's father indicates that Timothy's father was perhaps dead. . . son of a widow; 1 Tim. 4:14 – commissioning service; 2 Tim. 1:6

[12 years later still referred to as a very young man]

C. (:2) Character References – Consistent recognition of his spiritual maturity and giftedness

"*and he was well spoken of by the brethren who were in Lystra and Iconium.*"

ὃς ἐμαρτυρεῖτο ὑπὸ τῶν ἐν Λύστροις καὶ Ἰκονίῳ ἀδελφῶν.

Demonstrated fruit of the Holy Spirit – "*But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control*" (**Gal. 5:22-23**) – this was the measuring stick Paul would have used – somehow he was attracted to the young man because he could see Christ in Timothy

Already displaying significant spiritual giftedness in evangelism and preaching and encouraging others – **1 Tim. 4:14-16**

Humility and Servant Heart – look at the character requirements for leadership in **1 Tim. 3**
Phil. 2:19-22

II. (:3) PRECAUTIONARY RITUAL -- COMMISSIONING

A. Enthusiastic Appointment

"*Paul wanted this man to go with him;*"

τοῦτον ἠθέλησεν ὁ Παῦλος σὺν αὐτῷ ἐξελθεῖν,

Quite an endorsement on the part of the great apostle; especially since he had just been so adamant against taking John Mark

Not a matter of self promotion and selfish ambition on the part of Timothy; endorsed by the Apostle Paul himself

Think about the corporate recruiters that come around to college campuses and offer internships to those who seem to have the most potential; How would you like to be recruited by the Apostle Paul? Think back to how Jesus Christ chose the 12 Apostles – not always using the criteria that the world might have found impressive; Paul had insight into Timothy's character and knew that he would be a faithful servant for the Lord

How would the Lord evaluate your readiness for spiritual service? Are you someone that spiritual leaders can count on; do you want to sit on the sidelines or be deployed to the front lines?

Opportunity for training someone gifted in preaching and teaching and leadership;

Opportunity for gaining a valuable resource that would help them in their ministry

B. Expedient Accommodation – Surprising Action on Paul's Part

"*and he took him and circumcised him because of the Jews who were in those parts, for they all knew that his father was a Greek.*"

καὶ λαβὼν περιέτεμεν αὐτὸν διὰ τοὺς Ἰουδαίους τοὺς ὄντας ἐν τοῖς τόποις ἐκείνοις· ᾔδεισαν γὰρ ἅπαντες ὅτι Ἕλλην ὁ πατὴρ αὐτοῦ ὑπῆρχεν.

- Point of submission and sacrifice on the part of Timothy – not something he especially wanted for himself – not dying at age 21 to be circumcised – test of his character and desire to serve

- Act of love and accommodation to reach out to the Jews in effective ministry – not an issue regarding salvation here (later Paul refused to order Titus, a Greek, to be circumcised); not confusing the decree from the Jerusalem Council

Kent: Paul has been criticized for having Timothy circumcised in the light of the recent controversy at Jerusalem. However, it is clear that neither Paul nor Luke saw any inconsistency, for the very next sentence states that Paul conveyed the decisions of the Council. It should be remembered that the Jerusalem Council dealt with requirements for gentile converts, but Timothy was partly Jewish. Furthermore, this circumcision was not for salvation but was performed to make Timothy acceptable to synagogue audiences (not to placate Judaizing Christians). The operation regularized his status and increased his usefulness to Paul in Jewish areas.

Barnes: It was an act of expediency for the sake of peace, and was in accordance with Paul's uniform and avowed principle of conduct. 1 Corinthians 9:20, "*And unto the Jews I became as a Jew, that I might gain the Jews.*" Comp. Acts 21:23-26.

Stott: Little minds would have condemned him for inconsistency. But there was a deep consistency in his thought and action. Once the principle had been established that circumcision was not necessary for salvation, he was ready to make concessions in policy. What was unnecessary for acceptance with God was advisable for acceptance by some human beings.

Bruce: It was Timothy's mixed parentage that made Paul decide to circumcise him before taking him along as a travel-companion. In the eyes of Jews, Timothy was a Gentile because he was the uncircumcised son of a Greek. In Gentile eyes, however, he was practically a Jew, having been brought up in his mother's religion. Paul therefore regularized his status (and, in Jewish eyes, legitimized him) by circumcising him.

Steven Cole: In Galatians 2:3, Paul states that Titus, a Gentile, was not required to undergo circumcision. So why circumcise Timothy, but not Titus? With Titus, it was a question of whether a man is justified by grace through faith alone, or whether he must also keep the Law of Moses. It would have compromised the very gospel to circumcise Titus. But with Timothy, who was half-Jewish, it was a matter of causing needless offense to unbelieving Jews. Circumcision would allow Timothy to accompany Paul and Silas into the synagogues where they often preached. So it was a matter of becoming a Jew to the Jews, so that he could win the Jews (1 Cor. 9:20). Paul did not want anything to hinder Jewish people from hearing and believing the gospel.

MacArthur: In every kind of missionary endeavor we need to be very careful that we acknowledge certain priorities in terms of being careful about things. Every culture has its own uniqueness and any missionary who goes into any culture; any evangelist who goes into any situation must understand that there are characteristics about that situation which he has to be aware of. There needs to be precaution, and best of all it is saying to us we need to be sensitive to

people so we can adapt to the most advantageous approach in evangelism, the right precautions.

III. (:4-5) PROGRESS REPORT -- SERVICE

A. (:4) Ensuring Gentile Compliance with Jerusalem Council Decrees

"*Now while they were passing through the cities, they were delivering the decrees, which had been decided upon by the apostles and elders who were in Jerusalem, for them to observe.*"

Ὡς δὲ διεπορεύοντο τὰς πόλεις, παρεδίδοσαν αὐτοῖς φυλάσσειν τὰ δόγματα τὰ κεκριμένα ὑπὸ τῶν ἀποστόλων καὶ πρεσβυτέρων τῶν ἐν Ἰεροσολύμοις.

What did Paul say when folks asked him about Barnabas??

Authority inherent in these decrees from the apostles and elders at the Jerusalem Council

Able to balance being a man of biblical conviction with being able to accommodate the cultural preferences of those he was trying to reach with the gospel; nothing soft about Paul; but not insensitive either – knew how to speak the truth in love with a gracious spirit and from a servant heart

B. (:5) Edifying and Enlarging the Churches

"*So the churches were being strengthened in the faith, and were increasing in number daily.*"

Αἱ μὲν οὖν ἐκκλησίαι ἐστερεοῦντο τῇ πίστει καὶ ἐπερίσσευον τῷ ἀριθμῷ καθ᾽ ἡμέραν.

Another one of these progress report notations sprinkled throughout the book of Acts

Stott: So wise and healthy was the Jerusalem Council's decision, incorporated in their letter, that wherever its good news went, the churches grew in stability and steadfastness.

Church growth scenario

CONCLUSION:

As Paul closes out his ministry, he wants to encourage young Timothy to continue to take up the mantle of leadership and press on – his confidence in Timothy to include him on the missionary team has been proved out on the battlefield of spiritual warfare – look at what Paul has to say in his final words to Timothy:

2 Tim. 3:10 – 4:2

* * * * * * * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

1) What types of preparation and qualifications do you feel are most essential for Christian ministry?

2) What cultural accommodations have you made in order to be more accepted and effective as an ambassador for Jesus Christ?

3) How important was it for all of the churches to embrace the findings of the Jerusalem Council?

4) In your experience, have you seen the connection between the strengthening of church members in their maturity and faith and the effectiveness of their outreach to the unsaved?

* * * * * * * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Stott: Paul's concessions in Acts 15 and 16 are entirely in keeping with the conciliatory teaching of his letters. He urged Christians with a "strong" (or educated) conscience not to violate the consciences of the "weak" (or over-scrupulous). A strong conscience gives us liberty of behavior, but we should limit our liberty out of love for the weak. Again, though free, Paul was willing to make himself a slave to others. To those under the law he was prepared to become like one under the law, in order to win those under the law. Was that not exactly what he was doing when he circumcised Timothy, as also when some years later he accepted James' proposal in Jerusalem that he join in certain Jewish purification rites (21:17-26)?

Barclay: Timothy was a lad with a great heritage. He had had a good mother and good grandmother (2 Timothy 1:5). Often in the days to come he was to be Paul's messenger (1 Corinthians 4:17; 1 Thessalonians 3:2-6). He was at Rome with Paul when the apostle was in prison (Philippians 1:1; 2:19; Colossians 1:1; Philemon 1). Timothy was in a very special relationship to Paul. When Paul wrote to the Corinthians (1 Corinthians 4:17) he called him his beloved son. When he wrote to the Philippians he said that there was no one whose mind was so much at one with his own (Philippians 2:19-20). It seems very likely that Paul saw in Timothy his successor when he had to lay down his work. Happy indeed is the man to whom it is given to see the result of his training in one who can take up the burden when he lays it down.

Bock: In sum, what is seen here is Paul's cultural sensitivity. Instead of making Timothy a sideshow to the gospel in terms of whether he was a Jew or not, Paul permitted circumcision so that the gospel would remain the main topic. Knowing which principles are worth standing up for and which ideas are not worth elevating to an importance they do not deserve is a sign of discernment and leadership. Not every issue is worth starting a war over when it comes to the gospel and the ethnic unity of the church.

Deffinbaugh: Notes on Discipleship

(1) Discipleship is not for the elite in Christianity, but for all Christians.

(2) Salvation is the first step, commencing a life of discipleship. Salvation should not be seen apart from discipleship.

(3) Some have neglected discipleship in evangelism, tending toward an easy believism. They seem to be inviting men and women to have a kind of spiritual 'affair' with our Lord. They do not stress that the relationship is one of eternal commitment and far-reaching consequences.

Others have over-stressed or over-programmed it, failing to realize that it is ultimately the work of God and a life-long process.

(4) We have erroneously applied our Lord's relationship with the twelve and Paul's relationship with Timothy to discipleship. We have confused discipleship with apostleship. We have overlooked the matter of gift and calling. We have confused spirituality with certain kinds of service.

(5) We have made the matter of discipleship primarily an individual enterprise rather than a collective command to the corporate church.

(6) We have placed the emphasis upon finding a person to be our leader and guide, rather than developing a dependence on Christ Himself.

Dr. Drew Conley – **Called up to Active Duty**
Introduced here to a new servant of the Lord; church is full of too many celebrities and not enough servants; major development when you think of how Paul refers to Timothy later; three years earlier Paul and Barnabas had been evangelizing Lystra; if anybody could rightly be considered Paul's successor it would be Timothy; probably 21 in Acts 16; Paul had a high standard for those who would serve with him; Why did he choose Timothy? You should hate sitting on the sidelines; you want to get in the game; into active service for Christ;

1. (:1-2) Qualifications for Service – often a bypassing of the fundamental qualifications;
2 Universal Requirements for spiritual service and one unique characteristic:
- a disciple; learner; follower – can't be a leader until you are a proven follower; first must be born again and become a genuine follower of Jesus Christ; are you walking with Christ?
- well reported of in terms of character and life by the brethren – word we get martyr from; credible witness or testimony; continuous ongoing pattern (from verb tense); 1 Tim. 4:14-16; show by your life that God has called you; others could see Christ in him
- unique characteristic: part Greek and part Jew – God, why did you put me in this type of family; unsaved dad who probably died while he was still young; living in a very Greek type of culture; fulfill what God wants you to do; particularly suited to upcoming ministry of Paul

2. (:3) Opportunity for Service -- Paul wanted Timothy to join up; not self promotion or personal ambition on the part of Timothy; don't clamor for a place to serve; work hard to be a servant and God will give you a place; Spurgeon: Be more concerned about your ability than your opportunity; and most of all concerned about your walk with God; cf. all the preparatory work before you become a surgeon; you don't just start off cutting on people; God blesses likeness to Jesus more than great talents; talent is not equivalent to godliness; if you're too smart to serve, you're actually too dumb; God wants your heart; cf. piddly amount of money put in the right stock and you end up with a fortune; stop worrying about how much or how little talent you have; put what you have on the altar and let God use it; Circumcision was a test of Timothy's character and desire to serve; willingness to sacrifice for others; not a contradiction to the Jerusalem Council; 1 Cor. 9 – I'll give up anything to reach people for Christ; opens door of opportunity for Timothy to minister to Jews while not cutting off access to Greeks; better to get that operation when you are only a few days old than when you are 21; are you willing to give up something of yourself and put self on the back burner;

3. (:4-5) Impact for Service – Timothy got to take part in what God was doing in the churches

at that time through the apostolic ministry; in Christ Jew and Gentile are one; don't have to become a Jew first to become right with God; salvation by grace through faith as free gift from God; maintain unity of body in love through deference to one another; established in the faith like muscles are established when you work them; taught the truth of the gospel; these believers had interaction with lost people; not cloistered; Look at the consistent order:
More suitable workers leads to strengthening of the church which leads to increase of the church

Dr. John Vaughn: **Keeping the Rules -- in Balance**
Story of how Timothy joined Paul in the ministry; importance of keeping the rules but keeping them in balance; we need balance in our lives; Sailing thru sea of clarity we see an island of apparent contradiction; truth must be kept in balance; can't pick up trombone and blare away on the same note all the name; music has variety of pitch, instrument, volume, etc. Must have all the elements of music in balance to have a symphony; the Judaizers had been trying to enforce the OT law on the new Gentile believers; there are some practical things you must do but keeping the law is not one of them; avoid offenses to the Jews and Gentiles and to the gospel; going up to Turkey and Greece and tell them you don't have to submit to this rite; very surprising

1. (:1-2) People who are grounded in the Word of God are <u>Growing People</u> -- will grow spiritually because that is where you meet the Lord Jesus Christ
The place of greatest opposition is often the place of greatest opportunity
Great difficulty can lead to great opportunity
Timothy had leadership ability; loved the Lord; continually giving a good testimony about Timothy; probably ordained right at that time; if you want to be a leader go ahead and start leading right now; be an encouragement to young people who are showing leadership ability; both young and wise

2. (:3) People who are grounded in the Word of God are <u>Knowing People</u> -- will have insight into spiritual potential and leadership potential in others
Paul wanted him as an understudy; someone he could groom for the ministry; you shouldn't insist on your rights if it hinders your ministry; balance in the ministry; he needed to honor the Jews in order to reach the Jews for Christ; remove a stumbling block to a group of people he could reach; don't have the attitude: "I don't have to do this and you can't make me!"

3) (:4-5) People who are grounded in the Word of God are <u>Overflowing People</u>

TEXT: Acts 16:6-15

TITLE: OPENING DOORS AND OPENING HEARTS -- MACEDONIAN CALL AND SALVATION OF LYDIA

BIG IDEA:
GOSPEL OUTREACH DEPENDS ON GOD'S SOVEREIGN INITIATIVE IN OPENING DOORS AND OPENING HEARTS

INTRODUCTION:
Do you ever get discouraged in your efforts at reaching out to others with the gospel message? Do you wonder why your ministry plans just don't seem to work out the way that you envisioned? Does it seem like you are witnessing to hearts of stone that have no response to God's gracious offer of new life? It is easy to get discouraged in Christian ministry if we forget our dependence upon the **sovereign initiative of God**. We are severely limited in what we can accomplish and God has ordained it to be that way. We can plan our course, but ultimately God is the one who closes certain doors and opens other doors of opportunity. We can try to persuade people of the truth of God's plan of salvation, but ultimately God must open hearts before people are able to respond in repentance and faith.

The Apostle Paul and his missionary team, despite their superior giftedness, faced the same limitations we do today. But they saw those limitations as a protection against discouragement. They expected success in their evangelistic efforts because they understood that:

GOSPEL OUTREACH DEPENDS ON GOD'S SOVEREIGN INITIATIVE IN OPENING DOORS AND OPENING HEARTS

2 SOVEREIGN DIVINE INITIATIVES THAT ARE ESSENTIAL FOR GOSPEL FRUIT
God is still at work today in these two very crucial areas.

I. (:6-10) OPENING DOORS -- THE HOLY SPIRIT DIRECTS OUR MINISTRY EFFORTS BY CLOSING AND OPENING DOORS FOR THE GOSPEL

A. (:6-7) Two Closed Doors = Asia and Bithynia

1. (:6) Asia: Closed Door

> "*And they passed through the Phrygian and Galatian region, having been forbidden by the Holy Spirit to speak the word in Asia;*"
>
> Διῆλθον δὲ τὴν Φρυγίαν καὶ Γαλατικὴν χώραν κωλυθέντες ὑπὸ τοῦ ἁγίου πνεύματος λαλῆσαι τὸν λόγον ἐν τῇ Ἀσίᾳ·

Looked like a tremendous opportunity from a natural perspective; but not the direction that the Lord was leading Paul and his missionary team of Silas and Timothy

- Galatic Phrygia = region of Iconium and Pisidian Antioch

Strange paradox: commanded to speak the word and yet forbidden by the Holy Spirit in certain contexts

Look at how active the *Holy Spirit* is in directing the movements of the missionary team

James 4:15 "*Instead, you ought to say, 'If the Lord wills, we will live and also do this or that*.'"

Prov. 19:21 "*Many plans are in a man's heart, But the counsel of the Lord will stand*."

Prov. 16:9 "*The mind of man plans his way, But the Lord directs his steps*."

Lam. 3:37 "*Who is there who speaks and it comes to pass, Unless the Lord has commanded it*?"

Paul learned this lesson: **Acts 18:21** "*I will return to you again if God wills*"
Important to make plans … but with the humility that God is in charge and will direct; we can't be stubborn and insistent on our agenda and itinerary

Rom. 1:10 "*always in my prayers making request, if perhaps now at last by the will of God I may succeed in coming to you*." There have been previous attempts and failures – God changes our plans all the time

Does not mean that the Word of God did not spread into Asia – just that God was not directing Paul's missionary team in that direction at this time.

2. (:7) Bithynia: Closed Door

> "*and when they had come to Mysia, they were trying to go into Bithynia, and the Spirit of Jesus did not permit them;*"
>
> ἐλθόντες δὲ κατὰ τὴν Μυσίαν ἐπείραζον εἰς τὴν Βιθυνίαν πορευθῆναι, καὶ οὐκ εἴασεν αὐτοὺς τὸ πνεῦμα Ἰησοῦ·

;an area on the north of Asia Minor, on the southern shore of the Black Sea.

Nothing wrong with effort directed towards initiating ministry on our part; we need to try to do what is strategic and what seems best to us in making the best use of our spiritual gifts; the Lord knows how to close and open doors

Stott: How the Holy Spirit did his preventive work on these two occasions we can only guess. It may have been through giving the missionaries a strong, united inward impression, or through some outward circumstance like illness, Jewish opposition or a legal ban, or through the utterance of a Christian prophet, perhaps Silas himself (15:32). At all events, having come from the east, and having found the south-westerly and northerly roads obstructed, the only direction left open to them was **north-west**.

Jeff Hughes: How? How did the Holy Spirit restrain Paul from going into Asia? Most Bible scholars believe Paul was struck at this time with a brutal infirmity, a sickness, with a fever so severe that his eyesight would be permanently damaged.

Look at the proportion of negative guidance to positive guidance

Note how here the reference is the to *Spirit of Jesus*
Kent: Inasmuch as the Spirit was sent by the Father and the Son (John 14:26; 16:7), he is

variously referred to as the Spirit of God, the Spirit of Christ (Rom. 8:9), or the Spirit of Jesus.

Application: How do we respond to **closed doors** from the Lord?

Guzik: At the time, Paul probably had no idea of the greatness of God's purpose. God wanted to give him a continent for Jesus, to give him a personal doctor, and to give all of us the man whom God would use to write more of the New Testament than anyone else did. God knows what He is doing when he says, "No."

B. (:8-10) One Open Door = Macedonia

1. Sense of Divine Mission -- Keep Moving Forward – don't be discouraged by closed doors – just means God is leading you to keep moving – not to quit

"*and passing by Mysia, they came down to Troas.*"

παρελθόντες δὲ τὴν Μυσίαν κατέβησαν εἰς Τρῳάδα.

Ended up, due to Paul's persistence, at the end of their journey – up against the seacoast … nowhere else to go – in desperate need of God's direction

2. Sense of Human Need -- Expect Divine Direction

"*And a vision appeared to Paul in the night: a certain man of Macedonia was standing and appealing to him, and saying, 'Come over to Macedonia and help us.*'"

Καὶ ὅραμα διὰ [τῆς] νυκτὸς τῷ Παύλῳ ὤφθη, ἀνὴρ Μακεδών τις ἦν ἑστὼς καὶ παρακαλῶν αὐτὸν καὶ λέγων· διαβὰς εἰς Μακεδονίαν βοήθησον ἡμῖν.

Boice: Maybe one reason why the Protestant churches in this country in particular are not prospering is that they are going to those who are prospering when they ought to go to those who have known needs.

Are the heathen nations calling out to your heart: Send the Light?

3. Sense of Ministry Urgency – Follow the Call of God

"*And when he had seen the vision, immediately we sought to go into Macedonia, concluding that God had called us to preach the gospel to them.*"

ὡς δὲ τὸ ὅραμα εἶδεν, εὐθέως ἐζητήσαμεν ἐξελθεῖν εἰς Μακεδονίαν συμβιβάζοντες ὅτι προσκέκληται ἡμᾶς ὁ θεὸς εὐαγγελίσασθαι αὐτούς.

Kent: the first of the so-called "*we*" sections of the book, and it is commonly assumed that the author Luke became a participant in the events at this time.

Cole: We can also surmise that Paul left Luke behind to pastor the fledgling church at Philippi, because the narrative shifts back to "they" in 17:1 and remains that way until Paul sails from Philippi with Luke in 20:5, 6, about seven years later.

Illustration: Using a personnel consultant to for Leadership Evaluation – one of the key components is that sense of **Urgency**

No time to waste; looking for pathway of obedience – not resisting or trying to avoid it

What is the best possible help we can provide to a lost world?? Not the social gospel, but the **spiritual gospel**

Application: How do we respond to **open doors** from the Lord?

Boice: We need to understand that "closed doors," though they are a type of negative guidance, are nevertheless true guidance. If we can learn anything from the apostle Paul here, we learn that negative guidance merely keeps us from where we are not called in order that in God's time we might come to where God is calling us and will provide blessing.

II. (:11-15) OPENING HEARTS -- THE LORD BRINGS GOSPEL FRUIT BY OPENING PREPARED HEARTS TO RESPOND TO THE GOSPEL MESSAGE

Presupposition:

- Hearts are closed to the gospel, incapable of responding on their own
- Minds are blinded to the gospel; human reason cannot rescue anyone
- Will is enslaved to sin; in bondage; self help programs doomed to failure
- People are spiritually dead, separated from God, enemies of God

A. (:11-12) Strategic Base of Operations in Philippi

"*Therefore putting out to sea from Troas, we ran a straight course to Samothrace, and on the day following to Neapolis; and from there to Philippi, which is a leading city of the district of Macedonia, a Roman colony; and we were staying in this city for some days.*"

Ἀναχθέντες δὲ ἀπὸ Τρῳάδος εὐθυδρομήσαμεν εἰς Σαμοθρᾴκην, τῇ δὲ ἐπιούσῃ εἰς Νέαν πόλιν κἀκεῖθεν εἰς Φιλίππους, ἥτις ἐστὶν πρώτη[ς] μερίδος τῆς Μακεδονίας πόλις, κολωνία. Ἦμεν δὲ ἐν ταύτῃ τῇ πόλει διατρίβοντες ἡμέρας τινάς.

Stott: They must have enjoyed a favourable wind to complete their 150-mile journey in only two days, since it took them five days on their return (20:6).

Kent: Philippi was the first European city in which Paul preached. It was located on the Egnatian Way, the Roman highway which connected the Aegean Sea with the Adriatic. The city had the status of a colony which meant that it had been organized by the state and was actually a military outpost. . . The people were given the rights of Roman citizens. The distinctive prerogatives of a colony were autonomous government, immunity from tribute and taxation (at least in some cases), and treatment as if they actually lived in Italy.

- A leading city – *prote* – "first, chief" – honorary title bestowed on some cities
- Not the capital of the province of Macedonia; that was Thessalonica
- Not the capital city of its district; that was Amphipolis

Stott: Luke is expressing pride in what was probably his own city.

Boice: A new alignment of the missionaries [Paul and Silas], a new worker in the person of Timothy, and a new vision [Macedonian Call] issued in the founding of a new church, the church at Philippi.

B. (:13) Targeted First Adopter Group – Jewish Women in Prayer Service

"*And on the Sabbath day we went outside the gate to a riverside, where we were supposing that there would be a place of prayer; and we sat down and began speaking to the women who had assembled.*"

τῇ τε ἡμέρᾳ τῶν σαββάτων ἐξήλθομεν ἔξω τῆς πύλης παρὰ ποταμὸν οὗ ἐνομίζομεν προσευχὴν εἶναι, καὶ καθίσαντες ἐλαλοῦμεν ταῖς συνελθούσαις γυναιξίν.

Kent: The absence of men at the prayer place may explain why there was no synagogue in the city, for ten Jewish men were required for its establishment.

C. (:14-15a) Specific Prepared Hearts -- Salvation and Baptism of Lydia and Her Household

"*And a certain woman named Lydia, from the city of Thyatira, a seller of purple fabrics, a worshiper of God, was listening; and the Lord opened her heart to respond to the things spoken by Paul. And when she and her household had been baptized,*"

καί τις γυνὴ ὀνόματι Λυδία, πορφυρόπωλις πόλεως Θυατείρων σεβομένη τὸν θεόν, ἤκουεν, ἧς ὁ κύριος διήνοιξεν τὴν καρδίαν προσέχειν τοῖς λαλουμένοις ὑπὸ τοῦ Παύλου. ὡς δὲ ἐβαπτίσθη καὶ ὁ οἶκος αὐτῆς,

MacArthur: There were two kinds of dyes they used. The first kind was for the rich people. You know, most of the purple stuff was for, you know, royalty and all that. And they use to extract this purple dye drop by drop from a little thing called a murex which was a shell-fish. And they would catch these shell-fish and they would extract drop by drop this precious purple dye and really super rich people would have purple dye from the murex shell-fish for their garments. And like everything, once the elite get it all of us peons want to get in on the thing, so the next thing you know they had to come up with a second class dye and they got it from an extraction from a madder root and they used that for the commoners dye. Well, she was in this business.

Aside: Lord has always favored the color **purple** – Go Ravens! Color of royalty

Not everybody is listening when we are speaking the gospel

"*the Lord opened her heart to respond*" = key to the passage

2 Cor. 4:4-6 "*For God, who said, 'Light shall shine out of darkness,' is the One who has shown in our hearts to give the Light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ.*"

2 Thess 2:13-14 "*God has chosen you from the beginning for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and faith in the truth. It was for this He called you through our gospel, that you may gain the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.*"

D. (:15b) Reality of Conversion Demonstrated by Insistent Spiritual Service -- Hospitality Shown by Lydia

> "*she urged us, saying, 'If you have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come into my house and stay.' And she prevailed upon us.*"
>
> παρεκάλεσεν λέγουσα· εἰ κεκρίκατέ με πιστὴν τῷ κυρίῳ εἶναι, εἰσελθόντες εἰς τὸν οἶκόν μου μένετε· καὶ παρεβιάσατο ἡμᾶς.

Theme of **Hospitality** --
Interesting: you don't have those in need of hospitality begging for help; you have those with a heart for spiritual service begging for the opportunity to provide that blessing.

Rom. 12:9-13 "*Let love be without hypocrisy. Abhor what is evil; cling to what is good. Be devoted to one another in brotherly love; give preference to one another in honor; not lagging behind in diligence, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord; rejoicing in hope, persevering in tribulation, devoted to prayer, contributing to the needs of the saints, practicing hospitality*."

1 Pet. 4:7-9 "*The end of all things is near; therefore, be of sound judgment and sober spirit for the purpose of prayer. Above all, keep fervent in your love for one another, because love covers a multitude of sins. Be hospitable to one another without complaint*."

Heb. 13:1-2 "*Let love of the brethren continue. Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by this some have entertained angels without knowing it*."

CONCLUSION:
Look at all the things that went wrong for the Apostle Paul at the beginning of this second missionary journey. He just couldn't seem to get on the right track … the Holy Spirit kept putting up road blocks and closing doors.

Illustration: A young man was learning to be a paratrooper. Before his first jump, he was given these instructions: Jump when you are told. Count to ten and pull the rip cord. In the unlikely event your parachute doesn't open, pull the emergency rip cord. When you get down, a truck will be there to take you back to the airport.

The young man memorized these instructions and climbed aboard the plane. The plane climbed to ten thousand feet and the paratroopers began to jump. When the young man was told to jump, he jumped. He then counted to ten and pulled the rip cord. Nothing happened. His chute failed to open. So he pulled the emergency rip cord. Still, nothing happened. No parachute.

"Oh great," said the young man. "And I guess the truck won't be there when I get down either!"

Look at how the Lord blessed as Paul didn't get discouraged but trusted in God's sovereignty to open the right doors at the right time and open hearts to respond to the message of salvation.

GOSPEL OUTREACH DEPENDS ON GOD'S SOVEREIGN INITIATIVE IN OPENING DOORS AND OPENING HEARTS

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DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

1) Are we passively waiting for divine direction when we should be on the move and expecting God to direct us?

2) Do we have compassion for the spiritual needs of those around us?

3) Do our methods of evangelism reflect a dependence upon the sovereignty of God to open the hearts of those He has prepared to respond in repentance and faith?

4) Should we just assume that everyone who professes salvation is a genuine believer?

* * * * * * * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Stott: I agree with Campbell Morgan who wrote: "That invasion of Europe was not in the mind of Paul, but it was evidently in the mind of the Spirit." With the benefit of hindsight, knowing that Europe became the first Christian continent and was until fairly recently the main base for missionary outreach to the rest of the world, we can see what an epoch-making development this was. It was from Europe that in due course the gospel fanned out to the great continents of Africa, Asia, North America, Latin America and Oceania, and so reached the ends of the world.

Stott: quoting A. T. Pierson – *prohibition and restraint* . . . vs *permission and constraint* . . . Pierson went on to give some later examples from the history of missions of this same "double guidance": Livingstone tried to go to China, but God sent him to Africa instead. Before him, Carey planned to go to Polynesia in the South Seas, but God guided him to India. Judson went to India first, but was driven on to Burma. We too in our day, Pierson concludes, "need to trust him for guidance and rejoice equally in his restraints and constraints." . . .

From this we may learn that usually God's guidance is not negative only but also positive (some doors close, others open); not circumstantial only, but also rational (thinking about our situation); not personal only, but also corporate (a sharing of the data with others, so that we can mull over them together and reach a common mind).

MacArthur: Friends, a great way to know you where God wants you to work, just start going any old direction and watch Him close doors and just keep pressing on until you find an open one. So many times the will of God is like that thing at the amusement park with all the mirrors. You keep smashing into things and finally there's an open one and you go through it but you know it takes persistence, doesn't it? . . .

That only took two days. The return trip took five days. And so we conclude that the sea and the wind was favorable. And again without spiritualizing it let me remind you that when God opens the door, the boat is ready and the winds are favorable. When it's time to move then God really moves, see . .

Ray Pritchard: How does **God's Guidance** come to us?
#1: Guidance comes through obedience in the ordinary. Just do it!

#2: Guidance comes through suddenly changing circumstances.
#3: Guidance may come through supernatural events.
#4: Guidance comes through wise counsel joined with common sense.

Jerry Shirley: **The Vision, the Venture, and the Victory – the Gospel in Europe**
Psalm 37:23 "*The steps of a good man are ordered by the Lord…*"
This can apply to us personally, to our families, finances, moves, businesses, decisions, dating, our church, etc.

But also, the "stops" of a good man are ordered by the Lord.

Sometimes God closes doors, puts up roadblocks, when we are going the wrong way.

This isn't an audible voice, but sometimes it's an inner impression, a lack of peace inside. God sometimes uses outward circumstances to guide us, like a door closing…and the worst thing we can do is kick it down and barge thru anyway. If we insist on having our way God may do something that we won't like in the end…He may let us! . . .

Examples of catching the vision for lost souls:
David Brainerd, won many thousands of American Indians to Christ. He said, "I cared not where or how I lived, or what hardships I went thru, so that I could but gain souls for Christ. While I was asleep I dreamed of these things, and when I awoke, it was the first thought that I had, the thought of this great work."
He caught the vision, he heard the Indians crying, "come over here and help us!"

David Livingston, the first man to take the gospel into the heart of Africa, said, "I must open a way to the interior or perish!"
It was do or die…he caught the vision, and he heard the Africans crying, "come over here and help us!"

J. Hudson Taylor, pioneer Missionary to China, said, "I feel as though I cannot live if something is not done for China."

William Booth, founder of the Salvation Army, said, "Oh, God, what can I say? Souls! Souls! Souls! My heart hungers for souls!"

David Dykes: Illustration:
In the late 19th century, cotton was king in South Alabama. Cotton was the sole crop and brought prosperity to that part of the country. In the early 20th century a natural disaster occurred. The Mexican Boll Weevil crossed into Texas and spread from here. Those little boll weevils loved cotton and by 1915, the farmers in South Alabama were broke. One farmer decided to try growing peanuts and in the first year produced over 6,000 bushels. Other farmers planted peanuts and other crops, and prosperity soon returned.

What was first seen as a disaster–a closed door for cotton–actually became a tremendous blessing because the farmers were forced to diversify. In 1919 the city of Enterprise, Alabama erected a monument to the Boll Weevil.

TEXT: Acts 16: 16-24

TITLE: DEMONIC RELIGIOUS PROFITEERING

BIG IDEA:
THE DISTINCTIVENESS OF THE GOSPEL MUST NOT BE SULLIED BY ASSOCIATION WITH DEMONIC RELIGIOUS PROFITEERING

INTRODUCTION:
Are you appalled as I am at the amount of **profiteering** surrounding false religion in our day? Just look at the false teachers who tickle the ears of their vast followers on TV or radio broadcasts. Follow the money stream; examine their extravagant lifestyles and you will see that they have nothing in common with those who offer the unadulterated gospel message free of charge and from pure motives of serving the Lord.

Examples:

Go back in history and look at Martin Luther's complaints against the **Roman Catholic Church**; he exposed how the church took advantage of its people's faith for monetary gain – the practice of the selling of indulgences, etc. Even today the Vatican doesn't lack for money – you have these sex charge scandals involving the priests and huge payouts of cash settlements – no lack of funds

Rev. Sun Myung Moon – Unification Church – at one time a robust, diverse business -- especially in the Washington area, where the movement controlled more than **$300 million** in commercial, political and cultural enterprises – including ownership of the Washington Times

Ministry of **Joel Osteen** – get closer to the truth of the gospel – just that much more deceptive an American author, televangelist, and the senior pastor of Lakewood Church in Houston, Texas. His ministry reaches over seven million broadcast media viewers weekly in over 100 nations around the world; preaches the prosperity gospel, a belief that wealth and power are rewards for pious Christians

Certainly there is a ton of money involved today in **occult practices** and **fortunetelling**, etc. – I don't even want to get close enough to these demonic inspired pursuits to examine them

There can be no peaceful co-existing with false religions and their greedy exploitation;
No tolerance of demonic religious superstitions with their false promises and false hopes

THE DISTINCTIVENESS OF THE GOSPEL MUST NOT BE SULLIED BY ASSOCIATION WITH DEMONIC RELIGIOUS PROFITEERING

Last week we saw the gospel impacting a different segment of society – the rich and influential represented by Lydia as the Lord opened her heart to understand the message and liberated her from the bondage of her sin; Today we see a woman from a different social and economic class – a young slave-girl – exploited by a number of masters or pimps – someone who is in desperate bondage to a demon who is using her as a mouthpiece

Brock: Bruce notes that in Philippi [in Acts 16] three very different kinds of individuals are singled out: religious women, a possessed woman from the "dark side" and a simple "secular soldier." Williams argues that they are the three groups held in contempt by Jews: women, slaves, and Gentiles – so all gender, ethnic, and social barriers are crossed.

Simple Outline: **Action and Reaction**

I. (:16-18) ACTION = EXORCISING DEMONS -- DEMONIC RELIGIOUS PROFITEERING MUST BE EXPOSED AS FRAUDULENT AND POWERLESS BEFORE THE AUTHORITY OF JESUS CHRIST

A. (:16) Contrast Between Prayer and Profiteering – Between Evangelism and Exploitation – Between Ministry and Money-Making

> "*And it happened that as we were going to the place of prayer, a certain slave-girl having a spirit of divination met us, who was bringing her masters much profit by fortunetelling.*"
>
> Ἐγένετο δὲ πορευομένων ἡμῶν εἰς τὴν προσευχὴν παιδίσκην τινὰ ἔχουσαν πνεῦμα πύθωνα ὑπαντῆσαι ἡμῖν, ἥτις ἐργασίαν πολλὴν παρεῖχεν τοῖς κυρίοις αὐτῆς μαντευομένη.

Paul and the missionary team had this awkward encounter in the course of their normal day of ministry – they weren't looking for a confrontation with satanic forces; the devil in the form of his henchmen found them

Sad case of this poor young slave-girl; being used as a mouthpiece for the evil one; in bondage in so many respects; but apparently she was very effective from a business standpoint – bringing in a ton of profit – what a business model – no costs – just profits dropping right to the bottom line

Python spirit – name of a dragon that guarded the oracles of Delphi – associated with the worship of their false gods; she had the fortunetelling power – very valuable commodity to her owners who were making a ton of money off her pronouncements

Peter Loughman: What they had was a portable Delphi oracle. Instead of people having to travel all the way to Delphi to hear what the god Apollo has to say about their particular situation, folks could just come to them. The slave girl functions like a fortune teller. Customers pay a fee, and the slave girl would give an utterance concerning the customer's situation. You can imagine, people would pay a hefty price to hear the voice of Apollo. Remember, they voice they heard from this slave girl, they attributed to the god Apollo.

We understand from this passage that the fortune telling was inspired by an indwelling demon – raises the question of the nature of demonic activity today?

- Certainly there is still much fortune telling; astrology; occult practices
- Liberals would dismiss this story as a misinformed myth – wanting to characterize all bizarre behavior from strictly a psychological framework; or due to chemical imbalances – but denying the supernatural element
- Some people would understate the level of demonic activity in the church age – just associated with an outbreak at the time when Jesus was physically on earth … but this was after that time
- Some people would overstate the level of demonic activity today and ascribe

everything sinful to direct demonic involvement

- Probably the balanced perspective is to recognize that we are right now involved in serious **spiritual warfare**:

Ephes. 4:12 "*For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places*." So we need the full armor of God

One distinguishing mark between genuine gospel ministry and demonic inspired false teachers will be the motivation factor – if you detect any type of mercenary spirit – trying to get rich from ministry pursuits – that is a huge red flag

<u>Contrast</u> Between Prayer and Profiteering – Between Evangelism and Exploitation – Between Ministry and Money-Making

B. (:17) <u>Confusion/Contamination</u> Over Religious Pluralism vs Uniqueness of Jesus Christ

"*Following after Paul and us, she kept crying out, saying, 'These men are bond-servants of the Most High God, who are proclaiming to you the way of salvation.*"

αὕτη κατακολουθοῦσα τῷ Παύλῳ καὶ ἡμῖν ἔκραζεν λέγουσα· οὗτοι οἱ ἄνθρωποι δοῦλοι τοῦ θεοῦ τοῦ ὑψίστου εἰσίν, οἵτινες καταγγέλλουσιν ὑμῖν ὁδὸν σωτηρίας.

Imperfect tense – *kept crying out*

Perhaps: *a way of salvation* – no definite article – further confusing the issue

MacArthur: "*Most High God*" was an ancient title used by both Jews and Gentiles to identify the one, true, and living God of Israel and distinguish Him from all false idol gods (cf. **Ge 14:18-20**; Nu 24:16; Dt 32:8; Pss 18:13; 21:7; **Is 14:14**; Da 3:26; Lk 1:32; Heb 7:1).

Melchizedek identified as priest of the *Most High God* = possessor of heaven and earth; Satan aspired to be like the Most High God and to possess all things

Confusing for Gentiles to hear this identification – could have been thinking in terms of Zeus and their hierarchy of mythical gods – they would not necessarily make the connection to the exclusivity of the gospel of Jesus Christ; something can be true and yet not explained fully so that there is still confusion and misrepresentation

Slave-girl must have made quite a scene with this advertising – somehow she was making money each day for her masters as well – this was part of their overall business strategy – get attention for their agenda and offer their fortune telling services

Paul certainly was not comfortable with this type of publicity – not the type of herald he would have wanted; did not want his gospel message introduced by a demonic spirit

[how different from **John the Baptist**, a man filled with the Holy Spirit, serving as a forerunner to Jesus – Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world]

C. (:18a) <u>Conflict</u> Escalating by Repeated Association

"*And she continued doing this for many days. But Paul was greatly annoyed,*"

τοῦτο δὲ ἐποίει ἐπὶ πολλὰς ἡμέρας. διαπονηθεὶς δὲ Παῦλος

When do you see Paul getting *annoyed* … in fact, *greatly annoyed*?? Disturbed; burdened

How could Paul let this go on for so many days?
Lenski: We may venture to say that the Lord let it continue as long as he did because he wanted Paul to finish the work in Philippi; for after he drove out the spirit Paul had to leave the city (v. 39, 40).

This Exorcism is not something that we should expect men to be gifted in today; seems very much like an apostolic experience that was rooted in divine revelation in a prophetic sense so that Paul knew when to engage the demonic spirit; not to say that we would not encounter demonic activity and need to pray for deliverance – but not have the same dynamic involved as the apostolic experience

<u>What enraged the Lord Jesus</u>? Seeing religious profiteers contaminating the temple (which should be a house of prayer) with their money-making exploitation of the people

2 Cor. 2:17 "*For we are not like many, peddling the word of God, but as from sincerity, but as from God, we speak in Christ in the sight of God*."
MacArthur: From a Gr. Verb that means: "*to corrupt*;" this word came to refer to corrupt hucksters, or con men who by their cleverness and deception were able to sell as genuine an inferior product that was only a cheap imitation. The false teachers in the church were coming with clever, deceptive rhetoric to offer a degraded, adulterated message that mixed paganism and Jewish tradition. They were dishonest men seeking personal profit and prestige at the expense of gospel truth and people's souls.

Titus 1:11 "*teaching things they should not teach for the sake of sordid gain*"

1 Tim. 6:5 "*who suppose that godliness is a means of gain*"

D. (:18b) <u>Confrontation</u> Between Authority of Jesus Christ and Impotence of Demons

"*and turned and said to the spirit, 'I command you in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her!' And it came out at that very moment.*"

καὶ ἐπιστρέψας τῷ πνεύματι εἶπεν· παραγγέλλω σοι ἐν ὀνόματι Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ ἐξελθεῖν ἀπ᾽ αὐτῆς· καὶ ἐξῆλθεν αὐτῇ τῇ ὥρᾳ.

Not much of a fight put up by the demon; immediate conquest

Mark 5:1-20 casting legion of demons out of man and into herd of swine

Where did the spirit go in this instance??
What happened to the slave-girl – just assumed that she was converted and knit into the church with Lydia, but we don't know that to be true – not the emphasis in the story

Look at the **power of Jesus Christ** over Satan and his demonic forces

Look at the separation we must maintain from any association with false teaching that would compromise the distinctiveness of the gospel message

II. (:19-24) REACTION = ENRAGING DECEIVERS -- THE DISTINCTIVENESS OF THE GOSPEL BRINGS FALSE CHARGES AND PHYSICAL PERSECUTION

5 Characteristics of these enraged deceivers:

A. (:19a) They Increase Their Wealth by Exploitation and Greed

"*But when her masters saw that their hope of profit was gone,*"

ἰδόντες δὲ οἱ κύριοι αὐτῆς ὅτι ἐξῆλθεν ἡ ἐλπὶς τῆς ἐργασίας αὐτῶν,

same Greek word used here for "*gone out*" as in vs. 18 for the demonic spirit departing

Contrast the futile hopes of the world vs the certain hope of believers – are our affections set on things of this world or on the kingdom of God and our heavenly citizenship?

B. (:19b) They Intimidate the Righteous with Strong Arm Tactics

"*they seized Paul and Silas and dragged them into the market place before the authorities,*"

ἐπιλαβόμενοι τὸν Παῦλον καὶ τὸν Σιλᾶν εἵλκυσαν εἰς τὴν ἀγορὰν ἐπὶ τοὺς ἄρχοντας

Brock: Money is more important to them than salvation, not to mention the woman's welfare and dignity.

Bruce: Paul and Silas the most Jewish in appearance (vs. Luke and Timothy)

C. (:20-21) They Invent Malicious Lies and False Charges

1. (:20) Assassinate Their Character – Causing a Riot, political unrest

"*and when they had brought them to the chief magistrates, they said, 'These men are throwing our city into confusion, being Jews,*"'

καὶ προσαγαγόντες αὐτοὺς τοῖς στρατηγοῖς εἶπαν· οὗτοι οἱ ἄνθρωποι ἐκταράσσουσιν ἡμῶν τὴν πόλιν, Ἰουδαῖοι ὑπάρχοντες,

Lenski: The emperor Claudius had recently expelled all Jews from Rome (18:2), and it was the pride of every colonial city to become more or less a replica of Rome. . . . Philippi had scarcely any Jews in it, not enough even to maintain the smallest kind of a synagogue.

2. (:21) Attack Their Message and Lifestyle – Introducing destructive religious cult

"*and are proclaiming customs which it is not lawful for us to accept or to observe, being Romans.*"

καὶ καταγγέλλουσιν ἔθη ἃ οὐκ ἔξεστιν ἡμῖν παραδέχεσθαι οὐδὲ ποιεῖν Ῥωμαίοις οὖσιν.

Brock: charging them with bringing a destructive foreign cult – not consistent with religious tolerance

Ironic: Paul because of his stance of not insisting upon circumcision had been accused of being too Gentile; here he is accused of being too Jewish

Stott: The slave owners were very clever. They not only concealed the real reason for their anger, which was economic, but also presented their legal charge against the missionaries "in terms that appealed to the latent anti-Semitism of the people (*'these men are Jews'*) and their racial pride ('*us Romans*') and so ignited the flames of bigotry." - Longenecker

D. (:22-23a) They <u>Inflict</u> Cruelty from the Protection of a Mob Mentality

"*And the crowd rose up together against them, and the chief magistrates tore their robes off them, and proceeded to order them to be beaten with rods. And when they had inflicted many blows upon them,*"

καὶ συνεπέστη ὁ ὄχλος κατ᾽ αὐτῶν καὶ οἱ στρατηγοὶ περιρήξαντες αὐτῶν τὰ ἱμάτια ἐκέλευον ῥαβδίζειν, πολλάς τε ἐπιθέντες αὐτοῖς πλην

sounds more like the Ku Klux Klan than a judicial proceeding in a sophisticated city

Lenski: And all this was wholly illegal according to Roman law, was inflicted on innocent men without process of law to satisfy a few greedy men and a wholly ignorant mob.

E. (:23b-24) They <u>Inflate</u> Their Egotistical Sense of Power and Jurisdiction

"*they threw them into prison, commanding the jailer to guard them securely; and he, having received such a command, threw them into the inner prison, and fastened their feet in the stocks.*

ἃς ἔβαλον εἰς φυλακὴν παραγγείλαντες τῷ δεσμοφύλακι ἀσφαλῶς τηρεῖν αὐτούς. ὃς παραγγελίαν τοιαύτην λαβὼν ἔβαλεν αὐτοὺς εἰς τὴν ἐσωτέραν φυλακὴν καὶ τοὺς πόδας ἠσφαλίσατο αὐτῶν εἰς τὸ ξύλον.

CONCLUSION:

Why does the world hate the gospel message? Because of its exclusivity – cannot co-exist peacefully with false religions

Remember our spiritual warfare: **2 Cor. 10:3-5**

THE DISTINCTIVENESS OF THE GOSPEL MUST NOT BE SULLIED BY ASSOCIATION WITH DEMONIC RELIGIOUS PROFITEERING

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DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

1) Where do we witness demonic activity in our world today? How dangerous is it to have any association with the occult or with fortunetelling?

2) What are some current day examples of religious profiteering?

3) Have you been the subject of any false charges or attacks against your character and ministry?

4) What was the response of Paul and Silas to such harsh and unjustified treatment?

* * * * * * * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

MacArthur: The literal Greek...I want you to get this, a most fascinating thing...the literal Greek is, she had a spirit, comma, a python. That's the same as a python snake, the same term...a spirit, a python, or a python spirit. You say, well, what is a python spirit? Well, in Greek mythology...and this is all mythology...in Greek mythology, there's a place called Pytho, and Pytho was at the foot of Mount Parnassus. Now, at Pytho, there was a dragon. The dragon guarded Pytho...that area...and the dragon's name was Python. Stay with me. This dragon guarded the oracles of Delphi. Now you may have heard of that. Delphi was a place where oracles were given. Now, you say, what's an oracle? I'll give you the definition. The term "oracle," which is an occult term, means either a place where mediums consult demons or it means the revelation the demons give themselves. So it can refer to the place or the demonic revelation. The oracles at Delphi...Delphi was a place that was a monstrous temple and in this temple were all these medium priestesses and these priestesses were conjuring up demons and giving out information. Now, you say, what about the dragon? Well, supposedly, long ago in Greek mythology, this dragon guarded these oracles. Apollo, who was the third son of Jupiter in mythology, came down and slew the dragon. All of the oracle power of the dragon was then transferred to Apollo and he took on the name Pythias. And so the python idea ties in with Apollo who received the dragon's power and was able, then, to contact these demon spirits at Delphi. Now, let me say this just so you'll understand. They believed, the people in this world believed, in that world of that day, they believed that the gods were alive. They believed in Apollo and Jupiter and Venus and Mars and all those people, Cupid and everybody else. Now, they believed that Apollo...that Apollo spoke through the oracles at Delphi. And so the term python means any kind of medium contact with the god Apollo. This girl, then, was one of the thousands of priestesses from Delphi who were called pythons because they were plugged into Apollo whose other name was Pythias. . .

nothing but a mouth through which a demon spoke...and this is the word ventriloquist. In Isaiah 8:19, the Bible says that the people were to watch out for mediums that peep and mutter and the word in the Greek...it's in Hebrew in the Old Testament, but the Greek translation, they use the word eggastrimuthus which means ventriloquist. They were to watch out for ventriloquist demons who used the voice of humans. You say, then that girl was a dummy and demons talked through her.

David Silversides: **The Gospel in Europe**

v. 16-18 A Significant Miracle –

every miracle in Scripture is a sign; a slave girl jointly owned by a group of business men; had a spirit of python; dragon in Greek mythology; name used for anyone with fortunetelling spirit; purporting to tell the future; Why was the apostle grieved by this publicity? What she was saying was true; simplest answer: by this testimony from evil spirit it was blurring the distinction; the devil was seeking to portray the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ as part of the general scene of supernatural and magic that already existed; did not want the gospel put on the same level as the rest of the evil magic that already went on; gospel was in opposition to all that world of magic and fortune telling; gospel must be kept distinct and unique; Paul did not take a pray and wait-and-see approach as we would in many situations; he just announced the miracle and it happened at once; why had Paul not done this earlier? Biblical miracles involved divine revelation – infallibly and directly revealed to him by God that now was the time to accomplish this; a sample of infallible prophecy;

v. 19-24 An Apparent Setback

anger at lost income was their real motive as contrasted with the stated motive in v.20 – looks like a very unpromising turn of events; looks like a terrible setback for the work of the gospel; things were just getting going in Europe there in Philippi; we are not competent to know the purposes of God from individual events; need to humble ourselves; problems are not a sign to abandon the evangelistic effort in that location; acceptance of God's Providence and confidence in God's Providence

Mark Chanski: **Demons in the 21st Century?**

Mark 9:29 – this kind comes out only by prayer; cultic involvement; consider these three verses from three angles:

1. a brief exposition – different personalities in Philippi: Lydia, demon-possessed girl, jailor – all able to be saved by the same gospel – employed by pimps who took advantage of her powers; speaking truth here about the identity of the missionaries; Mark 1 – "*you are the holy one of God*" – did not appreciate this unsolicited testimony; not wanting any publicity from satan; superior authority invoked in name of Jesus

2. A handful of views – what are we to think of this event? **5 views regarding demonic activity**:

a. the limitation theory – Jesus and apostles shared current misguided belief in demons; misdiagnosed deviant psychological behavior or chemically imbalanced conditions; throw this view out – totally unacceptable

b. accommodation view – Jesus enlisted the current first century language and legend that would be attributing illness to demonic influence; but He didn't really believe this himself; this is unacceptable as well; liberal, anti-supernatural mindset

c. incarnation outbreak perspective – the first coming of Christ initiated the kingdom of God on the earth and brought a unique outbreak of demonic activity on earth as invader came into this dark world and stimulated strong demonic reaction; such things are confined to time of his first or second coming; "*have you come to destroy us before the appointed time*?" But even this account is post-Christ; there was demonic activity in OT; Lev. 17:7 goat demons; 1 Sam. 16:14; 1 Kings 22:23 "a deceiving spirit"; sorcerers and magicians; witch of Endor… etc.

d. ongoing phenomena perspective – held by most Pentecostals; frequency of demonic activity expected to be as frequent now as during Christ's earthly ministry; but this goes a bit too far

e. spiritual warfare perspective – takes parts from c and d; look at **Ephes. 6:12** "*our struggle is not against flesh and blood but against* …" – we need to take up the full armor of God; ongoing demonic activity throughout the church age; satan still prowling about as a roaring lion;

3. Some practical applications

a. in daily living – we battle not just against false ideas or bad habits or poor upbringing or hormonal imbalances or caffeine highs and lows – don't minimize the impact of the supernatural; innumerable supernatural demons under the direction of satan out to assault us; don't overlook the invisible realm; issue is not merely physical and chemical and environmental; don't be ignorant of schemes of satan; satan's best trick is to make people think he doesn't exist; satan present in the Garden of Eden to seduce Adam and Eve; who assaulted Job?? Saul?? Ps. 78:49; Satan entered into Judas; Peter tempted by Satan; Eph. 4:27 – don't give the devil a foothold; Jam. 3:15 jealousy and selfish ambition (daily sins we engage in) are described as demonic; 1 Tim 3:7 the snare of the devil; 2 Tim. 2:25; 1 Cor. 10:20 worshiping of demons; what about our self idolatry and pride; 2 Cor. 12:7 messenger of Satan; 1 Tim. 4:1-2 attitude of Who cares about doctrine = activity of deceiving spirits;

b. in spiritual counseling – maintain perspective that there is a raging spiritual warfare; don't restrict demonic activity to that which is bizarre; use prayer and word of God; don't need fancy incantations; **2 Cor. 10:3-4**; batter the fortresses of darkness with the battering ram of truth

c. in gospel preaching –

Peter Loughman: When the slave girl says, "These men are servants of the Most High God, who are telling you the way to be saved." What the pagans hear is, "These men are servants of whatever god you serve." See, she is saying a very ambiguous thing. The people hearing what she is saying are free to interpret it anyway they want; When they hear the phrase "Most High God" they fill in whatever name they want. What the slave girl does is emasculate the power of Paul's message so that people ignore him, thinking that Jesus is another god among many gods.

In essence the slave girl is a verbal coexist bumper sticker. . .

TEXT: Acts 16: 25-40

TITLE: UNSHACKLED!

BIG IDEA:
THE ALL POWERFUL GOD DELIVERS BELIEVERS FROM THE SHACKLES OF SATAN AND SIN

INTRODUCTION:
If you are a believer in Jesus Christ and still living in bondage to sin, you need to open your eyes and see that the chains have fallen off. God delights to use simple object lessons and we have one of those clear pictures in our passage today. This passage is about the divine deliverance of Paul and Silas from the chains of prison in Philippi. But it is also about much more than that. For you see that the cry of the Philippian jailor is "*Sirs, what must I do to be saved*?" The issues run much deeper.

As you recall your own salvation, what type of chains fell off your life? Maybe there were chains of anger or fear. Certainly there were chains of selfishness and pride that prevented you from relating to God and to others around you in the type of love Christ came to demonstrate to us. But even though we have been delivered once for all in a positional sense from sin and from Satan and from the value system of the world around us we still struggle with fully experiencing that deliverance. This passage reminds us of the power of God and should encourage us to go out from the prison of sin rejoicing in the sufficiency of our salvation. That should be the testimony of all who have placed their faith in Jesus Christ alone for salvation.

Maybe you are struggling with some particular sin and are having difficulty sensing any deliverance or victory. Hopefully this passage will encourage you to rejoice in the simplicity and completeness of your deliverance. Maybe you still wrestle with the issue of salvation itself and cry out with the Philippian jailor for God to open up your spiritual eyes to understand what it means to place your confidence in Jesus Christ alone.

THE ALL POWERFUL GOD DELIVERS BELIEVERS FROM THE SHACKLES OF SATAN AND SIN

Radio show: Unshackled = the testimonies of those who have been delivered from the bondage of Satan and sin and this world

Remember the context of spiritual warfare against demons and satanic forces – seen last week in the deliverance of the slave girl from the fortunetelling demon

I. (:25-34) GOD'S DELIVERANCE SPREADS THE JOY OF SALVATION TO NEW CONVERTS – THE SIMPLICITY AND POWER OF THE GOSPEL

A. (:25) Joy in the Midst of Suffering Gains a Hearing

"*But about midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns of praise to God, and the prisoners were listening to them;*"

Κατὰ δὲ τὸ μεσονύκτιον Παῦλος καὶ Σιλᾶς προσευχόμενοι ὕμνουν τὸν θεόν, ἐπηκροῶντο δὲ

αὐτῶν οἱ δέσμιοι.

The outward circumstances look bleak – you have God's A Team – His leading missionaries who are charged with bringing the gospel message to Europe – beaten and bleeding and locked up in the inner dungeon of some miserable prison. Satan is working overtime to extinguish the flame of gospel testimony. It's midnight and the jailor is sleeping just fine … but Paul and Silas probably have difficulty getting comfortable.

Yet their testimony is one of joy in the midst of suffering. Talk about a positive attitude! No complaining and blaming of God or questioning His providence.
The other prisoners were locked up for legitimate crimes – you can bet they were curious about how these railroaded Christians could be so upbeat. They had heard something of this message of the way of salvation – heralded by the slave girl with the fortune telling demonic spirit. They wanted to learn more.

Praying out loud – intelligible prayer – not ecstatic utterances in some angelic tongue
Singing – no musical sound track to accompany them – probably some early hymns that the believers had converted from scripture texts – oriented around praising God – worship in spirit and in truth – our singing is important to God

Not embarrassed to be associated with Jesus Christ – not concerned that others were listening in; in fact they wanted their words to be broadcast to others

Wiersbe: God gives songs in the night – Job 35:10; Ps. 42:8

Stott: It is wonderful that in such pain, with lacerated backs and aching limbs, Paul and Silas at about midnight were praying and singing hymns to God. Not groans but songs came from their mouths. Instead of cursing men, they blessed God. No wonder the other prisoners were listening to them.

Tertullian: The legs feel nothing in the stocks when the heart is in heaven!

B. (:26) Jolt of God's Power Brings Divine Deliverance

"*and suddenly there came a great earthquake, so that the foundations of the prison house were shaken; and immediately all the doors were opened, and everyone's chains were unfastened.*"

ἄφνω δὲ σεισμὸς ἐγένετο μέγας ὥστε σαλευθῆναι τὰ θεμέλια τοῦ δεσμωτηρίου· ἠνεῴχθησαν δὲ παραχρῆμα αἱ θύραι πᾶσαι καὶ πάντων τὰ δεσμὰ ἀνέθη.

Fortunately in MD we don't have any experience with great earthquakes .. but even our recent taste of a minor earthquake gives you a sense of how powerful the impact can be. I was eating a late lunch at Chick Filet – whole restaurant shook – very strange feeling;
This earthquake was far more powerful and divinely directed to accomplish something very specific – did not destroy the jail; did not cause any injuries; but opened all the cell block doors and unfastened all the chains – a pretty special earthquake
What a demonstration of the Power of God – He specializes in delivering people from all types of chains of bondage –

- Think of the chains of death that could not hold His Son captive – Jesus triumphed over death so that all who trust in Him could live forever
- The chains of this jail in Philippi that had been secured by Satan were no challenge to the power of God

Very different reactions – the prisoners were trying to figure out how to respond .. but the jailor knew right away that he was in big trouble

C. (:27-28) Jailor Experiences the Grace of God

"*And when the jailer had been roused out of sleep and had seen the prison doors opened, he drew his sword and was about to kill himself, supposing that the prisoners had escaped. But Paul cried out with a loud voice, saying, 'Do yourself no harm, for we are all here!*"

ἔξυπνος δὲ γενόμενος ὁ δεσμοφύλαξ καὶ ἰδὼν ἀνεῳγμένας τὰς θύρας τῆς φυλακῆς, σπασάμενος [τὴν] μάχαιραν ἤμελλεν ἑαυτὸν ἀναιρεῖν νομίζων ἐκπεφευγέναι τοὺς δεσμίους. ἐφώνησεν δὲ μεγάλῃ φωνῇ [ὁ] Παῦλος λέγων· μηδὲν πράξῃς σεαυτῷ κακόν, ἅπαντες γάρ ἐσμεν ἐνθάδε.

So much **irony** in this passage – The jailor who is charged with keeping prisoners in chains is the one who is actually in the bondage of satan and sin – living a meaningless, empty life where he is plugged into satan's agenda; he is the one that needs to be unshackled

He understood that the escape of the prisoners would mean deserved death for himself.
He had been charged with the security of the prisoners.

Paul and Silas could have protected themselves and fled the city. But they were more concerned to give a testimony to others of what the Grace of God is all about. Love compelled them to stay.

There is no salvation apart from understanding the grace of God. That is where people trip up.

D. (:29-34) Joy Spreads to All Who Put Their Faith in the Lord Jesus

1. (:29) Fear of God is a Good Place to Start = beginning of wisdom

"*And he called for lights and rushed in and, trembling with fear, he fell down before Paul and Silas,*"

αἰτήσας δὲ φῶτα εἰσεπήδησεν καὶ ἔντρομος γενόμενος προσέπεσεν τῷ Παύλῳ καὶ [τῷ] Σιλᾷ

Conviction of sin; knows that God is at work here; understands that Paul and Silas are God's messengers; moves right away from the physical circumstances to the spiritual significance; God is working in his heart to remove his spiritual blindness – look at how many people Jesus encountered who never made that connection from the physical miracle to the spiritual significance

2. (:30) The Right Question – must ask the Right People

"*and after he brought them out, he said, 'Sirs, what must I do to be saved?*"

καὶ προαγαγὼν αὐτοὺς ἔξω ἔφη· κύριοι, τί με δεῖ ποιεῖν ἵνα σωθῶ;

Most urgent question that anyone can ask – you have to be right on this one; implicit in the question is the acknowledgement that he is lost and in need of salvation; the power of God which he has just witnessed is hanging over his head in terms of the execution of God's wrath because he deserves condemnation; he has no light and is in darkness himself; he has no life spiritually; his life is empty and meaningless – he knows that he does not have the joy that Paul and Silas are demonstrating
You can't be too busy to ask this question; you can't put off asking it for another day

A Personal Question – nobody else can do something to save him

Still has a works mentality – tell me what I have to do to make things right with God

Cole: This was not an academic question for this jailer. He had just been awakened by a powerful earthquake. If that's ever happened to you, you know that it's a pretty good adrenaline rush! Then, when he rushed to the prison, he confirmed his worst nightmare— the doors were open. He assumed the worst, that all the prisoners had escaped. Instant death would be better to him than the torture that the authorities would inflict before they killed him.

Bock: The earthquake, especially if severe enough to loosen chains, may also have made the jailer nervous about who was imprisoned and why the gods have acted in this way . . . presented him with irrefutable evidence that God is at work with Paul's group. He wants to know whatever more Paul can offer. Is there a way to escape God's reaction to the injustice in which the jailer has played a role? In the face of this evidence, the jailer does not want to be found on the opposing side.

3. (:31) The Only Answer = Simplicity of the Gospel Focused in Faith in the Person of the Lord Jesus
"*And they said, 'Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you shall be saved, you and your household.*'"

οἱ δὲ εἶπαν· πίστευσον ἐπὶ τὸν κύριον Ἰησοῦν καὶ σωθήσῃ σὺ καὶ ὁ οἶκός σου.

Showing love for his enemies; the very authorities that had inflicted a beating and imprisoned him were those to whom he preached the message of saving faith; no grudges on the part of Paul; just as Christ did not come to condemn the first time but to freely offer salvation to all

Gal. 2:16 "*knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the Law but through faith in Christ Jesus, even we have believed in Christ Jesus, so that we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the Law; since by the works of the Law no flesh will be justified*."

Starts with intellectual assent, but much more than that – you have to know certain facts about Christ Jesus – especially about His sinless life, His sacrificial death and His powerful resurrection; but then you must make a commitment to place your trust and reliance in the person of Jesus Christ; understanding that since He is God, that involves a change in the authority orientation of your life – instead of you being in charge, you are acknowledging that He deserves

to be your Lord

Notice that Paul and Silas don't confuse the issue with the depths of doctrinal instruction about the sovereignty of God and election – their message is not: "Well I don't know if salvation is possible for you or not …"
Simply "*Believe in the Lord Jesus and you shall be saved*"

This same approach will work for anyone in your household

Cole: The jailer asked, "What must I do to be saved?" Paul did not answer with something to do, but rather with someone to believe in. Believing is not a matter of human effort, but rather of ceasing from our efforts and relying on God alone. As Paul wrote (Rom. 4:4-5), "Now to the one who works, his wage is not credited as a favor, but as what is due. But to the one who does not work, but believes in Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is credited as righteousness." Saving faith, then, is a matter of ceasing from my own efforts to save myself, and trusting in Jesus Christ to save me.

Wiersbe: A hard-hearted person seeking vengeance would have let the cruel jailer kill himself, but Paul was not that kind of a man.

4. (:32) <u>The Source of Authority</u> = the Word of God
"*And they spoke the word of the Lord to him together with all who were in his house.*"

καὶ ἐλάλησαν αὐτῷ τὸν λόγον τοῦ κυρίου σὺν πᾶσιν τοῖς ἐν τῇ οἰκίᾳ αὐτοῦ.

"*Faith comes by hearing and hearing by the Word of God.*" – **Rom. 10:17**

Imagine their hunger to hear the word of God; what a prepared audience!

5. (:33-34) <u>Four Fruits of Faith</u> – [could be a sermon in itself]
"*having believed in God with his whole household.*"
πανοικεὶ πεπιστευκὼς τῷ θεῷ.

Wallace: their faith is summarized in a causal perfect participle to suggest its enduring quality

a. (:33a) **Ministry of Compassion**
"*And he took them that very hour of the night and washed their wounds,*"

καὶ παραλαβὼν αὐτοὺς ἐν ἐκείνῃ τῇ ὥρᾳ τῆς νυκτὸς ἔλουσεν ἀπὸ τῶν πληγῶν,

fruit of repentance – testifying that it had been wrong for them to have been beaten and now he was going to do what he could to make it right

Start serving the Lord immediately; do what you can do from a changed heart

b. (:33b) **Discipleship of Obedience**
"*and immediately he was baptized, he and all his household.*"

καὶ ἐβαπτίσθη αὐτὸς καὶ οἱ αὐτοῦ πάντες παραχρῆμα,

Issue of **Infant Baptism** – this passage is pointed to frequently for support – but actually it clearly emphasizes believer baptism throughout:

- If you believe, you will be saved; if any in your household believe, they also will be saved
- Word of God spoken to all of them – doubt that infants would have much comprehension
- They all believed
- They all were baptized
- They all ate together and rejoiced greatly

Cole: Baptism is the way to confess that you have trusted in Christ. It is an act of obedience to Jesus Christ, showing that He has cleansed you from sin and that you are identified with Him in His death, burial, and resurrection. It signifies a break from your former life of sin, and a commitment to follow Jesus as your Lord.

c. (:34a) **Fellowship/Hospitality with the Saints**

"*And he brought them into his house and set food before them,*"

ἀναγαγών τε αὐτοὺς εἰς τὸν οἶκον παρέθηκεν τράπεζαν

Food and fellowship always linked closely together

Bock: Now that they are no longer in prison, God has brought about a different kind of connection between them. Those who were enemies and separated are immediately brought together. Thus the scene also illustrates the reconciliation that the gospel brings at the human level.

d. (:34b) **Abundant Joy**

"*and rejoiced greatly,*

καὶ ἠγαλλιάσατο

Joy should characterize our lives as believers – not moaning and groaning on Monday like the world

Quite a dramatic change in temperament – had been suicidal earlier – not rejoicing greatly

II. (:35-40) GOD'S DELIVERANCE SPARKS:

- **PUBLIC REBUKE THAT SHAMES THE MOTIVATION AND IMPOTENCE OF SATANIC FORCES AND**
- **PRIVATE REASSURANCE THAT ENCOURAGES BELIEVERS TO REMAIN UNSHACKLED IN LIFE AND BOLD IN THEIR WITNESS**

A. (:35-39) God's Deliverance Sparks Public Rebuke

1. (:35-36) False Façade of Righteousness and Peace

"*Now when day came, the chief magistrates sent their policemen, saying, 'Release those men.' And the jailer reported these words to Paul, saying, 'The chief magistrates have sent to release you. Now therefore, come out and go in peace.*"'

Ἡμέρας δὲ γενομένης ἀπέστειλαν οἱ στρατηγοὶ τοὺς ῥαβδούχους λέγοντες· ἀπόλυσον τοὺς ἀνθρώπους ἐκείνους. ἀπήγγειλεν δὲ ὁ δεσμοφύλαξ τοὺς λόγους [τούτους] πρὸς τὸν Παῦλον ὅτι ἀπέσταλκαν οἱ στρατηγοὶ ἵνα ἀπολυθῆτε· νῦν οὖν ἐξελθόντες πορεύεσθε ἐν εἰρήνῃ.

Devil and his henchmen are all about injustice and strife – here the officials try to extricate themselves from an embarrassing situation

Trying to hide behind delegated policemen rather than dealing with situation personally

The **irony** continues: Not in their power to release these prisoners because they had been proven impotent to keep them bound

2. (:37) Insistence on Rights as Roman Citizens and Vindication for Mistreatment

"*But Paul said to them, 'They have beaten us in public without trial, men who are Romans, and have thrown us into prison; and now are they sending us away secretly? No indeed! But let them come themselves and bring us out.*"'

ὁ δὲ Παῦλος ἔφη πρὸς αὐτούς· δείραντες ἡμᾶς δημοσίᾳ ἀκατακρίτους, ἀνθρώπους Ῥωμαίους ὑπάρχοντας, ἔβαλαν εἰς φυλακήν, καὶ νῦν λάθρᾳ ἡμᾶς ἐκβάλλουσιν; οὐ γάρ, ἀλλὰ ἐλθόντες αὐτοὶ ἡμᾶς ἐξαγαγέτωσαν.

Paul making this very public to rebuke these magistrates and hold them accountable for their injustice; staged a sit-in to protest their treatment

Stott: The citizen had only to say *civis Romanus sum* and he would be immune to punishment; heavy penalties were prescribed for those who violated these citizenship privileges.

3. (:38) Fear of Accountability

"*And the policemen reported these words to the chief magistrates. And they were afraid when they heard that they were Romans,*"

ἀπήγγειλαν δὲ τοῖς στρατηγοῖς οἱ ῥαβδοῦχοι τὰ ῥήματα ταῦτα. ἐφοβήθησαν δὲ ἀκούσαντες ὅτι Ῥωμαῖοί εἰσιν,

4. (:39) Humiliated Posture of Appealing and Begging

"and they came and appealed to them, and when they had brought them out, they kept begging them to leave the city."

καὶ ἐλθόντες παρεκάλεσαν αὐτοὺς καὶ ἐξαγαγόντες ἠρώτων ἀπελθεῖν ἀπὸ τῆς πόλεως.

Kent: They had been illegally treated, without even an opportunity to claim their Roman citizenship previously. By insisting upon a dignified exit and the personal presence of the magistrates, they doubtless secured a measure of protection for the Philippian believers who

might otherwise have suffered continued persecution.

B. (:40) God's Deliverance Sparks Private Reassurance

"*And they went out of the prison and entered the house of Lydia, and when they saw the brethren, they encouraged them and departed.*"

ἐξελθόντες δὲ ἀπὸ τῆς φυλακῆς εἰσῆλθον πρὸς τὴν Λυδίαν καὶ ἰδόντες παρεκάλεσαν τοὺς ἀδελφοὺς καὶ ἐξῆλθαν.

Left Luke behind (20:5)

CONCLUSION:

Illustration: A man stood up in Hamilton, Ontario, Canada four years after the sinking of the Titanic in a testimony meeting and this is what he said. He said, I am a survivor of the Titanic. When I was drifting alone on a spar that awful night, the tide brought a man toward me in the sea and his name was John Harper. He was hanging to a piece of wreckage. And as he neared me, he said, Man, are you saved? No, I'm not, I replied. He said, Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved. And the waves took him away but strange to say, they brought him back a little later and he said, Are you saved yet? And I said, No. And he said, Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved. And I watched him go down. And he said, there alone in the night with two miles of water under me, I believed and I was saved. He said, I was John Harper's last convert.

You know, there's a lot of sinking men in this world. It's a simple message. Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and...what?...thou shalt be saved. Let's pray.

* * * * * * * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

1) Do we still associate the power of God with not only our initial salvation but with our ongoing struggle against the bondage of sin in our lives?

2) What content from the Word of God would you share with a person who is asking how they can be saved?

3) What is the relationship between water baptism and salvation?

4) When does God want us to assert our rights?

* * * * * * * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Wiersbe: The city officials knew that they had no convincing case against Paul and Silas, so they sent word to the jailer to release them. Paul, however, was unwilling to sneak out of town, for that kind of exit would have left the new church under a cloud of suspicion. People would have asked, "Who were those men? Were they guilty of some crime? Why did they leave so quickly? What do their followers believe?" Paul and his associates wanted to leave behind a strong witness of their own integrity as well as a good testimony for the infant church in Philippi.

Toussaint: But why did Paul wait so long to mention his Roman citizenship? Perhaps the uproar at the trial (vv. 19-22) kept him from being heard. Or maybe Paul purposely waited till the most propitious time to give out this information.

MacArthur: **How to Turn Persecution Into Production**
5 things in the cycle: Suffering persecution led to singing praises which led to preaching salvation which led to seeing production which led to securing protection and the cycle ran fully.
1. Suffering Persecution
They got into this mess in the first place by being bold. Don't ever restrict your boldness for fear of persecution. Persecution only translates your boldness into new opportunity. . .

Now, we think of stocks in the sense of early America, you know, with your feet and your hands, which is bad enough. According to archeology, the stocks that they used in those days had a series of holes that got wider and wider and the idea was to spread the legs of the individual as far as they could go in order to induce cramping. And so after all the beating was done, in this filthy dungeon where they would be living in absolute filth, their legs were stretched to the extremity to induce cramping that was excruciating. Already having been flailed by a bundle of heavy rods in the hands of an expert, their backs would have been a horrible pulp. Sometimes these things caused internal hemorrhaging, almost always, injuries to organs, smashed vertebrae, broken ribs and very often, death. They endured every bit of that. Then the aching, bleeding, limping men pushed into the dark cell, far from the light and far from the air in solitary confinement, lice, rats, disease, infested first century jails, the prisoners were forced to exist in their own filth, their legs were slammed into stocks which clamped them and that's the way they existed.
2. Singing Praises
God never changes. Did you hear that? God never changes. If God is worth praising right now, He's worth praising any moment. Are you with me? You say, but oh, if you knew my trouble, ah, oh... Listen, praising God has nothing to do with your trouble. . .

Now, you've got to be above your circumstances, right, to do that. Listen. Just get a grip on who God is and what He wants to do and remember that after you've suffered awhile, He'll make you perfect. . .

What happens on the outside is immaterial. He says this, our light affliction, it's only for a moment and "it works for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory." Here's our secret. "We look not at the things that are seen, but at the things which are not seen, for the things which are seen are temporal...the things which are not seen are"...what?..."eternal." You know who he looked at in his problems? He looked at the eternal God. That's who he looked at. That's the key. Get your mind on the Spirit and on who God is and not on your circumstances.
3. Preaching Salvation

4. Seeing Production

5. Securing Production

John Piper: **Joy Recovered**
How do you become a Christian? How does the ransom Jesus paid become a ransom for me? How does the substitution he made for sins become a substitute for my sins? How does the repair he made for the injured glory of God become a repair for the injury I have done? What must I do to be saved?

The death of Jesus can be held out to any and every person in the world with this assurance: there is grace here to cover all your sins if you will receive it and believe in Jesus Christ. There is a substitute for sinners here able to bear all your sins if you will receive him and believe on him. There is a ransom here that has paid the whole debt of all who come to Christ and believe. All that Christ is he will be for you if you come to him and believe in him. . .

The reason the Bible is so jealous not to let salvation be by works is because that would rob God of glory in the work of salvation. If we try to work our way to salvation, it draws attention to our strength and our value and our contribution. But faith on the other hand throws all attention on the value and the sufficiency of who Christ is and what Christ did. Faith glorifies God. Works glorify us. . .

The root reason God will not let salvation be by works—why he will not let salvation be earned by our efforts—is because this would rob Jesus of his glory. God is trying to bring creation back to its original purpose (Truth #1). God began by creating the world for his glory, and he is now saving the world in a way that restores that great purpose. So anything that diminishes his glory in the work of salvation will not be accepted. . .

Paul said in Ephesians 2:8, "By GRACE are you saved through faith." He saves by grace because grace is the capstone of his glory. We know this because it says in Ephesians 1:5f. that he "predestined us to be his children according to the good pleasure of his will unto the praise of the glory of his grace." Everything he has done in salvation is aimed at winning praise from us for the glory of his grace. . .

Once you get a handle on this, you realize why certain things are required for our salvation and certain things are not. In a word, God requires of us things that glorify his grace, and rejects things that would glorify our self-sufficiency or glorify sin.

TEXT: Acts 17: 1-15

TITLE: TRUTH VS TRADITION – TALE OF TWO CITIES

BIG IDEA:
YOUR RESPONSE TO THE GOSPEL REFLECTS YOUR VALUE SYSTEM:
- **PASSION FOR THE TRUTH OF GOD'S WORD OR**
- **JEALOUSY FOR THE SECURITY OF MAN'S TRADITIONS**

INTRODUCTION:

Funerals have a way of stopping you in your tracks and making you think about what really matters in life. That's why Solomon writes in **Ecclesiastes 7:2** that "*It is better to go to a house of mourning than to go to a house of feasting*." Karen and I recently attended a funeral of a dear friend who went home to be with the Lord after wasting away for six months with stomach cancer. The elder officiating at the ceremony made the point that Steve's life was characterized by loving his wife Connie. Everybody could tell that he cherished his wife. His four children were there to testify that they had learned lessons from observing how their Dad treated their Mom.

What would someone say about you or me? What would be a summary statement that would best describe the impact of our life on others? What could someone write on your tombstone. There are always the lighthearted comments, like "I told you I was really sick." But let's be serious and reflective for a minute. How has our **value system** shown itself in our words and deeds? As I thought about this for my own life, I certainly see that there is a lot of room for growth in the area of loving and cherishing my wife. In fact, she was poking at me just the other day for being so inattentive that I did not even recognize that she had lopped a couple of inches off her hair. She was right … I have to confess – some things just don't register with me … but they should.

But I was encouraged when I came to this passage for this morning which addresses the issue of our ultimate value system. There are certainly many areas where I need to grow and set a better example. But when it comes to **passion for truth**, I have a pretty good track record. That is not to say that I am right all of the time, but I have a hunger to learn what God has said, to see that implemented in my life and to teach those truths accurately and fully to others.

2 Tim.2:15 "*Be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, accurately handling the word of truth*."

I can say that by God's grace I have invested my adult life in trying to faithfully carry out that charge. Our passage this morning presents a tale of two cities – Paul's missionary outreach to Thessalonica and to Berea. As always, he meets with a variety of responses to the presentation of the gospel message – some positive, but the majority negative. It is instructive to see the contrast in the way Luke records what took place in these two cities.

YOUR RESPONSE TO THE GOSPEL REFLECTS YOUR VALUE SYSTEM:
- **PASSION FOR THE TRUTH OF GOD'S WORD OR**
- **JEALOUSY FOR THE SECURITY OF MAN'S TRADITIONS**

Presentation of the Gospel / Responses to the Gospel / Pressure to Move On to the Next City

I. (:1-10a) TROUBLE IN THESSALONICA – EMPHASIS ON NEGATIVE RESPONSE = JEALOUSY FOR THE SECURITY OF MAN'S TRADITIONS

A. (:1-3) Presentation of the Gospel -- Missionary Mindset – Aggressive Arrival in Town -- Preaching Christ from the Scriptures in the Synagogue

1. Have a Strategic Plan and Work Your Plan

"*Now when they had traveled through Amphipolis and Apollonia, they came to Thessalonica, where there was a synagogue of the Jews. And according to Paul's custom, he went to them, and for three Sabbaths*"

Διοδεύσαντες δὲ τὴν Ἀμφίπολιν καὶ τὴν Ἀπολλωνίαν ἦλθον εἰς Θεσσαλονίκην ὅπου ἦν συναγωγὴ τῶν Ἰουδαίων. κατὰ δὲ τὸ εἰωθὸς τῷ Παύλῳ εἰσῆλθεν πρὸς αὐτοὺς καὶ ἐπὶ σάββατα τρία

Coming from Philippi – beaten and imprisoned – but vindicated and victorious; does not take any time off but continues on with his mission
100 mile journey by the Egnatian Way – south westerly direction
Kent: Apparently nightly stops were made at Amphipolis (thirty-three miles from Philippi), Apollonia (thirty miles from Amphipolis) until they reached Thessalonica (thirty-seven miles from Apollonia).

Wiersbe: Paul knew that Thessalonica was a strategic city for the work of the Lord. Not only was it the capital of Macedonia, but it was also a center for business, rivaled only by Corinth. It was located on several important trade routes, and it boasted an excellent harbor. . . Paul labored at his tent making trade (Acts 18:3; 1 Thess. 2:9; 2 Thess. 3:7-10) . . .

Working hard day and night; received a couple of monetary gifts from saints in Philippi

2. Combine the Best of Human Reason with the Power and Sufficiency of the Scriptures

"*reasoned with them from the Scriptures, explaining and giving evidence*"

διελέξατο αὐτοῖς ἀπὸ τῶν γραφῶν, διανοίγων καὶ παρατιθέμενος

sounds like Paul would have been an outstanding debater; Christians don't check their minds at the door; must use all of our reasoning power
after the pattern of the resurrected Christ on the road to Emmaus – **Luke 24:19-27**

a. "*reasoned*" – dialectic approach rather than a sermon; question and answer and discussion approach

Zeisler: Why is it helpful to observe that Paul reasoned from the Scriptures? This is telling us something about the power of the Bible. I have been in settings where the Bible is used to bludgeon, where it is shouted, where its message is intended to descend on people like a heavy weight in order to bring about some kind of change in their behavior, regardless of whether they understood it, believed anything different, or knew any more than they had known before. I have also been in settings that are mostly about an emotional stirring, where language is used in a way that bring tears to everyone's eyes. But once people leave, they can't remember what was said,

and nothing has been learned. What Paul was doing in this synagogue reminds us that the Bible's power is ultimately the power to persuade us, to open our minds to understand what we didn't understand before. We become aware of truth in such a way that truth itself changes us. Paul reasoned, talked with people, listened to questions, and answered objections, expecting that the God of the Bible would take the words of the Bible and change people's interior life by them.

b. "*explaining*" – opening the Scriptures (the writings) to them and expounding the meaning; making it plain and understandable

c. "*giving evidence*" – proving, alleging; lay down alongside; prove by giving evidence; establish evidence to show that something is true

Cole: Paul reasoned with the Jews from the Scriptures (17:2). The word "reasoned" indicates a dialogue, where Paul presented the truth and then responded to questions or challenges from the congregation. He explained and gave evidence "that the Christ had to suffer and rise again from the dead" (17:3). "Explained" means to open. Luke used the same word of God opening the eyes of the men on the road to Emmaus (Luke 24:31). "Giving evidence" literally means "to place before or alongside." Paul would take one Scripture and place it alongside another Scripture to support and prove his point.

Stott: It was inevitable in Jewish evangelism that the Old Testament Scriptures should be both the textbook and the court of appeal. What is impressive is that neither speaker nor hearers used Scripture in a superficial, unintelligent or proof-texting way. On the contrary, Paul "*argued*" out of the Scriptures and the Bereans "*examined*" them to see if his arguments were cogent. And we may be sure that Paul welcomed and encouraged these thoughtful responses. He believed in doctrine (his message had theological content), but not in indoctrination (tyrannical instruction demanding uncritical acceptance). As Bengel wrote about verse 11, "a characteristic of the true religion is that it suffers itself to be examined into, and its claims to be so decided upon."

3. Stay Focused on the Death and Resurrection of Christ
   "*that the Christ had to suffer and rise again from the dead,*"

   ὅτι τὸν χριστὸν ἔδει παθεῖν καὶ ἀναστῆναι ἐκ νεκρῶν

4. Call People to a Personal Response to the Person of Jesus Christ
   "*and saying, 'This Jesus whom I am proclaiming to you is the Christ.'*"

   καὶ ὅτι οὗτός ἐστιν ὁ χριστὸς [ὁ] Ἰησοῦς ὃν ἐγὼ καταγγέλλω ὑμῖν.

B. (:4-8) Mixed Response – Agitated <u>Controversy</u> -- Some Positive but Most Negative

1. (:4) <u>Some Positive</u>
   "*And some of them were persuaded and joined Paul and Silas, along with a great multitude of the God-fearing Greeks and a number of the leading women.*"

   καί τινες ἐξ αὐτῶν ἐπείσθησαν καὶ προσεκληρώθησαν τῷ Παύλῳ καὶ τῷ Σιλᾷ, τῶν τε σεβομένων Ἑλλήνων πλῆθος πολύ, γυναικῶν τε τῶν πρώτων οὐκ ὀλίγαι.

Not just presenting content but trying to **persuade** people of the truth

1 Thess. 1:5 "*for our gospel did not come to you in word only, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction*"

Many positive references to the church at Thessalonica in the epistles – but also mentions the context of affliction and persecution from the jealous Jews

Jew **Aristarchus** believed (Col. 4:10)
God- fearing Greek **Secundus** (Acts 20:4)

Deffinbaugh: *leading women*, which may mean that they belonged to the upper class in the town; alternatively the phrase can mean 'wives of the leading men'

2. (:5-8) Most Negative – Driven by Jealousy and Instigating an Emotional Mob Mentality

Emphasis: Jealousy for the Security of Man's Traditions --

> "*But the Jews, becoming jealous and taking along some wicked men from the market place, formed a mob and set the city in an uproar; and coming upon the house of Jason, they were seeking to bring them out to the people. And when they did not find them, they began dragging Jason and some brethren before the city authorities, shouting, "These men who have upset the world have come here also; and Jason has welcomed them, and they all act contrary to the decrees of Caesar, saying that there is another king, Jesus." And they stirred up the crowd and the city authorities who heard these things.*"
>
> Ζηλώσαντες δὲ οἱ Ἰουδαῖοι καὶ προσλαβόμενοι τῶν ἀγοραίων ἄνδρας τινὰς πονηροὺς καὶ ὀχλοποιήσαντες ἐθορύβουν τὴν πόλιν καὶ ἐπιστάντες τῇ οἰκίᾳ Ἰάσονος ἐζήτουν αὐτοὺς προαγαγεῖν εἰς τὸν δῆμον· μὴ εὑρόντες δὲ αὐτοὺς ἔσυρον Ἰάσονα καί τινας ἀδελφοὺς ἐπὶ τοὺς πολιτάρχας βοῶντες ὅτι οἱ τὴν οἰκουμένην ἀναστατώσαντες οὗτοι καὶ ἐνθάδε πάρεισιν, οὓς ὑποδέδεκται Ἰάσων· καὶ οὗτοι πάντες ἀπέναντι τῶν δογμάτων Καίσαρος πράσσουσιν βασιλέα ἕτερον λέγοντες εἶναι Ἰησοῦν. ἐτάραξαν δὲ τὸν ὄχλον καὶ τοὺς πολιτάρχας ἀκούοντας ταῦτα,

Where does this deep-rooted jealousy come from? [**Matt. 15** – Jesus condemns their tradition; cf. Fiddler on the Roof]

- Desire to hold on to their traditions and resist any change – especially one that would elevate Gentiles to equal standing with the Jews – nationalistic pride and prejudice
- Resented growing popularity of Paul and his fellow missionaries and their new Christian way
- Money implications – people switching allegiance from supporting synagogue structure with its leaders – who liked their salaries and perks; what's in it for me?
- Ultimately motivated by their father the devil who was fighting against the advance of the gospel – should have been people of the Word – **John 5:39**

Blaiklock: The *lewd fellows of the baser sort* {KJV} are literally, 'bad men from among the market people', the labourers, no doubt, and humbler trade-associates of the Jewish commercial houses. Mt. xx. 3 pictures those who stood 'idle in the market-place' awaiting work. The desperate have often become the tools and dupes of the evil. So they were at Thessalonica.

Radical False Charges:

- They have **upset the world** – what an impact these few missionary leaders had; everywhere they went they created much more than just a buzz
- They are **revolutionaries** in the political realm – advocating allegiance to a different king and a different set of standards

Deffinbaugh: *Turned . . . upside down* is *anastatosantes*. The verb means 'to stir up, excite, unsettle.' In the New Testament it occurs only here, in 21:38, and in Galatians 5:12.

World today needs to be turned upside down; shake people out of their materialistic complacency; change the focus from the temporal to the eternal

Stott: the kingship of Jesus has unavoidable political implications since, as his loyal subjects, we must refuse to give to any ruler or ideology the supreme homage and total obedience which are due to him alone.

Wiersbe: Paul hoped that the salvation of the Gentiles would "provoke" the Jews into studying the Scriptures and discovering their promised Messiah (Rom. 11:13-14), but in this case, it only provoked them into persecuting the infant church.

C. (:9-10a) Pressure to Move On to the Next City – Accelerated <u>Departure</u>

"*And when they had received a pledge from Jason and the others, they released them. And the brethren immediately sent Paul and Silas away by night to Berea;*"

καὶ λαβόντες τὸ ἱκανὸν παρὰ τοῦ Ἰάσονος καὶ τῶν λοιπῶν ἀπέλυσαν αὐτούς. Οἱ δὲ ἀδελφοὶ εὐθέως διὰ νυκτὸς ἐξέπεμψαν τόν τε Παῦλον καὶ τὸν Σιλᾶν εἰς Βέροιαν,

Constable: The city officials could not find the missionaries to bring them to trial. Consequently they made Jason and his friends pay a bond guaranteeing that Paul would cause no further trouble but leave town. If trouble continued, Jason would lose his money. If it did not, he would receive it back. Paul did leave town and wrote to the Thessalonians that Satan hindered his return (1 Thess. 2:18). His inability to return may have been the result of this tactic of his enemies. The Christians, however, carried on admirably, for which Paul thanked God (1 Thess. 1:7-10; 2:14-16).

50 mile journey

II. (:10b-15) <u>TRUTH SEEKERS IN BEREA</u> – EMPHASIS ON POSITIVE RESPONSE = PASSION FOR THE TRUTH OF GOD'S WORD

A. (:10b) Presentation of the Gospel -- Missionary Mindset – Aggressive <u>Arrival</u> in Town -- Preaching Christ from the Scriptures in the Synagogue

" *and when they arrived, they went into the synagogue of the Jews.*"

οἵτινες παραγενόμενοι εἰς τὴν συναγωγὴν τῶν Ἰουδαίων ἀπῆεσαν.

Deffinbaugh: Luke seems to want us to view Berea in contrast to Thessalonica, rather than in terms of comparison. One contrast is to be seen in the size of these two places. Thessalonica was a large, major city; Berea, so far as we can tell, was a small, "sleepy town," an "out of the way

place" (see footnote 12 on Berea). Another contrast is that while Amphipolis and Apollonia seem to have had no synagogue, this town did. And finally, Luke draws out the contrast between the "more noble-mindedness" of the Jews in Berea than those in Thessalonica.

B. (:11-13) Mixed Response – Agitated <u>Controversy</u> -- Some Positive but Most Negative

1. (:11-12) <u>Some Positive</u> – More Noble-Minded and Investigative – Driven by Truth

Emphasis: Passion for the Truth of God's Word --

> "*Now these were more noble-minded than those in Thessalonica, for they received the word with great eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily, to see whether these things were so. Many of them therefore believed, along with a number of prominent Greek women and men.*"
>
> οὗτοι δὲ ἦσαν εὐγενέστεροι τῶν ἐν Θεσσαλονίκῃ, οἵτινες ἐδέξαντο τὸν λόγον μετὰ πάσης προθυμίας καθ᾽ ἡμέραν ἀνακρίνοντες τὰς γραφὰς εἰ ἔχοι ταῦτα οὕτως. πολλοὶ μὲν οὖν ἐξ αὐτῶν ἐπίστευσαν καὶ τῶν Ἑλληνίδων γυναικῶν τῶν εὐσχημόνων καὶ ἀνδρῶν οὐκ ὀλίγοι.

"*noble-minded*" -- Open-minded; without prejudice; only NT usage – interested in searching out truth

- takes enthusiasm and interest
- takes diligence and effort to do the study on daily basis
- takes careful judgment and discernment

Putting a priority on the truth

2. (:13) <u>Most Negative</u> – Gullible and Easily Manipulated

> "*But when the Jews of Thessalonica found out that the word of God had been proclaimed by Paul in Berea also, they came there likewise, agitating and stirring up the crowds.*"
>
> Ὡς δὲ ἔγνωσαν οἱ ἀπὸ τῆς Θεσσαλονίκης Ἰουδαῖοι ὅτι καὶ ἐν τῇ Βεροίᾳ κατηγγέλη ὑπὸ τοῦ Παύλου ὁ λόγος τοῦ θεοῦ, ἦλθον κἀκεῖ σαλεύοντες καὶ ταράσσοντες τοὺς ὄχλους.

Look at how the media today manipulates the crowds against Christianity

C. (:14-15) Pressure to Move On to the Next City – Accelerated <u>Departure</u>

> "*And then immediately the brethren sent Paul out to go as far as the sea; and Silas and Timothy remained there. Now those who conducted Paul brought him as far as Athens; and receiving a command for Silas and Timothy to come to him as soon as possible, they departed.*"
>
> εὐθέως δὲ τότε τὸν Παῦλον ἐξαπέστειλαν οἱ ἀδελφοὶ πορεύεσθαι ἕως ἐπὶ τὴν θάλασσαν, ὑπέμεινάν τε ὅ τε Σιλᾶς καὶ ὁ Τιμόθεος ἐκεῖ. οἱ δὲ καθιστάνοντες τὸν Παῦλον ἤγαγον ἕως Ἀθηνῶν, καὶ λαβόντες ἐντολὴν πρὸς τὸν Σιλᾶν καὶ τὸν Τιμόθεον ἵνα ὡς τάχιστα ἔλθωσιν πρὸς αὐτὸν ἐξήεσαν.

Constable: The text is not clear if Paul took a ship to Athens or travelled there by land. Perhaps his pursuers did not know either. It seems that Paul's escorts took him to the sea to give the

impression that they intended to put him on a ship, but then they accompanied him to Athens by land. In any case he reached Athens safely and sent instructions back with the Berean brethren who had accompanied him that Silas and Timothy should join him soon.

CONCLUSION:

Barclay: Look at the courage of Paul. He had been imprisoned in Philippi; he had left Thessalonica in peril of his life, under cover of darkness; and once again in Beroea he had had to flee for his life. Most men would have abandoned a struggle which seemed bound to end in arrest and death. When David Livingstone was asked where he was prepared to go, he answered, "I am prepared to go anywhere, *so long as it is forward*." The idea of turning back never occurred to Paul either.

Do you really care that God has spoken in His Word? Does truth float your boat?
Or are you more concerned that nothing impact the comfort and pleasures of your earthly life?
Do you want your life to be transformed to be more like the Lord Jesus; or do you want to reshape Jesus into an idol of your own making so that He thinks like you and acts like you and does not convict you of sin and a need for change in your life?
Are you more concerned with protecting the traditions of man's wisdom and an earthly oriented value system or are you like the noble minded ones in Berea that will go to any length to search out God's truth and act upon it? What will God write as the inscription on your tombstone when it comes to that final day of accountability? Do you really have a passion for the truth of God's Word?

* * * * * * * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

1) How prepared are you to reason with unbelievers from the scriptures about the person of Jesus Christ and the significance of His death and resurrection and Messianic role?

2) Why is faith in Jesus Christ not a "leap into the dark"?

3) Where do we see the motivation of jealousy today on the part of those who oppose the gospel message?

4) Why did Paul's presentation of the gospel seem to consistently stir up angry opposition while today in our context we typically do not see the same type of violent reaction?

* * * * * * * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Steven Cole: **Upsetting the World for Christ**
In Thessalonica, an angry mob accuses him and Silas of upsetting the world, or as some translations put it, of turning the world upside down and of proclaiming a king other than Caesar (17:6, 7).

To upset the world for Jesus Christ, we need to be men and women who are committed to Christ and the gospel.

1. The world needs to be upset. Ever since the fall of the human race into sin

2. To upset the world for Christ, God uses men and women committed to Christ and the gospel.

3. To upset the world for Christ, God uses the message of the gospel. . .

The Jews thought that Messiah would be a conquering King who would deliver them from Rome and other enemies, but they didn't like the notion of Him suffering and dying for sinners. That implied that they were sinners, but they viewed the Gentiles as the sinners! They liked the idea of a King who would make life comfortable for them, but they didn't like the notion of a King who would confront their sin! But the gospel proclaims Jesus as both the Savior of sinners and the Lord of all of our lives. We have not faithfully proclaimed the gospel if we give out an easy message that dodges sin and lets the sinner continue as his own lord, "using" Jesus to make life more comfortable.

4. The proper response to the gospel is first to verify its truth, then to believe in Jesus as Savior and follow Him as Lord, no matter what the cost.

Deffinbaugh: And so it was at Thessalonica when Paul and the others went to the synagogue and were invited to speak. Here, as always, Paul preached of Jesus as Israel's Messiah. His argument could be summarized: (1) The Old Testament prophets spoke of Messiah. (2) This Messiah must be rejected by His people, Israel, and be put to death for the sins of men. (3) This crucified Christ must, according to the Old Testament prophets, be raised from the dead. (4) Jesus of Nazareth is the Messiah, having fulfilled all of these prophecies. (5) Each listener must make a choice, either to accept Jesus as their Messiah, or to reject Him, as the Jewish leaders and people of Jerusalem had done. To receive Him was to obtain the forgiveness of sins and the assurance of eternal life; to reject Him was to await the future day when He will come to judge and to punish His enemies.
. . .
Let me seek to illustrate this difference between these two groups of Jews. The Thessalonian Jews were somewhat like the reluctant housewife who does not wish to have her daily routine interrupted, and thus does not welcome the vacuum cleaner salesman who comes to the door. The salesman may be able to convince this woman to buy his product, but he will have to overcome all kinds of resistance. The Bereans were like the woman who is almost out of her favorite make-up and opens the door delighted to find the Avon salesperson standing there. This woman has her order ready and simply waits for the opportunity to place it. She does not need to be "sold" anything for she already wants to buy it. . .

How different these Berean Jews were from many of their fellow-Jews in other places. Most Jews seemed to care little about truth or about what the Old Testament actually taught. What they cared about was their position and their power and prestige. They were motivated and driven, not by their hope of Messiah, nor by their love for and confidence in the Scriptures, but by their jealousy. They cared less about what the Bible taught than about what they wanted for themselves. . .

Jealousy was the principle motivation behind the opposition of both groups of Jewish opponents

to the Gospel. It was jealousy which prompted the Jewish religious leaders to accuse Jesus of treason and to demand His crucifixion (Matthew 27:28; Mark 15:10; cf. John 7:31-32, 45-49). So too it was jealousy which prompted the Jews to oppose Paul and his preaching of the gospel (Acts 17:4; cf. Acts 13:6ff., 45; 14:1-2ff.).

MacArthur: **Men Who Turned the World Upside Down**
Our beloved God has always had people that made waves when they confronted the system and the sinners that make up the system, you see.

When you come to the Book of Acts, you've got another guy and it's Paul. Every time he put his foot down, something rattled inevitable. In Acts, he didn't go into a town and just gently leave an impression. He turned the towns into chaos whenever he ministered there.

We're going to see five spiritual principles that made these men that really turned the world on its ear. These are exciting principles.

Principle No. 1 -- **Courage**
- trust God -- courage equals confidence in God
- confess sin.
- thank Him in advance

Principle No. 2 – **Content** = speak the truth
If you're gonna be effective in content, you need to one, confess your sins, so that you have clear mind and pure mind. Two, study the word. Three, personalize the word, and fourth, share the word, even if it's just teaching your wife or your husband or somebody else.

Principle No. 3 – **Converts**

Principle No. 4 – **Conflict**

Principle No. 5 – **Concern** for the glory of God

In spite of what had happened. Remembering all of the pain and the grief, he went in [to the synagogue in the next town] anyway. And he knew that he had to go the Jewish Synagogue because he had to buck the existing religious system - he had to bring those Jews to a, knowledge, of Christ. I think of John Bunyan. John Bunyan bucked the religious establishment. John Bunyan was in England and the religious establishment was the Church of England and he wasn't real happy with the Church of England. So, he decided, "I'll operate outside the Church of England, and I'll just preach Jesus Christ, and teach Christ." And so, he started preaching all over everywhere, and they said, "You better shut up, or we'll put you in jail. You can't preach outside an organized church.

And John Bunyan said, in effect, "Just watch me." And he continued to preach; so you know what they did? They packed him up and threw him in a cell and they left him there for 12 years. You say, "Oh John, now see what you did by being impetuous?" You know what he did for 12 years, in there, a good part of that time? He wrote, *Pilgrim's Progress.* Next to the Bible, that book has affected more lives than any book ever written. Now, if John Bunyan hadn't have had

the courage to do what was right, and take the effect of it, he may never have had the time, to write that thing. Certainly not while he was running around preaching everywhere.

S. Lewis Johnson: **Triumphs and Trouble in the Ministry**

Now, the church, today, it couldn't upset a teacup. I always think of that preacher who asked some kids to recite the books of the Bible; and one little kid began at Genesis and he went all the way through to "Revolutions." [Laughter] Well, that's really what happens when we preach the Word of God. There are revolutions; and there was a revolution there in Thessalonica on this day.

Zeisler: If we are not eager and joyful and grateful for God's truth, we need to ask why not. Why don't we value God's truth as the Bereans did? Amos warned of a coming day when there would be a famine for the word of God, when people would hunger for it and not have the opportunity to hear it (Amos 8:11-12). We have the opportunity and most of us aren't hungry enough. May God open our eyes in our prayers to changes, choices, repentance we can make so that we will hunger for more and more of him.

TEXT: Acts 17:16-23

TITLE: NO ROOM FOR TOLERANCE ABOUT WHO GOD IS – PART 1 – THE APPROACH IN ATHENS

BIG IDEA:
THE PROCLAMATION OF THE TRUTH ABOUT GOD LEAVES NO ROOM FOR TOLERANCE OF WORTHLESS RELIGIOUS PHILOSOPHY
(no matter how sophisticated or intellectual or culturally accepted)

INTRODUCTION:

The University of Richmond where Jenny attended has a very special contest for its students with a very valuable reward. You can win a free year's tuition by submitting the best thesis question for the university to debate and discuss from various angles for a couple of years. It's called the Quest Question. Past winner: "Is Truth in the eye of the beholder?" Doesn't sound too tough (you have to submit an entire package that expands on your theme and suggests avenues of debate for the different departments)
Jenny and I put our heads together and submitted a surefire winner:

"Is Tolerance the new modern virtue?" We'll be talking about this today … However, sad to say it must not have been politically correct enough to win the prize … Winning statement = "When does Discovery Inspire Change? Why Change?"

What about Tolerance in today's culture?
being patient and fair is one thing; We are not talking about going about like the KKK in a crusade of violence and a lynch mob type mentality; but today tolerance means not speaking against another point of view as being wrong and dangerous … but taking a hands-off approach; different strokes for different folks

cf. the Christian testimonies you hear in the media – I want to give praise to God for what He's done for me ….. but not: God calls upon each one of you to repent and put your faith also in Him

Problems of living in a pluralistic society in a democratic nation:
cf. how our National Day of Prayer is supposed to make the effort to incorporate people of every faith as if they have equal validity

cf. how after the 9/11 tragedy in the service that followed in the National Cathedral the speakers like Billy Graham had to walk the fine line between not compromising the truth and being gracious to the pagan philosophers

How would Paul respond? Notice that he didn't get invited back to many cities?
Cf. our military chaplaincy program
What type of tolerance is appropriate for us?

THE PROCLAMATION OF THE TRUTH ABOUT GOD LEAVES NO ROOM FOR TOLERANCE OF WORTHLESS RELIGIOUS PHILOSOPHY
(no matter how sophisticated or intellectual or culturally accepted)

The Approach / The Argument / The Application
Today: Setting the Stage and Setting the Tone for the gospel presentation in Athens

I. (:16-21) SETTING THE STAGE -- WHEN ENCOUNTERING IDOLATRY AND INTELLECTUAL SOPHISTICATION AND RELIGIOUS PHILOSOPHY, PAUL WAS TICKED OFF, NOT TOLERANT

A. (:16) PAUL'S IRRITATION / INDIGNATION OVER IDOLATRY

> "*Now while Paul was waiting for them at Athens, his spirit was being provoked within him as he was beholding the city full of idols.*"
>
> Ἐν δὲ ταῖς Ἀθήναις ἐκδεχομένου αὐτοὺς τοῦ Παύλου παρωξύνετο τὸ πνεῦμα αὐτοῦ ἐν αὐτῷ θεωροῦντος κατείδωλον οὖσαν τὴν πόλιν.

[Was going to spend entire sermon on just this verse 16]
Didn't go around wrecking the idols like King Asa (1 Kings 15:12 "*removed all the idols which his fathers had made… But the high places were not taken away*) -- which was appropriate to do in a theocracy; but he didn't just look the other way either

Background of Athens – "*city full of idols*"
Lots of statues and religious symbols
That phrase could well be translated "drowning in idols," or "swamped with idols."

At the time of Paul's visit to Athens, that city was no longer important as a political seat; Corinth was the commercial and political center of Greece under the Roman Caesars. But Athens was still the university center of the world

By this time, the city of Athens was about 600 years old. The birthplace of democracy, Athens was named after Athena, the virgin goddess who was enshrined in the beautiful Parthenon of the Acropolis. Athens was a university city, where in former years students from all over the known world sat at the feet of the great philosophers, Socrates, Plato and Aristotle. …. But in 86 B.C., Athens was sacked by the Romans. Most of the beautiful buildings for which Athens was famous were destroyed. … Historians tell us that there were over 30,000 statues within the city proper. Probably only a population left of 10,000 – a pretty hefty idol/people ration … Paul knew that behind the art, the beauty, the gold, the silver and the marble was something much more deadly--behind them was idolatry, immorality and captivity.
(Ritchie)

Paul hated false misrepresentations of God and futile attempts by man to devise their own religious systems. He hated the evil of the idolatry and he felt compassion for the people who remained in bondage and spiritual ignorance.

Paul was probably reminded of his past intellectual pursuits in Judaism – **Phil. 3**

He was born in Tarsus, one of the three great university cities of the Roman world, the other two being Athens and Alexandria in Egypt. Paul himself had been trained as a Jew at the feet of the greatest rabbis in Jerusalem. He was a man of incredible intellect, unsurpassed in his ability to reason with the mind that God gave him.
He knew firsthand the delusion and pride that come with the sophistication of the wisdom of this world. Remember: the preaching of the cross was foolishness to the Gentiles.

Phil. 3:7-8 "*But whatever things were gain to me, those things I have counted as loss for the sake of Christ. More than that, I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them but rubbish in order that I may gain Christ*"

There's an example of repentance and conversion!

literally *sharpen*; figuratively *arouse, excite, stimulate*; in a negative sense *provoke, irritate, cause to be upset*; only passive in the NT (AC 17.16; 1C 13.5 "*love is not provoked*") … anger exasperate

<u>WHAT PROVOKES OUR SPIRIT?</u>
Usually those things which impact our comfort and well-being and the pursuit of what we want to accomplish

- We are provoked by people who treat us wrong
- We are provoked by circumstances that bring us pain; or cause us to waste our time; or inconvenience us

Paul looks at things from God's perspective – He is provoked by those things that provoke God

Have we become so numb to the perversity of the world around us that our spirit is no longer provoked?

- Do we see the idolatry that Paul saw? Are we sensitive to it? Do we hate it?
- Do we have a love for the people that are living lives of futility and hopelesssness; do we care what happens to them?

Look at how angry God got in the **days of Noah** – **Gen. 6:5-7** "*Then the LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great on the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. 6 And the LORD was sorry that He had made man on the earth, and He was grieved in His heart. 7 And the LORD said, 'I will blot out man whom I have created from the face of the land, from man to animals to creeping things and to birds of the sky; for I am sorry that I have made them*.'"
Last days described as being similar to days of Noah
Matt 27:37-38 "*For the coming of the Son of Man will be just like the days of Noah. For as in those days which were before the flood they were eating and drinking, they were marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered the ark*,"

Look at how angry God was in the **days of Moses** when the Israelites made the golden calf as their idol to worship -- **Ex. 32:7-10** "*Then the LORD spoke to Moses, 'Go down at once, for your people, whom you brought up from the land of Egypt, have corrupted*

themselves. 8 They have quickly turned aside from the way which I commanded them. They have made for themselves a molten calf, and have worshiped it, and have sacrificed to it, and said, This is your god, O Israel, who brought you up from the land of Egypt!' And the LORD said to Moses, 'I have seen this people, and behold, they are an obstinate people. 10 Now then let Me alone, that My anger may burn against them, and that I may destroy them; and I will make of you a great nation.'"

Look at <u>what motivates Paul</u> to preach the gospel here in Athens:

- You normally have the love motivation – "for the love of Christ constrains us" – compassion for people
- You normally have the fear motivation – don't want to see the wrath of God executed against these people
- But here Paul elevates the aspect of motivation to the desire to see God glorified – It greatly disturbs him to see God robbed of His glory which He so richly deserves

B. (:17) (cf. vv. 2-3) PAUL'S <u>INITIATIVE</u> TO SEEK OUT OPPORTUNITIES TO DIALOGUE ABOUT THE TRUTH

"*So he was reasoning in the synagogue with the Jews and the God-fearing Gentiles, and in the market place every day with those who happened to be present.*"

διελέγετο μὲν οὖν ἐν τῇ συναγωγῇ τοῖς Ἰουδαίοις καὶ τοῖς σεβομένοις καὶ ἐν τῇ ἀγορᾷ κατὰ πᾶσαν ἡμέραν πρὸς τοὺς παρατυγχάνοντας.

He could have taken a mini-vacation here; some much needed rest while he waited for his traveling companions (Silas and Timothy); had just finished some intense tours of duty in Thessalonica and Berea
He was accustomed to the Jewish element in the audience stirring up the crowd and the authorities against him; he kept having to move on to the next location under duress; He had to keep one step ahead

1) Some people feel that Paul blew it in Athens –
   - Should have waited for the ministry team
   - Resorted to logical debate rather than reasoning from the Scriptures
   - Didn't really present the complete gospel message …

I disagree

2) Some see Paul's approach here as a model for how to identify with the culture and present sort of a "friendship evangelism" model of subtly working the gospel in as he had opportunity … I see some of that sensitivity … but I take Paul's approach to be much more bold and confrontational and even sarcastic than that .. He issued a strong indictment against their practice of idolatry

How did Paul take the Initiative?
Paul went to where the unbelieving people were. He met them on their home field.
3 Different Groups:

1) The synagogue – religious people – already interested in spiritual things
2) The marketplace – common people going about their daily activities
diff. culture back then … not like us accosting someone in Giant …
they were used to the social interaction in this forum and discussing a wide range of topics
3) Then we will see that he was granted an opportunity to take his message to the Philosophers of the city -- the super educated and articulate

WHAT TYPE OF INITIATIVE DO WE TAKE?

Are we always waiting for someone to tell us what to do? Are we driven like Paul was so that we just cannot rest unless we find opportunities to present the gospel?

C. (:18-21) PAUL'S INTELLECTUAL PLATFORM FOR A MORE SYSTEMATIC PROCLAMATION

"*And also some of the Epicurean and Stoic philosophers were conversing with him. And some were saying, 'What would this idle babbler wish to say?' Others, 'He seems to be a proclaimer of strange deities,'-- because he was preaching Jesus and the resurrection. And they took him and brought him to the Areopagus, saying, 'May we know what this new teaching is which you are proclaiming? For you are bringing some strange things to our ears; we want to know therefore what these things mean.' (Now all the Athenians and the strangers visiting there used to spend their time in nothing other than telling or hearing something new.)*"

τινὲς δὲ καὶ τῶν Ἐπικουρείων καὶ Στοϊκῶν φιλοσόφων συνέβαλλον αὐτῷ, καί τινες ἔλεγον· τί ἂν θέλοι ὁ σπερμολόγος οὗτος λέγειν; οἱ δέ· ξένων δαιμονίων δοκεῖ καταγγελεὺς εἶναι, ὅτι τὸν Ἰησοῦν καὶ τὴν ἀνάστασιν εὐηγγελίζετο. ἐπιλαβόμενοί τε αὐτοῦ ἐπὶ τὸν Ἄρειον πάγον ἤγαγον λέγοντες· δυνάμεθα γνῶναι τίς ἡ καινὴ αὕτη ἡ ὑπὸ σοῦ λαλουμένη διδαχή; ξενίζοντα γάρ τινα εἰσφέρεις εἰς τὰς ἀκοὰς ἡμῶν· βουλόμεθα οὖν γνῶναι τίνα θέλει ταῦτα εἶναι. Ἀθηναῖοι δὲ πάντες καὶ οἱ ἐπιδημοῦντες ξένοι εἰς οὐδὲν ἕτερον ηὐκαίρουν ἢ λέγειν τι ἢ ἀκούειν τι καινότερον.

1. Opposition can be a good thing – allows for clear distinctions between truth and error

Don't you hate it when you are witnessing to someone and they keep agreeing with you as if they have the same type of faith in Christ when you know that they just don't see the distinctions? That's why those evangelistic explosion questions up front are so good:

"If you were to die right now and stand before God and He were to ask you Why should I let you into my heaven, what would you say?"

It makes people commit to where their trust is before you give them all the right terminology.

Paul was dealing with Philosophers who had a highly defined worldview where it was easy to point out the differences. These Philosophies that had some ability to grapple

with the difficult questions of life – with suffering; with hardship …

a. Philosophy of the Epicureans – Motto: "*Eat, drink and be merry for tomorrow we die*" / everything happens by chance / deism

Kent: Epicureans sought contentment by a serene detachment from the world, and believed there would be no divine intervention in life nor punishment after death (the emphasis on sensual pleasure was a later perversion). They were materialistic in their outlook.

Taught that people couldn't connect with the gods at all and that as a result, there was no reason to seek moral good.

The Epicureans are the spiritual fathers of all our modern self-help, self-realization groups. The Epicurean philosophy was to seek a path of tranquillity. They didn't even want to think about a God who would judge them for their evil ways, so they crossed all thought of that out of their minds. For them, truth came through experience. Today's Epicureans agree with that. "If it feels good, do it," they say "All truth is within me." (Ritchie)

b. Philosophy of the Stoics – Motto: "*Grin and bear it*" / your fate has been determined; accept it without emotion / pantheistic = everything is god

Kent: Stoics sought happiness by accepting nature as it is and finding their place within it. They were essentially pantheistic.

Emotions were to be denied, and personal discipline and morality were highly valued.

Stoics also believed that life had no meaning. Rather than considering life to be random and unpredictable, they believed in an unchangeable fate set in motion by distant powers. What will happen to you will happen; it can't be changed. Therefore, the wise person is strong, able to be dealt terrible blows and suffer significant pain, able to bear up under good and bad and never raise an eyebrow, able to steel themselves against every contingency. (Zeisler)

Stott: To oversimplify, it was characteristic to Epicureans to emphasize chance, escape and the enjoyment of pleasure, and of the stoics to emphasize fatalism, submission and the endurance of pain.

Look at all **the resurrection** has to offer both of these systems: Hope for eternity; a personal relationship with a God who is alive and cares about you individually

2. Name Calling and False Charges are to be Expected / Misunderstood
   a. "*idle babbler*" – gave him no intellectual respect for his views; tough audience to reach
      could not grasp the system of thought without fuller explanation;

The word babbler is literally "*seed-pecker*." They saw Paul as one of the little birds in the marketplace going around pecking at seeds here and there. They regarded him as a mere collector of fragments of truth, gathering a few choice words from philosophies that he had picked up along the way and trying to impress people. They smiled and dismissed him contemptuously. (Stedman)

Stott: used of various seed-eating or scavenging birds . . . . from birds it was applied to human beings, vagrants or beggars who live off scraps of food they pick up in the gutter, "gutter-snipes". Then thirdly it was used particularly to describe teachers who, not having an original idea in their own heads, unscrupulously plagiarize form others picking up scraps of knowledge from here and there . . . until their system is nothing but a ragbag of other people's ideas and sayings.

b. "*proclaimer of strange deities – because he was preaching Jesus and the resurrection.*"
(the word is demons)
note plural – confusing the doctrine of the Trinity? Personifying the Resurrection as a separate deity?
Talk about strange deities … how about their hodgepodge of countless idols

3. Opposition Presented an Opening for Proclamation of the Gospel
   a. Fantastic Setting – "*brought him to the Areopagus*"
      physical hill of Mars; or symbolized the court system?
      court of judges who had the final authority in the city of Athens
      Super Bowl of philosophical debate – look at its history
      Fairly intimidating

Kent: Areopagus was the same court which had tried and condemned Socrates centuries before. Sometimes it met on the hill west of the Acropolis.

We have the wrong setting inside this little hotel room for Peter's sermon …
this sermon should be shouted from the mountaintops; demands a large outdoor amphitheater

b. Inquiring Audience
   "*May we know what this new teaching is which you are proclaiming? For you are bringing some strange things to our ears*; *we want to know therefore what these things mean*"

Major Problem: they wanted to know in an intellectual sense but not in terms of submitting their hearts and wills to the Sovereign God

Mostly a Futile Exercise: "*Now all the Athenians and the strangers visiting there used to spend their time in nothing other than telling or hearing something new"*

II. (:22-23) SETTING THE TONE – STRANGE MIXTURE OF SENSITIVITY, SARCASM AND AUTHORITY

"*And Paul stood in the midst of the Areopagus and said, 'Men of Athens, I observe that you are very religious in all respects. For while I was passing through and examining the objects of your worship, I also found an altar with this inscription, TO AN UNKNOWN GOD. What therefore you worship in ignorance, this I proclaim to you.*'"

Σταθεὶς δὲ [ὁ] Παῦλος ἐν μέσῳ τοῦ Ἀρείου πάγου ἔφη· ἄνδρες Ἀθηναῖοι, κατὰ πάντα ὡς δεισιδαιμονεστέρους ὑμᾶς θεωρῶ. διερχόμενος γὰρ καὶ ἀναθεωρῶν τὰ σεβάσματα ὑμῶν εὗρον καὶ βωμὸν ἐν ᾧ ἐπεγέγραπτο· Ἀγνώστῳ θεῷ. ὃ οὖν ἀγνοοῦντες εὐσεβεῖτε, τοῦτο ἐγὼ καταγγέλλω ὑμῖν.

A. SENSITIVITY – BUILDING THE BRIDGE BETWEEN PAUL AND HIS AUDIENCE

"*Men of Athens, I observe that you are very religious in all respects*"
Gets their attention; appeals to what interests them; looks like he is paying them a compliment

The word he used was literally, "you are god-fearers." But the word he chose for "god" was rather unusual. Instead of the common word *theos*, which means God in his greatness, he chose the word *daimon*, demon, by which he implied that the gods they worshipped were lesser concepts than the great idea of God. They understood that he meant to compliment them because they had a concept of, and a capacity for, God. They were very much involved with and interested in God. (Stedman)

Paul connected with a fear the Greeks had: They didn't want to accidentally offend any god by failing to recognize and worship it. So they erected altars and sacrificed to the unknown god in addition to all of their "known" gods.

Sincerity will get you nowhere – it is all about truth and a heart response that conforms to the truth about God

B. SARCASM – you might not read this the same way

For all of your intellectualism and sophistication, even you yourselves have had to confess your spiritual ignorance – we see a little bite from the mouth of the Apostle Paul

"*examining the objects of your worship*" – subtle dig at their idolatry

C. AUTHORITY

"*What therefore you worship in ignorance, this I proclaim to you*"
Not bashful about sermonizing;
Great Commission: "*All authority has been given to me …*"

Could you be accused of arrogance? Yes
Could you be accused of being a know-it-all? Yes

CONCLUSION:

Different contexts call for different types of **approaches** in presenting the gospel. In this sophisticated center of philosophy and intellectual debate, Paul did not back down or apologize for the message of the exclusivity of salvation by Jesus Christ and the significance of His resurrection. He stood up against the sophisticated intellectuals of that city and addressed their pagan idolatry and ignorance of the nature of the one true God. In all he did he was motivated by wanting God to be glorified. He was provoked by the same things that provoke a holy God. He took initiative to address his audience and he adopted a tone that combined sensitivity, sarcasm and authority in order to gain their attention and provide a platform for discussion. Next week we will look at the **argument** itself.

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DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

1) How does the resurrection provide *proof to all men*?

2) What types of idols fill our cities today?

3) What type of reasoning is appropriate with unbelievers?

4) How do you seek to build a bridge with your audience in order to present the gospel effectively?

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QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Stott: Paul was provoked by idolatry, and provoked to anger, grief and indignation, just as God is himself, and for the same reason, namely for the honour and glory of his name. Scripture sometimes calls this emotion "jealousy." . . . "*I am the Lord, that is my name! I will not give my glory to another or my praise to idols*." (**Is. 42:8**) Our Creator and Redeemer has a right to our exclusive allegiance, and is "jealous" if we transfer it to anyone or anything else. Moreover, the people of God, who love God's name, should share in his "jealousy" for it. (cf. 1 Kings 19:10; 2 Cor. 11:2ff)

MacArthur: Well, Paul arrived in Athens and he was going to wait awhile, but his waiting was like most men's hard labor, you know. He just didn't know the meaning of it. And he hadn't been there very long until he began to be impressed by the city. And last time we saw how Athens impressed Paul. Remember I told you three things. First

of all, it stirred him up in the inside in the sense that it aroused his spiritual interest. He saw the city full of idols, verse 16. And then it stirred him emotional, it provoked him when he saw the glory of God not really going to God. He saw all this glory given to false gods. So the lostness of men worshipping idols and the glory of God moved him. And the third thing, it compelled his service. Verse 17. "Therefore he disputed." Therefore, he preached, he reasoned. So Athens tremendously impressed him. The lostness of its people, the glory of God not going to God, and he began to work. And He began to preach. And then we saw that when he began to preach, he impressed Athens, as he always did. Four ways: contempt, some people mocked; questioning, some people said "hum, this is interesting, let's hear this"; curiosity, some people said "I want to hear more" and they dragged him up to this court; and some people were converted. So there was contempt, questioning, curiosity and conversion. Athens impressed Paul. Paul, in turn, impressed Athens.

Zeisler: But in the first century A.D., Athens was a mere shell of that glory. Its population was tremendously reduced. It had no economic or military importance. It traded on its reputation of greatness, and was still impressed with itself, but there was nothing great there anymore. The arrogance that accompanied the knowledge of what Athens had once been seemed to be everywhere in this city. You might think of Athens in this period as an aging movie star who needs layers of makeup and all the tricks of wardrobe and lighting to retain any suggestion of glamour. Or perhaps it was like a former athlete at a card show, overweight, wheezing, signing pictures of himself as a young man, when he could do great things on the field. Athens was something like that—trying to hold up an image of itself that was no longer true. . .

If Paul had come here and was reading our newspapers, looking at our inscriptions, he might say something like this: “I’ve looked at the kind of country you are, and I see that you are a great military and economic power with an enormous desire to do good. But you are so morally weak that you have very little to offer, and your influence is waning. Let me tell you how you can become what you want to be, the answer to what you are missing.”

Or he might have said this: “I observe in your literature that you place a high value on equal inclusion and acceptance of everyone. But you don’t act on your values. I know that because in the most popular entertainment in your culture, “reality TV,” you humiliate people and laugh at those who get rejected. The way you entertain yourselves is destroying people. That tells me that you are missing something. Let me tell you about the God who can make you who you hope to be.”

Steven Cole: Paul began by stating his observation that they were very religious in all respects. He was restraining his indignation over all the idols that he saw, and picking up on the fact that at least they were interested in spiritual things. One way to begin a conversation about the Lord is to ask a person, “Do you have any spiritual beliefs?” Or, if a person is spouting off intellectual ideas about God, you can say, “I see that you’ve done some thinking about spiritual issues. Have you given any thought to who Jesus is?”

TEXT: Acts 17:24-29

TITLE: NO ROOM FOR TOLERANCE ABOUT WHO GOD IS – PART 2 – THE ARGUMENT – BASED ON THE UNIQUENESS OF GOD

BIG IDEA:
THE PROCLAMATION OF THE TRUTH ABOUT GOD LEAVES NO ROOM FOR TOLERANCE OF WORTHLESS RELIGIOUS PHILOSOPHY
(no matter how sophisticated or intellectual or culturally accepted)

INTRODUCTION:

J I Packer: (Knowing God) What were we made for? To know God. What aim should we set ourselves in life? To know God What is the "eternal life" that Jesus gives? Knowledge of God. "*This is life eternal, that they might know thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent*" (**John 17:3**). What is the best thing in life, bringing more joy, delight, and contentment, than anything else? Knowledge of God. "*Thus saith the Lord, Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, neither let the mighty man glory in his might, let not the rich man glory in his riches; but let him that glorieth glory in this, that he understandeth and knoweth me*" (**Jer. 9:23** f.).

Paul comes to these sophisticated intellectuals in Athens and brings to them the precious knowledge of God. He presents the gospel argument in a way that exposes the inconsistency and foolishness of worshiping their many idols while focusing on the majesty and glory of the One True God.

PROCLAIMING THE TRUTH ABOUT GOD – HE IS UNIQUE – LEAVES NO ROOM FOR TOLERANCE OF WORTHLESS RELIGIOUS PHILOSOPHY

Like a yearlong seminary course on the **Nature and Attributes of God** – true Theology …

Looked last week at Paul's **Approach** – picking up on their recognition of an altar to the Unknown God – Next week will be part 3 – the **Application** (the altar call) – Here we have Paul's **Argument** -- What does Paul proclaim here about Who God is?

SIX DISTINCTIVE TRUTHS ABOUT GOD –
SHOWCASING HIS UNIQUENESS

I. (:24a) GOD IS UNIQUE AS OUR POWERFUL CREATOR

"*The God who made the world and all things in it*"
ὁ θεὸς ὁ ποιήσας τὸν κόσμον καὶ πάντα τὰ ἐν αὐτῷ,

Rom. 1:20, 25 – don't turn around and worship the creation instead of the Creator "*For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse*. . .

For they exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever."

Jer. 10:1-12 "*Thus you shall say to them, 'The gods that did not make the heavens and the earth will perish from the earth and from under the heavens.' It is He who made the earth by His power, Who established the world by His wisdom; And by His understanding He has stretched out the heavens*." You better listen when He speaks! There is none like the Lord!

Nehemiah 9:6 "*Thou alone art the LORD. Thou hast made the heavens, The heaven of heavens with all their host, The earth and all that is on it, The seas and all that is in them. Thou dost give life to all of them And the heavenly host bows down before Thee.*"

Contrast dumb idols made by human hands
Application: we are accountable to the one who created us; no room for compromise here with other theories of origins
We need to be thankful that God has created us as He has … short, tall, athletic, clumsy … Bill Gothard very good on this subject

II. (:24b) GOD IS UNIQUE AS THE LORD (SOVEREIGN) OF HEAVEN AND EARTH

"*since He is Lord of heaven and earth*"
οὗτος οὐρανοῦ καὶ γῆς ὑπάρχων κύριος

God did not just create the world and set everything in motion and then walk away; He rules over His creation; He is the King, the ultimate sovereign; every knee must bow in submission to Him
He is running the show; He is calling the shots

Grudem: God's exercise of power over his creation is also called God's *sovereignty* = his exercise of rule as sovereign or king – working out His purposes because He controls all things

Do you realize how arrogant it is to shake our fist at God and rebel against Him? What are we thinking? How do we think that will turn out?

Illustration: Had someone who reports to me at work basically tell me this week, I don't like what you are telling me to do; I don't think it needs to be done; and I'm just not going to do it! How do you think that's going to turn out?

The angels in heaven obey their sovereign master – those that didn't are headed for the lake of fire; how much more creatures on earth had better get in line with His program

These philosophers in Athens have been living a life of intellectual arrogance – imagining that they in their natural wisdom can solve the ultimate questions of man's origins (Where did I come from?) and man's purpose in life (Why am I here?) and

man's destiny (Where am I going?); but not submitting to the revelation that would bring them the true knowledge of the Lord of heaven and earth

Such knowledge of the Lord's sovereignty requires spiritual illumination – not brilliant minds – **Luke 10:21-24** "*At that very time He rejoiced greatly in the Holy Spirit, and said, 'I praise You, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that You have hidden these things from the wise and intelligent and have revealed them to infants. Yes, Father, for this way was well-pleasing in Your sight. All things have been handed over to Me by My Father, and no one knows who the Son is except the Father, and who the Father is except the Son, and anyone to whom the son wills to reveal Him.' Turning to the disciples, He said privately, 'Blessed are the eyes which see the things you see, for I say to you, that many prophets and kings* [and philosophers in Athens] *wished to see the things which you see, and did not see them, and to hear the things which you hear, and did not hear them.*'"

Doctrine of Exclusivism – our culture hates this
Application: He should be acknowledged as the Lord of our life
Not willing to share His glory with another

III. (:24c) GOD IS UNIQUE IN HIS TRANSCENDENCE

"*does not dwell in temples made with hands*"
οὐκ ἐν χειροποιήτοις ναοῖς κατοικεῖ

Without human limitations; He is different than us in some important respects …
Above us

Wiersbe: We wonder how the Council members reacted to Paul's statement about temples, for right there on the Acropolis were several shrines dedicated to Athena.

What is the relationship between God and the material universe which He has created?
He is both **greater than His creation** and **independent** from it

(Grudem) **4 False World Systems:**
1) That differs from the typical humanistic view that we could call **materialism** – which denies the existence of God all together and says that the material universe is all that there is – many Christians live their lives as practical materialists – just concerned with laying up riches and enjoying pleasures on earth rather than setting their heart on eternal things

2) Scriptural view of God is also quite different from **pantheism** which says that the whole universe is God – denying His distinctive existence and majestic transcendence; thus the goal in systems based on this perspective is for the individual to blend in with the universe – losing your distinctiveness
Any philosophy that sees creation as an "emanation" out of God would be related to pantheism – Gnostic errors in the early church

3) **Dualism** represents an eternal conflict between the forces of good (under God's direction) and the forces of the evil aspects of material existence; cf. Star Wars movies; Most New Age religion is dualistic

4) **Deism** – God is viewed as a divine clock maker who wound up the clock of creation at the beginning but then left it to run on its own – so there is no personal relationship with a God who cares about the details of your everyday life

Why should we put a lot of money into ornate cathedrals and fancy stained glass windows? The established church has missed the boat badly here …
We need a sense of the majesty of God … but coming from our internal heart attitude … not emotionally induced by external grandeur; we can get that type of stimulus from the grandeur all around us in nature

Is. 66:1-2 "*Thus says the Lord, 'Heaven is My throne and the earth is My footstool. Where then is a house you could build for Me? And where is a place that I may rest? For My hand made all these things. Thus all these things came into being,' declares the Lord. 'But to this one I will look, To him who is humble and contrite of spirit, and who trembles at My word.*'"

Application: Let's look for him in the right places

John 4 – *worship in Spirit and Truth*

Mark 14:58 "*We heard Him say, 'I will destroy this temple made with hands, and in three days I will build another made without hands.*'"

Hebrews 9:11 "*But when Christ appeared as a high priest of the good things to come, He entered through the greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands, that is to say, not of this creation;*"

2 Corinthians 5:1 "*For we know that if the earthly tent which is our house is torn down, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.*"

Stott: Any attempt to limit or localize the Creator God, to imprison him within the confines of manmade buildings, structures or concepts, is ludicrous.

IV. (:25) GOD IS UNIQUE IN HIS SELF-EXISTENCE / SELF-SUFFICIENCY – SUSTAINER OF ALL

> "*neither is He served by human hands, as though He needed anything, since He Himself gives to all life and breath and all things*"
>
> οὐδὲ ὑπὸ χειρῶν ἀνθρωπίνων θεραπεύεται προσδεόμενός τινος, αὐτὸς διδοὺς πᾶσι ζωὴν καὶ πνοὴν καὶ τὰ πάντα·

Ritchie: God is a giver, not a taker, Paul tells them. The Athenians had invented a god and then wondered how he should be appeased. But they had missed the whole point. God doesn't want to be appeased, he wants to give life and breath. How many religions are there around today based on what man can do to please God? Paul's word to the Athenians cut across all the philosophies and religions of that day, and it still cuts across all the philosophies and religions of our day.

Application: Don't try to approach God with a **works orientation**. Recognize by faith our complete dependence upon Him.
This is bad news for those who imagine themselves to be self-sufficient and who think that God needs their contributions. Paul had been a very prominent Pharisee who prided himself on all he brought to the party.

It can be a shattering experience to come face-to-face with the worthlessness of your works of righteousness:
Illustration: like a student studying diligently the professor's notes for an important final exam and then discovering that the test really covers a book you have not even read

We need to make sure that our approach in bringing the gospel to people is to serve them (just as Christ came to serve and give His life a ransom for many); not to recruit people to fulfill our dreams of growing a larger ministry for God

Ps. 50:9-12 *"I shall take no young bull out of your house, Nor male goats out of your folds. 10 "For every beast of the forest is Mine, The cattle on a thousand hills. 11 "I know every bird of the mountains, And everything that moves in the field is Mine. 12 "If I were hungry, I would not tell you; For the world is Mine, and all it contains.*"

Boice: God continues to give the universe and world stability. The very fact that we and the world are here, that we are alive, and that we can think about both it and ourselves are all due to the sustaining activity of God.

V. (:26) GOD IS UNIQUE IN HIS PROVIDENTIAL GOVERNANCE -- NO RESPECTER OF PERSONS / HE MAKES ALL THE RULES

> "*and He made from one, every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined their appointed times, and the boundaries of their habitation*"
>
> ἐποίησέν τε ἐξ ἑνὸς πᾶν ἔθνος ἀνθρώπων κατοικεῖν ἐπὶ παντὸς προσώπου τῆς γῆς, ὁρίσας προστεταγμένους καιροὺς καὶ τὰς ὁροθεσίας τῆς κατοικίας αὐτῶν

Does everything according to His good pleasure
Goes back in time to the creation of Adam; demonstrates that God is working out His plan for every nation on earth – times and seasons for their dominion and limitations to

their sphere of control

Application: No room for national pride or self-will; these philosophers in Athens had prestige; they had culture and a rich heritage going for them; they thought they were something special

Pretty significant words for this city of Athens that was probably looking back and feeling sorry for that their glory days were behind them.

You went to Princeton … big deal … you are in the same boat as all other men … you never had 2 nickels to scrape together … don't worry … you have the same chance to seek God and respond to Him in faith … in fact, more so … because you are not hindered by the type of pride that considers yourself wise in your own eyes
(we fit in both categories …)

Longenecker: Contrary to the Athenians' boast that they had originated from the soil of their Attic homeland and therefore were not like other men, Paul affirms the oneness of mankind in their creation by the one God and their descent from a common ancestor. And contrary to the "deism" that permeated the philosophies of the day, he proclaimed that this God has determined specific times for men and "the exact places where they should live" so that men would seek him and find him.

Stott: although God cannot be held responsible for the tyranny or aggression of individual nations, yet both the history and the geography of each nation are ultimately under his control.

VI. (:27-28) GOD IS UNIQUE IN HIS IMMANENCE, IN HIS SELF REVELATION AND IN HIS REDEMPTIVE PURPOSES -- GOD DESIRES THE RESTORATION OF OUR FAMILY RELATIONSHIP

A. God can be found – Because He is a Revealing God

"*that they should seek God, if perhaps they might grope for Him and find Him*"
ζητεῖν τὸν θεόν, εἰ ἄρα γε ψηλαφήσειαν αὐτὸν καὶ εὕροιεν,

Interesting statement of God's Purpose and Desire as the God of History: that men and nations should seek Him

The groping and reaching out of a blind man

Boice: word that the Greek poet Homer used in the well-known story of the Cyclops. The giant one-eyed Cyclops had captured Odysseus and his men, and Odysseus had gotten him drunk and then blinded him with a sharp stake. The epic's hero then wanted to sneak out of the cave where he and his men were being held. But it was difficult because the Cyclops was groping around, feeling after Odysseus so that he might find him and kill him. That is the very word Paul uses. So it is as if he is saying: In our sin we are as blind as the blinded Cyclops. Nevertheless, because creation is still there, we

have an obligation to feel after God and find him, even though we cannot see him.

Cole: Thus Paul's meaning in Acts 17:27-28 is not that fallen men of their own natural ability and free will can seek after and find God. He clearly refutes that idea in Romans 3. Rather, he is showing that even though men are in fact dependent on God for everything, and even though God has graciously given men life and breath and all things, men have ignored God and gone their own way. They should have sought God and groped in the dark for Him, and if they had, God would have graciously let them find Him. Even though God is high and lifted up, He is also near to all who call upon Him.

People waste a lot of energy hunting for God in all the wrong places. They need to respond to the revelation that God has already given … that is why the Word of God is so essential. God is the one who takes the initiative to seek and to save the lost; and we are here as God's representatives to participate in that mission.

Stedman: to show how God draws men and does not seek to evade them. To the pagans the gods dwelt on Mount Olympus, remote from humanity. Men had to go through perilous and hazardous journeys in order to find and placate their gods, to seek them out and find them, while the gods hid themselves from men. But Paul's word is that the true God is not doing that:

Deffinbaugh: their system of searching for the one true God is defective and futile. The God who was, to them "unknown" is a God who has made Himself known. God is not trying to hide from men; men are hiding from God, and often by means of their religion. The "unknown god," whom they have acknowledged exists is the God who caused all things to come into existence—the Creator of all things, including men. And His very creation is that which bears testimony of His existence, as well as His attributes (or characteristics). Thus, if God is unknown to these Athenians, it is not because God has not revealed Himself to men, but because men have closed their eyes to His existence and character.

B. God is close at hand – Because He is a Personal/Relational God

"*though He is not far from each one of us; for in Him we live and move and exist*"

καί γε οὐ μακρὰν ἀπὸ ἑνὸς ἑκάστου ἡμῶν ὑπάρχοντα. ἐν αὐτῷ γὰρ ζῶμεν καὶ κινούμεθα καὶ ἐσμέν,

C. We have been created in the image of God; Therefore we are His offspring

"*as even some of your own poets have said, 'For we also are His offspring*."
ὡς καί τινες τῶν καθ᾽ ὑμᾶς ποιητῶν εἰρήκασιν· τοῦ γὰρ καὶ γένος ἐσμέν.

(Paul quoted from two ancient poets of the region: Epimenides and Aratus)
N. B. Stonehouse: These pagan writers as creatures of God confronted with the divine revelation were capable of responses which were valid so long as and to the extent that they stood in isolation from their pagan systems. Thus, thoughts which in their pagan

contexts were quite un-Christian and anti-Christian, could be acknowledged as up to a point involving an actual apprehension of revealed truth.

Dignity of man – man is not worthless and insignificant

Man's personality, intelligence, creativity, desire for companionship, his desire to relate to God, his zest for life, his dominion over life, all come from God.

(:29) CONCLUSION – FINAL INDICTMENT OF THE INCONSISTENCY AND FOOLISHNESS OF IDOLATRY

> "*Being then the offspring of God, we ought not to think that the Divine Nature is like gold or silver or stone, an image formed by the art and thought of man*."
>
> γένος οὖν ὑπάρχοντες τοῦ θεοῦ οὐκ ὀφείλομεν νομίζειν χρυσῷ ἢ ἀργύρῳ ἢ λίθῳ, χαράγματι τέχνης καὶ ἐνθυμήσεως ἀνθρώπου, τὸ θεῖον εἶναι ὅμοιον.

Let's not insult the character of God; let's turn away decisively from idolatry.

Stedman: He is saying that, if it is true that we are made with a capacity for God, if we know that we are made to contain and reflect God, then it is not only insulting to God to make an idol of him, but it is also degrading to man. It is saying that we can be satisfied with things that are less than ourselves, that we can find satisfaction in trinkets and trifles and baubles, in material values

Wiersbe: God made us in His image, so it is foolish for us to make gods in our own image! Greek religion was nothing but the manufacture and worship of gods who were patterned after men and who acted like men. Paul not only showed the folly of temples and the temple rituals, but also the folly of all idolatry.

* * * * * * * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

1) How do other religions deal with the topics of immanence and transcendence?

2) To what extent does God control everything that happens?

3) If God does not need anything from anyone why does He seek genuine worshippers?

4) How does our derivation from God as Creator preclude idolatry?

* * * * * * * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Stott: All idolatry, whether ancient or modern, primitive or sophisticated, is inexcusable, whether the images are metal or mental, material objects of worship or unworthy concepts in the minds. For idolatry is the attempt either to localize God, confining him within limits which we impose, whereas he is the Creator of the universe; or to domesticate God, making him dependent on us, taming and taping him, whereas he is the Sustainer of human life; or to alienate God, blaming him for his distance and his silence, whereas he is the Ruler of nations, and not far from any of us; or to dethrone God, demoting him to some image of our own contrivance or craft, whereas he is our Father from whom we derive our being. In brief, all idolatry tries to minimize the gulf between the Creator and his creatures, in order to bring him under our control. More than that, it actually reverses the respective positions of God and us, so that, instead of our humbly acknowledging that God has created and rules us, we presume to imagine that we can create and rule God. There is no logic in idolatry; it is a perverse, topsy-turvy expression of our human rebellion against God.

Zeisler: So quoting from their own background, Paul spoke of a personal God and said it was foolish to think that such a God as this would care about their statue. He was saying, "If you want significance, you need to know this God. But you're not going to buy him off with a statue, or a Parthenon, or ten of them. We gain nothing by appealing to God with the work of our hands. Nations rise and fall because he says they should, not because they are the victims of fate. We are born, we grow, and we die with his awareness of us. We were made to inhabit the earth, we were made to seek after God. Deep in your hearts you even know that it's true yourselves.

TEXT: Acts 17: 30-34

TITLE: NO ROOM FOR TOLERANCE ABOUT WHO GOD IS – PART 3 – THE APPLICATION AND RESPONSE

BIG IDEA:
THE PROCLAMATION OF THE TRUTH ABOUT GOD LEAVES NO ROOM FOR TOLERANCE OF WORTHLESS RELIGIOUS PHILOSOPHY
(no matter how sophisticated or intellectual or culturally accepted)

INTRODUCTION:
Some commentators have criticized Paul's approach in Athens based on a couple of factors:

- He was ministering solo – without the support of the other members of his missionary team
- Acts 17 does not seem to stress the message of the crucifixion (although certainly preaching Jesus and the Resurrection presumes the significance of the crucifixion)
- He quotes from a couple of their pagan poets

But I would argue that Paul adjusted his approach to his audience and that Acts 17 is a masterful exhibit of effective communication of the gospel message with its emphasis on the uniqueness of God in contrast to the futility of idol worship. We have already studied Paul's Approach and his Argument. Today we finish with a look at his Application and the variety of Responses.

I. (:30-31) THE APPLICATION: IMMINENCY OF JUDGMENT DEMANDS IMMEDIATE REPENTANCE BECAUSE THE JUDGE IS THE RESURRECTED JESUS

In business terms we call this, Asking for the Order
Paul's version of the altar call

A. Unique Time in History – These are the Last Days

"*Therefore having overlooked the times of ignorance,*"

τοὺς μὲν οὖν χρόνους τῆς ἀγνοίας ὑπεριδὼν ὁ θεός,

Understand the Times – Judgment day fast approaching; don't mistake God's patience and forbearance and longsuffering for leniency

The coming of the Messiah has changed everything

Paul had begun this address in Athens by making a connection to their admitted ignorance about God – but here he shows that despite ignorance they are culpable and without excuse

B. Universal Requirement -- Repentance

"*God is now declaring to men that all everywhere should repent,*"

τὰ νῦν παραγγέλλει τοῖς ἀνθρώποις πάντας πανταχοῦ μετανοεῖν,

- This requirement does not exclude faith, it assumes faith = two sides of the same coin; that is why to the Philippian jailor the only requirement verbalized is: "*Believe in the Lord Jesus and you will be saved*"

- This requirement is much more than a change in one's view of who Jesus is – their must be a sin component to repentance; we want to be saved from our former manner of life when we lived in selfishness, indulging the lusts of the flesh and exalting the pride of our own ways; people struggle with understanding repentance to be a requirement for salvation; they get confused and think that repentance is a work of man; it is a gift of God; but not in the sense of a tangible thing that you unwrap … but an enablement – we are the ones that do the repenting; we are the ones that must do the believing – but that is only possible because God works in us to enable us and draw us to Himself; Godly sorrow worketh repentance not to be repented of. [Daily reading **2 Cor. 7:10**] You must want to be saved and changed – not to continue on in your present course of sin and rebellion and alienation from God

- This requirement does not extend to Reformation of our life – that is a fruit of repentance, not the root of repentance – we don't change ourselves to make ourselves acceptable to God; we cast ourselves on the mercy and power of God to deliver us from our sins and transform our lives

C. Unavoidable Accountability – Judgment Day Coming –
5 Certainties about final judgment:

1. Judgment is Fixed

"*because He has fixed a day*"
καθότι ἔστησεν ἡμέραν

Man is not in charge of his final destiny; he is not self sufficient or in control
Our views about eschatology might be foggy in some of the details; we might not be able to agree in all of the fine points; but when it comes to the certainty of judgment day, let's not waffle; God has fixed a day! Nothing anyone can do will change that; God is not foggy about the details of the end times; He is working out everything according to His timetable.

Men may mock at the doctrine of the resurrection of Jesus and sneer, Where is the promise of His coming back?

2. Judgment is Universal

"*in which He will judge the world*"
ἐν ᾗ μέλλει κρίνειν τὴν οἰκουμένην

Does not matter whether you are still living or already passed from this earth;
Does not matter if you are rich or poor;
Does not matter if you are highly intellectual and sophisticated or just a simple blue collar laborer;
Does not matter if you are Jew or Gentile

3. Judgment is Righteous

in righteousness"
ἐν δικαιοσύνῃ,

Isn't it frustrating when judgments are not in accord with what is right and fair?
Isn't it frustrating when people don't get punished for wickedness and don't get rewarded for doing what is right?
Divine promise stands: "As you sow, so shall you also reap" – but you must view that in light of eternal reckoning – not in what gets dished out to you today

4. Judgment is Messianic
"*through a Man*"
ἐν ἀνδρὶ

The identity of the Judge is no longer a mystery – all judgment has been committed to the God-Man who is the one mediator between God and man

God Incarnate; God took on humanity and still today remains fully God and fully man

5. Judgment is Divinely Orchestrated
"*whom He has appointed,*"
ᾧ ὥρισεν,

John 5:22-27

D. Undeniable Proof – the Resurrection
"*having furnished proof to all men by raising Him from the dead.*"

πίστιν παρασχὼν πᾶσιν ἀναστήσας αὐτὸν ἐκ νεκρῶν.

THE RESURRECTION OF JESUS CHRIST IS THE ONLY APOLOGETIC WE NEED
Vindication of Jesus – He is whom He claimed to be – both Lord and Judge
We all were children of God in the sense of being descended from the first Adam; we need to make sure that we are in God's spiritual family by union with the second Adam who is able to forgive our sins and impute to us His perfect righteousness

People are always asking for proof – God has given the ultimate proof; what more could He give?

II. (:32-34) THE RESPONSE: THREE DIFFERENT RESPONSES TO THE MESSAGE OF THE RESURRECTION

A. (:32a) Mockery and Hardened Hearts
"*Now when they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some began to sneer,*"

Ἀκούσαντες δὲ ἀνάστασιν νεκρῶν οἱ μὲν ἐχλεύαζον,

Paul did not sugarcoat the gospel message at all; did not back down from confrontation; must have been preaching the crucifixion if He was preaching the resurrection

Zeisler: Some were too haughty, too impressed with themselves, too much in love with their own past, too committed to protecting the shell, too unwilling to see their shallowness. So they sneered.

Stedman: Some mocked. That means their pride was threatened. Mocking is always the defense of pride when it feels itself attacked but has no logical defense; it resorts to ridicule. This is still the reaction of many today. Whenever they hear of Jesus, they begin to ridicule. But Christianity ridiculed is always a sign of weakness, an admission of defeat.

B. (:32b-33) Procrastination and Lost Opportunity

"*but others said, 'We shall hear you again concerning this.' So Paul went out of their midst.*"

οἱ δὲ εἶπαν· ἀκουσόμεθά σου περὶ τούτου καὶ πάλιν. οὕτως ὁ Παῦλος ἐξῆλθεν ἐκ μέσου αὐτῶν.

INTELLECTUAL CURIOUSITY / DELAYING TACTICS / SMOKESCREEN

God delivers His message according to His timetable; you need to respond when the opportunity is in front of you; no guarantee you will ever have another chance
Paul did not hang around Athens and schedule other meetings in accordance with their schedules; he was on the move, led of the Spirit to fulfill his mission as Apostle to the Gentiles
These people had in front of them God's choice messenger. Yet they chose to put him off. What was more important in their lives than responding to the good news of God's offer of salvation?

C. (:34) Commitment of Faith and Fellowship in the Gospel

"*But some men joined him and believed, among whom also were Dionysius the Areopagite and a woman named Damaris and others with them.*"

τινὲς δὲ ἄνδρες κολληθέντες αὐτῷ ἐπίστευσαν, ἐν οἷς καὶ Διονύσιος ὁ Ἀρεοπαγίτης καὶ γυνὴ ὀνόματι Δάμαρις καὶ ἕτεροι σὺν αὐτοῖς.

When you believe, you join up – there is no believing and then continuing on to live as you did before
Jesus Christ wants to transform our lives; wants to give us purpose in serving Him;
"*Follow Me and I will make you fishers of men*."

* * * * * * * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

1) What does Paul mean here by "*the times of ignorance*"?

2) How would you explain the requirement of repentance to the unsaved?

3) How should the imminent nature of impending judgment motivate our evangelism?

4) How does the resurrection provide *proof to all men*?

* * * * * * * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Piper: "**The age of ignorance is over**, and the age of repentance is here! What does this mean?

Let's begin by looking at the phrase, "*the times of ignorance*" in verse 30: "The times of ignorance God overlooked. . ."

What I had never seen before in studying this verse is the close connection between the "*times of ignorance*" and the "*mystery of Christ*" which had been kept secret for generations. Let me show you what I've seen.

In Ephesians 3:4-6 Paul says,

> *When you read this you can perceive my insight into the mystery of Christ, which was not made known to the sons of men in other generations as it has now been revealed to his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit. . .*

Note that the mystery of Christ is now being made known but before this "now" it was not made known. It was concealed. These were generations of ignorance concerning the mystery of Christ. Then Paul goes on and tells us precisely what the mystery of Christ is:

> *. . .that is, how the Gentiles are fellow heirs, members of the same body, and partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel.*

What then is the mystery of Christ? It is the full membership of Gentiles in the people of God. The Jews do not have solitary privilege of access to the kingdom. Gentiles are fellow heirs, and full members in the same body, the church, and partakers of the same great promises. That is the first thing in the mystery of Christ.

The other thing is that this access to the inheritance and the body and the promises is "*in Christ Jesus through the gospel.*" So there are two parts to the mystery of Christ:

1. Gentiles are not second-class citizens in the body of Christ: "there is neither Jew nor Gentile" (Gal. 3:28, Eph. 2:14). Both are fellow heirs of the same inheritance.

2. This Gentile privilege comes only through the gospel of Jesus Christ. Where Christ is preached and believed, Gentiles are grafted into the tree of God's people.

Now Paul says in verse 5 that this is a mystery (not because it is paradoxical or

confusing but) because it was not made know to the sons of men in other generations as it has now been revealed to his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit. In Colossians 1:26 he says that this mystery was "*hidden for ages and generations but now is made manifest to his saints*." And in Romans 16:25 he says that the mystery "*was kept secret for long ages but is now disclosed*."

My conclusion from these passages about the "*mystery of Christ*" is that this secret corresponds to the "*times of ignorance*" in Acts 17:30. Now what does this teach us about the times of ignorance? At least two things:

1) The times of ignorance were part of God's sovereign plan for world history. God is not the helpless victim of human ignorance.

Ephesians 3:5-6, Colossians 1:26, and Romans 16:25-26 make it plain that the mystery of Christ was kept secret by God for generations. The mystery was hidden. It was not revealed. God looked down on a rebellious creation, where the nations were going their own ways and instead of sending immediate judgment, and rather than sending foreign missionaries he looked away and left the nations in their ignorance for a season.

This is what Paul means when he says in his letters that the mystery of Christ was kept secret for ages. And this is what he means here in Acts 17:30 when he says that God overlooked the times of ignorance.

"*Overlooking*" does not mean indulging or ignoring the ignorance of the nations. We know this because in Romans 2:12 Paul says, "*All who have sinned without the law will perish without the law.*" In other words, judgment will be according to the knowledge at a person's disposal. But all people in the world have enough knowledge of God in nature and in their own conscience, which they do not live up to, that they will be judged on account of it. God does not indulge or ignore sin during the times of ignorance. That is not what "overlook" means.

It means that God took no notice of ignorance, as it were. Instead of tending to it, he looked the other way and let it be. This is confirmed by Paul's words in Acts 14:16. He is preaching to the unbelievers at Lystra and says,

In past generations he allowed all the nations to walk in their own ways.

In other words, the times of ignorance God "*overlooked*" in the sense that he allowed them to walk in their own ignorant ways. He did not come forth in immediate judgment nor did he come forth with the revelation of the mystery of Christ. He let the nations go their own way, as he says in Acts 14:16.

And so I infer that the "*times of ignorance*" were part of God's sovereign plan for world history. Not that God instilled ignorance into innocent people, but that he withheld revelation from guilty people. And he did so according to the dictates of infinite wisdom (l Cor. l:2l).

The revelation of the mystery of Christ was kept hidden for ages. But when the iniquity of the nations was complete (Genesis 15:16) and when the fullness of the times was come (Gal. 4:4), God sent his Son into the world to die for sinners and to rise again. And that leads us to the second thing we learn from comparing the times of ignorance and the hiding of the mystery of

Christ.

2. The times of ignorance are over, and from now on Jesus Christ is the necessary object of all saving faith.

Remember, Paul said in Ephesians 3:6 that the mystery now being revealed is that Gentiles are now "*partakers of the promises IN JESUS CHRIST THROUGH THE GOSPEL.*"

What God had kept secret for generations was that the Gentiles would one day be full fellow heirs with the people of God AND that this great ingathering of the nations would be through the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Before the coming of Christ people were saved by trusting in the mercy of God. The looked to his mighty deeds like the Exodus. And they looked to the blood sacrifices. And they looked to the promises of a Redeemer. But they did not know Jesus Christ, and they did not know how the nations would be saved, and how they would be related to the Jews in the kingdom of God.

But now the mystery is revealed. The times of ignorance are over. Jesus Christ has come, and the revelation of the mystery is that Gentiles are full fellow heirs with Jews, and all this is THROUGH THE GOSPEL. That's the point of Ephesians 3:6."

TEXT: Acts 18: 1-11

TITLE: ENCOURAGEMENT IN CORINTH

BIG IDEA:
PERSEVERANCE IN MINISTRY FEEDS ON DIVINE ENCOURAGEMENT

INTRODUCTION:
By the time the Apostle Paul arrived in Corinth, he had many reasons to be discouraged and fearful in the ministry.

- Remember his call in **Acts 9:15-16** "*he is a chosen instrument of Mine, to bear My name before the Gentiles and kings and the sons of Israel; for I will show him how much he must suffer for My name's sake*." We have seen that sobering prophecy fulfilled in city after city.
- **Acts 13:50-52** – first missionary journey in Pisidia Antioch – persecution instigated by the Jews arose and Paul had to shake the dust off his feet and leave the district and head over to Iconium
- **Acts 14:5** – attempt was made to stone the missionary team – they escaped
- **Acts 14:19-22** – they fled to Lystra where Paul healed the lame man – here the attempt to stone him was successful and Paul was left for dead … but he was revived by the Lord and went back into the city to finish the job – "*encouraging them to continue in the faith, and saying 'Through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God.*'" Paul was an expert when it came to tribulations
- Internal debate among church leaders in **Acts 15** over the controversy surrounding circumcision – probably some pretty heated discussions; a lot of stress
- Painful parting of ways with Barnabas over the issue of taking John Mark with them as they set out on the second missionary journey
- Then the pattern kept repeating itself of ministry success and jealous opposition and painful persecution – beaten with rods and imprisoned in **Philippi** (16:23); hidden by Jason and the brethren in **Thessalonica** from the angry mob and snuck out of town to **Berea**; chased there by the same folks so that he had to flee to **Athens** where he ministered all alone against a bunch of intellectuals who ended up mocking the message of the resurrection for the most part

So by the time he gets to Corinth, he is still lonely and ministering by himself; he is physically exhausted and probably still suffering from earlier beatings; he has new challenges ahead because of the depressing sinful state of this commercial hub and seafaring town; plus he was out of money and would not have much time for ministry because of the need to work to support himself

Cole: when Paul describes how he felt during his early days in Corinth, he uses "*distress*" (**1 Thess. 3:7**), "*weakness*," "*fear*," and "*much trembling*" (**1 Cor. 2:3**). Even though he was a giant in the faith, Paul struggled with the same emotions that we all struggle with. . . So the spiritual concerns and discouragement about his ministry, the constant opposition, loneliness, physical pain and weariness, and the lack of funds, were weighing on Paul.

Paul had every reason to be discouraged and fearful in ministry and to throw in the towel
We all face situations where we need divine encouragement to press on in ministry

PERSEVERANCE IN MINISTRY FEEDS ON DIVINE ENCOURAGEMENT

4 COMPASS POINTS OF YOUR MINISTRY MINDSET

Keeps you going in the right direction:

- As individuals
- As families
- As churches

I. (:1-4) MINISTRY IDENTITY – KNOW WHO YOU ARE AND THE ROLE GOD WANTS YOU TO PLAY IN KINGDOM EXPANSION – ENCOURAGEMENT FROM NEW MINISTRY PARTNERS

A. (:1) Progressive Approach to Church Planting – Strategic Location

"*After these things he left Athens and went to Corinth.*"

Μετὰ ταῦτα χωρισθεὶς ἐκ τῶν Ἀθηνῶν ἦλθεν εἰς Κόρινθον.

53 mile journey to Corinth

Why did he end up in Corinth?? Family there? Liked their sports teams?? Great climate??
He ended up there because he was responding to the Macedonian call to bring the gospel to those who were lost in sin and darkness – Paul knew who he was in terms of **Ministry Identity** --

Focused his attention in the larger cities that were the most strategic for the spread of the gospel

Commercial center – trade routes north and south as well as travel by sea

Kent: The city was served by two ports on the opposite sides of the four-mile-wide neck of land . . . To save the two hundred mile voyage around the Peloponnesus, traders often put their ships on rollers and moved them overland from one port to the other. . . Corinth was famed for its Temple of Aphrodite on its acropolis, in which one thousand sacred prostitutes contributed their sordid influence to the morals of the city.

Stott: Corinth was a city of seafarers, of maritime merchants, and it is hardly surprising that Poseidon, the Greek god of the sea, whom the Romans called Neptune, was worshipped there. F. W Farrar imagined its markets stocked with cosmopolitan goods – "Arabian balsam, Egyptian papyrus, Phoenician dates, Libyan ivory, Babylonian carpets, Cilician goats'-hair, Lycaonian wool, Phrygian slaves." Paul must have seen its strategic importance. If trade could radiate from Corinth in all directions, so could the gospel

Blaiklock: So notorious was the city for its debauchery that the phrase "to play the Corinthian" found its place in Greek to express the lowest of loose living"

S. Lewis Johnson
One well-known commentator has said, "If Athens was a center of clouded light, Corinth was a center of corrupt life. If Athens was full of idolatry, Corinth was full of sensuality."

Paul was in need of much encouragement

B. (:2) Providential Supporting Partners – Aquila and Priscilla

And he found a certain Jew named Aquila, a native of Pontus, having recently come from Italy with his wife Priscilla, because Claudius had commanded all the Jews to leave Rome. He came to them,"

καὶ εὑρών τινα Ἰουδαῖον ὀνόματι Ἀκύλαν, Ποντικὸν τῷ γένει προσφάτως ἐληλυθότα ἀπὸ τῆς Ἰταλίας καὶ Πρίσκιλλαν γυναῖκα αὐτοῦ, διὰ τὸ διατεταχέναι Κλαύδιον χωρίζεσθαι πάντας τοὺς Ἰουδαίους ἀπὸ τῆς Ῥώμης, προσῆλθεν αὐτοῖς

Probably already believers; had come from Rome where a church already existed (Rom. 1:7-8); they knew what it was to be on the run from political persecution

Rom. 16:3-4 very dedicated and brave workers for the Lord – "*Greet Prisca and Aquila, my fellow workers in Christ Jesus, who for my life risked their own necks, to whom not only do I give thanks, but also all the churches of the Gentiles.*" Quite a commendation from Paul

Ended up helping Paul with the church in Ephesus and hosting it in their home – Acts 18:18-28; 1 Cor. 16:19

The Lord brought them together somehow and they were gracious to invite Paul into their home and include him in their business pursuits; what an encouragement to once again have support and fellowship in the gospel ministry

C. (:3) Practical Job Skills for Self Support

"*and because he was of the same trade, he stayed with them and they were working; for by trade they were tent-makers.*"

καὶ διὰ τὸ ὁμότεχνον εἶναι ἔμενεν παρ᾽ αὐτοῖς, καὶ ἠργάζετο· ἦσαν γὰρ σκηνοποιοὶ τῇ τέχνῃ.

Leather workers; Cilicia, Paul's home area, was noted for its goat hair and skins.

Wiersbe: this was one of the way Paul separated himself from the religious hucksters of his day. Jewish rabbis did not accept money from their students but earned their way by practicing a trade. "He who does not teach his son to work, teaches him to steal."

Lots of <u>applications</u> could be made here with respect to correcting wrong ideas in the church about support for Christian leaders

- Presumptuous to prepare for full-time Christian ministry without having any other means of supporting yourself and your family – as if God is always intending to support you full time
- Paul was not some type of failure during the times when he worked full time at secular jobs to support himself – he needed to set the example for working hard – an example that is not understood or appreciated by many Christian ministers today
- His **Ministry Identity** was not conditioned on where he was getting his money – he was a gifted apostle and church planter regardless of whether he was freed up financially to devote all of his time to those pursuits or not

D. (:4) Priority on Gospel Persuasion

"*And he was reasoning in the synagogue every Sabbath and trying to persuade Jews and*

Greeks."

διελέγετο δὲ ἐν τῇ συναγωγῇ κατὰ πᾶν σάββατον ἔπειθέν τε Ἰουδαίους καὶ Ἕλληνας.

Worked hard six days at his trade and only had the Sabbath day free for extended gospel debates
Imperfect – kept trying to persuade them
"*every Sabbath*" – didn't miss any opportunities

Second compass point of his ministry mindset:

II. (:5-6) <u>MINISTRY FOCUS</u> – FAITHFULLY STAY ON TASK – ENCOURAGEMENT FROM OLD MINISTRY PARTNERS AND FINANCIAL SUPPORTERS

A. (:5) Committed Concentration

But when Silas and Timothy came down from Macedonia, Paul began devoting himself completely to the word, solemnly testifying to the Jews that Jesus was the Christ.

Ὡς δὲ κατῆλθον ἀπὸ τῆς Μακεδονίας ὅ τε Σιλᾶς καὶ ὁ Τιμόθεος, συνείχετο τῷ λόγῳ ὁ Παῦλος διαμαρτυρόμενος τοῖς Ἰουδαίοις εἶναι τὸν χριστὸν Ἰησοῦν.

Kent: they brought a gift which freed him to devote more time to his missionary efforts

2 Cor. 11:8-9 "*when the brethren came from Macedonia they fully supplied my need, and in everything I kept myself from being a burden to you, and will continue to do so*"

Phil. 4:14-15 "*no church shared with me in the matter of giving and receiving but you alone*"

Also brought good news about the young believers at Thessalonica (**1 Thess. 3:6-10**)

Students at college can take a number of subjects; but they have one area of concentration; they select a major and give that their priority and focus

<u>1. Focused on the Word</u>

Longenecker: Lit. "*Paul held himself to the word*" The verb *syneicheto* is reflexive (middle voice), durative (imperfect tense), and inchoative (a function of the imperfect), suggesting that with the coming of Silas and Timothy, Paul began to devote himself exclusively to the ministry of the word and continued to do so throughout his stay in Corinth.

<u>2. Focused on Evangelism</u>

<u>3. Focused on Jesus Christ</u>

1 Cor. 2:1-5 Paul determined to minister in humility, to magnify Jesus Christ and the message of the cross; to preach the gospel in simplicity and power

B. (:6a) Clean Conscience

"*And when they resisted and blasphemed, he shook out his garments and said to them, 'Your blood be upon your own heads! I am clean.'*"

ἀντιτασσομένων δὲ αὐτῶν καὶ βλασφημούντων ἐκτιναξάμενος τὰ ἱμάτια εἶπεν πρὸς αὐτούς· τὸ αἷμα ὑμῶν ἐπὶ τὴν κεφαλὴν ὑμῶν· καθαρὸς ἐγὼ

Ezekiel 33:1-20 Account of the watchman's duty
(Neh. 5:13)

Wiersbe: To have blood *on your hands* means that you bear the responsibility for another's death because you were not faithful to warn him. The image comes from the watchman on the city walls whose task it was to stay alert and warn of coming danger (Ezek. 3:17-21; 33:1-9). But to have blood *on your head* means that you are to blame for your own judgment.

C. (:6b) Changed Course

"*From now on I shall go to the Gentiles.*"

ἀπὸ τοῦ νῦν εἰς τὰ ἔθνη πορεύσομαι.

Need to be flexible and adjust the game plan – criticism of Cam
Not a once for all decision – but in this particular locale

III. (:7-8) MINISTRY MOMENTUM – EXPECT KEY CONVERTS – ENCOURAGEMENT FROM NEW CONVERTS

A. (:7) God-fearing Gentile

"*And he departed from there and went to the house of a certain man named Titius Justus, a worshiper of God, whose house was next to the synagogue.*"

καὶ μεταβὰς ἐκεῖθεν εἰσῆλθεν εἰς οἰκίαν τινὸς ὀνόματι Τιτίου Ἰούστου σεβομένου τὸν θεόν, οὗ ἡ οἰκία ἦν συνομοροῦσα τῇ συναγωγῇ.

B. (:8a) Synagogue Ruler

"*And Crispus, the leader of the synagogue, believed in the Lord with all his household,*"
Κρίσπος δὲ ὁ ἀρχισυνάγωγος ἐπίστευσεν τῷ κυρίῳ σὺν ὅλῳ τῷ οἴκῳ αὐτοῦ,

1 Cor. 1:14-16 – obviously a prominent convert – listed first among those Paul personally baptized

C. (:8b) General Mix

"*and many of the Corinthians when they heard were believing and being baptized.*"

καὶ πολλοὶ τῶν Κορινθίων ἀκούοντες ἐπίστευον καὶ ἐβαπτίζοντο.

Utley: I do not believe it [baptism] is the channel for receiving the grace of God or the Spirit. It was that public opportunity for new believers to express their faith in a very public and decisive way. No NT believer would ask, "Must I be baptized to be saved?" Jesus did it! Jesus commanded the church to do it! Do it!" Baptism is still a major decisive public declaration of one's personal faith, especially in non-Christian cultures.

IV. (:9-11) MINISTRY PERSEVERANCE – BOLDLY KEEP SPEAKING THE TRUTH – ENCOURAGEMENT FROM GOD HIMSELF

A. (:9a) Divine Encounter

"*And the Lord said to Paul in the night by a vision,*"

Εἶπεν δὲ ὁ κύριος ἐν νυκτὶ δι᾽ ὁράματος τῷ Παύλῳ·

Kent: At crucial periods in Paul's life the Lord appeared to him. At Corinth the Lord knew the plot which was in store and encouraged him.

B. (:9b) Divine Exhortation – Be Bold

"*Do not be afraid any longer, but go on speaking and do not be silent;*"

μὴ φοβοῦ, ἀλλὰ λάλει καὶ μὴ σιωπήσῃς,

Fear paralyzes

Deffinbaugh: The Jews were provoked to jealousy by the belief of many Gentiles,3 and it was this jealousy which prompted their opposition. Paul is now experiencing success in his ministry to the Gentiles; why should he not anticipate intensified opposition from the Jews? It was Paul's success which posed the danger.

C. (:10) Divine Encouragement – The Presence and Protection of God

"*for I am with you, and no man will attack you in order to harm you, for I have many people in this city.*"

διότι ἐγώ εἰμι μετὰ σοῦ καὶ οὐδεὶς ἐπιθήσεταί σοι τοῦ κακῶσαί σε, διότι λαός ἐστί μοι πολὺς ἐν τῇ πόλει ταύτῃ.

Cole:

1) The Lord confirmed His **presence**.
2) The Lord confirmed **His protection**.
3) The Lord confirmed His **purpose**.

Look at how Paul fulfilled the Great Commission – received assurance, "*Lo, I am with you always*"

Don't underestimate the forces of God

Example of Elijah – **1 Kings 19** – 7,000 remaining who have not bowed the knee to Baal

Example of Elisha – **2 Kings 6:15-17**

John 10:16 "*I have other sheep, which are not of this fold; I must bring them also*"

Lord knows His elect even before they have responded in repentance and faith to the gospel

D. (:11) Diligent Edification

"*And he settled there a year and six months, teaching the word of God among them.*"

Ἐκάθισεν δὲ ἐνιαυτὸν καὶ μῆνας ἓξ διδάσκων ἐν αὐτοῖς τὸν λόγον τοῦ θεοῦ.

Might have been tempted to bug out of town early on; but the divine encouragement stopped his fears and caused him to settle in for long term profitable ministry

They didn't need human wisdom or psychology to address their areas of behavior dysfunction; they needed the practical truths of the Word of God

CONCLUSION:

Stedman: **It's Always Too Soon to Quit**

Illustration: A man was shoveling snow from his driveway when two boys carrying snow shovels approached him. "Shovel your snow, mister?" one of them asked. Puzzled, the man replied, "Can't you see that I'm doing it myself?" "Sure," said the enterprising lad: "that's why we asked. We get most of our business from people who are half through and feel like quitting!"

Dr. V. Raymond Edman used to say to the students at Wheaton (Illinois) College, "It's always too soon to quit!" And Charles Spurgeon reminded his London congregation, "By perseverance, the snail reached the ark."

We need divine encouragement to fuel our perseverance … that comes to us in many ways

- As we hold on to our **Ministry Identity** and receive encouragement from new friends
- As we maintain our **Ministry Focus** and labor together with partners in the gospel
- As we are blessed with the fruit of new converts and experience some **Ministry Momentum**
- And as we **persevere in ministry** with the promise of God's presence and protection and good favor

1 Cor. 6:9-11 the transforming power of the gospel

* * * * * * * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

1) What makes you discouraged in ministry?

2) What partnership relationships in ministry has God provided to encourage you?

3) Are you surprised to find that the Apostle Paul struggled with fear at different points of his ministry?

4) Why should the doctrine of election motivate believers to witness?

* * * * * * * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Stott: [Parallels in Paul's ministry pattern in Corinth and then in Ephesus in Acts 18-19]
First, in both cities Paul began with a serious and sustained attempt to "persuade" his Jewish hearers in the synagogue that Jesus was the Christ (18:4-5; 19:8).

Secondly, in both cities Paul responded to Jewish rejection of the gospel by leaving the synagogue and turning to Gentile evangelism, using as his base the house of Titius Justus in Corinth and the lecture hall of Tyrannus in Ephesus (18:6-7; 19:9).

Thirdly, in both cities Paul's bold step was vindicated by many people hearing and believing the gospel (18:8; 19:10).

Fourthly, in both cities Jesus confirmed his word and encouraged his apostle – in Corinth by a night vision and in Ephesus by extraordinary miracles (18:9-10; 19:11-12).

Fifthly, in both cities the Roman authorities dismissed the opposition and declared the legitimacy of the gospel – in Corinth through the proconsul Gallio and in Ephesus through the town clerk (18:12ff; 19:35 ff).

John MacArthur: **The Gospel in Vanity Fair**
Paul gave some great advice to the Thessalonians. And he wrote to the Thessalonians through the City of Corinth. In fact, he wrote this advice right while he was experiencing right what we're going to study this morning. And this is what he said, "Let ye brethren be not weary in well doing." . . .

Now ministering, and I use the word loosely, in Aphrodite's temple, were a thousand priestesses, and their particular ministry was the ministry of prostitution. And so every evening, these thousand priestesses descended from the Acropolis, and infiltrated the City of Corinth and plied their trade. And so it was a wide-open carnival atmosphere. The whole city was nothing but a great big hustling territory for professional prostitutes. . .

You know, it was from the City of Corinth that he wrote 1 Thessalonians, that he wrote 2 Thessalonians, that he wrote Romans. And it was back to the Christians at Corinth that he wrote 1 and 2 Corinthians. So the Church in Corinth became a very important base of operations for New Testament, first century Christianity. . .

This time, there are four things that God encourages Paul with. One: **companionship**, his friends. God brings some friends into his life. And isn't it true that friends are an encouragement? Two: apostleship, his **converts**. God brings some converts into his life, and that's encouraging. Three: **fellowship**, his god. God himself comes in fellowship with him and encourages him. And fourth: **hardship,** his enemies. Did you know you can be encouraged by your enemies? Well, we'll see that in a couple weeks, and that is really an exciting thing to see. . .

Now, Claudius unloaded all of the Jews because they were always having riots, and the riots were instigated by a person named Crestus. Now, you know, you can go back in history until you're blue in the face and never find anything about anyone in that area who fits the bill named Crestus. But what is very interesting is that the Greek Crestus is only one letter different than the Greek Christis, which is Christ. It's only the difference between an I and an E. And what it seems

to be indicating is this: That what caused Claudius to send all the Jews out was they were rioting over the issue of Christ, which indicated probably some missionaries had come there, and had proclaimed Christ again as always was done in the synagogue, and as always happened with Paul, right? A riot ensued, and the element they had accepted Jesus Christ as Messiah was set against the Jews that were unbelieving, and they threw the city into turmoil, and Claudius got uptight and kicked them all out of town. . .

Well, he departed, and entered a certain man's house. He lived in this man's house; Titus Justice. That's interesting. It's a Roman name. He was a Gentile, god fearer, who attended the synagogue. And you know, he's the same apparently as the man called Gaius, G-A-I-U-S, in Romans 16:23. And in 1 Corinthians 1:14, Paul says, "I baptized only two; Gaius and Crispus."

Apparently, this is Gaius, and his Roman name, and there were often three names, would be Gaius Titus Justice. So this man became a Christian. They had a church in his house next door to the synagogue. Kind of like we are right here with the temple about three doors down. And he began to bear fruit. Now if you think that was something, look at verse 8, absolutely thrilling. "And Crispus, the chief ruler of the synagogue, believed on the Lord _____ house." Can you imagine that?

Steven Cole: **Our Faithful Lord**
Because God is faithful to us, especially in times of difficulty, we should respond with faithful service to Him.
1. God's servants all go through difficult times.
2. God is faithful toward His servants.
3. God's servants should be faithful in serving Him in spite of difficulties.

Zeisler: Taking all of these things together—Paul's rejection in city after city, his loneliness, his poverty, and the concern he would have felt about the place he was now going—we know he was discouraged. He tells us so in the first letter to the Corinthians: "*And when I came to you, brethren, I did not come with superiority of speech or of wisdom, proclaiming to you the testimony of God. For I determined to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ, and Him crucified. I was with you in weakness and in fear and in much trembling*." (1 Corinthians 2:1-3.) But he went to Corinth anyway. He didn't quit, hoping someone else would do it. He didn't give up his calling. He lived out his own (later) description of the Christian life: he walked by faith, not by sight. He went into Corinth without any assurance ahead of time of how God would meet his needs, only the assurance that he would do so.

Dr. John Whitcomb: **Planting the Church in Corinth**
Blaspheming – denying that Christ was God; never entering this particular synagogue again; Paul just moved next door; not minimizing water baptism or he wouldn't have baptized anyone; implication that baptism does not save everyone; Paul was a travelling church planter; preferred people be baptized by local leaders;

TEXT: Acts 18: 7-23

TITLE: CYCLE OF AGGRESSIVE MINISTRY, UNPROVOKED ATTACK, PROVIDENTIAL DELIVERANCE, MINISTRY EXPANSION

BIG IDEA:
CONCENTRATE ON AGGRESSIVE MINISTRY AND YOU WILL EXPERIENCE THE COMPLETE CYCLE OF MINISTRY BLESSING

INTRODUCTION:
I am convinced that one of the primary purposes of the Book of Acts is to motivate us to **aggressive ministry** as we witness time and again God's faithfulness throughout the inevitable cycle of crisis and deliverance. Paul keeps entering into new situations, but the outcome is very similar. If we are willing to walk by faith and be pioneers in ministry, we too can experience the same privilege of seeing God's faithfulness to bring ministry fruit and deliverance from persecution. But if we are willing to sit on the sidelines and leave the evangelism and edification to others, we will have a very lethargic Christian life.

CONCENTRATE ON AGGRESSIVE MINISTRY AND YOU WILL EXPERIENCE THE COMPLETE CYCLE OF MINISTRY BLESSING
- **AGGRESSIVE MINISTRY -- CALLING**
- **UNPROVOKED ATTACK -- CRISIS**
- **PROVIDENTIAL DELIVERANCE – CLIMAX OF DELIVERANCE**
- **MINISTRY EXPANSION – CYCLE RENEWED**

My youngest daughter Julie was home from college this week … she made one observation that I found pretty convicting. After being back at home for several days, she remarked, "You folks (Mom and Dad) are really boring!" After she had caught up with some of her high school friends I think she was ready to head back to the faster pace of college life. I am afraid there is some truth to that. But the type of excitement that I would like to see relates to ministry fruit and contending for the gospel against whatever opposition might come our way.

I. (:7-11) AGGRESSIVE MINISTRY -- CALLING

(this section was the concluding paragraph from last week's message; overlapping here)

A. (:7-8) Divine Effects – Ministry Fruit

1. (:7) Titius Justus – God had prepared a home for a base of operations after the trouble in the synagogue

2. (:8) Crispus along with his household and many other Corinthians – God had prepared the hearts of people to respond to the gospel in repentance and faith

B. (:9a) Divine Encounter (to reinforce the Calling)

"*And the Lord said to Paul in the night by a vision,*"

Εἶπεν δὲ ὁ κύριος ἐν νυκτὶ δι᾽ ὁράματος τῷ Παύλῳ·

C. (:9b) Divine Exhortation – Be Bold (to fulfill your Calling)

"*Do not be afraid any longer, but go on speaking and do not be silent;*"

μὴ φοβοῦ, ἀλλὰ λάλει καὶ μὴ σιωπήσῃς,

Fear paralyzes; the key is to maintain that level of aggressive ministry – when we are willing to sit on the sidelines, the cycle of blessing is interrupted

D. (:10) Divine Encouragement – <u>The Promise</u> of the Presence and Protection of God

"*for I am with you, and no man will attack you in order to harm you, for I have many people in this city.*"

διότι ἐγώ εἰμι μετὰ σοῦ καὶ οὐδεὶς ἐπιθήσεταί σοι τοῦ κακῶσαί σε, διότι λαός ἐστί μοι πολὺς ἐν τῇ πόλει ταύτῃ.

Cole:

1) The Lord confirmed His **presence**.
2) The Lord confirmed **His protection**.
3) The Lord confirmed His **purpose**.

E. (:11) Diligent Edification

"*And he settled there a year and six months, teaching the word of God among them.*"

Ἐκάθισεν δὲ ἐνιαυτὸν καὶ μῆνας ἓξ διδάσκων ἐν αὐτοῖς τὸν λόγον τοῦ θεοῦ.

Might have been tempted to bug out of town early on; but the divine encouragement stopped his fears and caused him to settle in for long term profitable ministry

II. (:12-13) UNPROVOKED ATTACK -- <u>CRISIS</u>

A. (:12a) Territory Venue for Adjudication -- Political Structure in Corinth

"*But while Gallio was proconsul of Achaia,*"

Γαλλίωνος δὲ ἀνθυπάτου ὄντος τῆς Ἀχαΐας

Comes from a prominent family:
Stott: Gallio -- 51-52 A.D. brother of Seneca, the Stoic philosopher and dramatist and tutor of the youthful Nero; known as a friend of justice and truth

The most **fixed date** we have in the book of Acts – extra biblical sources tell us when Gallio was the Roman representative in Achaia

Bock: thought to be anti-Semitic

But also referenced as kind and gentle and gracious and fair-minded, impartial
Important to do your research and know what type of judge will be deciding your case; Jews decided to take their shot at putting Paul away

B. (:12b) Trial Before the Roman Authority

"*the Jews with one accord rose up against Paul and brought him before the judgment*

seat,"

κατεπέστησαν ὁμοθυμαδὸν οἱ Ἰουδαῖοι τῷ Παύλῳ καὶ ἤγαγον αὐτὸν ἐπὶ τὸ βῆμα

United surprise attack – they grabbed Paul and forced him to appear before Gallio
Not the last time that Paul will be on trial .. cf. last chapters of Acts

Longenecker: the *bema* was a large, raised platform that stood in the *agora* [marketplace] . . . in front of the residence of the proconsul and served as a forum where he tried cases.

7.5 feet high

You never know when a crisis will arise; when persecutors will attack; but we do know to expect such opposition –
2 Tim. 3:10-12 "*Now you followed my teaching, conduct, purpose, faith, patience, love, perseverance, persecutions, and sufferings, such as happened to me at Antioch, at Iconium and at Lystra; what persecutions I endured, and out of them all* ***the Lord rescued me****! Indeed all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will be persecuted*."

So you can see from this passage how persecution arises:
- To the extent that we are faithful to the apostles' teaching – reinforcing the whole counsel of God; not backing away from the controversial convictions
- To the extent that we walk by faith and are aggressive in ministry and just won't give up
- To the extent that our light of the righteousness of Christ shines in this dark, wicked world and exposes sin

Think of the **ramifications of this inquiry** – could seriously impact the spread of the gospel throughout the Roman Empire; the Jews were not looking for some local ruling; they had been chasing Paul from city to city; they wanted to come up with some broader charge that would shut Paul's ministry down across the whole region

C. (:13) Trumped Up Charge

"*saying, 'This man persuades men to worship God contrary to the law.'*"

λέγοντες ὅτι παρὰ τὸν νόμον ἀναπείθει οὗτος τοὺς ἀνθρώπους σέβεσθαι τὸν θεόν.

What law are we talking about here? Surely the attackers believed that Paul was in opposition to the law of Moses … but here must be Roman law – that is all that Gallio would care about; Jews would try to take a religious controversy and elevate it to the level of political insurrection

Bruce: Judaism was a *religio licita*, an authorized religion. But Paul's teaching was something new and un-Jewish . . .; it was, they urged, a *religio illicit*, which accordingly ought to be banned by Roman law."

Bock: The *verb anapeitho*, *persuade* is an NT hapax. It can refer to evil persuasion

But Gallio was inclined to view this religious controversy as a dispute that belonged under the overall umbrella of Judaism

III. (:14-17) PROVIDENTIAL DELIVERANCE – CLIMAX OF DELIVERANCE

A. (:14a) Salvation/Deliverance Does Not Depend on Us

"*But when Paul was about to open his mouth,*"

μέλλοντος δὲ τοῦ Παύλου ἀνοίγειν τὸ στόμα

Paul was not at a loss for words and certainly was not unwilling to defend himself; but the Lord had the situation handled and did not need Paul to say a word

Reminds us of the promise that Christ made to His disciples that they would be dragged before political magistrates and they did not have to worry about planning ahead of time what to say; God would give them the words

B. (:14b-15) Separation of Church and State – Boundaries of Political Adjudication

"*Gallio said to the Jews, 'If it were a matter of wrong or of vicious crime, O Jews, it would be reasonable for me to put up with you; but if there are questions about words and names and your own law, look after it yourselves; I am unwilling to be a judge of these matters.*'"

εἶπεν ὁ Γαλλίων πρὸς τοὺς Ἰουδαίους· εἰ μὲν ἦν ἀδίκημά τι ἢ ῥᾳδιούργημα πονηρόν, ὦ Ἰουδαῖοι, κατὰ λόγον ἂν ἀνεσχόμην ὑμῶν, εἰ δὲ ζητήματά ἐστιν περὶ λόγου καὶ ὀνομάτων καὶ νόμου τοῦ καθ᾽ ὑμᾶς, ὄψεσθε αὐτοί· κριτὴς ἐγὼ τούτων οὐ βούλομαι εἶναι.

POLITICAL POWERS MUST REFRAIN FROM THE ARENA OF ADJUDICATING SPIRITUAL TRUTH WHILE PROTECTING CITIZENS FROM RELIGIOUS PERSECUTION –

Bock: Rome, as a matter of state policy, will not meddle in matters of religious practice by a particular group other than to determine whether a religion is legitimate and not contrary to state interests.

Freedom of religion under the democratic government of the United States -- (Different from a theocracy such as God had established under Moses where the state had the responsibility to execute heretics and protect the genuine worship of the one true God)

Establishment Clause of First Amendment to the Constitution:

"Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion"

Free Exercise Clause:

"... or prohibiting the free exercise thereof"

Separation of Church and State – what does this mean in our context?

C. (:16) Surprising Force of the Judicial Vindication

"*And he drove them away from the judgment seat.*"

καὶ ἀπήλασεν αὐτοὺς ἀπὸ τοῦ βήματος. [17]

MacArthur: You know what that indicates to me? That indicates to me that they didn't quit when he said, "Forget it. I'm not going to get involved." They probably really hung around and persisted. Finally, he called his lictors and said, "Get them out." He drove them out of there.

D. (:17) Sosthenes Attacked – Wheel turns full cycle; what goes around, comes around

"*And they all took hold of Sosthenes, the leader of the synagogue, and began beating him in front of the judgment seat. And Gallio was not concerned about any of these things.*"

ἐπιλαβόμενοι δὲ πάντες Σωσθένην τὸν ἀρχισυνάγωγον ἔτυπτον ἔμπροσθεν τοῦ βήματος· καὶ οὐδὲν τούτων τῷ Γαλλίωνι ἔμελεν.

The Attacker now becomes the Attacked

Options:

- probably the Jewish accusers turning now on one of their own – on Sosthenes who probably had advocated that Gallio would give them a favorable verdict; Gallio does not care what the Jews do to one of their own; ignores it as an internal conflict
- could be the watching Greek crowd resorting to anti-Semitism (Whitcomb)
- could even be the judicial police officials who were trying to drive the Jews away from the court area

Wiersbe: If this is the same Sosthenes mentioned by Paul in 1 Corinthians 1:1, then he too got converted, and the Jews and to find another ruler for their synagogue! It would be interesting to know exactly how it happened. Did Paul and some of the believers visit Sosthenes and minister to him? Perhaps his predecessor Crispus helped "*wash the wounds*" (Acts 16:33) and used this as an opportunity to share the love of Christ.

Longenecker: Gallio, however, turned a blind eye to what was going on, evidently because he wanted to teach those who would waste his time with such trivialities a lesson.

Bock: the ambivalence is not unlike the way Pilate handled Jesus.

IV. (:18-23) MINISTRY EXPANSION – CYCLE RENEWED

A. (:18a) Departure from Corinth after extended ministry

"*And Paul, having remained many days longer, took leave of the brethren and put out to sea for Syria, and with him were Priscilla and Aquila.*"

Ὁ δὲ Παῦλος ἔτι προσμείνας ἡμέρας ἱκανὰς τοῖς ἀδελφοῖς ἀποταξάμενος ἐξέπλει εἰς τὴν Συρίαν, καὶ σὺν αὐτῷ Πρίσκιλλα καὶ Ἀκύλας,

since Gallio was not going to sanction any prosecution, Paul took the opportunity to continue ministering for some time before leaving Corinth

MacArthur: After this, it says he took his leave of the brethren and sailed from there toward Syria. Now Syria is where Palestine is, where Jerusalem is. He's all the way in Greece. He's got to go all the way from Greece. That's about a 1,500-mile boat trip, and boats didn't go real fast in

that day. That's a long trip. He's going all the way back to Palestine/Syria area. He's leaving.

Apparently enough competent leadership was left behind to pastor the church at Corinth – remarkable how quickly Paul developed and trained spiritual leaders

B. (:18b) Keeping a Vow in Cenchrea – Thanksgiving Application

"*In Cenchrea he had his hair cut, for he was keeping a vow.*"

κειράμενος ἐν Κεγχρεαῖς τὴν κεφαλήν, εἶχεν γὰρ εὐχήν.

Port city for Corinth

Kent: home of Phoebe and location of another church – Rom. 16:1

Think back to God being faithful to fulfill His promise that Paul would not be harmed in Corinth

Nazarite vows – **Num. 6:1-21**

Stott: involved abstinence from drinking wine and from cutting one's hair for a period, at the end of which the hair was first cut and then burned, along with other sacrifices, as a symbol of self-offering to God. If the vow was completed away from Jerusalem, the hair could still be brought there to be burned. Such vows were made either in thankfulness for past blessings (such as Paul's safekeeping in Corinth) or as part of a petition for future blessings (such as safekeeping on Paul's impending journey). Once Paul had been liberated from the attempt to be justified by the law, his conscience was free to take part in practices which, being ceremonial or cultural, belonged to the matters *indifferent*, perhaps on this occasion in order to conciliate the Jewish Christian leaders he was going to see in Jerusalem (cf. 21:23 ff.).

MacArthur: Nazirite come from a Hebrew root nazir, which means to vow, to vow something, to promise something. A Nazirite literally was a consecrated one. That's what it literally means. "Consecrated one." There's a Greek word nazir, the same word. It is used to speak of holiness or devotion. When a person took a Nazirite vow, he was saying, "God, I promise to consecrate myself totally to You." He was cutting off every other thing. A Nazirite totally consecrated himself to God, took a vow of self-imposed separation, self-imposed discipline for the purpose of special devotion to God.

C. (:19-21) Brief Stay in Ephesus

"*And they came to Ephesus, and he left them there. Now he himself entered the synagogue and reasoned with the Jews. And when they asked him to stay for a longer time, he did not consent, but taking leave of them and saying, 'I will return to you again if God wills,' he set sail from Ephesus.*"

κατήντησαν δὲ εἰς Ἔφεσον, κἀκείνους κατέλιπεν αὐτοῦ, αὐτὸς δὲ εἰσελθὼν εἰς τὴν συναγωγὴν διελέξατο τοῖς Ἰουδαίοις. ἐρωτώντων δὲ αὐτῶν ἐπὶ πλείονα χρόνον μεῖναι οὐκ ἐπένευσεν, ἀλλὰ ἀποταξάμενος καὶ εἰπών· πάλιν ἀνακάμψω πρὸς ὑμᾶς τοῦ θεοῦ θέλοντος, ἀνήχθη ἀπὸ τῆς Ἐφέσου,

Whitcomb: Holy Spirit had forbidden him to go here at the beginning of his second missionary

journey;

surprising he would not stay here and take advantage of such an opportunity

"*if God wills*" = mindset of those following the Lord's leading; not just a catch phrase

D. (:22-23) Concluding Travels to Complete Second Missionary Journey

> "*And when he had landed at Caesarea, he went up and greeted the church, and went down to Antioch. And having spent some time there, he departed and passed successively through the Galatian region and Phrygia, strengthening all the disciples.*"
>
> καὶ κατελθὼν εἰς Καισάρειαν, ἀναβὰς καὶ ἀσπασάμενος τὴν ἐκκλησίαν κατέβη εἰς Ἀντιόχειαν. Καὶ ποιήσας χρόνον τινὰ ἐξῆλθεν διερχόμενος καθεξῆς τὴν Γαλατικὴν χώραν καὶ Φρυγίαν, ἐπιστηρίζων πάντας τοὺς μαθητάς.

Kent: Although Jerusalem is not mentioned by name in 18:22, it appears to be meant in the phrase "*having gone up and greeted the church*."

Whitcomb: Paul saw the saints in desperate situation in Jerusalem; poor; ostracized; could not get jobs; perhaps starving; wanted to collect money for them on third missionary journey to relieve their stress; wanted to build bond between Hebrew and Gentile believers

Transition to beginning of **third missionary journey** of Paul – begins once again from the mother church in Antioch; launches this journey with no companion at all; Silas disappears

Stott: This must mean that he revisited the churches of Pisidian Antioch, Iconium, Lystra and Derbe, which he had established during his first missionary journey (chapters 13 to 14) and consolidated during his second (16:6).

MacArthur: He went off on his third journey. Want to hear something interesting? You know where he went on the third journey? Same place he went on the second journey. You know where he went on the second journey? Same journey he went on the first journey. I think you get a little idea of his pattern of evangelism. You strengthen the converts and let them do the work, right?

A famous missionary said this: "No man has the right to hear the Gospel twice until every man has heard it once." That isn't true. Paul would totally disagree with that principle. Paul went back to the same group three times.

CONCLUSION:
CONCENTRATE ON AGGRESSIVE MINISTRY AND YOU WILL EXPERIENCE THE COMPLETE CYCLE OF MINISTRY BLESSING

How can you tell whether you are walking by faith and involved in aggressive ministry?

- You will sense your inadequacy and your need for God's resources
- You will be pushing the envelope of new areas of ministry that take you out of your comfort zone

- You won't be able to accurately predict the outcome of your efforts
- You will be experiencing the joy of fellowship with Christ in both His sufferings and in the power of His resurrection life

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DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

1) How aggressively are you ministering in the cause of the gospel?

2) What promises or assurances do we have from the Lord that encourage us to be bold and courageous in continuing to proclaim the gospel in our context?

3) What is the present climate in our culture with respect to separation of church and state?

4) Should Christians make the type of vow to God that the Apostle Paul made here?

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QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Stott: Gallio's refusal to take seriously the Jewish case against Paul or to adjudicate was immensely important for the future of the gospel. In effect, he passed a favourable verdict on the Christian faith and thus established a significant precedent. The gospel could not now be charged with illegality, for its freedom as a *religio licita* had been secured as the imperial policy.

MacArthur: Seneca said of Gallio that he was famous for his kindness. In fact, Seneca said, "No man is as sweet to one as Gallio is to everyone." He was a very, very kind man by reputation. It's interesting that he's called a deputy of Achaia, the proconsul of Achaia, because Luke was historically right on the nose. We have evident to indicate that at this time, this is exactly who he was and exactly the right title that he had, and those titles changed historically, so this is another vindication of the accuracy of the Scripture. . .

Maybe they had a little different view on just who this Messiah was. It certainly was no crime, and that's exactly how he responds. It's exciting to see how God uses Gallio to accomplish His purpose. God does that. He either uses you willingly or unwillingly, wittingly or unwittingly, but He uses you. Everybody. Read Isaiah 44-45. Read about Cyrus, the pagan king who God kept calling, "My servant, Cyrus."

Zeisler: I tried to think of some examples that might be useful in a culture like ours, and most of them are electronic. Most of us don't regularly see growing plants made into food, and we often eat without having any idea what is in our food. But we are surrounded by electronics. It struck me that one thing that might be similar to a Nazirite vow in my own case is to keep the car radio off. I don't like silence. But that would probably be a good choice for me, because I am in the car enough that I would be reminded often, "It's quiet in here—that means that I have chosen a restriction that will give me the chance to be grateful, to sing a hymn, to offer a prayer." Saying no offers an opportunity to say yes to the Lord. Similar choices might be turning off cell phones, or restricting how much news you have at your fingertips. There are many ways to enter into a discipline that gives you a chance to recognize and appreciate the daily presence of the Lord. . .

Paul's journey home to Jerusalem and Antioch was in both cases a recognition that he couldn't go on forever without replenishing his spiritual life, without drinking deeply from the well of the truest things. He set an example for us, both in committing himself to a daily series of reminders that God was present and he could give thanks to him, and in returning to deep roots. And we will do well to sometimes go back home to the place where God has met us, where the people of God will support us, listen, and be part of the good renewal of our hearts.

Cole: This raises the question, "Should Christians today make vows before God?" Bill Gothard's popular seminar has promoted the idea of making a vow to spend five minutes every day reading the Bible and praying. In my humble opinion (feel free to disagree with me, since I, too, am in process!), this is not a healthy way to encourage Bible reading and prayer. We should read the Bible and pray every day, but we are in a loving relationship with God, not in a performance relationship where we check off each day that we have done our duty. If you're not reading your Bible and praying often, I'll shoot straight: You need to repent and get back to your first love for the Lord (Rev. 2:4-5). But if your normal pattern is to seek the Lord through His Word and prayer, but you happen to miss a day, I don't think you need to kick yourself because you have broken a vow before God. The point is, spend time with the Lord often because He loves you and you love Him.

TEXT: Acts 18:24-28

TITLE: THE IDEAL PREACHER

BIG IDEA:
THE DEVELOPMENT OF YOUR GIFTEDNESS AND DOCTRINAL UNDERSTANDING CONTRIBUTES TO A MORE EFFECTIVE MINISTRY

INTRODUCTION:

In the last 5 verses of Acts 18, we get introduced to a very special preacher. We see the beginning of the ministry of **Apollos** in Ephesus. His activities are sandwiched between Paul's two visits to this important city – a short stay and then a more extended stay which we will study later in Acts 19.

Apollos is noteworthy for a couple of reasons:

- He bridges the **transition** from those who were just familiar with the ministry of John the Baptist (more of an OT saint) to those who are fully indoctrinated in the gospel message of Christianity and what it means to be a disciple of Christ; we always have to keep in mind the transitional nature of the events in Acts
- He also demonstrates for us many of the characteristics of an **ideal preacher**; in fact he becomes so popular that when we study the first four chapters of 1 Corinthians we are dismayed to see that some immature believers had directed their loyalties to his personality and ministry rather than fully appreciating the balanced ministry of the body of Christ; they had to be reminded to focus on

NINE CHARACTERISTICS OF THE IDEAL PREACHER

Not saying don't preach unless you are a Ten in all of these categories … these are ideal characteristics – even Paul did not have all of these (8.5 out of 9 isn't bad)
Why should you be interested in these characteristics if your spiritual gift is not preaching? Much of what we will learn applies to all areas of ministry; plus you want to make sure you are not settling for incompetence in the pulpit [but please take me aside privately!]

I. (:24a) POLISHED SPEAKING ABILITY

"*Now a certain Jew named Apollos, an Alexandrian by birth, an eloquent man, came to Ephesus;*"

Ἰουδαῖος δέ τις Ἀπολλῶς ὀνόματι, Ἀλεξανδρεὺς τῷ γένει, ἀνὴρ λόγιος, κατήντησεν εἰς Ἔφεσον,

"*eloquent*" – combines idea of educated and well-spoken

A. Highly educated –

Comes from the city of Alexandria – one of the famous education centers of that day; the Roman seat in Egypt; boasted a university with a library of almost 700,000 volumes; huge Jewish population of over 1 million so he was raised in the Jewish traditions

Stott: Alexandria had a huge Jewish population at that time. It was here that the LXX had been produced some 200 years before Christ, and here that the great scholar Philo, Jesus'

contemporary, lived and worked, struggling by allegorical interpretation of the Old Testament to reconcile Hebrew religion with Greek philosophy.

B. Eloquent and well-spoken --
Probably had that personality charisma that drew people like a magnet and held their attention

Necessary?? No! Helpful?? Maybe!
Can be an advantage or a stumbling block – don't make your boast in your abilities; remember that the Lord loves to use our weakness to demonstrate His power and strength

Exodus 4:10 "*Then Moses said to the LORD, 'Please, Lord, I have never been eloquent, neither recently nor in time past, nor since Thou hast spoken to Thy servant; for I am slow of speech and slow of tongue.*'" Yet that was the man the Lord had chosen to lead His people out of Egypt; it was wrong of Moses to plead inadequacy in this area – remember we are all jars of clay, earthen vessels – so that God can demonstrate the excellency of His power through us

1 Corinthians 2:1 "*And when I came to you, brethren, I did not come with superiority of speech or of wisdom, proclaiming to you the testimony of God.*"

Satan does a great job at coming across as a polished speaker – **2 Cor. 11:14** "*Satan disguises himself as an angel of light."*

Christ: **Matthew 7:29** "*for He was teaching them as one having authority, and not as their scribes.*"
More important than eloquence is power and authority
Jesus chose uneducated fishermen to be His disciples
But it sure doesn't hurt to be gifted with **polished speaking ability**

More importantly:
II. (:24b) POWERFUL BIBLE EXPERT
"*and he was mighty in the Scriptures.*"

δυνατὸς ὢν ἐν ταῖς γραφαῖς.

Same word from which we get dynamite – he could blow it up as a speaker – light you on fire

Not just talking about head knowledge, but the ability to apply God's word in a powerful way to the people and situations at hand

Requires study, memorization, meditation, not taking things out of context; having great faith in the power of the Word of God; using it as the powerful weapon it is = the Sword of the Spirit; it is a fire; a hammer

Not tempted to doubt the **sufficiency of the Scriptures** and turn to human wisdom or philosophy or psychology to change people's behavior

Not delivering **sermonettes** for Christianettes; not watering down doctrine to some type of Christian lite message; proclaiming the entire counsel of God

Power of **expositional preaching** rather than some type of weak, subjective approach – the text is what is prominent and you are exegeting it – bringing out its intended meaning and application

Joshua 1:8 "*This book of the law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do according to all that is written in it; for then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have success*."

Acts 7:22 "*And Moses was educated in all the learning of the Egyptians, and he was a man of power in words and deeds.*"

Ezra 7:6 "*This Ezra went up from Babylon, and he was a scribe skilled in the law of Moses, which the LORD God of Israel had given; and the king granted him all he requested because the hand of the LORD his God was upon him. . . . For Ezra had set his heart to study the law of the LORD, and to practice it, and to teach His statutes and ordinances in Israel.*"

Look how Satan twists God's Word: **Gen. 3:1** "*Now the serpent was more crafty than any beast of the field which the Lord God had made. And he said to the woman, 'Indeed, has God said, You shall not eat from any tree of the garden?. . . You surely will not die . . .*"

Christ:
Matthew 4:4 "*But He answered and said, 'It is written, Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God.'*"

Luke 24:19 "*And He said to them, 'What things?' And they said to Him, 'The things about Jesus the Nazarene, who was a prophet mighty in deed and word in the sight of God and all the people,'*"

MacArthur – Illustration: I always think about the young man who came to a Bible teacher after he taught and he was so overawed by the teaching and the strength of the man and his teaching and the ability and the power and knowledge, and he said to him, he said, "I just was so thrilled by your teaching," he said, "I'd give the world to be able to teach the Bible like that." And the man said, "Good, because that's exactly what it will cost you." And he was right. It takes a kind of commitment, it takes a measure of dedication to be mighty in the Scriptures,

III. (:25a) FAITHFUL DISCIPLE

"*This man had been instructed in the way of the Lord;*"

οὗτος ἦν κατηχημένος τὴν ὁδὸν τοῦ κυρίου

word in the Greek is the one from which we get **catechism** – systematic, organized instruction; involves repetition of question and answer; Paul as an apostle and prophet received his doctrine by way of revelation – directly from God; Apollos had been catechized – taught by oral repetition

not just a hearer of the Word, but a doer; requires humility and submission to be a good learner; but you must be instructed by the right teachers; Apollos taught by disciples of John the Baptist; there are a lot of false teachers out there like the Pharisees = the blind leading the blind; you will

become like the ones instructing you

ultimately the **Holy Spirit** must be our teacher – we all as believers have received the **anointing** who teaches us all truth

takes time to be properly instructed and then tested before being entrusted with ministry leadership; that is why you don't recognize a new believer as an elder; would lead to pride and poor judgment

the way of the Lord is completely at odds with the way of the world:

- it is the narrow way vs the broad way;
- it is the way of the cross vs the way of self exaltation and pride;
- it is the way of love and compassion vs selfishness and self-centeredness;
- it is the way of walking by faith instead of by sight;
- it is the way of purity and holiness instead of the lusts of the flesh;
- it is the way of persecution vs popularity – you cannot be a man-pleaser; friendship with the world is enmity to God

MacArthur: I believe that Apollos was not a Christian but that he was a student of John the Baptist. And if that's difficult for you to handle just from that phrase, look at the end of verse 25. Act 18:25. It says that he was "knowing only the baptism of John." Now, Apollos then was the truest Old Testament saint. He accepted the whole Old Testament all the way down to the fulfillment of it and John the Baptist. He accepted the message of John the Baptist that the Messiah was coming. He even accepted the fact that the Messiah was Jesus

Proverbs 21:11 "*When the scoffer is punished, the naive becomes wise; But when the wise is instructed, he receives knowledge*."

Colossians 2:7 "*having been firmly rooted and now being built up in Him and established in your faith, just as you were instructed, and overflowing with gratitude.*"

Proverbs 10:29 "*The way of the LORD is a stronghold to the upright, But ruin to the workers of iniquity.*"

Christ: **Hebrews 5:8** "*Although He was a Son, He learned obedience from the things which He suffered.*"

Illustration: Someone writes to me: please tell me how I can produce type of exegetical outlines that you produce. Took a whole lifetime of pursuing various disciplines …

IV. (:25b) PASSIONATE FOR THE LORD

"*and being fervent in spirit,*"

καὶ ζέων τῷ πνεύματι

"*boiling*"
you cannot be lukewarm and be effective as a preacher; if you communicate that you don't

intensely care about the message you are proclaiming, why should anyone listen??
You must be enthusiastic, on fire
you will never be dull and boring because your passion will inflame your preaching
you grasp the significance and urgency of dealing with issues of eternity

Martin Lloyd-Jones – preacher must have both **light and heat**

significance of the definite article – *in the Spirit* – is there a reference to the work of the Holy Spirit here?? Or just to the emotional passion of an unregenerate man?? Seems to be a reference to his human spirit – he was on fire in his emotions and passion and zeal and enthusiasm

one can be zealous about the wrong things – the Pharisees were overly concerned about their ceremonial cleansing rituals .. but they neglected to do justice, to love mercy and to walk humbly with their God – the weightier matters of worship and obedience

zealous for people to be saved – that is why we preach the gospel

2 Sam. 6:16 – remember when David was dancing before the Lord and demonstrating great emotion and passion – to such an extent that Michal was embarrassed -- "*King David leaping and dancing before the Lord*"

Romans 12:11 "*not lagging behind in diligence, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord;*"

Remember the types of prayers that James 5 tells us to emulate – "*Elijah prayed earnestly*" – with zeal and passion and fire

Christ:
Psalm 119:139 "*My zeal has consumed me*"
John 2:13-17 incident of Christ cleansing the Temple

V. (:25c) ACCURATE TEACHER

"*he was speaking and teaching accurately the things concerning Jesus, being acquainted only with the baptism of John;*"

ἐλάλει καὶ ἐδίδασκεν ἀκριβῶς τὰ περὶ τοῦ Ἰησοῦ, ἐπιστάμενος μόνον τὸ βάπτισμα Ἰωάννου·

cannot twist or adulterate the Word of Truth; must teach with precision, with accuracy, with exactness
2 Tim. 2:15 "*Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, accurately handling the word of truth*."

2 Tim. 3:15-17 "*and that from childhood you have known the sacred writings which are able to give you the wisdom that leads to salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work*."

but like anyone – had certain limitations and blind spots
only preach what you know – if you don't understand some text, you can't make it plain to

others; required of a steward to be found faithful

fine to have zeal, but it must be according to knowledge – **Rom. 10:2**

Deuteronomy 19:18 "*And the judges shall investigate thoroughly; and if the witness is a false witness and he has accused his brother falsely,*"

Acts 17:11 Bereans were commended because they checked things out; they were not gullible; they wanted truth to be taught with precision and accuracy

Stedman: What did it mean for him to only be informed about the baptism of John?
It consisted primarily of **three great truths** which John declared:
1. First that, before God, **forgiveness of sins is possible only on the basis of repentance**. Thus there was no longer any need to bring a sacrifice or offering. That was a startling message to these Jews. They had been told that the only way they could have their sins forgiven was by means of an animal substitute whose blood was shed on their behalf. Thereby God passed over their sins -- accepted, temporarily at least, the blood of the animal on their behalf, and forgave their sins. But John came with the startling word that all God really wanted was a repentant heart.
2. John had the people **express their repentance in baptism**, which was a symbolic act of cleansing. This also was something new. In the Old Testament you can read in the Law about certain cleansings in which, after fulfilling a sacrifice, the bringers of the sacrifice would wash themselves. This was similar to baptism, but not quite the same. John came announcing that as people repented, changed their mind about their evil, called it what God called it, and forsook it, God forgave their sins. The symbol of that forgiveness was the washing of baptism. And John insisted that their repentance had to be real, insisted that they actually produce fruit that befitted repentance. That is, their actions had to demonstrate that they really meant what they said and would indeed turn from their evil. He met several different groups of people and told them specific things that they could do in order to indicate that they really had judged themselves before God.
3. Third was his **announcement that there was coming One** who would complete the work he had begun. Repentance is just a beginning with God. It is as far as we human beings can go by ourselves, but it does not give us life. Repentance would achieve forgiveness of sins, but it would not give us any positive ground of action, any power by which to live. That is what John announced would be available when Jesus came. "There is coming one after me," he said, "who is mightier than I, whose shoes I am not worthy to carry. I have baptized you with water, as a symbol of the forgiveness God gives. But he will go further; he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit. He will put life into you. He will give you power. He will pour into you that which it takes to live as God asks. That I can't do," {cf, Matt 3:11, Mark 1:7, Luke 3:16}.

VI. (:26a) BOLD AND COURAGEOUS IN MINISTRY

"*and he began to speak out boldly in the synagogue.*"

οὗτός τε ἤρξατο παρρησιάζεσθαι ἐν τῇ συναγωγῇ.

Joshua 1:9 "*Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous! Do not tremble or be dismayed, for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go.*"

1 Tim. 1:7 "*For God has not given us a spirit of timidity, but of power and love and discipline*."

VII. (:26b) HUMBLE AND TEACHABLE

"*But when Priscilla and Aquila heard him, they took him aside and explained to him the way of God more accurately.*"

ἀκούσαντες δὲ αὐτοῦ Πρίσκιλλα καὶ Ἀκύλας προσελάβοντο αὐτὸν καὶ ἀκριβέστερον αὐτῷ ἐξέθεντο τὴν ὁδὸν [τοῦ θεοῦ].

Lot of ministers fail the test at this point – severely limits their ministry

Bruce: how much better it is to give such private help to a preacher whose ministry is defective than to correct or denounce him publicly!

Proverbs: A scorner hates rebuke but a wise man loves counsel

VIII. (:27a) COMMENDED BY THE BRETHREN

"*And when he wanted to go across to Achaia, the brethren encouraged him and wrote to the disciples to welcome him;*"

βουλομένου δὲ αὐτοῦ διελθεῖν εἰς τὴν Ἀχαΐαν, προτρεψάμενοι οἱ ἀδελφοὶ ἔγραψαν τοῖς μαθηταῖς ἀποδέξασθαι αὐτόν,

A. Personal Initiative

B. Gifting and Calling Recognized and Encouraged

C. Supported in Ministry

Christ: **Luke 2:52** *"And Jesus kept increasing in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men.*"

IX. (:27b-28) EFFECTIVE IN MINISTRY -- SUMMARY

"*and when he had arrived, he helped greatly those who had believed through grace; for he powerfully refuted the Jews in public, demonstrating by the Scriptures that Jesus was the Christ.*"

ὃς παραγενόμενος συνεβάλετο πολὺ τοῖς πεπιστευκόσιν διὰ τῆς χάριτος· εὐτόνως γὰρ τοῖς Ἰουδαίοις διακατηλέγχετο δημοσίᾳ ἐπιδεικνὺς διὰ τῶν γραφῶν εἶναι τὸν χριστὸν Ἰησοῦν.

A. Strategically Deployed

B. Helpful and Encouraging a life of Faith through Grace

C. Powerful Debater
Overwhelm someone in argument; crushed them with his arguments

D. Bible-based

E. Christ-centered

CONCLUSION:
1 Cor. 3:6 "*I planted, Apollos watered, but God was causing the growth*."

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DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

1) How much is **eloquence** over-valued in our Christian circles?

2) Would you say that mega-churches today model the ministry of leaders who could be described as "*mighty in the Scriptures*"?

3) How do we respond to **constructive criticism** and suggestions that would enhance our ministry?

4) Where do we see today the type of public interaction with non-believers in an evangelistic debating setting such as we see in the ministry of Apollos?

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QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Kent: What was the spiritual status of Apollos when he first came to Ephesus? From Luke's description, what Apollos knew was true as far as it went. . . His case seems similar to that of the twelve men whom Paul met (19:1-7). Although his knowledge was at first imperfect, when more light was presented to him he immediately accepted. "*My sheep hear my voice*" (John 10:27). Before the encounter with Aquila and Priscilla, it is best to regard Apollos in the same class as OT saints. They too hoped for salvation in Messiah and had not rejected him. The entire Book of Acts depicts the **transition** from Judaism to Christianity. It is not surprising, therefore, to find imperfect forms of faith during those epochal days.

MacArthur: **From Judaism to Jesus – Apollos in Transition**

Now the Book of Acts then, beloved, must be understood transitionally. If you don't understand that there's a state of flux here, you're going to get all kinds of confusion into your life. We always hear them say, "Well, oh we want to get back to the Book of Acts." I don't want to go back to the Book of Acts. Not in terms of practice. They say, "We need to be the First Century Church." No, if God wanted us to be the First Century Church, we'd be the First Century Church. He's decided that we be the 20th Century church.

Now, we want to live by biblical doctrine, but I'm not interested in going back there. I'm not interested in having trouble over what I eat like Peter did. I'm not interested in going over to the temple in Jerusalem and making vows like Paul did and having to take a Nazarite vow and cut all my hair and haul my hair half way across the world so I can burn it properly in Jerusalem. I'm not interested in all the trappings of Judaism. I'm not interested in that, and if people are going to say, "We got to do just like we did in the Book of Acts, man, they can lay so many things on them, it'll confuse the issue, you won't believe it. These people who are always in the framework of whatever you want to call it, Charismatic Movement, always want to adapt the Book of Acts to everything. They're going to get themselves in a lot of trouble if they're really honest about doing that.

Now, the Book of Acts then gives us the history of the early years as the decaying Judaism faded away and the New Covenant came into fullness. Let me hasten to say that salvation is not a process, but the transition often is. I told you last week that just because you can get saved doesn't change all your habits. That takes time. That's what growth is all about. And the same thing was true in Judaism. They were saved and then they grew away from Judaism gradually.

Now the Holy Spirit knows how important it is for us to understand this transition. And it's important historically for us to get a good view of the Book of Acts, and a healthy view of what God is doing. And so, here in verses 18 through chapter 19 verse 7, the Holy Spirit just stops in the middle of everything and shows us some people in transition. And we saw last week the first one in transition is Paul. This week, we're going to see the second one, Apollos. Next week, we're going to see the third, which is a group of twelve disciples of John the Baptist. They're all in transition.

Ray Stedman: **Halfway Christians**
So Apollos knew this much, but he knew nothing of the cross, nor of the resurrection, and he did not know of the coming of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost. His message was basically incomplete. He announced the word about Jesus but he said nothing about those three essentials which make it possible for the word of Jesus to be experienced in our own life: His death, his resurrection, and the coming of the Holy Spirit.

TEXT: Acts 19:1-7

TITLE: THE DISPENSATIONAL PROGRESSION FROM JOHN'S BAPTISM TO CHRISTIAN BAPTISM

BIG IDEA:
CHRISTIAN BAPTISM SHOULD SYMBOLIZE BOTH OUR FAITH UNION WITH JESUS CHRIST AND OUR RECEPTION OF THE GIFT OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

INTRODUCTION:
There are numerous baptisms mentioned in God's progressive revelation. Ceremonial purifications were common practice in Judaism. These early forms of baptism could involve priests or other believers or even clothing and various utensils (Lev. 8:6; Exod. 19:10-14)

Mark 7:3, 4
"*For the Pharisees and all the Jews do not eat unless they carefully wash their hands, thus observing the traditions of the elders; and when they come from the market place, they do not eat unless they cleanse themselves; and there are many other things which they have received in order to observe, such as the washing of cups and pitchers and copper pots*."

Heb. 9:9-10 speaking of the limitations of the OT priestly system in contrast to the New Covenant:
"*Accordingly both gifts and sacrifices are offered which cannot make the worshiper perfect in conscience, since they relate only to food and drink and various washings, regulations for the body imposed until a time of reformation*."
These actions only touched the outer man while Christ came to bring reformation from within under the dispensation of the New Covenant

But the most important types of baptism are discussed in our text this morning and there is much controversy surrounding how this historical narrative should have application to believers today. It should be clear that there is some type of progression in view from

- first, the **baptism of John the Baptist** which is described as a baptism of repentance, of preparation for faith in Jesus Christ to
- second, what I will call **Christian baptism**. This is described as believer baptism in the name of the Lord Jesus and bears some association with the reception of the Holy Spirit.

At issue for us is the charismatic or Pentecostal doctrine of **the baptism of the Holy Spirit** which would encourage believers to seek some post conversion experience with the Holy Spirit that would result in the speaking of tongues and a new level of Christian intimacy. Is this what Christ desires each of us to seek after today? Are those who do not speak in tongues some type of second rate Christians? Or is the charismatic position not a legitimate option for some believers but actually a misunderstanding and misapplication of texts such as this?

What does not seem to be in view here is any type of infant baptism experience or any type of connection between baptism and circumcision as if Christian baptism is somehow the fulfillment of circumcision. So we will not be looking at those controversial subjects.

CHRISTIAN BAPTISM SHOULD SYMBOLIZE BOTH OUR FAITH UNION WITH JESUS CHRIST AND OUR RECEPTION OF THE GIFT OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

I. (:1) TRANSITIONAL PERIOD BETWEEN OT AND NT SAINTS

"*And it came about that while Apollos was at Corinth, Paul having passed through the upper country came to Ephesus, and found some disciples,*"

Ἐγένετο δὲ ἐν τῷ τὸν Ἀπολλῶ εἶναι ἐν Κορίνθῳ Παῦλον διελθόντα τὰ ἀνωτερικὰ μέρη [κατ]ελθεῖν εἰς Ἔφεσον καὶ εὑρεῖν τινας μαθητὰς

This account dovetails nicely with the previous section dealing with **Apollos** needing to progress to complete faith in Jesus Christ

Kent (quoting Ramsay): the higher and more direct route to Ephesus, rather than the regular trade route through the Lycus and Maeander valleys.

18:21 Paul had promised to return to Ephesus if God permitted it

"*disciples*" means followers – does not always identify individuals as Christians

We find that these disciples are specifically identified as disciples or followers of John the Baptist. Where do you find such individuals today?? Nowhere to be found – this a very special category of individuals – leads to some **application issues** for us today

II. (:2-4) TWO KEY QUESTIONS EXPOSING THE INCOMPLETE FAITH OF THESE DISCIPLES OF JOHN THE BAPTIST

A. (:2) Key Question #1 – What is the Timeline Relationship Between Faith in Jesus Christ and the Reception of the Holy Spirit?

1. Question

"*and he said to them, 'Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?*'"

εἶπέν τε πρὸς αὐτούς· εἰ πνεῦμα ἅγιον ἐλάβετε πιστεύσαντες;

MacArthur: The question reflects Paul's uncertainty about their spiritual status.

Or what it more that Paul recognized the possible incompleteness of their faith in this transitional context?

Have you asked anyone this question lately? Sounds like a question a Pentecostal might ask: Have you been baptized with the Holy Spirit yet?

Shows the importance of the gift of the indwelling Holy Spirit to Paul:

– associated with character fruit: *love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control* -- Holiness

- associated with spiritual gifts
- associated with power for ministry
- associated with leading and direction for ministry

Paul presents this timeline as the normal explanation of what should be the experience of every Christian.
Talking about believing in Jesus Christ because that has been the whole theme of the apostles' preaching throughout the Book of Acts – the object of your faith is very important

1 Cor. 12:12-13 "*For even as the body is one and yet has many members, and all the members of the body, though they are many, are one body, so also is Christ. For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free, and we were all made to drink of one Spirit*."

Romans 8:9 "*if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Him*."

1 Cor. 6:19 "*Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and that you are not your own*?"

Ephes 1:13 "*sealed with the Holy Spirit of Promise*"

2. Clarification

"*And they said to him, 'No, we have not even heard whether there is a Holy Spirit.'"*

οἱ δὲ πρὸς αὐτόν· ἀλλ᾽ οὐδ᾽ εἰ πνεῦμα ἅγιον ἔστιν ἠκούσαμεν.

Had not heard that the Holy Spirit had been **given** yet; knew nothing of the event so Pentecost; probably as disciples of John the Baptist they had heard that one was coming who would baptize with the Spirit

Seems to indicate that they had not fully believed in the person of Jesus Christ – they fall into that unique transition period where they were some form of OT disciples of John the Baptist – a category that does not even exist today
Certainly they were ignorant of the teaching concerning the promised gift of the Holy Spirit – quite a significant admission since the dramatic day of Pentecost that launched the church and marked the beginning of this new Christian movement that grew out of the roots of Judaism but diverged from it – this day of Pentecost was all about the coming of the Holy Spirit – a long awaited and very special event

Spurgeon: Give a man an electric shock, and I warrant you he will know it; but if he has the Holy Ghost, he will know it much more.

Stott: In a word, they were still living in the Old Testament which culminated with John the Baptist. They understood neither that the new age had been ushered in by Jesus, nor that those who believe in him and are baptized into him receive the distinctive blessing of the new age**, the indwelling Spirit.**

Do we value this special blessing?

B. (:3-4) Key Question #2 – What was the Nature of Your Baptism?

1. (:3) Question

"*And he said, 'Into what then were you baptized?' And they said, 'Into John's*

baptism."'

εἶπέν τε· εἰς τί οὖν ἐβαπτίσθητε; οἱ δὲ εἶπαν· εἰς τὸ Ἰωάννου βάπτισμα.

Apparently their status as disciples was associated with some type of baptism

People want to ask the question: were these OT disciples already genuinely saved?? Not the question to ask – what you want to see is that their faith is incomplete – they need to be fully introduced to the person of Jesus Christ whom the Holy Spirit makes plain

Why did Paul ask them about their experience of water baptism? Was he indicating that water baptism somehow is essential to the new birth experience? Some people put too much emphasis on baptism – doctrine of baptismal regeneration == hold that water baptism is the direct agent of regeneration – we tend not to put enough emphasis on it

2. (:4) Clarification

"*And Paul said, 'John baptized with the baptism of repentance, telling the people to believe in Him who was coming after him, that is, in Jesus.*"'

εἶπεν δὲ Παῦλος· Ἰωάννης ἐβάπτισεν βάπτισμα μετανοίας τῷ λαῷ λέγων εἰς τὸν ἐρχόμενον μετ᾽ αὐτὸν ἵνα πιστεύσωσιν, τοῦτ᾽ ἔστιν εἰς τὸν Ἰησοῦν.

John's was an anticipatory baptism; a prepatory baptism
They seemed to understand the concept of sin and repentance

The One whom John described as "coming" has already come and fulfilled his earthly ministry

Paul's explanation to them focused on understanding the person and ministry of Jesus Christ – the significance of His death and resurrection – He did not spend a lot of time teaching them about the person of the Holy Spirit

MacArthur: Oh Paul asked the right question. He did not ask did you after believing realize that you must press on to a second level? Didn't say that. Didn't say don't you know how to seek for the baptism? Didn't say that. He didn't say let's go to the second level; he said let's go back to the first level. He didn't say we must go to higher things. He said, let's get back to the basics. You don't know Jesus.

III. (:5-7) NORMAL APPLICATION OF CHRISTIAN BAPTISM ACCOMPANIED BY UNUSUAL SPECIAL SIGN GIFTS

A. (:5a) Faith Comes by Hearing

"*And when they heard this,*"

ἀκούσαντες δὲ

they heard the message of the gospel about the person of Jesus Christ and the absolute necessity of faith in His name
remember the parable about the sower and the various soils – these 12 men had the good soil that received the Word of God and acted on it in faith

B. (:5b) Christian Baptism Immediately Follows Faith

"*they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.*"

ἐβαπτίσθησαν εἰς τὸ ὄνομα τοῦ κυρίου Ἰησοῦ,

very different from the baptism of repentance administered by John the Baptist; so they were baptized a second time

Raises the interesting question: were the apostles rebaptized after Pentecost?? They never made a big deal of this and they were in a very unique category of genuine disciples of Christ who transitioned into NT believers in the church age

Bruce: no question of re-baptism seems to have arisen for them; probably their Pentecostal endowment with the Spirit transformed the preparatory significance of the baptism which they had already received into the consummative significance of Christian baptism. But these Ephesian disciples had received no such Pentecostal endowment.

C. (:6a) The Holy Spirit is Received in Conjunction with Faith – not some mountaintop second blessing experience

"*And when Paul had laid his hands upon them, the Holy Spirit came on them,*"

καὶ ἐπιθέντος αὐτοῖς τοῦ Παύλου [τὰς] χεῖρας ἦλθε τὸ πνεῦμα τὸ ἅγιον ἐπ᾽ αὐτούς,

the laying on of hands is symbolic – not the means by which the Holy Spirit came on them

You see this small group of believers identified with the apostles and accepted as genuine believers in the one body of Christ; speaks to the unity of the body; not trying to imply that we need some special service where super leaders lay hands on us to receive the baptism of the Holy Spirit – nobody should be trying today to put themselves in the position of the Apostle Paul

D. (:6b) The Unusual Gift of Tongues Verifies the Legitimacy of this New Group being incorporated into the Body of Christ

"*and they began speaking with tongues and prophesying.*"

ἐλάλουν τε γλώσσαις καὶ ἐπροφήτευον.

We learned back in **Acts 2** that **speaking in tongues** involves known foreign languages that were unknown by the speaker; not ecstatic utterances; here that is clear as well since the content of the spoken message is described as prophesying – not 2 separate activities necessarily but those who were speaking in tongues were actually communicating divine revelation in the form of **prophesying**

This experience of speaking in tongues marked the entrance point for **significant new groups** to be incorporated into the body of Christ

- Acts 2 - at Pentecost
- Acts 8 – Samaritans
- Acts 10 – Gentiles
- Acts 19 – now the disciples of John the Baptist

E. (:7) This Experience Was Quite Unique

"*And there were in all about twelve men.*"

ἦσαν δὲ οἱ πάντες ἄνδρες ὡσεὶ δώδεκα.

A very special category of believers during this unique time of transition

Number 12 – interesting that it is the same as the number of the tribes of Israel – possibly symbolic of the OT saints as a whole transitioning over to believers under the dispensation of the New Covenant; not saying that the church is equal to Israel and will spiritually fulfill the OT promises made to the nation of Israel

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DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

1) How do you know you have received the gift of the Holy Spirit?

2) Why would it have been important for these new believers to speak in tongues?

3) What would be the distinction between a gift of insight and spiritual discernment and the gift of prophesying?

4) What do you think these twelve disciples had been doing in Ephesus before Paul arrived and how was he able to connect with them?

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QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

P. Jewett: [Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible] Because of the indecisive character of the arguments for infant baptism from the NT arguments for infant baptism from the NT data, those who favor the practice have put a major emphasis on the argument that the NT age is the fulfillment of the covenant made with Abraham, as signed and sealed by circumcision. Therefore baptism may be said to take the place of circumcision, as the Apostle Paul wrote in Colossians 2:11, 12 . . .

Admittedly Baptists have, for the most part, failed to appreciate the full implication of this argument. It is true that the NT fulfills the OT, and it may even be said that circumcision is to the OT what baptism is to the NT. But the weakness of Paedobaptist argument is that it stresses the continuity in redemptive history without allowing due place for the discontinuity in redemptive history. The significant difference between the age of type and anticipation on the one hand, and the age of fulfillment on the other, is not sufficiently appreciated. The Paedobaptist argues from the OT concept of a literal seed to be circumcised, to the conclusion that the children of Christians are a literal seed now to be baptized. But the NT teaches that one becomes the seed of Abraham by faith, not by birth or heredity.

Barclay: These incomplete Christians knew the condemnation and the moral duty of being better; but the grace of Christ and the help of the Holy Spirit they did not know. Their religion was inevitably a thing of struggle and had not reached the stage of being a thing of peace. The incident shows us one great truth – that without the Holy Spirit there can be no such thing as complete Christianity. Even when we see the error of our ways and repent and determine to change them we can never make the change without the help which the Spirit alone can give.

MacArthur: We live in a day when the movement that we know of is Pentecostalism or if you will the later movement begun in 1960 called the charismatic movement has posed this question as the question to ask Christians. "Have you received the Holy Spirit since you believed?" The view that they take is that you can be a Christian and not possess the Holy Spirit. And at some point after your salvation you then by a certain activity allowed through certain information to come to the knowledge of the fact that the spirit is available to you and that you can receive the Holy Spirit in certain ways.

Now this view is held by many Pentecostals. And perhaps not all of them would hold it in the same technical sense; some would no doubt say that the Christian has the Holy Spirit in a limited sense. But not in the sense of permanent personal full and dwelling. And so they would make a distinction between possessing the Holy Spirit and possessing the fullness of the Spirit or the Baptism of the Spirit. But really it boils down to the same thing. If you say a person receives a part of the Spirit or a limited sense of the Spirit, then you're saying in effect that the person hasn't received the Spirit at all. . .

So as we see in the Book of Acts is a transition. The new covenant comes, the old covenant has died and as the Book of Hebrews says, "It fades away, it decays and grows old." But as the new covenant arrives, the people come to Christ which is a momentary miracle; they still find it difficult to make the full transition. And so in the Book of Acts, there are various transitional things occurring. There are some old things that just kind of die slowly. Some old forms like for example, the early church met in the synagogue.

And there are some new things that come and they're new and they're permanent things. But watch. There are some things we see in the Book of Acts that aren't old, and they aren't new and permanent. They are just especially for the transitional period. And unless you understand that, you become confused. . .

Ezekiel 36:26. You don't need to turn to it, just listen. God says, now watch this promise. "A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you." Verse 27. "And I will put my spirit within you." Now do you read any conditions there? What are the conditions for getting the spirit? What are they? Is there an if there? Nope. God says I will do it. Now the credibility of God is at stake. If a Christian has to do something to get the Holy Spirit then in theory, there are some Christians who never do that something so they never get the Holy Spirit. Therefore the promise of God is invalidated in their behalf. No the credibility of God is at stake. And secondly the credibility of Jesus is at stake in **John 14, Verse 16**.

Jesus said, "I'll pray the Father, he shall give you another comforter." What are the conditions? The only condition for the coming of the comforter was what? The prayer of Jesus. I'll pray the Father and he'll give you the comforter. Next verse. "Even the spirit of truth and the world cannot receive it sees him not, neither knows him, but you know him. He dwells with you and shall be in you." What's the condition? No condition. The prayer of Jesus.

these men have been dwelling in the hinterlands of spiritual experience. Now, I don't know where these men had gone. I'm just going to surmise what had happened to them. They had become disciples of John the Baptist. They had become attached to him. They had listened to John, they'd imbibed his message. But then, something had happened, and these men had drifted off from the land of Palestine, where John was ministering. Maybe they wanted to proclaim the message of John the Baptist. But they went off into the hinterlands of the ancient word, wandered around from village to village, preaching the truth that John had preached. They, therefore, missed the ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ. They missed the events of the crucifixion, the burial, the resurrection. They missed the great event of the coming of the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost. And, traveling all over the back parts of Asia Minor, they had finally arrived at Ephesus, that very important city. And here they had encountered the Apostle Paul, who had experienced the things that they had totally missed. He sensed there was some reality to them, but there was something missing. And it was the presence of the Holy Spirit.

TEXT: Acts 19:8-20

TITLE: THE POWER OF GOD'S KINGDOM OVER DEMONIC FORCES – THE POWER OF THE WORD AND WORKS OF GOD

BIG IDEA:
THE PROCLAMATION OF THE WORD OF THE LORD AND THE MAGNIFICATION OF THE NAME OF THE LORD PRODUCE POWERFUL RESULTS

INTRODUCTION:
We have been singing the Christmas carols and it sounds like the arrival of the infant is so sweet and tender and gentle. The angels are proclaiming "*Peace on earth and good will to men*;" yet God is born into a world where the forces of evil battle desperately against the kingdom of God.

God has placed each of us in our own sphere of darkness in order to bring the light of the gospel to those around us. For the Apostle Paul, that sphere of darkness we will study today is the city of Ephesus – a city dominated by satanic and demonic activity; A city known for the temple of Artemis and for all of its magical and occult practices; A city where God is going to demonstrate that **the power of His Word and of His Works** can be victorious in radically changing lives and rescuing people from the bondage of their life of futility.

THE PROCLAMATION OF THE WORD OF THE LORD AND THE MAGNIFICATION OF THE NAME OF THE LORD PRODUCE POWERFUL RESULTS

I. (:8-10) THE POWER OF THE WORD OF GOD – THE PROCLAMATION OF THE WORD OF THE LORD DESPITE MALICIOUS OPPOSITION PRODUCES POWERFUL RESULTS

A. (:8) Evangelism of the Jews In the Synagogue

"*And he entered the synagogue and continued speaking out boldly for three months, reasoning and persuading them about the kingdom of God.*"

Εἰσελθὼν δὲ εἰς τὴν συναγωγὴν ἐπαρρησιάζετο ἐπὶ μῆνας τρεῖς διαλεγόμενος καὶ πείθων [τὰ] περὶ τῆς βασιλείας τοῦ θεοῦ.

1. The Meeting Venue – "*he entered the synagogue*"

Had started out in this same venue on his previous short visit (18:19-20) – Haven't we been down this road before? Doesn't it lead to opposition and persecution? But also it has been proven effective

2. The Moxie / Boldness – "*speaking out boldly*"

No substitute for courage and aggressive ministry; if you are passive you will accomplish nothing;
Wayne Gretzky: "You miss 100% of the shots you don't take."

3. The Ministry Timeframe – "*for three months*"

4. The Methodology – "*reasoning and persuading*"

Plenty of opportunity for interaction; not just a one-way communication; not afraid to entertain objections; recognizing that people must go through a process to come to an understanding of the truth

5. The Message – "*about the kingdom of God*"

Bock: Jesus as the Messiah who fulfills promise

What systematic, confrontational evangelism are we performing?

B. (:9) Malicious Opposition

"*But when some were becoming hardened and disobedient, speaking evil of the Way before the multitude,*

ὡς δέ τινες ἐσκληρύνοντο καὶ ἠπείθουν κακολογοῦντες τὴν ὁδὸν ἐνώπιον τοῦ πλήθους,

Bock: speaks of stubbornness when it comes to emotions; used regarding Pharaoh (Exod. 8:15; 9:35) and of the people in the wilderness (Deut. 2:30); (Heb. 3:8, 13, 15; 4:7; Rom. 9:18) . . . The threefold response of hardening, unbelief, and speaking evil indicates complete rejection of Paul's message.

Imperfect Passive – would speak to the balance between divine sovereignty and human responsibility

There is a way which God has established for us to live – Apollos – **18:25** *the way of the Lord*
Not just a set of beliefs – but involves how to live; the way to God, to salvation, to heaven; through the narrow gate and down the narrow road
Prov. 16:25 "*There is a way which seems right to a man, But its end is the way of death.*"
John 14:4-6 Jesus is *the Way*

C. (:10) Evangelism and Edification of the Gentiles In the Lecture Hall of Tyrannus

"*he withdrew from them and took away the disciples, reasoning daily in the school of Tyrannus. And this took place for two years,*"

ἀποστὰς ἀπ᾽ αὐτῶν ἀφώρισεν τοὺς μαθητὰς καθ᾽ ἡμέραν διαλεγόμενος ἐν τῇ σχολῇ Τυράννου. τοῦτο δὲ ἐγένετο ἐπὶ ἔτη δύο,

Name *Tyrannus* = despot or tyrant
Longenecker: the name must have been a nickname given by the man's students [if he was a philosopher] or tenants [if he rented out the hall]

Barclay: One Greek manuscript says that Paul taught in that hall from 11 a.m. to 4 p.m. . . In the Ionian cities all work stopped at 11 a.m. and did not begin again until the late afternoon because of the heat. . . What Paul must have done was to work all morning and all evening at his trade and teach in the midday hours.

Think of how much content Paul would have been able to communicate in such a dedicated period of time

D. (:10b) Powerful Results

"*so that all who lived in Asia heard the word of the Lord, both Jews and Greeks.*"

ὥστε πάντας τοὺς κατοικοῦντας τὴν Ἀσίαν ἀκοῦσαι τὸν λόγον τοῦ κυρίου,
Ἰουδαίους τε καὶ Ἕλληνας.

Kent: Probably at this time occurred the founding of the churches at Colosse, Hierapolis, and the seven cities of Revelation 2-3. Also wrote several letters to the church at Corinth

Paul stayed in Ephesus but others went out and started church in outlying areas; focus is on people hearing the Word of God – *Faith comes by hearing and hearing by the Word of God*

II. (:11-20) THE POWER OF THE WORKS OF GOD – THE MAGNIFICATION OF THE NAME OF THE LORD BY SPECIAL DIVINE MIRACLES PRODUCES POWERFUL RESULTS

A. (:11-12) Special Divine Miracles: Healing and Exorcising

"*And God was performing extraordinary miracles by the hands of Paul, so that handkerchiefs or aprons were even carried from his body to the sick, and the diseases left them and the evil spirits went out.*"

Δυνάμεις τε οὐ τὰς τυχούσας ὁ θεὸς ἐποίει διὰ τῶν χειρῶν Παύλου, ὥστε καὶ ἐπὶ τοὺς ἀσθενοῦντας ἀποφέρεσθαι ἀπὸ τοῦ χρωτὸς αὐτοῦ σουδάρια ἢ σιμικίνθια καὶ ἀπαλλάσσεσθαι ἀπ᾽ αὐτῶν τὰς νόσους, τά τε πνεύματα τὰ πονηρὰ ἐκπορεύεσθαι.

Special, remarkable miracles according to Dr. Luke – miracles not of the ordinary kind; not some phony counterfeit miracles; these were the real deal; contrasted with the superstitious magical practices of the times
We should not expect that God would continue to act in this way as common practice throughout the church age; they were unusual even for the apostolic times

Demon possession distinguished from illness

Cf. healings associated with touching the cloak of Jesus (Luke 8:44) and coming in contact with Peter's shadow (Acts 5:15)

Bruce: the sweat-rags being used for tying round his head and the aprons for tying round his waist while he was engaged in his tent-making

Barclay: In those days everyone believed that illness and disease, and especially mental illness, were due to evil spirits who settled in a man. Exorcism was a regular trade. If the exorcist knew the name of a more powerful spirit than that which had taken up residence in the afflicted person. By speaking that name he could overpower the evil spirit and make him depart.

Real demonic powers are at work in the world today – Paul wrote to the church at Ephesus about the need to put on the whole armor of God – **Ephes. 6:10-12**
"*so that you will be able to stand firm against the schemes of the devil. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of*

this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places."

B. (:13-16) Counterfeit Attempts Exposed, Wounded, Defeated, Humiliated

"*But also some of the Jewish exorcists, who went from place to place, attempted to name over those who had the evil spirits the name of the Lord Jesus, saying, "I adjure you by Jesus whom Paul preaches." And seven sons of one Sceva, a Jewish chief priest, were doing this. And the evil spirit answered and said to them, "I recognize Jesus, and I know about Paul, but who are you?" And the man, in whom was the evil spirit, leaped on them and subdued all of them and overpowered them, so that they fled out of that house naked and wounded.*"

Ἐπεχείρησαν δέ τινες καὶ τῶν περιερχομένων Ἰουδαίων ἐξορκιστῶν ὀνομάζειν ἐπὶ τοὺς ἔχοντας τὰ πνεύματα τὰ πονηρὰ τὸ ὄνομα τοῦ κυρίου Ἰησοῦ λέγοντες· ὁρκίζω ὑμᾶς τὸν Ἰησοῦν ὃν Παῦλος κηρύσσει. ἦσαν δέ τινος Σκευᾶ Ἰουδαίου ἀρχιερέως ἑπτὰ υἱοὶ τοῦτο ποιοῦντες. ἀποκριθὲν δὲ τὸ πνεῦμα τὸ πονηρὸν εἶπεν αὐτοῖς· τὸν [μὲν] Ἰησοῦν γινώσκω καὶ τὸν Παῦλον ἐπίσταμαι, ὑμεῖς δὲ τίνες ἐστέ; καὶ ἐφαλόμενος ὁ ἄνθρωπος ἐπ᾽ αὐτοὺς ἐν ᾧ ἦν τὸ πνεῦμα τὸ πονηρόν, κατακυριεύσας ἀμφοτέρων ἴσχυσεν κατ᾽ αὐτῶν ὥστε γυμνοὺς καὶ τετραυματισμένους ἐκφυγεῖν ἐκ τοῦ οἴκου ἐκείνου.

Bruce: It is possible that Sceva actually belonged to one of the Jewish chief priestly families, but more probably "Jewish Chief Priest" was his own designation of himself, set out on a placard"

Cf. American tele-evangelists who plead for money and then promise to send you some handkerchief they have prayed over and blessed; like invoking a Christian form of Abracadabra

Rabbit's foot syndrome – Alladin's Genie – trying to manipulate God to produce effects that will benefit us; efficacy of the power of the name of Jesus is not mechanical where we can just call upon it and control its power; nor can it be used in some second hand fashion as if by association with the godly some of the power of the Lord rubs off and can be harnessed
Children can't just piggyback on the faith of their parents – Jesus will say: "I knew your Mom and I knew your Dad … but I never knew you in terms of you having a faith relationship"

Mike Fogerson -- Illustration:
A Basketball in my hands is worth $30, in the hands of Kobe Bryant $24.8 Million/year
[These figures don't take into account endorsements, etc.]
A football in my hands is worth $25, in the hands of Aaron Rogers $7.3 Million/year
A baseball bat in my hands is worth $70, in the hands of Prince Fielder $15.5 Mill./year
A steering wheel in my hands is worth $50, in the hands of Jeff Gordon $27 Mill./year
The name of Jesus on the lips of a person who doesn't believe/faith. . . weak.
The name of Jesus from the lips of a believer who has sold out to Jesus. . . powerful

Wiersbe: God enabled Paul to perform "*special miracles*" because Ephesus was a center for the occult (Acts 19:18-19), and Paul was demonstrating God's power right in Satan's territory. But keep in mind that wherever God's people minister the truth, Satan sends a counterfeit to oppose the work. Jesus taught this truth in His parable of the tares (Matt. 13:24-30, 36-43). Peter experienced it in Samaria (Acts 8:9ff); and Paul experienced it at Paphos (Acts 13:4-12). Satan imitates whatever God's people are doing, because he knows that the unsaved world cannot tell the difference (2 Cor. 11:13-15). . . Had this exorcism succeeded, it would have discredited the name of Jesus Christ and the ministry of the church in Ephesus.

Longenecker: The name of Jesus, like an unfamiliar weapon misused, exploded in their hands; and they were taught a lesson about the danger of using the name of Jesus in their dabbling in the supernatural.

Does the devil know your name? Apparently he was aware of both the activity of Jesus and of Paul – those who were characterized by 2 key identifiers:

- they went around proclaiming the Word of God
- they performed the Works of God in a way that magnified the Name of God

Are we doing enough to get the devil's attention?

C. (:17-20) Powerful Results

"*And this became known to all, both Jews and Greeks, who lived in Ephesus; and fear fell upon them all and the name of the Lord Jesus was being magnified. Many also of those who had believed kept coming, confessing and disclosing their practices. And many of those who practiced magic brought their books together and began burning them in the sight of all; and they counted up the price of them and found it fifty thousand pieces of silver. So the word of the Lord was growing mightily and prevailing.*"

τοῦτο δὲ ἐγένετο γνωστὸν πᾶσιν Ἰουδαίοις τε καὶ Ἕλλησιν τοῖς κατοικοῦσιν τὴν Ἔφεσον καὶ ἐπέπεσεν φόβος ἐπὶ πάντας αὐτοὺς καὶ ἐμεγαλύνετο τὸ ὄνομα τοῦ κυρίου Ἰησοῦ. Πολλοί τε τῶν πεπιστευκότων ἤρχοντο ἐξομολογούμενοι καὶ ἀναγγέλλοντες τὰς πράξεις αὐτῶν. ἱκανοὶ δὲ τῶν τὰ περίεργα πραξάντων συνενέγκαντες τὰς βίβλους κατέκαιον ἐνώπιον πάντων, καὶ συνεψήφισαν τὰς τιμὰς αὐτῶν καὶ εὗρον ἀργυρίου μυριάδας πέντε. οὕτως κατὰ κράτος τοῦ κυρίου ὁ λόγος ηὔξανεν καὶ ἴσχυεν.

1. Awareness of the Power of God

2. Fear of God

Also fear of dabbling in a spiritual realm where demonic activity is real and is spooky

3. Glorifying the Name of the Lord Jesus

MacArthur: Even the unsaved began to recognize something stupendous about the Name of Jesus. That's exactly what God wanted. What a name! The Name at which every knee should bow. Well, the Name of Jesus was magnified and people saw with awe and with a sense of terror that that name was not to be trifled with. Beloved, that is true. Every time I hear somebody take the name of Jesus in vain, I just kind of cringe. That's not a name to trifle with. And those people saw that.

Psalm 70:4 "*Let all who seek You rejoice and be glad in You; And let those who love Your salvation say continually, 'Let God be magnified*.'"

4. Confessing and Repenting of Sinful Practices

When Jesus is magnified, sin is dealt with in a decisive manner

5. Continuation of the Cycle of the Growing Power of the Word of God

Deliverance from occult practices

Drachma, silver coin – represented one fourth of a day's wages

What are the **strongholds of today**?

- Various forms of Sexual addiction
- Homosexuality with its claim to be natural and irreversible
- Drug and alcohol addiction
- Addiction to entertainment in various forms

Bock: These believers are described through the use of a perfect-tense participle . . . highlighting the enduring nature of their faith.

Barclay: Nothing can more definitely show the reality of the change than that in superstition-ridden Ephesus they were willing to burn the books and the charms which were so profitable to them. They are an example to us. They made the cleanest of clean cuts, even though it meant abandoning the things that were their livelihood. It is all too true that many of us hate our sins but either we cannot leave them at all or we do so with a lingering and backward look. There are times when only the clean and the final break will suffice.

Bruce: According to magical theory, the potency of a spell is bound up with its secrecy; if it be divulged, it becomes ineffective. So these converted magicians renounced their imagined power by rendering their spells inoperative.

Toussaint: With this sixth "progress report" Luke brought another section of his book to a conclusion (cf. 2:47; 6:7; 9:31; 12:24; 16:5; 28:30-31).

CONCLUSION: Application to Christmas

Christ came:

- To proclaim the Word of the Lord:
  - **Heb. 1:1-2** "*God, after He spoke long ago to the fathers in the prophets in many portions and in many ways, in these last days has spoken to us in His Son, whom He appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the world. And He is the radiance of His glory and the exact representation of His nature, and upholds all things by the word of His power*."
  - **John 3:34** "*For He whom God has sent speaks the words of God*." – Jesus came down from heaven; from above; and accurately proclaims the word of God

- To magnify the Name of the Lord:
  - **John 1:14** "*And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we saw his glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth*."
  - **John 17:4** "*I glorified You on the earth, having accomplished the work which You have given Me to do*."

- With Powerful Results

We are called to go and do likewise

* * * * * * * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

1) What are some of the main realities about the kingdom of God that would have been part of Paul's core message here?

2) What types of abuses and shenanigans do you see from self-proclaimed healers and exorcists?

3) How much doctrine and theology was Paul able to cover during this 2-3 year period?

4) How do dramatic conversions and radically changed lives help promote the growth and influence of the Word of God?

* * * * * * * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Stedman: **Off Witchcraft**
The major problem in Ephesus was that it was a center for witchcraft. Superstition, demonism, and witchcraft held this city in its thrall. A weird mixture of black arts, worship of demons, astrology, occult practices of various kinds, and superstitious fears, had filled this city with priests, magicians, witches, warlocks, and quacks of every description. The inevitable consequence, as always among people who are held in bondage by witchcraft, was that people lived in fear and darkness, indulging their lusts in painful, degrading practices, and were sunken in slavery, in squalor, and in drunken debauchery. . .

concerning the kingdom of God, i.e., God's rule over the hearts of men and his desire to bless them and fulfill them and to lead them into the place that he had originally intended man to be, a station of dominion and authority under the control and sovereignty of God. This kingdom of God, Paul said, had come with the coming of Jesus Christ, and it was opposed to the rule of Satan. . .

These are symbols which God chose to employ in order to underscore the characteristic of the apostle which made him a channel of the power of God -- just like Moses' rod. Cast on the ground it became a serpent, and another time when lifted over the waters, it poured them back. There was nothing magic about the rod itself; it was a symbol of something about Moses which God honored. So these sweatbands and trade aprons were symbols of the honest, dignified labor of the apostle, his labor of love and humbleness of heart, his servant-character which he manifested and which released the power of God. This is what God means to teach by this -- that it is through a man whose heart is so utterly committed that he is ready to invest hard, diligent labor in making the gospel available, and who is humble at heart, willing to stoop to a lowly trade, that the power of God is released.. .

That is how a church ought to operate -- in the power of the Spirit, and by the authority of the Word. There are strongholds like this all around us today, bastions of darkness. Drugs is one, witchcraft another, homosexuality a third, in this area, now. There are a hundred thousand homosexuals in San Francisco alone, being deluded and trapped by a philosophy which tells them that they ought to accept their condition and treat it as though it were normal and natural. This will lock them into a bondage they will never be freed from. How desperately this situation needs the assault of truth and of light, as does the whole matter of crime, and of riot and revolution. God longs to deliver people from these strongholds, and he has given the church this power.

MacArthur: **Exorcism:**
Jesus cast out demons by authority. Jesus passed that same authority onto his Apostles. The Apostles could cast out demons authoritatively with a word. And they were gone. Now I believe that that is one of the apostolic gifts. I do not believe that such a gift exists today. I believe they had this gift for the purpose of confirming the word. . .

the reason the ministry in Ephesus was so dramatic and so dynamic and so tremendous was because of the Word. Great works are always built on the word of God. You believe that? Where the Word dominates, Satan is defeated. That's true. He can't handle it. So it was in Ephesus. "Beloved if there is a ministry that is dominated and saturated with the word of God, there is a ministry in which Satan is being defeated." . .

Anyway, it says in Verse 9 that "when some were hardened and believe not," again beloved just a little note, the word there for hardened is in the imperfect tense. Some were continuing to be hardened. Hardening is a process. Any kind of hardening isn't it? Any kind of hardening is a process. You know what happens -- gradual rejection of Jesus Christ, gradual rejection of the Gospel results in hardening. Hardening, hardening, hardening. And so they gradually wouldn't believe, wouldn't believe, more resistant, more resistant, persistent opposition. Finally their hearts were like rocks. . .

The New Testament accounts of the casting out of demons revealed this: It is always a matter of authority, never of ritual. All cases of the expulsion of demons in the New Testament were on the basis of authoritative statements rather than ritual. You say what do I mean. I mean rather than all long, drawn-out sessions of trying to get that demon out with uses of formulas or whatever else, it was simply the statement of Christ, "Out!" And the demon were gone. Now, that was authority, not ritual. Never a formula, never an exorcism, always a Word of authority. . .

Now, I don't like to use the word a Christian can be demon possessed because possession speaks of ownership, and no Christian is owned by a demon. But yes, demons can be in Christians, influencing them and oppressing them, and creating all kinds of problems. But I believe that only happens when a Christian lives in a state of continued sin willfully. Acts 5. . .

Let's look at the Word of God and its influence on Ephesus. It's proclamation, it's confirmation, it's competition, it's conviction, it's domination.

Steven Cole: **God Using Us Vs Us Using God**
As you are no doubt aware, many evangelicals claim that we should often be experiencing the kinds of signs and wonders that we read about in our text. Since the early 20th century, the Pentecostals made such claims, but not many took them seriously. But in the late 1970's, John Wimber and the Vineyard churches that he spawned began claiming that miracles should be the ordinary experience of the church. Jesus said that His followers would do greater works than He Himself did (John 14:12). Wimber asserted that the main reason that we do not see such works of power is our skeptical Western mindset.

Along with Peter Wagner and Charles Kraft, in 1982 Wimber began teaching a course at Fuller Seminary, MC510, popularly called, "Signs and Wonders." Hundreds of students took the course, which ran until 1986, when the seminary halted the class and appointed a task force to evaluate the material from biblical, theological, scientific, and pastoral perspectives (published as

Ministry and the Miraculous, ed. by Lewis Smedes [Fuller Seminary], 1987). Wimber did not believe that miracles will take place every time we pray, but he did teach that they are the necessary manifestation of the kingdom's presence and advance. If we are not doing miracles along with our preaching, we are not preaching the gospel as we should, according to Wimber. **We should allow God to use us according to His will for His glory, but we should not try to use Him for our own purposes.**

1. We should not try to use God for our own purposes.

A. We attempt to use God when we use spiritual power for financial gain.
B. We attempt to use God when we manipulate the Scriptures according to what "works."
C. We attempt to use God when we dabble in the occult.

2. We should allow God to use us according to His will for His glory.

A. For God to use us, we must be people of integrity, subject to His will.
B. For God to use us, we must demonstrate our faith through repentance.
C. For God to use us, we must seek to magnify the name of the Lord Jesus.
D. For God to use us, we must seek to proclaim God's Word and the gospel.

John Hamby: **Meeting Satan Head-On** – What Happens when the gospel is preached in Satan's territory?
When Paul came to Ephesus he found a city that was completely in the grip of superstition, fear, demonism and darkness. Here the great **temple of Artemis** was located (also called Diane), one of the Seven Wonders of the ancient World. But this temple is also a seat of great immorality and depravity. The major problem in Ephesus was that it was a center for the practice of magical arts, especially the casting of spells on people and things. . .

The word used for those who "*practiced magic*" "…(periergos) is interesting. The only other place it occurs in the New Testament is in 1 Timothy 5:13, where it is translated 'busybodies.' It means going beyond that which is legitimate. It is means doing with care and pains that which is not worth the trouble and effort. It means to meddle. This is the word the Holy Spirit uses to describe the involvement of the Ephesian people in the world of magic and sorcery. It was not only going beyond the limits set by God, it was not worth it. It promised more than it could deliver." [John Philips. Exploring Acts. (Neptune, NJ: Loizeaux Brothers, 1986) p. 386] . . .

The whole business of astrology and horoscopes, Crystals and meditation, spirit guides are all means by which satanic forces trick a person into opening their minds and yielding their wills to them. The books on these subjects all suggest that you are about to discover some previously hidden power that few know about.

Gil Rugh: **The Word of God Changes Lives**
Third missionary journey in Ephesus; Look at what God is doing to support and validate the ministry of Paul; similar to Peter's ministry in Acts 5; validated God's messengers in contrast to all of the false voices; irrefutable, true miracles; garments associated with his labors in leather working; the message that Paul is preaching is one to be believed; you realize how pagan the practice of Judaism had become; contrast between Paul's ministry and these hucksters; **Mark 1:24**; Matt. 8:29; overt recognition of demonic activity is not as clear to us today even though there still is such activity; a complete break with paganism; 1 Thess. 1:2-10; the gospel changes the life from the inside out; you don't end up with a Christianity where nothing changes in your life; you are now a worshipper of the true, living God

TEXT: Acts 19:21-41

TITLE: QUIETING OPPOSITION TO CHRISTIANITY

BIG IDEA:
OPPOSITION TO CHRISTIANITY STRUGGLES TO FIND ANY LEGITIMATE AVENUE OF ATTACK

INTRODUCTION:
What must it be like to be in the midst of a riot?? Especially when the frenzy of the crowd is directed against you? Paul's traveling companions in Ephesus found themselves in just such a predicament. We will look at how they got there and how God in His Providence extricated them from that mad mob. The closest we come is watching on TV some political demonstration in another country where the crowd is burning the American flag and cursing our country – not a place where we would want to be.

We have talked many times about how conflict will inevitably arise wherever the gospel is faithfully preached. The point of today's narrative from the city of Ephesus seems to be that

OPPOSITION TO CHRISTIANITY STRUGGLES TO FIND ANY LEGITIMATE AVENUE OF ATTACK

There should really be no legitimate legal recourse against the gospel message since we are not advocating the advance of the kingdom of heaven by the overthrow of existing political regimes. We are counting on God to change the hearts of individuals and for social reform to then occur as people walk in the light and renounce their former sinful practices.

TRANSITION (:21-22) STRATEGIC PLANNING -- GEOGRAPHIC MINISTRY GOALS: LONG TERM PLANS AND IMMEDIATE FOCUS – COMMITMENT TO MINISTRY

A. (:21) Long Term Plans

1. (:21a) Visit Jerusalem

> "*Now after these things were finished, Paul purposed in the spirit to go to Jerusalem after he had passed through Macedonia and Achaia, saying, 'After I have been there,*"

> Ὡς δὲ ἐπληρώθη ταῦτα, ἔθετο ὁ Παῦλος ἐν τῷ πνεύματι διελθὼν τὴν Μακεδονίαν καὶ Ἀχαΐαν πορεύεσθαι εἰς Ἰεροσόλυμα εἰπὼν ὅτι μετὰ τὸ γενέσθαι με ἐκεῖ

MacArthur: Now Paul always was making plans. Paul was a master strategist.

Alford: "purposed in the spirit" – an expression mostly used by St. Paul; see Rom. 1:9; 8:16; 12:11; 1 Cor. 2:4; 5:3-4;14:14

Acts 9 – saints in Jerusalem were not always so excited to hear that Paul wanted to visit! What a dramatic conversion the Lord had accomplished in his life.

Kent: The epistles reveal that one of his reasons for going to Jerusalem was to deliver the collection from the churches (1 Cor. 16:1-3; also Acts 24:17). . . It can be questioned whether Paul's own spirit or the Holy Spirit is meant in 19:21. However, for the Christian the two should be in harmony, and nothing here indicates that Paul was planning contrary to the leading of the Lord.

Barclay: The church in Jerusalem was poor; and Paul aimed to take a collection from all his Gentile churches as a contribution to it . . . Paul pressed on with this scheme for two reasons. First, he wished in the most practical way to emphasize the unity of the Church. He wished to demonstrate that they belonged to the body of Christ and that when one part of the body suffered all must help. In other words, he wished to take them away from a merely congregational outlook and to give them a vision of the one universal Church of which they were part. Second, he wished to teach them practical Christian charity. Doubtless when they heard of the privations of Jerusalem they felt sorry. He wished to teach them that sympathy must be translated into action.

Guzik: Luke doesn't mention it here, but we know that one reason why Paul wanted to go through Macedonia and Achaia, then to Jerusalem was to collect and deliver a fund he had been collecting from other churches to help out the church in Jerusalem (Romans 15:25-31; 1 Corinthians 16:1-4).

2. (:21b) Visit Rome

"*I must also see Rome.*"

δεῖ με καὶ Ῥώμην ἰδεῖν.

Stott: he was even dreaming of Spain, the most westerly outpost of Roman civilization in Europe. His vision had no limits.

Rackham: The purpose of S. Paul, which coincided with the will of God, was achieved; but, as in other cases, the means by which he was brought to Rome were far different from what he had wished or arranged. Thus we have presented to us a typical instance of divine overruling of human plans, but to the achievement of one and the same end

B. (:22) Immediate Focus

"*And having sent into Macedonia two of those who ministered to him, Timothy and Erastus, he himself stayed in Asia for a while.*"

ἀποστείλας δὲ εἰς τὴν Μακεδονίαν δύο τῶν διακονούντων αὐτῷ, Τιμόθεον καὶ Ἔραστον, αὐτὸς ἐπέσχεν χρόνον εἰς τὴν Ἀσίαν.

1 Cor. 16:8-9 *But I will remain in Ephesus until Pentecost; for a wide door for effective service has opened to me, and there are many adversaries.*

Learn some important truths here about opposition to Christianity – not covering all aspects of this topic – but those lessons we can learn from Paul's experience in Ephesus

THE MOTIVATION FOR OPPOSITION TO CHRISTIANITY
THE MOB MENTALITY SURROUNDING OPPOSITION TO CHRISTIANITY

THE MISREPRESENTATIONS ASSOCIATED WITH OPPOSITION TO CHRISTIANITY

I. (:23-27) THE MOTIVATION FOR OPPOSITION TO CHRISTIANITY -- THE REASON FOR THE RIOT -- IT'S ALL ABOUT THE INCOME AND THE INFLUENCE—CONFLICT IN EPHESUS
WHY DO PEOPLE OPPOSE THE GOSPEL MESSAGE?

A. (:23-26) The Income Motivation – Don't want to lose money

"*And about that time there arose no small disturbance concerning the Way. For a certain man named Demetrius, a silversmith, who made silver shrines of Artemis, was bringing no little business to the craftsmen; these he gathered together with the workmen of similar trades, and said, 'Men, you know that our prosperity depends upon this business. And you see and hear that not only in Ephesus, but in almost all of Asia, this Paul has persuaded and turned away a considerable number of people, saying that gods made with hands are no gods at all.*"'

Ἐγένετο δὲ κατὰ τὸν καιρὸν ἐκεῖνον τάραχος οὐκ ὀλίγος περὶ τῆς ὁδοῦ. Δημήτριος γάρ τις ὀνόματι, ἀργυροκόπος, ποιῶν ναοὺς ἀργυροῦς Ἀρτέμιδος παρείχετο τοῖς τεχνίταις οὐκ ὀλίγην ἐργασίαν, οὓς συναθροίσας καὶ τοὺς περὶ τὰ τοιαῦτα ἐργάτας εἶπεν· ἄνδρες, ἐπίστασθε ὅτι ἐκ ταύτης τῆς ἐργασίας ἡ εὐπορία ἡμῖν ἐστιν καὶ θεωρεῖτε καὶ ἀκούετε ὅτι οὐ μόνον Ἐφέσου ἀλλὰ σχεδὸν πάσης τῆς Ἀσίας ὁ Παῦλος οὗτος πείσας μετέστησεν ἱκανὸν ὄχλον λέγων ὅτι οὐκ εἰσὶν θεοὶ οἱ διὰ χειρῶν γινόμενοι.

Artemis = Goddess of fruit – pictured as a woman with many breasts

Gospel was threatening earthly treasures

B. (:27) The Influence Motivation – Don't want to lose power

"*And not only is there danger that this trade of ours fall into disrepute, but also that the temple of the great goddess Artemis be regarded as worthless and that she whom all of Asia and the world worship should even be dethroned from her magnificence.*"

οὐ μόνον δὲ τοῦτο κινδυνεύει ἡμῖν τὸ μέρος εἰς ἀπελεγμὸν ἐλθεῖν ἀλλὰ καὶ τὸ τῆς μεγάλης θεᾶς Ἀρτέμιδος ἱερὸν εἰς οὐθὲν λογισθῆναι, μέλλειν τε καὶ καθαιρεῖσθαι τῆς μεγαλειότητος αὐτῆς ἣν ὅλη ἡ Ἀσία καὶ ἡ οἰκουμένη σέβεται.

Constable: The temple of Artemis was a source of civic pride to the Ephesians. In view of Ephesus' commercial decline, it is easy to see how the silversmiths' protest could have so quickly aroused popular opposition to the Christian missionaries. This was a case of mob violence; many of the protesters did not understand what the issue was. A major boulevard, the Arcadian Way, ran from the harbor to the theater, and it was probably this artery that the ringleaders used to collect citizens on their march to the theater.

Gospel was threatening earthly gods

Kent: The image within the temple was of a woman carved with many breasts to signify the fertility of nature. It was reputed to be so ancient that the tradition arose that it had fallen from heaven (19:35). Perhaps it was originally made from a meteorite.

Stott: either miniature models of the temple or statuettes of the goddess

Barclay: when pilgrims came to Ephesus, they liked to take souvenirs home

Change in pagan society did not come about by political movement or even by moral outcry; but by the preaching of the gospel and changed lives

II. (:28-34) THE MOB MENTALITY SURROUNDING OPPOSITION TO CHRISTIANITY -- THE RAGE ASSOCIATED WITH THE RIOT -- BLIND LOYALTY TO IDOLATRY – CHAOS IN EPHESUS

9 Characteristics of a Mob Mentality:
(Similar to how the media attacks Christianity today)

A. (:28a) Anger

"*And when they heard this and were filled with rage,*"

Ἀκούσαντες δὲ καὶ γενόμενοι πλήρεις θυμοῦ

B. (:28b) Backlash

"*they began crying out, saying, 'Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!'*"

ἔκραζον λέγοντες· μεγάλη ἡ Ἄρτεμις Ἐφεσίων.

C. (:29a) Confusion

"*And the city was filled with the confusion,*"

καὶ ἐπλήσθη ἡ πόλις τῆς συγχύσεως

D. (:29b) Frenzy

"*and they rushed with one accord into the theater,*"

ὥρμησάν τε ὁμοθυμαδὸν εἰς τὸ θέατρον

Theater was a public venue with seating capacity that could contain thousands and be used for a variety of purposes

E. (:29c) Scapegoat Targeting

dragging along Gaius and Aristarchus, Paul's traveling companions from Macedonia.

συναρπάσαντες Γάϊον καὶ Ἀρίσταρχον Μακεδόνας, συνεκδήμους Παύλου.

Their issue was more with Paul as the leader; but they were happy to target any of his close

associates as well

F. (:30-31) Volatile Atmosphere

"*And when Paul wanted to go into the assembly, the disciples would not let him. And also some of the Asiarchs who were friends of his sent to him and repeatedly urged him not to venture into the theater.*"

Παύλου δὲ βουλομένου εἰσελθεῖν εἰς τὸν δῆμον οὐκ εἴων αὐτὸν οἱ μαθηταί· τινὲς δὲ καὶ τῶν Ἀσιαρχῶν, ὄντες αὐτῷ φίλοι, πέμψαντες πρὸς αὐτὸν παρεκάλουν μὴ δοῦναι ἑαυτὸν εἰς τὸ θέατρον.

There would be no reasoning with such a mob; Paul was courageous to want to engage them in dialogue; but cooler heads prevailed and recognized the powder keg situation that would only be intensified by the appearance of Paul

Barnes: *Asiarchs*. These were persons who presided over sacred things, and over the public games. It was their business to see that the proper services of religion were observed, and that proper honour was rendered to the Roman emperor in the public festivals, at the games, etc. They were annually elected, and their election was confirmed at Rome before it was valid. They held a common council at the principal city within their province, as at Ephesus, Smyrna, Sardis, etc., to consult and deliberate about the interests committed to their charge in their various provinces. . .

There was a general prejudice against the Jews. They were disposed to charge the whole difficulty on Jews-- esteeming Christians to be but a sect of the Jews. They were, therefore, indignant and excited, and indiscriminate in their wrath, and unwilling to listen to any defence.

G. (:32) Incoherent Noise

"*So then, some were shouting one thing and some another, for the assembly was in confusion, and the majority did not know for what cause they had come together.*"

ἄλλοι μὲν οὖν ἄλλο τι ἔκραζον· ἦν γὰρ ἡ ἐκκλησία συγκεχυμένη καὶ οἱ πλείους οὐκ ᾔδεισαν τίνος ἕνεκα συνεληλύθεισαν.

Guzik: "The noise must have been deafening. The acoustics of the theater are excellent even today and at that time were even better because of bronze and clay sounding vessels placed throughout the auditorium." (Williams)

H. (:33) Squelched Dialogue

"*And some of the crowd concluded it was Alexander, since the Jews had put him forward; and having motioned with his hand, Alexander was intending to make a defense to the assembly.*"

ἐκ δὲ τοῦ ὄχλου συνεβίβασαν Ἀλέξανδρον, προβαλόντων αὐτὸν τῶν Ἰουδαίων· ὁ δὲ Ἀλέξανδρος κατασείσας τὴν χεῖρα ἤθελεν ἀπολογεῖσθαι τῷ δήμῳ.

S. Lewis Johnson: Alexander = the Jewish man who is put forward by the Jewish interests in the city of Ephesus in order to plead their case and to be sure that the people make no mistake about who the real enemy is; it's Paul and his followers and not the Jewish people. Because, after all, Paul and his friends were largely Jewish people and the Ephesians might think it's really the Jewish people as a whole that they are to fight.

I. (:34) Rallying Cry

> "*But when they recognized that he was a Jew, a single outcry arose from them all as they shouted for about two hours, 'Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!'*"
>
> ἐπιγνόντες δὲ ὅτι Ἰουδαῖός ἐστιν, φωνὴ ἐγένετο μία ἐκ πάντων ὡς ἐπὶ ὥρας δύο κραζόντων· μεγάλη ἡ Ἄρτεμις Ἐφεσίων.

But people had no interest in supporting the cause of the Jews – lumped them together with the Christians as seen by this rallying cry

III. (:35-41) THE MISREPRESENTATIONS ASSOCIATED WITH OPPOSITION TO CHRISTIANITY -- THE RATIONAL PLEA FOR ABANDONING THE RIOT -- GET A GRIP – CALMING IN EPHESUS

God uses these misrepresentations to frustrate opposition and in His providential sovereignty to relieve the pressure of persecution at times; even the opponents of Christianity cannot find a legitimate foothold for criticism and political judgment

A. (:35-36) Christianity Poses No Real Threat to the City of Ephesus and the Temple of the Great Artemis

> "*And after quieting the multitude, the town clerk said, 'Men of Ephesus, what man is there after all who does not know that the city of the Ephesians is guardian of the temple of the great Artemis, and of the image which fell down from heaven? Since then these are undeniable facts, you ought to keep calm and to do nothing rash.*"
>
> Καταστείλας δὲ ὁ γραμματεὺς τὸν ὄχλον φησίν· ἄνδρες Ἐφέσιοι, τίς γάρ ἐστιν ἀνθρώπων ὃς οὐ γινώσκει τὴν Ἐφεσίων πόλιν νεωκόρον οὖσαν τῆς μεγάλης Ἀρτέμιδος καὶ τοῦ διοπετοῦς; ἀναντιρρήτων οὖν ὄντων τούτων δέον ἐστὶν ὑμᾶς κατεσταλμένους ὑπάρχειν καὶ μηδὲν προπετὲς πράσσειν.

S. Lewis Johnson: Now, the town clerk was the secretary. He was the chief magistrate of this free society. He drafted the decrees of the city of Ephesus. He controlled the money, he controlled the assembly, under the proconsuls, which were Roman.

This turns out to be false counsel – note that Artemis is not worshipped anymore and Christianity has emerged victorious

Stott: the crowd's frenzy was calmed by the city clerk, who was the elected head of the city executive or the chief administrative assistant, annually elected, of the magistrates; he had a staff of permanent clerks, responsible for the paper work of the city.

B. (:37) Criminal Charges are Not Appropriate – No Threat to <u>Our Religion</u>

1. <u>No Sacrilege</u>

"For you have brought these men here who are neither robbers of temples"

ἠγάγετε γὰρ τοὺς ἄνδρας τούτους οὔτε ἱεροσύλους

2. <u>No Blasphemy</u>

"*nor blasphemers of our goddess.*"

οὔτε βλασφημοῦντας τὴν θεὸν ἡμῶν.

C. (:38-39) Complaints and Charges Must be Addressed Lawfully – No Threat to <u>Our Economy</u> --

2 Options:

"*So then, if Demetrius and the craftsmen who are with him have a complaint against any man, the courts are in session and proconsuls are available; let them bring charges against one another. But if you want anything beyond this, it shall be settled in the lawful assembly.*"

εἰ μὲν οὖν Δημήτριος καὶ οἱ σὺν αὐτῷ τεχνῖται ἔχουσι πρός τινα λόγον, ἀγοραῖοι ἄγονται καὶ ἀνθύπατοί εἰσιν, ἐγκαλείτωσαν ἀλλήλοις. εἰ δέ τι περαιτέρω ἐπιζητεῖτε, ἐν τῇ ἐννόμῳ ἐκκλησίᾳ ἐπιλυθήσεται.

Stott: Demetrius and his colleagues are familiar with statutory legal procedures. If they have a private grievance, they should bring their case to the proconsular assizes. If, on the other hand, their case is more serious and more public, they should refer it to "a legal assembly," the correct technical term for the regular (three times a month) official meetings of the *demos* or city council.

D. (:40-41) Consequences of an Unruly Riot Could Be Serious

"'*For indeed we are in danger of being accused of a riot in connection with today's affair, since there is no real cause for it; and in this connection we shall be unable to account for this disorderly gathering.' And after saying this he dismissed the assembly.*"

καὶ γὰρ κινδυνεύομεν ἐγκαλεῖσθαι στάσεως περὶ τῆς σήμερον, μηδενὸς αἰτίου ὑπάρχοντος περὶ οὗ [οὐ] δυνησόμεθα ἀποδοῦναι λόγον περὶ τῆς συστροφῆς ταύτης. καὶ ταῦτα εἰπὼν ἀπέλυσεν τὴν ἐκκλησίαν.

Disorderly conduct would constitute a serious threat from the Roman government

CONCLUSION:

Campbell Morgan: The church persecuted has always been the church pure; and, therefore, the

church powerful. The church patronized has always been the church in peril, and very often, the church paralyzed.

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DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

1) What type of opposition should believers expect from the proclamation of the gospel?

2) How does Christianity threaten the income potential or the influence of enemies of the gospel today?

3) What means should Christians use to try to ensure that the political authorities allow for the freedom of religious expression?

4) How does the Lord provide guidance through the Holy Spirit and yet ultimately control our plans by His providential sovereignty?

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QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Stott: Luke's purpose in recounting this incident was clearly apologetic or political. He wanted to show that Rome had no case against Christianity in general or Paul in particular. In Corinth the proconsul Gallio had refused even to hear the Jews' charge. In Ephesus the town clerk implied that the opposition was purely emotional and that the Christians, being innocent, had nothing to fear from duly constituted legal processes. Thus the impartiality of Gallio, the friendship of Asiarchs and the cool reasonableness of the city clerk combined to give the gospel freedom to continue on its victorious course.

Barnes: that the extensive prevalence of the Christian religion would destroy many kinds of business in which men now engage. It would put an end to all that now ministers to the pride, vanity, luxury, vice, and ambition of men. Let religion prevail, and wars would cease, and all the preparations for war which now employ so many hearts and hands would be useless. Let religion prevail, and temperance would prevail also; and consequently all the capital and labour now employed in distilling and vending ardent spirits would be withdrawn, and the business be broken up. Let religion prevail, and luxury ceases, and the arts which minister to licentiousness would be useless. Let Christianity prevail, and all that goes now to minister to idolatry, and the corrupt passions of men, would be destroyed. No small part of the talent, also, that is now worse than wasted in corrupting others by ballads and songs, by fiction and licentious tales, would be withdrawn. A vast amount of capital and talent would thus be at once set at liberty, to be employed in nobler and better purposes. . .

[description of temple of Artemis] -- It was 425 feet in length, 220 in breadth, and was supported by 127 pillars of Parian marble, each of which was sixty feet high. These pillars were furnished by as many princes, and thirty-six of them were curiously carved, and the rest were finely polished. Each pillar, it is supposed, with its base, contained 150 tons of marble. The doors and panelling were made of cypress wood, the roof of cedar, and the interior was rendered splendid

by decorations of gold, and by the finest productions of ancient artists. This celebrated edifice, after suffering various partial demolitions, was finally burnt by the Goths, in their third naval invasion, A.D. 260.

Cole: **Why People Oppose the Gospel**
Luke's purpose for including this incident seems to be twofold (I'm following Richard Longenecker, Expositor's Bible Commentary [Zondervan], 9:502): First, he was trying to present an apologetic that the Christian faith was a legitimate religion, not at odds with Roman law or government. Therefore any who persecuted the Christian Church were in violation of Roman law. He shows this by telling of the friendliness of Asiarchs toward Paul (19:31). These men were from the noblest and wealthiest families in the province of Asia, and were a quasi-religious association that sought to secure loyalty to Roman rule (ibid., pp. 503-504). The fact that they were friendly toward Paul shows that he could not have been a threat to the state. Also, the city clerk's intervention to quell the riot (19:35-41) shows that he did not regard the Christians as a threat to the city or its citizens.

Luke's second purpose for including this incident was to show that spiritually, the only thing that heathenism can do against Paul and the Christian faith "is to shout itself hoarse" (Ernst Haenchen, cited by Longenecker, p. 502). Unbelievers oppose the gospel because
Satan has blinded their minds and the gospel confronts their sin. Satan's fury against the church is great, but pagan religions are impotent and empty in the long run. God's sovereign providence protects His church, even in the face of fierce opposition. So our text is showing us that …

People oppose the gospel because Satan has blinded them and the gospel confronts their sin; but God rules over all.

1. When the church effectively spreads the gospel, Satan will arouse opposition.

2. People oppose the gospel because Satan blinds their minds and the gospel confronts their sinful lifestyles.

3. God is sovereign to protect His church against the opposition of Satan.

If you know the rest of the story, you know that Paul eventually did get to Rome, but not quite as he had envisioned! He got arrested in Jerusalem, detained in Caesarea for two years, and eventually, by way of shipwreck on Malta, got to Rome as a prisoner. We don't know whether he ever did get to Spain. But Paul's plans, made in dependence on the Spirit, show us that we should seek the Lord for how He wants to use us in His purpose. But the outworking of those plans is subject to His sovereign control.

Richard Caldwell Jr: Confusion is one of the strategies of the devil:
1. Confusion Based on Distortion
Not yelling, "We may lose our business!" This is all about worship and civic pride and spirituality; they were dishonest regarding their reasons for stirring up such a commotion; cf. minority imposing its moral agenda on the majority (homosexual agenda) and turning around that argument in Montgomery County sex education case in the courts;
2. Confusion Based on Emotions
We are angry about what?? We are not sure?? Working up a mob mentality and paying no attention to the facts; doesn't matter what the scriptures say; just an emotional issue – Christians

respond this way to some issues as well;
Transition: still God is sovereign in such a situation; He is in control and over-rules and magnifies His name; He is never defeated by the devil; we should have a quiet confidence even when we are shouted down and not heart
1 Cor. 14 – *God is not a God of confusion*; the devil is
Paul receiving **Counsel** – touched by the **Courage** and loyalty of Paul; trying to get into the theater to try to make a defense for his companions; not willing to sacrifice others to save himself; two sources of counsel – the disciples and his friends, the Asiarchs (leaders in the province of Asia – lifetime title even beyond their political service; promoting loyalty to the emperor); worse thing he could have done would have been to make an appearance in a rash and foolish fashion; submitted his initial reaction and emotional reaction to wise counsel; Paul had friends in high places and he had friends who were not believers; Christianity certainly was not about overturning Rome
Calmness Returned to the situation (:35) – God uses lost men with wicked motives (like this mayor) – he knows he has to answer to Rome for this riot; motivated by self-preservation

Macarthur: **The Riot at Ephesus**
Now the history of Christianity has taught us well many things. But one thing the history of Christianity has taught us is that the church thrives best when it is persecuted. When the church creates issues in the world, it then begins to thrive in the purest sense. The persecuted church confronts the world and grows and has effect. A bold church is an effective church. And a bold church is a persecuted church. So persecution and effectiveness to some degree go together. . .

the real riot comes when sort of a pseudo religious materialism comes to the form. . .

I suppose we could say in the case of Ephesus that there were three approaches of Satan. Hardness, hypocrisy and hatred. And those were his three particular angles of opposition for the gospel. So whatever the word prevails, Satan is aggressively set against the Word. And here in Ephesus we find beginning in Verse 21 that the vent of the people, that their anger is based upon their desire for material gain. In other words, Christianity was affecting their business. That's kind of exciting. Christianity was an economic problem in the first place. . .

So he wanted to go to Rome. After he had taken care of the needs of the Saints in Jerusalem. Incidentally there's a great break kind of and keep it in your mind. Right here in the Book of Acts. Because from here on, the whole goal in the mind of Paul is Rome. And finally at the end of Acts, he gets there. But he doesn't get there in the way that he thought he would get there. But he gets there. From here on out, his sights are set on Rome. And he's going to make it. And man is it an exciting trip getting there. . .

Now very likely Demitris is a big wheel in the guild of silversmiths. Many of you have studied any kind of world history or ancient history you know that there were such things as guilds in Europe. Where people who were artisans of the same craft would ban together just like unions today, perhaps less sophisticated, but just as powerful in the community at which they existed. . .

So it was a very, very famous place. And periodically during the year it had a string of pilgrims making an influx into the city. So tourist traffic in the worship of Artimus was really big business. And the silversmiths made their living by selling these little shrines to the tourists. And to the people making pilgrimages to the city of Ephesus to worship at the shrine of Artimus. Now

the best we can tell was that these were little models of the temple or else little statues of Artimus. Now this was an interesting thing. . .

Why does God take up all this 20 verses to tell us about a riot? One of the reasons is because it's exciting to see the successes of Christianity put in the mouths of the pagans, do you see? It isn't just us that's claiming God's power. The Pagans are admitting it. Do you see how important that kind of apologetic is? It's one reason why it's here. And another thing, the reason the spirit puts it here is because the rioters are so frustrated because there's nothing they can really do because there's no-one to blame and there's nothing evil that Christians have done. . . .

They didn't go around blasting Artimus. They didn't have marches against the Temple of Artimus. They didn't carry posters around down with Artimus of the Ephesians. They didn't land bast that, all they did was preach a positive message and the negative took care of itself. . .

And that which the outside tempest could never accomplish, inside life did. People if you want to change the community for Jesus Christ, don't protest against a community. Just live a holy life and start leading people to Jesus Christ. And the end result is the community won't be able to handle you. Always thought about this particular pastor who used to march on the city hall all the time. What a waste. You get a whole bunch of people to march on the city hall for what reason? Where everybody say, oh, there's that nut marching down to city hall again. . .

So he appeals to their pocketbook and their piety and thirdly he appeals to their patriotism. . . So their trade was in danger, their religion was in danger and their reputation in the world was in danger. Oh I like that. Christianity hit them economically, religiously and politically and socially

Dr. S. Lewis Johnson: **Christianity and the Special Interests**
it's God's purpose for him to go on to Rome, ultimately, and preach Christ there. And the uproar is the occasion for the accomplishment of the plan of God. . .

We also learn the nature of the opposition; vested interests, vested interests also often, in our particular day, are opposed to the truths of Christianity because Christianity often cuts across the materialistic aims of our society. For example, it's not surprising that gambling interests should be upset over Christianity because Christianity in its purest form, obviously, leads to the fact that there will be very few people who will be engaged in gambling. The tobacco industry is also one of the natural opponents of Christianity because the general practice of Christianity and the recognition that the body is something given us by God, which we are to preserve from the obvious evils, well, it seems quite clear that the tobacco industry is not going to be Evangelical in its general approach to things. And if you will look at the other types of things that characterize our society, drugs and so on, you will see that Christianity represents a threat to many of the vested interests that form part of our society. . .

You might have thought that Paul would have been a blasphemer of the goddess Diana. But instead of coming with a negative approach, the apostle, evidently, came with a positive one. He didn't say, "Tomorrow we will denounce Artemis, and day after day denounced Artemis as his message. He introduced them to the positive side of the Christian faith, which was not the shrine of Diana, which those people carried as amulets on their arms or hanging about their necks.

Constable: The crowd's reaction to Alexander showed distinct hostility toward him.

Apparently Alexander was a leading unbelieving Jew who wanted the crowd to understand that even though Paul was a Jew the local Jewish community did not approve of him (cf. 18:12-17). However, like Gallio in Corinth, this crowd did not distinguish between Christianity and Judaism. Both faiths stood against idolatry. Perhaps the crowd assumed Alexander wanted to defend Paul who was also a Jew. This Alexander may be the one Paul warned Timothy about (1 Tim. 1:19-20; 2 Tim. 4:14), but he may have been someone different since Alexander was a common name among both Jews and Gentiles.

TEXT: Acts 20:7-12

TITLE: EUTYCHUS – A DIVINE OBJECT LESSON REGARDING RESURRECTION

BIG IDEA:
YOU CAN'T SAY ENOUGH ABOUT THE MESSAGE OF THE GOSPEL WHICH FOCUSES ON THE POWER OF THE RESURRECTION

INTRODUCTION:
You all remember the classic children's nursery rhyme:

Humpty Dumpty sat on a wall,
Humpty Dumpty had a great fall.
All the king's horses and all the king's men
Couldn't put Humpty together again.

In our story from Acts this morning we have a divine object lesson to reinforce the power of the resurrection message which the Apostle Paul was proclaiming. We find the story of Eutychus who falls to his death and is brought back to life in miraculous fashion. What all the king's horses and all the king's men are unable to do, God easily accomplishes through His servant Paul. The story reminds us of the incident of **Christ raising up Lazarus** – providing the setting for those famous words of comfort and assurance:

> "*I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes in Me will live even if he dies, and everyone who lives and believes in Me will never die*." (**John 11:25-26**)

We find the Apostle revisiting churches in various cities on what amounts to a farewell tour before he ends up at Jerusalem and ultimately at Rome. His goal is to encourage and strengthen the saints and reinforce the message of new life in Jesus Christ. He wants the disciples to remain strong in the faith and continue to advance the kingdom of God. He wants to warn them about temptations and difficulties that could throw them off track. He wants to reinforce his personal love and commitment to them in the fellowship of the gospel. He has a lot to say to the saints gathered together in this upper room in the city of Troas.

YOU CAN'T SAY ENOUGH ABOUT THE MESSAGE OF THE GOSPEL WHICH FOCUSES ON THE POWER OF THE RESURRECTION

Because I believe this incident is recorded with the purpose of communicating a spiritual object lesson to us today, I am going to take some more liberty with the passage in terms of symbolism than how I would normally exegete a text.

- Many lessons here also about the worship practices of the early church
- Many lessons here also about Paul's pastoral care for the early church – look at his great love for the believers; his tireless efforts at providing edification and strengthening; his indoctrination program to exalt the truth of God's Word

I. (:7-8) THE MESSAGE OF THE GOSPEL IS THAT LIGHT HAS COME INTO THE WORLD – THE CIRCUMSTANCES SURROUNDING THE OBJECT LESSON

A. (:7) Emphasis on Length of the Message

1. Calendar Shift to Meeting on the Lord's Day (instead of the Sabbath)

"*And on the first day of the week,*"

Ἐν δὲ τῇ μιᾷ τῶν σαββάτων

MacArthur: Ellen G. White, who is responsible for starting 7th day eventism wrote this. Quoting "to us as to Israel the Sabbath is given for perpetual covenant. To those who receive his holy day, the Sabbath is a sign that God recognizes them as his chosen people." What she's saying there is that people that meet on the Sabbath are the chosen people; the others are not. "The sign or seal of God is revealed in the observance of the 7th day Sabbath. The mark of the beast is the observance of the first day of the week."

But you know something; that is not scriptural. In Galatians, not only from the life of the church, they probably meant every other day, but the Lords' day was a special day. But in **Galatians 4:10**, Paul says to those Christians in Galatia, "*you observe days and months and times and years*." In other words, you're still hung up on the Jewish Sabbath. I'm afraid that I have bestowed upon you labor in vain. If you really we're saved, you ought to be over that. That part of the old covenant is gone. In case that isn't convincing enough to show you the Sabbath is not anymore to be observed, listen to this one. **Colossians 2:16**. "*Let no man therefore judge you in food or in drink or in respect of a feast day or of the new moon or of a Sabbath day which are a shadow of things to come*." Don't let anybody condemn you for what you eat or what you may drink or a feast you may or may not keep or a new moon or a Sabbath. Those things were shadows, when the reality came the shadow was gone.

Boice: This change is a proof of the resurrection. There are many evidences: the empty tomb, the grave clothes, the changed character of the disciples, and so on – all these and other historical facts are powerful evidences for the fact of the resurrection of Christ. But among these many evidences, there is the change of the day of worship to Sunday. Why would that happen? Particularly, why would that happen among Jews, who mostly made up the early Christian congregations and who were trained by centuries of tradition to worship on the seventh day? There is only one explanation -- Jesus rose from the dead on that day.

2. Centrality of the Lord's Table – associated with Agape Love Feast

"*when we were gathered together to break bread,*"

συνηγμένων ἡμῶν κλάσαι ἄρτον,

The word *synagogue* comes from the Greek verb "συνάγω" = gather and means place of concentration; a gathering together; an assembly

"to break bread" – combines both aspects of the agape meal and the special remembrance of the Lord's Table

Principal point of the believers getting together – not just some minor tacked-on ordinance – remember the Lord in His death and resurrection and fellowship together as they worship the Lord

People met at night because they had to work during each day – no weekends off for those who were slaves or servants; had to use their time wisely; not the leisure time that we enjoy today

Barclay: There is something very lovely about this simple picture. The impression is that of a family meeting together rather than of a modern church service. Is it possible that we have gained in dignity in our Church services at the expense of family atmosphere?

3. Context of Farewell Message

"*Paul began talking to them, intending to depart the next day,*"

ὁ Παῦλος διελέγετο αὐτοῖς μέλλων ἐξιέναι τῇ ἐπαύριον,

Waiting seven days in Troas to catch ship for the next part of his journey; already tired out from a five day journey at sea and preparing to depart on the next leg of his journey; but **made himself available** to speak from his heart to these dear believers
Must have been a very interested audience – taking this rare opportunity to hear the last words they might ever hear from the lips of the great apostle (turns out he might have been able to visit one more time)

Word for talking here, we get the word "*dialogue*" – some questions and answers and discussion perhaps as well; conduct a discussion; speak; preach

4. Communication Extended Because of Pastoral Concerns

"*and he prolonged his message until midnight.*"

παρέτεινέν τε τὸν λόγον μέχρι μεσονυκτίου.

Probably the longest sermon we have in the Bible – gets to midnight and it turns out that is just the halfway point of the message
People were hungry for the Word of God; not constrained by artificial time limits; you speak more than 30 minutes in our culture and people get antsy

MacArthur: And Paul, when he got there, didn't just say, well, a few nice little choice words. I've got to go. He continued his speech till midnight. Meetings weren't regulated by the clock, folks. They were regulated by the needs of the people, and their hunger for the Word. You see, in the early days, these people were hungry. They met for the Word. You know, **1 Peter 2:2** always hits me, and I get to thinking about this. It says, "*As babies, desire the pure milk of the Word that you may grow thereby*." I have never in my life seen a baby that didn't like milk. That baby not only likes it; that baby wants it. Babies want milk. You'd have a very abnormal, sick baby that didn't want milk, but I've sure seen a lot of Christians that didn't seem to want teaching.

B. (:8) Emphasis on Light associated with Revelation and Illumination

"*And there were many lamps in the upper room where we were gathered together.*"

ἦσαν δὲ λαμπάδες ἱκαναὶ ἐν τῷ ὑπερῴῳ οὗ ἦμεν συνηγμένοι.

"*upper room*" – does not mean that churches have to meet in private homes in an upper room

Why did the Holy Spirit have Luke insert this reference?? Very interesting detail

Possibilities:

- Because Christians did not want to be accused of meeting off in the dark where they could be involved in immoral activities ?? Doubtful

- Because the smoke from these oil lamps would have been a contributing cause to Eutychus falling asleep – that seems to be part of it

  Blaiklock: The burning oil was the main reason for the deterioration of the atmosphere, most apparent higher in the room, where the unfortunate Eutychus sat in the window-alcove.

- Also because of the association of light with revelation and illumination

John 1:6-13 "*There came a man sent from God, whose name was John. He came as a witness, to testify about the Light, so that all might believe through him. He was not the Light, but he came to testify about the Light. There was the true Light which, coming into the world, enlightens every man. He was in the world, and the world was made through Him, and the world did not know Him. He came to His own, and those who were His own did not receive Him. But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name, who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God*."

John 3:19-21 "*This is the judgment, that the Light has come into the world, and men loved the darkness rather than the Light, for their deeds were evil. For everyone who does evil hates the Light, and does not come to the Light for fear that his deeds will be exposed. But he who practices the truth comes to the Light, so that his deeds may be manifested as having been wrought in God*."

Isaiah 9:2 "*The people who walk in darkness Will see a great light; Those who live in a dark land, The light will shine on them.*"

Isaiah 50:10 "*Who is among you that fears the LORD, That obeys the voice of His servant, That walks in darkness and has no light? Let him trust in the name of the LORD and rely on his God.*"

We have been called to live as:

- Children of light

  Ephesians 5:8 "*for you were formerly darkness, but now you are light in the Lord; walk as children of light.*"

- Light of the world

  Matt. 5:14-16 "*You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do men light a lamp, and put it under the peck-measure, but on the lampstand; and it gives light to all who are in the house. Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven.*"

II. (:9) THE MESSAGE OF THE GOSPEL IS THAT REJECTION OF THE LIGHT LEADS TO DEATH – THE CONDITION REQUIRING NEW LIFE

And there was a certain young man named Eutychus sitting on the window sill, sinking into a deep sleep; and as Paul kept on talking, he was overcome by sleep and fell down from the third floor, and was picked up dead.

καθεζόμενος δέ τις νεανίας ὀνόματι Εὔτυχος ἐπὶ τῆς θυρίδος, καταφερόμενος ὕπνῳ βαθεῖ διαλεγομένου τοῦ Παύλου ἐπὶ πλεῖον, κατενεχθεὶς ἀπὸ τοῦ ὕπνου ἔπεσεν ἀπὸ τοῦ τριστέγου κάτω καὶ ἤρθη νεκρός.

Young man – probably around 8-14 years old when you look at the words used to describe him

Name Eutychus means "Fortunate" or "Lucky"—but we find God is sovereignly and providentially at work in the details of this incident

Perched on a good spot to get some air in a room that probably had become hot and stuffy – no screens – just an open window; up on the third floor; commendable to find him here after probably a long day of chores

Present tense of the verb indicates that he was in the process of trying to fight off nodding off; he would drift a little and then snap his head up and then drift back off; finally sleep wins out; he probably kept thinking, Surely Paul must be about ready to wrap this up … but he kept on talking (maybe that is what some of you think about my sermons)

How can we be sure he was actually dead?? Diagnosis comes to us from Luke the physician who was physically present (resumption of the "we" passages in Acts – vv.5-6) and wrote this book of the Bible

Not saying anything in the text negative about Eutychus … but certainly in a symbolic sense he stands for those who fail to take the opportunity to receive the light of God's revelation and end up dead in their trespasses and sins – the state of physical death points to that more eternal reality of spiritual death – He is in desperate need of new life and salvation; nothing that he can contribute to gain this new life; it will have to be all the work of God

In our story, you can imagine the immediate outpouring of shock and grief and anguish on the part of the believers … as the sermon is interrupted and they rush down the stairs and outside to see what has become of the young boy

Falling three flights will do tremendous damage; Illustration of one of our owners

Not the last time somebody fell asleep during a sermon

III. (:10) THE MESSAGE OF THE GOSPEL IS THAT GOD SAVES BY RAISING THE DEAD TO NEW LIFE – THE CONTACT WITH GOD THAT RESULTS IN NEW LIFE

But Paul went down and fell upon him and after embracing him, he said, "Do not be troubled, for his life is in him."

καταβὰς δὲ ὁ Παῦλος ἐπέπεσεν αὐτῷ καὶ συμπεριλαβὼν εἶπεν· μὴ θορυβεῖσθε, ἡ γὰρ ψυχὴ αὐτοῦ ἐν αὐτῷ ἐστιν.

Paul is merely the channel, the conduit for the power of God to flow through in this instance

A person needs that personal connection with God by grace through faith

Bock: The parallel with Elijah and Elisha is strong (1 Kings 17:19-22; 2 Kings 4:34-35), with Paul bending over the boy's body. . . The power of God over life is reaffirmed.

Death does not extinguish the soul; the body is the tent we live in here on earth

IV. (:11-12) THE MESSAGE OF THE GOSPEL IS THAT OUR NEW LIFE SHOULD REVOLVE AROUND WORSHIP AND FELLOWSHIP AND EDIFICATION AND TESTIMONY – THE CELEBRATION AND COMFORT ASSOCIATED WITH NEW LIFE

And when he had gone back up, and had broken the bread and eaten, he talked with them a long while, until daybreak, and so departed. And they took away the boy alive, and were greatly comforted.

ἀναβὰς δὲ καὶ κλάσας τὸν ἄρτον καὶ γευσάμενος ἐφ' ἱκανόν τε ὁμιλήσας ἄχρι αὐγῆς, οὕτως ἐξῆλθεν. ἤγαγον δὲ τὸν παῖδα ζῶντα καὶ παρεκλήθησαν οὐ μετρίως.

Time around the Lord's Table should be one of celebration and worship and fellowship

Do you think Paul had the people's attention as he continued his message?

When did Paul get to sleep?? My food is to do the will of the Father . . .

CONCLUSION:

What lessons do we take away from this short narrative, this remarkable miracle
Ephes. 1:19 "*and what is the surpassing greatness of His power toward us who believe*"
Same power that resuscitated Eutychus; same power that raised up Jesus Christ from the dead

Another picture is present for us here in this story of Eutychus as well. You could view this as the death of a believer followed by the restoration of fellowship that will occur when Christ returns – when we will all sit together and enjoy communion with our Lord around the marriage feast of the bridegroom with His bride.

So on different levels this object lesson speaks to us of the power of the resurrection and those words of assurance from our Lord that we mentioned at the beginning:

"*I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes in Me will live even if he dies, and everyone who lives and believes in Me will never die*." (**John 11:25-26**)

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DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

1) How often should believers celebrate the Lord's Table?

2) How can we increase our hunger for the teaching ministry of the Word of God?

3) How does this passage argue against the theory of life being annihilated at the point of death?

4) How could Paul function here without any sleep?

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QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

MacArthur: So in his mind he feels this is the last time he'll ever be in Eastern Mediterranea. He has some tremendous, tremendous roots there. Some beloved, beloved sons in the faith. And he knows in his own mind that the feeling is it's over, this is it, this is my last time, this is farewell, this is swan song and so forth. And so there's a feeling through this passage of finality. It's interesting that probably he did get back if very briefly. And that's due to the fact that he made the statement that he left Profimus ill at Myledus. And since that didn't happen here, it must have happened at a later time and so we conclude that perhaps his Roman imprisonment was separated into two sections and in the middle he made another little trip near Asia Minor.

But for the most part, this is it. This is the wrap up on it. And you sense farewells and I suppose all of us know that when farewells come along there's kind of love, kind of rises to the top. And when we're saying goodbye for the last time to the people we really care about, all the little things sort of fade and just kind of love sort of rules. And maybe that's in a sense what happens here. Although I think it probably ruled in all the life with Paul, from the time of his conversion.

And so we see a series of goodbyes and a series of farewells all through Chapter 20 as Paul goes back toward Jerusalem. . . But we see here six areas, just words. They don't really mean that the text is divided by God this way. It's a very poor outline in fact. Just some nails to hang your thoughts on. But there are six different things here that express Paul's love. His affection, his giving, his teaching, his persistence, his availability and his concern.

Dr. Brian Green: **The Midnight Miracle**
This is one of the events on the final journey of the Apostle Paul. He was visiting particular places where he had previously seen the blessing of the Lord. Troas was an important seaport. God has the answer for every situation in life.
1. (:7) The Remarkable Meeting
Look at earlier instances in Acts of remarkable occurrences;
a. The Day = the first day of the week; first mention that the disciples came together on the first day of the week instead of the Jewish Sabbath; day of worship, celebration, remembrance, rest, rejoicing; based on the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ = beginning of a new week; we

remember the cross and the blood that was shed but we celebrate the resurrection; we serve a risen Savior; world wants Sunday to be just like any other day; it is a sad thing to steal God's day from Him;
b. The Details of this Memorable Meeting – the Lord's Table and a long sermon; both are very important; an encounter with Christ as we interact with the preaching of the Word; causes us to grow in grace; encourages us amidst the difficulties
c. The Duration of the Meeting – people holding torches of light; unashamed of the gospel; the longest sermon in the Bible; most of the people there did not have a day off; they were servants and would come in the evening because they were eager to hear the Word of God; do a series on the night occasions in the Bible and what transpired (Daniel 5; Paul visited by angel in prison; call goes forth "Behold the bridegroom comes to the chamber"; Judas going out when it was night; etc.)
d. The Distraction = the heart of the meeting –

2. The Recorded Miracle
a. The Reason for this recorded miracle – between age of 8 and 14; know nothing else about him; probably a slave who had worked all day; kids will let you know if they don't want to listen, but grownups can sit there and fake it;
Illustration: wife speaking to the preacher after her husband had walked out in the middle of the sermon; Preacher remarks: "What was it I said that so offended your husband that he walked out in the middle of the sermon?" Wife responds: "Oh that was not it at all; he often walks in his sleep."
b. The Reaction – the shock in the group; great sorrow to the church; God can raise up someone from their sins right now
c. The Restoration – we have passed from death to life; from kingdom of Satan to kingdom of God; what happened in life of Eutychus after this? Dedicated as a witness;

3. Remembering the Memorable – other references to Troas = very significant:
Acts 16:8-9 Paul was going in the opposite direction; instead due to the Macedonian Call the gospel came to Europe – watershed moment – Place of Vision
2 Cor. 2:12 – door opened; Place of Mission
2 Tim. 4:13 – left certain things behind in Troas; maybe he was in a hurry; 3 symbolic things that were what Eutychus needed most to go on in the faith:

TEXT: Acts 20:17-27

TITLE: POIGNANT PASTORS' CONFERENCE –
DRAMATIC FAREWELL MESSAGE TO ELDERS AT EPHESUS – PART 1

BIG IDEA:
PASTORAL MINISTRY MUST FOLLOW THE APOSTOLIC PATTERN

INTRODUCTION:
Bible conferences can be a special time for believers. I remember the privilege of taking in one of the Shepherds Conferences hosted by Dr John MacArthur out in California – a wonderful lineup of distinguished speakers who had much to offer the assembled group of pastors. Now imagine cranking that experience up to an unbelievably higher level and you have the type of unique pastors' conference that the Apostle Paul hosted for the elders from Ephesus as he gathered them to himself at the port city of Miletus.

These were men that Paul had discipled for a period of three years and then appointed to care for God's precious flock. Paul had poured his life into these leaders as well as his doctrine. He had great expectations for their future ministry. Now Paul is on his farewell tour and has one last opportunity to communicate to them face to face. His insights and reminders and warnings and exhortations in this context should guide our pastoral ministry today.

Our own emphasis on plurality of elder church government has highlighted many of the same principles featured here. This passage is close to my heart because of how deep my convictions run in these areas. We have had a lot of teaching in these same areas from our studies in 1 Thessalonians and in the Book of Nehemiah – both books focusing on a variety of leadership issues. So hopefully much of this will be review for us … but remember that what is believed in evangelical church circles today about these principles still needs to be faithfully practiced.

PASTORAL MINISTRY MUST FOLLOW THE APOSTOLIC PATTERN
Many people do not even buy into this central premise. They think that the Holy Spirit is giving them better insight today into how the church should be structured for our times and that the consistent example we see in Acts and in the Epistles is just anecdotal rather than binding. But Paul points back to the course of his ministry as the pattern for these leaders. They are exhorted to pick up the baton of spiritual leadership and faithfully pass it along to future generations.

I. (:17-21) PASTORAL TRACK RECORD OF A CONSISTENT, HUMBLE, CARING, PERSEVERING, PROFITABLE PROCLAMATION OF THE GOSPEL OF THE GRACE OF GOD

A. (:17) Staging the Pastors Conference

"*And from Miletus he sent to Ephesus and called to him the elders of the church.*"

Ἀπὸ δὲ τῆς Μιλήτου πέμψας εἰς Ἔφεσον μετεκαλέσατο τοὺς πρεσβυτέρους τῆς ἐκκλησίας.

Longenecker: At Miletus the coastal boat docked for a number of days to load and unload cargo.

Stott: As the crow flies, Ephesus was only thirty miles north of Miletus, but the rather circuitous

road was longer. It must have taken about three days for a messenger to travel to Ephesus and bring the elders back to Miletus.

Paul had established a **leadership structure** in the local churches; had not left them just floundering without pastoral care
Elders (:17) = *Pastors* (:28) = *Bishops* (:28) – the top level of church leadership
No distinction of office between Teaching Elders and Ruling Elders
Plural elders; singular church at Ephesus

Reviewing His Record – Follow my example is his core message here; be careful how you build and follow my blueprint – **1 Cor. 3:10-11**

B. (:18) Consistent Track Record of Personal Discipleship

"*And when they had come to him, he said to them, 'You yourselves know, from the first day that I set foot in Asia, how I was with you the whole time,*"

ὡς δὲ παρεγένοντο πρὸς αὐτὸν εἶπεν αὐτοῖς· ὑμεῖς ἐπίστασθε, ἀπὸ πρώτης ἡμέρας ἀφ᾽ ἧς ἐπέβην εἰς τὴν Ἀσίαν, πῶς μεθ᾽ ὑμῶν τὸν πάντα χρόνον ἐγενόμην,

did not have any difficulty getting the elders to show up for this conference

1 Thess. 1:5 "*for our gospel did not come to you in word only, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction, just as you know what kind of men we proved to be among you for your sake*"

Tone here may be apologetic (Paul may be under attack from some who were undermining his ministry;) definitely he wants to instruct them in how to continue to carry on the ministry in Ephesus

Consistent ministry – did not get off to a slow start in Asia – was the same person from day one until now

"with you" – when Jesus chose His disciples – one of the expressed goals was that they might be with Him; transparent life; not just classroom instruction

Zeisler: There is a form of leadership that insists on distance between the superior and the inferior. Directions are spoken from a high tower, and important statements are issued on official stationery. There is little connection between the one who has authority and the people who receive his word. In God's kingdom there is no notion of Christian leadership that is merely authoritarian without relationship. It can't work.

C. (:19a) Humble Track Record of Spiritual Service

"*serving the Lord with all humility*"

δουλεύων τῷ κυρίῳ μετὰ πάσης ταπεινοφροσύνης

Is. 66:2 "*This is the one to whom I will look: he who is humble and contrite in spirit and trembles at my word*."

James 4:6 "*God is opposed to the proud, but gives grace to the humble*."

Pride is what brings down more spiritual leaders than any other sin. Pride makes it extremely difficult to have the proper functioning of a plurality of elder form of church government = a biblical form.

C. J. Mahaney: Humility is honestly assessing ourselves in light of God's holiness and our sinfulness. . . Pride is when sinful human beings aspire to the status and position of God and refuse to acknowledge their dependence upon Him. . .
[True Greatness depends on a right view of the cross.] What a powerful death! The cross ransoms, the cross liberates, the cross transforms! So make it your aim and lifelong habit, when you see someone who's serving, to be reminded of the sacrifice of the Savior, for apart from His sacrifice there is no serving. True greatness is attained only by emulating the Savior's example – and made possible only by the Savior's sacrifice.

Boice: Humility is important, of course, because the opposite of humility is pride, and pride is a great danger for those who are in prominent positions of church leadership. It is a danger for anyone, but it is particularly dangerous for those who stand up and talk, at least if they are effective doing it . . ."

MacArthur: As capable as he was, as astute as he was, as much of a man of knowledge, he was humble. **Verse 9 of 1 Corinthians 15** expresses it, "*For I am the least of the apostles, that I'm not fit to be called an apostle, because I have persecuted the church of God.* But," he said, I like that, "*By the grace of God I am what I am, and His grace, which was bestowed upon me was not in vain, but I labored more abundantly than they all, yet not I but the grace of God which was with me.*" He says I'm nothing, I don't deserve anything, but I am what I am by the grace of God. And as long as he had that attitude, people, he served the Lord with humility.

D. (:19b) Caring Track Record of Empathy and Affection

"*and with tears*"

καὶ δακρύων

Two possibilities here:

- emphasis on tears is combined with the next point which deals with Paul's own struggles and hardships;
- or more probably these are tears expended on behalf of others; the burden Paul feels for all the young believers as he ministers to them

Boice: He learned to identify with those to whom he ministered.

Man of compassion and empathy; large heart; had a bond of affection and love for the believers

Rom. 12:15 "rejoice with those who rejoice and weep with those who weep"

E. (:19c) Persevering Track Record in the Midst of Persecution

"*and with trials which came upon me through the plots of the Jews;*"

καὶ πειρασμῶν τῶν συμβάντων μοι ἐν ταῖς ἐπιβουλαῖς τῶν Ἰουδαίων,

goes way beyond the normal hardships one would experience in life; Paul has large groups of enemies who are conspiring against him to physically harm him and squash his ministry

F. (:20-21) Profitable Proclamation of the Gospel of the Grace of God – Both Publicly and Privately

> "*how I did not shrink from declaring to you anything that was profitable, and teaching you publicly and from house to house, solemnly testifying to both Jews and Greeks of repentance toward God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ.*"
>
> ὡς οὐδὲν ὑπεστειλάμην τῶν συμφερόντων τοῦ μὴ ἀναγγεῖλαι ὑμῖν καὶ διδάξαι ὑμᾶς δημοσίᾳ καὶ κατ᾽ οἴκους, διαμαρτυρόμενος Ἰουδαίοις τε καὶ Ἕλλησιν τὴν εἰς θεὸν μετάνοιαν καὶ πίστιν εἰς τὸν κύριον ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦν.

Look at the boldness and courage of the Apostle Paul; his commitment to the sufficiency of God's Truth; his loyalty to the gospel message

* *

1 Thess: 2:1-12 message

SUPERNATURAL BOLDNESS IN PROCLAIMING THE GOSPEL REQUIRES PURE MOTIVES AND PROPER CONDUCT (THE MARKS OF SPIRIT-FILLED CHURCH PLANTERS)

1. (:1-2) SUPERNATURAL BOLDNESS IN PROCLAIMING THE GOSPEL CAN BE IDENTIFIED BY THE POWER OF THE HOLY SPIRIT IN THE CONTEXT OF PERSECUTION

c. Perseverance Despite Persecution is the Key

2. (:3-6) SUPERNATURAL BOLDNESS IN PROCLAIMING THE GOSPEL REQUIRES PURE MOTIVES

CHECKLIST OF PURE MOTIVES

a. Three Negatives -- Integrity of Ministry -- Not:

1) "*from error*" -- source of Paul's message was not the product of deception or illusion
2) "*from impurity*" -- not associated with sexual impurity (many of the religions of the day had sexual rituals); possibly a reference to integrity of motivation as well
3) "*by way of deceit*" -- not using tricky or crafty methods

b. One Positive -- Confident Sense of God's Commission

c. One Main Contrast -- Our Primary Orientation

"*not as pleasing men but God, who examines our hearts*"

d. Three More Negatives -- Unselfish Approach

1) not with "*flattering speech*" -- manipulating people
2) not with a "*pretext for greed*"
3) not "*seeking glory from men*"

3. (:7-12) PAUL'S PICTURE OF THREE ROLE MODELS THAT ILLUSTRATE PROPER CONDUCT IN THE MINISTRY

a. (:7-8) Gentleness and Tender Care of a Loving Mother

1) Gentleness

"*But we proved to be gentle among you*"

2) Tender Care

"*as a nursing mother tenderly cares for her own children*"

3) Genuine Affection

"*Having thus a fond affection for you*"

4) Sacrificial Love

"*we were well-pleased to impart to you not only the gospel of God but also our own lives, because you had become very dear to us*"

b. (:9) Hard Work and Self-Sufficiency of an Unselfish Sacrificial Laborer

1) Difficulty Involved

"*For you recall, brethren, our labor and hardship, how working night and day*"

2) Unselfishness – Necessary Task

"*so as not to be a burden to any of you*"

laboring with their hands for their own support so as not to be a burden and to provide a good example

3) Main Task – never lose sight of the number one objective

"*we proclaimed to you the gospel of God*"

c. (:10-12) Godliness and Positive Training of a Father with Vision

1) Modeled Godly Conduct

"*You are witnesses, and so is God, how devoutly and uprightly and blamelessly we behaved toward you believers*."

2) Three Primary Activities = exhorting, encouraging, imploring

"*just as you know how we were exhorting and encouraging and imploring*"

3) Impartiality and Personal Attention

"*each one of you as a father would his own children*"

4) His overriding Ambition

"*so that you may walk in a manner worthy of the God who calls you into His own kingdom and glory.*"

* *

II. (:22-24) PASTORAL COMMITMENT TO FINISH THE COURSE OF MINISTRY WHATEVER THE PERSONAL COST IN A MANNER HIGHLIGHTING THE GOSPEL OF THE GRACE OF GOD

A. (:22-23) Commitment to Go to Jerusalem

1. Divinely Driven

"*And now, behold, bound in spirit,*"

Καὶ νῦν ἰδοὺ δεδεμένος ἐγὼ τῷ πνεύματι

Rugh: "bound by the Holy Spirit" is the sense
Not where you would go if you were motivated by self preservation

Look how similar to the mindset of the Lord Jesus – who also set His face to go to Jerusalem, knowing what type of death awaited him there

2. Details Deprived

I am on my way to Jerusalem, not knowing what will happen to me there,

πορεύομαι εἰς Ἰερουσαλὴμ τὰ ἐν αὐτῇ συναντήσοντά μοι μὴ εἰδώς,

uncertain future when it comes to the details or outcome of what will face him in Jerusalem

3. Difficulties Destined

"*except that the Holy Spirit solemnly testifies to me in every city, saying that bonds and afflictions await me.*"

πλὴν ὅτι τὸ πνεῦμα τὸ ἅγιον κατὰ πόλιν διαμαρτύρεταί μοι λέγον ὅτι δεσμὰ καὶ θλίψεις με μένουσιν.

He has been given enough forewarning to know that he is heading into a context of "*bonds and afflictions*" – imprisonment and pain

Kent: the Spirit did not prohibit his going, but told him what would happen when he arrived

B. (:24) Commitment to Finish the Course

1. Unselfish, Courageous Mindset

"*But I do not consider my life of any account as dear to myself,*"

ἀλλ᾽ οὐδενὸς λόγου ποιοῦμαι τὴν ψυχὴν τιμίαν ἐμαυτῷ

eternal priorities

Except a grain of wheat fall into the ground and die it remains alone …

Phil. 2:17; 3:7-14

"*For to me to live is Christ and to die is gain*"

Illustration from S. Lewis Johnson: There was an elderly Scottish woman who was being interviewed by the pastor to see if she could join the Scottish Presbyterian Church. And she was having a little difficulty with the questions that were asked her. And, finally, she said, "Well, Sir, I want you to know I cannot answer your hard questions; but one thing I do know, I would gladly die for him." Well, that's the kind of service that the Lord would love to have from all of us.

2. Unflinching, Determined Resolve

"*in order that I may finish my course, and the ministry which I received from the Lord Jesus,*"

ὡς τελειῶσαι τὸν δρόμον μου καὶ τὴν διακονίαν ἣν ἔλαβον παρὰ τοῦ κυρίου Ἰησοῦ,

I serve Jesus as Lord; He is the Master
God gives each of us a certain scope of work to accomplish for Him; we need to use our time wisely and maximize our efforts, but He gives us the time and opportunity to complete the work He has for us; Paul at the end of his life had this assurance that he was finishing the race successfully; that he was completing his prescribed ministry

Wants to finish well

3. Unwavering, Faithful Proclamation of the Truth

"*to testify solemnly of the gospel of the grace of God.*"

διαμαρτύρασθαι τὸ εὐαγγέλιον τῆς χάριτος τοῦ θεοῦ.

Rugh: Sums up the passion of Paul; his single focus

The answer to pride; the answer to inadequacy in the ministry; the answer to everything is the grace of God; Paul taught the fundamental truths associated with the grace doctrines

III. (:25-27) PASTORAL TESTIMONY OF A CLEAR CONSCIENCE IN MINISTRY DUE TO FAITHFULLY COMMUNICATING THE WHOLE COUNSEL OF GOD

A. (:25) Final Farewell

"*And now, behold, I know that all of you, among whom I went about preaching the kingdom, will see my face no more.*"

Καὶ νῦν ἰδοὺ ἐγὼ οἶδα ὅτι οὐκέτι ὄψεσθε τὸ πρόσωπόν μου ὑμεῖς πάντες ἐν οἷς διῆλθον κηρύσσων τὴν βασιλείαν.

B. (:26) Clear Conscience

"*Therefore I testify to you this day, that I am innocent of the blood of all men.*"

διότι μαρτύρομαι ὑμῖν ἐν τῇ σήμερον ἡμέρᾳ ὅτι καθαρός εἰμι ἀπὸ τοῦ αἵματος πάντων·

Ezekiel 33:1-20 The Watchman's Duty

C. (:27) Courageous Communication

"*For I did not shrink from declaring to you the whole purpose of God.*"

οὐ γὰρ ὑπεστειλάμην τοῦ μὴ ἀναγγεῖλαι πᾶσαν τὴν βουλὴν τοῦ θεοῦ ὑμῖν.

CONCLUSION TO PART 1:

1 Cor. 4:1-5 message – **Performance Review for Christian Ministers**

THE JUDGMENT OF THE LORD IS ALL THAT MATTERS WHEN IT COMES TO ULTIMATE ACCOUNTABILITY FOR CHRISTIAN MINISTRY

1. (:1) THE ROLE OF THE CHRISTIAN MINISTER – TWOFOLD JOB DESCRIPTION

"*Let a man regard us in this manner*"

How should Christian ministers want others to view them? What type of job description have the leaders of the church written for themselves? What are they trying to accomplish?

a. SERVANTS OF CHRIST

MacArthur: Paul expresses his humility by using a word lit. meaning "*under rowers,*" referring to the lowest, most menial, and most despised galley slaves, who rowed on the bottom tier of a ship (9:16; see Luk 1:2; Ac 20:19).

b. STEWARDS OF THE MYSTERIES OF GOD

2. (:1) THE REQUIREMENT FOR THE CHRISTAIN MINISTER = FAITHFULNESS = THE ONE ESSENTIAL STANDARD OF MEASUREMENT

"*In this case, moreover, it is required of stewards that one be found trustworthy.*"

A steward is responsible for the capable administration of the property of another; hence faithfulness is the primary standard of evaluation. (2 Tim. 2:2, Acts 20:27)

* * * * * * * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

1) What types of questions do you think the elders might have asked the Apostle Paul in this final training session?

2) As you think about spiritual leaders who have impacted your life, what type of humility have they demonstrated in their ministry?

3) What work or ministry has the Lord committed to you where you need to demonstrate faithfulness and commitment?

4) Does your present church context preach the difficult portions of God's Word in a systematic fashion or just pick and choose various topics of interest to highlight?

* * * * * * * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Wiersbe: Paul used six graphic pictures of his ministry to explain why he would not quit but would go to Jerusalem to die for Jesus Christ if necessary.
1) Paul saw himself as an *accountant* (20:24) who had examined his assets and liabilities and decided to put Jesus Christ ahead of everything else.
2) He also saw himself as a *runner* who wanted to finish his course in joyful victory (Phi. 3:12-14; 2 Tim. 4:8).
3) Paul's third picture is that of the *steward*, for his ministry was something that he had "*received of the Lord.*" The steward owns little or nothing, but he possesses all things. His sole purpose is to serve his master and please him.
4) The next picture is that of the *witness* – "*to solemnly give witness*" – reminds us of the seriousness of the message and of the ministry.
5) Picture number five is the *herald* (20:25). The herald tells what the king tells him to declare
6) The final picture, and perhaps the most dramatic, is that of the *watchman*.

MacArthur: And there is enough time for you to finish the work that God gives you. And I think that's so important. That gives me such a tremendous sense of direction in my life. To know that if I maximize, that I can finish the work, then I don't worry about dying, see, I don't have to worry about death. If I worry about just finishing the work and I don't mean worry in the sense of a negative, but worry in the sense of anticipation, if I think through the fact that if I maximize time, I'm gonna finish the work and then go to be with the Lord in a sense of fulfillment. . .

And so here are these men, where his own disciples, his own children in the faith, now grown up to be at least spiritual young men or spiritual fathers perhaps in the terminology of John. And so he calls to them to meet with them. And I think, as we've seen so many times, here is really the Biblical pattern for the church, you grow your own leadership. And Paul had done it there, and now he had turned the church over to them to nurture it, to carry it on, and he has one last time to spend with them. . .

my obligation toward God is to serve him, that's how I view my ministry. My obligation toward the church is to teach the church, whether it's publicly or privately, to reinforce that teaching and to make it livable, that's the priority Godward and churchward.

S. Lewis Johnson: **The Integrity of Paul's Ministry**
When we think of Paul's ministry of integrity or the integrity of Paul's ministry, it certainly had soundness, incorruptibility, honesty. There was a firm adherence to values, the values derived from the Lord God. In that sense, Paul's ministry was surely a ministry of integrity. We live in a day in which integrity is very important and it's often rare in the experience of men. The Book of Proverbs in the 19th chapter, and in the 1st verse, says, "*Better is the poor, that walketh in his integrity, than he that is perverse in his lips and is a fool*." . . .

Charles Hodge used to say, "Salvation is all of the Lord and that truth is engraved upon almost every page of the Bible. It is of the Lord in its conception." Long before there was ever an angel that floated over the ether of God's creation, He had thought of the gospel of the grace of God

and had determined that it should eventually be preached. He is the one who revealed it in the Garden of Eden, when he came down after man sinned and said, "Where art thou?" The beginning of the revelation of the truth of the gospel of the grace of God. It is of God in its execution. It is the un-aided work of a solitary conqueror, the Lord Jesus Christ. And it is likened, that is, the position of it is likened to a banquet not a pot-luck supper where everyone brings a little something in order to participate. That is, a little something of Pelagian works or semi-Pelagian free will or Arminian cooperation with the grace of God or even Lutheran non-resistance to the work of God. The Scriptures say that we are dead in trespasses and sins, we have nothing to bring to this banquet. It is something that God has done in the magnificent conception of his magnificent grace. How thankful we should be that in the grace of God, he has opened our minds to see what others have not had the privilege to see as yet. And how grateful we should be, in the proclamation of that truth to others to sit and enjoy the banquet and never say anything to anyone about us is to be unfaithful to the apostle himself. He didn't hold back anything that was profitable to those Ephesians. No novelties of the hour, no interest in the sensation; he was interested in the salvation of souls.

Gil Rugh: **Overviewing Church Leadership**
Paul had celebrated the Passover in Philippi; 50 days to Pentecost; hopes to get to Jerusalem for that. Only major speech of Paul in book of Acts directed to believers – in particular, the spiritual leaders; three year ministry was sufficient for him to appoint leaders; responsible for the spiritual condition of the church; Acts 14:21 – revisited the churches on first missionary journey and appointed elders; same pattern; apostolic leadership will pass off the scene; Congregational govt is not biblical; bible must be ultimate authority for pattern of leadership; Paul using himself as an example; already there are problems at church at Ephesus; challenges to the apostolic doctrine; I want to remind you of my practice; serving as a slave; doesn't sound humble when you tell people you are humble! Didn't make himself out to be some great and mighty person; some preachers can't stop talking about themselves; he was burdened for these people; grieved over their situations; "*admonish each one with tears*;" not just a job for Paul but the commitment of his life; did not promote or exalt himself or cause the brethren to serve him; genuine in his ministry; enduring the trials; not a ministry of comfort; same person in public setting and in more private settings in homes; You don't believe in Christ until you recognize your sin and turn from your sin to God and put your faith in Christ; Luke 24:47; Acts 17:30; Acts 11:18 – repentance comes from an act of God in the heart; inseparably joined to faith; Ephes. 2; you cannot hold on to your sin and try to cling to Christ for escape from hell; they will have the same type of battle against difficulties and must be found faithful

David Silversides: **God's Gracious Word and Work**
Jews of dispersion would be gathered in Jerusalem for Pentecost so Paul desired to get there in time to preach the gospel to them; exhorted the elders regarding their duty in caring for the flock of God; must have been a collection of churches there in Ephesus, not just a single congregation; that is how Presbyterian denominations justify synods and general assemblies, etc. number of conversions in Ephesus was very great; yet church reported to meet in house of Aquilla and Priscilla – was that just one congregation of many?? This was more like a presbytery coming together; quite a large gathering of elders here; Ps. 74:1-2 – it is God's congregation; not simply a club making its own rules; no such thing as divine blood, but the human blood of Jesus – the incarnate God – speaks of the unity of His person – both divine and human in one person; one person but two distinct natures;
"*and now*" – making specific pronouncement to bring matters to either a partial or final conclusion; look at vs. 32 specifically

1. acknowledging that our precious things are in the hands of God

We rely on God's wisdom, power, grace and faithfulness to care for that which we have entrusted to Him; agreed in his heart with the fact that the Ephesian church was in the hand of God; Ps. 31:5; all depends upon God

2. the Word as the means of safekeeping

Promises and provisions of the gospel of the grace of Christ; all that it teaches; those who are in Christ have been forgiven of their sins; are kept for glory; etc. The power of God keeps His people by faith and confirms them unto the end;

3. the Word instrumental in its own fulfillment

Able to build you up; we in Christ are like an incomplete building; a work in progress; we are being sanctified; we have not yet attained; we are still sinners; the Word is the very means by which the promise is fulfilled; 1 Pet. 1:23;

4. the completion at the end

Ephes. 1:11-12

TEXT: Acts 20:28-32

TITLE: POIGNANT PASTORS' CONFERENCE –
DRAMATIC FAREWELL MESSAGE TO ELDERS AT EPHESUS – PART 2

BIG IDEA:
PASTORAL MINISTRY MUST FOLLOW THE APOSTOLIC PATTERN

WATCH OUT FOR WOLVES!

INTRODUCTION:

I made a serious error last week when I introduced this series of messages on Paul's final farewell address to the Ephesian elders gathered at Miletus. I told you this would be a two part message; actually it ends up being a three part message. We covered three areas last week of the Apostolic Pattern for Pastoral Ministry:

I. (:17-21) PASTORAL TRACK RECORD OF A CONSISTENT, HUMBLE, CARING, PERSEVERING, PROFITABLE PROCLAMATION OF THE GOSPEL OF THE GRACE OF GOD
II. (:22-24) PASTORAL COMMITMENT TO FINISH THE COURSE OF MINISTRY WHATEVER THE PERSONAL COST IN A MANNER HIGHLIGHTING THE GOSPEL OF THE GRACE OF GOD
III. (:25-27) PASTORAL TESTIMONY OF A CLEAR CONSCIENCE IN MINISTRY DUE TO FAITHFULLY COMMUNICATING THE WHOLE COUNSEL OF GOD

Final two points each deserve full treatment on their own. We will cover Point 4 today:

IV. (:28-32) PASTORAL WARNING AGAINST FALSE TEACHERS WHO WILL SEEK TO LEAD THE SHEEP ASTRAY

Piper: Let me just mention one feature to watch out for in the **recognition of wolves**. As I have watched the movement from biblical faithfulness to liberalism in persons and institutions that I have known over the years, this feature stands out: An emotional disenchantment with faithfulness to what is old and fixed, and an emotional preoccupation with what is new or fashionable or relevant in the eyes of the world.

Let's try to say it another way: when this feature is prevalent, you don't get the impression that a person really longs to bring his mind and heart into conformity to fixed biblical truth. Instead you see the desire to picture biblical truth as unfixed, fluid, indefinable, distant, inaccessible, and so open to the trends of the day.

So what marks a possible wolf-in-the-making is not simply that he rejects or accepts any particular biblical truth, but that he isn't deeply oriented on the **Bible**. He is more oriented on **experience**. He isn't captured by the great old faith once for all delivered to the saints. Instead he's enamored by what is **new** and **innovative**.

* * * * * * * * *

That quote from Piper would certainly be true about the emerging church movement. But whatever the ilk or ism of the day, there never seems to be a lack of false teachers trying to infiltrate the church and lead the flock astray.

Part of our problem is that we cannot judge the **motives** of someone else. If we could, we would see that false teachers would be exposed much more easily. I think that is why Paul concludes with the fifth area which we will study next week:

V. (:33-35) PASTORAL EXAMPLE OF SELF SUPPORT AND SACRIFICIAL GIVING

If you could identify who was truly unselfish and ministered with a humble, servant spirit you would have a good early warning system. But we do have the objective truth of the Bible against which we can measure the teaching of those who would twist the truth and adulterate the gospel of the grace of God.

4 MOTIVATIONS FOR ELDERS TO GUARD AGAINST FALSE TEACHING
(Incentives, Encouragements)

A. (:28) Guard Against False Teachers Because of Your Divine Commissioning – Stewardship Responsibility

1. Scope of Responsibility
    a. Personal Life – you are a sheep (part of the flock) before you are a shepherd
        "*Be on guard for yourselves*"

        προσέχετε ἑαυτοῖς

προσέχω— Active imperative here; 2nd pers plural -- **1.** act. *turn one's mind to*—**a.** *pay attention to, give heed to, follow* w dat. Ac 8:6, 10f; 16:14; 1 Ti 1:4; 4:1; Tit 1:14; Hb 2:1; 2 Pt 1:19.—**b.** *be concerned about, care for, pay attention to* w. dat. Ac 20:28. προσέχειν ἑαυτῷ *be careful,* ***be on one's guard*** Lk 12:1; 17:3; Ac 5:35; cf. Mt 7:15; 10:17.—**c.** *occupy oneself with, devote* or *apply oneself to* w. dat. 1 Ti 4:13; Hb 7:13; *be addicted* 1 Ti 3:8.—**2.** mid. *cling to* w. dat. 1 Ti 6:3 v.l.

Matt. 7:15 "*Beware of the false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly are ravenous wolves.*"

Luke 12:1 "*Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy*"

You don't want to be disqualified from pastoral responsibility:
- You want to be a **holy** vessel to promote holiness; otherwise you have hypocrisy and no moral platform from which to counsel and exhort others
- You want to be a **discerning** teacher to promote truth and expose error;
- You want to be a **committed** leader who is available to minister to the flock; not distracted

Look at all of the spiritual leaders who have let their guard down and suffered loss of their personal reputation as well as loss of effectiveness as a leader – we could rattle off examples; Elders first of all must be "*blameless*" in reputation themselves

Understand that Satan will first try to attack the leadership --
Look at the history of the seminaries in the various mainline denominations going heretical long before the rank and file church membership has been corrupted

Book by Richard Swartley: A Wolf in the Pulpit? The Setup for Moral Failure and the Abuse of

Power – senior pastor model with its unrealistic expectations and its lack of accountability creates a context that makes it more difficult for pastors to adequately **guard themselves**

- sexual problems – ranging from pornography to any type of inappropriate behavior
- financial exploitation in a variety of forms
- abuse of power in a variety of forms

you have a governing structure that depends more on the personality and charisma of the senior pastor

"*Be on guard for yourselves*" – hopefully within the context of the checks and balances of a plurality of elder governing system

b. Local Church

"*and for all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers,*"

καὶ παντὶ τῷ ποιμνίῳ, ἐν ᾧ ὑμᾶς τὸ πνεῦμα τὸ ἅγιον ἔθετο ἐπισκόπους

not just shepherding the strong or the rich or your personal favorites; care must extend to the entire flock; the Good Shepherd is concerned for the welfare of each of the sheep

leadership is a delegated authority role from the Holy Spirit – church recognizes leaders; Holy Spirit makes someone a leader and commissions them to that role

Bruce: Probably the reference to the Holy Spirit here does not mean that their appointment to this sacred ministry had been commanded by prophetic utterance in the church, but rather that they were so appointed and recognized because they were manifestly men on whom the Holy Spirit had bestowed the requisite qualifications for the work.

"*overseers*" – word here is bishop –

S. Lewis Johnson: We have things backward in the church, often; we think if a person wants to be an elder, then he ought to be an elder. And the next thing that we try to do is to be voted into the office by people. That is, unfortunately, what has caused some of the difficulties in our churches. Because, in many of our churches, when a man is put up for an office, like the office of overseer, the office of elder, then he is voted; and thus it is thought he becomes an elder. You don't become an elder by vote; you don't become an elder by self-choice. You become an elder in only one way, by **divine appointment**.

That is why the epistles detail the qualifications for elders – this is how you judge that a man has been made an elder by the Holy Spirit.

2. <u>The Function of Shepherding</u>

"*to shepherd the church of God*"

ποιμαίνειν τὴν ἐκκλησίαν τοῦ θεοῦ,

Pres. Tense infinitive – keep on shepherding continually

Not called to lord it over the flock; called to shepherd; **lead** flock to pasture and **feed** it and

protect it and nurture it and guide it

Don't ever get confused and think that the local church belongs to you; don't call it MacArthur's church

Psalm 23:1 "*The Lord is my Senior Pastor*" -- He is the Head of the Church; He is the Good Shepherd – we serve collectively as undershepherds

One thing that bothers me about large, mega-churches is that the recognized senior pastor cannot possibly "shepherd" the large mass of individuals effectively; he becomes more of a public teacher and administrator of the professional staff; so this critical pasturing function is delegated to the leaders of various small group ministries who are not really at the "pastor" level; your number of elders should be proportionate to the size of your congregation to allow for effective shepherding; **John 10** – the shepherd knows each sheep by name and can tenderly care for its needs

3. The Value of the Flock

"*which He purchased with His own blood.*"

ἣν περιεποιήσατο διὰ τοῦ αἵματος τοῦ ἰδίου.

περιποιέω 1aor. mid. **περιεποιησάμην**; only middle in the NT; (1) *preserve (for oneself), save* (LU 17.33); (2) *gain* or *acquire (for oneself), obtain* (1T 3.13); *pay the price for, acquire with much effort* (AC 20.28)

the church belongs to Jesus Christ; not some nameless group of people that don't matter that much

Is. 43:21 "*The people whom I formed for Myself will declare My praise*"

1 Pet 1:18-19 "*knowing that you were not redeemed with perishable things like silver or gold from your futile way of life inherited from your forefathers, but with precious blood, as of a lamb unblemished and spotless, the blood of Christ*"

Interesting combination of words – God not usually associated with having blood to shed; points to the deep truths of the incarnation where Jesus who is truly divine takes on human nature, yet without sin, and becomes the God-man in one person

Bruce: "*his own*" = "of His own one" – used thus as a term of endearment to near relations; "only" or "beloved"

This task of guarding the flock **cannot be delegated to any other group**. It falls on the shoulders of the elders to get the job done. They have been divinely commissioned for the task and the very shed blood of the Head of the Church, the Lord Jesus, cries out for spiritual leaders to take this responsibility seriously.

2nd Motivation:

B. (:29-30) Guard Against False Teachers Because of Their Aggressive Attacks – Sneak Attacks (the church is in grave danger all of the time)

1. (:29) Attacking from the Outside

"*I know that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock;*"

ἐγὼ οἶδα ὅτι εἰσελεύσονται μετὰ τὴν ἄφιξίν μου λύκοι βαρεῖς εἰς ὑμᾶς μὴ φειδόμενοι τοῦ ποιμνίου,

Paul's departure will leave the young believers vulnerable; they need the careful guarding by the elders

Wolves are cunning predators – fierce, cruel, savage (heavy, weighty); dangerous pretenses – they present themselves as harmless but are destructive
"Who's afraid of the big bad wolf??" don't take them lightly

Ezek. 22:27 "*Her princes within her are like wolves tearing the prey, by shedding blood and destroying lives in order to get dishonest gain*."

Zeph. 3:3 "*Her princes within her are roaring lions, Her judges are wolves at evening; they leave nothing for the morning*."

2 Pet. 2:1-3
Jude 4 "*For certain persons have crept in unnoticed, those who were long beforehand marked out for this condemnation, ungodly persons who turn the grace of our God into licentiousness and deny our only Master and Lord Jesus Christ.*"

S. Lewis Johnson: If [false teachers] were called wolves, we sheep would start running. We might not be able to escape them, but we would run. So the wolves come, not as wolves, but as Paul says in 2 Corinthians 11, they come as "*ministers of righteousness*." To think, the reverend doctor so and so is actually a wolf. But he is, if he doesn't preach the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ, if his message doesn't tally with the word of God.

Alan Carr: analogy of wolves:

1. **Pack Animals** - They rarely work alone, but feel safer, and can do far more damage when operating in numbers.
2. **Typically Operate In The Dark** - These beasts are terribly afraid of the light as it exposes their errors.
3. **They Attack The Young, The Weak And The Sickly** - The wolves typically go after those who cannot easily defend themselves against their attacks.
4. **They Never Attack Face To Face** - They always attack from the blind side. When you let your guard down, that is the moment when the enemies of the church will attack.

2. (:30) Attacking from the Inside

"*and from among your own selves men will arise, speaking perverse things, to*

draw away the disciples after them."

καὶ ἐξ ὑμῶν αὐτῶν ἀναστήσονται ἄνδρες λαλοῦντες διεστραμμένα τοῦ ἀποσπᾶν τοὺς μαθητὰς ὀπίσω αὐτῶν.

"*Perverse things*" – distorted, corrupted; things that mislead

To lure away

Deffinbaugh: I think that the first step in the fall from a shepherd to a wolf is that one ceases to think and act like a servant and begins to expect to be served. The "good shepherd" (not our Lord, but the faithful shepherd or elder) is one who gives of his life, who sacrifices personally for the benefit of the sheep. The "wolf" becomes willing to sacrifice the sheep so that he may benefit. He expects to gain from the sheep, even at the expense of the sheep. He may first become a mere "hireling," looking out for himself and not really caring for the sheep. When there is danger or demands, he is not present to care for the sheep. But eventually he becomes the wolf, who actually devours the sheep.

Matthew Henry: Probably Paul has an eye to those of the circumcision, who preached up the ceremonial law; these he calls grievous wolves, for though they came in sheep's clothing, nay, in shepherds' clothing, they made mischief in the congregations of Christians, sowed discord among them, drew away many from the pure gospel of Christ, and did all they could to blemish and defame those that adhered to it; not sparing the most valuable members of the flock, stirring up those whom they could influence to bite and devour them (**Gal. 5:15**); therefore they are called dogs (**Phil. 3:2**), as here wolves. While Paul was at Ephesus, they kept away, for they durst not face him; but, when he was gone, then they entered in among them, and sowed their tares where he had sown the good seed.

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2 Cor. 2:17 Message – **Marks of Genuine Ministers of the Gospel**

How can you tell whether someone is a genuine gospel preacher? There are many hucksters and shysters in the religious arena who are out for personal gain and exploiting others for their own advantage. The Apostle Paul came under great attack by some false teachers at Corinth. He pointed to these evident marks of the validity and sufficiency of his gospel ministry:

1) Genuine Ministers of the Gospel are in the Minority — "*we are not like many*"

2) Genuine Ministers of the Gospel offer the unadulterated truth of God's Word without charge — they are not hucksters, "*peddling the Word of God*"

3) Genuine Ministers of the Gospel are Marked by Integrity — "*but as from sincerity*"

4) Genuine Ministers of the Gospel are Sent by God — "*as from God*"

5) Genuine Ministers of the Gospel Speak with the Power and Authority and Mind of Christ — "*we speak in Christ*"

6) Genuine Ministers of the Gospel Stand Accountable to God — "*in the sight of God*"

* *

C. (:31) Guard Against False Teachers Because of the Apostolic Shepherding Model – Shepherding Model

> "*Therefore be on the alert, remembering that night and day for a period of three years I did not cease to admonish each one with tears.*"
>
> διὸ γρηγορεῖτε μνημονεύοντες ὅτι τριετίαν νύκτα καὶ ἡμέραν οὐκ ἐπαυσάμην μετὰ δακρύων νουθετῶν ἕνα ἕκαστον.

Paul had personally invested a lot into the spiritual development of the believers at Ephesus; he had laid a good, solid foundation – concerned that the leaders coming after him would not follow through and do the hard work necessary to protect the flock; don't get careless; don't get sloppy; don't be neglectful – *be on the alert*

Wiersbe: danger of failing to stay alert and forgetting the price that others have paid so that we might have God's truth.

"*admonish*" -- Word from which we get nouthetic counseling – admonish, correct, instruct nouthetic counseling consists of lovingly confronting people out of deep concern in order to help them make those changes that God requires.

"*with tears*" – Paul was **emotionally engaged** with the flock; not some type of detached download of information; he was concerned for their struggles against sin; for the hardship of the trials they faced; for the family troubles that arose; for the threat of persecution; he did not want them to fall away from the faith

D. (:32) Guard Against False Teachers Because of God's Powerful Resources – Sanctifying Grace (there is the hope of being successful in the task)

> "*And now I commend you to God and to the word of His grace, which is able to build you up and to give you the inheritance among all those who are sanctified.*"
>
> Καὶ τὰ νῦν παρατίθεμαι ὑμᾶς τῷ θεῷ καὶ τῷ λόγῳ τῆς χάριτος αὐτοῦ, τῷ δυναμένῳ οἰκοδομῆσαι καὶ δοῦναι τὴν κληρονομίαν ἐν τοῖς ἡγιασμένοις πᾶσιν.

"*commend you*"
Psalm 31:5 "*Into your hand I commit my spirit; you have ransomed me, O Lord, God of truth.*"
Luke 23:46 – Christ quoted this psalm
2 Tim. 1:12 – "*I am convinced that He is able to guard what I have entrusted to Him until that day*"

1 Pet. 1:23
John 17:17 "*Sanctify them in the truth; Your word is truth.*"
Ephes. 1:11-14 Holy Spirit is the guarantee of the full inheritance
Col. 1:12 "*giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified us to share in the inheritance of the saints in Light*"

Matthew Henry: He commends them to the word of God's grace, not only as the foundation of their hope and the fountain of their joy, but as the rule of their walking

F. B. Hole: God, and God alone, is the resource of His people. But then He has given His Word, which reveals Himself.

Piper:
What is this inheritance? Well, the inheritance Paul sometimes talks about is the kingdom of God. Twice in 1 Corinthians (6:9,10) and once in Galatians (5:21) he says that people who go on living in sin and unbelief will not inherit the kingdom of God. It's the inheritance Jesus talked about when the rich young ruler came and asked him, "What must I do to inherit eternal life?" (Luke 18:18,25,26; cf. Tit. 3:7). It's what Jesus meant when he said, "Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth" (Matt. 5:5).
The inheritance is salvation, the kingdom of God, the new heavens and new earth, eternal life -- "the riches of the glory of God" (Eph. 1:18; Rom. 8:17). . .

We'll see from the context in a moment what sanctified means in very practical terms. In short, it means that your heart is changed so that you love the holy God and his revealed will for your life, and that you hate sin, especially in your own life.

So when Paul leaves Miletus and commits the elders into the care of God and his word, he is not committing them to something passive. The word of God is active and powerful. Paul says that the word of grace is a builder. It builds a useful structure out of a life of ruins. It builds design out of a life of confusion. It builds security out of fear and anxiety. It builds strength out of weakness. It builds permanence and stability out of wavering uncertainty. It builds beauty out of ugliness. The word of God's grace is a master builder. And it's called a word of grace because it always builds with lousy raw materials in our lives.

CONCLUSION PART 2:
At sporting events on TV (like NHL ice hockey games), I like to hear the stirring anthem of our neighbor to the north, Canada – some large chested man belts out the lyrics in a majestic tone: "O Canada, we stand on guard for thee"
What a privilege and what a responsibility to be tasked with standing on guard for the flock of Jesus Christ which He purchased with His own blood.

4 Motivations:

- Stewardship Responsibility – divinely commissioned to guard the flock
- Sneak Attacks of the wolves – danger abounds
- Shepherding Model of Apostle Paul – don't let the toil of those who went before us be in vain
- Sanctifying Grace as our key resource – Divine presence and divine resources will prove sufficient for the task as we persevere to the end and gain our inheritance

Richard Baxter – The Reformed Pastor (1656) – Oh then, let us hear these arguments of Christ, whenever we feel ourselves grow dull and careless: "Did I die for them, and wilt not thou look after them? Were they worth my blood and are they not worth thy labour? Did I come down from heaven to seek and to save that which was lost; and wilt thou not go to the next door or street or village to seek them? How small is thy labour and condescension as to mine? I debased myself to his, but it is thy honour to be so employed. Have I done and suffered so much for their salvation; and was I willing to make thee a co-worker with me, and wilt thou refuse that little that lieth upon thy hands?"

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DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

1) Who are some false teachers in our day (famous names that you would recognize)?

2) What steps are you taking to guard yourself against temptation and false doctrine?

3) How would you distinguish genuine ministers of the gospel from Satan's counterfeits?

4) In what ways has God proven faithful in your life to use the Word of Grace to build you up and protect you and mature you?

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QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

John Piper: **Watch Out for the Wolves Within**

This is Paul's way of saying that the church is always a threatened church. Satan never takes vacations. Sin lurks at the door waiting for the moment of doctrinal or moral carelessness. The command for the elders, therefore, is: Stay awake. Be alert. Watch.

But watch what? Paul applies our vigilance in two ways: Elders must watch themselves; and the elders must watch the church.

Robert Murray McCheyne said, "What my people need most from me is my personal holiness."

Steve Shepherd: **Making a Graceful Exit**

Illustration.- Feb. 11, 1861 When A. Lincoln left Springfield, IL, to start his inaugural journey to Washington, D.C., he paid an unforgettable tribute to his friends and neighbors in what is known today as the Farewell Address. "My friends, no one, not in my situation, can appreciate my feeling of sadness at this parting. To this place, and the kindness of these people, I owe everything. Here I have lived a quarter of a century, and have passed from a young to an old man. Here my children have been born, and one is buried. I now leave, not knowing when, or whether ever, I may return, with a task before me greater than that which rested upon Washington. Without the assistance of the Divine Being who ever attended him, I cannot succeed. With that assistance I cannot fail. Trusting in Him who can go with me, and remain with you, and be everywhere for good, let us confidently hope that all will yet be well. To His care commending you, as I hope in your prayers you will commend me, I bid you an affectionate farewell."

Lincoln's farewell address was brief (perhaps a minute) but very thoughtful. And spiritual, which is something that is often missing in our farewells today. As Christians we should always part company as best we can and as blessed as we can.

TEXT: Acts 20:33-38

TITLE: POIGNANT PASTORS' CONFERENCE –
DRAMATIC FAREWELL MESSAGE TO ELDERS AT EPHESUS – PART 3

BIG IDEA:
PASTORAL MINISTRY MUST FOLLOW THE APOSTOLIC PATTERN

PREFERENCE FOR SELF SUPPORT IN CHRISTIAN MINISTRY
[Caveat: In certain circumstances]

INTRODUCTION:
This will be our final message on the book of Acts. The remaining chapters detail Paul's journey to Jerusalem, the various trials which cause him to defend himself, and then his final voyage to Rome after being shipwrecked on the island of Malta. These stories are mainly historical narrative without a lot of additional doctrinal insight. But as we conclude our study of the Book of Acts today, we come to a truly revolutionary passage in terms of modern day Christian thinking. You won't hear this message from the lips of too many pastors and teachers. You can take courses at the best seminaries in the country and you won't find many professors advocating for this position. That means that I must be extremely careful and guarded in what I say today. We all struggle to be objective when we come to the Word of God and not be overly influenced by our own upbringing and circumstances. We also must be balanced in giving full weight to the impact of the short paragraph in front of us while at the same time being honest about how this integrates with the rest of Scripture – this is the very difficult discipline of **Systematic Theology**.

V. (:33-35) PASTORAL EXAMPLE OF SELF SUPPORT AND SACRIFICIAL GIVING IN THE MINISTRY
That's not revolutionary you say … we all appreciate the pastoral example of the Apostle Paul; we understand that for a good part of his foundational ministry he supported himself in tentmaking work; we have no problem with that . . . Let me put the thesis to you in a different statement:

3 Exhortations to Spiritual Leaders to Prefer and Pursue Self Support in the Ministry:

Remember Paul's audience here = pastors, ministers of the gospel, those gifted in evangelism and teaching and counseling
You have to first prefer it … then you have to pursue it – now we are going to have some serious debate and questions regarding where this model is appropriate

My mentality has been more to end up in this position of self support by default; I have always preferred if I could have been supported by others in the ministry; I have been willing to minister diligently regardless of whether I need to support myself or not; but I can't say I have preferred this position; I certainly did not have the mentality during my years of education that I needed to prepare myself to support myself and my family in secular work. I thought I was preparing to be supported by others in the full time ministry.

You can see how those who are supported in full time Christian ministry would have a bias against advocating for this position. But understand that I am NOT saying it is wrong to be

supported full-time. There are other passages that clearly state that those who labor in the gospel ministry have a right to such support. Paul was willing to give up this right. There are passages that put the burden on the local believers to support their leaders – especially those who labor hard in the time-consuming functions of preaching and teaching (although those passages need to be scrutinized closely). The emphasis is never on the Christian worker to pressure others to raise support for his own ministry. He ultimately must depend on God like each of us for his daily bread; he can choose to support himself if that is a viable option or he is certainly free to make his needs known and accept willing gifts from those who want to free him up for such ministry.

I would use the <u>analogy of marriage</u> here to try to bring some perspective.

- Remember **the teaching of the Lord Jesus**:
  Matt. 19:10-12 after his severe treatment of the subject of divorce
- Remember **the teaching of the Apostle Paul**:
  1 Cor. 7:1-9

Both of these point to a superior state – but one that is practiced by only a few; and certainly marriage is held in honor by all and those involved are not looked down upon in any way or despised

But that does not mean that we <u>ignore the teaching</u> regarding what makes the single state superior in some respects and in some situations for dedicated and focused ministry

Let's see what our text before us this morning clearly teaches

3 Exhortations to Spiritual Leaders to Prefer and Pursue Self Support in the Ministry:

A. (:33-34a) Don't Follow the Selfish Motivation of Counterfeit Spiritual Leaders – <u>Work Hard to Meet Your Own Needs</u> – Self Support

"*I have coveted no one's silver or gold or clothes. You yourselves know that these hands ministered to my own needs*"

ἀργυρίου ἢ χρυσίου ἢ ἱματισμοῦ οὐδενὸς ἐπεθύμησα· αὐτοὶ γινώσκετε ὅτι ταῖς χρείαις μου

1. <u>No Materialistic Motivation in the Ministry</u> -- **Integrity**

"*I have coveted no one's silver or gold or clothes.*"

What would be wrong is to minister from a motivation of selfishness or greed or covetousness or a desire to make merchandise out of the gospel ministry. Many verses speak to this characterization of false teachers

"*coveted*" – used of strong desire, craving, longing in either a good sense or bad sense (covet, lust after)

1 Tim. 3:1 "*if any man aspires to the office of overseer, it is a fine work he desires* [longs after] *to do*"

Gal. 5:17 "*For the flesh sets its desire against the Spirit*"

James 4:2 "*You lust and do not have; so you commit murder*"

Does not mean that Paul never refused monetary gifts; in fact in writing to the Philippians he commends them for their practice of supporting him financially:

Phil. 4:10-20 "*you have done well to share with me in my affliction*"

Look at the promise that "*my God will supply all your needs according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus*"

Love of money is a root problem
False teachers are characterized by their motivation to exploit others for money and gain a personal following to enhance their own well-being

1 Peter 5:2 "*shepherd the flock of God among you, exercising oversight not under compulsion, but voluntarily, according to the will of God; and not for sordid gain, but with eagerness*"
Implies the opportunity to earn money in the ministry – there is a legitimate way to approach this and a selfish way

2. No Disconnect Between His Teaching and His Life Example -- **Transparency**
"*you yourselves know*" – open, transparent life before them; three years they had been able to observe him

3. No Shrinking Back From Physical Labor -- **Diligence**
"*these hands*" – not afraid to roll his sleeves up and do the hard work necessary
Look at the caricature of preachers on TV shows; soft; cannot do any practical labor
Paul worked with his hands at his trade as a leather worker

1 Thess. 4:11-12 "*and to make it your ambition to lead a quiet life and attend to your own business and work with your hands, just as we commanded you, so that you will behave properly toward outsiders and not be in any need*."

4. No Excusing Himself from the Universal Responsibility to provide for his own needs [and those of his family] – **Responsibility**
"*ministered to my own needs*"

[acronym = **DIRT** = Diligence / Integrity / Responsibility / Transparency]

2 Thess 3:10 "*If anyone is not willing to work, then he is not to eat, either. For we hear that some among you re leading an undisciplined life*"
Pastors are to be an example to the flock in this area as well; certainly it is hard work to be an effective pastor – yet in this context Paul was pointing to his willingness to work hard with his hands at secular labor

Practical reasons for self support: Shows what circumstances would favor this approach
- Provides a platform of integrity – puts you above criticism and suspicion
- Sets the example for believers in situations where a disciplined life is an issue and a godly work ethic needs to be established
- Gains you more accessibility and a better hearing from those who spend their days working at secular jobs for a living
- Avoids draining the resources of others so that those resources can be directed to the truly needy – look where the emphasis is in the NT on giving = to the needy
- Eliminates the problematic distinction between professional clergy and laypeople while promoting the NT church governing model of plurality of elders

Objections/Challenges to self support:

- **Distraction** -- You become entangled with your professional pursuits – certainly a danger of distraction and divided loyalties

Matt. 6:24 "*No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and wealth*."
But you can work full time in secular work and still have your priority on the kingdom of God

2 Tim. 2:3-4 "*Suffer hardship with me as a good soldier of Christ Jesus. No soldier in active service entangles himself in the affairs of everyday life, so that he may please the one who enlisted him as a soldier*." Don't get entangled – serious warning for me …
Model of a soldier in warfare does not lend itself at all to model of self support; just the opposite

Certainly when the Lord called His disciples, he had them leave their fishing nets and devote themselves fully to following after Him for those concentrated short years of preparation and training
If the church is in a financial position to do so they might prefer that the spiritual gifts of certain individuals not be limited by outside work obligations – so free those people up to minister – that is the church driving the issue of support rather than the minister lobbying or negotiating for it or making it a condition of his service

- **Expediency** argument – how can you accomplish what you need to? Hard to imagine how the Apostle Paul got so much accomplished during his three years in Ephesus, working hard night and day; it would seem that larger churches need some type of staff to take care of the needs of the flock

- **Quality** issue – for your preaching and teaching to be of the necessary quality and depth, you must spend incredible time locked alone in your study – but I can operate just fine from a context of self support – but I can't spend time in other activities that might be necessary: training other men to be teachers; discipling young believers; counseling; etc.

- Family Situations – complications of supporting wife and children; very different from Paul's situation

Transition: 2 Radically different orientations: The mindset and motivation are key --

- I want others to minister to my needs; I am a taker; I exploit others = **Selfish Ambition**
- I will meet my own needs and even minister to others at sacrifice to myself = **Servant Approach** to ministry

I Cor. 9:18 is the key passage where Paul speaks of his right to support in the ministry and yet how he makes his boast in *preaching the gospel without charge*

1 Thess. 2:9 "*For you recall, brethren, our labor and hardship, how working night and day so as not to be a burden to any of you, we proclaimed to you the gospel of God*."

B. (:34b-35a) Follow the High Standard Practiced by the Apostle Paul –
<u>Work Hard to Help Others</u> – Sacrificial Giving

> "*and to the men who were with me. In everything I showed you that by working hard in this manner you must help the weak"*
>
> καὶ τοῖς οὖσιν μετ᾽ ἐμοῦ ὑπηρέτησαν αἱ χεῖρες αὗται. πάντα ὑπέδειξα ὑμῖν ὅτι οὕτως κοπιῶντας δεῖ ἀντιλαμβάνεσθαι τῶν ἀσθενούντων,

Self Support not for all Christian workers in all circumstances – look at the ones on Paul's team – they received support from Paul himself! So it is clearly not wrong to receive support

How can a position of support by others ever rise to the level of helping to support others?? Paul definitely putting his conduct out there as something that should be emulated – not saying that he is the exception – in what manner did Paul work hard?? Not talking about just working hard in preaching and teaching

"*men who were with me*" – Silas, Timothy, Luke, Epaphroditus

Problem with many of us is that we see little purpose in our work
Work ethic is important – but not for the sake of accumulation but for sharing with those in need

We have an obligation to help the weak!
"*weak*" – Those who are without strength = what word means literally; unable to help themselves; can't even give anything in return

- Without financial strength
- Physically weak, handicapped, unable to work
- Mentally and emotionally weak
- Spiritually feeble

Roles might be reversed at some future point; we might be in the strong category right now but in the weak category in the future and in need of help by other believers

C. (:35b) Follow the High Standard Taught by the Lord Jesus –
<u>Work Hard to Enjoy the Blessing of Giving</u> – Superior Standing

> "*and remember the words of the Lord Jesus, that He Himself said, 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.*'"
>
> μνημονεύειν τε τῶν λόγων τοῦ κυρίου Ἰησοῦ ὅτι αὐτὸς εἶπεν· μακάριόν ἐστιν μᾶλλον διδόναι ἢ λαμβάνειν.

How was Jesus supported in His three year ministry?? Not much insight into this; maybe He had saved up from his earlier carpentry business?? Maybe God provided for Him in ways supernatural?? He certainly depended upon God; He did not go around raising any support; He certainly set his seal of approval on full-time missionary work since during His ministry His disciples were supported by His followers: "*Certain women ... and many others ... were contributing to their support out of their private means*" (**Lk. 8:2-3**).

These words not recorded in the gospel accounts, but well known saying of Jesus
Jesus backed up His teaching with His example and His life:

- Gave up everything to come down to earth
    - **Phil. 2:7** "*emptied Himself*"
- Came to minister rather than to be ministered to
    - **Mark 10:45** "*For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many*."
- Gives us His riches at His expense = GRACE = God's riches at Christ's expense
    - **2 Cor. 8:9** "*For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sake He became poor, so that you through His poverty might become rich*."

Implies that there is <u>some blessing in receiving</u>; don't shut off support and help when it is needed and appropriate – that would be prideful; thinking that your sufficiency comes from self rather than from God; let others experience the blessing of giving

Cf. as you mature more meaningful to give at Christmas time than to receive

God loves to give good gifts to His children; He is a generous, giving God; you can never out-give God
James 1:17 "*Every good thing given and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shifting shadow*."
Luke 11:9-13 God won't disappoint His children by denying them good things

God is the expert on Giving – "*who for the joy set before Him endured the cross*" **Heb. 12:2**

<u>So why don't Christians give??</u>

- We prefer financial security for the future – fear, anxiety – vs. "*Give us this day our daily bread*"
- We failed to work hard enough so that we have the resources to share with others
- We lack contentment with God meeting our needs and want too extravagant a lifestyle; note Paul worked to meet his "needs"; We live above our needs and then above our means
- We think that people don't deserve the help – but look at how much we have been forgiven and blessed by God's mercy
- We think that what we give won't really matter since it will not be enough to bail them out – but we need to do our part; cf. soldier rationalizing that his efforts won't be enough to win the battle; don't try to shift responsibility to others who we feel have more resources

We should be fighting for the privilege of giving – How much can I give?? Is the proper question Do you want to be **blessed** by God? Have you believed the lie of this world that money is the key to happiness?

(:36-38) PRAYERFUL, TEARFUL, EMOTIONAL FAREWELL

> "*And when he had said these things, he knelt down and prayed with them all. And they began to weep aloud and embraced Paul, and repeatedly kissed him, grieving especially over the word which he had spoken, that they should see his face no more. And they were accompanying him to the ship.*"

> Καὶ ταῦτα εἰπὼν θεὶς τὰ γόνατα αὐτοῦ σὺν πᾶσιν αὐτοῖς προσηύξατο. ἱκανὸς δὲ κλαυθμὸς ἐγένετο πάντων καὶ ἐπιπεσόντες ἐπὶ τὸν τράχηλον τοῦ Παύλου κατεφίλουν αὐτόν, ὀδυνώμενοι μάλιστα ἐπὶ τῷ λόγῳ ᾧ εἰρήκει, ὅτι οὐκέτι μέλλουσιν τὸ πρόσωπον αὐτοῦ θεωρεῖν. προέπεμπον δὲ αὐτὸν εἰς τὸ πλοῖον.

"Blessed be the tie which binds our hearts in Christian love" – these early Christians experienced the emotional depths of fellowship in the gospel

CONCLUSION PART 3:
Remember the **theme verse** of the Book of Acts as we close our study:
Acts 1:8 "*but you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth.*"
We have covered a lot of ground in Paul's 3 missionary journeys and seen the power of the Holy Spirit at work in amazing ways.

Now in Paul's farewell address to the spiritual leaders he leaves behind in Ephesus, he reminds them:

PASTORAL MINISTRY MUST FOLLOW THE APOSTOLIC PATTERN

Let's remember Paul's example in this important area of **self support** and **sacrificial giving** as well.
A. (:33-34a) Don't Follow the Selfish Motivation of Counterfeit Spiritual Leaders – Work Hard to Meet Your Own Needs – Self Support

B. (:34b-35a) Follow the High Standard Practiced by the Apostle Paul – Work Hard to Help Others – Sacrificial Giving

C. (:35b) Follow the High Standard Taught by the Lord Jesus – Work Hard to Enjoy the Blessing of Giving – Superior Standing

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DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

1) Have you ever heard a message before about considering giving priority to self support in terms of Christian ministry?

2) What do you see as the advantages and disadvantages of self support in your own church context?

3) Does your own work ethic include the priority of accumulating resources to help meet the needs of the weak?

4) How have you personally experienced the blessing of giving to others and how has that motivated you to continue to be generous?

* * * * * * * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

James Slopsema: **Supporting the Weak (particularly in the Church)**

1. A Solemn Calling

Addressed to the elders, but not exclusively the work of elders but of all of us;

"*weak*" –

- Those who are without strength = what word means literally
- Without financial strength
- Spiritually feeble
- Mentally and emotionally weak
- Financially weak

The weak are those who can only receive and give nothing in return
Anyone of us at any time can become the weak mentioned in this passage;
Certain groups are often weak: widows and widowers [loneliness], orphans, elderly, mentally handicapped; crippled, etc.
Who specifically are these weak in this context? Paul had in mind the poor; Paul had a right to live off the gospel (be supported by material things by the people he taught); almost always he put aside that right to put away the charge that he came to them to gain money; those who were with him (Silas and Timothy and Luke and others) – accompanying him in ministry; also the poor were with him; same word used other contexts for those who are weak in faith and struggle with sin; can't extricate themselves; there are those who have physical weakness – sometimes due to old age, deformity, terminal illness – reduced to begging; those who are floundering under heavy burdens – sometimes responsibilities, or problems that are overwhelming – so you can hardly function;

"*support*" = embrace someone; clasp to your bosom and embrace and help and provide for them; that is not always done in the church; often we neglect and avoid them; include them socially in our circles; elderly need visits; saints caught in sin need help in strengthening and restoration; chronically ill need ongoing visits; those who are depressed and filled with anxiety need encouragement;

Two reasons (not excuses) that explain why church neglects the weak:

- It requires *labor* – hard, wearisome work; time and resource commitment – people not willing and ready to do that
- A matter of giving and giving and getting nothing in return

It is necessary to do this – because God commands it – Love your neighbor as yourself
How has God helped us in our weakness? Look at all He expended on our behalf to lift us up out of our horrible sin condition; how can we refuse to support the weak?

2. A Wonderful Encouragement

Words of Jesus – "*more blessed to give than to receive*"
Famous saying of Jesus – even though you don't find it in the gospels; familiar to the disciples and repeated on numerous occasions
"It is blessed <u>to receive</u>" is implied – especially blessed to receive help from your fellow saints in

the church when you are in a weak condition; God provides the needed resources within the context of the local church
"*blessed*" – made happy; their needs are met; they taste the mercies of Jesus Christ and the love of God; sometimes those who are weak will refuse to receive help – is it pride? Is it a concern that you have nothing to give back? We must not do that! Don't cut off a blessing that God has for you from the church

It is even more blessed to give – many don't believe this principle – especially when they get nothing in return; immature faith that is self-centered and self-seeking; not just the young in the church; they receive the approval of the Lord their God; living as His servant; the closeness of God's friendship and fellowship;

Remember the words of Jesus and believe them

3. A Necessary Example [of Apostle Paul]
"*to show*" – taught you by example – had been with these elders for 3 years;

David Alan Black:

The Thessalonian Road to Self-Support

"What pay do I get, then? It is the privilege of preaching the Good News without charging for it and without claiming my rights in my work for the Gospel" (1 Cor. 9:18).

The Bible says that we cannot love God and money at the same time. We must love one and hate the other. There is no middle ground. The ways of the world constantly creep into our thinking about money, even though we are Christians. From earliest childhood we learn that money is essential to our happiness, and the more of it the better. It takes a great deal of effort to unlearn this false concept. As Jesus said, we must become like little children again if we are to be effective in the kingdom of God.

I cannot tell you how many times I have heard pastoral ministry described as a "profession." For nearly 35 years of teaching in Christian universities and seminaries I have seen students earn M. Div. degrees for no other reason than to be sufficiently "credentialed" to be hired by a local church. Somehow our wealth blinds us to basic biblical principles. The church in America is particularly blessed. Pastors often have better salaries than many of their parishioners. God has made the United States the richest nation on earth. To those whom much is given, much is also required. I believe that God is beginning to ask for an accounting from the American church about how we have used His money.

To all who would follow Him, Jesus gave the same basic message. We must willingly accept inconvenience, suffering, and uncertainty. No genuine follower of Jesus can put comfort, family ties, or security ahead of His kingdom. Jesus never apologized for calling His disciples to a life of sacrifice. Throughout the New Testament you will find that those who followed Jesus often paid a very high price, even with their lives. One such person is the apostle Paul. He sought to serve Jesus and it cost him everything. Not only did he give up all the privileges of his Jewish upbringing, but he surrendered his rights as a Christian apostle to be supported in his church planting ministry. The Bible says that he willingly worked with his own hands night and day so as not to be a financial burden to other Christians. Paul exemplifies what true Christian ministry is. *It is a positive sacrifice for the good of others.* His life is an example of the proper attitude a servant of Jesus Christ should have today. His teaching about self-support mocks our convenience store Christianity.

Just how did we get from the kind of sacrificial service modeled by Paul's ministry to the modern professionalized clergy? This radical paradigm shift took place very early in the history of the church. Within 300 years of the resurrection, the church of Jesus Christ began to look to the Old Testament for its models of ministry. It began to combine the kingdom of God with the kingdoms of this world. This new hybridized form of Christianity – often referred to as the "Constantinian Compromise" because of the role that Emperor Constantine played in its development – began to teach that God had instituted class distinctions among Christians. In New Testament Christianity, *all* believers are priests and are asked to serve the kingdom willingly and voluntarily. This is true even of church leaders, whom Peter commanded, "Do your work, not for pay, but from a real desire to serve. Do not try to rule over those who have been put in your care, but be examples to the flock" (1 Pet. 5:2b-3).

With the advent of Constantinian Christianity, however, all of this changed. Rather than taking every aspect of Jesus' teaching literally and seriously, Christian leaders began to see ministry more as a profession than as an act of voluntary service. The church became clericalized, professionalized, and institutionalized. Christians no longer accepted voluntary servanthood as normative. I believe one of the reasons God called Paul to be an apostle is because He knew that Paul would set an example for others. He was the "chief of sinners" (1 Tim. 1:15), yet by the power of the Holy Spirit he lived an incredible life. Wherever he went, people could not forget his example and the impact he made on their lives. To me, this is one of the most encouraging things about Paul's life. You see, Paul was an ordinary vessel just like you and me. In 1 Cor. 4:7 he tells us, "We who have this spiritual treasure are just like common pots of clay, in order to show that the supreme power comes from God and not from us." Here we have a man whose greatest desire was to live as a humble bondservant of the Lord Jesus Christ. The question to ask is, Are you and I willing to do the same?

Paul was a missionary doing pioneer evangelism and church planting throughout the Mediterranean world. What a rebuke his life is to the disobedience and greed of so many Christians and churches today. We need to rediscover his method of doing ministry if we are to achieve financial health today. I believe that his instructions to the church in Thessalonica present us with an unmistakably clear pattern of ministry. As you read these instructions my hope is that you will come to realize that self-supporting ministry is not only biblical but healthy. Paul shows us that the greatest joy in ministry is not found in material possessions. In fact, one may even serve Jesus in utter poverty. Instead, joy in ministry is found when we remember the words of the Lord Jesus, who said "There is more happiness in giving than in getting" (Acts 20:35).

Paul's teaching about ministry finances is found in several passages in 1-2 Thessalonians, which we will now briefly examine. How different this model of ministry is from the methods that pass themselves off as biblical in today's church. When we look at the life of the apostle Paul, we are amazed at how important he considered working for a living. He ministered among the Thessalonians at his own expense, even though he had the right to be supported by others. He spent whole days and nights working so as not to be a burden to others. The tragedy of our day is that so few followers of Jesus have the burden to follow this example. To understand Paul's method of self-support, we must begin with his words in 1 Thess. 2:7-10:

> Even though as apostles of Christ we could have made demands on you, we were gentle when we were with you, like a mother who tenderly cares for her children. Because of our love for you we were willing to share with you not only the Good News from God but even our very own lives, for you had become so dear to us. Surely you remember, our brothers and sisters, how we labored and toiled, working night and day so that we would not be a burden to you as we preached to you the Good News from God. You are our witnesses, and so is God, that our conduct toward you who are believers was pure, right, and without blame of any kind.

Every Christian who is concerned about the spiritual life of the church in America ought to read and re-read this passage. What Paul says is astonishing. Rather than asking for support from his fellow Christians, which was his right as an apostle, Paul joyfully and willingly supported himself when he was in Thessalonica. Here is a highly educated, brilliant man eking out a living by performing manual labor. The key verse that explains Paul's motive is

1 Thess. 2:10: "…so that we would not be a burden to you as we preached to you the Good News from God." "Not be a burden"! Does this statement make you feel a little uncomfortable? Most missionaries today would never think of going to the mission field without first being supported. Of course, such support is not sinful. But why couldn't this money be used to support foreign nationals who are better able to reach their nations for Christ? Why couldn't this money be spent on helping the needy or providing health care for the poor in the name of Jesus?

Something is very wrong when our foreign missionaries do not even consider the possibility of becoming tentmakers. Paul knew it was wrong for him to become a financial burden on his fellow Christians when he could work for his own living. Until we accept self-denial, as Paul did, we will never see the Great Commission fulfilled in our generation. We will always find ourselves following the pattern of financial dependence that has become the norm of our missionary culture. I'm convinced that one of the main reasons we are not reaching the world for Christ today is our refusal to follow Paul's example. We feel we cannot be missionaries unless we are fully supported by others. In light of all of this, I ask a simple question: When did God change His pattern of doing missionary work?

This concept of self-support is further developed in our next passage, 1 Thess. 4:11-12. If there was any doubt about Paul's high view of work, it evaporates with this text. Here he commands the Thessalonian believers:

> Make it your aim to live a quiet life, to mind your own business, and to earn your own living, just as we told you before. By doing this you will win the respect of non-believers, and you will not have to depend on anyone for your needs.

There are few passages of Scripture that are clearer than this one. Is it any wonder that I am an advocate of self-supporting missions? There are many practical ways to flesh out this teaching. At the very least we can all agree that sloth and laziness have no place in the life of a Christian. Every able-bodied person ought to earn his or her own living – a point that Paul emphasized time and again when he was in Thessalonica. Why should this principle become null and void just because a person today enters so-called "fulltime Christian ministry"? A high work ethic is not reserved only for "laypeople." It is for every believer, whatever your calling, whatever your vocation, and whatever your circumstances. God has ordained that we demonstrate to a watching world the highest standards of personal responsibility. He wills for us to mind our own business and work for a living. If we don't, we will lose the respect of non-believers, plain and simple.

When I was in college a good friend of mine went off to seminary and then decided to go to Japan under the auspices of a well-known foreign mission board. His experience has to be the missionary's greatest nightmare. And I need to tell his story here because I think it illustrates vividly what Paul was trying to teach the Thessalonian believers. As with every other missionary sent out by this particular mission board, my friend had first to undergo deputation in order to raise his financial support. After a long and arduous process of fundraising, he arrived in Japan, where his assignment was to reach Japanese businessmen with the Gospel. For four years he labored in vain. Not a single soul was converted, not a single church planted. And the reason soon became painfully obvious. The news that he was a salaried "missionary" was an insuperable stumbling block to these hard-working Japanese businessmen. They simply could not believe that the person talking to them was not gainfully employed. Greatly discouraged, my friend left the mission field, returned to the States, and resigned from the mission board. Then he immediately returned to Japan and got a job in a Japanese company that specialized in teaching English to Japanese businessmen. Within months he had led several of his students to Christ, and eventually a small church was formed. In the meantime, he had learned to speak fluent Japanese and had taken a Japanese bride.

I believe there may be people reading these words whom God is calling to go to the "uttermost parts of the world." I am convinced that God wants to send forth thousands upon thousands of believers from our shores. Have you gotten down on your knees and asked the Lord how He could use your God-given gifts and abilities as a tentmaker? Tentmakers are incredibly effective. Their work provides a natural entrée for establishing a network of relationships

in which the seed of the Gospel can be sown. Most importantly, in sharing your faith you can never be accused of "being paid to do it."

Some people might object by saying, "When Paul says we are to earn our own living, surely he is excluding fulltime salaried missionaries and pastors." To this I have two responses. The first is that there is nothing in this text that would limit Paul's injunction to so-called laypeople. My second response is really a question: How could the apostle require from the believers in Thessalonica what he himself did not practice? As we read passages like 1 Thess. 4:10-11, there is a tendency, I believe, to dismiss their application to missionaries and pastors. This is partly due to a faulty view of "fulltime ministry." For example, we often speak of "laypeople" who work behind the scenes at "secular" jobs to help support missions. I think a more biblical way of viewing the matter is this: *Every* Christian is to be a fulltime missionary wherever he or she is. This means that even if you never end up on the foreign mission field, you can still be sold-out to missions. You can still be committed to living a missional lifestyle. In all of his writings, Paul seems to accept a life of sacrifice for the sake of the Gospel as both normal and necessary. "The only thing that matters," he writes in Phil. 1:27, "is that your citizenship should be as the Gospel of Christ requires, so that, whether or not I am able to go and see you, I will hear that you are standing firm with one common purpose, and that with one desire you are struggling together for the faith of the Gospel." Here Paul urges every believer to become a "Great Commission Christian." He himself had made a conscious choice to deny the rights due him as an apostle and instead chose a life of suffering and incessant physical labor for the sake of the Gospel. Just look at the terrible list of sufferings he describes in 2 Cor. 11:23-29. These afflictions included, not surprisingly, "labor and toil" (v. 27) – yet another reference to Paul's commitment to self-support. Indeed, his very first boast vis-à-vis the false apostles is, "I have worked harder than they have!" (v. 23). I encourage you to read Paul's catalog of sufferings in 2 Cor. 11:23-29 slowly and carefully. I might have expected Paul to say, "Since I am suffering so much for the Gospel, surely others will want to increase their financial support so that I will not have to work so hard." This is precisely what Paul does *not* say. When he boasts that he has worked harder than his opponents, he is not implying that his commitment to self-support was a mistake!

I often hear the complaint, "Thousands of missionaries are ready to go to the unreached if only support were available." This is not the greatest need facing missions, however. It is outstripped by the untold thousands of opportunities to reach the lost millions through tentmaking evangelism. Praise the Lord for my friend who went to Japan to serve in "fulltime Christian service" as a layman! God may not be calling you to Japan. But wherever you live and wherever you go, you can find ways of participating in this great work of world evangelization.

Paul's next reference to work in 1 Thessalonians is in chapter 5, where he writes (5:12-13):

> We urge you, our brothers and sisters, to respect those who labor among you, who guide and instruct you. Treat them with the greatest respect and love because of the work they do.

Traditionally, the "work" described here has been interpreted to refer to the spiritual work of church leaders. I once held to this view myself. Today I am convinced that Paul had manual labor in mind when he wrote these words. Earlier he had insisted that the Thessalonians earn their own living by "working with your own hands" (4:11). And here in 5:12-13 there is nothing in the context that would require us to see these workers as the fulltime paid staff of a church. I may be wrong, but it seems to me that Paul is continuing his emphasis on the necessity of work as an expression of our Christian faith and as a witness to outsiders who are always suspicious of religious hucksters whose sole motive in ministry is greed. Paul, in fact, was quick to defend himself against such a charge in 1 Thess. 2:5: "You know very well that we did not come to you with flattering speech, nor did we use words to cover up greed – God is our witness!" Clearly, Paul was above reproach when it came to finances.

Our final passage is 2 Thess. 3:6-12. It is absolutely brilliant in the Greek. Here it is in translation:

> Our brothers and sisters, we command you in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to keep away from all of your brothers and sisters who are living a lazy life and who fail to follow the instructions we gave them.

> You yourselves know very well that you should act just like we did. We were not lazy when we were with you. We did not accept anyone's food without first paying for it. Instead, we labored and toiled, working night and day so as not to be a burden to any of you. We did this, not because we do not have the right to demand our support. We did it to be an example for you to follow. When we were with you, we kept on telling you over and over again, "Whoever refuses to work is not allowed to eat." We say this because we hear that there are some people among you who are lazy and who do nothing but meddle in other people's lives. In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, we command these people and warn them to lead orderly lives and to earn their own living.

I believe all of us – myself included – need to learn to live the lifestyle we read about in this wonderful passage. If you are living for Christ, you must be a responsible worker. A greedy, self-indulgent lifestyle is simply out of the question. As Christians, how can we ever be lazy and fail to work to supply our own needs? How can we say Jesus is Lord unless we are quick to obey Paul's instructions in this passage? Notice that Paul does not exclude the church leaders from this exhortation. The command is clear: Those Thessalonians who were mooching off the charity of the church must stop it.

This passage is a coal of fire on our heads. Our first reaction, I suppose, should be to fall on our knees in repentance. Next, we need to seriously ask ourselves whether it is right to support those who *do* not work because they *will* not work. I am convinced that the tremendous material resources of the United States would be better used to address the crying demands of the unfinished missionary task. I believe that 2 Thess. 3:6-12 teaches us that we are *all* responsible to lead orderly lives and to earn our own living. It is obvious that Jesus will have no one among His followers who wants to be financially dependent when they could be supporting themselves.

Of course, I am not speaking about people with genuine needs. Jesus obviously loved the needy. To all those who would follow Him, He gave them an example of helping the helpless. Paul, too, was emphatic about this. He wrote to the Galatians that "we should remember the needy…, which is the very thing I have been eager to do" (Gal. 2:10). For Christians, then, there can be no other option when confronted with the needy than to do everything we can to help them. Paul himself was willing to receive temporary monetary supplements to his income when the need occasioned it. Clearly, however, this was the exception to the rule.

We need to ask ourselves, What does the Lord Jesus think of our church budgets that are bloated with unnecessary expenses when that money could go to help the truly needy? A look at our ledgers reveals not a body of sacrificial givers but a society of getters. As someone once said, "We tithe to ourselves," meaning that our church offerings are used mostly for things that will make *our* lives more comfortable. There is a principle at work here: *Self-centered Christians cannot and will not put into practice biblical priorities* – priorities such as those found in Phil. 2:3-4 ("Always consider others as more important than yourselves; look out for another's interests, not just your own") or Rom. 12:13 ("Share what you have with God's people who are in need"). The Thessalonian road to financial health requires that we voluntarily go out of our way to put the genuine needs of others before own. How many millions of dollars are wasted each year because we are preoccupied with the fleshpots of Egypt when we should be content with manna from heaven? Why, like the Pharisees, are we consumed with cleaning the outside of pots and forgetting the agony of the lost and dying?

The conclusion is inescapable: In light of the commands of Jesus (Matt. 28:19-20; Mark 16:15) and the consistent example of Paul, and in view of the lost condition of billions of people in this world, churches must give everything above basic necessities to the cause of world evangelization. In his talk to the pastors of the Ephesian church, Paul said:

> I have never coveted anyone's silver or gold or clothing. You yourselves know that with these hands of mine I have worked to provide everything my companions and I needed. I have given you an example that

> by working hard like this we must help the weak, remembering the words that the Lord Jesus Himself said, "There is more happiness in giving than in getting."

Paul's teaching about Christian finances has always offended people. What makes it so difficult is that it is not simply a theological doctrine but a way of life. Paul was one of the greatest apostles who ever lived, yet he didn't demand his rights – least of all his right to financial support. It is important that we understand that Paul's instructions about support make sense only to those who have accepted Jesus' radical teachings about self-denial. "Anyone who does not forsake everything cannot be My disciple," He said (Luke 14:33). You see, the American church will have to answer to God for what we did about a lost world. Jesus Himself will demand an accounting from what He has given us to invest. What kind of stewards are we being with the blessings He has showered upon us? This, I believe, is the question of the hour.

I urge you to listen carefully – not to anything I have said, but to the voice of the Lord Jesus as He speaks to you through His Word. He has the power to change anybody who is weary of half-hearted Christianity and is unafraid to take a giant step of faith.

April 8, 2010

http://www.daveblackonline.com/thessalonian_road_to_selfsu.htm

Ruth Siemens: Interesting article – attempts to answer six main questions about Paul's example of self support:

A. How much did Paul work?

B. How much did he get in gifts?

C. When did he do spiritual ministry?

D. Why did he work at all?

E. What was his strategy and how effective was it?

F. What are the implications for us today?

http://www.globalopps.org/papers/whydid.htm
http://www.ijfm.org/PDFs_IJFM/14_3_PDFs/06_Siemens.pdf

TEXT: Acts 21:1-40

TITLE: FACING DANGER AT JERUSALEM

BIG IDEA:
FOLLOWING JESUS INTO THE FRONT LINES OF SPIRITUAL WARFARE CAN BE EXTREMELY DANGEROUS

INTRODUCTION:
Sometimes danger cannot be avoided. We all have a strong drive towards self-preservation; but when it comes to the gospel ministry, our loyalty to following Jesus must take priority over our natural love of safety and security. Paul knew that the Spirit was calling him to minister in Jerusalem. He also was well aware of the dangers that would face him there. In fact, his conversion and calling to his special apostolic Gentile ministry way back in Acts 9 included the prophecy of how much he must suffer for the cause of Christ. That is why he would not be deterred from his mission. His journey to Jerusalem parallels the determined mindset of the Lord Jesus who fully drank the dregs of the bitter cup His Father had ordained for Him – submitting even to death on the cross.

Much can be learned in this chapter about the complexity of decision making and determining the will of God.

A lot of **debate** around Paul's decisions in this chapter:
- Was he right or wrong to press on to go to Jerusalem despite the numerous warnings and counsel to the contrary?
- Was he right or wrong to agree to the plan to try to appease the Jewish believers who were still zealous for the Law by participating in the ceremonial exercise described here?

FOLLOWING JESUS INTO THE FRONT LINES OF SPIRITUAL WARFARE CAN BE EXTREMELY DANGEROUS

I. (:1-7) WARNING DELIVERED BY DISCIPLES ALONG THE JOURNEY
A. (:1-3) Extensive Journey to Tyre (with stops along the way) – Stops at Cos / Rhodes / Patara / Phoenicia - Cyprus / Syria - Tyre

> "*And when it came about that we had parted from them and had set sail, we ran a straight course to Cos and the next day to Rhodes and from there to Patara; and having found a ship crossing over to Phoenicia, we went aboard and set sail. And when we had come in sight of Cyprus, leaving it on the left, we kept sailing to Syria and landed at Tyre; for there the ship was to unload its cargo.*"

Joseph Alexander: "*parted from them*" – means more than mere departure, namely painful and reluctant separation

Jack Arnold: The word "*departed*" is a very affectionate word and means "to tear oneself away." Paul and the others had such a deep love for the elders at Ephesus that to leave was a heart-rending experience.

Missionary journeys take one out of their comfort zone – enduring hardship as a good soldier of

Jesus Christ; new adventures every day; new relationships every day; this was not a pleasure cruise; lots of danger and uncertainty; determined to reach his destination

B. (:4-7) Emotional Journey to Ptolemais – Repeated Warnings and Farewells/Final Greetings

> "*And after looking up the disciples, we stayed there seven days; and* ***they kept telling Paul through the Spirit not to set foot in Jerusalem.*** *And when it came about that our days there were ended, we departed and started on our journey, while they all, with wives and children, escorted us until we were out of the city. And after kneeling down on the beach and praying, we said farewell to one another. Then we went on board the ship, and they returned home again. And when we had finished the voyage from Tyre, we arrived at Ptolemais; and after greeting the brethren, we stayed with them for a day.*"

Constable: There is ample evidence in the text that Paul was not disobedient to God in going on to Jerusalem (cf. **Acts 9:16; Acts 19:21; Acts 20:22-24; Acts 21:14; Acts 23:1; Acts 23:11**).

Important to understand that the Holy Spirit was **not saying** "Paul should not go to Jerusalem." But some of the disciples were interpreting what the Holy Spirit was saying about the dangers that awaited Paul in Jerusalem as a message not to go. So they were adding a "the Lord has shown me" prefix to their own mix of bias and personal interpretation regarding the revelation from the Spirit.

Frank Allen: They evidently thought that God would be honored more by Paul's liberty, but it was the plan of God that He should be honored by Paul's prolonged imprisonment. ..

We have seen how he stopped at Troas seven days, near Ephesus a few days, at Ptolemais one day and at Caesarea several days. His desire was to exhort the disciples and pray with and for them in every place. Paul was not longing for an opportunity to view and study the noted places of art, or the historic sights which might be seen as he passed from city to city. He was not seeking vacation days or places of entertainment. He might have found strong reasons for needing a rest; he might have enjoyed many a feast and social hour among friends and men of distinction in the cities which he visited and revisited. He had one great goal and he kept that clearly in mind. He wanted to preach Jesus Christ and Him crucified.

II. (:8-14) WARNING DELIVERED BY AGABUS AT CAESAREA

A. (:8-9) Offer of Hospitality at the Home of Philip the Evangelist Accepted

> "*And on the next day we departed and came to Caesarea; and entering the house of Philip the evangelist, who was one of the seven, we stayed with him. Now this man had four virgin daughters who were prophetesses.*"

This is not Philip the apostle; but a believer who had been driven out of Jerusalem as a result of the early persecution (maybe even at the hand of Saul) and came to minister here (remember him as one of the seven selected as deacons in **Acts 6** (sometimes we demean the office of deacon – **Acts 8:5**); no hard feelings against Paul – able to forgive him and minister alongside him now; he was especially gifted as an evangelist; not wringing his hands because his daughters weren't married; family committed to ministry; importance of prophecy in early church before they had the NT

Did these daughters provide some prophetic insight to Paul that is not recorded? They would not have been involved in public teaching in the church but rather private prophesying so they probably were issuing warnings to Paul about what lay ahead for him in Jerusalem; Justification of women involved in role of prophesying from **Acts 2:17** quoting Joel prophecy about end times (of course we are already in the end times)

B. (:10-11) Object Lesson Administered by Agabus

"*And as we were staying there for some days, a certain prophet named Agabus came down from Judea. And coming to us, he took Paul's belt and bound his own feet and hands, and said, 'This is what the Holy Spirit says: **In this way the Jews at Jerusalem will bind the man who owns this belt and deliver him into the hands of the Gentiles**.'*"

Jack Arnold: Agabus was a true prophet for back in **Acts 11**, he had rightly predicted the famine of A.D. 46.

Seems that Agabus was appointed often to bring bad news!

C. (:12-14) Opposition Regarding Jerusalem Trip Rebuked by Paul

1. (:12) Resistance by the Local Residents

"*And when we had heard this, we as well as the local residents began begging him not to go up to Jerusalem.*"

It is possible for us to let our own emotions and desires interfere with God's master plan

Jack Arnold: When Martin Luther was on his way to face the diet of Worms where he was sure to conflict with religious authorities and possibly be imprisoned or put to death, his dear friend tried to dissuade him. He answered, "If there were more devils in Worms than tiles on the roofs, still, I would go."

2. (:13) Resolve of Paul

"*Then Paul answered, 'What are you doing, weeping and breaking my heart? For I am ready not only to be bound, but even to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus.'*"

Paul was not unmoved by their arguments and by the bond of fellowship … but served a greater Master

3. (:14) Resignation by the Disciples

"*And since he would not be persuaded, we fell silent, remarking, 'The will of the Lord be done!'*"

Mindset: not my will by Thine

III. (:15-26) ARRIVAL AT JERUSALEM AND ATTEMPTS TO AVOID OFFENSE

A. (:15-20a) Arrival at Jerusalem

1. (:15-16) Relationship for Hosting

"*And after these days we got ready and started on our way up to Jerusalem. And some of the disciples from Caesarea also came with us, taking us to Mnason of Cyprus, a disciple*

of long standing with whom we were to lodge."

2. (:17) Reception at Jerusalem
   "*And when we had come to Jerusalem, the brethren received us gladly.*"

Bringing a substantial gift from the Gentile churches – but that is not the emphasis in how warmly he was received; all about fellowship in the gospel

Constable quoting Ladd: The geographical extension of the church was not Luke's main interest; it was rather the movement of redemptive history from the Jews to the Gentiles. In keeping with this purpose, Luke devotes considerable space to the record of Paul's last visit to Jerusalem, not because the visit was important in itself, but because it showed the final rejection of the Gospel by Jerusalem."

3. (:18-20a) Report Delivered Regarding Successful Ministry to the Gentiles
   "*And now the following day Paul went in with us to James, and all the elders were present. And after he had greeted them, he began to relate one by one the things which God had done among the Gentiles through his ministry. And when they heard it they began glorifying God;*"

Reminds us of how Paul reported back to the church at Antioch; very important that people receive details of God's work; they had been devoting themselves to prayer with very specific concerns and petitions
Particular ministry to the Gentiles

B. (:20b-26) Attempts to Avoid Offense

1. (:20b-22) False Charge
   a. Mingling of Loyalty to Christ and Loyalty to OT Practices
      "*and they said to him, 'You see, brother, how many thousands there are among the Jews of those who have believed, and they are all zealous for the Law;*'"

Concerned to try to protect Paul from unnecessary attack

   b. Misrepresentation Creating Conflict
      "*and they have been told about you, that you are teaching all the Jews who are among the Gentiles to forsake Moses, telling them not to circumcise their children nor to walk according to the customs.*"

Lot of false teachers running rampant spreading lies about the Apostle Paul and trying to undermine his leadership and ministry

Constable: From here to the end of Acts Paul argued before various audiences that he was a loyal Jew and that his mission to the Gentiles was not anti-Jewish. He insisted that he did not oppose the Jews or their keeping of the Mosaic Law. The elders' plan aimed to prove to the Jewish Christians in Jerusalem, and to all the Jews there, that Paul had not abandoned the customs of the Jews. He had, of course, ceased to believe and teach that salvation came by obeying the Mosaic Law. He was no longer a Jew in religion, but he was still a racial Jew and as such observed Jewish cultural practices (e.g, a ritual of purification for those who came from foreign, unclean

lands; cf. **Numbers 19:12**). Many commentators believed the vow in view here was a Nazarite vow, but that vow could not be taken for less than 30 days.

The four men in question had taken a temporary vow, as Paul had done earlier (**Acts 18:18**). At the end of the vow each of them had to bring an offering to the temple (cf. **Numbers 6:14-15**). The elders suggested that Paul go with them to the temple, purify himself with them for temple worship, and show his support of the Jewish custom by paying for their offerings. Paul could do this . . . without compromising his convictions since the Jews did not regard taking a vow as essential for acceptance by God. It was strictly voluntary. They regarded circumcision, on the other hand, as essential. However, Paul did not even object to circumcision as a custom (**Acts 16:3**), though he did object to it as a rite essential for God's acceptance (**Galatians 2**).

c. Mystery of How to Respond

"*What, then, is to be done? They will certainly hear that you have come.*"

We cannot just do nothing; we need to make some attempt to address the opposition that we know will quickly spring up and gain momentum

2. (:23-25) Recommended Course of Action

a. (:23-24) Dealing with the Suspicious Jewish Believers

"*Therefore do this that we tell you. We have four men who are under a vow; take them and purify yourself along with them, and pay their expenses in order that they may shave their heads; and all will know that there is nothing to the things which they have been told about you, but that you yourself also walk orderly, keeping the Law.*"

Joseph Alexander: They advise him to conciliate these zealots by an act of ceremonial conformity, while at the same time they reiterate the previous decision as to Gentile converts.

William Barclay: The leaders saw a way in which Paul could guarantee the orthodoxy of his own conduct. Four men were in the middle of observing the Nazarite vow. This was a vow taken in gratitude for some special blessing from the hand of God. It involved abstention from meat and wine for thirty days, during which the hair had to be allowed to grow. It seems that sometimes at least the last seven days had to be spent entirely in the Temple courts. At the end certain offerings had to be brought--a year old lamb for a sin-offering, a ram for a peace offering, a basket of unleavened bread, cakes of fine flour mingled with oil and a meat offering and a drink offering. Finally, the hair had to be shorn and burned on the altar with the sacrifice. It is obvious that this was a costly business. Work had to be given up and all the elements of the sacrifice had to be bought. It was quite beyond the resources of many who would have wished to undertake it. So it was considered an act of piety for some wealthier person to defray the expenses of someone taking the vow. That was what Paul was asked to do in the case of these four men and he consented. By so doing he could demonstrate so that all could see it that he was himself an observer of the Law.

b. (:25) Dealing with the Suspicious Gentile Believers

"*But concerning the Gentiles who have believed, we wrote, having decided that they should abstain from meat sacrificed to idols and from blood and from what is strangled and from fornication.*"

No problem dealing with the Gentile community; the edicts of the Council at Antioch had been consistently adhered to by Paul and his companion ministers

3. (:26) Expedient Completion of the Plan
"*Then Paul took the men, and the next day, purifying himself along with them, went into the temple, giving notice of the completion of the days of purification, until the sacrifice was offered for each one of them.*"

This was all about legitimate expediency on the part of Paul; not compromising Christian convictions or exposing the gospel message to charges of adulteration

IV. (:27-40) ATTACK AGAINST PAUL BY VIOLENT MOB

A. (:27-30) Antagonism Aroused

1. (:27-28) Slander
"*And when the seven days were almost over, the Jews from Asia, upon seeing him in the temple, began to stir up all the multitude and laid hands on him, crying out, 'Men of Israel, come to our aid! This is the man who preaches to all men everywhere against our people, and the Law, and this place; and besides he has even brought Greeks into the temple and has defiled this holy place.*'"

This plan seemed to work well for the first few days … but outsider Jews came into the area intent on exposing Paul as anti-Jew and anti-Law and anti-temple and anti-Jerusalem (surprising given the extreme effort Paul had expended to come to minister in Jerusalem)

Constable: The Jews from Asia, possibly from Ephesus, were obviously unbelievers. They charged Paul with the same kind of crimes the unbelieving Jews had accused Stephen of committing (**Acts 6:11; Acts 6:13-14**).

2. (:29) Speculation – Trumped up Charge
"*For they had previously seen Trophimus the Ephesian in the city with him, and they supposed that Paul had brought him into the temple.*"

Frank Allen: The Jewish rule was written and printed before the temple that "No man of alien race is to enter within the balustrade and fence that goes round the temple. If anyone is taken in the act, let him know that he has himself to blame for the penalty of death that follows." Some of the envious Jews, who had followed Paul from Asia, saw Trophimus of Ephesus with Paul and they imagined that he had taken him, though a Greek, into the temple.

3. (:30) Seizure
"*And all the city was aroused, and the people rushed together; and taking hold of Paul, they dragged him out of the temple; and immediately the doors were shut.*"

No due process here; no reasonable dialogue or investigation into the charges

B. (:31-40) Attack Restrained

1. (:31-32) Confusion Ramping Up – Stopping the Beating
"*And while they were seeking to kill him, a report came up to the commander of*

the Roman cohort that all Jerusalem was in confusion. And at once he took along some soldiers and centurions, and ran down to them; and when they saw the commander and the soldiers, they stopped beating Paul."

If God had not directed this commander and his soldier to rush to the scene, Paul would have been killed; sounds like a severe beating

2. (:33-36) Chaos Raging – Seeking Answers
    a. (:33-34) Transferred to the Safety of the Barracks for Further Interrogation
    "*Then the commander came up and took hold of him, and ordered him to be bound with two chains; and he began asking who he was and what he had done. But among the crowd some were shouting one thing and some another, and when he could not find out the facts on account of the uproar, he ordered him to be brought into the barracks.*"

Frank Allen: Paul was not only rescued from the mob but he was protected and finally transported by the Roman government to the very place where he had longed to go, to Rome. The people thought that Paul's plans were being defeated, and Paul was likely tempted to so believe at that time. But Paul left all his plans with God, was ready to submit to His will, and in the end he found that in this, as in other things, God's plan was best

    b. (:35-36) Protected from the Angry Mob by the Soldiers – Riot Frenzy
    "*And when he got to the stairs, it so happened that he was carried by the soldiers because of the violence of the mob; for the multitude of the people kept following behind, crying out, 'Away with him!'*"

Echoing the chant directed against Jesus = "Crucify Him"

3. (:37-40) Citizen Reasoning – Speaking in Defense
    "*And as Paul was about to be brought into the barracks, he said to the commander, 'May I say something to you?' And he said, 'Do you know Greek? Then you are not the Egyptian who some time ago stirred up a revolt and led the four thousand men of the Assassins out into the wilderness?' But Paul said, 'I am a Jew of Tarsus in Cilicia, a citizen of no insignificant city; and I beg you, allow me to speak to the people.' And when he had given him permission, Paul, standing on the stairs, motioned to the people with his hand; and when there was a great hush, he spoke to them in the Hebrew dialect, saying,*"

Frank Allen: **Mistaken Identity** -- An Egyptian who had claimed to be the Messiah had led a rough band of about four thousand men out into the wilderness and there had gathered about him about thirty thousand with the aid of whom he had threatened the Roman garrison in Jerusalem. The band was defeated and dispersed but their leader had escaped and it was feared that he might appear again. Moreover, the cruel conduct of Felix, who was the Roman procurator at this time, had driven the Jews almost to the point of insurrection. As a consequence the Roman captain, Lysias, his officers and men, were keeping a vigilant guard, on this occasion, when there were many thousands of Jews in and about Jerusalem, lest trouble should again arise. From the tower of Antonia at the northwest corner of the temple, and overlooking the place of worship, the sentinel could discover any disorder at once and the soldiers could be dispatched to quell a riot in a moment's time.

Fluent in both Greek and Hebrew
Understood the rights of his citizenship and exercised them when appropriate;
His pedigree and upbringing in Tarsus gave him some instant credibility with this commander;
Amazing that Paul was able to quiet the crowd and speak his message

Cliffhanger – Why did the Roman commander even let Paul speak since he was charged with keeping things peaceful? What will Paul communicate in the next chapter?

CONCLUSION:

Jack Arnold: At the time of the Reformation in England, one of the converts to Christ was Thomas Bilney, a student at Cambridge. Bilney got hold of a Greek New Testament and read the words, "Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief." God used this verse to open up his eyes to the fact that salvation is all by God's grace and appropriated through faith in Christ. He became a powerful voice for Christ. Then came the counter-reformation and many reformers were burnt at the stake if they would not recant their biblical beliefs. Bilney was imprisoned and was told to recant or face death by flames. Friends urged him to recant.

Just two days before he was to be burned, his friends poured into the prison, overwhelming him with arguments and examples of why he should recant. But Bilney had an inward struggle which agitated his soul, for he felt he had a conviction from the Holy Spirit that he should die. The words of the Bible, "Whosoever will save his life will lose it," went through his mind over and over again. Finally Bilney broke and rationalized in his mind a compromise. He said, "I will preserve my life in order to dedicate it to the Lord." He recanted and within a few months Bilney, ridden with guilt, confused in mind, began to give up the Christian Faith altogether. Having denied the Word of God, he could no longer bear to hear it. He wandered from the faith and finally one day, overburdened by grief, he fell as lifeless into the arms of his friends. They knew they had caused his fall and they cried out, "God by a just judgment deliver up to the tempest of their conscience all who deny Christ's truth," referring to themselves who were instruments in Bilney's rejection of the revealed will of God.

This apparent apostasy by Bilney went on for several years but gradually Bilney returned to the Faith. Again he became a strong voice for Christ and again he was arrested and told to recant or be burned at the stake. Bilney, having learned his lesson, refused to give up his beliefs about Christ. The night before he was to be executed by fire, he stretched his hand out towards the lamp that was burning on the table. He placed his finger in the flame and kept it there until his finger had burned off to the joint. He then said to his friends, "I am persuaded, by God's holy Word and the experience of martyrs, that when the flames consume me, I shall not feel them. However, this stubble of a body shall be wasted by it, a pain for the time will be followed by joy unspeakable.

The next day he descended into the Lollard's Pit where many Christian martyrs had gone up in flames. He fell on his knees and prayed. Then rising up, warmly embracing the stake, he kissed it.

What is the lesson? Bilney's friends almost ruined him. When someone is set on the will of God, don't try to talk him out of it!

* * * * * * * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

1) Do we value fellowship with believers in other areas as Paul did – even when we don't have that much familiarity with them and take every opportunity to minister and encourage?

2) What can we learn in this passage about a mob mentality and how does that mesh with what we have learned in earlier incidents in the book of Acts?

3) How do we respond to false accusations and slander directed against us as we pursue our ministry for Christ?

4) When we are convinced of a specific mission that God intends for us to fulfill, how do we summon the courage not to be diverted from the task? How do we evaluate the counsel of even our godly friends?

* * * * * * * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Jack Arnold: Some fine Bible scholars feel that Paul was out of the will of God here, for he went on to Jerusalem in spite of the warnings of various prophets and friends who spoke in the Spirit. They say it was God's will for Paul to get to Rome but not in chains. He was to speak to the Emperor Nero and other Roman officials but not as a prisoner. Their claim is that Paul was bullheaded about going to Jerusalem because he felt he was God's gifted evangelist to the Jews, but God had called him to preach to the Gentiles. The claim that Paul was out of the will of God is faulty because:

1) Paul was carrying a love offering from the Gentile Christians to the needy saints in Jerusalem, and he had promised to deliver it himself.

2) Later in Paul's writing to the Philippians from a Roman prison he expresses that all the things that had happened to him had not hindered the gospel but furthered it. "*Now I want you to know, brethren, that my circumstances have turned out for the greater progress of the gospel*" (**Phil. 1:12**).

3) According to the Bible, Paul was to preach before kings and rulers, and he had not done so up to this point. "*But the Lord said to him, 'Go, for he is a chosen instrument of Mine, to bear My name before Gentiles and kings and the sons of Israel; for I will show him how much he must suffer for My name's sake'*" (**Acts 9:15, 16**). Imprisonment was God's way of getting Paul before the Roman authorities.

Steven Cole: **How do we discern God's will**? The bad news (or good news, depending on how you look at it) is that there is no simple, mechanical formula in Scripture for discerning God's

will in specific situations. If there were, we would probably just apply the formula without seeking God Himself. So the good news side of it is that God primarily guides us through our relationship with Him, as we grow to understand His Word and learn to walk daily by His Holy Spirit. But since even the best of us (including Paul) are fallen sinners, it is an imperfect and somewhat uncertain process at best. But even when we miss God's will due to our dim sight or sin, He is sovereign and gracious to overcome our mistakes.

Constable: Note the similarities between Luke's accounts of Jesus' trip to Jerusalem and Paul's. Both stories involve a plot by the Jews and handing over to the Gentiles. There were triple predictions along the way of suffering in Jerusalem in both cases. Both Jesus and Paul steadfastly resolved to go there despite opposition, and both resigned themselves to God's will. [Note: Longenecker, p515.] Luke probably told his story as he did to help the reader appreciate the similarities between Jesus and Paul to authenticate Paul's ministry.

Steven Cole: Was Paul right or wrong in the approach he took in Jerusalem to try to appease the Jewish believers who were still zealous for following the law?

PRO Arguments:
First, Paul himself had taken a Nazirite vow (**Acts 18:18**). Thus why is it wrong for him to participate in this ceremony? Second, Paul's participation did not compromise any biblical truth, but was a matter of Christian liberty. It fit in with his policy of becoming a Jew to the Jews, in order to win the Jews (**1 Cor. 9:20**). His offering animal sacrifices here did not deny the finished work of Christ, but were only memorials. Third, if Paul had made such a serious error, would not the Holy Spirit have made this clear in the text? Besides, Paul later states that he had not violated his own conscience (23:1; 24:16-18). Fourth, Paul's motives were pure. He was trying to unify the Jewish and Gentile Christians and be a witness to the unbelieving Jews. Fifth, the negative results of his actions do not prove that he made a mistake. Such a pragmatic approach denies that Paul's arrest had been prophesied before his arrival in Jerusalem (**20:22-23; 21:4, 11**).

CON Arguments: [I do not agree with Cole in this argument that Paul was wrong here]
In response, first, the text never hints at whether Paul had been right or wrong to take a Nazirite vow. It is, at the very least, a debatable matter that he was right to do so. Second, it is arguable that Paul's actions compromised or, at the very least, clouded some crucial biblical truths. Why should believers in Jesus Christ, whose blood cleanses us from all sin, go through a ritual of purification involving animal sacrifice under the priestly system that put the Savior to death? As the author of Hebrews argues, Christ is the sum of everything that the Jewish sacrificial system pointed forward to. Why go back to the old system when the veil in this very temple had been torn? It is one thing for Paul to set aside his freedom in Christ and to adopt some neutral Jewish customs that might be a hindrance to the gospel. But to participate in a Jewish sacrifice for purification at the temple was at the least to cause confusion on what Paul elsewhere plainly taught, that the decrees of the Law were removed by being nailed to the cross (**Col. 2:11-14**).

The third argument was that there is no indication in the text that Paul erred or sinned, and that he later states that he had always maintained a clear conscience. But in light of Paul's epistles, **verse 20** should jar any sensitive reader of Scripture. Paul taught that the law is our tutor to lead us to Christ, so that we may be justified by faith. Thus the purpose of the tutor is done away with (**Gal. 3:24-26**). He taught that Christ is the end or fulfillment of the Law for righteousness to all who believe (**Rom. 10:4**). He exhorts the Galatians, "*It was for freedom that Christ set us free; therefore keep standing firm and do not be subject again to a yoke of slavery*." He goes on to tell

them that "*in Christ Jesus, neither circumcision nor uncircumcision means anything, but faith working through love*" (**Gal. 5:1, 6**). How the sum of Paul's teaching about not being under the Law can be harmonized with a favorable view of being zealous for the ceremonial Law, is beyond me!

Regarding Paul's clear conscience, he does not mean that he had never sinned or made a mistake. Rather, he is defending his integrity, first before the Jewish Sanhedrin (**Acts 23:1**), and then before the Roman governor Felix (**24:16**). I would not agree with Donald Grey Barnhouse (Acts) that Paul deliberately sinned by going to Jerusalem and cooperating with this scheme. But I do contend that he made a major mistake, in spite of his sincere motives. To live with a clear conscience means that we confess our sins and acknowledge our mistakes, not that we live perfectly.

The fourth argument is that Paul's motives were pure. Granted, but sincerity and pure motives do not protect us from making major mistakes. Regarding the final argument, that the negative results are no basis for determining right or wrong, I agree. Sometimes we act in obedience and suffer terribly. Sometimes we disobey God and life seems to go well for a while. But the prophecies about Paul's imprisonment say nothing about whether the actions that led to that imprisonment were right or wrong. As James Boice argues (p. 364), the greatest proof that Paul was wrong was that God, who is sovereign over the details of our lives, intervened before Paul was able to offer the sacrifice in the temple and prevented him from doing it. . .

How should Paul have responded to this scheme? He should have said to James and the elders, "Brothers, we need to have a long discussion." He should have found out exactly what they meant by their statement about being zealous for the Law. He should have used this as an opportunity to educate the Jerusalem leaders that in Christ we are not under the Law, but under grace. And, he should have warned them of the danger that they were in of falling into the racist views of the unbelieving Jews against the Gentiles. In their effort not to offend these Jews so as to reach them with the gospel, the leaders had allowed them to come into the church and yet hang onto their Jewish ceremonies and customs without showing them that Christ was the fulfillment of these things. They should have been in the process of educating these Jewish believers that in Christ, there is no Jew or Gentile (Gal. 3:28). They should have been pointing them toward taking the gospel to every tongue and tribe and nation, and that God is no respecter of a man's race (**Acts 10:34-35**).

Deffinbaugh: I do not believe Paul is rejecting any direct words of divine prophecy. He is rejecting an improper interpretation and application of what God has revealed. Just as it is possible to misinterpret and misapply Scripture, so it is possible to misinterpret and wrongly apply prophecy.

Notice that when Paul insisted on going to Jerusalem, all of those who had sought to dissuade him from going on ceased their resistance with the words, "*The Lord's will be done*" (**Acts 21:14**). Does this not indicate that they had mistakenly discerned God's will for Paul's life, and that his sense of God's guidance prevailed?

Now allow me to cite some other evidences that would support the conclusion that Paul was right to continue on to Jerusalem.

- In Tyre, the entire group escorted Paul to his ship. Why would the church commend Paul in this

manner if he were stubbornly acting in disobedience to the Spirit of God?

- What the Spirit revealed about what was to happen to Paul in Jerusalem, God had already revealed to Paul at the time of his conversion:

> 15 *But the Lord said to him, "Go, because this man is my chosen instrument to carry my name before Gentiles and kings and the people of Israel. 16 For I will show him how much he must suffer for the sake of my name*" (**Acts 9:15-16**).

Dennis Allen: Exhortation about the proper use of technology – This was the conclusion of the 3rd missionary journey – took 5 years; traveled over 2500 miles; made use of the Roman system of roads that involved a certain level of engineering and sophistication as well as transportation by boat over many miles; look at how quickly the church grew in these first 25 years after Christ; don't be afraid of new technology – just use it for good purposes; look at how God used the printing press – Bible was first book printed

TEXT: Acts 22:1-30

TITLE: TELLING OUR STORY – TRANSFORMED BY THE GOSPEL OF GOD'S GRACE

BIG IDEA:
OUR PERSONAL TESTIMONY SHOULD DEMONSTRATE THAT OUR SALVATION AND MINISTRY DERIVE FROM GOD'S SOVEREIGN INITIATIVE

INTRODUCTION:
Paul took every opportunity to tell his story of how God had worked in his life to transform him from a zealous Jew who was actively persecuting the church of Jesus Christ to the Apostle to the Gentiles. He had set his face to go to Jerusalem because he knew that great crowds would be present to celebrate the religious feast. (As one who was fishing for men, he knew to go where the fish are.) He had been warned about the danger and suffering that would await him in that city . . . and now he was caught up in the midst of a riotous crowd that was calling for his execution. Instead of trying to answer point-by-point the false claims that had been trumped up against him (**21:21, 28**), he quieted the crowd in order to present the simple facts of how God had been working in his life and ministry.

Each of us has an important story to tell in our witness to Jesus Christ. As we relate to our past there may be a tendency to either diminish (deny) our past or to exaggerate our past. Paul did neither. He was secure in the knowledge that by the grace of God, he who had been chief among sinners and a leader in persecuting Christians was now a trophy of God's grace. [cf. Paul's testimony in **1 Tim. 1:12-17**] The story we tell of God's transforming power is primarily a relational story rather than just about information and doctrinal truth.

OUR PERSONAL TESTIMONY SHOULD DEMONSTRATE THAT OUR SALVATION AND MINISTRY DERIVE FROM GOD'S SOVEREIGN INITIATIVE

I. (:1-21) FOUR STAGES OF PAUL'S PERSONAL SPIRITUAL TESTIMONY

(:1-2) Introduction

> "*Brethren and fathers, hear my defense which I now offer to you. And when they heard that he was addressing them in the Hebrew dialect, they became even more quiet; and he said,*"

Respectful address to this unruly crowd;
Paul can justify his behavior if they will just quiet down and give him a hearing.
Here he offers up his defense – speaking to them in Hebrew.

Joseph Alexander: probably speaking to them in that Aramaic modification of Hebrew that had become their vernacular dialect.

Lenski: These "*brethren and fathers*" wanted to tear Paul to pieces, were completely disowning him. Yet he calls them by this affectionate title. He rises above their ignorant passion. Calm, self-possessed, master even of this frightful situation, he intends to bring them to their senses.

A. (:3-5) Committed to Persecuting Christians as a Jewish Zealot

1. (:3) Zealous Jew

"*I am a Jew, born in Tarsus of Cilicia, but brought up in this city, educated under Gamaliel, strictly according to the law of our fathers, being zealous for God, just as you all are today.*"

Longenecker: The triad of "birth" (*gennesis*), "upbringing" (*trophe*, lit. "nourishment"), and "training" (*paideia*) was a conventional way in antiquity of describing a man's youth.

Lenski: The three perfect participles refer to states; once born, reared, educated a man remains thus.

Checks off all the important boxes to the Jews; counters the charge that he was acting as a traitor to undermine the Jewish culture and way of life and traditions; Nobody could be more Jewish than Paul; nobody more passionate and zealous

Establishes common ground

Joseph Alexander: "*at the feet*" will then convey the two distinct ideas of intimate nearness and subjection to authority.

Bock: Although this is a "new" faith, it has old roots. Establishing this fact is important in a culture where a religion is valued for its age.

2. (:4-5a) Famous Persecutor of the Christians

"*And I persecuted this Way to the death, binding and putting both men and women into prisons, as also the high priest and all the Council of the elders can testify.*"

A known figure; not some obscure leader who has been operating in secret that they should fear; the important leaders here in their presence could back up his claims – he was not making any of this up

3. (:5b) Man on a Mission to Damascus

"*From them I also received letters to the brethren, and started off for Damascus in order to bring even those who were there to Jerusalem as prisoners to be punished.*"

Used to be the leader in carrying out the wishes of the high priest and Jewish Council – what brought about such a 180 degree change in his loyalties?

B. (:6-11) Confronted by Jesus Himself on Damascus Road

1. (:6) Bright Light

"*And it came about that as I was on my way, approaching Damascus about noontime, a very bright light suddenly flashed from heaven all around me,*"

Others can testify to seeing this great light

2. (:7) Convicting Voice

"*and I fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to me, 'Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?'*"

3. (:8) Word of Identification
"*And I answered, 'Who art Thou, Lord?' And He said to me, 'I am Jesus the Nazarene, whom you are persecuting.*'"

Tremendous testimony to the resurrection of Jesus Christ – the historical figure –
We all must have a time when we collide with Christ and are regenerated. You can't just drift into the kingdom of God. It might not look as dramatic as Paul's testimony, but it is equally dramatic internally in terms of being transformed from the kingdom of darkness to the kingdom of light.

4. (:9) Special Illumination -- Unique Experience
"*And those who were with me beheld the light, to be sure, but did not understand the voice of the One who was speaking to me.*"

5. (:10) Special Instructions
"*And I said, 'What shall I do, Lord?' And the Lord said to me, 'Arise and go on into Damascus; and there you will be told of all that has been appointed for you to do.*'"

The initiative was all on the part of Jesus; Paul did not seek out this experience; he was struck down on the Damascus road and given explicit instructions by the Sovereign Majestic Lord of the Universe.

6. (:11) Special Impairment
"*But since I could not see because of the brightness of that light, I was led by the hand by those who were with me, and came into Damascus.*"

Humbling experience; making Paul completely dependent; breaking him down

C. (:12-16) Converted and Commissioned Under the Tutelage of Ananias

1. (:12) Identification of Ananias
"*And a certain Ananias, a man who was devout by the standard of the Law, and well-spoken of by all the Jews who lived there,*"

Joseph Alexander: tries to conciliate the Jews by showing that his introduction to the Christian church was through a well-known Jew, of high repute among his brethren at Damascus.

Look at the importance of the role of Ananias – came alongside Paul and guided him through this early discipleship process; did not just communicate information but called Paul to respond in obedience to the gospel and be baptized and take steps of obedience to his commission

2. (:13) Regeneration
"*came to me, and standing near said to me, 'Brother Saul, receive your sight!' And at that very time I looked up at him.*"

3. (:14-15) Commissioning
"*And he said, 'The God of our fathers has appointed you to know His will, and to see the Righteous One, and to hear an utterance from His mouth. For you will be a witness for Him to all men of what you have seen and heard.*"'

Similar commission to our Great Commission:
- To Know His Will
- To See His Character
- To Hear His Word
- To Witness to All Men

4. (:16) Call to Respond
"*And now why do you delay? Arise, and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on His name.*"

Baptism is the first step of discipleship and obedience to our commission;
Forgiveness of sins and Cleansing from Sin are essential to spiritual service;
It is all about Faith = "*calling on His name*"

Kent: Baptism symbolized the method of salvation (identification with Christ) and washing symbolized the result (cleansing from sin).

D. (:17-21) Commanded by Jesus to Leave Jerusalem to Evangelize the Gentiles

1. (:17-18) Urgency of the Command
"*And it came about when I returned to Jerusalem and was praying in the temple, that I fell into a trance, and I saw Him saying to me, 'Make haste, and get out of Jerusalem quickly, because they will not accept your testimony about Me.*"'

Sometimes we are slow to GO!

Longenecker: Most likely the visit to the temple and the vision referred to here occurred on Paul's return to Jerusalem three years after his conversion (cf. **9:26-29; Gal. 1:18-19**). At that time, Luke tells us, Paul faced opposition from the Hellenistic Jews of the city, who viewed him as a renegade and sought to kill him (cf. **9:29**).

Lenski: Desecrate the Temple (**21:28**) – that was unthinkable to him. Now it was in the sacred Temple itself that Jesus communicated with him and ordered him to go to the Gentiles. Jesus chose that place as being most fitting. Would the Lord of the Temple, he who had revealed himself to Paul in his heavenly glory, desecrate the Temple by a communication he made?

2. (:19-20) Identification with the Jews
"*And I said, 'Lord, they themselves understand that in one synagogue after another I used to imprison and beat those who believed in Thee. And when the blood of Thy witness Stephen was being shed, I also was standing by approving, and watching out for the cloaks of those who were slaying him.*"'

Bock: Paul's defense is that he was where the crowd is now, a persecutor and a faithful Jew; only God's direction has made him otherwise. If there is a complaint to be made about Gentiles being

included in God's promise and message, Paul is not to blame. God is responsible for these events.

3. (:21) Authority of the Command
"*And He said to me, 'Go! For I will send you far away to the Gentiles.*'"

II. (:22-30) REACTION TO PAUL'S TESTIMONY

A. (:22-23) Tumultuous Reaction From the Jewish Mob

1. (:22) Demanding Paul's Execution
"*And they listened to him up to this statement, and then they raised their voices and said, 'Away with such a fellow from the earth, for he should not be allowed to live!*'"

Infuriated at his indictment of the Jews and his devotion to ministering to the Gentiles.

Kent: the suggestion of Gentile equality in matters of salvation was abhorrent to their traditions. Jews believed in proselytizing Gentiles, but not apart from requiring submission to the Mosaic Law.

2. (:23) Displaying Their Anger
"*And as they were crying out and throwing off their cloaks and tossing dust into the air,*"

Joseph Alexander: Outward signs of rage

B. (:24-30) Tactics of Interrogation by Roman Commander

1. (:24) Scourging
"*the commander ordered him to be brought into the barracks, stating that he should be examined by scourging so that he might find out the reason why they were shouting against him that way.*"

Not a pleasant way to be examined; intends to beat the truth out of him

Bruce: The scourge (Latin *flagellum*) was a fearful instrument of torture, consisting of leather thongs, weighted with rough pieces of metal or bone, and attached to a stout wooden handle. If a man did not actually die under the scourge (which frequently happened), he would certainly be crippled for life.

2. (:25-29) Shifting Gears
   a. (:25-27) Claim to Roman Citizenship
   "*And when they stretched him out with thongs, Paul said to the centurion who was standing by, 'Is it lawful for you to scourge a man who is a Roman and uncondemned?' And when the centurion heard this, he went to the commander and told him, saying, 'What are you about to do? For this man is a Roman.' And the commander came and said to him, 'Tell me, are you a Roman?' And he said, 'Yes.*'"

Joseph Alexander: binding Paul with the straps by which the person to be scourged was fastened to a post or other fixture

b. (:28) Value of Roman Citizenship
"*And the commander answered, 'I acquired this citizenship with a large sum of money.' And Paul said, 'But I was actually born a citizen.'*"

c. (:29) Protection of Roman Citizenship
"*Therefore those who were about to examine him immediately let go of him; and the commander also was afraid when he found out that he was a Roman, and because he had put him in chains.*"

Stott: he does not seem to have released him … At least he was still in chains the following day and subsequently. What is the explanation of this? Possibly a distinction is to be made between the heavy chains, a torture in themselves (of which Paul may have been relieved) and the lighter chains to prevent the prisoner from escaping.

C. (:30) Transfer of Venue to Jewish Council
"*But on the next day, wishing to know for certain why he had been accused by the Jews, he released him and ordered the chief priests and all the Council to assemble, and brought Paul down and set him before them.*"

* * * * * * * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

1) When did Christ confront us and draw us to Himself?

2) What emotions are associated with our memories of our pre-conversion days?

3) How and when did Paul make use of his Roman citizenship?

4) How can we improve in the telling of our gospel story?

* * * * * * * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Stott: Looking back over Paul's defence, we may perhaps say that he made two major points. The first was that he himself was a loyal Jew, not only by birth and education but still. True, he was now a witness where before he had been a persecutor. But the God of his fathers was his God still. He had not broken away from his ancestral faith, still less apostatized; he stood in direct continuity with it. Jesus of Nazareth was "the Righteous One" in whom prophecy had been fulfilled.

And Paul's second point was that those features of his faith which had changed, especially his acknowledgment of Jesus and his Gentile mission, were not his own eccentric ideas. They had been directly revealed to him from heaven, the one truth in Damascus and the other in Jerusalem. Indeed, nothing but such a heavenly intervention could have so completely transformed him.

Steven Cole: Have you ever wished that you had a more dramatic testimony? Perhaps you've heard of someone who came to Christ from a life of terrible sin and you've thought, "If I just had a testimony like that, I could lead all sorts of people to Christ!" But, like me, you grew up in the church. Your testimony isn't all that dramatic.

When did I get saved? I honestly don't know. Was it at three? In grade school? In college? Only the Lord knows! All I know is, it's not a very dramatic story. But the Lord has shown me over the years that my heart is just as corrupt as the hearts of the most wicked people on earth. I've also learned that it takes the same mighty power of God to save an outwardly good person as it does to save an outwardly evil person. And, that outwardly good person needs salvation every bit as much as the notorious sinner does.

1. Paul's testimony teaches us that being zealously religious does not reconcile us to God.

2. Paul's testimony teaches us that salvation is by God's grace and power, not by our merit or will power.

Paul was not considering the claims of Christ as he marched toward Damascus that day. He had not been re-reading his Bible in light of the life, death, and claimed resurrection of Jesus, to see if the ancient prophecies pointed to Jesus as Israel's Messiah. He was not unhappy with his life in Judaism, searching for another way. Rather, he was militantly defending the Jewish faith, seeking to rid it of the blight of these heretics who claimed that Jesus was the Christ. It was as he pursued this course of action with a vengeance that God literally stopped Paul in his tracks. His power knocked Paul to the ground and blinded him. Then God gave very specific orders about what Paul had to do next.

Everything about Paul's conversion came from God. Nothing about his conversion stemmed from Paul. God didn't look down and see some merit in Paul that qualified him to come to salvation. Quite to the contrary, he confesses that he was "a blasphemer, a persecutor, and a violent aggressor" (1 Tim. 1:13). Twice Jesus emphasizes that by persecuting the church, Paul was persecuting Jesus Himself (Acts 22:7, 8). For this, he deserved God's judgment, but he was shown God's mercy. God didn't say, "Oh Paul, I'd really like you to be My apostle, but I'm not going to force your will. You have to exercise your free will to choose Me!"

There are many who say that the reason that God chose Paul, or that He chooses anyone, is that He foresees that the person will one day choose to follow Him. But to say this is to base God's sovereign election on the fallen will of man, ignoring the plain biblical truth that unless God first does a work of grace in our hearts, no one would ever choose Him. No one comes to Jesus unless the Father draws him (John 6:44). No one is able to come to Jesus unless it has been granted him from the Father (John 6:65). No one knows who the Father is except the Son, and anyone to whom the Son wills to reveal Him (Luke 10:22).

In several places, Paul attributes the first cause of our salvation to God's choice of us, not to our choice of Him. In Galatians 1:15, he says that God set him apart from his mother's womb and called him through His grace. In Ephesians 1:4-6, he says, "Just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world …. In love He predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ unto Himself, according to the kind intention of His will, to the praise of the glory of His grace, which He freely bestowed on us in the Beloved." In 2 Timothy 1:9, he says that God "has saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own

purpose and grace which was granted us in Christ Jesus from all eternity." There are many more such verses.

If we deny God's sovereign election, we rob Him of glory and attribute at least part of the cause of our salvation to something in us. If God's choice of us depends on what He foresaw that we would do, then we have grounds for boasting, either in our will, in our brilliant minds that caused us to see the truth, or in our faith, which God saw that we would exercise. But if our salvation rests not on our will or our effort, but only on God who shows mercy (Rom. 9:16), then He gets all the praise and glory!

If God's grace and power are mighty to save a sinner such as Paul, then He is able to save any sinner, and to do it instantly and totally. His light can blind and knock down the most insolent, proud, powerful persecutor of the church. You may have some terrible sins in your past. You may even be militantly opposed to Christianity, convinced by all of your arguments that it is just a myth. But the risen Lord Jesus is mighty to save even you. He can open your eyes to get a glimpse of His glory and grace, and you will never be the same.

3. Paul's testimony teaches us that God often must humble us before He extends His mercy toward us.

4. Paul's testimony teaches us that baptism is an important confession of our faith in Christ.

5. Paul's testimony teaches us that God saves us for His purpose, not for our agendas.

Scott Maxwell:
3 Divisions from Acts 21-28 – 3 different regions featured as Paul is under arrest:

I. (:21-23) Paul's Incarceration in **Jerusalem**
II. (:24-26) **Caesarea**
III. (:27-28) Travelling to **Rome**

We live under 2 authorities and in 2 citizenships. Paul's third missionary journey finished in the area of Turkey. He has come to Jerusalem for Pentecost along with some of his Gentile companions – bringing a huge offering from the Gentile churches to the church in Jerusalem. This will show unity between Jews and Gentiles in the body of Christ. Unbelieving Jews had come from Ephesus – they had known him for 3 years and hated him and his message that embraced the Gentiles.

I. (:1-5) The Unquestionable Identification with the Temple

A. Identifies with the Jewish Leaders and Sanhedrin

Views these Jews as family, not enemies – even though they were trying to kill him;
Desperately desires them to listen to his defense;
Speaks in the tongue of the crowd – trying to identify with them without compromising with the truth (so he does not speak Greek)

B. Hellenized Jew – influenced by Greek culture
C. Strict Education according to Mosaic Law
D. Persecutor of Christians

"*zeal for God*" -- Not validating the zeal of the Jews for God as expressed against Christ; **Phil. 3:4ff; Rom. 9:30ff**

Compassion for the Jews
The Way: summed up person of Christ and how to live as a disciple of Christ
They were trying to kill him for defiling the temple … he was identified with the temple from way back

II. (:6-16) The Undeniable Transformation
Messiah Jesus stopped the temple's representative from carrying out the will of the Sanhedrin and transformed Paul to be the Apostle to the Gentiles for Jesus
A true understanding of Mosaic Law should lead people to Jesus rather than away; Jesus is the true Messiah spoken of in the OT;
Now Paul understands that the temple's will is not God's will at all;
Note how close together Ananias puts forgiveness of sins and getting baptized – in the early days of church those 2 things took place right next to each other; immediate public scrutiny made you count the cost of believing in Christ immediately; outward picture that you have believed in Christ and been cleansed of your sins by His death on the cross; so he could speak of all of this together in one sentence

Now Messiah has aversion to the temple and its false system of worship
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lkXMU9Lnetk

TEXT: Acts 23:1-35

TITLE: TRIAL PROGRESSES FROM JEWISH SANHEDRIN TO ROMAN GOVERNOR

BIG IDEA:
PROVIDENTIAL DELIVERANCE ASSURES US OF GOD'S SOVEREIGN PLAN FOR OUR LIVES EVEN IN THE MIDST OF DESPERATE CIRCUMSTANCES

INTRODUCTION:
Paul had been told that he would experience much suffering in the course of his apostolic ministry and testimony for the Lord Jesus. Here we see him embroiled in contentious trial processes that seem out of control apart from the providential deliverance engineered by the Lord Jesus. Certainly Paul understood his Roman citizenship and used that to his advantage. He also understood the points of division between the different Jewish religious groups in power and was able to use that to his advantage as well. But apart from God's intervention (without transcending natural laws) in a providential sense, the large Jewish conspiracy would have attacked and killed Paul. But he was invincible until the Lord's program in using him was finished.

PROVIDENTIAL DELIVERANCE ASSURES US OF GOD'S SOVEREIGN PLAN FOR OUR LIVES EVEN IN THE MIDST OF DESPERATE CIRCUMSTANCES

I. (:1-11) PROVIDENTIALLY DELIVERED FROM THE JEWISH SANHEDRIN

A. (:1-5) Contentious Start to Paul's Testimony before the Sanhedrin

1. (:1) Autobiographical Report by Paul -- Testimony of a Good Conscience

"*And Paul, looking intently at the Council, said, 'Brethren, I have lived my life with a perfectly good conscience before God up to this day.*'"

Lenski: The meeting [with the Sanhedrin] was called in order to enlighten the chiliarch in regard to Paul and in regard to anything of a criminal nature chargeable against him as expressed in yesterday's riotous demand for his death.

Cf. Paul's testimony before the Ephesian elders in **chap. 20** – he had a clear conscience

2. (:2) Attacking Response by the High Priest

"*And the high priest Ananias commanded those standing beside him to strike him on the mouth.*"

Bob Deffinbaugh: I think this is the real reason Ananias reacted so strongly to Paul's claim. Paul, as a Christian, could claim to possess a clean conscience before God. This is due to the saving work of Jesus, which is vastly superior to the sacrificial system of the Old Testament law. No good Jew could ever be good enough to claim a clean conscience before God, and Ananias was not a good Jew. This man was a scoundrel, and an embarrassment to the Jews. He used his office for material gain, and he did not hesitate to use violence to achieve his goals. He was so hated by the Jews that he was violently killed in the Jewish uprising in Jerusalem a number of years later.

Joseph Alexander: Striking on the mouth implies a previous unlawful use of it, as well as an injunction to cease speaking. . . Translated into language it was here equivalent to saying, that

Paul's claim, not only to integrity and innocence as some suppose, but to the highest theocratical fidelity, was false in itself, and grossly insulting to his judges, whom it charged, by necessary implication, with being themselves unfaithful to their great national and religious trust.

Steven Cole: Remember, Paul had just been badly beaten by the angry mob. His face was probably sore and bruised. The blow must have both shocked Paul and hurt terribly. Also, the high priest's command was grossly unjust and revealed that he was not interested in justice, but only in getting Paul condemned. Ananias was a notoriously corrupt high priest. According to Josephus, he stole from the common priests and used violence and political power to further his goals. The Jewish nationalists hated him because of his pro-Roman leaning. During the Jewish revolt against Rome, some Jewish loyalists assassinated him.

3. (:3) Angry Reaction by Paul

"*Then Paul said to him, 'God is going to strike you, you whitewashed wall! And do you sit to try me according to the Law, and in violation of the Law order me to be struck?'*"

Jewish authorities used the law when it was to their advantage … but then ignored the weightier matters of the law when they did not want to be held accountable

Jack Arnold: When Paul said, "*God is going to strike you*," this was a hidden prediction for Ananias was killed by an assassin in 64 A.D.

Bock: Such a person is like a clean and sturdy wall only on the surface and is actually unclean and insecure.

4. (:4-5) Awareness Retraction by Paul

"*But the bystanders said, 'Do you revile God's high priest?' And Paul said, 'I was not aware, brethren, that he was high priest; for it is written, You shall not speak evil of a ruler of your people.'*"

William Barclay: It was indeed a crime to speak evil of a ruler of the people (**Exodus 22:28**). Paul knew perfectly well that Ananias was high priest. But Ananias was notorious as a glutton, a thief, a rapacious robber and a quisling in the Roman service. Paul's answer really means, "This man sitting there--I never knew a man like that could be high priest of Israel."
[Interesting view but probably not correct]

Brian Bell: Possibilities:

[1] Paul didn't know his tormentor's identity because of his defective vision?

[2] Paul was speaking in irony saying, "He didn't act like a high priest; so how could I recognize him as such when he was totally out of character."

[3] Possible Ananias wasn't wearing his priestly garments. It's also probable Paul did not know Ananias personally because he had not had contact with the Sanhedrin for 20 years.

[4] Paul completely lost his cool? (failure in self-control)

Application: Do not speak evil of the authorities God has placed over us

B. (:6-11) Crafty Strategy Employed by Paul

1. (:6) Driving a Wedge between the Pharisees and Sadducees

"*But perceiving that one part were Sadducees and the other Pharisees, Paul began crying out in the Council, 'Brethren, I am a Pharisee, a son of Pharisees; I am on trial for the hope and resurrection of the dead!'*"

Deffinbaugh: It seems clear that Paul has grasped the fact that there is no chance of a fair trial, and thus his outcry is intended to produce the results that Luke describes.

2. (:7-9a) Dissension between the Pharisees and Sadducees

"*And as he said this, there arose a dissension between the Pharisees and Sadducees; and the assembly was divided. For the Sadducees say that there is no resurrection, nor an angel, nor a spirit; but the Pharisees acknowledge them all. And there arose a great uproar;*"

Cf. arguments between conservative and liberal parties; between cults and Christianity; between different Christian denominations

3. (:9b) Defense of Paul by some Pharisees

"*and some of the scribes of the Pharisaic party stood up and began to argue heatedly, saying, 'We find nothing wrong with this man; suppose a spirit or an angel has spoken to him?'*"

Jack Arnold: Note again God's providential care for Paul. Just a few words were used by God to cause a fight which in turn divided the Sanhedrin which just a few minutes before was solidly against the Apostle Paul. God just laughs at the plans and purposes of puny men and uses the most simple things to bring about His purposes. "*The wicked plots against the righteous, and gnashes at him with his teeth. The Lord laughs at him; for He sees his day coming*" (**Psalm 37:12, 13**).

God uses the smallest, insignificant things to accomplish His purposes. Esther and the Jews were saved in the Book of Esther because the King had insomnia. Because he couldn't sleep, he called for the records and found that nothing had been done for Mordecai. Out of royal insomnia arose the deliverance of the Jewish people.

Moses' tears as a baby awakened sympathy in Pharaoh's daughter and the Jewish nation was preserved and led out of the land of Egypt.

C. (:10-11) Combined Solution – Political Commander and Divine Commander Intervene

1. (:10) Rescue and Relocation – Orchestrated by Political Commander
"*And as a great dissension was developing, the commander was afraid Paul would be torn to pieces by them and ordered the troops to go down and take him away from them by force, and bring him into the barracks.*"

2. (:11) Reassurance and Reassignment – Orchestrated by Divine Commander
"*But on the night immediately following, the Lord stood at his side and said, 'Take courage; for as you have solemnly witnessed to my cause at Jerusalem, so you must witness at Rome also.'*"

The Lord is always by our side in our most difficult moments

Cf. vision that Stephen had of the Lord (while Paul was holding the coats of those who were casting the stones); now Paul is the one seeing the vision of the Lord Jesus – what extraordinary grace and mercy

Steven Cole: In a sermon on the Lord's words, "Take courage" (The Westminster Pulpit [Baker], pp. 18-20), G. Campbell Morgan asks the question, "How are we to obey Him?" How can we take courage when we feel fearful or discouraged? He concludes that the only way is to get a clear vision of the Lord Himself. It is to see Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith, who endured such hostility of sinners against Himself (**Heb. 12:2-3**). He observes, "All our fear and all our panic result from a dimmed vision of the Lord, a dimmed consciousness of Christ" (p. 19). A few paragraphs later he states, "There is no refuge for the soul of man other than the Lord Christ" (p. 20).

If you're discouraged about your present difficult circumstances, or feeling down about past mistakes you have made, or anxious about the future, the Lord wants you to take courage. He is with you in your trials, He commends you for your past service, and He promises to use you again in His service as you continue to walk with Him.

Jack Arnold: What did Paul learn here? He learned that God was sovereign and as long as he was breathing God had a purpose for his life. He learned that God keeps His promises for He told Paul he was to witness before kings. He learned something of the providential presence of the overruling Lord. Paul learned what John Wesley learned when he said, "I'm immortal until my work is done!" . . .

Why do men buck so hard at divine providence? They do not want to believe God controls everything because man seems to be a puppet, or they cannot reconcile God's love with a plan which includes suffering and sickness. Men think this is unfair according to their own standard of reasoning. But what are our choices? There are just two. Either everything happens by accident and man is left to pure chance and fate, or things are planned by God and all things are working out for God's own glory, for the good of God's elect and for the return of God's Son, Jesus Christ. To know that God has a plan and is carrying out this plan brings confidence, assurance and boldness to the Christian, for he senses he is a man of destiny. Let's face it, it is God's providence which change the course of history.

John Stott: It would be hard to exaggerate the calm courage which this assurance must have brought to Paul during his three further trials, his two years' imprisonment and his hazardous voyage to Rome.

Brian Bell: Illustration - Just after WWII, American soldiers found a little cellar where Jews had hid out. Written on the wall one had written, "I believe in the sun, even when it does not shine. - I believe in love, even when it is not shown. - And I believe in God even when I cannot see Him work."

Application:

- Trust this: God is present, and at work thru all your circumstances, just when you need Him the most!
    - What promises has God made to you that He will surely keep and you can count on?

II. (:12-22) PROVIDENTIALLY DELIVERED FROM THE JEWISH CONSPIRACY

A. (:12-15) Conspiracy – Jewish Plot

1. (:12-13) Bound by an Oath

"*And when it was day, the Jews formed a conspiracy and bound themselves under an oath, saying that they would neither eat nor drink until they had killed Paul. And there were more than forty who formed this plot.*"

Deffinbaugh: More than 40 men formed a conspiracy and bound themselves by oath not to eat or drink until they had killed Paul. How interesting. Paul joined himself with four men by the taking of a vow. Then there are the more than 40 men who bind themselves in an oath and fast until it is fulfilled. Paul's kind of religion is vastly different than that of these assassins.

2. (:14-15) Bullying the Officials

"*And they came to the chief priests and the elders, and said, 'We have bound ourselves under a solemn oath to taste nothing until we have killed Paul. Now, therefore, you and the Council notify the commander to bring him down to you, as though you were going to determine his case by a more thorough investigation; and we for our part are ready to slay him before he comes near the place.*'"

Bock: From a narrative standpoint, the effort to take matters into their own hands flies in the face of God's program as revealed in Acts 23:11. Those who seek to take events into their own hands do not have as much control as they think (Gaventa 2003: 322). And in seeking to take matters into their own hands, they also overstep the divine law they think they are defending, by agreeing to lie and murder. The irony is that they take an oath before God that actually violates God's standards and will.

B. (:16-18) Counterintelligence – Exposing the Ambush

1. (:16) Informing Paul

"*But the son of Paul's sister heard of their ambush, and he came and entered the barracks and told Paul.*"

2. (:17) Informing the Centurion Guard

"*And Paul called one of the centurions to him and said, 'Lead this young man to the commander, for he has something to report to him.*'"

Probably Paul picked a guard that was more favorable to his cause;
Did not tell him everything but enough to convince the centurion that there was a story worth telling to the commander

3. (:18) Informing the Commander

"*So he took him and led him to the commander and said, 'Paul the prisoner called me to him and asked me to lead this young man to you since he has something to tell you.*'"

Brian Bell: Amazing, watch how God pulled this all off:

[1] The otherwise unknown nephew just happened to overhear the plot
[2] He somehow entered the heavily guarded barracks to tell Paul.
[3] A centurion was willing to take him to the commander.

[4] The busy commander listened to him right away & believed him.
[5] Then the commander ordered a small army to escort Paul out of town under cover of darkness.

C. (:19-22) Confidentiality

1. (:19) Inquiry

"*And the commander took him by the hand and stepping aside, began to inquire of him privately, 'What is it that you have to report to me?'*"

2. (:20-21) Intelligence (Information)

"*And he said, 'The Jews have agreed to ask you to bring Paul down tomorrow to the Council, as though they were going to inquire somewhat more thoroughly about him. So do not listen to them, for more than forty of them are lying in wait for him who have bound themselves under a curse not to eat or drink until they slay him; and now they are ready and waiting for the promise from you.'*"

3. (:22) Instruction

"*Therefore the commander let the young man go, instructing him, 'Tell no one that you have notified me of these things.'*"

Bock: In sum, this passage is rooted in God's providence, which moves to protect God's children, although the means are not always known as they are here. God works behind-the-scenes here. Stephen's martyrdom shows that providence also does not always mean physical rescue as here with Paul.

III. (:23-35) PROVIDENTIALLY DOCKETED FOR THE ROMAN COURT

A. **(:23-24) Preparation** to Take Paul to Felix in Caesarea

1. (:23) Soldiers

"*And he called to him two of the centurions, and said, 'Get two hundred soldiers ready by the third hour of the night to proceed to Caesarea, with seventy horsemen and two hundred spearmen.'*"

Thomas Constable: This is the third time Paul left a city secretly at night (cf. **Acts 9:25; Acts 17:10**).

2. (:24) Saddles

"*They were also to provide mounts to put Paul on and bring him safely to Felix the governor.*"

B. (:25-30) Penmanship of the Transfer Letter

1. (:25-26) Salutation

"*And he wrote a letter having this form:*
'Claudius Lysias, to the most excellent governor Felix, greetings.'"

2. (:27-29) Substance

"*When this man was arrested by the Jews and was about to be slain by them, I came upon them with the troops and rescued him, having learned that he was a Roman. And wanting to ascertain the charge for which they were accusing him, I brought him down to*

their Council; and I found him to be accused over questions about their Law, but under no accusation deserving death or imprisonment."

3. (:30) Signoff
"*And when I was informed that there would be a plot against the man, I sent him to you at once, also instructing his accusers to bring charges against him before you.*"

C. (:31-35) Process for the Hearing

1. (:31-32) Securing Paul at Antipatris
"*So the soldiers, in accordance with their orders, took Paul and brought him by night to Antipatris. But the next day, leaving the horsemen to go on with him, they returned to the barracks.*"

William Arnot: Paul is now in the hands of a thoroughly bad man; but the Roman laws are around him, and these suffice to protect him, in the meantime, alike from the foul treachery of the Jews, and the mean avarice of Felix. The law will not permit him to be tried, far less to be condemned, until he and his accusers are brought face to face before a regular tribunal. Paul is placed under arrest indeed; but it is for the protection of his life, rather than for the restraint of his liberty.

2. (:33) Staging Paul Before the Governor at Caesarea
"*And when these had come to Caesarea and delivered the letter to the governor, they also presented Paul to him.*"

3. (:34-35) Scheduling the Hearing
"*And when he had read it, he asked from what province he was; and when he learned that he was from Cilicia, he said, 'I will give you a hearing after your accusers arrive also,' giving orders for him to be kept in Herod's Praetorium.*"

CONCLUSION:

Deffinbaugh: As I think about this passage [**Rom. 8:28**], one word in particular comes to mind – HOPE. This passage gives me great hope because it demonstrates God's sovereignty in such a way that I am greatly encouraged. God's promises and purposes will be accomplished, in the midst of chaos, confusion, conflict, and human blundering.

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DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

1) When are we guilty of showing disrespect to God's appointed authorities in our life – whether at work or in the context of civil government?

2) What are some examples from your life where God worked behind the scenes in seemingly small ways to accomplish His providential care and guidance for you?

3) What promises do you cling to in times of trouble?

4) How can we tell whether God's providential working in our lives means it is time for us to wait passively upon Him or it is time for us to take action?

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QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Joseph Alexander: Having borne his testimony to the people from the castle stairs and been rejected by them, he now appears, for the same momentous purpose, in the presence of the Sanhedrin, of which he had once been a member, or at least an emissary. But the rejection of his testimony here is still more prompt and violent than in the other case (1-5). Under the influence of party spirit, the Pharisees espouse his cause, but only for the moment, and so as to increase his personal danger, from which he is a third time rescued by the Romans (6-10). The disappointed zealots from a plot against his life, from which he is a fourth time rescued by the Romans (11-22). Having been thus repeatedly rejected by the Jews and protected by the Gentiles, he is finally delivered from the power of the former, and entrusted to the keeping of the latter, being transferred by the Tribune at Jerusalem to the procurator at Cesarea (23-35).

Jack Arnold: This trial before the Sanhedrin served two purposes. First, it was the means God used in His providential care of Paul to get him officially arrested by the Romans and taken ultimately to Rome. Second, this was God's last major appeal to the Jews to turn to the Messiah, Jesus Christ. The Jews rejected Christ. They rejected the message of Stephen about Christ. They rejected the teaching of the Apostles in Jerusalem. Now, what would they do with Paul and his message about Christ? This was God's final appeal for the Jewish leaders in Jerusalem to receive Christ as Savior and Lord. Jerusalem was weighed in the balances and found wanting. They had denied the Lord, Stephen, the Apostles and now they denied Paul. The theocracy would be judged and Israel destroyed in 70 A.D. because these stiff-necked Jews refused to come to Jesus Christ, the Messiah.

Steven Cole: **When we face trials and opposition in our service for the Lord, we should trust Him to protect us by His providence and to work out His sovereign plan for our lives.**

1. We all will face trials and opposition in our service for the Lord.

Luke skillfully contrasts the kindness and lawful protection of the Roman commander with the murderous conniving of these religious Jews. This pagan man kindly took Paul's nephew by the hand, led him aside where they could talk privately, and listened to what he said. He could have scoffed at it as the wild imagination of a young boy, but he didn't do that.
Rather, he used his authority and the troops at his disposal to protect this Roman citizen so that he would receive a fair trial. And so a pagan Roman soldier shows far more kindness to Paul than his own kinsmen did. It calls to mind the story of Jonah, where the pagan sailors showed Jonah much more kindness than the disobedient prophet was willing to show towards the pagan people of Ninevah.

2. When trials and opposition hit, we should trust God to protect us by His providence and to work out His sovereign plan for our lives.

Here is how theologian Wayne Grudem defines God's providence:

God is continually involved with all created things in such a way that he (1) keeps them existing and maintaining the properties with which he created them; (2) cooperates with created things in every action, directing their distinctive properties to cause them to act as they do; and (3) directs them to fulfill his purposes.

John Calvin puts it (The Institutes of the Christian Religion, ed. by John McNeill [Westminster Press], 1:16:4), "providence means not that by which God idly observes from heaven what takes place on earth, but that by which, as keeper of the keys, he governs all events."

As Grudem's definition outlines, there are three aspects of God's providence in the Bible (I'm following his treatment and quoting him, pp. 315-354, here).

First, God's providence means **preservation**, that "God keeps all created things existing and maintaining the properties with which he created them" (p. 316). Hebrews 1:3 tells us that Christ "upholds all things by the word of His power." The Greek word translated "uphold" means to carry or bear. Grudem says, "It does not mean simply 'sustain,' but has the sense of active, purposeful control over the thing being carried from one place to another" (ibid.). Colossians 1:17 also asserts that "all things hold together" in Christ. If Jesus were to "let go," the entire universe would instantly disintegrate! Thus God did not just design the laws of science and nature and step away from them. Rather, He actively maintains such laws.

Second, God's providence means **concurrence**, that "God cooperates with created things in every action, directing their distinctive properties to cause them to act as they do" (p. 317). This includes God's causing things to happen that we would think of as merely "natural" occurrences. For example, the Bible says that God causes the rain and snow to fall on earth, along with the wind to blow and the lightning to flash (Job 37:6-13; Ps. 135:7). God also gives food to the wild animals and birds (Ps. 104:27-29; Matt. 6:26).

God governs what we might call random chance events, such as the casting of lots (Prov. 16:33). Also, God causes things to happen where His creatures also play a role. For example, I may water and fertilize my grass or a farmer his crops, but God causes them to grow. I can put water into the freezer, but God makes it freeze (Job 38:27, 29-30).

God also governs human affairs. He determines the time, existence, and boundaries of the nations (Acts 17:26). He sets up rulers and takes them down again (Dan. 4:34-35; Ps. 22:28). He governs every aspect of our lives (Jer. 10:23; Prov. 16:9; 20:24), including the number of days that we will live (Ps. 139:16). He is even sovereign over evil, although He is not tainted in any way by it nor is He responsible for it (Gen. 50:20; Acts 2:23; 4:27-28; 1 John 1:5). But He uses evil men and events to carry out His sovereign plan, even as He is doing in our story with this evil plot to kill Paul.

Third, God's providence means **government**, that "God has a purpose in all that he does in the world and he providentially governs or directs all things in order that they accomplish his purposes" (p. 331). "He does according to His will in the host of heaven and among the inhabitants of earth; and no one can ward off His hand or say to Him, 'What have You done?'" (Dan. 4:35). God "works all things after the counsel of His will" (Eph. 1:11).

TEXT: Acts 24:1-27

TITLE: YOU CAN'T HANDLE THE TRUTH

BIG IDEA:
GOSPEL PROCRASTINATION RESISTS ALL TESTIMONY TO GOD'S TRUTH

INTRODUCTION:
How ironic that the courts of human justice so often resist the testimony to God's truth and thereby serve as a venue to subvert justice. This is exactly what we see happening as Paul's trial progresses to the Roman court of the governor Felix in Caesarea. We might ask Who is really on trial in this context? For it is the convicting gospel truth courageously presented by Paul to Felix and his adulterous wife that will cause them to hide in fear and shame and guilt while Paul continues to minister with a clear conscience – despite the aggressive false charges against him.

There is much in this passage to learn about the danger of procrastination and delay in responding to gospel conviction. Where there is opportunity to embrace Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior – that opportunity must be seized. Otherwise your heart hardens and it becomes more difficult to turn from your sinful ways.

GOSPEL PROCRASTINATION RESISTS ALL TESTIMONY TO GOD'S TRUTH

I. (:1-9) UNJUSTLY CHARGED – STAGING AN OPPORTUNITY TO TESTIFY – FELIX HOLDS COURT

A. (:1) Court Trial Initiated

"*And after five days the high priest Ananias came down with some elders, with a certain attorney named Tertullus; and they brought charges to the governor against Paul.*"

Lot of effort and attention devoted by the Jews to try to bring Paul down; couldn't just let him alone; shows the effectiveness of Paul's ministry
Role of professional lawyer like Tertullus has not changed all that much down thru the centuries; Jewish officials figured they needed someone with some clout that was familiar with Roman court proceedings who could make the case for them

Frank Allen: In the last chapter we left Paul at Caesarea in Herod's palace. This was a fortress built upon a promontory extending into the sea the ruins of which still stand. The law provided that the trial of a Roman should take place as soon as possible. Therefore, within five days, as soon as word could be taken from Caesarea to Jerusalem and his accusers could return, Paul was tried before Felix the governor of Judea.

Jack Arnold: **Felix Antonia** was the Roman governor of Judea for five years and was the successor of Pontius Pilate. Felix was born a slave, but his brother Pallas, who was also a slave, became a favorite of Claudius Caesar, the Emperor of Rome. It is believed that Pallas was shown favor because he was a homosexual partner of Claudius Caesar, the emperor. Through Pallas, Felix was given the governorship of Judea. He was the first slave in history to become a governor of a Roman province. He was an absolute demagogue who abused his authority. He was ruthless, vile, greedy and totally unrestrained in his sexual behavior. It is interesting to note

that in Latin Felix means "pleasure." The Roman historian, Tacitus, said of Felix, "He wielded his kingly authority with the spirit of a slave, in all cruelty and lust." He slaughtered any and all who were a threat to his rule for he was an insecure tyrant. He had been married three times to different princesses. We know little about his first wife. His second wife was the granddaughter of Anthony and Cleopatra. His third wife was Drucilla who had been the wife of the King of Emesa. Felix, a man never to deny his lustful passion, seduced Drucilla, committing adultery and then later married her. Felix was completely unscrupulous. He would rub out anyone who got in the way of his political ambitions. It was before such a wicked judge that the Apostle Paul was to appear. . .

Perhaps his name, **Tertullus**, which means "little Tertius," tells us something about his character. Using your imagination, you can see him as a short, fat, cocky, feisty and pompous man, strutting around the courtroom trying to establish his case.

B. (:2-4) Conciliatory Opening Remarks

"*And after Paul had been summoned, Tertullus began to accuse him, saying to the governor, 'Since we have through you attained much peace, and since by your providence reforms are being carried out for this nation, we acknowledge this in every way and everywhere, most excellent Felix, with all thankfulness. But, that I may not weary you any further, I beg you to grant us, by your kindness, a brief hearing.*'"

C. (:5-6a) Charges Specified – 4 Specific Charges

1. Cancer --

"*For we have found this man a real pest*"

You would think you would start out with your strongest charge; this is pretty lame; all this uproar just to exterminate a pest? Very general characterization before we get into the 3 more specific charges

Like a cancer or a plague – **Luke 2:11** is other NT usage

Albert Barnes: This word is commonly applied to a plague, or pestilence; and then to a man who corrupts the morals of others, or who is turbulent, and an exciter of sedition. Our translation somewhat weakens the force of the original expression. Tertullus did not say that he was a pestilent fellow, but that he was the very pestilence itself. In this he referred to their belief, that he had been the cause of extensive disturbances everywhere among the Jews.

2. Political Agitator -- Schism

"*and a fellow who stirs up dissension among all the Jews throughout the world,*"

Troublemaker – this is the main charge that would be of concern to the Roman government so Tertullus leads with this to try to make his case against Paul

Where is the evidence of this dissension? True the Pharisees and the Sadducees were just at each other over the issue of the resurrection; true that there was much disagreement about Jewish-Gentile relationships within the context of the church. But where is the harm to the Roman government? Paul is a self-proclaimed Apostle to the Gentiles. It is the Jews that are causing all the upheaval.

3. Ringleader -- Sedition

"*and a ringleader of the sect of the Nazarenes.*"

Nazareth was well known as place of origin for Jesus; plus Nazarenes may have carried a negative connotation

Bock: A sect is a recognized group with identifiable beliefs. The term is used five other times in Acts (**5:17** of the Sadducees; **15:5** of the Pharisees; **26:5** of the Pharisees; **28:22** of reports to Roman Jews about Christians. . . The implication is that Paul, as a violator of Jewish law, was disturbing the peace in a way that was socially disruptive, and the Romans did try to enforce public peace in Jewish regions. The lack of a direct danger to Rome, however, is evident. The most they could chare Paul with was being allegedly disruptive.

Jack Arnold: The second charge was that of a radical ringleader of a religious heresy. The word "sect" could mean "heresy." Jews referred to early Christians as Nazarenes because they were followers of Jesus of Nazareth. The Jews were claiming that Christianity was an illegal religion not recognized by the Roman state. The Romans wanted no religious leader to come on the scene of history who would be a revolutionary since they had heard of the rumor of the Christians about a Messiah who would rule the world.

Albert Barnes: It is properly a military word, and denotes one who stands first in an army, a standard-bearer, a leader, or commander. The meaning is, that Paul had been so active, and so prominent in preaching the gospel, that he had been a leader, or the principal person, in extending the sect of the Nazarenes.

4. Desecrator -- Sacrilege

"*And he even tried to desecrate the temple;*"

This charge had already been answered by Paul earlier. Would not get much traction from the government officials.

D. (:6b-8) Case Venue

1. (:6b-8) Prior Attempt to Pass Judgment

"*and then we arrested him.*
And we wanted to judge him according to our own Law."

2. (:7-8) Present Opportunity to Pass Judgment

"*But Lysias the commander came along, and with much violence took him out of our hands, ordering his accusers to come before you. And by examining him yourself concerning all these matters, you will be able to ascertain the things of which we accuse him.*"

E. (:9) Corroboration by the Conspiring Jews

"*And the Jews also joined in the attack, asserting that these things were so.*"

II. (:10-21) UNJUSTLY CHARACTERIZED – SILENCING THE FALSE CLAIMS – FELIX HEARS PAUL'S DEFENSE

A. (:10-13) Opening Argument

1. (:10) Addressing the Governor

"*And when the governor had nodded for him to speak, Paul responded: 'Knowing that for many years you have been a judge to this nation, I cheerfully make my defense,*"

No sense of victimization or resentment on the part of Paul despite the unjust treatment.

Bock: The structure of his reply is that

- He did not make a disturbance (**vv. 11-13**),
- His relationship to the Way is not a violation of Judaism (**vv. 14-16**),
- There was no temple desecration (**vv. 17-19**),
- And there is no proof for the charges, as even the previous examination showed (**vv. 20-21**)

2. (:11-12) Appealing to His Blameless Public Behavior

"*since you can take note of the fact that no more than twelve days ago I went up to Jerusalem to worship. And neither in the temple, nor in the synagogues, nor in the city itself did they find me carrying on a discussion with anyone or causing a riot.*"

Appeals to very recent events which could easily be checked out and substantiated.

3. (:13) Asserting His Innocence of All Charges

"*Nor can they prove to you the charges of which they now accuse me.*"

As a Roman citizen, there need to be proven charges – not a mob lynching.

B. (:14-16) Objective Assessment of His Life and Ministry

1. (:14a) Follower of God's Way

"*But this I admit to you, that according to the Way which they call a sect I do serve the God of our fathers,*"

We do have religious differences – but from some common traditions.

2. (:14b) Believer in God's Word

"*believing everything that is in accordance with the Law, and that is written in the Prophets;*"

How upset can they be with someone who is so loyal to their own sacred scriptures?

3. (:15) Lover of the Resurrection

"*having a hope in God, which these men cherish themselves, that there shall certainly be a resurrection of both the righteous and the wicked.*"

4. (:16) Preserver of a Blameless Conscience

"*In view of this, I also do my best to maintain always a blameless conscience both before God and before men.*"

C. (:17-21) Opposing Accusation Addressed

1. (:17-18a) Innocent Behavior

"*Now after several years I came to bring alms to my nation and to present offerings; in which they found me occupied in the temple, having been purified, without any crowd or uproar.*"

2. (:18b-21) Incendiary False Witnesses

"*But there were certain Jews from Asia--who ought to have been present before you, and to make accusation, if they should have anything against me. Or else let these men themselves tell what misdeed they found when I stood before the Council, other than for this one statement which I shouted out while standing among them, 'For the resurrection of the dead I am on trial before you today.'*"

Frank Allen: He had manifested his love for his people by bringing a great gift of alms to them to aid them in their poverty. He had gone through the usual form of purification before he entered the temple and had aroused no tumult. Those Jews from Asia who did stir up the tumult ought to have been there to present their objections to his actions if there were any accusations which they could prove. The fact that they were not there was a reasonable assurance of his innocence.

Bruce: It may be that the Sanhedrin thought it best that the Asian Jews should not appear, as cross-examination would soon have revealed the hollowness of their charges, and a Roman judge would not look lightly upon people who wasted his time with unfounded accusations.

III. (:22-27) UNJUSTLY CONFINED – SPEAKING WORDS OF CONVICTION – FELIX HIDES FROM THE TRUTH

A. (:22-23) Confined But Allowed Special Privileges and Visitors

1. (:22) Procrastination in Judgment

"*But Felix, having a more exact knowledge about the Way, put them off, saying, 'When Lysias the commander comes down, I will decide your case.'*"

2. (:23) Privileges in Confinement

"*And he gave orders to the centurion for him to be kept in custody and yet have some freedom, and not to prevent any of his friends from ministering to him.*"

B. (:24-27) Confined But Allowed to Witness and Bring Conviction

1. (:24) Heard Paul's Testimony

"*But some days later, Felix arrived with Drusilla, his wife who was a Jewess, and sent for Paul, and heard him speak about faith in Christ Jesus.*"

2. (:25) Hid From Paul's Convicting Message

"*And as he was discussing righteousness, self-control and the judgment to come, Felix became frightened and said, 'Go away for the present, and when I find time, I will summon you.'*"

Frank Allen: He evidently fitted his message on that day to the need of the hour, for he probably knew that Felix had persuaded Drusilla to come to him from her husband Azizus, and that he was living with her in Caesarea in an adulterous relationship. Felix was not accustomed to hearing true, conscientious ministers, and it is not likely that he had any idea that Paul would talk of

righteousness and purity and judgment to come. . .

He preached to Felix and Drusilla a most searching message. Felix was alarmed and terrified. He could not bear to hear Paul go on with his denunciation of sin. He felt that the application of the Gospel which Paul had made fitted him exactly, but he was not ready to yield. It meant a revolution of life and practice for him, the giving up the woman by his side and changing his method of conducting his office. The easiest way to get the matter off his mind for the present was to dismiss the messenger and this was what he did.

Bock: Felix found himself on the horns of a dilemma. He could not convict Paul, since Lysias the tribune had found no fault in him (**23:29**), nor had the Sanhedrin (**23:9**), nor had Tertullus been able to substantiate his charges. On the other hand, Felix was unwilling to release Paul, partly because he hoped for a bribe (**26**) and partly because he wanted to curry favor with the Jews (**27**). The only other option was to postpone his verdict on the pretext that he needed the tribune's advice.

3. (:26) Hoped for a Bribe

   "*At the same time too, he was hoping that money would be given him by Paul; therefore he also used to send for him quite often and converse with him.*"

Bock: The term [*bribe*] appeared earlier in Acts when Simon tried to offer money to Peter to gain the right to distribute the Spirit (**8:18**). Felix knows from Paul's remarks about alms and offerings that Paul has access to large amounts of money, and he may assume that Paul can get more.

4. (:27) Held Paul Prisoner

   "*But after two years had passed, Felix was succeeded by Porcius Festus; and wishing to do the Jews a favor, Felix left Paul imprisoned.*"

CONCLUSION:

Illustration: Dean's argument (five year old grandson) about when he plans to put his trust in Jesus and submit to His authority … "the day He comes back." When told that would be too late, after thinking for just a few seconds, he came up with the next best alternative: "the day before Jesus comes back." Sadly that is too often the grievous error of natural man.

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DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

1) What was Paul's attitude throughout this lengthy trial process?

2) Are we courageous to confront sin where appropriate?

3) What do you think Felix understood of the Way?

4) What are some of the common excuses people give for putting off a decision regarding faith in Jesus Christ?

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QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Frank Allen: This is a striking passage illustrating the danger of delay in accepting Christ. Paul spoke to Felix and Drusilla concerning the most important subject in the world, "*concerning the faith in Christ Jesus*." He had spoken of righteousness, no doubt telling them of the righteousness of Christ and how we may be made righteous through Him. He had told them of the necessity of living a sober and pure life; he had warned them of the awful judgment which will be meted out to those who go on in sin, when at the last day God will divide the righteous from the wicked. He had no doubt called upon them to repent of their sins and be saved. He had very probably urged this wicked couple to repent at once and continue in sin no longer. But Felix, though deeply moved, alarmed, terrified by the picture of the judgment to come, still wanted to put off making a decision. At another time he would hear Paul, perhaps he would consider his plea more favorably some day in the future, but so far as history records that convenient day never came. Felix continued in sin, was recalled to Rome and would have suffered the death penalty had it not been that his brother, a favorite with the Emperor, interceded and prevailed upon him to spare his life. Felix, it appears, went on in sin and died a slave of lust, unrepentant of his many crimes.

Pharaoh put off his decision until "*tomorrow*," Felix until "*a convenient season*." What a fearful mistake! The Psalmist had before him the history of those who delayed when he said: "*To day if ye will hear his voice, harden not your heart*" (**Hebrews 3:7, 8**). Paul had dealt with many procrastinators when he said: "*behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation*" (**II Corinthians 6:2**). The writer to the Hebrews knew that multitudes had been lost because of neglect when he asked this searching question: "*How shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation*" (**Hebrews 2:3**). The opportunity which is given now may not be given again; the call which comes to you today and startles you with its burning words may not come again; the Spirit, who pleads with you so earnestly today, because you refuse to listen, may pass you by tomorrow.

Jack Arnold: Procrastination means more rejection of Christ and progressive hardening to any sensitivity in spiritual matters.

- Say not, "After I have done my fill of pleasure, I will trust Christ."
- Say not, "After I have sowed my wild oats, I will consider the claims of Jesus."
- Say not, "After I make it in business, then I will attend to my soul and spiritual realities."
- Say not, "After I get married, then I will think about being saved."
- Say not, "After I get old and have lived life to its sinful maximum, then I will receive Christ on my deathbed."

My friend, do not procrastinate, for you cannot receive Christ when it is convenient to you. You can only receive Christ when the Holy Spirit has you under conviction.

- Say not, "Tomorrow I will give up my pet sins and follow Christ," for tomorrow may never come.
- Say not, "Tomorrow I will be saved," for you may become a victim of tomorrow and never be saved.

TEXT: Acts 25:1-27

TITLE: APPEALING TO CAESAR -- THE ROAD TO ROME

BIG IDEA:
THE PROVIDENCE OF GOD NAVIGATES OUR LIFE THROUGH SURPRISING TWISTS AND TURNS TO ACCOMPLISH GOD'S KINGDOM PURPOSES

INTRODUCTION:

Why did God choose to include so much detail about the various trials involving the Apostle Paul? This forms a substantial portion of the book of Acts. Much of it may seem repetitious to us, but God wants to reinforce a number of key points:

- Validate the innocence of the Apostle Paul against all charges – both those religious charges of heresy and sacrilege concocted by the Jews; as well as any charges of political insurrection; Christianity should not be viewed as anti-government
- Track the movement in Paul's journey from Jerusalem to Rome – all guided by the sovereign Providence of God – despite all opposition and obstacles
- Point out the tension between conflicting parties (i.e. Jewish interests vs. Roman; etc.)

Think how long this process has dragged on – what is going on in the outside world in terms of the spread of Christianity and Jewish/church relationships? How has Paul been spending his time? What emotions or thoughts might have Paul been experiencing during this long period of captivity?

What do we know about God's will for Paul at this point in his life – cf. **23:11**

David Thompson: One must ask why is all of this happening to Paul? Why is God permitting a man who is completely innocent to go through all of this? The answer is, His sovereign plan is to get Paul to Rome and before He takes him to Rome, he wants him testifying of His grace found in Jesus Christ to the most powerful people in the world. God wants him in Rome and Satan does not.

THE PROVIDENCE OF GOD NAVIGATES OUR LIFE THROUGH SURPRISING TWISTS AND TURNS TO ACCOMPLISH GOD'S KINGDOM PURPOSES

Chap. 25 sets the stage for **Chap. 26** where Paul will offer his defense before Agrippa

I. (:1-12) PAUL APPEALS TO CAESAR – BANKING ON ROMAN CITIZENSHIP VS JEWISH MALICE

A. (:1-5) Jews Lobby Festus Unsuccessfully for Jerusalem Trial of Paul

1. Festus Checks Out Jerusalem

> "*Festus therefore, having arrived in the province, three days later went up to Jerusalem from Caesarea.*"

Who is this character Festus and why would he want to go to Jerusalem? **Not a procrastinator** like his predecessor Felix; very efficient and quick to act

David Thompson: It is interesting to watch the dynamics of candidates in an election year. They try to make trips to areas to gain some popularity to earn votes. They make some political move to try and smooth things out. It isn't that they want people right with God, he wants them supporting him

Kent: It was most important for a Roman procurator of Judea to establish some sort of working arrangement with the high priest and Sanhedrin if he were to govern with any degree of success.

Interesting: starts in Caesarea where Paul is and then goes up to Jerusalem and then returns – taking with him some of the accusers.

Jack Arnold: Festus replaced Felix as governor of the province of Judea in 59 A.D. Secular historians tell us that he was an honest official, dealing in fairness and justice with those whom he governed. Festus was characterized as a man who did something immediately. He did not wait. We will see this characteristic in this chapter, for we see his promptness, briskness, quickness and punctuality. This man was an administrator, but he was also unprincipled and a political expedient. Festus openly confessed Paul had done no wrong and yet he was willing to sacrifice Paul on the altar of political expediency. Festus held office for only two years and died in 61 A.D.

2. Jews Lobby for Jerusalem Trial

> "*And the chief priests and the leading men of the Jews brought charges against Paul; and they were urging him, requesting a concession against Paul, that he might have him brought to Jerusalem (at the same time, setting an ambush to kill him on the way).*"

The Jews have not given up on this strategy of getting Paul out on the open road and ambushing him – would they be willing to absorb some collateral damage and kill some of the guards as well?? Definitely so.

David Thompson: It is clear that these religious leaders still hate grace and still hate Paul and they still hate Jesus Christ whom he preaches. There is an old saying that "time heals"; well time does not heal when it comes to people who hate grace. William Larkin said you can always count on two things from religious frauds: persistence and deceit (Acts, p. 346). Jewish people will never be content, happy or at peace until Jesus Christ, her Messiah reigns. No political leader will ever solve Israel's problem.

Kent: The Jews doubtless hoped to exploit the inexperience of Festus in Judea, knowing that he would be unaware of the previous plot which had necessitated Paul's removal to Caesarea.

What type of Huge power play is taking place here?

Power struggles:

Jewish authorities vs Roman authorities
Christians vs unbelievers
Jewish interests vs Gentile interests
Christians who really understood grace vs those who were more legalistic
Court venue of Jerusalem or Caesarea as gateway to Rome

Even among the Jewish Sanhedrin – between Pharisees and Saduccees
Interests of Satan vs. God's kingdom agenda

3. Festus Maintains Trial in Caesarea

"*Festus then answered that Paul was being kept in custody at Caesarea and that he himself was about to leave shortly. 'Therefore,' he said, 'let the* ***influential men*** *among you go there with me, and if there is anything wrong about the man, let them prosecute him.*"'

Joseph Alexander: The governor's reply to their exorbitant or treacherous petition was, that Paul was already in safe-keeping at the seat of government, and as the governor expected to be there himself before long, his removal was unnecessary and indeed would be inconvenient.

B. (:6-8) Jews Accuse Paul Before Festus at Caesarea

1. Speedy Trial in Caesarea

"*And after he had spent not more than eight or ten days among them, he went down to Caesarea; and on the next day he took his seat on the tribunal and ordered Paul to be brought.*"

2. Unsubstantiated Charges Brought by the Jews from Jerusalem

"*And after he had arrived, the Jews who had come down from Jerusalem stood around him, bringing many and serious charges against him which they could not prove;*"

These Jews will just not give up – The world tends to think of religious people as more morally upstanding than the general population. What does this tell us about the potential corrupting influence of false religion?

Many and serious charges – they manufactured a whole string of accusations hoping that the sheer weight would obscure the lack of evidence for any of the specific charges

Proverbs 12:17 . . . *a false witness utters deceit.* Proverbs has a lot to say about those who bear false witness

What is the real charge against Paul? Not all the trumped up false charges, but the real charge that inflamed the Jews? That Paul continued to testify to the **resurrection of Jesus Christ. (cf. 22:7-8; 23:6; 24:15, 21)**
That is the historical fact that would substantiate all of the claims that Jesus had made to His deity – claims that the Jews considered to be blasphemy.
What evidence could Paul point to in support of the resurrection of Jesus?

3. Simple Defense by Paul

"*while Paul said in his own defense, '****I have committed no offense either against the Law of the Jews or against the temple or against Caesar****.*"'

Very simple, straightforward defense; when you are telling the truth you don't have to orchestrate a bunch of lies; no fancy legal attorney representing him
No heresy / No sacrilege / No treason

Joseph Alexander: From what Paul here denies we learn what his enemies affirmed, to wit, the same old charges of schism or apostasy (from the law), sacrilegious desecration (of the temple), and treacherous revolt (against the emperor). These are substantially the charges urged, two years before, at the bar of Felix by Tertullus (**24:5-6**).

C. (:9-12) Paul Rejects Trial at Jerusalem and Appeals to Caesar

1. Political Equivocation on the Part of Festus

> "*But Festus, wishing to do the Jews a favor, answered Paul and said, 'Are you willing to go up to Jerusalem and stand trial before me on these charges?'*"

Why so much concern about doing the Jews a favor?
Very accommodating on the part of Festus to be willing to go back to Jerusalem – he would love to put this back in their hands if he could and make it a religious trial for heresy rather than a political trial.

What do the Scriptures say about being **double-minded?**

Bruce: But he had newly entered upon his period of office as governor of Judea, the Sanhedrin was the supreme national court of the people he had come to govern, and it would be politic to begin his administration by doing something to gain their good will, if this could be done without infringing Roman justice.

2. Paul Stands on His Rights as a Roman Citizen – Appeals to Caesar

> "*But Paul said, 'I am standing before Caesar's tribunal, where I ought to be tried. **I have done no wrong to the Jews**, as you also very well know. If then I am a wrongdoer, and have committed anything worthy of death, I do not refuse to die; but if none of those things is true of which these men accuse me, no one can hand me over to them. I appeal to Caesar.'*" Remember 23:11

Illustration: Like playing the idol on the TV show Survivor – special Get Out Of Jail free card; changes the whole conversation; a real game changer

William Arnot: The right of appeal to the emperor was Paul's talisman; it was employed only in the last resort. But it was effectual. It represented the Roman empire; it wielded the power paramount of the world. Neither Festus on the one hand, nor the Jewish rulers on the other, dared to touch a hair of the prisoner's head while he lay under the shelter of imperial law.

What was Paul's view of **capital punishment** as executed by proper government authorities?

Joseph Alexander: The whole verse may be paraphrased as follows. "Why do you ask me such a needless question? Can you really expect a Roman citizen, already standing at the Roman bar, to consent to undergo another trial at the tribunal of these Jews, who have just failed again to prove their charges against me, and have therefore not the slightest claim upon me, as you must yourself be now convinced, if you knew it not before?" . . .

The possession of this citizenship, therefore, was the providential means of saving Paul, at this critical juncture, not only from the power of his Jewish foes, but also from the weakness of his Roman friends.

3. Festus Reluctantly Consigns Paul to Go to Rome

"*Then when Festus had conferred with his council, he answered, 'You have appealed to Caesar, to Caesar you shall go.'*"

Was Festus enthusiastic about sending Paul on down the line to Caesar? Why the hesitancy?

Jack Arnold: Again we see God's hand at work. We left Paul in **Acts 24** in jail with no apparent way to get out and be on his way to Rome. But in **Acts 25**, we have a change of administration, a new trial, a governor who upheld Roman law, and Paul's appeal which would take him to Rome as a prisoner to appear before Caesar. God works in strange and mysterious ways.

Next scene in this legal plot that we would expect to see is Paul being transported under heavy guard to Rome to appear before Caesar
But another scene intervenes

Blaiklock: *Appellatio*, to which process Paul thus resorted, was the act by which a litigant disputes a judgment, and the effect was that the case was brought before a higher magistrate, normally the one who had originally appointed the magistrate of the lower court…. Hence, probably, there was some measure of embarrassment for Festus when, after consultation with his board of assessors (**12**), he accepted the appeal. He had virtually acquitted the prisoner, and, as a newcomer, had no exact knowledge of the religious situation out of which the charge had arisen. He must have been at a loss of how to phrase the letter which was to accompany the appellant to the imperial court, and the terms of the communication to a tribunal so exalted as Caesar's were a matter of some importance, if only to the reputation of the magistrate concerned.

II. (:13-22) FESTUS EXPLAINS PAUL'S CASE TO AGRIPPA

A. (:13) Arrival of Agrippa and Bernice

"*Now when several days had elapsed, King Agrippa and Bernice arrived at Caesarea, and paid their respects to Festus.*"

Jack Arnold: Bernice was a very beautiful woman and was the blood sister to Agrippa II and to Drucilla, wife of Felix. Bernice made a fetish of incestuous relationships. She had been married to her uncle, Herod, King of Chalcis, but when he died she chose to live with her brother, committing the worst kind of incest. Later on, to avoid the scandal with Agrippa, Bernice left Agrippa and married Polemon, King of Pomins. She stayed married for only a brief time, and she divorced her husband. She then went back to Agrippa and together they went to Rome. Bernice then became the mistress to two successive Roman emperors, Vespasian and Titus, who were father and son.

Kent: It should not be supposed that Festus was a subordinate to Agrippa. This visit was not that of a monarch to one of his underlings, but a courtesy call from a neighboring ruler to the new procurator of an adjoining province.

B. (:14-16) Account of Paul's Case

"*And while they were spending many days there, Festus laid Paul's case before the king, saying, 'There is a certain man left a prisoner by Felix; and when I was at Jerusalem, the chief priests and the elders of the Jews brought charges against him, asking for a*

sentence of condemnation upon him. And I answered them that it is not the custom of the Romans to hand over any man before the accused meets his accusers face to face, and has an opportunity to make his defense against the charges."'

Bruce: Agrippa the younger had the reputation of being an authority on the Jewish religion, and Festus decided that he was the man who could best help him to frame the report which he had to remit to Rome in connection with Paul's appeal to the emperor.

C. (:17-19) Adjudication Revealing Only Jewish Religious Disagreements

"*And so after they had assembled here, I made no delay, but on the next day took my seat on the tribunal, and ordered the man to be brought. And when the accusers stood up, they began bringing charges against him not of such crimes as I was expecting; but they simply had some points of disagreement with him about their own religion and* ***about a certain dead man, Jesus, whom Paul asserted to be alive.***"

Very surprising case on all fronts

D. (:20-21) Appropriate Next Steps

1. (:20) Jerusalem?

"*And being at a loss how to investigate such matters, I asked whether he was willing to go to Jerusalem and there stand trial on these matters.*"

Roman officials do not seem in command of the case; they are reacting on the one hand to the pressure coming from the Jewish authorities and on the other hand to the desires of Paul himself as a Roman citizen.

2. (:21) Caesar??

"*But when Paul appealed to be held in custody for the Emperor's decision, I ordered him to be kept in custody until I send him to Caesar."*

3. (:22) Agrippa

"*And Agrippa said to Festus, 'I also would like to hear the man myself.' 'Tomorrow,' he said, 'you shall hear him.*"'

An additional unexpected hearing is now introduced into the plot line

Why would Agrippa want to hear from Paul? Influential person in religious circles; curious to hear his story

The verb "*I would like to hear*" is **imperfect tense** indicating that Herod had wanted to hear Paul for a long time.

III. (:23-27) PAUL BROUGHT BEFORE AGRIPPA AND BERNICE

A. (:23) Staging of the Hearing

"*And so, on the next day when Agrippa had come together with Bernice, amid great pomp, and had entered the auditorium accompanied by the commanders and the prominent men of the city, at the command of Festus, Paul was brought in.*"

Why so much pomp and ceremony?

Boice: In Greek the word "*pomp*" is *fantasia*. It is the word from which we get our words "fantasy" and "fantastic." It refers to something light, fleeting, or passing, something of momentary interest only. In the context of this great public display by Agrippa, Festus and the others, the word was probably chosen carefully to suggest that these seemingly important things are only passing fantasies.

Frank Arnold: Festus really laid out the red carpet for Agrippa and Bernice. In a huge banquet hall, great pomp and pageantry was carried on. Agrippa and Bernice were garbed in the clothes of the splendor of royalty. Festus was arrayed in the scarlet of a Roman procurator, and around him were his tribunes, legionaries and servants. There was beautiful music and luscious banqueting. Paul was then commanded to come into this great auditorium. In this magnificent crown, a man walked in leading the prisoner Paul whose hands were bound and whose clothes were tattered. Paul stood before this group of VIPs and gave them the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. He was not disturbed or frightened by the rank and splendor of the audience because he knew God had called him to speak before kings and governors.

Bock: The inquiry is held before the prominent people of the city and military leaders. These are probably the five tribunes, officers commanding over one thousand men each, stationed in Caesarea.

Why did Paul's case merit so much attention on the part of these high officials?
These were very important individuals with full schedules with lots of high priority duties.

Where do Scriptures make a big distinction between those people who are prominent in the eyes of the world and those who are prominent in God's kingdom?

What can we say about the courage and composure of Paul as he gives testimony to Jesus Christ before such prominent people?

B. (:24-25) Review of the Previous Findings of Festus

1. (:24) Passionate Plea for Execution by the Jews
   "*And Festus said, 'King Agrippa, and all you gentlemen here present with us, you behold this man about whom all the people of the Jews appealed to me, both at Jerusalem and here, loudly declaring that he ought not to live any longer.'*"

Penalty is supposed to fit the crime – could not make sense of Paul's situation from this standpoint.

Makes the point that he had not caved to pressure from the Jews to execute Paul – but how had he allowed the Jews to influence his judgment?

2. (:25) Examination Led to Exoneration and Appeal to Caesar
   "*But I found that he had committed nothing worthy of death; and since he himself appealed to the Emperor, I decided to send him.*"

C. (:26-27) Need for Clarification of the Charges Before Sending to Caesar

"*Yet I have nothing definite about him to write to my lord. Therefore I have brought him before you all and especially before you, King Agrippa, so that after the investigation has taken place, I may have something to write.* ***For it seems absurd to me in sending a prisoner, not to indicate also the charges against him***."

Look how the Roman officials were struggling to justify how Paul could even be considered a prisoner with charges worth pursuing.

Very concerned that he would be embarrassed by sending a prisoner with such vague charges

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DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

1) What can we learn about hatred and malice from the protracted campaign of the Jews against the Apostle Paul? What does this tell us about the potential corrupting influence of false religion?

2) Where do you see governing officials, who know what is the right course of action, give in to popular opinion and allow their judgment to be improperly influenced? Where has this happened in the church? Politics over Justice?

3) How can we rely on the providence of God – knowing that He is sovereign over all of our circumstances?

4) What type of individuals are judged to be influential and impressive by the world vs. what type in God's economy?

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QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Frank Allen: Overview: After Paul was arrested by the Roman captain, Lysias, he had been allowed to make a defense on the castle stairs. The next day Lysias attempted to give him a hearing before the Jewish council. When he was transferred to Caesarea he was tried by Felix with the Jews accusing; later he was given a hearing by Felix and Drusilla. After two years he was tried again under Festus, the successor of Felix, with the Jews still bringing the same charges against him. Later he was heard by Festus and Agrippa. Thus, after Paul's arrest before he was taken to Rome, he had six public hearings and several private conferences; but following them all the Roman officials, Lysias, Felix, Festus and Agrippa were unable to find any charge against him that was worthy of punishment.

Stott: Herod Agrippa II was the son of Herod Agrippa I of Acts 12 and the great grandson of Herod the Great. Bernice was his sister, and rumors were rife that their relationship was incestuous. Because he had been only seventeen years old when his father died, he was considered too young to assume the kingdom of Judea, which therefore reverted to rule by procurator. Instead, he was given a tiny and insignificant northern kingdom within what is now Lebanon, and this was later augmented by territory in Galilee. He was nevertheless influential in

Jewry because the Emperor Claudius had committed to him both the care of the temple and the appointment of the high priest. He and Bernice came to Caesarea to pay their respects to the new procurator, and during their stay Festus raised Paul's case, which he had inherited from Felix.

Frank Allen: There was Bernice the sister of Agrippa seated beside him, exercising nothing but contemptible curiosity for this man who was a leader of the hated sect of the Nazarenes. But worst of all, beneath the dignity and display of Agrippa, there was a heart that was corrupt and a life that was immoral since he was living in incest with his sister Bernice at this time. This man, Agrippa the Second, was the last of the cruel Herods. His great-grandfather is remembered because he murdered the infant children in trying to kill Jesus. His grand-uncle had beheaded John the Baptist. This had come about because John had reproved Herod for his immoral relationship with Herodias, his brother's wife. His father, who was known as Agrippa I, had taken the life of James and attempted to kill Peter. He had been eaten of worms because he took to himself the honor which belongs to God. Each of the Herods which we have named died or was disgraced not long after the events just mentioned. The name of Jesus had lived and his following had enlarged, but the glory of the Herods had almost departed. However cruel the Herods had been to the Christians in the past Paul would not cower before them. The faith of Paul could rise above all human handicaps. He knew that the grace of God was sufficient to sustain him under all circumstances. He would speak with all the courtesy, earnestness and persuasion that he was able to use.

David Thompson: Bernice was also the daughter of Herod Agrippa I and the sister of Drusilla (**Acts 24:24**). She was one year older than her brother. She had been married but when her husband died, she moved in with her brother and there were incestuous rumors about their relationship between both Jews and Romans. This couple was the leading scandal of this time.

TEXT: Acts 26:1-32

TITLE: PERSONAL TESTIMONY TO THE HOPE OF THE GOSPEL

BIG IDEA:
EFFECTIVE PERSONAL TESTIMONY COVERS OUR PRE-CONVERSION LIFE, OUR SAVING ENCOUNTER WITH JESUS CHRIST, AND OUR TRANSFORMED LIFE AND MINISTRY

INTRODUCTION:
Remember that the purpose of this inquiry before Agrippa was to help Festus prepare specific charges to write down in the letter that would accompany Paul to Caesar in Rome (**25:26-27**). Agrippa's familiarity with Jewish doctrine and practice uniquely equipped him to understand the issues of this controversy. Paul used this stage to present his streamlined (elevator speech) testimony that covered his pre-conversion days, his conversion encounter with Jesus and his post conversion transformed life and ministry. What a model for the type of testimony each of us should be prepared to offer up today.

EFFECTIVE PERSONAL TESTIMONY COVERS OUR PRE-CONVERSION LIFE, OUR SAVING ENCOUNTER WITH JESUS CHRIST, AND OUR TRANSFORMED LIFE AND MINISTRY

I. (:1-11) PRE-CONVERSION TESTIMONY OF LIFE AS A STRICT PHARISEE

A. (:1-3) Personal Entreaty to King Agrippa

> "*And Agrippa said to Paul, 'You are permitted to speak for yourself.' Then Paul stretched out his hand and proceeded to make his defense: 'In regard to all the things of which I am accused by the Jews, I consider myself fortunate, King Agrippa, that I am about to make my defense before you today; especially because you are an expert in all customs and questions among the Jews; therefore I beg you to listen to me patiently.*'"

Paul does not want to be interrupted prematurely; he wants to be allowed to give his entire defensive argument – explaining his conversion and the motivation for his gospel ministry "apologia" – from which we get apologetics

Kent: Paul was not now on trial. All trials in the provincial courts had ceased the moment his appeal to the emperor was allowed. This occasion was arranged to satisfy Agrippa's interest in Paul, and also to provide Festus with information with which to write an accusation to send to Rome.

Stott: It was a dramatic moment when the holy and humble apostle of Jesus Christ stood before this representative of the worldly, ambitious, morally corrupt family of the Herods, who for generation after generation had set themselves in opposition to truth and righteousness.

Constable: The Lord had told Paul that he would bear His name before the Gentiles and kings (**Acts 9:15**). Jesus had also told His disciples that before the Tribulation enemies would deliver them to prison and bring them before kings and governors for His name's sake. This, He said, would lead to an opportunity for their testimony (**Luke 21:12-13**). This is exactly what happened to Paul, and he used this opportunity to give his testimony, as this chapter records.

B. (:4-5) Jewish Upbringing as a Strict Pharisee

> "*So then, all Jews know my manner of life from my youth up, which from the beginning was spent among my own nation and at Jerusalem; since they have known about me for a long time previously, if they are willing to testify, that I lived as a Pharisee according to the strictest sect of our religion.*"

Paul could not be accused of being ignorant of the Jewish beliefs and practices and traditions; he was steeped in them

Constable: Paul said that it was because of his Jewish heritage, not in spite of it, that he believed and preached what he did. The Jewish hope finds fulfillment in the Christian gospel. It was, therefore, ironic that the Jews, of all people, should have charged him with disloyalty.

C. (:6-8) Resurrection Hope Consistent with Jewish Tradition

> "*And now I am standing trial for the hope of the promise made by God to our fathers; the promise to which our twelve tribes hope to attain, as they earnestly serve God night and day. And for this hope, O King, I am being accused by Jews. Why is it considered incredible among you people if God does raise the dead?*"

Abrahamic promises make no sense apart from a future hope;

Kent: the issue was the hope of salvation for Israel. This had been promised to the patriarchs and enlarged by the prophets to include the sending of a divine Deliverer whose coming would bring the salvation for which they longed, and would also issue in resurrection that even those who had died might participate in Messiah's reign.

Bruce: That a faithful Pharisee believed in the resurrection of the dead, and saw no fulfilment of Israel's ancient hope apart from the resurrection, went without saying. But the amazing and indeed absurd feature of the present dispute was that he was being prosecuted for his proclamation of this very hope – and prosecuted by Jews, of all people! But this hope was the hope that God would keep the promise which He made to the fathers of the nation long ago; it was the hope which gave life and meaning and purpose to the ordinances of divine worship, faithfully maintained by all twelve tribes of Israel generation after generation – the hope that God would one day come down to deliver His people as He had done when they were slaves in Egypt, that He would raise up a horn of salvation for them "*in the house of His servant David, as He spoke by the mouth of His holy prophets from of old"* (cf. **Luke 1:69f**.).

Application: If we were to be examined regarding our personal testimony would there be enough evidence to convict us of standing for the hope of the gospel?

D. (:9-11) Zealous Persecution of Christians

> "*So then, I thought to myself that I had to do many things hostile to the name of Jesus of Nazareth. And this is just what I did in Jerusalem; not only did I lock up many of the saints in prisons, having received authority from the chief priests, but also when they were being put to death I cast my vote against them. And as I punished them often in all the synagogues, I tried to force them to blaspheme; and being furiously enraged at them, I kept pursuing them even to foreign cities.*"

The Jews are treating him unjustly even as he had tried to force Christians to blaspheme

II. (:12-18) CONVERSION TESTIMONY LEADING TO HIS COMMISSIONING

A. (:12-14) Crisis Conversion = Damascus Road Experience

1. (:12-13) Saw the Light

   "*While thus engaged as I was journeying to Damascus with the authority and commission of the chief priests, at midday, O King, I saw on the way a light from heaven, brighter than the sun, shining all around me and those who were journeying with me.*"

2. (:14) Heard the Voice

   "*And when we had all fallen to the ground, I heard a voice saying to me in the Hebrew dialect, 'Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me? It is hard for you to kick against the goads.'*"

Bock: All fell down, but only Saul heard the voice. Only this version notes that all fell to the ground. This shows that it was a real, external event, not merely an internal vision of Jesus. Only Saul, however, understood the exchange.

Constable: Goads were sharp sticks used to drive cattle. The figure of kicking against goads was and is a common rural metaphor that describes opposing the inevitable (like "banging your head against a wall"). Such action only hurts the one doing it, not the object of his hostility. This was the case in Paul's antagonism to God that his persecution of Christians expressed.

Dave Guzik: These words emphasize:

- The personal appeal of Jesus (*Saul, Saul*).
- The misdirected nature of his persecution (*Me*).
- The folly of persecuting Jesus (*Why*).

Application: When people offer resistance to our presentation of the gospel and treat us harshly because of our identification with Christ, they ultimately are persecuting Christ Himself. We should not take it personally but count it joy to fellowship in the sufferings of Christ.

B. (:15) Confrontation with Jesus

"*And I said, 'Who art Thou, Lord?' And the Lord said, 'I am Jesus whom you are persecuting.*"

C. (:16-18) Commissioning to Bear Witness

1. (:16) The Directive = Appointed to Communicate God's Revelation

   "*But arise, and stand on your feet; for this purpose I have appeared to you, to appoint you a minister and a witness not only to the things which you have seen, but also to the things in which I will appear to you;*"

Stott: Christ's commission of Saul took the form of three verbs, all in the first person singular of direct speech, although respectively in the past, future and present tenses: "*I have appeared to you*", "*I will rescue you*" and "*I am sending you*".

Application: We all have been called to be witnesses for Christ. It is not a matter of whether or not we will be a witness … but rather what type of witness will we be?

2. (:17) The Deliverance = Lifting of the Veil of Darkness / Freedom from Bondage
"*delivering you from the Jewish people and from the Gentiles, to whom I am sending you, to open their eyes so that they may turn from darkness to light and from the dominion of Satan to God,*"

Bruce: That believing Gentiles were to have an equal and rightful share in the heritage of the holy people of God, was a feature of the gospel which it was Paul's peculiar mission first to understand and make known (cf. **Eph. 2:19; 3:1** ff.).

Stott: A similar promise of "*rescue*" was made to Jeremiah. This did not guarantee immunity to suffering. On the contrary, it was part of the vocation of prophets and apostles to endure suffering (cf**. 9:16**). But it did mean that their testimony would not be silenced until their God-appointed work was done.

3. (:18) The Destination = Lofty Goal
"*in order that they may receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among those who have been sanctified by faith in Me.*"

Bock: So the gift of the gospel has two prime elements:
(1) the forgiveness of sins and
(2) the reception of a place with God and the saints

III. (:19-23) GOSPEL WITNESS OF THE NEED FOR REPENTANCE AND FAITH ON THE PART OF ALL PEOPLE

A. (:19-21) Preaching Repentance and Faith to All

1. (:19-20) The Preaching
"*Consequently, King Agrippa, I did not prove disobedient to the heavenly vision, but kept declaring both to those of Damascus first, and also at Jerusalem and then throughout all the region of Judea, and even to the Gentiles, that they should repent and turn to God, performing deeds appropriate to repentance.*"

2. (:21) The Persecution
"*For this reason some Jews seized me in the temple and tried to put me to death.*"

B. (:22-23) Pressing the Application to All People

"*And so, having obtained help from God, I stand to this day testifying both to small and great, stating nothing but what the Prophets and Moses said was going to take place; that the Christ was to suffer, and that by reason of His resurrection from the dead He should be the first to proclaim light both to the Jewish people and to the Gentiles.*"

Stott: This renewed claim that Paul was not an innovator, but a faithful exponent of the Scriptures, also had its parallel in Luther and the other sixteenth-century Reformers. They were accused by the Roman Catholic Church of teaching novelties. But they denied it. "We teach no new thing," Luther claimed, "but we repeat and establish old things, which the apostles and all godly teachers have taught before us." Or, as Lancelot Andrewes was to say a century later, "we are renovators not innovators.

Lenski: Paul does not complain about the treatment he received from the Jews, his own nationalists. Two years of Roman imprisonment have not embittered him against those who occasioned it by their murderous attack upon him in the temple. Not one harsh or hateful word appears in his address. What he sees is this wonderful help of God which came to his rescue at that critical moment and by rescuing him then enabled him to stand as a constant confessor to this very day.

Johnny Potter: What is this new and different light that Christ would be the first to proclaim? Could it be The Light that is uniquely found in the person of Jesus Christ, a LIGHT that produces a LIFE that is also uniquely found in Jesus Christ, a LIFE that up until the time of Christ had not been available to mankind, a truly new LIFE? I think this is exactly the thought behind this phrase. Listen to these Scripture readings: regarding light: **Gen 1:1-3; Psalm 27:1; Psalm 36:9; John 1:1-4; John 8:12; 2 Timothy 1:10**. The Christ "*would be the first to proclaim light*" in the sense of the unique light that yields the ultimate life God intends for us, life that is distinct and different than the biological life with which we are familiar. Paul testified of the Christ who was the first to proclaim THAT LIGHT AND LIFE!

IV. (:24-32) CONCLUDING INTERACTIONS – SEEKING CONVERTS

A. (:24-26) Paul's Interaction with Festus – "I Speak the Sober Truth"

"*And while Paul was saying this in his defense, Festus said in a loud voice, 'Paul, you are out of your mind! Your great learning is driving you mad.'*"

"*But Paul said, 'I am not out of my mind, most excellent Festus, but I utter words of sober truth.'*"

"*For the king knows about these matters, and I speak to him also with confidence, since I am persuaded that none of these things escape his notice; for this has not been done in a corner.*"

Interesting that Festus interrupts but Agrippa does not deny Paul's claims; Festus still has nothing concrete to write down to pass along to Caesar

The gospel message is foolishness to the Gentiles

Steven Cole: Festus was a rationalist. For him, the notion that Jesus or anyone else could rise from the dead was just plain crazy. He thought that in spite of Paul's great learning, saying such things proved that the man had lost his mind. He believed in philosophy and logic, not in religious superstition.

B. (:27-29) Paul's Interaction with King Agrippa – "I Desire Your Salvation"

"*King Agrippa, do you believe the Prophets? I know that you do.*"

"*And Agrippa replied to Paul, 'In a short time you will persuade me to become a Christian.'*"

"*And Paul said, 'I would to God, that whether in a short or long time, not only you, but also all who hear me this day, might become such as I am, except for these chains.'*"

Saying essentially: "Do you think that in such a short time you can persuade me to be a Christian?" e.g. I see where you arguments and questions are going; you are calling for a decision

Bruce: Therefore he could not admit that he did believe the prophets; on the other hand, he could not say that he did not believe them, for his reputation for orthodoxy and his influence with the Jews would be gone if he did. So he turned Paul's appeal aside with a smile…"

Humor on the part of Paul = "*except for these chains*"

C. (:30-32) Sidebar Discussions – Paul is Innocent of All Serious Charges

1. (:30-31) General Consensus
   "*And the king arose and the governor and Bernice, and those who were sitting with them, and when they had drawn aside, they began talking to one another, saying, 'This man is not doing anything worthy of death or imprisonment.'*"

2. (:32) Official Dilemma
   "*And Agrippa said to Festus, 'This man might have been set free if he had not appealed to Caesar.'*"

Dave Guzik: It seems that Paul might have been set free here if he had not appealed to Caesar. So, was Paul's appeal to Caesar a good thing or a bad thing?

i. Some people believe it was a bad thing, and that Paul was trusting in the power of the Roman legal system instead of in the power of God. They say that Paul might have been set free by Agrippa if he had not appealed to Caesar.

ii. However, we should see the fulfillment of God's plan through all these events. By his appeal to Caesar, Paul will have the opportunity to preach to the Roman Emperor the way he had to Felix, Festus, and Agrippa, thus fulfilling the promise that Paul would bear My name before…kings (**Acts 9:15**).

iii. The appeal to Caesar, and his subsequent journey to Rome at the Empire's expense, were also the fulfillment of the Holy Spirit's purpose that Paul should go to Rome (**Acts 19:21, 23:11**). This also answered a long-standing desire in the heart of Paul to visit the already present Christian community there (**Romans 1:9-13**).

CONCLUSION:

S. Lewis Johnson: There's a marvelous story with which I'll conclude, of a well-known preacher who was concluding his message, and in concluding his message he wanted to bring home the facts of the gospel of Christ, and he chose to use the text in the Old Testament, "*Turn ye, turn ye from your evil ways, for why will ye die O house of Israel?*" And he said first, "Why will ye die? Why this desperate resolve? Why this firmness? Why will ye die? You vacillate elsewhere, why are you so obstinate here?" He emphasized the first word "why." "What reason have you got? What motive have you got? What argument? What apologies? What excuses? Why will ye die?" And then turning to the little pronoun "you" he said, "Why will ye die, you gray heads?" . . . You face soon, perhaps, the relationship with the Lord God. Why will you die? Or you young people,

why will you die?" He said, "You who have such promise and opportunity, your life, so far as we know, lied ahead of you. Why will ye die?" And finally, he emphasized the final word, "Why will ye die? Why this determination to make your way ultimately to the lake of fire? Why are you so purposing in all that you do, to spend your time in separation from the Lord God? And he concluded with the text, "Turn ye, turn ye from your evils ways, for why will ye die O house of Israel?" Well, that's a marvelous way to conclude this sermon. Why will ye die?

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DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

1) What should our approach be to apologetics?

2) What does Paul have to say about good works in relation to the gospel message?

3) How has God used your personal testimony of conversion and ministry?

4) Where have we seen our testimony treated as foolishness and madness and how did we respond?

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QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Stott: Paul's three defenses were successful. Neither Felix, nor Festus, nor Agrippa found him guilty. Instead, each indicated that he was innocent of the charges made against him. Paul was not content with this, however. He went further. He proclaimed in court his threefold loyalty – to Moses and the prophets, to Caesar, and above all to Jesus Christ who met him on the Damascus road. He was a faithful Jew, a faithful Roman and a faithful Christian.

Bock: We also see a summary of how evangelism takes place (Fernando 1998: 598-605). God calls and enables, both through circumstances and through faithful witnesses. These witnesses speak to anyone, great or small, about Jesus. The message is focused on what God has done with and through Jesus on behalf of others. Christianity is neither merely an ethic nor a culturally grounded faith that has contributed to Western culture; it is a divinely revealed relationship to God that God initiates through the work and provision he graciously provides through Jesus, an obstacle-free way into fellowship with him. It is rooted in teaching that God has revealed in words of promise, in Scripture, and through attested events. This message is for anyone, east or west, north or south, rich or poor, slave or free. It is presented with persuasion and invitation but not coercion.

Boice: The apostle Paul was turned around. He could testify to the grace of God in his transformation. If the Lord Jesus Christ has stopped you and turned you around, then you can testify too. If you are not testifying to God's grace or if you feel you cannot, you need to examine yourself to see whether you have really met Jesus. Has Jesus turned you from sin? Has he revealed himself to you? Have you come to trust him?

Dan Duncan: That's the condition of man. He is so blind he cannot see how blind he is, and so

Paul's mission was to go to the blind and tell them how blind they are, to give them the truth and in that way to open their eyes so that they would turn from darkness to light, from Satan to God, and Paul did that by speaking the truth. He did that by reasoning with men. We have seen him doing that throughout the book of Acts as he has gone into the synagogues of the Jews and into the marketplaces of the Gentiles. He would give well-reasoned explanations of biblical truth, as he was doing before this group of people, Agrippa, Bernice, Festus, the Roman commanders and all of the rich and powerful people that were there. He made things clear.

He spoke in a very clear way, but it wasn't Paul who opened eyes. That is God's work, the work of the Holy Spirit who shines light into the darkness of the heart, who brings the truth to bear upon a person's sinful condition, their mind, and their will. It is He, the Spirit of God, who opens hearts to respond. That is the greatness of grace. But Paul is said to do it. It is given as his mission because it occurs through the preaching of the gospel, and Paul would go out and preach the gospel. That's when regeneration occurs. That's when this life occurs. It occurs in connection with the preaching of the gospel.

TEXT: Acts 27:1-44

TITLE: DELIVERANCE THROUGH SHIPWRECK

BIG IDEA:
FAITH IN GOD'S PROVIDENCE CAN SPILL OVER TO IMPACT UNBELIEVERS AROUND US

INTRODUCTION:
Raging storms and fearful shipwrecks are common metaphors for the difficult times that we can experience in life. What is our demeanor during these crisis moments? What type of faith in God and leadership traits do we portray? How strong is our confidence in the Providence of God and His presence with us and loving care for us during those times that seem hopeless from a natural perspective?

Sometimes our demeanor and faith in God during such times of crisis can prove to be a blessing to non-believers as well. Such was the case with Paul's experience as he was being transported by sea to Rome under centurion guard along with a group of other prisoners.

Frank Allen: It was evidently the latter part of the summer when Festus had completed arrangements to send Paul to Rome. He was committed, with certain other prisoners, to the care of a centurion named Julius who was in charge of a band of Roman soldiers. The first ship in which they sailed was bound for the north-east part of the Aegean Sea, to a place called Adramyttium. Two of Paul's friends were with him, Luke, the writer of this narrative, and Aristarchus of Thessalonica. It seems to have taken about two months to complete the voyage.

Brian Bell: The last 2 chapters are an extensive travel narrative, which include: the route followed, landmarks passed, heavy use of technical seafaring terminology, & ancient sailing techniques; but most importantly some great practical wisdom during life's crisis!

Dr. Liam Goligher: I don't think there's anything more terrifying than a wreck, whether it's a car wreck or a plane crash, or a shipwreck. Perhaps the shipwreck is the most terrifying of all because of the prolonged agony that the passengers and the crew endure. Here in Acts 27, we have the best account from the ancient world of a shipwreck. It's a one-of-a-kind thing. It's one of the best told stories in ancient history. It's also the product of an eyewitness. Luke, who writes it, was there. He is accurate in terms of the route the ship took, ancient navigating skills which he refers to, even the details of the ship's physical construction and the way in which the sailors tried to cope with the storm.

FAITH IN GOD'S PROVIDENCE CAN SPILL OVER TO IMPACT UNBELIEVERS AROUND US

I. (:1-8) DIFFICULT JOURNEY BY SEA TOWARDS FINAL DESTINATION – DIVINE PROVIDENCE SETS OUR COURSE (WE ARE NOT IN CONTROL)

A. (:1) Prisoners (Including Paul) Escorted by Centurion Named Julius

"*And when it was decided that we should sail for Italy, they proceeded to deliver Paul and some other prisoners to a centurion of the Augustan cohort named Julius.*"

Luke accompanying Paul on this journey so this is a firsthand account of what took place

Jack Arnold: Paul was probably the only prisoner on the voyage who was a Roman citizen. The others were criminals who were sent to Rome for execution. Many of them would become gladiators and would be fed to the wild beasts. These prisoners would be men whose future was one of despair and hopelessness. Yet this gave Paul an excellent opportunity to share Christ with these men so as to give them an eternal hope. Paul and the prisoners were delivered to Julius who apparently was a very kind- hearted man who treated Paul with courtesy and respect throughout the whole voyage. Julius was a very important soldier; he belonged to the Augustan Cohort of the Roman military establishment which was a very prestigious outfit, a hand-picked body of soldiers responsible directly to the emperor himself. We have every reason to believe that Paul shared Christ with Julius on a personal level many times.

William Barclay: Paul has embarked upon his last journey. Two things must have lifted up his heart. One was the kindness of a stranger, for all through the voyage Julius, the Roman centurion, treated Paul with kindness and consideration which were more than mere courtesy. He is said to have belonged to the Augustan Cohort. That may have been a special corps acting as liaison officers between the Emperor and the provinces. If so, Julius must have been a man of long experience and with an excellent military record. It may well be that when Paul and Julius stood face to face one brave man recognized another. The other uplifting thing was the devotion of Aristarchus. It has been suggested that there was only one way in which Aristarchus could have accompanied Paul on this last journey and that was by enrolling himself as Paul's slave. It is probable that Aristarchus chose to act as the slave of Paul rather than be separated from him--and loyalty can go no further than that.

B. (:2-3) First Leg of the Journey – Arriving at Sidon

1. (:2) Setting Sail Along Coast of Asia with Aristarchus

"*And embarking in an Adramyttian ship, which was about to sail to the regions along the coast of Asia, we put out to sea, accompanied by Aristarchus, a Macedonian of Thessalonica.*"

Aristarchus – **Col. 4:10; Philemon 24**

Bruce: The port of embarkation is not specified; probably it was Caesarea.

2. (:3) Harboring at Sidon with Special Benefits

"*And the next day we put in at Sidon; and Julius treated Paul with consideration and allowed him to go to his friends and receive care.*"

What type of care did Paul receive? Was he suffering from some type of physical ailment? Certainly he could use additional supplies for the next leg of his journey. Paul had very close friendships that had been forged in some of his previous missionary journies.

C. (:4-5) Second Leg of the Journey – Arriving at Myra in Lycia

"*And from there we put out to sea and sailed under the shelter of Cyprus because the winds were contrary. And when we had sailed through the sea along the coast of Cilicia and Pamphylia, we landed at Myra in Lycia.*

Things are progressing nicely at this point … despite some challenges from contrary winds

D. (:6-8) Third Leg of the Journey – Arriving at Fair Havens near Lasea

"*And there the centurion found an Alexandrian ship sailing for Italy, and he put us aboard it. And when we had sailed slowly for a good many days, and with difficulty had arrived off Cnidus, since the wind did not permit us to go farther, we sailed under the shelter of Crete, off Salmone; and with difficulty sailing past it we came to a certain place called Fair Havens, near which was the city of Lasea.*"

Frank Allen: They sailed slowly westward about one hundred miles, in the face of adverse winds, almost to Cnidus; but as the wind was so strongly against them they turned southward toward the island of Crete. They sailed around Cape Salmone, at the eastern point of the island, and anchored at a place then known, and still known, as Fair Havens. It is a harbor at the south-central portion of the island.

Boice: Fair Havens was not a "fair" place. It must have been named by the Chamber of Commerce to try to get people to visit it, which they normally tried to avoid doing. It was now late in the sailing season. The sailors knew they would not be able to reach Rome before winter. They would have to winter somewhere. "But not Fair Havens," they must have said. "Anywhere but Fair Havens. There is nothing to do here at all. If we get stuck in Fair Havens, it's going to be a long, hard winter." They knew there was a nicer port further along the coast, a place called Phoenix. So when a gentle south wind began to blow they decided to take a chance and go for it.

II. (:9-20) DESPERATE SITUATION DUE TO HUGE STORM AT SEA – DIVINE PROVIDENCE CAN THROW US A CURVE THAT POINTS TOWARDS HOPELESSNESS

A. (:9-12) Warning of Paul Ignored

1. (:9-10) Warning Delivered

"*And when considerable time had passed and the voyage was now dangerous, since even the fast was already over, Paul began to admonish them, and said to them, 'Men, I perceive that the voyage will certainly be attended with damage and great loss, not only of the cargo and the ship, but also of our lives.'*"

Albert Barnes: It is evident that, when they started, they had hoped to reach Italy before the dangerous time of navigating the Mediterranean should arrive. But they had been detained and embarrassed contrary to their expectation, so that they were now sailing in the most dangerous and tempestuous time of the year.

2. (:11-12) Warning Ignored

"*But the centurion was more persuaded by the pilot and the captain of the ship, than by what was being said by Paul. And because the harbor was not suitable for wintering, the majority reached a decision to put out to sea from there, if somehow they could reach Phoenix, a harbor of Crete, facing southwest and northwest, and spend the winter there.*"

Dr. Liam Goligher: The shipowner, probably thinking of the bottom line and the profit margin, favored pushing on as quickly as possible but Paul, who was no sailor, was nonetheless a

seasoned traveler and he warned against going. One of the things that we know about Paul is that by this stage we know from an earlier letter he wrote he had already experienced in his life three shipwrecks so he may not have been a seasoned sailor but he did have some experience of heavy weather and so he warns.

B. (:13-20) Wind Storm Leads to Despair

1. (:13) False Confidence

> "*And when a moderate south wind came up, supposing that they had gained their purpose, they weighed anchor and began sailing along Crete, close inshore.*"

2. (:14-17) Forced Conduct

> "*But before very long there rushed down from the land a violent wind, called Euraquilo; and when the ship was caught in it, and could not face the wind, we gave way to it, and let ourselves be driven along. And running under the shelter of a small island called Clauda, we were scarcely able to get the ship's boat under control. And after they had hoisted it up, they used supporting cables in undergirding the ship; and fearing that they might run aground on the shallows of Syrtis, they let down the sea anchor, and so let themselves be driven along.*"

Albert Barnes: Called *Euroclydon*. Interpreters have been much perplexed about the meaning of this word, which occurs nowhere else in the New Testament. The most probable supposition is, that it denotes a wind not blowing steadily from any quarter, but a hurricane, or wind veering about to different quarters. Such hurricanes are known to abound in the Mediterranean, and are now called *Levanters*, deriving their name from blowing chiefly in the Levant, or eastern part of the Mediterranean. The name *Euroclydon* is derived probably from two Greek words, \~*eurov*\~, wind, and \~*kludwn*\~, a wave; so called from its agitating and exciting the waves. It thus answers to the usual effects hurricane, or of a wind rapidly changing its points of compass.

Frank Allen: They found a temporary shelter to the leeward of a little island called Clauda, which is about twenty-three miles from the Fair Havens, and with great difficulty under-girded, or frapped, the ship, that is, wound great cables around the hull. This is only done in the greatest extremity. It is done to prevent the ship from springing a leak and foundering, owing to the great strain upon the mast in a terrible storm. The old single-masted ships were more apt to spring a leak in a storm because the strain all came in one place and was not distributed over the ship as in modern vessels. This was no small ship. It would be small in comparison with our largest ocean liners, but it was not small when, in addition to its cargo of grain, it could carry two hundred and seventy-six passengers.

Jack Arnold: As they drifted by an island, there was a brief letup in the fierceness of the wind because the island provided a degree of protection. They took advantage of this lull to draw on board the dinghy, a small lifeboat, which was normally towed behind the ship. The sea was so choppy that they barely were able to get the lifeboat in the ship.

Blaiklock: The storm was now heavy upon the lumbering vessel, as it came roaring out of the north-east. Far to the south, off the African coast, lay the notorious Syrtes (**17**), the graveyard of many ships, as underwater archaeology has vividly revealed in recent years. Hence the battle to maintain a westerly course, aided, it appears, by a veering of the wind to the east, as the cyclonic disturbance shifted its centre.

3. (:18-20) Failing Confidence

> "*The next day as we were being violently storm-tossed, they began to jettison the cargo; and on the third day they threw the ship's tackle overboard with their own hands. And since neither sun nor stars appeared for many days, and no small storm was assailing us, from then on all hope of our being saved was gradually abandoned.*"

Bruce: Eleven dreary nights and days followed. The storm blotted out the sun by day and stars by night, and thus they had no means of keeping a reckoning. The ship was no doubt leaking badly, and they "could not tell which way to make for the nearest land, in order to run their ship ashore, the only resource for a sinking ship; but unless they did make the land, they must founder at sea" (Voyage, p. 117). No wonder, then, that they began to lose all hope of ever reaching safety.

III. (:21-44) DANGEROUS ORDEAL BUT SAFE ON LAND AT LAST – DIVINE PROVIDENCE VALIDATES OUR CALM AND COURAGEOUS FAITH

A. (:21-26) Divine Assurance

> "*And when they had gone a long time without food, then Paul stood up in their midst and said, 'Men, you ought to have followed my advice and not to have set sail from Crete, and incurred this damage and loss. And yet now I urge you to keep up your courage, for there shall be no loss of life among you, but only of the ship. For this very night an angel of the God to whom I belong and whom I serve stood before me, saying, Do not be afraid, Paul; you must stand before Caesar; and behold, God has granted you all those who are sailing with you. Therefore, keep up your courage, men, for I believe God, that it will turn out exactly as I have been told. But we must run aground on a certain island.*"'

Frank Arnold: Paul had the same crisis as these other men on the ship. The storm and danger was no less severe for Paul than anyone else. He had the same set of circumstances that these pagans had but he approached them differently. Under pressure, Paul had the loving Christ with him and he had the assurance of victory in death and the promise that all would work out for good. Their pagan gods of Zeus and Jupiter could not help them, but Christ gave Paul the power to be calm and encourage these pagans. They must have been impressed with this man Paul, for they saw he was different.

Albert Barnes: None of their lives shall be lost. It does not mean that they should be converted; but that their lives should be preserved. It is implied here that it was for the sake of Paul, or that the leading purpose of the Divine interposition to rescue them from danger was to save his life. The wicked often derive important benefits from being connected with Christians; and God often confers important favours on them in his general purposes to benefit his own people. The lives of impenitent men are often spared because God interposes to save his own people.

Kent: Paul had a fresh message from God assuring him that he would live to stand before Caesar, and that all of his fellow passengers would be spared as well. Paul appears in this narrative as a most unusual prisoner – advising, encouraging, and receiving divine enlightenment. God's remarkable dealings with him on this voyage are doubtless one of the important reasons why Luke has recorded this sea voyage in such detail.

Brian Bell: **4 ANCHORS TO DROP IN ANY STORM**:

1. The Anchor of GOD'S PRESENCE.
   23a "*For there stood by me this night an angel of the God to whom I belong, and whom I serve*."
2. The Anchor of GOD'S PEACE.
   24a "*Do not be afraid, Paul*."
3. The Anchor of GOD'S PLAN.
   24b "*you must be brought before Caesar*."
4. The Anchor of GOD'S PROTECTION.
   24c "*and indeed, God has granted you, all those who sail with you*."

B. (:27-32) Desertion Aborted

1. (:27-29) Anchoring Near Land

"*But when the fourteenth night had come, as we were being driven about in the Adriatic Sea, about midnight the sailors began to surmise that they were approaching some land. And they took soundings, and found it to be twenty fathoms; and a little farther on they took another sounding and found it to be fifteen fathoms. And fearing that we might run aground somewhere on the rocks, they cast four anchors from the stern and wished for daybreak.*"

William Arnot: While they waited in this position for the dawn, they were exposed to two dangers, known to the seamen, but of which the landsmen on board would not be aware. On one hand, the anchors might drag; -- in point o fact they held fast, but this could not be known till experience proved it. It is worthy of note that in the English sailing directions you learn that the ground in St Paul's Bay is so good that "while the cables hold there is no danger, as the anchors will never start." But, on the other hand, the ship might founder at anchor. The risk of this was greater now than when she was drifting.

2. (:30-32) Attempted Escape Thwarted by Paul

"*And as the sailors were trying to escape from the ship, and had let down the ship's boat into the sea, on the pretense of intending to lay out anchors from the bow, Paul said to the centurion and to the soldiers, 'Unless these men remain in the ship, you yourselves cannot be saved.' Then the soldiers cut away the ropes of the ship's boat, and let it fall away.*"

Frank Allen: During the darkness the sailors were planning to escape in the little boat and leave the soldiers and passengers to their fate. Paul's eagle eye caught their movements and discerned their intentions although they were pretending to cast anchors out of the foreship. He told the centurion and the soldiers, who drew their short swords and cut the ropes, allowing the boat to fall off into the sea.

C. (:33-38) Dining Appropriately

"*And until the day was about to dawn, Paul was encouraging them all to take some food, saying, 'Today is the fourteenth day that you have been constantly watching and going without eating, having taken nothing. Therefore I encourage you to take some food, for this is for your preservation; for not a hair from the head of any of you shall perish.' And having said this, he took bread and gave thanks to God in the presence of all; and he broke it and began to eat. And all of them were encouraged, and they themselves also took food. And all of us in the ship were two hundred and seventy-six persons. And*

when they had eaten enough, they began to lighten the ship by throwing out the wheat into the sea.

Bruce: We have seen Paul in many roles, but here he stands out as the practical man in a critical emergency.

Stott: Here then are aspects of Paul's character which endear him to us as an integrated Christian, who combined spirituality with sanity, and faith with works. He believed that God would keep his promises and had the courage to say grace in the presence of a crowd of hard-bitten pagans. But his trust and godliness did not stop him seeing either that the ship should not take risks with the onset of winter, or that the sailors must not be allowed to escape, or that the hungry crew and passengers had to eat to survive, or (later) that he needed to gather wood to keep the beach fire burning. What a man! He was a man of God and of action, a man of the Spirit and of common sense.

Albert Barnes: It cannot mean that they had lived entirely without food; but that they had been so much in danger, so constantly engaged, and so anxious about their safety, that they had taken no regular meal; and that what they had taken had been at irregular intervals, and had been a scanty allowance.

William Barclay: As we read the narrative, into the tempest there seems to come a strange calm. The man of God has somehow made others sure that God is in charge of things. The most useful people in the world are those who, being themselves calm, bring to others the secret of confidence. Paul was like that; and every follower of Jesus ought to be steadfast when others are in turmoil.

D. (:39-44) Deliverance Accomplished

1. (:39-41) Running Aground

"*And when day came, they could not recognize the land; but they did observe a certain bay with a beach, and they resolved to drive the ship onto it if they could. And casting off the anchors, they left them in the sea while at the same time they were loosening the ropes of the rudders, and hoisting the foresail to the wind, they were heading for the beach. But striking a reef where two seas met, they ran the vessel aground; and the prow stuck fast and remained immovable, but the stern began to be broken up by the force of the waves.*"

Frank Allen: A very difficult task was still before them; to run the ship aground in such a way as to allow them to escape to land in a quiet bay where they could swim to shore. In order to lighten the ship so that it would draw as little water as possible and make the best speed when they let her run ashore, they threw out the wheat into the sea. They discovered a creek with a sandy beach, in what is now known as Saint Paul's bay, where they planned to ground the ship. They cut off the anchors and hoisted up the foresail. They loosed the ropes which held up the rudder paddles so that they could steer the ship. With rapidly increasing speed the ship began to turn. She swung around clear of the rocky precipice and toward the creek. The wind and the waves roaring behind her drove her into the bay and the sailors guided her as they had intended so as to drive her into the sand and mud of the beach. Inexperienced men could not have done this. This was why Paul had warned the centurion that the sailors must remain in the ship if they were to be saved. A little island, which from the distance had looked like the mainland, so directed the sea that it ran through and met the waves from the opposite direction. The waves beat upon the

hinder part of the ships so violently that they soon broke it to pieces. The forepart had been driven into the sand and mud so deeply that it held fast, and in the comparative calm of the bay they were all able to swim or float on the wreckage of the ship to the shore. This was a very remarkable fact since there were two hundred and seventy-six people on board.

Brian Bell: Debris from every kind of **shipwreck** is floating all around us: broken marriages, ruined relationships, shattered dreams, mangled morals, twisted guilt, damaged hearts. And the need is great for courageous Christians like Paul who will stand faithfully in life's uncertainty & proclaim the spiritual anchors that can hold people fast to Christ.

2. (:42-44) Swimming/Floating Ashore

> "*And the soldiers' plan was to kill the prisoners, that none of them should swim away and escape; but the centurion, wanting to bring Paul safely through, kept them from their intention, and commanded that those who could swim should jump overboard first and get to land, and the rest should follow, some on planks, and others on various things from the ship. And thus it happened that they all were brought safely to land.*"

Frank Arnold: The Roman soldiers decided to kill all the prisoners before they could leave the ship. This was understandable because the Roman law said that any soldier who allowed a prisoner to escape was himself subject to the same penalty the prisoner would have received--death!

* * * * * * * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

1) Why was the centurion Julius so kind-hearted towards Paul?

2) How do we see in this passage the synergy between God's sovereignty and man's responsibility?

3) How has God used our faith in His providence to impact others around us?

4) How does this narrative argue against the Apostle Paul being some type of miracle worker that could command the laws of nature to do his bidding?

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QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Jack Arnold: The two overriding concepts in this chapter are the **providence of God** in preserving and keeping Paul and the whole crew of the ship, and the **personal faith** of Paul. Whenever there were troubles or trials, this man Paul was in the center of it all, and he always stood out among men as a great man of faith who truly affected people around him for good.

Frank Allen:
One of the most remarkable facts about the voyage is this, that Paul, who was being taken a

prisoner to Rome, became, during the voyage from Caesarea to Melita, the most respected man on board the ship and virtually the commander of the vessel. His faith, courage, cheerfulness, reliability, and particular his divinely guided foresight, had won for him the respect of both soldiers and sailors and had influenced the commander of the ship so that he acted upon his advice.

Lessons Learned:

1. God controls all the forces of nature.
2. God expects men to use means to carry out His plan.
3. Those who honor Him God will honor.
4. God gives divine protection to His own.
5. The true servant of God recognizes God's providence in the common things of life.
6. God knows the end from the beginning.
7. The life of a godly man is precious in the sight of God.

Albert Barnes: We have in this case a full answer to the objection that a belief in the decrees of God will make men neglect the means of salvation, and lead to licentiousness. It has just the contrary tendency. Here is a case in which Paul certainly believed in the purpose of God to save these men; in which he was assured that it was fully determined; and yet the effect was not to produce inattention and unconcern, but to prompt him to use strenuous efforts to accomplish the very effect which God had determined should take place. So it is always. A belief that God has purposes of mercy; that he designs, and has always designed, to save some, will prompt to the use of all proper means to secure it. If we had no evidence that God had any such purpose, effort would be vain. We should have no inducement in exertion. Where we have such evidence, it operates as it did in the case of Paul, to produce great and strenuous endeavours to secure the object.

Chris Benfield: **Who is at the Helm of Your Vessel?**
A Defiant Journey (**10-12**) – It is clear they refused to listen to godly counsel. They were determined to set sail regardless of the cost. I want to consider a couple of aspects regarding their defiance.

Notice:
1. The Admonition (10) – Paul warned that a journey at this time was ill advised. He was certain the time for safe travel had passed. It would be dangerous for the ship as well as all who traveled to set sail. They would have done well to have listened to the man of God. A church that has a pastor is blessed to have a man of God to lead them and give godly counsel. The church would do well to listen to the man of God.

2. The Arrogance (11-12) – These refused to heed the words of Paul. They were determined to travel regardless of the dangers involved. They thought they knew better than Paul. Who was he to offer them counsel?

That same arrogant and rebellious attitude is prevalent in our day. Many who attend the house of God will not listen to the man of God. They refuse to admit he has anything of value to offer. Who is he to tell me how to live? I'll tell you, he is God's man. He has been called of God and ordained to lead you in the ways of the Lord! Many have found themselves in trouble because they refused to listen to the man of God. . .

Is Jesus at the helm of your vessel? Are you following His direction or have you chosen to chart your own course? Going contrary to the will of God is never a good decision. The Lord stands ready to restore you, but you must seek Him. If you are going your own way, things will soon get out of hand if they haven't already.

Boice: **Application Principles:**

- Paul knew God was with him.
- Paul knew he belonged to God.
- Paul was in the Lord's service.
- Paul trusted God in all circumstances.

Dr. Liam Goligher: The point that Paul is making here is that God has revealed his will and in this situation where the storm is assaulting them, as it were, this storm can't do anything to interfere with God's revealed will. No assassination attempt, which had been tried. No imprisonment; he had been imprisoned for two years. No mob violence; he had been exposed to mob violence. No storm at sea and no shipwreck could impede the will of God. God's unstoppable plan and Paul's calm ability to encourage others sprang from his faith in God.

Stott: It would capture the essential geographical outlook of Luke to entitle the Gospel of Luke "*From Galilee to Jerusalem*" and the Book of Acts "*From Jerusalem to Rome*", for Jerusalem was the goal of Jesus' ministry, while Rome was the goal of Paul's. Although the journeys of Jesus and Paul differed from one another in their ultimate direction and destination, they also resembled one another in their pattern, for both included a resolute determination, an arrest, a series of trials in Jewish and Roman courts, and even death and resurrection. For Paul's descent into the darkness and danger of the storm was a kind of grave, while his rescue from shipwreck and later springtime voyage to Rome were a kind of resurrection. Luke's highest apology for Paul was to portray him as so conformed to the life of the lord that even his sufferings and deliverance are parallel.

TEXT: Acts 28:1-31

TITLE: THE FINISHING LINE BECOMES THE NEW STARTING LINE

BIG IDEA:
GOD CONTINUES TO PROMOTE THE VICTORIOUS EXPANSION OF THE GOSPEL

INTRODUCTION:
We arrive in Chapter 28 at the end of this marvelous book of the Acts of the Apostles. But while it brings to fruition the promise of gospel expansion set forth in **Acts 1:8** "*from Jerusalem to Judea to Samaria and to the ends of the earth*," it serves as the launching point for the untold story of how God continues to this day to bless and promote the victorious expansion of the Gospel. Jesus promised that He would build His church and would be successful against all opposition.

GOD CONTINUES TO PROMOTE THE VICTORIOUS EXPANSION OF THE GOSPEL

I. (:1-6) ESCAPING VIPER VENOM AT MALTA – GOD PROTECTS HIS SERVANTS -- ISLANDERS CONSIDER PAUL FIRST CURSED . . . THEN A GOD

A. (:1-2) Taking Shelter At Malta

1. (:1) Getting Their Bearings

"*And when they had been brought safely through, then we found out that the island was called Malta.*"

What a relief for all of them to be safely onshore and not under attack by the local natives; it was a rough ride but God proved himself faithful to his promise to bring Paul to Rome;

They had some familiarity with Malta

Bock: The island's ancient name means "refuge"

It is about 60 miles off the south tip of Sicily.

MacArthur: The word "*barboroi*" in the Greek was a word the Greeks used to refer to anybody who spoke a language foreign to them and did not speak Greek. All it means is they were natives of Malta who spoke a foreign language.

2. (:2) Receiving Hospitality

"*And the natives showed us extraordinary kindness; for because of the rain that had set in and because of the cold, they kindled a fire and received us all.*"

Tremendous demonstration of hospitality
[cf. importance of lighting a fire on TV show Survivor]

MacArthur: Hospitality is to be the characteristic of a godly man, according to First Timothy and Titus; the characteristic of an elder, a leader in the church. But beyond that, hospitality is to be characteristic of all Christians, according to **First Peter 4:9**. (**Matt. 10:40**; **Rom. 12:13**)

B. (:3-6) Targeted by Extreme Native Superstition

1. (:3) Encounter with the Snake

"*But when Paul had gathered a bundle of sticks and laid them on the fire, a viper came out because of the heat, and fastened on his hand.*"

Once again Paul is helpful and involved in the necessary practical tasks of day-to-day living; not functioning as some privileged elite that demands service from others

Looks like Paul just can't catch a break

2. (:4) Initial Expression of Extreme Native Superstition = Paul is Cursed

"*And when the natives saw the creature hanging from his hand, they began saying to one another, 'Undoubtedly this man is a murderer, and though he has been saved from the sea, justice has not allowed him to live.'*"

Be careful how you jump to conclusions about natural events – we don't see the whole picture; don't be judgmental and quick to condemn
Look at how many Christians live like these pagans … imagining that bad things happen to them because they did X

3. (:5-6) Opposite Expression of Extreme Native Superstition = Paul is a God

"*However he shook the creature off into the fire and suffered no harm. But they were expecting that he was about to swell up or suddenly fall down dead. But after they had waited a long time and had seen nothing unusual happen to him, they changed their minds and began to say that he was a god.*"

The incident was not treated as any big deal by Paul

Be careful on the other extreme not to give someone too much credit; you need a right view of God and the gospel in order to be able to have a balanced view towards life

Kent: Luke has previously recorded a similar change of opinion in reverse (**14:11-12, 19**), a reminder of the fickleness of human opinion whether good or bad.

Scott Harris: The perversion to this truth is the idea that whenever something bad happens to someone it is because God is punishing them for doing something evil along with its corollary that if things are going well then they have done something good and God is blessing them. The book of Job demonstrates the lie to the first part of this idea and **Psalm 73** exposes the lie of the second part. Bad things do happen to good people and good things happen to bad people. There are very godly people that suffer greatly in this life and there are evil people that seem to get away with everything and live in luxury and ease. But like Asaph in **Psalm 73** we must remember that what happens in this life is not the final accounting for either punishment or reward.

II. (:7-10) HEALING MINISTRY IN HOME OF PUBLIUS – GOD PROVIDES FOR HIS SERVANTS AND BLESSES THEIR MINISTRY -- ISLANDERS SHOW PAUL RESPECT BY SUPPLYING HIM FOR JOURNEY

A. (:7) Hospitality of Publius

"*Now in the neighborhood of that place were lands belonging to the leading man of the island, named Publius, who welcomed us and entertained us courteously three days.*"

B. (:8) Healing of Publius' Father by Paul

"*And it came about that the father of Publius was lying in bed afflicted with recurrent fever and dysentery; and Paul went in to see him and after he had prayed, he laid his hands on him and healed him.*"

MacArthur: He did two things. He prayed and he laid his hands on him. Why did he pray? Because all power is from whom? God. Why did he lay his hands on him? Because he wanted him to see that it was through him that God moved in power; that it was the power of God but that Paul was the agent or the representative of that power. What Paul was doing by praying and laying hands on was identifying God's power and the fact that he was God's agent.

Scott Harris: The particular medical problem Publius' father was suffering was Brucellosis. It is also known as Malta fever, Mediterranean fever, Gibraltar fever, Cyprus fever, Rock fever, Undulating fever and Bang's disease. It is caused by any one of several species of the Brucella bacteria and is common in farm animals such as cattle, pigs and goats. In humans it causes intermittent fevers, cold sweats, weakness, muscle aches and can resemble typhoid. It can persist for months and can lead to death. The most common means of humans being affected is through raw milk. Pasteurization is now the main preventive measure and antibiotics are used to treat those infected. The fact that this man also had dysentery indicates he had some other medical problems as well.

C. (:9) Healing Ministry of Paul Expanded

"*And after this had happened, the rest of the people on the island who had diseases were coming to him and getting cured.*"

Michael Crawford: would be great if the church became known as a place of healing; too often we have the museum model of church (where we are curators of exhibits that people come to see) rather than the hospital model – where people come to be healed

D. (:10) Honoring of Apostle Paul

"*And they also honored us with many marks of respect; and when we were setting sail, they supplied us with all we needed.*"

III. (:11-16) ARRIVAL AT ROME UNDER HOUSE ARREST – GOD KEEPS HIS PROMISES TO HIS SERVANTS

A. (:11-12) Short Stop at Syracuse

1. (:11) Voyage on Alexandrian Ship

"*And at the end of three months we set sail on an Alexandrian ship which had wintered at the island, and which had the Twin Brothers for its figurehead.*"

Kent: The ship bore the figurehead of the Twin Brothers, Castor and Pollux. These mythological

figures were revered by sailors, and their constellation Gemini was supposed to bring good luck in a storm.

Bock: Castor was said to be an excellent horseman, and Pollux could box.

2. (:12) Respite at Syracuse
   "*And after we put in at Syracuse, we stayed there for three days.*"

B. (:13-14) Remainder of Journey to Rome

1. (:13a) Arrival at Rhegium
   "*And from there we sailed around and arrived at Rhegium,*"

2. (:13b-14a) Arrival and Hospitality at Puteoli
   "*and a day later a south wind sprang up, and on the second day we came to Puteoli. There we found some **brethren**, and were invited to stay with them for Seven days;*"

3. (:14) Arrival at Rome
   "*and thus we came to Rome.*"

Bock: The trip from Malta has taken three weeks. The total journey has taken well over four months. God's word has come to pass.

C. (:15-16) Under Guard at Rome

1. (:15a) Reception by the Brethren
   "*And the **brethren**, when they heard about us, came from there as far as the Market of Appius and Three Inns to meet us;*"

Bruce: A few miles' journey from Puteoli brought them on to the Appian Way, one of the great Roman roads of south Italy, called after Appius Claudius, in whose censorship it was planned (312 B.C.). Along this road they made for Rome. But news of their approach had reached the capital already, and a number of Christians set out southwards along the Appian Way to meet the apostle and escort him back to Rome. Some of them got as far as The Three Taverns, a halting-place on the Appian Way about thirty-three miles from Rome; others walked ten miles farther and met him at the market-town of Appii Forum.

2. (:15b) Response of Paul of Thanksgiving and Encouragement
   "*and when Paul saw them, he thanked God and took courage.*"

3. (:16) Rules of House Arrest in Rome
   "*And when we entered Rome, Paul was allowed to stay by himself, with the soldier who was guarding him.*"

IV. (:17-31) FINAL TRANSITION OF GOSPEL PROCLAMATION FROM JEWS TO GENTILES – GOD OPENS DOORS FOR THE CONTINUED PROCLAMATION OF THE GOSPEL

A. (:17-24) Final Appeal to the Jewish Leaders

"*And it happened that after three days he called together those who were the* ***leading men of the Jews****, and when they had come together, he began saying to them,*"

You might think that Paul would not want to see the Jews anymore; but had such great love for them; wanted to testify to Jesus being the fulfillment of the hope of Israel

1. (:17b-20) Reviewing the Facts of His Case

   "***Brethren****, though I had done nothing against our people, or the customs of our fathers, yet I was delivered prisoner from Jerusalem into the hands of the Romans. And when they had examined me, they were willing to release me because there was no ground for putting me to death. But when the Jews objected, I was forced to appeal to Caesar; not that I had any accusation against my nation. For this reason therefore, I requested to see you and to speak with you, for I am wearing this chain for the sake of the hope of Israel.*"

Alexander: Paul's address presented two points to his Jewish hearers; his motive in appealing to the Emperor (**v. 17-19**), and his firm adherence to the ancient doctrine (**v. 20**).

2. (:21-22) Reality of Negative Press Regarding Christian Sect Stirs Curiosity

   "*And they said to him, 'We have neither received letters from Judea concerning you, nor have any of the brethren come here and reported or spoken anything bad about you. But we desire to hear from you what your views are; for concerning this sect, it is known to us that it is spoken against everywhere.'*"

3. (:23) Reasoning with Them Regarding the Claims of Christ

   "*And when they had set a day for him, they came to him at his lodging in large numbers; and he was explaining to them by solemnly testifying about the kingdom of God, and trying to persuade them concerning Jesus, from both the Law of Moses and from the Prophets, from morning until evening.*"

Stott: This is likely to mean, as on previous occasions when he addressed Jewish people, that Paul argued for the necessary identification of the historical Jesus with the biblical Christ.

4. (:24) Reaction Mixed

   "*And some were being persuaded by the things spoken, but others would not believe.*"

B. (:25-29) Final Rejection of the Gospel by the Jewish Leaders

1. (:25a) Began Leaving

   "*And when they did not agree with one another, they began leaving after Paul had spoken one parting word,*"

2. (:25b-28) Prophetic Indictment

   "*The Holy Spirit rightly spoke through Isaiah the prophet to your fathers, saying,*

   'Go to this people and say, You will keep on hearing, but will not understand; And you will keep on seeing, but will not perceive; For the heart of this people has become dull, And with their ears they scarcely hear, And they have closed their eyes;

Lest they should see with their eyes, And hear with their ears, And understand with their heart and return, And I should heal them.'

Let it be known to you therefore, that ***this salvation of God has been sent to the Gentiles****; they will also listen.*"

Steven Cole: Hardness of heart prevents sinners from responding in faith to the gospel, but it never thwarts God's ultimate purpose. There is a mystery here, in that sinners are always responsible for their stubbornness and unbelief, but if they turn in repentance and faith to the Lord, it is not their doing, but only because He has granted it to them (**Acts 11:18**). In other words, we are solely responsible for our unbelief, but if we come to faith in Christ, it is solely from God, so that none can boast.

3. (:29) Finished Leaving
"*And when he had spoken these words,* ***the Jews departed****, having a great dispute among themselves.*"

C. (:30-31) Final Open Proclamation of the Gospel to All in Rome -- Not Hindered by House Arrest
"*And he stayed two full years in his own rented quarters, and was* ***welcoming all who came to him****, preaching the kingdom of God, and teaching concerning the Lord Jesus Christ with all openness, unhindered.*"

Bruce: On this triumphant note, then, Acts is brought to an end. The kingdom of God and the story of Jesus are openly proclaimed and taught in Rome itself, under the complacent eye of imperial authority.

Alexander: It ends where it does, for no such personal or trivial reason, but because the writer's purpose is accomplished and his task performed. As soon as he has traced the course of Christ and Christianity from the Holy City to the Mistress of the World, he has already shown the virtual fulfillment of the promise and the plan with which the history begins – **1:8**.

Kent: During this time Paul wrote four of the NT epistles: Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon.

Blaiklock: The delay was due to the necessity for accusers to appear from Palestine, and for the hearing to find a place on Caesar's calendar. It is not unlikely that the case lapsed for want of accusation. . . The book ends abruptly . . . The work continues, and if the Acts of the Apostles ends by the Tiber, the acts of God through the dedicated lives of men found, and still find, a stage far wider in place and time.

Michael Crawford: Sometimes our message is too small; kingdom of God is all encompassing message; look at how despite all opposition, the book ends with the gospel being proclaimed in unhindered fashion; nothing can defeat God's purposes

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DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

1) When has God fulfilled a promise or demonstrated His providence in a way that was completely unexpected by you?

2) Do you have a tendency to blame bad circumstances on God reacting negatively to something you have done?

3) How can you grow in your exercise of hospitality as demonstrated by these islanders and in your servant type behavior as demonstrated by the Apostle Paul?

4) How committed am I to fulfilling my intended role in the Great Commission?

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QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Stott: So by God's providence Paul reached Rome safe and sound. But he arrived as a prisoner! Christ's promise that he would testify in Rome had not included that information. How was this compatible with the providence of God? It seems to me legitimate to argue that the apostle, who was brought to Rome to witness, found his witness expanded, enriched and authenticated by his two-year custody in the city.

Boice: Will we be found faithful? That is the final question for us from Acts. The Word is not hindered. We are its messengers. Will we take the gospel to the ends of the earth beginning with our Jerusalem, as we have been instructed to do? If we will, God will bless it to the praise of the glory of his great grace.

Scott Harris: As we have seen throughout the book of Acts, those who proclaim the gospel are persecuted by the sinners that reject it (**Acts 7**). Those that strive to live in godliness are hated by those that love their sin (**Acts 12:1f**). Those who profess faith in Jesus Christ will still stumble at times and will still have to deal with the ramifications of their actions (**Acts 5:1-11; 15:36f**). And until the believer is in heaven, he must deal with ramifications of living in a fallen world including physical decay, disease and natural disasters. Paul certainly had his share of all of these.

Bock: Luke chose to end his book here because his point was the arrival of the word to the highest levels of Rome. The book's ending is open-ended with respect to the future of the Jewish nation because the church is still preaching the word to whoever will hear it. This was Luke's key point, even if Luke knew of Paul's eventual demise. This is the best explanation for the ending of Acts.

MacArthur: **The Last Lap – God's Faithfulness to a Faithful Man**
You set up a lot of dreams and they never materialize; they never happen. And that's just exactly where God moves in and God plants desires in the heart of those who fear him and meets those desires and fulfillment. And we see that in this passage. You just can't miss it as Paul arrives at Rome and has the fulfillment of that desire that has lingered in his breast for years. . .

What I see in this passage is the **tremendous faithfulness of God to a faithful man**. God says,

"I will fulfill the desire of all them that fear me." Now look what God does with this man. Just six things.

Number one, he surrounds him with kindness. Have you seen it? First in chapter 27 verses 2 and 3 when they first left Caesarea he arrives in Sidon and immediately he is refreshed there and ministered to by the Christians. In chapter 28 verses 1 and 2 his needs are met by the Maltese. In verse 10 of 28 they honored him with many honors and they gave him everything that he needed. God surrounds his faithful people with kindness.

Second thing. God ministered to his needs. When he needed physical ministry, when he was sick in Sidon, he was ministered to medically. In chapter 28 he was ministered to by Publius in verse 7 by being given a place of lodging. He was ministered to by the necessities that were granted in verse 10. In verse 14 when he arrived in Puteoli the brethren there ministered to him. God continually ministered to his needs, supplying exactly what he wanted. When it was food he got food. When it was medicine he got medicine. When it was fellowship he got fellowship.

Third thing. God encouraged him over and over again. Back in 27 when the ship was being torn up in the hurricane you will remember that God came and sent an angel to him and the angel said don't worry Paul, you're going to make it to Rome and everybody is going to make it with you. Take courage and so forth, and he reported that to the people. God encouraged him.
And then I think the greatest encouragement must have been in verse 15 of 28 "When he saw those Christians 43 miles from town all gathered at the side of the road waiting to walk with him the rest of the way, showing him their love and affection." And then 10 miles further met another group and together they went to Rome and his heart was thrilled and he was encouraged.

The fourth thing that God does for a faithful man is to protect him from harm. God saved him in a hurricane. We saw that. God saved him in a shipwreck and God saved him from a snake bite. God protects his own.

Fifthly, God blessed his influence. Wherever he went things happened. It's startling to think about. He had such a dramatic influence on the ship that it's almost a foregone conclusion that some of them came to know Jesus Christ. He had such an impact on Malta that a church was begun there. It may even have been that a church was begun in Syracuse. We know that he had a profound effect on the city of Rome because many people in Caesar's household were saved. God blessed that man's influence. Everywhere he went, blessing accompanied.

Sixthly and last. God fulfilled his desire. God fulfilled his desire. He wanted to get to Rome, he got to Rome. He wanted to be encouraged and know that the Christians loved him. They encouraged him. God met his desire.

Alistair Begg: **Paul Makes the Most of Every Opportunity**
Col. 4:5 – "*Make the best possible use of your time*" – Paul is seizing he day; *Carpe deim*; live in the moment in the light of eternity;
1) (:**16**) Seizing the opportunity with the Roman Soldiers
Succession of soldiers who were assigned to guard Paul
2) **(:17ff)** Seizing the opportunity with the Jewish Leaders

Sinclair Ferguson: **A Wish Fulfilled**
Significance of the acts of the apostles; gospel coming now through the apostles to the ends of

the earth; Paul desires now to go to Spain and then push even beyond there; the ambassador of Jesus Christ has providentially been brought to Rome; nobody there to bring charges against him; this is not Paul's final arrest and imprisonment

Why does Luke finish his account here? The forward march of the gospel of Jesus Christ has only just begun; book concludes in an open-ended way; benchmarks throughout the book: the church grew; the word multiplied; etc.

Ending little cameos that tie together threads Luke has woven through the book to show how God providentially works through His servant

1) (:1-10) Arrive in Malta
There will never be any impediment that will impede the purposes of God;
Islanders don't tend to like visitors; yet they exhibited special kindness; What did Julius make of all of this?
"*gathering sticks*" -- Humble, menial service is the mark of God's people;
Unbelievers are always unstable – first think that Paul will be struck down in judgment; then bow down themselves in worship
God is in the details – providentially engineers shipwreck to bring Paul here to heal this man;
Parallel to ministry of Jesus – stilling the storm, dealing with demonic man, raising dead girl; ends with a meal
Hudson Taylor: "God's work done in God's way never lacks God's resources"

2) (:11-16) Finishing Journey to Rome
There is no community that can compare to the family of God –
We have no need for dump idols represented by these figureheads on this Alexandrian ship;
Amazing fellowship among believers Paul has never even seen;
Entertained royally by these Christians;
Cf. triumphant welcome for victorious general bringing captured chained prisoners with him; here the chained prisoner is being so welcomed;
We think a lot about the importance of the Apostle Paul to the Christian church --
Sometimes we forget about the importance of the Christian church to the Apostle Paul;
Most wonderful bond between teacher of God's Word and people of God;
No community in the world like this

3) (:17-31) Final Testifying to Christ in Rome
There are man-made chains that can bind the work of God
Paul proclaiming the kingdom of God and gospel of Jesus Christ with all boldness and no hindrance

Brian Bell: That's exactly what Job's counselors assumed. Job your problem could only be a result of unconfessed sin!
a) Remember the former baseball pitcher(Padres) Dave Dravecky --
(1) He got cancer in his pitching arm. Had surgery, removing 1/2 his deltoid muscle. Made a comeback, then during a game his humerus snapped in the middle of a pitch.
(2) Dave said, "I was in Grand Rapids, Michigan, speaking at a chapel service when I was approached by a man in his twenties. He told me I had cancer because there was sin in my life. He told me that the Holy Spirit revealed to him that God had a special plan for me - to be a preacher - but 1st I had to get rid of the sin." (When You Can't Come Back)

b) What a terrible theology! - “Snakebites don’t prove wrong-doing, anymore than hard times always imply hidden sin.”

(1) Dave went on to say in his book, “The issue is not our character but the character of God! Is God the kind of God who gives people tumors when they sin? Does he dole out diseases when we fail him? Say, maybe, cataracts when we lust or hardening of the arteries when we hate.”

(2) This is Pharisee theology! When they came across a blind man they asked Jesus “who sinned this man or his parents?” Jesus said, neither, & then proceeded to heal the man. **(Jn.9**)

(3) Let’s hear from another David, Read **Ps.103:10-14.**

(a) Oh, what comfort that brings your soul!

(4) Quoting Dravecky one last time he said, “I didn’t get angry with the man. I felt sad that he was carrying around such a distorted picture of God. And I wondered how that picture would get him through life when one day he would have to walk through his own valley of suffering.”

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Appendix A
Acts Passages on Testifying to the Resurrection of Jesus Christ

Acts 1:3 “To these He also presented Himself alive, after His suffering, by many convincing proofs, appearing to them over *a period of* forty days, and speaking of the things concerning the kingdom of God.”

Acts 2:22-36 "Men of Israel, listen to these words: Jesus the Nazarene, a man attested to you by God with miracles and wonders and signs which God performed through Him in your midst, just as you yourselves know-- [23] this *Man*, delivered up by the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God, you nailed to a cross by the hands of godless men and put *Him* to death. [24] "And God raised Him up again, putting an end to the agony of death, since it was impossible for Him to be held in its power. [25] "For David says of Him, 'I was always beholding the Lord in my presence; For He is at my right hand, that I may not be shaken. [26] 'Therefore my heart was glad and my tongue exulted; Moreover my flesh also will abide in hope; [27] Because Thou wilt not abandon my soul to Hades, Nor allow Thy Holy One to undergo decay. [28] 'Thou hast made known to me the ways of life; Thou wilt make me full of gladness with Thy presence.' [29] "Brethren, I may confidently say to you regarding the patriarch David that he both died and was buried, and his tomb is with us to this day. [30] "And so, because he was a prophet, and knew that God had sworn to him with an oath to seat *one* of his descendants upon his throne, [31] he looked ahead and spoke of the resurrection of the Christ, that He was neither abandoned to Hades, nor did His flesh suffer decay. [32] "This Jesus God raised up again, to which we are all witnesses. [33] "Therefore having been exalted to the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, He has poured forth this which you both see and hear. [34] "For it was not David who ascended into heaven, but he himself says: 'The Lord said to my Lord, "Sit at My right hand, [35] Until I make Thine enemies a footstool for Thy feet."' [36] "Therefore let all the house of Israel know for certain that God has made Him both Lord and Christ-- this Jesus whom you crucified."

Acts 3:14-16 "But you disowned the Holy and Righteous One, and asked for a murderer to be granted to you, [15] but put to death the Prince of life, *the one* whom God raised from the dead, *a fact* to which we are witnesses. [16] "And on the basis of faith in His name, *it is* the name of Jesus which has strengthened this man whom you see and know; and the faith which *comes* through Him has given him this perfect health in the presence of you all. “

Acts 4:1-2 “And as they were speaking to the people, the priests and the captain of the temple *guard*, and the Sadducees, came upon them, [2] being greatly disturbed because they were teaching the people and proclaiming in Jesus the resurrection from the dead.”

Acts 4:10-12 “let it be known to all of you, and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ the Nazarene, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead-- by this *name* this man stands here before you in good health. [11] "He is the stone which was rejected by you, the builders, *but* which became the very corner *stone*. [12] "And there is salvation in no one else; for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men, by which we must be saved."
Acts 4:20 “for we cannot stop speaking what we have seen and heard."

Acts 4:33 “And with great power the apostles were giving witness to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and abundant grace was upon them all.”

Acts 5:30-32 "The God of our fathers raised up Jesus, whom you had put to death by hanging Him on a cross. [31] "He is the one whom God exalted to His right hand as a Prince and a Savior, to grant repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins. [32] "And we are witnesses of these things; and *so is* the Holy Spirit, whom God has given to those who obey Him."

Acts 10:38-43 "*You know of* Jesus of Nazareth, how God anointed Him with the Holy Spirit and with power, and *how* He went about doing good, and healing all who were oppressed by the devil; for God was with Him. [39] "And we are witnesses of all the things He did both in the land of the Jews and in Jerusalem. And they also put Him to death by hanging Him on a cross. [40] "God raised Him up on the third

day, and granted that He should become visible, [41] not to all the people, but to witnesses who were chosen beforehand by God, *that is*, to us, who ate and drank with Him after He arose from the dead. [42] "And He ordered us to preach to the people, and solemnly to testify that this is the One who has been appointed by God as Judge of the living and the dead. [43] "Of Him all the prophets bear witness that through His name everyone who believes in Him receives forgiveness of sins."

Acts 13:28-38 "And though they found no ground for *putting Him to* death, they asked Pilate that He be executed. [29] "And when they had carried out all that was written concerning Him, they took Him down from the cross and laid Him in a tomb. [30] "But God raised Him from the dead; [31] and for many days He appeared to those who came up with Him from Galilee to Jerusalem, the very ones who are now His witnesses to the people. [32] "And we preach to you the good news of the promise made to the fathers, [33] that God has fulfilled this *promise* to our children in that He raised up Jesus, as it is also written in the second Psalm, 'Thou art My Son; today I have begotten Thee.' [34] "*And as for the fact* that He raised Him up from the dead, no more to return to decay, He has spoken in this way: 'I will give you the holy *and* sure *blessings* of David.' [35] "Therefore He also says in another *Psalm*, 'Thou wilt not allow Thy Holy One to undergo decay.' [36] "For David, after he had served the purpose of God in his own generation, fell asleep, and was laid among his fathers, and underwent decay; [37] but He whom God raised did not undergo decay. [38] "Therefore let it be known to you, brethren, that through Him forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you,"

Acts 17:2-3 "And according to Paul's custom, he went to them, and for three Sabbaths reasoned with them from the Scriptures, [3] explaining and giving evidence that the Christ had to suffer and rise again from the dead, and *saying*, "This Jesus whom I am proclaiming to you is the Christ."

Acts 17:18 "And also some of the Epicurean and Stoic philosophers were conversing with him. And some were saying, "What would this idle babbler wish to say?" Others, "He seems to be a proclaimer of strange deities,"-- because he was preaching Jesus and the resurrection."

Acts 17:31 "because He has fixed a day in which He will judge the world in righteousness through a Man whom He has appointed, having furnished proof to all men by raising Him from the dead."

Paul's Trials – His Testimony:
Acts 22:14-15 "And he said, 'The God of our fathers has appointed you to know His will, and to see the Righteous One, and to hear an utterance from His mouth. [15] 'For you will be a witness for Him to all men of what you have seen and heard."

Acts 23:6-8 "But perceiving that one part were Sadducees and the other Pharisees, Paul *began* crying out in the Council, "Brethren, I am a Pharisee, a son of Pharisees; I am on trial for the hope and resurrection of the dead!" [7] And as he said this, there arose a dissension between the Pharisees and Sadducees; and the assembly was divided. [8] For the Sadducees say that there is no resurrection, nor an angel, nor a spirit; but the Pharisees acknowledge them all."

Acts 24:21 "other than for this one statement which I shouted out while standing among them, 'For the resurrection of the dead I am on trial before you today.'"

Acts 25:19 "but they *simply* had some points of disagreement with him about their own religion and about a certain dead man, Jesus, whom Paul asserted to be alive."

Acts 26:8 "Why is it considered incredible among you *people* if God does raise the dead?"

Acts 26:22 "And so, having obtained help from God, I stand to this day testifying both to small and great, stating nothing but what the Prophets and Moses said was going to take place; [23] that the Christ was to suffer, *and* that by reason of His resurrection from the dead He should be the first to proclaim light both to the *Jewish* people and to the Gentiles."