



A Devotional Commentary on the book of Acts

A PASSION FOR HIS PASSION

BOBBY R. WOOD

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Preface

The title of this devotional commentary series was taken from 1 Samuel 17:40. The commentary is written with a trembling hand and an impelled heart. The hand trembles because it is not worthy of such a task, but it writes because it is driven by a passion for the Word of God. I have no glittering sword to offer you to defeat the giant. I have not earned Saul's armor to pass on to you. I can only offer you a stone from the brook. However, I am confident that there are anointed believers out there in giant land that share the same passion about God's Word as I do. They have the Spirit, they have the sling, they have the passion, and all they need is a stone to win the day. I am also encouraged by the fact that God has chosen the foolish, the weak, the base, and the despised to accomplish his will (1 Corinthians 1:27-28).

My goal in this series is to offer a plain and understandable devotional commentary that would cause someone to get excited about studying their Bible. Nothing would excite me more than to know that I was used of the Lord to "fan the flame" in someone's heart.

The book of Acts is where we begin our series. Acts is brimming over with a passion for Christ and his cause. The early Church not only prayed "Thy Kingdom Come" with their lips; they paid for that Kingdom to come with their lives. They were driven forward by an unquenchable passion for the Passion of Christ.

After 2000 years nothing has changed as far as God is concerned. The harvest is still ripe; the Great Commission is still in effect; the Gospel of Jesus Christ is still the saving message; and the Holy Spirit is still moving. All that is needed is someone to fall in love with Jesus and catch the passion for His Passion. The Lord needs you; will you answer him?

[Introduction to Acts](#)

Luke is the author of Acts as well as the Gospel of St. Luke. He was a physician by trade and a companion of the Apostle Paul in his travels (Colossians 4:14; 2 Timothy 4:11; Philemon 24). Luke wrote the book of Acts about A.D. 63.

The theme of the book of Acts is “*The Advance of the Kingdom of God into all the earth by the Gospel of Jesus Christ.*” The book begins and ends with the kingdom of God (1:3; 28:31). The highest theme of all prayer is “Thy Kingdom Come” (Matthew 6:10). The overriding theme of the Old Testament is the establishment of the Messiah’s Kingdom on earth. This will be temporarily fulfilled during the 1000 year Millennial Reign of Christ on the earth (Revelation 11:15; 20:1-7) and eternally fulfilled in the new heavens and earth (Revelation 21-22). The Old Testament prophets placed a great emphasis on the earthly rule of the Christ. Jesus will be seated in Jerusalem and the nations will flow in and out of the city to see the King in his beauty (Micah 4:2-3; Haggai 2:7; Zechariah 2:11; 1 Kings 10:4-7). The Messiah’s earthly reign was on the minds of the disciples in Acts 1:6. Jesus did not deny a future earthly kingdom restoration; he just stated its fulfillment was in the Father’s hands. The thing that concerned Jesus was the establishment of his kingdom spiritually. The kingdom of God is primarily a spiritual one, and the only way into it is by spiritual birth (Luke 17:21; John 3:5). The new birth would be accomplished by the Spirit and the proclamation of the gospel. This is where the book of Acts comes in.

The advance of God’s purpose on the earth was initially given to Adam. Adam was not only created to be fruitful and multiply the earth, he was also to subdue it, and keep dominion over it. The charge to subdue and rule was given to Adam because there was an enemy lurking in the garden that was determined to destroy God’s purpose. History shows us that Adam failed his mission and allowed the enemy to introduce a deadly poison into the world that would eventually require the Son of God to come to his own earth. That poison is known as “sin.” Sinless Adam became sinful Adam, and instead of advancing the righteousness of God throughout the earth and to his seed, Adam advanced his poison into the human race. The apostle Paul amplified this fact very clearly in his letter to the Romans 5:12-18.

We would be biblically safe in saying that: “*Kingdom Advance is the salvation of sinners.*” Every sinner that is rescued from sin and won to Christ is an advance of the King’s kingdom. People are our greatest investment, evangelism is our greatest work, and the Passion of Christ is our greatest message.

After Adam’s failure, God raised up the nation Israel to carry forward his purpose. God granted to Israel his holy law which equipped them for their mission. We might note here that the giving of the law is a parallel event to the giving of the Spirit. The law would be an effective weapon for Israel to advance righteousness in all the earth. Tragically, Israel followed in Adam’s footsteps and failed her mission. She committed the blunder of exalting the law above the Lord (Romans 10:1-4). Despite the many blunders of Israel, God would call forth certain persons out of the nation Israel and empower them to advance his cause. Prophets, Priests, and Kings would be brought forth to help in the advance. Finally, after many centuries there would come out of Israel a Deliverer that would settle the victory for Kingdom Advance once and for all. Luke has already given Theophilus a thorough, investigated treatise on the person and work of the Deliverer (Luke 1:1-4). He begins his second treatise with the words: “...*of all that Jesus began to do and teach*” (Acts 1:1).

In the book of Acts, the advance was taken out of the hands of the Jews as a nation and it was given to the Church which would consist of believing Jews and Gentiles. The Church would now become the primary leader in Kingdom Advance. For 2000 years the Church of the Lord Jesus Christ has been the advancer of gospel righteousness. The Spirit and the bride are still calling for thirsty sinners to take of the

water of life freely (Revelation 22:17).

The book of Acts is Luke's report of the *Commencement* of the Church and her *Continuous* territorial expansion of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Brother Luke is constantly giving us updates throughout his treatise. The principle of advance and increase is well established in the book of Acts. *If we are not seeing a spiritual increase in our own personal lives; or if we are not seeing increase in the saving of sinners in our churches, then we are not a biblical pattern for New Testament Christianity.*

There are seven simple but potent facts we need to keep in mind as we tour the book of Acts:

Fact 1: Acts is a transitional book. It is the "between place" of the Old and New Covenants. Many methods that are used in Acts may not apply to us today. For example, we are not required by Scripture to take Communion every day; we are not required to pick seven deacons when we only need two, and people do not speak with other dialects when they are saved. However, we must not throw out the baby with the bathwater. We can and must be filled with the Spirit; we can expect miracles and revivals; we can expect sinners to be saved in masses. All will be well if we leave all these things up to the Sovereign Spirit. We must not allow the non-essentials to divide us.

Fact 2: To be filled with the Spirit is crucial. The Great Commission can only be achieved when the Church stays in full Submission to the Spirit. The Holy Spirit knows how to "run" things and we know how to "ruin" things. *A submissive obedience to the Holy Spirit's leadership will guarantee Kingdom Advance on a local and world-wide level.*

Fact 3: There is an enemy to confront. Our priority against Satan is to "*Endeavour to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace*" (Ephesians 4:3). If Satan divides us, he conquers us. Those of us that are actively involved in Kingdom Advance must not be ignorant of the devil's devices. He will constantly be seeking to plant tares in the wheat. The Church can avoid many of these tares if she keeps the focus on "quality" as well as "quantity." Evangelism must be balanced by discipleship.

Fact 4: The gift of utterance is vital. This is our "preaching gift." God has chosen the foolishness of preaching to save. To compromise the preaching of the Word is to halt the advance. Any local assembly that has not kept the pulpit the priority has ceased to help in the cause and has placed themselves under the "curse of Meroz" (Judges 5:23). The gift of utterance was continuously prayed for by the early saints (Acts 4:31; Ephesians 6:18-19). We need a revival of gospel preachers today that are filled with the Spirit and gifted with gospel utterance.

Fact 5: Prayer is a divine necessity. We must give ourselves to prayer. If there is one thing that the book of Acts breathes, it is the spirit of prayer. Acts teaches us with demonstrable clarity that Kingdom Advance lives or dies by prayer power. This is taught in the Old Testament as well as the New. From time to time, God has poured out the Spirit of grace and supplication upon the Church in a mightier way. This greater effusion of the Spirit of prayer has always been followed by great revivals and super thrusts of Kingdom Advance. Oh! That we could see such an outpouring at this present hour!

Fact 6: Missions and Evangelism are crucial. We must make much of missions and evangelism. Territorial expansion of the name of Jesus is the goal of all the above. This expansion may come about by winning whole cities (Samaria), or whole families (Cornelius), or maybe just one person at a time (the Eunuch). Our responsibility is to be ready at all times to *Go, Stand, & Speak* (Acts 5:20).

Fact 7: The power of personal testimony is priceless. Nothing surpasses the effectiveness of Kingdom Advance like one person's testimony. Paul's most powerful sermon was not a nice exegesis of some prominent doctrine, or an eloquent sermon on how to get from point A to point B in seven easy steps. Paul's most powerful message was what he was before and after he met Jesus Christ. If we could only persuade the saints to take their testimony to their work places, to their schools, to their neighborhoods and to their families; I have no doubt that evangelism would explode. After all, the best definition of

evangelism I have ever heard is: *“Evangelism is one beggar telling another beggar where to get bread.”*

I can only speak for me personally on this matter of evangelism through personal testimony. I have read many good books on evangelism (and still do), I have seen videos and attended conferences about evangelism, and I have read and heard many great preachers concerning evangelism. However, I must tell you that nothing has motivated me more in sharing my personal testimony than my passion for my Savior’s Passion. Several years after my salvation experience, I received an abundant infilling of the Holy Spirit. He literally transformed my life. One of the outstanding things that changed in me was that I fell freshly in love with my Lord. Jesus literally became my passion. I had an insatiable desire to witness for Christ like I never had before. Sharing my faith was no hardship whatsoever. I say very humbly and thankfully that God has helped me to keep the fire burning. To be saved and called to advance the gospel and kingdom of Jesus Christ is the highest honor that can be placed upon any one human being.

I might add that I would never give a step by step method on how to be filled with the Spirit. All I know is that before I got to Romans 8:2; I had to get to Romans 7:24. I was sick and tired of being sick and tired.

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Chapter One

The Prelude to Pentecost

Acts 1:1-11

The Church will advance the testimony of Christ throughout the world by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Devotional Commentary

Luke naturally begins his record of Kingdom Advance with the life and ministry of the King. As far as what Jesus did on earth we will let John speak on this matter, *“There are also many things which Jesus did, the which, if they should be written every one, I suppose that even the world itself could not contain the books that should be written. Amen.”* (John 21:25)

Jesus began his Messianic ministry on earth at the age of thirty by the act of baptism in the Jordan River. The Messiah’s Ministry would be authenticated by the divine Trinity (Luke 3:21-23). Trinity is a word that describes God as being one God in three persons. We see the Trinity at work in creation (Genesis 1:1-3; John 1:1-13), in salvation (Ephesians 1:1-14), in Christian baptism (Matthew 28:19-20), in the life of Jesus (Luke 3:21-22), and in the life of the Church (Acts 1:3-8). At our Lord’s baptism we see a thrice-fold descending: First, we see the *descending* of God the Son into the watery grave of Jordan. By this act Jesus was numbered with transgressors (Isaiah 53:12), fulfilling all righteousness (Matthew 3:15), and dying to his glory, to glorify the Father (Philippians 2:5-11). Second, we see the *descending* of God the Holy Spirit upon the Son. By this act the Spirit was fulfilling Scripture and anointing Jesus for ministry (Isaiah 11:1-6; 61:1). The words Messiah and Christ mean “the Anointed One.” Third, we see the *descending* of God the Father to speak for his Son. By this act the Father was sealing his Son (John 6:27) and authenticating the Deity of Christ. Jesus has always been and will always be God.

There are three wonderful applications for us:

Application 1:

Our baptism is the funeral for the “self-life.”

The Jordan River is symbolic of “death to self.” Before Israel could advance to conquer Canaan, they had to cross old Jordan’s stormy waters. They descended down into Jordan symbolizing they were dying to themselves and then they came out on resurrection ground. This is exactly the meaning of Christian baptism. It is our public identification with the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ. It is our public avowal that we have died to self and have been raised to walk in newness of life (Romans 6:3-6). To neglect baptism is to keep “self” alive, and the Holy Spirit will never descend upon “flesh” (Exodus 30:32).

Application 2:

The anointing of the Spirit qualifies for ministry.

Jesus did not begin ministry “until” he was clothed with the Spirit. Jesus’ submission to the Spirit is a beautiful act. It is the Lamb being clothed with the Dove. Jesus knew the importance of the Spirit’s ministry. This is why Jesus would not allow his disciples to begin ministry “until” they were clothed with

power from on high (Luke 24:49; Acts 1:4-5). This is an established pattern for ministry. Must our Lord and the early Church need the Spirit's power and yet, we will do ministry without it? God forbid! Let us plead Luke 11:13 with our Father until he answers. The anointing of the Spirit is what will carry you through the difficulties (Isaiah 59:19).

Application 3:

God's seal is our security.

The New Covenant blessing would be the indwelling gift of the Spirit (Ezekiel 36:27; Acts 2:38-39). God the Father would seal his saints with the Spirit, thereby authenticating his ownership of them and granting to them the full assurance that they would be eternally secure (2 Corinthians 1:22; Ephesians 1:13, 4:30).

The Trinity is not only clearly seen in action at the beginning of our Lord's ministry, but also at the beginning of the Church's ministry. We have the *Passion of the Son*, the *Promise of the Father*, and the *Power of the Spirit*.

The Passion and Ascension of God the Son (1:1-3, 9-11) Jesus spent forty days with his "hand picked" apostles giving commandments and instructions of what was to come concerning the kingdom of God. These forty days of Jesus showing he was alive was undeniable evidence that he was the biblical, risen Messiah (1 Corinthians 15:5-8). The passion and resurrection of Christ would become the message by which the Church would accomplish Kingdom Advance. The word passion means "to suffer." It has reference to the "Paschal Lamb" which was killed for Passover (Exodus 12). Jesus fulfilled the Old Testament feast of Passover when he died as the Lamb of God (1 Corinthians 5:7). The passion and resurrection of Christ would catch fire in the early church and start a blaze that would burn until the Ascended Lord becomes the Descended Lord (Revelation 19:11).

Whenever a local church loses its passion for the Passion of Christ then Kingdom Advance will cease in that assembly.

It is very true that not only must the things of Christ be taught but also caught. Have you spent forty days with Christ lately? Have you gotten alone with Christ before an open Bible and viewed his nail-scarred hands and feet? Have you visited the empty tomb and rejoiced that he is alive? Have you caught the passion? What drives you? Is the fire of the Gospel in your bones? Are you living like the two disciples that were headed for Emmaus with downcast spirits or are you living like the 120 disciples that were headed towards the uttermost parts of the earth with a fire in their heart? Maybe you need to put the brakes on and invite Jesus to abide with you awhile and rekindle the burning heart (Luke 24:32).

The Gospel of Jesus Christ is the Church's weapon of power to advance his Kingdom. Moses had his staff, David had his sling, and the Church has her gospel. The blood-shedding death of our Lord and his empty tomb laid the groundwork and secured the victory for advance. Every obstacle in the path of advance was obliterated by the finished work of Jesus. The Church would have a message that no other religion on earth could compare to. She could proclaim a God that would forgive all a persons sins, live in their heart, walk with them at all times, never leave them and grant to them a title to a mansion in heaven!

The Gospel would be good news for mankind. The bad news is that sin destroyed mankind. It hindered the progress of what Adam was to be. It became the arch enemy of heaven and happiness. It brought with it death and the grave. The good news is that Jesus came into the world and took Adam's place on our behalf. He tasted death on the cross and after three days he conquered the grave! O death, where is thy

sting? O grave, where is thy victory? Soon the good news of Christ would advance to the whole world. Soon, Jerusalem and the world would experience the sound waves of a TNT Church, ignited and inspired with the Gospel of Jesus Christ! Oh, my fellow saints; we have the cure, let us not be silent! We must have a passion for his Passion!

The Ascension of Jesus (vv. 9-11) would play a huge role in the hearts of the early Church. It is sometimes lost sight of in comparison with the Death and Resurrection of Christ and the blast of Pentecost. However, its vital truth should be known. The Ascension of Christ has several truths for us:

Truth 1: Christ is now seated by the Father's right hand in supreme authority (Matthew 28:18; Hebrews 1:3). The authority of Christ secures the accomplishment of evangelism. The success of Kingdom Advance does not depend upon the shifting will of man but upon the sovereign will of God (Psalms 110:3; Ephesians 1:11). This fact does not exclude the will of man in salvation. No man ever came to Christ against his own will. The efficacious work of the Holy Spirit upon the sinner causes the sinner to yield to Christ voluntarily and freely.

Truth 2: Christ is now glorified and the dispensation of the Spirit is now in full effect (John 7:39, 16:13-14). Therefore, the Church will not have to rely on the might or power of human strength to evangelize the earth, but on the guidance and energizing power of the Spirit (Zechariah 4:6).

Truth 3: Jesus' heavenly ministry of intercession is now in full effect (Hebrews 7:25). When Moses' arms were lifted up in intercessory prayer on the mountain, Joshua won the battle in the valley. So, likewise, the Church is guaranteed victory in the valley because the nail-scarred hands of Jesus are lifted up continuously in intercession. This is why intercessory prayer is so powerful in Kingdom Advance.

Truth 4: At the Ascension of Jesus the disciples were promised that Jesus would return. This truth has encouraged the Church and given her hope throughout the ages. The doctrine of the Second Coming of Christ has been a tremendous motivation for all the saints. The Bride longs to see her Bridegroom (Revelation 19:7-8).

As Jesus was taken up into heaven the disciples were gazing up into heaven (v. 11). The Church needs to keep her eyes upon Jesus. The whole of the Christian life is a continuous looking to Jesus. The Christian life is *commenced* by looking unto Jesus (Isaiah 45:22); it is *continued* by looking unto Jesus (Hebrews 12:2) and it is *consummated* by looking into his face at his appearing (1 John 3:2).

Our Lord's earthly ministry was now complete. His feet will not touch earth again until he returns as Judge (Revelation 19:11; Zechariah 14:4). His final word to the disciples was one of the hardest for faith to endure – WAIT.

The Promise of God the Father (1:4-5) - The Father's promise was given in Joel 2:28-32 and Ezekiel 36:24-30. The gift of the Holy Spirit's indwelling would be the New Covenant gift. Jesus amplified this promise in his discourse to the disciples in John 14-16. The Father's promise would involve four things: First, Jesus would baptize his disciples with the Holy Spirit (Matthew 3:11; Mark 1:8; Luke 3:16; John 1:33). Second, the Holy Spirit would baptize the disciples into the body of Christ (1 Corinthians 12:13). Third, The Church would begin (Matthew 16:18; Acts 2:47). Fourth, the Spirit would come to indwell each believer (Ezekiel 36:27; John 14:17; 1 Corinthians 3:16).

The "*Baptism of the Holy Spirit*" has been taught as a separate experience after the salvation experience. Various words and phrases have been brought forth to describe this second experience, however, the Bible is clear that the baptism of the Spirit is the salvation experience. I do believe that the dilemma would be resolved if we would understand just how mighty and supernatural the salvation experience is. It is hard to imagine that anyone that is an avid student of the Scriptures could exalt any experience greater than the salvation experience. I admit that to be filled with the Spirit can be a

tremendous experience, but it can never match being indwelt with the Spirit.

We are not instructed to wait for the Spirit because the baptism has happened. The 120 in the upper room were instructed to wait because the fulfillment of the feast of Pentecost was scheduled to take place fifty days after the resurrection. This was established in the 23rd chapter of Leviticus. There were seven feasts of the Lord and Pentecost was the last of the spring feasts. Pentecost means the fiftieth day.

The Power of God the Holy Spirit (1:6-8) - The disciples were concerned about the prophetic future and Jesus was concerned about the here-and-now. The book of Revelation is good to read and study, but we must not get consumed about what God has not revealed and lose focus on what he has revealed. There are many things unclear about our Lord's Coming, but there is certain clarity about our Lord's Commission. Let the Father take care of our Lord's Coming and we will take care of the going.

Acts 1:8 would become the watchword for advance. The whole mission of taking Christ to the ends of the earth would be led and accomplished and managed by the Holy Spirit. The Kingdom of God has always been led forward by the Holy Spirit. Even though Pentecost is the beginning of his dispensation on earth, he was always involved in the purpose of the Father. God has a fixed principle in Kingdom Advance that we would do well to keep before us: "...*Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, says the Lord of hosts*" (Zechariah 4:6).

Anyone that has been in full submission to the control of the Holy Spirit has always advanced the Gospel in their generation.

The mission of Acts 1:8 can be summed up by three prepositions within the verse:

Preposition 1: Upon you - There is a vast difference in having the Spirit of God "in" you and the Spirit "upon" you. The Spirit in you is for salvation, and the Spirit upon you is for service. As soon as Samuel anointed David with oil (a symbol of the Spirit) from his horn (a symbol of power), the Spirit of God came upon David from that day forward (1 Samuel 16:13). Have you had a day like that? Are you trying to serve God in the power of the flesh? Do not forget that our Lord did not begin ministry until he had the Spirit upon him. Neither would he allow his disciples to begin advancing until they had the Spirit upon them. This anointing is not for the servant of the Lord to "show-off" but to "show-up" when God calls. The word power means "the ability to do." It is dynamite power. Every local church should be a power-house and every saint should be a power-witness. No device that runs off electricity is worth a nickel until you plug it in. Many churches have lost the power from on high because there is a breaker out in the power box or else someone has pulled away from the power source.

Preposition 2: Unto Me - There are a lot of things that will take place in the Spirit-filled person, but one thing must take place or else we know it to be only flesh faking it. That one thing is: *A Spirit anointed believer will make it all about Jesus*. If there is anything that stands out in the book of Acts it is this: *The early church made it all about Jesus*. Holy Ghost people give great evidence to the person of Christ. Is there enough evidence to convict you of being Spirit-filled? Heaven is heaven, because it is all about Jesus! We would have more heaven in our churches if we would make it more about Jesus instead of ourselves. God only knows how many local churches have lost advancing power because someone wanted more glory than Christ! This is known in the Bible as "vain-glory." The word witness is used in a legal sense of someone giving evidence. Eventually it was associated with those that were willing to die for their faith. They were known as "martyrs."

Preposition 3: Unto the world - The mission of the Church would call for territorial expansion to the ends of the globe. Israel was to conquer Canaan only but the Church is to reach the world with the

Gospel. Luke structured his treatise in the order of Acts 1:8. The Church should pray for Spirit-filled missionaries and missions. We may not be able to go ourselves, but we can stretch our arms through prayer and financial giving. These two weapons for advance are no problem for Spirit-filled believers. Laziness in the prayer-closet and stinginess in the wallet are sure signs that the flesh has usurped the throne in that believer's heart. We have been saved to the uttermost (Hebrews 7:25) to take the gospel to the uttermost and this will only be accomplished by those that have a passion for His Passion.

“The call of the cross is to enter into the passion of Christ. We must have upon us the print of the nails...” – Gordon Watt

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Chapter Two

Preparing for Pentecost

Acts 1:12-26

The increase of Kingdom Advance in a local church will be measured by the spiritual condition of its leaders.

Devotional Commentary

Acts 1:12-26 has a great lesson for every generation. It is dreadfully sad how many local churches have lost advancing power because of poor leaders. Placing the wrong man in the right position can be devastating for that local church's future. If a leader gets in his mind that God has placed him there to "run" the show, then look out, because the only running he will do is to run people off. We need to keep an eye for the "Diotrephes spirit" (3 John). Here are two principles that must guide us in every choice:

I. Prayerful Consideration (1:12-15, 24-26) – The upper room was the early church's prayer-closet. They met God in secret and he rewarded them openly. Private praying secures public power. The word "accord" in verse 14 has the picture of a choir with many different voices yet making one sound. What a sight and sound it would have been to hear 120 voices making one song. According to the Greek text, they were praying "the" prayer. This must have been the prayer pattern our Lord gave in Luke 11:1-13. "*Thy Kingdom Come*" is the foundational request and "*asking for the Holy Spirit*" is the top-stone. The 120 saints were pleading the promise. Are we? Are we claiming our rightful inheritance? What! Jesus needed Spirit-power, the early Church needed Spirit-power, and yet we will presume to attempt Kingdom work without it! God forbid! Banish the thought! There is no hint whatsoever that the invitation of John 7:37-39 has subsided. The invitation still goes out to "*any man.*" Will you be that man?

Praying people will make good choices because they are inviting God to call the shots. Abraham had his altar, but Lot never did. If our mind is already made up, then prayer is mocking God. Prayer is not getting God's approval as to what is on your mind; it is you giving acceptance as to what is on his mind.

II. Scriptural Qualification (1:16-23) – Peter is led by the Spirit to apply Psalm 109:8 to the horrific death and replacement of Judas. The betrayer had a terrible ending on earth. Those thirty pieces of silver meant nothing now. He had "sold his soul" for thirty pieces of filthy lucre. His ungodly deed would be remembered every time the Church celebrates the Lord's Supper. Now, it was time to put Judas behind and replace him with a man of God's choosing.

We must allow Scripture to dictate our choices. Samuel was a great man of God and even he would have chosen the wrong man for king (1 Samuel 16). The man we choose must be a "Bible Man." His life should line up with the principles laid down in Acts 6 and 1 Timothy 3. By-the-way, there are more qualifications to check a man by other than being the husband of one wife. To follow Scripture is to secure the Spirit's guidance. *The Holy Spirit will never lead us contrary to the "letter" or the "spirit" of the Scriptures.* Some good biblical principles to follow in making such a choice are in our text:

Principle 1:

Choose only faithful men (v. 21).

The words “accompanied with us all the time” are good words to choose a man by. They give two qualities about a good leader: First, He can be known by his *company*. A man’s company outside the Church will speak much of the man. Second, He can be known by his *commitment*. Peter wanted a man that was faithful “all the time.” Many leaders start out in a blaze but fizzle out in the long run. Jesus said, “No man having put his hand to the plow, and looking back, IS FIT for the kingdom of heaven” (Luke 9:62). Make sure the man you are choosing has been faithful to his wife, his children and his church. Make sure he has followed Jesus actively. Always remember this principle: *A church will be just like its leaders*. Ten minutes with the deacon board or pastor will reveal where the church is spiritually.

Principle 2:

Choose a man with a strong witness (v. 22).

Even though Peter is referring to a visible eye-witness to Jesus after his Passion, the principle holds true for all leaders. He must give evidence of the person of Christ. The essence of an “ordained” man is not how much money is in his wallet but how much of Jesus is on his life. Look at the man and ask, “Does he resemble Jesus?” If there is doubt – then do not do it. The whole purpose of Kingdom Advance is to be a witness unto Jesus; and this purpose must determine who we choose for spiritual positions. Character is everything. They were replacing a hypocrite and we are laying hands on them. We not only need revivals, we need replacements!

Principle 3:

Choose a man God has “shown” (v. 24).

There are two unchangeable things we look for when choosing a leader: First, choose a man God *knows*. We have no way to look into a man’s heart. That is why we need to make prayer a priority when we choose leaders. God is looking for men with pure hearts. He can see if the man will abuse the office or turn out to be a hindrance. Second, choose a man God *shows*. When God chooses a man, He anoints the man. This anointing on the man of God removes all questions and doubts. He stands out. He is different. You cannot explain it but there is something “otherworldly” about him. Ah! We know what it is. It is the glow of God. It is the fire on the bush. It is Jesus on the man. It is the fragrance of the spices of the apothecary. It is the dove brooding over his lamb-like soul. The man is “known” and “shown” by God and then he is “known” by the Church. God has been working in him; giving him Scripture cravings, prayer desires, a love for the saints, and longings for deeper holiness. God will not work through a man until he works in the man (Philippians 2:12-13).

May all of us that have been placed in spiritual positions never forget those most solemn words of Acts 1:25, “*Judas by transgression fell.*” A fallen leader takes many down with him. The devil knows this and that is why he exerts more energy into bringing down leaders. Satan loves to get fallen leaders on main news channels so he can show the world that the church is a fake. He wants to persuade the world that the fallen ones represent all believers. Be that as it may, we will carry on in Kingdom Advance. The Judas’ will come and go but Jesus lives on!

Chapter Three

The Spirit and the Bride

Acts 2:1-47

Pentecost would usher in the blessing of the Spirit and the birthday of the Church.

Devotional Commentary

The celebrated feast of Israel's past had come to its fulfillment. Jesus was now glorified and seated in heaven; therefore, he could now baptize his people with the Holy Ghost. The Spirit and the Church would link together and become the driving force for Kingdom Advance (Revelation 22:17). As the holy oil ran down the beard of Aaron and flowed down his garments, so now the Great High Priest of heaven would release an abundant effusion of the Spirit to his body. Pentecost, like Calvary will never happen again. It only needs to be appropriated. Has Pentecost fully come in and upon you? Are you stuck between Calvary and Pentecost? Are you wandering in the wilderness or conquering in Canaan?

Pentecost came suddenly and supernaturally. There were no "elite" saints that got the blessing while others did not. All disciples were recipients of the Pentecostal blessing. The Holy Ghost took over the prayer-meeting and the world has never been the same since. The Spirit came as wind and fire. He is well known by these symbols in the Old Testament. Wind and fire are mysterious and miraculous. Many of the externals of Pentecost have gone but there is one blessing that has never left the Church, and that is the "gift of utterance." Ordinary persons were able to speak other dialects immediately with boldness and clarity. The curse of Babel had been reversed. Confusion was turned into order. There were no silent saints after Pentecost. You cannot keep quiet when the heart is bursting forth. There is not now, nor has there ever been, a true Bible preacher that lacked the gift of utterance. Also, we might add, that to get up into a pulpit and utter some words is not necessarily true biblical preaching unless the speaker is uttering "*the wonderful works of God*" (Acts 2:11).

Whenever the Holy Ghost moves mightily, questions will always follow. We love the natural order. We are dreadfully formalistic. We hate to be disturbed from our slumbers and schedules. There are three important questions that were asked that day:

I. Who are these people? (2:7-11) – Aren't these folks mere Galileans? How do they talk our talk? The Spirit-filled life is the *normal* Christian life, but when some unknown "Galilean" Christian gets on fire, the *subnormal* thinks they are *abnormal*. It is glorious to see ordinary believers become extraordinary when the Spirit takes over. Behold! A bush burns but it is not consumed! God has surely chosen the weak, the foolish, the despised and the unknown to confound men and glorify Himself (1 Corinthians 1:26-31). The feast of Pentecost brought many nations into Jerusalem. It was God's time to reverse the curse of Babel (Genesis 11:1-9). In Genesis the world came into Shinar with one language and left with many languages, but in Acts the world came into Jerusalem with many languages but left with one – the good news of Jesus Christ and the wonderful works of God (v. 11).

II. What is going on? (2:12) – I would to God that we would have a moving of the Spirit so powerful that folks would ask, "What meaneth this?" We are so predictable. We have run out of surprises. It is so routine and mundane at the cemetery. I would dare say that if someone came up out of one of those graves,

that folks would travel the world to see such a sight. The town question would be, “What is going on over there?” On Pentecost 3000 dead sinners came up out of the grave of sin! The amazers, the doubters, and the mockers stood spell-bound with one thing to say, “What meaneth this?” Peter answers “what is this” with “this is that” (v. 16). Peter’s sermon is an excellent pattern to follow for all those who desire to win souls. His sermon was:

A. Saturated with the Scriptures (vv. 16-21, 25-28, 31, 34-35). Half of Peter’s sermon was Old Testament quotations! Illustrations are fine, and stories can be effective, but only the pure Word of God can pierce the heart. Kingdom Advance will always be successful where the Word is preached with power. Preachers that have any worth are those whose sermons fit Paul’s word to Timothy: “Preach the Word” (2 Timothy 4:2). We must get the Word of God in us. The fire must be in our bones. Any one that handles the Word of God should be diligent in the study or quit! Could a man be of any use to the medical field who never studied medical books? Could a man be an effective lawyer if he never studied law books? Neither can a man preach effectively if he does not study the Bible. He may pat the back, tickle the ear, flatter the eye and draw the crowds, but he will never bring a dead sinner to life. Instead, he will heal the wound slightly and cry “peace, peace” when there is no peace. This kind of preaching deceives sinners into a false security. God pity these kind and all that sit under their bewitchments! Peter’s Old Testament quotations are:

Quotation 1: Joel 2:28-32 quoted in Acts 2:16-21. Joel’s prophecy splits up into two parts which are linked together by one promise (v. 21):

1. The last days (vv. 16-18). The last days began with Jesus (Hebrews 1:1-2). I wish we could get it into our hearts that the days we live in are not “depressive” but “dynamic.” We are living in the dispensation of the Spirit. These are days of power and fullness. All flesh can walk in the might of God. The invitation is simply this: *Let him that is thirsty come!* Are we full? Have we enough of God? Are we satisfied with the status quo? Are there any deer panting for the water brook? Take advantage of your inheritance my friend. Claim your heritage!
2. The last of the last days (vv. 19-20). These will be the days of the Apocalypse. They are the times and seasons that are in Father’s hands (v. 7). Therefore, we need not get caught up in the Anti-Christ but focus on “the” Christ. We need not get in a tangent about what the mark of the beast is, but get passionate about the marks our Lord received. Our job is not to predict the future but to preach the faith. We must be about our Father’s business.
3. The promise (v. 21). This verse is also quoted by Paul in Romans 10:13. It is God stretching out his arms to a lost and dying world. Its theme is Messianic deliverance and salvation. It can be outlined as:
 - a. The scope of salvation: *Whosoever*
 - b. The simplicity of salvation: *shall call*
 - c. The source of salvation: *the name of the Lord*
 - d. The surety of salvation: *shall*
 - e. The satisfaction of salvation: *be saved*

Quotation 2: Psalm 16:8-11 is quoted in Acts 2:25-28. David’s Psalm is a reference to the resurrection of Jesus. One particular verse that has given some folks trouble is verse 27. Did Jesus go into hell when he died? Much of the confusion is in the word that is translated as hell. The Greek word for hell is *hades*. Hades is a place that has two sides with a gulf that separates them. One side of hades is known as paradise or Abraham’s bosom and the other side is known as hell or a place of torment (Luke 16:19-31).

When Jesus died he went to the side known as paradise (Luke 23:43). When a Christian dies now they go directly to heaven (2 Corinthians 5:8).

Quotation 3: Psalm 110 is quoted in Acts 2:34-35. This Psalm has reference to the Lordship of Jesus. It is a beautiful Messianic Psalm.

B. Saturated with the Savior (vv. 22-36). Almost every verse in Peter's sermon speaks of Jesus. Jesus was:

Approved (v. 22) – Jesus was the miracle worker.

Chosen (v. 23a) – Calvary did not catch God by surprise! Peter would not allow the wicked any bragging rights. They were guilty of murdering the Son of God and yet they were at the same time fulfilling the will of God. The word determinate means to mark out with boundaries. The word counsel means to purpose or to will. The word foreknowledge means to know beforehand. Many brethren wrestle with this verse to the point where they actually explain it away. There is a tendency to misuse the word foreknowledge. It does not say foresight but foreknowledge. God knew what was going to happen to his Son, because he planned it (1 Peter 1:20). God was not left helpless and dependent upon what man did with Christ before he decided to send him to earth. Did God foresee that man would kill Christ and then establish his plan based on that? Absolutely not! Christ was foreordained before the foundation of the world to die on the cross. It was God's plan before anything else and he used man to accomplish it.

Crucified (v. 23b) – Peter did not say Jesus died for you, but by you. The substitution of Christ for sinners is at the very heart of our faith. His Passion is the essence of Christianity.

Resurrected (vv. 24, 32) – Jesus' tomb travailed and gave birth. The resurrection played a valuable role in the book of Acts. No other religion on earth has a resurrected God!

Foreseen (vv. 25-28) – David's faith was anchored in the Messiah. This is why David was a saved man (Romans 4:6-8).

Exalted (vv. 33-36) – Both Lord and Christ!

Gospel advance will move mightily through the foolishness of preaching. We need to just preach Jesus. Stop preaching a plan and preach the man; stop preaching a creed and preach the Christ; stop preaching a religion and preach a relationship with Christ. It is not about our method or our denomination, it is about Christ. Paul said that neither circumcision nor uncircumcision avails anything, but a new creature (Galatians 6:15). The only preaching that makes new creatures is preaching that is saturated with Jesus.

C. Saturated with the Spirit. The Scriptures and the Savior are anointed in and of themselves. However, the preacher must be filled with the Spirit or he will kill rather than give life (2 Corinthians 3:6). Peter was not just preaching Joel's prophecy, he was experiencing it. Peter had what he preached. There was no guessing or hesitating in Peter's sermon. The man that knows preaches with authority. The flow of thought and Scripture was evidence that Peter was being carried along by another. His application of the Bible to his hearers was magnificent. Peter cared nothing about being "seeker-sensitive." He bluntly told his hearers that they had killed God's beloved. He did not take them into a counseling room and manipulate them into a false conversion. Peter had cast his net into the sea of humanity and he was about to make the biggest catch of his life. His Scripture quoted, Spirit anointed and Savior appointed sermon produced question number three.

III. What shall we do? (2:37) - Holy Ghost conviction always synchronizes with Holy Ghost preaching. Revival was in the air. Evangelism is fired by revival. Evangelism without revival is like fishing with

Peter all night and catching nothing. Pentecost changed all that. Peter's sermon was followed by three responses:

Response 1: Peter's response to their question was two-fold:

Repent (v. 38a) - Repent means "a change of mind concerning sin and Christ." Some say we need not preach repentance because a sinner cannot quit sinning. The only alternative is to tell them they can have Christ and keep sinning. No one can love God with all their heart perfectly, so are we not to preach it? God has every right to command every sinner to repent and to send that sinner to hell if he does not (Acts 17:30). However, we must preach repentance right. 1 Thessalonians 1:9 is the correct order. We do not tell sinners to stop sinning and you will be saved. We tell them to turn toward God and naturally their back will be turned against sin (Acts 20:21). Faith and repentance are two sides of one coin. We do not preach repentance because we think the sinner can quit sinning; we preach it because we know that God can give it (Acts 5:31; 2 Timothy 2:25). When God works repentance in a sinner, three things will happen:

1. The sinner will start "thinking." This is *conviction*. Repentance begins in the mind. The Spirit works his work on the mind, thereby causing the sinner to "think" about his condition (Psalm 119:59; Luke 15:17). Awareness takes place that startles the sinner, because it is the awareness of being "accountable to God." It is an awareness of being lost and undone (Isaiah 6:5). All manner of spiritual thoughts begin to pass before the sinners "minds-eye." The sinner who cared nothing about spiritual things is now considering God, sin, death, hell, eternity, guilt, and salvation. Many are in hell that fought this "love-arrest" from God. If conviction is not stifled or quenched, it will move from the mind to the heart.
2. The sinner will get "troubled." This is *contrition*. The work of repentance moves from the mind to the heart. This produces "godly sorrow" (2 Corinthians 7:10) which produces repentance. We must be very careful about trying to lead someone to Christ when the sorrow they are experiencing is merely of the world. The Spirit-wrought evangelical grace of repentance will cause the sinner to cry out, "*Against thee, thee only, have I sinned*" or "*I am not worthy*" (Psalm 51:4; Luke 15:19). The sense of the sinner's accountability to God is overwhelming and may cause great distress, but God has to wound before he heals. He kills to make alive. If contrition is not quenched, it will move from the heart to the will.
3. The sinner will "turn." This is *conversion*. This turning is a turning unto Christ by faith. It is the work of the Spirit on the will (Psalm 110:3). If my face is toward Christ then my back is toward sin. I cannot look both ways. There is a false repentance that attempts to look both ways. It is when the sinner turns 90 degrees instead of 180 degrees. The best example of this fake repentance is found in Matthew 27:3; where the word repentance means that Judas was not sorry for his betrayal of Jesus but only that he got caught. He may have had remorse but he did not have repentance. There are many church methods used today that foster fake repentance. You cannot hand the prodigal son a tract and tell him he can get saved without leaving the pig-pen or without going to the Father. By not preaching repentance we have produced church rolls full of professors of Jesus who have no possession of Jesus.

Now as soon as true evangelical repentance and faith are wrought in the sinner, then the forgiveness of sin is given. God's forgiveness is complete and eternal. The word forgiveness means that God now treats the believer as if he had never sinned at all. That is the only way he can treat the repentant sinner because all has been placed upon Christ. Upon receiving Christ the conviction ceases and freedom is enjoyed. The

storm is over and peace reigns (Isaiah 32:17; Romans 5:1). Reconciliation is settled and the judge has become the Father. The sinner is now accepted in the beloved (Ephesians 1:6).

Be baptized (v. 38b) - The preposition “for” means “because of.” You are not baptized to get forgiven but because you are forgiven. To add anything to the blood of Christ for salvation is unbiblical. However, baptism is very important. It is the public identification with the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ (Romans 6:3-6). It is our public vow to God that we have died to self and will walk in newness of life. Baptism is an external sign of an internal cleansing. Not to be baptized is disobedience and evidence that true repentance may not have taken place.

Response 2: The people responded to Peter in a mighty way (vv. 41-47a). Three thousand followed through with “Believers Baptism.” Look at the words that describe the early church and compare them with us today:

Steadfast: Does this word describe your commitment to your Savior and to your church? Quitters never win and winners never quit. They were committed to:

1. God’s book. I have heard preachers avoid the word “doctrine” like it is the plague. Paul is constantly exhorting Timothy to preach sound doctrine. Doctrine is truth! We had better preach doctrine because the devil is preaching his (1 Timothy 4:1-3).
2. Fellowship. Is your church a fellowship or a battleship? It is easy to have fellowship and unity when the whole assembly shares a passion for His Passion.
3. Communion. The Lords table was very serious business with the early saints. We should not stick Communion at the end of the service, but make it the whole service. We should never take Communion without our children to see it. All children’s churches should be shut down for Communion. In the Old Testament God had Israel to set up memorials and when the children saw a memorial they would ask their parents what it meant, and that gave the parent the opportunity to teach their child about the miracle God did at that spot. I love to hear a child during Communion whisper to their parent: *What is that?*
4. Prayers. The early saints lived around the throne. The book of Acts breathes prayer. Have you ever spent one sweet hour of prayer with God? No prayer = no power.

Sharing: One huge difference was in how they handled their possessions. Our churches are measured by how many possessions we have and they were measured by how many they gave away. They sold their possessions and we are sold to our possessions. It is okay to possess possessions, as long as they do not possess you. Their actions were not forced Communism or taxed Socialism, but voluntary Christianity.

Response 3: God responded by adding saved people to the Church (v. 47a). This is the purest church growth you can have, yea; it is the only growth you can have! This is the ultimate sign of a Spirit-filled church. Not to win souls is not to advance. The goal of Kingdom Advance is souls, souls, and more souls! We plant, we water, and God gives the increase. A church that is continually decreasing is not a New Testament Church according to Acts. We agree that Pentecost was unique, but we shall see that the whole book of Acts is Kingdom increase. From the beginning to the end of Acts the Church increased! God did not call us to fail!

Church growth is not merely numbers. There are many unbiblical methods being used today to get numbers. God only adds “saved” people to his church roll. Our man-made additions usually turn into subtractions, whereas, God’s additions turn into multiplications.

The Pentecostal blessing was magnificent! This is our heritage to claim and appropriate. We are living

in the dispensation of the Holy Spirit! He is here! He is on the earth and in the Church! Why don't we acknowledge him and give him honor? Are we sensitive to his dove-like disposition? Do we ever commune with him (2 Corinthians 13:14)? The fullness of Pentecost enriched the Church with four tremendous blessings:

Unity – This will bring the blessing (Psalm 133).

Understanding - The Bible came alive after Pentecost.

Unction - The dew of heaven was upon the Church.

Utterance - The gospel flowed from their lips with saving power.

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Chapter Four

The Cost of Pentecost

Acts 3-4

The Church must be willing to pay the price of selling out to the Spirit's call.

Chapters 3 & 4 are structured in a chiasmic form. The effectiveness of this literary design is that we get the main point the writer is making. The center of the chiasm is the "preaching point." It is the place "marked X."

- A - A man's body is laid at the apostle's feet (3:2-3)
- B - Believers share what they have (3:6)
- C - Believers stretch forth their hands (3:7)
- D - Believers unite for prayer (3:1, 10-11)
- E - The healed man enters with them (3:8)
- F - Peter preaches (3:12-26)
- G - Opposition (4:1-3)
- H - The Church Advances (4:4)
- G' - Opposition (4:5-7)
- F' - Peter preaches (4:8-12)
- E' - The healed man stands with them (4:14-22)
- D' - Believers unite for prayer (4:24-31)
- C' - Believers ask to stretch forth his hands (4:30)
- B' - Believers share what they have (4:32-34)
- A' - A man's bounty is laid at the apostle's feet (4:35-37)

Devotional Commentary

It is very difficult for Christians in America to grasp the thought of being persecuted for the faith. The Christian life, if lived in full service to Jesus, has a price to pay. There are many that find the Gospel very offensive; and the closer we approach the last of the last days, the more intense the conflict will be. Many good and sincere saints have in their minds that to be filled with the Spirit is for happiness, and to enter ministry is a path that yields sunshine every day. Have we forgotten what happened to Jesus right after he entered into his earthly ministry and was anointed by the Spirit? The Spirit drove him into the wild to be tested by the devil (Mark 1:12-13). *To experience biblical Pentecost is to be willing to pay the cost.*

The Miracle of the Poor (3:1-10) - Isaiah said the "lame will leap like a deer" (Isaiah 35:6). God used the lame to exalt his name. The poor crippled man became a show-piece for what the gospel can do. The miracle takes place in four stages:

Stage 1: We see the man *lame* (v. 2). The cripple was totally powerless to help himself. The word "impotent" is translated in Romans 5:6 as "without strength." It means powerless.

Stage 2: We see the man *looking* (vv. 4-5). Looking caused Eve to eat the forbidden, Achan to steal the forbidden, and David to know the forbidden. The devil gets to the heart through the eyes. Jesus gets to the

heart through the eye of faith. The simplicity of salvation given in Isaiah 45:22: “*Look unto me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth: for I am God and there is none else.*” “Look and Live” was the saving word for the serpent bitten Israelites (Numbers 21:4-9).

Stage 3: We see the man *lifted* (vv. 5-6). The difference in healing services today and the healing service then was money. The cripple was not charged but changed. He did not need money but a miracle. Now that he could walk he could work. Peter lifting the man up is a wonderful picture. Christ was lifted up so sinners could be lifted up. Love lifted me!

Stage 4: We see the man *leaping* (v. 8). Peter and John did not have silver and gold, but they had power. Laodicea did not have power, but they had silver and gold (Revelation 3:14-21). Must we admit that we are living in Laodicean times? Are impotent sinners rising up and walking in our churches? Has anything amazing happened in your ministry lately? What do we have to give that money cannot buy?

The Message of the Preacher (3:11-26) - Peter’s evangelistic sermons recorded by Luke are much different from many we hear today. This sermon is full of the Scriptures, the Savior, and the Spirit. Peter did not have to reach for his book of “illustrations” to flavor his message; he had one in real life! The lame man was evidence that the Messiah’s Ministry was still advancing. There are always two things that stand out in the evangelistic sermons recorded in Acts. First, the Gospel is always the essence of the message (vv. 13-18, 20-26a). The Gospel is what the Spirit has been sent to bless. Not to preach the Gospel is to rob the Spirit of the one instrument by which he saves sinners. The Gospel is the supreme weapon of advance. Woe be unto us if we preach not the Gospel (1 Corinthians 9:16). Second, salvation is always commanded (vv. 19, 26b). The verbs are imperatives.

Peter’s sermon can be outlined under three headings:

- A) The *truth* concerning Jesus (vv. 12-18, 20-26a). First, he is the Son of the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. This is proof positive that Jesus was and is God (v. 13). Second, he is the Holy One and the Just (v. 14). These two traits are dreadful to the unsaved at the Great White Throne. Third, he is the risen Prince of life (v. 15, 26a). Prince means Preeminence (Colossians 1:18). Fourth, he is the Suffering One that all the Old Testament prophets spoke of (v. 18, 22-24).
- B) The *trial* concerning Jesus (vv. 13b-15). Peter’s hearers had put Jesus on trial and now the table is turned and they are on trial. Peter does not present the cross as a nice suggestion. He does not preach “Seven Steps to Satisfaction.” He bluntly tells them that they have “*killed the Prince of Life*” (Acts 3:15). The Cross will not have its full effect on me until I realize that it is not just “for” me, but “because” of me.
- C) The *triumph* concerning Jesus (vv. 19, 26b). There is a strange but wonderful paradox concerning sinners and the Savior: *Our sin was what killed the Savior, and yet, we look to the Savior for salvation from our sin.* Peter commands repentance the right way by using the word “converted.” The Greek word for converted is *epistrepho*. *Strepho* means “to turn” and the prefix *epi* means “to.” Peter does not tell them to turn from their sins (even though this is implied); he tells them to turn to God. When a sinner turns toward Christ in faith their sins are blotted-out, obliterated and completely erased. Peter then uses the word *strepho* again in verse 26, but with a different prefix. The prefix in verse 26 is *apo* which means to turn from. Please notice carefully that in verse 26 they are not doing the turning themselves but God turns them. We would summarize it like this: *True biblical evangelical repentance is God turning the sinner from their sin and then the response of the sinner is to turn toward God* (Jeremiah 31:18).

Peter’s application to his hearers is clear and uncompromising. Many arguments concerning God’s part

and man's part in salvation would cease immediately if Scripture was taken as it is written. Verses 19 and 26 do not clash, they harmonize. God's sovereignty and man's responsibility harmonize when the Spirit is working. They always clash apart from the Spirit's working. Responsibility is best defined this way: "Salvation is man's response (v. 19) to God's ability (v. 26)."

The Madness of the Persecutors (4:1-22) - It is not the miracle or the message that drives the enemy to madness, it is the "name" (v. 18). The disciples could be as religious as they wanted, they just could not use the name. Behind the name was a man who died and rose again and the Sadducees did not believe in a resurrection. The belief in a resurrection was one major truth that separated them from the Pharisees.

Peter defends the name and contends for the faith. Once again, Peter goes straight to the Gospel (v. 10). He emphatically states that not only is the lame man walking physically because of the name "Jesus," but that no man can walk spiritually apart from the name (v. 12). Peter quotes from Psalm 118:22. The words "made whole" in verse 9 share the same root as the word "saved" in verse 12. The Greek word is *sozo*. It refers to Messianic deliverance from the *penalty (justification)*, the *power (sanctification)*, and the *presence (glorification)* of sin. The lame man was not just healed in body but also in soul. He was saved by faith in the name of Jesus.

We must never compromise the truth in Acts 4:12. Salvation is by faith in Christ alone. Salvation is not in a denominational name, a ministry name, or a church name. If we are challenged for preaching the name of Jesus, then our response will be: "*For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard*" (Acts 4:20).

The Might of the Prayer-Warriors (4:23-31) - The Church's response to opposition was to make a phone call to God! They had a direct line through Jesus. Prayer moves the arm that moves the world. Prayer brings God into the situation. *All battles are won in the prayer-closet*. The Church did not pray for the trouble to cease, but for boldness to preach in the midst of it. Prayer gives the Church courage to advance in the face of opposition. The book of Acts is soaked with the Spirit of prayer. These prayer-warriors teach us how to pray: First, they were *synchronized* (v. 24) - The word "voice" is singular. Unity or death! Second, they were *scriptural* (vv. 25-28) - Bible praying breaks through to the throne. Learn to pray your Bible and plead the promises. Third, they were *specific* (v. 29) - There was no playing in their praying. They did not pray around the world, but to the need. Fourth, they were *shaken* (v. 31) - God authenticated the request with a shaking. O! What praying power the Church had! We must pray to learn how to pray. The greatest prayer request we can make is for more prayer. Little prayer = little power!

The Money of the Prosperous (4:32-37) - Our chiasmic structure begins with a poor man laying his burden at the apostles' feet and ends with a prosperous man laying his bounty at the apostles' feet. God's people are not known in Scripture as stingy people. The Church follows in the steps of her God, who loved so much that he gave (John 3:16).

The "oneness" of the early saints is beautiful. It is the oneness of the blessed Trinity. It is the oneness of holy Matrimony. As soon as a local church loses their oneness, then Kingdom Advance ceases in that divided body. In our particular text, God raises up a man that will be a key player in Kingdom Advance. He is a gifted man God will use to keep oneness in the body. His name is Barnabas and it means "encourager." Barnabas is an excellent example of "full surrender." He gives new meaning to what a real "yard-sale" is. What a person does with their money tells a lot about that person. Obviously, Barnabas gave himself as well as his money. Once again, this was not forced Communism or taxed Socialism, but

pure Christianity.

Why is it that Christians have such a hard time giving to missions? Maybe this is why we need to examine the book of Acts afresh. It is a fantastic testimony, especially in our day, to read these words: “... *for as many as were possessors of lands or houses sold them, and brought the prices of the things that were sold.*” (Acts 4:34)

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Chapter Five

Pretense and Persecution

Acts 5:1-42

The body of Christ must keep in step with the Spirit to combat pretense and persecution.

Devotional Commentary

The word “filling” is a popular word in Acts. It is used to describe a person who is under the influence or control of something or someone. Paul makes the contrast (not comparison) of being filled with wine to being filled with the Spirit (Ephesians 5:18). To have fresh fillings of the Holy Spirit is the only way any local church or individual Christian can keep advancing with the gospel. There are three “fillings” that summarize this section:

I. Ananias is filled with Lying (5:1-16) - It would have been refreshing if chapter 5 would have opened up with the connecting word “and” or “also.” It opens with the contrasting word “but.” Barnabas had exemplified full surrender and Ananias would exemplify the fake surrender. The devil has a counterfeit for everything about Christ. Jannes and Jambres will always be around (2 Timothy 3:8). The story before us teaches us a biblical principle: *God not only rules, he overrules.*

A) The Deceivers (vv. 1-2) - Ananias means “to whom God has graciously given” and Sapphira means “sapphire or precious stone.” Their names would add guilt to their crime. They had premeditated an embezzlement of God’s money, and then they premeditated to cover it up with a lie. Joshua was faced with this dilemma when Achan stole a wedge of gold and hid it (Joshua 7). It is hard to play hide-and-go-seek with God. Materialism and money has caused unending tragedy in so many lives and yet multitudes are still living a life of continuous deceit. Satan saw that outward persecution could not halt the Church, so he would now try inward pretense. There is a solemn word for us from this incident. It calls for a heart search. Do we want people to think we are fully dedicated to the Lord when we are holding back in our heart? Do we sing “Sweet hour of Prayer” and never pray one hour? Do we sing “Wherever he leads I will follow” and refuse to go through open doors? Do we sing “I Surrender All” and barely give God a few minutes a day? Do we sing “Take time to be holy” and never take time? The path of deceit is tragic. It begins by pretending to have a close fellowship with God when we are not (1 John 1:6); then after we have lived the lie so long, we actually deceive ourselves and justify our lifestyle (1 John 1:8); and then finally if we are confronted about our lifestyle, we will deny that it is wrong, thus calling God a liar when His word says otherwise (1 John 1:10)! The only way out of this deceitful life is to confess (to agree with) your sins to God and get forgiven (1 John 1:9).

B) The Detection (vv. 3-4, 8-9) - Satan is well involved in the whole matter. The question Peter was really asking in verse 3 was not why Satan did what he did, but why Ananias allowed Satan to do what he did. This whole incident should not have happened. First, Ananias should have resisted Satan with Scripture (Proverbs 24:9; Matthew 4:1-13). Second, Ananias did not have to yield to the suggestion Satan made (James 4:7). Third, Ananias’s heart should not have been open for Satan to fill (Proverbs 4:23).

If the omniscient Spirit wanted to use us as examples, how empty our church pews would be! We cannot

fake our commitment. Pretense will sooner or later catch up. “*Be sure, your sin will find you out*” (Numbers 32:23). Multitudes might pass through this life undetected, but the Day of Judgment is coming. Many have pretended religion so long that their conscience has grown callous, and they have persuaded themselves they are actually doing it for God (Matthew 7:21-23).

We must not overlook the truth that the Holy Spirit is God (vv. 3-4). We must not take for granted his presence in the Church. Whether or not we realize it; God is still judging persons in the Church. His chastisement is being exercised continuously, but we are just too blind to see it. Many church members are at this very moment under God’s chastisement and do not know it! This one biblical truth has tripped up more saints than any other. Israel of old could never understand God’s chastening hand (Deuteronomy 8:5; Proverbs 13:24; Hebrews 12:6). It would be wise for us to press the pause button and take time to examine ourselves to make sure we are sincere in our commitment to Christ (2 Corinthians 13:5).

C) The Dead (vv. 5, 10) - Whether or not Ananias and Sapphira were truly saved persons is between them and God. Personally, I believe they were. The Bible speaks of a sin unto death for believers (1 John. 5:16). The fact that God did not allow them to get by with it may be in their favor. The persons we should be concerned about are those who practice deceit every day and never pay for it. The Bible calls them “bastards” without a heavenly Father (Hebrews 12:8).

Church discipline never halts a local church’s advance unless it is done in the wrong spirit. Church discipline helped Kingdom Advance by putting the fear of God on the Church. There is nothing healthier in this world than a biblical fear of God. It is the beginning of knowledge (Proverbs 1:7); and without it men become monsters (Romans 3:18). Discipline helped make the Church a “great” Church. They had *great power* (4:33); *great grace* (4:33); and now *great fear* (5:11). The infection was cleansed and the body revived with fresh power (vv. 12-16). Church discipline that is done in the right spirit will cause four things: First, sinners will be *terrified* (v. 13a). The Church will have fewer tares in the wheat. Second, saints will be *magnified* (v. 13b). The Church will have honor instead of humiliation. Third, believers will be *multiplied* (v. 14a). The Church will experience healthy growth. Fourth, the Lord will be *glorified* (vv. 11, 14b). The Church will bring honor to her Lord.

II. Sadducees are filled with Anger (5:17-28a) - The Sadducees had a number of distinctive beliefs, contrasting strongly with those of the Pharisees: First, they held only to the written Law, and rejected the traditions of the Pharisees. Second, they denied the resurrection of the body, personal immortality, and a future judgment. Third, they denied angels (Acts 23:8). Fourth, they denied divine providence and believed man mastered his own fate.

The Sadducees had their high priest and the Church had hers (Hebrews 3:1). The Sadducees did not believe in angels, so God sent an angel to deliver the apostles. Persecutors have their prisons but the Lord Jesus has the universal key. The angel opened the doors and renewed the disciples’ mission (v. 20). Their mission is ours also. We are to: *Go* wherever he sends us; *Stand* wherever he places us and *Speak* whatever He gives us. The apostles did exactly what they were told to do; for we find them *going* (v. 21); *standing* (v. 25); and *speaking* (v. 25).

III. Jerusalem is filled with Truth (5:28b-42) - Despite the pretenders and persecutors, the whole of Jerusalem was filled with the teachings of Christ (v. 28). There were men in the church who had made up their minds to obey God and leave the consequences to Him. Please allow verse 29 to soak into your spirit. We will be challenged many times and in many ways to obey man above God. People will try to manipulate us, control us, threaten us, and even kill us unless we succumb to their will. Therefore, we

must hide this principle of obedience in our hearts that we might not sin against God. Fear not him who can only kill the body, but fear him that can kill the body and the soul and cast them both into hell.

Allow me to share a spiritual growth moment that happened early in my walk with Christ that involved Acts 5:29. In the early 1980s I was working for a company that was closed on Sunday. After the original owner sold the business the new owners immediately opened on Sunday. I had just begun to get back in church at this time. I was growing and I had a tremendous need to be under the preached word; so I asked the supervisor if I could be off on Sundays and the reply was “no.” For about three months I prayed and fasted to the Lord about what I should do. Every time I opened my Bible I was hoping God would answer me – and he did! One day I felt led to read through the book of Acts. When I came to Acts 5:29, it jumped out and grabbed my whole being. God had spoken. That may sound exciting but it put me in a fearful state of mind. God told me to obey him and not the supervisor; which meant that I had to quit my job and that meant no paycheck! I gave my notice with trembling faith. It was my last day and it was about 3:00 in the afternoon. To my surprise, my supervisor walks in and approaches me. He gently and graciously told me that I could keep my job and that I did not have to work on Sundays! O my, what joy burst through my heart! I felt like I had grown ten years in my faith. God was so real to me! I did not have any idea that later on in my life I would become a minister and that I would have to stand on Acts 5:29 many more times.

Gamaliel succeeded in calming the moment. His little speech is very touching; however, it had no spiritual depth whatsoever. It is the “wait-n-see” approach. It is the way of the procrastinator. If all sinners followed Gamaliel’s “wait-n-see” advice, they would all be in hell. You might die while you delay. There is a legend that Satan wanted a demon to go to earth and lead as many sinners to hell as possible. The first demon said he would tell sinners there is no hell, but Satan refused him. The second demon said he would tell sinners there is no heaven, but Satan refused him. The third demon got the job. He said he would tell sinners that they need to be saved, but just not now. Hell is full of souls that listened to the lie and delayed too long. *“Wherefore, the Holy Ghost says, TODAY if you will hear his voice”* (Hebrews 3:7). *“Behold, NOW is the accepted time; behold, NOW is the day of salvation”* (2 Corinthians 6:2).

Gamaliel was proven wrong. He tried to compare some rebel named Theudas with the incomparable Jesus. Gamaliel and his followers have slipped into eternity but the followers of Christ have multiplied by the millions! God’s answer to Gamaliel’s comment that it might come to naught (v. 38) was answered by: *“they ceased not to teach and preach Jesus Christ”* (v. 42).

Luke has a great style in crowning his sections with Kingdom affirmations. He gives us a great sermon title in verse 41: *Shame for His Name!*

Chapter Six

Murmuring over Money

Acts 6:1-7

The maturity marker of a Church is shown by how it handles its problems.

- A - The number of disciples multiplied (v. 1)
- B - The multitude called (v. 2a)
- C - The apostles' choice (v. 2b)
- D - The Spirit filled seven (v. 3)
- C' - The apostles' choice (v. 4)
- B' - The multitude pleased (v. 5)
- A' - The number of disciples multiplied (v. 7)

The two book-ends (A, A') of the chiasm are more confirmation facts that Kingdom Advance is still moving forward. The center of the chiasm (D) gives us this vital truth: *Holy Ghost men are the answer to many local church dilemmas*. Words cannot express the importance of choosing the right man to lead the church. A church will never rise higher than its leadership. A business will never outgrow its management. Church growth comes as the saints grow (spiritually). What would the book of Acts be if you took out the people? The clarion call of the church is for "Loyal Leaders for the Lord!"

Devotional Commentary

I write this paragraph with all my heart. I am a husband, a father, and a pastor. I have tried to serve God as a leader with the sincerity of my heart. I am constrained to say that the number one need above all needs in our local churches is for God to give us leaders who have no selfish desire to control the body, or any self-seeking aim whereby they might promote themselves, or any political motives where they can dominate the business meeting. Men of the Bible were not chosen because they were rich or famous or even religious. God chooses men after his own heart. Yes, I agree that it almost sounds irreverent, but it goes with the spirit of the Bible; that a man to be qualified for a leadership position he should be "God-like." The men we need in the forefront of Kingdom Advance should be:

Humble Men (6:1-2) - No ministry is insignificant. The need (emphasis should be on this word) in the early church centered on the widows who were not receiving adequate financial assistance. The murmuring was coming from the *Grecians*. They were Jews from a foreign land that spoke Greek. Apparently, there was some favoritism going on amongst the widows. To solve the problem, the Church did not seek more money but more men. The Church needed waiters. The word for serve in verse 2 means "to be a servant." It is where we derive the English word deacon. The text has no hint whatsoever that these men were chosen to be authoritarians and dictators in the Church. They simply counted money and distributed it among the widows without slipping some of it into their own pockets. If God wanted to enlarge their usefulness, then that was His call. Waiting on tables or serving widows may seem like a humiliating task but if it is God's business then it should be counted an honor.

A few years ago I was visiting members at the local hospital. As I was leaving I passed by a room

where a lady I knew was a patient. She had a folded washcloth on her forehead, and she could hardly open her eyes. I could tell she was thirsty, so I began to feed her some ice. As I was standing there, I thought to myself how I could be preaching a great revival or evangelizing the masses and here I stand feeding this lady some ice. It seemed such a menial task. Then the Lord really cut me down to size. He told me the lady on the bed was him, and that I was feeding him! He reminded me of Matthew 25:40 *“And the King shall answer and say unto them, Verily I say unto you, inasmuch as you have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, you have done it unto me.”* Humble people are God’s best friends. God takes a lot of stock in the humble (Isaiah 66:2; 1 Peter 5:5).

Honest Men (6:3a) - The words “honest report” means “witness.” The chosen man would need to have a good repute for being honest. He must not have the “love of money” disease like Ananias and Judas. There have been more money issues in the church than anything else. Shady deals and under the table dealings should not be named in the Church. Hell will not be hot enough for the self-called pastors and leaders who used the sheep of the Shepherd to fill their own greedy pockets. If you think I am harsh you should read an apostolic authority on this issue (2 Peter 2). The Lord only knows, after all the scandals that have come upon the church, we need a revival of men of integrity. A good book to read about this issue is *“The Integrity Crisis”* by Warren Wiersbe. Where are the days of an honest hand-shake? Where are the days when a man’s word was a solid promise? We cry out with David, *“Help, Lord; for the godly man ceases and the faithful fail from among the children of men”* (Psalm 12:1).

Holy Men (6:3b) - It is tragic that we too often divorce the word “holy” from Spirit. There are many things done today under the name of the Spirit that is the opposite of holiness. Robert Murray McCheyne said the greatest good he could do for his people was to be a holy man. Nice sermons, faithful visits, eloquent prayers, and great singing are utterly worthless without a holy life. Holiness means that the man is clearly “set apart” for God. A man that is qualified for office must have deep longings for holiness. His unceasing cry is for 1 Thessalonians 5:23 to be fulfilled in his personal life. He literally craves a life without sin. He abhors the old man and is at enmity with sin. He begs the Father to keep him full of the Holy Ghost; not so he can be happy but holy. Holiness is not merely the way a person dresses or how moral they are. Holiness is not living up to some Pharisee’s traditions or rules. A lot of holiness today is nothing but pure legalism. True biblical evangelical holiness is “Christ-likeness.” If the holy Jesus lives within us then all we need to do is decrease and let him increase (John 3:30). When we die to self and live to God, then holiness will come as natural as grapes from the vine.

Heavenly Minded Men (6:3c) - James gives the best definition of a man full of wisdom: *“But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be entreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy”* (James 3:17). This heavenly man of wisdom is priceless. I know at least for me as a pastor that I crave this wisdom. I need power in the pulpit and fluency in the prayer-closet, but I crave wisdom to lead. When there is a storm brewing in your church and folks are at odds with one another and they are looking to their leaders to do something about it, then you really appreciate the brother that walks in wisdom.

Whenever we handle our problems with the guidance of the Spirit the result will always be: *“the word of God increased and the number of the disciples multiplied”* (6:7). The apostles are to be commended here for their maturity. They knew that prayer and preaching were two indispensable priorities. Watch out brother for Satan’s deadly device of “distraction.” Nothing, absolutely nothing, should take our time more than our time with God. A good church will recognize this and appreciate the man of God who does.

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Chapter Seven

Stones and Crowns

Acts 6:8-8:3

The Church must be ready not only to evangelize but to experience the passion of Christ.

Devotional Commentary

This section is focused on one of the chosen seven whose name is Stephen. His name means “crowned.” The particular crown that Stephen lived up to was the Victor’s Crown. This section has two book-ends: 6:8-15 and 7:54-8:3. There are some similarities in them:

1. Stephen is full of faith and power (6:8 with 7:55).
2. Stephen is hated (6:9-14 with 7:54, 57-59).
3. Stephen and the glory (6:15 with 7:55).

Since the Spirit has shined the light on Stephen, we will focus on his ministry.

Stephen the Prisoner (6:8-15) - Stephen was blessed with a greater effusion of the Spirit than some of the other disciples. Sometimes we think that we would love to be filled with the Spirit without realizing what it might cost us. To whom much is given much is required. Stephen was willing to bear in his body the marks of the cross. Stephen’s last days resemble those of our Lord. False witnesses were brought forth by the religious parties of the synagogue. They could not refute Stephen’s wisdom and spirit. His words were filled with the fire of the Spirit of God and they burned deep. The thing that infuriated them was that Stephen spoke against their customs. God in heaven alone knows how many preachers have taken criticism, tomatoes, firings, and beatings because they dared to preach the word in Spirit power which contradicted traditions and customs. Stephen was ready to make his case and the glow of glory was upon him. It was as if he had just come out of the holy of holies and the Shekinah glory was upon him. Stephen lived on the mountain where the bush burned. You can feel the passion of Stephen leaping out of the Bible. O! That we might catch the flame! Isaiah craved the fire and made his longings known to God: *“Oh that you would tear apart the heavens, and come down, that the mountains might flow down at your presence, as when the melting fire burns, the fire causes the waters to boil, to make your name known to your adversaries, that the nations may tremble at your presence”* (Isaiah 64:1-2).

Stephen the Preacher (7:1-53) - Stephen’s sermon begins with the God of glory. He had been with God and felt the glory therefore it was natural to begin his preaching at this point. Stephen was so powerful, not only in his message but as a man. Israel had lost the glory. They had the Law, the Temple, and the customs but no glory. Ichabod was written over the door of Judaism (1 Samuel 4:21). Stephen had what they lost and he was going to tell them why. His sermon focuses on certain leaders of Israel:

Abraham (vv. 2-8) - Abraham was called to go out by faith on the promise of God. He is the father of all the faithful. God’s call to Abraham was two-fold: *Get thee out and come into*. He left the pagan land of Ur where the moon was worshipped and went to the Promised Land of Canaan where the Messiah was worshipped (Genesis 14:17-20).

Joseph (vv. 9-18) - Verse 9 was a short dagger for the hearer and a boost for Stephen. Stephen was wearing Joseph's shoes. Joseph is an excellent type of Christ.

Moses (vv. 20-44) - Stephen divided Moses' life into three forty year periods: Moses was forty years in Egypt (vv. 20-28); forty years in Midian (vv. 29-36); and forty years in the wilderness (vv. 37-44).

Joshua (v. 45a) - Joshua's leadership and territorial expansion parallels the book of Acts.

David (vv. 45b-46) - David had the passion long before Pentecost (Psalm 63:2).

Solomon (vv. 47-50) - Solomon was blessed to see the glory fall (2 Chronicles 7:1).

Stephen crowned his sermon with a passionate charge to his listeners for their stubbornness. He indicts them for three things: First, they *resisted* the Holy Ghost (v. 51). Second, they *raged* against the prophets and the Just One (v. 52). Third, they *refused* to keep God's law (v. 53).

Stephen the Persecuted (7:54-8:3) - Stephen was not met at the back door with a "enjoyed the sermon" handshake. The mob responded to the message with the hatred of their father Cain. There were two loud cries that climaxed the moment.

The sinners' cry of *furiousness* (vv. 54, 57-59a) - They gnashed on Stephen like animals and hurled stones at him until he passed into glory. Stephen's passion for his Lord's Passion cost him his life. He paid the cost of Pentecost.

The saints' cry of *forgiveness* (vv. 55-56, 59b-60) - Stephen's response was of the very spirit of his master. He was the Abel of the New Testament. We need to keep that steadfast look that Stephen had. Stephen was a true Holy Ghost man. His ministry was short-lived but complete. He did not have a long life but he had a full one. The impact he made left an impression on God's next soldier (Paul) who was about to be recruited for Kingdom Advance. I firmly believe that the "pricking" of Paul's conscience began with the stoning of Stephen. The glory-glow must have left a huge impression on Paul. Paul would soon catch the passion.

The pains of Calvary are much too bear,
Can my feeble soul, His sufferings share?
In the garden of sorrow he prayed thrice,
Revival cost – we must pay the price.

He went all the way; His will was the Cross,
Not to pray and fast; how infinite the loss.
Soul travail, what speechless pain that day,
Revival cost - the price we'll pay.

A work of God no words can explain,
The gain of souls is wrought through pain.
Will we prevail at the throne and stay?
Revival cost – the price we'll pay.

I hear a sound of abundance of rain!
Christ paid the price with bloody pain.
Enlarge our soul Father, neither easy nor nice,
Revival cost – we'll pay the price.

The rain is coming; the sound is in the trees,
It will come to those on their knees.
Travailing prayer is the only way
Revival cost – the price we'll pay.

Never, no never; will we cease nor stop,
But remember our Lord, whose blood did drop.
Help us Holy Spirit, to watch and pray,
Revival cost – the price we'll pay.

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Chapter Eight

Miracles and Magic

Acts 8:4-25

The truth of the Gospel of Christ will over power any lie from the kingdom of darkness.

- A - Preaching in Samaria (8:4-8)
- B - Simon the magician is deceitful (8:9-13)
- C - Pentecost in Samaria (8:14-17)
- B' - Simon the magician is discovered (8:18-24)
- A' - Preaching in Samaria (8:25)

Devotional Commentary

Jesus had opened the door in Samaria while he was ministering on earth. He was driven by divine necessity to enter into Samaria (John 4:4). Jesus' entrance into Samaria was like Joshua's entrance into Jericho. There were walls and strongholds that had existed for years between the Jews and the Samaritans. The walls did not stop the Lord Jesus because he had experience at bringing them down (Joshua 5:13-6; Ephesians 2:14). The Samaritan walls were:

Racial Walls. A survey of the gospels will show that the Jews and the Samaritans despised each other. Jesus did not consider the color of the skin but the condition of the heart. The gospel call is still to "whosoever."

Gender Walls. A man was not to speak with a woman in public, and yet Jesus went into Samaria for this very purpose. He met a woman at a well and gave her some living water and the rest is history. The woman brought the whole town to Christ. Kingdom Advance took place that day in Samaria. This pioneered the way for Philip.

Worship Walls. The Samaritans thought God could only be worshipped in a certain place. Jesus straightened that up when he let the woman know that God was Spirit and he could be worshipped any where.

Sinful Walls. Not only was there water drawn out of a well that day but there was a confession drawn out of the woman. In his unique way of dealing with sinners, Jesus broke up the fallow ground of her heart and then he planted the seed of truth and watered it with his living water. Some "non-repentance" advocates say that since John never uses the word repentance it does not need to be preached. John may not have used the word, but he sure drew the picture. I would just about guarantee that the woman at the well turned away from her sensual lifestyle.

The Message that came to Samaria (8:4-8, 25) - There are three different words used for the word preach in this section. In verse 25a the word for preached means "to speak." In verses 4, 12 & 25b the word is a verb that means "to announce good news." Biblically, the good news is the gospel of Jesus Christ (1 Corinthians 15:1-5). In verse 5 the word means "to be a herald." The herald that God sent to Samaria was Philip. Philip had a mighty anointing on his life. He was an evangelist whose preaching career can be summed up in one word – Jesus. He was always preaching Jesus (Acts 8:5, 35). Through the ministry of Philip a great advance took place in Samaria. Philip's message was confirmed with mighty

miracles.

Luke tells us that the whole city was stirring with great joy. Philip had a great God who offered to great sinners a great salvation. The gospel brought the town into a beautiful unity. Christ unites! A divided church is an oxymoron. The reason many assemblies are divided is because they have ceased to keep the main thing the main thing. They have transferred their energy from the gospel to sideshows and entertainment. The gospel causes great things to happen. What makes a great church?

Great Power (4:33) - The word means “dynamite” power.

Great Grace (4:33) - The favor of God was on the Church.

Great Persecution (8:1) - Persecution is no problem when power and grace are present.

Great Joy (8:8) - The “joy of salvation” is an inward grace which is not based on a person’s circumstances.

Great Numbers (11:21) - Increase is the biblical pattern.

The Magician that came to Samaria (8:9-13, 18-24)

A. Simon *bewitches* (vv. 9-11) - Verse 9 begins with the contrasting word “but.” Satan tries to counterfeit a great messenger with a great magician. Notice Luke’s use of the word great for Simon in verses 9 & 10. Simon’s dazzling deceits were performed by the use of magic. The Greek word for sorcery is *magus*, which means magic. This is why Simon is known as Simon Magus. There is an old Latin proverb that says, “*The world loves to be deceived.*” Simon knew this and used it to his advantage. Samaria was gullible to his little magic tricks. We have our magicians today who get upon the religious stage and do their miracle tricks. Apparently someone is being dazzled and sending their money to these performers. We can surely understand how the Anti-Christ will be able to dupe so many (2 Thessalonians 2:8-10). Simon had his magic but Philip had the miracles and the message. Simon’s magic could dazzle the eyes but Philip’s message could change the heart. Simon had an illusionary bag of tricks but Philip had an Inspired book of truth. The Pharaoh had his magic snakes but Jehovah’s snake devoured them. The Philistines had their Dagon but Jehovah’s ark crushed him to pieces. Nice facilities may dazzle the eyes, but they will never save sinners. Solomon’s marble, silver and gold temple would amaze the onlooker but without the glory cloud it left the onlooker empty inside.

B. Simon *believes* (v. 13) - Simon had been a pretender all his life; therefore, it was no problem for him to pretend to be a believer. Not all believing is genuine (John 2:24-25; James 2:19-21). We are not saved by faith plus works but by a faith that works. Simon was following the crowd because the crowd would eventually become his customers. Whenever there is a great move of the Spirit many folks will get caught up in the crowd rather than the Spirit, and the result is numerous false conversions. Salvation is not “group therapy.” You must believe on your own. The Bible says to, “*Work out your own salvation*” (Philippians 2:12). This does not mean you are saved by works. If you keep the text in the context you will understand its meaning. Philippians 2:12 must be interpreted with 2:13. You work out what God works in. Salvation is an individual matter between you and God.

C. Simon *betrays* (vv. 18-24) - Peter uses graphic language to describe Simon’s spiritual condition (v. 23). The sinful state that Simon was in is pictured as bile that flows from the liver and chains that bind the depraved. Simon was eaten up with greed and a love for money. He was a self-seeking utilitarian who wanted to make a buck off Jesus. If he could make more money by adding Jesus to his magic then why not, and if someone came along with something new that would add to his bankbook then he would try that. Simon was a show-piece for the Humanist Movement, which believes that “I” is number one and whatever you have to do to make “I” happy then do it. Simon would also make a classic *Prosperity*

Preacher. He was good at manipulating and bewitching the naïve. However, he could not fool God. Peter laid bare his wicked heart and rebuked him for attempting to use the power of the Holy Spirit to gain money. The principle holds true in all things: *It is very dangerous to use the blessings of the Lord to promote yourself.*

The Miracle that came to Samaria (8:14-17) - These verses are at the center of the chiasm and they confirm that Kingdom Advance is right on schedule. Peter and John were sent for because they had the apostolic keys. This is one of those moments that demonstrate the transitional aspect of the book of Acts. Pentecost had come to Samaria. The gift of the Spirit was the link that united the Church. This is a unique incident and not a pattern for the Church.

As we said earlier, this is a miracle when you consider that for centuries the Jews hated the Samaritans. Only Jesus can bring reconciliation to pass like this. It is truly a beautiful sight to see the Jew laying hands on the Samaritan. Maybe you need a miracle to come to you. Maybe you have been at odds with someone for years and you need to make things right. Meditate on this miracle and ask God to do it in you.

We desperately need mighty miracles in our cities. There are walls and strongholds that have existed for years. The racial, gender, denominational, and prejudice walls are well established in our cities. I understand that a house has to have walls for protection and security. Not all walls are bad. Truth cannot be compromised. However, there are many barriers that need to be removed by the power of the gospel. No one should ever hate another person for any reason whatsoever.

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Chapter Nine

Chariot Aflame!

Acts 8:26-40

A quick and submissive obedience to the Spirit's leadership is critical to Kingdom Advance.

Devotional Commentary

The obedience of Philip to the Spirit's call is a wonderful example for us who desire to win souls. Philip had won masses to Christ in Samaria and yet he is willing to go to great extremes to win one man. These verses give us a classic soul-winning moment. Soul-winning conferences are okay and helpful but if we would meditate on these verses and let them penetrate our minds and hearts, I am convinced we would not need to look any further on how to win souls (Proverbs 11:30). In the big city of Chicago many years ago, several churches had gathered together for a conference on how to win souls and at the same time Dwight L. Moody was on his soap box on the street corner winning souls by the hundreds with the simple gospel message. D.L. Moody had the one thing needful for successful evangelism and that was "a passion for Christ's Passion!"

Many soul-winning techniques today are nothing but revived Pharisee-ism. There is an eternity of difference between "proselytizing" and "evangelizing" (Matthew 23:15). We must stay as close to Scripture as possible or we will have a lot of blood on our hands. God's work must be done God's way. We must be very careful about jumping on every "new" Philistine cart that comes along. David and his friend Uzzah paid dearly for using Philistine methods instead of Bible methods (2 Samuel 6). There are some necessary things that must take place in every soul-winning moment. We will summarize the salvation of a sinner by using three words found in Luke 19:10, which state that the Lord Jesus came to *seek* and *save* that which was *lost*.

I. The Lost (8:27-28) - The lost man in our text is an Ethiopian Eunuch. He was a man with a high office who served the queen. Candace was not a name but a title. The eunuch had a very important position and a very important need. Here is a man that had all a man could want and yet he had an empty spot that position, prosperity, and popularity could not fill. He left Ethiopia and its wealth to seek Jerusalem and its worship. The Bible is the best place to look when you need answers and thank God it has been instilled in most of humanity that the Bible is the answer book.

The Eunuch was returning home with a hunger in his heart. It was not a coincidence he was reading Isaiah 53. The description of the Messiah in Isaiah 53 is so detailed you would have thought Isaiah was sitting at the foot of the cross. The Holy Spirit already had the Eunuch at the cross; now all he needed was for someone to tell him the name of the man on the cross.

II. The Seeking (8:29-35) - There are two key persons involved in seeking and saving a lost soul:

The Spirit (vv. 29, 39) - The Bible is very clear about the Spirit's role in the seeking and saving of a sinner. God in his grace makes the initial step toward the sinner. This is illustrated in Genesis 3 when God approached Adam first. When the Lord Jesus begins to seek out one of his sheep he will send the Holy Spirit to begin the initial work of what the Bible calls "conviction" (John 16:8). I call this the "love-arrest" of God. Since salvation is a creating work (2 Corinthians 5:17; Ephesians 2:10) we can

compare it with the creation of the heavens and earth. God said first, "Let there be light," so the Spirit's first work on the sinner is illumination. Illumination is when the sinner realizes for the first time that they are guilty and accountable to God for their sin. It is well illustrated in Acts that the expression of conviction will vary in each person. Normally, when conviction begins in a person, they will begin to seek the Lord. His seeking us draws us to seeking him. This drawing is of the Lord (John 6:44). Philip finds the Eunuch seeking God. The moving of the Spirit has prepared the sinner for the soul-winner.

The Soul-winner (vv. 29-35) - Philip had his feet always shod with the gospel. He was ready at a moments notice to obey the leading of the Spirit. Philip ran and joined the Eunuch in his chariot. The man's reply to Philip's question breaks my heart every time I read it. The world does not know and we have got to tell them! This is why we need a passion for his Passion. This is why we need to be Bible readers and Bible ready. What would you have done with Isaiah 53? Are you even in a place where the Spirit has confidence in you? I am sure that Philip did not give the full theological meaning of every word, but wait, he did give him the full theological meaning because he gave him Jesus and Jesus is theology (the study of God).

The Word of God plays a vital role in salvation. Faith comes by hearing and hearing by the Word (Romans 10:17). The Bible is the written record and established truth concerning Jesus Christ. It was given to us so we would believe that Jesus is the Christ (1 John 5:13).

III. The Saving (8:36-40) - Philip gave the lost man someone in which to anchor faith. This is the most important moment in dealing with a seeker. We must not give them the impression that saying yes to a few scriptures from the "Roman Road" is what saves. We must lead them directly to Jesus. To believe the Bible is the Word of God is not salvation, but believing on the Lord Jesus Christ is. Philip started at Scripture but he did not stop there. He clearly led him on to faith in Christ. Salvation is by faith alone.

The Eunuch wanted to be baptized which was good evidence that he had experienced a saving work. However, Philip, being true to Scripture questioned the man about his faith in the Lord Jesus (v. 37). This verse is proof that there is only one biblical baptism and that is "Believers Baptism." I love this verse. It is the one question that must be answered sincerely to qualify a person for baptism and for heaven. The question in verse 37 is the "bottom line." There are many things that people get caught up in about a salvation experience and the only one that really matters is: "*Do you believe in Christ with all your heart?*" The concern about this being "easy believeism" is removed by the words "all your heart."

Important Note: I am aware that many translators have eliminated verse 37 from their translation. I know there are manuscripts that do not have it. I know there are brilliant Greek scholars who do not mind leaving it out. But I will never understand why a true Christian would want to eliminate verse 37 when it is in some manuscripts. The verse does not contradict the spirit or the letter of any other portion of the bible. As a matter of fact, it confirms the biblical truth that salvation is by faith alone in Christ alone.

The Ethiopian Eunuch publicly identified himself with the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ (vv. 38-39). After they came up from the immersing, Philip left as fast as he came. The word for "caught away" in verse 39 is used in 1 Thessalonians 4:17 to describe the rapture of the Church. Philip's disappearance may have been good for the Eunuch. Sometimes a new believer looks too much to the soul-winner rather than the Savior. I stumbled horribly after I was saved because I had my eyes on man. There was a Christian man that I really looked up to. He fell into horrible sin and shame, and it really impacted me. I thought that if he could not live it then why try. I wasted some years until the Lord gently but firmly rebuked me for focusing on man instead of Him. Now I am looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of my faith. Maybe you need to turn your eyes upon Jesus.

Acts 8:26-40 has a chiastic structure:

- A – Philip’s location – Jerusalem to Gaza (8:26)
- B – Philip went and saw a eunuch (8:27)
- C – The chariot is moving (8:29)
- D – Philip speaks before he preaches (8:30)
- E – The Ethiopian’s question (8:31)
- F – Scripture, “he opened not his mouth” (8:32)
- G – Isaiah’s question (8:33a)
- H – For his life is taken from the earth (8:33b)
- G’ – Eunuch’s question (8:34)
- F’ – Scripture, “he opened his mouth” (8:35)
- E’ – The Ethiopian’s question (8:36)
- D’ – Philip speaks before he baptizes (8:37)
- C’ – The chariot is standing still (8:38)
- B’ – Philip went and the eunuch saw him no more (8:39)
- A’ – Philip’s location – Azotus to Caesarea (8:40)

The main thought or preaching point in the chiasm is the humiliation of Christ. The word for “taken” in verse 33 means “to be lifted up from the ground.” This would clearly be a reference to the substitution of Christ on the cross. The whole of Isaiah 53 is a portrayal of Calvary. The Passion of Christ is the essence of all that we stand for and believe in. We do not hold up Jesus as a mere example to imitate but we lift him up as mankind’s only remedy from sin and hell to salvation and heaven. The only Jesus that Peter, Philip, Stephen, and Paul knew was a crucified and risen Jesus.

We might also add that the chiastic structure proves the necessity for the inclusion of verse 37.

Chapter Ten

Paul Catches the Passion

Acts 9:1-31

The power of the Passion of Christ can reach the hardest heart.

Devotional Commentary

The conversion of Saul of Tarsus was not only an act of God that changed the course of Paul's life but it also changed the course of history. Paul's salvation experience was a marvelous testimony to the Sovereign Grace of God. The unwilling was made willing (Psalm 110:3), the stubborn was made soft, the marred vessel was broken and placed back upon the Potter's wheel and made again. God can do anything he wants, with anyone he wants, anytime he wants (Daniel 4:35). Only God can take a man from breathing out threatening and slaughter (v. 1) to preaching in the synagogue (v. 20).

The initial evidence that Paul was a changed man was his question in verse 6: "*Lord, what will you have me to do?*" Since the Hebrew number for grace is five, we shall look at Paul's saving moment in 5 stages: *Paul's company, conviction, conversion, consecration and commission.*

Paul's Company (vv. 1-2, 14) - A man is always known by the company he keeps. Paul's clique was the self-righteous crowd. His authority come from the high priest, who gave him authorized letters to persecute Christians. Paul would use the letters to bind the Church, but later on he would be given new letters from a new High Priest whereby he would free the Church. Paul was a mad man with a religious zeal totally out of control. Despite his religious training and Pharisee medals, he was a man steeped in ignorance and unbelief (1 Timothy 1:13).

Paul's Conviction (v. 5) - Paul was one of those that had been resisting the Holy Spirit under the ministry of Stephen (7:51). To kick against the pricks means to rebel against the Lord's seeking grace. When a farmer was plowing his field with his oxen he would keep a long stick with a sharp point on the end and if his oxen got lazy or out of control the farmer would goad the ox with the pointed stick. It would be very hard on the ox to kick against the pricking and cause the point to go deeper. God was pricking and Paul was kicking.

Many newer Bible translations have eliminated most of verse 5 and all of verse 6. They base their elimination of certain verses on the absence of them in certain manuscripts. However, we do find them in some manuscripts. We know that the King James Version is not to be idolized. We know that the Church had the Word of God before 1611. However, it really concerns me about doing away with certain verses when they do not contradict any other scriptures.

The Monday before New Year's Day of 2011 I felt impressed to preach the following Sunday on Acts 9:6. I could not get it out of my mind. I began to feel the burden of the text more and more. I knew this was the message for the New Year. So I worked all week on the text and context. On Saturday evening I decided to look at some other translations of the verse I was preaching. I could not find it. It broke my heart. God had burdened me with a text and my people might not have it in their possession! I know that I am only ankle high compared to the brilliant scholars that spend their life viewing and reviewing manuscripts. I am not bashing other versions of the Bible. I know some words in the King James Bible are

archaic. I am only pleading that we use some spiritual common sense when we handle “the” Word of God.

Paul’s Conversion (vv. 3-17a) - Paul’s conversion involved three things:

1) *A Vision* (v. 3) - The God of glory had enveloped Paul. Paul had seen a small glimpse of the glory on Stephen’s face but now he saw Jesus’ face and the brightness caused immediate blindness. Later, Paul would tell Agrippa about his heavenly vision (Acts 26:19). Heaven came down and glory filled Paul’s soul.

Paul’s conversion was a marvelous display of Sovereign grace. He wasn’t seeking the Lord like the Ethiopian Eunuch nor was he exercising his free will and coming to the Lord on his own. He was a rebel and he despised Jesus. In the creation days of Genesis, God burst through the darkness with the light of his glory! Creation was the sovereign work of the Creator. He took counsel from no man and neither was he dependent upon any man in his creating work. On the road to Damascus God broke through the dark heart of Paul like a lightning bolt! He did not ask Paul for his permission. He did not wait for Paul to move toward him. The Sovereign Lord of heaven did his pleasure on Paul and Paul was glad! Many argue that God will not violate man’s free will because that would make us puppets. I wish to God I was his puppet! I have no quarrel with God breaking into my life without me willing it first. I can only speak for myself on this matter. I know my stupidity and stubbornness. I know my unwillingness hinders me. I crave grace! I owe my soul to the Sovereign God of Grace! Matchless Grace, Infinite Grace, Amazing Grace, and Unconditional Grace are my themes of praise! My will kept me bound not free. He set me free by setting my will free. I will gladly bow my face to the ground and attribute all of my salvation to God’s free will – not mine!

2) *A Voice* (vv. 4-9) - The salvation call is personal and effectual. Someone in heaven knew Paul’s name but Paul did not know his. It is amazing that Paul was 100 miles ahead of the Ethiopian Eunuch in Bible knowledge and yet he did not know any more about Jesus than the Eunuch! The Eunuch asked Philip who Isaiah was talking about (8:34) and Paul asked, “Who are you, Lord” (9:5)? Paul had to be startled when he discovered the voice he heard was from the person he hated most. Joseph in the Old Testament was hated, beaten, and sold by his brethren. In their minds, they knew he was dead. Then one day they experienced a rude awakening when they strolled down to Egypt for some bread and found themselves standing before the Prime Minister of Egypt without having any idea who he was. Can you imagine how fast their hearts started beating when they heard the voice of the great one say, “*I am Joseph*”? Paul had been killing Jesus by killing his saints. Paul knew that this man called Jesus was a fake and he was dead, forever dead. Can you imagine what Paul felt inside when he heard the voice say, “*I am Jesus*”?

3) *A Visit* (vv. 10-19) - Paul had spent his time persecuting disciples, now he is totally dependent upon one. Paul had put his hands on many disciples and cast them into prison and now a disciple lays his hands on Paul and says, “Brother Saul” (v. 17). There is a melody in the word “Brother.” The sign given to Ananias was “behold, he prays” (v. 11). The sign of prayer seems to be a very odd one, because being a Pharisee, Paul would have prayed often and long. He would have stood on the street corner and prayed long repetitious prayers to entertain the onlookers. After the applause, he would have walked away with emotional glee and self-righteous pride. But after his Damascus Road deliverance Paul was a new man and this would make his prayers new.

Prayer is a true barometer of where a Christian is with God. Paul’s dull and dry prayer-life would become fervent and full of faith. As a Pharisee he prayed with his lips but as a born again believer he would draw nigh with his heart. A true identification marker of a New Testament church is “behold, they

pray.” The word “behold” is always used in the Bible to startle us to look at something worthy of our attention.

Friend, do you pray? Do you really pray? Do you pray in your praying? Is there fervency and tears in your praying? How often are you at your Father’s throne? Are you suffering from the Martha syndrome of being too busy or are you enjoying the Mary spirit of sitting often at the feet of your Lord (Luke 10:38-42)? The danger for most Christians is not choosing the bad over the good, but choosing the good over the best. Prayer time is the best time.

Paul’s Consecration (v. 17b) - Paul was changed from a Satan-controlled man to a Spirit-controlled man. The filling of the Spirit is not some little nice option for the child of God, it is a divine imperative! Ephesians 5:18 is a continuous command. No one is qualified for ministry until they are filled. The pattern of the filling of the Spirit is crystal clear in the book of Acts. It is amazing how we have missed this essential fact. We should exhort every new believer to immediately begin their journey under full submission to the Spirit. We should let them know they have a companion and friend who indwells them and will guide them into all truth. Oh, how I wish someone would have told me about the Holy Ghost blessing after I got saved! I wasted my teenage years struggling under the power of the flesh. I spent my early Christian years living in Romans 7. I thank God for leading me into Romans 8 where the law of the Spirit freed me from the law of sin and death!

Friend, have you been filled and are you filled today with the Spirit? If you are not for sure, then just take a fresh walk through Acts again. There are many and various signs that will follow a Spirit-filled believer but the supreme one is: “A passion for His Passion.”

Paul’s Commission (vv. 15-31) - Paul would walk in the steps of the Savior (1 Peter 2:21). There are three marks whereby Paul would resemble His Lord: First, Paul would be a *selected* man (v. 15) - The word for chosen means “to pick out or choose.” The choice is God’s sovereign prerogative. God did not choose the man Paul because of foreseen faith. The election of God toward certain persons has nothing to do with the merit of the person, foreseen or not. The election of God is always based in his grace (Romans 11:5-6). Paul’s mission would be primarily to the Gentiles. Second, Paul would be a *suffering* man (v. 16). The word for suffer is translated as “passion” in Acts 1:3. Paul would share the Passion of Christ throughout his ministry. In his letter to the Galatians he said, “I bear in my body the marks of the Lord Jesus.” Paul would catch the passion for His Lord’s Passion.

Suffering is a word we do not like to give much thought to. Our goal in life and ministry is to skip along and be happy all the day. American Christianity seems to be so far from the cross. We are concerned about happiness and success while we have brothers and sisters that are being viciously persecuted in other lands. The difference in the cross we carry and the cross they carry is that their cross has blood on it. Having a passion for His Passion may sound like a catchy phrase, but it goes much deeper than words could express. It might just cost you your life! Third, Paul would be a *sought-after* man (vv. 20-31) - When God seeks a man out and sets him apart, then that man becomes a “sought-after” man by the devil. Paul’s poster would be placed on every synagogue door. As soon as Paul began his preaching ministry, he became a target for death. Notice some verses in our text:

v. 23 *they took counsel to kill him.*

v. 24 *they watched the gates day and night to kill him*

v. 29 *they went about to slay him*

Have you been wounded in the house of your friends? Please do not quit. You are not serving the people primarily, you are serving the Lord. You are blessed to be honored with your Savior's Passion marks! Count it all joy and re-catch the passion for His Passion!

Chapter Eleven

The Wall Comes Tumbling Down

Acts 9:32-11:18

The Power of the Passion brings down strongholds of religious tradition.

Devotional Commentary

This chapter is vibrant with life and power. We move from the ministry of Paul for a while to the ministry of Peter. Peter was given the keys to the Kingdom. He was sent for at critical junctures throughout the book. In this section, Peter would be used to open the door to the Gentile world. His visit to Cornelius would change the course of history forever. The section before us involves three certain persons.

I. A Certain man named Aeneas (9:32-35) - Lydda was a prosperous and active little place where trade and commerce flourished. It was situated on a great caravan road between Babylon and Egypt. It was a good place for a miracle. Peter's visit to Lydda involved three types of people:

- 1) *The Saints* (v. 32) - The word saint means "a most holy thing." Something that is holy is set apart by its own uniqueness. The sanctification or holiness of the Church was a heavy burden and desire of the Lord Jesus (John 17:17). The holiness of God is the touchstone of the Church. We worship a *holy God*, we preach a *holy Bible*, we teach *holy Matrimony*, we live by the *Holy Spirit*, and we are a *holy Church*. We are in the world but not of it. To be wholly sanctified is the heart-cry of every believer (1 Thessalonians 5:23). Biblical holiness is not merely in the way you dress or in the rules you keep which many times leads to legalism and "holier-than-thou" attitudes. True biblical holiness is pure Christ-likeness.
- 2) *The Sick* (vv. 33-34) - Aeneas' name means "laudable." After his miracle he became a trophy of praise to the name of Jesus. His brief story packs a powerful punch. His testimony teaches three vital truths about grace:

Vital Truth 1:

God's Grace is Sovereign (v. 33)

Aeneas did not find Peter because he could not. He was an impotent paralytic. John reminds us that no man can come to Christ unless he first be drawn (John 6:44). In Luke 15, the Shepherd finds the lost sheep, the woman finds the lost silver and God finds the lost son. Some say that the prodigal son came by himself, but the Bible says that he was lost and found (Luke 15:24). God found that boy and brought him to his father. God also found Aeneas. There is no cry, no prayer, no seeking and no willing from Aeneas in the text. He is simply met with the heaven-sent message: "Jesus Christ makes you whole." Salvation is of the Lord (Jonah 2:9). Aeneas did do his part by rising and making up his bed. Our part in salvation is the echo of grace. God shouts the delivering words of grace: "I make thee whole," and we echo back with "I rise and walk." The quarrel between the free-will of man and the free-grace of God is unnecessary. The free-grace of God makes the man whole and then the free-will of man gets him up.

Vital Truth 2:
God's Grace is Saving (v. 34a)

The word whole means "to cure or to save." The text does not inform us that Aeneas was paralyzed because of some particular sin in his life. The fact is that Aeneas did not only need a physical cure but a spiritual one as well. We all need a spiritual miracle because we have all sinned and come short of the glory of God (Romans 3:23). What Aeneas received from Adam was overruled by what he received from Christ. God's grace that saves is greater than all our sin (Romans 5:12-21). Has Christ made you whole?

Vital Truth 3:
God's Grace is Sufficient (v. 34b)

Aeneas was able to get up and walk. The grace of God does not end after we are saved. Whatever valley or fire or trouble we face, the grace of God will be sufficient for us (2 Corinthians 12:9).

3) *The Sinners* (v. 35) - Aeneas instantly became a witness for Christ. He did not have to say a word; the voice was in the life. They saw him and turned to the Lord. Do people see you and turn from the Lord or to the Lord?

The phrase "turned to the Lord" is an excellent, simple way of saying they repented (turned) and trusted Christ (to the Lord). Repentance and faith are two sides of the coin of salvation.

II. A Certain disciple named Tabitha (9:36-43) - Joppa was situated on the edge of the Mediterranean Sea. Peter was there to do the Lord's will and Jonah was there to escape the Lord's will (Jonah 1:3). Joppa was about to experience something they would never forget. They would be privileged to see a woman be brought back to life. Her name was Dorcas. The miracle in Joppa involved:

1) *A Reputable Woman* (vv. 36-37) - The name Dorcas means "a gazelle." Dorcas lived up to her name by being a graceful and giving person. The Bible focuses on three things about Dorcas: First, her *discipleship* (v. 36a) - Dorcas is the only woman in the Bible called a disciple. Second, her *deeds* (v. 36b) - The word "full" says it all. Third, her *death* (v. 37) - With the words "those days," the Spirit makes the death of Dorcas more horrific. "Those days" of Dorcas' life were filled with love and good works. She had many friends. She won the hearts of the people by making them coats for the winters and garments for the weddings. She was a cheerful giver who represented Christ well. Now the sunshine of her life was darkened by the storm clouds of death. We will probably never understand why the good die young.

2) *A Remorseful Weeping* (vv. 38-39) - Love weeps! Jesus wept (John 11:35). Live as to be missed. Leave something good behind. All those garments Dorcas made were living testimonies to the woman she was. She was dead but her deeds were not. If you died today what would be your legacy? What would you be remembered for? Are your discipleship deeds powerful enough to live after you die?

3) *A Resurrection Wonder* (vv. 40-41) - We must not miss the power of prayer in this miracle. I wish I knew how to pray like the saints of old! The praying recorded in Acts is phenomenal to us but natural to them. After Peter prayed he gave a command to Tabitha to arise. What right did Peter have to tell a dead person to wake up? Is he mocking her inability? Can she arise? Can she exercise her will to live? The verb "arise" is an imperative or a command to live, but how shall she? Once again, we see God's

Sovereign Grace in action. Dorcas represents us all by her death. We have all died in Adam (1 Corinthians 15:22). Every sinner without Christ is not sick or weak but dead (Ephesians 2:1; 1 Timothy 5:6). Lost persons might resolve to do better, or repeat a prayer, or reform some habits; but they still need a resurrection. Salvation is a Resurrection Wonder! The salvation of a sinner is equated with the resurrection of Christ (Ephesians 1:19-20).

Preaching the gospel is a very foolish business if you view it through secular eyes. What is more foolish than the prophet Ezekiel standing on his rock pulpit and preaching to a valley of dry, dead bones? What is more foolish than Peter telling a dead person to live? What is more foolish than telling carnal sinners that hate God and love sin, to hate their sin and love God? Why do we give our lives to such foolishness? Because we know that with the preaching of the gospel comes the power of a God who raises the dead. The Word of power is in sync with the Spirit of power and the dead live! Preach on, ye saints of the Most High God!

III. A Certain man called Cornelius (10-11:18) – Caesarea was located on the Mediterranean Sea about 30 miles from Joppa. This is where the Lord Jesus tested his disciples with the question about who he was and Peter spoke forth his classic confession of Christ (Matthew 16:16). Peter would be tested in Caesarea again. This test would be Peter's Mt. Moriah test where he would be asked to sacrifice his strongest convictions. Tradition and prejudice have a hard and long death. They usually have to die out with a particular generation. Whenever we are faced with the call of God that contradicts our traditions and customs, we need to stay very open to the Spirit and remember Isaiah 55:8: "for my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways, my ways, says the Lord."

God will never ask us to do anything that contradicts the Bible, but he will ask us to do many things that contradict our opinions of the Bible.

Acts chapter 10 deals with a "Sea Side Shake-up." It is a beautiful moment in the history of the Church. The Lord Jesus is tearing down the wall that separated Jew and Gentile (Ephesians 2:14). Thousands of years of division will be erased in a days work. It involves two men:

A. Cornelius the Gentile (10:1-8, 22)

1) *His Vocation* (v. 1) - Cornelius was a Roman soldier of an Italian cohort (600 men). His name is Latin and it means "a horn." The horn is a symbol of power. Cornelius had authority over many; therefore, he would have been just the right man to spread the gospel faith. It is wonderful to see people that have great authority and influence using their position to influence others for Christ.

2) *His Virtues* (vv. 2, 22) - Cornelius was a God-fearing, praying and giving man. He lived better morally without the Holy Ghost than many who have the Holy Ghost. This is no slight whatsoever on the Spirit; rather it is a rebuke to the saints that live in the power of the flesh.

3) *His Vision* (vv. 3-8) - Many have wondered if God hears the prayers of a lost person. Cornelius is your answer; however, we must say that it all hinges on the man. God will not give his ear to a hypocritical Pharisee who prays out of pretense. God will not hear a man's prayer if he is hiding sin in his heart (Psalm 66:18). But God will hear the prayer of a lost man if he is seeking God with sincerity (v. 5, 31). The thing that concerns God in all praying is that it comes from the heart. If the seeker is sincere then God will lead them to fuller revelations of his truth. If the praying person is playing at prayer or doing

it for some superstitious reason, then obviously, God has no interest in it.

B. Peter the Jew (10:9-23)

The praying in Caesarea is met by the praying in Joppa. As Peter was praying he fell into a trance and here is what followed:

1) *The Vision* (vv. 9-12) - Peter's vision was graphic and intense. By the vision coming from heaven, God was telling Peter that this was his will in heaven and he wanted it done on earth. The four corners was God's way of telling Peter that the gospel was to have no boundaries. It was for all manner of persons. North, South, East, and West would be ablaze with a passion for His Passion.

2) *The Voice* (vv. 13-15) - God was holding Peter upside down and shaking the prejudice out of him. His life-long convictions were being tested. Peter's response was "Not so, Lord." The phrase is a contradiction. You can say "not so" and you can say "Lord," but you cannot say them together (Matthew 7:21-23). Peter was not being rebellious, but ignorant. God solves Peter's dilemma by using the word "cleansed" in verse 15. The word for cleansed is used in 1 John 1:7 where the blood of Jesus is said to cleanse us from all sin. God was telling Peter that he could clean up a Gentile heart as well as Jewish (Proverbs 21:1). When God cleanses a man we better be careful what we call him.

The vision and the voice were repeated to Peter three times. Peter is well acquainted with the number three. He denied the Lord three times (Matthew 26:34). He was asked by Jesus three times if he loved him (John 21:15-17). And now the Lord speaks to Peter three times (v. 16).

3) *The Visitors* (vv. 17-23) - The number three is before us again. Peter receives three visitors to parallel his thrice-fold vision. Another parallel is found in verses 13 & 20. Arise, kill and eat parallels arise get thee down and go with them.

4) *The Visit* (vv. 24-33) - Peter and Cornelius unite and share their vision experiences. Cornelius put shoes on his prayers and organized an assembly. He was boiling over with excitement. I wish folks today were as hungry to hear the word as Cornelius was. We would do well to learn from Cornelius on how to conduct a revival effort or evangelism campaign. There are several things we need to focus on to have effective evangelistic meetings: First, we must begin with earnest prayer and fasting (vv. 2, 9, 30). Second, we must be Spirit-led (vv. 19, 44). Third, we must prepare and invite (vv. 24, 27, 33). Fourth, we must be concerned for the unsaved (vv. 24, 27, 33). Fifth, we must call a Spirit-filled preacher (vv. 19, 25). Sixth, we must have God to show up (vv. 33, 44).

5) *The Visitation* (vv. 34-48) - O my! What a moment! It happened in two phases:

1. *The preacher opened his mouth* (vv. 34-43) - Peter's sermon was running over with Jesus. Jesus gives peace (36a), Jesus is Lord (36b), Jesus was the Anointed One (38), Jesus was crucified (38), Jesus was raised up (40), Jesus is the Judge (42), Jesus was the Prophets message (43a), and Jesus is to be believed in (43b).

There was no invitation, no altar call, no lifting of hands for prayer, and no pulling folks aside to the counseling room. It was all of Sovereign Grace.

2. *God opened the heavens* (vv. 44-48) - Jesus was glorified in the sermon and the Spirit came down to give his stamp of approval. Jerusalem had their Pentecost, Samaria had theirs, and now Caesarea gets theirs. The Acts 1:8 mission is not impossible because with God all things are possible (Luke 1:37).

This was a glorious day. I love that phrase: "...on the Gentiles also was poured out the gift of the

Holy Ghost” (v. 45). That is me! That is my wife, my children, my grandchildren, and my church. The God of the Old Testament is my God! The Messiah of Israel is my Messiah! Bless God, I do receive the gift. I am now sealed into the blessed New Covenant of grace by the cleansing power of Jesus’ blood! I am not common but cleansed! My sins (all of them) have been forgiven and sent away to be seen no more (Hebrews 10:17-18)!

The Trinity was involved in the whole meeting. Verse 38 is a pure “Trinitarian Truth.”

God the Father was there (vv. 33-35, 38, 40-42, 46)

God the Son was there (vv. 36-43, 48)

God the Spirit was there (vv. 19, 38, 44-45)

6) *The Vindication* (11:1-18) - Peter was confronted by those who shared his earlier prejudices. However, the air was quickly cleared when they heard what God had done among the Gentiles. It is refreshing to read verse 18 and see how the founding apostles viewed the evangelical grace of repentance as a work of God.

Chapter Twelve

The Flame Passes On

Acts 11:19-13:12

The Power of the Passion cannot be stopped by persecutions or prisons.

Devotional Commentary

In his letter to the Ephesians, Paul tells us that the Lord has given to his Church various kinds of men and various kinds of ministries (Ephesians 4:11-12). In the section before us we will see these various ministries keep Kingdom Advance alive and moving forward. Some plant and some water, but God gives the increase (1 Corinthians 3:6-8). There are five mentioned.

I. The Evangelist (11:19-21) - The Evangelist is the fisherman who brings in the catch. He is gifted with the ability to preach the gospel with clarity and unction. Satan tried to halt the spreading of the Good News but he only helped it. The mighty power of the Holy Spirit removed all fear and made the Church as bold as a lion (Proverbs 28:1). The early saints turned their lemons into lemonade, their test into testimonies, and their persecution into preaching. They sowed and watered (vv. 19-20) and God gave the increase (v. 21).

II. The Encourager (11:22-26) - The gift of encouragement is priceless to the body of Christ (Romans 12:8). Barnabas had the gift and he used it effectively. He was sent to Antioch to edify the new believers. Barnabas' name means "son of encouragement" (Acts 4:36). The "Barnabas Ministry" is highly undervalued in the Church today. We love the big harvests, the big catch, the masses, and the numbers. We should thank God for these, but oh, how sad it is when the following year many of those additions become subtractions.

The churches are in dire straits for Spirit-filled teachers. Teaching the newly converted disciples to observe all things is a long, hard, and tedious work. Note two things concerning Barnabas' ministry:

1) *His Exhortation* (v. 23) - Purpose of heart means to have a determined resolve. Daniel was blessed with a purpose of heart (Daniel 1:8). The Victorious Christian Life is not obtained by accident but by audacity. If you are going to sustain a passion for His Passion, then you will have to do it on purpose. If you are going to cleave unto the Lord, you must intend to do it. Cleaving to the Lord is staying power. To cleave means to "be united like glue." Never allow anything or anyone to come between you and your Lord.

2) *His Example* (v. 24) - Barnabas' life was a tree of life (Proverbs 11:30). God made the trees to produce "after its kind." The fruit of a Christian is another Christian. Quality produces quantity. It is a shame that we have over emphasized making disciples above maturing disciples. If the saved person does not advance and grow on a personal level then he or she will be a stumbling-block to the cause of Christ. Vagabond believers are a terrible hindrance to Kingdom Advance. We must lead new believers to a fuller life of power in the Spirit. We must lead them to live out the fullness of the word Christian (v. 26). The word Christian comes from *Christos* (Christ). The root word for both is *chrío*, which means "to anoint." At his baptism Jesus was anointed without measure by the Holy Spirit. The Spirit's

presence on Christ qualified him to be the “Anointed One.” The anointing that was on Christ was now seen on his disciples; therefore, the world named them Christians. No one has a right to call themselves a Christian if the anointing of the Holy Ghost is not visibly upon their life.

III. The Prophet (11:27-30) - The ministry of the prophet was to “forth-tell” and “foretell.” They had to be tested by the Word of God (Deuteronomy 18:15-21; Isaiah 8:20).

Agabus’s name means “locust.” In the Old Testament locust were associated with famines and droughts (Joel 1:4). The disciples took Agabus’ prophecy serious and began to make preparations. God will provide for his people. God did not spare his people *from* the famine but *in* the famine. God will allow spiritual famines to come upon us to try our faith. Abraham made a poor choice in his famine (Genesis 12:10-20). Elimelech made a poor choice in his famine (Ruth 1). God knows the future; therefore, we need to stay in tune with the Spirit.

The gift of prophecy would become the priority gift in the Church (1 Corinthians 14). The completion of the canon of Scripture changed how the Church conducted the public worship. In the early days of the Church, the Spirit would work immediately upon the person giving them a tongue (which must be interpreted), a prophecy (which must be tested), a word of knowledge or wisdom, etc. Now that the Bible is complete we rely upon it for our guidance. That does not mean God cannot speak to someone about the future, but it does mean that God will not say anything to anyone contrary to Scripture. For example, if any one says that God gave them a prophecy “date” concerning the coming of the Lord, then we immediately know the prophecy to be a false one according to Matthew 24:36.

IV. The Apostle (12:1-25) - An apostle is someone sent on a mission. Peter and James were leading apostles in the New Testament. Acts 12 is focused mainly on Peter and his prison break-out. The story involves four things:

1) *Unmerciful Persecution* (vv. 1-4) - Herod Agrippa I was the murderous king at this time. He was a classic people-pleasing politician. Men like Herod have only one motive for living – self glory. Herod would do whatever it took to secure his title. James and Peter meant nothing to Herod. It is devastating to a local church when the spirit of self-promotion creeps in. Title-hungry men have no boundaries. Self-seekers will literally destroy a local congregation to secure their power hold.

Peter was spared because of Passover. He was placed in prison with two Roman soldiers at his side and two guarding the door. He would be tried after Passover. The word “Easter” is an unfortunate translation. Easter was originally a pagan celebration. The word Easter comes from the word *Ishtar*. Ishtar was the goddess of fertility (eggs). The Greek word for Easter in verse 4 is *pascha*. It refers to the Passover lamb. *Pascha* is translated 28 times as Passover and this once as Easter. The correct translation should be Passover.

2) *Unceasing Prayer* (v. 5) - Once again, we see how important the privilege of prayer is to the advancement of the gospel. Prayer gives the boldness needed to face persecution. Prayer keeps God involved in the battle. To cease to pray is to eliminate God from the cause. There are four ingredients to successful deliverance praying: First, prayer must be persevering. Second, prayer must be in unity. Third, prayer must be vertical unto God. Fourth, prayer must be intercessory.

Acts 12:1-5 has a chiasmic structure:

- A – The Church is persecuted (v. 1)
- B – James is killed (v. 2)
- C – The people are pleased (v. 3a)
- D – Peter is taken (v. 3b)
- E – The Unleavened bread of the Passover (3c)
- D' – Peter is taken (v. 4a)
- C' – The people are pleased (v. 4b)
- B' – Peter is kept in prison (v. 5a)
- A' – The Church is praying (v. 5b)

The Passion of Christ is at the heart of the chiasm and it better be at the heart of our preaching and our ministries. The Passion of Christ is the essence of all we believe. The “preaching point” of the chiasm is to remind the Church that it is her lot to suffer for Christ. The two “book-ends” of the chiasm are to remind the Church that persecution is overcome by prayer.

3) *Unchained Prisoner* (vv. 6-19) - Luke used another chiastic structure to help us find the preaching point of the context.

- A – Herod, Peter and the keepers (v. 6a)
- B – Peter and the soldiers (v. 6b)
- C – Peter is freed by the angel of the Lord (vv. 7-8)
- D – Peter went out of the opened prison door (v. 9)
- E – The gate opens and the angel leaves (v. 10)
- F – Peter came to himself (v. 11)
- G – Deliverance from above (v. 11b)
- F' – Peter considered the thing (v. 12a)
- E' – The gate shuts and Rhoda leaves (vv. 13-15)
- D' – Peter went in through the opened door (v. 16)
- C' – Peter is freed by the Lord (v. 17)
- B' – Peter and the soldiers (v. 18)
- A' – Herod, Peter and the keepers (v. 19)

The two “book-ends” confirm that Herod is not in control but the Lord is. The center of the chiasm (G) reminds the Church that God will always be there for her deliverance. This principle is what the three Hebrews stood upon when they faced Nebuchadnezzar’s fiery furnace (Daniel 3). They told the king that God might not deliver them from the fire, but he would deliver from the king. Actually, James and Peter were both delivered from Herod.

4) *Unwarranted Pride* (vv. 20-24) - Herod placed a heavy tax burden on the cities. He was abusing his office to promote his covetousness. Herod’s audacious act was a preview of the abomination of desolation to come (2 Thessalonians 2:4).

Herod’s premeditated self-exaltation and the Lord’s immediate judgment on him is a solemn warning to all those in leadership positions. The craving to be as or above God is what made Lucifer the devil (Isaiah 14:12-15) and what made Adam and Eve like the devil.

The things that brought about the “pride parade” of Herod are what cause the same trouble today: *Royal Apparel, Position, and Eloquent Speech*. The motive behind Herod’s pride is what drives too many churches today. There is too much showing-off. Let us keep before our eyes Proverbs 16:18: “Pride goes before destruction and a haughty spirit before a fall.” The middle letter in the word pride is “I.”

V. The Teacher (13:1-12) - The ministry of teaching was closely associated with the role of the Pastor, but not limited to the pastoral office. The teacher was the Bible instructor. The word for teacher is translated many times as Master. The ministry of teaching is desperately needed in the church today.

Beginning at chapter 13 we find a shift from Peter to Paul. Paul will now be the main torch-bearer of the gospel message. Our present passage deals with three types of men:

- 1) *The Preacher* (vv. 1-5) - I am amazed with the naturalness and ease at how Luke speaks of the Spirit’s activity and leadership. The Spirit was sent to manage and maintain every step of the Church. We are exhorted seven times in the Revelation to hear the Spirit (Revelation 2:7, 11, 17, 29; 3:6, 13, 22). Preachers are always talking about having a “vision” but what we really need is “audio.” We need to lay hold of the radio dial in our minds and tune them into the Spirit’s station. I have seen many a good Christian go off the deep end because of some “vision” they had. I realize that when a church speaks of having a vision it is merely “goal-setting.” However, we must be careful how we use Proverbs 29:18 to support our vision. The Hebrew word for vision is not “a future plan” to fulfill, but a “word from God” now. If preachers would get as concerned and excited about getting on their knees with an open Bible and getting a “word from God,” as they do about trying to reach some vision, then they would exceed any vision they could plan on paper. To accomplish that you need certain kinds of men: First, you need *Servant* men (v. 2a) - The word ministered means “to serve others at your own expense.” To serve the Lord in this manner is to serve God for who he is, not for what he can give. Second, you need *Separated* men (v. 2b) – The word separate was translated as determinate in Acts 2:23. It means “to mark off with boundaries.” Paul and Barnabas were being selected out from the other men and separated to a specific work. All this is coordinated by the Spirit. Third, you need *Sent* men (vv. 3-4) - Paul and Barnabas would accomplish a pioneering advance that would be unprecedented. They would fulfill Acts 1:8 by going to the uttermost with the gospel of Jesus Christ. They had the passion for His Passion.
- 2) *The Pretender* (vv. 6, 8-11) - Elymas was a magician. Peter had his Simon Magus to deal with and Paul had his Elymas to deal with. Both were classic pretenders. The Spirit gives a graphic description of Elymas: *a sorcerer, a false prophet, a deceiver, a child of the devil, and an enemy of righteousness* (vv. 6, 10). The Holy Ghost struck the pretender with blindness. The kingdom of darkness cannot overcome the Kingdom of light.
- 3) *The Prudent* (vv. 7, 12) - A high-ranking official in Cyprus named Sergius desired the Word. Luke reminds us in verse 12, that even though the judgment of God on Elymas urged Sergius to believe, it was the doctrine (teaching) of the Lord that caused the astonishment. Signs and wonders have their place, but nothing can match the gospel message.

The devil will always pour all his experience and energy into keeping lost people lost. We must not forget this for one second. Biblical evangelism is pure war! It is the battle for the soul of man. This should answer a lot of questions as to why we experience so much trouble when we get serious about getting serious. Satan is not disturbed by a church that has lost the passion. A church that is slowly moving away from the passion needs to place a sign on the door: “Going out of Business.” A church that has already

lost the passion needs to place a sign on the door: "Out of Business."

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Chapter Thirteen

Amazing Grace Saves the Gentiles!

Acts 13:13-16:5

The Burning Flame of the Passion of Christ will spread its influence into the Gentile nations.

Devotional Commentary

Something takes place at this juncture of Kingdom Advance that will change the course of history, especially for the Jewish nation. The long-lived Jewish olive tree would take on Gentile branches. The mystery of a Jew-Gentile Church would be solved and revealed by the Apostle Paul. Paul goes into depth about this revealed mystery in Romans 11 and Ephesians 3. The torch of the gospel will be transferred into the hands of the Gentile nations.

This section of Luke's treatise is divided into four phases:

I. The Departure Phase (13:13-14; 15:36-41) - There are two departures that were not very Christian.

1) *John Mark's Departure* (13:13) - John Mark took hold of the plow and then turned back (Luke 9:62). For some reason John Mark decided to forsake his brethren and return to Jerusalem. Maybe the battle was too intense. Maybe he got homesick. Maybe he did not want to leave the memories of the Jerusalem revival. Maybe he got the "Jonah Syndrome" and did not want the Gentiles to get saved. Luke does not inform us of why Mark turned back. It is terribly sad to see good servants give up and go back. There are many Christians at this very moment who are serving in a local church "out of the will of God"! It is not only crucial that we serve the Lord but we must serve him in the right place. The easy road has a dead end. If you settle for comfortable Christianity, then you are sure to lose the passion.

Are you exactly where you are supposed to be? I tried to escape the call to preach by volunteering to be a deacon. I tried to flee from being a pastor by being an evangelist. It is terrible to want to do the right thing (serve God) in the wrong place! Do not leave your place just because trouble comes. You have no right to leave a position until you receive orders from headquarters; and the headquarters is not the hierarchy but the Holy Ghost! Stay on! It is your basic training for the bigger battle. God will send his man to pastor "Hornets Nest Baptist Church" because he is making his man there. Do not look at the church as your enemy, look at it as the Potter's Wheel.

2) *Paul's Departure* (15:37-41) - Barnabas was the melancholy man who loved to encourage others; therefore he felt it necessary to keep John Mark on board. Paul, however, was the choleric man who loved to enforce others; therefore he thought it best to leave Mark behind. Paul had no patience for quitters. He would not sit down with you and share in your pity party. Paul left all his tears for the prayer-closet, but on the battle-field he was all backbone and grit. Neither Paul nor Barnabas would budge. It got hot in the room. The only remedy was for them to depart from one another. Thankfully, we find later on that Paul and Mark had reconciled (2 Timothy 4:11).

Division among believers can be a gut-wrenching experience. However, we are thankful for the bed-rock principle that God not only rules, He overrules.

II. The Discourse Phase (13:15-52) - The discourse phase takes place in two settings:

1) *The Synagogue Setting* (vv. 15-41) - Paul's sermon has many similarities to Peter's sermon (Acts 2) and Stephen's sermon (Acts 7). One difference that stands out in Paul's sermon is his use of the word "justified" (v. 39). We are introduced to what was to come in that majestic letter to the Romans. Justification by faith would become the banner of the Protestant Reformation. Paul's truth about justification would get lost in the Dark Ages of Church history; and God would respond with another choleric named Martin Luther who would revive the doctrine of justification by faith alone.

The word justified is a legal word you would find in the courtroom. From a biblical standpoint, to be justified is to be acquitted by God for all your sins. God is a holy judge and we are guilty sinners and as long as we are in a state of sin and guilt, he cannot accept us. There is a "nature-clash" between us and God. God is perfectly holy and our carnal nature hates holiness. Therefore, if we are going to gain acceptance with God, we must somehow obtain a righteousness that is as pure as God himself. To even remotely think that we can live a good enough life to match the righteousness of God is sheer stupidity. If it was possible, then Christ has to allow every Pharisee into heaven. But Jesus said that our righteousness must exceed that of the Pharisee (Matthew 5:20). The only righteousness we are capable of is "self-righteousness" and that would put us in hell for sure.

The eternal question remains: *"How then can man be justified with God?"* (Job 25:4) It is beyond imagination how that question has caused centuries of chaos and division in the Lord's Church when the answer is as plain as the sun in the sky. It is truly wonderful how the Spirit of God can say volumes in one sentence. Here is the answer to the eternal question: *"Be it known unto you therefore, men and brethren, that through this man is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins: AND BY HIM ALL THAT BELIEVE ARE JUSTIFIED FROM ALL THINGS, from which you could not be justified by the Law of Moses"* (v. 38-39).

Hallelujah! The answer is in the Passion of Christ! Jesus is my righteousness. I do not have any righteousness of my own. It does not matter how many religious things I do, I cannot produce the righteousness I need for heaven. I can be good, go to church, get Sunday School pins, be baptized, love my dog, read my Bible, join the church, repeat a prayer, sign a decision card, etc; but if I do not somewhere in the middle of all that trust the Lord Jesus Christ for my salvation, then I will split hell wide open!

The confusion about being justified before God is how God can pronounce a sinner to be totally innocent when they are still capable of sinning and probably will sin again. Is God compromising his holiness? Is God merely slapping the criminal on the hand and letting him go? How can God remain just and still justify the guilty? The answer is found in the biblical principle of "imputation." To impute means to "put something to someone else's account." If I write some checks to pay some bills and the money is not in my account, then I would be in trouble with the bank and they would have the right to close my account and charge me with the crime. But, if my rich friend offers me some of his money to put into my account without me having to work for it, and I accept his offer, then his money would be imputed to my account. It would not be my money that goes into my account but once it is in my account then it becomes mine. The bank would be satisfied because their law had been met. I would be satisfied because my need had been met. My friend would be satisfied because his offer was accepted and he was able to give and bless me with grace. Every one of us has been given a life from God. We owe him perfect obedience. Unfortunately, we have squandered it on useless pleasures and vanity and now we have bills to pay but no money in our account. Our account in heaven is about to be closed and we will pay for our crimes

(Romans 6:23). How shall we pay God when he is requiring a perfect obedience? The answer is in our rich friend and his name is Jesus. Jesus came and lived a perfect life of obedience (Hebrews 5:8). He has satisfied the Law. He now offers us his righteousness to be imputed to our account without us working for it. The transaction will take place the moment we believe on him. The Father will be satisfied because his Law has been met. We will be satisfied because our need has been met. Our friend will be satisfied because his offer was accepted and he was able to bless us out of pure love!

There are three imputations in the Bible:

1. Adam's sin imputed to the human race (Romans 5:12-18).
2. Sin imputed unto Christ (2 Corinthians 5:21).
3. Christ's righteousness imputed to the believing sinner (Romans 4:11, 22, 24).

In the above scenario, the man with no money does not have any room to boast. He is the bad guy who purchased things for himself without the money to pay for it. All the praise goes to the friend. I have been asked many times if I am a Calvinist or an Arminian. If these were the only two choices then I would answer this way: "Study both systems diligently and the one that gives God all the glory is the one I would be."

2) *The Street Setting* (vv. 42-52) - Those are dreadful words for the Jewish nation in verse 46: "*lo, we turn to the Gentiles.*" The purpose of God in eternity past was for the Gentiles to be the seed of the Messiah as well as the Jews. Noah prophesied that Japheth's seed would dwell in the tents of Shem (Genesis 9:27). Nothing catches God by surprise.

Many have foolishly handled the truth of verse 48 to their own detriment (2 Peter 3:16). There is only one way to rightfully interpret verse 48 and that is to take it just as it is. People believe because they were ordained to believe. If God ordained none, then none would believe. The wrong question to ask is: "Why does God save some and not others?" The right question to ask is: "Why does God save any at all?"

The word ordain means "to appoint, determine, or set." It is a military word that is used for appointing a soldier to a post. Some will argue that verse 38 is referring to Christian service not salvation. Yet, the verse plainly states that they were ordained to eternal life, not eternal service. It is this simple: "God ordains, we believe." He does not ordain because we believe, we believe because He ordains. To change the structure of the sentence would be to make God dependent upon the sinner. This would be to dethrone God's will and enthrone man's will. However, the Bible teaches that God chose us in love before we chose him by faith (John 15:6; Ephesians 1:4; 1 John 4:19). The reason for God's choice is based purely in his Sovereign love (Deuteronomy 7:6-8). I will never understand why some of my brethren struggle with our heavenly Father doing his pleasure. It does not matter if we fully understand this truth as long as we know that everything our Father does is right. We will lose our minds if we try to figure out what God has not revealed to us. You can read and study Acts 2:23 until Jesus comes back and you will never be able to explain it in its fullness.

There are a couple of arguments against verse 38 we might address:

1. "If God has already ordained some to believe then why do we even witness to them?" We witness to them because God ordained and commanded us to witness to them. He that ordained the end has ordained the means to that end. Rather than hindering evangelism, this truth encourages it. It is exciting to preach the gospel when you know that God has ordained some to believe. If Kingdom Advance

depended solely on the will of the sinner, then there would be no advance at all. But God has secured for himself a remnant according to his electing grace (Romans 11:5). God has not left his purpose up to the sin-twisted will of man (John 1:13; Romans 9:16). If the salvation of a sinner is totally left up to his will, then what is the purpose of praying for the sinner? What should we ask God to do? If God is dependent on the sinners will, then God is as helpless as we are.

2. "Acts 13:48 does not refer to individuals but to the Gentile nation as a whole." But Luke tells us that "as many as." If God ordained the Gentile nation as a whole to believe, then no Gentile would die unsaved. To teach that God ordained nations as whole to believe, would be flirting with the false doctrine of universalism. If it is right for God to ordain nations, then it would be right for God to ordain persons out of that nation. We must remember this principle: "*Whatever God does is always right, whether we understand it or not.*"

The ordaining is God's part, the preaching of the gospel is our part, and the believing is the sinner's part.

III. The Division Phase (14) - Apparently, many were displeased with Paul's preaching. However, Paul was not concerned about pleasing the crowd, so he kept on preaching (v. 7). The Spirit would provide a real-life illustration for Paul's preaching. This phase is divided up into three sections with each section crowned with the words "*they preached*" (vv. 7, 21, 25).

1) *A Stirring Persecution* (vv. 1-7, 19) - As always, some believed and some did not. After the Titanic plunged into the sea, a giant sign was placed on the wall for people to see if their loved one was alive or not. There were two words at the top of the sign with a line drawn between them. One word said "Saved" and the other word was "Lost." Men divide men into three classes: Lower, Middle and High, but God divides men into two classes: Saved or Lost.

Verse 4 speaks of division in the city. Not all division is bad. The flesh will always be at war with the Spirit (Galatians 5:17). The darkness will always hate the light (John 3:19). Jesus divides (Matthew 10:34).

2) *A Standing Proof* (vv. 8-21a) - Spirit-filled preaching, like the sun, hardens some and softens others. The impotent cripple was proof positive that the gospel is the power of God unto salvation. While the impenitent are stirred with wrath, the impotent is strengthened to walk. Notice six things about the cripple: First, he lives at Lystra. Lystra means "a ransoming." Jesus came to ransom us from sin (Mark 10:45; 1 Timothy 2:6). Jesus' blood was the ransom price to loose us from the chains that bind. The Greek words for ransom and Lystra have a parallel sound. Ransom is *lutron* and Lystra is *loostrah*. Second, he is powerless (Romans 5:6). He is a New Testament Mephibosheth (2 Samuel 9). Third, he was a cripple from birth (Psalm 51:5). Our first birth gives us the nature of Adam and our second birth gives us the nature of Jesus. That which is born of the flesh is flesh and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit (John 3:6). Fourth, he heard Paul (Romans 10:13-17). We must preach the gospel in its purity. We must help support our missionaries that are preaching the gospel. We must pray to our Father to give us preachers of the gospel. Fifth, he had faith (Ephesians 2:8-9; Romans 3:28). Sixth, he was saved. The word healed means "to be delivered from the penalty, power and presence of sin." It is Messianic Salvation.

3) *A Staying Power* (vv. 22-29) - There are many persons who have experienced standing power, but have

lost staying power. He that endures to the end shall be saved. Perseverance is the badge of the saints. The Bible has two words for those that turn back or quit on God. One is a *backslider* and the other is an *apostate*. A backslider is a child of God that slides back, is chastised and comes back. An apostate slides back and never comes back. An apostate will not experience chastisement because he does not belong to God. Peter was the backslider and Judas was the apostate.

The apostles took discipleship very serious. Jesus called men to follow him and never look back. There is a healthy balance of evangelism and discipleship in Acts. Verse 22 confirms how vital spiritual growth is in Kingdom Advance. If every believer became a vagabond and never got established in the faith, then Kingdom Advance would come to a screeching halt. The chain of grace must keep adding links. Do not be the last link in the chain.

IV. The Decision Phase (15:1-35) - We all face epoch moments from time to time when the choice we make will determine our whole future and the future of those we love. America has faced many of these epoch moments in her fight for freedom. The early Church had come to one of those moments where the liberty of grace was at stake. The battle was between grace (faith) and law (works). The battle is still well alive today. There are only two religions in the world. One is that man obtains heaven by his unfinished works and the other is that man obtains heaven by the finished work of Jesus Christ. The Bible does not pivot God's Law against God's grace. They are in complete harmony. The Law's purpose is to show the sinner how unholy he is, thereby forcing him to look outside of himself for help, and then grace steps in to save.

There are two sides with two arguments.

The Works Argument (vv. 1-5)
God plus man saves.

Judaism required circumcision for salvation. They were okay with accepting Christ but they added circumcision to Christ. They did not mince their words: "*circumcision or hell.*" Their system of soteriology was Christ plus Law, which is the same as Christ plus works or Christ plus me. Christ did not come to help us save ourselves; he came to save all by himself. If a sinner could obtain heaven by their own effort then the Passion of Christ was a useless event (Galatians 2:21).

The only difference between the Judaism of Paul's day and the legalist of our day is the word circumcision has been replaced with words such as: Christ plus baptism, Christ plus church membership, Christ plus deeds, etc.

The most subtle ones are those who preach Christ as the only way to heaven and then turn around from the same Bible and tell their sheep that if they do certain things they can be unsaved again. They preach a person under grace and then preach the same person back under law (Galatians 3:3). If you are a Christian and you sincerely believe that you were saved by grace, but now you sincerely believe that if you commit certain sins you could be lost again, then according to inspired Scripture you have fallen from grace (Galatians 5:4). You cannot have it both ways. Beware of any preaching or teaching that takes you out of the New Covenant and places you under the Old Covenant.

The inspired Scriptures solve the works problem in one sentence: "*Not of works, lest any man should boast*" (Ephesians 2:9). This is not pulling a text out of context. Paul has just described the sinner as dead. Therefore, it is obvious that works cannot play a role in salvation because the sinner has none! It is not "grace saves and law keeps saved." It is not "faith saves and works keep saved." It is "grace saves

and grace keeps saved.” Grace all the way secures the glory for God (Ephesians 1:6, 12, 14).

The Grace Argument (vv. 6-35)

God alone saves.

We are introduced to seven godly men that stood on the side of grace.

Peter (vv. 7-11) - Peter speaks as if he had read Ephesians and Romans. He declared that the Gentiles received the Holy Spirit by faith. God does not have one plan for the Jew and another one for the Gentile (v. 9). Salvation has always been by faith. Paul proves that Abraham and David were saved by faith apart from works (Rom. 4). Peter climaxes his argument with a classic foundational truth: “*Sinners are saved by grace alone*” (Acts 15:11).

Paul & Barnabas (vv. 12, 35) – Two giants for grace.

James (vv. 13-21) - James argues that Gentiles do not have to become Jews to be saved. It is a subtle mistake that some Messianic Jews are making today. There is a teaching among some Messianic Jews that Gentiles are not complete until they take up the practice of some Jewish traditions. As sincere as they may be, the Bible eliminates that teaching when it declares that every Christian is “complete in Christ” (Colossians 2:10).

Judas & Silas (vv. 22-32) - These two soldiers of the Lord had leadership qualities and the gift of prophesy (v. 32). Silas becomes the more prominent of the two. By a strange turn of events, Silas is thrust into the lime-light.

Timothy (16:1-5) - God turned Paul and Barnabas’ split into a success. Timothy would become a pillar in the Church. His grandmother and mother were born again Jews (2 Timothy 1:5), and they had a strong influence on Timothy (2 Timothy 3:14-15). Paul exercised his Christian liberty by having Timothy circumcised. Paul was not giving in to Judaism, but helping Timothy’s ministry with fellow Jews. It was not unbiblical compromise but biblical wisdom. Our Christian liberty is to be used wisely (1 Corinthians 9:20).

As we move from this portion of Acts, let us not forget to be very careful about trying to make others conform to our rules and prejudices. We have no biblical authority to force others to submit to our convictions, denominations, traditions, or experiences. It is a very subtle move from grace into legalism. Ministers must stay alert, lest we become modern-day Pharisees who promote tradition above Scripture (Mark 7:13).

Chapter Fourteen

Prayer Meetings and Power Moments

Acts 16:6-40

The Church must keep in step with the Spirit to secure Kingdom Advance.

Devotional Commentary

Acts 16:6-10 are introductory verses to Paul's Macedonian Vision. Paul's spirit was in sync with the Holy Spirit. The Spirit put the brakes on Paul twice and would not allow him to go in a certain direction (vv. 6-7). If God is not giving you peace about a decision then it would be wise to wait. You will know when the door is open. Never use political tactics for a place in ministry. When you are in God's will the doors will open without any force. *"The steps of a good man are ordered by the Lord: he delights in his way"* (Psalm 37:23). *"A man's heart devises his way: but the Lord directs his steps"* (Proverbs 16:9). Finally, the door was opened and the vision came (v. 9). To go before the vision is given is defiance and not to go after the vision is given is disobedience. The Spirit of God does not operate in doubt. If we are in tune with him, he will give us inward assurance that we are moving in the right direction (v. 10 *assuredly*).

The rest of this section involves three prayer meetings accompanied with three power moments (vv. 13, 16, 25). Prayer is the fire-power for Kingdom Advance. Our passion and our prayer life always go together. There has never been a passionate Christian that neglected the prayer-closet. Prayer is the oxygen of the body of Christ. It is the very breath of the Church. God is extremely personal and he thoroughly enjoys a personal quiet time with his children.

I. Riverside Praying and a Seller of Purple (16:11-15) - Philippi was a great city. The advance began here at a women's prayer-meeting. Someone has said, "In most churches the men do the voting and the women do the praying." Some of the greatest prayer-warriors in the Bible were women. Lydia must have become a prayer warrior, because her name means "travail." Real praying, Kingdom praying, soul-birth praying, and Calvary praying is likened unto pains of travail (Isaiah 53:11; 66:8-9). True intercessory prayer is the hardest and most powerful work you will ever do in the spiritual realm. The flesh and the devil will fight against it with all their might (Daniel 10:13).

Lydia was also a Christian lady whose character and influence counteracted that nauseating spirit of Jezebel that crept into the church of Thyatira (Revelation 2:20). The Bible says that God just gently opened Lydia's heart for the gospel. Her testimony is well appreciated in these days of hype and emotional extravagance. We know the Christian experience is one that is "joy unspeakable and full of glory" (1 Peter 1:8), but we must not over emphasize the expression of salvation above the essential of salvation, which is faith in Christ.

There are four things that every truly saved person desires after trusting Christ: First, they desire to publicly identify themselves with Christ by baptism (v. 15a). Second, they desire to see their loved ones saved (v. 15b). Third, they desire to fellowship with the saints (v. 15c). Fourth, they desire to be faithful to the Lord (v. 15d).

II. Roadside Praying and a Damsel of Divination (16:16-22) The Greek word for divination is *Puthon*.

In Greek mythology Pythian was a serpent who guarded the oracle at Delphi. The false prophetess would utter false prophecies for a nice price. The demon possessed damsel had become a big money-maker for her masters. It seems to have always been and still is today, easy to make a luxurious living by telling lies. Isaiah confronted the issue in his day: *“This is a rebellious people, lying children, children that will not hear the law of the Lord. Which say to the seers, See not; and to the prophets, prophecy not unto us right things, speak unto us smooth things, prophecy deceits”* (Isaiah 30:9-10). Every generation since Adam has seen liars who preach for money. In our generation lying miracles and lying sermons have become popular ways of living. The old Latin proverb still holds: *“The world loves to be deceived.”*

While the damsel and her owners were making big dollars by telling lies; Paul and Silas were getting beaten for telling the truth. The stocks and bonds of the wicked was prosperity but the stocks and bonds of the righteous was prison. Someday God will turn everything around. *“Fret not thyself because of evil-doers, neither be thou envious against the workers of iniquity. For they shall soon be cut down like the grass, and wither as the green herb”* (Psalm 37:1-2).

Paul had taken all the mocking he was going to take. The demon in the woman was commanded by Paul to leave her. Kingdom Advance pierces the dark world. Paul exercised his delegated authority. *“Greater is he that is in us than he that is in the world”* (1 John 4:4). One of the most blessed truths in Scripture is “The Authority of the Believer.” The devil has managed to keep most Christians blind to this truth. This truth came to me at a critical time in my ministry. A man in the church was out of control and he was causing a great disturbance in the body. Luke 10:17-20 was opened up to me anew. After I gave this word to the church, we assembled at the altar and exercised our God-given authority over the spirit of division and victory was gained. We do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against spirits who seek to hinder the Kingdom of our Lord from advancing.

The order of authority in the spirit realm is not God, Satan, the Church, and the sinner. The order is God, the Church, Satan, and the sinner. The King James translation in Luke 10:19 does not give us the full impact of the text. The word power at the beginning of the verse should be translated “authority.” The Church has authority over the demons ability. When I was in elementary school, there was a little short lady that stood in the middle of the road with a whistle in her hand. Every driver had the ability to crush her with their vehicle but they never did. When she raised her hand they obeyed. Her power was not in her physical ability but in her badge. Her badge gave her *authority* over their *ability*. The Church’s authority is a delegated authority which must be taken very serious and exercised with extreme caution and reverence. Our authority lies within the name of Jesus and the badge of his blood (Revelation 12:11). It is terrible how much territory Satan has a stronghold on when he could be made to flee if the church would stand her ground. A good example of the exercising of authority is in Jude 9.

Paul and Silas were accused of being trouble-makers and were beaten with many stripes. They truly were sharing in their Lord’s Passion. We may not be persecuted for our faith in America but not all is calm elsewhere. We need to daily remember our brothers and sisters that are suffering persecution. *“Remember them that are in chains, as bound with them; and them which suffer adversity, as being yourselves also in the body”* (Hebrews 13:3).

III. Prison Shaking Prayer and an Old Jailor (16:23-40) - Paul and Silas were beaten with stripes and chained up in an old prison cell. When the clock struck twelve they began to have an old fashioned church service. It is strange today at what it takes to have a church service compared with the early saints. We have duped ourselves into thinking it takes so many things to organize a church service when all Paul and Silas had was two people and God (Matthew 18:20). However, those two persons must be gathered together in Jesus’ name or in the nature of his name. Paul and Silas were gathered together in unity and

God commanded the blessing (Psalm 133). The blessing fell at the midnight hour. This is the third of three important midnights in the Bible: *Midnight Redemption* (Exodus 12:29); *Midnight Return* (Matthew 25:1-10); and *Midnight Revival* (Acts 16:25). The midnight revival took place in three stages:

Stage 1: The Shaking of a Prison (vv. 25-26) - We can understand Paul and Silas' praying but their praises surpass understanding. The lost person will lift up prayers when trouble comes, but only a saved person can lift up praises. After the horrible losses that old Job suffered; he still praised the Lord (Job 1:21). Praise is a powerful weapon for Kingdom Advance. A person of praise is very effective in the Lord's work. Praise and worship have been revived in the Church. I say revived because it is not new. One glance at the Hebrew hymn book of Psalms and you will see that praise and worship has a rich heritage. Praise accomplishes five major things:

1. Praise magnifies God (Psalms 34:3).
2. Praise wins souls (Psalms 40:3).
3. Praise gives increase (Psalms 67:5-6).
4. Praise defeats the devil (2 Chronicles 20:21-22).
5. Praise creates an atmosphere for God (Psalms 22:3).

Paul and Silas created an atmosphere of praise in the prison and God came to inhabit. God sent a customized earthquake that opened the doors and loosed the chains. The jailor assumed he was the only one with the keys. He did not know Paul and Silas' friend named Jesus has the keys to all prison doors (Revelation 3:7-8).

Stage 2: The Awakening of a Sinner (vv. 27-30) - Conviction set in strong and fast on the old jailor. I am sure Paul and Silas added some preaching with their praying and singing. Since the jailor would not go to church, God brought church to him. Notice the difference of expression between the jailor's conviction and Lydia's. Jesus spoke of a woman that loved much because she sinned much. The jailor shook much because he sinned much. The jailor came in trembling with godly sorrow and asked the eternal question of the ages; "*What must I do to be saved?*" (v. 30). Salvation was not an option for the jailor but a must. I wish we would preach it that way. Salvation is a must! Giving your soul to Christ is not merely an invitation but an imperative! Sinners are commanded to repent (Acts 17:30). The verb "believe" in verse 31 is in the imperative mood, which means it is a command. Salvation is personal, urgent, and necessary. It is a glorious day when a sinner begins to ask this question. It is even more glorious when the answer comes and Christ is trusted.

Stage 3: The Making of a Disciple (vv. 31-37) - Is getting saved that simple? Isn't there more to going to heaven than just believing? Is it safe to tell sinners all they have to do is to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ? Actually, the danger is telling them anything else! It is beyond amazing that the Holy Spirit could put salvation on paper so crystal clear and yet multitudes still do not get it right. Salvation is faith in Christ alone. The "B" word is not behave, beg, or baptize; it is BELIEVE. The bottom line concerning salvation is, "have we somewhere and at sometime placed faith in God's dear Son?" This verse is so important we will outline it to give it clarity:

1) *The Word of Salvation is Believe*. Faith is the essential ingredient. Unbelief damns and faith saves (Mark 16:16). True biblical evangelical faith is trusting in Christ with all your heart (Romans 10:9-10).

It is leaning wholly on Jesus. It is not believing in you, plus Jesus, but Jesus only. Some accuse us of teaching easy believe-ism. Believing is not easy, it is impossible. Faith is a gift and fruit of the Spirit (Ephesians 2:8; Galatians 5:22). God gives what he commands. Not believing on Christ is as natural to a sinner as light to the sun. Faith is one of those perfect gifts that comes down from the Father of lights (James 1:17; Acts 3:16). And let us not forget the words of the Baptist: “*A man can receive nothing except it is given to him from heaven*” (John 3:27).

“You do not have to go up to heaven to find faith, and neither do you have to go to Jesus’ grave to find faith. The word of faith is nigh thee, in thy mouth, and in thy heart: that is, the word of faith, which we preach; that if you will confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and believe in your heart that God has raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart man believes unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation” (Rom. 10:8-10).

2) *The Way of Salvation is Jesus.* Jesus was very emphatic in John 14:6 concerning the way to the Father’s house. Jesus is the way. Salvation is not faith in a plan but in a person. Salvation is not faith in the creed but in the Christ.

There is a useless schism in the body of Christ over “Lordship Salvation.” Every truth has two extremes and the two extremes on this issue are:

Extreme 1:

To require a person to become a full-fledged disciple before they can have the assurance of salvation

According to this extreme, verses 33-34 would have to happen before the jailor could be assured of being saved. The jailor did not start believing in verse 34. The verb “believing” in verse 34 is in the perfect tense. The perfect tense is an action which is viewed as having been completed in the past once for all, never having to be repeated. The initial faith in Christ for salvation is a once-for-all event, never to be repeated. The reason it is a settled issue is because faith is placed in a perfect Savior. Calvary will never have to be repeated. The jailor had clearly believed before his baptism. To require anything other than faith in Christ for salvation is unbiblical.

Extreme 2:

To tell the sinner that they need to invite Christ into their heart as Savior and then later on they can make him Lord

First of all, you cannot make Jesus Lord; He already is Lord. Secondly, you cannot receive Christ in parts. Those that ignore the Lordship of Christ in gospel salvation usually present Jesus as a mere “ticket-to-heaven-serve-him-when-you-please” Savior. You cannot get Jesus the man without getting Jesus the Master. The Holy Ghost confession that was orally confessed by the early Church was “Jesus is Lord” (1 Corinthians 12:3; Romans 10:9-10; Philippians 2:10-11).

3) *The Warranty of Salvation is Shall.* When God says shall then it is settled. When God gives a promise it is complete. God’s promises are sure because:

1. God cannot lie (Numbers 23:19a; Titus 1:2)

2. God cannot change (Numbers 23:19b)
3. God does exactly what he says (Numbers 23:19c)
4. God's promises cannot be reversed (Numbers 23:20)
5. God's promises are certain in Christ (2 Corinthians 1:20)

The gospel of Jesus Christ comes with a guarantee. When you buy man-made products you are normally asked if you would like to buy the one, two, or three year warranty package. They offer you these because they know their products might not last. I would never preach a gospel that is temporary. I will never replace everlasting with temporary in John 3:16. Not only has God promised to save, but he also has promised to complete the work he started (Philippians 1:6). Do not replace the "shalls" of God with ifs, buts, or maybes. There is not one single soul in hell that can say they placed faith in Christ and he did not save them (John 6:37).

There is a great lesson in these three power moments for all that are in ministry. There will be seasons in ministry when the Lord will allow us to serve in the tranquility of the riverside. He may grant us a time of peace in a local church that is free from strife, where we can minister to persons like Lydia who love the Lord. There may be seasons when the Lord will allow trouble-makers like the damsel to "nag" us like a thorn in the side to try our patience and faith. God may call us to minister to the demonized and disobedient. It may cost us some "stripes and chains." Then there will be seasons when we are thrust into a hornet's nest to be beaten verbally. We will be called to dwell in the midst of people who are imprisoned with unforgiving heart, addictions, and all manner of strongholds. Wherever our Lord places us he will provide for us. Nothing is too hard for the Lord! The only thing we need to stay concerned about is that we keep a passion for His Passion! Where God places us is not our business; our business is to preach Jesus wherever we go.

Are you willing to leave the quiet riverside if Jesus needs you in the prisons? Are you willing to leave Jerusalem if God needs you in the desert? Are you willing to leave the mega church in Antioch and go to the uttermost parts of the earth? Are you willing to leave the country church and go into the fierceness of the city? Are we willing to practice what we sing, "*Where he leads I will follow?*"

Chapter Fifteen

Fire in the Synagogue!

Acts 17:1-20:1

The Holy Ghost is the Spirit of judgment and the Spirit of burning (Isaiah 4:4).

Devotional Commentary

In this section of Luke's treatise we will follow in the footsteps of the apostle Paul. There is no way to measure what the apostle Paul accomplished in his missionary journeys. There are five major places Paul pioneered as he headed to the uttermost parts of the earth. When Paul enters a new field he begins his work at the synagogue (17:1, 10, 17; 18:4, 19; 19:8).

I. Thessalonica (17:1-9) - The last four letters of the word "Thessalonica" means victory. The popular athletic English word "nike" has its origin here. God brought a great victory to this Macedonian city. We have two epistles to the Thessalonians that give us good insight into the church that Paul started there. Some scholars believe that 1 Thessalonians is the earliest New Testament book. There is a pattern in every new town Paul enters: he goes to the *synagogue*, he shares the *scriptures*, he proclaims the *Savior*, souls are *saved*, and sinners are *stirred*.

1) *The Synagogue* (v. 1) - The Jewish synagogue was established for the purpose of reading and expounding the Scriptures. The Torah was the center of the synagogue service. They assembled on the Sabbath day (our Saturday). We assemble on the Lord's Day (our Sunday) to celebrate the resurrection of Christ. We are not following the Pope as some assume, but we are following Jesus and the early Church (John 20:1, 19; 1 Corinthians 16:2; Revelation 1:10). Paul had a pattern of visiting the Jews first (Romans 1:16).

2) *The Scriptures* (vv. 2-3a) - Paul reasoned "out of" the scriptures not "into." True biblical preaching or teaching must exegete (bring out the meaning) the passage as it is. We all have preconceived ideas and beliefs that sometimes blur the way we see a text, but we must allow the Bible to speak for itself and tell others what it is speaking. Paul's pattern was threefold: First, by *reasoning*; Paul would mingle thought with thought and discuss the scriptures with clarity. Second, by *opening*; Paul would bring to light truths that the god of this world had blinded their eyes from seeing (2 Corinthians 4:4). Third, by *alleging*; Paul would open it up and lay it before them to understand. Paul's pattern was nothing new. He was walking in the steps of that great man of God named Ezra (Nehemiah 8:1-8). The word "allege" means to lay food out on the table. Paul was the master-chef who could prepare a feast for his hungry hearers, and the Thessalonians were starving for the truth.

3) *The Savior* (v. 3b) - Moses had his staff, David had his sling and stone, Ehud had his dagger, and Paul had his gospel. Wherever Paul opened up the scriptures he made a direct line to Christ. To stand behind a pulpit and deliver sermons that never mention Christ is to betray the ministry. Not to preach a beaten, bloody, bruised, buried, and risen Savior is to not preach at all. It is betrayal! It is to be like Judas! Paul preached a crucified Christ not a covetous Christ. The gospel of Jesus Christ is not a prosperity gospel. We dare not put our Lord on the same level as personified mammon! You cannot serve God and mammon (Matthew 6:24). The word "suffered" in verse 3 is becoming a familiar word. The Passion

lives on! Paul never moved away from the Passion of Christ. The death of our Lord was at the center of time (B.C.–A.D.) and at the center of Paul’s preaching.

4) *The Saved* (v. 4) - Paul was able to advance the Kingdom of God in Thessalonica among the pious Greeks and the prominent women. Luke sure loved his math. He is always reminding us that God added, God multiplied, or great multitudes believed. The principle of increase is biblical. A decreasing church is a sign that the Holy Ghost is not present in power. If decrease begins to happen, then there should be immediate evaluation and action. Note that the only word Luke used to describe the saved was that they believed. Salvation is by faith alone in Christ alone.

5) *The Stirring* (v. 5-9) - Notice that Luke describes the mad mob by one common denominator in verse 5: “*they believed not.*” There are no other categories to put people in except the saved one or the unsaved one. The devils crowd concocted a mob that would bring the new believers to trial. Their accusations were good testimonies about the saved: “*They turned the world upside down and did contrary to Caesar’s decrees*” (vv. 6-7). When the laws of men go against the laws of God then we have to obey God rather than men. The Church will always be faced with anti-biblical laws from men. The gospel should cause some culture shock. We will preach and live contrary to any rule that smacks at Bible truth. Moses’ parents were not afraid of the king’s commandment (Hebrews 11:23), Daniel’s friends were not afraid of the king’s commandment (Daniel 3), Daniel was not afraid of the king’s commandment (Daniel 6), and Esther was not afraid of the king’s commandment (Esther 4:16). We are not militant Christians who take up the sword and spear, but we are soldiers who stand for what is right. Note carefully that Paul did not try to change the culture but to win souls out of the culture. We are not society-winners but soul-winners.

Has there been any stirring lately in your ministry? How studious are you in the Scriptures? Can you present Christ clearly from the Old and New Testaments? Are you seeing people saved? Are you making the devil mad? Are you holding back the truth because you are afraid of the king’s commandment? That king may be some “head-honcho” in the church who wants to stifle and hush God’s man. We must keep the fire burning! We must sustain the passion for His Passion! God bless you and Godspeed! Onward Christian soldier! We have decided to follow Jesus – no turning back, no turning back!

II. Berea (17:10-15) - Paul follows his normal pattern and the people follow theirs. Paul’s Berea visit is very similar to his visit to Thessalonica. However, the Spirit of the Lord leads Luke to commend the Bereans for their reception and love for the Scriptures (v. 11). If the Holy Spirit would take the time to point something extraordinary out, then we should take time to examine it.

The word noble in verse 11 means “to be well minded.” The Bereans were fascinated with God’s book. The bush was burning and the Bereans were drawn to it. They caught the fire that was in Paul. The passion must be caught as well as taught. Receiving the written word leads to believing the Living Word. Oh, that the Bible was respected and received today as it was in Berea! O happy town Berea became! O happy preaching that was for Paul! Nothing blesses the Bible-chef more than hungry hearers.

The Bereans were more zealous over the Bible than a lot of preachers that preach it for a living. A pastor or preacher that does not pour his heart and mind into his Bible is not worth the title he bears. Thousands of local churches are literally starving for some “Bible Steak,” only to arrive at the Lord’s house to keep getting “Baby Formula” because the preacher has been too lazy to get a word from God. Study my brother! Dig for gold! You will preach the word exactly how you absorb the word. You will love Jesus as much as you love his word. It is his biography and portrait. The blood of our forefathers has been shed for the Bible. Our forefathers carried it with them across the ocean. Our grandparents and their

grandparents drew comfort from it. It is still the book that is requested to be read when a loved one is gone and the family needs encouragement. If you have no zeal to study your Bible then it is impossible to have zeal to preach it. The Word of God is our life and the life of those we minister to. If we live by every word that God has breathed then we do not need cute stories and flattering illustrations only; we need every word of God! Paul's charge to Timothy and every preacher that follows Timothy is: Preach the Word (2 Timothy 4:2).

"Then said Jesus unto them, therefore every scribe which is instructed unto the kingdom of heaven, is like unto a man that is an householder, which brings forth out of his treasure things new and old" (Matthew 13:52). God has given us 39 treasure-books in the old and 27 treasure-books in the new. Sunday is coming and the sheep are hungry, what shall we fix for dinner?

III. Athens (17:16-34) - Paul's success in Athens proves the gospel can penetrate the most formidable places. Athens was Paul's Jericho. It was a satanic stronghold where the intellectual giants lived. Its walls of idolatry seemed impossible to overcome but with God all things are possible. To see Paul standing in the midst of those intellectual giants would have been worth a year's salary to see. It was another David versus Goliath moment. On one side you have the philosophers with their titles, their books, their knowledge, and their eloquent speeches, and on the other side you have Paul with his sling and stone. The stone was Paul's gospel and the sling was the gift of utterance. As David slung the stone into Goliath's forehead, so Paul would utter forth the gospel with Holy Ghost power into the minds of the intellects. The philosophers had no idea who they were up against. They were facing a man who had graduated from the "Third Heaven Seminary" (2 Corinthians 12). The intellects stood spell-bound and speechless as Paul led them from the creation in Genesis 1:1 to the Great White Throne in Revelation 20. Let's watch the battle unfold. There are two sides:

Side One: The Philosophers.

There are three words that best describe Athens.

- 1) *Idolatry* (vv. 16, 22-23, 29) - Athens glittered with golden gods and silver shrines and adamant altars. The word "superstitious" in verse 22 means "to fear demons." Superstitious people are driven by fear instead of faith. Paul walked by faith into a city that lived by fear. Faith is stronger than fear because Christ is stronger than demons. Idols and images were made to please the gods and they were worshipped to appease the gods. God is Spirit and he must be worshipped in spirit. There is a reason the Spirit never gave us a physical description of Christ. Verse 23 gives proof that there is in the conscience of every man a need for more than idols. They knew there was a God that surpassed the mind, so they made him an altar.
- 2) *Intellectualism* (vv. 18-21) - Despite all their book knowledge, the Athenians lived in darkness. You cannot receive the living God through the brain but through the spirit (1 Corinthians 2:12-17; Ephesians 4:17-18). Two major philosophies of the day were the Epicureans and the Stoics.

1. *The Epicureans.* Epicurus was a Greek philosopher who held that the highest good was pleasure and the world is a series of fortuitous combinations of atoms. Epicurus may be dead but his "lie" lives on in the "Humanist Manifesto." Humanism started in the garden when Eve assumed that she had the right to become as God. Humanism exalts humans. It is self-driven and self-fed. It is built on the philosophy that every human has the right to have all the pleasure they desire. It does not matter who

they hurt or how they get it, they have the right to be happy (2 Timothy 3:4).

2. *The Stoics*. Zeno was the Greek philosopher who founded this teaching. He taught that man's happiness consisted in bringing himself into harmony with the universe. The students of this school of thought were trained to endure evils with indifference. They believed that if a person could become callous and emotionless then life would be easier to endure. They mixed humanity and the universe. Stoicism has revived under the "New Age Movement." It is hard to grasp the fact that the United States of America would eliminate the truth of creation from the text book and replace it with the theory of evolution.

Paul's new teaching about a man who died for sins and rose again was strange to their earthly-mindedness. Paul was speaking of heavenly things. Is it not amazing that Nicodemus, the giant of religious intellectualism, did not know any more of the supernatural than the Athenian giants that never read the book of Genesis?

3) *Ignorance* (vv. 23, 30) - Some people are ignorant because they have never known the truth (1 Timothy 1:13), and others are ignorant because they refuse to know the truth (2 Peter 3:5). I am not so sure that a lot of people in our communities are not as gospel hardened as they are gospel ignorant. Paul says that God winked at much of the Athenian ignorance. This means that God was not as severe as He could have been. God is very longsuffering (2 Peter 3:9). Paul's heart was stirred toward the Athenians (v. 16) because he used to be the same way. This is why God was so severe in his dealing with the Jews. They had much more light and to whom much is given, much is required. America will pay dearly at the judgment because she has been blessed with more light. Now, because of the light of the gospel that was shining in Athens, they were commanded to repent (v. 30). More light equals more responsibility. This is why God will be more severe on the local church than the local gambling place or the local bar.

Side Two: The Preacher.

Paul's springboard for his sermon was their altar TO THE UNKNOWN GOD. The essence of Paul's message is the "Living God" who is sovereign above all. Paul's twelve point sermon would amplify characteristics about the Living God.

1. He is the Creator of all things (v. 24a)
2. He is the Lord of all things (v. 24b)
3. He is self-dependent (v. 25a)
4. He is the giver of life (vv. 25b, 28)
5. He has pre-planned all things (v. 26)
6. He is not stoic (without feelings) or distant (v. 27)
7. He is Spirit (v. 29)
8. He is patient and full of grace (v. 30a) "over-looking" past ignorance
9. He commands universal repentance (v. 30b)
10. He set a date in which he will judge the world (v. 31a)
11. He has ordained the Judge (v. 31b)
12. He raised his Son from the dead (v. 31c)

The gospel flame that began in that little upper room has now spread to great heights and lengths. The

passion that was ignited in the 120 is now burning all over the known world of Paul's day. The gospel has penetrated the hearts and minds of all races and classes of men. It is so exciting to be a part of this eternal movement 2000 years later. We have no reason to be ashamed of the gospel despite the intellectual movements of our day. There is nothing to fear about evolution. When the evolutionists can prove their theory then we might get alarmed, but until then we have nothing to fear. The theory of evolution has one underlying purpose: *to eliminate God*. The fool has not only said in his heart that there is no God (Psalms 14), he has also said it with his lips.

There is one supreme lesson we need to glean from Acts 17 and that is: "*the gospel works for all generations*". If we think for one second that we cannot compete with the culture of our day and if the enemy can convince us that our gospel is old fashioned and archaic, then we are done! If we lose faith in the pure gospel of Christ and start inventing our own little Philistine carts to accomplish Kingdom Advance, then the battle is over and the enemy takes the field. We do not need anything "new," we just need the old preached with fresh power. We need the passion for His Passion revived and rekindled. We need to fan the flame and stir up the gift of God that is in us! Oh, may God grant to the Church saints like David. Saul had the armor, the stallion, the sword, the title, and the degrees, and yet he was a coward. David had his sling, his stone and the anointing of the Holy Ghost, and he was courageous! *The problem is not with the gospel, but with our confidence in the gospel*. We must get to the place where we wholeheartedly believe that the gospel has saving power. Once we are convinced of the gospel to save then we need to preach it with all the anointing power God will give us!

IV. Corinth (18:1-17) - Paul's arrival in Corinth united him with a Christian couple who became a great blessing to him. I am so grateful for the providence of God. My wife and I have been so blessed in ministry to meet brothers and sisters in Christ that have helped us in so many ways. I thank God for those who share our vocation. If this little book can encourage one couple in ministry then it has been worth all the effort and strain that has went into it. If I only knew this book had gotten into the hands of one person and reignited the passion for His Passion, then I would bow my knees in humble adoration to God who gave it to me.

Paul followed his normal pattern in Corinth: The Synagogue (v. 4), the Scriptures (v. 4), the Savior (v. 5), the Saved (v. 8), and the Stirring (vv. 6, 12). Paul's words in verse 6 reflect and relate to Ezekiel's ministry to the Jews (Ezekiel 3:16-21). Paul was free from guilt because he had warned them about refusing Christ. No preacher should ever leave a ministry and not be able to say verse 6 with all his heart. If we avoid certain truths because we might offend someone, then we are immediately disqualified for ministry. We are warned of God to warn men. Our hands must be blood-free and our conscience guilt-free.

The Lord's words in verses 9-10 were given to encourage the apostle to keep advancing. Paul would later use the same principle to encourage Timothy (2 Timothy 1:6-7). The fear of failure, the fear of man, and the fear of Satan will cause ministerial paralysis and unwarranted compromise. Verse 10 has a three-fold blessing:

1) *The Presence of the Lord – I am with you*. The Lord has led many soldiers into battle with these words. Isaac was sustained by these words as he fought for the wells (Genesis 26:24); Joshua was given renewed courage by these words (Joshua 1:5); Jeremiah was strengthened by them (Jeremiah 1:8); and the Church has been given these assuring words for her Great Commission (Matthew 28:20). There is absolutely nothing that can replace the presence of God. If God is not in the camp, then the camp will become the devils turf. Moses knew this (Exodus 33:14-15); Joshua knew this (Joshua 7);

and Isaiah knew this (Isaiah 64:1-3). If God took a vacation from your church, would things go on as usual? If God stepped out for a month from your life, what would change? The promise of His manifested presence is for those who are active in Kingdom Advance. The indwelling presence cannot be lost, but the anointing presence can. David lost the anointing presence and cried after it with many tears (Psalms 51:10-12).

2) *The Protection of the Lord – No man will hurt you.* The Lord placed a hedge about Paul in Corinth. The vision of protection would make Paul as bold as a lion. Paul was invincible because he was surrounded by the invisible. You can do the impossible when you see the invisible (Hebrews 11:27). We must never allow what we can see to appear bigger than what we cannot see. We do not walk by sight, but by faith (2 Corinthians 5:8).

3) *The Purpose of the Lord – I have much people in this city.* The foreknowledge of God is a tremendous encouragement to ministry. The verb “have” is not in the future tense but the present tense. The Lord spoke as if they were already his before they heard Paul preach. How could this be? It could be because of two majestic truths:

The Election of God

The people that our Lord is referring to are those that were given to him by his Father (John 6:37). The Church is the Father’s love-gift to his Son and Jesus is the Father’s love-gift to the Church (Ephesians 5:25). Jesus had a remnant in Corinth that belonged to him by “Divine Election” (Ephesians 1:4-5; Romans 11:5).

It must grieve our heavenly Father when his children quarrel over his predestinating purpose. Paul urges the clay not to argue about what the Potter is doing (Romans 9:19-23). The age old argument against God’s sovereign electing love is: “*If God has already predetermined who are his, then why witness to them?*” God’s election according to grace does not excuse people from witnessing but it encourages people to witness. That is the whole purpose of the Lord’s vision to Paul. Paul did not see it as an excuse but a motivation. “*Therefore I endure all things for the elect’s sake, that they may also obtain the salvation which is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory*” (2 Timothy 2:10).

If “getting saved” depended solely on the will of the sinner, then ministry would be the most discouraging vocation on earth. The whole purpose of why we pray is because we know God must do something! If a man could come to God all by himself and of his own free-will, then why do we ask God to do something? Why should we spend time praying to God who cannot do anything until the sinner gives him the okay? There is something we have overlooked in our theology: “*God is not obligated to save sinners*”. Have we forgotten that creation and Calvary were voluntary? If one sinner is saved it will be by the pure grace of God. If we attribute the saving of a sinner to God’s grace then we secure God’s glory (Ephesians 1:6, 12, 14).

The Lord did not give Paul a list of names and addresses to visit. Paul’s job was to preach the whole gospel to the whole world. The knowledge of those that belong to the Lord is for God to know (2 Timothy 2:19). Our job is to preach the gospel to “whosoever will.” The Great Commission is for the Church to go into all the world. The argument that persons who believe in God’s election are against evangelism is silenced by scripture, by Paul, and by church history. We have to believe in God’s sovereign election because it is Bible doctrine (Deuteronomy 7:6-8; John 13:18, 15:16; Romans 9:11, 11:5, 7, 28; Ephesians 1:4; 1 Thessalonians 1:4; 2 Thessalonians 2:13; 2 Peter 1:10). We have to believe in evangelism because it is Bible doctrine (Matthew 28:18-20; Mark 16:15; Acts 1:8; Romans 10:14-17; Ephesians 6:15; Revelation 22:17). Election and Evangelism harmonize. It is men that have torn them apart.

The Foreknowledge of God

Acts 18:10 clearly implies that the Lord's knowledge was not an assumption but a settled knowledge. God cannot assume anything because he is omniscient. The word foreknowledge has been interpreted as mere foresight. There is a difference in foreseeing something and foreknowing something. How can God foresee what he does not know and how can he know what he has not planned? How can God foresee a person believing when he has to see the person created first? And who did the creating? If God had to make his plans on foreseen events, then God would have to depend on something outside of himself. This would immediately eliminate God's sovereignty. To foreknow is to foreordain. The word "know" is used in salvation as an intimate word of relationship (Matthew 7:23). To know is to own. It is not merely events that God foreknows but it is persons (Romans 8:29). If it is wrong for God to elect individuals then it is massively wrong to elect nations. God can do as he pleases with whoever he pleases whenever he pleases and all we can do is join hands with Jesus and say: *"Even so, Father; for so it seemed good in thy sight"* (Matthew 11:26).

The argument that God's predestinating purpose destroys the responsibility of man is false. Every person in hell will be there because they refused to receive Christ. If God passes by a man and leaves that man in his sin then how can you blame God? If the man loves his sin so much that he refuses to turn from it to Christ, then how can we blame God for the man's choice to die lost? God is not dealing with good people but sinners that love their sin. He is not working with soft, holy clay but marred clay.

The reason many teach that God's election is based on the foreseen faith of the creature is because they are trying to avoid the assumption that God would be a cruel and unfair God if he chose some and not others. However, the supporters of this view will have to answer an even harder question: "If God looked ahead in time and saw that a person was not going to believe and go to hell, then why would God even create that person?" Why wouldn't God only create those that would believe? If we are trying to escape the "cruelty of God" (which is a dreadful misnomer), then we are safer on the side of election based on foreseen grace rather than election based on foreseen faith. If God based his election on the foreseen faith of the sinner, then what shall we do with 1 John 4:19? The love of God had to come before the faith of the sinner, because faith is a work of God and love is his essence (1 John 4:16). Faith has not always existed, but love has. Faith is not everlasting (1 Corinthians 13:10), but love is (Jeremiah 31:3).

There is some marred clay in the potter's house. If the Potter does nothing with it, then no one complains because the Potter has the right to do whatever he pleases with his own clay. If he leaves the clay to itself, then no one makes a fuss. If he decides to reach into the marred clay and take out a piece for himself and form it into something for his glory, then that would be great. It would be rude and silly to ignore his glory piece in the window and complain about the unused clay. As for the clay that was used; no one would praise it for its own willingness because it had none. People would pass by the Potter's window and be in awe of the Potter's work. The glory would go solely to the Potter. When God (Potter) created man (clay), he did something marvelous; he gave the clay a free-will to obey or not. The clay (Adam) decided to use his free-will to disobey his Creator, thus becoming marred clay. Look what happened to the free-will of Adam after he sinned: *"Adam and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God"* (Genesis 3:8). Adam became marred clay. Our bodies die because they have Adam's blood running through the veins. The "free" will of man now became a "bound" will in sin. The bent of every sinner is to hide from God. If God had left Adam and Eve and their seed to themselves, then no one could complain, especially after all God had given them. If God decides to reach into the marred clay of humanity and take out a piece for himself to fashion it for his glory then that would be great. It would be a

marvelous display of God's mercy. If he decides to take the rest of the marred clay and throw it into the fire, then that is fine because it was hardened and marred of its own free-will. Sinners do not go to hell because God is cruel and unfair; they go to hell because they choose to go. One look at Mt. Calvary eliminates even the remotest thought that God is cruel. If you struggle with God's sovereign election you might want to read Romans 9:19-21.

If you are lost and you know you are marred clay, then please read and reread the words of the Lord Jesus: "...and him that comes to me I will in no wise cast out." (John 6:37). If you are waiting to trust Christ after you understand God's sovereign purpose then you will die lost. God only requires one thing from you and that is for you to believe on his beloved Son for your salvation (John 6:29).

If you are saved and serving God in Kingdom Advance, then be encouraged because the Shepherd still has many sheep that needs to hear the joyful sound that "Jesus Saves!" Jesus has already prayed for them to believe through our testimony (John 17:20).

V. Ephesus (18:18-20:1) - Ephesus was a big target for Kingdom Advance. The Church in Ephesus became one of the strongest in Church history. Satan had a strong grip in Ephesus but God was about to loosen it. Ephesus experienced three mighty things in the early days of Kingdom Advance.

A) The Preaching Wonder (18:24-28) - In Corinth Paul met a certain Jew named Aquila (Acts 18:1) and in Ephesus he met a certain Jew named Apollos (18:24-28). Apollos was born in the great city of Alexandria, which was known for its world famous library that housed thousands of volumes. It was in Alexandria that the Hebrew Bible was translated into Greek. The translation is known as the LXX or the Septuagint. The influence of Alexandria radiated through Apollos. There are four outstanding traits about Apollos we would do well to desire. Apollos was:

1) *Mighty in the Scriptures* (v. 24) - The word eloquent means that Apollos was a learned man in the Septuagint and he was very able to express what he learned with dynamic speech. He was a Bible man. He knew it, studied it, meditated on it, and shared it. A man can only be mighty in the pulpit if he is mighty in the scriptures. You cannot preach what you do not know! To attempt to preach without diligent study is no different than Jesus jumping off the pinnacle to prove that God would help him. Jesus did not tempt God and neither should we (Matthew 4:5-7). Apollos knew his Bible better than his bankbook, yea; it was his bankbook.

2) *Fervent in Spirit* (v. 25) - It is refreshing to be in the presence of a man on fire. The word fervent means "to be boiling over." Oh, how this fervency is needed today! Fervency gives preaching its punch and power. Apollos was not even filled with the Spirit yet! He was filled with the Word and the word of God is a fire that gets into the bones (Jeremiah 23:29; 20:9). We need fervency. The lukewarm atmosphere is like a plague on the body of Christ. God is fire! Passion is fire! We need: *Fervent service* (Romans 12:11), *Fervent love* (1 Peter 4:8), and *Fervent praying* (James 5:16).

The essence of God is fervency. To be mighty in the scriptures and lack fervency will lead to "dead, dry orthodoxy." The letter kills but the Spirit gives life. To be fervent and lack Bible depth will lead to "wild fanaticism." The first is *no fire* and the latter is *wild fire*. Apollos was knowledge on fire!

3) *Bold in the Synagogue* (v. 26) - It was a beautiful moment when Aquila and Priscilla took the young preacher under their wings and brought him into the world of the New Testament. Apollos only had known the baptism of John. It speaks very highly of Aquila and his wife. At the same time, it is very impressive that Apollos was humble enough to allow this couple to teach him. Whenever a person

ceases to be teachable, then it is at that very moment they cease to learn and grow. Criticism that is ministered in love is very profitable. A wise person will utilize healthy criticism to their advantage. A fool will despise good counsel.

We would do well to learn from these three saints. Many local churches would advance more mightily if some learned humble saint would set their young preacher aside and share with him about his lack. Many churches will allow him to go on year after year while the church slowly dies. D. L. Moody was taken aside by two ladies who saw a man without the anointing. He took their advice, sought the Spirit's fullness, and turned his generation upside down for Jesus.

I am so thankful for the advice of the older saints. I have had my share of unloving and hateful criticism, and it really hurts. However, I have been blessed in my journey to meet some wonderful saints like Aquila and Priscilla. I remember sharing my call with an older preacher named Boyd Manion. I will never forget the advice he gave to me that day as long as I live. With tears in his eyes and gravity in his voice, he told me to never compromise the Word of God. The pastor that can unite the generations can grow a successful church.

4) *Convincing to the Sinner* (v. 28) - Apollos not only had knowledge, he had the skill to use it. He was able to prove that Jesus was the Messiah with such clarity and evidence that the listener was convicted. The word for convinced is also used in John 16:8 to explain the convicting work of the Holy Spirit. Preaching that does not convince does not save. If someone asked us to quote three Old Testament Scriptures that clearly pointed to the Messiah, would we be able? If you were going to lead me to Christ from the Old Testament, what passage would you use?

B) The Pentecostal Way (19:1-10) - We are presented with an unusual circumstance in these verses. There are twelve men at Ephesus that are eager to follow Christ but they are stuck in the Old Testament. Their reception of the indwelling Spirit happened out of the norm. Keep in mind that Acts is a transitional book. To say that these disciples were saved and this is a second work of grace is to misunderstand what is taking place. They were not saved in the New Testament sense. To belong to Christ you must have the indwelling Spirit (Romans 8:9; 1 Corinthians 12:3; Ephesians 1:13-14). The generation that lived in the days of Pentecost were born under the Old Covenant and saved under the New Covenant. We live after the transition but they lived during the transition. All they knew under the Old Covenant was the "law of stone," but after Pentecost they were under the "law of the Spirit." What God had written on tablets was now written on their hearts by the penmanship of the Holy Ghost (2 Corinthians 3). A mystery that had been hidden in eternity past had been revealed for the first time in their generation. The mystery was "*Christ in you, the hope of glory*" (Colossian 1:27).

Paul was helping these disciples make the transition from the Old into the New. The authentic seal of the New Covenant was the gift of the indwelling Spirit (Ezekiel 36:26-27). Paul was exercising apostolic authority by conferring the blessing on the twelve. The number twelve in Hebrew means "completeness." These twelve disciples of John were now complete in Christ (Colossians 2:10).

It is not against scripture to ask someone who believes in Christ if they have received the Holy Ghost. Just because a person says they believe in Christ is not evidence they are saved. Many *profess* Christ who does not *possess* Christ. A very legitimate question every professor of Christ should be able to answer is, "*Has the Spirit of God witnessed to your spirit that you are a child of God*" (Romans 8:16; 1 John 3:24; 5:9)? We must follow the New Testament pattern of emphasizing the gift of the Spirit as the authentic mark of a New Testament believer (Acts 2:38; 2 Corinthians 1:22; Ephesians 1:13-14; 1 John

2:27; Jude 19). We must be extremely careful about using some modern-day techniques when we are dealing with lost souls. If the Holy Spirit can tell a sinner they are lost, then he can tell them when they are saved. We can tell sinners how to get saved (Acts 16:31); we can tell them how God will save them (Ephesians 2:8-9); and we can tell them what they will experience when he saves them (Romans 8:16; 1 Peter 1:8); but we cannot tell them they are saved. The only person that has the authority to tell a lost person that they are saved is the Holy Spirit. He can witness with the Word (1 John 5:13) and he can witness directly to the spirit (Romans 8:16; 1 Corinthians 2:9-16).

C) The Prevailing Word (19:11-41) - Kingdom Advance in Ephesus is well described in Acts 19:20: *“So mightily grew the Word of God and prevailed.”* Nothing in this world has ever been able to bind the Bible. The Bible has breakthrough power. The ark prevailed over Dagon; Moses’ serpent prevailed over Pharaoh’s serpents; and the Bible prevails over the devil’s lies. In Ephesus, Paul confronted two giants:

1. *Counterfeit Christianity* (vv. 12-19)

Satan loves to counterfeit Christianity. He had some wandering Jews in Ephesus who were trying to imitate Paul. Notice carefully, that they “took upon themselves” the ministry of exorcism. Self-called people have caused more trouble in local churches than any other person. Jeremiah commanded Baruch: *“Do you seek great things for yourself? Seek them not”* (Jeremiah 45:5). The self-called sons of Sceva tried to cast out a demon, but the demon responded with “Who are you?” Then the demon drove the man like a raging animal and the man attacked the seven.

Christians do have authority over evil spirits, but we must be very careful how we exercise it (Luke 10:17-19). To use the name of Jesus in a light and flippant manner is dangerous. You cannot divorce the name of Jesus from the nature of Jesus. You can quote the name of Jesus, but you had better be a partaker of his nature (2 Peter 1:4). Paul was a partaker of the divine nature, but the sons of Sceva were not.

The Church has always been challenged by vagabonds that wander from church to church. They usually want to come into the church and take over. Many of them are self-called and not God-called. They desire to be something they are not. A back seat will not do for them. They have no desire to get established in the church and learn to know and love the people. They cannot get close to the people because being vagabonds, they will be moving shortly if they do not get their way. We must not forget that there is still an enemy lurking in the garden looking for an opportunity to plant tares in the wheat. If we are awake and walking in the Spirit, we should have no problem discerning the vagabond.

Verses 18-20 prove that truth prevails over lies. The city had a bonfire of their magic books. Luke pivots the books of Ephesus against the book of God. The word of God prevailed and increased. Paul later counseled the church at Ephesus to take the Sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God (Ephesians 6:17). Is God’s word prevailing in you? Do you read the Bible or does it read you? Is the Word of God getting inside you and working effectually? Have you had a bonfire lately? When I was a teenager I was addicted to carnal music. I loved the sound without paying a lot of attention to the lyrics. After the Holy Spirit took control of my life, he impressed upon my heart to trash all my cassettes. I remember taking my cassette cases and emptying them clean. It was a tremendous release for me and a giant step forward in my new walk with Christ.

2. *Culture Corruption* (vv. 21-20:1)

Ephesus experienced a culture shock when Paul came to town. Paul came into Ephesus with the Sword of the Spirit and made havoc of satanic strongholds. We must re-emphasize and renew the place of

scripture in the local church. The Church is the salt that prevents cultural corruption. If the salt loses its savor then corruption takes over the culture. As the Church goes, so goes the world. Thank God that the Bible is not bound by culture, by laws of men, by prison bars, by golden idols or anything else the devil has in his arsenal. The Bible is a spiritual book. Jesus whipped the devil with “it is written;” Paul whipped the devil with “it is written;” and if we are going to take back the culture from the enemy, then we must stand on what is written in the Holy Word of God!

Acts 19:21-20:1 has a chiastic structure. Remember, in a chiastic structure the center of the chiasm is the particular truth that the writer wants to convey.

A – Paul decides to leave Ephesus (19:21)

B – Paul and the disciples (19:22)

C – Town Commotion (19:23)

D – Demetrius and the craftsmen (19:24-25)

E – God’s man (19:26)

F – The great goddess Diana (19:27)

G – Great is Diana (19:28)

H – The town takes the men (19:29a)

I – The rush into the theatre (19:29b)

J – Paul advised to not go in (19:30)

K – Certain of the Chief of Asia (19:31a)

J’ – Paul advised to not go in (19:31b)

I’ – The confusion in the theatre (19:32)

H’ - The town takes the men (19:33)

G’ – Great is Diana (19:34)

F’ – The great goddess Diana (19:35)

E’ – God’s men (19:37)

D’ – Demetrius and the craftsmen (19:38)

C’ – Town commotion (19:40)

B’ – Paul and the disciples (20:1a)

A’ – Paul decides to leave Ephesus (20:1b)

Luke is informing us by the chiasm that despite all the raging and the rioting, the gospel has succeeded into the highest places in Ephesus. The chief of Asia were high ranking men through out Asia. They were men who had been selected by their city to represent their city at the Roman games. Ten men would be selected and one of those ten men would be chosen to lead the rest. Luke is telling us that Paul has gained some friends in high places. The Word of God has no limits. Voltaire tried to eliminate the Bible in his generation, but after his death they used his house to print Bibles in! Higher criticism, liberalism and modernism have attacked the Bible ferociously but to no avail. God’s truth will endure forever (Psalm 100:5). We must make much of the Scriptures. We must stand firm on the inerrancy and infallibility of the Word of God. We must learn to use it skillfully against the kingdom of darkness. The Bible is an *offensive* weapon. It is *milk* for the babe, *meat* for the mature, a *hammer* for the builder, a *fire* for the preacher, a *guide* to the traveler, and a *lamp* in the darkness. It is *perfect*, converting the soul; it is *sure*, making wise the simple; it is *right*, rejoicing the heart; it is *pure*, enlightening the eyes; and it is *true* and *righteous* altogether. Biblical convictions will overcome bad culture.

Today’s culture is an overwhelming obstacle for the Church. Godly principles no longer govern the government. Laws are being passed that are contrary to biblical statutes. Many of the saints have

compromised their convictions and yielded to cultural lifestyles. However, we must continue to fight the good fight of faith. And in this battle against corrupt culture, there is something very important we must not forget: *“Our primary mission is not to change the culture but to win the sinner out of it.”* We might not be able to shutdown the corrupt places but we can, by the grace of God, turn sinners from them. *“And others save with fear, pulling them out of the fire; hating even the garment spotted by the flesh”* (Jude 23). If the Church would get serious about her Father’s business, then the devil would be out of business in many cities.

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Chapter Sixteen

Passionate Compassion

Acts 20:2-38

To have passion without the “com” is like having John 3:16 without the words “so loved.”

Devotional Commentary

Some of the most mean-spirited people are those that have a religious passion without compassion. The word passion means “to suffer” and the prefix com means “with.” The call of the cross is to weep with them that weep. The Passion of Christ is the expression of his everlasting love for the hurting. If we share in our Lord’s Passion, then we must be willing to suffer with the wounded. Moses is a good Old Testament example of “passionate compassion.” The writer of Hebrews commends Moses for “*choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season*” (Heb. 11:25). The apostle Paul is a good New Testament example of “passionate compassion.” Acts 20 allows us to get a glimpse into Paul’s innermost being.

This section of Luke’s treatise involves three important events:

I. The Feasts of the Lord (vv. 6, 16) - There is a wonderful teaching for us in the way the early disciples combined the old with the new. They were well aware that the Messiah had come and brought fulfillment to the Old Testament types and shadows. They knew they were not bound to the ceremonies and rituals of the past. However, they still celebrated the feasts of the Lord, but with new meaning. They respected their roots and heritage in the original olive tree, knowing at the same time that all had changed with the grafting in of the Gentiles (Romans 11). The feasts (appointments) of the Lord are given in Leviticus 23. There are seven feasts, with four in the spring and three in the fall.

- 1) *Passover* (23:5) - This was fulfilled in the Passion of Christ. Jesus is the true Passover Lamb of God (John 1:29; 1 Corinthians 5:7). Our Passover celebration is the Lord’s Supper.
- 2) *Unleavened Bread* (23:6-8) – This was fulfilled in the perfection of Christ. Leaven is a Bible symbol for evil (1 Corinthians 5:7-8).
- 3) *Firstfruits* (23:9-14) – This was fulfilled in the resurrection of Christ (1 Corinthians 15:20). We celebrate this every Lord’s Day morning and especially on Resurrection Sunday (Easter).
- 4) *Pentecost* (23:15-22) – This was fulfilled in the coming of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:1). The two loaves are the Jews and Gentiles making one body – the Church.

The long gap between the four spring feasts and the three fall feasts symbolizes the long gap between the day of Pentecost and the resurrection of the Church (1 Thessalonians 4:13-18).

- 5) *Trumpets* (23:23-25) – This will be fulfilled in the resurrection of the Church (1 Corinthians 15:51-55).
- 6) *Atonement* (23:26-32) – This will be fulfilled during the Great Tribulation (Matthew 24:21; Revelation 7:14).
- 7) *Tabernacles* (23:33-44) – This will be fulfilled during the 1000 year Millennial Reign of Christ

(Revelation 20:1-10).

Many of the Jews that believed on Christ could not let go of the past. They chained men to traditions that were no longer in effect. The disciples showed a beautiful exercising of the liberty we have in Christ (Galatians 5:1). They demonstrate their new liberty in the book of Acts. Here are some examples:

- ~They honored the temple even though they knew the real temple was now the Church. Compare Acts 3:1 with 1 Corinthians 3:16.
- ~They honored the Sabbath even though they knew it had been replaced with the first day of the week. Compare Acts 18:4 with Acts 20:7 and Revelation 1:10.
- ~They honored the feasts of Passover and Unleavened Bread even though they knew they were fulfilled in Christ. Compare Acts 12:4 and 20:6 with 1 Corinthians 5:7-8. The word Easter in Acts 12:4 should be translated as Passover.
- ~They honored the feast of Pentecost even though they knew it was fulfilled 50 days after Jesus' resurrection. Compare Acts 2:1 with Acts 20:16.

It is a shame at the number of local churches that have been wiped out or rendered powerless by the over-stressing of traditions. This is why we need to refresh ourselves in Luke's inspired treatise on the Acts of the Apostles. No church has ever advanced very far where the "by-laws" took preeminence over the Bible. A strict and ignorant adherence to religious traditions plunged the Church into the "Dark Ages." Paul would warn the elders of this danger in Acts 20:30. There have been many good men of God that have been bound from preaching and leading the flock into Kingdom Advance because some Pharisee who controlled the church screamed "we-have-never-done-it-that-way."

We do not deny that there some good traditions, but they must never be given authority above the Scriptures (2 Thessalonians 2:15; Mark 7:3-13).

II. The Fortune of Eutychus (vv. 7-12) - Before we criticize Eutychus for falling asleep, let's remember that he did show up for the service. I applaud him for hanging in there so long! His name means "fortunate." You might think he was very unfortunate because of the fall that led to his death. However, we think he was very fortunate for several reasons:

First, He got to hear the preaching of the apostle Paul. This would have been worth the fall alone.

Second, He now had a miracle to share with his children and grandchildren. Do you have a miracle to share? If you are saved then you have a miracle to share. Are you sharing your miracle? Has your children ever heard your testimony?

Third, He became an instant blessing to others. You have been blessed by God to be a blessing to others (Genesis 12:2-3; Acts 20:35).

Fourth, He was fortunate to hear the glorious gospel of Christ. There are multitudes that have never heard the good news; do not take it for granted.

Fifth, He was fortunate to get his name in God's Word. Is your name written in the Lamb's book of life (Luke 10:20; Revelation 20:15)?

Sixth, He was fortunate to be a type of Christ. He was dead and brought back to life. Were you once dead in sin but now you are alive in Christ (Luke 15:24)? Have you had the Father's embrace of love and mercy (Luke 15:20; Acts 20:10)? Are you showing that love and mercy to others? Are you a giver or a taker?

III. The Farewell Address of Paul (vv. 17-38) - Paul called for a leadership conference. The leaders are referred to as elders and overseers. The word elder and the word overseer are used interchangeably in the Scriptures for the office of a bishop or pastor (1 Timothy 3:1). Paul called the leaders together and poured out his heart to them with tears and with warnings. Paul's ministry is a "ministry paradigm" for us. His farewell address has several "twin-truths" we should remember.

A. Tears & Temptations (v. 19) - A passion for Christ's Passion always involves tears. The closer we get to our Lord, the more our hearts will break for the saved that are cold and unsaved that are callous. Many of our tears and tests will come from the persons we are called to minister to. Ministry is the call of the broken heart. Even though we are sent to heal the broken hearted; many times it will be our hearts that break. Humility will guard our hearts and minds from unnecessary torment of conscience. Humility will move God to favor us with the grace we need (1 Peter 5:5).

B. Repentance & Faith (v. 21) – No one fly's to heaven without these two wings. They are two sides to one coin. The doctrine of repentance has taken a beating over the last few years (The Lordship Controversy) and has been deleted from many pulpits. A close look at verse 21 should clear up the matter at once. Repentance is not primarily from sin but toward God. It is impossible to turn toward God without turning from sin. They are opposite directions. To argue that repentance is a mere change of mind without a change of life is to distort the essence of the word. To say that the Gospel of John does not use the word repent is to close a willful eye to the truth. I know of no better definition of repentance than John 8:11. We would also do well to look at how often John uses the word repent in the book of Revelation. When we preach true evangelical repentance, we are not telling sinners they must stop all sinning before they can be saved. They might quit some habits, but it would still leave them with no more righteousness than a Pharisee. The true order of repentance is in 1 Thessalonians 1:9. We need to get this right. We do need to preach against sin and sinning, but our primary word is "turn toward God." We fail miserably if we think we can get sinners to quit sinning before they turn to God. We also fail miserably if we give sinners the impression that they need not return to Father (Luke 15:18).

Repentance is an effectual work of the Spirit. The godly sorrow that works repentance is produced by the efficacious work of the Spirit (2 Corinthians 7:10). When the work of the Spirit prevails in the sinner, then the sinner will begin to hate their sin and cry out toward God for deliverance from it.

Faith is the other side of the coin. A person could quit all their bad habits and become very moral and still perish; because the sin that damns is the sin of unbelief (Mark 16:16; John 16:9). This is why our primary message is the Passion of Christ. Our responsibility is to lift up Jesus and his responsibility is to draw men to himself (John 12:32). The Spirit has placed an emphasis on the preposition "toward" in the text. True gospel preaching is to exhort sinners to turn their eyes upon Jesus. Biblical faith is a strong conviction that Jesus saves (Ephesians 2:8). It is not mere intellectual consent to some particular verses and neither is it a mere emotional feeling that comes over you in a power-driven worship service. Saving faith involves three essentials: *Knowing* about Christ (the mind); *Assenting* to Christ (the heart); and *Commitment* to Christ (the will).

After my wife and I dated for a good while, she began to *know* me but that did not make us married. One day I told her that I loved her and I asked her if she would marry me. She *assented* and said yes, but that did not make us married. The day finally came when Daphne proved her faith in me, when she said "I

do;” and at that moment she *committed* her life to me. You can *know* that Christ died for you, and you can *assent* that he will save you; but you are not saved until you say “I do” to Christ with whole-hearted *commitment* (John 2:23-24; Romans 10:9-10).

C. *Chains & Chastisements* (v. 23) – The word afflictions means “pressure.” We hear a lot today about “peer pressure.” The ministry has more than its share of pressures. *What you are under pressure is what you are.*

D. *Counting & Completing* (v. 24) – This is a wonderful verse. Paul was an unselfish servant that had “died to self” and acknowledged that Christ was his life (Galatians 2:20; Colossians 3:1-4). Paul was driven by “one thing” (Philippians 3:13), and that one thing was to complete his course with joy. The word finish means “to complete.” It was used by our Lord in his high priestly garden prayer (John 17:4), and on the cross (John 19:30). Paul did not want to merely finish, he wanted to finish well. Finishing well for Paul meant completing his ministry with a guilt-free conscience concerning all men. Paul was unmovable and undaunted in his preaching. He was not moved by the fear or flattery of man. There was not one verse in the entire Bible he was afraid to preach on.

E. *Warnings & Wolves* (vv. 28-32) – This verse always humbles me inside. To know that I am a pastor by the direct leadership of the Holy Ghost is more than I can take in. This one truth gives an abundance of courage in Kingdom Advance. However, a huge responsibility comes with the privilege. We are charged to feed the flock. This places the pulpit in the highest place in a local church. The blood-bought Church of Jesus Christ needs the truth! Many local churches are tired of salads and leftovers from the pulpit. I am aware that Paul said that in the last days many would not endure sound doctrine (2 Timothy 4:2-4), but that is for the goats not the sheep. The true Church loves the unadulterated truth!

The reason we need the truth is because there are wolves in sheep’s clothing prowling on the Shepherds flock. The motto for the pastor is “*therefore watch*” (v. 31). There are many in the pulpit for covetous reasons. A good test to measure the wolves by is verse 35.

Paul leaves Ephesus with the tears and prayers of the saints (v. 36-37). Paul has left us a prime example of what a true servant of the Lord is. He has packed into his farewell address so many leadership qualities. We should come back to this address often and weigh ourselves. Here is a check-list:

- 1} Do I seek humility?
- 2} Does my prayer-life have tears?
- 3} How do I respond to my tests?
- 4} Do I preach repentance and faith accurately?
- 5} Do I take criticisms and sufferings maturely?
- 6} Do I seek to be unselfish and die to self?
- 7} Do I serve the Lord joyfully?
- 8} Am I preaching the pure gospel?
- 9} Am I holding back for fear or favor of men?
- 10} Do I love the flock?
- 11} Do I stand firm against the wolves?
- 12} Am I a giver or receiver?

Chapter Seventeen

Wanted: Dead or Alive

Acts 21-22:29

The Church must be ready at all times to defend the reason for her passion for His Passion.

Devotional Commentary

Paul had a “Wanted” poster on every synagogue door in Jerusalem with his picture on it. He was a threat to the Jewish religion. This section has a clear chiasmic structure with Paul’s Defense as the main point. The word defense means “to give a reasoned statement or argument.” In the theological arena, it is referred to as apologetics. It can be a verbal or written defense of the faith. For the apostle Paul, it was his personal testimony.

- A – Paul will be bound by the Gentiles (21:1-16)
- B – Paul discusses his Gentile ministry (21:17-25)
- C – Paul and the temple (21:26)
- D – Paul is rescued by a captain (21:27-37)
- E – Paul leading men into the wilderness (21:38)
- F – Paul and his birthplace (21:39)
- G – Paul speaks in the Hebrew tongue (21:40)
- H – Paul’s Defense (22:1)
- G’ – Paul speaks in the Hebrew tongue (22:2)
- F’ – Paul and his birthplace (22:3)
- E’ – Paul leading men into prison (22:4-5)
- D’ – Paul is rescued by the Captain (22:6-16)
- C’ – Paul and the temple (22:17)
- B’ – Paul discusses his Gentile ministry (22:17-21)
- A’ – Paul is bound by the Gentiles (22:22-29)

Paul was surely walking in the steps of his Savior. Jerusalem was where the Passion of Christ took place and Paul’s passion for Christ’s Passion would lead him to the same place. Jerusalem was a danger zone for Paul. But then again, what can you do to a man that believes death is gain (Philippians 1:21)? This section takes place in two phases:

I. Paul heads toward Jerusalem (Acts 21:1-16) - Paul makes several visits along the way to Jerusalem. It was very common for local assemblies to support and minister to their missionaries.

A. Paul Visits Tyre (vv.1-7) – Paul was advised by fellow disciples to avoid Jerusalem (v. 4). They probably misread the Spirit’s message because the Spirit had already led Paul up to Jerusalem. The disciples took the Spirit’s lead as a word for Paul not to go, instead of a word for Paul to be prepared for what he would face. The counsel of others is good, but ultimately we ourselves must hear from God.

B. Paul Visits Caesarea (vv. 8-16) – At Caesarea Paul came into contact with three men of God.

1) *Philip* the Evangelist (vv. 8-9) – Philip was one of the chosen seven in Acts 6. He was a pioneer for the gospel in Samaria (Acts 8). An evangelist was a “bringer of good news.” Philip was gifted to present the gospel to sinners with clarity and unction (Ephesians 4:11). It would have been a marvelous blessing to hear Philip and Paul talk about their passion for Christ. They were two giants in the faith.

Luke records that Philip’s four daughters had the gift of prophesy. This should not raise any eye-brows because the Pentecostal blessing was for all flesh (Acts 2:17). The fact that women prophesied in public, does not contradict other scriptures concerning a woman’s role in the Church. The devil has sure stirred up a lot of trouble about women participating in public worship. There are some scriptural principles we need to be governed by when we are interpreting certain texts concerning a woman’s role:

Principle 1:

Scripture never contradicts itself.

Acts 2:17-18 and 1 Corinthians 11:5 are starting points. These two verses will help us interpret other passages that “seem” to say something different. The established fact is: “*The outpoured Spirit was not an exclusive gift just for men.*” Therefore, when we view other Bible passages about a woman’s role in the setting of public worship, we need to keep in mind the above scriptures. Pride and prejudice are horrible lenses to read the Bible through.

Principle 2:

Scripture never pivots the man against the woman.

Christianity has been accused of belittling women in the Church. We do admit that bigotry against women has existed in many local churches and still does. But God has exalted womanhood to its rightful place in Christ (Galatians 3:28). 1 Corinthians 14:34-35 has been torn from its context to silence women completely. A careful and common sense reading of 1 Corinthians 14 should clear up the matter at once. The problem in Corinth was not women speaking in public, but women speaking out of order. It was also a problem with the men (v. 28). It did not matter if you were a male or female; if you were speaking out of order or if you were speaking in another dialect without an interpreter, then you should keep silent in the assembly.

Principle 3:

Scripture never separates church and home.

This may be one of the most overlooked truths in the Bible. The ministry must reflect the home. God instituted the home before the Church. This principle is at the essence of passages such as 1 Corinthians 14:34-35 and 1 Timothy 2:11-12 & 3:1. The principles of *submission* and *headship* are not principles of *slavery* and *master*; they are principles of *success* and *order*. There is nothing more beautiful than the harmonious relationship of husband and wife. The wife honors her husband’s God-given role as head of the home by submitting to his headship, which is under Christ’s headship. Likewise, the husband honors his wife’s God-given role by loving her passionately. When a marriage is functioning according to

biblical principles, the result is a wonderful testimony to the glory of God (Ephesians 5:21-33).

If a wife tries to usurp authority at home then she will probably assert herself in the church. Paul was addressing this in 1 Timothy 2:12. The Greek word for “usurp authority” is *authenteo*. It means “to kill another.” When a wife tries to put herself above her husband in the church, then she kills his respect and authority in the eyes of others. This is why a woman is forbidden to be a pastor (1 Timothy 3:1). Once again, the church must reflect the home.

2) *Agabus* the prophet (vv. 10-14) – Agabus’s graphic prophesy was a confirmation from the Holy Spirit concerning Paul’s future. It was not given to discourage Paul but to encourage him. Paul would have been strengthened by the graphic portrayal of what would happen to him by the fact that his God could read the future. Nothing would catch Paul by surprise. We can face tomorrow because our God has tomorrow in his hands.

3) *Mnason* the old disciple (v. 16) – Mnason means “remembering.” I am sure the younger disciples had a blessed experience as they listened to this veteran tell of his early memories in the faith. This verse has a wonderful picture of the uniting of the old and young. There has been a terrible blunder in the body of Christ in the last several decades of emphasizing one generation above another. This has caused a huge generation gap in the Church. We have placed so much emphasis on the youth that we have forgotten who has kept the lights on all these years. I began my ministry as a youth leader. I love young people and I love to see a church full of them. It is terribly sad to see a local church that is destitute of youth. However, I thank God for allowing me to grow up in old time worship services with the “old disciples.” O my, they sure knew how to pray the power down and shout the glory up! The uniting of the generations is dear to God’s heart (Titus 2:3-5).

II. Paul arrives in Jerusalem (Acts 21:17-22:29) - Paul rehearsed his Gentile success with the brethren. The brethren knew Paul was a wanted man; so they advised him to take a purification vow to prove that he was not an enemy of Moses and the Jewish customs. Despite Paul’s attempt to appease the mob, he was soon taken and drug out of the temple to be killed. He was rescued by the chief captain of the Roman army. The words, “*Away with him,*” were shouted in Jerusalem at our Lord’s trial. Paul was experiencing the Passion of Christ in his own life.

There have been many good men of God that have heard the words, “*Away with him*” from some clique that wanted to get rid of him. A lot of pastors have suffered by the hands of those they were sent to minister to. All it takes is one person who decides they do not like the preacher and before long, that one becomes ten and the ten becomes twenty and soon they are crying “*Away with him.*”

The captain gave Paul the liberty to give his defense before the people. Paul’s defense was his personal testimony. It is a rehearsal of his Damascus Road experience. Luke uses a phrase in Acts 22:16 that is not found in Acts 9. Acts 22:16 has been ripped out of its context to teach that baptism is essential to salvation. We must not forget the biblical principle when we are interpreting a verse: “*Scripture will never contradict Scripture.*” In the original manuscripts there were no such things as commas. If you remove the commas in verse 16; the two parallels appear more clearly and the verse reads more smoothly:

Arise and be baptized

and

Wash away thy sins calling on the name of the Lord.

The fact that the verse seems to have the two parallels backwards is not an issue. Paul is not giving a creedal statement of the order of salvation; he is rehearsing his experience with Ananias. Paul was clearly a saved man before he was commanded to arise and be baptized. Look at the words Ananias uses toward Paul in verses 13-15: *brother, chosen, know his will, see the Just One, hear his voice, be his witness*. Clearly, the context proves the text. It is very clear that your sins are washed away when you call on the name of the Lord. The whole of scripture supports this view (Acts 4:12; Romans 10:13; 1 John 1:7; Revelation 1:5). The teaching of baptism in this verse is consistent with all other scriptures; and the teaching is: *“baptism is an outward symbol of an inward cleansing.”* The Greek word for “wash away” is *apolouo*. The root word *louo* is used in Revelation 1:5. God has always had one remedy for the washing away of sin (Genesis 3:21; Hebrews 9:22). Neither circumcision nor baptism should be added to the precious blood of Jesus.

Paul is a tremendous example of what it is to have a passion for Christ’s Passion. We must put on the armor of God every day and be ready at a moments notice to give people an answer for why we are so passionate about our Savior. Our best defense in Kingdom Advance is our testimony of who we were before we met Jesus and who we are now. The gospel can be explained and preached from the Bible, but it is extremely powerful when it also can be preached from the life. Living epistles carry more weight than epistles on papyri (2 Corinthians 3).

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Chapter Eighteen

Look! The Bush Still Burns!

Acts 22:30-24:27

The Church is invincible until her mission is accomplished.

Devotional Commentary

The thing that aroused Moses' curiosity about the burning bush was that it was not consumed (Exodus 3:2). It was God's way of telling Moses that his people would go through the fiery trials of the desert without being extinguished. The apostle Paul was the bush that kept on burning.

In the Gospel of John we are constantly reminded about Jesus' "hour." Jesus had a mission to accomplish and his enemies could not kill him until that hour had come (John 7:30; 8:20; 12:27; 13:1; 17:1). We all have our "hour" (Hebrews 9:27). Paul's "hour" would come by the hand of Nero; but even Nero could not have him until God was finished with him. Paul was a "hot potato" being passed from hand to hand. The Romans did not want Paul because he was a Roman citizen. The Pharisees did not want Paul because he believed in the resurrection. Felix did not want Paul because he made him tremble. Agrippa did not want Paul because he was too persuasive. Festus did not want Paul because he thought he was a mad man. Everyone is afraid of fire! We love to watch it burn from a distance but we do not like to get too close, lest it make us what it is!

In Acts 22:30-24 Paul is followed by *Confusion, Comfort, Conspiracy, and Conviction*.

I. Confusion in the Council (22:30-23:10) - Paul stood before the Sanhedrin to give his defense. Luke tells us that Paul had earnestness in his eyes as he spoke. The fearlessness of Paul made Ananias feel uncomfortable, so he had some bystanders to slap Paul on the mouth to show Paul he was the "head-honcho." Paul was smitten in the mouth and with the mouth he smote back. He lost his cool and lashed out at Ananias calling him a hypocrite (Matthew 23:27-28).

Paul utilized the moment by pivoting the Pharisees against the Sadducees. The truth about the resurrection was the doctrine that caused the confusion and dissension. No one likes dissension in the Church, but truth must not be compromised. There are certain truths that are essential to the faith that we must contend for (Jude 3). Neither the Pharisees nor the Sadducees were right concerning Christ. The Pharisees did not like Paul until they found out that he supported their teachings about the resurrection and angels. It is a sad day in a local church when a particular doctrine takes supremacy above Christ himself. I would rather know the God of the Word above the Word of God. Bibliolatry is dangerous and divisive.

Once again Paul is rescued by the Roman army, because his hour had not come. Paul clearly knew when his race was about finished (2 Timothy 4:6-8).

II. Comfort in the Christ (v. 11) - In the midst of all the chaos and rage, Paul found a friend in Jesus. Verse 11 is a diamond in the rough. The Lord was there beside Paul all the time. After the roar of the daytime dilemmas the Lord came to Paul in the tranquility of the night. Paul may have found comfort in reminiscing about David's battle with Saul's envy and murderous heart. Maybe Paul thought about David's night seasons. *"I will bless the Lord, who has given me counsel: my reins also instruct me in the 'night seasons'"* (Psalm 16:7). *"The Lord will command his loving kindness in the daytime, and in*

the 'night' his song shall be with me, and my prayer unto the God of my life" (Psalm 42:8). Are you in a night season in your life and ministry? Are you in the middle of intense pressure and trouble? Are your days chaotic and mad? Do you have forty "Post-it" notes on your desk and a calendar running over with appointments; and some of those appointments are not with happy people? When all the lights are out and everyone is in bed; then steal away and you will find a friend who visits in the night.

Jesus told Paul to be of good courage. Paul would later tell Timothy to be of good courage (2 Timothy 1:7-14). Courage is a must for Kingdom Advance. The devil is a fierce foe that walks about seeking whom he may devour. Courage is made strong by those sweet visits from the Lord. I know that we live by faith and not feelings; but I sure appreciate when the Lord passes by and causes my cup to run over! I love those glory moments when my Father embraces me and sheds abroad his love in my heart by the Holy Ghost (Romans 5:5). I love those sweet manifestations of Jesus (John 14:21). Stephen saw the Lord standing above him and Paul saw the Lord standing beside him. Our God is the God of all comfort (2 Corinthians 1:3-4).

III. Conspiracy in the Camp (vv. 12-24:23) - Forty Jews placed themselves under a curse to kill or be killed. They were bounty hunters who were willing to lay their lives on the line for Paul's head. They did not know that the Lord had placed Paul's nephew near to hear their plan. The nephew took the news to Claudius Lysias who took the news to Felix.

Ananias saw that the public conspirators were out maneuvered, so he paid some lawyer named Tertullus to bear false witness against Paul (24:1-9). Luke informs us of his eloquence as an orator (v. 1). The Greek word for orator is *rhetor*. It is where we derive the word "rhetoric." Tertullus had plenty of "hot air rhetoric" to blow before Felix. After he flattered Felix he lit in on Paul with his rhetorical vengeance (vv. 4-6).

Paul was able to give a clear and concise answer to Felix (vv. 10-21). His answer involved two things that were important to Paul: his *confession* and his *conscience*.

1) *Paul's Confession* (vv. 14-16) – In Paul's short confession, he spoke of two things: First, the *way* (v. 14a) – Christianity was known as "the way." That is because it is "the way" to heaven and happiness. The Christ of Christianity is the "Way" (John 14:6). There are many ways that seem right, but they only lead to death (Proverbs 14:12). Second, the *worship* (v. 14b) – Paul did not contradict the Torah or God of his fathers. Paul believed every word of the Old Testament. The God of the Ten Commandments was the God that Paul worshipped.

2) *Paul's Conscience* (v. 16) – Paul's pearl of great price was a clear conscience. He did not want to leave earth with anything left undone. For the apostle Paul, liberty was not being free from chains that suppressed the hands and feet, but the chains that bound the spirit and the conscience of a man. We would do well to take heed to Paul's example. Never leave a place of ministry with an unclean conscience. Our accountability to God is of the utmost importance. If you have anything in your life that is gradually hardening your conscience, you better deal with it now (1 Timothy 4:1-3).

Despite the conspiracies of the enemy, Paul is still standing. God is working all things together for good to them that love him, and are the called according to his purpose (Romans 8:28). The conspiracy of the Jews would be the instrument the Lord would use to get Paul to Rome! The conspiracy of Joseph's brothers led Joseph to God's appointed place in Egypt. The conspiracy of Haman led Esther to her place of honor in Persia. The conspiracy of Judas led our Lord to his appointed place on the Cross. We must never underestimate what the Lord is doing. If the enemy is conspiring against your ministry, then maybe

the Lord is using that to catapult you to your appointed place.

The Lord is always ahead of the devil. This is why it is so vital that we keep in step with the Spirit. God will use the devils plots to fulfill his purpose. Isaiah said that God “*frustrates the tokens of the liars, and makes diviners mad; that turns wise men backward, and makes their knowledge foolish*” (Isaiah 44:25). Isaiah also said: “*No weapon that is formed against you will prosper; and every tongue that shall raise against you in judgment you will condemn. This is the heritage of the servants of the Lord, and their righteousness is of me, says the Lord*” (Isaiah 54:17). Claim thy heritage Church! Stand on the promises Kingdom Advancers! Do not allow the devil to steal, kill, or destroy your passion for Christ’s Passion! Burn, burn, burn; but never be consumed! False fire burns out, but the bush that burns with the flame of Pentecost is non-extinguishable!

IV. Conviction in the Conscience (vv. 24-27) - Felix and his Jewish wife Drusilla were drawn to the flame of the burning bush. After a while things got too hot for Felix and he sent Paul away. Luke places this moment in a chiasmic structure. The center of this chiasm is potent.

A – Felix and his Jewess wife (24a)

B – Felix sends for Paul (24b)

C – Paul speaks about self-control (25a)

D – Felix trembles and delays (25b)

C’ – Felix’s greed is out of control (26a)

B’ – Felix sends for Paul (26b)

A’ – Felix and the Jews (27)

We are not sure of Felix’s motive in wanting to hear of the faith in Christ. Was he serious about the faith or was he entertaining his wife like he would entertain the Jews afterwards (v. 27)? Paul did not make Felix mad and yet he left Paul bound. We cannot see into a man’s heart but we can see the fruit he bears; and Felix lacked the fruit. Felix got close enough to the burning bush to get singed but not close enough to get saved. Judas kissed heaven but went to hell.

1) *Paul’s Convincing Reason* (v. 25) – Paul discussed three truths that every Christian should be well informed about. These three particular truths are the weapons used by the Holy Spirit to arrest sinners (John 16:8-10). We should learn them well.

Righteousness

Adam was created with a perfect righteousness because he was made in the image of God. Adam was to propagate righteousness throughout the earth through his seed. After Adam sinned he became unrighteous and unfit for heaven. His sin was so vile that it would take innocent blood to cover it. Adam passed his unrighteousness to all his seed; therefore, the only thing you need to do to be unrighteous is to be physically born (Psalm 51:5; Romans 5:12-18). Since God is the only perfect righteous person, the seed of Adam would have to be as righteous as God to qualify for heaven. Therefore, if you say that you have been good enough to go to heaven, then you are saying you are as good as God. You cannot measure your goodness by no person other than God. Since the seed of Adam cannot be as good as God; God came as the seed of Adam in the man Christ Jesus (Genesis 3:15; John 1:14; Hebrews 2:9-18). If any person could get to heaven by being good, then the Passion of Christ was a useless event (Galatians 2:21).

Therefore, the righteousness that we all need is not to be found in our own good works, but in the glorious gospel of Jesus Christ (Romans 1:16-17). Jesus Christ is the provided righteousness we all need. To receive Christ is to have his righteousness imputed to your account. It was his blood that was shed to free us from our wretched state. The sinful state of mankind does not lie in what we do that makes us unrighteous as much as in what we cannot do. We cannot be as righteous as God is because “*we have all sinned, and come short of the glory of God*” (Romans 3:23). The one sole condition that lays upon the seed of Adam for receiving God’s righteousness is faith in Jesus Christ. Listen to the Apostle Paul’s conclusive statement after considering the sinfulness of man and the sacrifice of Christ: “*Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith without the deeds of the law*” (Romans 3:28). “*For by grace are you saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: not of works, lest any man should boast*” (Ephesians 2:8-9).

Temperance

The word temperance means “self-control.” Adam had self-control because he had a perfect righteousness. When Adam sinned his nature became sensual and animalistic. He had a poison in his body that was wicked and vile. The poison of sin controlled Adam’s mind, affections, and will. Adam tried to do some good things but the evil was always there. His son Cain could not control his envy and temper, so he slew his brother. The remedy for lack of temperance comes from the indwelling power of the Holy Spirit (Galatians 5:23).

Paul nailed Felix to the wall when he brought up temperance. Tacitus said of Felix that “he reveled in cruelty and lust, and wielded the power of a king with the mind of a slave.” Felix’s unrighteous state of sin made him a vile and evil man who was out of control. Paul brought Felix’s dark heart before the light of God’s perfect righteousness and Felix began to shake. Like the prodigal son, Felix began to come to his senses of being lost and it was not a pretty sight. Old fashioned conviction set in and the Holy Ghost was pricking Felix’s heart intensely.

Not to preach against sin is to damn the sinner with their blood on your hands. The good news of the gospel is not very exciting to the man who is not aware of the bad news of his wicked heart. Our theology (doctrine of God) and soteriology (doctrine of salvation) will be messed up if we do not understand hamartiology (doctrine of sin). Most of the cheap methods that are used to win souls would change if we understood the real plight the sinner is in. The seed of Adam has been poisoned with an evil heart (Mark 7:21-23). We need more than some method, we need a miracle. Oh, that we would learn that lost people need a new heart! Oh that we could say with Micah: “*Truly I am full of power by the Spirit of the Lord, and of judgment, and of might, to declare unto Jacob his transgression, and to Israel his sin*” (Micah 3:8)!

Judgment

Paul spoke of the righteousness Felix did not have in Adam but could have in Christ and Felix was *touched*. Then Paul spoke of the absence of temperance and the lifestyle of wicked living and Felix *trembled*. Then Paul took Felix to the grave and then to the Great White Throne (Revelation 20) and Felix was *terrified*. He stood Felix before the judge whose eyes are as a flame of fire and his feet like unto fine brass. He took Felix before the open books and showed him that his name was not there. He showed him the lake that burns without end. “*And as it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment*” (Heb. 9:27).

2) *Felix's Convenient Season* (v. 25) – Felix had enough preaching for the day and he got rid of Paul as quickly as possible. Felix said he would call for Paul at a more opportune time. The harvest time of Felix's life is past and his summers have ended. I wonder if he got saved. I wonder if God ever passed by Felix again. We do know that two years later he is still an old sinner (v. 27). Felix is like so many that just keeps putting salvation off. Biblically speaking, there is only one convenient season to be saved in and that is when the Spirit of the Lord is causing you to tremble. I believe in praying for a person as long as they are breathing; however, I know there are multitudes that are as good as in hell because God has left them alone. The unpardonable sin comes when a person says NO to the Spirit's tug for the last time.

This is why it is absolutely and extremely important that we get the gospel to the children while they are in a tender state. Human nature is geared to grow harder with time. That is why the Holy Ghost shouts TODAY! *"Today if you will hear his voice, harden not your hearts"* (Hebrews 3:15).

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Chapter Nineteen

Tried and True

Acts 25-26

The power point of Kingdom Advance lies in the sincerity and integrity of the saints.

Devotional Commentary

God holds the trying of his Church in high esteem. *“The trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perishes, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honor and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ”* (1 Peter 1:7). Peter did not say that our faith was precious, but the trial of it. Earth is parole territory. The wilderness was proving ground for Israel of old (Deuteronomy 8). Daniel was tried and found true (Daniel 6:4); Jesus was tried and found true (Luke 23:4); and Paul was tried and found true (Acts 25:25).

There is phenomenal power and weight in the integrity of the Church. Kingdom Advance is sustained and increased by the holiness of the saints. To lose our sincerity is to lose everything. I am tremendously concerned that the Church is losing the field in this area. The world does not trust God’s people. We are to be in the world but not of it. It does not matter how many weapons we have in our arsenal, if we are tried and found to be untrue to the faith, then we have not only hindered Kingdom Advance for Jesus, but we have helped strengthen the devil’s grip. The greatest tool in the hands of the devil is a “carnal Christian.” A carnal Christian is a saved person who is still dominated by the old self (1 Corinthians 3:1-4). It is the lot of the saints to be tested by the world. We should be tried. God does not operate in counterfeit gold. Christian persecution has the tendency to sift the chaff from the wheat. Trouble will tell if the Word went deep (Matthew 13:20-21).

Paul was tried before the great men of his day and found to be true. There was nothing about Paul that Satan could get his hands on and it frustrated him immensely. If the devil cannot find anything, he will concoct something. Paul’s trials before great men were not surprises to him. For he had been told by Ananias that he would stand before kings (Acts 9:15).

I. Tried before Festus (25:1-12) - Festus had been sent to Judea to replace Felix. While he was in Jerusalem he was met by the enemies of Paul who pleaded with him to help them get their hands on Paul. I am sure the Jews offered Festus a nice sum for his help (24:26; 25:9). The word translated “favor” in verse 3 is the same as the word translated “pleasure” in verse 9. They both have the same root word as that of grace. However, God’s grace cannot be bought. The favors the Jews received from corrupt judges cost them plenty of “blood money” (Matthew 27:4).

Felix tried real hard to get Paul to go back to Jerusalem but the apostle would not have it. Paul appealed to Caesar and Felix conferred.

II. Tried before Agrippa (25:13-32) - Agrippa and his sister Bernice had come to Caesarea to honor Festus on his appointment as procurator of Judea. This particular Agrippa was the last of the Herodian dynasty. He is Herod Agrippa II. After Festus rehearsed the Pauline situation with Agrippa, the king wanted to hear the man himself (vv. 13-22).

This sure is an amazing sight. God’s humble man Paul stands before pompous politicians and corrupt

kings. Christianity to these people was nothing more than a superstitious fable (v. 19). However, Paul does not change or compromise his message concerning the gospel of Jesus Christ. This is why Paul is an amazing man. He does not modify or tweak his message to suit the crowd. He is fully aware that all men are sinners and are in need of the good news of Jesus Christ. Paul did not see men by color or social status, but by their spiritual bankruptcy. The little earthly “bema seats” of Festus and Agrippa were nothing compared to the Great White Throne Judgment of Paul’s God!

Paul’s introduction (vv. 1-3) helps set the stage for his defense. He appeals to Agrippa’s knowledge of Jewish life and to his patience. Paul’s defense is summed up under these headings:

1) *Paul’s Majestic Messiah* (vv. 4-8) - Paul begins his defense by linking his own life with the Jewish accusers (vv. 4-8). The hope of all Jews is Messianic Deliverance. God’s promise to his people was the expectation of the Messiah who would establish his kingdom on earth. The Messiah is at the heart and soul of the Jewish religion. The resurrection was the foundation for Paul’s defense. He began by proposing that raising the dead was not a strange and unbelieving truth. The resurrection of Christ is the touchstone of the Church. No other religion can even come close to the gospel of Christ. Our Savior lives! We serve a risen Savior. Dead idols have no meaning. They cannot embrace and love. Jesus is the Majestic Messiah! God’s promise is fulfilled and hope is available to all that believe.

2) *Paul’s Masticating Madness* (vv. 9-12) - Paul was sincere, but sincerely wrong. He thought he was doing God a favor by eliminating the impostor he thought was Jesus. Paul had lived the very life his accusers were living. Paul had gotten obsessed with killing the saints. He uses very graphic words to describe his madness. The meaning of the word punished means “to be a guardian.” Paul thought of himself as a protector of Judaism. Paul forced the saints to speak against Jesus. The meaning of the word persecuted means “to put to flight.” Paul’s madness was beyond measure. No one could have predicted that this mad man would become one of the greatest men that ever lived. Grace is truly amazing!

3) *Paul’s Midday Meeting* (vv. 13-15) - On his way to Damascus Paul encountered the God of glory. The Shekinah glory of the Lord enveloped the callous killer and brought him to his knees. God in his sovereign grace broke through the darkness of Paul’s heart. The light was bright but the voice was dreadful. It was not the brightness of the atom bomb that done the damage, but the sound waves. The sound waves of the Lord’s voice in Paul’s natural dialect shook him to the bone. “*The voice of the Lord is powerful; the voice of the Lord is full of majesty. The voice of the Lord breaks the cedars; yea, the Lord breaks the cedars of Lebanon*” (Psalm 29:4-5). God spoke over the dark and empty void and creation began (Genesis 1:3)! God spoke over Paul’s dark and empty heart and creation began (Ephesians 2:10; 4:24; 2 Corinthians 5:17). Paul had encountered the man he thought was forever dead. The name he was trying to obliterate from earth had spoken from heaven.

4) *Paul’s Ministerial Mission* (vv. 16-18) - All of the words that the Lord spoke to Paul would be amplified in Paul’s letters to the churches. Paul’s ministerial mission is the essence of Kingdom Advance. It has to do with saints winning sinners to the Savior. Paul’s mission involved:

First, a *divine purpose* (v. 16) – Paul knew he was not a saved man by accident. He did not believe in luck or chance. Paul was a theist who believed that God not only creates but he also controls. He held firmly to the doctrine of the Providence of God. You must have a strong conviction that you were created and saved for a divine purpose; or else you will become a useless vagabond wandering aimlessly through life. God did not create and then hope everything would turn out right. He decrees things (Job 28:26; Psalm 2:7; Proverbs 8:29)! He predestinates things (Romans 8:29, 30; Ephesians 1:5, 11)! He purposes

things (Romans 8:28, 9:11; Eph. 1:11; 2 Timothy 1:9)!

The Lord saved Paul on purpose. Jesus would make Paul a minister. The Greek word for minister is *huperetes*. It means “an under-rower of a ship.” Paul would be a servant and a witness for Jesus. He was God-made and God-called. Many fail or quit ministry because they were self-called.

Second, a *divine promise* (v. 17) – Paul was guaranteed deliverance on earth until his final day of eternal deliverance from earth. The Lord would be Paul’s wall of salvation. Paul clung to this promise as a branch to the vine (2 Corinthians 1:10; 1 Timothy 4:18). We are thankful for the Lord’s hedge of protection. We are invincible until our mission is accomplished.

Third, a *divine power* (v. 18) – Paul’s mission was not to change the society with a social gospel. His mission was not to change the culture by burning down buildings. Paul’s mission was to change the people by the proclamation of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Kingdom Advance is not merely having a worship service on Sunday; it is war! There is another kingdom established on earth at this very moment. It is a dark kingdom with a dark hearted king whose goal is to keep men in darkness. But greater is he that is in us than he that is in the world (1 John 4:4)! Light is greater than darkness and God is greater than Satan. O! Why aren’t we more victorious in Kingdom Advance? If 1 John 4:4 is true, then why is the culture influencing the Church rather than the Church influencing the culture? Christian kids should be the influencers rather than the influenced. Christian marriages should be stronger than non-Christian marriages. Churches should be more united than any other people. “*It is time for thee, Lord, to work: for they have made void thy law*” (Psalm 119:126).

The one instrument Paul would be given whereby he would accomplish his mission was the gospel of Jesus Christ (Romans 1:16). When a person turns to Christ by faith, they receive a full pardon from the penalty of sin. Forgiveness is God’s part. When God forgives, he forgets (Hebrews 10:17). Once a person is forgiven, God no longer deals with that person as a sinner or slave but as a son. Once a person is initially forgiven and the *relationship* is established, then confession and forgiveness is for *fellowship* (1 John 1:7-9).

5) *Paul’s Messianic Message* (vv. 19-23) - Paul comes full circle in his defense. He once again links himself with the Messianic hope that all Jews share. Paul linked himself with John the Baptist by preaching a repentance that is followed by works. Paul’s message was nothing new or strange. Repentance was a common theme of the Old Testament prophets. Paul also linked himself with Moses and the prophets concerning the message of the Messiah. All of the trouble came because Paul believed the Messiah had come and his name was Jesus!

Acts 25:11-26:32 is another chiastic structure. Compare this chiasm with the one in chapter seventeen. Paul’s Defense is at the center of both chiastic structures. Luke is reaffirming the power of personal testimony in Kingdom Advance.

- A – Paul’s appeal to Caesar (25:11-12)
- B – Felix and Agrippa discuss Paul (25:13-22)
- C – Agrippa, Bernice and Festus arrive (25:23-27)
- D – Agrippa speaks to Paul (26:1)
- E – Paul speaks to Agrippa (26:1-3)
- F – Paul’s sober words (26:4-8)
- G – Paul’s madness (26:9-12)
- H – Paul’s Defense (26:13-23)

G' – Paul's madness (26:24)

F' – Paul's sober words (26:25)

E' – Paul speaks to Agrippa (26:26-27)

D' – Agrippa speaks to Paul (26:28)

C' – Agrippa, Bernice and Festus leave (26:30)

B' – Felix and Agrippa discuss Paul (26:31)

A' – Paul's appeal to Caesar (26:32)

Paul almost persuaded Agrippa to be a Christian. Almost is a dreadful word. Herod Agrippa II will never forget that day throughout all eternity. The memory of the message and the messenger will gnaw at his conscience for ever. He had his opportunity and refused Christ. Agrippa and Paul will meet again at another trial. At the "Bema Seat" of Festus' court Paul was a witness to convert Agrippa, but at the "Judgment Seat" of Jesus' court Paul will be a witness to condemn Agrippa (Revelation 20:11-15). See the notes on Acts 11:26 for the meaning of the word "Christian."

One of the most solemn truths about being a witness for the Lord is the knowledge that we might be the very witness the Lord uses to condemn a sinner to hell. The most heart-wrenching reality of ministry is to watch an unsaved person walk away from Christ after being convicted of their sin. We must put all our energy into persuading sinners to turn to Christ. It is not our responsibility neither our ability to save the lost; our call is to present the gospel to them in love.

Paul became an entertainment to Roman authorities. They enjoyed his sermons but not his invitations. They had no idea that God was in their face through his chosen vessel. They could only see the clay, but not the treasure within. Paul reminds me of another prophet of olden days. *"And they come to you as the people come, and they sit before you as my people, and they hear your words, but they will not do them: for with their mouth they show much love, but their heart goes after their covetousness. And, lo, you are unto them as a lovely song of one that has a pleasant voice, and can play well on an instrument: for they hear your words, but they do not do them. And when this comes to pass, (lo, it will come,) then shall they know that a prophet has been among them"* (Ezekiel 33:31-33).

Chapter Twenty

Storms and Serpents

Acts 27-28:31

Kingdom Advance will be accomplished through adversity and afflictions.

Devotional Commentary

Luke is consistent throughout the book of Acts to demonstrate how the people of God will face enormous obstacles as they seek to accomplish the mission of Acts 1:8. Luke is also consistent to demonstrate how Kingdom Advance cannot be stopped by any obstacle (Zechariah 4:7). The purpose of God will be fulfilled exactly as he has planned (1 Thessalonians 5:24). Deism is the belief that God created and then left everything up to chance. Theism is the belief that God created and he controls everything. The Bible is clearly a theistic book (Daniel 4:34-35; Proverbs 16:4; Romans 8:28; Ephesians 1:11; Hebrews 1:3). Theists believe in the magnificent doctrine of the *Providence of God*. A simple definition of biblical providence is: “God is the guiding power of the universe.” The guiding power of God is demonstrated clearly in Acts 27. It is assuring to know that there is someone in the shadows holding the reins.

Luke closes his treatise with a *Violent Storm*, a *Venomous Serpent*, and a *Victorious Savior*.

I. The Violent Storm (27:1-44) – There is nothing more terrifying than to look out your front window and see the daytime sky filled with dark storm clouds and the trees kissing the ground because of the power of the wind. Fear can be one of the most tormenting emotions a person can experience (1 John 4:18). The storm in Acts 27 is brimming with fear. There are four things that highlight the message Luke is trying to convey in his record of the storm.

1) *The Hostile Winds* (vv. 4-13) – Wind has enormous power. It was beginning to blow opposite the direction they were headed (vv. 4, 7). The *fast* spoken of in verse 9 was the feast of the atonement (Leviticus 23:26-32). I do believe the Spirit was tying two truths together at one time. The Feast of Atonement was a time when Israel was commanded to “afflict” their souls. The feast of Atonement was a time of fasting and heart-searching. The affliction typified the great affliction that Jesus would go through on the cross (Isaiah 53:4). Even Israel of old shared in the Passion of Christ. Paul and his fellow disciples were not only experiencing the affliction of the Atonement but the affliction of the storm.

Paul was no stranger to shipwrecks (1 Corinthians 11:25). He exercised common sense and told the mariners that it was not wise to sail. However, the captain exercised book sense and ignored Paul. Not only were the passengers facing contrary winds; they were facing two contrary men (v. 11). It does seem that every church will have someone with a contrary spirit. They take pleasure in being the one that opposes everything unless it is their idea. Julius was the centurion that was responsible for the prisoner’s safe arrival in Rome (v. 1). He believed the owner of the ship above Paul.

There were a few things that caused the master of the ship to make a poor decision. Some decisions we make are insignificant and some are life-changing. There are some warning signs in the text we need to

always consider when we are making an important choice. First, be careful about leaning on your own understanding like the captain (v. 11; Proverbs 3:5-6). The worker that has been at it longer will be more careless than the new one. Whenever you are making a choice always consider the “spiritual impact” it will have on your life. Money is not everything! Do not “sell out” and compromise your convictions for a bigger salary. Second, be careful about the desire to choose the most comfortable spot. The word *commodious* in verse 12 means “convenient.” Be extremely cautious about choosing the “easy” ministry over the “trying” one. *The only easy ministry you can ever be involved in, is the one where the Lord wants you* (Matthew 11:28-30). What you think would be an easy place to serve in, will become an unbearable burden to you because it is not the Lord’s burden for you. Storms are no problem when you know you are where God wants you to be. Do not forsake the “conflict zone” for the “comfortable zone.” *“Woe to them that are at ease in Zion...”* (Amos 6:1). The “woe” of Amos is not for those outside of Zion but in Zion. *Smooth seas never made skillful sailors.* Third, watch out for what Oswald Chambers calls “The Dance of Circumstances.” That little deceitful south wind was all it took to convince the captain he had the green light (v. 13). We must not be driven by the circumstances on the outside but by the compass on the inside. When you are choosing a soul-mate, watch out for that warm and seductive south wind. Do not be driven by emotions alone. True love is very discerning and wise (Philippians 1:9-10). When you are choosing a ministry place, watch out for the flattering pats on the back and juicy salary offer. You must never be bought! Whatever choice you are making, do not get focused on the south wind you feel at the moment, but look out into the vast ocean and use some common sense. *Do not allow the good things to deceive you into missing the best things* (Luke 10:41-42).

2) *The Horrific Waves* (vv. 14-20) – That little word “but” speaks volumes. The gentle and warm south breeze turned into a monstrous violent northeaster. A Euroclydon is a violent agitating whirlwind. It will cause sea billows to roll over the ship. The ship had a new owner now and it was the sea! They cast all the equipment they had into the hungry sea (v. 19). That equipment the captain leaned on was now useless. His knowledge, his books, his compass, and all his sea-driving apparatuses were no good in the storm. Please write this down! There will come a time in your walk with Christ when all your book knowledge, all your ministerial know-how, and all your pious visions will be useless. That is the time when you clear the deck of your mind, ignore all human voices, and turn the radio dial in your mind to the station where the Holy Spirit is the DJ (Revelation 2:7).

3) *The Heavenly Word* (vv. 21-26) – Paul was given a word from the heavenly messenger. The word was two-fold: First, “*I told you so*” (v. 21). Bad choices cause terrible harm and losses. Please think of the consequences that will follow the choice you make; especially when precious souls are involved. You can pull the nails out of the post but you will still have the scars. The word “howbeit” in verse 26 speaks of the consequences of their decision. Second, “*I tell you so*” (vv. 22-25). Paul encouraged the passengers with the promise and purpose of God. Paul had already been told that he must go to Rome (Acts 19:21; 23:11). The circumstances of life do not hinder God’s will; they fulfill it: “*Fire, and hail; snow, and vapor; stormy wind fulfilling his word*” (Psalm 148:8).

The promises of God are to be believed (v. 25). We are thankful to God for the Spirit of faith that calms the soul. We are surrounded by negative and discouraged people. Discouragement is like the flu; it will get you down and it is highly contagious. *God has as much commanded us to believe as he has commanded us to pray.* Faith will always drive out fear. Some false teachers have persuaded the Lord’s people that to have sickness or trials in their life is to not have faith. God did not remove the storm; he gave faith in it! Sometimes God does not deliver you *from* the fire but *in* the fire (Daniel 3:25).

4) *The Humiliating Wreck* (vv. 39-44) – I wonder how the captain explained his “fender-bender” to his employer? Maybe it helped when he reported that he did not lose one passenger. Paul mentions a more humiliating and dangerous type of shipwreck than what they experienced. It is the shipwreck of faith (1 Timothy 1:19). There are multitudes out there on the ocean of life that have made poor choices, and now they are barely surviving by hanging on to some little board. All of God’s children will make it home. Some are headed home with honor and some with humiliation. Live so that when you see Jesus, you will not blush with embarrassment (1 John 2:28).

Luke has provided for every preacher and teacher a “preaching point.” He has brilliantly given us another chiastic structure with the main thought in the center. It is very beautiful.

- A – The disciples are “prisoners” (v. 1)
- B – The passengers enter a ship (v. 2)
- C – Julius is good to Paul (v. 3)
- D – The violence of the wind (vv. 4, 7-10)
- E – They gave themselves to the sea (vv. 14-15)
- F – They found a certain island (v. 16)
- G – They lightened the ship (v. 18)
- H – All that sailed (v. 24)
- I – Be of good cheer (v. 25)
- J – The fourteenth night (v. 27)
- K – They let down the boat (v. 30)
- L – Salvation is in the ship (v. 31)
- K’ – They let the boat go (v. 32)
- J’ – The fourteenth day (v. 33)
- I’ – All were of good cheer (v. 36)
- H’ – All that sailed (v. 37)
- G’ – They lightened the ship (v. 38)
- F’ – They found a certain creek (v. 39)
- E’ – They gave themselves to the sea (v. 40)
- D’ – The violence of the waves (v. 41)
- C’ – Julius is good to Paul (vv. 42-43a)
- B’ – The passengers leave a ship (v. 43b)
- A’ – The disciples are escapees (v. 44)

Being in the ship appears to be the most dangerous place to be and yet it is the safest place to be. It does not matter what your circumstances are; if you are in God’s will then you are in the eye of the hurricane where the winds are calm and sometimes the sun is shining! No storm can sink the gospel ship of Zion!

Read through your Bible and place a “P” where you see God working behind the scenes. If you take the letters “nce” off of providence you get the word “provide.” The providence of God is the providing of God. God is in the shadows working his will. His name is Jehovah-Jireh; which means “the Lord will provide” (Genesis 22:14).

Sometimes it is very tempting to jump ship. It is always dangerous to flee in the storm. Whenever you

are surrounded by the storm clouds of strife and trouble, and the wind is in your face and the waves are over you head; just remember the Lord Jesus is out there walking on the water! It may be over your head, but it is under his feet! It does not amaze me for one second that Jesus walked on the water, but it does amaze me that Peter did (Matthew 14:29). I will not beat up Peter for sinking when he was the only one that had the audacity to get out of the comfortable zone!

Vance Havner said that most Christians are so afraid of going out on a limb that they never even get up the tree.

II. The Venomous Serpent (Acts 28:1-10) – The storm of Acts 27 taught us the doctrine of the providence of God and the serpent of Acts 28 teaches us the doctrine of the authority of the believer. Paul was able to shake off the viper because he had been given *authority* over its *ability* (Mark 16:18; Luke 10:17-20). The incident was used by the Lord to give Paul an open door to the barbarians (vv. 7-10). The word “barbarian” did not mean then what it means now. A barbarian was simply a person that did not speak the Greek language. The barbarians on the island of Melita (now called St. Paul’s Bay) treated Paul and his friends with kindness.

Paul had a burden for the barbarians. *“I am debtor both to the Greeks, and to the Barbarians; both to the wise, and to the unwise”* (Romans 1:14). To the barbarians, the whole incident of the viper was an *authority issue*. If Paul died, which was assumed (vv. 4, 6); then the viper had more power than Paul. It startled them when Paul shook the beast off, and ignorantly, yet instinctively they called Paul a god (v. 6). In their minds, only a god had authority over the beast world. This immediately established Paul as someone they had better listen to; thus the door for the gospel was opened wide.

A viper is used in the Scriptures as a cunning and malignant beast. John the Baptist and Jesus called the hypocrites of their day “a generation of vipers” (Matthew 3:7; 12:34; 23:33). Satan has the essence of the viper (Genesis 3:1; Revelation 12:9). Satan may come at you as a roaring lion (1 Peter 5:8); but most of the time he attacks like a serpent. Paul’s response to the vipers bite has two valuable lessons for anyone that is actively engaged in Kingdom Advance. First, Paul did not walk around the camp-fire and prate his power. Even though the viper could not harm him, he did not allow it to fasten on him but for a second. You might get bit but you must never allow that malicious person to latch on to you, neither allow the venom to sink into your spirit. *“The tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity: so is the tongue among our members, that it defiles the whole body, and sets on fire the course of nature; and it is set on fire of hell”* (James 3:6). You will be bitten by cruel criticism, gory gossip, seducing speeches, terrible threatening, rivalry rhetoric, and any other venomous verbal abuse the devil can muster up. Just remember that you do not wrestle against flesh and blood, and that you must not fight back with carnal words (2 Corinthians 10:3-5; Ephesians 6:12). I never had an enemy until I got serious about Kingdom Advance. It was very hard for me to deal with mean-spirited words whether they were by letter or orally. I had a very difficult time shaking them off. I have since learned to shake them off at once and not give place to the devil (Ephesians 4:27). Second, Paul immediately exercised his authority over the beast. We must not play with fire or we will get burned. We must not give the enemy an inch. It is an embarrassment to the name of Jesus when Christian fathers allow the devil to come in the front door of their home when they should be planted on the threshold in the name of the Lord. The enemy sowed his tares in the wheat while daddy slept (Matthew 13:25). It is a shame to the Lord’s honor when church leaders allow the devil to come into the church and devour it when they have the authority over him. *“And I sought for a man among them that should make up the hedge, and stand in the gap before me for the land, that I should not destroy it: but I found none”* (Ezekiel 22:30).

Too many churches have yielded their authority and become useless for Kingdom Advance. The devil

has been given room to set up a stronghold and from there he rules. The stronghold will usually be in an authoritative position. Satan loves the uppermost seat (Matthew 23:2; 1 Timothy 3:6). Our authority over all the power of the enemy has been delegated to us by the Lord Jesus Christ. The blood and name of Jesus is our defense and overcoming power (Revelation 12:11). We have no reason for defeat. We have no reason to run. There is no armor for the back in Ephesians 6:10-18. God opened up the Red Sea for Israel to go forward but he never opened it up for them to go back to Egypt. The spirit of fear is not of God. The cross was the Messiah's moment of crushing the head of the serpent (Genesis 3:15).

Not long after my wife and I entered ministry we were confronted by an onslaught of vicious attacks from the enemy. We were young and zealous but very naïve. I was allowing the venomous words to defeat me. Fear was always at my side and it affected me physically, emotionally, and spiritually. One Sunday afternoon God set me free and endued me with a super thrust of faith. As my wife and I were walking out of our garage I hit the button to close the door. As we were getting into the car we saw a snake on the garage door. It just so happened that the head of the snake was caught in one of the creases of the door. Immediately the Lord said to my heart, "Bobby, all you are dealing with is the tail of the enemy I have already crushed his head!" O my! Twenty five years later my wife and I are still serving the King of Kings! O marvelous grace and wondrous glory! Who is like unto the Lord our God!

III. The Victorious Savior (Acts 28:16-31) – The first six words in verse 16 say so much for Kingdom Advance. We have traveled from that little upper room in Jerusalem all the way to Rome. No man was more qualified to help accomplish the mission more than the apostle Paul who was himself a Jew and a Roman citizen. The Pentecostal flame had spread to the uttermost parts of the earth. *"The kingdom of heaven is like a grain of mustard seed, which a man took, and sowed in his field: which indeed is the least of all seeds: but when it is grown, it is the greatest among herbs, and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and lodge in the branches thereof." The kingdom of heaven is like unto leaven, which a woman took, and hid in three measures of meal, till the whole was leavened*" (Matthew 13:31-33).

Paul's normal pattern in a new place was: *the Synagogue, the Scriptures, the Savior, the Saved, and the Stirring*. Paul's pattern is a grand way to close out our study of the book of Acts.

- 1) *The Synagogue*. Paul cannot begin his missionary tour in the synagogue because he is under house arrest. So Paul improvises and brings the synagogue to his house (v. 17, 23).
- 2) *The Scriptures*. Now that Paul has an assembly, he moves into the scriptures (v. 23). Paul was very skilled with his Bible. God's indictment on Israel through the prophet Hosea was: *"My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge..."* (Hosea 4:6). The word "lack" does not merely mean ignorance concerning certain truths but the lack of skill in how to use the truths they know. Paul knew how to use the truth. The Bible is the Sword of the Spirit (Ephesians 6:17) and it takes great skill to use a sword. Many Christians are afraid to witness because they do not have the confidence they need in their knowledge of the Bible. However, we must keep in mind that we are not sharing Bible facts as much as we are sharing Jesus. If you know Jesus personally, then witnessing out of the Bible should not be a problem. Paul took his Bible and "persuaded them concerning Jesus" (v. 23).
- 3) *The Savior*. Paul had moved from the *scriptures* to the *Savior*. When you are filled with the Spirit you will fall in love with Jesus and out of the abundance of the heart the mouth will speak. A bride that is in love will have no difficulty talking about her bridegroom. Passion is powerful.
- 4) *The Saved*. Paul sowed the seed of the Word and God gave the increase. Some were saved and some were not. The book of Acts commences with the Lord adding to the Church (2:47) and consummates

with the Lord adding to the Church (28:24). This should be the pattern for all ministries. If sinners are not getting saved under my ministry then I have ceased to have a New Testament ministry and I have lost the reputation of being a New Testament preacher. Oswald Chambers said the true mark of a God-ordained ministry is that from time to time a life is changed under that ministry. Acts 28:24 is a summary verse of time and eternity. There is no middle ground or neutrality in the verse. You are either right or wrong; saved or lost; believing or not believing; headed for heaven or hell. *“For we are unto God a sweet savor of Christ, in them that are saved, and in them that perish: To the one we are the savor of death unto death; and to the other the savor of life unto life”* (2 Corinthians 2:15-16).

5) *The Stirring*. The unbelievers were troubled by the tentmakers words. Luke uses another chiasmic (reverse parallelism) to focus on the strong prophecy of Isaiah.

- A – Paul testified the kingdom of God (v. 23)
- B – Some did not receive Paul (v. 24)
- C – They agreed not among themselves (v. 25a)
- D – They departed after Paul’s word (v. 25b)
- E – Go unto the Jews and they will not hear (v. 26)
- F – The heart of this people is waxed gross (v. 27)
- E’ – Go unto the Gentiles and they will hear (v. 28)
- D’ – They departed after Paul’s words (v. 29a)
- C’ – They reasoned among themselves (v. 29b)
- B’ – Paul received all (v. 30)
- A’ – Paul preached the kingdom of God (v. 31)

The heart of Luke’s last chiasmic structure in Acts is a fitting way to end his treatise. It links the Old Testament prophet (Isaiah) with the New Testament prophet (Paul). They have several similarities as God’s chosen vessels:

1. Both men were the master evangelical preachers of their generation. Isaiah gives us the classic “Calvary Chapter” of the Bible (Isaiah 53); and Paul gives us the classic “Resurrection Chapter” of the Bible (1 Corinthians 15).
2. Both men saw a *vision*, heard a *voice* and had a *visitor* (Isaiah 6:1-7; Acts 9:1-11).
3. Both men experienced great conviction.
Woe is me! For I am undone! (Isaiah 6:5)
O wretched man that I am! (Romans 7:24)
4. Both men experienced a great cleansing.
Lo, thy sin is purged. (Isaiah 6:7)
Thy sin is washed away (Acts 22:16)
5. Both men experienced a great commission.
Go, and tell this people (Isaiah 6:9)
Go: for I will send thee (Acts 22:21)
6. Both men were given a difficult mission to their own people. They would both experience the refusal of their message by their own people (Isaiah 6:9-11; Acts 28:26-27).
7. Both men would have a unique ministry for the Gentiles. No prophet of the Old Testament comes close to Isaiah in prophesying about the future of the Gentiles coming to the Messiah (Isaiah 11:10; 42:1, 6; 49:6, 22; 54:3; 60:3, 5, 11; 62:2; 66:12, 19). No apostle of the New Testament can match Paul in

ministry to the Gentiles (Acts 9:15; 13:46-48; 28:28).

Here I am, a Gentile believer, 2700 years after Isaiah and 2000 years after Paul; writing a devotional commentary on the book that links the Old with the New! The Messiah that Isaiah and Paul were so passionate about is my Messiah. I thank my God in heaven that I have the opportunity to be involved in such a glorious work as Kingdom Advance. I thank God for all you soldiers of the cross in giant land that are giving your lives to the Advance. I hope this stone from the brook assists you in some small way to further the gospel of Jesus Christ.

The book of Acts does not have an ending. Acts 28:31 closes in a way that you expect another chapter. Pentecost lives on! We must keep the fire burning! We must pass the flame on from generation to generation. We must keep preaching the kingdom of God, and teaching those things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ, with all confidence. We must keep a passion for His Passion!

My shame is real, my heart is sinking,
My longings were real, but I wasn't thinking.
Heavenly power I sought from on high,
I wanted resurrection without having to die.

I wanted power but shunned the pain,
Not the loss, only the gain.
Can a child be born without travail?
I cried for souls, without feeling the nails.

Resurrection power was my thirst,
Now I know Calvary came first.
What! Glorious crown and Preachers power,
Without Gethsemane's travinging hour?

Can I know my Lord for real?
And avoid the Cross, his pain not feel?
Can I know the Pentecostal power?
And avoid the Cross, His travinging hour?

Forgive me Lord, my shame is true,
I've sought thy blessings but not you.
I want to experience your power and pain,
The knowledge of thee is the highest gain.

Help me Lord to drink thy cup,
To share thy fellowship, and with thee sup.
O! My flesh despises thy humiliation!
But it's the only path to exaltation.