



THE BOOK OF Acts

WITH PASTOR GARY HAMRICK



CORNERSTONE CHAPEL

January 29, 2023

"The Power of the Holy Spirit"

Acts 1:1-11

Pastor Gary Hamrick



Some Christians feel powerless: struggling to have victory over sin, unable to be bold in their witness, tired of running the race, wondering if there is more to the Christian life than just biding their time until Jesus returns. Maybe this describes you, and maybe it is because there is an absence of God's power without the fullness of the Holy Spirit. In this lesson from Acts 1 we will look at the person and power of the Holy Spirit available to all Believers and learn what it means to be baptized with the Holy Spirit.

1. **Acts 1:1-11** – *"The former account I made, O Theophilus, of all that Jesus began both to do and teach, until the day in which He was taken up, after He through the Holy Spirit had given commandments to the apostles whom He had chosen, to whom He also presented Himself alive after His suffering by many infallible proofs, being seen by them during forty days and speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God. And being assembled together with them, He commanded them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the Promise of the Father, 'which,' He said, 'you have heard from Me; for John truly baptized with water, but you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now.' Therefore, when they had come together, they asked Him, saying, 'Lord, will You at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?' And He said to them, 'It is not for you to know times or seasons which the Father has put in His own authority. But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.' Now when He had spoken these things, while they watched, He was taken up, and a cloud received Him out of their sight. And while they looked steadfastly toward heaven as He went up, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel, who also said, 'Men of Galilee, why do you stand gazing up into heaven? This same Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will so come in like manner as you saw Him go into heaven.'"*
2. The Book of Acts
 - a. Written by Luke, who was the only Gentile writer of the Bible
 - b. In some ways, Acts is a continuation of Luke's gospel
 - c. Luke was a physician, and he became a traveling companion of Paul
 - i. **Colossians 4:14a** – *"Luke the beloved physician..."*
 - d. Written sometime around AD 60-69
 - e. Acts and the Gospel of Luke are both addressed to an unknown man named Theophilus, meaning "lover of God"
 - f. Ideally this book could be called "Acts of Jesus through the Apostles"
3. Acts 1—Jesus' final instructions to His disciples
 - a. Following His resurrection, Jesus appeared to people for forty days until He ascended back into heaven

- b. Just prior to His ascension, Jesus told His disciples that God would provide them with something specific to enable them to continue His ministry and spread the message of the gospel:
 - i. **Acts 1:8** – *“But you shall receive **power** when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.”*
 - ii. Power is **dunamis** in the Greek, which is where we get our English word “dynamite”
- c. In order to be equipped to spread the good news of Jesus, often at the risk of death, the disciples needed the power of the Holy Spirit
- d. Many Christians are living powerless lives, struggling to overcome temptation and sin, unable to witness, and simply waiting for Jesus to return
 - i. We need the Holy Spirit:
 - 1. To be bold as witnesses
 - 2. To resist sin and temptation
 - 3. To be vessels for God’s miracles
 - a. **2 Corinthians 4:7** – *“But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us.” (1984 NIV)*

4. Who is the Holy Spirit?

- a. The Holy Spirit is the third person of the Trinity
 - i. There is one God who reveals Himself in a plurality of three persons: God the Father, God the Son (Jesus), and God the Holy Spirit
 - 1. **Genesis 1:26-27** – *“Then God said, ‘Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.’ So God created man in His own image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them.”*
- b. The Holy Spirit has always existed being co-equal and co-eternal with God because He is God
 - i. **Genesis 1:2** – *“The earth was without form, and void; and darkness was on the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters.”*
- c. The Holy Spirit is not an “it” or just a “force,” but He has all the attributes of personality
 - i. Mind
 - 1. **1 Corinthians 2:11** – *“For what man knows the things of a man except the spirit of the man which is in him? Even so no one knows the things of God except the Spirit of God.”*
 - ii. Will
 - 1. **1 Corinthians 12:11** – *“But one and the same Spirit works all these things, distributing to each one individually as He wills.”*
 - iii. Emotion
 - 1. **Ephesians 4:30** – *“And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption.”*

5. How do you get the Holy Spirit and the power that comes with the Holy Spirit?

- a. **John 14:16-17** – *“And I will pray the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may abide with you forever—the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees Him nor knows Him; but you know Him, for He dwells **with** you and will be **in** you.”*
 - i. With in the Greek is **para**, meaning “with, near, or around”
 - ii. The first role of the Holy Spirit is to be around us, near us, drawing us, and leading us to the saving knowledge of Jesus Christ
 1. No one comes to Jesus without the Holy Spirit’s influence
 - a. **John 6:44** – *“No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him; and I will raise him up at the last day.”*
 - b. **1 Corinthians 12:3** – *“Therefore I make known to you that no one speaking by the Spirit of God calls Jesus accursed, and no one can say that Jesus is Lord except by the Holy Spirit.”*
 - iii. In in the Greek is **en**
 - iv. The second role of the Holy Spirit is to indwell Believers
 1. **John 20:19-22** – *“Then, the same day at evening, being the first day of the week, when the doors were shut where the disciples were assembled, for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood in the midst, and said to them, ‘Peace be with you.’ When He had said this, He showed them His hands and His side. Then the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord. So Jesus said to them again, ‘Peace to you! As the Father has sent Me, I also send you.’ And when He had said this, He breathed on them, and said to them, ‘Receive the Holy Spirit.’”*
 2. At the moment of conversion, the Holy Spirit comes to dwell in the Believer
 3. **1 Corinthians 3:16** – *“Do you not know that you are the temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you?”*
 4. **Romans 8:11** – *“But if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who dwells in you.”*
6. Baptism of the Holy Spirit
- a. Many Christians believe that the indwelling of the Holy Spirit upon conversion is all that is available to us, but in Acts 1:8, Jesus mentioned what is known as “the baptism of the Holy Spirit”
 - b. The baptism of the Holy Spirit is an overflowing fullness and power of the Holy Spirit in the Believer, subsequent to salvation
 - i. **Acts 1:8** – *“But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come **upon** you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.”*
 1. Upon in the Greek is **epi**, meaning “upon, on, over”
 - ii. **Acts 1:5** – *“For John truly baptized with water, but you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now.”*
 1. Baptism in the Greek is **baptizo**, meaning “to overwhelm, to submerge, to immerse”

- iii. The Bible makes a distinction between the indwelling of the Holy Spirit and the overwhelming power of the Holy Spirit
- iv. Some people may be living nominal Christian lives with no victory over sin, unable to witness, wondering if there is more—we should want the fullness of the Holy Spirit in our lives
- v. How do you get the baptism of the Holy Spirit?
 - 1. **Luke 11:11-13** – *“If a son asks for bread from any father among you, will he give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will he give him a serpent instead of a fish? Or if he asks for an egg, will he offer him a scorpion? If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him!”*

Discussion Questions

1. Read **Acts 1:1-11** to provide a foundation for your Bible study time.
2. What (or who) did Jesus say would come to the disciples to enable them to continue His ministry and spread the gospel after His ascension into heaven? (See #3b above)
3. Why did the disciples need the Holy Spirit? (See #3c above)
4. Why do we need the Holy Spirit? Share an example of a situation in which you need the Holy Spirit’s help. (See #3d-i above)
5. Who is the Holy Spirit? What role does He have in the Trinity? (See #4 above)
6. Read **John 14:16-17**, **John 20:19-22**, **1 Corinthians 3:16**, and **Romans 8:11**. How do we get the Holy Spirit? (See #5 above)
7. What is the “baptism of the Holy Spirit?” (See #6b above)
8. What is the difference between the indwelling of the Holy Spirit at conversion and the baptism of the Holy Spirit? (See #6 above)
9. Do you ever feel like you are living a powerless Christian life? Discuss the importance of receiving the baptism of the Holy Spirit. How do we receive this power? (See #6b-iv and #6b-v-1 above)
10. Close your meeting by allowing the Holy Spirit to lead your time of prayer.

* Unless noted, all Scriptures quoted are from the New King James Version (NKJV)



The followers of Jesus, who numbered about one hundred and twenty, were told to wait in Jerusalem until the “Promise” of the Holy Spirit. When the Day of Pentecost came, God poured out the Holy Spirit on all who had gathered in that Upper Room. It was an AUDIBLE, VISIBLE, and VERBAL event—the sound like a rushing wind, the sight of flames of fire lighting on each person, and people speaking in “tongues.” In this lesson, we will look at the history of Pentecost and cover the AUDIBLE and VISIBLE aspects of what happened when God’s Spirit was poured out in Acts 2.

1. **Acts 2:1-13** – *“When the Day of Pentecost had fully come, they were all with one accord in one place. And suddenly there came a sound from heaven, as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled the whole house where they were sitting. Then there appeared to them divided tongues, as of fire, and one sat upon each of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance. And there were dwelling in Jerusalem Jews, devout men, from every nation under heaven. And when this sound occurred, the multitude came together, and were confused, because everyone heard them speak in his own language. Then they were all amazed and marveled, saying to one another, ‘Look, are not all these who speak Galileans? And how is it that we hear, each in our own language in which we were born? Parthians and Medes and Elamites, those dwelling in Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya adjoining Cyrene, visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, Cretans and Arabs—we hear them speaking in our own tongues the wonderful works of God.’ So they were all amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, ‘Whatever could this mean?’ Others mocking said, ‘They are full of new wine.’”*
2. Three topics the Apostle Paul warned us in Scripture not to be ignorant about
 - a. Israel and the place of the Jews in history and prophecy
 - i. **Romans 11:25** – *“For I do not desire, brethren, that you should be ignorant of this mystery, lest you should be wise in your own opinion, that blindness in part has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in.”*
 - b. The Rapture of the Church and End Time events
 - i. **1 Thessalonians 4:13, 16-17** – *“But I do not want you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning those who have fallen asleep, lest you sorrow as others who have no hope. ... For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord.”*
 - c. The Holy Spirit and spiritual gifts

- i. **1 Corinthians 12:1** – *“Now concerning spiritual gifts, brethren, I do not want you to be ignorant.”*
 - 1. Topics like spiritual gifts and the baptism of the Holy Spirit are non-salvation issues that should be discussed but should never cause division
 - a. **Ephesians 4:3** – *“...endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.”*
- 3. Waiting for the baptism of the Holy Spirit
 - a. Just prior to His ascension into heaven, Jesus instructed His followers to “wait” for the baptism of the Holy Spirit
 - i. **Acts 1:4-5** – *“And being assembled together with them, He commanded them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to **wait** for the Promise of the Father, ‘which,’ He said, ‘you have heard from Me; for John truly baptized with water, but you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now.’”*
 - b. Jesus’ followers totaled about one hundred and twenty people at this time, including the eleven remaining disciples and Mary the mother of Jesus
 - i. The people did not know how long they would have to wait
 - 1. While they were waiting, Peter suggested that they select a replacement for Judas, casting lots to choose from two men, Joseph and Matthias; the lot fell to Matthias
 - a. This was unlikely to have been a directive from the Lord
 - i. Matthias is never mentioned in Scripture again
 - ii. God selected the next apostle Himself when he called Saul (who became Paul) in Acts 9
 - c. On the day of Pentecost, ten days after Jesus’ ascension into heaven, Jesus’ followers received the baptism of the Holy Spirit
- 4. Historical background of Pentecost
 - a. Pentecost is **Shavuot** in Hebrew, meaning “Feast of Weeks”
 - b. Pentecost is seven full weeks and one day after the Feast of Firstfruits, for a total of fifty days
 - i. Pentecost in Greek means “fiftieth” day
 - c. Pentecost commemorated the giving of the law which Moses received from God on Mount Sinai
 - d. Pentecost was a celebration of the end of the wheat harvest
 - i. There would be an offering at the temple of two loaves of wheat bread made with leaven
 - ii. **Leviticus 23:16-17** – *“Count fifty days to the day after the seventh Sabbath; then you shall offer a new grain offering to the LORD. You shall bring from your dwellings two wave loaves of two-tenths of an ephah. They shall be of fine flour; they shall be baked with leaven. They are the firstfruits to the LORD.”*
 - iii. This was the only feast where the people were required to add leaven, which is symbolic in Scripture of sin

- iv. The offering of the two loaves was a picture of God as the Lord of the harvest, and the ultimate harvest of souls that would come through the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross, enabling sinners to be saved
5. Why did God choose the Feast of Pentecost as the day to pour out His Spirit in this way?
- a. God has been unveiling His plans for the world through the chronological order of the ancient Jewish feasts
 - i. Christ's crucifixion occurred at Passover
 - ii. Christ's resurrection occurred during the Feast of Firstfruits
 - iii. God poured out His Holy Spirit on the early Church Believers at Pentecost
 - iv. It is possible that the rapture of the Church could coincide with the Feast of Trumpets
 - 1. **1 Thessalonians 4:16** – *"For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first."*
6. Contrasting the giving of the law and the giving of the Spirit
- a. In the Old Testament, when God was giving the law to Moses on Mount Sinai, the Israelites became impatient and sinned against God by creating a golden calf to worship
 - i. As punishment, God commanded the tribe of Levi to go through the Israelite camp and kill their own people, and three thousand people died
 - 1. **Exodus 32:28** – *"So the sons of Levi did according to the word of Moses. And about three thousand men of the people fell that day."*
 - b. After God poured out His Spirit on the Believers in the New Testament in Acts 2, Peter preached the first evangelical message, and three thousand people were saved
 - i. **Acts 2:38-41** – *"Then Peter said to them, 'Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is to you and to your children, and to all who are afar off, as many as the Lord our God will call.' And with many other words he testified and exhorted them, saying, 'Be saved from this perverse generation.' Then those who gladly received his word were baptized; and that day about three thousand souls were added to them."*
 - c. The law shows us how sinful we are, but it cannot save us
 - i. **2 Corinthians 3:6b** - *"...not of the letter but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life."*
 - d. Both an abundant life and eternal life come by the Spirit, not the law
 - i. **John 10:10b** - *"I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly."*
 - ii. **John 3:16b** – *"...whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life."*
 - 1. Life is found in the Spirit through faith in Jesus Christ, not by the law
 - e. Pentecost in the New Testament was a picture of the need for salvation and God's acceptance of sinners saved by grace
7. Three phenomena associated with Pentecost in Acts 2

- a. Audible
 - i. Sound as a mighty, rushing wind
 - ii. Examples of wind mentioned in reference to the Lord in Scripture:
 1. **Jeremiah 30:23** – *“Behold, the whirlwind of the LORD...”*
 2. **John 3:8** – *“The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear the sound of it, but cannot tell where it comes from and where it goes. So is everyone who is born of the Spirit.”*
- b. Visual
 - i. Like tongues or flames of fire lighting on each person
 - ii. Examples of fire mentioned in reference to the Lord in Scripture:
 1. **Exodus 3:1-2** - *“Now Moses was tending the flock of Jethro his father-in-law, the priest of Midian. And he led the flock to the back of the desert, and came to Horeb, the mountain of God. And the Angel of the LORD appeared to him in a flame of fire from the midst of a bush. So he looked, and behold, the bush was burning with fire, but the bush was not consumed.”*
 2. **Exodus 13:21** - *“And the LORD went before them by day in a pillar of cloud to lead the way, and by night in a pillar of fire to give them light, so as to go by day and night.”*
 3. **Exodus 19:18** – *“Now Mount Sinai was completely in smoke, because the LORD descended upon it in fire.”*
 4. **Matthew 3:11** – *“I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance, but He who is coming after me is mightier than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire.”*
 5. **Hebrews 12:29** – *“For our God is a consuming fire.”*
- c. Verbal
 - i. People spoke in other languages (what is known as “tongues”)
 - ii. **To be continued in Pastor Gary’s next sermon...**

Discussion Questions

1. Read **Acts 2:1-13** to provide a foundation for your Bible study time.
2. Discuss what happened in this passage. What might it have been like to be present for this event? (See #1 above)
3. What are the three topics about which the Apostle Paul warned us not to be ignorant? (See #2 above)
4. Why did the Jews celebrate Pentecost? (See #4d above)
5. Why did God choose the Feast of Pentecost as the day to pour out His Spirit in this way? (See #5 above)

6. Contrast the giving of the law in the Old Testament with the giving of the Spirit in the New Testament. (See #6a and #6b above)
7. Read **2 Corinthians 3:6b**, **John 10:10b**, and **John 3:16b**. What is the purpose of the law? Where do we find access to both an abundant and eternal life? (See #6c and #6d above)
8. What does Pentecost in the New Testament represent? (See #6e above)
9. Discuss the audible and visible phenomena the followers of Jesus experienced in Acts 2. (See #7a and #7b above)
10. What ways have you experienced the Holy Spirit's presence in your life?
11. Close your meeting by allowing the Holy Spirit to lead your time of prayer.

* Unless noted, all Scriptures quoted are from the New King James Version (NKJV)



In this study, Pastor Gary teaches about one of the gifts of the Spirit—known as “tongues”—manifested in Acts 2. Tongues is a known language, except to the person speaking, that God gives a Believer for the purpose of prayer and/or praise to God. Is the gift of tongues still available today? Should all Believers speak in tongues? And why would God give the gift of a language to people who cannot understand it themselves? Pastor Gary addresses these and other key questions in this teaching on the gift of tongues.

1. **Acts 2:1-13** – *“When the Day of Pentecost had fully come, they were all with one accord in one place. And suddenly there came a sound from heaven, as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled the whole house where they were sitting. Then there appeared to them divided tongues, as of fire, and one sat upon each of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance. And there were dwelling in Jerusalem Jews, devout men, from every nation under heaven. And when this sound occurred, the multitude came together, and were confused, because everyone heard them speak in his own language. Then they were all amazed and marveled, saying to one another, ‘Look, are not all these who speak Galileans? And how is it that we hear, each in our own language in which we were born? Parthians and Medes and Elamites, those dwelling in Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya adjoining Cyrene, visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, Cretans and Arabs—we hear them speaking in our own tongues the wonderful works of God.’ So they were all amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, ‘Whatever could this mean?’ Others mocking said, ‘They are full of new wine.’”*
2. Jesus’ followers received the baptism of the Holy Spirit
 - a. Jesus had introduced the concept of the baptism of the Holy Spirit to His followers prior to His ascension into heaven
 - i. **Acts 1:4-5** – *“And being assembled together with them, He commanded them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the Promise of the Father, ‘which,’ He said, ‘you have heard from Me; for John truly baptized with water, but you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now.’”*
 - b. All Believers receive the indwelling of the Holy Spirit at the moment of salvation, but the baptism of the Holy Spirit is a separate empowering of the Holy Spirit subsequent to salvation
 - c. In Acts 2, on the day of Pentecost, about one hundred twenty Believers received the baptism of the Holy Spirit when the Holy Spirit came upon them in power
3. Three phenomena associated with Pentecost in Acts 2
 - a. Audible (verse 2)
 - i. The sound as a mighty, rushing wind
 - b. Visual (verse 3)

Like flames of fire lighting on each person

c. Verbal (verse 4)

- i. People speaking in other “*tongues*” (languages)
- ii. There were two reactions to Jesus’ followers speaking in tongues in Acts 2
 1. Some people were curious
 - a. **Acts 2:12** – “*Whatever could this mean?*”
 2. Some people were critical
 - a. **Acts 2:13** – “*They are full of new wine.*”
 3. People today often have similar views regarding the concept of tongues

4. What is “tongues?”

- a. Tongues is a known language, except to the person speaking, that God gives a Believer for the purpose of prayer and/or praise to God
- b. The first mention of tongues in Scripture is in the Gospel of Mark
 - i. **Mark 16:17-18** – “*And these signs will follow those who believe: In My name they will cast out demons; they will speak with new tongues; they will take up serpents; and if they drink anything deadly, it will by no means hurt them; they will lay hands on the sick, and they will recover.*”
- c. In 1 Corinthians 12, the Apostle Paul included tongues in a list of spiritual gifts
- d. In 1 Corinthians 14, Paul provided instructions regarding how the gift of tongues should operate

5. Was the gift of tongues limited to the first-century Church or is it still available for Believers today?

- a. **1 Corinthians 13:8-12** – “*Love never fails. But whether there are prophecies, they will fail; whether there are tongues, they will cease; whether there is knowledge, it will vanish away. For we know in part and we prophesy in part. But when that which is perfect has come, then that which is in part will be done away. When I was a child, I spoke as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child; but when I became a man, I put away childish things. For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part, but then I shall know just as I also am known.*”
 - i. There are two interpretations of the phrase in verse 10, “*But when that which is perfect has come, then that which is in part will be done away.*”
 1. Some people believe that verse 10 is in reference to the completion of Scripture, and therefore they believe that the gifts of the Spirit have ceased as Scripture is complete
 - a. This view was developed at the turn of the twentieth century as a fundamentalist response to the birth of the Pentecostal movement
 - b. Prior to this, theologians had agreed that the gifts were still available
 2. When considered in the context of verses 11 and 12—where Paul used “now and then” statements to compare the experience of the Believer on earth with the experience of the Believer in heaven, verse 10 refers to the perfection of the Believer in heaven, not the completion of the Bible
 - a. Therefore, all the gifts are still available today

6. If the gift of tongues is still available today, why would God give the gift of a language to people who cannot understand it themselves?
 - a. Most people, at times, struggle to communicate clearly—language is both a “bridge and a barrier”
 - b. The gift of tongues allows a person to bypass language and communicate directly to the heart of the Lord
 - c. It is a gift of prayer and praise to God
 - i. **Acts 2:11** – *“Cretans and Arabs—we hear them speaking in our own tongues the wonderful works of God.”*
 - ii. **Acts 10:46a** – *“For they heard them speak with tongues and magnify God.”*
 - iii. **1 Corinthians 14:2** – *“For he who speaks in a tongue does not speak to men but to God, for no one understands him; however, in the spirit he speaks mysteries.”*
 - iv. Tongues is not a prophetic message to people
7. Scripture discourages tongues in public worship services
 - a. **1 Corinthians 14:18-19** – *“I thank my God I speak with tongues more than you all; yet in the church I would rather speak five words with my understanding, that I may teach others also, than ten thousand words in a tongue.”*
 - b. **1 Corinthians 14:23** – *“Therefore if the whole church comes together in one place, and all speak with tongues, and there come in those who are uninformed or unbelievers, will they not say that you are out of your mind?”*
8. Am I supposed to speak in tongues?
 - a. God does not give every Believer the gift of tongues, but every Believer has one or more gifts of the Spirit
 - i. **1 Corinthians 12:29-30** – *“Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Are all workers of miracles? Do all have gifts of healings? Do all speak with tongues? Do all interpret?”*
9. Is tongues the evidence for the baptism of the Holy Spirit?
 - a. Tongues can be AN evidence of the baptism of Holy Spirit, but it is not THE evidence
 - b. **1 Corinthians 13:1** – *“Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I have become sounding brass or a clanging cymbal.”*
 - c. The evidence for the baptism of the Holy Spirit is love
 - i. **1 Corinthians 13:13** – *“And now abide faith, hope, love, these three; but the greatest of these is love.”*
 - ii. **1 Corinthians 14:1a** – *“Pursue love, and desire spiritual gifts...”*
10. Wait upon the Lord for the gifts He wants to give you
 - a. It is never wrong to want more of the Lord
 - b. Be cautious and open, not closed and critical

- c. **1 Peter 4:10-11** – “As each one has received a gift, minister it to one another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God. If anyone speaks, let him speak as the oracles of God. If anyone ministers, let him do it as with the ability which God supplies, that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom belong the glory and the dominion forever and ever. Amen.”

Discussion Questions

1. Read **Acts 2:1-13** to provide a foundation for your Bible study time.
2. Discuss the difference between the indwelling of the Holy Spirit at the time of salvation and the baptism of the Holy Spirit. (See #2b)
3. How did people react to the Believers speaking in tongues in Acts 2? Compare this with common attitudes toward tongues in the Church today. (See #3c-ii above)
4. What is the definition of tongues? (See #4a above)
5. Read **1 Corinthians 13:8-12**. Is the gift of tongues still available to the Church today? Why or why not? (See #5 above)
6. Read **Acts 2:11**, **Acts 10:46a**, and **1 Corinthians 14:2**. What is the purpose of the gift of tongues? (See #6 above)
7. Does Scripture offer parameters for the expression of the gift of tongues? (See #7 above)
8. Should everyone speak in tongues? (See #8 above)
9. Is tongues an evidence of the baptism of the Holy Spirit? What is the evidence of the baptism of the Holy Spirit? (See #9 above)
10. Read **1 Peter 4:10-11**. How should we view the gifts of the Spirit? (See #10 above)
11. Close your meeting by allowing the Holy Spirit to lead your time of prayer.

* Unless noted, all Scriptures quoted are from the New King James Version (NKJV)

February 19, 2023

"Four Foundations of the Church"

Acts 2:40-47

Pastor Gary Hamrick



In 1869, the tallest lighthouse in America was built in Cape Hatteras, North Carolina. It was built a half mile from the coast, but after more than a hundred years of beach erosion, the Army Corps of Engineers had to relocate the lighthouse another half mile inland. The erosion threatened the foundation of the lighthouse. In a similar way, the Church is to be like a lighthouse—guiding people, warning people, and helping people to get safely home to Jesus. Unfortunately, there has been a slow erosion of some of the foundational elements of the Church that threaten the Church's ability to be the beacon of light that we are called to be. In Acts 2:42, we learn about four foundational elements that defined the early Church—things that should still define the Church today.

1. **Acts 2:40-47** – *"And with many other words he testified and exhorted them, saying, 'Be saved from this perverse generation.' Then those who gladly received his word were baptized; and that day about three thousand souls were added to them. And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers. Then fear came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were done through the apostles. Now all who believed were together, and had all things in common, and sold their possessions and goods, and divided them among all, as anyone had need. So continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they ate their food with gladness and simplicity of heart, praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved."*
2. Four foundations of the Church found in Acts 2:42
 - a. **Acts 2:42** – *"And they continued steadfastly in the **apostles' doctrine** and **fellowship**, in the **breaking of bread**, and in **prayers**."*
 - b. All other elements of the church should flow from these four components
 - c. When these items are absent, the church will be either anemic or dead
3. The apostles' doctrine
 - a. Refers to the Word of God
 - b. Scripture's primary message is about eternal life
 - c. Scripture's secondary message is how to navigate earthly life
 - i. When we abandon God's Word, we become irrelevant to the culture, as we have no hope to offer for this life or the life to come
 - d. **Psalms 119:105** – *"Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path."*
 - e. **Jeremiah 15:16** – *"Your words were found, and I ate them, And Your word was to me the joy and rejoicing of my heart; For I am called by Your name, O LORD God of hosts."*
 - f. **Jeremiah 23:29** – *"Is not My word like a fire?" says the LORD, 'And like a hammer that breaks the rock in pieces?'"*

- g. **Ephesians 5:26** – “...that He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word.”
- h. **1 Peter 2:2a** – “...as newborn babes, desire the pure milk of the word.”
- i. **Isaiah 40:8** – “The grass withers, the flower fades, But the word of our God stands forever.”

4. Fellowship

- a. Fellowship in Acts 2:42 translates to “Koinonia” in the Greek
- b. Koinonia is used in several ways throughout Scripture:
 - i. Fellowship
 - 1. **1 John 1:7** – “But if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have **fellowship** with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin.”
 - ii. Contribution
 - 1. **Romans 15:26** – “For it pleased those from Macedonia and Achaia to make a certain **contribution** for the poor among the saints who are in Jerusalem.”
 - iii. Sharing
 - 1. **Hebrews 13:16** – “But do not forget to do good and to **share**, for with such sacrifices God is well pleased.”
 - iv. Communion
 - 1. **2 Corinthians 13:14** – “The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the **communion** of the Holy Spirit be with you all. Amen.”
- c. “Koinonia” speaks to the closeness, caring for, and sharing with other people who are united in the common bond of Jesus Christ

5. Breaking of bread

- a. Referred to either eating together or Communion
- b. **Acts 2:46** – “So continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they ate their food with gladness and simplicity of heart.”
 - i. In this instance, “breaking bread” most likely referred to eating together
- c. In **Acts 2:42**, “breaking of bread” most likely referred to Communion
- d. **1 Corinthians 10:16-17** – “The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ? For we, though many, are one bread and one body; for we all partake of that one bread.”
- e. Communion reminds us:
 - i. Of Christ’s sacrifice
 - ii. That we are one body, unified together in the bond of Christ

6. Prayer

- a. Prayer is conversation, communication, and communion with God
- b. Prayer is not informing God of anything but is rather inviting Him into everything
- c. Prayer is less about moving God’s hand and more about moving our hearts
- d. **Psalms 5:3** – “My voice You shall hear in the morning, O LORD; In the morning I will direct it to You, And I will look up.”

- e. **Psalm 46:10** – *“Be still, and know that I am God; I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth!”*
- f. **Matthew 18:20** – *“For where two or three are gathered together in My name, I am there in the midst of them.”*
- g. **Matthew 21:13** – *“And He said to them, ‘It is written, “My house shall be called a house of prayer...”’”*

Discussion Questions

1. Read **Acts 2:40-47** to provide a foundation for your Bible study time.
2. What are the four foundations of the Church found in **Acts 2:42**? (See #2a above)
3. What is the “apostles’ doctrine?” What happens to the Church when God’s Word is abandoned? (See #3a and #3c above)
4. Read **Psalm 119:105, Jeremiah 15:16, Jeremiah 23:29, Ephesians 5:26, 1 Peter 2:2a, and Isaiah 40:8**. Discuss the importance of the Word of God in the Church. (See #3 above)
5. Discuss the different ways the word “Koinonia” is used in Scripture. What do these definitions tell us about relationships among Believers? What should this look like in our day-to-day lives? (See #4 above)
6. To what did “breaking of bread” refer in **Acts 2:42**? (See #5c above)
7. Read **1 Corinthians 10:16-17**. Of what does Communion remind us? (See #5e above)
8. What purposes does prayer serve? (See #6a, #6b, and #6c above)
9. Read **Psalm 5:3, Psalm 46:10, Matthew 18:20, and Matthew 21:13**. How does prayer impact your life? (See #6d, #6e, #6f, and #6g above)
10. Close your meeting by allowing the Holy Spirit to lead your time of prayer.

* Unless noted, all Scriptures quoted are from the New King James Version (NKJV)

February 26, 2023

"When it's OK to Disobey"

Acts 3-4

Pastor Gary Hamrick



Eventually, all Christians' faith will be tested in the areas of conscience and duty—to see whether they have the courage to obey God rather than man, wherever man's law and authority contradicts the higher law and authority of God. The early church practiced civil disobedience wherever that contradiction existed. We have been living in a time more recently when government and/or employer policies, laws, and ordinances are increasingly at odds with God—with God's policies, laws, and ordinances. Christians in America are having to decide, "Who is really Lord?" And whom will you obey—God or man? Christians should be the best citizens, living in subjection to governing authority, praying for and respecting our leaders—but where the contradiction exists, may God help us to say, as the early church did, "We must obey God rather than men!" (Acts 5:29)

1. **Acts 3:1-10** – *"Now Peter and John went up together to the temple at the hour of prayer, the ninth hour. And a certain man lame from his mother's womb was carried, whom they laid daily at the gate of the temple which is called Beautiful, to ask alms from those who entered the temple; who, seeing Peter and John about to go into the temple, asked for alms. And fixing his eyes on him, with John, Peter said, 'Look at us.' So he gave them his attention, expecting to receive something from them. Then Peter said, 'Silver and gold I do not have, but what I do have I give you: In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk.' And he took him by the right hand and lifted him up, and immediately his feet and ankle bones received strength. So he, leaping up, stood and walked and entered the temple with them—walking, leaping, and praising God. And all the people saw him walking and praising God. Then they knew that it was he who sat begging alms at the Beautiful Gate of the temple; and they were filled with wonder and amazement at what had happened to him."*
2. God used Peter to heal a man unable to walk
 - a. This was the first miracle of the early church
 - b. Verse 10 says the people "were filled with wonder and amazement" at the sight of this miracle
 - c. Peter used the opportunity to give God the glory and share the Gospel
 - i. **Acts 3:12-19** – *"So when Peter saw it, he responded to the people: 'Men of Israel, why do you marvel at this? Or why look so intently at us, as though by our own power or godliness we had made this man walk? The God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the God of our fathers, glorified His Servant Jesus, whom you delivered up and denied in the presence of Pilate, when he was determined to let Him go. But you denied the Holy One and the Just, and asked for a murderer to be granted to you, and killed the Prince of life, whom God raised from the dead, of which we are witnesses. And His name, through faith in His name, has made this man strong, whom you see and know. Yes, the faith which comes through Him has given him this perfect soundness in the presence of you all. Yet now, brethren, I know that you did it in ignorance, as did also your rulers. But those things which God foretold by the mouth of all His prophets, that*

the Christ would suffer, He has thus fulfilled. Repent therefore and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, so that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord.”

- d. About two thousand men were saved, bringing the early church total to about five thousand men (plus women and children)
 - i. **Acts 4:4** – *“However, many of those who heard the word believed; and the number of the men came to be about five thousand.”*
- e. It is the Word of God that brings people to repentance

3. Peter and John were taken into custody

- a. The Jewish leaders objected to the message, not the miracle
- b. They still believed the sacrificial system was the only way to reconciliation with God and therefore believed the Gospel message was heretical
- c. They had Peter and John placed in jail
 - i. **Acts 4:1-4:3** – *“Now as they spoke to the people, the priests, the captain of the temple, and the Sadducees came upon them, being greatly disturbed that they taught the people and preached in Jesus the resurrection from the dead. And they laid hands on them, and put them in custody until the next day, for it was already evening.”*
- d. The leaders did not understand that Jesus did not defy the law, but rather fulfilled the law
 - i. **Matthew 5:17** – *“Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them.”* (1984 NIV)
 - ii. **Acts 4:12** – *“Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.”*

4. Peter and John refused to stop sharing about Jesus

- a. The Sanhedrin tried to silence their speech
 - i. **Acts 4:17-18** – *“But so that it spreads no further among the people, let us severely threaten them, that from now on they speak to no man in this name.’ So they called them and commanded them not to speak at all nor teach in the name of Jesus.”*
- b. Peter and John refused to stop following Jesus’ command to preach the Gospel
 - i. **Mark 16:15** – *“And He said to them, ‘Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature.’”*
 - ii. **Acts 4:19-20** – *“But Peter and John answered and said to them, ‘Whether it is right in the sight of God to listen to you more than to God, you judge. For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard.’”*

5. When is civil disobedience acceptable to God?

- a. Civil disobedience is acceptable to God when man’s law or authority contradicts the higher law or authority of God
- b. Examples of civil disobedience in the Bible
 - i. Exodus 1
 - 1. The Egyptian Pharaoh commanded the Hebrew midwives to kill all newborn baby boys, but the midwives did not do as Pharaoh commanded

- ii. Daniel 3
 - 1. The Babylonian king Nebuchadnezzar commanded that the people worship a gold image; Israelites Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego refused to worship the gold image
- iii. Daniel 6
 - 1. The Babylonian king Darius commanded that people may not pray to anyone except him; Daniel continued to pray to the Lord
- c. If you are going to engage in civil disobedience, you must have a clear Scriptural basis and directive from God to do so
 - i. Christians' love for God should cause them to submit to the governing authorities unless doing so would violate God's law
 - ii. In each of the Scripture examples above, God protected the people from harm—but there is no guarantee
- d. **Acts 5:29** – *“But Peter and the other apostles answered and said: ‘We ought to obey God rather than men.’”*

Discussion Questions

1. Read **Acts 3:1-10** to provide a foundation for your Bible study time.
2. What did Peter do when the people were “amazed” at the sight of a miracle? What example should this set for us? (See #2c above).
3. Why did the Jewish leaders take Peter and John into custody? What did the Jewish leaders not understand about the Gospel? (See #3a, #3b, and #3d above)
4. Read **Acts 4:19-20**. How did Peter and John respond to the command to stop sharing the Gospel? (See #4b above)
5. When is civil disobedience acceptable to God? (See #5a above)
6. Discuss examples of civil disobedience found in Scripture. (See #5b above)
7. How would a Christian know if engaging in civil disobedience is the right thing to do? (See #5c above)
8. Read **Acts 5:29**. Who is our ultimate authority? (See #5d above)
9. Discuss what Godly civil disobedience looks like.
10. Close your meeting by allowing the Holy Spirit to lead your time of prayer.

* Unless noted, all Scriptures quoted are from the New King James Version (NKJV)

March 19, 2023

Lessons from the Early Church

Acts 4:32-5:1-11

Pastor Gary Hamrick



The early church was united around common beliefs and common burdens—the belief in Jesus as Lord and Savior—and the burden of being persecuted by those who opposed them. Jews in the first century who believed in Jesus as Lord and Savior were killed at worst and canceled at best. As a result of facing such real persecution, the early church followers pooled their resources and shared them with each other as needed. It was not socialism, it was survivalism. In addition, when God struck down Ananias and Sapphira for their deception, the early church quickly learned that “the Church pure is the Church powerful” (as G. Campbell Morgan once said). They developed a healthy “fear of the Lord” and walked in holiness before God. The early church serves as a good example for the Church today.

1. **Acts 4:32-37; 5:1-11** – *“Now the multitude of those who believed were of one heart and one soul; neither did anyone say that any of the things he possessed was his own, but they had all things in common. And with great power the apostles gave witness to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. And great grace was upon them all. Nor was there anyone among them who lacked; for all who were possessors of lands or houses sold them, and brought the proceeds of the things that were sold, and laid them at the apostles' feet; and they distributed to each as anyone had need. And Joses, who was also named Barnabas by the apostles (which is translated Son of Encouragement), a Levite of the country of Cyprus, having land, sold it, and brought the money and laid it at the apostles' feet. But a certain man named Ananias, with Sapphira his wife, sold a possession. And he kept back part of the proceeds, his wife also being aware of it, and brought a certain part and laid it at the apostles' feet. But Peter said, ‘Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit and keep back part of the price of the land for yourself? While it remained, was it not your own? And after it was sold, was it not in your own control? Why have you conceived this thing in your heart? You have not lied to men but to God.’ Then Ananias, hearing these words, fell down and breathed his last. So great fear came upon all those who heard these things. And the young men arose and wrapped him up, carried him out, and buried him. Now it was about three hours later when his wife came in, not knowing what had happened. And Peter answered her, ‘Tell me whether you sold the land for so much?’ She said, ‘Yes, for so much.’ Then Peter said to her, ‘How is it that you have agreed together to test the Spirit of the Lord? Look, the feet of those who have buried your husband are at the door, and they will carry you out.’ Then immediately she fell down at his feet and breathed her last. And the young men came in and found her dead, and carrying her out, buried her by her husband. So great fear came upon all the church and upon all who heard these things.”*
2. The early church was not practicing socialism; they were practicing survivalism
 - a. The early church was driven by common beliefs and common burdens; to survive amid persecution, they had to pool their resources
 - b. We are not to make a pattern out of a practice
 - c. The Bible teaches hard work, not socialism
 - i. **2 Thessalonians 3:10b** – *“If anyone will not work, neither shall he eat.”*

- ii. **1 Timothy 5:8** – *“But if anyone does not provide for his own, and especially for those of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever.”*
 - iii. **Proverbs 12:11** – *“Whoever works his land will have plenty of bread, but he who follows worthless pursuits lacks sense.”* (ESV)
 - iv. **Proverbs 14:23** – *“All hard work brings a profit, but mere talk leads only to poverty.”* (1984 NIV)
 - v. **2 Thessalonians 3:8** – *“...nor did we eat anyone's food without paying for it. On the contrary, we worked night and day, laboring and toiling so that we would not be a burden to any of you.”* (1984 NIV)
- 3. The early church was not *mandated* by the law to give, they were *motivated* by the heart
 - a. God did not kill Ananias and Sapphira for keeping back part of the proceeds from the sale of their land
 - b. God killed Ananias and Sapphira for saying that they had given all the proceeds as an offering when they had not
 - c. God took a drastic measure to communicate a drastic message
- 4. The early church had to learn that “the Church **pure** is the Church **powerful**” (G. Campbell Morgan)
 - a. God made an example of Ananias and Sapphira to communicate a message
 - i. He hates willful disobedience
 - ii. He is a holy God and expects holiness from His people
 - b. **2 Corinthians 7:1** – *“Therefore, having these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God.”*
- 5. The early church walked in “the fear of the Lord”
 - a. When we engage in deliberate sin, we don’t have an adequate fear of the Lord
 - b. A healthy fear of the Lord motivates holy living; when we fear God, we sin less
 - c. We must balance God as a loving Father with God as a righteous judge
 - d. We can acquire this view through our own determination or through painful consequences

Discussion Questions

1. Read **Acts 4:32-37; 5:1-11** to provide a foundation for your Bible study time.
2. Why did the early church pool their resources? (See #2a above)
3. Does the Bible teach socialism? How do we know? (See #2b and #2c above)
4. Why did God kill Ananias and Sapphira? Why did He use such drastic measures? (See #3b and #3c above)
5. What does God’s response to Ananias’ and Sapphira’s sin tell us about God? (See #4a-i and #4a-ii above)

6. Read [2 Corinthians 7:1](#). What is “the fear of the Lord?” (See #4b above)
7. Why do we need a healthy fear of the Lord? (See #5a and #5b above)
8. What happens when we do not have a healthy fear of the Lord? (See #5d above)
9. Compare and contrast a time when you did not have an adequate fear of the Lord with a time when you did have a healthy fear of the Lord. What were the results?
10. Close your meeting by allowing the Holy Spirit to lead your time of prayer.

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March 26, 2023

"A Martyr's Example"

Acts 6:8-7:60

Pastor Gary Hamrick



The first martyr of the early church was a man named Stephen. He was killed defending his faith in Jesus Christ. His life and death serve as a great example for Christians today and challenge us with three questions: (1) Do I love God more than my own life? (2) Do I forgive others who have wronged me? and (3) Am I prepared to see the Lord when I die? This study addresses these questions and encourages us to pray for the same courage and boldness that Stephen had.

1. **Acts 6:8-7:3; 7:17-22, 7:44-60** – *"And Stephen, full of faith and power, did great wonders and signs among the people. Then there arose some from what is called the Synagogue of the Freedmen (Cyrenians, Alexandrians, and those from Cilicia and Asia), disputing with Stephen. And they were not able to resist the wisdom and the Spirit by which he spoke. Then they secretly induced men to say, 'We have heard him speak blasphemous words against Moses and God.' And they stirred up the people, the elders, and the scribes; and they came upon him, seized him, and brought him to the council. They also set up false witnesses who said, 'This man does not cease to speak blasphemous words against this holy place and the law; for we have heard him say that this Jesus of Nazareth will destroy this place and change the customs which Moses delivered to us.' And all who sat in the council, looking steadfastly at him, saw his face as the face of an angel. Then the high priest said, 'Are these things so?' And he said, 'Brethren and fathers, listen: The God of glory appeared to our father Abraham when he was in Mesopotamia, before he dwelt in Haran, and said to him, 'Get out of your country and from your relatives, and come to a land that I will show you.'... But when the time of the promise drew near which God had sworn to Abraham, the people grew and multiplied in Egypt till another king arose who did not know Joseph. This man dealt treacherously with our people, and oppressed our forefathers, making them expose their babies, so that they might not live. At this time Moses was born, and was well pleasing to God; and he was brought up in his father's house for three months. But when he was set out, Pharaoh's daughter took him away and brought him up as her own son. And Moses was learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians, and was mighty in words and deeds. ... Our fathers had the tabernacle of witness in the wilderness, as He appointed, instructing Moses to make it according to the pattern that he had seen, which our fathers, having received it in turn, also brought with Joshua into the land possessed by the Gentiles, whom God drove out before the face of our fathers until the days of David, who found favor before God and asked to find a dwelling for the God of Jacob. But Solomon built Him a house. However, the Most High does not dwell in temples made with hands, as the prophet says: 'Heaven is My throne, And earth is My footstool. What house will you build for Me?' says the LORD, 'Or what is the place of My rest? Has My hand not made all these things?' You stiff-necked and uncircumcised in heart and ears! You always resist the Holy Spirit; as your fathers did, so do you. Which of the prophets did your fathers not persecute? And they killed those who foretold the coming of the Just One, of whom you now have become the betrayers and murderers, who have received the law by the direction of angels and have not kept it.' When they heard these things they were cut to the heart, and they gnashed at him with their teeth. But he, being full of the Holy Spirit, gazed into heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right*

hand of God, and said, 'Look! I see the heavens opened and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God!' Then they cried out with a loud voice, stopped their ears, and ran at him with one accord; and they cast him out of the city and stoned him. And the witnesses laid down their clothes at the feet of a young man named Saul. And they stoned Stephen as he was calling on God and saying, 'Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.' Then he knelt down and cried out with a loud voice, 'Lord, do not charge them with this sin.' And when he had said this, he fell asleep."

2. Before he was martyred, Stephen recalled 1100 years of Jewish history in his defense of the Gospel
 - a. In verses 7:2-19, he shared about the Jewish patriarchs: Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph
 - b. In verses 7:20-43, he shared about the Jewish prophets, specifically Moses
 - c. In verses 7:44-50, he shared about the most important physical place of the Jewish faith, the temple
 - d. He explained that all these things—the patriarchs, the prophets, and the temple—gave them a wonderful heritage, but salvation is found in the person of Jesus Christ
3. Gnashing of teeth
 - a. Stephen challenged and rebuked the Jewish leaders regarding their rejection of Jesus as Messiah
 - i. **Acts 7:54** – *"When they heard these things they were cut to the heart, and they gnashed at him with their teeth."*
 1. "Cut to the heart" means that the leaders were convicted of their sin
 2. Rather than repent in humility, they responded with hostility
 3. In their anger, the leaders stoned Stephen to death
4. A martyr's example
 - a. Do I love God more than my own life?
 - i. Are you willing to be arrested or even die for Jesus?
 - ii. A martyr is killed because of his or her faith
 1. The second-century Christian historian Tertullian said, "The blood of the martyrs is the seed of the Church."
 - iii. The martyrdom of members of the early church is one piece of evidence for the resurrection of Jesus Christ
 1. People will not die for something they know to be false
 2. The first-century Roman historian Tacitus said, "And in their deaths, they were made the subjects of sport, for they were wrapped in the hides of wild beasts and torn to pieces by dogs, or nailed to crosses, or set on fire, and when day declined, were burned to serve for nocturnal lights."
 - iv. We won't be willing to die for Jesus if we are not first willing to live for Him
 - b. Do I forgive others who have wronged me?
 - i. **Acts 7:60** – *"Then he knelt down and cried out with a loud voice, 'Lord, do not charge them with this sin.'"*
 - ii. **Matthew 5:7a** – *"Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy."*

- iii. **Luke 23:34a** – “Jesus said, ‘Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.’” (1984 NIV)
- iv. **Matthew 6:12** – “...and forgive us our sins, as we have forgiven those who sin against us.” (NLT)
- v. Unforgiveness makes people prisoners of their own pain
- vi. Forgiveness does not excuse what the offender did
 - 1. To forgive can mean “to forward someone to God”
 - a. God retains the exclusive right to vengeance
 - i. **Romans 12:19** – “Do not take revenge, my friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: ‘It is mine to avenge; I will repay,’ says the Lord.” (1984 NIV)
- c. Am I prepared to see the Lord when I die?
 - i. **Acts 7:58-59** – “...and they cast him out of the city and stoned him. And the witnesses laid down their clothes at the feet of a young man named Saul. And they stoned Stephen as he was calling on God and saying, ‘Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.’”
 - ii. Stephen saw Jesus “standing”
 - 1. In other parts of Scripture, Jesus is described as “sitting” at the right hand of the Father
 - a. **Matthew 26:64b** – “...you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Power...”
 - b. **Colossians 3:1** – “If then you were raised with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God.”
 - c. Jesus may have stood as a way to honor Stephen for his faithfulness
 - iii. Stephen had complete confidence that he would go to be with his Maker
 - iv. We are all fallen sinners and need confidence like Stephen
 - 1. **Luke 19:10** – “...for the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost.”

Discussion Questions

1. Read **Acts 6:8-7:3; 7:17-22, 7:44-60** to provide a foundation for your Bible study time.
2. Why did Stephen provide the religious leaders with a summary of 1100 years of Jewish history? (See #2d above)
3. How did the leaders respond to Stephen’s rebuke of their rejection of Jesus? (See #3a-i above)
4. What is a martyr? (See #4a-ii above)
5. How is the martyrdom of members of the early church evidence for Christ’s resurrection? (See #4a-iii-1 above)
6. Have you ever wrestled with the idea of being arrested or killed in the name of Jesus? How do we

know if we would be willing to die for Jesus? (See #4a-iv above)

7. Read [Acts 7:60](#), [Matthew 5:7a](#), [Luke 23:34a](#), and [Matthew 6:12](#). How does Stephen set an example for forgiveness? Why is it important that we forgive others? Do you ever struggle with offering forgiveness? (See #4b above)
8. Read [Acts 7:58-59](#). How do we know Stephen was prepared to meet the Lord face to face? Are you prepared to see the Lord when you die? (See #4c above)
9. Close your meeting by allowing the Holy Spirit to lead your time of prayer.

* Unless noted, all Scriptures quoted are from the New King James Version (NKJV)

April 16, 2023

"From Bitter to Better"

Acts 8:4-25

Pastor Gary Hamrick



Have you ever battled bitterness? It's not that uncommon. Bitterness usually sets in after one painful or disappointing event, or series of events, that rob people of the joy they once had. Sometimes bitterness is expressed outwardly—people who are mean, angry, moody, and negative. But sometimes bitterness is internal—people who are suffering on the inside but smiling on the outside. Whether external or internal, God wants to heal us of bitterness and restore the joy of our salvation.

1. **Acts 8:4-25** – *"Therefore those who were scattered went everywhere preaching the word. Then Philip went down to the city of Samaria and preached Christ to them. And the multitudes with one accord heeded the things spoken by Philip, hearing and seeing the miracles which he did. For unclean spirits, crying with a loud voice, came out of many who were possessed; and many who were paralyzed and lame were healed. And there was great joy in that city. But there was a certain man called Simon, who previously practiced sorcery in the city and astonished the people of Samaria, claiming that he was someone great, to whom they all gave heed, from the least to the greatest, saying, 'This man is the great power of God.' And they heeded him because he had astonished them with his sorceries for a long time. But when they believed Philip as he preached the things concerning the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, both men and women were baptized. Then Simon himself also believed; and when he was baptized he continued with Philip, and was amazed, seeing the miracles and signs which were done. Now when the apostles who were at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent Peter and John to them, who, when they had come down, prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit. For as yet He had fallen upon none of them. They had only been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. Then they laid hands on them, and they received the Holy Spirit. And when Simon saw that through the laying on of the apostles' hands the Holy Spirit was given, he offered them money, saying, 'Give me this power also, that anyone on whom I lay hands may receive the Holy Spirit.' But Peter said to him, 'Your money perish with you, because you thought that the gift of God could be purchased with money! You have neither part nor portion in this matter, for your heart is not right in the sight of God. Repent therefore of this your wickedness, and pray God if perhaps the thought of your heart may be forgiven you. For I see that you are poisoned by bitterness and bound by iniquity.' Then Simon answered and said, 'Pray to the Lord for me, that none of the things which you have spoken may come upon me.' So when they had testified and preached the word of the Lord, they returned to Jerusalem, preaching the gospel in many villages of the Samaritans."*
2. A man named Simon
 - a. Because of persecution, the early church followers began to scatter into the countries surrounding Israel
 - b. Philip, one of the original deacons, went to Samaria and began evangelizing
 - c. Simon, a man who formerly practiced sorcery, was saved

- d. Upon seeing individuals receive the baptism of the Holy Spirit through the laying on of hands by the apostles Peter and John, Simon offered money in exchange for the same power
 - i. He wanted the prestige that came with being the conduit through which people received the baptism of the Holy Spirit
 - ii. Peter, by discernment of the Holy Spirit, recognized bitterness and envy in Simon's heart

3. Common causes of bitterness

- a. Envy and jealousy about what others have that you don't
 - i. This was the attitude Peter recognized in Simon
 - ii. Simon was envious of the power the Lord had granted the apostles
 - 1. **Acts 1:8** – *"But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth."*
- b. The disappointments of life
 - i. Hannah struggled with bitterness when she could not conceive
 - 1. **1 Samuel 1:10** – *"And she was in bitterness of soul, and prayed to the Lord and wept in anguish."*
- c. Betrayal and rejection by other people
 - i. Esau dealt with bitterness when his brother Jacob took the blessing that was supposed to be his
 - 1. **Genesis 27:34** – *"When Esau heard the words of his father, he cried with an exceedingly great and bitter cry, and said to his father, 'Bless me — me also, O my father!'"*
- d. The hardships and misery of life
 - i. Job faced bitterness when God allowed him to face the loss of his family, possessions, and health
 - 1. **Job 7:11** – *"Therefore I will not restrain my mouth; I will speak in the anguish of my spirit; I will complain in the bitterness of my soul."*
- e. Personal loss and the death of loved ones
 - i. Naomi became bitter after the death of her husband and two sons
 - 1. **Ruth 1:20** – *"But she said to them, 'Do not call me Naomi [Pleasant]; call me Mara [Bitter], for the Almighty has dealt very bitterly with me."*
- f. Personal failure
 - i. Peter was bitter as he grieved over his denial of Jesus
 - 1. **Luke 22:62** – *"So Peter went out and wept bitterly."*

4. Dealing with bitterness

- a. Bitterness affects all those around us and is a sin against God
- b. When we allow bitterness to settle in our hearts, we become sour
- c. God commands us to get rid of bitterness

- i. **Ephesians 4:31-32** – *“Let all bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, and evil speaking be put away from you, with all malice. And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God in Christ forgave you.”*
 - ii. **Hebrews 12:14-15** – *“Pursue peace with all people, and holiness, without which no one will see the Lord: looking carefully lest anyone fall short of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up cause trouble, and by this many become defiled.”*
- d. God wants to heal us of any bitterness
 - i. Getting rid of bitterness almost always involves forgiveness—either toward someone else or yourself
 - ii. We must pray for God to remove any bitterness
 - 1. **Acts 8:24** – *“Then Simon answered and said, ‘Pray to the Lord for me, that none of the things which you have spoken may come upon me.’”*

Discussion Questions

1. Read **Acts 8:4-25** to provide a foundation for your Bible study time.
2. Why did Peter rebuke Simon?
3. Read through the common causes of bitterness. Are there any you identify with? How have you experienced bitterness in your own life? (See #3 above)
4. Read **Ephesians 4:31-32** and **Hebrews 12:14-15**. Why is it important that we deal with bitterness? (See #4a-#4cii above)
5. How do we deal with bitterness? (See #4d-i and #4d-ii)
6. Close your meeting by allowing the Holy Spirit to lead your time of prayer.

* Unless noted, all Scriptures quoted are from the New King James Version (NKJV)



One of the most dramatic conversion stories is recorded in Acts 9 when Saul (Paul) met Jesus on the road to Damascus. This encounter would forever transform his life. Paul would go from being a persecutor and murderer of Christians to becoming a Believer himself who would, next to Jesus, have the most profound impact on the world for Jesus. It is a testament to the transforming power of Jesus and how He can radically change a person from the inside.

1. **Acts 8:1-3 & 9:1-9** – *"Now Saul was consenting to his death. At that time a great persecution arose against the church which was at Jerusalem; and they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles. And devout men carried Stephen to his burial, and made great lamentation over him. As for Saul, he made havoc of the church, entering every house, and dragging off men and women, committing them to prison. ... Then Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest and asked letters from him to the synagogues of Damascus, so that if he found any who were of the Way, whether men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem. As he journeyed he came near Damascus, and suddenly a light shone around him from heaven. Then he fell to the ground, and heard a voice saying to him, 'Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?' And he said, 'Who are You, Lord?' Then the Lord said, 'I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. It is hard for you to kick against the goads.' So he, trembling and astonished, said, 'Lord, what do You want me to do?' Then the Lord said to him, 'Arise and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do.' And the men who journeyed with him stood speechless, hearing a voice but seeing no one. Then Saul arose from the ground, and when his eyes were opened he saw no one. But they led him by the hand and brought him into Damascus. And he was three days without sight, and neither ate nor drank."*
2. Paul
 - a. Paul's given name was Saul, which means, "prayed for," or "asked of God"
 - i. His name changed to Paul in Acts 13; God would eventually call him to preach to the Gentiles, and he may have decided to adopt a Roman name to better connect with his audience
 - b. Paul was a Jew, of the tribe of Benjamin
 - i. He was likely a member of the Sanhedrin, the Jewish ruling council
 1. In Acts 23:1, he refers to members of the Sanhedrin as "brothers" rather than "fathers," as though they were his peers
 - ii. He was a Pharisee and strictly adhered to the letter of the law
 - c. Paul was first mentioned in Acts 7:58 at the stoning of Stephen
 - i. He was emotionally engaged in the persecution and execution of Christians
 1. He believed he was acting righteously
3. Paul's encounter with Jesus

- a. Paul was granted special permission to bound and imprison Christians in Damascus, Syria
 - i. Damascus was about 150 miles from Jerusalem
 - ii. While on the road to Damascus, a bright light enveloped Paul and his traveling companions, and Jesus spoke to Paul
 - 1. **Acts 9:4-5** – *“Then he fell to the ground, and heard a voice saying to him, ‘Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me? And he said, ‘Who are You, Lord?’ Then the Lord said, ‘I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. It is hard for you to kick against the goads.’”*
 - a. Jesus takes it personally when people mistreat both Christians and Jews
 - i. **Matthew 25:40b & 45b** – *“Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these My brethren, you did it to Me. ... Inasmuch as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to Me.”*
 - b. A goad was a tool that a farmer would use to prod oxen—if the oxen kicked back against it, they would injure themselves
 - iii. The other men could hear but not see Jesus
 - iv. God then blinded Paul for three days
 - 1. Paul fasted and prayed during this time
 - a. You cannot simply put Jesus “over” an old life; Paul had to die to himself
 - i. **Mark 2:21** – *“No one sews a piece of unshrunk cloth on an old garment; or else the new piece pulls away from the old, and the tear is made worse.”*
- b. **Acts 9:10-16** – *“Now there was a certain disciple at Damascus named Ananias; and to him the Lord said in a vision, ‘Ananias.’ And he said, ‘Here I am, Lord.’ So the Lord said to him, ‘Arise and go to the street called Straight, and inquire at the house of Judas for one called Saul of Tarsus, for behold, he is praying. And in a vision he has seen a man named Ananias coming in and putting his hand on him, so that he might receive his sight.’ Then Ananias answered, ‘Lord, I have heard from many about this man, how much harm he has done to Your saints in Jerusalem. And here he has authority from the chief priests to bind all who call on Your name.’ But the Lord said to him, ‘Go, for he is a chosen vessel of Mine to bear My name before Gentiles, kings, and the children of Israel. For I will show him how many things he must suffer for My name’s sake.’”*
 - i. Ananias was hesitant to believe that Paul’s conversion was genuine, but God assured him that He had chosen Paul for His purposes
 - 1. Paul would later suffer much for Jesus
 - a. **2 Corinthians 11:23b-28** – *“I have worked much harder, been in prison more frequently, been flogged more severely, and been exposed to death again and again. Five times I received from the Jews the forty lashes minus one. Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was stoned, three times I was shipwrecked, I spent a night and a day in the open sea, I have been constantly on the move. I have been in danger*

from rivers, in danger from bandits, in danger from my own countrymen, in danger from Gentiles; in danger in the city, in danger in the country, in danger at sea; and in danger from false brothers. I have labored and toiled and have often gone without sleep; I have known hunger and thirst and have often gone without food; I have been cold and naked. Besides everything else, I face daily the pressure of my concern for all the churches.” (1984 NIV)

4. The transforming grace of Jesus Christ

- a. **Acts 9:17-22** – *“And Ananias went his way and entered the house; and laying his hands on him he said, ‘Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus, who appeared to you on the road as you came, has sent me that you may receive your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit.’ Immediately there fell from his eyes something like scales, and he received his sight at once; and he arose and was baptized. So when he had received food, he was strengthened. Then Saul spent some days with the disciples at Damascus. Immediately he preached the Christ in the synagogues, that He is the Son of God. Then all who heard were amazed, and said, ‘Is this not he who destroyed those who called on this name in Jerusalem, and has come here for that purpose, so that he might bring them bound to the chief priests?’ But Saul increased all the more in strength, and confounded the Jews who dwelt in Damascus, proving that this Jesus is the Christ.”*
 - i. Ananias went and laid hands on Paul, and Paul received his sight back
 1. Paul was baptized
 2. He spent a few days with the disciples
 3. He immediately began to preach about Jesus
- b. God would eventually inspire Paul to write one-third of the New Testament, and Paul would travel the known world sharing the good news of Jesus Christ
 - i. **1 Timothy 1:13-14** – *“Even though I was once a blasphemer and a persecutor and a violent man, I was shown mercy because I acted in ignorance and unbelief. The grace of our Lord was poured out on me abundantly, along with the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus.” (1984 NIV)*
- c. In AD 67, when he was soon to be beheaded by Emperor Nero, Paul stated,
 - i. **2 Timothy 4:6b-8** – *“...the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Finally, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give to me on that Day, and not to me only but also to all who have loved His appearing.”*
- d. God transformed Paul’s life, and He is still transforming lives today

Discussion Questions

1. Read **Acts 8:1-3 & 9:1-22** to provide a foundation for your Bible study time.
2. Who was the apostle Paul? What was his background? (See #2 above)
3. What happened to Paul on the road to Damascus? (See #3a-ii-1 above)

4. Why did Jesus accuse Paul of persecuting Him personally? (See #3a-ii-1-a above)
5. Why did Jesus use a “goad” as an analogy? Have you ever experienced this principle in your own life? (See #3a-ii-1-b above)
6. Read **Mark 2:21**. Why did God blind Paul for three days? (See #3a-iv-1-a & #3a-iv-1-a-i above)
7. Read **Acts 9:10-16**. Why was Ananias hesitant to go see Paul? (See #3b & #3b-i above)
8. Read **2 Corinthians 11:23b-28**. How do we know that Paul’s conversion was genuine? (See #3b-i-1-a above)
9. Read **Acts 9:17-22**. How did Paul respond after receiving his sight back? (See, #4a-i-1 through #4a-i-3 above)
10. Read **1 Timothy 1:13-14** & **2 Timothy 4:6b-8**. How did God use Paul after his conversion? What does this tell us about God’s ability to transform lives? (See #4b-#4d above)
11. How has the transforming work of Christ changed your life?
12. Close your meeting by allowing the Holy Spirit to lead your time of prayer.

* Unless noted, all Scriptures quoted are from the New King James Version (NKJV)

May 14, 2023

“Lessons from a Jew and a Gentile”

Acts 10:1-23

Pastor Gary Hamrick



Some people believe they are relatively good and don't really need God. Others believe they are too bad for God to forgive them. The truth is that it doesn't matter what we think about ourselves. What matters is what God thinks. And what God thinks is that everyone needs a Savior because no one is good enough to get to Heaven on their own or bad enough to be excluded. Jesus died for all, that “everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.”

1. **Acts 10:1-23** – *“There was a certain man in Caesarea called Cornelius, a centurion of what was called the Italian Regiment, a devout man and one who feared God with all his household, who gave alms generously to the people, and prayed to God always. About the ninth hour of the day he saw clearly in a vision an angel of God coming in and saying to him, ‘Cornelius!’ And when he observed him, he was afraid, and said, ‘What is it, lord?’ So he said to him, ‘Your prayers and your alms have come up for a memorial before God. Now send men to Joppa, and send for Simon whose surname is Peter. He is lodging with Simon, a tanner, whose house is by the sea. He will tell you what you must do.’ And when the angel who spoke to him had departed, Cornelius called two of his household servants and a devout soldier from among those who waited on him continually. So when he had explained all these things to them, he sent them to Joppa. The next day, as they went on their journey and drew near the city, Peter went up on the housetop to pray, about the sixth hour. Then he became very hungry and wanted to eat; but while they made ready, he fell into a trance and saw heaven opened and an object like a great sheet bound at the four corners, descending to him and let down to the earth. In it were all kinds of four-footed animals of the earth, wild beasts, creeping things, and birds of the air. And a voice came to him, ‘Rise, Peter; kill and eat.’ But Peter said, ‘Not so, Lord! For I have never eaten anything common or unclean.’ And a voice spoke to him again the second time, ‘What God has cleansed you must not call common.’ This was done three times. And the object was taken up into heaven again. Now while Peter wondered within himself what this vision which he had seen meant, behold, the men who had been sent from Cornelius had made inquiry for Simon's house, and stood before the gate. And they called and asked whether Simon, whose surname was Peter, was lodging there. While Peter thought about the vision, the Spirit said to him, ‘Behold, three men are seeking you. Arise therefore, go down and go with them, doubting nothing; for I have sent them.’ Then Peter went down to the men who had been sent to him from Cornelius, and said, ‘Yes, I am he whom you seek. For what reason have you come?’ And they said, ‘Cornelius the centurion, a just man, one who fears God and has a good reputation among all the nation of the Jews, was divinely instructed by a holy angel to summon you to his house, and to hear words from you.’ Then he invited them in and lodged them. On the next day Peter went away with them, and some brethren from Joppa accompanied him.”*
2. Jews and Gentiles
 - a. In Biblical times, there were only two classes of people—Jews and Gentiles (non-Jews)

- b. God created the Jewish people through Abraham and his descendants, giving them a special role as the conduit through which He would reveal Himself to the world
 - i. Ultimately Jesus Christ, the Savior of mankind, would be revealed through the Jewish people
 - c. God gave the Jews land, language, and laws to express who He is
 - i. This sometimes led to pride within the community
 - ii. Some Jews believed Gentiles existed to be fuel for the fires of hell
 - iii. God selected a specific group of people to reveal Himself, but He died for all and loves all
- 3. The first Gentile convert
 - a. Cornelius was described as
 - i. *“Devout”*
 - ii. *“Feared God”*
 - iii. *“Gave generously”*
 - iv. *“Prayed to God always”*
 - b. He was what some might consider “a good person”
- 4. Being “good” is not good enough; we all need a Savior—**JESUS**
 - a. No one is good enough on his/her own
 - i. An individual who thinks that he/she is a “good person” is harder to convince of his/her need for a Savior
 - b. The missing piece of Cornelius’ life was Jesus
 - c. God sent an angel to visit Cornelius telling him to send for Peter, and He instructed Peter to go as requested and tell Cornelius about Jesus
- 5. Whatever a person’s tribe, tongue, race, or nation, Believers are one people under the Lordship of Jesus Christ
 - a. Before Peter went to Cornelius, God had to teach him to be receptive to a Gentile being saved
 - b. God gave Peter a vision of animals that were not kosher (against Jewish law to consume), and instructed him to *“take and eat”*
 - c. **Mark 7:18a-19** – *“‘Don’t you see that nothing that enters a man from the outside can make him ‘unclean?’ For it doesn’t go into his heart but into his stomach, and then out of his body.’ (In saying this, Jesus declared all foods ‘clean’).”* (1984 NIV)
 - i. Why did God give dietary laws to begin with?
 - 1. There were regulations and rituals that God put into effect for a time to distinguish the Jews from the pagan nations around them and reveal who God is
 - d. Believers are to be known as belonging to Jesus rather than being known by what they eat, wear, or which holidays they celebrate
- 6. Rituals and regulations have been fulfilled in Christ and are no longer necessary to keep

- a. **Colossians 2:16-17** – *“Therefore do not let anyone judge you by what you eat or drink, or with regard to a religious festival, a New Moon celebration or a Sabbath day. These are a shadow of the things that were to come; the reality, however, is found in Christ.”* (1984 NIV)
 - b. Christ fulfilled the dietary and ceremonial aspects of the law
 - i. The moral code is still intact
 - c. Peter did not immediately understand this, as he took pride in the fact that he upheld the dietary laws
 - d. God showed Peter that the dietary laws were no longer binding, and the traditional views Jews held toward Gentiles were not appropriate
 - i. **Acts 10:15** – *“And a voice spoke to him again the second time, ‘What God has cleansed you must not call common.’”*
 - ii. **Acts 10:15** – *“The voice spoke to him a second time, ‘Do not call anything impure that God has made clean.’”* (1984 NIV)
7. We do not worship people, pray to people, or get to God through people; Jesus is our direct access to God and HE alone is worthy of our worship
- a. **Hebrews 4:16** – *“Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need.”*
 - b. When Peter arrived, Cornelius was starstruck and fell at his feet to worship him
 - i. Peter corrected him, saying, *“Stand up; I myself am also a man.”*
 - c. Peter told how God had changed his view that only Jews could be saved, and then he shared the Gospel
 - i. **Acts 10:27-28; 38-48** – *“And as he talked with him, he went in and found many who had come together. Then he said to them, ‘You know how unlawful it is for a Jewish man to keep company with or go to one of another nation. But God has shown me that I should not call any man common or unclean. ... God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power, who went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with Him. And we are witnesses of all things which He did both in the land of the Jews and in Jerusalem, whom they killed by hanging on a tree. Him God raised up on the third day, and showed Him openly, not to all the people, but to witnesses chosen before by God, even to us who ate and drank with Him after He arose from the dead. And He commanded us to preach to the people, and to testify that it is He who was ordained by God to be Judge of the living and the dead. To Him all the prophets witness that, through His name, whoever believes in Him will receive remission of sins.’ While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit fell upon all those who heard the word. And those of the circumcision who believed were astonished, as many as came with Peter, because the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out on the Gentiles also. For they heard them speak with tongues and magnify God. Then Peter answered, ‘Can anyone forbid water, that these should not be baptized who have received the Holy Spirit just as we have?’ And he commanded them to be baptized in the name of the Lord. Then they asked him to stay a few days.”*
 - d. Jesus died for all

- i. **Romans 10:12-13** – *“For there is no difference between Jew and Gentile—the same Lord is Lord of all and richly blesses all who call on him, for, ‘Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.’”* (1984 NIV)

Discussion Questions

1. Read **Acts 10:1-23** to provide a foundation for your Bible study time.
2. Why did God give the Jewish people specific land, language, and laws? (See #2c-iii above)
3. How do these verses describe Cornelius? (See #3 above)
4. Why is “being good” not good enough? What was missing in Cornelius’ life? (See #4 above)
5. Why was Peter hesitant to share the Gospel with Cornelius? What did God teach him about this attitude? (See #5a, #5b, and #5c above)
6. Read **Mark 7:18a-19**. Why did God give dietary restrictions to the Jewish people? (See #5c above)
7. Read **Colossians 2:16-17**. Why are Old Testament rituals and regulations no longer necessary? (See #6a and #6b above)
8. Read **Acts 10:15** in both the NKJV and the 1984 NIV. How did God annulling the dietary laws coincide with Him offering salvation to Gentiles? (See #6d above)
9. Read **Hebrews 4:16**. What gives us direct access to God? How should this affect our approach to God? (See #7 and #7a above)
10. Read **Acts 10:27-28, 38-48**. What is the significance of salvation that is available to all?
11. Close your meeting by allowing the Holy Spirit to lead your time of prayer.

* Unless noted, all Scriptures quoted are from the New King James Version (NKJV)

May 28, 2023

“That’s Not Fair!”

Acts 12:1-11

Pastor Gary Hamrick



We tend to view events and circumstances in life as either “fair” or “unfair.” Sometimes it’s hard to reconcile situations that don’t make sense to us. What do you do when God doesn’t do what you want Him to do? In Acts 12, two of Jesus’ original twelve disciples, James and Peter, were arrested by King Herod because of the ongoing persecution of Christians. Peter was miraculously delivered from prison by an angel sent by God, but James was martyred. Why did God rescue one but allow the other to be executed? In this study, we’ll tackle this theological dilemma.

1. **Acts 12:1-11** – *“Now about that time Herod the king stretched out his hand to harass some from the church. Then he killed James the brother of John with the sword. And because he saw that it pleased the Jews, he proceeded further to seize Peter also. Now it was during the Days of Unleavened Bread. So when he had arrested him, he put him in prison, and delivered him to four squads of soldiers to keep him, intending to bring him before the people after Passover. Peter was therefore kept in prison, but constant prayer was offered to God for him by the church. And when Herod was about to bring him out, that night Peter was sleeping, bound with two chains between two soldiers; and the guards before the door were keeping the prison. Now behold, an angel of the Lord stood by him, and a light shone in the prison; and he struck Peter on the side and raised him up, saying, ‘Arise quickly!’ And his chains fell off his hands. Then the angel said to him, ‘Gird yourself and tie on your sandals;’ and so he did. And he said to him, ‘Put on your garment and follow me.’ So he went out and followed him, and did not know that what was done by the angel was real, but thought he was seeing a vision. When they were past the first and the second guard posts, they came to the iron gate that leads to the city, which opened to them of its own accord; and they went out and went down one street, and immediately the angel departed from him. And when Peter had come to himself, he said, ‘Now I know for certain that the Lord has sent His angel, and has delivered me from the hand of Herod and from all the expectation of the Jewish people.’”*
2. The persecution of James and Peter
 - a. Jews who did not believe in Jesus and Romans joined forces to persecute Christians in the early church
 - b. James and Peter, two of the original twelve disciples, were subject to this persecution
 - i. James
 1. Brother of John; not the same James who wrote the Book of James, who was the half-brother of Jesus
 2. James and John were fishermen and known for their quick tempers
 - a. In **Mark 3**, Jesus called them “*Boanerges*,” meaning “Sons of Thunder”
 - b. In **Luke 9**, upon being denied lodging in Samaria, they suggested calling fire down from heaven to consume the Samaritans
 - c. In **Mark 10**, Jesus rebuked them for asking if they could sit on His right and left when He came into His glory
 - ii. Peter

1. The Bible records more about Peter than any of the other original twelve disciples
 2. He wrote the books of 1 Peter and 2 Peter
 3. He was impulsive
 - a. In [Mark 8:31-33](#), when Jesus told His disciples that He would be killed, Peter rebuked Jesus to His face, and Jesus said, *“Get behind Me Satan! For you are not mindful of the things of God, but the things of men.”*
 - b. In [Matthew 26:31-35](#), Jesus predicted that His disciples would forsake Him
 - i. Peter claimed that even if everyone else deserted Jesus, he would not
 - ii. Shortly after, he denied Jesus three times as Jesus predicted
 4. He was also courageous and adventurous
 - a. When Jesus came to the disciples walking on the water, Peter was the only one who got out of the boat; ultimately he would begin to sink as fear set in, but he was the only disciple who attempted to walk on the water with Jesus
 - b. When Jesus asked “Who do you say that I am?” Peter was the first person to declare, “You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God.”
 - c. After his restoration following his denial of Jesus, God used Peter to preach the first evangelical message, and three thousand people were saved
 - iii. James and Peter, along with John, were part of the inner circle of Jesus’ ministry
 1. When Jesus healed Jairus’ daughter in [Mark 5](#), they were the only disciples that Jesus took with Him into Jairus’ home
 2. They were the only disciples with Jesus at the Mount of Transfiguration in [Matthew 17](#), where the glory of God came upon Jesus, and Moses and Elijah appeared
 3. When Jesus prayed in the Garden of Gethsemane in [Mark 14](#), Jesus took Peter, James, and John with Him to have them pray separately from the other disciples before going farther alone
 - iv. Peter and James both loved and followed Jesus and would each ultimately die for Jesus
3. A challenging theological dilemma
- a. Why is it that God allowed James to be executed and He chose to rescue Peter by delivering him from jail?
 - i. We can look at similar scenarios in our own lives and be overcome by feeling “it’s not fair”
 - b. How do we reconcile these things, particularly where it involves what God may do for one person and not do for another?
 - c. We tend to evaluate and judge things as fair or unfair by our own personal standards, but what does Scripture tell us?

4. A Biblical perspective—what do you do when God doesn't do what you want Him to do?
 - a. God's **ways** are HIGHER
 - i. Some things will simply be a mystery to us and difficult to understand until we are with Jesus
 1. **Isaiah 55:8-9** – *“For My thoughts are not your thoughts, Nor are your ways My ways,” says the LORD. ‘For as the heavens are higher than the earth, So are My ways higher than your ways, And My thoughts than your thoughts.’”*
 2. **Ecclesiastes 8:17** – *“Then I saw all that God has done. No one can comprehend what goes on under the sun. Despite all his efforts to search it out, man cannot discover its meaning. Even if a wise man claims he knows, he cannot really comprehend it.”* (1984 NIV)
 3. **Deuteronomy 29:29** – *“The secret things belong to the LORD our God, but the things revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may follow all the words of this law.”* (1984 NIV)
 - b. God's **nature** is GOOD
 - i. He always has our best interests at heart
 1. **Psalms 100:5** – *“For the LORD is good and his love endures forever; his faithfulness continues through all generations.”* (1984 NIV)
 2. When things challenge us, we tend to deny God's goodness
 - a. This was Satan's strategy with Eve in the Garden
 - i. God provided freedom with one rule, and Satan turned it into legalism — “God's holding back on you”
 3. Our circumstances do not change the nature of God
 4. **Psalms 84:11** – *“For the LORD God is a sun and shield; the LORD will give grace and glory; no good thing will He withhold from those who walk uprightly.”*
 - c. God's **grace** is SUFFICIENT
 - i. He will strengthen us in our weaknesses
 1. In 2 Corinthians, the apostle Paul spoke of a “thorn” in his flesh; we don't know exactly what Paul's “thorn” was, but it was debilitating and distracting, and Paul pleaded with God to remove it
 - a. **2 Corinthians 12:8-10** – *“And He said to me, ‘My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness.’ Therefore most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in needs, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ's sake. For when I am weak, then I am strong.”*
 2. If God doesn't change our circumstances, He will strengthen us to endure them
 3. In our weakness, we can feel the greatness of His power
 - d. God's **justice** is PERFECT
 - i. He is going to sort it all out in the end

1. **Luke 3:5-6** – *“Every valley shall be filled and every mountain and hill brought low; the crooked places shall be made straight and the rough ways smooth; and all flesh shall see the salvation of God.”*
- ii. God will deal with every injustice, and deliver and rescue all His children—if not in this life, in the life to come
 1. God dealt with Herod
 - a. **Acts 12:20** – *“Now Herod had been very angry with the people of Tyre and Sidon; but they came to him with one accord, and having made Blastus the king's personal aide their friend, they asked for peace, because their country was supplied with food by the king's country. So on a set day Herod, arrayed in royal apparel, sat on his throne and gave an oration to them. And the people kept shouting, ‘The voice of a god and not of a man!’ Then immediately an angel of the Lord struck him, because he did not give glory to God. And he was eaten by worms and died.”*
 2. God judged Herod, but took James and (eventually Peter) to heaven
- iii. God will have the last word

Discussion Questions

1. Read **Acts 12:1-11** to provide a foundation for your Bible study time.
2. What is the theological dilemma present in this passage? (See #3a above)
3. Do you ever struggle with feeling that God isn't being fair?
4. Read **Isaiah 55:8-9**, **Ecclesiastes 8:17**, and **Deuteronomy 29:29**. Why are God's ways “higher” than our ways? How can this serve as a comfort to us? (See #4a above)
5. Read **Psalms 100:5** and **Psalms 84:11**. Does God ever “hold out” on us? What should we do when we are tempted to deny God's goodness? (See #4b above)
6. Read **2 Corinthians 12:8-10**. How should we react when God allows difficult circumstances to remain in our lives? (See #4c above)
7. Read **Luke 3:5-6**. How will God deal with injustice? (See #4d above)
8. Discuss a time when you saw God's faithfulness amid difficult circumstances.
9. Close your meeting by allowing the Holy Spirit to lead your time of prayer.

* Unless noted, all Scriptures quoted are from the New King James Version (NKJV)

June 11, 2023

“Embrace God’s Grace”

Acts 13

Pastor Gary Hamrick



Did you know that being a “good person” is not good enough? The Bible tells us that the human condition is broken and sinful and therefore we need a Savior—Jesus. We can’t do or say enough good things to overcome our broken condition. But here’s the good news—God offers us forgiveness of sins through faith in Jesus and what He did on the cross when he died for our sins. That act of kindness and mercy is God’s grace. In this teaching from a sermon that Paul delivered in Acts 13, we will learn to embrace God’s grace and receive the forgiveness we all need!

1. **Acts 13:1-3, 13-15** – *“Now in the church that was at Antioch there were certain prophets and teachers: Barnabas, Simeon who was called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen who had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch, and Saul. As they ministered to the Lord and fasted, the Holy Spirit said, ‘Now separate to Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.’ Then, having fasted and prayed, and laid hands on them, they sent them away. ... Now when Paul and his party set sail from Paphos, they came to Perga in Pamphylia; and John, departing from them, returned to Jerusalem. But when they departed from Perga, they came to Antioch in Pisidia, and went into the synagogue on the Sabbath day and sat down. And after the reading of the Law and the Prophets, the rulers of the synagogue sent to them, saying, ‘Men and brethren, if you have any word of exhortation for the people, say on.’”*
2. The Holy Spirit called Paul into ministry
 - a. Following his conversion, Paul spent about ten years in preparation for God’s calling on his life
 - b. While Paul was serving in Antioch, The Holy Spirit spoke—most likely through a word of prophecy—and announced that Paul (along with Barnabas) was ready for ministry
3. Paul’s first missionary tour
 - a. Took about two years to complete (ca. AD 46-48)
 - b. He sailed from the island of Cyprus to several cities in Asia Minor (Turkey) and then back to Antioch in Syria
 - c. Barnabas accompanied Paul and they were later joined by John Mark (who wrote the Gospel of Mark)
 - d. In total, they traveled around twelve hundred miles
 - e. Paul’s first convert was Sergius Paulus, the proconsul (governor) of Cyprus
4. Paul preached faith over works
 - a. In each place Paul went, he would first visit the synagogue before preaching to the Gentiles
 - b. The Jews prided themselves on their obedience to the law
 - i. Faith had become secondary to obedience in Jewish culture
 - c. We are accepted through faith in Jesus Christ, not obedience to the law

- i. **Genesis 15:6** – *“Abram believed the Lord, and he credited it to him as righteousness.”* (1984 NIV)
 - ii. **Romans 3:10b** – *“There is none righteous, no, not one.”*
 - iii. **Romans 3:23** – *“For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.”*
- d. Paul reviewed Jewish history, reminding them that Jesus was a descendant of David, and introduced them to the message of grace
 - i. **Acts 13:23, 38-39, 43** – *“From this man's seed, according to the promise, God raised up for Israel a Savior—Jesus ... Therefore let it be known to you, brethren, that through this Man is preached to you the forgiveness of sins; and by Him everyone who believes is justified from all things from which you could not be justified by the law of Moses. ... Now when the congregation had broken up, many of the Jews and devout proselytes followed Paul and Barnabas, who, speaking to them, persuaded them to continue in the grace of God.”*

5. Grace

- a. Scripture explains grace as God’s unmerited favor and His undeserved kindness
- b. The word *grace* (or some form of it) appears 185 times in the Bible
- c. The first time the Bible mentions grace is in Genesis
 - i. **Genesis 6:8** – *“But Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord.”*
- d. The last time the Bible mentions grace is in the last verse of the Bible
 - i. **Revelation 22:21** – *“The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen.”*
- e. Grace is one of the key attributes of God
 - i. **Psalm 145:8** – *“The LORD is gracious and full of compassion, slow to anger and great in mercy.”*
- f. Grace is personified in Jesus
 - i. **John 1:14, 17** – *“And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth. ... For the law was given through Moses, but grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.”*
- g. Grace is the basis for our salvation through faith in Jesus Christ
 - i. **Ephesians 2:7-9** – *“...that in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast.”*

6. Grace does not mean the law of God is without merit

- a. The moral code is still intact
- b. There is a purpose of the law
 - i. It explains God’s righteous standard
 - 1. **Romans 7:7b** – *“...I would not have known sin except through the law. For I would not have known covetousness unless the law had said, ‘You shall not covet.’”*
 - ii. It exposes our sinful condition

1. **Hebrews 4:12** – *“For the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.”*
- iii. It expresses our need for a Savior
 1. **Galatians 3:24-25** – *“Therefore the law was our tutor to bring us to Christ, that we might be justified by faith. But after faith has come, we are no longer under a tutor.”*
 2. *Tutor* translates to **pedagogue**, which was a person tasked with caring for a child, including walking the child to school—pedagogues connected children with educational instruction as the law connects our hearts to the heart of the Savior
7. Amazing grace
 - a. Being a good person does not save us
 - b. We are saved through a personal relationship with Jesus
 - c. John Newton, a former slave trader who found redemption in Christ and wrote the hymn *Amazing Grace*, near his death said, “My memory is nearly gone, but two things I remember: One, I am a great sinner, and two, God is a great Savior.”

Discussion Questions

1. Read **Acts 13:1-3, 13-15** to provide a foundation for your Bible study time.
2. Read **Genesis 15:6, Romans 3:10b**, and **Romans 3:23**. On what basis are we, as sinful human beings, accepted by Christ? (See #4c above)
3. Read **Acts 13:23, 38-39, 43**. Why was Paul’s message of faith over works so radical to the Jews? (See #4b and #4d above)
4. How does Scripture define grace? (See #5a above)
5. Read **Psalms 145:8** and **John 1:14, 17**. Where do you see grace in God’s character? How does Jesus personify grace? (See #5e and #5f above)
6. Read **Ephesians 2:7-9**. What role does grace play in salvation? (See #5g above)
7. Read **Romans 7:7b, Hebrews 4:12**, and **Galatians 3:24-25**. What is the purpose of the law? (See #6b above)

8. Have you ever attempted to earn God's favor through "being a good person"? Why doesn't this work?
9. Discuss a specific time when you clearly saw God's grace in your life.
10. Close your meeting by allowing the Holy Spirit to lead your time of prayer.

* Unless noted, all Scriptures quoted are from the New King James Version (NKJV)

June 18, 2023

"What Tough Times Teach Us"

Acts 14:8-22

Pastor Gary Hamrick



If you are going through a difficult time, you are not alone. Plenty of people suffer in this life, but for the Christian, there are things we can learn through adversity. Acts 14:22 says, "We must through many tribulations enter the kingdom of God." Pastor Gary unpacks this verse and teaches four things that we can learn through tough times.

1. **Acts 14:8-22** – *"And in Lystra a certain man without strength in his feet was sitting, a cripple from his mother's womb, who had never walked. This man heard Paul speaking. Paul, observing him intently and seeing that he had faith to be healed, said with a loud voice, 'Stand up straight on your feet!' And he leaped and walked. Now when the people saw what Paul had done, they raised their voices, saying in the Lycaonian language, 'The gods have come down to us in the likeness of men!' And Barnabas they called Zeus, and Paul, Hermes, because he was the chief speaker. Then the priest of Zeus, whose temple was in front of their city, brought oxen and garlands to the gates, intending to sacrifice with the multitudes. But when the apostles Barnabas and Paul heard this, they tore their clothes and ran in among the multitude, crying out and saying, 'Men, why are you doing these things? We also are men with the same nature as you, and preach to you that you should turn from these useless things to the living God, who made the heaven, the earth, the sea, and all things that are in them, who in bygone generations allowed all nations to walk in their own ways. Nevertheless He did not leave Himself without witness, in that He did good, gave us rain from heaven and fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with food and gladness.' And with these sayings they could scarcely restrain the multitudes from sacrificing to them. Then Jews from Antioch and Iconium came there; and having persuaded the multitudes, they stoned Paul and dragged him out of the city, supposing him to be dead. However, when the disciples gathered around him, he rose up and went into the city. And the next day he departed with Barnabas to Derbe. And when they had preached the gospel to that city and made many disciples, they returned to Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch, strengthening the souls of the disciples, exhorting them to continue in the faith, and saying, 'We must through many tribulations enter the kingdom of God.'"*
2. Paul and Barnabas in Lystra
 - a. Part of Paul's first missionary tour, between AD 46 and 48
 - b. While there, Paul healed a man crippled in both feet
 - c. Because of the miracle, the crowd thought Paul and Barnabas were the Greek gods Hermes and Zeus
 - i. According to local myth, Hermes and Zeus visited Lystra many years before, went unrecognized, and were shown no hospitality by anyone except one elderly couple
 - ii. As a result of their mistreatment, the gods destroyed the city with a flood, saving only the elderly couple and turning their home into the temple of Zeus

- iii. When the residents saw Paul perform a miracle, they immediately assumed Hermes and Zeus had returned and didn't want to make the same mistake supposedly made by the residents of Lystra years before
 - iv. Paul unsuccessfully argued that he and Barnabas were only men, only there to point them to the one true God
 - d. Some Jews that were hostile toward Christianity then stirred up the crowd against Paul and Barnabas, and the crowd turned against them, ultimately stoning Paul
 - e. It is likely that Paul was killed
 - i. In 2 Corinthians 12 Paul described an experience of being taken up to heaven
 - 1. Most scholars believe that passage is in reference to Paul's experience being stoned in Lystra
 - ii. **Acts 14:20** states that the disciples *"gathered around him,"* so the disciples may have laid hands on Paul and prayed, and God may have revived him
 - f. Paul and Barnabas left Lystra but soon returned, where Paul exhorted the disciples
 - i. **Acts 14:22b** – *"We must through many tribulations enter the kingdom of God."*
 - ii. **Acts 14:22b** – *"We must go through many hardships to enter the kingdom of God."* (1984 NIV)
 - iii. His desire for strengthening Believers was greater than his own fear of death
- 3. What did Paul mean when he said, *"We must through many tribulations enter the kingdom of God"*?
 - a. Paul was not implying that hard work and suffering are a means to get to heaven
 - i. The suffering that opened heaven for us was Jesus' death on the cross; access to heaven is through faith in Jesus
 - b. There is a difference between the "kingdom of God" and the "kingdom of heaven"—the first is a designation; the second is a destination
 - i. **Luke 17:20b-21** – *"The kingdom of God does not come with observation; nor will they say, 'See here!' or 'See there!' For indeed, the kingdom of God is within you."*
 - c. When you submit to His kingdom, you will encounter and experience some measure of trial, tribulation, or suffering
 - i. **1 Peter 4:12-13** – *"Dear friends, do not be surprised at the painful trial you are suffering, as though something strange were happening to you. But rejoice that you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed."* (1984 NIV)
 - ii. **2 Timothy 3:12** – *"Yes, and all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution."*
 - iii. **John 16:33** – *"These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world."*
 - d. Paul understood what it meant to suffer
 - i. **2 Corinthians 11:23-28** – *"I have worked much harder, been in prison more frequently, been flogged more severely, and been exposed to death again and again. Five times I received from the Jews the forty lashes minus one. Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was stoned, three times I was shipwrecked, I spent a night and a day in the open sea, I have been constantly on the move. I have been in danger from rivers, in danger from bandits, in danger from my own countrymen, in*

danger from Gentiles; in danger in the city, in danger in the country, in danger at sea; and in danger from false brothers. I have labored and toiled and have often gone without sleep; I have known hunger and thirst and have often gone without food; I have been cold and naked. Besides everything else, I face daily the pressure of my concern for all the churches.” (1984 NIV)

- e. The Christian life is not a life of ease; there will be some degree of suffering and trials
 - i. For Believers, this life is as bad as it gets; for unbelievers, this life is as good as it gets

4. What tough times teach us

a. Patience

- i. **James 1:2-3** – *“My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience.”*

b. Perseverance

- i. **Romans 5:3-5** – *“And not only that, but we also glory in tribulations, knowing that tribulation produces perseverance; and perseverance, character; and character, hope. Now hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us.”*
- ii. **James 1:12** – *“Blessed is the man who endures temptation; for when he has been approved, he will receive the crown of life which the Lord has promised to those who love Him.”*

c. Perspective

- i. **Romans 8:18** – *“I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us.” (1984 NIV)*

d. Presence of God

- i. **Hebrews 13:5b** – *“I will never leave you nor forsake you.”*
- ii. **Matthew 28:20b** – *“Lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.”*
- iii. **Isaiah 41:10** – *“Fear not, for I am with you; be not dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you, yes, I will help you, I will uphold you with My righteous right hand.”*

5. Oaks of righteousness

- a. The Southern Live Oak Tree is the hardest wood in North America and was at one time used to make ships
- b. The trees become strong through resistance to the winds that come off the ocean
 - i. **Isaiah 61:2-3** – *“To proclaim the year of the Lord's favor and the day of vengeance of our God, to comfort all who mourn, and provide for those who grieve in Zion—to bestow on them a crown of beauty instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning, and a garment of praise instead of a spirit of despair. They will be called oaks of righteousness, a planting of the Lord for the display of his splendor.” (1984 NIV)*

Discussion Questions

1. Read **Acts 14:8-22** to provide a foundation for your Bible study time.
2. When Paul stated, *“We must through many tribulations enter the kingdom of God,”* was he implying that we must work our way to heaven? Why or why not? (See #3a above)

3. Read **Luke 17:20b-21**. To what kingdom was Paul referring? What is the significance of this “designation” in the life of the Believer? (See #3b above)
4. Read **1 Peter 4:12-13**, **2 Timothy 3:12**, and **John 16:33**. How do we know that suffering is part of the Christian life? (See #3c above)
5. Read **2 Corinthians 11:23-28**. How do we know that Paul was qualified to speak on suffering? (See #3d above)
6. Read **James 1:2-3** and **Romans 5:3-5**. Discuss a time when a difficult circumstance helped you develop patience and perseverance. (See #4a & 4b above)
7. Read **Romans 8:18**. Has a challenging situation ever caused you to shift your perspective away from things that were not important? (See #4c above)
8. Read **Hebrews 13:5b**, **Matthew 28:20b**, and **Isaiah 41:10**. What is God’s promise to us during tough times? What are practical things we can do to better rely on God’s presence? (See #4d above)
9. Read **Isaiah 61:2-3**. What are some of God’s promises that we can hold to when we’re facing difficulty? (See #5b-i above)
10. Close your meeting by allowing the Holy Spirit to lead your time of prayer.

* Unless noted, all Scriptures quoted are from the New King James Version (NKJV)

June 25, 2023

“Sing in the Darkness”

Acts 16:11-34

Pastor Gary Hamrick



There are times in the course of life when things are hard, and life is difficult. In Acts 16, Paul and Silas were beaten and thrown into prison. They didn't know whether they would be rescued or killed for their faith. Nevertheless, they “prayed and sang” to the Lord because God is worthy of our worship no matter our circumstances. It's easy to sing when times are good, but how easily do you sing when times are bad? In this teaching, we are invited to pray, “Lord, teach me to sing in the darkness.” In other words, even when things are bad in life, may we still have a song on our lips for the One who is worthy of our worship!

1. **Acts 16:11-34** – *“Therefore, sailing from Troas, we ran a straight course to Samothrace, and the next day came to Neapolis, and from there to Philippi, which is the foremost city of that part of Macedonia, a colony. And we were staying in that city for some days. And on the Sabbath day we went out of the city to the riverside, where prayer was customarily made; and we sat down and spoke to the women who met there. Now a certain woman named Lydia heard us. She was a seller of purple from the city of Thyatira, who worshiped God. The Lord opened her heart to heed the things spoken by Paul. And when she and her household were baptized, she begged us, saying, ‘If you have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come to my house and stay.’ So she persuaded us. Now it happened, as we went to prayer, that a certain slave girl possessed with a spirit of divination met us, who brought her masters much profit by fortune-telling. This girl followed Paul and us, and cried out, saying, ‘These men are the servants of the Most High God, who proclaim to us the way of salvation.’ And this she did for many days. But Paul, greatly annoyed, turned and said to the spirit, ‘I command you in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her.’ And he came out that very hour. But when her masters saw that their hope of profit was gone, they seized Paul and Silas and dragged them into the marketplace to the authorities. And they brought them to the magistrates, and said, ‘These men, being Jews, exceedingly trouble our city; and they teach customs which are not lawful for us, being Romans, to receive or observe.’ Then the multitude rose up together against them; and the magistrates tore off their clothes and commanded them to be beaten with rods. And when they had laid many stripes on them, they threw them into prison, commanding the jailer to keep them securely. Having received such a charge, he put them into the inner prison and fastened their feet in the stocks. But at midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them. Suddenly there was a great earthquake, so that the foundations of the prison were shaken; and immediately all the doors were opened and everyone's chains were loosed. And the keeper of the prison, awaking from sleep and seeing the prison doors open, supposing the prisoners had fled, drew his sword and was about to kill himself. But Paul called with a loud voice, saying, ‘Do yourself no harm, for we are all here.’ Then he called for a light, ran in, and fell down trembling before Paul and Silas. And he brought them out and said, ‘Sirs, what must I do to be saved?’ So they said, ‘Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved, you and your household.’ Then they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all who were in his house. And he took them the same hour of the night and washed their stripes. And immediately he and all his family were baptized. Now when he had brought*

them into his house, he set food before them; and he rejoiced, having believed in God with all his household."

2. Paul's second missionary journey

a. Traveling companions

i. Silas

1. Jewish; leader in the church in Jerusalem

ii. Timothy

1. Had a Jewish mother but a Greek (Gentile) father
2. Around fifteen years old
3. Would become Paul's protégé and later pastor the church at Ephesus
4. Paul would eventually write two letters to him (1 & 2 Timothy)

iii. Luke

1. Gentile and the writer of Acts

b. Paul and his companions visited the city of Philippi

i. Philippi was named for and developed by Philip II of Macedon (king 359-336 B.C.), the father of Alexander the Great

ii. Philippi was an important Roman colony as prestigious as Rome itself

iii. There was no synagogue in Philippi, so the men went to the river

1. A river would often serve as a place of prayer in the absence of a synagogue

iv. The men met a woman named Lydia

1. Lydia loved God but did not know Jesus
2. She became the first convert on European soil

3. An encounter with a demon-possessed girl

a. A slave girl with a *"spirit of divination"* followed them for days, crying out, *"These men are the servants of the Most High God, who proclaim to us the way of salvation."*

i. Through demonic forces, she could provide insight (potentially deceptive) into people's lives

1. God condemns this type of activity

a. **Deuteronomy 18:10-12a** – *"There shall not be found among you anyone who makes his son or his daughter pass through the fire, or one who practices witchcraft, or a soothsayer, or one who interprets omens, or a sorcerer, or one who conjures spells, or a medium, or a spiritist, or one who calls up the dead. For all who do these things are an abomination to the LORD."*

2. Her owners were exploiting her to make a profit

b. Paul, *"greatly annoyed,"* eventually commanded the demon to leave the girl

i. Why was Paul annoyed?

1. Bad theology

a. Some scholars believe the original language implies she was stating *"a way of salvation,"* rather than *"the way of salvation"*

- b. It's possible that the local people may have interpreted "Most High God" as Zeus
 - 2. She served as a distraction from Paul's mission
 - 4. Paul and Silas arrested
 - a. When Paul healed the girl, the slave owners lost their source of profit and were financially ruined
 - b. They dragged Paul and Silas before the authorities and began beating them
 - i. It is likely that the crowds left Luke and Timothy alone because they did not appear Jewish
 - c. The magistrates had Paul and Silas stripped, beaten with rods, and thrown into prison
 - d. The men were placed in the "inner prison," with their feet placed in stocks
 - e. They began to pray and sing
 - 5. "Lord, teach me to sing in the darkness"
 - a. Prayer is a relatively normal response in crisis; singing is more challenging
 - b. When the Babylonians destroyed Jerusalem, the prophet Habakkuk focused on praising God
 - i. **Habakkuk 3:17-18** – *"Though the fig tree may not blossom, nor fruit be on the vines; though the labor of the olive may fail, and the fields yield no food; though the flock may be cut off from the fold, and there be no herd in the stalls—yet I will rejoice in the LORD, I will joy in the God of my salvation."*
 - c. Horatio Spafford
 - i. Horatio Spafford was a prosperous lawyer who lost his wealth in the Great Chicago Fire, lost four daughters when their boat sank over the Atlantic, and lost a son to scarlet fever
 - ii. In dealing with his grief over the loss of his daughters, Horatio penned the famous hymn **It is Well with My Soul**: *"When peace like a river attendeth my way, when sorrows like sea billows roll, whatever my lot thou has taught me to say, 'it is well, it is well with my soul.'"*
 - iii. He, his wife Anna, and his two remaining daughters moved to Jerusalem
 - 1. They began charitable work with Jews and Arabs
 - 2. They opened an orphanage that later became a center to help children in need
 - a. The Spafford Children's Center is still in operation today
 - 3. The Spafford's turned their tragedy into a blessing for others
 - d. **Hebrews 13:15** – *"Therefore by Him let us continually offer the sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of our lips, giving thanks to His name."*
 - e. **Psalms 40:1-3a** – *"I waited patiently for the LORD; and He inclined to me, and heard my cry. He also brought me up out of a horrible pit, out of the miry clay, and set my feet upon a rock, and established my steps. He has put a new song in my mouth—praise to our God."*

Discussion Questions

1. Read [Acts 16:11-34](#) to provide a foundation for your Bible study time.
2. What does God's Word say about using demonic forces to provide insight into people's lives? (See #3a-i-1-a above)
3. How were the slave girl's owners exploiting her? (See #3a-i-2 above)
4. Why was Paul "*greatly annoyed*" with the girl's proclamation that they were "*the servants of the Most High God, who proclaim to us the way of salvation*"? (See #3b-i above)
5. Why were Paul and Silas thrown into prison? (See #4a and #4b above)
6. How did Paul and Silas respond to their circumstances? (See #4e above)
7. Why was the act of singing so significant? (See #5a above)
8. Discuss the challenges of praising God amidst difficult circumstances.
9. Read [Habakkuk 3:17-18](#), [Hebrews 13:15](#), and [Psalm 40:1-3](#). How can we learn to "sing in the darkness"?
10. Close your meeting by allowing the Holy Spirit to lead your time of prayer.

* Unless noted, all Scriptures quoted are from the New King James Version (NKJV)

July 9, 2023

“Taking Jesus to the Marketplace”

Acts 17:16-34

Pastor Gary Hamrick



People who don't normally come to church or know anything about the Bible will not understand who Jesus is unless Christians tell them. In Acts 17, Paul went to the “marketplace” and explained Jesus in terms that “unchurched” people could understand. His conversation and interaction with the pagan people of Athens teaches us some important things about taking Jesus to a lost world outside the church.

1. **Acts 17:16-34** – *“Now while Paul waited for them at Athens, his spirit was provoked within him when he saw that the city was given over to idols. Therefore he reasoned in the synagogue with the Jews and with the Gentile worshipers, and in the marketplace daily with those who happened to be there. Then certain Epicurean and Stoic philosophers encountered him. And some said, ‘What does this babbler want to say?’ Others said, ‘He seems to be a proclaimer of foreign gods,’ because he preached to them Jesus and the resurrection. And they took him and brought him to the Areopagus, saying, ‘May we know what this new doctrine is of which you speak? For you are bringing some strange things to our ears. Therefore we want to know what these things mean.’ For all the Athenians and the foreigners who were there spent their time in nothing else but either to tell or to hear some new thing. Then Paul stood in the midst of the Areopagus and said, ‘Men of Athens, I perceive that in all things you are very religious; for as I was passing through and considering the objects of your worship, I even found an altar with this inscription: TO THE UNKNOWN GOD. Therefore, the One whom you worship without knowing, Him I proclaim to you: God, who made the world and everything in it, since He is Lord of heaven and earth, does not dwell in temples made with hands. Nor is He worshiped with men's hands, as though He needed anything, since He gives to all life, breath, and all things. And He has made from one blood every nation of men to dwell on all the face of the earth, and has determined their preappointed times and the boundaries of their dwellings, so that they should seek the Lord, in the hope that they might grope for Him and find Him, though He is not far from each one of us; for in Him we live and move and have our being, as also some of your own poets have said, “For we are also His offspring.” Therefore, since we are the offspring of God, we ought not to think that the Divine Nature is like gold or silver or stone, something shaped by art and man's devising. Truly, these times of ignorance God overlooked, but now commands all men everywhere to repent, because He has appointed a day on which He will judge the world in righteousness by the Man whom He has ordained. He has given assurance of this to all by raising Him from the dead.’ And when they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some mocked, while others said, ‘We will hear you again on this matter.’ So Paul departed from among them. However, some men joined him and believed, among them Dionysius the Areopagite, a woman named Damaris, and others with them.”*
2. The apostle Paul in Athens
 - a. Athens was a pagan city full of idols
 - b. The city was considered the intellectual center of the known world
 - c. Paul was distressed at the presence of the idols
 - i. The idols were symptomatic of the people's lack of relationship with the Lord

d. Paul “reasoned” with the people, sharing the good news of Jesus

3. What can we learn from Paul’s encounter with the people of Athens?

a. Be willing to “dialogue” with people who don’t know Jesus

i. Paul reasoned with people both inside and outside the synagogue

1. For those outside, he would translate the Scriptures into language they could understand

ii. We have to have conversations with people

1. We must be willing to share the knowledge of Jesus Christ and how to have relationship with Him

iii. Don’t “beat people over the head with the Bible”; walk through doors as God opens them

b. People have an innate need to connect with God

i. The people of Athens knew there was something greater than themselves

ii. We are spiritual beings, made in the image and likeness of God

1. **Genesis 1:26** – “Then God said, ‘Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.’”

iii. We will try to fill the need for God with all sorts of things until we understand that we need Jesus

c. A “religious” person does not mean a “redeemed” person

i. Redemption is accomplished through the paying of a ransom to purchase something that has been lost

1. **Ephesians 1:7** – “In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace.”

2. People are redeemed when they choose to believe in Jesus as Savior

d. All people have an “entry point” for you to connect them with Jesus

i. Paul used the inscription “TO THE UNKNOWN GOD” as his entry point

ii. If you are listening, you will find entry points in conversations with others

e. A relationship with Jesus starts with repentance: turning from sin and turning to God

i. We must do more than provide people with the “feel good” information; they need to repent and be converted

1. **Acts 3:19a** – “Repent therefore and be converted.”

f. Results may vary, but do your best and leave the rest to God

i. Some mocked Paul, some were curious about what he said, and some believed

ii. We only need to do what God calls us to do; He is the one who saves

iii. A prayer to share Jesus with the lost:

God give me eyes to see the lost

A heart that loves the lost

A will to win the lost

Discussion Questions

1. Read [Acts 17:16-34](#) to provide a foundation for your Bible study time.
2. Why was Paul distressed in Athens? How did he respond? (See #2c and #2d above)
3. What does it look like to “dialogue” with people who don’t know Jesus? (See #3a above)
4. Read [Genesis 1:26](#). Why do we have an “innate need to connect with God”? What will people do when this need is not met? (See #3b above)
5. Read [Ephesians 1:7](#). Discuss the difference between “religious” and “redeemed.” (See #3c above)
6. What “entry point” did Paul use to connect with the people? How can you find entry points in conversations with others? Discuss a time where God opened a door for you to speak with someone about your faith. (See #3d above)
7. Read [Acts 3:19a](#). Why is repentance important? (See #3e above)
8. What does it look like to “do your best and leave the rest to God?” (See #3f above)
9. Close your meeting by allowing the Holy Spirit to lead your time of prayer.

* Unless noted, all Scriptures quoted are from the New King James Version (NKJV)

July 16, 2023

“Revival or Revolt?”

Acts 19:11-41

Pastor Gary Hamrick



Wherever Christ is preached there is usually one of two responses—revival or revolt. When the light of Jesus is turned on, it confronts the darkness of whatever it touches. If the response is contrition and humility, the result is revival, but if the response is confusion and hostility, the result is revolt. In Acts 19, we see both responses. Pastor Gary compares the revolt in Ephesus to our current culture, and highlights five points of revival that are still true today.

1. **Acts 19:11-41** – *“Now God worked unusual miracles by the hands of Paul, so that even handkerchiefs or aprons were brought from his body to the sick, and the diseases left them and the evil spirits went out of them. Then some of the itinerant Jewish exorcists took it upon themselves to call the name of the Lord Jesus over those who had evil spirits, saying, ‘We exorcise you by the Jesus whom Paul preaches.’ Also there were seven sons of Sceva, a Jewish chief priest, who did so. And the evil spirit answered and said, ‘Jesus I know, and Paul I know; but who are you?’ Then the man in whom the evil spirit was leaped on them, overpowered them, and prevailed against them, so that they fled out of that house naked and wounded. This became known both to all Jews and Greeks dwelling in Ephesus; and fear fell on them all, and the name of the Lord Jesus was magnified. And many who had believed came confessing and telling their deeds. Also, many of those who had practiced magic brought their books together and burned them in the sight of all. And they counted up the value of them, and it totaled fifty thousand pieces of silver. So the word of the Lord grew mightily and prevailed. When these things were accomplished, Paul purposed in the Spirit, when he had passed through Macedonia and Achaia, to go to Jerusalem, saying, ‘After I have been there, I must also see Rome.’ So he sent into Macedonia two of those who ministered to him, Timothy and Erastus, but he himself stayed in Asia for a time. And about that time there arose a great commotion about the Way. For a certain man named Demetrius, a silversmith, who made silver shrines of Diana, brought no small profit to the craftsmen. He called them together with the workers of similar occupation, and said: ‘Men, you know that we have our prosperity by this trade. Moreover you see and hear that not only at Ephesus, but throughout almost all Asia, this Paul has persuaded and turned away many people, saying that they are not gods which are made with hands. So not only is this trade of ours in danger of falling into disrepute, but also the temple of the great goddess Diana may be despised and her magnificence destroyed, whom all Asia and the world worship.’ Now when they heard this, they were full of wrath and cried out, saying, ‘Great is Diana of the Ephesians!’ So the whole city was filled with confusion, and rushed into the theater with one accord, having seized Gaius and Aristarchus, Macedonians, Paul’s travel companions. And when Paul wanted to go in to the people, the disciples would not allow him. Then some of the officials of Asia, who were his friends, sent to him pleading that he would not venture into the theater. Some therefore cried one thing and some another, for the assembly was confused, and most of them did not know why they had come together. And they drew Alexander out of the multitude, the Jews putting him forward. And Alexander motioned with his hand, and wanted to make his defense to the people. But when they found out that he was a Jew, all with one voice cried out for about two hours, ‘Great is Diana of the Ephesians!’ And when the city clerk had quieted*

the crowd, he said: 'Men of Ephesus, what man is there who does not know that the city of the Ephesians is temple guardian of the great goddess Diana, and of the image which fell down from Zeus? Therefore, since these things cannot be denied, you ought to be quiet and do nothing rashly. For you have brought these men here who are neither robbers of temples nor blasphemers of your goddess. Therefore, if Demetrius and his fellow craftsmen have a case against anyone, the courts are open and there are proconsuls. Let them bring charges against one another. But if you have any other inquiry to make, it shall be determined in the lawful assembly. For we are in danger of being called in question for today's uproar, there being no reason which we may give to account for this disorderly gathering.' And when he had said these things, he dismissed the assembly."

2. Revival and revolt in Ephesus
 - a. Christianity confronts darkness, and people typically respond in one of two ways
 - i. Revival
 1. A result of contrition and humility
 - ii. Revolt
 1. A result of confusion and hostility
 - iii. Both revival and revolt occurred when Christianity came to Ephesus
3. The revolt in Ephesus shares similarities to our current culture
 - a. A mob mentality
 - b. Often results in violence
 - c. A desire to silence Christians and cancel any opposing views
 - d. A money trail that reveals the cultural agenda and what the culture worships
 - e. An idolization of perverted sexuality foisted upon the culture
4. Characteristics of a revival
 - a. The people had a holy fear of God
 - i. **Acts 19:17a** – *"This became known both to all Jews and Greeks dwelling in Ephesus; and fear fell on them all."*
 - ii. When he have a healthy fear of God, we will sin less
 1. **Psalm 86:11** – *"Teach me Your way, O LORD; I will walk in Your truth; Unite my heart to fear Your name."*
 - b. They had a reverence for the Name of Jesus
 - i. **Acts 19:17b** – *"And the name of the Lord Jesus was magnified."*
 - ii. When Jesus modeled prayer for the disciples in **Luke 11:2**, He opened with, *"Our Father in heaven, hallowed be Your name."*
 1. *Hallowed* in the Greek is **hagiazō**, which means, "to consecrate; to separate as holy and pure"
 - iii. There are more than 350 names and titles for God in the Bible that express God's character, nature, and holiness
 1. **Psalm 8:1a** – *"O Lord, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth!"* (1984 NIV)
 2. **Psalm 29:2a** – *"Ascribe to the Lord the glory due his name."* (1984 NIV)

3. **Psalm 30:4** – *“Sing to the Lord, you saints of his; praise his holy name.”* (1984 NIV)
 4. **Psalm 34:3** – *“Glorify the Lord with me; let us exalt his name together.”* (1984 NIV)
- c. They believed in Jesus and confessed their sins
- i. **Acts 19:18** – *“And many who had believed came confessing and telling their deeds.”*
 - ii. True belief in Jesus is always followed by sincere confession of sins
 1. **1 John 1:9** – *“If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”*
 2. **2 Timothy 2:5** – *“For there is one God and one Mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus.”*
 - a. Jesus is our high priest—we do not need another mediator to confess our sins
 - b. We can confess our sins to a trusted friend—not to have that person absolve us of sin—but for the purposes of accountability and prayer
- d. They purged their lives of ungodly influences
- i. **Acts 19:19** – *“Also, many of those who had practiced magic brought their books together and burned them in the sight of all. And they counted up the value of them, and it totaled fifty thousand pieces of silver.”*
 1. Fifty thousand pieces of silver equates to about fifteen million dollars today
 2. The people were more concerned about the spiritual cost of sorcery and occult influences than they were about the cost of destroying their books
 - a. Under conviction, the people removed things from their homes that were hindering their relationships with the Lord
 - i. It is important that we periodically take inventory of the things we allow into our homes and what we may need to get rid of
- e. They gave priority to the Word of God
- i. **Acts 19:20** – *“So the word of the Lord grew mightily and prevailed.”*
 1. There are many benefits to knowing and obeying God’s Word
 - a. **Jeremiah 15:16a** – *“When your words came, I ate them; they were my joy and my heart's delight.”* (1984 NIV)
 - b. **Jeremiah 23:29** – *“‘Is not my word like fire,’ declares the Lord, ‘and like a hammer that breaks a rock in pieces?’”* (1984 NIV)
 - c. **Ephesians 5:26** – *“That He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word.”*
 - d. **1 Peter 2:2** – *“As newborn babes, desire the pure milk of the word, that you may grow thereby.”*
 - e. **James 1:22-25** – *“Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says. Anyone who listens to the word but does not do what it says is like a man who looks at his face in a mirror and, after looking at himself, goes away and immediately forgets what he looks like. But the man who looks intently into the perfect law that gives*

freedom, and continues to do this, not forgetting what he has heard, but doing it—he will be blessed in what he does.” (1984 NIV)

- f. **Psalm 85:6** – “Will You not revive us again, that Your people may rejoice in You?”

Discussion Questions

1. Read **Acts 19:11-41** to provide a foundation for your Bible study time.
2. How did the people of Ephesus react to the message of Christianity? (See #2a above)
3. Where do you see similarities between the revolt in Ephesus and reactions to Christianity in our current culture? (See #3 above)
4. Read **Psalm 86:11**. What are the benefits of a healthy fear of God? Where have you seen this principle at work in your own life? (See #4a above)
5. Read **Psalm 8:1a**, **Psalm 29:2a**, **Psalm 30:4**, and **Psalm 34:3**. Why is a reverence for the Name of Jesus important? (See #4b above)
6. Read **1 John 1:9** and **2 Timothy 2:5**. Discuss the significance of confessing our sins. Who absolves us of sin? What is the purpose of confessing your sins to another person? (See #4c above)
7. Why did the people in Ephesus destroy their sorcery/occult books? What can we learn from their actions? Do you regularly take inventory of the influences you allow into your home? (See #4d above)
8. Read **Jeremiah 15:16a**, **Jeremiah 23:29**, **Ephesians 5:26**, **1 Peter 2:2**, and **James 1:22-25**. Discuss the benefits of knowing and obeying God’s Word. How do you see this principle operate in your life?
9. Read **Psalm 85:6**. How can we encourage revival in our world today?
10. Close your meeting by allowing the Holy Spirit to lead your time of prayer.

* Unless noted, all Scriptures quoted are from the New King James Version (NKJV)

August 20, 2023

“Running the Race”

Acts 20:17-24

Pastor Gary Hamrick



Six times in the New Testament living the Christian life is compared to “running a race.” The starting line is when we trust Christ as our personal Lord and Savior. The finish line is when we die and go to Heaven or when Christ returns to take us Home, whichever happens first. The time in between the start and the finish is the race we are to run as Believers in Jesus. In Acts 20, Paul teaches us—by his example—three important aspects of running the race: HUMILITY, ENDURANCE, and ABANDONMENT. Follow along as Pastor Gary shares about “running the race.”

1. **Acts 20:17-24** – *“From Miletus he sent to Ephesus and called for the elders of the church. And when they had come to him, he said to them: ‘You know, from the first day that I came to Asia, in what manner I always lived among you, serving the Lord with all humility, with many tears and trials which happened to me by the plotting of the Jews; how I kept back nothing that was helpful, but proclaimed it to you, and taught you publicly and from house to house, testifying to Jews, and also to Greeks, repentance toward God and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ. And see, now I go bound in the spirit to Jerusalem, not knowing the things that will happen to me there, except that the Holy Spirit testifies in every city, saying that chains and tribulations await me. But none of these things move me; nor do I count my life dear to myself, so that I may finish my race with joy, and the ministry which I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the gospel of the grace of God.’”*
2. Paul’s parting words to the elders at Ephesus
 - a. Paul was at the end of his third and final missionary journey
 - b. He compared living the Christian life to running a race
 - i. This comparison is made six times in the New Testament
 - ii. There is a starting line, a finish line, and a prize at the end of the race
 1. The starting line is when you trust Christ as your Lord and Savior
 2. The finish line is when you die and go to heaven, or Jesus returns to take us home, whichever happens first
 3. The prize is spending eternity with the Lord
 - iii. It is a race of endurance, and you are the only one on your track
 - iv. What matters most is not how well you start but how you finish
 - v. **2 Timothy 4:7-8** – *“I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day—and not only to me, but also to all who have longed for his appearing.”* (1984 NIV)
3. Paul teaches us three things by example
 - a. Run with humility
 - i. **Acts 20:18b-19a** – *“You know, from the first day that I came to Asia, in what manner I always lived among you, serving the Lord with all humility.”*

- ii. Pride is one of the greatest obstacles to finishing well
- iii. John Calvin said, “Pride is the pregnant mother of all sins.”
 - 1. Pride is at the root of all sins—believing “I know better than God”
- iv. Satan’s fall from heaven was a direct result of pride
 - 1. Every time we operate in pride, we operate in the spirit of Satan
 - 2. Every time we operate in the spirit of humility, we operate in the spirit of Jesus
 - a. **Matthew 11:28-29** – *“Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.”* (1984 NIV)
 - b. **Philippians 2:8** – *“And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death—even death on a cross!”* (1984 NIV)
 - c. **James 4:6b** – *“God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble.”*
 - i. There are times when God may seem silent—it may be a place to ask the Lord if there is pride in your heart.
 - 1. Do I feel entitled?
 - 2. Do I judge others with greater scrutiny than I judge myself?
 - 3. Do I rarely say I’m sorry to the Lord and people I offended?
 - ii. **Matthew 23:12** – *“For whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and whoever humbles himself will be exalted.”* (1984 NIV)
- b. Run with endurance
 - i. **Acts 20:19b** – *“...with many tears and trials which happened to me by the plotting of the Jews.”*
 - ii. **Hebrews 12:1-2** – *“Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.”*
 - iii. Remember those who have gone before you in the faith
 - iv. The race is not a sprint; it is a marathon and we are not exempt from hardships.
 - v. As Believers in Jesus, we have a Helper who will hold our hand and help us through every adversity, never leaving or forsaking us
 - 1. **Psalms 42:6** – *“O my God, my soul is cast down within me; therefore I will remember You from the land of the Jordan, and from the heights of Hermon, from the Hill Mizar.”*
 - 2. Mt Hermon is the highest elevation in Israel and Mizar is one of the smallest hills in Israel—the psalmist was declaring, “Whether I am in the deepest valleys or the on highest mountain peak, I will remember that the Lord is with me”

c. Run with abandonment

- i. **Acts 20:22-24** – *“And see, now I go bound in the spirit to Jerusalem, not knowing the things that will happen to me there, except that the Holy Spirit testifies in every city, saying that chains and tribulations await me. But none of these things move me; nor do I count my life dear to myself, so that I may finish my race with joy, and the ministry which I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the gospel of the grace of God.”*
- ii. Paul didn’t consider his life of greater worth than doing the will of the Lord
- iii. We must love God more than anything and anyone, including life itself
- iv. Scripture offers examples of people who started the race well but did not finish well
 1. **2 Timothy 4:10** – *“for Demas has forsaken me, having loved this present world...”*
 2. Judas loved money more than he loved Jesus
 3. **Galatians 5:7** – *“You were running a good race. Who cut in on you and kept you from obeying the truth?”* (1984 NIV)
- v. **1 Corinthians 9:24-25** – *“Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one gets the prize? Run in such a way as to get the prize. Everyone who competes in the games goes into strict training. They do it to get a crown that will not last; but we do it to get a crown that will last forever.”* (1984 NIV)

Discussion Questions

1. Read **Acts 20:17-24** to provide a foundation for your Bible study time.
2. Read **2 Timothy 4:7-8**. Why does Scripture compare the Christian life to a race? How have you seen this concept at work in your life? (See #2 above)
3. Read **Matthew 11:28-29** and **Philippians 2:8**. Why is it important to “run with humility”? (See #3a above)
4. Read **James 4:6b** and **Matthew 23:12**. How can we address pride in our own hearts? (See #3a-iv-2-c above)
5. Read **Hebrews 12:1-2**. How do we “run with endurance”? (See #3b above)
6. Read **Psalms 42:6**. Where can we find strength when we are weary? (See #3b-v)
7. What does it mean to “run with abandonment”? (See #3c-iii above)
8. Read **Galatians 5:7**. What in your life poses the greatest threat to finishing well? (See #3c-iv above)
9. Read **1 Corinthians 9:24-25**. Discuss the importance of “running your race” well. (See #3-c-v above)
10. Close your meeting by allowing the Holy Spirit to lead your time of prayer.

* Unless noted, all Scriptures quoted are from the New King James Version (NKJV)

August 27, 2023

“Advice and Warnings to the Church”

Acts 20:25-31

Pastor Gary Hamrick



In his farewell words to the elders of the church in Ephesus, Paul shared some important advice and warnings about how to keep the Church healthy and protect it from attacks both without and within. Even though his words are from the first century, this passage provides timeless principles for the Church today.

1. **Acts 20:25-31** – *“And indeed, now I know that you all, among whom I have gone preaching the kingdom of God, will see my face no more. Therefore I testify to you this day that I am innocent of the blood of all men. For I have not shunned to declare to you the whole counsel of God. Therefore take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood. For I know this, that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock. Also from among yourselves men will rise up, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after themselves. Therefore watch, and remember that for three years I did not cease to warn everyone night and day with tears.”*
2. Paul’s farewell speech to the elders of the church in Ephesus
 - a. Paul knew that his death was near as persecution against Christians was rampant
 - i. He would soon be martyred by Nero the emperor
 - b. In the first part of the speech (v. 17-24), Paul summarized his time in Ephesus and likened the individual Christian journey to running a race
 - c. In the second part of the speech (v. 25-31), he provided advice for keeping the Church healthy and gave warnings regarding threats against the Church
3. Advice to keep the Church healthy
 - a. Teach the whole counsel of God’s Word
 - i. **Acts 20:27** – *“For I have not shunned to declare to you the whole counsel of God.”*
 - ii. Studying all of Scripture enables Believers to be well-equipped
 - iii. **Ephesians 4:11-13** – *“And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.”*
 1. Pastors should seek to be “innocent of the blood of all men”
 - a. **James 3:1** – *“Not many of you should presume to be teachers, my brothers, because you know that we who teach will be judged more strictly.”* (1984 NIV)
 - iv. Some parts of the Bible are pleasant, and some parts are challenging
 1. Some churches only focus on one or the other
 2. God is love, but He is also a righteous judge

- a. Teaching the whole counsel of God's Word ensures Believers are equipped with the right balance
 - b. Take heed to yourselves and to all the flock
 - i. **Acts 20:28a** – *"Therefore take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers."*
 - ii. *Take heed* is **prosechō** in the Greek, which means "give attention to"
 - 1. Leaders must pay attention to their own spiritual condition and their own families **before** attending to others, or they will not be able to adequately care for anyone
 - a. The pastor is not supposed to be everything to everybody—only Jesus can do that
 - b. Pastors need your prayers
 - i. If the pastor falls, the congregation is impacted
 - c. Tend to ("*shepherd*") the church of God
 - i. **Acts 20:28b** – *"Shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood."*
 - ii. *Shepherd* in the Greek is **poimainō** which means "to tend" or "to feed"
 - iii. God calls pastors to tend, care for, and feed His people
 - 1. The church belongs to God, not the pastor
 - 2. Your pastor did not bleed for you; Jesus did
4. Warnings for the Church
- a. **Acts 20:29-30** – *"For I know this, that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock. Also from among yourselves men will rise up, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after themselves."*
 - i. There is an imminent threat from outside the Church
 - 1. Persecution broke out against the first century Church and continues in many places today
 - 2. Deliberate opposition precedes deadly persecution
 - a. Weaponization of the government against the Church
 - b. Discouraging and silencing the Church
 - ii. There is also an imminent threat from within the Church
 - 1. Paul warns against churches "speaking perverse things"
 - a. No longer holding to the inerrancy of Scripture
 - b. Substituting social justice for Biblical justice
 - c. Tolerating and celebrating sin under the banner that "God is love"
 - 2. **Acts 20:31** – *"Therefore watch, and remember that for three years I did not cease to warn everyone night and day with tears."*
 - a. We must be vigilant—may God help us to be courageous as His Church and bring glory and honor to Him

Discussion Questions

1. Read **Acts 20:25-31** to provide a foundation for your Bible study time.

2. Why is it important for churches to teach the “whole counsel of God’s Word?” (See #3a-ii above)
3. Read [Ephesians 4:11-13](#) and [James 3:1](#). Why does God judge pastors “more strictly”? (See #3a-iii above)
4. What happens when a pastor only focuses on either the “pleasant” or “challenging” parts of the Bible? Why is a balanced approach important? (See #3a-iv above)
5. How can a pastor best care for the flock entrusted to him? (See #3b-ii-1 above)
6. To whom does the church belong? What is the pastor’s responsibility to the congregation? (See #3c above)
7. Discuss threats to the Church from outside. Where do you see these types of threats in our culture today? (See #4a-i above)
8. Discuss threats to the Church from within. What do these types of threats look like? (See #4a-ii above)
9. How can we be vigilant to protect God’s Church? (See #4a-ii-2)
10. Close your meeting by allowing the Holy Spirit to lead your time of prayer.

* Unless noted, all Scriptures quoted are from the New King James Version (NKJV)

September 3, 2023

“Parting Words of Encouragement”

Acts 20:32-38

Pastor Gary Hamrick



If you know that you will probably never see a friend or loved one again, you will likely exchange some tender, parting words. This was the case with Paul and the elders of the Ephesian church when he met with them in Miletus. He closed his remarks with parting words of encouragement about God’s grace that are applicable to us today as well. In this study, we will unpack this final passage of Paul’s speech to the Ephesian elders as we seek to better understand God’s amazing grace.

1. **Acts 20:32-38** – *“So now, brethren, I commend you to God and to the word of His grace, which is able to build you up and give you an inheritance among all those who are sanctified. I have coveted no one’s silver or gold or apparel. Yes, you yourselves know that these hands have provided for my necessities, and for those who were with me. I have shown you in every way, by laboring like this, that you must support the weak. And remember the words of the Lord Jesus, that He said, “It is more blessed to give than to receive.” And when he had said these things, he knelt down and prayed with them all. Then they all wept freely, and fell on Paul’s neck and kissed him, sorrowing most of all for the words which he spoke, that they would see his face no more. And they accompanied him to the ship.”*
2. Paul’s final words to the elders from Ephesus had three parts
 - a. First, he likened Christianity to a race—what matters most is not how you start, but how you finish
 - b. Secondly, he provided advice for keeping the Church healthy and gave warnings about threats from within and without
 - c. Lastly, he concluded with words of encouragement (v. 32-38)
3. Paul “commended” the elders to God
 - a. *Commend* in the Greek is **paratithēmi**, meaning “to place trust in for protection”
 - b. Paul was trusting the Lord to care for the people he loved
4. Entrust your life and loved ones to God
 - a. We must trust the Lord with our own lives and those of our loved ones
 - b. Upon His death, Jesus stated, *“Father, ‘into Your hands I commit My spirit.’”* (**Luke 23:46**)
 - i. *Commit* in the Greek is also **paratithēmi**
 - ii. Jesus trusted the Father to care for Him in death
 - c. **Psalm 31:14-15a** – *“But as for me, I trust in You, O LORD; I say, ‘You are my God. My times are in Your hand.’”*
 - d. **Psalm 139:7-10** – *“Where can I go from your Spirit? Where can I flee from your presence? If I go up to the heavens, you are there; if I make my bed in the depths, you are there. If I rise on the wings of the dawn, if I settle on the far side of the sea, even there your hand will guide me, your right hand will hold me fast.”* (1984 NIV)

5. Rely on God's grace

- a. Grace is *"God's unmerited favor; His undeserved kindness expressed to us through Jesus"*
- b. Grace builds us up
 - i. The *"word of His grace"* is the message of the New Testament (v. 32)
 - 1. The message of the Old Testament is that of the law—what you must do for God
 - a. The Old Testament is necessary to understand the character and nature of God, and who we are in relation to Him
 - b. The moral code of the law exposes our sinful hearts and helps us realize how much we need a Savior
 - i. The law does not save us
 - ii. If heaven were gained by following the word of the law, we would all fail
 - 2. The message of the New Testament is that of grace
 - a. Jesus entered the world to die for our sins and He offers His righteousness in exchange for our sinfulness to all who accept Him by faith as Lord and Savior
 - b. Where the law falls short, grace steps in
 - c. **John 1:17** – *"For the law was given through Moses, but grace and truth came through Jesus Christ."*
 - d. The thief who was crucified with Jesus made a simple profession of faith, and Jesus assured him, *"today you will be with Me in Paradise."* (**Luke 23:43**)
 - i. This man had never gone to a Bible study, been baptized, or participated in any Christian activity, and yet Jesus saved him because he placed his faith in Christ
 - 3. The law reminds us that we are sinners; grace reminds us we have a Savior
- c. Grace gives us an inheritance
 - i. *"Sanctified"* (v. 32) is **hagiazō** in the Greek, meaning "set apart"—those who have a relationship with Christ
 - ii. **1 Peter 1:3-4** – *"Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade—kept in heaven for you."* (1984 NIV)
 - iii. Our *"inheritance"* refers to everything God has for us, both in this life and in eternity with Him
 - 1. An inheritance requires a death—Jesus fulfilled this requirement

6. Accepting God's grace

- a. Some try hard to be a "good person" but fail over and over and become frustrated
- b. Some are so ashamed of the things they have done that God's grace seems unattainable
 - i. Those sins are exactly what Jesus died for

- ii. We must not place the emphasis on ourselves, but rather surrender our lives to God and rest in His grace

*“Grace, grace, God's grace,
Grace that will pardon and cleanse within;
Grace, grace, God's grace,
Grace that is greater than all my sin.”ⁱ*

Discussion Questions

1. Read **Acts 20:32-38** to provide a foundation for your Bible study time.
2. What is the significance of Paul “commending” the elders to the Lord? (See #3 above)
3. Read **Psalm 31:14-15a** and **Psalm 139:7-10**. How are we to trust the Lord with our own lives and those of our loved ones? (See #4c and #4d above)
4. What is grace? (See #5a above)
5. What is the main message of the Old Testament? Why is the Old Testament important? (See #5b-i-1-a and #5b-i-1-b above)
6. Read **John 1:17**. What is the message of the New Testament? (See #5b-i-2-a and #5b-i-2-c above)
7. Read **1 Peter 1:3-4**. What is the inheritance we have in Christ? (#5c-ii and #5c-ii above)
8. Have you ever attempted to earn God’s favor through being a “good person”? What happened? Have you ever felt like your sins are too great for grace to cover?
9. How should we respond when we are tempted to work for God’s favor or feel like we have sinned too much to receive His grace? (See #6b-i and #6b-ii above)
10. Close your meeting by allowing the Holy Spirit to lead your time of prayer.

* Unless noted, all Scriptures quoted are from the New King James Version (NKJV)

ⁱ *"Grace Greater than our Sin"* by Julia H. Johnston, [Trinity Hymnal | GRACE, GRACE, GOD'S GRACE - Lyrics Hymn](#)

September 10, 2023

"Hearing God"

Acts 21:1-15

Pastor Gary Hamrick



Does God still speak today? Yes and no. He does not supersede or contradict His Word (the Bible) with "new" revelation, but He does still speak tenderly to people. Jesus said that His sheep hear His voice (**John 10:27**). How can we discern the voice of the Lord from all the other voices and noise in our world? We will answer that question in this study on Acts 21.

1. **Acts 21:1-15** – *"Now it came to pass, that when we had departed from them and set sail, running a straight course we came to Cos, the following day to Rhodes, and from there to Patara. And finding a ship sailing over to Phoenicia, we went aboard and set sail. When we had sighted Cyprus, we passed it on the left, sailed to Syria, and landed at Tyre; for there the ship was to unload her cargo. And finding disciples, we stayed there seven days. They told Paul through the Spirit not to go up to Jerusalem. When we had come to the end of those days, we departed and went on our way; and they all accompanied us, with wives and children, till we were out of the city. And we knelt down on the shore and prayed. When we had taken our leave of one another, we boarded the ship, and they returned home. And when we had finished our voyage from Tyre, we came to Ptolemais, greeted the brethren, and stayed with them one day. On the next day we who were Paul's companions departed and came to Caesarea, and entered the house of Philip the evangelist, who was one of the seven, and stayed with him. Now this man had four virgin daughters who prophesied. And as we stayed many days, a certain prophet named Agabus came down from Judea. When he had come to us, he took Paul's belt, bound his own hands and feet, and said, 'Thus says the Holy Spirit, "So shall the Jews at Jerusalem bind the man who owns this belt, and deliver him into the hands of the Gentiles."' Now when we heard these things, both we and those from that place pleaded with him not to go up to Jerusalem. Then Paul answered, 'What do you mean by weeping and breaking my heart? For I am ready not only to be bound, but also to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus.' So when he would not be persuaded, we ceased, saying, 'The will of the Lord be done.' And after those days we packed and went up to Jerusalem."*
2. A seeming contradiction regarding Paul's decision to go to Jerusalem
 - a. Paul believed the Holy Spirit told him to go to Jerusalem
 - i. **Acts 20:22-23** – *"And see, now I go bound in the spirit to Jerusalem, not knowing the things that will happen to me there, except that the Holy Spirit testifies in every city, saying that chains and tribulations await me."*
 1. The ESV uses the phrase *"constrained by the Spirit"*
 2. The NIV uses the phrase *"compelled by the Spirit"*
 - b. Others believed the Holy Spirit did not want Paul to go to Jerusalem
 - i. Sometimes different perspectives can lead us to different conclusions
 1. Paul may have clearly heard from the Lord, but his friends focused on the hardship that awaited him in Jerusalem

- a. Paul was compelled to go regardless of the hardship
- b. Paul's friends wanted to prevent the hardship

3. Does God still speak today?

- a. There's nothing in the Bible to imply that God has stopped speaking
 - i. There is no new revelation in terms of addition to Scripture, but God speaks in inaudible ways to our spirits
- b. **Psalm 86:7** – *"In the day of my trouble I will call upon You, for You will answer me."*
- c. **Isaiah 58:9a** – *"Then you shall call, and the LORD will answer; you shall cry, and He will say, 'Here I am.'"*
- d. **Jeremiah 33:3** – *"Call to Me, and I will answer you, and show you great and mighty things, which you do not know."*
- e. **John 10:27** – *"My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me."*
- f. The question should not be "Does God still speak today?" but rather:
 - i. How does God speak today?
 - ii. In what ways does God speak?
 - iii. How can we discern the voice of God from all other voices?

4. How do we hear from the Lord?

- a. The Word of God
 - i. The Bible is the primary way we hear from God
 - ii. God will never supersede or contradict His Word
 - iii. He uses His Word to counsel and guide us
 - iv. **Psalm 119:105** – *"Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path."*
 - 1. *"Lamp to my feet"* represents God's direction in the immediate; *"light to my path"* represents God's direction for the long-term
 - v. **Psalm 32:8a** – *"I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go."*
 - vi. **Joshua 1:8** – *"Do not let this Book of the Law depart from your mouth; meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do everything written in it. Then you will be prosperous and successful."* (1984 NIV)
 - vii. The more you are in God's Word, the more it forms you and transforms you
 - 1. Sometimes the Bible will speak to you directly through a passage
 - 2. Sometimes the Bible will speak to you indirectly through a principle
 - a. You will get neither if you are not reading your Bible
 - viii. **Psalm 119:133a** – *"Direct my steps by Your word."*
- b. The wisdom of others
 - i. God will often speak through other people to confirm what He is doing in your life
 - ii. **Proverbs 11:14b** – *"But in the multitude of counselors there is safety."*
 - iii. **2 Corinthians 13:1a** – *"Every matter must be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses."* (1984 NIV)
 - iv. The voice of other people can be confirmation but should never be direction
 - 1. If you have a relationship with Jesus, you should not be receiving first-hand information from second-hand sources

2. Paul received His direction from the Holy Spirit
 - a. His friends confirmed that he would face hardship
 - b. He did not allow his friends' desire that he not go to Jerusalem deter him from obeying what the Lord had told him to do
- v. God is not obligated to bring a confirming word from other people
 1. If you sincerely believe the Lord has spoken to you about something, and it aligns with Scripture, but you have not received a confirming word, simply proceed with caution
 - a. Sometimes we can misinterpret what God is telling us, but He is gracious and will redirect us when needed
- c. The witness of peace
 - i. **Colossians 3:15a** – *"Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts."* (1984 NIV)
 1. Rule in the original Greek is **brabeuō**, meaning "to act as an umpire; arbitrate"
 2. The peace of God helps us to know and discern what God is saying to us
 - ii. **Philippians 4:6-7** – *"Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus."*
 - iii. Christians know what it is to have God's peace and they know what it is to not have God's peace
 1. Never go against your peace
 2. If you do not have a peace about a particular decision, do not proceed
- d. The whisper of God
 - i. Following a major move of God, the prophet Elijah spiraled into depression
 - ii. God came to Elijah to speak to him and help him
 1. **1 Kings 19:11-13** – *"Then He said, 'Go out, and stand on the mountain before the LORD.' And behold, the LORD passed by, and a great and strong wind tore into the mountains and broke the rocks in pieces before the LORD, but the LORD was not in the wind; and after the wind an earthquake, but the LORD was not in the earthquake; and after the earthquake a fire, but the LORD was not in the fire; and after the fire a still small voice. So it was, when Elijah heard it, that he wrapped his face in his mantle and went out and stood in the entrance of the cave."*
 - iii. We often want God to show up in powerful ways—which He sometimes does—but most of the time He speaks in a gentle whisper
 1. We have to quiet ourselves before the Lord and incline our ears to hear the whisper of God
 - iv. **Psalms 78:1** – *"Give ear, O my people, to my law; incline your ears to the words of my mouth."*
 1. To incline in the original Hebrew is **nāṭā**, meaning "to stretch or to bend"
 - v. May we incline our ears to hear what the Spirit is saying to us

Discussion Questions

1. Read **Acts 21:1-15** to provide a foundation for your Bible study time.
2. What was the “contradiction” regarding Paul’s decision to go to Jerusalem? How did Paul determine his decision? (See #2 above)
3. Read **Psalm 86:7**, **Isaiah 58:9a**, **Jeremiah 33:3**, and **John 10:27**. Does God still speak to people today? (See #3 above)
4. Read **Psalm 119:105**, **Psalm 32:8a**, and **Joshua 1:8**. What is the primary way God speaks to us? (See #4a above)
5. Discuss a time where you heard God speak to you directly or indirectly through His Word.
6. Read **Proverbs 11:14b** and **2 Corinthians 13:1a**. How does God use the wisdom of others to confirm His will? Has God ever used others to confirm His will in your life? (See #4b above)
7. Read **Colossians 3:15a** and **Philippians 4:6-7**. What is it like to experience God’s peace? What is it like when you do not have God’s peace? Have you ever “gone against your peace” and later regretted it? (See #4c above)
8. Read **1 Kings 19:11-13**. What is the “whisper of God?” Why does God often choose to speak in a gentle whisper rather than seemingly more “powerful” ways? (See #4d-ii and #4d-iii above)
9. Read **Psalm 78:1**. How can we “incline” our ears to hear what God wants to say to us? (See #4d-iv above)
10. Close your meeting by allowing the Holy Spirit to lead your time of prayer.

* Unless noted, all Scriptures quoted are from the New King James Version (NKJV)



We all have an "internal moral compass" called a conscience, implanted by God in the soul of every human being. Since God is the standard for right and wrong, and since we are created in the image and likeness of God, we all have the capacity to choose right over wrong. A conscience allows us to feel pleasure when we do what is right and conviction when we do what is wrong. When the apostle Paul defended himself against unjustly imprisonment, he opened his remarks with, "I have lived in all good conscience before God until this day" (Acts 23:1). Should not we all want to say that? In this study, we will define "conscience" and discuss the different kinds of consciences in the Bible.

1. **Acts 21:30-34a, 22:30-23:1** – *"And all the city was disturbed; and the people ran together, seized Paul, and dragged him out of the temple; and immediately the doors were shut. Now as they were seeking to kill him, news came to the commander of the garrison that all Jerusalem was in an uproar. He immediately took soldiers and centurions, and ran down to them. And when they saw the commander and the soldiers, they stopped beating Paul. Then the commander came near and took him, and commanded him to be bound with two chains; and he asked who he was and what he had done. And some among the multitude cried one thing and some another. ... The next day, because he wanted to know for certain why he was accused by the Jews, he released him from his bonds, and commanded the chief priests and all their council to appear, and brought Paul down and set him before them. Then Paul, looking earnestly at the council, said, 'Men and brethren, I have lived in all good conscience before God until this day.'"*
2. A violent mob attacked the apostle Paul
 - a. Paul traveled to Jerusalem at the conclusion of his third and final missionary journey
 - b. The Lord prepared Paul for the tribulation he would face
 - i. **Acts 20:22-23** – *"And see, now I go bound in the spirit to Jerusalem, not knowing the things that will happen to me there, except that the Holy Spirit testifies in every city, saying that chains and tribulations await me."*
 - c. The Jews viewed Paul as a traitor because he preached that Jesus was the Messiah and that salvation was a gift given through Jesus' sacrifice on the cross rather than a reward for obedience to the law
 - i. They attacked him and wanted to kill him
 - ii. A Roman military unit intervened
 - iii. The Romans realized it was a religious dispute and took Paul to the Sanhedrin—the Jewish ruling council—to defend himself
 - iv. Paul boldly gave his defense
 1. One of the reasons he could defend himself confidently was that he possessed a good conscience
3. What is a conscience?

- a. Both the Biblical and secular view define conscience as “our moral compass”
- b. Conscience is mentioned twenty-nine times in the New Testament
- c. Conscience in the Greek is **suneidesis**: **sun**, meaning “with,” and **oida**, meaning “to know”
 - i. Vines defines conscience as “a co-knowledge with oneself and God”
- d. Conscience is the inner judge or witness that approves when we do right and disapproves when we do wrong

4. We inherit conscience from God

- a. **Genesis 1:26-27** – *“Then God said, ‘Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth. So God created man in His own image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them.’”*
 - i. We are made in the image and likeness of God, with His essential nature and pattern
 - 1. Part of what we inherit from God is the “moral compass” of conscience
 - a. **Genesis 3:7** – *“Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves coverings.”*
 - b. No one taught Adam and Eve to feel shame; their consciences were already implanted and they therefore felt conviction immediately upon sinning against God
 - i. They felt vulnerable and exposed
 - c. **Romans 2:15b** – *“...their conscience also bearing witness, and between themselves their thoughts accusing or else excusing them.”*
 - i. The existence of conscience testifies to the existence of God

5. Types of conscience in Scripture

- a. Good conscience
 - i. **Hebrews 13:18** – *“Pray for us; for we are confident that we have a good conscience, in all things desiring to live honorably.”*
 - ii. When we heed the still small voice of the Holy Spirit, a good conscience results
- b. Weak conscience
 - i. **1 Corinthians 8:10-13** – *“For if anyone sees you who have knowledge eating in an idol’s temple, will not the conscience of him who is weak be emboldened to eat those things offered to idols? And because of your knowledge shall the weak brother perish, for whom Christ died? But when you thus sin against the brethren, and wound their weak conscience, you sin against Christ. Therefore, if food makes my brother stumble, I will never again eat meat, lest I make my brother stumble.”*
 - 1. Even if we may have freedom in an area (not speaking of sins addressed in Scripture), we should not impose our freedoms at the cost of another’s convictions
- c. Evil conscience
 - i. **Hebrews 10:22** – *“Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water.”*

1. Before knowing Jesus as Savior, our consciences are continually guilty
- d. Pure (clear) conscience
 - i. **2 Timothy 1:3** – *“I thank God, whom I serve with a pure conscience, as my forefathers did, as without ceasing I remember you in my prayers night and day.”*
- e. Seared conscience
 - i. **1 Timothy 4:1-2** – *“Now the Spirit expressly says that in latter times some will depart from the faith, giving heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons, speaking lies in hypocrisy, having their own conscience seared with a hot iron.”*
 1. When we ignore the Holy Spirit’s conviction over and over, we can eventually become dead to conviction in that area
 - a. A seared conscience is extremely dangerous
 - b. Be grateful for conviction because it reveals that God loves you and your conscience is still functioning
6. Takeaways
 - a. Thank God that you have been delivered from an evil conscience
 - b. Honor God by maintaining a good, pure, and clear conscience
 - c. Repent to God early and often to avoid a seared conscience

Discussion Questions

1. Read **Acts 21:30-34a and 22:30-23:1** to provide a foundation for your Bible study time.
2. What is a conscience? (See #3 above)
3. Read **Genesis 1:26-27** and **Genesis 3:7**. Where does conscience originate? (See #4 above)
4. Read **Romans 2:15b**. How does the presence of the conscience testify to the existence of God? When have you experienced this principle in your life? (See #4a-i-1-c-i above)
5. Read **Hebrews 13:18**. What is a “good conscience”? What must we do to have a good conscience? Discuss a time where you either submitted or did not submit to the still small voice of God and the resulting effects on your conscience. (See #5a above)
6. Read **1 Corinthians 8:10-13**. Discuss the concept of a “weak conscience.” How should we respond when our conscience differs from another Believer in relation to behaviors not explicitly addressed in Scripture? (See #5b above)
7. Read **Hebrews 10:22**. What does it mean to have an “evil conscience”? How can a person overcome an evil conscience? (See #5c above)
8. Read **2 Timothy 1:3**. Discuss the benefits of a pure conscience. (See #5d above)
9. **1 Timothy 4:1-2**. Why is a “seared conscience” dangerous? How can we avoid searing our

consciences? (See #5e above)

10. What are practical things we can do to protect our consciences? (See #6 above)

11. Close your meeting by allowing the Holy Spirit to lead your time of prayer.

* Unless noted, all Scriptures quoted are from the New King James Version (NKJV)

October 1, 2023

“Take Courage!”

Acts 23:1-11

Pastor Gary Hamrick



In Acts 23, Paul was put in prison for protection from an angry mob that was trying to kill him. While there, the Lord Jesus appeared to him and said, “Be of good cheer,” or literally, “Take courage!” Jesus knew exactly what Paul needed to hear amid his discouragement. Our Lord is the dispenser of encouragement, and He knows when we need it too. There are five separate occasions recorded in the Bible when Jesus spoke encouragement to individuals, and every time He did, it was to address their fear, worry, or discouragement. Do you need to hear Jesus say, “Take courage” today? Is there someone in your life you could encourage? In this teaching from Acts 23, we will discuss encouragement from Jesus in the life of the Believer.

1. **Acts 23:1-11** – *“Then Paul, looking earnestly at the council, said, ‘Men and brethren, I have lived in all good conscience before God until this day.’ And the high priest Ananias commanded those who stood by him to strike him on the mouth. Then Paul said to him, ‘God will strike you, you whitewashed wall! For you sit to judge me according to the law, and do you command me to be struck contrary to the law?’ And those who stood by said, ‘Do you revile God’s high priest?’ Then Paul said, ‘I did not know, brethren, that he was the high priest; for it is written, “You shall not speak evil of a ruler of your people.”’ But when Paul perceived that one part were Sadducees and the other Pharisees, he cried out in the council, ‘Men and brethren, I am a Pharisee, the son of a Pharisee; concerning the hope and resurrection of the dead I am being judged!’ And when he had said this, a dissension arose between the Pharisees and the Sadducees; and the assembly was divided. For Sadducees say that there is no resurrection—and no angel or spirit; but the Pharisees confess both. Then there arose a loud outcry. And the scribes of the Pharisees’ party arose and protested, saying, ‘We find no evil in this man; but if a spirit or an angel has spoken to him, let us not fight against God.’ Now when there arose a great dissension, the commander, fearing lest Paul might be pulled to pieces by them, commanded the soldiers to go down and take him by force from among them, and bring him into the barracks. But the following night the Lord stood by him and said, ‘Be of good cheer, Paul; for as you have testified for Me in Jerusalem, so you must also bear witness at Rome.’”*
2. Paul before the Sanhedrin
 - a. An angry mob attacked Paul
 - i. The Jews viewed Paul as a traitor for preaching that salvation is through belief in Jesus rather than through works
 - b. Paul was rescued from the mob by Roman soldiers
 - i. The Roman commander realized the confrontation was regarding a religious dispute and took Paul to face the Jewish ruling council, known as the Sanhedrin
 - c. The Sanhedrin was in agreement with the mob
 - d. The council consisted of Sadducees and Pharisees
 - i. The two sects had the same basic beliefs with some doctrinal differences

1. The Sadducees rejected the concept of resurrection from the dead and did not believe in heaven, hell, angels, or demons
- e. Paul knew he would not get a fair trial and asserted his heritage as a Pharisee (v. 6)
 - i. He used the doctrinal differences to pit the two sects against one another instead of against him (v. 7)
 1. The Pharisees briefly came to his defense, but the two sides erupted into chaos
3. Paul in prison
 - a. The Roman commander once again recognized Paul was in danger and placed him in prison for his safety
 - b. Jesus appeared to Paul while he was in prison and stated, *"Be of good cheer, Paul; for as you have testified for Me in Jerusalem, so you must also bear witness at Rome."*
 - i. *"Be of good cheer"* is translated in other versions as *"be encouraged"* or *"take courage"*
 1. The Greek word for *"be of good cheer"* is **tharseō**, which means "to be confident and take courage"
 - c. Paul would remain in prison or under house arrest for years as he attempted to get a fair trial
 - i. God used Paul's imprisonment as an opportunity to place him before the highest government officials in the land so that he could share the Gospel with them
 1. **Acts 9:15** – *"...[Paul] is a chosen vessel of Mine to bear My name before Gentiles, kings, and the children of Israel."*
 2. Paul presented his defense and testified of Jesus to:
 - a. The Sanhedrin in Jerusalem (Acts 23)
 - b. Governor Felix in Caesarea (Acts 24)
 - c. Governor Festus (Acts 25)
 - d. King Agrippa (Acts 26)
 - e. Emperor Nero (Caesar) in Rome
4. Take courage
 - a. Jesus used the word **tharseō** five times in the New Testament:
 - i. When He healed a paralytic
 1. **Matthew 9:2** – *"Then behold, they brought to Him a paralytic lying on a bed. When Jesus saw their faith, He said to the paralytic, 'Son, **be of good cheer**; your sins are forgiven you.'"*
 - ii. When He walked on water
 1. **Mark 6:50** – *"For they all saw Him and were troubled. But immediately He talked with them and said to them, '**Be of good cheer!** It is I; do not be afraid.'"*
 - iii. When He healed a woman who had been bleeding for twelve years
 1. **Luke 8:48** – *"And He said to her, 'Daughter, **be of good cheer**; your faith has made you well. Go in peace.'"*
 - iv. When telling His disciples of the tribulations they would face
 1. **John 16:33** – *"These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation; but **be of good cheer**, I have overcome the world."*

v. When Paul was placed in prison

1. **Acts 23:11** – *“But the following night the Lord stood by him and said, **“Be of good cheer, Paul; for as you have testified for Me in Jerusalem, so you must also bear witness at Rome.”***

5. Success in God’s eyes is measured by faithfulness, not results

- a. There is no record of any of the government officials that Paul spoke with accepting Christ as Savior, but there is evidence that members of Caesar’s household became Christians
 - i. **Philippians 4:22** – *“All the saints greet you, but especially those who are of Caesar’s household.”*
- b. Jesus gives us courage and calls us to impart that courage to others
 - i. **Hebrews 3:13** – *“But encourage one another daily, as long as it is called Today, so that none of you may be hardened by sin’s deceitfulness.” (1984 NIV)*
 - ii. **Hebrews 10:25** – *“Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching.” (1984 NIV)*
 - iii. **Psalms 27** –

*“The LORD is my light and my salvation;
Whom shall I fear?
The LORD is the strength of my life;
Of whom shall I be afraid?
When the wicked came against me
To eat up my flesh,
My enemies and foes,
They stumbled and fell.
Though an army may encamp against me,
My heart shall not fear;
Though war may rise against me,
In this I will be confident.
One thing I have desired of the LORD,
That will I seek:
That I may dwell in the house of the LORD
All the days of my life,
To behold the beauty of the LORD,
And to inquire in His temple.
For in the time of trouble
He shall hide me in His pavilion;
In the secret place of His tabernacle
He shall hide me;
He shall set me high upon a rock.
And now my head shall be lifted up above my enemies
all around me;
Therefore I will offer sacrifices of joy in His tabernacle;*

*I will sing, yes, I will sing praises to the LORD.
 Hear, O LORD, when I cry with my voice!
 Have mercy also upon me, and answer me.
 When You said, 'Seek My face,'
 My heart said to You, 'Your face, LORD, I will seek.'
 Do not hide Your face from me;
 Do not turn Your servant away in anger;
 You have been my help;
 Do not leave me nor forsake me,
 O God of my salvation.
 When my father and my mother forsake me,
 Then the LORD will take care of me.
 Teach me Your way, O LORD,
 And lead me in a smooth path, because of my enemies.
 Do not deliver me to the will of my adversaries;
 For false witnesses have risen against me,
 And such as breathe out violence.
 I would have lost heart, unless I had believed
 That I would see the goodness of the LORD In the land of the living.
 Wait on the LORD;
 Be of good courage,
 And He shall strengthen your heart;
 Wait, I say, on the LORD!*

Discussion Questions

1. Read [Acts 23:1-11](#) to provide a foundation for your Bible study time.
2. Why was Paul taken before the Sanhedrin? Why was he ultimately placed in prison? (See #2 and #3a above)
3. Discuss the significance of Jesus' appearance to Paul. Why did Jesus choose that time in Paul's life to appear with a word of encouragement? (See #3 above)
4. Read [Matthew 9:2](#), [Mark 6:50](#), [Luke 8:48](#), and [John 16:33](#). Discuss the circumstances under which Jesus spoke encouragement to people. Are there specific times in your life when God spoke encouragement to you? (See #4 above)
5. How does God measure success? (See #5 above)
6. Read [Philippians 4:22](#). Why did God allow Paul to endure prison, for the purpose of placing him in a position to share the Gospel with government officials, when there is no record that those officials ever accepted Christ as Savior? What can we learn from Paul's experience? (See #5 above)

7. Read [Hebrews 3:13](#) and [Hebrews 10:25](#). Why is both receiving and giving encouragement important? How can we encourage others? (See #5b above)
8. Read [Psalm 27](#). What verses do you find most encouraging in this chapter? Why? (See #5b-iii above)
9. Close your meeting by allowing the Holy Spirit to lead your time of prayer.

* Unless noted, all Scriptures quoted are from the New King James Version (NKJV)

October 8, 2023

"The Judgment to Come"

Acts 24:22-27

Pastor Gary Hamrick



The Bible speaks about JUDGMENT—a personal judgment when we stand before the Lord and a global judgment for the wicked, known as the Great White Throne Judgment. For those who don't know Christ as Lord and Savior, the idea of "judgment" might be scary. But to those who have a relationship with Jesus, there is nothing to be afraid of! John 5:24 tells us that Believers "shall not come into judgment but pass from death to life." That is because the punishment intended for us was taken by Jesus on the cross. In this study, we will consider the "the judgment to come" mentioned in Acts 24.

1. **Acts 24:22-27** – *"But when Felix heard these things, having more accurate knowledge of the Way, he adjourned the proceedings and said, 'When Lysias the commander comes down, I will make a decision on your case.' So he commanded the centurion to keep Paul and to let him have liberty, and told him not to forbid any of his friends to provide for or visit him. And after some days, when Felix came with his wife Drusilla, who was Jewish, he sent for Paul and heard him concerning the faith in Christ. Now as he reasoned about righteousness, self-control, and the judgment to come, Felix was afraid and answered, 'Go away for now; when I have a convenient time I will call for you.' Meanwhile he also hoped that money would be given him by Paul, that he might release him. Therefore he sent for him more often and conversed with him. But after two years Porcius Festus succeeded Felix; and Felix, wanting to do the Jews a favor, left Paul bound."*
2. The Apostle Paul before Governor Felix
 - a. After being placed in prison for his own protection, a plot was devised to murder Paul
 - i. Paul's nephew uncovered the plot and Paul was transferred to Caesarea Maritima
 - b. Paul presented his defense and shared the good news of Christ with Governor Felix and his wife Drusilla
 - i. Felix and Drusilla were curious about Paul's faith in Christ but did not accept Christ
 1. Felix said he would call Paul back at a "convenient time"
 - c. Paul focused on three things in his discourse
 1. Righteousness
 2. Self-control
 3. The judgment to come
3. Righteousness
 - a. God wants us to understand His assessment of the human condition so we will see our need for a Savior
 - i. **Romans 3:10b** – *"There is none righteous, no, not one."*
 - ii. **Isaiah 64:6a** – *"But we are all like an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are like filthy rags."*
 1. The Hebrew word for rags translates to "menstrual cloths"
 - b. If we believe the lie that we are "basically good," we will die in our sin

- i. **Jeremiah 17:9a** – *“The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked; who can know it?”*
 - c. Jesus loves us, died for us, and those who put their faith in Him will be saved
 - i. **Philippians 3:9** – *“...not having my own righteousness, which is from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is from God by faith.”*
- 4. Self-control
 - a. A lack of self-control is connected to almost every sin
 - b. **Galatians 5:22-23** – *“But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law.”*
 - c. **Proverbs 25:28** – *“Whoever has no rule over his own spirit is like a city broken down, without walls.”*
- 5. The judgment to come
 - a. Jesus is Judge
 - i. **John 5:22** – *“For the Father judges no one, but has committed all judgment to the Son.”*
 - ii. **Acts 10:42** – *“And He commanded us to preach to the people, and to testify that it is He who was ordained by God to be Judge of the living and the dead.”*
 - b. Everyone will be judged
 - i. **Hebrews 9:27** – *“And as it is appointed for men to die once, but after this the judgment.”*
 - ii. **Romans 14:10b** – *“For we shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ.”*
 - c. The Great White Throne Judgment is only for the wicked at the end of the age
 - i. **Revelation 20:11-15** – *“Then I saw a great white throne and Him who sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away. And there was found no place for them. And I saw the dead, small and great, standing before God, and books were opened. And another book was opened, which is the Book of Life. And the dead were judged according to their works, by the things which were written in the books. The sea gave up the dead who were in it, and Death and Hades delivered up the dead who were in them. And they were judged, each one according to his works. Then Death and Hades were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death. And anyone not found written in the Book of Life was cast into the lake of fire.”*
 - d. Believers in Jesus are “judged” at the time of salvation; since Christ’s righteousness is imputed to us and our names are written in the Lamb’s Book of Life at that time, the only “judgment” Christians will face is one where Jesus determines our rewards, not our punishment
 - i. **Revelation 21:27** – *“But there shall by no means enter it anything that defiles, or causes an abomination or a lie, but only those who are written in the Lamb’s Book of Life.”*
 - ii. **John 5:24** – *“Most assuredly, I say to you, he who hears My word and believes in Him who sent Me has everlasting life, and shall not come into judgment, but has passed from death into life.”*

- iii. **Matthew 16:27** – *“For the Son of Man will come in the glory of His Father with His angels, and then He will reward each according to his works.”*
- e. For those who are right with God through salvation in Christ, there is no reason to fear judgment
- f. Those who are delaying accepting Christ as Savior, waiting for a “more convenient time,” must realize that we are not guaranteed tomorrow

Discussion Questions

1. Read **Acts 24:22-27** to provide a foundation for your Bible study time.
2. What topics did Paul address in his discourse before Felix and Drusilla? (See #2c above)
3. Read **Romans 3:10b**, **Isaiah 64:6a**, **Jeremiah 17:9a**, and **Philippians 3:9**. Discuss the concept of righteousness. Why is righteousness important to understand? How do we become righteous? (See #3 above)
4. Read **Galatians 5:22-23** and **Proverbs 25:28**. Why is self-control important in the life of the Believer? How do we improve our self-control? (See #4 above)
5. Who is the ultimate Judge? How do we know? (See #5a above)
6. Who will be judged? (See #5b above)
7. What is the Great White Throne Judgment? (See #5c above)
8. How are Believers judged? (See #5d above)
9. How should the coming judgment motivate us in our interactions with nonbelievers?
10. Close your meeting by allowing the Holy Spirit to lead your time of prayer.

* Unless noted, all Scriptures quoted are from the New King James Version (NKJV)



Life is full of twists and turns that may sometimes catch us by surprise, but God is never caught off-guard. And some of those twists and turns are intended as "divine detours." The Lord desires to use Believers to share their testimony so others can hear about a life-changing relationship with Christ, and God will bring people along our path so that they can learn the good news of Jesus. In the book of Acts, we see this scenario play out in Paul's life. During his imprisonment in Caesarea, God brought Paul five influential leaders so those leaders could hear Paul testify of Jesus. It is a good reminder that we should be looking for those "divine detours"—times when God will bring people along our path to hear the Gospel of Jesus Christ. May we be faithful to share our story for God's glory!

1. Jesus spoke words of encouragement to Paul while he was in prison
 - a. **Acts 23:11** – *"But the following night the Lord stood by him and said, 'Be of good cheer, Paul; for as you have testified for Me in Jerusalem, so you must also bear witness at Rome.'"*
 - i. The Jewish leaders wanted to kill Paul for teaching that salvation was through faith in Jesus Christ rather than obedience to the law
 1. **John 1:17** – *"For the law was given through Moses, but grace and truth came through Jesus Christ."*
 - ii. The Roman garrison arrested Paul and placed him in prison for his protection
 - iii. Jesus appeared to Paul to encourage him and give him an assignment
 - b. Paul would ultimately get out of prison, but Jesus did not say how quickly or by what means
 - i. Paul would be transferred to another prison in Caesarea, stand trial multiple times, endure a shipwreck, be bit by a poisonous snake, and more
 - ii. God wanted Paul to share the Gospel with people he met along the way
 1. Governor Felix and his wife Drusilla
 2. Governor Porcius Festus
 3. King Agrippa II and his sister Bernice
2. **Acts 26** – *"Then Agrippa said to Paul, 'You are permitted to speak for yourself.' So Paul stretched out his hand and answered for himself: 'I think myself happy, King Agrippa, because today I shall answer for myself before you concerning all the things of which I am accused by the Jews, especially because you are expert in all customs and questions which have to do with the Jews. Therefore I beg you to hear me patiently. My manner of life from my youth, which was spent from the beginning among my own nation at Jerusalem, all the Jews know. They knew me from the first, if they were willing to testify, that according to the strictest sect of our religion I lived a Pharisee. And now I stand and am judged for the hope of the promise made by God to our fathers. To this promise our twelve tribes, earnestly serving God night and day, hope to attain. For this hope's sake, King Agrippa, I am accused by the Jews. Why should it be thought incredible by you that God raises the dead? Indeed, I myself thought I must do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth. This I also did in Jerusalem,*

and many of the saints I shut up in prison, having received authority from the chief priests; and when they were put to death, I cast my vote against them. And I punished them often in every synagogue and compelled them to blaspheme; and being exceedingly enraged against them, I persecuted them even to foreign cities. While thus occupied, as I journeyed to Damascus with authority and commission from the chief priests, at midday, O king, along the road I saw a light from heaven, brighter than the sun, shining around me and those who journeyed with me. And when we all had fallen to the ground, I heard a voice speaking to me and saying in the Hebrew language, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me? It is hard for you to kick against the goads." So I said, "Who are You, Lord?" And He said, "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. But rise and stand on your feet; for I have appeared to you for this purpose, to make you a minister and a witness both of the things which you have seen and of the things which I will yet reveal to you. I will deliver you from the Jewish people, as well as from the Gentiles, to whom I now send you, to open their eyes, in order to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among those who are sanctified by faith in Me." Therefore, King Agrippa, I was not disobedient to the heavenly vision, but declared first to those in Damascus and in Jerusalem, and throughout all the region of Judea, and then to the Gentiles, that they should repent, turn to God, and do works befitting repentance. For these reasons the Jews seized me in the temple and tried to kill me. Therefore, having obtained help from God, to this day I stand, witnessing both to small and great, saying no other things than those which the prophets and Moses said would come—that the Christ would suffer, that He would be the first to rise from the dead, and would proclaim light to the Jewish people and to the Gentiles.' Now as he thus made his defense, Festus said with a loud voice, 'Paul, you are beside yourself! Much learning is driving you mad!' But he said, 'I am not mad, most noble Festus, but speak the words of truth and reason. For the king, before whom I also speak freely, knows these things; for I am convinced that none of these things escapes his attention, since this thing was not done in a corner. King Agrippa, do you believe the prophets? I know that you do believe.' Then Agrippa said to Paul, 'You almost persuade me to become a Christian.' And Paul said, 'I would to God that not only you, but also all who hear me today, might become both almost and altogether such as I am, except for these chains.' When he had said these things, the king stood up, as well as the governor and Bernice and those who sat with them; and when they had gone aside, they talked among themselves, saying, 'This man is doing nothing deserving of death or chains.' Then Agrippa said to Festus, 'This man might have been set free if he had not appealed to Caesar.'"

- a. God did not immediately rescue Paul from his circumstances, but instead sent him to places where He wanted him to share the Gospel
 - i. God does not always give us all the details regarding the future but provides grace for each situation as it comes
- b. He often takes us down paths we might not have chosen for ourselves because He wants us to prepare and look for divine appointments to share the good news of Jesus with others
 - i. **1 Peter 3:15b** – "Always be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you."

3. Divine detours

- a. Success in God's eyes is not measured by results but by our obedience
 - i. None of the people Paul shared the Gospel with is recorded as having accepted Christ

- ii. Paul was successful in sharing his testimony
- iii. We must leave the results with the Lord
 - 1. **1 Corinthians 3:6-7** – *“I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the increase. So then neither he who plants is anything, nor he who waters, but God who gives the increase.”*
- b. God opens doors so that we can open our mouths
 - i. We must tell people the good news of Jesus
 - 1. **Acts 1:8** – *“But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”* (1984 NIV)
- c. Every Christian has a testimony worth sharing
 - i. Tell your story for His glory

Discussion Questions

1. Read **Acts 23:11 and Acts 26** to provide a foundation for your Bible study time.
2. What was the assignment Jesus gave to Paul? (See #1a above)
3. Discuss some of the challenges Paul faced. How might you feel in these circumstances? (See #1b-i above)
4. Why did God allow Paul to endure these hardships? (See #1b-ii above)
5. Why can we take comfort when facing unexpected detours in our own lives? (See #2a-i above)
6. Read **1 Peter 3:15b**. How can we “be ready” for opportunities to share the good news of Jesus? (See 2b-i above)
7. Read **1 Corinthians 3:6-7**. How does God measure success? (See #3a above)
8. Read **Acts 1:8**. Why does God open specific doors in our lives? How should this affect our thoughts, attitudes, and actions? (See #3b above)
9. How might you use your story for His glory? (See #3c above)
10. Close your meeting by allowing the Holy Spirit to lead your time of prayer.

* Unless noted, all Scriptures quoted are from the New King James Version (NKJV)

November 5, 2023

"Stop Listening to the Majority"

Acts 27:1-12

Pastor Gary Hamrick



There is a lot of cultural pressure today to conform to the latest majority opinion. Groupthink can be intimidating, and the "majority consensus" often causes people to either go silent to avoid ridicule or conform to fit in. But Paul said in [Galatians 1:10](#), *"If I were still trying to please man, I would not be a servant of Christ."* In other words, we can't be a God-pleaser and a man-pleaser at the same time. Godly men and women in the Bible have always been willing to stand alone when necessary. In this study we will discuss how to stop listening to the majority and how to start honoring God.

1. [Acts 27:1-12](#) – *"And when it was decided that we should sail to Italy, they delivered Paul and some other prisoners to one named Julius, a centurion of the Augustan Regiment. So, entering a ship of Adramyttium, we put to sea, meaning to sail along the coasts of Asia. Aristarchus, a Macedonian of Thessalonica, was with us. And the next day we landed at Sidon. And Julius treated Paul kindly and gave him liberty to go to his friends and receive care. When we had put to sea from there, we sailed under the shelter of Cyprus, because the winds were contrary. And when we had sailed over the sea which is off Cilicia and Pamphylia, we came to Myra, a city of Lycia. There the centurion found an Alexandrian ship sailing to Italy, and he put us on board. When we had sailed slowly many days, and arrived with difficulty off Cnidus, the wind not permitting us to proceed, we sailed under the shelter of Crete off Salmone. Passing it with difficulty, we came to a place called Fair Havens, near the city of Lasea. Now when much time had been spent, and sailing was now dangerous because the Fast was already over, Paul advised them, saying, 'Men, I perceive that this voyage will end with disaster and much loss, not only of the cargo and ship, but also our lives.' Nevertheless the centurion was more persuaded by the helmsman and the owner of the ship than by the things spoken by Paul. And because the harbor was not suitable to winter in, the majority advised to set sail from there also, if by any means they could reach Phoenix, a harbor of Crete opening toward the southwest and northwest, and winter there."*
2. After being falsely accused of heresy and spending two years in prison, Paul was transferred from Caesarea to Rome by ship so that he could appeal his case
 - a. During the journey, a typhoon arose, and the ship was tossed around the Mediterranean for two weeks
 - b. In verse 21, Paul stated, *"Men, I perceive that this voyage will end with disaster and much loss, not only of the cargo and ship, but also our lives."*
 - i. Paul had warned the group that it was not safe to sail, but the centurion Julius ignored him in favor of the majority opinion
 - ii. This decision led to disaster as the storm would ultimately wreck the ship completely
3. The fallible majority
 - a. People will often adopt the views of the majority even when they contradict their own senses

- i. Dr. Solomon Asch, a prominent 20th century psychologist, conducted “conformity” experiments that showed that the desire to be right is not as strong as the desire to be liked
 1. Dr. Asch’s participants were placed in a group that was mostly made up of individuals who were, unknowingly to the participants, “plants,” placed there as part of the experiment
 2. Upon being shown three lines of varying lengths, group members were to state which line was equal in length to a fourth line
 - a. The “plants” went first, and each selected a specific line that was obviously not the correct choice
 - b. When it was time for the participants to choose, they selected the same line as the others in effort to avoid ridicule from the group
 3. In our current culture, it can be even more tempting to compromise truth as online social platforms have unlocked an even larger majority
 - ii. Be willing to stand in the minority or even stand completely alone
 - b. Mark Twain stated, *“Whenever you find yourself on the side of the majority, it is time to pause and reflect.”*
 - c. Booker T. Washington said, *“A lie doesn't become truth, wrong doesn't become right, and evil doesn't become good, just because it's accepted by a majority.”*
 - d. We must become comfortable with being disliked
4. Be a God pleaser, not a man pleaser
- a. **Galatians 1:10** – *“For am I now seeking the approval of man, or of God? Or am I trying to please man? If I were still trying to please man, I would not be a servant of Christ.”* (ESV)
 - i. Pleasing God and pleasing the world are not compatible
 - ii. We cannot claim to be servants of Christ if we are not willing in all circumstances to honor Him
 - b. There are many examples in the Bible of God’s servants facing ridicule and hatred from the tyranny of the majority
 - i. The majority laughed at Noah
 - ii. The majority rebelled against Moses
 - iii. The majority wanted a king instead of God
 - iv. The majority stoned Stephen
 - v. The majority beat Paul
 - vi. The majority killed Jesus
 - c. It is better to stand alone with Jesus than to stand with the majority against Him
 - i. **Joshua 5:13-15** – *“And it came to pass, when Joshua was by Jericho, that he lifted his eyes and looked, and behold, a Man stood opposite him with His sword drawn in His hand. And Joshua went to Him and said to Him, ‘Are You for us or for our adversaries?’ So He said, ‘No, but as Commander of the army of the LORD I have now come.’ And Joshua fell on his face to the earth and worshiped, and said to Him, ‘What does my Lord say to His servant?’ Then the Commander of the LORD’s army said to Joshua,*

'Take your sandal off your foot, for the place where you stand is holy.' And Joshua did so."

1. We know the individual Joshua encountered was God because Joshua was allowed to worship Him and because the Man told Joshua a similar message to one God gave Moses at the burning bush: *"Take off your sandals because this is holy ground."*
2. Our question should not be, "Lord, are you with me?" but rather, "Lord, what are you doing and how can I join with You?"

5. Stop listening to the majority

- a. Great men and women of God are willing to go alone when necessary
 - i. Abraham left his country and people to go where God led
 - ii. Noah built an ark while others mocked
 - iii. Daniel defied the king's command not to pray and he prayed to God anyway
 - iv. Esther stood alone in defense of her people
 - v. The prophets spoke God's words when no one would listen
 - vi. Mary gave birth to the Son of God when no one believed her
 - vii. Paul was imprisoned alone
 - viii. John was exiled on the island of Patmos alone
 - ix. The apostles were martyred alone
 - x. Jesus died alone
- b. Two choices
 - i. Religious leaders in Jesus' day were condemned because *"They loved the praise of men more than the praise of God."* ([John 12:43](#))
 - ii. Peter and the other apostles were commended because they said *"We ought to obey God rather than men."* ([Acts 5:29](#))
- c. Trust God more than you fear man
 - i. [Proverbs 29:25](#) – *"The fear of man brings a snare, but whoever trusts in the Lord shall be safe."*
- d. Draw your strength from the Lord
 - i. [Hebrews 12:2-3](#) – *"Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. Consider him who endured such opposition from sinful men, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart."* (1984 NIV)

Discussion Questions

1. Read [Acts 27:1-12](#) to provide a foundation for your Bible study time.
2. Paul was a seasoned traveler; why did the centurion Julius not listen to his warning not to sail? What happened as a result? (See #2b above)

3. What do Dr. Solomon Asch's conformity experiments tell us about human nature? (See #3a above)
4. Discuss what the fallible majority looks like in your life. When have you felt the pressure to be liked? (See #3a above)
5. Read [Galatians 1:10](#). Why is being a man-pleaser not compatible with being a God-pleaser? (See #4a-i above)
6. Read [Joshua 5:13-15](#). Why was Joshua's question misguided? What might have been a better question? (See #4c-ii above)
7. We have two choices: to be men-pleasers or God-pleasers. What Bible characters inspire you with their example of enduring persecution to obey the Lord? (See #4b & 5a above)
8. Read [Proverbs 29:25](#). How can you overcome the fear of man and practice trusting the Lord? (See #5c above)
9. Read [Hebrews 12:2-3](#). Who is the source of our boldness? How does this encourage you to be bold for God? (See #5d above)
10. Close your meeting by allowing the Holy Spirit to lead your time of prayer.

* Unless noted, all Scriptures quoted are from the New King James Version (NKJV)



All of us have seasons when we go through dark times. The emotional weight can be so heavy that it leaves us feeling hopeless. Hope is like oxygen—with it we thrive; without it we can die. But God is the God of hope and comfort who will help us in our time of need. In this study we will discuss six principles from Acts 27 to help us have God’s hope.

1. **Acts 27:13-38**— *“When the south wind blew softly, supposing that they had obtained their desire, putting out to sea, they sailed close by Crete. But not long after, a tempestuous head wind arose, called Euroclydon. So when the ship was caught, and could not head into the wind, we let her drive. And running under the shelter of an island called Clauda, we secured the skiff with difficulty. When they had taken it on board, they used cables to undergird the ship; and fearing lest they should run aground on the Syrtis Sands, they struck sail and so were driven. And because we were exceedingly tempest-tossed, the next day they lightened the ship. On the third day we threw the ship's tackle overboard with our own hands. Now when neither sun nor stars appeared for many days, and no small tempest beat on us, all hope that we would be saved was finally given up. But after long abstinence from food, then Paul stood in the midst of them and said, ‘Men, you should have listened to me, and not have sailed from Crete and incurred this disaster and loss. And now I urge you to take heart, for there will be no loss of life among you, but only of the ship. For there stood by me this night an angel of the God to whom I belong and whom I serve, saying, “Do not be afraid, Paul; you must be brought before Caesar; and indeed God has granted you all those who sail with you.” Therefore take heart, men, for I believe God that it will be just as it was told me. However, we must run aground on a certain island.’ Now when the fourteenth night had come, as we were driven up and down in the Adriatic Sea, about midnight the sailors sensed that they were drawing near some land. And they took soundings and found it to be twenty fathoms; and when they had gone a little farther, they took soundings again and found it to be fifteen fathoms. Then, fearing lest we should run aground on the rocks, they dropped four anchors from the stern, and prayed for day to come. And as the sailors were seeking to escape from the ship, when they had let down the skiff into the sea, under pretense of putting out anchors from the prow, Paul said to the centurion and the soldiers, ‘Unless these men stay in the ship, you cannot be saved.’ Then the soldiers cut away the ropes of the skiff and let it fall off. And as day was about to dawn, Paul implored them all to take food, saying, ‘Today is the fourteenth day you have waited and continued without food, and eaten nothing. Therefore I urge you to take nourishment, for this is for your survival, since not a hair will fall from the head of any of you.’ And when he had said these things, he took bread and gave thanks to God in the presence of them all; and when he had broken it he began to eat. Then they were all encouraged, and also took food themselves. And in all we were two hundred and seventy-six persons on the ship. So when they had eaten enough, they lightened the ship and threw out the wheat into the sea.”*

2. The apostle Paul gave a word of encouragement

- a. Paul had been under arrest for two years under a charge of heresy and was being transported from Caesarea to Rome by ship to appeal his case to Caesar
 - b. The ship was caught in a heavy storm called a “Euroclydon”—also known as a “Nor’easter”—for many days, and the men aboard believed they were going to die
 - c. God had spoken a word to Paul telling him neither he nor the other men would die; Paul stood up to encourage the men and tell them the storm would not take their lives
3. Hope is critical
- a. Dr. Curt Richter’s hope experiment
 - i. In 1957, Dr. Curt Richter, an American biologist, took wild rats and placed them in cylinders filled with water and found that they would tread water for an average of sixteen minutes before they would give up and die
 - ii. Dr. Richter then did the experiment again, and right around the sixteen-minute mark, he took the rats out, dried them off, fed them, and then put them back in the water
 - iii. The rats then tread water for an average of three days before giving up
 1. The rats continued treading water because of the hope of again being removed from the cylinder
 - b. **Psalm 31:24** – *“Be of good courage, and He shall strengthen your heart, all you who hope in the Lord.”*
4. Six principles to help us have God’s hope
- a. A word of encouragement goes a long way (v. 22)
 - i. Sometimes all we need is one person to speak an encouraging word
 - ii. **1 Thessalonians 5:11** – *“Therefore encourage one another and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing.”* (1984 NIV)
 - iii. **Hebrews 3:13** – *“But encourage one another daily, as long as it is called Today, so that none of you may be hardened by sin’s deceitfulness.”* (1984 NIV)
 - iv. **Hebrews 10:25** – *“Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another — and all the more as you see the Day approaching.”* (1984 NIV)
 - b. Find encouragement from God’s Word (v. 23-25)
 - i. Although Paul’s experience being visited by the Lord was out of the ordinary, God has a message from us in His Word that we can access every day
 - ii. **Romans 15:4** – *“For everything that was written in the past was written to teach us, so that through endurance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope.”* (1984 NIV)
 - c. Hold on to that “one promising thing” (v. 24)
 - i. Sometimes looking toward something, we are anticipating can give us hope—seeing your kids grow up, writing a book, getting married, etc.
 - ii. **James 1:12** – *“Blessed is the man who endures temptation; for when he has been approved, he will receive the crown of life which the Lord has promised to those who love Him.”*
 - d. Pray for a new day (v. 29)

- i. **Psalm 143:8** – *“Cause me to hear Your lovingkindness in the morning, for in You do I trust; cause me to know the way in which I should walk, for I lift up my soul to You.”*
- e. Keep up your strength (v. 33-37)
 - i. Do not neglect food and rest—when you do not have energy, you will feel even more hopeless
- f. Lighten the load (v. 38)
 - i. When ships are facing a storm, those aboard will sometimes throw off supplies that weigh the ship down to stabilize the vessel and keep it above water
 - ii. Do not overcommit yourself—you may have to say no to some opportunities until the storm passes

Discussion Questions

1. Read **Acts 27:13-38** to provide a foundation for your Bible study time.
2. Why did the men on the ship believe they were going to die? Discuss a time where you struggled to have hope. (See #2b above)
3. Discuss the significance of Dr. Curt Richter’s “hope experiment.” What does this experiment reveal to us? (See #3a above)
4. What is the importance of a “word of encouragement”? Has there ever been a time when someone spoke an encouraging word to you at “just the right moment”? (See #4a above)
5. Read **1 Thessalonians 5:11**, **Hebrews 3:13**, and **Hebrews 10:25**. How can we practice encouraging others? (See #4a-ii, #4a-iii, and #4a-iv above)
6. Read **Romans 15:4**. How does God’s Word provide hope? (See #4b above)
7. How can looking forward to “that one promising thing” or asking God for a “new day” increase our hope? (See #4c and #4d above)
8. What is the importance of keeping up our strength when we are feeling hopeless? (See #4e above)
9. What are practical ways we can “lighten the load” in seasons of hopelessness? (See #4f above)
10. Close your meeting by allowing the Holy Spirit to lead your time of prayer.

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December 3, 2023

“Being Relatable for Christ”

Acts 28:17-31

Pastor Gary Hamrick



In the closing chapter of Acts, Paul meets with some Jewish leaders to explain the truth about Jesus. Until his dying day, Paul used various encounters with people as opportunities to tell them about Jesus Christ. He always looked for a “relatable entry point” in connecting the hearts of people with the truth of Jesus. Paul’s approach to evangelism is a great example for us to follow in reaching people who cross our paths with the good news of Jesus Christ. Follow along as Pastor Gary encourages us to see the world around us with a heart for the lost.

1. **Acts 28:17-31** – *“And it came to pass after three days that Paul called the leaders of the Jews together. So when they had come together, he said to them: ‘Men and brethren, though I have done nothing against our people or the customs of our fathers, yet I was delivered as a prisoner from Jerusalem into the hands of the Romans, who, when they had examined me, wanted to let me go, because there was no cause for putting me to death. But when the Jews spoke against it, I was compelled to appeal to Caesar, not that I had anything of which to accuse my nation. For this reason therefore I have called for you, to see you and speak with you, because for the hope of Israel I am bound with this chain.’ Then they said to him, ‘We neither received letters from Judea concerning you, nor have any of the brethren who came reported or spoken any evil of you. But we desire to hear from you what you think; for concerning this sect, we know that it is spoken against everywhere.’ So when they had appointed him a day, many came to him at his lodging, to whom he explained and solemnly testified of the kingdom of God, persuading them concerning Jesus from both the Law of Moses and the Prophets, from morning till evening. And some were persuaded by the things which were spoken, and some disbelieved. So when they did not agree among themselves, they departed after Paul had said one word: ‘The Holy Spirit spoke rightly through Isaiah the prophet to our fathers, saying, “Go to this people and say: ‘Hearing you will hear, and shall not understand; and seeing you will see, and not perceive; for the hearts of this people have grown dull. Their ears are hard of hearing, and their eyes they have closed, lest they should see with their eyes and hear with their ears, lest they should understand with their hearts and turn, so that I should heal them.’” Therefore let it be known to you that the salvation of God has been sent to the Gentiles, and they will hear it!’ And when he had said these words, the Jews departed and had a great dispute among themselves. Then Paul dwelt two whole years in his own rented house, and received all who came to him, preaching the kingdom of God and teaching the things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ with all confidence, no one forbidding him.”*
2. The apostle Paul’s continued imprisonment
 - a. Paul was wrongfully imprisoned due to an accusation of heresy by the Jewish leaders for preaching that salvation is through faith in Jesus rather than obedience to the law
 - b. After two years of “legal wranglings,” he appealed his case to Caesar Nero and sailed to Rome
 - i. During the trip, he and the other 276 passengers endured a shipwreck when their ship capsized in a storm

- ii. All passengers survived by floating on pieces of the ship's debris until they reached the island of Malta
 - iii. Paul then sailed the rest of the way to Rome where he was placed on house arrest and allowed to have visitors
 - c. He would ultimately be beheaded five to seven years later by Nero's order
- 3. While imprisoned, Paul used every opportunity to share with others about Jesus
 - a. Paul led some of Caesar's servants to Christ
 - i. **Philippians 4:22** – *"All the saints greet you, but especially those who are of Caesar's household."*
 - ii. God places people in our path so that we can share with them the good news of Christ
 - b. Paul would find a relatable entry point in his conversations with others to share about Jesus
 - i. **1 Corinthians 9:19-22** – *"For though I am free from all men, I have made myself a servant to all, that I might win the more; and to the Jews I became as a Jew, that I might win Jews; to those who are under the law, as under the law, that I might win those who are under the law; to those who are without law, as without law (not being without law toward God, but under law toward Christ), that I might win those who are without law; to the weak I became as weak, that I might win the weak. I have become all things to all men that I might by all means save some."*
 - ii. We can better help people understand the Gospel when we understand their backgrounds
 - 1. Paul used the Jewish Scriptures to reason with the Jews
 - 2. When Paul reasoned with Gentiles in Acts 17, he appealed to their belief in an "unknown God," explaining to them that this God was actually Jesus, the God of the universe
 - 3. Some people were persuaded and some were not, but Paul was faithful to his calling to share the Gospel and left the results to God
- 4. Every chance encounter is an opportunity
 - a. A simple question to provide an entry point to a conversation about Jesus is, "Do you go to church?"
 - i. If they say yes, you can follow up with, "Where?"
 - 1. Then ask how long they have been following Christ
 - ii. If they say no, you can follow up with, "Why not?"
 - 1. If they had a bad experience at church, explain the importance of following Christ even when others may not represent Him well
 - iii. Find the entry point for the people you encounter
 - 1. Be observant
 - 2. Be willing to tell others about Christ
 - 3. Be an example of a life in submission to Christ
 - b. God will take you to "Caesar's household" (wherever He places you) so that those around you can see and hear Jesus in you

Discussion Questions

1. Read **Acts 28:17-31** to provide a foundation for your Bible study time.
2. Read **Philippians 4:22**. How do we know Paul was sharing Christ with those in Caesar's household? (See #3a above)
3. Why does God place people in our path? If you were wrongfully imprisoned, would you still share Christ with those around you? Why or why not?
4. Read **1 Corinthians 9:19-22**. How would Paul begin conversations about the Gospel? What can we learn from Paul's approach? (See #3b above)
5. Compare and contrast the way Paul reasoned with the Jews in Acts 28 with his conversation with Gentiles in Acts 17. (See #3b-ii-1 and #3b-ii-2 above)
6. Where did Paul focus his efforts? (See #3b-ii-3 above)
7. Have you ever shared the Gospel with another person? What was your entry point to begin the conversation?
8. How can we find entry points with others? (See #4a-ii above)
9. Where is "Caesar's household" in your life? (See #4b above)
10. Close your meeting by allowing the Holy Spirit to lead your time of prayer.

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