

**Sunday – November 19, 2017**

## **Preparation**

Over the next five days of Daily in the word we'll read through the remainder of the book of Acts, giving much focus to the events of Paul's ministry. For those that allow the devil to tell them that "God can't use me because of my past", Paul is living proof that God can use any one. Having a slight understanding of his past through the passages we've read up to this point, Paul was, without doubt, the antithesis of a godly person. In our first "introduction" to him, we read in Acts 7:58 concerning the death of Stephen, "And cast him out of the city, and stoned him: and the witnesses laid down their clothes at a young man's feet, whose name was Saul." As we read further in Acts 8:1 we find that, "Saul was consenting unto his death. And at that time there was a great persecution against the church which was at Jerusalem; and they were all scattered abroad throughout the regions of Judaea and Samaria, except the apostles." In Philippians 3:5-6, Paul's description of himself was as follows; "Circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, an Hebrew of the Hebrews; as touching the law, a Pharisee; Concerning zeal, persecuting the church; touching the righteousness which is in the law, blameless." His "zeal" was so great that after his conversion, Ananias has the following fears concerning Paul, "Then Ananias answered, Lord, I have heard by many of this man, how much evil he hath done to thy saints at Jerusalem: And here he hath authority from the chief priests to bind all that call on thy name."

This being the case, again, Paul was not raised in a "Christian" home, nor saved at an early age in Sunday school. He was a murderer, sadly, in the name of the Lord. Yet, God used him mightily to minister to the Gentiles, and ultimately the church, all because, from the moment Paul was faced with the reality of Who the Lord Jesus Christ truly is, he lived a life of surrender. Peter reminds us in Acts 10:34, "Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons".

Therefore, no matter what any of our pasts look like, we too, being confronted with the word of God and the reality of Who Christ is, can be used mightily of God, if only we live a life of surrender.

As we follow Paul throughout his missionary journeys, going from place to place spreading the word of God, it should serve as reason for thanksgiving. Ephesians 3:1-7 provides an explanation of Paul's ministry that we'll be reading about this upcoming week: "For this cause I Paul, the prisoner of Jesus Christ for you Gentiles, If ye have heard of the dispensation of the grace of God which is given me to you-ward: How that by revelation he made known unto me

the mystery; (as I wrote afore in few words, Whereby, when ye read, ye may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ) Which in other ages was not made known unto the sons of men, as it is now revealed unto his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit; That the Gentiles should be fellowheirs, and of the same body, and partakers of his promise in Christ by the gospel: Whereof I was made a minister, according to the gift of the grace of God given unto me by the effectual working of his power.”

Perhaps this Preparation was unique in its presentation, however in closing, may we be thankful for, if for nothing else, the second, third, fourth, fifth, and etc. opportunities we have been given to surrender to the Lord Jesus Christ. May we be provoked to allow God to use us more by surrendering all of our life to Him.

**TODAY'S READING: ACTS 11-14**

**OVERVIEW:**

The transition from Jerusalem to Antioch (chapters 11 and 12); Paul's first missionary journey (chapters 13 and 14).

**HIGHLIGHTS & INSIGHTS:**

As we begin today, let's take a few moments to review what we have discovered thus far from the Book of Acts. Acts 1-6 is the record of God offering the Messiah and the kingdom of heaven to the Nation of Israel. In chapter 7, the question of Acts 1:6 has been answered by the Nation of Israel and God withdraws His offer of the Messiah and kingdom of heaven. Chapter 8 marks the beginning of the transition from God dealing with the Nation of Israel to God dealing with a racially mixed group of Jews and Gentiles called the Church, the body of Christ. Chapter 9 continues the transition with the salvation and calling of Paul, the apostle to the Gentiles. In chapter 10, Peter, the apostle to the Jews, confirms that God is indeed offering eternal life to the Gentiles. From these chapters alone, God has made it abundantly clear that He has postponed His dealings with the Nation of Israel and begun to focus His attention on the Church. Today in chapters 11 through 14, we will discover the final phases of transition.

Chapter 11 reveals a transition from Jerusalem to Antioch. When the persecution arose in chapter 8, the majority of believers fled while the apostles remained steadfast in Jerusalem (8:1). Each time a new people group received the Word of God, envoys from Jerusalem were sent to confirm God's working amidst that group (see Acts 8:14-17, 25; 11:1-3, 19-22). Paul himself needed affirmation from the apostles in Jerusalem to validate his ministry (Gal. 2:1, 9). From these facts, it is easily seen that Jerusalem was the base of operations and place of authority for the early church. This makes perfect sense: 1) If you are a believing Jew waiting for Jesus your Messiah to touch down on the Mount of Olives (Acts 1:9-12; Zech. 14:1-9) and establish the capital of His kingdom in Jerusalem at His second coming – why leave Jerusalem and miss all of the action?! 2) If you are seeking to reach only Jews with the message of the kingdom of heaven and 3) If the apostle to the Jews (Peter) resides there. But with Israel's rejection of the King and kingdom in Acts 7, God turns His attention to Gentiles and therefore, establishes a new base of operations in Antioch. Watch the flow of chapter 11: once the apostles in Jerusalem have confirmed the salvation of the Gentiles (11:18), Barnabas seeks out Paul, the apostle to the Gentiles, and brings him to Antioch (11:25, 26) where a multi-ethnic church of Jews and Gentiles had been

planted (Acts 13:1). Notice also, that it was in Antioch that *“the disciples were called Christians first”* (11:26). It is significant to note also that for the first ten years of the church, not one believer had ever been called a “Christian”! Not until God makes the transitions from Israel to the Church, and Jerusalem to Antioch, does God see fit to have His followers called “Christians”; another confirmation that Antioch is the new base of operations.

In the next chapter, it is evident that the apostles now understand that God has postponed His plan for Israel. The first piece of evidence is that the Apostle James is not replaced after his execution. Jesus promised the twelve apostles, *“Verily I say unto you, That ye which have followed me, in the regeneration when the Son of man shall sit in the throne of his glory, ye also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel”* (Matthew 19:28). Since the apostles expected Jesus Christ to return immediately, they wanted to be sure. Obviously then, since Judas Iscariot committed suicide, a replacement is required to fill twelve thrones, which is why the eleven apostles immediately elected Judas’ replacement in Acts 1:15-26. The fact that the Apostle James is not replaced clearly indicates that the apostles realize that Christ’s return has been postponed and the Church is now God’s primary institution.

Another evidence is that Peter leaves Jerusalem and doesn’t return (12:19). The leadership team of Peter, James and John is being dismantled and Jerusalem’s central authority is waning. This is another indication that Antioch, rather than Jerusalem, is the new center of God’s global outreach.

In Acts 13, God introduces His new institution the Church. God’s new institution is multi-racial (13:1) and missional (13:2-4). Paul and Barnabas are sent out as missionaries from their local church in Antioch. Note that Paul and Barnabas were called by God to perform a particular “work” (13:2) and that “work”, as you have seen in reading Acts 13 and 14, is preaching the gospel and planting reproducing local churches. We may deduce then, that the work of a missionary is preaching the gospel and planting reproducing local churches. Though many faithful Christians serve in diverse capacities in missions, gospel preaching and church planting are the preeminent components of missions.

A comparison of the sermons preached by Peter and those preached by Paul give further evidence that God is no longer offering the kingdom of heaven to Israel, but instead, is bringing all men into the spiritual, internal kingdom of God. Peter’s sermon is simply, “You Jews killed our Messiah and rejected the kingdom. Repent and be water baptized” (see Acts 2:36-38; 3:15, 19, 20). Paul’s message, however, is, *“Be it known unto you therefore, men and brethren, that*

*through [Jesus] is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins: And by him all that believe are justified from all things, from which ye could not be justified by the law of Moses.”* Peter’s message is the gospel of the kingdom, while Paul’s is the gospel of grace (see 13:42, 43).

Acts 13:4 – 14:26 is the record of Paul’s first missionary journey in approximately 46 AD. On this first journey the gospel was preached and churches were planted on the Island of Cyprus, Antioch of Pisidia, Iconium, Lystra, Derbe, and Perga; all cities, except Cyprus, are in Galatia which is modern day Turkey. The journey took approximately two years and covered nearly 1,250 miles!

Tuesday – November 21, 2017

## TODAY'S READING: ACTS 15-17

### OVERVIEW:

The Jerusalem church addresses false teaching (chapter 15); Paul's second missionary journey (chapters 16 and 17).

### HIGHLIGHTS & INSIGHTS:

Acts 15 introduces to us continuing controversy surrounding the salvation of the Gentiles. When Paul and Barnabas return to Antioch of Syria they are met by some false teachers who are disputing with and convincing the newly saved Gentiles that they must be circumcised to be saved. Indeed, circumcision was a significant symbolic act under the Old Testament law, but through the blood of Jesus Christ, the law had been satisfied and circumcision was no longer necessary (Galatians 5:6). Paul, seeing the gospel in jeopardy, begins *"no small dissension and disputation"* (15:2) with these false teachers. Finally, it is determined that this question must be addressed by the apostles in Jerusalem.

Peter weighs in with the point that whether Jew or Gentile all are saved by grace so *"why tempt ye God, to put a yoke upon the neck of the disciples, which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear?"* (15:10). James settles the dispute: *"my sentence is, that we trouble not them, which from among the Gentiles are turned to God: But that we write unto them, that they abstain from pollutions of idols, and from fornication, and from things strangled, and from blood"* (15:19, 20). If the Gentiles are saved by grace, then why do they have to *"abstain from meats offered to idols, and from blood, and from things strangled, and from fornication"* (15:29) when none of those things is related to salvation or sanctification? James answers the question in verse 21: *"For Moses of old time hath in every city them that preach him, being read in the synagogues every sabbath day"*. These stipulations were placed upon the Gentiles in an effort to keep the door of faith open to the Jews. This is the same principle Paul followed in his ministry and described in 1 Corinthians 9:19-23 where he states, *"unto the Jews I became as a Jew, that I might gain the Jews; to them that are under the law, as under the law, that I might gain them that are under the law . . . I am made all things to all men, that I might by all means save some. And this I do for the gospel's sake"*. Paul, Barnabas, Judas and Silas deliver the letter to the church at Antioch and there is much rejoicing at the decision of the apostles.

In approximately 50 AD, Paul and Barnabas determine to revisit the cities where

they had preached the gospel and planted churches, but they can't agree on who should be their companions. Even the heroes of our faith are carnal at times! Barnabas takes his nephew, John Mark, who abandoned them on their first journey, and heads for Cyprus following the original route (15:39). Paul selects Silas (also called Silvanus) and takes a new route through Syria and Cilicia (15:40, 41).

Chapter 16 opens with Paul and Silas arriving in the neighboring cities of Derbe and Lystra. Paul is impressed by a young disciple named Timotheus (Timothy) who has a remarkable testimony in his hometown, Lystra and another city, Iconium (16:2). Paul invites Timothy to join him and Silas on this second journey but determines that Timothy must first be circumcised since he is half Jewish (16:1,3). Timothy was circumcised not as part of his salvation or sanctification, but in preparation for preaching the gospel to the Jews (I Corinthians 9:19-23). After passing through Phrygia and Galatia (16:6), Paul's team is "forbidden of the Holy Ghost" to go anywhere but Macedonia. Once the team lands at Philippi, a chief city of Macedonia, we discover exactly why God wanted them there: He had arranged divine appointments with lost souls like Lydia and her family (16:14), a young girl possessed by a demon (16:16-18), the Philippian jailer and his family (16:30-34), Jews and Gentiles in Thessalonica and Berea (17:1-4,10-12) and Dionysius, Damaris and others in Athens (17:34). Proverbs 16:9 declares, "*A man's heart deviseth his way: but the LORD directeth his steps*". Paul's heart was leading him to Asia and Bithynia, but God directed his steps to Macedonia. Imagine the consequences if Paul had been stiffnecked, insisted upon his own plans and strategy, and forced his way into Asia and Bithynia and neglected Macedonia? He would have missed God's supernatural orchestration of events and those listed above may have entered eternity in the flames of hell. Has God put obstacles, hindrances or roadblocks in the path of your plans? Don't be stiffnecked; trust the Lord. Brethren, let the Lord direct your steps.

## TODAY'S READING: ACTS 18-21

### OVERVIEW:

Paul's ministry at Corinth (chapter 18); Paul's ministry at Ephesus (chapter 19); Paul begins his journey to Jerusalem (chapter 20); Paul's arrival in Jerusalem (chapter 21).

### HIGHLIGHTS & INSIGHTS:

By the time we open our Bibles to Acts 18 in today's reading, Paul and his missionary team have preached throughout Syria and Cilicia (15:41), the cities of Lystra and Derbe (16:1), throughout Phrygia and Galatia (16:6), the cities of Philippi, Thessalonica and Berea (16:11,12; 17:1,10) of Macedonia and Athens, Greece (17:15). With the preaching of the word came persecution. In II Corinthians 11:23-28, Paul described his persistent sufferings in these terms: *"in labours more abundant, in stripes above measure, in prisons more frequent, in deaths oft. Of the Jews five times received I forty stripes save one. Thrice was I beaten with rods, once was I stoned, thrice I suffered shipwreck, a night and a day I have been in the deep; In journeyings often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils by mine own countrymen, in perils by the heathen, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren; In weariness and painfulness, in watchings often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness. Beside those things that are without, that which cometh upon me daily, the care of all the churches."* What a resume! If God's "whatever, wherever, whenever" for you (and me) included such persecutions, would you still obey Him? *"Then said Jesus unto his disciples, If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me"* (Matt. 16:24).

Acts 18 begins with Paul traveling from Athens to Corinth, a city in the Roman province of Achaia (18:12). Corinth was a wealthy city, a center of intellectualism and famous for its excess, perversion, and vice. Every day was Mardi Gras in Corinth. It was the New Orleans, Amsterdam or Bangkok of biblical times! To be a Corinthian was to almost automatically be associated with sexual promiscuity. In fact, "Corinthian woman" was a proverbial phrase for a prostitute, and "to play the Corinthian", is to play the whore, or indulge whorish inclinations. Paul was sent there to shine the light of the glorious gospel of Christ in their great darkness. Prior to Paul's arrival, God had already arranged a meeting between Paul and a Jewish couple (Aquila and Priscilla) who were exiled from Rome. This



couple became faithful followers of Christ, using all of their resources to further the gospel of Jesus Christ. Aquila and Priscilla were sound in doctrine having corrected Apollos' outdated teaching (18:25,26); Paul called them his "*helpers in Christ Jesus*" (Rom. 16:3) because they had "*for my (Paul's) life laid down their own necks*" (Rom. 16:4); all of the Gentile churches also gave thanks for Aquila and Priscilla (Rom. 16:4); and when they returned to Rome, their home became the meeting place of the church (Rom. 16:5). Aquila and Priscilla knew what marriage was all about: a joint venture in advancing the gospel of Jesus Christ!

Paul carried out a fruitful ministry in Corinth for "a year and six months" (18:11). In that time, some prestigious men came to Christ: Justus, whose house was structurally connected to the Jewish synagogue; Crispus, the chief ruler of the synagogue; and eventually, another chief ruler of the synagogue and the man who had caused a riot over Paul's preaching: Sosthenes (18:17; I Cor. 1:1,2). In due time, Paul and Aquila and Priscilla departed for Ephesus where Aquila and Priscilla were left, and Paul continued on to Caesarea eventually returning home to Antioch of Syria (18:22,23). While at Ephesus, Aquila and Priscilla met a Jew from Alexandria, Egypt named Apollos, a powerful preacher who needed to be brought up to date doctrinally. Apollos was still preaching the gospel of the kingdom of heaven and performing the "baptism of John" – talk about a time warp! He had no idea that Jesus the Messiah had already come and gone, that God's plan for Israel had been postponed, and that the

Church Age was already in effect. He was probably still wearing his hair in a mullet! (I love the bumper sticker, "Friends don't let friends wear mullets".) Aquila and Priscilla enlightened this evangelist and brought him into the present by explaining the events of the past 22 years (18:26). Apollos humbly and joyfully receives the new revelation, preaches that Jesus is the Christ and moves on to Corinth (19:1).

While Apollos is at Corinth, Paul begins his third missionary journey passing through Phrygia and Galatia (18:23) and landing at Ephesus (19:1) where he finds some of Apollos' converts. As Jesus said, "*The disciple is not above his master*" (Matt. 10:24), so Paul finds some unsaved disciples who, like their discipler Apollos, have been baptized with the baptism of John the Baptist. They are also unaware that the Messiah has already come and gone. Therefore, these disciples are most certainly not saved because salvation comes only through Jesus Christ (see John 14:6) and the indwelling of the Holy Ghost is evidence of that salvation (Romans 8:9b "*Now if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his*"). These disciples, however, have never even heard of Jesus Christ

or the Holy Ghost (19:1-4)! Paul preaches the gospel of grace to them, they are water baptized in Jesus' name, and then they receive the Holy Ghost, speaking with tongues and prophesying (19:4-6). Remember: tongues are a sign to skeptical Jews (I Cor. 1:22; 14:22). The events here at Ephesus are exactly like the events in Samaria (Acts 8:14-16): Paul's apostolic authority and his message is validated by the sign of tongues. These Jewish disciples of Apollos now know for certain that Paul's gospel is the true gospel.

Paul had a fruitful few years at Ephesus (19:9,10,18-20), and the Word of God had free course throughout Asia (modern day Asia Minor). However, his success was stifled by a massive riot which forced him to begin his journey to Jerusalem (19:21; 20:1). On his way to Jerusalem, Paul revisits many of the places wherein he had planted churches and preached the gospel, edifying the disciples. Paul, knowing that Jerusalem would mark the beginning of his end, is not afraid to die for the name of the Lord Jesus (21:13), because long ago, at his salvation, Paul had already laid his life in the hands of Jesus: *"for I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day"* (II Tim. 1:12). Paul fearlessly and confidently declares in II Tim. 4:6-8, *"For I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing"*.

O God, let us live fearlessly abandoned to you that we may have the confidence of Paul at our death!

## TODAY'S READING: ACTS 22-25

### OVERVIEW:

Paul's testimony before riotous Jews (chapter 22); Paul's testimony before the Jewish Council (chapter 23); Paul's testimony before Felix, the governor of Judea (chapter 24); Paul's testimony before Festus (chapter 25).

### HIGHLIGHTS & INSIGHTS:

Paul's arrival in Jerusalem marked the beginning of his end. In Acts 21, the Jews of Jerusalem had stirred up a riot crying out, *"Men of Israel, help: This is the man, that teacheth all men every where against the people, and the law, and this place: and further brought Greeks also into the temple, and hath polluted this holy place"* (21:28). The Roman chief captain of Jerusalem not wanting this riot to reach Caesar's ears for his job's sake, immediately halted the riot, rescuing Paul from certain death (21:31,32). Chapter 22 is Paul's testimony before the riotous Jewish crowd, but as soon as he mentions preaching to Gentiles (22:21, 22), the crowd returns to a nearly unmanageable uproar. The chief captain was about to scourge Paul until he discovered that Paul was a Roman citizen. With that revelation, Paul inserted himself into the flow of the Roman legal system, thereby guaranteeing him an audience with leading political figures in the Roman government, even Caesar himself. The following chapters record Paul's testimony before a few of these figures. In chapter 23, Paul stands before the Jewish council once again in Jerusalem. In chapter 24, Paul is transferred to Caesarea, the Roman provincial seat of Judea, where he stands before governor Felix. Felix is replaced by Festus (24:27), and in chapter 25, Paul gives testimony before Festus and the Jewish council.

Though there are many truths and applications we could pull out of today's reading, let's focus primarily on a few truths related to Paul's suffering.

1) Suffering was a natural part of Paul's commission as it is a natural part of our commission. When God commissioned Paul as the apostle to the Gentiles, he described his ministry in this way: *"he is a chosen vessel unto me, to bear my name before the Gentiles, and kings, and the children of Israel: For I will shew him how great things he must suffer for my name's sake"* (Acts 9:15,16). God promised that Paul would have the incredible privilege of preaching the gospel to Gentiles, kings and the children of Israel, so what Paul was experiencing in Acts 21-25 was God's faithfulness in keeping His promises. But God's faithfulness

also included the promise of suffering. In the depth of the night, God compassionately reassured Paul of His promise: *“Be of good cheer, Paul: for as thou hast testified of me in Jerusalem, so must thou bear witness also at Rome”* (Acts 23:11). Paul accepted suffering as the natural result of following Christ and reckoned that *“the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us”* (Romans 8:18). Paul placed all of his hope in eternity because that is what he had invested in. God promised those of us who would desire to live like Paul: *“Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution”* (II Tim. 3:12). If we witness and seek to live holy lives, we will suffer for it, but if we have invested in eternity, a greater hope is yet before us.

2) Suffering brings us into a deeper intimacy with Christ, because we experience a taste of His sufferings. It would be natural for Paul to be angry with God; it's not hard to imagine Paul saying something like, “God, here I am witnessing for you, seeking to live a holy life, and this is what I get?”! It's the complaint we often hear from the lost: “Why do bad things happen to good people?” In reality, however, this is a very self-righteous and self-centered question. Self-righteous because we are calling ourselves “good” when Romans 3:12 states, *“there is none that doeth good, no, not one”*. Self-centered because we think life is all about us when Revelation 4:11 declares, *“Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honour and power: for thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure they are and were created”*. The real question should be, “Why do good things happen to such bad people?” And this is Paul's perspective. Paul is so thankful for the price that Jesus Christ paid for him that he considers these sufferings a blessing. In fact, suffering like Christ was one of his goals in life: *“Yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ, And be found in him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith: That I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death”* (Phil. 3:8-10). Through suffering, we become more intimately acquainted with Christ.

## TODAY'S READING: ACTS 26-28

### OVERVIEW:

Paul's testimony before King Agrippa (chapter 26); Paul's journey to and arrival in Rome (chapters 27 and 28).

### HIGHLIGHTS & INSIGHTS:

As we move into chapter 26 today, we find Paul giving his testimony before king Agrippa, the great grandson of Herod the Great who sought to kill Jesus at his birth (Matthew 2:1-16). At this point, let's pause and consider the SINCERE CONCERN of Paul's message, and the SIMPLE CONTENT of Paul's message.

First, the SINCERE CONCERN of Paul's message. It would have been easy for Paul to despise the corrupt and wicked rulers before whom he had been on trial. Clearly, none of them were willing to take a stand for the truth and declare Paul innocent (23:27-29; 24:12, 13; 26:31). The Jews falsely accused Paul and wanted to kill him (21:28, 29; 23:12-15). Felix kept Paul in prison in hopes of a bribe (24:26), and to please the wicked Jews (24:27) and likewise, Festus kept Paul bound to keep the Jews happy (25:9). It seems that "justice" went to the highest bidder or the best liar. Despite all of this injustice and corruption, Paul, rather than becoming incensed, declares the gospel of Jesus Christ, sincerely longing for the salvation of these wicked men. Even when king Agrippa, one of the most perverted and corrupt men imaginable, sarcastically commented to Paul, "*Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian*" (26:28), Paul sincerely responded, "*I would to God, that not only thou, but also all that hear me this day, were both almost, and altogether such as I am, except these bonds*" (26:29). Paul could see through the wickedness of these men to the cross where Christ died even for their sins. With all the love in his heart, Paul longed to see the salvation of his persecutors. How successful are you at obeying Matthew 5:44: "*Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you*" ?

Second, the SIMPLE CONTENT of Paul's message. It is important for us to pay attention to the content of Paul's message each time he stood before a government official. If it were me, I would be up all night, wracking my brain, trying to fashion the most moving and powerful sermon ever. But not Paul; each time he stands before a world ruler, he simply gives his testimony and a simple gospel presentation. Nothing fancy; simply, "*I once was lost, but now I'm found.*"

In fact, God told Paul that he would *“be his witness unto all men of what thou hast seen and heard”* (Acts 22:15). Paul was only responsible for preaching what he had seen and heard. As believers in Christ, we don't have to be intellectual elitists, eloquent preachers, or Bible experts; we simply need to declare boldly what we have seen and heard! The great evangelist H.A. Ironside was once interrupted by an atheist shouting, “There is no God! Jesus is a myth!” and finally, “I challenge you to a debate!” Ironside responded, “I accept your challenge, sir! But on one condition: when you come, bring with you ten men and women whose lives have been changed for the better by the message of atheism. Bring former prostitutes and criminals whose lives have been changed, who are now moral and responsible individuals. Bring outcasts who had no hope and have them tell us how becoming atheists has lifted them out of the pit! And sir,” he concluded, “if you can find ten such men and women, I will be happy to debate you. And when I come, I will gladly bring with me two hundred men and women from this very city whose lives have been transformed in just those ways by the power of the gospel of Jesus Christ.” You can't argue with a changed life. Ask God to open a door today for you to tell someone what you've seen and heard.

After a difficult journey, Paul finally landed at Rome (28:16) around 60 A.D., and was allowed to live in a rented house where he preached to both Jews and Gentiles and received guests. For the next two years Paul continued *“Preaching the kingdom of God, and teaching those things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ, with all confidence, no man forbidding him”* (28:31). It is believed that Paul also wrote his epistles to Philemon, Timothy, Titus, the Ephesians, the Colossians and the Philippians at this time. According to tradition, Paul was beheaded sometime after 64 A.D. during Nero's severe persecution of Christians. During this same persecution, Peter was crucified upside-down because he didn't consider himself worthy to be crucified in the same fashion as his Lord and Savior.

Before we end, let's consider what may be the most important lesson of the Book of Acts: God takes full responsibility for accomplishing His own mission. Acts is rather comical when you consider how confused these “great men of God” were for the first 27 years of their ministry. The believers in Acts 1- 7 had no idea whether or not Christ would immediately restore the kingdom to Israel so they sold their houses and all of their possessions and camped out in Jerusalem so they didn't miss the Second Coming of Christ (Acts 1:6,7; 2:44-47; 4:34,35; Zechariah 14:1-9); the Apostles were dazed and confused when the Samaritans and Gentiles started getting saved (Acts 11:1-3,18); the Jewish believers had an extremely difficult time letting go of circumcision and the law of Moses and trusting solely in the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ (Acts 15:1,2);

the Apostles were most certainly shocked when God postponed His dealings with Israel in order to begin working with a new institution, the Church, composed of both Jews and Gentiles (Rom. 11:25; Eph. 3:1-13). From a human standpoint, living in the time of the early church would have been frustrating and confusing IF you were trying to analyze and formulize God. But if you *“walked by faith, not by sight,”* then every day would have been an adventure. At exactly the right time and in exactly the right place, exactly the right people were saved, connected and moved on. Consider God’s ancient arrangement of the Jewish holy feasts so that the Jews would at the right time and in the right place, witness the crucifixion of their Messiah at Passover, and fifty days later at Pentecost, have a chance to repent of their fatal error (Acts 2). Remember how God intervened on behalf of Peter and John, freeing them from prison to continue preaching to the people (Acts 5:17-20)? Think of how the persecution that arose after the stoning of Stephen served God’s purposes in motivating the obstinate Jewish believers to get out of Jerusalem and carry out the rest of God’s mission to Judea, Samaria and the uttermost (Acts 1:8; 8:1f). Remember how God supernaturally arranged Philip’s meeting with the Ethiopian eunuch (Acts 8:26- 30)? Consider also, the perfectly timed salvation of Paul, the apostle to the Gentiles (Acts 9) and Peter’s visit to Cornelius’ house (Acts 10). We could go on and on. The bottom line? God will accomplish His own mission despite our cluelessness. If we surrender ourselves to Him daily, we have the amazing honor of joining Him where He is working.

Have a great adventure with God today!

**Saturday – November 25, 2017**

## **Reflection**

As we reflect on our time spent in the book of Acts, we have now completed the transition from Jew to Gentile, and the Law to the Church. This week of Daily in the word began with Peter defending his ministry to the Gentiles after learning from God that after they have been cleansed He no longer calls them common (10:15). Of course that cleansing is by the applied blood of Jesus Christ to the repentant soul.

We then move from Peter's ministry to the ministry of the apostle Paul. As God told Ananias in Acts 9:15, "Go thy way: for he is a chosen vessel unto me, to bear my name before the Gentiles, kings, and the children of Israel;" it was known that God's call on Paul would not be easy as God continued to say, "For I will shew him how great things he must suffer for my name's sake." After reading of the miraculous accounts of several individuals' salvation and baptism, Paul returns to Jerusalem in spite of the disciples' attempt for him to re-think that idea, only for his message to be rejected and he arrested. We then find Paul standing before rulers, defending his call to spread the gospel of Jesus Christ to all peoples.

The question for us today, as we reflect on this week's reading; if we were called upon to defend our ministry of spreading the message of God, could we biblically defend our actions? Better question: are we ministering in such a fashion that we might find ourselves in a position of needing to defend our words and actions for the Lord?

When we consider each of Paul's defenses, he began with the telling of his salvation story. This "story" is the foundation of not only his ministry but of his very life. Everything he did; every place he went; every word he spoke was because of the foundation of Jesus Christ apprehending him on that "beautiful" road to Damascus when he first saw the Light. After his "three-days-dead" (that period of time when he sat in darkness without food, water, or sight, hence no voice – like a dead person) he "resurrected" unto new life as sight was granted (Acts 9:17). That day was the first day of true life and the foundational reason for everything he did thereafter.

We who are re-born into the family of God through Christ also have a calling upon our lives. In 2 Corinthians 5:18, it is stated like this, "And all things are of God, who hath reconciled us to himself by Jesus Christ, and hath given to us the ministry of reconciliation;" As we reflect on The Acts of the Apostles, let's first reflect on our own life's foundation. Is this the central reason we do, and say, and serve as we do? If not, then what is the foundation of our life? What should be the foundation? Secondly, let's reflect on our "ministry of



reconciliation.” How well are we allowing Christ in us to work through us in reconciling others back to God? Well enough that we have been, or could be called upon to defend our actions for Christ? Lastly, if we had to defend ourselves, what defense do we have? We are told in 1 Peter 3:15, “But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts: and be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear:” Do we have an answer ready? What scripture might we use? Let’s reflect upon, write down, and commit to memory these verses so that, should the time arise, we are ready to give an answer for the hope that is in us that should be flowing out through us.

### **MEMORY VERSE REFLECTION:**

**Acts 13:26** “Men and brethren, children of the stock of Abraham, and whosoever among you feareth God, to you is the word of this salvation sent.”

**Acts 17:23** “For as I passed by, and beheld your devotions, I found an altar with this inscription, TO THE UNKNOWN GOD. Whom therefore ye ignorantly worship, him declare I unto you.”

**Acts 20:26-27** “Wherefore I take you to record this day, that I am pure from the blood of all men. For I have not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of God.”

**Acts 24:14** “But this I confess unto thee, that after the way which they call heresy, so worship I the God of my fathers, believing all things which are written in the law and in the prophets:”

**Acts 26:18** “To open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins, and inheritance among them which are sanctified by faith that is in me.”