

Sermons on Acts-Lowell Johnson

THE BOOK OF ACTS

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The first century church was filled with excitement and expectation because they never knew what God was going to do.

They were like the little girl listening to her grandmother reading stories from the Bible. Her grandmother asked her how she liked the stories. She said, "Oh, I love them. You never know what God is going to do next." That should be the way it is with us.

There is no better book of the Bible to study for the times we live in than the Book of Acts.

Today people are debating the purpose of the church, the functions of the church, and the structure of the church. There is a seminar somewhere in America every week offering direction and guidance on how to "do church."

We need a fresh look at the book of the Bible that describes the birth of the church and how the infant church managed to turn the world upside down.

The Book of Acts is one of the most important books in the entire Bible. Without it, the New Testament would be incomplete. I am hoping that this study will do more than tickle your ears or give you a fresh supply of sermon notes. If that's all you gain, I will have failed in my task. If you can study Acts without being moved to action, then you have missed the whole point of the Book of Acts. Like the Book of Genesis, the Book of Acts is a book of beginnings and a book of "firsts."

Genesis records the first man and woman, the first marriage, the first home, the first sin on earth, the first murder, etc.

The Book of Acts records the first local church, the first deacons and elders, the first mission movement, the first Gentile Christians, the first use of spiritual gifts, the first persecutions of the church and the first martyr.

Without the Book of Acts the New Testament would be incomplete. The Book of Acts is the connection between the Gospels and the Epistles.

If we had to leap from the Gospels to the Epistles without any knowledge of the Book of Acts, we would know very little about the birth and development of the early church.

1. The Gospels close in the city of Jerusalem. The Book of Acts closes in the city of Rome.
2. The Book of Acts provides an account of how the Church was born, how it developed, how it spread from Jerusalem (Jewish) to "the uttermost parts of the earth" (Gentile), and how its program of world-wide evangelization was instituted.
3. The Book of Acts describes the transition of when God set the nation of Israel aside and reached out to gather a Gentile people for His name (the church).
4. The Book of Acts shows the process of Christianity displacing Judaism, the church replacing the temple and synagogue, and the worldwide blessing overtaking the national privilege.
5. The Book of Acts shows us how the Church is to respond when living in a predominately pagan culture. The Church is to respond in two ways: (1) We are to be a bold witness for Christ in our world, and (2) we are to have visible and real love for each other. Christians are to be soul-winners and be mission-minded.

One of the first things to catch our attention as we read the Book of Acts is the TITLE, which is given in the KJV, "The Acts of the Apostles."

"The Acts of the Apostles" is really not a very good title. After listing the 12 Apostles in chapter one, nine of them are never mentioned again in the book. James is mentioned only once. John is mentioned only once. Really, there are two main speakers in the Book of Acts: Peter and Paul.

Other titles have been suggested for the Book of Acts:

1. The Acts of SOME of the Apostles.
2. The Acts of Jesus through His servants.

I like this title:

- A – Acts
- C – Concerning
- T – The
- S – Spirit

The Holy Spirit is not mentioned specifically in eleven chapters of the Book, but the Holy Spirit is mentioned over 50 times in Acts.

I. The Author of the Book of Acts

The human author of Acts is Luke, the physician and the human author of the third Gospel, and traveling companion of Paul.

A. Both Acts and Luke addresses the same person – Acts 1:1; Luke 1:1-3.

“Theophilus” means “lover or friend of God.” Here was a man who loved God and wanted to know all he could about Him. In Luke 1, he is called “most excellent Theophilus,” indicating he held an important position within the Roman Empire. Obviously, he was no ordinary man.

Luke is mentioned three times in the entire New Testament

- In Colossians 4:14 Luke is called a Physician.
There are many medical terms used in both Luke and Acts (Luke 4:32; 8:43-44; 22:44; Acts 3:7; 12:23; 13:11).
- In Philemon 24 Paul refers to Luke as his “fellow-laborer.”
- In 2 Timothy 4:11 Luke is Paul's only companion in prison.

Luke is the only Gentile writer of the entire Bible.

Luke tells us what Jesus did in this physical body. Acts tells us what Jesus IS DOING through His spiritual body.

Another proof that Luke is the human author is the “we sections” in the Book of Acts which occur in three places.

1. Acts 16:10-17 As Paul went from Troas to Philippi during the second missionary journey.
2. Acts 20:5-21:25 As Paul went from Philippi to Jerusalem during the third missionary journey.
3. Acts 27:1-28:16 On Paul's voyage to Rome.

The word “treatise” means an orderly account given mostly in a systematic exposition.

Luke tells us what Jesus Began to do; Acts tells us what Jesus Continues to do. Acts is a continuation of Luke's gospel. Acts begins where Luke ends. Acts is the “Rest of the Story.”

II. The Analysis of the Book of Acts Acts 1:2-3

Notice the last part of 1:3: Jesus presented Himself to the apostles for 40 days following His resurrection, “speaking of the things pertaining to the Kingdom of God.

Jesus spent 40 days making sure the disciples knew that He was literally back from the dead, resurrected by God. They would need complete confidence in the Resurrection as they encountered hostility to the Gospel. Most of them were eventually martyred for their faith, so it was important that they have infallible proof for what they would be preaching.

Acts 1:3 is the only place that tells us that the period between the Resurrection and the Ascension was precisely 40 days. The number 40 seems to have special significance in Scripture.

1. The rains fell 40 days and 40 nights during Noah's flood – Genesis 7:4
2. Moses spent 40 days in God's presence on Mt. Sinai – Exodus 24:18
3. The 12 spies spent 40 days exploring the land of Canaan – Numbers 13:25
4. A generation wandered in the wilderness 40 years – Numbers 14:32
5. Jonah warned Nineveh of coming judgment in 40 days – Jonah 4:4
6. Jesus was tempted in the wilderness for 40 days – Luke 4:2
7. Jesus appeared to the disciples for 40 days after His resurrection – Acts 1:3

During the 40 days Jesus accomplished two important goals: He proved that He was alive and He prepared them for the future. Jesus speaks “of things pertaining to the kingdom of God.” This expression refers to the sphere of salvation and the domain of divine rule over believer's hearts. It also refers to God's sovereign right to rule over the universe.

Luke offers two things: Jesus is Alive and Jesus is Active.

The disciples were convinced that Jesus was alive from the dead, and that transformed them from cowards to men of courage.

How real is Jesus to you? We are not going to do much for Jesus unless we are convinced that Jesus is alive and real to us.

Jesus was Active – Act 1:4: “The promise of the Father” was that the Holy Spirit would come. We can't do anything for God without His Spirit.

They, and we, would need the Holy Spirit:

A. To Enlighten Them

1. As to their memories

The New Testament was to be written. The many things Jesus had taught them would have to be recalled and written down under the same divine inspiration that had produced the Old Testament. They would need the Holy Spirit for that.

2. As to their message

The disciples were not to preach words of man's wisdom, but words supplied by the Holy Spirit. The Old Testament would have to be seen in a new light, and preached with a new reverence. The significance of Christ's death, burial, and resurrection would have to be understood and proclaimed. They would need the Holy Spirit for that.

3. As to their movements

The Holy Spirit would lead them in when to go, where to go, who should go, who should evangelize Europe, Asia, and Africa.

B. To Energize Them

1. To preach with Power

No man has the power to convict and convert. They needed a power outside themselves to make the Lord Jesus real to lost men and women.

2. To live the Christian Life

The Christians did not have it within themselves alone to live the Christian life. As our Lord had given His life FOR them, so now He must give His life TO them.

C. To Encourage Them

They were filled with enthusiasm now, but what about when they were scourged and threatened with cruel death?

The secret of their success was that the disciples had experienced a personal Pentecost. The Holy Spirit had empowered and inspired each of them; so, they could say, "I can do all things through Christ which strengthens me" (Philippians 4:13).

Holy Spirit, breath on me, Till I am all Thine own.

Until my will is lost in Thine, To live for Thee alone.

Breath on me, breath on me, Holy Spirit, breath on me.

Take Thou my heart, cleanse every part, Holy Spirit, breath on me.

III. The Authority for the Book of Acts Acts 1:3

Luke says there are "many convincing proof" that Jesus Christ rose from the dead. "Infallible proofs" means "the strongest kind of proof possible." What are those proofs?

1. The Roman Guard

After Jesus was buried, Pontius Pilate ordered a Roman guard around the tomb. Such a guard usually consisted of 16 men. Four soldiers would have been placed immediately in front of the tomb, while the other 12 slept in a semicircle in front of them. The guards changed shifts every four hours. These soldiers were the most highly trained. The penalty for failure to guard a prisoner or falling asleep on duty was death. No one could have gotten past them to steal the body from the tomb.

2. The Stone

The stone was the one silent and infallible witness to the whole episode. The stone was of enormous size and once rolled into place, would take three or four men to move it. The soldiers also sealed the tomb, which meant they stretched a cord over the rock and fastened it at either end with a sealing compound. They stamped it with the seal of the Roman governor. The penalty for breaking the seal was death.

3. The Grave clothes

Both Luke and John say the grave clothes, which were linen wrapping sheets, were still in place with the cloth that covered the face and were folded to the side. Evidently the spices and resins had hardened into the shape of Jesus' body.

- How do you explain that fact? Grave robbers would have taken the body without unwrapping it or they would have unwrapped it and thrown the winding sheets to the side.
- I believe that when Jesus rose from the dead, He passed right through the grave clothes, leaving behind the linen wrappings

just as John and Peter found them.

4. The Empty Tomb

Skeptics have never been able to explain why the tomb was empty. No one has ever disputed that fact.

If the Jewish authorities could have nailed the dead body of our Lord on the city wall, that would have been the end of the Christian movement.

5. The Resurrection Appearances Acts 1:3

The words “being seen of them forty days” means the disciples “eyeballed” Jesus. They looked Him over in great detail, examined His wounds, and satisfied themselves that it was the same Jesus they had known and loved.

The New Testament records at least 12 separate appearances of Jesus after His resurrection during those 40 days. All of these were eyewitness accounts.

6. The Initial Unbelief

All of the gospel writers agree that none of the disciples were expecting a resurrection and none of them believed at the first. They had to be convinced against their wills that Jesus rose from the dead.

7. The Radically Changed Disciples

On the Friday night after our Lord's crucifixion, the disciples were frightened, confused, dazed, and disheartened. Now consider the scene a few weeks later. These same disciples now boldly stand in the temple courts preaching that Jesus is Lord of all.

What changed these cowering men into flaming evangelists who shook their world with the gospel message? Only one credible explanation: They had seen the risen Christ and their life was changed forever.

If you ever really meet the risen Lord, your life will be changed forever too!

THE PROMISE OF THE FATHER Acts 1:4-5

Jesus commanded the disciples to wait in Jerusalem until they received the promised Holy Spirit who would come from the Father “not many days from now.”

This same promise was referenced by Luke at the very end of his gospel account, which forms a bridge between his two New Testament books.

- Luke 24:49 “Behold, I send the Promise of my Father upon you; but tarry in the city of Jerusalem until you are endued (clothed) with power from on high.”
- Acts 1:4 “And being assembled together with them” (a preferred alternative reading, “on one occasion, while He was eating 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.”

Acts is a continuation of Luke's Gospel. Luke's Gospel closes with the promise of the coming Spirit and the command to tarry (or wait) in Jerusalem until they were endued with power. Acts begins where Luke ends.

The Promise of the Father is the indwelling of the Holy Spirit in the lives of believers.

The indwelling of the Holy Spirit highlights the difference in the ministry of the Spirit between the Old and New Testaments. In the Old Testament the Holy Spirit was WITH believers, but not IN believers. The Holy Spirit came to indwell all believers in Christ beginning at Pentecost.

In referring to the Promise of the Father, Luke shares two things with us:

I. The Exhortation Acts 1:4

“Don't depart from Jerusalem, but wait for the Promise of the Father.”

Wait! Don't act until I tell you to! Be patient! Don't run ahead of me!

Patience is not a virtue our society seems to favor. We don't like to wait. We don't like to wait in traffic, to wait in line at the supermarket, at the doctor's office, or when our computers don't work fast enough.

Take your concordance and look up the word "WAIT." Over and over God's people are told to wait.

Psalm 27:14 "Wait on the Lord; be of good courage, and He shall strengthen your heart; wait, I say, on the Lord."

Psalm 37:7 "Be still before the Lord and wait patiently for Him."

Proverbs 10:22 Offers this counsel when we are tempted to take matters into our own hands, "Do not say, 'I'll pay you back for this wrong! Wait for the Lord, and He will deliver you.'"

Isaiah 40:31 "They that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; and they shall walk, and not faint."

Acts 1:4 takes us back to that mysterious 40-day period between Christ's resurrection and His ascension into Heaven.

- While Jesus and the disciples shared a meal together, the conversation turned to the future. Jesus would soon return to the Father in heaven and He would leave orders for the disciples to preach the gospel to the ends of the earth.
- "Lord, when do we get started? Where do you want us to begin?"

The answer is simple and quite shocking to these over-eager disciples. "Don't do anything yet. Go back to Jerusalem and wait there until the Holy Spirit comes."

Why did the disciples have to wait for what God had already promised them? Why does God often tell His people to wait on Him?

A. To Rearrange our Priorities

In Acts 1:4 Jesus commanded the disciples to stay in Jerusalem. I imagine that was the last place many of them wanted to be.

Jerusalem was the city where Jesus had been crucified. The men who put Him to death a few weeks earlier were still in power. If they killed Jesus, why wouldn't they kill His followers? If you're a follower of Jesus, any place on earth was safer than Jerusalem.

Because Jesus commanded the disciples to stay, if they left, it would show a lack of courage and reveal a fear of what man might do to them.

- It would also show a lack of faith, as if they couldn't trust an unseen Master to help them.
- Waiting rearranges our priorities, slows down our schedule, and forces us to listen to God.

B. To Test our Faith

Jesus gave specific instructions in three areas: (1) He told them What to do – wait. (2) He told them Where to wait – in Jerusalem. (3) He told them What to wait for – the Promise of the Father.

- But He didn't tell them how long to wait. They didn't know if they would have to wait a week, a month, a year, 10 years, or for 40 years.
- Remember that Abraham and Sarah had to wait 25 years after the promise for the birth of Isaac. Sadly, in a moment of weakness, they took matters into their own hands and Ishmael was born.
- I wonder if God has you waiting for something. Waiting for a promised job. Waiting to see if the bank will give you a loan. Waiting for a loved one to come to Christ. Waiting for your prayer to be answered. God may very well be testing your faith.

C. To Purify our Motives

One of the greatest dangers we face is pride. In a few days 3,000 people would be converted at one time (Acts 2). Lest they think that everything depended on them, God makes them wait. Waiting purifies our motives because we are made to realize that EVERYTHING depends on God.

The longer the disciples waited for the Spirit to fall, the more they appreciated the answer when it finally came. This is one reason our prayers usually are not answered the first time we pray.

D. To Remind us that God is God and we are not.

I think that's one reason God often does things to accomplish His purpose that make little sense to us. Like leading His people with a cloud by day and a fiery pillar by night; or marching around the walls of a city to defeat the city; or putting the blood of a lamb on the doorpost of their home to avoid the death angel.

II. The Expectation Acts 1:5

Evangelical believers are deeply divided over the baptism of the Holy Spirit. There is disagreement over what it is, when it occurs, and how it occurs.

Three observations are in order:

1. The baptism of the Holy Spirit is a gift promised by God the Father. That means it comes wholly apart from anything we do. It is an undeserved blessing from God.
2. In the Upper Room Discourse, Jesus pointed to a day when the disciples would experience an outpouring of the Holy Spirit unlike anything they had known up to that moment (John 14:16-18; John 16:7-15).
3. The baptism of the Holy Spirit was absolutely necessary for effective Christian witness. Jesus knew the disciples could never reach the world with the gospel unless they had the power of the Holy Spirit working in them.

Some basic questions about the baptism of the Holy Spirit:

A. What is the baptism of the Holy Spirit?

There are only seven direct references to the baptism of the Holy Spirit in the New Testament. These seven references tell us all there is to know about the subject.

The first five references are prophetic. Four of them simply record the words of John the Baptist (Matthew 3:11; Mark 1:8; Luke 3:16; John 1:33), when he announced to Israel that he "baptized with water, but there was One coming who would baptize with the Holy Spirit and fire."

This is a reference to this present dispensation.

The fifth prophetic reference is the one found in Acts 11:16, which is clearly historical. It is found in Peter's report to the Jerusalem church of what had happened in the house of Cornelius. Peter was shown by the Lord that God shows no partiality and that Gentiles can be saved, and in the same way as Jews, and they will be indwelt by the Holy Spirit just like Jews who have trusted the Lord are indwelt by the Spirit at the moment of salvation.

The final reference to the baptism of the Spirit is found in I Corinthians 12:13. This is the doctrinal passage for the Church. It explains what the baptism of the Spirit IS and what it DOES.

"For by one Spirit we were ALL baptized into one body – whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free – and have ALL been made to drink of one Spirit."

Note how universal this language is. Paul says we were ALL baptized by one Spirit into One body. We were ALL given the One Spirit to drink.

The baptism of the Holy Spirit is a sovereign act of God which places Jew and Gentile together into the body of Christ at the moment of our salvation. It is the universal experience of every person who comes to faith in Jesus Christ.

- Believers are immersed by Christ with the Holy Spirit. Christ is the baptizer who immerses each believer with the Spirit into unity with all other believers.
- There cannot be any believer who has not been Spirit-baptized, nor can there be more than one Spirit baptism. This is not an experience to seek, but a reality to acknowledge.
- At salvation, all believers not only become full members of Christ's body, the Church, but the Holy Spirit is placed within each of them (Romans 8:9).

B. Should I seek to be baptized in the Holy Spirit?

The answer is NO. Nowhere in the New Testament are believers told to seek the baptism of the Holy Spirit.

- We are exhorted to be filled with the Spirit, to walk in the Spirit, to quench not the Spirit, to make sure that we do not grieve the Holy Spirit.
- Nowhere in Scripture are we commanded to be baptized in the Holy Spirit.

- There is no need for any such thing as a second blessing. Christ's salvation provision is perfect and He calls only for obedience and trust in what has already been given.

C. What is the difference between being baptized in the Holy Spirit and being filled with the Spirit?

The answer: There is one baptism, but many fillings.

- By the fillings I mean that the moment-by-moment experience of the Holy Spirit's power may and should be repeated many times – Ephesians 5:18.
- We lose the filling of the Spirit through grieving and quenching the Spirit or when we disobey the Lord and allow sin into our lives. We lose fellowship and the power of the Spirit.
- At that point we must repent, turn from our sins, confess our sin, confess our need, return to the Lord and cry out for His help. As we do that, God's Holy Spirit fills us once again and we are again under His divine control.
- We do not get more of the Spirit, the Spirit gets more of us.

GOD'S JOB DESCRIPTION FOR EVERY CHRISTIAN Acts 1:6-8

For the most part, Acts 1 records the events which occurred between the resurrection of our Lord and the Day of Pentecost.

Three conversations take place in Acts 1:

1. A conversation with the resurrected, living Lord Acts 1:3-8
2. A conversation with angels Acts 1:9-11
3. A conversation among the disciples themselves Acts 1:12-26

Jesus is assembled together with the disciples. They know that it will not be long until the Lord would be taken up from them and would no longer be with them physically.

- Jesus tells them first to wait in Jerusalem for the Promise of the Father, the coming of the Holy Spirit.
- The disciples must have had many things on their minds that they wanted to talk to Jesus about, but one thing they wanted to talk to Jesus about was concerning the kingdom of Israel.

The Old Testament makes a close connection between the outpouring of the Holy Spirit and the coming of the kingdom (Ezekiel 39:28-29; Joel 2:28-31; Zechariah 12:8-10).

When Jesus told the disciples that very soon, they would be baptized with the Holy Spirit, they concluded that the establishment of the kingdom must also be near at hand.

Many commentators have upbraided the disciples for asking about the restoring of the kingdom of Israel, but they had a sound biblical reason for supposing that the kingdom was at hand.

The word "restore" (Acts 1:6) refers to the idea of God being King of Israel. The kingdom of David was the closest Israel had come to God's Kingdom in their history. When the kingdom was divided, the Kingdom of God was envisioned as returning to the time of David's glory. Many hoped that Jesus was the military leader they had been waiting for and that through Him Israel would be re-established to its previous glory.

There are some positive points that would cause them to ask this question:

1. This question represented a strong faith in Jesus; that He was the Sovereign Lord who had the power to establish His Kingdom on the earth.
2. There was the desire and zeal to see God's Kingdom established and the glory of the Lord fill the earth as the waters cover the sea (Habakkuk 2:14).
3. The genuine grief over the coming departure of the Lord.

But a negative side present was this: They asked, "Lord, are you AT THIS TIME going to restore the kingdom of Israel?"

Underline the phrase "at this time." They knew that one day they would reign with Christ in His Kingdom on Earth. That was a settled fact about which they had no doubt. It wasn't IF, but WHEN the kingdom would be restored or brought back to Israel.

What's wrong with the question, then? It was wrong because they were asking for something that was none of their business.

Jesus said that "it was not for them to know the times or seasons that the Father has put IN HIS OWN POWER."

1. Jesus took their focus off of timetables and put it on what needed to be done to spread the Gospel to the whole world. The priority is not discussing prophetic timetables, but to evangelize the world. God's timetable and ours are not the same.

2. The phrase, "which the Father hath put in His own power," means that the Father has reserved some things only for Himself. God the Father has set by His own divine authority the timetable for all the events surrounding the second coming of Christ to the earth. No one else can know that timetable. It's His and His alone.

There are many things we don't know because we can't know them because they belong only to God.

- Deuteronomy 29:29 "The secret things belong to the Lord our God."
- Suppose that on the first day of the semester the teacher tells the class that there will be four major tests and a few unscheduled pop quizzes. One inquisitive student raises his hand and asks, "Teacher, are you going to give us a pop quiz next Thursday?" "It's not for you to know the times and dates of my pop quizzes," the teacher replies. "As the one in authority over this class, I alone know the dates."

Does that mean there aren't going to be any pop quizzes? No, and if the students think that, they're going to be sadly surprised one day when the teacher says, "Take out a piece of paper."

By the same token, when Jesus says, "It's not for you to know the time or dates," it can only mean that the Kingdom is coming, but NO ONE can ever be sure of the date in advance.

Our job is to tell the world about Jesus. His job is to come back at the right time.

Acts 1:8 is an important verse in the Book of Acts for several reasons:

1. This verse contains the last recorded words of Jesus before His Ascension into Heaven. The final words of our Lord demand our close attention since they tell us what was on the Savior's heart just before He left this earth.

2. This verse offers a convenient outline for the Book of Acts.

- The Gospel is to be preached: Beginning in Jerusalem Acts 1-7
- In Judea and Samaria Acts 8-12
- To the ends of the Earth Acts 13-28

3. The first half of Acts 1:8 tells us WHAT to do: Be witnesses for Christ. The second half tells us WHERE to do it.

4. The first half of Acts 1:8 gives us God's job description for every Christian; the second half gives us God's plan for every local church.

Why didn't God take us to glory right after we were saved? The simple fact that a Christian is on earth and not in heaven is proof that God left us here to do something. There is something we can do on earth that we cannot do in heaven.

- When you think about it, there is one main thing we can do on earth that we will never do in heaven: you can tell a lost sinner about Jesus Christ.
- We can SING on earth and we can sing in heaven. We can PRAY on earth and we can pray in heaven. We can FELLOWSHIP with other believers on earth and we will certainly fellowship with them in heaven.
- There will be no lost sinners in heaven, so if we are going to tell the Good News to lost sinners, we must do it while we are on earth.

On earth we are His witnesses. He does not send angels to proclaim His name. He uses people like us to convince other people like us to believe in Him. We are God's witness or His evidence to convince an unbelieving world.

If we do not do our part, God has no other plan. We must do our part, because we are never more than ONE generation from heathenism and paganism.

We are not left to our own ability or strength to witness for our Lord.

Notice the word "Power" in Acts 1:8. The word "power" is the word "dunimus," from which we get our word "dynamic" or "dynamo."

The dynamic power of the Holy Spirit is given to make us into CHANNELS, overflowing; not RESERVOIRS or holding tanks.

In the Dead Sea nothing lives because the sea is stagnant; never flowing out. The Jordan River, on the other hand, is an ever-flowing channel, alive with life.

The Holy Spirit's power in us Produces:

A. A Change in our Lives 2 Corinthians 5:17

Look at the disciples Before and After Pentecost. Before Pentecost Peter was given to swearing and denying the Lord in a cowardly way; but after Pentecost, he was filled with courage to preach on the day of Pentecost.

- Before Pentecost John was known as one of the Sons of Thunder, but he became the Apostle of Love.
- If your life is not changed, you can't tell someone else about the changed life that comes from Christ. That is the reason some don't witness. There is no change in their own life to witness about.

B. A Courage in our Lives

Perfect or mature love will cast out all fear. We will have a new courage to WALK after the Lord as we should, to WORK for the Lord as we should and to WITNESS for the Lord as we should.

C. A Compassion in our Lives A passion for souls.

What is a Witness?

A. A Witness Tells What He Knows

1. The dictionary defines the word "witness" this way: "One who has seen or heard something; one who furnishes evidence." A witness is someone who can say, "I know this is true."

- In a court of law, a witness swears on the Bible and promises to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth.
- Witnesses tell the truth, and if they are good witnesses, that is all they do. A witness tells nothing less than the truth – nothing more either.

2. Luke often uses the word "witness." Acts 2:32; Acts 3:15; Acts 10:39-40; Acts 13:30-31; Acts 22:14-15.

- You don't have to be a theologian to be a witness for Christ; nor go to a Bible school or seminary or to be a missionary or have a high IQ.
- Just tell the truth about Jesus to anyone who is willing to listen. That's where witnessing always begins.

B. A Witness Shares What He Has Experienced – I John 1:1-3

C. A Witness Remains Loyal to the End

In Greek, the word for witnesses is "martyres," from which we get the English word "martyr." It means being loyal to Jesus no matter the cost and speaking up for Him even when others oppose you.

Notice the word "BOTH" in Acts 1:8. Some are interested only in Jerusalem; others are interested only in the ends of the earth. Here we have the Lord's master plan for world evangelism.

- Jerusalem refers to our Community. We are to begin with our neighbors, family, friends, and the people all about them.
- In all Judea and Samaria refers to our Country. Refers to those who speak the same language, with the same customs, in the same environment and under the same government. We would call this home missions.
- To the uttermost part of the earth refers to another Continent.

How quickly our world could be evangelized if every Christian would seriously follow our Lord's plan to witness.

Listen again: You shall be; not, if you want to be or decide to be.

And you won't have to force it. It will be like dynamite. It will explode out of your mouth.

A witness is anyone who cooperates with the Holy Spirit in telling others about Jesus. All God needs is a little cooperation from His people.

A CONVERSATION WITH THE ANGELS Luke 24:50-53; Acts 1:9-11

Remember that in Acts 1 there are three conversations:

1. A Conversation with the Lord Acts 1:3-8
2. A Conversation with Angels Acts 1:9-11
3. A Conversation which the Disciples had Among Themselves Acts 1:12-26

Read the Passage

The Bible records eleven different appearances of Jesus after He was raised from the dead. In our text we read of our Lord's eleventh appearance.

- It is interesting that his final appearance would be on Mt. Olivet and that He led His disciples to the far side of the Mount to a place called Bethany.
- It was here that the Triumphant Entry took place; that He sweated drops of blood in the Garden of Gethsemane, and that He said, "I am the Resurrection and the Life."
- If He had to go away, it would be at Bethany that the eleven would watch Him go out of their sight. The Mount of Olives had been the place of Agony; now it becomes the place of Triumph.

Three things catch our attention as we look at these verses:

I. The Ascension Acts 1:9

When the time came for Jesus to be resurrected from the dead, it took place in SECRET. No man witnessed that glorious moment. No person was inside the tomb when it occurred.

Soldiers outside the tomb were aware something terrifying was happening, but they did not see Jesus rise from the dead. The women who came to the tomb, found the evidence of the resurrection, but it was over when they got there.

Now, 40 days later, Jesus called the apostles to the Mount of Olives, to meet with Him. He has given them instructions as to what to do, and then something visible and mysterious begins to occur. Jesus ascends back to heaven.

"While they beheld Him" means they were looking at Him. They did not see Him rise from the dead, but He ascended while they were present with Him; while He talked with them; and in full view of all. So that there would be no doubt in their hearts that He was in heaven.

- The Ascension is described three times in the New Testament: twice by Luke (Acts 1:9; Luke 24:5) and once by Mark (Mark 16:19).
- But it is referred to or mentioned in eleven other New Testament books. [Example: I Timothy 3:16: "God was manifested in the flesh, justified in the Spirit, seen by angels, preached among the Gentiles, believed on in the world, received up in glory."]

Though the Ascension is described only three times in detail in the New Testament, it was Prophesied in the Old Testament (Psalm 68:18, interpreted by Paul in Ephesians 4:8, "When He ascended on high, He led captivity captive, and gave gifts to men;" Psalm 110:1 – "The Lord said to my Lord, "Sit at my right hand, till I make your enemies your footstool")' Predicted by Jesus Christ (John 7:33; John 8:21; John 13:33-36; John 14:2-3); Proven in the experiences of Steven, Paul, and John (Acts 7:55-56 as Steven was being stoned to death, he looked into Heaven and saw "the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God;" Acts 9:1-19; Acts 22:1-16; 26:12-18 as Paul recounts his testimony of conversion; Revelation 5:6 John, on the Island of Patmos, saw "a Lamb as though it had been slain in the midst of the throne of God."

Notice that last phrase of verse Acts 1:9: "and a cloud received Him out of their sight."

When He was born into this world, He was wrapped in swaddling clothes; when He left this earth, He was wrapped in glory clouds.

"A cloud" represents the presence of God. It was NOT a cloud such as you and I would see in the sky, but the Shekinah glory of the Lord clothed Him and He was lifted up in a cloud. The Shekinah glory cloud is the same cloud which lead the children of Israel through the wilderness and the cloud which hovered over the Mount of Transfiguration. The cloud enveloped Him and hid Him from their view as He went into heaven.

The Ascension speaks of:

- A. A Work Completed – Luke 24:50; Leviticus 9:22; Hebrews 10:11-12

The lifting up of hands was a sign that the offering had been accepted; the sin had been dealt with. He had completed His work.

- B. A Work Commenced

John 16:7 While Jesus was on earth, He was limited by time and space. Now, He is in all His believers through His Spirit.

What does His Ascension mean for us?

1. Jesus became our High Priest Hebrews 4:14-16
2. Jesus makes intercession for us in heaven Hebrews 7:25
3. Jesus became our Advocate I John 2:1-2
4. Jesus is our Mediator I Timothy 2:5
5. Jesus gives gifts to the Church Ephesians 4:8-11
6. Jesus gives gifts to the Saints Romans 12:4-8; I Corinthians 12:4-7

Lifted up was He to die
It is finished was His cry
Now in heaven exalted high
Hallelujah! What a Savior!

II. The Announcement Acts 1:10-11

Under the Mosaic Law, at least two witnesses were required to make something legal or binding (Numbers 35:30; Deuteronomy 19:15).

Angels had played an important role in the life of Jesus. They had announced His birth. They had watched over His temptation in the wilderness. Angels had strengthened Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane. Angels announced His resurrection. Now angels have witnessed His ascension.

Because Jesus didn't want His disciples to be discouraged or confused by His ascension, He sent two angels to give them a message.

- The message was that the same Jesus who was leaving them would come back "in like manner as you saw Him go into heaven." Acts 1:11
- The going and coming would be personal, visible, and physical. He left in the clouds from the Mount of Olives and will return to the same place and in the same way. The One who is coming back is "this same Jesus."

His ascension ends His redemptive work on earth.

- Hebrews 1:3 says that Christ "sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high." The Ascension was the final step in His redemptive work, following His Incarnation, Crucifixion, and Resurrection.
- John 17:4 Jesus prayed before His crucifixion, "I have finished the work which You have given me to do." He could only have sat down at the right hand of God if that work had been indeed finished. There is nothing else that needs to be done in order for man to be reconciled to God.

Our Lord's ascension exalts Him as head over all things – Ephesians 1:20-21.

This means Jesus is in charge! Christ's sitting posture is not a sign of inactivity, but of completion and authority.

In the ancient world, the right hand was symbolic of authority and power.

- Signet rings were worn on the right hand (Jeremiah 22:24), and blessing was conferred with the right hand (Genesis 48:14).
- A liar was said to have a deceitful right hand (Psalm 144:8).
- God delivered and gave victory with His right hand (Exodus 15:6; Psalm 20:6), and withdrew His right hand to bring defeat (Psalm 74:11).

Christ at God's right hand is symbolic of His blessing, power, and authority.

III. The Aftermath

How did the ascension affect the disciples? It caused them to Worship and Work – Luke 24:52; Hebrews 10:25; John 16:7

We saw what happened on this side of the clouds, but have you ever thought what happened on the other side?

- The best part of any trip is getting back home. Now Jesus is home at last! No more cruelties. No more misunderstandings. No more injustices. No more blood or tears. Gethsemane is over. Calvary is past. The tomb is empty and the Son is home!

- The Agony of earth is now Adoration in Heaven.
- The Bruises of earth has become the Blessings of Heaven.
- The Cross has become the Crown.

• Because of His grace, someday, you and I, too, shall be free from the earth and all its sorrows and we shall forever be at home with Him.

But what happened when the Lord Jesus got home? Psalm 24:7-10

All hail the power of Jesus Name!
 Let angels prostrate fall
 Bring forth the royal diadem
 And crown Him Lord of all!

O that with yonder sacred throng
 We at His feet may fall
 We'll join the everlasting song
 And crown Him Lord of all!

I wonder if the angels fell on their faces and said, "O Jesus, it's so good to have you back. It just hasn't been heaven without you!"

A Vietnam vet returned home as a hero. The band played; the people cheered, and soon the car in which he was riding pulled in front of a white framed house. The father saw the pinned sleeves of his uniform that held his two nubs that once were arms. The father grabbed his son by the two nubs, drew him up close and said, "Son, your father is proud of you."

When Jesus returned to heaven, I wonder if the Father stepped from His throne, and seeing the nail prints and scars from Calvary, He said, "Son, I'm proud of you!"

THE CHURCH ON ITS KNEES Acts 1:12-14

"The best way to get a church on her feet is to get her on her knees."

"Prayer is the thermostat that determines the spiritual temperature of any Christian or any church."

"Prayer produces unity and unity empowers prayer."

I don't often begin a sermon with a confession, but it seems the appropriate thing to do here.

Every time I prepare to teach or preach on prayer, I do so with some reluctance. It's not that I don't believe in prayer or that I don't pray, or that I don't like to preach on prayer. The reason is because I feel I come far short in my ability to pray.

Although I have been a Christian for over 40 years, I still find prayer to be an enormous challenge. It doesn't come naturally to me, never has, and for all I know, it never will.

Real prayer is hard work that involves the mind, the soul, the heart and the will. None of this is easy for me.

There are moments when I feel I am touching the hem of His garment, then somehow, I seem to lose my grip. This distresses me when I consider Paul's command to "pray without ceasing", but too often I "cease without praying." Real prayer!

I truly believe that God gives some the gift of prayer just like He gives others the gift of music. They know how to pray the way some people know how to make beautiful music on the violin. I do take comfort in knowing that God doesn't gift all His children in the same way. One teaches, another sings, another cooks, another serves on a committee, another leads the children's choir, and the list goes on. We are not all alike, which is good because how boring the church would be if we all were cut from the same cloth. Even if we don't have the gift of prayer, we can learn from those who do.

In these ending verses of Acts 1, we will find the church's first prayer meeting and their first business meeting.

The last half of Acts 1 also give us the preparation for Pentecost. The events of Acts 2 didn't just happen. There had to be a time of preparation for Pentecost.

Football team: If a football team is to be effective, they must be prepared. They don't just walk out on the field and play!

- Choir : The choir doesn't just come out on Sunday and beautiful songs come forth from their mouths. They prepared themselves for the service of God.

The Acts 2 experience comes after the Acts 1 experience!

I. The Place of Prayer Acts 1:12-13a

This "upper room" could very possibly have been the same upper room where the disciples ate their last supper, the Passover, with Jesus.

- It might also have been the room where Jesus appeared to the assembled disciples (minus Thomas) after the Resurrection – John 20:19.
- And the room where the disciples would gather to pray when Peter was in prison, the house of Mary, the mother of John Mark – Acts 12:12. It must have been a large room for Acts 1:15 says that about 120 disciples were gathered there.
- The words "abode there" implies their "headquarters".

II. The Period of Prayer

They were in the upper room for 10 days, waiting for the promise of the Holy Spirit to be fulfilled. Pentecost was 50 days after Passover and Jesus was ascended into heaven 40 days after the Resurrection. So, from the Ascension to Pentecost was 10 days. That was the period of time they "continued with one accord in prayer and supplication."

There are always times of preparation before great moves of God.

It takes time to prepare for what God has called you to do. It would have been foolish for the apostles to try to build the Church of Jesus without the power of the Holy Spirit. So, they were in a brief time of waiting – waiting to be "endued with power from on high" (Luke 24:49). Without the Holy Spirit, we are doomed to fail.

III. The Participants in Prayer Acts 1:13b, 14b

What a variety of people made up that first assembly of believers! There were men and women, apostles and "ordinary" people, and even members of our Lord's earthly family (Matthew 13:55; Mark 6:3).

His "brethren" had not believed in Him during His ministry, but they came to trust Him after His Resurrection. Mary and the other women were there.

How easy it would have been for someone to bring division into this beautiful assembly of humble people!

- The members of the Lord's family might have claimed special recognition.
- Peter could have been criticized for his cowardly denial of the Savior.
- John might have reminded the others that he had faithfully stood at the cross and had been chosen by the Savior to care for His mother.

But there was none of this. In fact, nobody was even arguing over who among them was the greatest.

IV. The Practice of Prayer Acts 1:14a

A. They were a Persevering Company – "These all continued"

The word "continued" means a steady consistency, a faithfulness for the 10-day period.

They didn't know how long they would have to wait for the promise of the Father, but they were willing to wait for as long as it took.

The fact that nothing was happening did not disappoint them. No souls were being saved; no outreach of any kind was being made. Yet, they knew Jesus was alive and He had promised them His power and nothing would discourage them.

B. They were a Purposeful Company – "These all continued with one accord"

The key phrase is "with one accord" and is found six times in Acts (1:14; Acts 2:1,46; Acts 4:24; Acts 5:12; Acts 15:25; Acts 2:44). "One accord" means that they were "in one heart." There was a harmony of purpose. They were purposefully united.

There was not a dissenting voice; not a murmur of complaint.

- Psalm 133:1 – one of the ugliest sights is when a church is not in one accord; one of the most beautiful sights

is a group of people in one accord.

- Unity is the hallmark of the internal state of the early church. When you see disharmony and discord in a church, it is usually because people are not praying.
- The attitude you display toward other people is a commentary on your prayer life.

Prayer is a prominent theme in Acts.

1. The early Christians determined the will of God by prayer Acts 1:24.
2. The early Christians developed their Priorities around prayer Acts 6.
3. The early Christians died and went to heaven in prayer Acts 6:5.
4. The early Christians did miracles by prayer – Raising Dorcas Acts 9:40
5. The early Christians defeated Satan through prayer Acts 12:1-19 Release of Peter from prison
6. The early Christians deployed their missionaries through Acts 13:3 prayer – when the church at Antioch sent out their first missionaries.

C. They were a Praying Company – Those all continued ...in prayer and supplication”

Pentecost happened in response to reconciliation among the disciples. There were deep tensions among them during and after Jesus' ministry among them. Sharp divisions and conflicts surged among these strong-willed people. Until they were together on their knees, fully open to God and each other, the Holy Spirit could not be given. If we want power from the Holy Spirit as individuals, we need to do a relational inventory: Is everyone forgiven? Are any restitution to be made. Are there any broken relationships that need to be healed?

- Since God did not want to send His Spirit to a jealous, quarreling Church, peace was brought through prayer.
- Down on our knees we can't look down on anybody and it is hard to bicker and quarrel and criticize and complain while we are opening our heart to God.

“In prayer and supplication” – The Greek omits supplication. The word prayer here means “with earnest purpose of mind making request.”

For ten days they were praying that God would prepare them to receive what the Lord had in store for them and that God would prepare the hearts of those who would hear the message to be receptive to the Spirit's conviction.

The result of their praying was that 3,000 were saved on the day of Pentecost. Acts 17:6 described these Christians as “those who have turned the world upside down.”

When was the last time the unbelieving world looked at the Church of Jesus Christ and accused it of having such power and influence in our world?

THE CHURCH'S FIRST BUSINESS MEETING Acts 1:15-26

The first business meeting in the early church was held because of the selecting of church leadership. Judas had committed suicide. Who would take his place? What principles need to be followed in selecting church leaders? What process is to be used?

Peter stands with a Bible in his hands. Peter says that there is Scripture concerning Judas which “must” be fulfilled.

Jesus gives a reference to Psalm 41:9 in John 13:18 “...that the Scripture may be fulfilled, 'He who eats bread with me has lifted up his heel against Me.'”

Psalm 109:8 The Apostle Peter cited this verse as justification for replacing Judas the betrayer with another apostle (Acts 1:20). “Let his days be few, and let another take his office.”

Judas was not an accidental disciple. He was chosen by Jesus Christ to be one of the original twelve.

From the beginning of Jesus' ministry, He knew that Judas was “a devil” (John 6:70). On the night of His betrayal, Jesus called Judas the “son of perdition” (John 17:12).

Yet, Jesus never treated Judas any differently than any of the other disciples. Jesus gave no hints concerning who Judas was or what he was going to do. He never treated him with suspicion.

Judas betrayed Jesus for 30 pieces of silver. After a time of reflection, John looked back as he wrote his gospel and wrote that Judas used to pilfer the disciples' money for his own use (John 12:5-6).

Both Matthew's and Luke's Gospels record the cunning Judas employed to betray Jesus into the hands of the authorities. In the Garden of Gethsemane, Judas used a Kiss to identify to the Jewish leaders and soldiers who Jesus was (Matthew 26:25, 48; Luke 22: 47-48).

In the dark, it would have been difficult for the soldiers and Jewish officials to pick out which person was Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane. Judas gave a Kiss of greeting as a sign to identify who Jesus was.

In Mark 14:21 Jesus said, "Woe to that man who betrays the Son of Man! It would be better for him if he had not been born."

Warren Wiersbe said, "If you are not born again, the day will come when you will wish you had never been born at all."

It was not the religious leaders who approached Judas with an offer to trade information for money. The whole betrayal plot was Judas' idea (Matthew 26:14-15; Luke 22:4).

- It was getting toward midnight when Judas made his deal to betray Jesus, but by sunrise he had changed his mind. He realized he had made a great mistake and somehow wanted to find a way to make things right. He took the bag of money back to the Chief Priest, but they just laughed at him. He even admitted, "I have sinned for I have betrayed innocent blood" (Matthew 27:4). But it was too late.
- Judas went out and hanged himself over his guilt. Peter, in Acts 1, elaborates by saying Judas fell headlong and was dashed to pieces and fell into the valley, dying as he hit the rocks below.
- It is the final act of a man who could not live with himself and the memory of what he had done. In the ultimate irony, Judas died before Jesus.
- Scripture says that Judas went to "his own place," which means "a place adapted to him and appropriate for him." He went to Hell.

A debate has continued for hundreds of years as to whether the disciples did the right thing in choosing Matthias as an apostle to take the place of Judas.

It was in the midst of a time of prayer that God seems to have spoken to Peter and revealed to him there was something that needed to be done. There was a vacancy among the apostles.

- The indication is that God spoke to Peter's heart and had him address the group of believers regarding the need to choose someone to serve in this position of leadership.
- The prophecy of Psalm 109:8 says, "Let another man take his place," much like we today replace deacons when the situation presents itself.

Peter makes sure the selection would be Biblical, Orderly, and Prayerfully.

There are some divine qualifications for being an apostle:

A. A Personal Experience of Christ's Earthly Ministry Acts 1:21

The person to replace Judas had to be one of those who accompanied the other apostles "all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us (Acts 1:21). In other words, they had to be eye-witnesses of the ministry of Jesus Christ. That obviously excludes anyone alive today who might claim to be an apostle.

B. A Personal Knowledge of Christ's Resurrection Acts 1:22

This refers to the 40-day period between the Resurrection and Ascension when Christ was making Himself known to His followers, proving He was alive from the dead. Again, this excludes modern-day "apostles."

C. A Personal Selection by the Lord Himself Acts 1:23-26

They got the number of qualified candidates from the 120 who were present in the upper room. They prayed that the Lord would reveal His choice (Acts 1:24-26).

The man selected must be Converted, Committed, and Called.

Some say, "But it was wrong for them to select Matthias. He was never heard of again!"

Expect for Peter and John, none of the original Twelve are mentioned by name in the Book of Acts after Acts 1:13!

Paul could not have "filled the ranks" because he could never have met the divine qualifications laid down in Acts 1:21-22.

- Paul did not travel with the Apostles when Jesus was with them on earth; and, though he saw the glorified Christ, Paul was not a witness of the Resurrected Christ as were the original Apostles.
- Paul made it clear that he was NOT to be classified with the Twelve (I Corinthians 15:8; Galatians 1:15-24).
- The 12 Apostles ministered primarily to the twelve tribes of Israel, while Paul was sent to the Gentiles (Galatians 2:1-10).
- It was necessary that twelve men witness at Pentecost to the twelve tribes of Israel, and also that twelve men be prepared to sit on twelve thrones to judge the twelve tribes (Luke 22:28-30).

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

It's a shame how we get leaders in some of our churches. We say:

1. "If they'll take the job, give it to them." We never pray or seek the Lord's will in the matter or check to see if they are qualified or faithful. We just look for a warm body to put in the position we need to fill.
2. They're not faithful, but if we give them a job, maybe they'll start coming and get faithful."
3. Or maybe we beg them if they say "No" to service: "O, come on, it won't take much time or effort, and besides, we can't get anyone else to do it."
4. Or, "Let's ask them to serve, they are Popular or Prominent or Prosperous, they're just not too committed."

Let me say a word about Joseph call Barsabbas: He was one of the candidates, but he was defeated. We do not read that he became angry and quit the church because he was not elected. Nor did some of the members who voted for Joseph say, "It's not fair. Joseph is a much better man than Matthias." No, they didn't get bent out of shape because their man didn't win. I'm sure Barsabbas went on serving and doing the best he could and that he was happy in his place of service.

The congregation was not divided over how the vote went. They rejoiced in the fact they had found the will of God. They knew it was not about them, it was about Him.

How do we know there was no division over how the selection went? Scripture tells us, "When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all with one accord in one place." Acts 2:1

Their selection of leadership was made biblically, orderly, and prayerfully. That's how God intended His people to select the leadership of His Church.

THE MIRACLE OF PENTECOST Acts 2:1-13

We are about to enter that section of the Book of Acts that deals with the Person and work of the Holy Spirit.

- During the 1960's and 1970's, many mainline denominations were introduced to a new charismatic move. It caused Disruption of Harmony among many, as well as Divisions in churches.
- Yet, one function of the Holy Spirit is to Glorify Christ, to Empower believers for witnessing, and to create a unity and oneness among believers.

There have been those who have tried to imitate or manufacture Pentecost, but without the manifestation of power that was manifested on the Day of Pentecost. Because there is no REAL power in so many of our churches, people will go after FALSE power; because there is no REAL FIRE, folks go after FALSE FIRE.

- I heard a young deacon say of his dad, "I don't care what the Bible says about tongues, my dad had the experience of tongues."
- Let me emphasize that Experience does not Prove Doctrine, but Doctrine does Prove Experience. To engage in any belief or action which does not have a Biblical foundation, throws one open to satanic influence and "doctrines of demons." Thus, we need to be careful when we approach the subject of tongues.

The key that unlocks the Book of Acts for us is Acts 1:8. Jesus said to His disciples, "Ye shall be my witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in Judea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the world."

- When Jesus was here, He had all power, He KNEW that He was not going to stay here, yet He knew that His followers would need this power. So He repeatedly gave the promise that the Holy Spirit would come to take

HIS place and would give them power to accomplish the will of God (John 14:16-17; John 15:26; John 16:7, 13-14).

- As a body without breath is a corpse, so the Church without the Spirit is dead.
- The beginning in Jerusalem covers a period of from 3 to 5 years.

I. The Meaning of Pentecost Acts 2:1

If you go back to the Old Testament, you will discover that Pentecost was one of the Jewish feast days, only they didn't call it Pentecost.

They called it the Feast of Weeks. Pentecost is the Greek name.

- The Feast of Weeks is mentioned in five places in the first five books – Exodus 23, 24, Leviticus 16, Numbers 28, Deuteronomy 16. It was the celebration of the beginning of the early weeks of harvest.
- In Palestine there were two harvests each year. The early harvest came during the months of May and June; the final harvest came in the fall.
- Pentecost was the celebration of the beginning of the early wheat harvest which meant that Pentecost always fell sometime during the middle of the month of May or some- times in early June.

The word Pentecost mean “fiftieth” and took place 50 days after Passover and is one of three great annual festivals celebrated in Jerusalem – the Feast of Passover, the Feast of First Fruits, and the Feast of Pentecost or Feast of Weeks, also called Feast of Harvest.

The Feast of Passover was given to Israel to remind them of God's grace in sparing the life of their first-born when the death angel passed through Egypt. The blood on the doorpost looked forward to the death of Jesus as He shed His blood for us.

The Feast of Pentecost symbolized the coming of the Holy Spirit. Jesus was on earth 40 days after His Resurrection until His Ascension. The disciples waited in the upper room 10 days, and then the Spirit came.

The day of Pentecost had come 1,500 times before; now it was “FULLY” come. It had come and gone, come and gone, come and gone, every since Moses instituted the feast. Now it had come to stay.

“They were all together in one place with one accord.” That means they were all unanimous in purpose. Their hearts and minds were joined together.

There was unity – physical unity, spiritual unity, emotional unity, and doctrinal unity. God never works in strife and confusion.

II. The Manifestations at Pentecost Acts 2:2-4

A. The Sound Acts 2:2

In contrast to the “still, small voice” in which God revealed Himself to Elijah while covering himself in the cave, God the Spirit thunders into the lives of the redeemed at Pentecost.

1. “Suddenly” There was something dramatic about the Spirits arrival. Jesus had left suddenly; now the Spirit came suddenly.

2. Supernatural “From heaven” The place where Jesus had just ascended was the place the Spirit would now come from.

The sound was not a wind, but a sound LIKE a violent, rushing wind, which gives the idea of a wind of tornadic proportions saturating the house.

This was an audible coming of the Spirit and filled the whole house where they were sitting. That is, the people in the house were totally immersed in the Spirit.

The sound or noise conveys the idea of power in the Voice of the Lord. The psalmist echoes the idea of the power of God's Voice. Psalm 29:3-5a.,7-9

The Holy Spirit filling the whole house is the baptism of the Spirit of which every believer partakes. In His initial coming the Spirit descends from heaven in a unique way, but the effect of what He does is just the same.

1. He baptizes us into the Body of Christ, His Church.
2. He makes us a partaker of Christ.
3. He places us firmly and securely in Christ.
4. He joins us together, in the same Spirit, to all of the redeemed.

5. He satisfies us deeply by letting us drink of the same fountain of living waters.
6. He applies all of the power of the cross and resurrection to our sinful lives –I Corinthians 12:13.

When you enter into a faith relationship to Christ, this same Holy Spirit comes in purifying power in your life. We do not hear a sound, but He leaves the same radical effect upon our lives.

Both the Baptism of the Spirit and the Filling of the Spirit occurred simultaneously at Pentecost – but they are not the same thing. Here is a way to contrast the two:

Baptism of the Spirit Filling of the Spirit

Happens once at salvation	Happens throughout the Christian life
A past event	A present reality
For every believer	For obedient believers
Never commanded	Commanded – Ephesians 5:18
Positional truth	Experiential practice
Places the believer in the body	Enables the believer to live for Christ of Christ
Spirit is resident in one's life	Spirit is President in one's life

One of the most important things to remember about the baptism and filling of the Spirit is that they are separate events with different purposes.

The Old Testament word for wind is “Ruach;” the New Testament word for wind is “Pneuma.” Both words refer to the Holy Spirit. John 3:8

The wind is:

1. Invisible

- a. Yet, it is real. Many things that are invisible are real.
- b. A skeptic said to a Christian:

“Have you ever seen the Holy Spirit? No.
 Have you ever tasted the Holy Spirit? No.
 Have you ever smelled the Holy Spirit? No.
 He said, “See, there is no Holy Spirit!”

The Christian Said:
 “Have you ever seen a pain? No.
 Have you ever smelled a pain? No.
 Have you ever touched a pain? No.
 But you have felt a pain: So, it is with the Holy Spirit.

2. Unpredictable John 3:8

3. Influential

- a. When the wind comes, it is at times a calm refreshing thing; at other times it is strong enough to uproot trees.
- b. As the wind blows in different ways, so the spirit has different types of ministry.

B. The Sight Acts 2:3

Pentecost was the birthday of the Church and everyone in the upper room was Baptized and Filled with the Holy Spirit.

- First, the disciples had heard the Spirit coming. Now they would actually see the Spirit descending and resting upon them in what appeared to be fire shaped like tongues.
- With the appearance of fire, it represents purity as well as the presence of the Lord –Deuteronomy 4:24 “Our God is a consuming fire.”

Here the Spirit is Filling the disciples. He fills us to enable us for Service; not for personal attention; not to make us feel better, but to empower us in worship, witness, and service.

C. The Speech Acts 2:4

This aspect of the giving of the Spirit is the most controversial and difficult to understand: Speaking with “other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance.”

- The supernatural speech that took place at Pentecost was not some unintelligible, ecstatic utterance or senseless babbling. It was human speech or language, uttered in known human languages by people who had no skill in those languages before the Spirit gave them utterance.
- The 120 disciples of Jesus were given the ability to speak the languages of the Jews and others who were in Jerusalem for Pentecost.
- Unfortunately, the KJV inserts the word “unknown” in some places of the English text, referring to the tongues, but the word “unknown” is not in the Greek text. It should be translated “other tongues” as modern translations do.

When we are told that every man heard in his own tongue, it was not a miracle of hearing, it was a miracle of speaking.

- Allow me to make a modern application: All of us here speak English: and most, if not all of us, speak only English. Then one Sunday an international audience joined us who needed to hear the gospel and the Spirit gave us utterance. The Spirit would anoint some to speak Russian, some German, some Spanish, some Turkish, some French some Italian, some Latin, etc., until every tongue represented heard in his own language.
- At least 15 different languages were spoken on the Day of Pentecost.

Sometimes folks read this account about speaking with other tongues and they think this account is all about speaking with tongues. But we need to distinguish between the event and the signs of the event.

Three unusual things happened on the Day of Pentecost – the sound of rushing wind, the tongues as of fire, and the actual speaking with tongues. Those three things are rightly seen as “signs.” They draw our attention to something else – the descent of the Holy Spirit upon the disciples. If you focus on the signs, you miss the whole point. The focus should be upon the descent of the Holy Spirit.

Some misuse and misinterpret these verses and want to recreate Pentecost in the local church. Let me mention three problems with this:

1. Speaking with tongues on the Day of Pentecost was not a precedent nor an evidence of believers beyond Pentecost being “baptized in the Spirit.”

If that were the case, then there would of necessity have to be the other two phenomena of the “sound of a violent, rushing wind: and “tongues” as of fire resting upon a person's head. You cannot lift tongues out of its context and make it a necessity for all believers.

2. The kind of tongues mentioned in this verse and throughout the Book of Acts were known languages.

They “began to speak” is the Greek word commonly used for human speech throughout the New Testament.

- “With other tongues” distinguishes that the kind of speaking taking place was with “different languages.” “Other” implies other than their own tongues or tongues not native to them.

3. It was the Spirit “giving them utterance,” not anything contrived, forced, imitated, or manipulated. Again, “utterance” is a word for intelligible speech.

Acts 2 is where God's harvest begins. Revelation 7:9 tells how it ends: “After this I beheld, and lo, a great multitude, which no man could number, of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues, stood before the throne, and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, and palms in their hands; and cried with a loud voice, saying, 'Salvation to our God which sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb.'”

The main business of the Church is to reach people – ALL PEOPLE!

III. The Miracle at Pentecost Acts 2:5-8

The Living Bible renders Acts 2:5-6 like this: “Many Godly Jews were in Jerusalem that day for the religious celebrations, having arrived from many nations. And when they heard the roaring in the sky above the house, the crowds came running to see what it was all about, and were stunned to hear their own language being spoken by the disciples.”

I like that rendering because it says, “the crowd came running.” What made them come running? What is it going to take today for the crowds to come running to the house of God? Something was happening in Acts 2 that could only be explained one way: God did it!

And notice: The speakers were “Galileans” who were considered to be the uneducated, country bumpkins of their day compared to educated people from other regions.

Many of those saved on the Day of Pentecost returned to their own country as witnesses and missionaries of the Gospel!

IV. The Misjudgment at Pentecost Acts 2:12-13

The reaction to the Gospel is the same today as it was on the Day of Pentecost: Some were Amazed and some mocked.

Acts 2:14-15 – Peter said, “No, these folks are not drunk as you suppose, it’s just the third hour of the day or 9:00 A.M.”

It’s obvious those folks were not Baptist, because a lot of Baptist get drunk before 9:00 A.M.

But something new now controlled their life. They were changed by the Power of God!

Have you experienced that change?

THE SERMON THAT BROUGHT 3,000 TO CHRIST Acts 2:14-41

In the twenty-eight chapters of Acts, Luke records the preaching of nineteen different sermons. Peter’s sermon on the Day of Pentecost was the first.

The first thing Peter did was to refute the charge that some in the disciples and apostles were drunk with wine – that drunkenness explained their unusual behavior – Acts 2:12-13.

- Peter reminded them that it was only the “third hour” of the day or 9:00 A.M., the time of the morning sacrifice and prayer. Drinking was neither practiced nor permitted prior to these observances.
- It is apparent we are living in more sinful times since both men and women get drunk all hours of the day.

The critics are always ready to throw cold water on whatever good is going on for God.

- Titus 1:15 “Everything is pure to those whose hearts are pure. But nothing is pure to those who are corrupt and unbelieving, because their minds and consciences are defiled.”
- Like liberals today, these men tried to explain away what was happening. Peter said, “No! Let me correct your thinking.” Acts 2:15-16.
- These are not being controlled by wine, but by the Holy Spirit.

Peter was a good preacher. All good preaching has three elements:

1. Good preaching will always expound the Word of God.

That is, he backed up his sermon with Scripture. Peter’s entire sermon is rather short, consisting of only 23 verses. But of the 23 verses, ten are direct quotations from the Old Testament. That means almost half of Peter’s sermon is composed of pure Scripture.

2. Good preaching will present Jesus Christ as Lord and the only Savior.

Peter’s points were: (1) Christ was crucified; (2) Christ was raised from the dead; (3) Christ was in heaven now, lifted up by the Father, and the Holy Spirit was here in His place. No sermon, however eloquent or forceful, can be called great unless Christ is the center of it all.

3. Good preaching will produce repentance and faith.

Peter gives us first:

I. The Explanation Acts 2:16-21

Peter quoted from three Old Testament passages in his sermon, the first being Joel 2:28-32.

Joel prophesied during a time of disaster in Israel. Locusts had swarmed over the land and destroyed every green thing. Every tree, plant, and crop had been eaten, spelling disaster for the economy. Joel used the opportunity to say that the destruction by the locusts was nothing compared to what the coming judgment of God would be like.

But Joel also spoke of a future time of blessing upon Israel then God would restore “the years that the swarming locust has eaten” (Joel 2:25).

He predicted that the Holy Spirit would be poured out upon the nation – and Peter said that is what happened at Pentecost. The wind, the fire, the speaking in other tongues were a direct connection to the prophecy of Joel.

The first part of Joel's prophecy, quoted by Peter, was fulfilled on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:17-18). But the second part was not: the signs in the heavens and the day of the Lord (Acts 2:19-20).

Many Old Testament prophecies had a dual focus. Prophets saw the coming of the Messiah and the Day of the Lord linked as one event, not two.

The Old Testament prophets saw two events like two mountain peaks in the far distance, but they didn't see the valley in between, which is where we live today. Christ came (the first peak) and will come again (the second peak), but in between these two events is the missionary period of the Church in which we live today.

From the prophet's perspective, the Day of the Lord encompassed everything from the coming of the Messiah to the final judgment. We know they are separated. So, part of Joel's prophecy was fulfilled at Pentecost and the other part will be fulfilled at the end of the Church age. So, when Peter says, “This is what was spoken by the prophet Joel...” he is referring to the first part of Joel's prophecy about the Spirit being poured out on all people.

- And the last part of Joel's prophecy that Peter quotes –“Whoever calls on the Name of the Lord shall be saved” – is an invitation that spans the Church age between the first and second comings of Christ.
- Whoever calls upon the Name of the Lord in this period of time will be saved. Joel saw it coming;
- Peter saw it being fulfilled.

The cosmic disturbances described in Acts 2:19-20 will be signs pointing to the Second Coming (Matthew 24:29-31; Revelation 19:11-16; Jude 14-15).

II. The Proclamation Acts 2:22-36

Peter's outline for his message is a great outline for anyone who wants to share the Gospel with the intent of inviting someone to believe on Christ and be saved.

A. Incarnation Acts 2:22

Go back to Acts 2:17 and note the phrase “in the last days.” The “last days” began when Christ came to earth and they will end when Christ returns to the earth.

“Jesus of Nazareth” was the humble name that often identified the Lord during His earthly ministry.

“A man approved of God” The one God put His stamp of approval upon; this is perfectly accepted by God.

“Miracles, wonders and signs” were supernatural means and works that validated Jesus as the Messiah.

B. Crucifixion Acts 2:23

The death of Jesus was planned by God due to man's wickedness. From eternity past (2 Timothy 1:9; Revelation 13:8) God predetermined that Jesus would die an atoning death as part of His pre-ordained plan.

The Lord had not been the victim of a Jewish mob, not the helpless prisoner of Pilate's judgment. What took place had been planned in eternity past. Jesus came to do precisely what had been fore-ordained.

C. Resurrection Acts 2:24-32

Death could not keep Jesus in the grave. Peter pointed out some proofs of the resurrection.

1. The Prophecy of David concerning Jesus Acts 2:25-28
2. The Testimony of Peter Acts 2:29-31
3. The Account of the eye-witnesses – the disciples Acts 2:32

D. Ascension Acts 2:33-36

III. Peter's Invitation Acts 2:37-41

Peter didn't even have to give an invitation. The Jews gave the invitation themselves!

A. Conviction Acts 2:37

They were "cut to the heart." They suddenly realized that they had killed their own Messiah. Yes, God had raised Him from the dead, but they were left with their guilt. What must they do?

B. Direction Acts 2:38-41

After preaching the sermon, all Peter had to do was direct them to God.

a. Repent

Peter told them to REPENT. To repent means to change your mind and heart about how you think about God and a change of purpose that turns an individual from sin to God.

You change your direction. You turn toward God instead of away from God. When you turn toward God, you encounter Jesus Christ.

b. Be Baptized for the remission of sin

Many have used this verse to prove that baptism is essential for salvation. Their doctrine rests on the little word "for". The Greek word means "because of." They were to be baptized, not in order to obtain remission of sin, but because they had already experienced the remission of sin as a result of their repentance. The word "for" can also mean "as a result of what has already happened." "Since you have repented of your sins, testify of your personal faith through a public affirmation of baptism."

This is a better understanding of the word. For example; A wanted poster may read like this: Jessie James: Wanted for robbery. They didn't want to rob him, they wanted him because he had robbed others.

Notice that in Acts 3:19 as Peter tells others how to be saved, he doesn't mention baptism as a must for salvation.

Three responses may come after hearing the gospel.

1. Critical: They turn from their only hope.
2. Conviction: But just being under conviction is not salvation.
3. Conversion:

"Pricked in their hearts" means to pierce or penetrate deeply. This convicting causes:

- Sorrow that they had put the Messiah to death.
- Guilt
- Fear of God's wrath
- Knowledge that what they did could not be undone.

Three thousand were saved because the Holy Spirit used the Word-centered and Christ-centered preaching of Peter. Preachers today will do well to copy Peter's preaching style.

BUILD ACCORDING TO PATTERN Acts 2:40-47

What is a New Testament church? How is a local New Testament church supposed to operate?

The Church did have a beginning time. It began on the Day of Pentecost in Acts 2. The first use of the word "church" in in Acts 2:14.

The Greek word for Church is "ekklesia" which means "the called-out ones." Christians are called out from the world system for God's purpose and to be holy (I Corinthians 1:2). We are to "come out from among them and be separate, says the Lord" (2 Corinthians 6:17).

We are told that 3,000 were saved on the Day of Pentecost, and the Church was born, but it continued to grow.

- 120 members Acts 1:15

- Then 3,000 members Acts 2:41
- Daily conversions Acts 2:47
- Then 5,000 men, not counting the wives and children, undoubtedly represented by the number of heads of households. Acts 4:4
- Multitudes of men and women Acts 5:14
- Numbers increasing greatly Acts 6:7
- Many new believers Acts 9:42
- A large number believed Acts 11:21
- A great multitude believed Acts 14:1
- A great number of Greeks and leading women Acts 17:4
- Many new believers Acts 17:12
- Almost all of Asia believed Acts 19:26
- Many myriads of Jews believed Acts 21:20

Some have estimated that there were as many as 100,000 new believers congregating in Jerusalem by the end of the first generation of believers.

Acts 17:6 says the early Church turned their world upside down for Christ.

They taught the doctrine of Christ, fellow-shipped around Christ, remembered Christ in communion, communicated with Christ in prayer, and exalted Christ in worship.

This early Church is a wonderful example of what all churches are to be like.

There is a sense in which duplicating any church is impossible. It's interesting in our day to see clones of certain well-known churches. Rather than developing it's own personality, the leadership of the churches try to duplicate another "success story" in hopes of doing the same thing themselves.

The practice of the early Church lays a groundwork for the right kind of foundation for every church.

Two fundamental ingredients are found in a New Testament church: Acts 2:32

1. Teaching the Word of God Acts 2:42

"How firm a foundation ye saints of the Lord is laid for your faith in His excellent Word. What more can He say than to you He hath said, to you who for refuge to Jesus have fled?"

2. They were in one accord Acts 2:46

Acts 2:44, 46 says, They were together. They met together. They are together. They learned together. They shared together. They prayed together.

Dr. Ed Young tells about when he first moved to Second Baptist in Houston, TX. He asked the deacons if there were folks who were out of sorts with the church. They told him of one lady who lived close to the church. After the service he asked one of the deacons to go with him to visit the lady. When they knocked on the front door, they saw the lady peep through the curtain and when she saw who it was, she ran to the back of the house. He said, "Come on, Deacon" and went to back door and knocked. Again, the lady peeped through the backdoor window and ran to the front of the house. Dr. Young went back to the front of the house. He knocked again on the front door. He sensed someone looking at him but saw no one. He knelt down and looked through the key-hole and there was the lady's eye-ball looking back at him. He said to her, "Lady, do you realize the first time we saw eye-to-eye was when we were on our knees?"

That's often what it takes to get in one accord.

I. The Establishment of the Church Acts 2:40-41

Peter had preached the gospel very powerfully and clearly. He said to them in Acts 2:23, "You have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain" the Son of God.

In Acts 2:40 Peter said, "Save yourself from this untoward (perverse) generation," and they gladly received the Word and were converted.

Notice Acts 2:36-37: For the first time they saw themselves as they really were and they saw their sin as it really was and they saw the Savior as He really is.

Acts 2:41 says they were saved then baptized. Notice the order. No other kind of baptism is ever considered in the New Testament as believer's baptism.

II. The Edification of the Church Acts 2:42a

A true new-born Christian finds delight in the Lord and His Word. He loves fellow-shiping with God's people and worshipping the Lord.

When you have to constantly coax a professing Christian to find delight in the Lord and His Words, and you have to berate him to join in fellow-shiping with God's people; and have to harass him to worship the Lord, the problem may be he has not experienced the new birth.

The Jerusalem church was a teaching church. What was "the apostles' doctrine"? It was everything they had learned by first-hand observing the life and ministry of Jesus; that is, His words and works.

They were passing on to the new converts in Jerusalem everything Jesus had taught them.

Typically, the Holy Spirit uses preachers and teachers to teach us the Word.

The responsibility of preachers and teachers in the Church is to dig deeply themselves into the riches of God's Word, then to teach the life-giving doctrines and principles of the Word of God.

Those who are being taught must do everything they can to be good hearers.

Notice" They continued steadfastly...daily. A Christian life is a disciplined life. That's the reason the early Christians were call "disciples."

III. The Experience of the Church Acts 2:46b, 44-46

A. They opened their Hearts to one another – Acts 2:42b

The word "fellowship" comes from the word "koinonia," which means "to hold things in common." It means to share your life with one another. Christianity is relational. We begin by having a relationship with the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Then we are to have a relationship with our brothers and sisters in Christ. Fellowship expresses what we share together; what we give as well as what we receive.

Our fellowship together is seen in the "one another" passages of the New Testament.

Negatively: Don't challenge one another. Don't complain against one another. Don't devour one another. Don't envy one another, Don't judge one another, Don't lie to one another. Don't speak against one another.

Positively: Accept one another. Admonish one another. Bear one another's burdens. Bear with one another. Build up one another. Care for one another. Comfort one another. Confess your sins to one another. Encourage one another. Fellowship with one another. Forgive one another. Greet one another. Honor one another. Be hospitable toward each other. Humble yourself toward one another. Be kind to one another. Love one another. Be members one of another. Pray for one another. Be at peace with one another. Have the same mind toward one another. Seek after that which is good for one another, Serve one another. Show forbearance to one another. Stimulate one another. Be subject to one another. Teach one another. Be tenderhearted one toward another.

This list tells me (1) everyone in the Body needs me and what I can do for them and (2) I need everyone in the Body for what they can do for me. We need each other.

B. They opened their Hands to one Another Acts 2:44-45

The Jerusalem church shared their material goods with one another. Some have suggested that this was communism or socialism. Not so. Communism says: "What's yours is mine." These Christians said. "What's mine is yours." Under Communism, sharing is compulsory; what these Christians did was voluntary.

Three times in this passage we are told that they are together. One gets the idea that shared meals played an important part in the life of the early church.

- Eating together is one mark of a united church. Sometimes we joke and say that if you want to have a good crowd, just announce that you're going to eat.

- The First Rule of Church Growth is "If you feed them, they will come." It's a biblical truth. In the earliest days of the church, Christians ate together.
- I believe that the church that eats together will stay together, will play together, will pray together, will grow together in every sense of the word.

C. They opened their Homes to one Another Acts 2:26

Remember that many of the people joining the church were probably in Jerusalem for Pentecost. Perhaps they stayed longer than they might otherwise have and needed places to stay and food to eat. The believers pooled their resources and provided for everyone in their homes.

IV. The Expression of the Church Acts 2:42c, 46a, 47a

The Church expressed its love for Christ through worship in a variety of ways.

Central to our relationship to the Lord is our learning to worship Him consistently. In worship we are recognizing the sovereignty, graciousness, goodness, and holiness of God. We are focusing our attention upon Him specifically. We are reflecting on all His character and attributes.

A. They Communed at the Lord's Table

The phrase, "to the breaking of bread," has a distinct reference to the Lord's Supper. The Lord's Supper represents the most hallowed time a church meets.

Communion calls for self-examination and purging of sin. Communion is an opportunity to look BACK at what Christ has done, FORWARD to His return, and INWARD to the spiritual condition of our lives. Communion should be offered and received regularly by churches and their members.

B. They Continued in Prayer Acts 2:42

"Prayers" is plural because it is all-inclusive. Whether we are praising, confessing, giving thanks, interceding, petitioning – all are prayers and all are part of our worship as believers.

Prayer involves asking which declares our dependence upon God. Prayer is worship.

C. They Celebrated their new Faith with:

1. "Many signs and wonders were done by the Apostles" Acts 2:43

There has been an emphasis on signs and wonders in the church in our day.

But we don't witness them like they did in the first century because we have the complete Word of God by which to authenticate our Christian experience. In both Jesus' ministry and the Apostles' ministry was proven by the power of God working through them. Today, we validate and authenticate our Christian experience and message by comparing it to the teaching of Scripture.

We do like the Bereans: We study the Scriptures to see if things are true or not – Acts 17:11.

2. Gladness Acts 2:46

Jesus came to save us and salvation brings joy. It was a joy to come to church and to be with God's people. They enjoyed the worship, praise, fellowship, and oneness of spirit.

3. Singleness of Heart Acts 2:46

They came to worship Christ, the Living Lord! Their worship was not encumbered with self-centeredness or showmanship. They simply offered up to God what was in their hearts through music, singing, and prayers.

4. Having Favor with all the people – daily

They witnessed, not only with their lips, but with their lives. They enjoyed the favor of the people outside the church. People who had not come to Christ yet, looked at these new Christians, and saw that there was something real about them. They were really having a good time praying, preaching, praising, laughing, giving their money and spending their money on the poor and taking care of the needs of others and fellow-shipping together, and they wanted to get in on it!

Three key words reveal the secret of the early church: Unified, Magnified, Multiplied!

“And the Lord added to the Church daily such as should be saved!”

THE CRIPPLE WHO DANCED IN CHURCH Acts 3:1-26

Luke spends the first two chapters of Acts developing the foundation of the Church. He moves slowly and carefully through the first two chapters as he gives so many important building blocks upon which the superstructure of the Church is built.

- In the third chapter of Acts, the pace of the book picks up as the Apostles begin moving out into Jerusalem and preaching the Gospel.
- The first half of Acts 3 tells the story of the miracle Peter performed, while the second half records the sermon Peter preached to the crowd that gathered as a result of the miracle.

In Acts 2:43 we are told that “many wonders and signs were done” by the hand of the Apostles. From the many miracles which were performed, Luke selects one, of which he gives a more detailed account. I think the reason he chose this miracle is that it is a picture of what sin does TO the individual and what salvation can do FOR an individual. SIN CRIPPLES BUT SALVATION CORRECTS!

Acts 3 may be divided in this way:

I. The Cripple Acts 3:1-6

It's interesting to me that even unbelievers understand that because Jesus Christ cared about hurting sinners, so should His body.

Like the lame man, the hurting people in our culture know intuitively that the one group of people most likely to help them is the Christian community.

I John 3:16-18 “By this we know love, because He laid down His life for us. And we also ought to lay down our lives for the brethren. But whoever has this world's goods, and sees his brother in need, and shuts up his heart from him, how does the love of God abide in him?”

The world just naturally expects more of Christians than it does non-Christians – and it has a right to!

We are told that 75% of all money given to charity in the U.S. is given by church members.

Notice Acts 3:2 – He was “lame from his mother's womb.” Acts 4:22 adds that this man was over 40 years old.

Think about what it must have been like for him and his parents. His parents never saw him take his first step. He could not share in the games of the other children. When he came to adulthood, he was unable to work, so he had to beg.

If all you see is a lame man, you have missed what God wants you to see.

- This lame man is a picture and represents fallen humanity outside of Christ. We were all crippled by the fall. We were all unable to walk with God.
- There are moral cripples, emotional cripples, mental cripples. Sin cripples everything it touches.

This lame man was born cripple and after 40 years (Acts 4:22), he still had to be carried by someone else to the place of begging.

- This man was taken day after day to the place where charity was expected. This was his only means of livelihood and all he had to look forward to every day.
- People coming into the temple would have money to put into the temple treasury, so it was a good place for the paralytic to beg. Besides, what better way to impress God than to give a few pennies to a needy beggar?

We would do well to draw a lesson from this man's situation and realize how few things we need in life are obtainable with money – not health, not happiness, not a good marriage or dedicated Christian children, and certainly not a relationship with God, which this man needed.

That which he needed most, he was about to receive from Peter and John.

A story from the early period of Church history illustrates the difference between wealth and true riches: St. Thomas Aquinas was in Rome walking along the street with a Roman Catholic Cardinal. The Cardinal noticed a beggar. Reaching into his pocket, he pulled out a silver coin and gave it to him.

Then he turned to Aquinas, the great doctor of the Church, and said, “Well, Thomas, fortunately we can no longer say, as Peter did,

'Silver and gold have I none.'" St. Thomas replied, "Yes, that is true. But neither can we say, 'In the Name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk.'"

II. The Christians

Just a few days earlier they were involved in a service where 3,000 were saved. On this day they were just as involved with one soul for which Jesus died. They didn't think one soul was too small for them.

A. They were men of Prayer Acts 3:1

Did you notice: Peter and John were going to church! These men had been chosen to be the disciples of Jesus, they had walked with Jesus, they had seen Him die, they had seen the risen Lord, the Holy Spirit had filled them, they were involved in 3,000 being saved; yet, they felt they ought to go to church.

- It seems that the deeper the spiritual experience a man has, the more he feels his need of worship and communion with God.
- Jesus set the example in church attendance. He knew all things; yet, we find Him at the house of God.
- It is at church where God can SPEAK to us the easiest, where God can CONVICT us the easiest, where God can REFRESH us the easiest.

Notice: They went to pray. They took prayer seriously. A person's prayer life tells a lot about them.

We are told in 3:1 that Peter and John went to the temple at the hour of prayer, being the ninth hour, that is, 3:00 P.M.

- The Jewish custom was that all devout Jews would go to the temple to pray three times a day – 9:00 A.M.; Noon/ 3:00 P.M.
- Psalm 55:17: "Evening, and morning, and at noon, will I pray and cry aloud: and He shall hear my voice."
- Jewish men stopped what they were doing and headed to the temple, where they spent an hour in prayer. This time consisted of fifteen minutes of silent meditation where they meditated on the greatness and goodness of God, thirty minutes of petition, and fifteen minutes of Adoration – which, by the way, I think is a neat pattern for prayer.

Three o'clock in the afternoon prayer time had special significance to the Christians, because it was the very hour on which Jesus had died on the cross when He cried in a loud voice, "It is finished," bowed His head, and gave up the ghost (John 19:30).

B. They were men of Perception Acts 3:2-5

As the lame man called out to them, they found their eyes "fastened" on him. They must have thought, "we've passed this guy hundreds of times before," but at that moment something unique was happening.

- Have you ever seen any one begging? The first time I ever saw someone begging is when I went to the fair as a kid. Some blind men were sitting on the side of the road with their little tin cups with pencils in them, offering a pencil if you put some money in their cup. The thing I remember is that although I saw them, I felt uneasy when I saw them. I didn't want to "fasten" my eyes on them.
- This man had been there a long time. I wonder why he had not been healed by Jesus.

Jesus certainly must have seen him as He passed into the temple. But He never healed him. All of which indicates that God has His time for great events, and that until His time strikes, things go on pretty much as usual. Then God's program moves into gear, and things happen which could have happened at any earlier time but did not, for a special reason.

- I don't know why God heals some and doesn't heal others. Just like I don't know why God gives some men more opportunities than He does others. The answer is somewhere in the sovereignty of God.

When Peter and John stopped and looked directly at him and said, "Look on us," the beggar must have thought, "Boy, I'm going to get a big sum from these two."

The moment Peter had this man's attention, he did two things which are more interesting:

1. Peter admitted his bankruptcy in the material realm.

- "Silver and gold, have I none." That's how I know they must have been Baptist preachers. They were broke!
- Peter said, "If you're looking for silver and gold, I can't help you there."
- That's a far cry from the "name it and claim it/ prosperity/seed faith" mentality of today!
- The beggar probably had more money than Peter.

The church is not called to meet the material needs of the world. Now, I don't mean it's wrong to give money. It's not wrong at all.

The parable of the good Samaritan keeps us in balance here, and shows that we can help people with our money and we should when it is needed. But that is not what the Church is called to do basically. The basic call of the Church is to release the life of God, to declare the redeeming power of God, and to make available to men what only God can do in the Name of Jesus.

2. Peter demonstrated his amazing adequacy in the spiritual realm.

“In the Name of Jesus, rise and walk.” The moment this man looked on Peter and John and at the mention of the Name of Jesus, something remarkable happened. Strength came flowing into his ankles, and Peter, sensing it, took him by the right hand and lifted him up. The man rose and began to leap and shout and jump around, trying out his new-found strength in his legs.

No wonder it had an amazing effect upon the people – Acts 3:9-11.

These people were convinced beyond a shadow of a doubt that God was at work.

Notice Acts 3:12: Peter was quick to turn the eyes of the people from him and to turn the spotlight on Jesus. Jesus is to get all the praise, honor, glory, credit.

- Peter told the people that he did not have the power nor perfection to accomplish such a thing.
- Peter and John did not belong to the “Since I Come Club.” They, like John the Baptist had the Spirit of “He must increase, but I must decrease.” The quickest way to be taken out of ministry is to say, “I want my name exalted.”

The healing of the lame man opened the door for Peter to preach Christ.

- Peter preached one of the boldest sermons ever recorded! Four times he used the word “you” to confront his listeners with their sin of murdering the Son of God.
- If they were to repent and believe the Gospel, Peter knew they would first have to see themselves as guilty before God. He wanted people to validate the Resurrection for themselves by understanding that the Messiah they killed is the one alive from the dead and working miracles.

Notice Acts 3:13-15

- You delivered up the Son of God
- You denied the Holy One and the Just
- You desired a murderer
- You destroyed the Prince of Life

Peter leaves no doubt who was responsible for the death of the One who healed the beggar. It was the Jews who killed Jesus in A.D.33, but it was our sins as well that took Him to the cross. We stand as guilty as the Jews or the Romans who put Jesus on the cross.

Notice the names and titles Peter used to exalt the Lord Jesus:

1. God's Son (Servant), Jesus Acts 3:13
2. The Holy One Acts 3:14
3. The Just One Acts 3:14
4. The Prince of Life Acts 3:15
5. The Name Acts 3:16
6. The Christ Acts 3:18
7. The Lord Acts 3:19
8. Jesus Christ Acts 3:20
9. The Prophet Acts 3:22-23
10. The Seed of Abraham Acts 3:25

Peter exposes their sin as he shows how the people opposed and rejected the Messiah Himself:

1. You delivered God's Son, Jesus up to be crucified
2. You denied the Holy One
3. You desired a murderer instead of the Just One
4. You killed the Prince of Life
5. You did not recognize the Name
6. You inflicted suffering on the Christ
7. You rejected the Seed of Abraham

God reacts to human guilt in love and grace. Notice how Peter softens the blow and offers a loving appeal to accept God's forgiveness.

Peter said, "I know you did what you did in ignorance." On the cross Jesus prayed, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do."

The people charged with the guilt for His death can be cleared by the grace of His death.

Peter calls upon them to Repent. Change your mind and your heart about Jesus and change your mind about the direction you are going in your sin.

"You looked at Jesus as one worthy of death. Change your mind concerning Him and see that He is the Prince of Life. Your ignorance nailed Him to the tree. Now repent and bow the knee."

Notice Acts 3:23 – The only alternative to Eternal Pardon is Eternal Punishment.

THE FIRST PERSECUTION OF THE CHURCH Acts 4:1-12

In Acts 3 we find the first physical miracle performed in the life of the newly formed church. While going to the temple at the hour of prayer, Peter and John heal a man who has been lame from birth (about 40 years) in the Name of the resurrected Lord Jesus Christ.

There was a two-fold result of the healing miracle: (1) Many were saved. Luke says in Acts 4:4 that the Church has now grown to about 5,000; (2) Great animosity was stirred up by the religious leaders.

Word reaches the Temple authorities that two of Jesus' followers have performed a great miracle on the temple grounds and are using it to prove to the crowd that Jesus had risen from the dead.

Luke mentions at least eleven groups of individuals who were in opposition to the two Apostles: priest, Captain of the temple (who was the chief of the temple police force), Sadducees, rulers, elders, scribes, Annas, Caiaphas, John and Alexander (nothing is known about them), and members of the high priest's family.

In the Gospels, the Pharisees were the primary opponents of Jesus. Here in Acts, however, the Sadducees are the primary opponents of the Church.

- The Sadducees were a small religious and political party from the upper class of Jews in Jerusalem. They had money and education. They were the elite, upper crust in Jerusalem and they had evolved into a kind of political nobility.
- The Sadducees were the liberals of their day. They denied the existence of angels, spirits, the resurrection, and the super-natural.

As Peter and John were speaking to the people, the chief priest, accompanied by the Chief of the Temple's guard, and other Sadducees, hasten to the scene. As they watched the growing crowd, they realized that they had to act quickly. They stepped in, stopped Peter in the middle of his message, arrested them, confronted them and charged them not to speak at all nor teach in the name of Jesus.

I. The Persecution Acts 4:1-4

Any time God starts blessing, Satan will do all he can to blast the work of God.

Two things happened as a result of Peter and John's being arrested:

1. The Punishment of the Apostles Acts 4:3

It was too late in the day for the authorities to legally convene a court to deal with Peter and John, so they took them into custody until the next day.

This opposition should not surprise us. Jesus told His disciples that they could expect such opposition.

- a. John 15:18-20 "If the world hates you, you know that it hated me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love its own. Yet because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you. Remember the word that I said to you, 'A servant is not greater than his master.' If they persecuted me, they will also persecute you."
- b. Mark 13:9 "But watch out for yourselves, for they will deliver you up to councils, and you will be beaten in

the synagogues. You will be brought before rulers and kings for my sake, for a testimony to them.”

c. 2 Timothy 3:12 “Yes, and all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution.”

2. The progress of the Church

Peter and John went to jail while church membership soared to a new high – 5,000 men.

This number didn't include wives and children of those men, so the number was likely three times higher.

This is the last time in the Book of Acts that a specific number of converts is mentioned.

The Sadducees were angry because of WHAT Peter was preaching. The resurrection of Christ had publicly disproved their liberal theology. Rather than confess themselves wrong, they led in the persecution of the Church and spearheaded this second and fatal national rejection of Christ. They hated Christ, hated His very Name, hated Him for His resurrection. Their anger was focused on Peter and John, who were publicly preaching Jesus and the resurrection.

Most of us react the same way the Sadducees did when our set theories are challenged and proven false. Instead of saying, “I'm wrong.” We tend to dislike intensely those who refute us.

- Although the Sadducees focused their anger on Peter and John, the devil was behind the opposition of the gospel.
- We need to realize that it is not the person who attacks us, but that it is the devil who is the person and the power who is behind the person who causes trouble.

How did Peter and John react when they were put in prison over night for preaching the resurrection of Christ? They did not moan and groan, but rather praised God.

I Peter 4:16 “If anyone suffer as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, let him glorify God in this matter.”

II. The Proclamation Acts 4:7-12

Peter is not going to preach in his own power or intellect or wisdom or insight, he is filled with the Holy Spirit.

He preaches Jesus! There is no real sermon without Jesus!

This is Peter's third sermon and he used the same outline:

- Jesus is the promised Messiah.
- You killed Him.
- He will forgive you.

Notice that the accused became the accuser; the judged became the judge.

Peter quotes Psalm 118:22 to say that Jesus is not only the cornerstone, but He is the Head of the Cornerstone. He is the sure foundation.

Peter is going to say that Jesus is the ONLY way to salvation.

Notice Acts 4:12: One of the greatest evangelistic text in the Bible.

A. The Great Provision Acts 4:12

“For there IS salvation”

God has made provision for each of us. God has made salvation possible.

Peter reminds them HOW God provided salvation. Acts 4:10

Salvation was provided through the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus.

- The blood of lambs could not cleanse of sin, it could only cover sin. It would eventually have to be dealt with.
- The death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus provided what the sacrifice of lambs could never provide. It makes salvation possible.

Peter boldly proclaims, “There is Salvation.”

B. The Great Limitation Acts 4:12

Nor is there salvation IN ANY OTHER.

- Salvation is available, but it is not available everywhere. One person cannot get it one place and someone else get it somewhere else. Salvation is possible only through

ONE EXCLUSIVE Source.

- There is one way to receive salvation.

Salvation is limited to Jesus. It is only through Him and His grace that anyone can be saved.

C. The Great Opportunity 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.”

This opportunity is being offered to all. None will be excluded. It is available now for all. If you repent of your sin and received Jesus into your heart, Jesus will save you.

But there is no guarantee you will have this opportunity tomorrow for we have no guarantee of tomorrow. The danger with waiting until later is that later has a way of becoming too late.”

“Then the Lord said, “My spirit shall not strive with man forever.” Genesis 6:3.

There is a place I know not where,
There is a time I know not when,
Over which a soul can go,
And never come back again.

Jesus is the only way.

A man may go to heaven without wealth, without health, without big earning, without culture, without beauty, without friends, but he cannot go to heaven without Jesus.

MEN WHO HAVE BEEN WITH JESUS Acts 4:13-22

You will remember that in Acts 4 we have the record of the first persecution of the Church. It is interesting to notice that.

1. The persecution came as a result of something GOOD being done.

Peter and John were about to enter the temple when they stopped to give a beggar, a poor paralytic, all they had: the power of Christ to heal. For the first time in his life, the man began walking, jumping, and praising God! Before long a crowd had gathered.

Peter and John followed the man into the temple, where Jewish leaders confronted them and demanded to know how they had healed the man. When Peter and John said it was through the power of Jesus Christ, they were arrested and held overnight.

2. The persecution came as a result of the Message of the resurrection of Jesus.

The next day Peter and John stood before the Sanhedrin to explain themselves, as to their authority in healing this man. When they told them that the healing was done in the Name of the resurrected, living Christ Jesus, they were determined to stop them.

3. The persecution came from within the religious body.

As I have said before, during the life and ministry of Jesus on earth, persecution came from the Pharisees.

- After our Lord's resurrection, persecution came from the Sadducees, who didn't believe in the resurrection from the dead.
- One group was conservative which took the Scriptures from a literal point of view. They were the Pharisees.
- The other group, the Sadducees, had a liberal view of Scripture. They did not believe in the existence of angels, miracles, or a resurrection.
- It is easy to remember which groups believed which. The Pharisees were pretty accurate in their understanding of Scripture when it came to angels and resurrection. Their theology was pretty “fair you see.”

However, the Sadducees were really off base regarding angels and resurrection, and that made their theology pretty “sad you see.”

Acts 4:22 tells us that this man had been lame for over 40 years. He had begged at the Beautiful Gate for a long time and Jesus must have passed him on numerous occasions.

Jesus had healed other lame men and made them to walk, but He made no attempt to heal this particular lame man.

It had not been God's time! This man was to be healed later by the Risen Christ for the greater glory of God.

Notice the progression of Acts 4:13

1. They SAW the boldness of Peter and John. The word “boldness suggest liberty of speech and freedom from pressure.
2. They PERCEIVED that they were uneducated and untrained men, but had to admit there was a holy wisdom in their argument.
3. They MARVELLED at their boldness, brilliance, and courage.
4. They TOOK KNOWLEDGE of them REALIZING that the secret of their power was that they had been with Jesus.

The only explanation concerning their might in word and deed was that these men “had been with Jesus.”

No higher compliment could have been paid to these two spirit-filled men.

Notice where this once lame man was – Acts 4:14

He was still with Peter and John, identifying himself with those who had healed him in Jesus' name and then lead him to the Lord.

He went with them to the Temple; now He would go with them to prison, too.

Look at these men. You could tell that these men had been with Jesus by their:

I. Life

If you have been with Jesus, others will know it. You will not have to put a sign around your neck or try to prove it or impress people in a hundred different ways.

A. You can see it in their Courage Acts 4:15-20

Someone shared a report that came out of China where millions of believers live. In many areas of China, Christians are not permitted to worship the Lord openly, so they meet in what are known as “house churches.” In order for a man to be considered worthy to serve as pastor of one of those “house churches,” the congregation expects that he will have been arrested at least once for preaching the Gospel.

This is the first instance in the New Testament of civil disobedience. They told the apostles to stop speaking about Jesus in Jerusalem. Luke says the council “severely threatened” them, hoping to scare them into submission. The council wanted the excitement over this one incident to die off and that would be the end of it.

The missionary movement of the Christian Church hung in the balance. What if Peter and John had given in to the bullying of the Sanhedrin and had stopped talking about Jesus? What would have happened to the expansion of the Church?

The question of whom to obey comes up again in Acts 5:29, and Peter puts it succinctly: “We ought to obey God rather than man.”

- The Bible is clear (Romans 13; I Peter 2) that Christians are responsible to obey civil governments as a general rule. We are to pay our taxes, obey the laws, respect our officials, and be good citizens.
- Governments have been put in place by God to carry out HIS laws, not man's. Therefore, if governments ever command us to do something that violates God's law, or forbids us from doing something that God commands, we are to obey God rather than man.

The Sanhedrin told Peter and John to stop doing something that Jesus commanded them to do: spread the Gospel in His Name; make disciples of all nations.

Therefore, they were obligated to disobey the Sanhedrin: “For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard” (Acts 4:20).

Three incidents from the Old Testament illustrate the principle Peter and John are standing on.

1. Exodus 1:15-17 The Israelite midwives in Egypt refused to kill the male Israelite babies when Pharaoh commanded it.
2. Daniel 1:8 When Daniel arrived in Babylon, he refused to defile himself by eating the foods of Babylon. Daniel came up with a vegetarian solution that God honored which made him even healthier than those eating the Babylonian diet.
3. Daniel 6:10 Daniel was forbidden to worship any God except Darius, the king of Babylon, for a period of 30 days. Daniel defied the the decree and continued to pray three times a day to God as was his custom.

B. You can see it in their Conduct

The closer we are to Jesus, the more like Him we become in our speech, spirit, and stand.

II. Loyalty Acts 4:18-19

If that command were given to us today by some official, would it bother us? Would it alter our life-style? Some can go a week or a month or even a year and never speak in His Name outside the church building.

They had settled the question of loyalty and the threatening did not stop them from speaking for Jesus.

Jeremiah 1:4-8

On the tomb of John Knox are these words: "Here lies the man who never feared the face of clay."

III. Lips Acts 4:20

They— and we — must speak the truth of God because of:

1. Conversion – Psalm 107:2 "Let the redeemed of the Lord say so"

2. Compassion

- What Jesus had done for these disciples and this lame man, He could do for others.
- "It is no secret what God can do. What He's done for others, He'll do for you. With arms wide open, He'll pardon you. It is no secret, what God can do."

3. Compulsion

- I Corinthians 9:16 "For necessity is laid upon me; yea, woe is unto me, if I preach not the Gospel."
- Jeremiah 20:9 "Then I said, I will not make mention of Him, nor speak any more in His name. But His word was in my heart as a burning fire shut up in my bones; I was weary of holding it back, and I could not."

During the slave days, a black slave woman was praying with another slave named John Jasper. When he was saved, he shouted so that it caused a disturbance. The master brought him in before him about the disturbance. He said, "Master, Jesus came in and the shout had to come out."

The white master began to cry, and then said, "John, you and I are brothers now. Jesus came into my heart, too. John, take the rest of the week off.

Tell all the black folks what Jesus did in your life." John Jasper became one of the great preachers of the South because he had been with Jesus!

Hershel Ford, a great Southern Baptist pastor of the past, wrote of the account that emphasizes choices:

When Napoleon's army invaded Russia, they came to a village where everyone had fled except one man. He was a woodsman, with the handle of his axe stuck in his leather belt. They started to shoot him, but he showed such calmness and courage that the French captain decided to save his life. However, the captain said, "We will mark him – we will brand him for life." They heated a branding iron and stamped the letter "N" on the palm of his hand.

"What does this mean?" asked the man. "That is the letter 'N'," he was told. "It stands for Napoleon – you now belong to our Emperor."

This man had always been a loyal Russian and he felt that it was time to show his loyalty. He took the axe from his belt, put his hand

on the block and cut that hand off at the wrist, saying, "That hand may belong to Napoleon, but I am a Russian and if I must die, I will die a Russian."

May God help us to be willing to make choices that declare to this world, we are a Christian. We will live like a Christian and if necessary, we will die as a Christian.

REFRESHING CHRISTIANS Acts 4:32-37

Every now and then in the Book of Acts, Luke gives what might be called a summary statement or a State of the Union Speech in the Lord and to report what their spiritual state was.

- The first time is found in Acts 2:42-47 when he spoke of their unity and power.
- The second occurs here in Acts 4:32-37. Again, the theme is great unity and love among these early Christians.

Because the Church was unhindered by 2,000 years of tradition, history, ritual, and division, the glimpses we get of the early Church are almost like a look at the ideal, a look at how the pristine Church ought to be when it functions as Christ's body in the world today.

There are two things to be noted in this passage: One has to do with fellowship; the other with stewardship and both are the results of their being filled with the Holy Spirit.

Two things I would point out about this second summary statements:

I. The Development of its Church Members Acts 4:32-35

That young Church was "Great" in four areas:

A. There was Great Unity

Unity in the church comes from being of one heart and one soul.

- When you realize that there were well over 5,000 who were now believers, this statement that they were "of one heart and of one soul" carries even more weight.
- How different the Church would be today if the unity and love they shared then had continued until today. There is heavenly power where the people are united. On the other hand, the power is hindered where there is division and strife.

To be of one heart and soul means that they were not centered in themselves nor caught up in petty and meaningless matters. Their purpose was sharing Him, not serving them- selves.

It's like tuning 100 pianos to the same tuning fork. To be of one heart with a group of people means to be bound emotional with them, to love them with a whole heart. The Christians in the Jerusalem church loved each other at a spiritual level.

To be of one soul or one mind means they were focused on the same ideas, the same objectives, the same purposes in life – primarily to glorify Jesus Christ and obey His commands.

B. There was Great Power Acts 4:33a

"Great power" refers to their preaching rather than to the miracles they may have performed.

To preach with "great power" means that they could not be ignored. When you heard the apostles preach, you were compelled to act. You either turned toward or turned away from God. There was no neutral ground. God gave them the ability to witness to the resurrection of Christ in such a way that men believed that He DID come forth from the grave.

C. There was Great Grace Acts 4:33b

Grace means "favor." God's favor rested upon the Jerusalem church. You could not have been a citizen of Jerusalem and not noticed that something very favorable was happening in the midst of these people who were followers of Jesus of Nazareth. They were a community of people characterized by joy, power, boldness, generosity, and goodness toward all.

D. There was Great Liberality Acts 4:32, 34-35

We saw in Acts 2:44-45 that the Christians in Jerusalem pooled their resources to take care of those in need.

- The Christians saw their possessions as belonging to God and they made them available to His people and His cause.
- In Acts 4:34-35, we see they were concerned about those who were underprivileged.

Not only would church members give up their in-hand assets – money, food, clothing – they were also willing to sell non-liquid assets such as property and houses to get money to help the poor.

One reason there was such need in the Jerusalem church was that many had been ostracized by families and fired from their jobs for identifying with Christ.

Not everyone sold everything they had. For example, Mary still has her house when we get to Acts 12. There appears to have been freedom in the church for people to do with their property as they were led.

Interestingly, we do not have a record of other New Testament churches duplicating the pattern set by the Jerusalem church in terms of “pooling” of resources. The Jerusalem church was in a very unusual situation and adopted unique practices to meet their needs. We definitely see sacrificial giving throughout the churches, but no mention of duplicating the practices of the Jerusalem church.

The Jerusalem Church lived with open hands. From their open hands, others could take what they needed; and into their open hands, God could put more resources to share. An open-handed church is a generous church.

II. The Dedication of One Member Acts 4:36-37

The church is made up of many, but it is also made up of individuals. Here Luke lifts out one member – Barnabas, brother of Mary, who was the mother of John Mark.

Barnabas is one of the most winsome characters of the New Testament.

- He is named for one of the twelve sons of Jacob. Joseph was a good name, but it was not good enough, for the apostles changed his name to Barnabas.
- His name is the same name used by Jesus for the “Comforter,” “one coming to aid another.” His name is translated “Son of Consolation,” “Son of Encouragement,” “Son of Refreshment.”
- He could comfort and encourage others only because of the work that the Holy Spirit had done in him.

I like his “nickname.” He was called the “Son of Comfort;” not the “Son of Complaint.” He was a courage bringer. He knew how to put heart into the hopeless. He had the ability to turn sobs into songs and tears into laughter.

By the way, what is your nickname? You have one, you know! Folks know you by some name!

I checked our church roll and looked under “church nicknames,” and you would be surprised what I found! I changed the names to keep the guilty from being embarrassed! I found two groups:

Herman the Hypocrite Worldly Wilma Rebellious Roy
Complaining Claude Tightwad Terry Critical Charlie
Prideful Pam Gossiping Gertrude Two-faced Tommy
Judgmental Judy

Then I found another group:

Prayerful Peggy Faithful Frank Working Walter
Helpful Helen Encouraging Eddie Committed Curtis
Friendly Frances Steadfast Steven

What is your nickname? Some are burdens rather than blessings.

Why is it so important to have a Son of Encouragement in a church?

1. Because courage is essential to the joy of living.

If you have lost your courage, if there is no hope in your heart, then you are miserable. When hope dies, we lose our zest for living. If we are abounding in hope, we are rich, no matter how empty our hands may seem.

2. Because if you have lost hope and courage, you have lost your usefulness.

If you have lost hope, wrong is forever on the throne. To lose courage is to be changed from an asset into a liability.

What did Barnabas do to earn his new name? How did he encourage folks?

1. He encouraged them by a wise use of his wealth.

Sometimes we speak as if money has no importance at all. It's easy to do that if you've never known poverty.

- But money has power. Money has the power to change hope into despair, but it will also enable us to change despair into hope.
- Some of those new Christians were suddenly cut off from family and friend because of their decision for Christ. He encouraged those desperate saints by the wise use of his wealth.
- I've been there. There were times when I was in school that we had to look for loose change so we could buy a loaf of bread.

2. He encouraged folks by believing in them and in seeing the best in them.

When Paul returned to Jerusalem after he became a Christian, his situation was desperate.

- His former friends hated him with the intense hatred that men would have for a turn-coat or traitor.
- Christians who should have received him did not, not because of hate, but because of fear. They were among those who had suffered at his hands.

He had thrown Christians in prison. He had even stoned some. They did not trust him.

- Most of the others believed the worst about Paul, but Barnabas believed the best about him.
- Barnabas was willing to forget the past and take a chance or risk and receive Paul. In fact, he staked his own life and the life of his fellow Christian on the genuineness of conversion. And what a blessing both for Paul and the church that Barnabas saw the best in Paul and took a chance on him.
- What I like about Barnabas is that he never sought recognition for what he did. Later, he gladly played second-fiddle to Paul.

It was this same Barnabas who believed in John Mark even in the face of an ugly failure. Mark went with Paul and Barnabas on their first missionary journey. For some reason, young John Mark played the coward, deserted, and went running back to his mother's arms in Jerusalem. The desertion hit Paul hard. It must have hit Barnabas harder because Mark was his nephew. In spite of this cowardly desertion on the part of Mark, Paul and Barnabas carried on.

- When they were about to go on their second missionary journey, Barnabas wanted to take John Mark with them. Paul didn't trust John Mark because he failed them. Barnabas said that he would not go without him. The contention got so heated that Paul and Barnabas parted ways.
- Who was right? Not long before his death, Paul acknowledged that Barnabas was right. Writing from a Roman prison Paul says, "Bring Mark with you, for he is profitable to me for ministry."
- Thank God that He does not cast us off when we make mistakes and fail! Paul failed, too, as did Peter, as do all who serve the Lord.
- Paul would later write in Galatians 6:1 to restore the fallen brother.

Barnabas encouraged folks not only by what he did, but by what he was – Acts 11:22-24.

When did Barnabas become such an encourager? When was his new name given to him?

It was given to him by the apostles AFTER he had become a Christian. Being a Son of Encouragement is the work of every Christian.

THEY LIED AND DIED Acts 5:1-16

The Book of Acts is filled with many "first." In Acts 4 we had the first PERSECUTION of the Church; here in Acts 5 we have the first PURGING within the Church.

This is the first recorded DISCORD within the Church.

The first word in Acts 5 is the word “but”. It is a word of contrast. The “buts” in the Bible are hinges on which great doors swing. Notice the contrast between Acts 4 and Acts 5:

1. In Acts 4 there is great unity; in Acts 5 there is great disunity, a tear has taken place in the fellowship.
2. In Acts 4 there is genuine charity; in Acts 5 there is counterfeit charity.
3. In Acts 4 the Holy Spirit filled the heart of Barnabas; in Acts 5 Satan filled the heart of Ananias.
4. In Acts 4 the Lord intervened for Peter in mercy; in Acts 5 the Lord intervened in judgment.

Satan has two main ways of hindering the Church: From Without and From Within.

If you were the devil, where would you put the people who could do more harm to the cause of Christ and His Church?

- If Satan cannot conquer the Church; he will seek to Corrupt it.
- His thought was, “I’ll let some ole hypocrite become active!” He is still using that method today.

Three things I would share with you:

I. The Church's Problem Acts 5:1-10

In Acts 4 Barnabas was part of the sweet aroma in the early Church. He sold a piece of personal property and “brought the money and laid it at the apostles' feet” for the good of the Church in Jerusalem. It was a purely sacrificial gift on his part.

“But,” Acts 5:1 begins, Ananias and Sapphira also sold some land and “kept back part of the proceeds...and brought a certain part and laid it at the apostles' feet.”

See the contrast?

A. The Satan-Inspired Deception Acts 5:1-2 (Ananias means “God is Gracious”)

The early Church was experiencing the overflowing generosity of the Church members. Ananias and his wife were aware of the popularity of the donors; and they decided to get in on the action.

They saw and heard the people's reaction to Barnabas' generosity. They became jealous. They wanted the Church to think that they were matching Barnabas' generosity. They wanted the praise for being sacrificial givers without having to be sacrificial.

A fateful family conference took place. Ananias and Sapphira decided to keep back part of the price.

They created the IMPRESSION that they had given all the proceeds from their sale like Barnabas did. They wanted credit for doing what Barnabas did, but without the price Barnabas paid. They kept back some of the money for themselves.

Bottom line? They acted hypocritically and would be judged for it. Fueling Ananias's hypocrisy was greed. He simply could not give away all the money he wanted to take credit for giving.

- The love of money is the root of more than a little evil in the world and the church (1 Timothy 6:10).
- The Bible does not condemn the possession of money. It is simply an amoral medium of exchange. It is the love of money – or the love of what money can be exchanged for – that is the source of greed in sinful human flesh.

B. The Spirit-Inspired Detection Acts 5:3-10

Let me point out that none of the church members were asked or required to sell anything or give anything to the church.

It was no sin to keep a part of all of the money they got for the land. It was no sin to sell the land. It was no sin to possess land.

Then what was the sin? Acts 5:4

Their sin was Deliberate Deception, wanting others to think they were spiritual, when in reality they were carnal. They wanted PROPIT for Themselves and Praise from their Fellowmen. They wanted honor without paying the price. Peter charged them with lying to God.

Their family conference was overheard in Heaven, as all such conversations are. We cannot hide anything from God. Hebrews 4:13; Psalm 139:1-2.

Peter's words in Acts 5:3 came like a thunderbolt to Ananias. The Holy Spirit knew all about their plan. He had been present in their

home, had heard their conversation, knew the market price of their property, knew about their conspiracy. He was there when the deed of sale was signed.

- Sin has many tools, and a lie is the handle that fits them all.
- The truth is that most of us have some of Ananias about us. We desire to be thought better or more holy or more spiritual than we are.

Did you notice that Peter asked Ananias about his heart twice? God sees the heart. It is not the size of the gift, but the sincerity of the giver!

Peter asked him a question that God would ask us every time we sin against Him. "Why has Satan filled your heart?" He will later ask Sapphira, "How is it you have agreed together to test the Spirit of the Lord."

Ananias never said a word. He may have trembled, but in a moment, he fell down – dead, by divine judgment!

If impulsive sins are serious (and they are), how much more serious are premeditated sins.

Now we come to Sapphira: (whose name means "beautiful")

- Peter asked: "How is it that you have agreed together to tempt the Spirit of the Lord?"
- Perhaps Ananias and his wife did not see their sin in the serious light of testing the Holy Spirit when they planned their deception; nor do we.

Sadly, both died with no time for repentance. They died with a lie on their lips.

II. The Church's Purging Acts 5:11-16

When Ananias presented their pretentious gift, Peter had x-ray vision. The Holy Spirit helped him to see into the soul of Ananias.

Only a Pure Church is a Powerful Church.

We are told that great fear came upon all the Church. People were genuinely afraid of the power that had been demonstrated through Peter in the Church. Fear is a healthy response to the judgments on sin by a holy God.

When the Church was purged, some were DRIVEN AWAY from the Church and some were DRAWN TO the Church.

- Hypocrites did not dare join this church. They were afraid their sins might result in being struck down like Ananias and Sapphira.
- The preachers had more power and respect than ever. Many signs and wonders were done among the people and they were all of one accord.
- The opposite of what we might expect happened when the church was purged. The Church responded with explosive growth. Both men and women flooded into the Church. This is the first mention by Luke of women entering the Church.
- It meant something to belong to that church! How much does it mean to belong to this church? Enough to be: Faithful? Holy? Committed? Totally True to the Lord?
- There was both fear and fruitfulness in that church.

III. The Church's Power

There are some lessons to be learned here:

1. We see Satan's strategy. His desire is to divide, disgrace, discourage and destroy God's people by corrupting the Church.
2. We see the seriousness of Sin. God hates sin and sees sin.

A teacher was teaching children about the rich man and Lazarus. She asked her class, "Which of these two men would you rather be?" One honest little fellow answered, "I would like to be the rich man while he lived and Lazarus after he died."

The story of Ananias and Sapphira warns us we can't have it that way. 2 Corinthians 13:5.

In the first 16 verses of Acts 5 we see the first Purging in the early Church. Two members of the Church, Ananias and his wife Sapphira, deliberately tried to deceive the Apostles and the Church concerning a gift they gave to the Church. They left the impression that they had given the total price they got from some land that they had sold. The fact was that they kept back a portion of the money for themselves.

- It was deliberate hypocrisy and they both died because of divine judgment. God removed them from the church.
- When people say, "There are hypocrites in the church," I want to say, "You're right. That's why you will fit right in! We freely acknowledge that we are not even close to perfection."

A front door revival takes place when many people come down the aisle and unite with the Church. We like to see that! This church had a backdoor revival. A backdoor revival takes place when those who should not be in church are put out. This church had a backdoor revival, and the after effect was a great ingathering.

In the verses before us we see how the apostles responded to persecution in the early days of the church in Jerusalem.

- Most Christians in America have never experienced serious persecution for their faith. We need to be prepared in case it happens.
- One principle from the apostles should guide our response to persecution: We must obey God rather than man.
- With the condition our world is in, we need to heed what Paul spoke in 2 Timothy 3:12: "All who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution."

When we look at this passage, we see:

I. The Assault on the Church Acts 5:17-25

Acts 5:17 says the religious leaders were "filled with indignation. "The word "indignation" means to be jealous; to be moved with envy, hatred, and anger; to burn with zeal."

- This suggests that the high priest and his fellow Sadducees were jealous of what the apostles were accomplishing through their miracles of healing and power and preaching of the resurrection of Christ.
- They were afraid of losing control of the people since everyone's attention was now on the apostles. They plotted to do the same thing to the apostles they had done to Jesus; silence them.

In Acts 5:18 the Sadducees ordered the apostles thrown in the common prison along with murderers and thieves. This gave the Sadducees time to plot their next move.

The apostles didn't remain in prison long because "an angel of the Lord" freed them and sent them back to continue preaching – Acts 5:19-21.

God must have a wonderful sense of humor because everything that was happening was making the Sadducees look bad.

1. The Sadducees didn't believe in angels so God sent an angel to release the apostles from prison. This was nothing less than divine intervention from Heaven.

2. When God delivers miraculously, it is for a purpose. This deliverance was NOT for SAFETY, but for SERVICE.

- This religious leader thought they had put a stop to the "Jesus movement" by putting Jesus of Nazareth to death and then by putting His apostles in prison. But when they were released by God's angel they went back to the temple and preach again the resurrection of Christ.
- The claims of a resurrection, miracles of healing and power, a miraculous escape from prison, a rapidly growing group of followers; the Sadducees and the Sanhedrin had a problem on their hands.

II. The Arraignment of the Apostles Acts 5:26-33

The Council officers went to the temple to arrest the apostles a SECOND TIME, though they did it with as little fanfare as possible so as not to antagonize the crowds and risk harm to themselves.

- The word "violence" in verse 26 means "force." The captain brought the apostles out without force. We can imagine the officers asking the apostles nicely if they would mind accompanying them to the Council, which they did.
- They knew they hadn't broken any laws and were probably excited about getting to testify about Christ to the Council.

The Council rulers accused the apostles of three things:

1. Insubordination Acts 5:28

“Did we not strictly command you not to teach in this Name?” You disobeyed us.

2. Indoctrination Acts 5:28

“You have filled Jerusalem with your doctrine.”

3. Incrimination

You “intend to bring this man's blood on us!” They said, “You are making the Jewish leaders look guilty for the death of Christ.”

It's interesting that they should not now want responsibility for Jesus' death when they and the crowds gladly accepted it during Jesus' “trial.” “His blood be on us and on our children” (Matthew 27:25).

III. The Apostles Answer to the Council's Accusation Acts 5:29-32

“We have a higher authority than you and His name is Jesus Christ!”

That simple, but delightful statement expressed the conviction filling the souls of the apostles. To obey God was the only thing that mattered; and, whatever the result of such action might be, the apostles were determined to do their duty to God and men.

After making that statement, Peter stated:

1. “You killed God's Messiah by hanging Him on a tree”. Acts 5:30.
2. “God raised Jesus from the dead”. Acts 5:30.
3. “God honored His risen Son and exalted Him to a seat of authority in Heaven. He is at the right hand of majesty on high and has become the High Priest of His people and is able to grant forgiveness of sins to all who believe. It is necessary for sinners to repent. Acts 5:31-32
4. The apostles created an increased hostility against themselves Acts 5:33.

The Jewish leaders were furious! They began plotting how to put the apostles to death. They couldn't shut them up, so they decided to shut them down.

IV. The Argument of Gamaliel Acts 5:34-42

Gamaliel was the grandson of Hillel, one of Israel's most respected rabbis, and also had been the teacher of Saul of Tarsus before he became a Christian (Acts 22:3).

Gamaliel pleaded for reason.

- He referred to two insurrectionists and cited their ultimate downfall.
- When people operate without God's help, their efforts are doomed to failure. BUT, if we are representatives of the Almighty, nothing can thwart their plans or silence their message.

Notice Gamaliel's advice Acts 5:38-39

Be careful lest you be fighting God. Why not let these men alone and let the thing run its course?

Here's some wise advice: Pick your battles. It's not worth dying on every hill!

Startling words: “Fighting against God!”

What does it mean to fight against God? To fight God is to resist the will of God.

God has a will for every individual. When we resist that will, we come to be at war with God. Every one of us have at times fought God.

When we fight against God, we also fight against our self.

We lose our inward peace and joy. We also find that when we fight against God, we are ripe for conflict with others.

Notice Acts 5:40-42.

The apostles were unjustly flogged, but their reaction was amazing.

What can you do with men who, when beaten, thank God for the blessing bestowed on them!

The persecution only made the apostles trust God more.

Note Acts 5:42.

NEEDED: MEN WHO WILL BE PROBLEM SOLVERS Acts 6:1-7

We tend to think of the early Church as being perfect, but it was far from perfect. The early church did have problems and, again, the problems came as a result of a segment within the church. There are no perfect people; therefore, there are no perfect Churches.

Did you notice the mathematics in the Book of Acts? In Chapter 2, the Lord ADDED to the Church daily such as should be saved (Acts 2:47). Here in Chapter 6, the number of the disciples was MULTIPLIED. But between the addition to the church and the multiplication of the Church, there was SUBTRACTION from the Church when the Lord removed Ananias and Sapphira in Chapter 5. Sadly, it will not be long until there will be a DIVISION in the Church.

As He did in Acts, the Lord often subtracts before He multiplies.

Up until now we read that the Church was of one accord" or of "one mind and one spirit." Now, there was a rent, a division in the body of believers.

- Satan's goal was to divide the membership and to discourage the leadership, but Satan's plan was to fail because the apostles exercised the spirit of wisdom in the matter.
- As we study this passage, we will discover the solution given and the solution for their problems works today also.

I. The Reasons for the Anguish Acts 5:1

I want you to notice that the problem was in part to the rapid growth of the Church. The truth is, rapid growth in a church often causes problems.

There were Growth Problems and Grievance Problems.

Secondly, notice that the complaint was against the leaders, the Apostles... "there arose a complaint against the Hebrews by the Hellenistic, because their widows were neglected in the daily distribution of food."

Remember that because of the persecution against those who were saved in Jerusalem, many had lost their jobs and were in need. Resources were pooled and help was given to those in need.

For the first time, there were two types of Jewish Christians in the early Church.

First, there were Jews who had never left their homeland. These were Palestinian Jews, Hebrews who had inherited the Old Testament culture, doctrines, and customs. This group continued to observe and respect the ancient traditions of the fathers. The Hebrew believers looked down on the Grecian believers as compromising "second-class" Jews.

The second group of Jews were those Jews born in other countries because of the Dispersion. During the days of Alexander, the Great, Greek culture, style of dress, and philosophy of life permeated the then-known world. As a result, many Jews, having grown up in Gentile nations, adopted the customs and spoke the language of their new country. They were known as Grecians or Hellenists. These were considered by the Palestinian Jews to be contaminated through contact with Gentiles.

A party spirit developed between the two groups when the Grecians claiming that their widows were being neglected in the daily serving of food. The Grecian widows were not getting a fair share, so they began to complain.

One of the disgraces of Christianity today is that we have so many church quarrels and split-ups. When these things happen and friends are divided, people are hurt, sweet relationships are broken, many people quit the church, and the young people of that generation are lost to the service of Christ.

There is no need for any church to have these quarrels. They are usually based, not on the great fundamental doctrines of the faith, but on trivialities, on gossip, hearsay and misunderstanding.

- Never will there come up in a church one single thing which cannot be settled in prayer – if we have the spirit

of Christ within us.

- When Christians go to quarreling among themselves, Satan sits back and laughs.

Murmuring is deadly to any fellowship. They were complaining among themselves, but not to those in authority.

- You murmur when you complain about a problem, but not to those who can do something about it.
- Murmuring is a serious sin in the sight of God. Murmuring brought the judgment of God upon the Children of God in the wilderness.

- 2 Corinthians 10:10 "Neither murmur ye, as some of them also murmured, and were destroyed of the destroyer."

- Philippians 2:14 "Do all things without murmurings and disputings."

- Murmuring is a sure sign of an unhappy spirit.

The devil does an inside job on the church when he tries to start division from the inside.

The word "murmuring" means an under-current; a talking under the breath; a campaign of criticism and fault-finding.

Murmuring is never approved of in the Word of God. It is never a way to solve a problem. It usually starts them. It always stems from the flesh; not the spirit.

II. The Recommendation of the Apostles Acts 6:2-6

When these Grecians complained, their complaint was against the leaders of the Apostles.

How did the Apostles react to this criticism?

They could have said, "You bunch of knot-heads, we were in this movement long before you were. If you don't like the way we are handling it, get out!"

Or, they could have assumed a martyr complex and said, "we are doing the very best we can; yet instead of appreciating what we are trying to do, you do nothing but complain."

But instead of taking this attitude, they examined the criticism, confessed that they had been doing wrong, and sought to remedy the situation.

- "It is not right," they declared, "that we should give up preaching the Word of God to serve tables."
- The Apostles said, "You know, much of the blame is ours."

How were they wrong?

1. They were not wrong in seeking to provide for the physical needs of the members of the church.
2. They were not wrong in that they were not satisfying all of the people. Nobody, either in pulpit or pew, ever gives complete satisfaction in doing any work in the church. If you expect to please everyone, you are doomed to disappointment.

- One congregation heard Paul up to a certain point, then shouted him down.

- Another congregation walked out on Jesus when He was preaching on the bread of life.

They were wrong in that they had become so absorbed in managing the business of the Church that they were not giving proper attention to preaching.

He didn't mean that they had quit preaching altogether. It means that preaching had become one of many tasks instead of their central and supreme task.

The Apostles were not saying that they were too good to lower themselves to do this task. Nor that one ministry is more important than another. What was important was that their priority was to use the spiritual gifts God had given them.

- Vance Havner said that the main thing is to keep the main thing the main thing.
- They were simply examining and establishing priorities.

Today as never before, the pastor has to sidetrack preaching and to get involved with administration or social emphasis.

They were wrong because preaching was their job. That was their divine calling.

- The man of God must spend time in PRIVATE with God before he can speak PUBLICALLY for God! We must

GET truth from God before we can GIVE truth from God.

- It is great when a church recognizes that truth and allows their pastor to give himself to prayer and the Word.
- Dr. Roy Hilton said: "The twenty-first century preacher is spread out so thin and expected to do so much that he ends up doing nothing. Let the preacher study, pray, and preach. This is what he has been called to do."
- One of the tasks of the deacon is to free the pastor from administrative things so that he can get alone with God.

Notice that the apostles did not deny the charges. They simply faced the facts. They listened to the complaint and then took measures to solve the problem.

They IMMEDIATELY went into action to solve the problem. They nipped it in the bud! If they had not, the problem would have grown and would have been harder to deal with.

Listen to the Apostle's proposal Acts 6:2-4

- This is exactly how problems ought to be handled. They didn't DENY the charges or IGNORE the charges or try to SHIFT the BLAME or try to MINIMIZE the seriousness of the situation or TRY to SOLVE all the problems themselves.
- They remembered some good advice that Moses received from his father-in-law – Exodus 18:13-26; Deuteronomy 1:9-18.

The suggestion met with instant and hearty approval. Seven men were chosen. Acts 6:3-5

Three primary qualifications were given:

1. They had to be Good men.

The men didn't have to be perfect (sinless), but they did have to have a "good" reputation among the church members.

- The words "honest report" means a man who commands the love and respect of others because of his personal integrity and unblemished character, a man who avoids evil and who devotes himself to the well-being of others, a man who is faithful to his God and to the work of his God, a man who is real and genuine.
- I Timothy 3 defines a man of "good reputation" as "reverent, not double-tongued, not given too much wine, not greedy, good conscience, tested, blameless, the husband of one wife, ruling their children and their own houses well.

2. They had to be Godly men.

Being full of the Holy Spirit means to be controlled by the Holy Spirit and to exhibit the characteristics of the Holy Spirit.

3. They had to be Gifted men

They don't have to be the smartest men in the church, but they are to be men of wisdom.

Wisdom is more than Common Sense. It is Skill in using the Spiritual knowledge that God has given him.

The Church had grown to some 20,000 to 30,000. Why were so few men chosen as deacons? Because the standards were so high. God is particular and specific as to the kind of men He wanted to serve.

I am convinced that some churches have too many men serving. We come to election time and really do not feel that there are enough men to meet the qualifications and so we just stick someone on the list anyway. It would be better to have fewer men than to put into office those who are not qualified.

Notice the words, "Look ye out". Inspect and examine the men. Never elect men on the basis of their popularity or personality or prestige or possessions.

Notice the wise choices that were made. All seven of the men chosen have Greek names. They were all from the Hellenist part of the church.

The Greeks were the ones who felt they were slighted, so the majority of the church (the Hebrews) chose seven men from the minority (the Greeks) to correct the problem.

Not only did the problem of food distribution get solved, but two discoveries were made: Stephen became a powerful preacher and the first Christian martyr, and Philip became the Church's evangelist.

Becoming a deacon was a stepping stone to further ministry for both these men. Serving as a deacon may be a doorway to even

further effectual ministry for the Lord. I have seen that in my own ministry. The laying on of hands symbolizes the fact that the church believed that God had set them apart for the task and that these men had committed themselves to faithfully serve God and His people to the best of their ability.

III. The Result of this Action Acts 6:7

The problem was met in a spiritual way. We do not hear of them murmuring any more.

The church of God was unified, the Word of God was magnified, the number of disciples was multiplied, and the Jewish priest were evangelized.

The mark of a great church is not that it has no problems, but that it wants to work its problems out in a way that pleases the Lord.

THE FACE OF AN ANGEL Acts 6:8-15

Let me remind you of where we are in the make-up of the first Church.

Seven men have been chosen to help solve a problem that had arisen in the church. Some members of the church felt that they were being neglected. They felt partiality was being shown between two groups. These men were to serve and minister in the church just as we have deacons who are to serve and minister in churches today.

Of the seven who were chosen, two stand out in the Book of Acts – Stephen and Philip. The other five are not mentioned again.

Stephen: The story of Stephen begins in Acts 6:8 and goes through Acts 8:3.

- Stephen suffered early for his faith. His ministry was SHORT, but his testimony was STRONG.
- Stephen was proof that the impact of a man's life and ministry has nothing necessarily to do with length. He showed that the effects of one courageous person, though a short duration, can have far-reaching effects.
- Stephen became the man of the hour. God needed a man to create a division between Judaism and the Church. His short-lived ministry produced the final break between Judaism and the Church. The whole city of Jerusalem would now turn against the Christians.
- When Stephen died, the church grieved loudly (Acts 8:2) because he was such a powerful preacher and so deeply loved. Yet, he did not die before accomplishing the mission God laid out for him.
- Perhaps the greatest impact Stephen's death was on the life of a young Pharisee named Saul of Tarsus who stood nearby and witnessed Stephen's death by stoning (Acts 8:1).

Philip: Philip preached and served for many years. He was known for his faithfulness in life.

Both men were needed by the Lord in His plan for the early Church. In the purpose of God, one was not greater or needed more than the other. Both had different tasks to perform for the Lord and they fulfilled them equally well.

The name "Stephen" is the Greek work for "crown." I point that out because Stephen lived up to his name. He did receive a special crown in glory.

The word of God mentions five crowns a Christian may win and one of those crowns is the Crown of life which is given to those who are faithful to God in the midst of trials. James 1:12; Revelation 2:10

The emphasis in Stephen's life was Fullness. He was full of wisdom (Acts 6:3, 10), full of the Holy Spirit (Acts 6:3, 10), full of Faith (Acts 6:5, 8), full of Power (Acts 6:9).

He was a spirit-controlled man. To be "full of" means "to be controlled by."

Notice this about Stephen: He was faithful in the small task that God gave him to do; so, God gave him a larger place of service.

- God honored His principle: "He that has been faithful over a few things, God will made him ruler over many things" (Matthew 25:21).
- Someone said that God moved Stephen from the "Pantry" (waiting tables) to the "Pulpit."

Look at some of the characteristics of Stephen's life:

I. He was a Spiritual Man

Sometimes we overlook the man himself and remember only that he was the first Christian martyr.

Three times in these verses Stephen is described as being filled or controlled with the Holy Spirit.

A. He was a Sensible man.

We have already seen that he was a Good man, a Godly man, and a Gifted man – Acts 6:3

B. He was a Stable man. Acts 6:5

The words “full of faith” means that he had the courage to stand for his convictions no matter what the circumstances or the cost.

- He was not swayed by the voices of men, but listened to the Voice of God.
- He displayed the same character in the Calm times as well as the Cruel times.

C. He was a Sweet-spirited man Acts 6:8

The word “faith” here should be translated “grace.” There was a sweet graciousness about his life. God had so worked in his life that there was a tenderness and beauty in his life which was winsome. We are to have that in our lives.

2 Peter 3:18

D. He was a Strong man Acts 6:8

To be full of power means to be full of divine energy so that he could fulfill what God had called him to do.

II. He was a Sensitive Man Acts 6:8-15

I do not mean that he was sensitive in the sense of being easily offended, easily hurt, or walking around with his feelings on his shoulders. (We have plenty of folks like that!)

He was a man who was in tune with God and in tune with man.

It is obvious that Stephen had Studied Scripture and Stored Scripture and could, therefore, Share Scripture.

- We are told in Acts 6:8 that Stephen was full of power and did great signs and wonders among the people. Apart from Jesus, the original Apostles, and Paul, we find no one doing signs and wonders except Stephen. He seemed to have the same calling and anointing for ministry as did the original Apostles.
- Probably because of the signs and wonders he was performing, great opposition against Stephen began to develop in Jerusalem.

Persecution comes from a new source –Acts 6:9. Synagogues were meeting places which began in the inter-testament period where the dispersed Jews (usually Hellenists), who did not have temple access, could meet in their community to worship and read the Old Testament.

The men in these synagogues had been watching the growth of the church in Jerusalem, and the ministry of Stephen, and apparently didn't like it.

What was the Subject of their debate?

Stephen spoke of the new order of things which was taking the place of the old order. Stephen spoke of the greater things. He spoke of a greater person than Moses, a greater sacrifice than all the bullocks, sheep and goats offered on Jewish alters, he spoke of a greater day than the Sabbath. He preached the superiority of Christ to all things in the Old Testament dispensation.

What was the Outcome of their debate?

Stephen won the debate. Saul and the others were not able to resist his wisdom and the spirit which filled him, and they became angry.

A deaf man once went to a big debate. Someone asked him why he went, since he could not hear. He said it was interesting to watch the man who lost. “For,” he said, “the one who gets whipped always gets mad.”

After the debate, Stephen was brought to trial. They hired some false witnesses, brought Stephen before them, and accused him of saying blasphemous things about the laws and customs of Moses.

- After hearing the indictment, the Sanhedrin turned to see how Stephen was reacting to the deadly charges.
- Just imagine if you or I had been dragged before an accusatory, judgmental body, and had been lied about

and accused falsely. If someone took a snapshot of our face at that moment, do you think they would look at the picture and say, “Wow, his face looks like the face of an angel?” Would we be that calm and composed in the midst of such a stressful situation. Or would our face bear the marks of fear, stress, confusion, and anger?

Our face is a good indicator of what’s going on in our heart. If we are at peace in our heart, our face is likely to manifest that peace. But if we are fearful or angry about our circumstances, our face is going to reflect that as well.

Sometimes our demeanor can win more arguments than our words can.

Stephen didn't look down or lower his eyes when facing the Council. What would an angel do? Would an angel be afraid to look directly at those who were accusing him? Not at all – and neither was Stephen afraid. He knew he had done nothing wrong and so stood in serene calm before those who were filled with hate toward him.

I think the eyes of the Council members were transfixed on Stephen, because “His face was like the face of an angel.”

The wonderful thing was that he was not even aware that his face was shining, but his enemies were. Stephen was so full of the Spirit, so full of wisdom, faith, grace, and power, that the glory of God shines from his face.

The closest example of what Stephen's face might have looked like is found in Exodus 34:29-33.

- When the Angel of the Lord appeared to the wife of Manoah, the mother-to-be of Samson, she told her husband, “A man of God came to me and his countenance was of the Angel of God, very awesome” (Judges 13:6).
- When the women at Christ's tomb saw an angel, they described his face as being “like lightning” (Matthew 28:3).

They must have thought the presence of God was in the room with Stephen.

When Christ is in a man's heart, as He was in Stephen's heart, a man even becomes different on the outside.

THE STONING OF STEPHEN Acts 7:51-8:1

Stephen, one of the first seven who was chosen as a deacon by the early church, is about to be stoned to death. But why?

- Through Stephen, God is giving Israel her last chance to repent as a nation before replacing Judaism with Christianity.
- Stephen spoke of the new order of things which was taking the place of the old order. He spoke of a greater person than Moses, a greater sacrifice than all the bullocks, sheep, and goats offered on Jewish alters, and he spoke of a greater day than the Sabbath. He preached of the superiority of Jesus Christ to all things in the Old Testament dispensation.
- The members of the synagogue accused Stephen of blasphemy, even using false witnesses to do so. The reason? The religious leaders would lose their position and power over the people.
- Stephen knew he was going to be put to death so he defends himself by surveying all of the Old Testament to show that what the Jews called blasphemy was actually a description of the charges God was bringing to Israel through the Messiah, Jesus Christ.

He devotes his sermon to Abraham, Jacob, Joseph and Moses.

So far, Stephen had not accused the Jews and Sanhedrin of anything. He had only surveyed the history of Israel and proved his respect for all the traditions of Israel.

But now Stephen turned to the Jewish leaders, themselves: To us a modern phrase, he stopped preachin' and went to meddlin'.

Notice Acts 7:51-53

1. They were “stiff-necked”

The term “stiff-necked” means “to be stubborn, rebellious, and obstinate – unreasonably determined to have one's own way and resisting a remedy.”

The chief sin of those standing before Stephen was that of resisting the Holy Spirit by being stubborn and proud.

2. They were uncircumcised in Heart and Ears

Circumcision was the sign of the covenant between God and Abraham and Abraham's descendants.

- Genesis 17:10-14 – Circumcision (cutting away the male foreskin) was not entirely new in this period of history, but the special religious sign directed toward God and the significance then applied to it, was entirely new, and identified the circumcised as belonging to the physical and ethnical lineage of Abraham.
- Without divine revelation, the rite would not have had this distinctive significance and it remained directed by God as distinctively for Israel.
- There were health benefits, since disease could be kept in the folds of the foreskin, the removing of the foreskin prevented disease. Historically, Jewish women have had the lowest rate of cervical cancer.
- But the symbolism had to do with the need to cut away sin and be cleansed. It was the male organ which most clearly demonstrated the depth of depravity because it carried the seed that produced depraved sinners.
- Thus, circumcision symbolized the need for a profoundly deep cleansing to reverse the effects of depravity.

Deuteronomy 10:16 Moses called the Israelites to cut away all sin in their hearts, as the circumcision surgery cut away the skin. This would leave them with a clean relationship to God.

Deuteronomy 10:6 “Moreover the LORD your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your descendants, to love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul, so that you may live.

Jeremiah 4:4: “Circumcise yourselves to the Lord, and take away the foreskins of your hearts.” The meaning of the symbol is the need for the heart to be cleansed from sin's deadly disease. The really essential surgery needed to happen on the inside, where God calls for taking away fleshly things that keep the heart from being spiritually devoted to Him.

Leviticus 26:40-43 – True repentance would be honored by God.

Romans 2:29 – The outward rite is of value only when it reflects the inner reality of a heart separated from sin unto God. Salvation results from the work of God's spirit in the heart, not mere external efforts to conform to His law.

The term “uncircumcised in heart and ears” denotes an outward appearance but no inward reality. For the Jewish elders to have undergone physical circumcision but not spiritual circumcision made them as unspiritual toward God as their pagan neighbors.

3. They resisted the Holy Spirit

Stephen continued comparing the Sanhedrin to the Jewish leaders of old who incurred God's displeasure by telling them they “always resist the Holy Spirit” (verse 51). Example: “Which of the prophets did your fathers not persecute?”

By killing Christ, the Jewish leaders of his day were resisting the work of God just as their ancestors had done by persecuting the prophets.

4. They killed the Just One

The Old Testament Jewish leaders persecuted the prophets who foretold the coming of “the Just One,” and the leaders of Jerusalem killed the Just One Himself.

5. They did not keep the Law

They who had received the Law from God had failed to keep it. They prided themselves on keeping the Law, but if they had kept the Law, they wouldn't have murdered the One the Law foretold.

Of course, all this did not sit well with the Jewish leaders, and they responded by attacking and murdering this great preacher of truth.

Their EARS did not hear the Truth, their HEARTS did not receive the Truth, and their NECKS would not bow to the Truth.

We need to look again at Stephen.

I. The Conviction of Stephen Acts 7:54

There was a two fold result of Stephen's sermon:

1. "They were cut to the Heart"

They had been listening to Stephen for 30 or 40 minutes and had grown increasingly uncomfortable as Stephen's case against them became stronger and stronger. By the time he finished, they knew he was talking about them.

- They were cut to the heart; literally, sawn in two; he dismembered them and their self-righteousness.
- The Word of God is like a sword. Stephen had used this sword, thrusting it right into their hearts.

2. "They gnashed at him with their teeth"

They were cut to the heart, they were guilty before God and man, but instead of confessing their sins to God, and crying out for forgiveness, they got mad at the preacher. Sinful human beings are like that. It is easier to be angry than to humble yourself and cry out, "God be merciful to me a sinner" (Luke 18:13).

II. The Confidence of Stephen Acts 7:55

They gnashed their teeth, but Stephen paid them no attention, for he was looking upward. While Stephen's accusers were full of fury, Stephen was full of the Holy Spirit.

- Jesus had promised confidence through the Holy Spirit: "Now when they bring you to the synagogues and magistrates and authorities, do not worry about how or what you should answer, or what you should say. For the Holy Spirit will teach you in that very hour what you ought to say" (Luke 12:11-12).
- That promise is for all who are being persecuted for their faith. "If you are reproached for the Name of Christ, blessed are you, for the Spirit of glory and of God rest upon you. On their part He is blasphemed, but on your part, He is glorified" (1 Peter 4:14).

What a sight that most have been for Stephen to look heavenward and see Jesus standing in preparation for Stephen's homecoming.

We see here that heaven is interested in earth: Stephen was down here and Jesus was up there; yet, He was interested in what was happening on earth. Jesus was standing ready to help. He stands ready to help us, too.

III. The Courage of Stephen Acts 7:56-59

When the elders heard Stephen say he saw Jesus standing at the right hand of God, it was too much for them. Evidently, they could not see heaven open; nor could they see Jesus standing at the right hand of the Father (Note Acts 7:57-58).

Stoning was the prescribed method of execution according to the Mosaic legislation for one found guilty of idolatry or blasphemy.

Deuteronomy 17:2-7

How did stoning take place?

The accused was taken out of the city, outside the walls, for stoning. They would tie the person's hands and feet, stand him on a pedestal about six feet above a stone floor, then push him forward off the pedestal. If that didn't kill him, they would turn him over on his back and drop a large stone on his chest. And if that didn't kill him, the whole crowd would begin pelting him with stones until he was dead.

This crowd didn't go through that process. They were so enraged that they began stoning Stephen immediately when they were outside the city.

- And where did they lay their cloaks and robes while they were stoning Stephen? At the feet of Saul of Tarsus, later to become the Apostle Paul.
- I'm sure Stephen's courage in the face of death remained with Paul for the rest of his life.

While the stones were crashing into Stephen's body, he was praying "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit." In the presence of his attackers, he once again affirmed the deity of Christ: "Lord Jesus..."

Stephen may have been present when Jesus was crucified when you consider what he prayed just before he died.

IV. The Coronation of Stephen Acts 7:60

Stephen tried to live like Christ; now he is dying like Him. With a tender prayer for his enemies, Stephen fell asleep.

- Notice how the Spirit of God views the death of a believer as “sleep” (rest).
- Going to sleep suggest a peaceful transition from one state to the next. The spirit of the person departs to be with the Lord. The person is very much alive; he has just left one realm and gone to another. The body “sleeps” until the final resurrection when it will be raised in glory.

V. The Contribution of Stephen Acts 8:1

Acts 8:1 tells us the result of Stephen's death. Saul was consenting to Stephen's death and it left a lasting impression on him for he makes reference to the event after his conversion – Acts 22:20.

Stephen's death was accompanied by great persecution of the Church that caused believers to scatter from Jerusalem to other regions and towns.

The end of the first phase of witnessing has come. At the beginning of Chapter 8 we will see that the church is scattered and the good news reaches Judea and Samaria.

SIMON THE SORCERER Acts 8:1-15

Jesus gave the Apostles their post-ascension marching orders in Acts 1:8. They were to spread the Gospel in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and then throughout the world.

In the first seven chapters of Acts, the Church did not move beyond Jerusalem. But when the death of Stephen sparked a wave of persecution against the Church, believers were forced to flee Jerusalem. Because they took their faith with them, evangelism began to take place.

Acts 8:1 says that “Saul was consenting to Stephen's death.” That means Saul was giving active approval to or was in complete agreement with what was happening. He voted “Yes” to the death of Stephen.

- The truth is that consenting to evil is as bad as committing evil. Saul was too refined to stand there throwing stones, but not too refined to hold the coats of those who did.
- By our failure to take a stand and speak out against evil, we become a party to the evil done. Someone said, “Silence is golden, but sometimes it's yellow.”

Stephen, the first Christian martyr, had met death at the hands of the enemies of the Gospel, and had gone to glory.

- Emboldened by having killed one of the leaders, they thought, “now, let's get them all. We'll soon stamp out Christianity.”
- But Christianity is more than human – Christianity is Christ and no one is able to destroy Him! Christians may die, but Christ lives on. He takes them up to heaven, but He raises up other Christians to stand in their place.

One church father said, “The blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church.” Where one dies for the faith, five spring up to take his place. The greatest growth of the Church comes, not when she is at ease in Zion and filled with plenty, but when hardships come.

Why is this true? Because in times of trouble, men come closer to God than ever before, and the closer they get to Him the more courage and more power they have to serve Him.

The death of Stephen jump-started a wave of persecution that sent the Church into the world, taking with it the Gospel of Jesus.

What is it going to take for God to get us out of our “comfortable places” to reach out to those He wants to win?

God's divine plan was to move out of Jerusalem to “all Judea and Samaria.”

Notice that in Acts 8:1 that the Apostles stayed in Jerusalem and the Christians went to Samaria evangelize.

We are prone to say that it's the preacher's job to spread Christianity, but notice here that the ones who went out to evangelize were not preachers, but laymen.

Why did the Apostles refuse to leave Jerusalem?

1. Were they brave? Were they trying to set a good example for others to follow?
2. Was it because the Apostles just couldn't believe Gentiles were as precious to God as the Jews?

3. Did they remain in Jerusalem to establish headquarters where they could contact their leaders, where inquiries could be made, and to hold the core of the Church together while those into whom they had poured their lives became living witnesses to the Gospel?

Whatever the reason for the Apostles remaining in Jerusalem, one thing is irrefutable. The remaining chapters of Acts reveal the declining authority of the original Apostles and the increasing influence of the man to be known as Paul.

It is very significant that the Gospel was now being taken to Samaria.

- Going to Samaria was not an easy choice, for “Jews have no dealings with Samaritans” (John 4:9). This antagonism had lasted for centuries. When the Babylonians conquered Palestine, they not only took many Jews into captivity, but they also permitted Gentiles to occupy the land that had been vacated. During the centuries that followed, those Gentiles intermingled with the Jews who had been allowed to remain. This led to a race of people who were half Jewish and half Gentile. They were known as Samaritans because they mainly occupied the province known as Samaria.
- The Jews in Jerusalem looked at the Samaritans as half-breeds since they had intermarried with pagan peoples and set up their own system of worship on Mount Gerizim.

It is Philip who deliberately takes the Gospel to Samaria. This is NOT Philip the Apostle, but Philip the Deacon (Acts 6:5) and now Philip the Evangelist (Acts 21:8).

- The theme of Philip's message is Christ (Acts 8:5)! His message was clear and emphatic!
- Notice Acts 8:6 The people Heard and Heeded Philip's message “with one accord.” Then, he Demonstrated God's power by performing miracles (Acts 8:7).
- The result of Philip's ministry! Acts 8:8

Acts 8:9 introduces us to one of the strangest personalities in the entire New Testament: Simon Magus.

- He was a pretender and a deceiver, used of Satan who tried to infiltrate the ranks of Christ's Church. Please notice that though there was a great revival in Samaria, everything about the revival was not good.
- As God sows His good Seed, the devil sows his bad (Matthew 13:24-30).

Simon Magus was involved in sorcery, magic arts. Simon practiced black magic.

- Through the use of sorcery, Simon had bewitched the people and gained a large following. The people, from the least to the greatest, thought that Simon received his power from God (Acts 8:10). His influence was great and had lasted for a long time.
- The people were astounded or confounded and amazed at what Simon did (Acts 8:9, 11, 13).
- Simon was not using slight-of-hand or trickery. Simon's sorcery was energized by Satan (2 Thessalonians 2:9-10) and he used it to magnify himself.

Three things I want you to see about Simon Magus:

I. Simon's Pretense Acts 8:12-13

A new preacher came to town. He did not magnify himself, but Christ, and he preached concerning the Kingdom of God.

- The same people who were once amazed by Simon and his exploits were now amazed by what Philip said about Christ and the miracles that were done. The people began to lose interest in Simon.
- Simon could denounce the new preacher, but he couldn't denounce the miracles performed by Philip. The miracles were undeniable and the people were excited.

Simon did the only thing he could do. He “seemingly” embraced Philip's message. His psychology was: when you can't lick 'em, join 'em” (Acts 8:13).

If this were the only statement about Simon, we would conclude that he had become a Christian, because he used the right language and did the right things.

What was the basis of Simon's faith?

- Not the message (the Word of God) Philip preached, but the miracles he performed.
- There is no indication that Simon repented of his sins; nor believed with all his heart (verse 37).

Simon pretended to be saved, but he did not have the real thing.

- The word “believe” (Acts 8:13) does not always refer to saving faith – James 2:19.
- Faith based on signs is not trustworthy faith – John 2:23-25.
- There is no indication that he received the Holy Spirit.
- It is possible to PROFESS to have the Lord without POSSESSING the Lord in your heart – Matthew 7:21-23.

II. Simon's Presumption Acts 8:14-21

When the news of the Samaritan Revival reached Jerusalem, the Apostles took immediate action.

The sending of Peter and John indicated the importance and significance of the event. Keep in mind that we are in the transition section of Acts. One dispensation is ending and another is beginning. Judaism is passing and Christianity is dawning. Old things are passing away; new things are beginning.

Notice Acts 8:15-17. Here we find a strange situation. These people had received Christ but had not received the Holy Spirit. How are we to explain this?

This is one of those times we can't be dogmatic, but we can make some suggestions. It may have been that the Lord wanted to preserve the unity of the Church. Peter and John identified themselves with the Samaritans. There was to be no more prejudice or antagonism between the two groups. They are now brothers and sisters in Christ. They are now one! When they received Christ, they must receive each other.

Then, in Matthew 16:13-20, Jesus asked who men said He, the Son of Man is. Then Jesus asked, “But who do you say I am?” Peter said, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.” Jesus blessed him and then said, “I will give to you the keys of the kingdom of God, and whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.”

Peter would use the keys to open the door of faith three times: In Acts 2 he opened the door of faith to the Jews; in Acts 8:14-21 he opened the door of faith to the Samaritans; in Acts 10:42-48, he opened the door of faith to the Gentiles.

Notice Acts 8:18-21 Simon thought he could buy the power and favor of God.

May I tell you, there are some things money, won't buy! You can't buy Happiness or Holiness or Heaven!

There are folks today in churches who think their money can buy them things like Position, Prestige (special treatment), Power, and Praise.

Some folks even select the church they join because they think that they will gain advantage by joining “that” church. Some join churches for business reasons or social reasons. They choose a certain church because of what the church can do for them; how it will elevate them! They seek to use God rather than to be used by Him. A selfish attitude always indicates a bad heart.

I like what Peter said in Acts 8:20! Peter uses the word “Apollyon” to refer to where Simon and his money could go. It is the word in Revelation 9:11 that is used in connection to hell.

In Acts 8:21 Peter says plainly, “Your heart is not right in the sight of God.”

III. Simon's Perversion Acts 8:22-25

Simon never admitted his guilt. He said to Peter, “You pray for me.” But salvation is a personal matter.

Peter calls on him to repent, but we never find him doing so.

Peter says, “I see that you are poisoned by bitterness and bound by iniquity.”

And Peter turns from Simon and returns to Jerusalem. I believe that when Peter left him, he was still lost.

What about you?

STOP THE CHARIOT! Acts 8:26-40

Acts 8 is a very important chapter in the Book of Acts. Because of “Great Persecution,” those who were chosen as servants to assist the Apostles in Acts 6, with the exception of Stephen, who had already been stoned to death, were scattered as they were forced to leave Jerusalem.

- Our Lord had commanded them in Acts 1:8 that they were to be His “witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and to the uttermost parts of the earth.” Philip the deacon/evangelist, shared the Gospel with the Samaritans and many were saved.
- In Acts 8:15-25 Peter and John were sent from Jerusalem to Samaria to authenticate the ministry of Philip, and the Samaritans were accepted into Christianity.

Now Philip is led of the Holy Spirit to talk to a man of Ethiopia and to lead him to a saving experience in Christ.

As you read these verses you will discover all of the ingredients that are essential for a soul's salvation.

1. There is a lost soul.
2. There is a Christian who is obedient to the Spirit's leading.
3. There is the inspired Word of God.
4. There is the Holy Spirit who convicts and converts the lost sinner.

The lost man was an Ethiopian Eunuch.

1. He was an Ethiopian: He was a black man.
2. He was a eunuch: He was incapable of fathering children.
3. He had great authority.
4. He was the treasurer to the Queen.
5. He was a proselyte to Judaism, which means that he converted from one religion or belief to another.

Then Philip demonstrated some Servant Qualities:

1. He Listened Acts 8:26
Philip had a spiritual ear that heard when the Lord spoke to him. And he also paid attention as the Lord gave directions for his life.
2. He Obeyed Acts 8:27
3. He Observed Acts 8:28-30
He looked for the reason God had sent him there. God had sent him to the desert for a reason and he was pretty sure it wasn't to study cactus. Philip discovered the reason when he saw the Ethiopian reading the writings of the prophet Isaiah.
4. He Inquired Acts 8:30-31
Philip wanted to know where this man was spiritually. Where did he stand with God? To find out where others stand with God, you have to ask.
5. He Shared Acts 8:34-35
Philip took the great passage in Isaiah on the suffering Messiah and showed him that Isaiah wrote about Jesus.

Every time a soul is saved, these things must be present.

In these verses we see:

I. A Prepared Sinner

Christianity is about to go beyond cultural and racial barriers.

Prejudice often keeps us from reaching out to those who are not like us. Prejudice takes many forms.

- The first form of prejudice we think of is racial prejudice – but that is not the only form. After World War II, the Foreign Mission Board had its most difficult job in finding missionaries to go to Japan.
- But there are also economic and social barriers. In one of the churches I pastored, our young people won a young lady to the Lord who was “from the wrong side of the tracks.” Some of the people said, “We don't want that kind of person in our church.” Yet, it takes as much of the grace of God to save us as it does “that kind” of person.
- The problem with some of us is that we have too much Jonah in us. He didn't want God to save the folks in Nineveh because he didn't like them and didn't think they were worthy of salvation.
- God is no respecter of persons. He'll even save a self-righteous person if they repent of their sins.

This black man didn't need a change of color, but a change of character.

This man had traveled 1,200 miles from Ethiopia to Jerusalem to worship. Tradition says that he was there when they put Christ to death. He was also there at Pentecost when 3,000 were saved. What an impact that must have made on his life.

He had been to Jerusalem to worship. As a Jewish proselyte he had probably been to Jerusalem to attend the great feast. But somehow these things did not satisfy. He came seeking, his heart was hungry, and his soul was thirsty, but when he left, he was not satisfied on the inside. As he rides along in the chariot, he opens his Bible and reads the Word of God, hoping to find peace for his heart and forgiveness for his sin. He was seeking the best way he could with what little he had. God always honors such interest.

II. A Prompt Soul-Winner Acts 8:26-31

Philip was sent as a special witness to lead him to a full knowledge of Christ.

His meeting with Philip was no accident. The providence of God is working on both ends. God plans everything from the foundation of the world. God planned for these men to start out, ignorant of each other, and then to come together at this spot, in this hour.

Philip could have found many excuses not to go. "But, Lord, many folks are being saved here and the ministry is growing."

Philip was aggressive, for in Acts 8:30 we are told that "Philip ran to him."

You see, it is not enough for a lost sinner to desire salvation; he must understand God's plan of salvation.

- Philip asked if he understood what he was reading. He answered, "How can I, except some man should guide me?" The word for "guide" refers to someone who could teach with the knowledge of authority.
- Everybody needs directions for their lives. I read about a man who went on his first jump from an airplane. The moment finally came for him to jump. He stood in the doorway for a moment, shouted "Geronimo" and jumped out. He pulled his rip cord and nothing happened. As he was free falling, he saw a man coming up from the ground toward him. The skydiver shouted to the man, "Do you know anything about parachutes?" The man shouted back, "No! Do you know anything about gas stoves?"
- If you are going to sky dive, you need to know how to operate a parachute. If you are going to work on gas stoves, you need to know how to avoid explosions. If you are going to be a soul-winner, you need to know how to lead someone to the Lord.

III. The Powerful Scripture Acts 8:30-35

Philip seized the opportunity and preached (or evangelized) unto him Jesus.

- Isaiah 53 has been a puzzle to the Jews. They love the prophecies that picture Christ as coming in triumph and victory to reign. But they could or would not accept the prophecies that presented Him as a suffering servant.
- Evidently Philip explained more than what was found in the passage. No doubt he unfolded the whole story of Jesus Christ, emphasizing His death, burial, and resurrection.

All of the Bible is about Jesus. It is His-tory! Jesus is the Heart and Centerpiece of the Bible. He is found on every page of Scripture. You ought to be able to take any passage of Scripture and find Jesus there somewhere in the shadows.

John 5:38; Luke 24:44

While we are not given a transcript of what Philip said, we do know what "preaching Jesus" involves.

- "Preaching Jesus" occurs when a person shares about the external existence of the Son of God. It involves sharing how the Son came to earth through the womb of a virgin to live as a man we know as Jesus of Nazareth.
- "Preaching Jesus" includes the fact that Jesus lived a sinless life. It includes the fact this sinless Son of God, Jesus, was nailed to a cross as the perfect sacrifice for sin. It would have absolutely included the fact this Jesus was raised from the dead on the third day. It would have included the fact He had ascended back to heaven and was declared by God the Father to be Lord of all. It would have included the fact that God has now "declared to men that all people everywhere should repent" Acts 17:30.

Philip obviously shared with this man that Jesus had given His followers a commission: "Go therefore into all the world and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit" Matthew 28:19.

IV. A Personal Salvation Acts 8:36-40

The Eunuch readily accepted the truth once it was presented to him by an authoritative guide. God had opened his mind and heart

to the truth and like a man dying of thirst, he drank from the fountain of life and was wondrously saved.

As they rode along, they came to a body of water, and the man said, "Here is water, why cannot I be baptized?" Philip had told him how to be saved; the next step was obedience in baptism.

Baptism has nothing to do with salvation, but obedience. Philip said, "I am ready to baptize you if you believe in Christ. The man cried out, "I do – with all my heart I believe. I am ready to follow Him forever."

It was then that Philip said, "Stop the chariot!", and he baptized him.

The reason the disciples baptized people is simple. Jesus told them to. They wanted to be obedient to what Jesus had told them to do.

Who do we baptize?

- It's not unusual for a child to say to me, "Preacher, I want to get baptized." But there is a spiritual order that must be followed for a person to be baptized.
- We are to only baptize those who have made a profession of their faith in Jesus Christ as their Lord. That profession is to be public.

Baptism is to be by immersion. Philip placed this man under the water and raised him back up again. It was a picture of the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ – Romans 6:4.

This eunuch had just been baptized by Philip and something happened. The Holy Spirit did something mysterious. Philip was instantly transported from one location to another.

The sudden catching away of Philip seems to stand out in the text, because it is the same order as that of Elijah (I Kings 18:12). The same Greek word is used of the rapture of the saints (I Thessalonians 4:12).

"And he went on his way rejoicing".

The eunuch Rejoiced because he Received Jesus; Philip Rejoiced because he Revealed Jesus.

A village pastor was walking down the street with his face beaming with joy. A friend noticed this, called his name and said, "You look like you have heard some good news!" "No," he answered, "I haven't heard good news. I've just shared THE Good News and someone believed it one more time."

The man got back into his chariot and went on his way rejoicing. He had something to rejoice over – he had Jesus in his heart, his name was written in the Lamb's Book of Life and he had a Friend to walk down every lonely road with him.

THE CONVERSION OF SAUL Acts 9:1-19

Special days in our lives are often called "red-letter days." The day Saul of Tarsus was saved has to be one of the greatest "red-letter days", not only in Saul's personal life, but in the history of the Church of the Lord Jesus.

Christianity has never had a more dangerous enemy than Saul of Tarsus or a more dedicated friend than Paul the Apostle – both are the same man. As Saul, he persecuted the Church, and as Paul, he preached Christ.

Saul could never get away from the testimony of Stephen, even though he favored his death. It's quite evident that he tried to kill the conviction in his heart by killing Christians and persecuting the church. Paul honestly believed he was doing the work of God (I Timothy 1:12-13).

Here is an example of a man who had the wrong religion. Some say that any religion is alright, just so you are sincere. After all, we're all headed to the same place. The prophets of Baal were sincere at Mt. Carmel, but they were sincerely wrong and so was Saul.

I. Saul's Condition Acts 9:1-2

A. Saul is described as an Angry man Acts 9:1

Although Saul was highly intelligent, he was living on the level of an animal.

- Acts 9:1 says that Saul was "yet" or "still" "Breathing out" "threatenings and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord." "Yet" or

“still” speaks of his persistence.

“Breathing out” means a deep intensity of rapid breathing because of anger. The picture is of a wild angry animal with flaring nostrils because his emotions are agitated.

- “Threatenings and slaughter” indicates that with every breath he was bent on active persecution.

Why was Saul so against Christ?

If you had stopped Saul and asked for his reasons, he might have said something like this: “Jesus of Nazareth is dead. Do you expect me to believe that a crucified nobody is the promised Messiah? According to our Law, anybody who is hung on a tree is cursed (Deuteronomy 21:23).

Would God take a cursed false prophet and make him the Messiah? No! His followers are preaching that Jesus is both alive and doing miracles through them. But this power comes from Satan, not God. This is a dangerous sect, and I intend to eliminate it before it destroys our historic Jewish faith.”

- In spite of his great learning (Acts 26:24), Saul was spiritually blind and did not understand what the Old Testament really taught about the Messiah. Like many other Jews, he stumbled over the cross, because he depended on his own righteousness and not on the righteousness of God.
- Many self-righteous religious people today do not see their need for a Savior and resent it if you tell them they are sinners.
- Saul believed the Law had to be obeyed before Messiah could come; and yet those “heretic disciples” were preaching against the Law, the temple, and the traditions of the fathers.
- Saul, as other Jews, looked for the Messiah to be a Jewish hero who would sit on David's throne and bring all nations under the royal Law. Jesus was a humble carpenter who died on a cross.

B. Saul is described as an Aggressive man

Damascus had a large Jewish population in that day, and it has been estimated that there could well have been thirty to forty synagogues in the city. The fact that there were already believers there indicates how effective the Church had been in getting out the message.

- The word “yet” in Acts 9:1 means that Saul was doing what he was doing in spite of inward turmoil and conflict. He was troubled inwardly because he had no inward peace.
- Sometimes when a person has serious doubts about their inward condition, they will do many things to silence the doubts of their soul. They will go to any length to silence the voice of conviction.
- I am convinced that that is the reason some people cause trouble in churches. They are not right on the inside and they express their lack of inward peace and contentment through causing problems.

II. Saul's Confrontation Acts 9:3-4

Saul was an enemy to Christ, but Christ was not an enemy to Saul. Romans 5:8

A. Saul had a Vision Acts 9:3

It was about noon time. The sun was at its highest and brightest; and, yet, there was a light brighter than the sun. This light was the Shekinah glory of the glorified Christ. The glory of God in Jesus Christ made the sun pale into darkness by comparison. No glory is greater than God's glory. I Corinthians 9:1

B. Saul heard a Voice

The Light and the Voice was not anything natural. It was supernatural, and experienced only by Saul. There were others traveling with Saul but were not confronted as he was. They heard a Voice and saw the great Light, but didn't understand what was being said (Acts 9:7; Acts 22:9). Saul was the only one confronted that day (Acts 26:19).

Liberals have suggested that when Saul was knocked to the ground, that he had an Epileptic seizure or a heat stroke. Then may we all have seizures and stay out in the sun for a long time.

No! He saw the resurrected, living, glorified Christ, the one who is brighter than the sun.

Notice what the Lord asked Saul: “Why are you persecuting ME?”

- Christ identifies Himself with the Church. If they suffer, He suffers. When you hurt one member of the body, you make the whole body suffer.
- This is comforting to a Christian, but it is an awful warning to those who persecute Christians. We need to remember that when we gossip about some saint.
- There is a positive side also. Matthew 25:40 – the kindnesses you do to God's people are kindnesses done to Christ.

III. Saul's Conviction Acts 9:5-9

“Who are you, Lord? I am Jesus whom you are persecuting.” What an amazing, shocking thing this was to Saul! He was convinced that Jesus was an imposter, that He had not risen from the dead. Now, he is confronted with the risen Lord Jesus Christ!

The “I am” part of the answer should not be passed over lightly, for it emphasizes the deity of Christ.

A “goad” or “prick” was a long pole with a sharp metal tip used by the ox-driver to “goad” an ox to pick up the pace. Sometimes, when jabbed with the goad, an animal would kick at it with a powerful hind leg, an action that only dug the metal tip in deeper, intensifying its pain. The goad Saul was kicking against was his own conscience, the sense of conviction he felt over what he had done to the Christians, the image of Stephen's face appearing like an angel, the sound of Stephen's voice asking God to forgive his killers as he died, the lack of fear exhibited by those he persecuted.

“Why are you struggling with your conscience? The harder you try to suppress the truth, the more painful it becomes for you.”

“Lord, what will you have me to do?”

Now the proud Saul is humbled, as all must become if they are to enter God's kingdom.

- Matthew 18:3-4 “Except you humble yourself as a little child, you cannot enter into HIS kingdom.”
- There is coming a day when all who are against Christ will humble themselves before Him.
- Salvation begets service. When one is truly saved, he will want to serve the Lord in some way.

IV. Saul's Conversion Acts 9:10-19

God used an unknown servant named Ananias to confirm Saul's salvation. Though fearful at first, he was ready to serve.

Ananias ministered to Saul in several ways. He restored Saul's sight by the miracle of the laying on of hands; he baptized him; he laid hands on him and Saul was filled with the Holy Spirit; he gave him food to eat; he introduced Saul to the Christians in Damascus.

Notice Acts 9:17-19 – Ananias called Saul, “Brother Saul.” What a warm and accepting greeting! It is important for a new convert to feel accepted; to feel that he is a real part of the family of God; to feel the love and fellowship that only God's family can give. What a responsibility we have as new converts come into our fellowship!

Acts 9:15 is a good summary of Paul's life and ministry:

- It was all of grace, for he did not choose God; it was God who chose him (I Timothy 1:14).
- He was God's chosen vessel and God would work in and through him to accomplish His purpose.
- God's name would be glorified as His servant would take the Gospel to Jews and Gentiles, kings, and commoners.
- He would suffer for Christ's sake.

Saul's testimony is given three times in the Book of Acts.

Stop and call to mind your salvation experience.

When was it?
Where was it?
How was it?

SHAPING THE VESSEL Acts 9:20-30

God did something in the Apostle Paul's life that only God could do: He took the Church's worst enemy and turned him into the

Church's greatest champion.

- How did Saul become Paul? God always trains His servants and the more critical the task, the more intensive the training. God doesn't send men into the thick of battle without them being prepared.
- God had to set Paul apart to give him the knowledge and wisdom he needed to be an apostle.

It is true for us also. It takes time for God to prepare us for the task He has for us. Don't be impatient. Let God do the deep work in your life that is needed in order for you to be a useful tool in His hand.

In Acts 9:15 God declared that Saul (Paul) was "a chosen vessel unto Him to bear His Name before Gentiles, and kings, and the children of Israel."

But before Saul could become Paul, God had to mold and shape his life.

2 Corinthians 4:7 (AMP) "But we have this treasure (this right of glory which comes from accepting Jesus into our hearts) in earthen vessels (perishable container), that the excellency of the power may be of God, and not of us."

Romans 9:21 "Hath not the potter power over the clay, of the same lump to make one vessel unto honor, and another unto dishonor?"

2 Timothy 2:20-21 "But in a great house there are not only vessels of gold and of silver, but also of wood and of earth; and some to honor, and some to dishonor. If a man therefore purge himself from these, he shall be a vessel unto honor, sanctified, and meet for the Master's use, and prepared unto every good work."

God used four Places and four Methods to shape Saul into the vessel that He wanted him to become.

I. In Arabia – God used Solitude Acts 9:20-23

Notice Acts 9:23 "Now after many days were past" (or fulfilled):

I believe that between verses 21 and 22, we have the time when Saul was in the desert alone with God for three years. We would not have known about this experience in Paul's life had he not mentioned it in Galatians 1:11-21.

Paul did not write much about his time in Arabia, but he wrote enough about it for us to see the importance of the trip.

- Notice Acts 9:22 "But Saul increased all the more in strength". He increased in spiritual strength.
- His preaching was convincing for he "confounded the Jews," a word that means to stir up trouble or confusion. The Jews were completely confused, troubled, stirred up, by the preaching of this former Pharisee.
- "Proving that this Jesus is the Christ." The word "proving" means "to knit together." In other words, Paul wove together the prophecies of the Old Testament with the life of Christ to prove He was the Messiah. He did it so convincingly, he confounded the Jews.

Arabia was God's seminary of solitude. For an extended period of time, the Lord took Saul away from the company of men and sent him into the desert to instruct him.

Most believe it is during his isolation in Arabia that the Lord taught Saul what we now read in his epistles. It may have been during this time when Paul was caught up to heaven (2 Corinthians 12:1-4). Saul probably took Old Testament scrolls with him into the desert and returned with the New Testament epistles in his heart.

It is in this same Arabia where others had been prepared.

- It was in this place where the children of God had received the commandments of God on the tablets of stone.
- Moses met the Lord at the Burning Bush there and also received the pattern for the tabernacle there.
- God spoke to Elijah through His still small voice there.

Why did God send Saul to Arabia?

- Because he was a novice (new convert). Paul would later write that you are to lay hands suddenly on no man.
- Many preachers and deacons have been ruined because they were thrown into spiritual service before they were ready.
- Saul needed to be alone with God. He needed time and isolation in order to think.
- We all need a bit of Arabia every day. We must get away from the distractions and noise and get into the Word of God. If we fail to do so, we will miss much of what the Lord wants to teach us.

In the school of solitude there was:

A. Communication

There are some lessons that can be learned only in the quiet times with God. I thank God for formal education, but some things cannot be learned in the schools of the world. I would not exchange what I have learned in the solitary place with God for all that the college and seminary professors taught me.

The most important lessons one can learn is how God speaks to you personally.

B. Revelation

Saul needed TIME to study, meditate, and let God teach him new things from the Old Testament. As he studied, he saw the scriptures in a new light. God revealed unto him, Jesus, in those Old Testament passages, shadows, symbolism, and types. Galatians 4:24-26.

C. Transformation

God was able to do His deeper work in Saul. God took Saul's bitterness and gave him His love. God took Saul's pride and gave him His compassion. God took Saul's arrogance and gave him His humility.

Saul learned the secret of Galatians 2:20. How? 2 Corinthians 3:18; Phil 1:6; 3:10-15.

II. In Damascus – God used Suffering Acts 9:16, 19-24; 2 Cor 11:23-28

A. God used suffering as a Prelude to future Suffering

This was only the Beginning of what Paul would be suffering. He was mobbed in Jerusalem, mocked in Athens, and martyred in Rome.

B. God used suffering as Preparation for future Service

God often teaches us His greatest lessons through suffering. He uses suffering:

1. To Temper Us: Sometimes He allows us to go through the fire to refine, purify, and fortify us.
2. To Tender Us: To make us more sympathetic toward others. To give us a spirit of compassion and to help us understand the suffering of others.
3. To Teach Us: A lady was going through a time of trouble. She asked her pastor to pray that God would help her to get what He wanted her to get from that experience.
4. To Tailor Us: God doesn't want us to go to heaven as we are. He wants to ready us by molding and shaping us into His image.

III. In Jerusalem – God used a Supporter Acts 9:26-28

This is the second mention of Barnabas in the Book of Acts. In Acts 4:36-37 Barnabas sold land and laid the money at the Apostle's feet to help the believers in Jerusalem. In Acts 11:24 the Apostles describe his character.

- Barnabas totally accepts Saul and gives the other disciples proof of Saul's conversion. He gives good reasons why Saul should be received. He has had a tremendous change in his life. His conduct, conversation, companions, and creed have changed.
- Nothing is more important to new Christians than being accepted by the church family.
- Romans 15:7 If the goal of a church is to glorify God, that church must lovingly accept new people. Nothing attracts people to a church as much as members who have a warm spirit of acceptance.

How can we make people feel accepted in our church?

1. Greet new people at every service.

Be friendly and give them a warm handshake and welcome. The number one reason visitors return to the church is they feel welcome.

2. Get to know new people by name.

Introduce yourself. Nothing makes a person feel welcome and accepted like someone remembering his or her name. The theme

song for “Cheers.” “Sometimes you want to go where everybody knows your name and they’re always glad you came.”

Our church ought to be “A Friendly Church where Jesus is Real!”

IV. In Tarsus – God Gave a Safe-haven Acts 9:29-30

Saul began to witness to the Greek-speaking Jews, the Hellenists that had engineered the trial and death of Stephen. No doubt he felt an obligation to take up the mantle left by Stephen. The Hellenistic Jews were not about to permit this kind of witness and so they plotted to kill him.

See Acts 9:25

SOME MINISTRIES OF THE CHURCH Acts 9:31-43

Notice Acts 9:31 – “Then had the churches rest throughout all Judea, Galilee, and Samaria.”

The “then” refers primarily to the fact that Saul was now converted and was no longer making havoc of the church. “The churches had rest” or “peace.”

Acts 9:31 is a kind of summary statement from the Lord to show the condition and the progress of the early church. You see a godly balance in the early church. Note two words: Edified and Multiplied.

- For years many churches have not kept this balance. They either go totally with Evangelism or Edification.
- If you only Evangelize, you will find that, because there is no spiritual growth, the saints will remain spiritual children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine. You will see them coming in the front door, which is a blessing, but they will also soon go out the back door because they are not grounded and rooted in the faith.
- On the other hand, if all a church does is edify – feed the sheep that are already there and fail to go after new sheep – the old sheep will one day die out and there will be no one left to feed. Both are to be ministries of the church.

A. Edified (or built up)

It is important for the saints of God to be strong in the faith. In Matthew 7 Jesus speaks of two houses: one built on the rock and the other built on the sand. The storms came, the winds blew, the rain falls. The house built upon the rock stands while the one built upon the sand falls. He is not talking about being saved or lost, but how one builds on his Christian faith.

What are some of the tools that can be used to build up a church? I Corinthians 10:23 says, “All things do not edify,” but some things do. What are they?

1. Preaching edifies – I Corinthians 14:3 “But he that prophesieth speaketh unto men to edification.”
2. Faith edifies – Jude 20 “Building yourself up on your most holy faith.”
3. Love edifies – I Corinthians 8:1 “Knowledge puffs up, but love edifies.”
4. Spiritual gifts edify – I Corinthians 14:12 “Since you are zealous for spiritual gifts let it be for edification.”

B. Multiply

If a church is truly spiritual, it will be evangelistic. The Bible knows nothing of going so deep with God that you lose your passion for souls.

There are four kinds of ministries mentioned here in this early church.

I. Human Ministry

Their’s was a ministry that was people directed. We are told that Peter went to Lydda and Joppa, but we are also told of some individuals there – Aeneas and Dorcas – who had needs and feelings and desires. One problem in many churches is that people feel that they really don’t count. One pastor gave me some really good advice: “Walk slowly through the crowd. Speak to children, to the elderly, leave no one out.”

- I bought a shirt with a slip of paper in it which said, “Inspected by #6.” I think that person wanted to be known as a person and not just a number.

- A census taker went by a house one day and asked the old black lady who was there, “How many children do you have?” She said, “Well there’s Bill, Fred, Sue...” The census taker said, “No! Just tell me the number of children you have.” She said, “My children don’t have numbers. They just have names.” God’s church must be interested in individuals.

Jesus loved individuals and were interested in them. He was interested in a blind man named Bartimaeus, a little man named Zacchaeus, a needy woman named Mary Magdalene. Jesus died on the cross for individuals. I know that He died for the sins of the world, but He died for individuals also.

There are a lot of individual needs in this passage in Acts. There is a man who has been sick for eight years. There were folks who were grieving because of the death of Dorcas. There are folks all around US with needs.

II. Healing Ministry Acts 9:32-35

Peter announces that the healing was accomplished by the Son of God. Remember that Jesus alone is the Great Physician. God is still in the healing business, but Jesus does the healing; not the disciples. Peter directed the glory to Christ for the healing, not himself.

James 5:14 says that prayer for healing should be administered by the Church of God.

Too often in church, we ask for prayer requests, but we don’t take the requests seriously.

III. Helping Ministry Acts 9:36-43

Dorcas was missed and mourned because she had been so merciful. Behind her labor was her love.

Joppa was the ancient seaport of Jerusalem and was famous in Jewish history.

- It was through Joppa that Solomon brought the timber with which to build the temple (2 Chronicles 2:16).
- It was also the port used by Jonah when he tried to run away from God – Jonah 1:3.
- It was an important place, so the Christians founded a church there.

One of its members was a lady named Tabitha or Dorcas. Tabitha was her Hebrew name and Dorcas was her Greek name. Her name means “gazelle,” which is both beautiful and graceful.

A. The Report about Dorcas Acts 9:36-37

Most of you know Bro. Mickey Dalrymple, pastor of Fairview in Columbus. He tells of a funeral he assisted in when he was a young preacher in Alabama. He was helping conduct a grave side service for an older woman. The lady’s family consisted of four sons, none of whom had a church background and they certainly didn’t have a workable knowledge of Scripture.

They were just four rough mountain boys. When everyone was assembled at the grave, the funeral director nodded it was time to begin. The other pastor was to speak first. He began the service with these words, “Boys, I want you to know that in my opinion, your mother was a real Dorcas.”

Those boys had no idea what he was talking about. I’m certain they had never heard someone read about Dorcas. From the looks on their faces, they thought this pastor was calling their mother a “doofus.” You could see the boys bristling up. “The way I saw it,” Mickey said, “they were getting ready to whip them a preacher, and I figured while they were at it, they might just go ahead and whip them two preachers! “

Fortunately, the pastor quickly went on to explain what he meant by saying, “In my opinion, your mother was a real Dorcas, and he described the wonderful character of this woman in the Bible. The boys settled down and we didn’t get whipped.”

We know this about Dorcas: She was a godly, gracious, and generous lady, who was a competent seamstress who devoted her time, talent, and energy to helping the needy ladies in her community. When she died, her death caused great sorrow, for her services were irreplaceable.

Dorcas used a needle for the glory of God and God thought enough of her faithfulness to put what she did in His Word.

God can use whatever you have for His glory. God used David’s sling, Moses’ rod, Samson was directed to a jawbone of a donkey for God’s glory.

God uses mechanics, cooks, teachers, factory workers, farmers. Whatever He has blessed you with, He can use.

B. The Request for Dorcas Acts 9:38

Possibly the messengers were dispatched before Dorcas died. What would Peter do when he saw she was dead?

C. The Restoration of Dorcas Acts 9:39-41

Notice what Peter did. He put all the people out, knelt down and prayed, called her by name and told her to arise. Where did he learn that? Mark 5:35-43

IV. Heavenly Ministry Acts 9:34-35, 42

The most important ministry is to make men ready for heaven. Heaven doesn't get excited about things we get excited about – the preacher preaches a good sermon, the choir does a good job – but when one gets saved, there is joy in heaven!

I wonder how much rejoicing people like Lazarus and Dorcas did, knowing that they had to die yet a second time! I don't know what these two, or the Son of the window of Nain, experienced in the hours between their death and resurrection, but one wonders if they would have preferred to remain in heaven.

One day, Jesus will catch up every saint to be with Him, never to die again.

CORNELIUS: GENTILE SALVATION Acts 10:1-11:18

Luke has shown how the Gospel had spread from Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and, now, to the ends of the earth, or to the Gentiles.

In this chapter, we see Peter using “the keys of the kingdom” for the third and last time. He had opened the door of faith for the Jews (Acts 2) and for the Samaritans (Acts 8), and now he would be used of God to bring the Gentiles into the church.

This event of the Gentile coming to salvation, Luke, who was himself a Gentile, records three times in the Book of Acts: Acts 10:24-28, 44-48, Acts 11:1-8 (In these few verses Peter tells what happened in Acts 10), Acts 15:6-9.

This event took place about ten years after Pentecost.

In this passage you find:

I. A Groping Centurion Acts 10:1-2

Cornelius was a centurion which means that he was a ruler of a hundred; a soldier who had one hundred men under his command. A centurion was comparable to our army captain. He was considered to be a soldier's soldier. Centurions were strong, loyal men who were the backbone of the Roman army.

A. The Sincerity of Cornelius Acts 10:1-2

Everything we know about Cornelius is good.

1. He was a Devout man.

This means he was devoted to religious feelings and duties. Today you would not call a man devout who never went to church, nor showed any interest in the things of God.

He was a true seeker, someone who was trying to find God. He was a pious, outwardly moral man. He did not know all about God, yet as far as he understood, he was devoted to God. “One that feared God,” means he revered and respected the God of Israel.

2. He feared God with all his house.

This means that he recognized God's place and power and that he led his family and servants to have a holy awe of God.

3. He gave much alms to all people.

In other words, he practiced what he preached by doing religious acts. He was generous in his acts of charity toward the poor and needy.

4. He prayed to God always

He knew that his own strength and resources were not enough. He felt the need of a higher being. He wanted to reach out and touch the hand of God, so in the only way he knew how to pray, he prayed.

You may be thinking, "This is one of the best men I ever read about; he was devoted to God, he feared God, he helped the poor, and he prayed to God. Surely this man doesn't need to be born again. He is alright as he is."

You can be the finest man in the world and yet you are on the way to hell if you do not follow the Bible plan and accept Jesus Christ as your Savior.

Acts 11:14 tells us this man was not saved. This tells us that all men are lost who do not have Christ as their Savior. They may be good men, moral men, respectful of God and holy things, but without Christ in their hearts and lives they are lost. A person can be devotedly religious and be lost.

B. The Searching of Cornelius Acts 10:3-8

Cornelius had been fasting and praying in his own house when the angel appeared to him. The angel's message to Cornelius was that God had taken note of his prayers and generosity.

- God is mindful of all that goes on. He sent His angel to Cornelius, who called him by name and assured him that God was aware of what was going on in his life and gave him the name and address of Peter who would come and lead him to salvation.
- He was faithful to the spiritual light that he had, so God gave him more revelation.
- Deuteronomy 4:29

Why didn't the angel tell Cornelius how to be saved? He was on the spot and Peter was a day and a half away. By the time the men were sent after him and the return trip was made, three days would have gone by. The angel knew the story of redeeming love, but never do we find a place in the New Testament where an angel was permitted to tell this story. All he did here was to tell Cornelius where he could find the preacher who had God's message.

This seems to be the reason: the angels in heaven have never sinned, they have never fallen, they have never needed redemption; so, God pushes the angels back and gives you and me the matchless privilege of proclaiming the Gospel. We can proclaim it better than Gabriel himself, because Gabriel cannot say what we can, "I am a sinner saved by grace."

God wants men today who will witness for Him. Peter could witness because he had had an experience with God. He had sinned, then he had sought forgiveness. Now Jesus was very real and very precious to him. One reason many church members are not able to witness today is that they have had no vital experience with the Lord.

Cornelius did not delay. He called in two servants and a devoted soldier. He told them the whole story and sent them to Joppa to find the preacher.

C. The Salvation of Cornelius Acts 10:34, 44-48

In his message Peter declared the Person and work of Christ as Lord and Savior.

Peter preached the Peace of God (Acts 10:36), the Power of God (Acts 10:38), the Presence of God (Acts 10:38), and the Pardon of God (Acts 10:43).

1. Jesus Christ is Lord of all.
2. Jesus of Nazareth was anointed of God with the Holy Spirit and power.
3. He went about doing good.
4. He healed many who were oppressed of the devil.
5. He was crucified on the tree.
6. God raised Him on the third day.
7. He revealed Himself openly to witnesses.
8. We are witnesses of these things.
9. Therefore, "whosoever believeth in Him shall receive remission of sins." Peter brings them to the point of decision and they trusted Jesus.

Acts 10:44-48 has been called the Gentile Pentecost. This sign gift of tongues was necessary, not for the Gentiles, but for the Jews present. This was proof positive that these Gentiles had received the Holy Spirit. This put these believing Gentiles on the same footing as the believing Jews. Peter and the other Jews would probably have never received the Gentiles as "fellow heirs and of the

same body” (Ephesians 3:6) had not the same sign (as at Pentecost) been given.

II. A Growing Christian Acts 10:9-16, 34

Before God could save the Gentiles, God had to prepare Peter to bring the message to Cornelius. God had to work through Peter's problem of prejudice against the Gentiles.

A. The Vision

The vision of the clean and unclean beast was God's way of teaching Peter that the Gentiles were to be a part of His kingdom.

If you are prejudice, it is just an indication that you have not grown in that area as a Christian. The arms of Jesus on the cross are open wide. “Whosoever will may come.”

Notice Acts 10:13-14 you may say “not so” and “Lord” separately, but you cannot say, “not so, Lord” if Jesus is to be Lord in your life.

B. The Visit Acts 10:48

The new believers at Caesarea requested that Peter remain with them. Follow-up instruction for new converts followed. Every new convert needs instructions and fellowship with those who are mature saints.

Peter had reached Cornelius, but Cornelius had also reached Peter!

WHEN IS A CHURCH CHRISTIAN? Acts 11:1-30

You will remember that Peter had been led by the Spirit to Caesarea to preach to Cornelius. The result was that Cornelius and his household had been saved and baptized. Peter had gone into Cornelius' home and had eaten with them and enjoyed sweet Christian fellowship with that group.

- Before Peter could get back to Jerusalem, word of his astonishing behavior in Caesarea spread among the Christian Jews like wild fire. Thus, the leaders of the church were waiting for Peter, ready to call him on the carpet for his unorthodox behavior at Cornelius' house. Instead of rejoicing that salvation had come to the Gentiles, the “circumcision party” in the Jewish church in Jerusalem rises up against him. They put Peter on trial and forced him to defend himself.
- They made this accusation, “You went in with those who are uncircumcised and are with them.” They were angry and were ready to throw Peter out of the Church.

This group had believed in Jesus, but believing that men are saved by simple faith, they believed that salvation came by faith, plus circumcision and other Jewish rites.

- You see, these viewed Christianity as an extension of Judaism. Thus, for a Gentile to become a Christian, it was deemed necessary for him to first be circumcised, placing himself under the Law of Moses. After that he was eligible to embrace Christ as his Messiah. At the time of the Cornelius affair there were no Christians in the Jerusalem church other than Jews and proselytes.
- This group made the mistake that men make today, men who want to add something to God's simple plan of salvation. But the Bible says, “By grace are we saved through faith (Ephesians 2:8).
- Again, it says, “Whosoever shall call upon the Name of the Lord shall be saved” (Romans 10:13). Again, it says, “He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life” (John 3:36). But so many people say, “That is not enough, we must add something.” So, they add baptism, the Lord's Supper, Church membership, and good works. Christ is able to save you without help from anything else on earth. You are to put all of your faith in Him and not in these outward things.

Peter answered this accusation in a sweet Christian spirit. He tried to show that every step he had taken had been ordered by the Lord – Acts 11:4-17.

Acts 11 is a turning point in the Book of Acts. We see three changes:

The death of Stephen is still producing results – Acts 11:19. The death of Stephen resulted in:

1. Philip going to Samaria to share the gospel and later to win the Ethiopian Eunuch to the Lord.
2. His death aided in the salvation of Saul (Acts 9).
3. Now his death resulted in the spread of the gospel to the Gentiles (Acts 11:19).

A church often prospers under persecution.

We see three changes:

1. There is a change in Persons Acts 11:25

The emphasis shifts from Peter to Paul. In Acts 12 and 15 there is one last glimpse of Peter, but from that point on, Paul is on center stage.

2. There is a change in Proclamation Acts 11:19-20

Luke moved from an emphasis on the Jews to an emphasis on the Gentiles.

3. There is a change in place Acts 11:26-27

The emphasis shifts from Jerusalem to Antioch. Except for Acts 15, the church at Antioch now holds center stage.

It was at Antioch that believers were first called "Christians." Acts 11:26. They did not call themselves Christians up to this point. They call themselves"

1. Disciples of the Lord – for they were His students, learners, followers.
2. Servants – they were bondslaves of Jesus.
3. Saints – they were "set apart" unto Christ.
4. Brethren – they were members of the Heavenly family.
5. Believers – they had deep faith in Christ.
6. People of the way. He is the Way, the Truth, and the Life.

The title "Christian" was given by the opposition as one of contempt and derision, but they took it and made it a worthy title.

- This is the first of three times that the word "Christian" is found in the New Testament. Acts 11:26; Acts 26:28; I Peter 4:16
- Why were they given the title "Christian?" Maybe it was because these believers reminded them of Christ. Did anybody ever think of Jesus by looking at your life? Are you reminding others of Jesus in your home life, in your business life, in your Church life?

When is a Church Christian? When it is:

I. A Converted Church Acts 11:19-21

Phoenicia, Cyprus, and Antioch were the places where the Christians went to escape the growing hostility in Jerusalem. They were "scattered abroad," says the Holy Spirit. Satan overreached himself. By scattering the burning coals of Christian witness, he made it possible for fresh fires of testimony to spring up elsewhere – to the Gentiles.

Notice:

A. The Conversation of the Disciples Acts 11:19

The "they" refers to the disciples who witnessed to the Gentiles. No names are given to these faithful witnesses. Though their names were not given, God knew who they were. Really, no recognition is necessary when you are doing what you are supposed to be doing.

It is a spiritual crime for a Christian to withhold the gospel. You will not be arrested for not witnessing for Christ, but you will give an account to God if you fail to do so.

B. The Cooperation with the Lord Acts 11:21

"And the hand of the Lord was with them." It is useless to try to do anything without the presence and power of the Lord.

- John 15:5 Jesus said, "Without me you can do nothing."
- The song writer said, "All is vain unless the Spirit of the Holy One comes down."
- Matthew 28:20 Jesus said, "And lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the earth." Because He is with

us, we have no excuse for not sharing the gospel.

C. The Commitment of the People Acts 11:21

“And turned unto the Lord.” They turned wholly FROM their old way and turned wholly TO the new way.

II. A Charming Church Acts 11:22-26

Look who the Church sent to minister in this new work to the Gentiles – Barnabas! Why Barnabas? Because of the kind of man he was.

A. The Description given to Barnabas Acts 11:24

1. His character – “He was a good man.”

We are not told that he was eloquent; or that he had great talent; or that he had great leaning – But, he was a godly, warmhearted, humble, kind and gentle man. Nothing can substitute for those qualities in a man's ministry.

2. His Christianity – He was “full of the Holy Spirit.”

He was a person who was Christlike in character, conduct, and conversation.

3. His Commitment – He was “full of faith.”

His confidence was in God. He did not depend upon his own strength.

B. The Directions given from Barnabas Acts 11:23

He exhorted them all (Here is “Mr. Encouragement” encouraging them all) that with purpose of heart they would cleave or continue or abide with the Lord. He wants them to keep their commitment level high through feeding daily on the Word of God.

When Barnabas arrived in Antioch, three things happened:

1. He saw Grace Acts 11:23

Can you see grace? Yes! He saw what grace had produced in their lives and knew that what he saw could come only from God. We can see the grace of God in a church through joyous attitudes, sweet dispositions, heartfelt singing, and steadfast faithfulness.

2. He Encouraged Growth Acts 11:26

Both Barnabas and Saul understood that the purpose of the Church was not only to register decisions, but to make disciples; not just evangelism, but also edification.

3. He Provided Guidance Acts 11:25-26

Here we see the bigness of Barnabas. He didn't have the ability of Paul and he was the first to admit it. These “baby Christians” at Antioch needed teaching. Barnabas realized his limitations. He realized that he had certain spiritual gifts, but he lacked others. So, he found a man who had the gift of teaching – Saul. Think of the encouragement it was to Saul, as well, in that he was trusted to use what God had given him. Barnabas could not do a certain job, but he was not jealous when someone else could. True spiritual workers rejoice in each other's success.

- Someone said that there is no telling how much could be accomplished if it didn't matter who got the credit.
- R.G. Lee said that Barnabas played second fiddle, but he played it so well that the kingdom of God made progress.

At first the two were referred to as Barnabas and Paul. Later on they were referred to as Paul and Barnabas. But this did not affect Barnabas, he was too big for jealousy. May God deliver us always from these little jealous fellows who spend their time griping because someone else can do a thing better than they can.

III. A Concerned Church Acts 11:27-30

Here we see the Antioch church responding to the needs of others.

- A Prophet named Agabus predicted through the Spirit that a famine was coming and it did come. The hearts of these Gentiles were deeply concerned for the Jews in Judea.
- Notice: Here was a Gentile church helping a Jewish church; a mission church helping a

mother church.

Why? The Jews call Gentiles dogs. They would not fellowship with them. But now the barriers were torn down. There are no longer any grudges. Now they are brothers.

What an amazing work of grace God will do in our lives if we will allow Him to!

GLORY UNTO GOD: IN DEATH AND DELIVERANCE Acts 12:1-24

In the same chapter we see God delivering one Apostle, yet he allowed James to be slain.

Why didn't God deliver James? He was a good man and a useful servant.

The same type of question is asked often today. Sometimes when death suddenly strikes, someone will say, "My loved one was good and useful; why did God take him and permit others to live who are worth nothing to the world?"

This is a question we will never be able to answer. We would have to be God to answer that question. But we do know this, God never makes a mistake. When He allows a sad thing to happen, it is all for the best. Some day we will understand the meaning of it all. We must leave the whole question in the loving hands of a loving Father, remembering that "all things work together for good to them that love God" (Romans 8:28).

Someone said that when we come to Acts 12, the church at Antioch was a church ON fire, and the church at Jerusalem was a church IN the fire.

Three things I want to point out to you from Acts 12:

I. The Death of an Apostle Acts 12:1-2

Before we get into these verses, let me point out that there are two men named James in Acts 12.

- James the Apostle was beheaded by Herod in Acts 12:1-2.
- The James in Acts 12:17 is James, the half-brother of Jesus. He, too, was put to death at a later date. History says that he was thrown from the pinnacle of the temple, but he was not dead when he hit the ground. The people finished their deed by stoning him to death.

In order to gain favor with the Jews, Herod sought to persecute the Christians and he directed his persecution against the main leaders of the Church.

- His first victim was James, the brother of John, the son of Zebedee.
- James was the first martyr from among the Apostles, and his brother, John, was the last Apostle to die.

James' death by the sword was the fulfillment of Matthew 10:10-23. Jesus asked James and John, "Are you able to drink of the cup that I shall drink of?" Their answer, "We are able."

Jesus actually drank the dregs from the cup of martyrdom, and John was exiled to the Isle of Patmos. They both proved that "they were willing" though they did not understand the meaning of the words of Jesus at the time they were spoken.

James was the first one of the Apostles to get to heaven. I can imagine that this reunion was filled with great happiness, and that James and Jesus set for hours side by side rejoicing together.

There is a question that always comes: "Why did God allow James to be put to death and Peter to be delivered?" I don't know the answer; and nor do you! One thing for sure, God got glory in the death of James and He got glory in the deliverance of Peter.

- Romans 9:14 "What shall we say then? Is there unrighteousness in God? God forbid."
- Genesis 18:25 "Shall not the Judge of all the world do right?"
- Isaiah 55:8-9 "For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways saith the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts higher than your thoughts."

It is not the length of your life that is important, but what you do with what God gives you.

You will notice that the Jerusalem church did not replace James as they replaced Judas (Acts 1:15-26). As long as the Gospel was going "to the Jew first," it was necessary to have the complement of twelve apostles to witness to and to represent the twelve tribes

of Israel. The stoning of Stephen officially ended that special witness to Israel, so the number of official witnesses was no longer important. The Apostolic age ended when the last Apostle died.

II. The Deliverance of an Apostle Acts 12:3-17

When the Jews heard that James was dead, they rejoiced greatly and praised Herod, who murdered James. Herod thought, "If they liked that I'll give them some more of the same and I'll become even more popular with them."

It's amazing what people will do to be popular. Even today we see people stifling their convictions, giving in to sin, and walking with the world in order to gain popularity.

You remember that Peter had gone back to Jerusalem after he had led Cornelius, a Gentile, to the Lord. Peter helped the church at Jerusalem to understand that God was saving Gentiles and that they should overcome their prejudices toward Gentiles.

- Herod arrested Peter, put him in prison, and waited for the time when he could put him to death. Herod knew that Peter was an important man, so he put sixteen soldiers to guard him. Four soldiers would serve three-hour shifts through the night. Two were chained to Peter and two outside the door.
- The words "after Easter" in the KJV should have been translated "after Passover." Knowing it was against Jewish Law to kill a man during Passover, Herod intended to wait until after Passover to execute Peter.

The turning point in the story comes in Acts 12:5: "Peter was kept in prison, BUT prayer was made...without ceasing...of the church...unto God...for him."

Prayer was made on Peter's behalf, and what a difference it would make! What would have happened had the believers prayed when James was in prison.

Just as soon as Peter was put in prison, the word reached the Christians and they called a prayer meeting in Mary's house. Mary was the mother of John Mark, a close personal friend of Peter, and a sister to Barnabas. John Mark would later write the Gospel of Mark and got much of his information from Peter.

Here we see two opposing forces: on the one hand we have Herod and all the power of the Roman government; on the other hand, we have this little band of praying people in Mary's house.

- Matthew 18:19-20 "Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there I am in the midst of them."
- Notice that God did not answer their prayers immediately. Days slipped by and Passover came near. The faith of these Christians was being tested, but they stood the test and kept on praying.

What was Peter doing while all this feverish activity was taking place? Death was staring him in the face. Was he worried? Was he afraid?

- He was sleeping! Peter knew that James had been put to death. He was told that he would be put to death the next day. And he was sleeping.
- Peter was a real sleepy head anyway (He would make a good Baptist). At the Mount of Transfiguration, he fell asleep. He fell asleep again in the Garden of Gethsemane. There he slept through the weakness of the flesh; here he slept through the strength of his faith.
- Peter could sleep because he knew two things: He knew he would live a long life (John 21:18). Secondly, God was watching over him so he had no need to worry (Psalm 121:1-4). (He must have thought, "If God is going to stay awake, I'm going to sleep").
- On the seal of the American Baptist Publisher's Society there is a picture of an ox standing between an altar and a plow. The words under the picture read: "Ready for either – service or Death."

Dr. Allen Redpath wrote: "When the Church is in trouble, keep your chins up and your knees down. When life beats you to your knees, you are in the right position to be helped by God!"

As Peter slept, he was chained between two soldiers with two others standing guard at the door of the prison. The angel of the Lord entered the prison with a great light. Note how the angel dealt with Peter:

- He smote Peter on the side to awaken him.
- He raised him up.
- The chains fell from his hands.
- He told Peter to clothe himself.
- He told Peter to put on his sandals.
- He told him to cast his coat around him.

- He told him to follow him.
- They passed the guards.
- The iron gate opened on its own accord (God had automatic doors long before man ever thought of them.)
- They went into the street.
- The angel departed.

And all the while Peter thought he was dreaming.

Peter went to the house where the Christians were praying. He knocked on the door and a slave girl named Rhoda came to the door. She was so glad and so excited when she heard Peter's voice that she forgot to open the door. She ran back to the group and shouted, "Peter is out of jail and is standing at the door!" Those praying said, "You are crazy. That can't be Peter! We're praying for his release!" "Lord, free Peter in Jesus' name. Oh, Lord, we look to you to free Peter!"

Peter found it easier to get out of prison than to get into this prayer meeting!

When Rhoda continued to stand on what she had heard, they went to the door and found Peter standing outside.

If God answered your prayers, would you be surprised?

III. The Destruction of an Archenemy Acts 12:18-23

Herod was so infuriated by Peter's escape that he left for the seacoast city of Caesarea after he put the four soldiers to death that were guarding Peter.

Herod was displeased with two cities, Tyre and Sidon for reasons we do not know; but it was bad news for them. These two cities were totally dependent upon Herod for food. They somehow persuaded Herod's chief of staff to get Herod to make a speech.

The people knew he was very sensitive to flattery. They knew if they buttered him up and complimented the king, he in turn might favor them. Therefore, they set a day for Herod to deliver an address. His throne was placed high above the crowd. Soon he came out in a robe of solid silver which glittered in the sun. The people, knowing his weakness for praise, greeted him with thunderous applause. Herod, blinded by his own conceit, gulped it all down. After the king made his speech, the people cried out, "It is the voice of a god."

Herod tried to receive glory unto himself and Acts 12:23 says that the angel of the Lord smote him and he "was eaten by worms" before he died. What a painful, agonizing, loathsome, offensive death. It seems that the worms worked from the inside to the outside of his body.

Notice Acts 12:24-25. The persecution of the Church only caused it to grow and prepare Paul for his first missionary journey.

PAUL'S FIRST MISSIONARY JOURNEY Acts 13:1-52

At the end of Acts 12 Barnabas and Saul, along with John Mark, returned from Jerusalem, where they had carried a "relief offering" to the Christians there. They returned to Antioch.

The third phase of our Lord's command was about to take place: Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and the uttermost parts of the world (Gentiles). Paul makes three missionary journeys.

Each of Paul's three missionary journeys had a different emphasis. There is a three-fold work in Paul's journeys which serves as a blueprint for all missionary activity:

Christianity is a missionary faith. Someone has wisely said, "We either Evangelize or we Fossilize!"

A. The work of Pioneer: He went to Evangelized

Unevangelized, untapped fields must be penetrated with the gospel. The field must be ploughed and planted. It is important to see that Paul sought to plant his pioneer churches in the cities and those churches could then evangelize the surrounding towns.

B. The work of Planner: The emphasis on Paul's second journey was an Expansion

Paul did not abandon the mission churches he planted in pioneer places. He went back and visited each one. He urged them to expand to reach out to surrounding areas.

He went back to strengthen the hands of his converts; to challenge them afresh; to leave them better taught; to share with them his own vision for a vast outreach in days to come.

C. The work of a Preacher: On his third journey he went to Encourage, to Exhort, and to Expand the Scriptures.

One of the ways he did this was to train men like Timothy, Titus and Luke to build saints up in the faith and to add to their knowledge of God's revealed truth.

In Acts 13 we see Paul begin his first missionary journey. He will complete his first journey at the end of Acts 14. It covers about a three-year period.

- These journeys had a mighty influence upon the world. Churches were planted in many places. The influence of Christ was felt by millions of people.
- These journeys were not pleasure trips for Paul. He found himself in prison often, and several times he was beaten with strips. He was almost stoned to death, he was hated and persecuted, he was shipwrecked, and at last his journey ended in his death.
- But he said, "None of these things move me" (Acts 20:24). Christ told him that he would be called to suffer many things, but he loved Christ so much and appreciated his salvation so much that he was glad to suffer all things for Christ sake.

I. The People of the Journey Acts 13:1-3

A. The Call From the Lord Acts 13:1-2

Five men are mentioned as "prophets and teachers."

- Prophets are those who are under the inspiration of the Spirit to Guide the church. They speak the heart of God through edification, exhortation, and comfort.
- Teachers are those who ground the church as they point out the ways and the mind of God revealed through the revealed Word of God.

Notice that the Church seems to have some organization at this point. Evidently Barnabas and Saul had done a good work during the year that they labored together at Antioch.

Notice too, that it was while these men were busy for the Lord, doing what God had equipped them to do, that the Spirit of the Lord spoke to them.

- God doesn't usually ask people who are doing nothing to do something for Him. He calls people who are doing something to do something.
- It's hard to steer a car that is not moving. God calls those who are busy doing what they know to do, and then He will give further instructions and directions.

1. Barnabas is first named. What a blessing he has already been to the Church and to Paul. He was known as the "Son of Consolation."

2. Simon (Simeon) was from present-day Nigeria. This is probably Simon of Cyrene, the one who carried the cross to Golgotha after Jesus sank beneath its weight (Luke 23:26).

3. Lucius of Cyrene. How did Lucius get saved? I suggest Simon the cross-bearer went back to Cyrene, talked to his buddy Lucius, and together they started walking with the Lord, eventually becoming significant figures in a ministry.

4. Manaen – was a foster brother of Herod Antipas, the Herod who cut off John the Baptist's head. Talk about the grace and sovereignty of God! Manaen grew up with Herod's vile, polluted family – yet the Lord rescued him and saved him for ministry.

5. Saul, who would become Paul.

These five men were fasting and praying in order to hear the Voice of the Lord and His

direction for the Church. Throughout Scripture, fasting was a discipline associated with a need to hear from God.

“The Holy Spirit said, ‘Separate TO ME Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I HAVE CALLED THEM.’ (Acts13:2)

I firmly believe that God calls men to preach. If I'm sure of anything in this world, I'm sure God called me to preach. I certainly had no such idea in my own mind. God, through the Holy Spirit, called me in an unmistakable way.

B. The Commissioning from the Church Acts 13:3

Here we have an ordination service. It was an official ceremony of the Church, setting aside two men to a specific work by prayer and the laying on of hands.

The laying on of hands was a symbolic act which said that the elders of the Church recognized that the Holy Spirit had indeed worked in the lives of Barnabas and Saul and had separated them unto Himself for the special task and ministry.

Just before I was ordained, I was told that a question would likely be asked at the ordination service, and I was also told the answer that was usually given. The question: “What are you going to do if we vote not to ordain you?” The answer: “If you vote not to ordain me today, I am going to go on preaching anyway.”

At a conference Dr. Adrian Rogers shared his ordination experience and said that he was asked that question and gave the usual answer. Dr. Rogers said, “I thought that was a good answer for many years, and now I realize it was not.” He said, “I realize now that if my home church would not have confirmed me, I should have asked what it was in my life that caused them to not confirm me and then worked to correct what had kept them from confirming me. I would need to do that before I ever began to preach.”

Do you realize the Church has a great responsibility when it comes to one of its own being called to the ministry? It is the role of the Church to confirm a man's calling. Churches are warned in Scripture to make sure a man is sovereignly called before they confirm him.

- I Timothy 5:22 “Do not lay hands upon anyone too hastily and thereby share responsibility for the sins of others; keep yourself free from sin.”

- Barnabas and Saul had proved themselves to the Church at Antioch. They had been there for a year and that time period had given the members an opportunity to observe their lives and to know their hearts. When the sovereign call of the Holy Spirit came to “set apart Barnabas and Saul,” the Church was ready to confirm them.

II. The Places of the Journey Acts 13:4-14

They journeyed the 16 miles from Antioch in Syria to the great seaport of Seleucia.

From Seleucia they sailed to the Island of Cyprus, the home of Barnabas.

There they preached in the synagogue at Salamis.

From Salamis they traveled 90 miles to Paphos, the capital of Cyprus.

Here they sailed to Perga in Pamphylia in Asia minor.

From Perga they went to Antioch in Pisidia.

From here they traveled to Iconium, then Lystra, and then to Derbe.

After this they re-traced their steps back to the church in Antioch.

(This first journey covered a period of about 3 years.)

Paul and Barnabas established a pattern they would follow the rest of their first journey. They went first to the synagogue – to those who had some knowledge of biblical things. When the Jews would reject them, they would turn to the Gentiles, who accepted the message.

III. The Problem on the Journey Acts13:6-12

This sorcerer is called Bar-Jesus in Acts 13:6 and Elymas in Acts 13:8. They are one and the same person, Elymas being his Greek name and Bar-Jesus his Jewish name.

The name “Elymas” means “the enlightened one.” His name in Hebrew was “Bar-Jesus,” which means “the son of Jesus.” In the Hebrew culture to call yourself a son of someone was to designate yourself as his follower.

Thus, when this man called himself Bar-Jesus he was claiming that he was a follower of Jesus, but what he taught was absolutely contrary to what Jesus taught. He was a Jew but evidently, he had rejected the Bible, which forbids any kind of sorcery. Obviously, he had the governor under his spell, and he instantly recognized the threat of the gospel to his own power and influence.

At Paphos Paul sought to win the governor, Sergius Paulus, to Christ and found him greatly interested. When this sorcerer saw that the governor was interested in Christianity, he did everything to divert him from a decision.

- Paul blazed out at him, and said, “You child of the devil, the Lord will strike you blind.” No doubt Paul was thinking of the way the Lord struck him with blindness when he opposed the Gospel. Immediately his sight was gone and someone had to lead him by the hand.
- Paul was not a wimpy Christian, but his heart was always for restoration – even for a man like Elymas. I suggest that although Paul was not mincing words with Elymas, his prayer was not, “sic him, Lord.” It was “save him.”
- Notice Acts 13:12. Notice that Luke didn’t say Sergius Paulus was astonished at the miracle that took place. Luke said he was astonished at the doctrine of the Lord. “You mean God loves me?” Sergius Paulus must have wondered in amazement, “You mean Jesus became a man and died in my place? You mean I can be forgiven and saved – made right and redeemed?”

A change takes place in Acts 13:9. Up to this point it has been Barnabas and Saul. From now on it will be Paul and Barnabas.

Some think that Paul took his name Paul from Sergius Paulus, his first Gentile convert. The name Paul would be better received among Gentiles.

IV. The Preaching on the Journey Acts 13:13-52

Here is Paul's first recorded sermon – remarkable in its similarity to Stephen's sermon in Acts 7.

We are told in Acts 13:13 that John Mark departed from Paul and Barnabas and returned to Jerusalem for some reason. John Mark went along to relieve Barnabas and Paul of tasks and details that would have interfered with their important ministry of the Word. No doubt he was invited to join the missionary party by his Uncle Barnabas. Nothing is mentioned about him being sent by the Holy Spirit.

Paul and Barnabas are now alone and they went to Antioch in Pisidia, not to be confused with Antioch in Syria, the location of the first Gentile church. This Antioch was located in the mountains of Asia Minor (modern Turkey).

On the Sabbath day they went to the synagogue and sat down in the congregation. There are three parts to a Jewish service. The ruler reads a portion from the Law, then a portion from the Prophets, then comes the midrash, or sermon. If any distinguished visitor was present, the ruler would ask him to give the sermon. On this day the ruler turned to Paul and Barnabas, saying, “If you have anything to say, say on.” Paul went to the front and preached his first recorded sermon. He interpreted the Scriptures and showed to all that it led up to Jesus Christ.

What kind of preacher was Paul? We find the answer in 2 Corinthians 10:10 – “His letters are powerful; but his bodily presence is weak, and his speech is contemptible (ineffective, monotone, boring). They said that he was a good writer, but a poor preacher. But when he finished that first sermon, the Gentiles crowded around him, and said, “We want you to preach to us again next Sunday.” That’s music to a preacher’s ears!

All during the week the Gentiles talked about Paul's sermon. There was something new and wonderful about it, especially to the Gentiles. They learned that they could become Christians without becoming Jews and submitting to circumcision and other Jewish rites. The next Sunday the house would not hold the people.

- When the Jews saw the Gentiles pouring in to hear the new Gospel, they became filled with prejudice and jealousy. They began to fight Paul and the Gospel he preached.
- The Jews stirred up the women of prominence against Paul and Barnabas and had them driven out of town. Paul and Barnabas did a strange thing, but something Jesus told His disciples to do when the message was rejected (See Acts 13:51).
- They left, but the disciples who were left behind were filled with joy and the Holy Spirit. The preachers were gone, but the believers rejoiced in the midst of their enemies, because they knew Christ had washed their sins away.

In the early days of America our land was greatly blessed by the traveling preachers. The little settlements of that day were widely separated and were not large enough to maintain churches or support pastors. These “saddle-bag” preachers came riding into these small settlements from time to time. They would stay awhile in each place, preaching the Gospel, winning the lost, and ministering to the people. They left a trail of blessing wherever they went.

We can think of Paul and Barnabas as having done the same kind of work.

In Acts 13-14 Paul and Barnabas were commissioned by the Holy Spirit to go into Gentile cities, present the Gospel, and establish churches. John Mark also goes with them. This is known as Paul's first missionary journey.

- In Acts 13 when they reach Paphos, they are confronted with a Jewish false prophet named Bar-Jesus. Paul tells him he is “full of all deceit and fraud” and a “son of the devil.” At the word of Paul, he becomes blind.
- In Acts 13:13 John Mark departs from Paul and Barnabas and returns to Jerusalem. The two go to Antioch in Pisidia and we have Paul's first recorded sermon to the Gentiles.
- As the Word of God begins to spread to the Gentiles, the Jews began to stir up trouble for the men of God, so they “shake off the dust from their feet against them.” They left there and came to Iconium.

When we come to Acts 14, they are still on their First Missionary Journey. They continue to advance the Gospel. They minister in three different cities – Iconium, Lystra, and Derbe.

Remember that Paul and Barnabas had just been driven out of Antioch in Pisidia. But instead of being discouraged, they simply pushed deeper into Gentile territory. They travel some 80 miles to Iconium.

Here in Acts 14 we find:

I. The Division at Iconium Acts 14:1-7

Acts 14:1 says that both Paul and Barnabas “SO SPOKE” in the Jewish synagogue that a great multitude of both Jews and Gentiles believed.

The words “so spoke” means “uniquely empowered by the Holy Spirit that the way they spoke brought forth much fruit.”

The result was that many Jews and Gentiles believed, but the unbelieving Jews poisoned the minds of the people against Paul and Barnabas.

- They sought to sabotage the ministry of Paul and Barnabas by speaking evil against them. Gossiping about them, and starting rumors concerning them.
- The longer they stayed in Iconium, the more intense the opposition became. The city was divided – half siding with the Jews in opposition and half with Paul and Barnabas. A plot was hatched to stone the two Apostles; and when they learned of it, they fled Iconium and went to Lystra and Derbe where they continued preaching the Gospel.
- The good work began in Iconium was short-circuited by jealousy and unbelief. Leaving Iconium was not cowardice on their part, but prudence. They wouldn't be able to minister anywhere if they were badly injured or killed in a stoning. So, they took the path of safety and left before the serious trouble started.

II. The Dispute at Lystra Acts 14:8-18

As Paul preached one day in Lystra, he saw a crippled man in the congregation who was evidently well known throughout the city. The Holy Spirit reiterates his condition three times: He was impotent in his feet; he had been a cripple from his birth; he had never walked. Thus, Luke makes it clear that this man was beyond human aid.

- While Paul preached his eyes fell from time to time on this lame man. There was an eagerness about him that caught Paul's attention. Paul had the spirit of discernment. This man was drinking in every Word. He believed what he was hearing. Paul's heart went out to him. Without hesitation and in a loud voice, Paul commanded: “Stand upright on your feet.” Immediately the lame man made the effort to obey. He had faith to try and the moment he began to obey, the power to obey was given.
- The man not only stood, but leaped and walked. The pagans in the city immediately declared that Paul and Barnabas were the gods Jupiter (Hermes) and Mercurius (Zeus). Instead of being persecuted, they were in danger of being worshiped.

There was a legend in Lystra that Zeus and Hermes had visited the town once before and had been ignored by everyone except one poor couple who took them in and were thus rewarded by the gods. All who had shown no hospitality were destroyed.

With that legend in mind, the inhabitants of Lystra were not going to fail to show honor and hospitality to Zeus and Hermes on this second visit. Thus, their adoration and worship in hopes of being rewarded and not judges.

Paul and Barnabas began to run into the crowd crying, "Stop! Don't do that!" Perhaps they remembered what happened to Herod when he allowed himself to be worshiped. (Acts 12:21-23).

- They turned the incident into an opportunity to point the Lystrans "to the living God, who made heaven and earth" (Acts 14:15-18).
- When Paul went to the Jew, he started with the Old Testament Scriptures, reminding them of their past history. With the Gentiles Paul points them to God the Creator.

No doubt the people were embarrassed, because they had been made to look foolish. Paul had insulted their gods, scorned their religion, and made a mockery of their worship. Resentment set in, which was a ready-made situation for the unbelieving Jews from Antioch and Iconium. They quickly convinced the people that Paul was an imposter, a troublemaker, a despiser of other men's religion and was not fit to live.

III. The Danger to the Apostles Acts 14:19-20

Notice the fickleness of those people. One moment they want to offer sacrifices to Paul and Barnabas and the next they are ready to stone them to death. One minute the people of Lystra cried, "They're gods!" The next, "Kill them!"

We are not told how Barnabas escaped being stoned. This is the only stoning Paul ever experienced as far as we know.

Some believe that Paul was dead, but I don't think so. God still had work for him to do. I believe that God keeps a man going until he finishes the work, He sends him to do.

Acts 14:20 – These disciples were risking their lives by encircling Paul's body. What were they doing? Praying? They were risking their lives by standing around Paul.

One outstanding thing happened at Lystra. Paul met a grandmother named Lois, a mother named Eunice, and a boy named Timothy. Later on, this boy Timothy is going to become a preacher. He will be one of the brightest stars in Paul's crown, and Paul will look upon him as his own son. If nobody else had been converted in Lystra except Timothy, Eunice, and Lois, it would have been worth all the suffering that came out of the trip. I'm sure that Paul felt that way.

IV. The Delight of the Journey Acts 14:21-28

A. The Recommendations Acts 14:21-26

It was time for them to close the tour and go back to the mother church. It took real courage to return to each of the cities. They had been run out of the first two places, and Paul had been stoned almost to death in the last one. But they had work to do in these places and they knew God would be with them.

1. They confirmed the converts. That is, they were strengthened by the Apostles and exhorted to be faithful. We need to do more of that today. We ought to do everything in our power to encourage and enlist our new converts.

2. They ordained elders in these new churches. These new churches needed elders and pastors.

B. The Report Acts 14:27-28

They told the wonderful story of the way God had opened doors among the Gentiles. I'm sure they told more about the victories than the hardships.

They were standing on home soil. The first journey has been completed. They had covered some 1,400 miles over a period of about three years.

What an example they left for us to follow today.

THE MAN WHO WANTED TO QUIT – AND DID

Acts 13:13; 15:36-38

You may have seen the poster in Christian bookstores which has two different pictures on it. On one half there is a football player in full uniform, but he was sitting on the bench in a posture of dejection and defeat. Underneath the player were two words, "I quit." On the other half of the poster, there is a picture of a skull-shaped hill with a cross outlined on the top. The caption there reads, "I didn't."

In life we sometimes face the temptation to quit. There are many who yield to that temptation. John Mark was one of these.

I. The Sad Report Acts 13:13

Luke reported that Mark defected in service when the team on the first missionary journey arrived in the Roman Province of Pamphylia. Luke stated, "and John left them and returned to Jerusalem."

There are many times when I wish the biblical writers had given more information than they did. This is certainly one of those times.

- Obviously, this is not something that happened all of a sudden. There must have been something that caused John Mark to leave as he did.
- I can't help but believe that Barnabas, and probably Paul, tried to get young Mark to reconsider his decision. But Luke did not tell us anything about that. All he said was that John left them and returned to Jerusalem.

John Mark was not the first man to give up and by no means was he the last. God's Word introduces us to many who did the same thing.

One thing that the membership roll of every church has in common is that they all contain names of people who quit.

Even though John Mark later redeemed himself, the report of his quitting remains a blemish on his record. The same is true of those who quit the local church.

But the story of John Mark doesn't end here.

- Barnabas believed in John Mark and gave him a second chance by taking Mark with him on a mission trip.
- Even Paul, who was so set against Mark because he left the team, said in 2 Timothy 4:11, "Get Mark and bring him with you, for he is useful to me for ministry." Paul realized that Mark was a better man than he was on that day he quit the team.
- Mark was RECLAIMED for service, for he wrote the Gospel of Mark – yet, this blemish remains on his record.

The Lord is the God who forgives the past, but it is near impossible to live down the past. That's why we need to so live our lives that our lives will be a credit and not a DISCREDIT!

II. The Suggested Reasons

Luke did not tell us why Mark quit and it may have been an act of kindness that he didn't do so. There are several possibilities:

A. Privations

Mark was from a wealthy family. His mother, Mary, lived in Jerusalem, and when he returned to Jerusalem, he probably went back to his mother's home.

We know Mary was wealthy because we are told in Acts 12:12 that she had a house sufficiently large enough for the Jerusalem church to use as a meeting place. A large house in those days automatically meant wealth. Mary also had servants. In that day, only the wealthy had servants.

John Mark probably never went without anything he needed or wanted.

That was not the kind of life a missionary lived. They often didn't know where they would sleep each night. They didn't have the best food to eat. They didn't know if they would be welcome when they reached their destinations.

B. Personalities

When the first missionary journey began, the order of leadership was Barnabas and Saul (Acts 12:25; 13:2). But in Acts 13:13 there is a change in leadership. Now it is "Paul and his party." Paul came to the forefront because spiritual gifts, and it may be that John Mark, who was Barnabas' nephew, didn't like that at all and expressed his dissatisfaction by quitting the team.

In observing people who quit or leave a local church, I find that, more times than not, there is a personality problem. Someone

doesn't like a Sunday School teacher, a Pastor, a Music Minister, or some staff member; so, someone quits or leaves.

If a person's loyalty to Christ or the local church is based on personalities, there is not loyalty.

If Mark quit because of personalities, then he may have quit out of spite. He may have thought, "If that's the way it's going to be, then I'm through. I'll show them; I'll quit." Their quitting shows their disapproval and they secretly hope it will reflect negatively on the person they dislike.

It's always a tragedy when one quits, but the greatest of all tragedies is in the life of a person who quits out of spite. There's an English motion picture entitled, "The Loneliness of the Long-Distance Runner."

It's about a young man who's a student in school. He has ability on the track. He is motivated to excel as a track star by the headmaster of the school who's also the coach.

This headmaster-coach tutors and trains this young boy and he is on his way to becoming an outstanding track star.

There is a big track event which would capture Nationwide fame for the young man. On that day the headmaster-coach does something to betray the friendship of the boy. The youth goes ahead and runs the race. He leaves the starting line and goes out with a burst of speed that puts him well ahead on the field. He's on the way to being the winner of this great track meet which will make him famous across England.

Everyone else is second to him. He races toward the finish line, and then suddenly he stops just a few seconds from the finish line. He folds his arms and stands there. The other runners pass by. The youth loses. He turns and looks at the headmaster-coach, and with glaring eyes and a note of anger he says, "Got even with you."

The person who quits out of spite loses far more than anybody else; far more than the person he's spiting.

Look what they lose: Fellowship with the Body of Faith.

Their Testimony before Others.

The Favor of God's Pleasure.

Do you think God ever says, "Well done, good and faithful servant" to anyone who quits? There may be times when we need to express our disfavor or displeasure over something, but to quit is to lose.

C. Procedures

Mark was a Jew and was raised in Judaism. He was taught that the Gospel was for the Jews; not the Gentiles.

Later he realized that the Gospel was for ALL people, for his Gospel was written for the Gentiles.

We cannot control what happens to us. However, we alone control how we respond to what happens to us.

III. The Serious Repercussions

When Mark quit:

A. He weakened the Team Effort

As far as we know, Mark never did any preaching on the journeys, because he was an assistant. But he had a job to do. Who did his job? Paul and Barnabas had to take up HIS task.

One problem I have never found a church to have is a surplus of workers. There always seems to be too many jobs and too few workers.

The task you are asked to do may seem unimportant, insignificant or unnoticed, but if you quit, it will be noticed.

B. He Demoralized the Team Spirit

Paul and Barnabas trusted and depended on Mark, and he let them down, to say nothing of letting the Lord down. The morale of workers is important and that morale is affected by the actions of others.

C. He Quit before the Best Experiences Came to Pass

The record of the first missionary journey is recorded in 75 verses. Mark stayed through 10 verses. He missed the exciting, evangelistic experiences that Paul and Barnabas experienced.

But – now, here is the question:

Should a man who is, or was, a defector be given another chance? Remember when you failed? You wanted and needed another chance.

Mark Twain said, "We are all like the moon. We all have a dark side."

Look at those who got a second chance: Moses, Rahab, Jonah.

And what about Peter? Disciples don't curse. And if they do, God wouldn't use them again!

Beginning Anew

He came to my desk with a quivering lip; the lesson was done.

Have you a new sheet for me, dear teacher, I've spoiled this one.

I took his leaf, all soiled and blotted, and gave him a new one all unspotted and new,

And into his tired heart I cried, "Do better, now, my child."

I went to the throne with trembling heart, the day was done.

Have you a new day for me, dear master, I've spoiled this one.

He took my day, all spoiled and blotted, and gave me a new one all unspotted.

And into my tired heart, He sighed, Do better now, My child.

Note Acts 15:36-38 I would like to say they worked through their conflict, but they didn't. They parted in anger and unresolved conflict. Both lost and so do we when we don't work through problems. Paul may have won an argument, but he hurt a friend.

Some advice:

1. When in disagreement, work hard to see both sides of the issue.
2. Attack issues; not people or individuals.
3. When both sides have good support, seek a wise compromise. Give a little. Be flexible.
4. If conflict persists, try to work through it. Don't run.

The poster said on one side, "I quit!" The other side, "I didn't."

THE JERUSALEM COUNCIL

Acts 15:1-35

Sometimes we think: "Wouldn't it have been wonderful to have lived back in the New Testament days of the early Church, where everyone loved one another and when there were no problems and no doctrinal difference?"

It may surprise you to know that the early Church was not perfect. There were problems. Folks didn't always agree.

Acts 15 is one of the most important chapters in the New Testament. It records the first unofficial Council of the Church. This Council was important because it dealt with the issue of salvation.

What does a person have to do to be saved?

Are Jews and Gentiles saved the same way? Did Gentiles have to submit to Jewish rituals in order to be saved? Did Gentiles have to submit to the traditions of Judaism in order to be saved? Did Gentiles have to be circumcised according to the Law of Moses in order to be saved?

Keep in mind that during the early years of the Christian Church, its members were converted Jews only. Not until the dispersion from Jerusalem following the martyrdom of Stephen was the Gospel preached to the Gentiles.

A group known as Judaizers wanted to preserve the traditions of Moses. They were afraid that if Gentiles were admitted to the Church without the rite of circumcision, the Church would lose its Jewish background completely.

In Acts 15, a group of Judaizers took it upon themselves to visit Antioch, implying they had been sent by the Church at Jerusalem (Acts 15:4). They had learned about the growth of the Gentile Church at Antioch and the great success of Paul's missionary program.

Upon arriving in Antioch, they began denouncing the teaching of Paul concerning free grace for the Gentiles. They insisted that no

one could be saved apart from being circumcised as a fleshly sign of submission to the Law of Moses. Thus, in order for a Gentile to become a Christian, he must first become a Jew.

Here is where the churches divide today. Some teach that a man is saved the minute he repents of his sins and puts his trust in Christ. "As many as received Him, to them gave He power to become the sons of God" (John 1:12).

- Others teach that you must add baptism or the Lord's Supper or church membership or good works, or something else in order to be saved.
- Throughout Church history, as well as in our day, man has come up with add-ons to the Gospel of grace. Human nature seems to want to create things we have to do in order to get to heaven: dress codes, behavioral standards, spiritual practices or theological doctrines.

The Bible gives the clear-cut answer to how a person is truly saved.

I. A Sharp Dissension Acts 15:1-2

The question of Acts 15 is, "How is a person really saved? Is the grace of God sufficient in salvation, or must a person do something in order to be saved or to keep one saved?"

Those who want to add-on to the gospel of grace admit that you must trust Christ to be saved, but they say that Christ Alone is not enough, you must add something else.

I tell you that Christ has the power to save men without help from anything else on earth. The worst enemy of Christianity is the man who makes salvation dependent upon external rites. Salvation is an inner thing – all the outward ceremonies and rites are powerless to save. The heart is the thing which must be changed.

Notice Acts 15:10. This passage deals with legalism – that is, salvation by grace PLUS something else. The word "yoke" means an oppressive burden. Legalism puts a yoke, a bondage on a person and there is a loss of freedom in Christ because of fear that the grace of God alone is not sufficient for salvation.

Paul is saying, "If we Jews cannot keep all the Jewish ceremonies and rites, and we are Jews who grew up with the Law, how can we expect Gentiles to do what we could not do?"

What can wash away my sin? Nothing but the blood of Jesus;
What can make me whole again? Nothing but the blood of Jesus.
Oh, precious is the flow That makes me white as snow;
No other fount I know, Nothing but the blood of Jesus.

II. A Sensible Decision Acts 15:2b-3

The Gentile church at Antioch decided to send Paul and Barnabas to Jerusalem to settle the matter.

- Luke tells us that "certain others" were sent with them. According to Galatians 2:1-5, 11-13, Peter was at Antioch when the Judaizers arrived. These Judaizers would not eat with the Gentiles, so Peter left the Gentile fellowship and went over to the Judaizers' side. Thus, Paul rebukes Peter publicly for he knew better, but his actions confirmed the claim of the Judaizers. Evidently, Peter had returned to Jerusalem before Paul's party departed Antioch to visit the Apostles and the Jerusalem church.
- Galatians 2 also tells us that Titus, a full-blooded Gentile, accompanied Paul and Barnabas to Jerusalem. He was taken as living proof that one could be saved by faith alone for, he had never been circumcised (Galatians 2:3), and yet, he was an approved disciple of Christ.

III. A Spiritual Discussion

Note Acts 15:4-6. When these men arrived in Jerusalem, they were graciously received by the church. The church knew of the good work they had done and felt honored to have them present. In Jerusalem there seems to have been three different meetings:

A. The Defense of Peter Acts 15:7-11

Peter gave the first of three speeches at the Council that amounted to one of the strongest defenses of salvation by grace through faith alone. Peter began his defense by reviewing how God saved Gentiles in the early days of the Church without a requirement of circumcision, law keeping or ritual – referring to the salvation of Cornelius and his household (Acts 10:44-48; Acts 11:17-18). If God

didn't require any additional qualifications for salvation, neither should the legalist.

Peter reminds the Apostles that God gave Cornelius and his household the Holy Spirit, which proved the genuineness of their salvation – and all without meeting the legalistic requirements.

Then Peter made a key point: We were saved by faith in Christ alone because of our inability to keep the Law of Moses. So why would we want to reinstate Law-keeping as a condition of salvation which the Jews have already proven could not be done. Why ask the Gentiles to do something that we ourselves were unable to do?

There are churches today that include add-ons to be members of their church.

They even confront you with fear and threats if one does not follow their mandates.

Some say one cannot go to heaven unless they become a member of their group.

I have in my files, a card from the Church of Christ that many of them give to their members. Let me share it with you:

I. THE ONLY CHURCH: There has been much misunderstanding about the "Only True Church," because of various denominations. The average Layman could be deceived. Be it clearly understood that the "Church of Christ" is the only true Church, and any person who is not a member of it is destined for Hell.

II. THE ONLY BAPTISM: Contrary to the popular doctrine of "Salvation by Grace," it should be clearly understood that Baptism administered by the Church of Christ is essential for Salvation. If a person is not baptized by the authority of our Church, they will be definitely bound for Hell.

III. THE ONLY MUSIC: Most churches today have instruments to "aid" in the worship of music. The only scriptural plan for music in the church is that of "singing". Any instrument used in the church service is blaspheming against God and gross sin.

IV. THE ONLY FELLOWSHIP: Members of the Church of Christ are admonished to have "true fellowship" with their brothers or sisters in the Church of Christ. This should be reflected by our business dealings, that we should always attempt to help other members of "The Church of Christ" when possible rather than people outside the Church of Christ in our business involvements.

V. THE ONLY DOCTRINE: Any doctrine preached by the "Church of Christ" is the only genuine and true doctrine. When we preach that a person can be saved and lost, it is to be accepted by the members of the Church of Christ, that all members recognize that there are many "false doctrines" that have become popular but those which we endorse are the only true and honest doctrines.

VI. Now in reading this I realize that there are always those who say, "Preacher, it is unchristian to down other folk's religion," But it is the duty of the pastor to expose error.

a. Jude 3-4

b. Philipians 1:17 "I am set for the defense of the gospel."

VII. The pastor should defend the truth in the right spirit so that folks won't be led astray.

VIII. When Jesus said from the cross, "It is finished," He used the Aorist Tense in the Greek.

The meaning in the Greek is this: It is done!

It cannot be undone!

It cannot be redone!

God did the redemptive work and man can add nothing to it!

B. The Declaration of Paul and Barnabas Acts 15:12

They recounted the work of God on their just completed First Missionary Journey among Gentiles.

C. The Decree of James Acts 15:13-21

The "James" spoken of here is the half-brother of the Lord Jesus. He was the Pastor of the Jerusalem church and therefore he acted as presiding officer.

James quotes from the Prophet Amos (Acts 9:11-12) which has its ultimate fulfillment in the millennial reign of Christ, but what was happening through Peter, Paul, and Barnabas was certainly a foreshadowing of the fact that Gentiles are part of God's plan.

IV. A Solemn Decision Acts 15:19-21

James brings the meeting to an end in giving his “sentence” – Gentiles are saved through faith in Christ PLUS NOTHING!

James adds these words in Acts 15:20 to insure unity and purity among Jew and Gentile. James proposed that the Gentiles abstain from four pagan, idolatrous practices that were violations of the Law of Moses so as not to offend Jews.

1. There was a Spiritual Issue

This refers to meat offered to pagan gods and then sold in the temple butcher shops. Because idolatry was so repulsive to Jews and forbidden by God, Gentiles should avoid offending their Jewish brethren and make every effort not to create conflict by eating meat that had been sacrificed to idols. This was about getting along in the body of Christ.

2. There was a Moral Issue

Sexual sins and orgies associated with the worship of pagan gods were prevalent among the Gentiles. Abstain from fornication because liberty in Christ is not a license to sin.

3. There was a Ritual Issue.

Gentiles were to abstain from eating strangle, rather than butchered animals. It was considered a delicacy among pagans to strangle an animal and cook the meat without draining the blood. This was prohibited under Jewish Law. So, the Gentiles were being asked not to create an offense among their Jewish brethren by continuing this practice. Life is in the blood.

These prohibitions were not to put Gentiles under the Jewish Law, but to promote fellowship and harmony as Jew and Gentile came together in one spiritual body.

There is a curse placed on any who does not preach the gospel of Grace Alone! Galatians 1:6-9.

V. A Special Delegation Acts 15:22-35

The Council put their decision and recommendations into a letter to be taken back to the church at Antioch (Acts 15:23-29).

It was a wise move to send two of their leading believers back with Paul and Barnabas to give the result of the Council. How the Gentiles must have rejoiced that salvation is in Jesus – PLUS NOTHING!

The letter accomplished two things: It solidified the doctrine of Salvation by Grace through faith alone (Ephesians 2:8-9), and it showed the importance of promoting harmony and fellowship among those in the body of Christ.

The result of the letter: Gratitude and Growth!

GOD LEADS US ALONG

Acts 15:36-16:10

After the Jerusalem Council, Paul and Barnabas returned to Antioch and read aloud to the Gentile believers the verdict of the Council – that man is saved by grace through faith in Jesus Christ, plus nothing. The Gentiles rejoiced at the reading of the letter.

After many days in Antioch, Paul suggested to Barnabas that they go and visit the brethren in every city where they had preached the Word on their first missionary journey.

This marks the beginning of the Second Missionary Journey. The events of this journey are recorded in Acts 15:36-18:22.

Notice the reasons for the Second Missionary Journey:

1. Acts 15:36 “...and see how they are doing.” In addition to proclaiming the Gospel, Paul also recognized his responsibility to mature the new believer in their faith (Matthew 28:19-20). So, he planned his second missionary journey to retrace his first one.

2. Acts 16:5

- “And so the churches were strengthened in the faith...” The word for established (KJV) or strengthen (NKJ) is a medical term. It is the same Greek word used in Acts 3:7, 16 concerning the lame man that Peter healed at the Beautiful Gate and we are told that “his feet and ankle bones received strength.” Paul's ministry, then, was to

“make the churches strong in faith.”

- “And increased in number daily.” Paul wanted to Evangelize the sinner, Edify the saints, Encourage the saints, and Enlarge the church.

It is important that we make sure that God is leading us in all that we do. If He is, then we have nothing to fear, even though the way may be tough.

God has given His children two important promises:

1. He will Never Leave us

- Joshua 1:5 “I will be with thee: I will not fail thee, nor forsake thee.”

- Hebrews 13:5 “for He hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee.”

- Exodus 33:12-15 “Then Moses said to the Lord, ‘See, you say to me, Bring up this people. But you have not let me know whom you will send with me. Yet you have said, I know you by name, and you have also found grace in my sight. Now therefore, I pray, if I have found grace in your sight, show me now your ways, that I may know you and that I may find grace in your sight. And consider that this nation is your people.’ And He said, ‘My Presence will go with you and I will give you rest.’ Then he said to Him, ‘If your Presence does not go with us, do not bring us up from here.’”

2. He will Always Guide us

- Exodus 13:21-22 “and the Lord went before them by day in a pillar of a cloud, to lead the way; and by night in a pillar of fire, to give them light; to go by night and day; He took not away the pillar of the cloud by day, nor the pillar of fire by night, from before the people.”

- While Jesus was on earth, He gave personal guidance to His disciple, now He has given us His spirit to guide us.

- John 16:13 “Howbeit, when He, the Spirit of Truth, is come, He will guide you into all truth.”

“He leadeth me! O blessed tho’t! O words with heav’nly comfort fraught!
What’er I do, where’er I be, still ’tis God’s hand that leadeth me!”

I. God Leads us in Difficulty Acts 15:36-41

I wish these verses did not have to be put in the Bible, but they did. The Bible doesn’t just reveal the good done by the saints, but it also reveals the wrong done by the saints.

Here were two men who had just helped bring unity to the Church, and yet, they could not settle their own disagreements. These two great men of God broke fellowship, for a time, NOT because of doctrinal differences, but because of a personality conflict.

It is interesting that between verses 35 and 36 of Acts 15 is where Galatians 2:11-14 fits in.

• Galatians 2:11 “But when Peter was come to Antioch, I withstood him to the face, because he was to blame.”

Now, here in Acts 15:39, Paul opposed Barnabas.

- Psalm 133:1 “Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity.”

- Proverbs 15:1 “A soft answer turns away wrath; but grievous words stir up anger.”

Brothers may Disagree, but they are not to be Disagreeable. Too often brethren are inflexible. We can be flexible without compromising.

Notice Acts 15:37 “determined”

Acts 15:39 “contention”

Both men were wrong in their attitudes, for both words carry the idea of stubbornness, self-will, of doing things their own way.

There is going to be fireworks. The word "contention" (Acts 15:39) means to rip or to tear. It implies an angry dispute. Tempers flared; words were exchanged; there was no reconciling the matter. A parting of the ways was the result.

They were both good men! Paul was looking at the WORK; Barnabas was looking at the WORKER!

Paul never had a better friend than Barnabas. He stood up for Paul in Jerusalem when no one believed in him (Acts 9:27). He called Paul to the work at Antioch (Acts 11:25) and worked by his side for a year.

They worked, worshiped, wept, and witnessed together on the first missionary journey.

All of us as God's servants are imperfect. God has always had to work through imperfect people like you and me to get His work done. If God had to depend on perfect people to accomplish His work, He could never get anything done.

There are three basic causes for conflict in the church:

1. Personality: Who's in charge?
2. Policy: How are things to be done?
3. Pride: Who gets the credit?

Well, who was right and who was wrong? Both!!

A. Paul was right I his HEAD

- Paul had a perfect right to say, "We don't need someone who is going to quit and go back on his commitment." Paul remembered only Mark's back as he walked away from his place of service.
- Paul could have quoted the Words of Jesus: "No man, having put his hand to the plow, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God" (Luke 9:62).
- We must count the cost! Men like Paul who are men of great ability and stamina often find it difficult to be patient with lesser spirits.

B. Barnabas was right in his HEART

Barnabas, doubtless, saw in young Mark, repentance, a potential to develop, and the need for a second chance.

He knew Mark was gifted. Sure, he had failed; but who hasn't? Who of us does not need a second chance? Who of us doesn't need a forgiving spirit exercised toward us, and the opportunity to try again?

This account should strike terror in the hearts of all godly servants. If two godly men of Paul's and Barnabas' caliber; two men whose partnership in Christian service was so obviously brought about by the Lord; two men who had weathered so many storms together; if these two men were divided by such sharp contention, where does that leave the rest of us?

We must keep a sharp look-out for Satan's attacks!

It is quite evident that the Spirit of God overruled. Though Paul had his way here, Barnabas had his in the end.

John Mark did prove himself worthy of Paul's fellowship. In Philemon 2 Paul calls Mark his fellow-laborer. In Colossians 4:10 Paul says, "Receive Mark when he comes to you." In 2 Timothy 4:11 Paul says, "Bring Mark with you, for he is profitable to me for the ministry."

John Wesley and George Whitfield worked together for God for several years, but there were theological differences. Wesley was Armenian and Whitfield was Calvinist, which drove them apart and their ministries separated.

When someone asked Wesley if he expected to see Whitfield in heaven, he flatly answered, "No, I do not." And then he explained, "George will be so close to the throne of God for all he has done that I doubt I will ever get close enough to see him."

We need to learn to disagree like that!

II. God Leads us in Disappointments Acts 16:1-7

This is one of the most mysterious sections of the Bible. It is the story of roadblocks and cross currents in which Paul and his companions hardly knew what to do. It is an account of faithful men struggling with perplexing circumstances.

After visiting the churches, he had founded on his first missionary journey, Paul now endeavors to enter new territory by traveling east into Asia Minor and Bithynia. Paul was taking the most logical route. He went where there appeared to be an open door.

We don't know how nor why the Spirit of God closed the door to Asia and at the same time opened it to Europe; but this is exactly what happened.

- Sometimes things don't go as we expect. Paul wanted to go in one direction; God said, "No!" (Acts 16:6c). Paul wanted to go in another direction; God said, "No!" (Acts 16:7c).
- Psalm 37:23 "The steps of a good man are ordered by the Lord." So are the Stops!

God closed two doors, but opened a better door. Our Disappointments are often God's Appointments!

Paul was sensitive to the leading of the Spirit – both as to where NOT to go, as well as where TO GO.

How can you tell what God's will for your life is? Colossians 3:15

C.H. Spurgeon wanted a college education. He made an appointment with the president of a college to meet at a certain time in a certain place. He went there, waited all afternoon, and the president didn't show up. He took this to mean that God had closed the door. He prepared himself the best he could. Later, he founded a college of his own. The strange thing is that the president kept the appointment. He, too, waited all afternoon – in the room next to the one Spurgeon was in!

A young lady had prepared herself for missionary service on foreign fields. She had been appointed by the mission board and was ready to sail when she received a telegram saying that her sister had died in a western state. She canceled her reservation and went home. The sister left four little children and since there was no one to care for them, this young lady had to stay with them. Her heart was broken. She had dreamed of being a missionary and now she would never have a chance to go out for the Lord.

However, she submitted to the Lord's will and did the best she could for the children. As they grew up, one by one they came to her saying, "Auntie, I feel that God wants me to be a missionary." So instead of one person going out as a missionary, four went out. She came to see, after all, that God's way was the best way.

As Acts 15 closed, we saw that the great team of Paul and Barnabas broke up. Barnabas and Mark went to the Island of Cyprus and this was the last we hear of Barnabas.

Paul took Silas with him and began his second missionary journey.

Silas was a man of commitment and compassion. It would take a special kind of man to deliver the decision of the Jerusalem conference to the Gentiles, and Silas was the man they sent with Paul and Barnabas and we are told that he "encouraged and strengthened the brethren" (Acts 15:32) and "spent time there" with the Christians in Antioch. Peter said that Silas was a "faithful brother" (1 Peter 5:12).

This is the first time Timothy's name is mentioned in Scripture (Acts 16:1). Most believe that Timothy and his mother were converted when Paul came through the region on his first missionary journey.

- Timothy soon became like a spiritual son to Paul (1 Timothy 1:2; 2 Timothy 1:2; 2 Timothy 2:1). He had made great spiritual progress which really caught Paul's eye. Paul wanted a companion to help him in ministry, so he decided to take Timothy with him.
- The name "Timothy" means "dear to God" or "the one who honors God." His father was Greek and his mother was a Jew. In spite of coming from a mixed marriage, which was common in that region, Timothy was influenced by his godly Jewish mother. Both his mother and his grandmother taught him the Jewish Scriptures and helped him grow in his relationship with the Lord. Even the people in Iconium and Lystra respected him.

Paul perhaps saw Timothy as a worthy young replacement for John Mark. Timothy is the only person in the New Testament that Paul addressed as "man of God" (1 Timothy 6:11).

Paul wanted to take Timothy with him as a missionary companion. Paul knew that the Jews would not accept Timothy in the Jewish synagogues if the Jews saw him as being only "half-Jewish," since his father was a Gentile.

- If Timothy were uncircumcised, it would be a stumbling block to the Jews. So, to remove that obstacle, Paul circumcised Timothy so the unsaved Jews would have no ceremonial reasons to reject Paul and Timothy and their preaching.
- In 1 Corinthians 9:19-22, Paul established the principle of doing what is necessary to remove obstacles to people's faith. He was circumcised – not for salvation, but for service; for the sake of the Gospel.

III. God Leads us to our Destination Acts 16:8-10

Denial was replaced by Direction as Paul had a vision from the Lord. Instead of Asia, God was directing Paul to leave Asia Minor and go into Europe.

This is one of the greatest events in history – the carrying of the Gospel into Europe. The Gospel would saturate the continent and later men would sail out to live in the new land called America, taking the Gospel with them and causing America to be birthed as a Christian nation.

Paul was not a well man physically and he needed Luke as his companion and physician. The “we section” in Acts 16:10-17 tells us that Luke joined the team here.

THE DELIVERANCE OF TWO WOMEN

Acts 16:9-18

These verses record some of the events which took place on the Second Missionary Journey. God had closed some doors of service to Paul, but in a vision, he heard a plea for help from Macedonia.

Paul had intended to revisit the churches he and Barnabas had founded on the first missionary journey and then move into Asia, but they “were forbidden of the Holy Spirit to preach the Word in Asia.” Acts 16:9-10 is one of the most important turning points in Church History. Had Paul been allowed to go into Asia, it would have meant India and China having the Gospel. But when the Spirit led him to Macedonia, it meant Europe and eventually America received the Gospel.

As Paul went into Macedonia, he came first to the chief city, Philippi. Four men made the journey:

1. Paul, who was the spiritual leader, called of God to take the Gospel to the Gentiles.
2. Silas, who carried the letter from the Jerusalem Council back to Antioch. According to I Peter 5:12, he served as secretary for both Paul and Peter. He was also imprisoned with Paul in Philippi when the two of them were beaten, thrown in prison, but sang hymns of praise at midnight.
3. Timothy, who Paul called his son in the faith, took John Mark's place as a missionary assistant.
4. Luke, who joined the Second Missionary Journey as they headed for Macedonia and helped take care of Paul's physical needs.

When they arrived in Macedonia, they went to Philippi, a Roman colony that was a favored city of Rome. The citizens of Philippi were exempt from Roman taxes.

Paul's custom was to go to the local synagogue when he went to a new city, but there was no synagogue in Philippi. Rabbinic tradition stated that at least ten Jewish men were needed in order to form a synagogue. It seems there were not ten men who were faithful worshipers of God in Philippi.

Paul did hear that there was a small band of women who met near a river on the Sabbath day to pray, so he and the other three men joined there for the prayer meeting.

We are introduced to two women in these verses:

I. A Prosperous Woman Acts 16:14-15

Lydia was a Gentile; not a Jewess; a Jewish proselyte, or “God-fearer,” like Cornelius (Acts 10:2).

- She wanted to know God, but all she knew was what she had learned from Jewish tradition.
- She was a businesswoman – a seller of dyed purple cloth. She probably imported the cloth from Thyatira and resold it in Philippi. Purple was the color of royalty and nobility, so she was probably very successful. We know she had a home large enough to host Paul and his team (Acts 16:15, 40).

Notice 16:14: “There was a certain woman named Lydia...” Have you noticed how often the writer uses the word “certain?” (Acts 16:12, 13, 16). There is always a certain woman, or a certain disciple, or a certain place, or on a certain day. The Lord does certain things, in a certain way, at a certain time, at a certain place. He is about to open the heart of a certain woman, named Lydia.

Three things I want you to see about Lydia:

A. She had an Opportune Heart

She had a heart which was prepared and ready for an encounter with God. She didn't know much about the One True God, but she wanted to. On the Sabbath day she made her way down by a river side for prayer. She had a yearning in her heart for true riches.

With all of her success and wealth, she was dissatisfied with her life. None of the things she had in her life would bring satisfaction. Down deep in her heart there was a longing for God. Her heart was ready for God and Paul told her the old, old story.

B. She had an Open Heart Acts 15:14

It's wonderful to see what God can do with a heart!

Medical technology has an instrument that can be put into the heart and it will tell you the condition of that heart. God has been doing that since man was created. He is the "heart-knower."

1. He can Read the heart of man – Jeremiah 17:9.
2. He can Redeem the heart of man – John 3:16.
3. He can Renew the heart of man – Psalm 51:10
4. He can Repair the heart of man – Luke 4:18 "He hath sent me to heal the brokenhearted."

In these two verses we have the two sides of conversion.

a. The Divine Side: "Whose heart the Lord opened" Paul could open the Scriptures, but he could not open her heart. The "opening" of a person's heart is a creative act of God. When a person is saved, God creates within them a NEW HEART, or a new nature.

(1) Ezekiel 36:26: "A heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you a heart of flesh."

(2) Ezekiel 11:19-20: "And I will give them one heart, and I will put a new spirit within you; and I will take the stony heart out of their flesh, and will give them an heart of flesh; That they may walk in my statutes, and keep mine ordinances, and do them: and they shall be my people, and I will be there God."

(3) Jeremiah 31:33: "I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be my people."

b. The Human Side "and she attended (responded) unto the things which were spoken of Paul"

C. She had an Overflowing Heart Acts 16:15

An open heart leads to an obedient heart. She was baptized. She wanted to be publicly and unashamedly identified as a follower of Jesus Christ. She wanted to give an outward witness of what she believed inwardly.

"and her household". She was not content to be in the kingdom alone. How could she be content? She wanted her family to experience Jesus as she had experienced Him. The impact of her conversion was so strong that those over whom Lydia exercised influence were likewise convinced of the truth of the Gospel and believed and were baptized. It probably included her immediate family and her extended family as well, including household servants.

Not only did Lydia open her heart to the Lord, she opened her home to Paul and his companions. It appears from verse 40 that Lydia's house became the base of operations while they were in Philippi. Lydia's faith was immediately manifested in the good work of hospitality. She wanted to share her blessings with others.

A mother was reading the Bible to her little boy and she read the portion which tells us that "foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nest, but the Son of Man hath no where to lay

His head." Tears came to the little fellow's eyes, and he said, "Mother, if I had been there, I would have given Him my pillow."

I expect to meet Lydia in heaven – not in a purple robe, but in a spotless white robe, washed in the blood of Jesus. What God did for Lydia, He can do for you.

II. A Possessed Woman Acts 16:16-18

There is always opposition to the Gospel, and in Philippi it came first from a demonized woman who brought her owners income by telling people's fortunes.

- She was like Simon the Sorcerer in Samaria (Acts 8) and Bar-Jesus in Paphos (Acts 13) – individuals used by Satan to hinder the spread of the Gospel. Her owners profited greatly from her association with evil spirits.
- Satan's strategy was obvious: to derail the Gospel by infiltrating it by forming an apparent alliance with Christ's work – for his own ends, of course. He loves to destroy the Gospel just enough to twist it into deadly heresy.

This girl was a slave to the demon that possessed her. It was the demon inside her that caused her to keep “crying out.” It was the demon that empowered her to be a fortune-teller.

Listen, you had better stay away from fortune-telling, Ouija boards, astrology, horoscopes, and the like. They are not from God. They are from the demonic. You are opening yourself up to something dangerous. A person can get in demonic bondage today just as surely as this girl got in demonic bondage in that day.

If you are involved in any of this, you need to stop it now and repent of it. God calls such things as horoscopes and the like, detestable.

What was the problem? What the girl was saying was true. These men were God's men and they did have God's message.

- The problem was that the voice was not from God. It was from the demonic.

- If Paul had allowed this girl's charade to continue, it would have made it appear that she was part of Paul's group of workers, and that was something Paul could not allow to happen. She was a danger to the progress of the Gospel and had to be dealt with.

There are several cases in the New Testament where demons acknowledge that Jesus was divine. Every time demons met Jesus during His public ministry, they immediately confessed Him as the Son of God and He would cast the demon out.

Luke 4:33-36; Luke 8:26-33 Jesus refused praise from demons and rebuked them.

Notice Acts 16:18 “But Paul, being grieved” (KJV); “But Paul was greatly annoyed” (NKJV).

Notice that Paul spoke – not to the girl, but to the demon spirit in the girl – and commanded the evil spirit to come out of her – not in his own name – but in the name of Jesus. As soon as the name of Christ was spoken, the demon fled. She was released from the spirit.

Something we don't know from this passage is whether or not this young slave girl got saved. To be set free from the demonic did not automatically mean she was saved. She would have to make a personal commitment of her life to Jesus Christ. She would have to respond to the Gospel just as Lydia had responded to the Gospel.

REVIVAL AT MIDNIGHT

Acts 16:19-40

If you were asked by a dying person how to be saved and experience God's forgiveness of sins, could you tell them? The Philippian jailer, who was about to kill himself, asked Paul and Silas,

“Sirs, what must I do to be saved?” Paul's response was clear-cut, plain, simple, and accurate, “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved.”

Paul and his companions left Troas and entered Europe, heading for the city of Philippi. While they were there they went to a riverside where Lydia was won to the Lord. After that, they cast a demon out of a girl who was used as a fortune-teller by her owners. With the demon cast out of the girl, the owners lost the income the girl provided them. As a result, the owners dragged Paul and Silas before the magistrates who had them beaten and thrown in jail.

Several things I want to share with you from this passage:

I. The Reason for the Jailing Acts 16:19-24

The possessed girl's master was infuriated because they were losing their profit from their use of this girl.

- I have noticed that men get infuriated the quickest when you deal with three things: Their Purse, their Power, and their Pride. All three were involved in this case.
- As so often happens, the officials, who should have been prosecuting the businessmen for their abuse of the young girl, prosecuted those who were standing up for righteousness and justice. Even today we see the laws of the land protecting and thereby sustaining pornography, perversions, abortions, and other unrighteous activity.

In Acts 16:20 the men who owned the possessed girl got it wrong. They said, "These men...exceedingly trouble our city." It wasn't Paul and Silas who troubled the city. It was them! We need to get the record straight! The real problem in the community is not the children of God, but those who want to legalize drinking and gambling and who have more interest in material things than the things of God.

Did you notice that the magistrates arrested Paul and Silas, but not Timothy and Luke? It may be that Timothy and Luke escaped. It may be that Luke and Timothy were not molested because Luke was a Gentile and Timothy was half Gentile and probably looked all Gentile.

- I would point out that all four men were IN God's will and DOING God's will when Paul and Silas were caught, beaten, and thrown in prison. So, why do those in God's will have to go through some of the experiences that they go through?

In Philippians 1:12-13, Paul explains why: "But I would ye should understand, brethren, that the things which happened unto me have fallen out rather unto the furtherance of the gospel, so that my bonds in Christ are manifest in all the palace, and in all other places."

The magistrates falsely accused both Paul and Silas. They accused them of being Jews, but they were both also Roman citizens. Also, they had not taught anyone except Jews and Jewish proselytes like Lydia. But these men were determined to see Paul and Silas punished, so they made up these charges along with others.

What started as false accusations by a few men quickly turned into a mob that was intent on seeing Paul and Silas punished: A "multitude rose up together against them." The magistrates joined the mob, tearing off Paul's and Silas' clothing and ordering them to be "beaten with rods."

The instrument that they used was something like our axe handle with a bundle of rods bound together with a red ribbon. Then they put them in stocks (Acts 16:24). These were wooden stocks that they put their legs in and stretched them to the point that they could not move.

II. The Reaction in the Jail Acts 16:25-26

If Satan expected his assault on the missionaries to dampen their spirits, he was in for a rude awakening.

- The blood was dried on their backs. Intense pain shot through their bodies every time they moved. Their feet and hands ached in the stocks, and they were hungry and cold and weary, BUT their spirits soared heavenward.
- When you are in pain, the midnight hour is not the easiest time to sing. Job 35:10 states that: "God giveth songs in the night." Anyone can sing in the day when the skies are clear and when life is full of laughter, but it takes a strong Christian to sing and rejoice and praise God in the midst of troubles.

How could they do that? Listen to Paul:

- Romans 8:28 "All things work together for good to them that love God."
- 2 Corinthians 4:19 "For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory."
- Romans 8:18 "For I reckon that the suffering of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed."
- Philippians 1:29 "For to you (Christians) it has been granted on behalf of Christ, not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for His sake." That

is, suffering for the gospel is a privilege granted by God.

And, they were singing while they were suffering! What an incredible reaction to suffering!

- Prayer and Praise and Powerful Weapons! Notice who was listening as Paul and Silas were singing. The prisoners heard them. The word “heard” in verse 25 means “to listen with intense amazement.” That prison had never heard such sounds before.
- The world wants to see how Christians react to difficult circumstances. They want to see whether they praise the Lord or if they complain, gripe, and become bitter.

But God heard them too, and He was certainly impressed. He responded by shaking the foundations of the prison. Paul and Silas didn't request an earthquake, but I think it was God's “Amen” for the way Paul and Silas reacted to their suffering for Christ.

Now notice exactly what happened. The walls did not cave in, nor did the roof fall. But the cell doors flew open, the anchor pins slipped out of the walls, the chains fell off, and the stocks were loosened. No one was hurt, but everyone was set free. This was no ordinary earthquake. It was one huge miracle from start to finish. There was no doubt as to who was in charge that night.

Not only was there a physical earthquake that night, but there was also a spiritual one. The hardened jailer was shook out of his wits. He responded immediately. When he found the prison doors all open, he took for granted that the prisoners were all gone. He knew the consequences. There was only one remedy for his situation. DEATH was better than DISGRACE. In fact, suicide was regarded as a noble act in such cases in those days.

III. The Request of the Jailer Acts 16:27-32

The jailer was about to kill himself rather than be killed by the authorities. Then Paul cried out with a loud voice, “Do thyself no harm – we are all here.”

A man has no right to harm himself. Others may harm him, but he must not do it. Others may bring shame and disgrace to his name, but he must not do it. Others may kill him, but he must not kill himself. The man who harms himself, also harms others.

The jailer called for a light. Someone else had to hold it for him, for he was trembling like a leaf. He brought the preachers out and fell down before them, crying out, “What must I do to be saved?”

The jailer is now the prisoner. He is under deep conviction. He brings Paul and Silas out to where he could talk to them. Notice how he addresses them now: “Sirs.” This speaks of respect and dignity.

On his knees the jailer asked, “What must I do to be saved?”

- This is the only place in the Bible where this question is asked in these specific words – “What must I do to be saved?”
- The plan of salvation is found throughout the Bible in many different places and under many different circumstances. For example, Nicodemus came to Jesus with questions and he was saved, but he did not ask, “What must I do to be saved?”
- On the day of Pentecost when Peter preached, the people asked, “Sir, what shall we do?” Peter told them and three thousand were saved; but their question was not, “What must I do to be saved?”

Paul told the jailer AND his household to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and they would be saved. The word “believe” carries with it a matter of trust. It is much more than head belief; it is heart commitment.

Paul said, “I am persuaded that He is able to keep that which I have committed unto Him.”

IV. The Redemption of the Jailer Acts 16:33-34

All of them believed and all of them were baptized and Immediately you see a change in them.

- One of the evidences of salvation is that he sought to straighten up the past. Salvation showed in service. Remember, this is the same man, who, just a few hours before, had thrown them into the inner prison and had brutally locked them in stocks, and now he is tenderly and humbly washing away all the blood, dirt, and filth from their wounds.

A sure sign of genuine conversion, is when a person willingly and gladly makes restitution whenever they have wronged or hurt others.

- When a man comes to Christ, he ought to go back and straighten up the past just as far as possible. If he holds any grudges, if he owes any money, if he has done anything wrong, he ought to try to straighten everything out.

V. The Rebuke of Paul Acts 16:35-40

Paul and Silas were still officially prisoners even though they had been taken into the jailer's home for food and medical attention. But the day after they had been imprisoned, the magistrates apparently had changed their minds about incarcerating Paul and Silas.

Perhaps the combination of the earthquake, plus the fact that the charges were baseless to begin with, made them decide they wanted nothing to do with those two. And so, they ordered Paul and Silas released.

- They had wronged Paul and Silas publicly and now they wanted to let them go privately. Paul said, “No, we are Roman citizens and the law says that we are not to be beaten or imprisoned without a fair trial.” When they heard that they were Roman citizens, they knew that they were in trouble and they plead with them to leave.
- What Paul did was not meant to be vindictive or obstinate, but it was designed to spare the young church at Philippi from further harassment and place the believers in a more secure position before the officials. It was also done for the safety of Timothy and Luke.

Notice Acts 16:40. They went back to the home base at Lydia's house “and when they had seen the brethren, they comforted (encouraged) the saints.”

They had just been beaten and put in prison; and yet, THEY encouraged the saints.

Only the grace of God could make men respond like that.

If there is one lesson to take away from these verses, it is the simplicity of the Gospel. Question: “What must I do to be saved?” Answer: “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved.”

RESPONDING TO THE WORD

Acts 17:1-15

Paul and his team are on their second missionary journey. They are going to move from Philippi to go to new territory. At Philippi they had been beaten and thrown into the Philippian Jail, but as they sang hymns at midnight, God sent an earthquake and loosened their bonds. As a result, the jailer, his family and many of the prisoners were saved.

Notice that as Luke continued to write his manuscript, he returned to the phraseology he used earlier in the book. The “we” is replaced by “they” in Acts 17:1.

- Luke had been with Paul in Philippi (notice Acts 16:10-17), but for reasons unknown, Paul left Luke in Philippi and he did not rejoin the missionary party until the missionaries returned to the city of Philippi (Acts 20:5-6 Luke sailed from Philippi with the team to Troas).
- Evidently, Paul thought Luke would be a good minister-leader for the young growing church at Philippi. If that is the case, Luke did an excellent job, because when Paul wrote his epistle to the Philippians later, the church had grown considerably.

In Acts 17 we find Paul ministering in three different cities – Thessalonica, Berea, and Athens.

If you trace Paul's journey on a map, you will see that he and his team was following the famous Roman road, called the Egnation Way.

It was about 100 miles from Philippi to Thessalonica. On his way there, Paul passed through two small towns – Amphipolis (am-fip-oh-liss) and Apollonia (ap-oh-lone-ih-ah) – but did not stop. Paul's strategy was always to preach in the largest cities and establish a church from which the Gospel could be preached as the churches sent out their own missionaries into the more remote areas.

I. The Response to the Gospel in Thessalonica Acts 17:1-10a

Let me give you an overall picture of the three cities in Acts 17 and how they responded to the Gospel:

- Thessalonica: Resisting the Word Acts 17:1-9
- Berea: Receiving the Word Acts 17:20-24
- Athens: Ridiculing the Word Acts 17:15-34

Thessalonica was the main city in Macedonia, having a population of about 200,000. It had been founded in the Greek period by a brother-in-law of Alexander the Great and was a port city and is a center of commerce still today.

The first thing Paul did was to head to the synagogue because there would be Jews as well as God-fearing Gentiles there. For three Sabbaths Paul ministered in the synagogue publicly. The actual amount of time spent in Thessalonica extended perhaps 4-6 months.

Four key words in Acts 17:2 - 3 describe Paul's approach to the synagogue congregation:

A. He Reasoned

He laid out the facts and answered their questions. The Greek word for “reason” is from the word that we get our English word “dialogue.” Rather than being a monologue, Paul's style was to have a dialogue over the Scriptures when he visited a synagogue – questions and answers, give and take, back and forth.

Paul was demonstrating what Peter wrote about in I Peter 3:15 – “Being ready, willing, and able to give a defense or answer by clarifying yourself to anyone who ask you for a reason for the hope that is within you, with meekness and fear.”

B. He Explained or “Opening the Scripture to them”

It is the same word that is used in Luke 24:31-32 to describe how the eyes of the two men on the Emmaus road were “opened” when they realized they were with Jesus. Paul explained the Scriptures, or opened the Scriptures, so as to reveal their meaning to his listeners.

The whole point of teaching and preaching the Scriptures is to explain them – to make them clear to the listener. Paul's goal was for people – Jews and Gentiles alike – to see Jesus in the Old Testament, to see that He was the Jewish Messiah for whom Israel had been longing.

A young student went to head the great preacher, George W. Truett at the First Baptist Church in Dallas, TX. After the service the young man was heard to say, “So, that was the great George W. Truett, huh? He didn't use one word that I didn't understand.”

That young man unintentionally paid Pastor Truett the highest compliment possible: His sermons were clear and understandable. And I believe Paul's were, too.

C. He Alleged or Demonstrated or Proved

Paul explained in detail the truths of the Scripture. He opened the Word and organized the Word and offered the Word, in such a reasonable and logical manner that they could not deny the truth.

He wove the Old Testament prophecies into his message, demonstrating how Jesus of Nazareth was the fulfillment of each one. Paul set before them one Old Testament proof after another that Jesus of Nazareth was the promised Messiah.

This presented a thorny problem to the Jewish theologian who knew passages like Isaiah 53, which spoke of a suffering Messiah, but also Psalm 2, which spoke of a ruling Messiah. The only way to reconcile a Messiah who reigned with authority, with a Messiah who suffered brutally, was to have two Messiahs.

Thus, the Jews called the reigning Messiah, “Messiah Ben David,” after Israel's mightiest king. They called the suffering Messiah “Messiah Ben Joseph,” after the Old Testament hero who suffered unjustly at the hands of his brothers. In the synagogue, Paul opened the Scriptures and explained how both sets of prophecies were fulfilled in one Person, how Jesus – son of Joseph – was the suffering Messiah who was crucified on the cross, but after three days, He – son of David – rose from the dead to rule and reign forever.

The key to opening the Scriptures is always to look for, talk about, and focus on the Person of Jesus Christ.

D. He Preached

That is, he drove the point home. In every sermon in the Book of Acts, you will find an emphasis on the resurrection of Christ. This is what separated Christianity from all the religions of the world. We serve a risen, living Savior.

The results of Paul's preaching follow a familiar pattern – Acts 17:4, 12.

But this response didn't bring joy to everybody. A familiar pattern takes shape once again. The unbelieving Jews were envious and jealous of Paul's success and were grieved to see the Gentiles and the influential women leaving the synagogue; so, they stirred up opposition by making unfounded accusations.

Notice who they recruited (Acts 17:5). The phrase “lewd fellows of the baser sort (KJV) means “the worthless loafers of the marketplace.” These were hoods who knew how to manipulate a crowd.

- We are told that they “set all the city on an uproar, and assaulted the house of Jason” where Paul and his companions had been

staying.

- In 17:6 they said, "These men have turned the world upside down." What a tribute to Paul and to the power of the Gospel. Wherever Paul went, things happened, souls were saved, and decisions for Christ were made.
- In turning the world upside down, it could better be said that they helped turn the world right side up!

II. The Response to the Gospel in Berea Acts 17:10b-15

Notice Acts 17:11– "they received the Word with all readiness of mind, and searched the Scriptures daily, whether those things were so."

These people of Berea were eager to learn the truth and they received the Word with all readiness of mind, but were careful to search the Scriptures daily, to see if the things Paul taught were true.

This speaks well of the Bereans, for they did not blindly follow anyone. They were eager for the truth, but it had to be the truth. They were not so eager to learn that they were gullible to any teaching that came their way. It was the truth they wanted.

Here is a word of warning for us today. Many things are being taught, some are true and some are false. In our eagerness to learn, we need to be aware, lest we approve and accept that which is false. Search the Scriptures to see for yourself what is true and what is not. One cannot be too careful, especially since error is on every hand.

Dr. James Travis use to say, "You can't grease any man and swallow him whole!"

- That's why I believe everyone should bring a Bible with them to church. When I get up to preach, check out what I say with the Word of God. When you go to Sunday School, take your Bible. Open it and check to see if what you are being taught is consistent with the Word.
- Now, don't take this as a license to start an argument. Arguing the Bible usually causes more problems than it solves. If someone makes a mistake or misinterprets a passage, do what Aquila and Priscilla did for the young preacher, Apollos.
- Acts 18:26 says that after they heard Apollos speak, Aquila and Priscilla, lovingly and humbly, "took him aside and explained to him the way of God more accurately." They didn't correct him publicly or in an embarrassing way, but they did it with a sweet, Christian spirit.

We ought to be Bereans! Examine the Scriptures daily!

THE UNKNOWN (KNOWN) GOD

Acts 17:14-34

Paul and his team began their second missionary journey from Antioch. From there they went to Derbe and Lystra, and then to Thyatira, Philippi, Thessalonica, and Berea.

- Some Jews stirred up some trouble for Paul in Thessalonica and so they had to move to Berea, but those same Jews hounded Paul again when they found out that Paul had been preaching in Berea, and they came to Berea to stir up trouble for him there also.
- Notice Acts 17:13-15. Paul left Silas and Timothy in Berea and Paul sailed alone to Athens. No sooner had Paul reached Athens when he sent for Silas and Timothy to join him in Athens as soon as possible.

I. Paul's Discovery Acts 17:16-17

While waiting for his two friends to join him, Paul decided to check out the city of Athens. Athens was, and still is, one of the most famous cities in the world. It is known for its literature and art, politics and thought. At that time, it was the intellectual center of the world.

- When Paul walked along the streets, he must have been aware of the fact that the greatest poets, scholars, statesmen, and warriors the world had ever known had also walked down the same streets.
- There was no city comparable to Athens, and yet, with all the education and knowledge, the God of Heaven was unknown. The city was completely devoted to the worship of innumerable gods.

Paul could see the magnificent Acropolis and the Parthenon towering above the city. But it saddened him to think that all this splendor was devoted to heroes and gods. Athens was the leading center of culture and philosophy of the ancient world, and yet, for all of its wisdom the city was as pagan as it could be. There were around 10,000 people living in Athens when Paul was there, but it is said that there were come 30,000 statues of gods in the city. More gods than people!

- Among all the temples, shrines, alters, and idols, there was an alter to everything and every god. Most of the gods were both savage and immoral. The worship of Aphrodite was filled with lust and sexual immorality. The god Hermes was worshiped as a god who would help you steal from others.

- Dionysus was the one to worship if you wanted to get drunk. On and on it went.
- Yet, uncertainly remained in the minds of the Athenians. They considered the possibility of overlooking a lesser-known god who might be angered by their negligence. Thus, to offset the god's reactions, they had erected an alter to The Unknown God.

II. Paul's Depression Acts 17:16

Paul's "spirit was provoked within him when he saw that the city was given over to idols." He was upset within himself.

- Internally, Paul's spirit "was stirred in him (KJV); "his spirit was troubled within him" (HCSB); "he was greatly distressed" (INB); "his spirit was being provoked within him" (NAS).
- The Greek word means that he got more and more angry.

Who or what was Paul angry toward? Not the Athenians themselves. His anger went beyond them. Paul knew these people were lost and they were deluded into false worship and paganism by Satan – Ephesian 6:12.

Paul knew that every statue and every philosophy stood in opposition to the one True God.

III. Paul's Debate Acts 17:17-34

Paul went first to the synagogue, but had little success with the Jews or the Gentile worshipers.

Paul then moved into the market place where he had no difficulty finding listeners, for most of the Athenians did nothing but listen, argue and philosophize about any and every doctrine.

The market place (the Agora) was the favorite gathering place of the intellectuals in this city of wisdom and learning. This was not a market in the usual sense where people sold goods. It was a market of news where the elite minds gathered to speculate and swap ideas.

Evidently Paul made quite a stir. People began to talk about this strange Jew who spoke about a strange God. Soon, Paul became the talk of the town, and gossip about him reached the philosophers of that day.

At that time Athens was the headquarters of two rival schools of philosophy, the Epicureans and the Stoics.

The Epicureans were the materialist and atheists of that day. They denied God's existence and believed that the world was ruled by chance. They denied life after death. They believed you were here today and gone tomorrow, so why not enjoy life as much as they can.

They taught that the chief goal in life was happiness and pleasure. If it feels good, then do it. Their motto was: "Eat, drink, and be merry, tomorrow we die." The Epicureans want life with no pain, just pleasure and convenience. That philosophy still exists today.

The Stoics were opposite of the Epicureans. They were pantheists claiming that God was embodied in everything material, but He does not exist as a separate being. God is in trees, plants, animals, mountains, and people. Their leading maxim was that man should live according to nature. Indifference was the key of life. Their motto in modern terms was "Grin and bear it." They were proud fatalist.

The Epicureans said, "Enjoy life;" the Stoics said, "Endure life!" These two philosophies were the Gentile equivalents of the Sadducees and the Pharisees.

When Paul preached about Christ, who had died for men's sins and came forth from the grave, the philosophers could hardly believe their ears. When Paul emphasized that all men would stand in judgment before the God of all the earth, his listeners acknowledged they had never heard any message to be compared with this one. They believed Paul to be the exponent of strange doctrines and gods, so they invited Paul to speak at a gathering of intellectuals.

Some referred to Paul as a "babbler" (Acts 17:18). The word means "one who picks up seed," implying "one who picks up scraps of knowledge and retails them" – one who pretends to have wisdom, but actually has none. Paul could care less what they thought about him, as long as he had the opportunity to preach Christ.

Paul goes to Mars' Hill and confronts them about the idol to The Unknown God. Paul says that he knows who the unknown god is, and he begins a very polished presentation – Acts 17:22-31.

A. The Greatness of God – He is Creator Acts 17:24

God is the maker of everything, and not the one who was made. God was not created by man; He is the One who made man and everything else that exist in the universe. He is the originator of all things. Everything that exist came from His hand (Colossians 1:15-17).

B. The Goodness of God – He is Provider Acts 17:25

Since God made everything, He has need of nothing. God is self-sufficient and needs nothing that God can supply.

It is God who gives to us what we need, even the breath that we breath. It is God's goodness that leads men to repentance (Romans 2:24).

C. The Government of God – He is Ruler Acts 17:26-27

God not only created the universe; He also controls or runs it. The God of creation is also the God of history and geography.

Paul says that all races have a common origin and all trace their descent from Adam.

It was God who first determined where national ethnic groups should make their homes. After the flood, Noah's three sons went their separate ways. Their descendants settled in three separate areas:

Shem in the Middle East

Ham in Africa

Japheth in Europe

Paul declares that God is no distant Deity. He is not far from any of us. God not only brought forth the entire human race from one man, but also controls the timing of each man's arrival in the world, right down to the very place where he is to be born.

D. The Glory of God – He is Father Acts 17:28-29

Paul is not saying that all people on earth are the Spiritual children of God, for sinners become God's children through faith in Jesus Christ. Rather, he was affirming the "Fatherhood of God" in a physical sense, for man was created in the image of God.

E. The Grace of God – He is Savior Acts 17:30-31

Previously, in His grace, God overlooked your ignorance or winked at your idolatry, but no longer.

Many people think that just because God is not judging them or chastening them now, they are getting away with the sin in which they are involved. They fail to factor in the long suffering of God. Paul says, "God had been gracious, but now is the time to repent, if they expect to escape coming judgment.

Notice Acts 17:32 When Paul mentioned the resurrection of Jesus, the gathering came unglued. The crowd exploded, and the meeting abruptly ended.

This will always be the result when the world's wisdom meets the wisdom of God. The philosophers thought that nothing existed beyond the grave. Thus, they could not accept this truth.

There were three different responses to Paul's message: Division – Delay – Decision; Rebellion - Reason – Reception.

First, some laughed and mocked or made fun. They didn't take Paul's message seriously.

Second, others were interested, but wanted to hear more.

Third, a small group accepted what Paul preached, believed on Jesus, and were saved.

Paul's message met with little success. He founded no church in Athens. He never returned to Athens.

- Even though Paul gave an incredibly polished sermon, only a couple of folks believed (Acts 17:33-34). Why? I believe it is because in Acts 17, Paul never mentioned the crucifixion of Christ, nor even the name of Jesus.

- Why? Could it be that, knowing he was in the company of the brilliant men, Paul thought the coarseness of the crucifixion was not culturally correct or politically correct?

From Athens, Paul went to Corinth, and in his letter to the Corinthians, he explains how he came to them. I Corinthians 1:17-18, 22-

TOO SOON TO QUIT

Acts 18:1-22

Warren Wiersbe tells of a man shoveling snow from his driveway when two boys carrying snow shovels approached him. "Shovel your snow Mister?" one of the them asked. "Only two dollars!" Puzzled, the man replied, "Can't you see that I'm doing it myself?" "Sure," said the enterprising lad; "that's why we asked. We get most of our business from people who are half through and feel like quitting!"

Dr. Ramond Edman use to say to his students at Weaton College, "It's always too soon to quit!"

- Acts 18 gives us an insight into one of the few times that Paul was disheartened, disillusioned, discouraged and depressed.
- Some of God's greatest servants have almost come to the point where they were ready to say, "I've had enough! I'm ready to quit!"
 - Moses and Elijah both prayed to die.
 - Jeremiah wanted to stop preaching, but he said that he could not because there was a fire in his bones and he had to preach.
 - John the Baptist, in prison, even doubted if Jesus was the Messiah when he was treated so badly for doing what he thought was God's will.
 - And now, Paul! (I wonder if he understood how John Mark felt.)

In Acts 18, Paul arrives in Corinth after a 45 mile trip from Athens. He had been beaten and opposed in Philippi; run out of Thessalonica; he felt like a failure at Athens with its 30,000 idols and gods; his back was probably not yet completely healed from the beating he and Silas received in Philippi; he was tired from his many weeks of travel; Paul left Timothy and Silas in Berea to help the believers there, so now, he arrives in Corinth, alone, lonely, fatigued, beaten, and on the edge of discouragement.

- In Corinth Paul found a city filled with immorality and filthy wickedness. It was known as "Sin City." Paul admits that, when he came to Corinth, he did so with fear and trembling.
- I Corinthians 2:1-3: "And I, brethren, when I came to you...was with you in weakness, and in fear, and in much trembling, but I was determined to know nothing among you, save Jesus Christ and Him crucified."

Corinth was a city with 200,000 people. It was a center of commerce and trade, located on a narrow neck of land between the Adriatic Sea and the Aegean Sea. Thus, Corinth had two harbors, one facing east and the other west.

Most seaports have their seamy side, but Corinth outdid them all since it had two harbors.

Here all commerce, travel, trade, tourists, soldiers, and thrill seekers converged. They brought their own brand of sin, immorality, and paganism to the city. It was the center of the worship of Aphrodite (af-ro-di-tee), the goddess of love and sex. Every evening a thousand priestesses of the temple (prostitutes) would descend upon the city to ply their trade.

Paul's letter to the Romans was written from Corinth and evidently, he had the city in mind when he wrote Romans 1:21-32.

Discouragement is a human condition, but the Christian has resources no one else has: the provisions and promises of God. When Paul faced a potentially discouraging situation in the city of Corinth, God sustained him through People, Promises, Power, Provisions, and due Process.

A. People Acts 18:1-4

Paul was alone in a strange, sinful city. He had no money, so he had to work. He was not well physically. He was burdened spiritually. He was depressed mentally.

Life for a man like Paul would be unbearable without close companions. While waiting for Timothy and Silas to come to him, by the providence of God, he met a Jewish couple by the name of Aquila and Priscilla. This friendship became a lasting fellowship. In three different cities, over a period of 16 years, Paul and Aquila and Priscilla ministered together.

This Jewish couple had recently come from Rome because of the anti-Semitism which came from the Roman Empire. At this time, Claudius commanded all Jews to leave Rome, and among those who got out of Rome was this wonderful couple, Aquila and Priscilla.

- Aquila and Priscilla had probably been converted to Christ in Rome by Jews who returned from Pentecost in Jerusalem. Aquila and Priscilla were tent makers – the same trade as Paul.

- The custom of Jewish parents, no matter the social status, was to teach their children a manual trade (working with their hands). Paul of Tarsus learned to make tents, which he now uses to support himself in his ministry. In many places this became a blessing, keeping Paul from becoming a burden to others (Acts 20:33-34; I Corinthians 4:12a; 9:6-15; 2 Corinthians 11:7; I Thessalonians 2:9; 2 Thessalonians 3:8). Thus, at first, Paul seems to have spent weekdays working at his trade, because of economic pressures.

Paul lived and worked with Aquila and Priscilla during the week, but on the Sabbath days, he witnessed boldly in the synagogue.

Some of the most faithful pastors, and I believe the pastors who will receive the greatest rewards in heaven, are bi-vocational pastors who work at regular jobs during the week and then preach in small churches on the weekend. The churches aren't large enough to support them full time, so they have a "tentmaking" ministry like Paul. Luke 13:30
Many full-time pastors could not do what bi-vocational pastors do.

B. Provisions 2 Corinthians 11:8-9; Philippians 4:15-16 (Acts 18:5)

When Paul was reunited with Timothy and Silas, he received a monetary gift of support – a love offering – from those to whom he had ministered in Macedonia. The gift enabled Paul to give up his secular employment and devote himself full-time to his missionary work.

When the Jews in Corinth rejected the Gospel, opposed Paul and blasphemed (Acts 18:6), notice what Paul did.

- Paul shook the very dust of the place off his garments to denote his utter separation of the synagogues. As far as they were concerned, Paul was through. To shake one's garments was an act of judgment that said: "You have had your opportunity, but now it's over" (Acts 13:51; Matthew 10:14-15).

- To have blood on your HANDS means that you bear the responsibility for another's death because you were not faithful to warn him. The image comes from the watchman on the city walls whose task it was to stay alert and warn of coming danger (Ezekiel 3:17-21; 33:1-9). But to have blood on your HEAD means that you are to blame for your own judgment. You had the opportunity to be saved, but you turned it down (Joshua 2:19). Paul's hands were clean (Acts 20:26) because he had faithfully declared the message of the Gospel. The Jews had their own blood on their own hands because they rejected God's truth.

C. Promises Acts 18:9-11

God promised Paul three things:

1. His Protection

A pattern had formed in Paul's life and ministry. Paul would go into a new town, preach in the synagogue, the Jews would oppose him, and he would end up being beaten, imprisoned, lied about, oppressed, and whatever else Satan's host could throw at him.

- This is the reason the Lord re-assured him and encouraged him. The Lord knows when we need His tender "fear not" the most. These two words can calm the storm in our hearts regardless of the circumstance that surround us.

- Luke shared only one example of divine protection during Paul's ministry in Corinth (Acts 18: 12-17), but it is a significant one.

2. His Presence Acts 18:10a

We have nothing to fear if God's presence is with us. Listen to Moses in Exodus 33:14-15.

3. His Prospects Acts 18:10c

God told Paul that there were many of His people in the city – before they had ever made decisions for Christ.

This promise raises the theological doctrine of election. But Paul did not spend his time speculating about Divine Sovereignty and Human Responsibility. Paul's job was to be the Messenger of the Gospel to those who would be saved – and it's our job as well.

Paul's second missionary journey ends in Acts 18:22 (Acts 15:36-18:22).

- Paul stays in Corinth 18 months and establishes a strong church.
- His second journey takes more than two years and he travels some 2,000 miles.
- Paul writes 1 and 2 Thessalonians while in Corinth.
- Paul will take Aquila and Priscilla back with him to his home church in Antioch.

He is only at Antioch a short time and then begins his Third Missionary Journey – Acts 18:23-21:16.

THE MISSING INGREDIENT IN THE MODERN CHURCH

Acts 18:23-19:7

Acts 18:23 marks the beginning of Paul's Third Missionary Journey (Acts 18:23-21:14).

Let me remind you that as Paul was ending his Second Missionary Journey, he went back to visit some of the churches on his way back to Antioch to give a report to his home church concerning the journey.

- Paul takes Priscilla and Aquila, his tent-making friends, with him. When he makes his way back through the churches and gets to Ephesus, Paul goes immediately into the synagogue. Here a surprise awaited him. Not only were they receptive to the Gospel, but they also wanted him to stay and tell them more. Paul refuses because he feels he must go to Jerusalem to fulfill a vow he had made.
- Paul does leave Aquila and Priscilla in Ephesus to minister to them while he goes to Antioch and then to Jerusalem. Paul leaves Jerusalem to begin his Third Missionary Journey. While Paul was making his way to Ephesus, a remarkable Jew had shown up in Ephesus. Luke interrupts his story of Paul to tell of this fascinating Jew. This is a kind of parenthesis that Luke inserts to explain what had happened by the time Paul finally reached Ephesus.

Let me remind you again that Priscilla and Aquila were a husband and wife team. In fact, their names are always mentioned together in Scripture.

- Since they were tent-makers and Paul was a tent-maker and there was a oneness in spiritual things, they were very hospitable toward Paul and received him into their house and he remained with them for a year and a half. Paul tells us that these two devoted people were willing to “lay down their own necks” for the Apostle.
- The couple had spiritual insight and they had a “church in their house.” It's interesting to note that this most noble Roman lady” is usually named first in relation to the couple. Maybe she became a Christian before her husband or maybe she was a more active worker than her husband. It seems that it was Priscilla who carefully expounded the way of God to Apollos that proved to be so helpful. Together, Aquila and Priscilla are a wonderful example for Christian husband and wives.

Notice Acts 18:24-28. Let me introduce you to Apollos:

A. He had Gifts (and he used them)

1. He was Educated Acts 18:24

He was a native of Alexandria, Egypt, the second most important city in the Roman Empire. It was the center for educations and philosophy. It was famous for its university with a library of some 700,000 volumes.

It was at Alexandria that the Hebrew Scriptures were translated into the Greek Septuagint version. Apollos was evidently in the Old Testament Scriptures. He believed and taught that God would one day send the Messiah.

Luke say that he was “mighty in the (Old Testament) Scriptures.” This speaks of his knowledge of the Old Testament Scriptures.

2. He was Eloquent Acts 18:24

He was a wonderful communicator. He was able to express himself and the knowledge of the Old Testament well.

- He was “fervent in Spirit,” or he was a lively, affectionate preacher. He carefully and accurately taught diligently the things of the Lord. He spoke with enthusiasm!”

3. - Apollos knew how to handle himself and spoke with authority about the Scriptures.

When he spoke, people listened!

B. He had Guidance Acts 18:25-26

With all of his Old Testament knowledge, Apollos was limited and he did not fully understand the basic Christian truths. You see, you can go only as far as you yourself know and understand.

He understood "the way of the Lord" (Acts 18:25). That phrase is used over and over in the Old Testament to describe the spiritual and moral standards God required His people to observe.

- God said of Abraham, "I know him, that he will command his children and his house - hold after him, that they keep the way of the Lord, to do righteousness and justice (Genesis 18:19).

- Micah 6:8 "He has shown you, O man, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God?"

Apollos "knew only the baptism of John (the Baptist)." John's message was one of repentance and one to prepare Israel for the Messiah's arrival.

Apollos knew nothing of the significance of Christ's death and resurrection, or the ministry of the Holy Spirit.

Aquila and Priscilla heard Apollos preach and, though they were impressed with his knowledge of the Old Testament and his eloquence and enthusiasm, they knew they should instruct him in the rest of the story. Remember, Aquila and Priscilla had Paul in their home for eighteen months and he had taught them the deeper things of God. Notice how this wonderful couple handled the situation.

- They didn't embarrass him or criticize him in public.

- They didn't feel that they were too "spiritually deep" to listen to him preach. There is a real danger when you think that you are spiritually mature to become a "spiritual snob" and think that you are so much deeper than everyone else and no one can enlighten you or anything.

- No! They took him to chicken dinner and explained to him lovingly and tenderly "the way more carefully."

No doubt this was great news to Apollos. Now he realizes that the message of John the Baptist had been fulfilled. Apollos now had the full Gospel to proclaim, and no doubt he got saved on the spot. He responded with a teachable spirit.

I don't know which to admire more in this situation: the tact of Aquila and Priscilla or the humble teachable spirit of Apollos. Obviously, the Holy Spirit was directing the scene. The attitude and actions of all involved were godly.

C. He had Goals Acts 18:27-28

It seems Apollos returned to the synagogue in Ephesus and gave the Jews the rest of the story.

What we see in Acts 18:24-28 and Acts 19:1-7 is the need for Progressive Revelation in the early Church. The Holy Spirit had come at Pentecost but not everyone had heard that. (Think about how slowly news traveled in that day compared to today!)

Notice Acts 19:1-7.

Paul was sensitive spiritually, and he detected a deficiency in their faith. The same defect existed in them that was in Apollos before he was instructed by Aquila and Priscilla.

Their testimony was not exciting; they were cold, rigid, and legalistic. Their doctrine was sound, but there was no response in Paul's spirit when they discussed their faith. Today we would say they were good, honest, and moral, but unsaved church members.

Why don't we have the power of God in our churches? How can we regain the power we once had with God? What is the missing ingredient that keeps us from experiencing the power of God? It is not our Programs or our Personnel or our Projects that accomplishes great things for God.

Zechariah 4:6 : "It is not by might, nor by power, but MY Spirit, saith the Lord of Host" if things are accomplished for God. God works in our lives and in our churches Through His Spirit, and unless His Holy Spirit is in control, all that we do is in vain.

At a certain Christian school, the teacher taught her class to repeat the Apostle's Creed, clause by clause, each pupil having his own clause. They would begin each day with the group repeating the creed.

One morning as they began, the first boy said; "I believe in God the Father, Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth." The second boy said, "I believe in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord." Then there was a time of silence. As the teacher looked up to see what had

happened, one of the pupils said, "Teacher, the boy who believes in the Holy Spirit isn't here today."

That's what was wrong in Ephesus; and that's what's wrong in many of our churches today.

Someone said, "If the Holy Spirit ceased His ministry, most churches wouldn't know it."

These twelve men were most likely disciples of Apollos. What Aquila and Priscilla did for Apollos, Paul did for these twelve men.

What was the difference between John's baptism and New Testament baptism?

- John's baptism pointed forward to One Who was coming; Christian baptism points back to One Who has come.
- John's baptism was linked to Repentance; Christian baptism is linked to Regeneration.

The possession of the Holy Spirit is the normal condition of every Christian. When we are born again, God the Holy Spirit comes to live in our hearts. If we are really saved, He is there.

We look at many lives today and we see no evidences of the Holy Spirit. This means one of two things: These people either have never been saved, or, if they have been saved, the world has crowded out and quenched the Holy Spirit.

If we have met the conditions of salvation, we have been saved. If there is no spiritual fruit in our lives, we are stifling the Spirit.

What is the fruit of the spirit? Galatians 5:22-23.

Are you bearing Spiritual fruit? Is the Holy Spirit in your life?

OPPORTUNITY IN THE MIDST OF ADVERSITY

Acts 19:8-41

Paul is on his Third Missionary Journey and finds himself in Ephesus.

- As far as we know, Paul stayed at Ephesus longer than at any other place in his ministry. He stayed there about three years.
- Paul gives us his view of his ministry in Ephesus in I Corinthians 16:8-9: "For a great and effective door has opened to me, and there are many adversaries."

I. Paul's Opportunity Acts 19:8-10

As Paul's custom was, when he came to Ephesus, he went into the synagogue every Sabbath for three months and, of course, he preached Christ boldly. As usual, the people rose up against him and fought him and the Gospel.

Paul left the synagogue and went to a school nearby, where he held services. The school of Tyrannus became the center from which the Gospel went out for Paul.

The pattern of a workday in Ephesus was as follows: People worked from 7:00 A.M. To 11:00 A.M. in the morning and then they took a break during the heat of the day from 11:00 A.M. to 4:00 P.M. in the afternoon. Then they would go back to work and worked from 4:00 P.M. to 9:00 P.M. at night.

- Taking advantage of this schedule, Paul held classes during the afternoon, when the building used by Tyrannus was vacant. So, Paul supported himself in ministry by making tents, and he used his time off to teach about the things of the kingdom. This continued by the space of two years.
- Paul preached the Gospel and taught the Word of God during the siesta time in the middle of the day.
- Probably the seven churches of Asia Minor came into existence through the preaching of Paul at Ephesus.

Ephesus was a very wicked seaport town and was at its highest population during the time of Paul. We are told that the morals of the city at that time were worse than the morals of animals.

Four words would sum up the condition of the city at that time:

1. Superstition Acts 19:19
2. Sorcery or witchcraft Acts 19:19
3. Spiritism of the occult Acts 19:13
4. Sensual Acts 19:24-27

II. Paul's Obstacles – I Corinthians 16:9 “And there are many adversaries”

What were these adversaries?

A. Inadequate Religion Acts 19:8-9

Judaism, with its rules, regulations, and legalism, left the people with no reality in their lives.

- When Paul presented the Gospel, the synagogue rejected the Gospel and Paul, so Paul departed from them.

- Matthew 10:14 “And whosoever shall not receive you, nor hear your words, when ye depart out of that house or city, shake off the dust of your feet.” That's what Paul did.

So now he goes to the school of Tyrannus for two years.

B. Imitation Religion Acts 19:11-16

The key word in Acts 19:11 is “special” or “unusual miracles.” Even Luke was amazed at the miracles in Ephesus. The miracles of healing came by coming in contact with Paul's handkerchiefs or aprons.

- The handkerchiefs spoken of here were actually the sweatbands Paul wore around his forehead when he labored as a tent maker. The aprons were the leather aprons of a blacksmith.

- There was no magical power in the sweatbands and aprons themselves. Rather, a proofs of Paul's love for the people to whom he ministered, his sweatbands and aprons provided a point of contact and triggered within the Ephesians faith to be healed and set free.

- The word “special” means “that which God permitted at a particular time with no intent of letting it happen again.”

Why would God permit these “special” miracles?

1. The miracles were intended to emulate the healing power of the Lord's own garments - Mark 5:27; Mark 6:56.
2. To show that God's hand of blessing and endorsement was on Paul, proving he was an Apostle equal to Peter. (In Acts 5:15, some were healed as Peter's shadow passed them and shaded them.)
3. To enhance the authority of Paul's evangelistic efforts in Ephesus.
4. To over-rule the superstitious minds of those in Ephesus. The Ephesians had been using clean, white pieces of cloth that they said had some magical power over disease. The sweatbands and aprons of Paul were not clean, but sweaty and dirty that collected while Paul made tents.

Some Radio and TV “preachers” are getting rich by selling “prayer clothes,” bottles of “anointing oil,” and even “pieces of the cross” and claim these have some healing power.

Why do so many fall for this type of thing?

1. Ignorance
2. Desperation. Some grab hold of such things as a last straw attitude.

Mr. and Mrs. Lentz wrote to Oral Roberts about their baby daughter who fell into the basement of the home they were building. The baby's spine was badly damaged. Every doctor they saw said there was no hope for the baby, but Oral Roberts said if they would send him \$500.00, he would pray for the baby and it would be healed. They sent the money, but the baby died a few months later. When they questioned Roberts, he said that the couple just didn't have enough faith or the baby would have been healed. The couple ended up getting a divorce over the matter.

Notice Acts 19:13-16.

Sceva, the chief priest, had seven sons who saw Paul cast out demons in the name of Jesus. They thought, “In the name of Jesus Christ,” was a magic formula, so they tried to duplicate what Paul did by using the name of Jesus. In those days, exorcists collected a fee whether or not they were successful. The evil spirits said, “Jesus I know, and Paul I know; but who are you?”

Under the power of the demons, the man with the evil spirit turned on the man, leaped on the seven men, beat them, tore off their clothes, and sent them running naked and wounded.

C. Idolatrous Religion Acts 19:23-28

The statue of Diana, which was in the temple, was said to have dropped straight down from heaven. The people worshiped this statue. At certain seasons thousands of worshipers came to Ephesus. This created an opportunity for a very lucrative business. The silversmiths of the city made small images of the goddess or the temple and sold them to the heathen. Then something began to ruin their business.

When Paul preached, the people turned from idols to Christ. When the people stopped buying the images, Demetrius, the head of the trade union, called the silversmiths together in an attempt to get rid of Paul and the Gospel.

III. Paul's Overcoming

A. The Savior was Exalted Acts 19:17-19

When people come to Christ, they ought not to leave any old doors open. They ought to make a clean break with the world. This means leaving the old paths of sin and breaking off with the old sinful companions.

- Fifty thousand pieces of silver would have been equivalent to the yearly wage of one hundred fifty men.

- Many Christians ought to have a burning of things in their home – sinful magazines, some ungodly DVDs, and anything that would keep them from a close fellowship with the Lord.

B. The Scriptures were Extended Acts 19:20

C. The Shrine was Eliminated Acts 19:23-41

Rather than preaching against owning books on witchcraft and the occult or preaching against idol, Paul preached Christ. When people were saved, they had no more use of those things.

In the Welsh Revival of 1901, under the anointed ministry of Robert Murry McCheyne, so great was the revival that every tavern and pub in Wales went broke. How many anti-alcohol sermons did McCheyne deliver? None. How many tirades against taverns? Zero. People simply lost all interest in alcohol when they got touched by the Lord and filled with the Spirit. The same thing happened in Ephesus. When people got saved, the idol business dried up.

A PORTRAIT OF THE UNDERSHEPHERD

Acts 20:1-38

Paul wrote three Books during his Third Missionary Journey:

- In Ephesus he wrote I Corinthians and sent it to them by Timothy.
- Paul then went from Ephesus to Macedonia where he wrote 2 Corinthians.
- Then he moved into Corinth and wrote the Book of Romans.

Acts 20 is a kind of itinerary of Paul's last lap on the Third Missionary Journey. He made three main stops:

1. Macedonia – Acts 20:1-5. The thrust of what Paul did there was to give “them much exhortation” (Acts 20:2). That is, “he begged them to go on with God, entreating them to let God have His way in their lives, and comfort them in the midst of trial.

2. Troas – Acts 20:6-16. The thrust of this passage is the changing of the Christian's day of worship from the Sabbath (Saturday) to the first day of the week (Acts 20:7).

Notice Acts 20:9-10. It used to upset me when people went to sleep while I was preaching, until I read that they went to sleep on Paul, too.

The Greek word for “young man” indicates that he was between fourteen and nineteen years old. They were in a building with three floors. The service was on the third floor. For some reason the young man was sitting in the window seal during the service. Paul got long winded and about midnight, the boy's eyes got heavy. He tried to fight the sleep, but the sleep won. The boy fell out of the window and broke his neck. Paul laid down upon the boy as Elijah did in his day – eye to eye, mouth to mouth – and life was restored in him.

Have you ever noticed how often sleepers are named in the Bible? This sleeper's name was Eutychus. Someone said, "you'd-a-cussed too if you had fallen out a third story window and broke your neck."

I heard about a man and his wife who were sitting in church. One Sunday not long after the preacher started his sermon, the man nodded off to sleep. The longer the preacher watched him sleep, the more irritated the preacher got at the man. Finally, the preacher had enough. He stopped the message, looked at the woman, and said, "Madam, would you please wake up your husband?" She replied, "Preacher, you're the one who put him to sleep. You wake him up!"

Did you notice that little was made of the incident? Paul just went down to where the boy was, God worked the miracle through him, and Paul continued to preach. How many modern-day preachers would be willing to hush such a miracle for the sake of exalting the message of Jesus? Most would want the spotlight on them. Everyone would know what "they" had done.

3. Miletus – Acts 20:17-38. Paul calls the elders of the church together and summarizes his ministry for the Lord.

I. Paul's Example

I think this is the richest pastor's conference ever convened. Here on the island of Miletus, Paul called for the pastors and elders from Ephesus together. Knowing he was headed for imprisonment, and, ultimately eternity, Paul called the elders together to give them final instructions and exhortation about ministry.

This was Paul's farewell meeting with the Ephesian elders. It is always a sad experience to leave family and friends, especially when you feel you will never see them again.

When you're reading through the New Testament, keep in mind that "elder", "pastor" and "bishop" are all interchangeable terms describing the same position.

- The Greek word translated "elder" doesn't speak of chronological years, but rather a mature person who has been selected to lead a local group of believers.
- "Bishop" means "overseer." The word stresses the leader's responsibility to watch over and protect their congregations from false teachers (Acts 20:28)
- "Pastor" means to feed and to shepherd. They tend and care for God's people.

Paul's example is seen in his:

A. Consistency Acts 20:18

Paul was with them in "all seasons" (KJV). Paul was faithful in all kinds of trials. Acts 20:24.

B. Consecration Acts 20:19

Paul had a tender spirit. He served in humility and demonstrated the mind of Christ – Philippians 2:2,8.

Frequent tears show that Paul's heart was at work. You never touch the heart of others until our own hearts are touched.

C. Courage Acts 20:20, 27

The words "kept back" comes from a Greek word signifying the withholding of food from a patient. It is a medical term. Paul had always spread a full table, setting before them the whole counsel of God. He never hesitated to set before them food they might not like, but was good for them. This is one reason why I like to teach through books of the Bible. This way we cover subjects whether it is pleasant or not.

D. Counsel Acts 20:21, 28-31

Paul's message had two points: Repentance, or turning from sin, and faith, or trusting in Christ.

Here we have the two fundamental requirements of the Gospel: a letting go of sin and a laying hold of the Savior. By Life and Lip, by Exposition and Example, Paul set before the Ephesians the Word of God.

Notice the order in Acts 20:28. Take heed to yourself first. Make sure you're cultivating a personal devotional life, one of Bible study and prayer. Make sure you're engaged in consistent communion with the Lord personally. Take heed to yourself.

True ministry is the overflow of what is taking place in your life personally, secretly, intimately. So, take heed to yourself. Make sure you are personally cultivating a walk with the Lord.

"And to all the flock". Take heed to yourself first and then to the flock. The main task of the pastor is to feed God's flock.

Then Paul warns: "After I leave, wolves will move in." These wolves are not wild, evil people. They are nice, respectable, religious wolves. But they distort the Word of God.

A wolf in sheep's clothing may look like a sheep, smell like a sheep, and even bleat like a sheep. The only difference between a sheep and a wolf in sheep's clothing is their diet. Wolves eat sheep.

"Not only will wolves from the outside sneak in," warned Paul, "but perverse men will stir things up from within."

Someone said that the church is most often hindered – not from the woodpeckers from without, but from the termites from within!

Paul not only fed the flock – he warned them night and day. If we feed but don't warn, we're just fattening up the flock for the kill.

II. Paul's Endowment Acts 20:35-38

Paul was about to leave them. He was giving them the responsibility of tending the flock.

A young girl was doing some internship, preparing to be a medical missionary. Toward the latter days before her separation for the mission field, a young doctor who was not a Christian had come to admire her Christian life and asked her some questions.

He said, "Do you really believe that those who have never heard the Gospel will die in their sins?" She said, "Yes." "Do you really believe that those you go to witness to, if they don't repent, will die in their sins?" She said, "Yes." Then he said, "Then, you cannot live like the rest of us."

As Paul was about to leave, he and the men knelt and wept together because they would never meet again this side of glory. What a scene this must have been!

The best part of being a pastor is people. The most joyful part is people. And the saddest part is often people.

Leaving close Christian friends is never easy. But one thing that Christians never say for the last time is "Good-bye." Our parting song is...

"God be with you till we meet again
Till we meet, till we meet
At Jesus' feet.
God be with you till we meet again."

COURAGE UNDER FIRE

Acts 21:1-22:1

At this time in Acts, Paul is on the last leg of his third, and final, missionary journey, carrying to Jerusalem a large financial gift from the churches in Macedonia and Greece to the harassed church in Jerusalem. But his friends tried to dissuade him from going, believing that danger awaited him there.

But Paul was a man of courage. During this time in Paul's life, it was a perilous time, because the Roman Emperor carried out great persecutions against the Christians.

It took courage to be a strong Christian in Paul's day, but in our modern day, Christians are being attacked more than ever – and certainly more than any other religion.

Before Paul met Jesus on the Damascus Road, he was very zealous for Judaism and gave all his power and talents to what he believed, even if it meant great persecution for the Christians.

- But Paul became a changed man when he met Jesus. He turned away from the old life and gave all his energy, powers, and talents to the service of Christ. He said good-bye to the old life without regret and counted himself as a man dead to those old things, but alive in Christ.
- If there was ever a man who was resigned to God's will, that man was the Apostle Paul. More than anything else, Paul wanted to do the will of God. Sometimes that took real courage.

Paul had two goals in going to Jerusalem:

1. To deliver the relief funds for the church to James and the Church elders (Acts 24:17; Romans 15:26-28).

2. His second priority was to help unite the Jewish and Gentile believers into one body. But the plan for the Church received a serious blow when Jews from Asia, who were in Jerusalem for Pentecost, recognized Paul and began stirring up the people of Jerusalem against him.

In the verses we are about to study, we will see the end of Paul's public ministry. Not his ministry, but his public ministry. From this point forward in Acts (except for a brief period in Rome between his first and second imprisonments), Paul is a prisoner of Rome.

As we follow Paul to Jerusalem and imprisonment, we see his resignation to the will of God.

I. The Voyage Acts 21:1-3

Acts 20 ends with a tearful farewell to the elders of the church at Ephesus. His friends at Ephesus didn't want him to leave. The Greek word for "departed" in 21:1 means "to tear away."

Paul literally had to resist their efforts to prevent him from leaving.

- As they sailed out of the harbor, I can imagine that Paul pointed upward, as if to say to the elders, "I'll see you some day in heaven."
- Someone has well said that Christians never say good-bye for the last time.

II. The Visit Acts 21:4-6

It seems that Paul was traveling on a cargo ship. The ship had to be unloaded and reloaded at Tyre. Paul found some disciples at Tyre and stayed with them for seven days.

Paul no doubt told the disciples of his plan to go to Jerusalem, and one day through the Spirit, they told Paul that he should not go up to Jerusalem. They feared for his life. Later in this chapter, Paul will receive a second warning not to go to Jerusalem.

The phrase "through the Spirit" doesn't mean Paul disobeyed instructions from the Holy Spirit, but that Paul took the words as a warning through the Spirit of what was going to happen in Jerusalem. The Holy Spirit had never said to Paul personally, "Don't go to Jerusalem."

In fact, Acts 19:21 says that Paul "purposed in the Spirit" to go to Jerusalem. Clearly, Paul was not out of the will of God in going to Jerusalem. Paul did not yield to the counsel of the Christians in Tyre because he felt in his heart that he was doing the right thing.

III. The Verdict Acts 21:7-14

When Paul arrived in Caesarea, he stayed in the home of Philip, the evangelist, one of the original seven deacons chosen to serve the church in Jerusalem. This is the same Philip who went to Samaria and held a great revival and afterward was sent by God to go to the desert where he led an Ethiopian to the Lord and baptized him.

- It was Paul's persecution which had driven Philip out of Jerusalem. Twenty years had gone by and Philip is faithfully serving as an evangelist in Caesarea. He had not seen Paul since Paul's conversion, but of course, he had heard about him.
- Now, the persecutor visits the home of the man whom he once persecuted. At the foot of the cross they had come to love each other.

Notice that Philip had four daughters who prophesied. This tells us of the active part that women have in the work of Christ.

While Paul was in Caesarea, the prophet Agabus came down from Judea and joined Paul and those with him. He had heard that Paul was determined to go to Jerusalem and he wanted to stop him. He stood up in the company and did a strange thing.

Agabus was much like one of the Old Testament prophets who used dramatic means for delivering their message – like Jeremiah, or Nathan who confronted David over his sins.

Agabus took Paul's leather belt and bound his own hands and feet with it, saying, "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" (Acts 21:11).

What would you have thought if it had been your belt and the message of the prophet had been directed at you? Paul's companions and friends gathered around him and said, "Paul, this is your second warning. You must not go. We can't afford to lose you. There is a great work yet to be done."

Notice Paul's response: Acts 21:13-14.

IV. The Violence Acts 21:15-22:1

Paul leaves Caesarea and heads up to Jerusalem – a distance of about 65 miles. When they arrived at Jerusalem, James and the elders received them gladly (Acts 21:17-20). Paul told all that the Lord had done and they presented the offering.

But the elders soon went from praise to problems.

Here's the background: An estimated 50,000 Jews in Judea had converted to Christ while maintaining their zeal for all things Jewish. They were in the process of transitioning from Judaism to Christianity. Many of them continued to observe the Law – not as a means of salvation, but out of respect for God and their heritage as Jews. It is here that false teachers had crept in and spread lies against Paul.

It is important to understand who was accusing Paul and for what reason. Four accusations were brought against Paul by his accusers.

1. Denouncing the Jewish People Acts 21:26-28a

The “Jews from Asia” accused Paul of teaching “against the people.” They were accusing Paul of being anti-Semitic. Why would the Jews in Asia have accused Paul of being against the Jews? It's because in his preaching, he would tell Jews and Gentiles alike that they could not be saved just by being Jewish, or by keeping the Law, which was true. But they took these words and twisted them to make it seem that Paul had a hatred for Judaism and those who followed Judaism.

2. Discrediting the Jewish Law Acts 21:28b

They said that Paul was against the Law of Moses. Jewish tradition held that the giving of the Law of Moses on Mount Sinai took place around the same time as Pentecost was celebrated. So, to say that Paul was against the Law of Moses at a time when the giving of the Law was being celebrated would increase the anger of the people toward him.

Of course, Paul was not against the Law. He taught that one could not be saved by keeping the Law, but that the Law itself was “holy and just and good” (Romans 7:12).

3. Defaming the Jewish Temple Acts 21:28c

They said that Paul taught against “this place,” the temple; but the charge was baseless.

4. Defiling the Jewish Temple Acts 21:28d-29

Paul had been seen with a Gentile from Ephesus, named Trophimus (Acts 20:4) while he was in Jerusalem. The Jews just assumed that Paul had taken Trophimus into the temple grounds and defiled it.

The fact that Trophimus had not been arrested, even killed, is evidence that he had not violated the temple rules regarding Gentiles.

The mob stirred up the whole city. The crowd seized Paul, dragged him out of the temple, locked the doors so that his blood wouldn't defile the temple grounds, and began to beat Paul.

It was Roman Soldiers who saved Paul's life as they broke up the mob attack on Paul – Acts 21:33-36.

Paul is going to ask to be heard –Acts 22:1. Acts 22 tells us what Paul said.

HOW TO GIVE YOUR TESTIMONY

Acts 22:1-30

You will remember that as we completed Acts 21, we saw Paul standing on the steps of the castle, in the custody of a Roman Captain. Three times Paul had been warned in Acts 21 not to go to Jerusalem, but he felt that it was God's will for him to go; He went in spite of the warnings. When he got to Jerusalem, the Jews seized him and were about to put him to death.

A Roman officer saved Paul from the Jews and was now taking him into the castle. As Paul mounted the outside steps, he looked down upon the great multitude of Jews and his heart went out to them. He wanted to tell them about Jesus. He asked the Captain for permission to speak and permission was granted. As Paul spoke, he spoke in their own language and Paul gave more than a

defense, he gave a declaration of what Christ had done for him.

If anyone ever doubted that a Christian can have real courage for the Lord in the midst of hostile situations, this account should dispel those doubts forever. Paul stands before a group of people who hate him and wanted to kill him and he stands to give a bold testimony for the Lord Jesus Christ. The same God who gave Paul courage to give a faithful and fearless testimony for his Lord can give you and me courage today to witness under difficult circumstances.

Luke 21:15 (NIV), "For I will give you words and wisdom that none of your adversaries will be able to resist or contradict."

It may be on the job, in the school, or any number of difficult situations; He can and will give you courage to stand for Him.

The salvation testimony of the Apostle Paul is referenced five times in the New Testament – once by Luke and four times by Paul himself.

The way Paul shares his personal testimony in the Lord Jesus is a wonderful example for us in sharing our personal testimony. A Christian testimony should always consist of three points:

1. What life was like before meeting Christ.
2. How we met Christ and came to believe in Him.
3. How life has changed since meeting Christ. That is, what difference has knowing Christ made in our life.

If you are saved, you have a testimony!

- Sometimes we hear folks tell about being saved after living a bad life and doing a lot of bad things. Others have grown up in a Christian home and they almost feel guilty because their background was not filled with dramatic sins from which Christ delivered them.
- If you were raised in a Christian home and didn't have a pre-Christian life filled with dramatic sins, praise the Lord. It was by the grace of God that you were raised in a loving home that was committed to Christ.
- It is to God's glory that you didn't experience many terrible sins and are innocent of having to experience the consequences of sin that others have. Your body and mind and conscience were spared from the hurtful consequences of sin. You need to realize that you do have a wonderful testimony. It was God who preserved you from a lot of bad things that others have been through.

We can learn from Paul how to give our personal testimony in Christ.

I. What Paul was like Before Meeting Christ Acts 22:1-5

Paul was proud of his Race – he was a Jew. He was proud of his Resources – he had a sharp mind. He was proud of his Religion – he was a Pharisee; a Hebrew of the Hebrews.

- But none of these things will bring salvation and none of these things will get you to heaven.
- Titus 3:5: "Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit."

These Jews were accusing Paul of attacking the Jewish faith (Acts 21:28). So, the first thing Paul did was to "establish that he was a Jew," born in Tarsus of Cilicia, but brought up in [Jerusalem]. For Paul to have been against the Jews would have been the equivalent of being against himself since he was a Jew. And he spoke to them in their own Hebrew language.

His parents were strict Hebrews and wanted their son to know Jewish Law, so they took him to study at the feet of Gamaliel, one of the most conservative and well-known rabbis of that day.

- Then, Paul, himself, was a Pharisee. As a Pharisee Paul counted obedience to the Law as his highest priority.
- Paul's connection to Gamaliel was important because the crowd accused him of saying obedience to the Law was unnecessary (Acts 21:28). Yet it was Paul who wrote in Romans 7:12 that "the Law is holy and the commandment holy and just, and good."
- Paul was not against the Law, but he understood that the Law has been fulfilled in Christ and that's what the Jews didn't understand.

Paul said that he was the champion for Judaism and even persecuted those of "the way," or, the Christian way. In fact, he believed killing Christians was his responsibility before God. See Acts 26:9-11.

Paul turns to the High Priest and says, "You remember this and so do the older men who are here. You even gave me letters so I could find more Christians and bind them and bring them to Jerusalem to put them in prison."

I wonder how Paul felt as he told about the way he had persecuted Christ and the Christians. I think a great heaviness filled his heart as he wished these things had never happened.

- I know there are things in my past that I wish I had never done. But Paul didn't linger long on the subject of his past life. He wanted to hurry on to tell the glorious story of his meeting with the risen Redeemer.
- Not one of us is proud of his past sins, but there is one thing for which we can be thankful. We come to Jesus and these sins have been covered by His blood. When we get to heaven our Lord will never bring up the matter of our sins, for Jesus does a thorough job when He saves us. He remembers our sin no more.

II. How Paul met Christ and Came to Believe in Him Acts 22:6-16

These verses essentially tell the story we have recorded in Acts 9.

Paul's testimony is recorded five times in the New Testament:

1. Once by Luke Acts 9
2. Then before the Jewish crowd Acts 22
3. Again, before the Roman governor Festus and King Agrippa Acts 26
4. Then a more doctrinal version Philipians 3
5. Finally, in I Timothy 1

Paul never got over that day when his life was transformed on the road to Damascus.

For theological clarity's sake, it's important to understand the words of Ananias as recorded in Acts 22:16: we understand that water doesn't wash anyone's sins away. It is "calling on the Name of the Lord" in repentance and faith that would remove Paul's (or anyone's) sin, baptism being the outward symbolic expression of that inner cleansing as Paul himself would later explain in Romans 6.

III. How Paul's Life Changed after Coming to Christ Acts 22:17-21

Paul stayed in Damascus, preached in the synagogues, then spent three years in the desert, receiving revelation from the Lord; then returned to Jerusalem to see Peter.

- It was when Paul told them that God was sending him to the Gentiles that they erupted in anger –Acts 22:21-24.
- They were going to scourge Paul (as they did Jesus) in order to determine why the Jews were intent on killing him. That's a little worse than water-boarding to get information from someone!

That's when Paul played his trump card with the Roman official – Acts 22:25-30.

Roman law provided for justice for all its citizens, which meant a trial before being punished. The Roman commander feared he would get himself in trouble if he scourged Paul, so he released him from the binding, but detained him until the next day. The remainder of the Book of Acts details the results of this event.

Paul would be taken to Rome, appear before Caesar, be under house arrest, released, re-imprisoned, and die as a martyr in Rome.

What can we learn from Paul's testimony?

1. Don't be intimidated by the testimony of others.
 - Sometimes if we don't have dramatic stories to tell, we think our testimony is less important or less interesting than others. Nothing could be further from the truth. Every testimony is important, including yours if you truly know Christ as your Savior. How bad one was prior to knowing Christ is not the issue. Meeting Christ is the issue.

2. Don't get lost in the details.

Sometimes those with a bad past give details of their past, and even embellish the past, to glorify themselves. The truth is that "all have sinned." Those listening don't need to know all the details. The details do not glorify the Lord Jesus.

3. Don't forget the details of your salvation experience.

No one evolves into being a Christian, it doesn't happen gradually. It happens with everyone the way it happened with Paul in the sense that at one point you were not a Christian and a few moments later you were. Becoming a Christian happens at a point in time. The events leading up to accepting Christ might have been a process, but the moment at which you make a conscious decision to place your faith in Christ and submit to His Lordship as your Savior is the moment you become a Christian. Our

“moment” may not be as drastic as Paul's, but it is a moment nonetheless.

Some folks say, “I've always been a Christian.” No, you haven't. Growing up in a Christian home and spending your formative years in church doesn't make you a Christian. Jesus used the phrase “born again” as a metaphor for spiritual birth. Physical birth happens in a moment of time and so does spiritual birth.

You may not remember the exact time and day you placed your faith in Christ, because you didn't write it down, but if you can't remember placing your faith in Jesus and accepting Him as Lord and Savior, then you may not be saved at all and you may need to commit your life to Him.

4. Don't let Satan persuade you that your testimony is unimportant.

Satan's target in spiritual warfare is God. Satan isn't trying to keep people from hearing about you, he's trying to keep people from hearing about God.

5. Be sure to give the glory to God.

The point of sharing our testimony is to give glory to Christ. Every Christian should thank God for saving his soul.

PAUL THE PRISONER

Acts 23:1-35

You will notice that in Acts 23:18, Paul is referred to as “Paul the Prisoner.” For the rest of the Book of Acts we will see Paul in prison, ready to stand trial before the Roman Emperor. If you want to see Paul's attitude about being in prison for Christ's sake, you have to read what he said in his prison letters.

1. Ephesians 4:1 “I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord...” Paul was in prison FOR the Lord; and, he was a prisoner OF the Lord. The Lord had captured him and he was shut in to the Lord.

2. Ephesians 6:20 “I am an ambassador in bonds.” An ambassador is one who is on business for his King.

3. Philippians 1:12-13 “I would that ye should understand, brethren, that the things which happened unto me have fallen out rather unto the furtherance of the Gospel; so that my bonds in Christ are manifest in all the palace, and in all other places.”

4. 2 Timothy 2:9 “Wherein I suffer trouble, as an evil doer, even unto bonds; but the Word of God is not bound.” You may chain the MAN of God, but you cannot chain the MESSAGE of God.

Acts 23 is an account of how Paul was kept and protected by the providence of God. The people wanted to kill Paul, but God was not through with him yet.

- Jesus was often near death; then you could hear Him say, “My hour (time) is not yet come” (John 7:6). We are told in John 17:1; “Jesus spoke these words...Father, the hour has come. Glorify your son that your son also may glorify you.” Then before Jesus went to the cross He said, “I have finished the work which Thou gavest me to do” (John 17:4).

- Notice Acts 23:11 The Lord is saying, “Paul, I will keep and protect you until you have finished the task, I have for you to do.”

I. The Courage Acts 23:1-5

The Roman captain had arrested Paul to save his life, but since he had no jurisdiction over Paul, he decided to have him tried before the Sanhedrin (the court) of his own people. He wanted to know why the Jews accused Paul, so he called a meeting of the Jewish Sanhedrin to gain this information.

- The Sanhedrin was composed of seventy-one members. They were required to be above 30 years of age, to have a good reputation, and must be well versed in Jewish Law.

- The captain brought Paul in and was ready to hear both sides. In an orderly way the captain sought to find out the charges against Paul. Every accused man had the right to know the charges against him and every Roman citizen was entitled to official protection.

The Sanhedrin was called into session for the next day and Paul was placed before them for the trial. Paul begins by stating clearly and confidently that he had nothing of which to be ashamed and nothing to regret. He says that all charges against him were baseless.

Paul said that he had lived in all good conscience before God until that day.

The word “conscience” appears 31 times in the New Testament; 25 of those appear in Paul's writings. Conscience is the inner voice

that approves when we do right and disapproves when we do wrong.

There are at least four different and distinct consciences mentioned by Paul in the New Testament.

1. A Good Conscience or a Pure Conscience (I Timothy 3:9).

2. A Defiled Conscience (I Corinthians 8:7) is one that has been sinned against so much that it is no longer sensitive (dependable).

3. A Seared Conscience (I Timothy 4:2). Desensitized, as if all the nerves that make them feel had been destroyed and turned into scar tissue.

4. An Evil Conscience (Hebrews 10:22) – bad, guilty, malicious, grievous.

Ananias, an unbelieving, overbearing Sadducee, was one of the most notorious high priest of Israel. He was a glutton, a tyrant, a bigot, and a murderer.

- When Paul says that he has lived before God in all good conscience, Ananias had Paul slapped on the mouth. The word “strike” is used of the mob's beating, a vicious blow.
- Paul was no sissy and had a little bit of a temper as well. He blurted out, “God will smite thee, thou whiten wall.”

Everyone there knew what Paul meant when he called the high priest a “whited wall.” All tombs near highways were whitewashed to warn travelers of the presence of death to prevent worshipers attending the feast in Jerusalem from becoming unclean. Paul implied the high priest looked immaculate on the outside, but there were hidden corruptions within his soul.

When Paul was told this man was the high priest, Paul quickly apologized. Many a man has the courage to fight, but he is not man enough to stand up and say, “I was wrong. I apologize.”

Paul said that he didn't know the man was the high priest. How could Paul not know the high priest? Some believe it had to do with Paul's bad eyesight (his thorn in the flesh, Galatians 4:15); or that Paul was so angry that he forgot to whom he was speaking; or that he was being sarcastic, since Ananias was not acting like a high priest. The simplest explanation is to take Paul's words at face value. He had been gone from Jerusalem for many years and would not likely have recognized Ananias by sight.

That this was an informal gathering of the Sanhedrin would have meant the high priest would not have been wearing his official garments.

II. The Conflict Acts 23:6-10

Paul was no dummy. He knew the bitter opposition between the Pharisees and the Sadducees and he exploits it to the fullest. Paul knew the importance of “divide and conquer.”

The Sadducees didn't believe in angels, spirits, or the resurrection from the dead. They were the liberals. The Pharisees were the conservatives. They believed in all three. So Paul dropped a bomb. He said, “I am a Pharisee and I preach the resurrection from the dead.” When the Sadducees attacked Paul, the Pharisees attacked the Sadducees and Paul just watched the fight.

III. The Comfort Acts 23:11

The Lord always stands by them who stand for Him. In Acts 23:11 the Lord STOOD by Paul, SPOKE to Paul, and SAFE-GUARDED Paul.

Just when I need Him, Jesus is near, Just when I falter, just when I fear;
Ready to help me, Ready to cheer; Just when I need Him most.

Just when I need Him, Jesus is strong. Bearing by burdens all the day long.
For all my sorrow giving a song – Just when I need Him most.

Just when I need Him, He is my all, Answering when upon Him I call.
Tenderly watching lest I should fall – Just when I need Him most.

IV. The Conspiracy Acts 23:12-24

Some 40 Asian Jews banded together and put themselves under a divine judgment if they did not kill Paul. They vowed not to eat or

drink anything until they had killed Paul.

Don't forget Acts 23:11. Man may plan, but the Lord often has other plans. When God stands by you, it doesn't matter who may stand against you.

We should never be amazed at God's resources to deliver us. Out of the blue comes word of a person we've never heard of. Paul had a sister, and his sister had a son, and God is going to use the lad in bringing deliverance to Paul. This is the only mention in Scripture of any of Paul's relatives.

The captain's plan was simple, but wise. He knew he had to get Paul out of Jerusalem or there would be one murderous plot after another against Paul, and one of them might succeed.

A human convoy was formed that would leave by night. Two hundred heavily armed men went in front of Paul and two hundred spear-men followed behind him. In the middle of the company force rode 70 cavalry men and in the midst of these rode Paul, the prisoner.

It's evident that Paul was no longer in charge of his movements. The Lord was guiding every move as Paul went to Rome.

The missionary prisoner traveled like a king. He has a bodyguard of 470 heavily armed soldiers. And notice, Paul was not walking – the usual custom for prisoners – but riding.

V. The Communication Acts 23:25-35

The captain wrote a letter to governor Felix, telling him that he found nothing worthy of death in Paul, but his accusers would want to bring charges against Paul before him.

Here is the greatest truth in this chapter: If we stand up for God, He will take care of us.

FOOLISH FELIX

Acts 24:1-27 (Acts 24:24-25)

Paul, the Apostle, is now Paul the Prisoner. He is in Caesarea at this time. The Jews of Jerusalem had sought to kill him, but the Romans had put him under protective arrest. Then forty men made a conspiracy to kill him. When this plot was discovered the Romans put Paul under a heavy convoy and brought him to Caesarea to appear before Governor Felix. When he came before Felix, he was treated very courteously. Felix said, "I will hear you fully when your accusers have come down from Jerusalem." Paul was kept in prison awaiting the arrival of his accusers.

History records that Felix was a wicked man. He had been a slave and then he became a freeman under Claudius. He pandered to the depravity of the emperor and rose in the court until he was finally awarded the governorship of Judah. He was corrupt in his administration and was hated by the Jews. His time as governor was characterized by graft; his wife was a teenager whom he stole from another king. The corruption of his rule became so great that Nero recalled him as governor. He would have been executed had it not been for his brother who was in Rome at the time and pleaded on his behalf.

The Jews – the high priest, Ananias, and the elders – came down from Jerusalem five days after Paul arrived and brought with them an "orator" (lawyer) named Tertullus to present their case against Paul to Felix.

Remember: The Jews hated Felix; yet, you would never know it from the way the lawyer showered praise and flattery upon him. He was doing what many politicians have always done – spin the truth to their own advantage. His lips were dripping honey as he began. He did some tall lying!

Here is what Tertullus said to Felix: "You brought peace to our country;" "you have corrected many evils;" "we accept you with all thankfulness." All lies!

They brought three charges against Paul:

1. Acts 24:5A – They accused Paul of being a nuisance, a troublemaker, one who stirred up insurrection and riots in city after city.

Felix was aware of the riots that had taken place at Philippi (Acts 16:20), at Thessalonica (Acts 17:6), at Ephesus (Acts 19:29), and at Jerusalem (Acts 21:30). Riots did seem to follow Paul and disturbing the peace was a

serious offense in that day. It was not Paul, but the Jews who did so.

2. Acts 24:5b They accused Paul of heresy, a ring leader of the sect of the Nazarenes, a reference to the followers of Jesus the Nazarene. All Christians at that time were suspected of plotting against Caesar.

3. The leader of this cause was considered a very dangerous enemy. They said Paul was teaching things which the Jews didn't believe.

4. Acts 24:6 They charged Paul of profaning the Temple. This is a repetition of the early accusation that Paul had taken a Gentile to the Temple which was an attempt to defile the temple.

They did some more tall lying when they said, "We knew that he was guilty, so we arrested him. We were going to give him a fair trial, but the chief captain with great violence took him out of our hands."

They were not going to give Paul a trial at all. They rushed into the Temple, dragged him out, and were about to kill him when the Chief captain rescued him. There was no trial to it. It was just a mob going about to murder him.

Felix could see through their scheme, but ordered Paul to be kept in custody, but gave him a great deal of liberty.

Paul had no attorney. He was an expert in both Jewish law and Roman law and he denied all charges. Paul's reply was courteous, calm, and challenging.

Paul then challenged his accusers to bring proof of their charges. There were no witnesses. The whole thing was a frame-up and a disgrace. It should not have been permitted in a court of law.

Felix knew Paul was not guilty of anything. He just didn't have the courage to make a decision that would have been unpopular with the Jews. He was a politician, straddling the fence.

Felix did not let Paul go free, but put him in hold. One reason was that he wanted to hear more about Jesus – See Acts 24:24-25.

Now Felix called for Paul. Why would he call for Paul?

1. Curiosity: He had heard Paul speak in his defense several days before and he talked about "the way," meaning the true way to the Lord, and Felix was curious to know more about "the way."

2. Profit might have motivated him: Acts 24:26. Others had paid Felix to go easy on them in his punishment of them; some had even bought their freedom.

3. The Holy Spirit: I'm convinced that the Holy Spirit prompted Felix to call for Paul. Something Paul said to Felix was used by the Holy Spirit to stir Felix's heart toward God.

I called Felix, "Foolish Felix." The Bible doesn't call many folks fools or foolish.

- Psalm 14:1 "The fool has said (in his heart), no God"
- Luke 12 The rich farmer was called a fool because he reckoned the temporary as more important than the Eternal.
- Proverbs 14:9 "Fools make a mock of sin." They take sin lightly; they feel they can get by with their sin.

Felix was foolish because of his:

I. Understanding Acts 24:24-25

Felix understood the Word of God to his heart, but he would not act on what he had heard. How do I know he understood? When Paul preached, he trembled. He was not trembling because he was afraid of Paul, but because he was convicted of his sin.

I've seen some cry when I've preached. I've seen others laugh or just sit there, but few have trembled.

The most foolish person in the world is he who hears God speaking to his heart and he fails to act!

The purpose of preaching is not to make folks comfortable or to entertain than or to sooth their conscience, but to awaken men to the consciousness of their sin.

God's Word is sharp (and it cuts deep), powerful, alive (it gets down to the very heart).

"He reasoned with them". Like a prosecuting attorney, the Word of God and the Spirit of God built a case against these two. The message was tailor-made for them.

Paul preached a three-point message:

1. Righteousness which they did not Possess.

God's righteousness, God's holiness, and how far these two had fallen from the image of God. Righteousness refers to both Outward Conduct and Inward Character. Righteousness was unknown in the career of Felix, who had a reputation for his lust, excessive desire for wealth, and cruelty.

2. Temperance which they did not Practice.

Temperance speaks of self-control and a disciplined life. It is the moderate use of good things and the abstinence from all bad things.

Paul's sermon thundered home to them the truth of the seventh commandment. Surely, they thought of their shameful escapades, their adulterous union, the abandoned husband.

3. Judgment that is to Come for which they were not Prepared.

Payday is coming. You may get away with your sin now, but some day you must face God.

Felix heard the sermon, felt the conviction of the Holy Spirit to his heart. What did he do?

We are told that Felix trembled, but we are not told that Drusilla trembled. She was as deep in sin as Felix, the sermon applied to her just as much as it did to him, but she was not moved. In the same manner two people can sit side by side in a church and listen to the same sermon. One is moved and comes to Christ, the other hardens his heart and refuses Christ, one is on his way to heaven and the other is on his way to hell.

Having heard the Gospel, Felix did the worst thing any unsaved person can do: He procrastinated. He put off a response until a more convenient time.

- This was a defining moment in Felix's life. He had come under conviction by the Holy Spirit; he was afraid to the point he trembled, but he did not follow through on the conviction he experienced.
- The fact is, there is never a convenient time to talk about sin. No one likes to discuss his unrighteousness, his lack of self-control, or his guilt before God at His coming.

THE DEADLINE

"There is a time, I know not when,
A place, I know not where,
Which marks the destiny of men
To Heaven or despair.

There is a line by us not seen,
Which crosses every path;
The hidden boundary between
God's patience and His wrath.

To cross that limit is to die,
To die, as if by stealth.
It may not pale the beaming eye,
Nor quench the glowing health.

The conscience may be still at ease,
The spirit light and gay.
That which is pleasing still may please,
And care be thrust away.

But on that forehead God hath settlements
Indelibly a mark,
By man unseen for man as yet
Is blind and in the dark.

And still the doomed man's path below
May bloom like Eden bloomed.
He did not, does not, will not know,
Nor feel that he is doomed.

He feels, he sees that all is well,
His every fear is calmed.
He lives, he dies, he wakes in Hell,
Not only doomed, but damned.

Oh, where is that mysterious bourn,
By which each path is crossed,
Beyond which God Himself hath sworn
That he who goes is lost?

How long may man go on in sin,
How long will God forbear?
Where does hope end, and where begin
The confines of despair?

One answer from the sky is sent,
Ye who from God depart,
While it is called today, repent
And harden not your heart."

Some things can be put off without serious consequences. Others cannot. When Felix put off his decision about Christ, he missed his chance for eternity.

II. Misunderstanding

Felix thought opportunities would always be his; always another time. Not so. You cannot get saved anytime you want to. It is not according to your timing, but God's.

There are three dangers of missing opportunity to be saved:

1. Death – Proverbs 27:1 – "Boast not thyself of tomorrow..."
2. Deafness – Proverbs 29:1 – "He who is often reprov'd and hardens his neck..."
3. Delay – Jesus may come back.

God says: Hebrews 3:7-8; Isaiah 1:18; Proverbs 1:24-28

III. Ultimate Understanding

Judgment day is coming; then the lost man will understand the importance of salvation – TOO LATE!

Felix said, "Tomorrow." God said, "Today!"

A pastor was standing outside at the front of the church after a Sunday night service, when a car load of boys who had been drinking drove up and a boy who the pastor had witnessed to, hung his head out of the car and shouted, "Hey, Preacher, how far is it to Hell?"

Only two blocks away a crash was heard. Everyone in that car was killed. The preacher thought to himself, "How far is it to Hell? How far is it to Heaven?" The answer is the same, depending on what you have done with Jesus – "Just one heartbeat!"

At first, Felix commanded that Paul should be given liberty (verse 23), but after two years when he realized the prisoner could not be bribed, he commanded that Paul should be chained. The preaching prisoner had become a nuisance upon whom he had wasted

precious time.

Two years pass between Acts 24:26 and Acts 24:27. It is said that Luke wrote the Gospel of Luke under the guidance of Paul during this time.

FALSELY ACCUSED

Acts 25:1-27

Before we get into Acts 25, let me introduce you to five people:

1. Ananias the High Priest: He was one of Israel's cruelest and most corrupt High Priest who was anointed by Herod. He tried to have Paul killed on at least two occasions.
2. Agrippa: King Agrippa was the last of the Herods. They were Edomites, descendants of Esau, the twin brother of Jacob.
 - The first of the line was Herod the Great, who had the male babies killed in Bethlehem (Matthew 2:16).
 - His son, Herod Antipas, had John the Baptist beheaded in prison (Matthew 14:10).
 - His grandson, Herod Agrippa I, put the Apostle James to death with the sword (Acts 12:2). He was eaten by worms.
 - His grandson, Agrippa II had been appointed by the Romans to be governor of Galilee. He was the brother of Felix's wife, Drusilla (Acts 24:24). Bernice was Agrippa's half-sister. Their incestuous relationship was the talk of Rome, where Agrippa grew up. Bernice for a while became the mistress of Emperor Vespasian, then of his son, Titus, but always returned to her half-brother.
3. Felix: He was a bad and cruel governor, even though the title of "most excellent" was given to him. He was so convicted by Paul's sermon that he "trembled," but would not yield his life to Jesus.
4. Festus succeeded Felix. He was a member of Roman nobility. Little is known of his brief tenure as governor. He died two years after assuming office, but was better than either his predecessor or his successor.
5. Bernice: She was the eldest daughter of Herod Agrippa I. Her sister, Drusilla, was married to Felix. These two women were two of the most corrupt and shameless women of their time in Roman history. Bernice lived an incestuous life with her half-brother, Agrippa.

What became of Ananias, Felix, and Drusilla?

- Ananias, the High Priest, was killed by assassins.
- Felix, the governor, was driven back to Rome and died in the mountains, an exile.
- Drusilla was buried under lava when Mount Vesuvius erupted.

All three had an opportunity to be saved, but rejected their opportunities and went down to death and to hell.

We often suffer unjust or unfair treatment by others. How should we respond when it happens?

I. The Accusation Acts 25:1-9

Paul had been kept in prison two years by Felix. When Felix was recalled by Rome, he left Paul in prison as a favor to the Jews. Then Festus became governor.

Although two years had gone by, and although Paul had kept silent all of this time, the Jewish hatred against him was still intense.

- When Festus reached Jerusalem, the High Priest and the chief Jews sought an interview with him, told him all about Paul's so-called crimes and asked the governor to send Paul to Jerusalem for trial.
- They did not really want Paul to have a trial, they didn't want him brought to Jerusalem. They were lying in wait to kill him.
- Festus heard the accusations from the Jews and knew Paul was guilty of nothing. He should have released Paul, but he was afraid that he would lose face with the Jews, so he offered Paul a proposition. "Are you willing, if I am present, to go up to Jerusalem and

be judged before the Sanhedrin?"

II. The Appeal Acts 25:10-12

The proposition was unfair to Paul. He was safer at Caesarea than at Jerusalem. Festus previously said that the trial ought to be held in Caesarea, but now he reverses his position.

Why? He had come to the place where he wanted to gain favor with the Jews. He was willing to go against his own conscience for personal gain.

Paul gives his answer to Festus. He knew that if he went to Jerusalem the Jews would surly assassinate him. His only way to escape was to appeal to Caesar as a Roman citizen.

Paul said, "I appeal to Caesar." Festus replied, "unto Caesar thou shalt go."

III. The Announcement Acts 25:13-21

Paul's case was taken out of the hands of Festus and the Sanhedrin. While Paul was waiting to set sail to Rome, Paul had an opportunity to give his testimony and to preach to Agrippa and Bernice.

IV. The Appointment Acts 25:22-27

When Festus told Agrippa about Paul, Agrippa said, "I would like to hear this man." Festus replied, "I will arrange an appointment for tomorrow."

Agrippa has a decision to make. What will he decide?

THE TRAGEDY OF ALMOST

Acts 26:24-32

Let me remind you that the last few chapters of Acts finds Paul either in prison or going to prison.

1. Acts 26:24-26 covers a period of two years in which Paul was in prison in Caesarea for preaching the Gospel.
2. Several times he is called upon to make his defense.
3. He stands before Felix, Festus, and Agrippa.
4. In each case, however, the tables are turned and it is not Paul who stands before these men as much as it is these men who stand before Paul!

Read Passage

This is probably one of the most tragic accounts found anywhere in the Word of God.

- Here was a man who was so close to salvation, and yet, he said no to Jesus.
- That tragedy is repeated over and over again.

If you will look closely at this passage you will discover three different people with three different attitudes toward Jesus:

1. Festus: Alienation Acts 26:24-25

a. The sanest man in that assembly that day was the man Festus said was crazy. The only man in that room who took into account all the factors in life was Paul. The only man there who had a true view and a proper perspective of time and eternity was Paul. The others, the majority, looked at life from the narrow viewpoint of self-

interest, from the standpoint of power, prosperity, popularity, or prestige. This world and its interest dominated their horizons. Only Paul looked at life from the standpoint of eternity. "Of all those there, only Paul had met Jesus." Only Paul knew Him and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings and was being made conformable unto His death. "Paul was the only man there in touch with both worlds – this world and the world to come." "I am not mad," Paul said.

b. "I am not mad, most noble Festus."

(1) Paul did not respond in kind. He was far too courteous a man and far too conscientious a Christian to speak evil of dignitaries.

(2) There is no excuse for a Christian to be rude. One cannot imagine the Lord Jesus being rude." Even though Festus was quite willing to throw Paul over to the wolves to further his own career, and Paul knew it to be so; even though Festus was prejudiced against Paul and took satisfaction in the fact that he would now have to appear before Nero; even though with Roman pride and snobbery he accused Paul of being mad; even though he wholly rejected Paul's

defense and Paul's clear-cut testimony to the reality of resurrection, eternity and the world to come, Paul responded with Christian courtesy. He called Festus "Most Noble Festus." Festus had a soul to be saved, and Paul was far more likely to reach him by being courteous than by being rude.

2. Paul: Altogether

- a. Paul's whole life was centered in Christ.
- b. Philippians 1:21 "For me to live is Christ..."

3. Agrippa: Almost

There are many "almost" in the bible. Folks who came so close to salvation and, yet, were not saved.

Acts 26 is a continuation of Paul's hearing before Agrippa. When Paul is given the privilege to speak for himself, he took advantage of the opportunity to witness for Christ. His witness was an account of his conversion experience. This is the third time in Acts that his conversion experience is recorded.

Paul is about to face one of the most impressive gatherings of royalty and splendor of his life. There was Festus, the procurator of Judea, clothed in his finest robe, supported and protected by his honor guard. There was Agrippa, the honored guest and King of Lebanon. He too was dressed in his royal attire fit only for a king. He too was surrounded by his well-disciplined honor guard. Seated next to him is Bernice (his wife and sister) bedecked with her long flowing gown and glittering jewels. No doubt there were other men of prestige and power, along with military guards, trumpeters, and legal advisors.

These dignitaries were ushered into the court with great pomp and ceremony. They formed a very impressive group. The stage is set, everything is ready. At the proper time the prison guards escort Paul, the lonely prisoner bound in chains, into the court. They lead him in to the presence of this assembled group of dignitaries and leave him standing there all alone – yet, he is not alone, FOR THE LORD STOOD BY HIM.

What a contrast between Paul and those assembled to hear him. A contrast between

Royalty and rags

Prestige and poverty

Power and weakness

Freedom and chains

As Paul stood before this group of royalty, the words of the Lord in Acts 9:15 were being fulfilled – "He is a chosen vessel unto me, to bear my name before the Gentiles, and Kings, and the children of Israel."

It should be noted, however, that Paul dominated the situation. He was not on trial before them, they were on trial before the Gospel.

Here is an example of how close a person can come to salvation and, yet, be lost.

I. The Reality of the Almost Acts 26:27-28

1. This verse is difficult to translate. Where do you put the emphasis?

A. Almost?

B. To be a Christian?

C. These are not words of scorn (some say ridicule and sarcasm), some translate it (Do you think you can persuade me to become a Christian with so few words or in so short a time?).

2. Notice what God used to try to get Agrippa to come to salvation:

A. Persuasion of the Scriptures Acts 26:26

The power of the Scriptures is compared to: A Mirror

A Sword

A Fire

A Hammer

B. Persuasion of the Soul-Winner

1. Acts 26:1-23 Paul shared his personal testimony.

2. 2 Corinthians 5:11 "knowing therefore the terror of the Lord, we persuade men..."

C. Persuasion of the Spirit

1. Paul knew what was going on in Agrippa's heart for the conviction of the Spirit had come to his heart. "Saul, Saul... it is hard for you to kick against the pricks."

2. I have seen conviction and wonder what else I could have said or done to get folks to come to Christ.

a. Judas Kissed the door of Heaven; yet, went to Hell

b. Pilate Tried to wash his hands of Jesus

c. Felix Paul, come back when I get ready

3. God says: "My Spirit shall not always strive with man."

4. Almost persuaded now to believe, Almost persuaded Christ to receive; Seems now some soul to say, "Go Spirit, go thy way, some more convenient day, On Thee I'll call.

Almost persuaded, come, come today. Almost persuaded, turn not away. Jesus invites you here, Angels are lingering near – Prayers rise from hearts so dear; O wanderer come.

Almost persuaded, harvest is past! Almost persuaded, doom comes at last. Almost cannot avail; Almost is but to fail! Sad, Sad that bitter wail – Almost, but lost!

II. The Reasons for the Almost

A. Bernice

1. What a wicked woman she was. She was married first to her uncle...now to her brother...shortly after Paul spoke to them, she was to leave Agrippa.

2. That is the reason many do not come to Jesus. They are unwilling to give up their sin.

B. Festus

1. He had just said that Paul was crazy. What would Agrippa think of him if he said "Yes" to Paul's Jesus?
2. The fear of men has kept many from Christ.
3. To become a Christian might have cost the king some sneers, but not to become a Christian cost him his soul.
4. Harry Ironside said, "Folks may be able to laugh you into hell, but they will never laugh you out of hell."

C. Paul

1. We see in Paul a living picture of what it cost to be a Christian.
2. There is a cost to be a Christian!

D. Agrippa

1. The bottom line is that Agrippa must choose for himself as to what he would do concerning Jesus.
2. No one can make that choice for you!

III. The Results of the Almost

1. So far as we know, the Holy Spirit never gave him another chance. Heaven's most gifted, persuasive, and spirit-filled ambassador has presented him with the demands of God's throne.
2. He refused to give up that which he could not keep in order to gain that which he could not lose.
3. He missed the joys of being a Christian. Here and Hereafter!

THE VOYAGE OF LIFE

Acts 27:1-44

When we read Acts 27, we learn that Luke spends a lot of time describing a voyage and a shipwreck...some 44 verses. He could have covered the incident in a few verses, so why did he spend so much time talking about this voyage?

Since ancient times, waters have pictured life as a journey or a voyage. Generally, the journey of life is filled with prosperity and adversity; trials and triumphs. Thankfully, the Bible indicates that life will have more triumphs than trials.

Paul's final journey commences with difficulty. Notice Acts 27:4. The winds were contrary; Acts 27:7 – sailed slowly many days; Acts 27:9 – sailing was now dangerous.

Keep in mind that there were no passenger ships such as we have today. They took passage upon cargo vessels when they were available. They had no compasses and no charts. They sailed by watching the heavens.

Acts 27 is a parenthesis. They present:

1. Paul as the Counselor Acts 27:1-20
2. Paul as the Encourager Acts 27:21-44
3. Paul as the Helper Acts 28:1-10
4. Paul as the Preacher Acts 28:11-31

Acts 27 was written:

1. To show how Paul the Prisoner became the Captain.
2. To show how Paul took command of a difficult situation and great crisis by trusting God and being an example to others.
3. To show how life pictures a journey or voyage. Sometimes there is smooth sailing; sometimes it is sink or swim; but there is safety on the other side.

Paul's greatest SPIRITUAL ambition was to be like Jesus – Philippians 3:10, 13-14.

Paul's greatest HUMAN ambition was to visit Rome, the capital and center of the great Roman Empire, where he could testify for

Jesus.

- He knew that if he could get the Christian faith firmly planted in Rome, the effects of it could be felt throughout the Empire.
- God had promised him that he would go to Rome, and God was going to fulfill that promise.

Let me give you a general account before we look at some specifics:

1. Paul was traveling to Rome on a cargo ship loaded with grain; probably wheat.
2. On board were 276 people, including several prisoners – Acts 27:37, 42.
3. Paul advised them not to sail at that time, but they wouldn't listen – Acts 27:9,14. (Euroclydon is a northeaster, a strong, dangerous windstorm greatly feared by sailors.)
4. For eleven days there was darkness because of the storm, causing them to throw the wheat and gear overboard to lighten the ship, causing the ship to rise in the water and ride more easily upon the water – Acts 27:18-19.
5. They used cables to under-gird the ship, wrapping the cables around the hull and winching it tightly to help the ship endure the battering wind and waves – Acts 27:17.
6. They went for 14 days without food during the storm because of seasickness and the difficulty of preparing food as well as their fear that they would die in the sea – Acts 27:27, 33.

Three things I want us to see:

I. The Suggestion Acts 27:1-14 (Note Acts 27:9-11)

Paul warned that if they sailed at that time, they would experience much hurt and much damage. Why didn't they listen to Paul?

A. Impatience – Acts 27:9 “much time had been spent”

They had already spent much time loading the ship, and they felt that it would be time wasted if they waited any longer. They would lose money by waiting.

B. Expert Advice – Acts 27:11

Who was Paul to be giving advice to seasoned sailors? He was no expert...But he knew the mind of God. The majority ruled. Paul was out-voted two to one.

C. Discomfort – Acts 27:12

The professional sailors deemed Fair Havens an unsuitable location to wait out the winter.

D. Favorable Circumstances – Acts 27:13

Circumstances were not what they appeared to be. The winds were helpful when they left Fair Havens, but shortly afterwards a northeaster of hurricane strength made it impossible to navigate, and they were driven out to sea away from the coast of Crete. The centurion probably began to wish he had listened to the counsel of Paul.

Two words are used in these verses that often carry deeper meanings:

1. Storms: Storms often come unexpected – not just literal storms, but storms in life.
2. Winds: In the Bible, winds often speak of difficulty.

II. The Storm Acts 27:15-26

They did everything they could do to save the ship from being destroyed – put cables around the ship to hold it together, pulled down part of the sail, even threw some of the cargo overboard – all to no avail.

Let me give you some truths about storms:

1. Storms often come when we disobey the will of God.

Paul was warned by revelation of God and tried to warn the man of the ship, not to sail at that time, but to no avail. It wasn't Paul's fault the men didn't listen. Sometimes we suffer for the unbelief of others.

2. Storms have a way of revealing character.

Paul began the voyage as a "prisoner," but he ended up as "the captain". Paul exhibits four great characteristics in the midst of the storm:

- a. Calmness: Paul was in control of himself and the situation. He trusted God in the midst of the storm.
- b. Courage: Paul spoke up when others were afraid to speak.
- c. Confidence: Paul knew what he was talking about because he got the information from God.
- d. Cheerfulness: While all others were struggling for themselves, Paul was concerned for his fellow passengers. Here was Paul, going to stand before Caesar, and here Paul thought about others in the hour of trial.

3. Even the worst storm cannot hide the face of God or hinder His purpose.

There were 276 men on board and 275 of them were filled with despair. Paul was the most valuable man on the ship! Paul begins by reminding them of their unwise decision (Acts 27:21) and told them that they brought all this distress upon themselves.

Notice some important truths in Acts 27: 23-25

1. God's Presence – Acts 27: 23 The angel of God stood by Paul.
2. Paul's Privilege – Acts 27:24 Encouraging Paul – "Saying, fear not, Paul."

3. God's Property – Acts 27:23 "Whose I am" Paul belonged to God "lock, stock and barrel.
4. Paul's Position – Acts 27:23 "Whom I serve"
5. God's Purpose – Acts 27:24 "You must be brought before Caesar." Satan cannot take our life as long as God has a job for us to do.
6. God's Power – Acts 27:24 God will preserve all on board – none will be lost.
7. God's Promise – Acts 27:25 Paul said that he believed God would keep the promise that He gave him.

4. Storms give us the opportunity to be examples and to bear witness of Jesus.

III. The Shipwreck Acts 27:27-44 (Note Acts 27:29-32, 40-44)

The great lesson in this chapter is that God works behind the scenes to care for His people and carry out His own great purpose. It was not the skill of the sailors which saved the 276 people. It was the power of God. The same God looks after His children today.

Acts 27:29 says they "cast forth four anchors from the stern" in order to slow the ship and stabilize it. The old preachers use to talk about some "anchors" that the child of God needed in his life, and then they would name four things they felt were important for Christians to have in their life. Let me list four of my own:

1. Common sense is needed in storms.
In a crisis use your head. When common sense makes good sense, seek no other sense.
2. Christian conviction.
Stand upon divine principles. Do not compromise when the going get rough.
3. Christian courage.
Stand your ground.
4. Christian steadfastness.
I Corinthians 15:58 "Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye steadfast, unmovable always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as you know that your labor is not in vain in the Lord."

ROME AT LAST

Acts 28:1-31

As Acts 28 opens, Paul and his fellow survivors stood on the shore of a little island, surveying the scene. Their clothes were wet and they were shivering in the coldness of the early morning.

- They had been on a Roman ship for many days, and a storm had driven them westward over the Mediterranean Sea. As the rain and wild winds tore the ship to pieces, the passengers, 276 in number, jumped into the sea and made their way safely to land. God had promised through Paul that everyone on the ship would be saved, but that the ship would be destroyed. This promise was kept, as are all the promises of God. The ship was gone, but the 276 people were safe on a little island.
- The news spread among the islanders and soon a crowd had gathered to render their assistance as was possible. One of the survivors no doubt asked one of the islanders where they were and the reply was Melita (Acts 27:26) or modern-day Malta, a small village about 18 miles long and 8 miles wide. On the map it is a small dot in a very large sea. If the ship had missed that island, disaster would have been inevitable. But God was in control from start to finish.

It's interesting to note that during World War II, Malta was the most heavily bombed spot on earth. The shipwrecked group of 276 men spent the winter months of November, December, and January on this island.

Acts 28:2 says that those living on the island were "barbarous people." This term is misleading to modern readers, because today the word suggest savages, cannibals, or wild people. But this is not what Luke meant at all. Romans gave this definition to all people who were unable to communicate in the official language of Latin or Greek. All other sounds were unintelligible and sounded like "ba-ba-ba."

The islanders recognized the need of the shipwreck survivors and immediately built a fire so all could get warm. Notice that Paul was one of the first to gather wood for the fire. Paul did not see himself as special. As others were gathering wood for the fire, he said, "I can help warm others."

We learn several things about Paul in this passage and in the Book of Acts:

I. Paul was a Protected Man Acts 28:1-6

One of the truths of the Word of God is that when the man of God is in the will of God, God protects him until his task is done. Look at some of the things from which God protected Paul:

1. God rescued him from the Jews in Damascus. Acts 9:23-25
2. Paul was stoned in Lystra and left for dead. Acts 14:19
3. He was put in Prison in Philippi. Acts 16:19-33
4. He was persecuted in Ephesus. Acts 19:23-41
5. Now he has been shipwrecked in the Mediterranean.

Think of all the examples of God's protection of his children.

1. Joseph: From the pit to the palace
2. Daniel: In the lion's den
3. Peter: In Prison – Acts 12

These natives treated the 276 men with kindness. They built a fire so as to warm and dry the drenched survivors.

Sometimes Satan tries to destroy or discourage us with sizable storms. Other times, he uses sneaky little snakes. While Paul was helping people, the snake struck. And you can be sure that's when the serpent will strike you.

As Paul laid a bundle of sticks on the fire, a snake (a viper) was driven out of the pile of sticks by the heat, stuck Paul's hand, fixed its fangs in the flesh and hung on.

The natives identified the snake as poisonous, because they expected Paul to die. When the natives saw it they believed that Paul must have been a murderer whom the gods were avenging through the snake. He had escaped the sea, but the gods would not be denied his death, for the venom would surely kill him.

I like what is said in Acts 28:5 “And he shook off the beast into the fire.” Paul shook it off. I like that! He shook it off – right back into the fire.

- When Paul was unaffected by the venom and did not even get sick from the poison, the natives quickly changed their minds and concluded that Paul himself must be a god.
- The God who protected Paul from the storm could also protect him from the bite of the snake.

The natives thought the calamity came to Paul because he must have been a bad man. They were mistaken. We often make the same mistake. We see someone suffering and we say that God must have sent the suffering because of some evil in their life. This may not be the case at all. Some of the greatest Christians have been the greatest sufferers.

There are certain vipers that try to latch on to us. With God's help we need to shake them off. There is the viper of dishonesty, worldliness, unguarded temper, malice, and unforgiveness.

You may say, “My viper is too strong. I have nursed it until it's my master. I can't shake it off.” But Christ can set you free.

II. Paul was a Powerful Man Acts 28:7-10

Publius was the leading citizen on the island – probably the Roman governor – who had a large estate. He provided resources for the 276 survivors for three days.

The father of Publius was sick with dysentery and Paul healed him. This is not the first time Paul exercised the gift of healing, but in all cases, he realized that the power was not in himself and he knew that what was done was done so that others might believe.

As a result of this healing, Publius honored Paul in many ways and provided for their needs.

III. Paul was a Purposeful Man Acts 28:10-16

Just as Jesus “steadfastly set His face to go to Jerusalem” to the cross, Paul purposed in the Spirit that he “must also see Rome.” That was his goal. That's what God wanted him to do and nothing was going to stop him.

After three months on the island, the captain of the ship makes ready to continue the journey to Rome. They were able to get passage on board another grain ship from Alexandria. This ship and its crew had spent the winter on the island and are now ready to carry the cargo of grain on to Italy.

Acts 28:16 “And so we came to Rome.”

Acts 28 completes the outline of the book. Acts 1:8 says that the Apostles were to be God's witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and to the end of the earth (to the Gentile world). God's purpose had been completed, for now the known world had been touched with the Gospel.

Paul wanted to go to Rome to Preach, but he went as a Prisoner. But, he was a Preaching Prisoner.

Julius delivered the other prisoners to his commanding officer, but intervened to allow Paul to live under guard in his own rented quarters.

Paul was put under house arrest. Under this provision, the guard was changed every six hours. Paul would later write to the Philippians, “All the saints salute you, chiefly they that are of Caesar's household (Philippians 4:22). Many of the guards chained to Paul were won to Christ while chained to him.

Paul spent two years under guard in his own rented house. During this time Paul had a fruitful ministry as he wrote his prison epistles: Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon.

Paul was then released for four or five years, during which time he wrote I Timothy and Titus.

He was then imprisoned again in 68 A.D.; at which time he wrote 2 Timothy and was then put to death.

Notice Philippians 1:12-13.

IV. Paul was a Preaching Man Acts 28:23-24, 30-31

Paul preached to both the soldiers (Philippians 1:13) and to the prisoners (Philemon 10: "I beseech thee for my son, Onesimus, whom I have begotten in the bonds").

V. Paul was a Prepared Man 2 Timothy 4:6-8

1. If Paul could have written his own epitaph, I'm sure he would have placed these simple words on the tomb: Paul, a servant of Jesus Christ.

- What a meeting Paul and Jesus must have had in heaven! Paul had met Jesus on the Damascus Road; he had had other visions of Him. He kept the face of the Lord in mind and a hope of seeing him again in his heart. When Paul got to heaven, all the choirs must have sung and all the saints rejoiced. Many of those whom Paul had won to the Lord were waiting to greet and thank him.

But the greatest moment was when he looked into the face of Jesus and laid his hand on the nail-pierced hands. I can hear Jesus saying: "You did a good job, Paul. I know you gave up all for My sake; you suffered much for Me. But that is all over now – no more tears, trials, beatings, hardships. You are home at last."

- Then I hear Paul say, "It was worth it all, Lord, just to see Your face and hear Your voice. I could go through it all ten thousand times and never repay You for what You have done for me. Thank You for coming into the world, dying on the cross, saving me, keeping me, and bringing me home to heaven."

Someday the time will come for us to meet Him!

My latest sun is sinking fast, I know I'm nearing the holy ranks
My race is nearly run; of friends and kindred dear,
My strongest trials now are past For I brush the dews on Jordan's banks
My triumph is begun. The crossing must be near.

I've almost gained my heavenly home O bear my longing heart to Him
My spirit loudly sings; Who bled and died for me;
The holy ones, behold, they come! Whose blood now cleanses from all sin
I hear the noise of wings. And gives me Victory.

O come, angel band
Come and around me stand
O bear me away on your snowy wings
To my immortal home.
O bear me away on your snowy wings
To my immortal home.

II Timothy 4:6-8: "For I am now ready to be offered, the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought a good fight."

*Chapter 28 ends as if there is more to come – There is – WE are to complete the task!

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