

Date: September, 10th, 2009

Today's reading: Acts 1-3

In Peter's main address to the people in Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost, Peter quotes from the Old Testament 3 times. There was no New Testament then so he used the scriptures he had. He uses Joel 2, Psalm 16 and Psalm 110 to show that the things which these people had just witnessed (i.e., the Apostles speaking in languages they had not studied and the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus), were prophesied hundreds of years before about the Messiah, the Christ. Interestingly enough, Jesus used Psalm 110:1 to confound the Jews when they were testing Him in Mat 22:41...

While the Pharisees were gathered together, Jesus asked them,

42 saying, "What do you think about the Christ? Whose Son is He?" They said to Him, "*The Son of David.*"

43 He said to them, "How then does David in the Spirit call Him 'LORD,' saying:

44 'THE LORD SAID TO MY LORD, "SIT AT MY RIGHT HAND, TILL I MAKE YOUR ENEMIES YOUR FOOTSTOOL" '?

45 If David then calls Him 'LORD,' how is He his Son?"

46 And no one was able to answer Him a word, nor from that day on did anyone dare question Him anymore.

The Pharisees did not have an answer for this dilemma of an ancestor calling one of his offspring "Lord" but the Holy Spirit helps Peter explain the verses to prove that David was not speaking of himself but of the Christ and that his body would not be left to decay but would be seated on the right hand of God, the preeminent position of authority. The passage says they were convinced ("cut to the heart") and we find 3000 did what Peter told them to, "repent and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins:"

What a powerful argument to fortify our faith!

Enjoy the life changing power of God's Word.

David

Date: September 11th, 2009

Today's reading: Acts 4-6

Sam says, "I can see how you have faith in this Jesus, and that's fine for you, but it's just not for me."

George says, "How can that be fine for me but not for you? Isn't there such a thing as absolute truth any more?"

Sam says, "No, there is no such thing as absolute truth."

George says, "Are you absolutely sure about that? If there's no absolute truth, how can I believe what you just said that there is no absolute truth? Do you expect me to take you at your word when you just told me, basically, that words only mean what we want them to mean?"

Sam needs to be convinced against this widely-held view called "relativism," where truth comes from within a person - your truth is different from my truth. This THEORY pervades our world. It can be heard in simple phrases such as: "What this verse means to ME is..." I realize that not everyone who uses that phrase means it in the relative way, but many do. Many leave the impression that I can have my interpretation and you can have your interpretation and that's just fine. We'll agree to disagree and we'll all get along because truth is what we make of it, not something outside of us that we must discover. The problem with this theory is that GOD is outside of us. And GOD has set the rules. God's word is truth. We MUST wrestle with it and come to terms with it.

The apostles said in **Acts 4:12**, "*There is **salvation in no one else**; for there is **no other name under heaven** that has been given among men by which we must be saved.*" What does that mean? It means there is absolute truth. It means there is only ONE way of attaining eternal life. It is through Jesus Christ. Jesus said, "*I am the way, and the truth, and the life; **no one comes to the Father but through Me***" (**John 14:6**). That doesn't leave many other options, does it?

Muhammad is not the way. Buddha is not the way. John Smith is not the way Mary Baker Eddy is not the way. Moses is not the way. JESUS is the way! And there is no other way.

Many today would and do call the apostles narrow minded but they were speaking what the Holy Spirit told them to speak. We too need to be narrow minded in the same way as the apostles.

God bless.

David

Date: September 12th, 2009

Today's reading: Acts 7-8

We live in a world of “rights” and “freedoms”. We get very put out and even angry when someone steps on our rights or takes away our freedoms. Almost from birth we seem to have a keen sense of what is fair or unfair and carry that over to wanting justice to be done, especially if we're the one who has been wronged.

Now let's digress for a moment as we consider Stephen's trial in chapter 7. Stephen gives a very concise history of God's dealing with the Jewish nation comparing Moses with Christ, both having been rejected by the people of Israel. He finally shows the examples of by-gone Israelites who killed the prophets and very ably shows that the Jewish leaders who were standing as his judge had done the same things by not following the law given by the direction of angels and by murdering Jesus the Christ. Like the words of Peter on Pentecost, Stephen's words were very convincing, so much so that they were “cut to heart”. The difference here is in the heart that was cut. Those listening on Pentecost repented and obeyed, but these Jewish leaders had an evil heart and instead became very angry to the point of participating in a very violent death for Stephen.

What caused that anger? I would make an educated guess and say it was pride, the same thing that causes us to get angry when someone steps on our “rights”. Note how Stephen reacted to the anger of those putting him to an unlawful and unjust death. Acts 7:60 b "Lord, do not charge them with this sin." And when he had said this, he fell asleep. The Lord who gave us the ultimate example of this attitude wants us to have that same spirit of love even for those who do us wrong.

Not an easy one to master but let's let the Word help us grow.

God bless.

David

Date: September 14, 2009

Reading: Acts 9-11

Today's reading gives us a true picture of the gospel's power to change lives. Look at how the following things were changed.

Saul's mission: He changed from persecutor to preacher based on the message of the gospel! Paul's transformation, although initiated by the miracle on the road, was effected through the message preached by Ananias. The implications to Saul when he heard the gospel and believed were life-changing. This is a wonderful example of someone who listened to his conscience. When his conscience was educated, he changed his behavior.

Barnabas' attitude: We have already seen (in chapter 5) that Barnabas was known as the "son of encouragement." Barnabas is now willing to risk his life to befriend Saul, who had been seeking men like Barnabas to imprison and kill only a short time before. He was convinced of the gospel's power to change men!

Jewish prejudice: Peter was firmly convinced that he should have nothing to do with unclean food (and by extension, unclean people). God's will revealed to him in a vision convinced him (by inference, no less) that he should go and preach to Gentiles. The Jewish brethren who accompanied Peter to Cornelius' house as witnesses revealed a willingness to listen to have the gospel preached to Gentiles, in spite of the change involved. The Jewish brethren in Judea were willing to accept that the gospel was available to all men – Jew and Gentile alike! The gospel message presented to Jew and Gentile alike resulted in conversions in Antioch and the formation of a church composed of both.

"And the disciples were first called Christians in Antioch." (11:26)

Enjoy the reading,

Tim

Date: January 25, 2010
Reading: Acts 11-12

The life of Herod Agrippa I was full of ups and downs. He grew up in exile in Rome. He was allowed to live for a time in Palestine with his uncle Antipas. When he returned to Rome in A.D. 36, Tiberius imprisoned him. He had made friends with Caligula, however, and when Caligula came to the throne at the death of Tiberius, the new emperor gave Agrippa control of some territory in the northeast of Palestine. When Antipas was banished in A.D. 39, Agrippa was given control over Galilee and Perea with Judea and Samaria to be added to his administration a couple of years later (A.D. 41).

Agrippa took advantage of the hostility of the Jews against the church to cultivate favor with his subjects. He first imprisoned James (one of the apostles and a son of Zebedee) and executed him (12:2). He next seized Peter and held him in prison, intending to execute him also.

Apparently on the night before Herod was intending to "bring Peter before the people" for the purpose of condemning him and executing him, Peter was miraculously delivered from prison with the aid of an angel (12:6-10).

There are some very interesting twists in the events of chapter 12. For instance, why didn't the Lord deliver James from the sword? As if there was any doubt, the rescue of Peter demonstrates that the Lord could have saved James' life. Since James was allowed to be killed, why was Peter rescued from prison?

Luke records that "constant prayer was offered to God for [Peter] by the church" (12:5). We know less about the circumstances of the death of James (was he imprisoned as Peter was - vs. 3?). If so, surely the church had likewise prayed for James when Agrippa imprisoned him. If they had prayed for James' release/safety, their prayers were not answered in the affirmative.

Again, if the church had prayed for James and he had not been spared from the sword, it would have taken some faith to pray on behalf of Peter also! Ironically, when Peter was miraculously delivered, members of the church were gathered together in the house of John Mark's mother, praying for him. It is probably a pretty safe assumption that these church members were praying for Peter's release, but when he appeared at the door of the house, they were quite unwilling to believe that it was actually him (12:12-16)!

It is not our place to question why God answers some prayers in the affirmative and answers others in the negative. As near as I can tell, no clue was given for why James and Peter were treated differently by the Lord.

Jesus encouraged His disciples to be persistent in prayer (Luke 11:5-13). Despite the death of James, the church prayed for Peter. If I pray for one sick person who does not get well, do I just give up on prayer and decide not to pray for other sick people?

The church prayed, but apparently had already decided how God would answer their prayers in

the affirmative, perhaps explaining why they were astonished to see Peter at the door of the house. Were they convinced that an affirmative answer to their prayers must entail a public release by Agrippa? God has the capacity to answer prayer, even perhaps particular requests, in many different ways and we must not limit Him in our minds.

I wonder what Peter thought when Herod seized him, knowing that his fellow apostle James had died a martyr. What evidence did he have that, unlike James, he would be spared death at the hands of Agrippa? Yet, the night before his possible execution, he slept. Would you be able to sleep under those circumstances? Sleep comes easy to those who have decided to accept whatever decision the Lord makes with regard to them.

The Lord didn't deliver James, saved Peter and executed Agrippa. Certainly an interesting chapter.

Postscript? "The word of God grew and multiplied" (12:24).

God bless the reader,

Allen

Date: September 15, 2009

Reading: Acts 12-14

In today's reading the first preaching trip of Paul is covered. Please pay attention to the emphasis of Paul and Barnabas in their work.

They "preached the word of God." (13:5)

Paul taught a lesson steeped in the Old Testament, showing how Jesus' crucifixion fulfilled prophecy. (13:16-41)

The next Sabbath "the whole city came together to hear the word of God." (13:44)

"And the word of the Lord was being spread throughout all the region." (13:49)

"Therefore they stayed there a long time, speaking boldly in the Lord..." (14:3)

"And they were preaching the gospel there." (14:7)

"And when they had preached the gospel to that city and made many disciples..." (14:21)

"Now when they had preached the word in Perga..." (14:25)

For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation..." (Romans 1:16)

Enjoy the reading,

Tim

Date: January 26, 2010

Reading: Acts 13-15

It was on the island of Cyprus that Barnabas and Saul encountered the sorcerer whose name was Bar-Jesus (13:4ff). He was a Jew by birth and described by Luke as a “false prophet.” Bar-Jesus was “with” the Roman proconsul who was in charge of the island province, Sergius



Paulus. It was not uncommon for Roman officials to have “diviners” in their employ for the purpose of consulting them regarding decisions, etc. Such apparently was the position of Bar-Jesus. It is probable that he made his living by advising the Roman governor by means of his “special powers.” Although the etymology is by no means undisputed, it appears that “Elymas” (Bar-Jesus’ other name) is derived from an Arabic word which means *sorcerer*.

Sergius Paulus was interested in hearing what Barnabas and Saul were preaching. Bar-Jesus evidently saw the two preachers as competition and so he “withstood them.”

Saul (now identified by Luke as Paul) addressed Bar-Jesus and identified who he really was. Bar-Jesus is a patronymic which means “son of Jesus/Joshua” and indicated the man’s physical lineage. With regard to his character, however, Elymas was anything but a son of Jesus (manifesting the character of the Savior). It may be that Paul intended the contrast when he described Elymas as a “son of the devil” (vs. 10). The apostle also noted that Elymas was “full of all deceit and all fraud,” probably a reference to the deceit he was practicing with regard to Sergius Paulus.

Elymas was also an enemy of all righteousness, deliberately distorting the truth to “turn the proconsul away from the faith” (vs. 10b, 8). He was an unscrupulous individual who would do anything to protect his own interests. He claimed to be divinely guided (a prophet), but he was a fraud, taking advantage of Sergius Paulus.

It is interesting that Luke records that Paul was “filled with the Holy Spirit” as he spoke to Elymas. His words to Elymas were blunt, but accurate. Paul was also empowered to cause Elymas to lose his sight for a time period. The “seer” was forced to try to find someone who could guide him because he couldn’t “see.” The proconsul realized the significance of what had happened and chose to listen to Barnabas and Saul rather than Elymas.

When others look at our lives, with whom do they think that we are “associated”?

God bless the reader,
Allen

Date: September 16, 2009

Reading: Acts 15-17

How do you approach your service to God?

Is it something so important that your whole family is persuaded by your commitment? Then you are like Lydia.

Is it something that has changed and given purpose to your life in a profound way – has it changed you from harsh and uncaring to penitent and remorseful for past sin? Then you are like the jailer.

Are you unwilling to change, even when confronted with truth? Have you closed your mind to consider different viewpoints than what you have always believed when someone is using scripture to “make his case?” Then you are like the Thessalonians.

Do you read your Bible and evaluate what is taught, no matter whether the preacher, an elder, or a respected teacher says it? Then you are like the Bereans.

Do you accumulate all kinds of knowledge with no intention of applying it to your life? Do you hold the view that there is no absolute truth and anyone that asserts that there is such a thing is close-minded and bigoted? Then you are like the Athenians.

The religious world is full of Thessalonians and Athenians. Be like Lydia, the jailer, and the Bereans!

Enjoy the reading,

Tim

Date: January 27, 2010
Reading: Acts 16-18

He was a member of the church and the circumstances of his conversion were unusual. He might not even have heard the gospel if the preachers hadn't been thrown in jail!

It all started when a slave girl began following Paul and Silas while they were in Philippi (Acts 16:16ff). She kept crying out that Paul and Silas were servants of the Most High God. She was possessed by a spirit of divination, but the attention that she was giving the two preachers distressed Paul and he cast out the spirit.

The masters of the slave girl were not overjoyed about the way things had turned out. They made money from the slave girl's powers of divination and now their source of profit was gone!

The slave girl's masters stirred up the magistrates of the city by charging Paul and Silas with teaching things contrary to Roman law. A multitude rose up against them, the magistrates tore off their clothes and commanded them to be beaten.

After the men had been beaten with many stripes, they were given into the custody of the jailor who put them into the inner prison. A midnight earthquake shook the prison, opening all the doors and loosing the chains of the prisoners.

The jailor awoke and, seeing the open doors and thinking that his prisoners had escaped, was about to kill himself when Paul stopped him, informing that all the prisoners were still there.

In the middle of the night, two preachers, most certainly in great pain from a severe beating received earlier, "spoke the word of the Lord" to a jailor who had nearly killed himself just a short time before. The jailor and his family were baptized into Christ.

What if the slave girl hadn't followed Paul and Silas? What if her masters hadn't made their false charges against the two preachers? What if Paul and Silas hadn't been beaten and put into prison? >From a certain perspective, none of these events were desirable – things went from bad to worse!

However, it was because of these events that the preachers and the sinners were brought together and lost souls were saved through the message of the cross!

Let's thank God for open doors and pray for the wisdom to recognize them.

God bless the reader,
Allen

Date: September 17, 2009

Reading: Acts 18-20

In our reading Luke details the conclusion of Paul's second missionary journey (18:1-22) and the greater part of his third journey (18:23-20:38).

Chapter 18 picks up the narrative of the second journey as Paul left Athens and arrived in Corinth. We meet Aquila and Priscilla, a couple who evidently became quite close to Paul (see Romans 16:3-5), and learn of some of the opposition Paul faced at Corinth from his Jewish countrymen. Paul's lengthy stay at Corinth resulted in the establishment of a congregation there. From there Paul visited Ephesus for a brief period and then returned to Antioch where his journey had begun.

On his third journey, Paul visited churches in Galatia and Phrygia (18:23) and made his way to Ephesus for his second visit there. From chapter 19 we learn that Paul's preaching at Ephesus (and perhaps at other places in the region during his Ephesian stay) was extremely effective. Paul's prolonged stay at Ephesus was ended by a raucous meeting in the theater of the city, a mob stirred up by the local silversmiths whose livelihood had been greatly diminished by Paul's effective preaching against idolatry.

Chapter 20 relates Paul's movements following his departure from Ephesus. He went to Macedonia and then Greece (Achaia; probably visiting Corinth) where he stayed a short time. After retracing his steps through Macedonia and sailing along the southern coast of Asia Minor, he met with the elders of the Ephesian church at the city of Miletus. Verses 18-35 are Luke's record of Paul's comments to those elders.

Another person of interest in our reading is Apollos. Aquila and Priscilla had left Corinth with Paul, traveled with him to Ephesus and then remained at Ephesus when Paul returned to Antioch of Syria (see 18:18-22). It was at Ephesus that Aquila and Priscilla met Apollos, a man who was teaching the "the things of the Lord", but imperfectly! He knew only the baptism of John, but spoke boldly in the Jewish synagogue at Ephesus. Aquila and Priscilla heard his teaching, took him aside and taught him about the baptism of the great commission. Before Paul could return to Ephesus (on his third journey), Apollos left Ephesus and went to Corinth where he was of great help to the brethren there.

Consider the attitudes of these people. Aquila and Priscilla could have reasoned that it wasn't their problem if Apollos didn't get it right! These two Christians, however, apparently loved truth and they loved Apollos. Together they corrected his misunderstanding, but they wisely took him aside rather than confronting him as he taught in the synagogue (18:25-26).

The attitude of Apollos was also commendable. It is not easy to have one's teaching challenged (even in a gentle way), but Apollos apparently accepted well the correction of Aquila and Priscilla. He had been instructed in the way of the Lord and was fervent in spirit, but he apparently also wanted to accurately teach about Jesus and humble enough to learn from these other disciples.

May we love the truth like these disciples! May we be humble in our search for understanding of God's word!

Happy reading,
Allen

Date: January 28, 2010

Reading: Acts 19-20

“Great is Diana of the Ephesians!” That was the cry of the group of craftsmen who had been called together by Demetrius the silversmith (Acts 19:24-28). Demetrius was upset because the teaching of Paul against idolatry was affecting his occupation, making silver shrines of Diana.

It wasn't just that Paul preached against idolatry, but people were listening! In Demetrius' own words, many people, not just in Ephesus but throughout all Asia, were being persuaded by the apostle's teaching and were turning away from the worship of Diana. Again, according to Demetrius, Paul was teaching that “they are not gods which are made with hands.”

Demetrius apparently didn't give much thought to the obvious truth of Paul's message. He was more concerned that his trade would fall into disrepute and the great temple of Diana at Ephesus might be despised! The “magnificence” of the goddess herself might be destroyed by the apostle's teaching! Of course, Demetrius claimed that “all Asia and the world” worshipped Diana; if this was so, why were they gathered together? Had they not gathered because fewer and fewer of the people of Asia were worshipping the goddess Diana, as a result of Paul's preaching?

The very thought of such happening was enough to drive the gathered craftsmen to wrath and they began to cry out and proclaim the greatness of Diana. Their ruckus raised a crowd, many of whom were not even clear about why they had come together (19:29, 32).

A Jew named Alexander tried to reason with the multitude, but they would have nothing of it. For two hours, they cried out (chanted?) “Great is Diana of the Ephesians!” TWO HOURS!!

Note that in the entire account, there is no record of anyone, Demetrius or anybody else, making any argument to show that Paul was wrong. No one offered evidence that the goddess Diana existed. They disagreed with Paul's teaching, but offered no explanation for why he was wrong. Their tactic was to raise a mob and chant about the greatness of Diana. That's the usual strategy of those whose religion is based on emotion or tradition – just keep repeating what you believe as though repetition makes it true.

There was no question that the crowd was “worked up.” Their emotions sustained them for two hours of chanting and they probably would have chanted longer if the city clerk hadn't warned them about the danger of being charged with rebellion!

“But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts, and always be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear;” (1 Peter 3:15). Emotion in religion is important, but our faith cannot be based on emotion alone. The principle of 1 Peter 3:15 suggests that we need to be able to explain why we believe what we believe.

God bless the reader,
Allen



Date: January 29, 2010
Reading: Acts 21-22

When Paul returned to Jerusalem at the conclusion of his third preaching trip, he met with the elders of the Jerusalem church, to whom the apostle gave a report of his work among the Gentiles (21:17-19). Among Jewish Christians, however, there was circulating a rumor about Paul. It was being said by some that Paul taught all the Jews among the Gentiles to forsake Moses (vs. 20-21). What Paul taught was that Gentiles did not need to be circumcised or keep the Old Law to be justified (see the books of Galatians and Romans!).

The elders suggested to Paul that he assist four men in the conclusion of their Nazirite vow (see Numbers 6) to show that the rumor being circulated was not true. It was in the process of doing this very thing that Paul was seen in the temple by some Jews from Asia. These Jews immediately stirred up a crowd and seized Paul, identifying him to the crowd as one who taught against the Jewish people, the law of Moses and the temple. Furthermore, they charged him with bringing Greeks into the temple, thus defiling it.

Gentiles could come in to the outer courtyard of the temple, but they were restricted from entering the inner courts. There was a low wall which surrounded these courts on which was posted the notice that no Gentile could go beyond the wall on the penalty of death. The Jews from Asia had seen Trophimus the



Ephesian (evidently a Gentile) with Paul elsewhere in the city. They assumed that Paul had brought Trophimus into the area forbidden to Gentiles.

Note carefully that these Asian Jews made the charge regarding the bringing of "Greeks" (i.e., Gentiles) into the temple against Paul without actually seeing him do it. They saw Paul in the city with a Gentile, saw Paul later in the temple and naturally assumed that he had brought same Gentile into the temple! Mr. Monk would have been so proud of their deductive powers!

Their response to the alleged defiling of the holy place was to drag Paul out of the temple and begin beating him with the intent of killing him (vs. 31-32). Mind you, the death penalty was to be exercised against any GENTILE who went into the forbidden area, but Paul was not a Gentile.

The Roman commander of the fortress Antonia intervened, no doubt saving Paul's life. The violence of the crowd was such that Paul had to be carried by Roman soldiers out of the temple courtyard. Chapter 22 records a defense by Paul, permitted by the commander, to the Jews who had been in the process of beating him. They listened to Paul until the point that he related the divine instructions to preach to Gentiles and then they threatened further violence so that Paul was taken into the fortress.

The Asian Jews made an obviously unsubstantiated charge against Paul and then, with "righteous fervor," unrighteously attempted to kill the apostle by beating him to death. How often in the history of mankind has "right" been defended by the commission of "wrong." Just today, for example, there were news blurbs regarding the trial of Scott Roeder, the man who killed the abortion doctor, George Tiller, in Wichita Falls, Kansas. He thought to stop the murder of unborn infants by murdering one who was doing it.

The apostle Paul had previously written to the Romans that we should not do evil that good may come (3:8). We cannot defeat evil by doing evil.

God bless the reader,
Allen

Date: September 18, 2009

Reading: Acts 21-24

Our reading takes us from Miletus where Paul had met with the Ephesian elders and brings us back to Jerusalem via Tyre and Caesarea for the conclusion of the apostle's third journey. At Caesarea, a prophet named Agabus predicted that Paul would be bound in Jerusalem and delivered to the Gentiles. Paul proceeded to Jerusalem anyway.

While assisting four men in the requirements of their vow, Paul was accosted in the temple by Asian Jews who accused him of defiling the temple and then attempted to beat him to death. Paul was rescued by Roman soldiers, but made his defense before the mob prior to being taken into the Roman barracks.

Paul appeared before the council in chapter 23, but that meeting ended with a "great dissension" as Pharisee and Sadducee argued with one another.

Paul's enemies were not deterred, even by the Romans who had the apostle in custody. More than forty men had taken a vow not to eat or drink until they had killed Paul. They had formed a plan to kill Paul, but the Roman commander, alerted to this plot, sent Paul by night to the governor at Caesarea.

Accused by the Jews before Felix, Paul also made his defense to the governor. Felix made no decision regarding his prisoner at that time, but heard Paul on other occasions. When Felix was replaced by Festus, he left Paul in custody.

Felix had some knowledge of the "Way" and probably realized that the accusations made by the orator Tertullus on behalf of the Jews were not true (24:5-6, 22). On a later occasion, Felix even listened, with his wife Drusilla, to the apostle preach about the "faith in Christ."

As Felix listened to Paul preach about righteousness, self-control and the judgment to come, he became afraid. He cut the sermon off by sending Paul away, suggesting that he would call for him when he had a "convenient time" (24:25).

I suspect that it was never "convenient" or comfortable for Felix to hear God's word regarding righteousness, self-control and the final judgment. Felix had good reason to be afraid; he was not a moral man. He had obtained his position as governor with the assistance of Jonathan, the Jewish high priest, but later ordered his assassination. He had enticed Drusilla, the daughter of Herod Agrippa I (see Acts 12), away from her husband, king Aziz of Emesa. She was the third wife of Felix.

The Roman historian Tacitus characterized Felix by writing that "in the practice of all kinds of lust and cruelty, he exercised the power of a king with the temper of a slave." Eventually he would be recalled to Rome, accused by the Jews of malfeasance, and replaced by Porcius Festus.

When faced with the need to change our lives, we can humble ourselves before God's truth...or we can put off those changes until we have a "convenient time."

Happy reading,
Allen

Date: January 30, 2010

Reading: Acts 23-24

Integrity. One of its definitions, according to Webster, is “firm adherence to a code of esp. moral or artistic values.” It is also defined as “the quality or state of being complete or undivided.” Honesty is listed as a synonym.

Not many people really have integrity of character. It is too easy to leave one’s moral values behind when convenience or “necessity” is served. The dishonest person is not “undivided.”

Paul had been taken into custody by the Roman commander in Jerusalem as the multitude of Jews in the temple were attempting to beat him to death. He was falsely accused of bringing a Gentile into the temple. He was examined by the Jewish counsel, a hearing which ended in a great dissension.

While Paul remained in Roman custody, there were forty Jews who bound themselves under an oath to neither eat nor drink until they had killed Paul. Paul had not been convicted of any crime at this point, but these men were determined to kill him. In fact, they asked the chief priests and elders to lie to the Roman commander about bringing Paul before the council to facilitate their ambush (23:14-15).

When the commander found out about the murder plot, he sent Paul to Caesarea where the Roman governor Felix was. He sent a letter to the governor, explaining the circumstances of Paul’s imprisonment. In the letter he lied regarding what he knew about Paul and when (23:27; compare to 21:34, 38; 22:24-27).

The Jews came to Caesarea with an orator named Tertullus to accuse Paul before the governor. Tertullus first flattered Felix (a form of dishonesty – 24:2-3) and then proceeded to lie about Paul’s actions (24:6), making a similar charge to one made by the Asian Jews (21:28). He lied about their intent to judge Paul according to the Jewish law, a law which permitted the death penalty only upon the testimony of two witnesses. Then the Jews who had brought Tertullus to the governor “assented” to the lies which Tertullus had told (24:9).

Felix didn’t release Paul from prison, although justice would have indicated this course of action since no charges had been proven against the apostle. Instead he repeatedly called for Paul to converse with him, hoping that the apostle would pay a bribe to be released from custody.

It would seem that integrity of character wasn’t any more common in Paul’s day than in ours. False accusations. Violence. Murder plots. Lies. Extortion. It may be difficult to maintain our integrity when so many around us are sacrificing theirs, but Paul stands out as an example of one who did.

“Go and do likewise.”

God bless the reader,
Allen

Date: February 1, 2010

Reading: Acts 25-26

Imagine that you are on trial and your fate is resting on your testimony. If you convince the judge, you go free; otherwise, you remain in jail and face the potential of being executed. How serious would you be in preparing for and giving your defense?

Consider Paul. What was Paul's concern as he stood before Festus and Herod Agrippa? His physical fate was clearly not his driving concern. Both Festus and Agrippa agreed that he was undeserving of death or chains (25:25; 26:31-32). Yet, when asked to present his case before both Festus and Agrippa, Paul used the opportunity to teach and attempt to convert Agrippa. He appealed to Agrippa's knowledge of the law to "make the case" for Jesus. He presented his own story, showing his conversion from persecutor to proclaimer. It was this allegiance to Jesus and his efforts to convert Gentiles that had led to his current imprisonment. Paul's message for his defense was Jesus as the hope of the Jews and the light to both Jews and Gentiles.

Festus thought Paul had lost his mind. Paul dismissed this rebuke and focused on his purpose – convicting and converting Agrippa. Paul's efforts resulted in an "almost" answer; "Almost you persuade me to be a Christian." Paul's desire had been an "altogether" answer – that Agrippa would become altogether like Paul except for the chains.

Paul saw every occasion as an opportunity to teach, even if it resulted in his continued imprisonment. May we be emboldened by his example and persuade others to become Christians.

Tim

Date: February 2, 2010

Reading: Acts 27-28

When Paul arrived in Rome, he called together the leaders of the Jews to discuss the circumstances behind his arrival. He explained that although he had done nothing against his people or the customs of the fathers, he had been delivered bound to Rome because of the hope of Israel. Incredibly, these leaders were ignorant of Paul's case and were willing to listen to him regarding "the sect that is spoken against everywhere." That was all Paul needed!

Paul arranged for a time to tell them about this sect. What was his message? Paul "explained and solemnly testified of the kingdom of God", using as a basis for the discussion the Law of Moses and the Prophets. The study lasted from morning to evening. The results were mixed, as some were persuaded and some disbelieved.

Paul took advantage of opportunities to teach, but he was also honest with those he taught. He attributed their unwillingness to believe to a refusal to see and hear the truth and repent so that they could be healed.

What is my response to the gospel message? Do I listen politely yet ignore the message by refusing to submit my will? Or am I persuaded by the message?

Let's be hearers of the message today!

Tim