

Day 7 : Acts 18:18-28 – Return To Antioch

Prayerfully read: 1 Thessalonians 5

Understanding

This passage introduces us to Apollos, who is also mentioned seven times in 1 Corinthians and once in Titus 3:13.

Paul returned from Corinth, heading towards Antioch via Cenchrea (just a few miles away), Ephesus (across the water), Caesarea (in Israel) and Jerusalem. He then set out via land again encouraging the churches on a journey that would bring him back to Ephesus – his third missionary journey. Again, we see that Paul did not believe that his presence was essential for any church – but that God would keep the believers in his absence.

In the meantime, Apollos, a Jew from Alexandria, arrived at Ephesus – where Priscilla and Aquila, Paul's companions, were. He believed the (Old Testament) Scriptures, and trusted that Jesus of Nazareth was the Messiah, but was preaching an incomplete message, apparently not having encountered the church but having been a disciple of John the Baptist (who had pointed to Jesus as the Messiah). Priscilla and Aquila instructed him more fully, and commended him to the churches in Achaia (i.e. Corinth and Cenchrea) – to whom he was a great help (v27-28).

Doctrines (Teachings)

- In God's eyes the important thing is not so much whether we have great gifts and knowledge, but whether we are using what we have got. Apollos as yet did not know many things – but he would get the opportunity to learn them. With what he did know, he served God with all his strength – and we should do likewise! In the same way, we must not expect other people to have already grasped everything that we have grasped – but we must be willing to help and encourage them all that we can. We must not write someone off just because they seem slow or behind!

Applying (Make sure that you are detailed and specific!)

- Are you using the gifts that you have? Is there more you could do with them? The way to develop your gifts and improve them is to use them!
- Make sure that you pray regularly for God to raise up new preachers to build up his church.

The Acts Of The Apostles

Daily Bible Reading Notes

Week 12 (Chapter 16:25-18:28)

Grace Church Belper

<http://www.gracebelper.org.uk>

(For previous weeks' notes, visit
<http://www.gracebelper.org.uk/readingnotes.php>)

Day 1 : Acts 16:25-34 – The Philippian Jailer

Prayerfully read (above and): 2 Corinthians 7

Understanding

In the jail, Paul and Silas (the Christian who had remained with Paul after coming from Jerusalem after the Acts 15 conference) weren't feeling sorry for themselves. They were praying and singing! Just like the Jerusalem apostles, Paul had been unfairly imprisoned – and just as with them (5:19), there would be a miraculous intervention.

The reason why the jailer was about to kill himself was because the penalty for allowing prisoners to escape was death. By killing himself, he would escape the shame involved. The prisoners, though, had not escaped. No angel had told them to leave – and Paul knew what the consequences would be if he did. Instead, he used his influence to keep the other prisoners.

Suddenly, great conviction of sin came upon the jailer as he realised how well Paul had treated him compared with his own carelessness when the beaten, bleeding men were given into his care. We do not know if the jailer had heard Paul's preaching earlier, or knew of the slave girl's testimony, or heard their singing now. But he was driven to cry out for salvation.

Doctrines (Teachings)

- God's providence (i.e. What happens in the world) is not the same as God's guidance. Just because an opportunity to do something opens up, does not mean that we should take it. In fact, the opportunity may be a test – to see what our real motives are: will we take an easy but not necessarily right way out when we have the chance? God expects us to use our wisdom and his Word in each situation.
- True conversion involves repentance. A person who comes to Christ must come to him as the Lord who our sin has been against, and as the Saviour who takes away our sin. The jailer was convicted of his sin and need to be saved – and then the reality of what God had done was seen as he took the missionaries to his own house, washed and fed them.

Applying (Make sure that you are detailed and specific!)

- How do you respond when things go wrong? Can you think of last time? How does your response compare to Paul and Silas' – what does this passage have to say, and how can you improve?
- Have you repented? Have you had real dealings with the risen, alive Christ as *your* Lord and Saviour?

Day 6 : Acts 18:1-17 – Corinth

Prayerfully read: 1 Thessalonians 4

Understanding

We are now introduced to Priscilla and Aquila, who are mentioned in Romans 16:3, 1 Corinthians 16:19 and 2 Timothy 4:19. We learn too that Paul was a tentmaker (v3).

Corinth was a very immoral city – full of idolatry and sexual immorality.

Gallio (v12) was the brother of the philosopher Seneca. He was proconsul in AD52-53, so it is now just under 25 years since the Lord Jesus' death and resurrection.

Again we see the common pattern: Paul went first to the Jews, and whilst some believed many others refused to and opposed him – upon which Paul then took the gospel to the Gentiles many of whom believed.

Paul remained in Corinth some time when the Lord revealed to him that there were many chosen people in the city. During that time Crispus, the ruler of the synagogue, believed (1 Cor. 1:14), and this might be why he was replaced as the synagogue ruler (v17) – though it seems that at some point Sosthenes also believed (1 Cor 1:1).

Again Luke shows that the cause of all the turmoil surrounding Christianity was not the Christians themselves, but the Jews – here, they sought to stir up trouble but the Roman ruler wasn't having any of it!

Doctrines (Teachings)

- Those who are saved have been chosen by God beforehand (v10). They shall all, in God's timing, one day hear the gospel, believe and be saved. We cannot know, though, in advance who any of them are, so it is our duty to speak the gospel courageously (v9) to anyone and everyone who will hear it, trusting that God has his people and will save them as we are faithful to him. Because of God's power and grace, the gospel can prosper even in the most immoral and wicked societies, such as Corinth.

Applying

- What opportunities is God giving you to speak about the gospel? What helps and encouragements does this passage bring?

Day 5 : Acts 17:16-34 – Athens

Prayerfully read: 1 Thessalonians 3

Understanding

Athens was the cultural capital of Greece. Epicureans and Stoics were two different schools of philosophy then existing. Epicureans were materialists – they believed that matter is all that there is. Stoics believed the the universe was governed by fate.

The Areopagus (“Mars Hill”) was where the philosophers met to discuss new ideas.

Preaching to these pagans, Paul did not preach from the Jewish Scriptures, which would have meant nothing to them. Instead, he began his preaching on the basis of creation. He preached that there is one God who is the creator of all and above all, and on whom we depend. He has created one human race over which he is completely sovereign. He has left many testimonies to himself in the created world teaching us that we ought to seek him. Therefore, Paul preached, idolatry of all kinds was foolish and wicked. From there, Paul preached God's judgment, and that the judge would be the Messiah whom he had raised from the dead. So whilst Paul began his preaching in a different place (with creation), he ended up in the same place – preaching the risen Lord and the need for repentance.

Doctrines (Teachings)

- All people everywhere have had truths about God revealed to them in creation that leave us without excuse if we do not respond in worship and seek God diligently until we find him (Psalm 19:1-, Romans 1:18-21). This is called “general revelation” - it is revealed to all people everywhere at all times. As such, we can appeal to people on this basis.
- God's witness to himself throughout the world means that everyone is guilty and needs the gospel – there is nobody who is innocent because they are unable to know anything about God.
- There will be a day of judgment, in which all people everywhere will be judged for the lives they have lived. None, though, will be saved because of their good lives – only by the free grace of Jesus Christ.

Applying (Make sure that you are detailed and specific!)

- What things should the created world around us draw us to think about? Does it? What does this passage have to say?

Day 2 : Acts 16:35-40 – Leaving Philippi

Prayerfully read: Philippians 1

Understanding

Paul and Silas had committed no crime, but the magistrates had allowed the people to have what they wanted in having them beaten. But they had no grounds on which to keep them imprisoned, so sent to release them.

This is the first time that we learn Paul was a Roman citizen – in fact he was born one (22:26-28).

Paul was not being awkward by insisting as he did. He knew that he would have to leave Philippi, and that if he left quietly then the city authorities would think they could persecute the Christians as they pleased. Paul insisted on his legal rights for their sake. The punishment for beating a Roman could be very severe – even that the city could have its status as a colony taken away and the magistrates put to death. That is why the magistrates were so afraid! Now they would think twice before mistreating the believers who Paul would leave behind. The fact that Paul was not a trouble-maker is shown by his agreeing to leave the city – presumably they wanted this because when Paul was gone there would be less danger of what had happened being talked about and finding its way to the Roman hierarchy.

Paul did not leave the city, though, without meeting and encouraging the believers. He did not believe that they were certain to perish without his help, even though they were so young – knew that God would provide.

Doctrines (Teachings)

- In general, Christians should be willing to give up their rights for the sake of others (1 Corinthians 9:19-22, Matthew 5:41). However, there may be times when the opposite is true – for the sake of others, we should assert our rights! The rule we must follow is Philippians 2:3 - “Let nothing be done out of selfish ambition or conceit”.

Applying (Make sure that you are detailed and specific!)

- Do you take responsibility for your own spiritual life? Paul believed that the Philippian believers would be able to prosper, even so young in the faith. It is too easy to blame our lack of progress on others when our own lack of self-discipline and watchfulness can be the real cause.
- What will it mean in different situations which you find yourself in (family, work...) to assert or not assert your rights in a godly way?

Day 3 : Acts 17:1-9 – Thessalonica

Prayerfully read: 1 Thessalonians 1

Understanding

Thessalonica was about 70 miles from Philippi. It seems to be suggested in verse 1 that Paul chose it because there were known to be Jews there – with whom he could show from the Scriptures what was taught about Christ (v2-3). We see that his preaching had two simple points: 1) The Scriptures show that the Christ must suffer and rise again 2) Jesus of Nazareth had fulfilled these promises and so was the Christ.

This preaching persuaded very many, including Gentiles. However, unbelieving Jews – again – took violent exception to what was happening. Presumably Jason (v5-6) was a well-known Christian when Luke wrote – he seems to assume this.

Again, Luke shows us that Paul and the missionaries were entirely peaceful – it was the unbelieving Jews, not them, who were the threat to law and order. Here, the Jews say the same thing as had been said when Christ was crucified – that they recognised no other king but Caesar (John 19:21). In my opinion the confession that only Caesar was the lawful king of Israel (and not Christ) is the “mark of the beast” that John wrote about to the churches of his day in Revelation (16:2).

Doctrines (Teachings)

- Christ's sufferings, death and resurrection were all predicted in the Old Testament. What he did was not a “plan B” when everything else had failed – it was what God had promised from the very beginning (first appearing in Genesis 3:15 with the promise that one born through the woman would defeat the serpent – though at the cost of suffering himself)
- Christian's have two kings who they must obey. “Caesar” rules only in temporal things – he has no power to command us what to believe, or to require us to break any of God's laws, or to rule the church. Christ rules in all things – and especially over the heart, and in the church.

Applying (Make sure that you are detailed and specific!)

- Who is your king? I don't ask you if you believe in Jesus – is he your king? What does this mean in practice? In what areas of life are you not submitting to his kingship?
- Do you enjoy studying the Old Testament Scriptures? Ask God for help!

Day 4 : Acts 17:10-15 – Berea

Prayerfully read: 1 Thessalonians 2

Understanding

The same word of God meets with very different responses. In Thessalonica, the unbelieving Jews caused a riot; at Berea, the Jews listened carefully to the word and then compared it diligently with their Scriptures to see if it was true or not.

Notice the word that Luke begins verse 12 with - “therefore”. *Because* they searched the Scriptures daily, *therefore* many of them believed.

However, the Jews at Thessalonica heard – and in their anger came to Berea in order to cause trouble and get rid of Paul from there too. Paul writes about these Jews in 1 Thessalonians 2:14-16. The “wrath” that was to come upon them was the destruction of Jerusalem and of the system of Judaism just a few years later, as prophesied by Jesus (Matthew 24).

Athens by sea was a journey of about 250 miles south. Paul did not believe that it was his Christian duty to stay in a situation of danger and be martyred, and he was sent there.

Doctrines (Teachings)

- The standard which we are to compare everything to is God's word. No matter how eloquent, winsome or persuasive a preacher is, what he says is only to be accepted if it agrees with what is written in the Bible. God does not require us to believe anything except what is in the Bible. In the Bible he has revealed the way of salvation and how to live to please him, and it will never lead us astray.
- The reason why two people can hear the same sound sermon and one of them profits greatly but the other does not at all is normally because of the minds that they bring with them, as Jesus taught in Matthew 13 in the parable of the sower. The Bereans listened so that they might profit if possible, and many were saved – the unbelieving Thessalonians did not.

Applying (Make sure that you are detailed and specific!)

- Luke says that the Bereans were “noble” because they searched the Scriptures every day. Would he say the same about you?
- How do you listen to sermons? What could you do to get more out of them (for example, to remember more afterwards, or be more alert or prepared when you come?) If you have Christian family – what do you talk about over Sunday lunch or tea?