



Provided by the Church of the Lutheran Confession - Board of Missions

Missiology





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Lesson 1 – God’s Eternal Universal Plan of Salvation, Old and New Testaments

Christian missionaries can proclaim the Gospel of Christ without studying methods and cultures and without using loud speakers and microphones or other modern means of communication. But there is one thing that Christian missionaries must have to do their work: they must have the Scriptures – either in written form or embedded in their memories. For the Scriptures not only give us the content of what we must proclaim, but also provide the basis and reason for mission work.

From the Scriptures we learn, first of all, that there is only one plan of salvation for all people. This plan of salvation goes back all the way to eternity in God’s mind. During His discussion of the coming judgment at the end of the world, Jesus told His disciples that on the last day **“the King (Jesus) will say to those on His right hand, ‘Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world’”** (Matthew 25:34). Jesus’ apostle Paul taught the very same thing. He wrote to the Christians in Ephesus: **“He (God) chose us in Him (Christ) before the foundation of the world”** (Ephesians 1:4).

God’s plan of salvation was not fully revealed to all from the beginning. Paul refers to God’s plan as a **“mystery, which from the beginning of the ages has been hidden in God who created all things through Jesus Christ.”** Although it was in part hidden, it was **“the eternal purpose which He accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord”** (Ephesians 3:9-11). God **“has saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace which was given to in Christ Jesus before time began, but has now been revealed by the appearing of our Savior Jesus Christ”** (2 Timothy 1:9-10). **“He (Christ) indeed was foreordained before the foundation of the world, but was manifest in these last times for you”** (1 Peter 1:20).

Thus, God’s plan of salvation in Jesus Christ is eternal. There has never been a different plan of salvation other than the one devised by God in eternity. In the last few centuries, various Christian groups have taught a different idea called *dispensationalism*. This teaching claims that there are several different dispensations (that is, systems of order), and that each dispensation has its own plan of salvation. In the “Old Testament dispensation”, for example, they claim that God gave His law so that people could be saved by their obedience to the law. They say that we are now under a different dispensation in which salvation is attained by faith in Christ. Dispensationalism denies that God’s plan of salvation in Christ is eternal.

There are many other reasons for denouncing dispensationalism as a false teaching, but the most important reason is the fact that it denies the clear teaching of Scripture that God has had only one plan of salvation from eternity: salvation through faith in Christ. The Scripture references given above clearly teach this truth.

God's plan of salvation in Jesus Christ is also universal. It is intended for all people of all ages. There were at least two moments in history when all living humans were told about God's universal plan. The first was in the Garden of Eden, shortly after Adam and Eve fell into sin. God Himself announced the plan of salvation to all mankind (Adam and Eve were the only living human beings) in these words directed at Satan, the deceiver: **"And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her Seed; He shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise His heel"** (Genesis 3:15). God's plan of salvation involved a future contest between the Woman's Seed and Satan. In this contest the Woman's Seed would be the winner, even though it would involve a real struggle. He would have His heel bruised by Satan, while Satan would have his head bruised. "Bruised" is no doubt too weak a term; Satan would have His head crushed. He would be utterly defeated. Hebrews 2:14 gives us the full explanation: **"Inasmuch then as the children have partaken of flesh and blood, He Himself** (the Woman's Seed, Jesus Christ) **likewise shared in the same, that through death He might destroy him who had the power of death, that is, the devil."** Jesus was most definitely the Woman's Seed, a true human born of a human mother (Mary), and the One who overcame the devil by suffering and dying in our place on the cross.

The second moment when all living human beings were told of God's plan of salvation came after the great flood when Noah and his three sons and their four wives stepped out of the ark. Surely the promise given to Adam and Eve had been passed down to them through the previous generations, and they were all aware of what God had said. At this time Noah made a distinction between his three sons, declaring specifically: **"Blessed be the LORD, the God of Shem"** (Genesis 9:26). This shows us that God's plan of salvation would be carried out through the offspring of Shem, rather than that of Ham or Japheth.

Nevertheless, God's promise to Abraham, of the line of Shem, stated that the blessings of the coming Woman's Seed would benefit all mankind. God said to Abram (his name at that time): **"In you all the families of the earth shall be blessed"** (Genesis 12:3). This same promise was repeated in similar words to Abraham's son Isaac and to Isaac's son Jacob. Moses, the spokesman the Holy Spirit used to write the words of Genesis, also tells us that God's promise of the Woman's Seed was the means by which Abraham would be saved, for he wrote: **"And he (Abraham) believed in the LORD, and He accounted it to him for righteousness"** (Genesis 15:6). The way of salvation for Abraham and all others (Jew and non-Jew alike) is by faith in God's promise of the Woman's Seed. This is the only way sinners can be counted as righteous in the sight of God.

It was God's plan to choose one particular nation, the children of Israel (Jacob), to receive and to pass on God's promise of a Savior. God put this nation in the land of Palestine, right at

the junction of three continents, so that from Israel other nations and people would also learn of the coming Savior. When the Israelites were about to enter Palestine, Moses told the people that God's blessings would be poured down on them, with this purpose: **"The LORD will establish you as a holy people to Himself, just as He has sworn to you, if you keep the commandments of the LORD your God and walk in His ways. Then all peoples of the earth shall see that you are called by the name of the LORD"** (Deuteronomy 28:9-10).

When Israel was obedient to God, this purpose was fulfilled. For example, in the days of King David and the early days of King Solomon, the blessings of God were poured out on the people to such a degree that the kingdom of David and Solomon became one of the most powerful nations on earth. Therefore, Solomon included non-Jews in his dedication of the Temple. They, too, could pray to the God of Israel, and he asked God to hear their prayers: **"Moreover concerning a foreigner, who is not of your people Israel, but has come from a far country for Your name's sake (for they will hear of Your great name and Your strong hand and Your outstretched arm) when he comes and prays toward this temple, hear in heaven Your dwelling place, and do according to all for which the foreigner calls to you, that all peoples of the earth may know Your name and fear You, as do Your people Israel"** (1 Kings 8:41-43).

Among the non-Jews who most likely came to faith in the God of Israel in the Old Testament we can list Jethro (Moses' father-in-law), Rahab of Canaan, Ruth of Moab, the Queen of Sheba, Naaman of Syria, the Ninevites, and the sailors traveling with the prophet Jonah. There may have been many others whose names were not recorded in the pages of the Bible but are known to God.

The fact that God's plan of salvation was intended for all people is repeated many times in the New Testament. Jesus told Nicodemus: **"God so loved the world that He gave His only-begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life"** (John 3:16). The apostle Paul compared the universal effect of Adam's action and the universal effect of Jesus's: **"As through one man's offense judgment came to all men, resulting in condemnation, even so through one Man's righteous act the free gift came to all men, resulting in justification of life"** (Romans 5:18). In other words, what Jesus accomplished on the cross and through His resurrection obtained justification (the forgiveness of sins) for all mankind, as many as were condemned by Adam's sin. The Bible clearly teaches that God's desires to save all, that Christ's life and death and resurrection is for all. It teaches universal redemption, universal justification, and the universal love of God for all peoples and nations without exception. Therefore, Paul wrote to the Corinthians: **"God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing their trespasses to them"** (2 Corinthians 5:19).

Notice how many times the word **"all"** is repeated in these words of Paul to his assistant Timothy: **"Therefore I exhort first of all that supplications, prayers, intercession, and giving of thanks be made for all men, for kings and all who are in authority, that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and reverence. This is good and acceptable in the**

sight of God our Savior, who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. For there is one God and one Mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus, who gave Himself a ransom for all (1 Timothy 2:1-6). This is the testimony of the apostle John also, who wrote: **“He Himself is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the whole world”** (1 John 2:2).

There is one grievous sin in particular that has interfered with God’s eternal and universal plan of salvation through Jesus Christ. That is the sin of racism. By racism we mean the notion that some individuals or races are superior to other individuals or races. Racism causes some to be unwilling to share the Gospel of Christ with those they consider to be inferior. There are many differences between individuals and between races, but we are all the same with respect to two things: 1. We are all sinners who have disobeyed God and deserve eternal punishment. 2. God wants to save us all, Jesus died to save us all, and the Holy Spirit wants us all to hear the Gospel of Christ and be saved by faith in Jesus. There is no human being of any race that God does not want to be eternally with Him in bliss. Since this is true of God, it should also be true of all who are God’s children by faith in Christ. We should want every person to be saved.

The history of the world and of the church shows that at times the sin of racism has been prevalent among men and has hindered the mission of the Christian Church. God’s special blessings to the Jews led many of them to look down on all non-Jews. The prophet Jonah, for example, did not want to preach God’s Word to the people of Nineveh because he was afraid that they would repent and thus avoid God’s judgment. Jonah would have preferred their destruction to their salvation. But God corrected his thinking. In the New Testament the work of the apostle Paul was obstructed by the Jews who did not want to share their Messiah with non-Jews.

There have been many other instances of racism since then. In the United States of America, for example, there were times (and still are) when white people despise black people and black people despise white people. And yet the same God has sent His Son to save them all, and those who believe in Christ are one Church, in spite of differences in appearance, culture, language, and background. We should look at every individual we meet as someone for whom Jesus died.

Jesus’ instructions to us are very clear; He says: **“Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations”** (Matthew 28:19). He says: **“Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature”** (Mark 16:15). The apostle Peter was slow to bring the Gospel to Gentiles. The Lord gave him a special vision to direct him to a Gentile home, where he then testified: **“God has shown me that I should not call any man common or unclean”** (Acts 10:28). **“In truth I perceive that God shows no partiality. But in every nation whoever fears Him and works righteousness is accepted by Him. ... He is Lord of all”** (Acts 10:34-36).

There is no basis for racism in God's creation. Paul told the Athenians: **"He (God) gives to all life, breath, and all things. And He has made from one blood every nation of men to dwell on all the face of the earth"** (Acts 17:25-26). He **"now commands all men everywhere to repent"** (Acts 17:30). Paul wrote to the Romans: **"Is He the God of the Jews only? Is He not also the God of the Gentiles? Yes, of the Gentiles also"** (Romans 3:29). He wrote to the Galatians: **"There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus"** (Galatians 3:28). And to the Colossians: **"There is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcised nor uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave nor free, but Christ is all and in all"** (Colossians 3:11).

We can all look forward to the new heavens and the new earth, where there will be no racism. We will look, **"and behold, a great multitude which no one could number, of all nations, tribes, peoples, and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, with palm branches in their hands, and crying out with a loud voice, 'Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!'"** (Revelation 7:9-10).

Questions

1. Why do we call God's plan of salvation an eternal plan?
2. Why do we call God's plan of salvation a universal plan?
3. What role did the Israelites play in God's plan of salvation?
4. In what way was the location of Palestine important for the Gospel of Christ?
5. Name some Gentiles who became believers in God through contact with Israel.
6. What verses prove the universality of Christ's redemption?
7. What is the sin of racism?
8. Is racism prevalent in your area of work? If so, give examples.
9. Use Scripture to show that racism is contrary to the will of God.
10. Why is it important to remember that there is only one Savior for the world?



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Lesson 2 – Missions to the Gentiles in Prophecy

The focus of Old Testament was not on Israel bringing the Word of God to the Gentiles, but on God's word to His people Israel. Even during Jesus' earthly ministry, before He completed His work on the cross, Jesus sent His followers only to the people of Israel (Matthew 10:5-6). But His desire was certainly for Gentiles to be drawn to the God of Israel through the devotion and godly lives of His people. When Jesus cleansed the Temple the second time, He called attention to the words of the prophet Isaiah: **"Is it not written, 'My house shall be called a house of prayer for all nations'? But you have made it a 'den of thieves'"** (Mark 11:17, from Isaiah 56:7). Non-Jews were not totally excluded from the blessings of God's people in the Old Testament.

The prophet Isaiah welcomed non-Jews when he declared: **"Also the sons of the foreigner who join themselves to the LORD, to serve Him, and to love the name of the LORD, to be His servants – everyone who keeps from defiling the Sabbath, and holds fast My covenant – even them I will bring to My holy mountain, and make them joyful in My house of prayer. Their burnt offerings and their sacrifices will be accepted on My altar"** (Isaiah 56:6-7).

When the prophets and psalmists talked about the coming of the Messiah, they frequently implied that the Gentiles would share in His blessings. Notice, for example, how many times all the nations (which include heathen Gentiles) are mentioned in the Messianic prophecies. In Psalm 2 we hear God the Father saying to His Son, the Messiah: **"I will give You the nations for Your inheritance, and the ends of the earth for Your possession"** (Psalm 2:8). After David foretold the sufferings of the Messiah in Psalm 22, he described the Messiah's eventual triumph and prophecies: **"All the ends of the world shall remember and turn to the LORD, and all the families of the nations shall worship before You"** (Psalm 22:27). In Psalm 46 we hear the words: **"I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth!"** (Psalm 46:10). **"All the earth shall worship You and sing praises to You"** (Psalm 66:4).

Martin Luther wrote a mission hymn based on Psalm 67, where it is written: **"God be merciful to us and bless us, and cause His face to shine upon us, ... that Your way may be known on earth, Your salvation among all nations"** (Psalm 67:1-2). Psalm 72 even mentions specific nations: **"The kings of Tarshish and of the isles will bring presents; the kings of Sheba and Seba will offer gifts. Yes, all kings shall fall down before Him; all nations shall serve Him"** (Psalm 72:10-11). David prophesied: **"All nations whom You have made shall come and worship before You, O LORD, and shall glorify Your name"** (Psalm 86:9).

In some of the later psalms God even calls on His people to bring the good news of the Messiah everywhere. For example: **“Proclaim the good news of His salvation from day to day. Declare His glory among the nations, His wonders among all peoples”** (Psalm 96:2-3). **“The LORD has made known His salvation; His righteousness He has revealed in the sight of the nations”** (Psalm 98:2). The shortest psalm calls on all nations to praise the Lord: **“Praise the LORD, all you Gentiles! Laud Him, all you peoples! For His merciful kindness is great toward us, and the truth of the LORD endures forever. Praise the LORD!”** (Psalm 117).

Among the prophets, it is especially Isaiah that describes the Messianic era as a time when all nations of the earth will learn to know their gracious Savior-God, the suffering Servant who went to the cross for the sins of mankind. Non-Jews will also rejoice in the salvation He will bring to all. **“It shall come to pass in the latter days that the mountain of the LORD’s house shall be established on the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills, and all nations shall flow to it. Many people shall come and say, ‘Come, and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob.’”** (Isaiah 2:2-3).

Chapters 7 to 11 of Isaiah are known as the Book of Immanuel, for in these chapters we read about the coming of the Messiah, Immanuel (God With Us), a Branch from the family of David. At the conclusion of this glorious prophecy Isaiah foretells: **“In that day you will say: ‘Praise the LORD, call upon His name; declare His deeds among the peoples, make mention that His name is exalted. Sing to the LORD, for He has done excellent things; this is known in all the earth’** (Isaiah 12:4-5).

When Isaiah speaks the comfort of the coming Messiah to the people of Jerusalem in Chapter 40, he also includes the rest of the world: **“The glory of the LORD shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together”** (Isaiah 40:5). The suffering Servant (the Messiah) is introduced in Chapter 42, and Isaiah says: **“He will bring forth justice to the Gentiles”** (Isaiah 42:1). **“He will not fail nor be discouraged, till He has established justice in the earth; and the coastlands shall wait for His law”** (Isaiah 42:4). God says to His Anointed One: **“I will keep You and give You as a covenant to the people, as a light to the Gentiles”** (Isaiah 42:6). The Messiah declares: **“There is no other God besides Me, a just God and a Savior; there is none besides Me. Look to Me, and be saved, all you ends of the earth!”** (Isaiah 45:21-22). The Messiah must first comfort His own people that have been waiting for Him, but His blessings do not stop there. He then brings His comfort to all. Isaiah says: **“For the LORD has comforted His people, He has redeemed Jerusalem. The LORD has made bare His holy arm in the eyes of all the nations; and all the ends of the earth shall see the salvation of our God”** (Isaiah 52:9-10).

Finally, the Holy Spirit guided His prophet Isaiah to devote a whole chapter to the Gentiles coming to praise the Jewish Messiah, the Savior of the world: **“The Gentiles shall come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your rising. ... The wealth of the Gentiles shall come to you. The multitude of camels shall cover your land, the dromedaries of Midian and Ephah; all those from Sheba shall come; they shall bring gold and incense and they**

shall proclaim the praises of the LORD. ... Surely the coastlands shall wait for Me; and the ships of Tarshish will come first, to bring your sons from afar. ... The sons of foreigners shall build up your walls, and their kings shall minister to you. ... You shall drink the milk of the Gentiles and milk the breast of kings” (Isaiah 60).

All these references to sharing the salvation of Israel with Gentiles should have led the prophet Jonah to delight in the command of God to proclaim God’s Word to the Assyrians in Nineveh. But Jonah did not want to call the Assyrians to repentance; he wanted them to perish in their sins. This was Jonah’s explanation of why he fled to Tarshish instead of going to Nineveh: **“I fled previously to Tarshish; for I know that You are a gracious and merciful God, slow to anger and abundant in lovingkindness, One who relents from doing harm”** (Jonah 4:2). Jonah was disappointed that the Ninevites responded to his message with repentance, so that **“God relented from the disaster that He had said He would bring upon them, and He did not do it”** (Jonah 3:10). But God’s attitude was different. He told His angry prophet: **“Should I not pity Nineveh, that great city, in which are more than one hundred and twenty thousand persons who cannot discern between their right hand and their left?”** (Jonah 4:11).

The prophets Elijah and Elisha, on the other hand, obeyed God’s command to bring the Word of their gracious Lord to the widow of Zarephath, a heathen village, and Naaman, a Syrian captain. Jesus pointed this out to the people of His hometown in Nazareth, saying: **“I tell you truly, many widows were in Israel in the days of Elijah, ... but to none of them was Elijah sent except to Zarephath, in the region of Sidon, to a woman who was a widow. And many lepers were in Israel in the time of Elisha the prophet, and none of them was cleansed except Naaman the Syrian”** (Luke 4:25-27). The people of Nazareth became so angry at Jesus’ words that they attempted to throw Him over a cliff.

In the same way the Jews threatened to kill Paul, God’s missionary to the Gentiles, when he informed them that the Lord had said to him: **“Depart, for I will send you far from here to the Gentiles”** (Acts 22:21). As soon as they heard the word **“Gentiles”**, they were furious and demanded that Paul be put to death. They could not tolerate the idea that Gentiles should or even could share in the blessings God had given the Jewish people.

But God Himself was always concerned with the nations of the world. That is why He put the children of Israel right in the middle of the world at that time, along the main road between the two most advanced ancient civilizations: the Egyptians and the Babylonians. He gave Joseph and Moses a prominent place in Egypt for the benefit of the Egyptians. He gave Daniel a prominent place in Babylon and Persia for the benefit of those heathen nations. For this reason, we may very well see Gentiles from Old Testament times in the mansions of heaven.

It was particularly in the days of the later prophets that God directed many of His words to the nations surrounding Israel:

- The Assyrians are mentioned in the following chapters: Isaiah 7, 8, 10, 20, 36, and 37; Jonah 3, 4; Nahum 1, 2, 3; Zephaniah 1.
- The Syrians are mentioned in Isaiah 7, 8, 17; Jeremiah 49; Daniel 11; Amos 1.
- The Babylonians are mentioned in Isaiah 13, 14, 21, 39, 46, 47; Jeremiah 20, 21, 22, 24, 25, 27, 28, 29, 32, 34, 37, 38, 39, 50, 51, 52; Ezekiel 21, 24; Daniel 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 7, 8; Habakkuk 1, 2.
- The Phoenicians are mentioned in Isaiah 23; Ezekiel 26, 27, 28; Joel 3; Amos 1.
- The Moabites are mentioned in Isaiah 15, 16; Jeremiah 48; Ezekiel 25; Amos 2; Zephaniah 1.
- The Ammonites are mentioned in Jeremiah 49; Ezekiel 21, 25; Amos 1; Zephaniah 1.
- The Philistines are mentioned in Jeremiah 47; Ezekiel 25; Amos 1; Zephaniah 1.
- The Egyptians and Ethiopians are mentioned in Isaiah 18, 19, 20, 30, 31; Jeremiah 42, 43, 44, 46; Ezekiel 29, 30, 31, 32; Daniel 11; Joel 3; Zephaniah 1.
- The Persians are mentioned in Isaiah 44, 45, 46; Daniel 2, 6, 7, 8, 10, 11.
- The Edomites are mentioned in Jeremiah 49; Ezekiel 25, 35; Joel 3; Amos 1; Obadiah; Malachi 1.
- The Magogites are mentioned in Ezekiel 38, 39.
- The Greeks are mentioned in Daniel 2, 7, 8, 10, 11.
- The Romans are mentioned in Daniel 2, 7.

Certainly all these references to heathen nations indicate that God was concerned with all these peoples. If He had not been concerned, He would not have bothered to address them and call them to repentance through His prophets. It is as though God could hardly wait for the Old Testament to come to an end so that He could send His Son to save the world and give the Holy Spirit to His followers so that they could go into all the world and to every nation with the Good News of Jesus' deliverance from sin, death, and the devil.

Among the very last of the prophets, Haggai and Malachi in particular foretold that the Gentiles would share in the victories of the Messiah. God spoke through Haggai: **"Thus says the LORD of hosts: 'Once more (it is a little while) I will shake heaven and earth, the sea and dry land; and I will shake all nations, and they shall come to the Desire of All Nations, and I will fill this temple with glory,' says the LORD of hosts. 'The silver is Mine, and the gold is Mine,' says the LORD of hosts. 'The glory of this latter temple shall be greater than the former,' says the LORD of hosts. 'And in this place I will give peace,' says the LORD of hosts"** (Haggai 2:6-9). It was in Jerusalem that God established peace through the Prince of Peace, Jesus Christ. Peace and reconciliation with God were established by Jesus through His suffering and death in the place of all mankind.

Malachi, the last of the prophets, prophesied that the Jewish Messiah will be praised throughout the world by the Gentiles: **"For from the rising of the sun, even to the going down, My name shall be great among the Gentiles; in every place incense shall be offered**

to My name, and a pure offering; for My name shall be great among the nations,' says the LORD of hosts" (Malachi 1:11).

Questions

1. In what way is the Old Testament different from the New Testament with respect to worldwide missions?
2. Which two Old Testament books refer to missions among the Gentiles?
3. Why did Jonah refuse to go to Nineveh at God's command?
4. How did God teach Jonah that his attitude was not good?
5. Why did the people of Nazareth want to kill Jesus after His sermon?
6. Why is it important that God gave His people the land of Palestine?
7. How do we know that God is concerned about all the nations of the world?
8. Summarize what the prophets Haggai and Malachi say about the coming Messiah.



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Lesson 3 – Jesus’ Teachings on Gentile Missions

Jesus’ interest in lost sinners and what He did for them is summed up in His own words:

“The Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost” (Luke 19:10). Although Jesus certainly wanted to save all lost sinners, both Jews and Gentiles, He restricted Himself and His followers almost entirely to the children of Israel during the days of His humiliation. He said to a Canaanite woman who came to ask for help for her daughter: **“I was not sent except to the lost sheep of the house of Israel”** (Matthew 15:24). He did then heal her daughter, however, because the woman asked only for the crumbs that fall from the Jewish table. To His twelve apostles Jesus said: **“Do not go into the way of the Gentiles, and do not enter a city of the Samaritans. But go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel”** (Matthew 10:5-6). Even when Jesus had a golden opportunity to work in a Samaritan village that recognized Him as **“the Savior of the world”**, He **“stayed there”** only **“two days”** (John 4:40-43).

Yet there are numerous examples of Jesus’ contact with Gentiles during His ministry to the Jews, and He did not fail to help these Gentiles both physically and spiritually. Even in His infancy the Wise Men from the East **“fell down and worshiped Him”** (Matthew 2:11). Soon after Jesus began His public ministry, He traveled through Samaria, and **“many of the Samaritans of that city believed in Him”** through His contact with one woman at a well; some of them even confessed: **“We ourselves have heard Him and we know that this is indeed the Christ, the Savior of the world”** (John 4:39-42).

Jesus made His headquarters in Capernaum in **“Galilee of the Gentiles”** (Matthew 4:15). He then began to teach and heal in that area. We read that **“His fame went throughout all Syria; and they brought to Him all sick people who were afflicted with various diseases and torments, and those who were demon-possessed, epileptics, and paralytics; and He healed them. Great multitudes followed Him – from Galilee, and from Decapolis, Jerusalem, Judea, and beyond the Jordan”** (Matthew 4:24-25). There is no hint that He turned any of them away because they had Gentile blood. Rather, we read of a Gentile centurion in Capernaum who had such faith in Jesus’ healing power that he believed that Jesus could heal his servant from a distance by merely saying a word. Jesus not only healed his servant by His word, but He **“said to the crowd that followed Him, ‘I say to you, I have not found such great faith, not even in Israel!’”** (Luke 7:9).

We have already mentioned the woman of Canaan; the fact that she was a Canaanite is of special interest because many years earlier, after the great flood, Noah had prophesied:

“Cursed be Canaan; a servant of servants he shall be to his brethren” (Genesis 9:25). This curse no longer applied to this Canaanite woman.

Jesus healed ten lepers, but the only one who returned to thank Him was a Samaritan. Jesus asked: **“Were there not any found who returned to give glory to God except this foreigner?”** (Luke 17:18).

In the week of His death some Greeks wanted to see Jesus. This led Jesus to look ahead to His coming death and the abundant fruit it would produce among the Gentiles such as these Greeks, and He said: **“Unless a grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it produces much grain”** (John 12:24). In fact, Jesus often looked ahead to the day when His name would be praised among the Gentiles, when **“many will come from east and west, and sit down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven”** (Matthew 8:11).

When Jesus was brought to the Temple when He was only forty days old, Simeon said that Jesus would be **“a light to bring revelation to the Gentiles”** (Luke 2:32). John the Baptist likewise pointed to Jesus and called Him **“the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world”** (John 1:29). Jesus Himself told the Samaritan woman at the well who asked about the proper place to worship God: **“Woman, believe Me, the hour is coming when you will neither on this mountain (Mt. Gerizim), nor in Jerusalem, worship the Father. ... The hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth”** (John 4:21-23).

As opposition to Jesus among the Jews and their leaders increased toward the end of His ministry, Jesus became more direct in talking about the day that would come soon when many Gentiles would receive Him. For example, He told the parable of the vinedressers who refused to accept the landowner’s servants and even his own son; instead, they **“took him and cast him out of the vineyard and killed him”** (Matthew 21:39). Jesus then asked His listeners what the landowner would do to such vinedressers. They answered Him: **“He will destroy those wicked men miserably, and lease his vineyard to other vinedressers who will render to him the fruits in their seasons”** (Matthew 21:41). With this answer the Jews were pronouncing their own sad fate, for Jesus told them: **“The kingdom of God will be taken from you and given to a nation bearing the fruits of it”** (Matthew 21:43). The Jewish leaders understood what Jesus was saying, and they hated Him even more because **“they perceived that He was speaking of them”** (Matthew 21:45).

Jesus told two other parables on this same theme. The first was about the marriage feast of the king’s son to which many had been invited. But when the invited people of the kingdom refused to come to his feast, some of them even killing the servants who invited them, the king told his servants: **“Go into the highways, and as many as you find, invite to the wedding”** (Matthew 22:9). Those who were first invited were the Jewish people. The king became angry with them, so **“he sent out his armies, destroyed those murderers, and burned up their city”** (Matthew 22:7). Surely this was a prediction of the destruction of Jerusalem, which took place in 70 AD. The invitation then was extended to the Gentiles.

The second is similar. Jesus told about a man who made a great supper to which many were invited. Those who were first invited refused to come, and so the man’s servant was then instructed to invite the poor and the maimed and the lame and the blind. Since there was still room for more, the servant was told: **“Go out into the highways and hedges, and compel them to come in, that my house may be filled. For I say to you that none of those men who were invited shall taste my supper”** (Luke 14: 23-24).

When His death drew ever nearer, Jesus expressed more frequently the coming days of mission to the Gentiles. When He foretold the coming destruction of Jerusalem, Jesus said: **“This gospel of the kingdom will be preached in all the world as a witness to all the nations, and then the end will come”** (Matthew 24:14). He spoke of the gathering His elect **“from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other”** (Matthew 24:31). On the final

Judgment Day **“all the nations will be gathered before Him”** (Matthew 25:32). Even when Jesus defended Mary, Martha’s sister, from those who accused her of waste because she poured out her precious perfume on Jesus, He had the Gentiles in mind, for He said on that occasion: **“I say to you, wherever this gospel is preached in the whole world, what this woman has done will also be told as a memorial to her”** (Matthew 26:13).

Zebedee’s sons James and John were certainly loyal followers of Jesus, but they did not completely share the spirit of their Master. When a certain Samaritan village did not want Jesus to come to them, James and John thought that a destructive fire from heaven would be appropriate, but Jesus responded: **“You do not know what manner of spirit you are of. For the Son of Man did not come to destroy men’s lives but to save them”** (Luke 9:55-56). It was not the time for judgment. In fact, when judgment did come, it came first for the Jews, not for the Gentiles. At the conclusion of one of His parables, Jesus addressed His fellow-Jews with these words: **“There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth when you see Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and all the prophets in the kingdom of God, and yourselves thrust out. They will come from the east and the west, from the north and the south, and sit down in the kingdom of God. And indeed there are last who will be first, and there are first who will be last”** (Luke 13:28-30). Judgment came to Jerusalem and the Jewish nation in 70 AD. Jesus warned them in advance: **“There will be great distress in the land and wrath upon this people. And they will fall by the edge of the sword, and be led away captive into all nations. And Jerusalem will be trampled by Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled”** (Luke 21:23-24). We are now living in the times of the Gentiles, a time when the Gospel of Christ is being proclaimed throughout the world.

John’s Gospel in particular stresses the **world** as the object of God’s love. **“God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son”** (John 3:16). Jesus called Himself **“the living bread which came down from heaven”** and then He said: **“The bread that I shall give is My flesh, which I shall give for the life of the world”** (John 6:51). **“I am the light of the world”** (John 8:12), Jesus said.

Jesus talked about the Gentiles as His **“other sheep”**: **“Other sheep I have which are not of this fold; them also I must bring, and they will hear My voice”** (John 10:16). Jesus will gather these other sheep through His Word. John took careful note of the words of the ruling high priest Caiaphas when he called for Jesus’ death. In a cunning and cruel way Caiaphas said: **“It is expedient for us that one man should die for the people, and not that the whole nation should perish.”** But John saw in these words of high priest a prophecy of world evangelism: **“Jesus would die for the nation, and not for that nation only, but also that He would gather together in one the children of God who were scattered abroad”** (John 11:50-52).

The cross would be the symbol of our Savior’s death, but Jesus Himself saw it also as a magnet attracting many Gentiles to Himself. He said: **“And I, if I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all peoples to Myself”** (John 12:32). Therefore, the evening before His arrest Jesus

prayed not only for His disciples, but for all the many who would be brought to faith through the faithful teaching of His followers: **“I do not pray for these alone, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word”** (John 17:20). This includes all of us Christians who are living today.

Immediately after Jesus’ suffering and death for the sin of the world and His triumphant resurrection, the message of Jesus with regard to the Gentiles changed from anticipation to reality. Now was the time for the worldwide mission to begin. The time of the Gentiles was at hand. Already on the day of His resurrection Jesus said to His disciples: **“As the Father has sent Me, I also send you. ... Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained”** (John 20:21-23). Not long after that, Jesus spoke to His followers (probably over 500 of them at one time) and gave them their commission: **“Go ... and make disciples of all the nations”** (Matthew 28:19). **“Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature”** (Mark 16:15).

Shortly before He ascended to heaven, Jesus said **“that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem”** (Luke 24:47). In a very short time Jesus and His Father would send the Holy Spirit to His disciples in Jerusalem for this purpose, and then they would be empowered to be His witnesses **“to the end of the earth”** (Acts 1:8). Jesus’ last words to His disciples while He was with them in the flesh directed them to do mission work, to be missionaries, to spread the Good News of His salvation throughout the world.

As we examine Jesus’ so-called “Great Commission” (Matthew 28:18-20) we find that it is based on Christ’s authority over heaven and earth, its key command is to make disciples of all nations; it involves movement and expansion; its method is baptizing and teaching; it is carried out in the name of the one Triune God (Father, Son, Spirit); and its goal is not to create shallow and superficial followers, but rather followers who are to be taught **“to observe all things”** that Jesus has commanded. This work of missions will continue as long as the world endures, for Jesus promised: **“And lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.”**

Questions

1. Where did Jesus and His disciples do their preaching before Jesus' death?
2. Name some Gentiles who came to faith in Jesus during those days.
3. What was Jesus' response to the desire of some Greeks to see Him?
4. Which parables of Jesus point ahead to the Gospel being preached among Gentiles?
5. What did Jesus mean when He talked about His **"other sheep"**?
6. In what way did Jesus pray for us on the night before His death?
7. What did Jesus mean by **"the times of the Gentiles"**?
8. List the various directions about Gentile mission work that Jesus spoke after He rose from the dead.
9. What promises did Jesus make to His disciples about their mission?



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Missiology

Lesson 4 – Early Mission Work in Jerusalem

The book of Acts is the Holy Spirit's own record of how Jesus' followers began to follow His instructions after His ascension to heaven. He had told them to announce the Good News to all people of all nations, even to the ends of the earth. But this did not happen in one day. In fact, the Good News of Christ is still going out into the world today and will continue to do so until Christ returns.

When Jesus promised that the Father would pour out of the Holy Spirit, He indicated the order in which the Good News would make its way through the world: **"You shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth"** (Acts 1:8). The book of Acts begins with the preaching of the Gospel in Jerusalem, and then Judea, and then Samaria, and finally to the Gentiles. We could say the book of Acts starts with Jerusalem, the capital of the Jewish world, and ends with Rome, the capital of the Gentile world. The Gospel made rapid progress in a relatively short time.

The Holy Spirit's tools in this initial period were the twelve apostles themselves, with the addition of the apostle Paul. All of them were called directly by the Lord Himself. When Judas Iscariot needed to be replaced, Peter stated the qualifications required to be an apostle: It must be someone who has **"accompanied us all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, beginning from the baptism of John to that day when He was taken up from us"** (Acts 1:21-22). They named two such men, Joseph Barsabas Justus and Matthias, and they asked the Lord to choose one of them as the new twelfth apostle by the casting of lots. Matthias was chosen, and **"he was numbered with the eleven apostles"** (Acts 1:26).

No doubt all the apostles did their work faithfully, beginning in Jerusalem and eventually going to other places. The book of Acts and the rest of the Scriptures tell us nothing about the preaching and the travels of most of the apostles. The little we know of what they did comes from the writings and stories that were collected by Eusebius of Caesarea, who wrote a book about the early history of the Church. It seems that some of the apostles went eastward with the Gospel, perhaps reaching as far as India and China. The book of Acts, however, describes only the work done by Peter and the two brothers, James and John, and the work of the apostle Paul and his co-workers, like Barnabas, Silas, Mark, Luke, Timothy, and Titus. Acts mentions the activity of others, including James, the brother of Jesus, as well as two of the seven deacons of the Jerusalem congregation, Stephen and Philip.

In this lesson we will summarize the mission work of the original twelve apostles and their associates, as found in the book of Acts and the letters written by others. We will not talk about the work Paul in this lesson; we will talk the mission work of the apostle Paul in later lessons.

As Jesus foretold, the Holy Spirit was poured out a few days (specifically, ten) after His ascension. The day God chose for this outpouring was Pentecost, which was already a Jewish festival day. There were many Jews from all over the world present in Jerusalem for this festival. There were only 120 followers of Christ in Jerusalem at the beginning of the day, including the twelve apostles, the four brothers of Jesus, Jesus' mother Mary, and other women who had been loyal followers of Jesus.

The Holy Spirit made His presence known by three astounding miracles: the sound of the wind, the tongues of fire, and the sudden ability of the believers to speak the praises of God in specific foreign languages. These miracles attracted many Jews who were from Jerusalem and far-off places. What amazed them in particular was that these men from Galilee were speaking in the languages of other nations: **"The multitude came together, and were confused, because everyone heard them speak in his own language"** (Acts 2:6). Fifteen foreign peoples are listed, and these foreigners asked: **"How is it that we hear, each in our own language in which we were born?"** (Acts 2:8). No doubt all of these visitors were Jews, for by this time in history the Jewish people had been scattered in many different countries, as far as Mesopotamia in the east and Rome in the west.

The book of Acts tells us what the apostle Peter said on that day of Pentecost about Christ's death and resurrection, and how many people responded to what he said by confessing their sins and being baptized in Christ's name for the forgiveness of their sins. The Holy Spirit blessed the preaching of the Gospel. **"Then those who gladly received his word were baptized; and that day about three thousand souls were added to them. And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers"** (Acts 2:41-42). Notice that their baptism was followed by a careful listening to the teaching of the apostles, in keeping with Jesus' instruction to make disciples by baptizing and teaching.

What began on Pentecost continued in the days that followed: **"So continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they ate their food with gladness and simplicity of heart, praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved"** (Acts 2:46-47). The young congregation in Jerusalem used the Temple itself as a place to spread the Gospel. They were certainly a mission-minded congregation, and the Lord blessed their testimony with daily additions to His Church.

As we continue to read the book of Acts, we see that this growth continued for some time. We are told: **"Many of those who heard the word believed; and the number of the men**

came to be about five thousand” (Acts 4:4). **“And believers were increasingly added to the Lord, multitudes of both men and women”** (Acts 5:14). The Gospel spread from Jerusalem to the neighboring countryside in Judea, as Jesus had foretold. **“A multitude gathered from the surrounding cities to Jerusalem, bringing sick people and those who were tormented by unclean spirits, and they were all healed”** (Acts 5:16). The miracles confirmed the Word, but the Word itself was the Holy Spirit’s main tool. **“Daily in the temple, and in every house, they did not cease teaching and preaching Jesus as the Christ”** (Acts 5:42). Teaching and preaching Christ – this is how mission work is done, and the Holy Spirit blesses the Word as He wills.

The early growth continued for some time. **“The number of the disciples was multiplying”** (Acts 6:1). **“Then the word of God spread, and the number of the disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests were obedient to the faith”** (Acts 6:7). Remember that many of the priests belonged to the sect of the Sadducees, whose members did not even believe in the resurrection of the dead or in angels. The Holy Spirit worked in their hearts also through Law and Gospel, and now they became believers in Christ, who did rise from the dead. Later we are told that there were also **“Pharisees who believed”** (Acts 15:5).

Before Jesus ascended to heaven, He told His disciples: **“These signs will follow those who believe: In My name they will cast out demons; they will speak with new tongues; they will take up serpents; and if they drink anything deadly, it will by no means hurt them; they will lay hands on the sick, and they will recover”** (Mark 16:17-18). The book of Acts gives many examples of this last sign: the healing of the sick. There are examples of all the other signs as well, except for the drinking of poison, but we can be sure this occurred as well, since Mark reports: **“They went out and preached everywhere, the Lord working with them and confirming the word through the accompanying signs”** (Mark 16:20).

Amazing things took place, beginning with the special signs on Pentecost. We are told: **“Many wonders and signs were done through the apostles”** (Acts 2:43). One of these signs took place at the gate of the Temple. There a lame beggar hoped to receive a gift of money from Peter and John. But Peter gave him much more. **“Peter said, ‘ ... In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk.’ And he took him by the right hand and lifted him up, and immediately his feet and ankle bones received strength. So he, leaping up, stood and walked and entered the temple with them – walking, leaping, and praising God”** (Acts 3:6-8). This miracle at a public place with many witnesses gave Peter an opportunity to preach the Law and Gospel: **“They taught the people and preached in Jesus the resurrection from the dead”** (Acts 4:2). Not even the threats and punishments of the Jewish leaders could stop them. **“With great power the apostles gave witness to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus”** (Acts 4:33).

Most of the signs were signs of healing. But there was one sign that was a sign of judgment that made a deep impression on the citizens of Jerusalem. Ananias and his wife Sapphira

wanted to give the believers the impression that they were just as generous as others who sold property, like Barnabas, who gave all of the proceeds of the sale to the congregation. Ananias and his wife also sold some property and gave proceeds to the congregation, but they kept back part of it for themselves and yet pretended to give it all. Peter accused Ananias of lying to the Holy Spirit, and when Ananias heard Peter's words he **"fell down and breathed his last"** (Acts 5:5). Before his wife learned of her husband's death, she repeated the same lie and **"immediately she fell down at his feet and breathed her last"** (Acts 5:10). The result was that **"great fear came upon all the church and upon all who heard these things"** (Acts 5:11).

Such signs continued for some time in the circle of the apostles, as is clear from Acts and other New Testament books. The question is sometimes raised as to whether the Holy Spirit is still confirming God's Word with such miracles today. There is no doubt that the almighty God is able to perform miracles of any kind whenever He chooses to do so. But it seems from a study of church history that for the most part God has chosen not to confirm the Word among us by such miraculous means, since we now have the entire written Scriptures, which the early Christians did not have. Paul told the Christians in Corinth that the miracles he performed were signs that proved that he was a true apostle, just like the original twelve: **"Truly the signs of an apostle were accomplished among you with all perseverance, in signs and wonders and mighty deeds"** (2 Corinthians 12:12). The letter to the Hebrews refers to these signs as having been done by those who were witnesses of our Lord's death and resurrection, saying: **"How shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation, which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed to us by those who heard Him, God also bearing witness both with signs and wonders, with various miracles, and gifts of the Holy Spirit, according to His own will?"** (Hebrews 2: 3-4).

Church history shows that the miraculous signs that were so abundant during the apostolic times gradually dwindled as the apostles and that whole generation passed away. Some of the signs claimed by later teachers were probably not authentic at all. We must remember the warning that the apostle Paul wrote to the Thessalonians: **"The coming of the lawless one is according to the working of Satan, with all power, signs, and lying wonders, and with all unrighteous deception among those who perish"** (2 Thessalonians 2: 9-10).

In our day, it seems that most of those who claim to be doing miracles in Christ's name are not doing these miracles by the power of God, for they are using these so-called signs to confirm their false teachings, not the truth of God. Some of these alleged faith healers and miracle workers are nothing but frauds, attempting to get rich at the expense of their deluded followers. We need to remember Moses' ancient warning: **"When a prophet speaks in the name of the LORD, if the thing does not happen or come to pass, that is the thing which the LORD has not spoken; the prophet has spoken it presumptuously"** (Deuteronomy 18:22). Moses also warned: **"If there arises among you a prophet or a dreamer of dreams, and he gives you a sign or a wonder, and the sign or the wonder**

comes to pass, of which he spoke to you, saying, ‘Let us go after other gods’ – which you have not known – and let us serve them,’ you shall not listen to the words of that prophet or that dreamer of dreams, for the LORD your God is testing you to know whether you love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul” (Deuteronomy 13:1-3). We need to test every teacher and alleged miracle worker by means of the Scriptures, to determine whether he is a true teacher or a false teacher. This is the case whether the signs seem genuine or not.

The early Christians combined their zeal for missions with fervent prayer. Even before Pentecost we find the 120 Christians in Jerusalem continuing **“with one accord in prayer and supplication”** (Acts 1:14). They prayed for the Lord’s guidance in choosing a twelfth apostle to replace Judas of Iscariot. After the Holy Spirit was poured out on them on Pentecost, **“they continued steadfastly in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers”** (Acts 2:42).

One of their prayers is recorded at some length. After they were commanded by the Jewish authorities **“not to speak at all nor teach in the name of Jesus”** (Acts 4:18), **“they raised their voice to God with one accord and said: ‘Lord, You are God, who made heaven and earth and the sea, and all that is in them, who by the mouth of Your servant David have said: “Why did the nations rage, and the people plot vain things? The kings of the earth took their stand, and the rulers were gathered together against the LORD and against His Christ.” For truly against Your holy Servant Jesus, whom You anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles and the people of Israel, were gathered together to do whatever Your hand and Your purpose determined before to be done. Now, Lord, look on their threats, and grant to Your servants that with all boldness they may speak Your word, by stretching out Your hand to heal, and that signs and wonders may be done through the name of Your holy Servant Jesus”**” (Acts 4:24-30). This is a good pattern for all mission prayers. It first calls attention to who God is and what He is capable of doing; He is the almighty Creator of heaven and earth. Then the prayer reminds God, so to speak, of what He had said about His Christ, His Anointed One, in the second psalm. Then they bring their request to God; they do not request that persecution should come to an end and their life made easier, but that they be given boldness to proclaim the Word of God; they also ask that God keep His promise to confirm the preaching of the Word with signs and wonders. God answered their prayer by filling them with the Holy Spirit, so that **“they spoke the word of God with boldness”** (Acts 4:31).

The apostles recognized that prayer was one of their privileges and duties; it was even more important than distributing food to the hungry. When the apostles were unable to handle all the tasks that needed to be done in the growing congregation, they chose seven helpers (or deacons) to handle the food distribution to the poor. They themselves said: **“We will give ourselves continually to prayer and to the ministry of the word”** (Acts 6:4).

The first believer to lose his life because of his confession of Christ was Stephen, one of those seven deacons. He died praying like his dying Master, for he prayed as Jesus prayed: **“Lord Jesus, receive my spirit,”** and: **“Lord, do not charge them with this sin”** (Acts 7:59-60).

Since there were many poor Christians in the Jerusalem congregation – particularly widows who had no one to support them – the apostles and the more well-to-do Christians helped them. One of the reasons the Gospel of Christ was attractive to the heathen world around these early Christians was the love and generosity they had towards one another. Such love and generosity are a necessary fruit of faith in Christ. From the very beginning, **“all who believed were together, and had all things in common, and sold their possessions and goods, and divided them among all, as anyone had need”** (Acts 2:44-45). The apostles did not make this into a rule that everyone had to follow, but it was something the early Christians joyfully volunteered to do. **“The multitude of those who believed were of one heart and one soul; neither did anyone say that any of the things he possessed was his own, but they had all things in common. ... Nor was there anyone among them who lacked; for all who were possessors of lands or houses sold them, and brought the proceeds of the things that were sold, and laid them at the apostles’ feet; and they distributed to each as anyone had need”** (Acts 4:32-35). When the apostles became too busy with this distribution of food and were unable to handle it properly, seven helpers were chosen to oversee this important work. It was important to support the material needs of the Christians. It was important for those who had, to share what they had with those who did not have. This kind of concern for helping others with earthly things is one of the best advertisements for the Christian faith, especially among those whose religion or culture knows little or nothing of such concern for others.

As we have already seen, the bold zeal of the Christians to proclaim the Gospel of Christ triggered hostility from the unbelievers, particularly the Jewish authorities. Already on Pentecost, some of those present in the crowd said the apostles were drunk, and that was the cause of their miraculous speaking in other languages. After Peter and John healed of the lame beggar, they were imprisoned overnight and summoned before the Jewish council on the next day. The Jewish authorities had a problem on their hands. It was obvious to the public that a miracle had taken place in the name of Jesus, whom they had crucified. What were they going to do? They commanded them not to teach in Jesus’ name and threatened to punish them if they disobeyed. But **“they let them go, finding no way of punishing them, because of the people, since they all glorified God for what had been done”** (Acts 4:21).

Not long after this, the high priest and his henchmen **“laid their hands on the apostles and put them in the common prison”** (Acts 5:18). This time they were set free by an angel from the Lord who **“opened the prison doors and brought them out”** (Acts 5:19). Again they were brought before the council. When Peter and the others freely admitted that they did not intend to obey the Jew’s commands to not talk about Jesus, **“they were furious and**

plotted to kill them" (Acts 5:33). It was dangerous to be a confessing Christian. But Gamaliel, a respected leader among them, advised restraint and they listened to his counsel.

This respite from persecution did not last long, however. When the deacon Stephen became especially bold in his witness about Christ and was given power to do miracles to confirm his teaching, the Jewish leaders **"stirred up the people, the elders, and the scribes; and they came upon him (Stephen), and brought him to the council"** (Acts 6:12). After listening to Stephen's address, **"they were cut to the heart, and they gnashed at him with their teeth. ... They cried out with a loud voice, stopped their ears, and ran at him with one accord; and they cast him out of the city and stoned him"** (Acts 7:54-58). They followed up this assault on Stephen with **"a great persecution ... against the church which was at Jerusalem; and they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria"** (Acts 8:1). The early Christians and their leaders were willing to endure ridicule, shame, persecution, and even death for the sake of the Gospel.

Questions

1. Where does the book of Acts begin, and where does it end?
2. What was special about the twelve apostles and Paul?
3. What happened on the day of Pentecost?
4. What is meant by the speaking in tongues?
5. What must we say about the claims of miracles and tongues in our day?
6. What is the test we must give to all who claim to teach God's Word?
7. What are the main points of the prayer in Acts 4:24-30?
8. What did the apostles consider to be their main responsibility?
9. How did the Christians in Jerusalem handle the problems of the poor?
10. Why did Christ's enemies refrain from punishing the apostles?
11. What form of persecution did the early Christians in Jerusalem endure?



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Missiology

Lesson 5 – The Spread of the Gospel from Jerusalem

Even though the early Christians were severely persecuted after the death of Stephen, the Lord turned the evil of persecution into the good of spreading the Gospel. When severe persecution broke out in Jerusalem, the Jewish Christians were scattered **“throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria”** (Acts 8:1). What did they do in Judea and Samaria? **“Those who were scattered went everywhere preaching the word”** (Acts 8:4). The result of the Jerusalem persecution was the preaching of the Gospel of Christ in many other places, and when the Word is preached, God works through it to create faith in Christ, and every believer in Christ becomes a spokesman for Christ to bring the Gospel to others in other places.

The next thing we read in Acts is that one of the seven deacons, Philip, **“went down to the city of Samaria and preached Christ to them”** (Acts 8:5). **“And the multitudes with one accord heeded the things spoken by Philip”** (Acts 8:6). When the apostles in Jerusalem heard what was going on in Samaria, **“they sent Peter and John to them”** (Acts 8:14) to further establish the Gospel work in that city and to cement the relationship between the Jerusalem Christians and the Samaritan Christians. There is only one Church of Jesus Christ, made up of all true believers in Christ everywhere, and this one Church is made up of sheep who listen to the voice of their Shepherd Jesus and voice of the apostles Jesus chose to teach His Church. On their way back to Jerusalem Peter and John preached **“the gospel in many villages of the Samaritans”** (Acts 8:25). The Gospel of Christ was moving through the land, and it was the persecution of Christians in Jerusalem that led to these new mission efforts.

Meanwhile the Lord sent the deacon Philip on a visit unrelated to the persecution. The Holy Spirit wanted the spread of the Gospel to Ethiopia in Africa, and He knew how He could do that. There was a man from Ethiopia who either was a Jew himself or was a Gentile who had become familiar with the faith and worship of the Jews. He had risen to a high office in Ethiopia, being **“a eunuch of great authority under Candace the queen of the Ethiopians, who had charge of all her treasury”** (Acts 8:27). This man had come all the way to Jerusalem to participate in Jewish worship and was now returning home. This man had been able to obtain a precious scroll of the prophet Isaiah in Jerusalem and was now reading it out loud while sitting in his chariot.

“Then the Spirit said to Philip, ‘Go near and overtake this chariot’” (Acts 8:29). It so happened (by God’s design) that the man was reading the chapter in Isaiah (chapter 53) that described the Servant’s sufferings and the reason for them: the Servant was being punished

for the sin of the people. When the eunuch asked Philip to explain this passage to them, **“Philip opened his mouth, and beginning at this Scripture, preached Jesus to him”** (Acts 8:35). Through this Gospel preaching the Holy Spirit led this eunuch to faith in Christ, to baptism, and to a joyful heart. Surely this official must have shared the Good News of Jesus with the people in his country of Ethiopia. Philip went on and **“preached in all the cities till he came to Caesarea”** (Acts 8:40).

Next we read that there were believers in Christ in far-off Damascus in Syria. The Pharisee Saul followed them there to arrest them and bring them back to Jerusalem for trial. But Jesus Himself appeared to Saul on the road to Damascus and convinced him that He was indeed the promised Messiah, the very Son of God. After this, Saul himself testified concerning Christ. **“Immediately he preached the Christ in the synagogues, that He is the Son of God”** (Acts 9:20). Again, the Lord turned the evil of persecution into the triumph of the Gospel because it is the will of the Lord Jesus to seek and save lost sinners, no matter what evils they may have committed in the past. The believers in Damascus had the privilege of seeing that their worst enemy, Saul, had been changed from a rabid Pharisee into a zealous preacher of the Gospel. The Lord Jesus had great plans for Saul. He would become Paul, the great missionary to the Gentile world, as we shall discuss in later lessons.

At this point in time the book of Acts reports that **“the churches throughout all Judea, Galilee, and Samaria had peace and were edified. And walking in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, they were multiplied”** (Acts 9:31). Meanwhile the apostle Peter was also making mission trips to the Jewish communities throughout the region. **“Now it came to pass, as Peter went through all parts of the country, that he also came down to the saints who dwelt in Lydda”** (Acts 9:32). Other towns mentioned include Sharon and Joppa. The Word of God was going out among the people and doing its work, as it always does. The book of Acts summarizes this activity: **“Now those who were scattered after the persecution that arose over Stephen traveled as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus, and Antioch, preaching the word to no one but the Jews only”** (Acts 11:19).

Up to this point the Christians had confined their Gospel preaching to the Jewish people or those Gentiles who had become thoroughly Judaized. Even though Jesus had told them to go out to all peoples and nations, their Jewish habits and customs were so ingrained in them that they were slow to carry out their Master’s instructions to go into all the world and preach the Gospel to everyone. So the Holy Spirit chose to give the apostle Peter, who was a leader among the Jewish Christians, a very specific command to go to a very specific Gentile home and bring the Gospel of Christ to one specific man and his family, friends, and associates. This man was Cornelius of Caesarea, **“a centurion of what was called the Italian Regiment, a devout man and one who feared God with all his household, who gave alms generously to the people, and prayed to God always”** (Acts 10:1-2).

Notice that this man was not a Gentile unbeliever, but a Gentile who worshiped the God of the Jews. In other words, he was a Gentile believer in the Messianic promises. Somehow he

had been brought to faith in the coming Messiah through contact with Jewish believers. But he did not know that the Messiah had already arrived in the person of Jesus of Nazareth, nor was he acquainted with everything Jesus had done as the Messiah. Therefore, God sent this man an angel by means of a vision, giving him a specific command: **“Send men to Joppa, and send for Simon whose surname is Peter. He is lodging with Simon, a tanner, whose house is by the sea. He will tell you what you must do”** (Acts 10:5-6). Cornelius obeyed this order and at once sent three men to Joppa to locate Simon Peter.

The Lord prepared Peter for their visit by putting him into a trance when he was praying on the rooftop. He was hungry and they were preparing a meal downstairs, but while he was waiting, Peter **“saw heaven opened and an object like a great sheet bound at the four corners, descending to him and let down to the earth. In it were all kinds of four-footed animals of the earth, wild beasts, creeping things, and birds of the air. And a voice came to him, ‘Rise, Peter; kill and eat’”** (Acts 10:11-13).

We need to understand that God Himself had separated the Jews from the Gentiles in the days of Moses by giving the Jews various laws concerning unclean food that effectively prevented them from eating with Gentiles and sharing their food. Yet the animals in the vision from heaven were the unclean animals that the Jews were forbidden to eat. But now the voice of God was telling Peter to kill these unclean animals and eat them. That is why Peter answered: **“Not so, Lord! For I have never eaten anything common or unclean”** (Acts 10:14). God was asking Peter to do something that God Himself had forbidden. How could he obey?

But **“the voice spoke to him again the second time, ‘What God has cleansed you must not call common.’ This was done three times. And the object was taken up into heaven again”** (Acts 10:15-16). Through this vision God was telling Peter that the old food laws were no longer in force. God had wanted His people in Old Testament times to keep themselves separate from the Gentiles until the coming of the Messiah. But now that was no longer the case. Jews could now freely associate with Gentiles. But it took a while for Peter to understand the meaning of this vision because the old Jewish ways were so ingrained in him.

The Holy Spirit made this lesson very clear. Just as Peter was struggling to understand and accept this message, the three men from Cornelius come at the door, asking for Peter. **“The Spirit said to him, ‘Behold, three men are seeking you. Arise therefore, go down and go with them, doubting nothing: for I have sent them’”** (Acts 10:19-20). Peter listened to the Holy Spirit and met the men, and they stayed there that evening. **“On the next day Peter went away with them, and some brethren from Joppa accompanied him”** (Acts 10:23). This was a major event in the history of Christian missions; it is good that there were witnesses with Peter who could testify as to what took place in the home of Cornelius.

After introductions had taken place, Peter explained to Cornelius and the **“many who had come together”** the importance of the vision he had seen on the rooftop. He said: **“You**

know how unlawful it is for a Jewish man to keep company with or go to one of another nation. But God has shown me that I should not call any man common or unclean” (Acts 10:27-28). After Cornelius explained how God Himself had instructed him to summon Peter from Joppa, Peter began his message: **“In truth I perceive that God shows no partiality. But in every nation whoever fears Him and works righteousness is accepted by Him”** (Acts 10:34-35). This is a very important statement regarding Christian missions. There is no race or people or tribe that is off-limits for the Gospel of Christ. The Gospel of Christ and the Christian mission allow no racism of any kind.

After announcing the work of Jesus Christ for the salvation of the world, Peter offered the benefits of that salvation freely to his Gentile listeners. He said: **“To Him (Christ) all the prophets witness that, through His name, whoever believes in Him will receive remission of sins”** (Acts 10:43). Through this Gospel message the Holy Spirit created faith in Christ in the hearts of Peter’s Gentile hearers. God saw fit to make this abundantly evident to all in the room, including the six Jewish Christians that Peter had brought along from Joppa. The Jewish Pentecost in Jerusalem was repeated, only this time it was a Gentile Pentecost: **“While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit fell upon all those who heard the word. And those of the circumcision (the Jewish Christians from Joppa) who believed were astonished, as many as came with Peter, because the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out on the Gentiles also. For they heard them speak with tongues and magnify God”** (Acts 10:44-46). God would not have poured out His Spirit on unbelievers, so Peter drew the obvious conclusion: **“Can anyone forbid water, that these should not be baptized who have received the Holy Spirit just as we (Jewish Christians) have?” “And he commanded them to be baptized in the name of the Lord”** (Acts 10:47-48). This was a very important moment in the history of the Christian Church. It was a very important step in the march of the Gospel of Christ throughout the world.

There were some Jewish Christians who objected strongly to what Peter had done. In their mind such an action was revolutionary; it was contrary to their upbringing and their understanding of God’s ways. But Peter defended his actions, and the six men from Joppa who witnessed what had happened in Caesarea gave their corroborating testimony. After reporting on everything that had happened in the home of Cornelius, Peter concluded: **“If therefore God gave them the same gift as He gave us when we believed on the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I that I could withstand God?”** (Acts 11:17). His objectors were then silent, and the Christians who heard Peter’s account **“glorified God, saying, ‘Then God has also granted to the Gentiles repentance to life”** (Acts 11:18).

A new era in mission work had begun. Almost immediately there was a change in attitude and method with respect to the preaching of the Gospel. We read: **“Now those who were scattered after the persecution that arose over Stephen traveled as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus, and Antioch, preaching the word to no one but the Jews only. But some of them were men from Cyprus and Cyrene, who, when they had come to Antioch, spoke to the**

Hellenists (Greeks), **preaching the Lord Jesus. And the hand of the Lord was with them, and a great number** (of Hellenists) **believed and turned to the Lord”** (Acts 11:19-21).

Antioch became the center of Gentile mission work, just as Jerusalem was the center of mission work among the Jews.

Peter continued to be in the forefront preaching the Gospel among the Jewish people. At this point, however, the book of Acts shifts its attention from the work of Peter to the work of Paul, whom the Lord Jesus had chosen as His special apostle to the Gentiles. The two letters of Peter in the New Testament indicate that Peter continued his work for some time until he was put to death by direction from Emperor Nero, most likely in Rome. In both of his letters Peter addressed Christians scattered in the Roman provinces of **“Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia”** (1 Peter 1:1). He now spoke of the Christian Church, made up of Jews and Gentiles, as God’s **“chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, ... who once were not a people but are now the people of God”** (1 Peter 2:9-10). Peter did not forget what God had taught him through his visit to Caesarea to meet Cornelius, for he wrote: **“The Lord is ... not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance”** (2 Peter 3:9).

When Jewish Christians experienced persecution, they were tempted to abandon Christ and return to their former Judaism without Jesus. At that time the Roman authorities did not persecute Jews unless they were Christian Jews. The letter to the Hebrews was written to Jewish believers to make them realize that a return to Judaism would be a fatal mistake. In every respect Christianity was the fulfillment of genuine Judaism, for Jesus was far superior to Moses, and Christian worship was far superior to Jewish worship, even as substance is superior to its shadow.

The letter to the Hebrews makes it clear that mission work includes not only the bringing of the Gospel to those who do not know it, but also the teaching and training of those who have been brought to faith in Christ. Converts are always tempted to revert to the kind of life they had before they became Christians, for that life was more free of persecutions and other troubles, as their confession of Christ often brought persecution. One Lutheran missionary, Ernest Wendland, has written: “In times of stress and under pressure from former associates the temptations to revert to the old ways of life are enormous” (*Missiological Perspectives*, E. Wendland, p. 65).

The other books in the New Testament, such as the letters of James, John, and Jude stress the production of the fruits of faith among Christians. In many areas of the world where Christian mission work has been done, the Christianity exhibited by the Christian life has been shallow and superficial, rather than solid and deep. John’s first letter teaches us how we can test ourselves in three ways: truth, righteousness, and love. James, the brother of the Lord, wrote: **“I will show you my faith by my works”** (James 2:18).

Finally, the book of Revelation describes the final victory of Jesus and His people over all the forces of evil arrayed against Him and against us in this world. What a great day it will be when the words of Revelation 7:9-10 will be fulfilled before our very eyes: **“I looked, and behold, a great multitude which no one could number, of all nations, tribes, peoples, and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, with**

palm branches in their hands, and crying out with a loud voice, 'Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!'"

Questions

1. How did God use the persecution of Christians to spread the Gospel of Christ?
2. How did God bless the preaching of Philip in Samaria?
3. Why was it important that Peter and John also go to Samaria?
4. What was the eunuch of Ethiopia doing when Philip met him?
5. How did Philip explain the meaning of Isaiah 53?
6. Name the towns and regions that the Gospel of Christ reached first.
7. Why were Jesus' apostles slow to preach the Gospel to the Gentiles?
8. Why was Peter's visit to Cornelius' home significant?
9. What was God teaching Peter through the vision of the unclean animals?
10. How did God show His approval of what happened in Cornelius' home?
11. Why it is important that there were six Jewish Christians present?
12. How did Peter defend his actions in the home of Cornelius?
13. Which city became the center for mission work among the Gentiles?
14. Why was the letter to the Hebrews written?
15. What will heaven reveal about the membership of the Holy Christian Church?



Provided by the Church of the Lutheran Confession - Board of Missions

Missiology

Lesson 6 – The Lord’s Choice of Saul to Be Missionary to the Gentiles

Jesus chose twelve men to be His apostles to bring His Gospel to the world after His ascension. One of them, Judas Iscariot, proved to be unfaithful, and he was replaced by Matthias shortly after Jesus’ ascension. But our Lord had in mind still one more apostle, an unlikely Pharisee named Saul. We meet Saul in the book of Acts for the first time in connection with the death of Stephen: **“They cast him (Stephen) out of the city and stoned him. And the witnesses laid down their clothes at the feet of a young man named Saul”** (Acts 7:58). We are not told that Saul himself threw any stones to kill Stephen, but that he was in favor of Stephen’s death, for the account continues: **“Now Saul was consenting to his death”** (Acts 8:1).

Saul then became a leader in a campaign to wipe out every kind of confession of Christ in the land. **“As for Saul, he made havoc of the church, entering every house, and dragging off men and women, committing them to prison”** (Acts 8:3). He was not satisfied with terrorizing those who confessed Christ in Jerusalem. When many Christians left Jerusalem because of the severe persecution, Saul went after them in other cities as well. **“Then Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest and asked letters from him to the synagogues of Damascus, so that if he found any who were of the Way, whether men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem”** (Acts 9: 1-2). Saul was convinced of the rightness of his cause, and he was zealous and relentless in the pursuit of his goal.

Later in the book of Acts Saul talked about his past as a Pharisee. In an address to the Jewish people in Jerusalem Saul stated: **“I am indeed a Jew, born in Tarsus of Cilicia, but brought up in this city at the feet of Gamaliel, taught according to the strictness of our fathers’ law, and was zealous toward God as you all are today. I persecuted this Way to the death, binding and delivering into prisons both men and women, as also the high priest bears me witness, and all the council of the elders, from whom I also received letters to the brethren, and went to Damascus to bring in chains even those who were there to Jerusalem to be punished”** (Acts 22:3-5). When Saul was then arrested by the Romans he said: **“I was born a citizen”** (Acts 22:28). That is, Saul was a Roman citizen, and this gave him several advantages and privileges in his journeys in the Roman Empire. The next day he told the crowd: **“I am a Pharisee, the son of a Pharisee”** (Acts 23:6).

In an address before King Herod Agrippa II Saul said of his upbringing and early life: **“My manner of life from my youth, which was spent from the beginning among my own nation at Jerusalem, all the Jews know. They knew me from the first, if they were willing to**

testify, that according to the strictest sect of our religion I lived a Pharisee. ... Indeed, I myself thought I must do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth. This I also did in Jerusalem, and many of the saints I shut up in prison, having received authority from the chief priests; and when they were put to death, I cast my vote against them. And I punished them often in every synagogue and compelled them to blaspheme; and being exceedingly enraged against them, I persecuted them even in foreign cities” (Acts 26:4-5, 9-11).

There are also autobiographical remarks in his letters that describe his early life as a Pharisee and his motivation for being so hostile to Christ and His followers. To the Galatians he wrote: **“You have heard of my former conduct in Judaism, how I persecuted the church of God beyond measure and tried to destroy it. And I advanced in Judaism beyond many of my contemporaries in my own nation, being more exceedingly zealous for the traditions of my fathers”** (Galatians 1:13-14). He wrote to Timothy, his student: **“I was formerly a blasphemer, a persecutor, and an insolent man”** (1 Timothy 1:13). Before his conversion Saul was proud of his Jewish heritage and his zealous Pharisaism, as he wrote to the Christians in Philippi: **“If anyone else thinks he may have confidence in the flesh, I more so: circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of the Hebrews; concerning the law, a Pharisee; concerning zeal, persecuting the church; concerning the righteousness which is of the law, blameless”** (Philippians 3:4-6). In his former life Saul had prided himself on his achievements as a strict Pharisee and no doubt depended on his record to attain for himself the glories of the resurrection from the dead and an eternal home with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of God.

This is the man the Lord Jesus chose as His thirteenth apostle, as His own very special apostle to the Gentiles. God had so planned Paul’s early life that he had three very important assets: he knew the Hebrew Scriptures as well as any man of his time and had the famous Gamaliel as his teacher; he was born as a Roman citizen so he could travel freely throughout the Roman empire; and he knew the Greek language that was the universal language of the eastern Roman Empire at that time, having been born in Tarsus of Cilicia, so he could communicate the Gospel wherever he went.

The Lord Jesus chose to change this man’s life when he was on his way to persecute the Jewish Christians in Damascus. There are three accounts of Saul’s encounter with the risen and living Lord Jesus in the book of Acts, as well as Saul’s mention of the event in his letter to the Galatians. In Acts 9:3-19 Luke relates what happened as follows: **“As he (Saul) journeyed he came near Damascus, and suddenly a light shone around him from heaven. Then he fell to the ground, and heard a voice saying to him, ‘Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?’”** Notice that when enemies of Christ persecute Christians, they are actually persecuting the risen Christ Himself, sitting at God’s right hand.

Saul wanted to know who was talking to him. **“He said, ‘Who are You, Lord?’”** Then Saul experienced the shock of his life when the voice answered: **“I am Jesus, whom you are**

persecuting. It is hard for you to kick against the goads." Saul had thought Jesus of Nazareth was a false teacher, a fraud, and that His followers were ignorant members of a superstitious cult that were spreading their poison in Jerusalem and elsewhere. Nevertheless, Saul's conscience must have begun to bother him a bit about what he was doing, for Jesus spoke of how hard it was for him to kick against the goads.

Saul had no choice but to submit to the voice of the risen Jesus, whom he now calls Lord. **"He, trembling and astonished, said, 'Lord, what do You want me to do?' Then the Lord said to him, 'Arise and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do.' ... Then Saul arose from the ground, and when his eyes were opened he saw no one. But they led him by the hand and brought him into Damascus. And he was three days without sight, and neither ate nor drank."** Luke tells us that his companions took Saul to the house of a man named Judas, who lived on Straight Street.

At this point the Lord Jesus chose to carry out His plan through a Jewish Christian living in Damascus, a man named Ananias. The account in Acts continues: **"Now there was a certain disciple at Damascus named Ananias; and to him the Lord said in a vision, 'Ananias.' And he said, 'Here I am, Lord.' So the Lord said to him, 'Arise and go to the street called Straight, and inquire at the house of Judas for one called Saul of Tarsus, for behold, he is praying. And in a vision he has seen a man named Ananias coming in and putting his hand on him, so that he might receive his sight.'" No doubt Saul was praying that the Lord Jesus would give him further instructions, and Jesus assured Saul that his sight would be restored by a man named Ananias.**

Ananias and the Christians in Damascus knew what kind of man Saul of Tarsus was. His violent campaign against Christians was well-known, and they had heard he was coming to Damascus. So, Ananias responded: **"Lord, I have heard from many about this man, how much harm he has done to Your saints in Jerusalem. And here he has authority from the chief priests to bind all who call on Your name."**

The Lord then gave Ananias the assurance he needed to carry out his assignment. **"The Lord said to him, 'Go, for he is a chosen vessel of Mine to bear My name before Gentiles, kings, and the children of Israel. For I will show him how many things he must suffer for My name's sake.'" The Lord had planned all of this from the beginning, and now He was carrying it out. Saul was God's choice to be an apostle to the Gentiles, and in the process of carrying out that assignment Saul would undergo countless hardships and persecutions.**

Obediently **"Ananias went his way and entered the house; and laying his hands on him he said, 'Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus, who appeared to you on the road as you came, has sent me that you may receive your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit.' Immediately there fell from his eyes something like scales, and he received his sight at once; and he arose and was baptized. So when he had received food, he was strengthened. Then Saul spent some days with the disciples at Damascus."** All of this is reported to us in Acts 9:3-19.

Saul then told his conversion experience to the Jewish mobs wanting to kill him in an address he made to them while standing on the stairs leading to the Roman soldiers' barracks next to the Jerusalem temple. Saul's address is recorded in Acts 22:1-21. To the above account of Luke, Saul added that after Ananias had restored his sight, he said to him: **"The God of our fathers has chosen you that you should know His will, and see the Just One, and hear the voice of His mouth. For you will be His witness to all men of what you have seen and heard. And now why are you waiting? Arise and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on the name of the Lord."** What a relief it must have been for Saul to hear that his sins against the risen Jesus could and would be forgiven, and that his baptism in Jesus' name would give him this assurance! Saul's baptism was very important to him, as we learn from his New Testament letters.

Saul also gave an account of his conversion when many years later he was asked to defend himself before King Herod Agrippa II and other important officials. This is what he said: **"As I journeyed to Damascus with authority and commission from the chief priests, at midday, O king, along the road I saw a light from heaven, brighter than the sun, shining around me and those who journeyed with me. And when we all had fallen to the ground, I heard a voice speaking to me and saying in the Hebrew language, 'Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me? It is hard for you to kick against the goads.' So I said, 'Who are You, Lord?' And He said, 'I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. But rise and stand on your feet; for I have appeared to you for this purpose, to make you a minister and a witness both of the things which you have seen and of the things which I will yet reveal to you. I will deliver you from the Jewish people, as well as from the Gentiles, to whom I now send you, to open their eyes, in order to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among those who are sanctified by faith in Me'"** (Acts 26:12-18).

Jesus told Saul what his life's work would be. He would be sent to the Gentiles to bring about their conversion from Satan to God, as he himself had been converted. This great goal would be accomplished by telling his own experiences and through the words God would yet reveal to him. This is the task given to every Christian in his own station in life. Our goal as Christians is always to bring people the message of the forgiveness of sins through Jesus Christ so that they will be brought out of the darkness of unbelief and the control of Satan into the light of God's love and the promise of eternal life. There is no doubt that Saul was given a special assignment to bring the Gospel of Christ to the Gentiles as an example for us to follow today. As Paul wrote to the Galatians: **"It pleased God, who separated me from my mother's womb and called me through His grace, to reveal His Son in me, that I might preach Him among the Gentiles"** (Galatians 1: 15-16).

Saul did not preach Christ among the Gentiles immediately after his conversion. His first preaching of Christ took place among the Jewish people – first in Damascus then later in Jerusalem. We read in Acts 9:20: **"Immediately he preached the Christ in the synagogues**

(of Damascus), **that He is the Son of God.**" His listeners were amazed, because they knew that he had come to Damascus to locate believers in Christ and take them back to Jerusalem for trial and punishment, even possibly death. **"But Saul increased all the more in strength, and confounded the Jews who dwelt in Damascus, proving that this Jesus is the Christ"** (Acts 9:22).

Saul did not return to Jerusalem for about three years. He later wrote to the Galatians what he did during that time: **"I did not immediately confer with flesh and blood, nor did I go up to Jerusalem to those who were apostles before me; but I went to Arabia, and returned again to Damascus"** (Galatians 1:16-17). We do not know what Saul did in Arabia, but it is very possible that Saul spent a year or so in relative solitude, studying the Hebrew Scriptures he knew so well and finding Jesus as the promised Messiah in the Old Testament prophecies and images.

After he returned to Damascus, Saul faced severe persecution for the first time because of his preaching of Christ. **"The Jews plotted to kill him. But their plot became known to Saul. And they watched the gates day and night, to kill him. Then the disciples took him by night and let him down through the wall in a large basket"** (Acts 9:23-25). Saul later recounted this experience to the Christians in Corinth: **"In Damascus the governor, under Aretas the king, was guarding the city of the Damascenes with a garrison, desiring to arrest me; but I was let down in a basket through a window in the wall, and escaped from his hands"** (2 Corinthians 11:32-33).

Where did he go then? He went to Jerusalem, but his reputation as a persecutor of Christians made it difficult for the Christians there to trust him at first. **"He tried to join the disciples; but they were all afraid of him, and did not believe that he was a disciple. But Barnabas took him and brought him to the apostles. And he declared to them how he had seen the Lord on the road, and that He had spoken to him, and how he had preached boldly at Damascus in the name of Jesus. So he was with them at Jerusalem, coming in and going out"** (Acts 9:26-28).

The only apostles Saul met at that time were Peter and James, the brother of Jesus, who was the head elder of the Jerusalem Christians, for Paul later wrote to the Galatians about this visit to Jerusalem: **"I went up to Jerusalem to see Peter, and remained with him fifteen days. But I saw none of the other apostles except James, the Lord's brother. ... I was unknown by face to the churches of Judea which were in Christ. But they were hearing only, 'He who formerly persecuted us now preaches the faith which he once tried to destroy.' And they glorified God in me"** (Galatians 1:18-24).

Thus, Paul's stay in Jerusalem was very short. He did not have time nor opportunity to preach the Gospel among the Christian groups outside of Jerusalem, in Judea. His stay was very short because the Jews in Jerusalem hated him because he was now a follower of Jesus and called Jesus the Messiah. Once again Saul was persecuted for his confession of Christ. **"He spoke boldly in the name of the Lord Jesus and disputed against the Hellenists, but**

they attempted to kill him. When the brethren found out, they brought him down to Caesarea and sent him out to Tarsus” (Acts 9:29-30).

Saul did not at first appreciate the fact that he could not stay in Jerusalem and work among his own people. Jesus Himself appeared again to Saul and reminded him that his appointed mission was to go to the Gentiles. Saul later recounted this experience when he addressed the Jews from the steps leading to the Roman barracks in Jerusalem. He said: **“Now it happened, when I returned to Jerusalem, and was praying in the temple, that I was in a trance and saw Him (Jesus) saying to me, ‘Make haste and get out of Jerusalem quickly, for they will not receive your testimony concerning Me’” (Acts 22:17-18).**

At first Saul dared to disagree with his Lord. He thought his background and experience made him an ideal candidate to preach to the Jews. He said: **“Lord, they know that in every synagogue I imprisoned and beat those who believe on You. And when the blood of Your martyr Stephen was shed, I also was standing by consenting to his death, and guarding the clothes of those who were killing him” (Acts 22:19-20).** But Jesus was insistent, saying to Saul: **“Depart, for I will send you far from here to the Gentiles” (Acts 22:21).**

We know very little about the next years in Saul’s life. We only know that he spent these years in Tarsus, the town in which he was born. It is hard to imagine that he was silent about his Savior there, but we know nothing about any results of his preaching during this time.

Meanwhile some of the scattered Jewish Christians in Antioch of Syria began sharing the Gospel of Christ with Gentiles in Antioch. This was the beginning of Gentile mission work, and Antioch became the center of this work for some time to come. **“The hand of the Lord was with them (these preachers of the Gospel in Antioch), and a great number believed and turned to the Lord. Then news of these things came to the ears of the church in Jerusalem; and they sent out Barnabas to go as far as Antioch. When he came and had seen the grace of God, he was glad, and encouraged them all that with purpose of heart they should continue with the Lord. For he was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and of faith. And a great many people were added to the Lord” (Acts 11:21-24).**

Antioch in Syria was one of the largest cities in the Roman Empire at that time. Barnabas needed help in this large city. He remembered that Saul was in Tarsus, and he no doubt knew something about what Jesus had called Saul to do, so here was an opportunity for Saul to begin to carry out his mission. **“Then Barnabas departed for Tarsus to seek Saul. And when he had found him, he brought him to Antioch. So it was that for a whole year they assembled with the church and taught a great many people. And the disciples were first called Christians in Antioch” (Acts 11:25-26).**

There was now danger that the Christians would divide into two churches: a Jewish Christian Church, centered in Jerusalem, and a Gentile Christian Church, centered in Antioch of Syria. The Christians in Jerusalem did not want that to happen. They were interested in what was going on in Antioch, so they sent Barnabas from Jerusalem to assist the believers in Antioch.

God provided another way to establish the unity of the two congregations: **“Prophets came from Jerusalem to Antioch. Then one of them, named Agabus, stood up and showed by the Spirit that there was going to be a great famine throughout all the world, which also happened in the days of Claudius Caesar. Then the disciples, each according to his ability, determined to send relief to the brethren dwelling in Judea. This they also did, and sent it to the elders by the hands of Barnabas and Saul”** (Acts 11:27-30). As the Jewish Christians had shared their spiritual treasures with the Gentiles, it was only fitting that the Gentile Christians would share their material possessions with the Jewish Christians.

It was no doubt during this visit of Saul and Barnabas to Jerusalem that a very important discussion took place among Barnabas and Saul and the leaders of the Jerusalem congregation. Barnabas and Saul, who were both Jews, had brought Titus, a Gentile Christian with them; as a Gentile he was uncircumcised. Some of the Jewish Christians in Jerusalem tried to insist that Titus be circumcised to be accepted as a Christian among them. In other words, they believed that in order to be a Christian, you had to become a Jew first by accepting circumcision and all the other Jewish rules and traditions.

In his letter to the Galatians, Saul explained what happened at that time: **“I went up again to Jerusalem with Barnabas, and also took Titus with me. And I went up by revelation, and communicated to them that gospel which I preach among the Gentiles, but privately to those who were of reputation, lest by any means I might run, or had run, in vain. Yet not even Titus who was with me, being a Greek, was compelled to be circumcised. And this occurred because of false brethren secretly brought in (who came in by stealth to spy out our liberty which we have in Christ Jesus, that they might bring us into bondage), to whom we did not yield submission even for an hour, that the truth of the gospel might continue with you”** (Galatians 2:1-5). Barnabas and Saul refused to have Titus circumcised. Such a demand for circumcision among the Gentile Christians was based on the false view that it was necessary for Gentile Christians to keep the Jewish laws and traditions in order to be true Christians. This was contrary to the true Gospel (Good News) of Jesus Christ, who had won free forgiveness of sins for all mankind; the keeping of the law is not necessary for salvation.

It was during this private meeting that Saul and Barnabas reached an agreement with the leaders in Jerusalem. Saul wrote to the Galatians: **“When they saw that the gospel for the uncircumcised had been committed to me, as the gospel for the circumcised was to Peter, ... and when James, Cephas, and John, who seemed to be pillars, perceived the grace that had been given to me, they gave me and Barnabas the right hand of fellowship, that we should go to the Gentiles and they to the circumcised. They desired only that we should remember the poor, the very thing which I also was eager to do”** (Galatians 2:7-10).

Questions

1. What was Saul, the Pharisee, doing when Stephen was put to death as a martyr?
2. Why was Saul so zealous in his attempts to hurt and even kill Christians?
3. What is significant about Saul being born in Tarsus?
4. What kind of education did Saul have in his youth and early adulthood?
5. Why was Saul on his way to the city of Damascus in Syria?
6. Why did Saul not carry out his intentions in Damascus?
7. Why was Saul amazed to know that it was Jesus who talked to Him from heaven?
8. What did Saul begin to realize as soon as Jesus addressed him?
9. What happened to Saul when he did arrive in Damascus?
10. How did Saul show that he was a changed man when he in Damascus?
11. Where did Saul go for some time before he returned to Damascus?
12. How was Saul able to escape from his enemies in Damascus?
13. Which Christian in Jerusalem accepted Saul's account and welcomed him?
14. Why did Saul go to Tarsus after such a short stay in Jerusalem?
15. In what city did mission work among the Gentiles begin to thrive?
16. Why did Barnabas summon Saul from Tarsus?
17. What was Saul's life's work?
18. How had God prepared Saul for this work?



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Missiology

Lesson 7 – Paul’s First Mission Journey

When Barnabas and Saul returned to Antioch from their mission of mercy to Jerusalem, they brought John Mark with them, the very man who later wrote the Gospel of Mark. The Gospel work in Antioch was going well. At that time this Christian congregation was blessed with five **“prophets and teachers: Barnabas, Simeon who was called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen who had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch, and Saul”** (Acts 13:1). The Gospel was making many converts among the Gentiles in that city.

But it was time for the Gospel to be spread into other cities and countries among the Gentiles: **“As they ministered to the Lord and fasted, the Holy Spirit said, ‘Now separate to Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.’ Then, having fasted and prayed, and laid hands on them, they sent them away”** (Acts 13:2-3). How did the Holy Spirit speak to them? Most likely the Holy Spirit spoke through one of those prophets, just as He had spoken through Agabus to announce a coming famine. In any case they were sure it was God’s will to send Barnabas and Saul on a mission. The laying on of hands was a ceremony that indicated that this was the Lord’s will, and soon they were on their way.

Barnabas was a native of the island of Cyprus, and so it was natural that they would go there first. **“So being sent out by the Holy Spirit, they went down to Seleucia, and from there they sailed to Cyprus”** (Acts 13:4). Since Barnabas and Saul were Jews, they began their work in the city of Salamis, where there were several Jewish synagogues. John Mark was their assistant. In the preceding centuries of turmoil, the Jews had been scattered throughout the Roman Empire. Almost any city of any size had one or more Jewish synagogues where Jews gathered on the Sabbath to listen to the reading of the Law and the prophets and to sing praises to their God. Their worship probably included a prayer for the fulfillment of God’s ancient promises and the arrival of the Jewish Messiah. Many Gentiles through the years had become attracted to Jewish worship and attended synagogue services. Some of them became Jews in almost every sense of the word, becoming circumcised and living according to the Old Testament Law. But most of the Gentiles who attended synagogue worship did not go that far, and these Gentiles were called God-fearers.

We read that Barnabas, Saul, and Mark **“preached the word of God in the synagogues of the Jews”** (Acts 13:5). We are not told about the results of this preaching in Salamis. But when they got to Paphos, another city on the island, they had an opportunity to bring God’s Word to the proconsul Sergius Paulus, **“an intelligent man”** (Acts 13:7). But they were fiercely opposed by **“a certain sorcerer, a false prophet, a Jew whose name was Bar-Jesus”**

(also called Elymas), who **“withstood them, seeking to turn the proconsul away from the faith”** (Acts 13:6-8).

At this point the Lord determined to confirm the word of His apostle Saul through a special sign, a miracle. Saul (now called Paul for the first time) called Bar-Jesus a **“son of the devil”** and said to him, **“The hand of the Lord is upon you, and you shall be blind, not seeing the sun for a time”** (Acts 13:10-11). This prophecy was fulfilled at once, and Bar-Jesus **“went around seeking someone to lead him by the hand”** (Acts 13:11). When Sergius Paulus witnessed what had happened, he was **“astonished at the teaching of the Lord”** and he **“believed”** (Acts 13:12).

When Paul and Barnabas sailed from Paphos to Perga in Pamphylia on the mainland, Mark left the group and returned to Jerusalem. But Paul and Barnabas continued the trip and went up from the coastland into the interior to another city called Antioch in Pisidia. Antioch was most likely one of the congregations that Paul addressed when he later wrote to the Galatians (although there are a few scholars that disagree). In this letter Paul wrote: **“You know that because of physical infirmity I preached the gospel to you at the first”** (Galatians 4:13). It is therefore possible that their travel route inland was made necessary by Paul’s health problem. The Lord still sometimes directs His mission work today by inflicting sickness on His workers so that their plans have to change. It is the Lord’s work; He has a hand in everything that takes place, whether it is sickness or natural disaster or shake-ups in the government.

There was a synagogue in Antioch in Pisidia, and that is where Paul and Barnabas began their work. Towards the end of the service Paul was given an opportunity to speak to the worshipers. In his account of what happened, Luke (the author of Acts) gives us an example of the kind of message the apostle Paul preached in a Jewish synagogue. The message is recorded for us in Acts 13:16-41. Paul began by talking about Moses and the exodus from Egypt, the conquest of Canaan under Joshua, the period of the judges, and the choice of David as king. All of this was no doubt very familiar to his listeners.

But at the mention of David, he began to speak of the promise God gave to David and how this promise was very recently fulfilled in Jerusalem. He said: **“From this man’s seed (David’s seed), according to the promise, God raised up for Israel a Savior – Jesus”** (Acts 13:23). Paul then spoke of Jesus’ suffering, death, and resurrection, and concluded: **“We declare to you glad tidings – that promise which was made to the fathers, God has fulfilled this for us their children”** (Acts 13:32-33). After referring to several Old Testament prophecies (from Psalm 2, Isaiah 55, Psalm 16) that were fulfilled by Jesus, Paul came to the climax of his Gospel sermon: **“Therefore let it be known to you, brethren, that through this Man is preached to you the forgiveness of sins; and by Him everyone who believes is justified from all things from which you could not be justified by the law of Moses”** (Acts 13:38-39).

The main point of Gospel preaching is to preach the forgiveness of sins to all sinners, based on the life, death, and resurrection of this Man Jesus, whom God sent to be the Savior of the world. This is the message that must always be the center of all Christian mission work.

“Through this Man is preached to you the forgiveness of sins.” In this sermon Paul made it clear that no amount of obedience to the law can possibly accomplish what the Gospel offers: **“You could not be justified by the law of Moses.”**

Paul concluded his message with a warning against despising his words. It seems that a number of the Jews were not convinced by His words, but the God-fearing Gentiles in the audience were delighted to hear about the coming of the Jewish Messiah: **“The Gentiles begged that these words might be preached to them the next Sabbath”** (Acts 13:42). This same thing happened in almost all of the Jewish synagogues Paul visited on his mission journeys. Most of the Jews simply did not want to hear or believe that the crucified Jesus of Nazareth was actually their promised Messiah. It was the Gentile God-fearers who were attracted to the Good News that Paul preached and they were quick to spread the Word to their relatives and friends. These Gentiles became the core members of the Christian congregations throughout the Roman Empire. There were also some Jews who became Christians, but these quickly became the target of persecution by the unbelieving Jews.

After this first Sabbath message in Antioch of Pisidia **“many of the Jews and devout proselytes followed Paul and Barnabas, who, speaking to them, persuaded them to continue in the grace of God”** (Acts 13:43). This was certainly a very promising beginning. **“On the next Sabbath almost the whole city came together to hear the word of God”** (Acts 13:44). What a golden opportunity for the Gospel! Just think: Jews and Gentiles gathering together to hear about Jesus, the Savior of the world! **“But when the Jews saw the multitudes, they were filled with envy, and contradicting and blaspheming, they opposed the things spoken by Paul”** (Acts 13:45). Instead of rejoicing at the influx of Gentile neighbors, they resented the interest of these non-Jews. These strangers, Paul and Barnabas, come to town, and now their synagogue is being overrun by Gentiles. They could not handle it, and so they found fault with the message that Paul and Barnabas proclaimed. They did all they could to squash the impact of the Gospel.

What were Paul and Barnabas to do? Should they, as Jews, cater to their own people and retract what they had said before? Should they take back their offer of forgiveness of sins through Christ to everyone in attendance? Should they take back their statement that the law of Moses could not justify anyone? No, they could not do that. **“Paul and Barnabas grew bold and said, ‘It was necessary that the word of God should be spoken to you (Jews) first; but since you reject it, and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life, behold, we turn to the Gentiles’”** (Acts 13:46). They were able to justify their actions from the Jewish Scriptures. Using one of the prophecies of the Messiah (Isaiah 49:6) they demonstrated that the Jewish Messiah was intended to be **“a light to the Gentiles”** and that the salvation won by this Messiah was to be proclaimed **“to the ends of the earth”** (Acts 13:47). **“Now when**

the Gentiles heard this, they were glad and glorified the word of the Lord. And as many as had been appointed to eternal life believed” (Acts 13:48).

Notice the wording that is used in verse 34 above. Those who rejected the Gospel did not reject the Gospel because God failed to include them and invite them. The Gospel message was intended for them, and the Holy Spirit wanted them to accept it. They, however, judged themselves unworthy of everlasting life. God did not judge them unworthy.

On the other hand, in verse 48 those who believed are not credited or praised for making the decision to believe the Gospel of Jesus. God had appointed them to eternal life, and because God chose them, they were brought to faith in Jesus. This is the Scripture’s teaching concerning conversion. Those who reject the Gospel are lost by their own fault. Those who believe the Gospel believe it because God appointed them to believe it. Salvation is by grace, and by grace alone. It is God’s doing, not our own.

It is vital that preachers of the Gospel and missionaries understand this. They can expect that the Gospel they preach will be rejected by some, perhaps by many. But God has appointed some to believe, and these will be brought to faith in Jesus through the means God has appointed: the Gospel in Word and Sacrament. No one can believe in Jesus or come to Him by his own reason or strength. No preacher by his preaching can cause anyone to believe in Christ if God does not bring about that person’s conversion. We are saved by grace, and by grace alone.

The next thing that happened in Antioch in Pisidia was typical of what happened wherever Paul and Barnabas preached the Gospel. Those who rejected the Gospel persecuted those who preached the Gospel and those who had been brought to faith in Christ: **“The word of the Lord was being spread throughout all the region. But the Jews stirred up the devout and prominent women and the chief men of the city, raised up persecution against Paul and Barnabas, and expelled them from their region. But they shook off the dust from their feet against them, and came to Iconium. And the disciples were filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit” (Acts 13:49-52).**

The preachers of the Gospel are the prime targets of persecution. But their joyful listeners do not escape persecution either, as we see in the events that followed in the city of Iconium. As in Antioch, Paul and Barnabas began their mission work by going **“together to the synagogue of the Jews, and so spoke that a great multitude both of the Jews and of the Greeks believed” (Acts 14:1).** What power there is in the Gospel to change people’s thinking from the inside out! Many were brought out of the darkness of unbelief into the light of the Gospel. They **“believed.”**

“But the unbelieving Jews stirred up the Gentiles and poisoned their minds against the brethren” (Acts 14:2). Not only did these Jews personally reject the Gospel, but they did all they could to persuade others to reject the Gospel. It is just as Jesus said to the Pharisees: **“You travel land and sea to win one proselyte, and when he is won, you make him twice as**

much a son of hell as yourselves” (Matthew 23:15). It is bad enough to reject the Gospel, but it is even worse to do everything you can to turn others away from the Gospel! Jesus said: **“Whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in Me to sin, it would be better for him if a millstone were hung around his neck, and he were drowned in the depth of the sea” (Matthew 18:6).**

The preaching of the Gospel of Jesus divides those who hear it into two groups. Paul and Barnabas stayed in Iconium **“a long time, speaking boldly in the Lord, who was bearing witness to the word of His grace, granting signs and wonders to be done by their hands. But the multitude of the city was divided: part sided with the Jews, and part with the apostles” (Acts 14:3-4).** It was just as Jesus said: **“Do you suppose that I came to give peace on earth? I tell you, not at all, but rather division: three against two, and two against three. Father will be divided against son and son against father, mother against daughter and daughter against mother, mother-in-law against her daughter-in-law and daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law” (Luke 12:51-53).**

In Iconium the opposition to the Gospel became violent. Paul and Barnabas were in danger of being stoned to death. But **“they became aware of it (the attempt to kill them) and fled to Lystra and Derbe, cities of Lycaonia, and to the surrounding region. And they were preaching the gospel there” (Acts 14:6-7).** By fleeing they were following Jesus’ directions: **“When they persecute you in this city, flee to another” (Matthew 10:23).**

In Lystra Paul and Barnabas were faced with a problem that faces many missionaries who attempt to bring the Gospel of Christ to people who speak a different language: that of not being properly understood. It seems the residents of Lystra understood the Greek language that Paul and Barnabas used, but their native language was Lycaonian. After the Lord confirmed Paul’s preaching by giving him power to heal **“a cripple from his mother’s womb, who had never walked” (Acts 14:8),** the Lycaonians **“raised their voices, saying in the Lycaonian language, ‘The gods have come down to us in the likeness of men!’ And Barnabas they called Zeus, and Paul, Hermes, because he was the chief speaker” (Acts 14:11-12).** In fact, the priest of Zeus in the city went so far as to prepare to bring them sacrifices of oxen and garlands as a way to worship these “gods.”

No doubt some false teachers would have been happy to receive such honor and glory and to be treated like gods, but as soon as Barnabas and Paul realized what was going on, they **“ran in among the multitude, crying out and saying, ‘Men, why are you doing these things? We also are men with the same nature as you, and preach to you that you should turn from these useless things to the living God” (Acts 14:14-15).** Misunderstanding is almost inevitable when there are language differences. When they begin their work in a foreign land, missionaries need to depend on translators. But even then, they cannot know for sure what the translator is saying, because they do not yet fully understand the language. It is certainly beneficial when the Christian missionary makes a serious effort to learn well the chief language of the people to whom he is speaking.

Notice that Paul and Barnabas tried to introduce the true God to the people of Lystra by speaking of the true God as their Maker and Provider. The true God, they said, **“did not leave Himself without witness, in that He did good, gave us rain from heaven and fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with food and gladness”** (Acts 14:17). In other words, the true God who created heaven and earth had been blessing them all along by providing bountifully for their earthly needs. **“With these sayings they could scarcely restrain the multitudes from sacrificing to them”** (Acts 14:18).

The mood of the people changed quickly, however, when unbelieving Jews from Antioch of Pisidia and Iconium came to Lystra to stir up trouble for Paul and Barnabas. The Lycaonians apparently believed all the false accusations the Jews leveled against the missionaries, for it is written that these troublemakers, **“having persuaded the multitudes, ... stoned Paul and dragged him out of the city, supposing him to be dead”** (Acts 14:19). Thus, within a short time Paul was treated as the god Hermes (or Mercury) and then stoned as a deceiver.

But Paul was not dead. **“When the disciples gathered around him, he rose up and went into the city. And the next day he departed with Barnabas to Derbe”** (Acts 14:20), a nearby city. Things went better for them in Derbe. Their preaching of the Gospel **“made many disciples”** (Acts 14:21) in that city. It was time for them to return to their home base in Antioch of Syria, but before they did that, **“they returned to Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch (in Pisidia), strengthening the souls of the disciples, exhorting them to continue in the faith, and saying, ‘We must through many tribulations enter the kingdom of God’”** (Acts 14:21-22). Follow-up is always necessary, especially when the new converts are being persecuted for their confession of Christ, as was the case with these new Christians.

In the absence of Paul and Barnabas the newly founded Christian congregations needed leadership to continue the work. Therefore, the missionaries **“appointed elders in every church,”** they **“prayed with fasting,”** and **“they commended them to the Lord in whom they had believed”** (Acts 14:23). On the return trip to their home base in Antioch they went through Pisidia and Pamphylia and **“preached the word in Perga”** (Acts 14:25), and then they caught a ship in the seaport of Attalia and **“sailed to Antioch, where they had been commended to the grace of God for the work which they had completed”** (Acts 14:26).

The Christians in Antioch were probably eager to hear what had happened on this first mission journey. **“When they had come and gathered the church together, they reported all that God had done with them, and that He had opened the door of faith to the Gentiles. So they stayed there a long time with the disciples”** (Acts 14:27-28). Notice that Paul and Barnabas did not take any credit for their success. They reported what God had done through their preaching of the Gospel. It was God who was at work to bring non-Jews (Gentiles) to faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. It was now clear to them that it was God’s will to bring the Good News of salvation in Christ to all people, and that He would bless their preaching by converting Gentiles from heathen unbelief to Christian faith.

Questions

1. Who sent Barnabas and Saul (Paul) on their mission? (Two answers)
2. Into what country did Paul and Barnabas go first?
3. In what place did Paul usually preach the Word first in a city?
4. Why did Paul do this?
5. How did God use this method to reach the Gentiles?
6. What miracle did God use to impress Sergius Paulus?
7. What important event took place in Antioch of Pisidia?
8. What other towns in Galatia did Paul and Barnabas visit?
9. What did the Lycaonians in Lystra attempt to do to Barnabas and Paul?
10. What persecutions did Paul and Barnabas endure on this first journey?
11. What do we learn from the words of Acts 13:46-48?
12. Who showed themselves to be enemies of the Gospel?
13. What did Paul and Barnabas report to those who had sent them?
14. What does the word “**must**” in Acts 14:22 mean for mission work today?



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Missiology

Lesson 8 – The First Doctrinal Controversy

The order of events leading up to the controversy between Paul and Barnabas, on the one hand, and certain Jewish Christians from Jerusalem, on the other hand, cannot be firmly established from Scripture. In this lesson we will be following one possible order of events that seems to make good sense. The events themselves are what is important, however, not the exact order in which they took place.

When Paul and Barnabas returned from their first mission journey, they stayed in Antioch of Syria **“a long time”** (Acts 14:28). It is possible and even likely that during this time the apostle Peter came to Antioch to visit the Christians there. Peter had no problem eating with the Gentile Christians in the congregation, for the congregation in Antioch was made up of both Jewish and Gentile Christians in one united congregation.

The Jewish Christians in Jerusalem, however, were not accustomed to eating with Gentiles, even though they were Christians. This was part of their Old Testament culture, and Peter knew this. Therefore, when Jewish Christians came to Antioch from Jerusalem, Peter stopped eating with the Gentile Christians and ate only with the Jewish Christians. This, of course, confused the Gentile Christians. Were they not Christians on the same level as the Jewish Christians? They became even more confused when Barnabas, Paul’s partner in his mission work to the Gentiles, also joined Peter and ate only with the Jewish Christians. In fact, Peter’s example led all the Jewish Christians in Antioch to stop eating with the Gentiles.

When Paul saw what was going on, he could not keep silent. This is what he wrote to the Galatians about what took place: **“Now when Peter had come to Antioch, I withstood him to his face, because he was to be blamed; for before certain men came from James (the head elder of the Jerusalem Christians), he would eat with the Gentiles; but when they came, he withdrew and separated himself, fearing those who were of the circumcision. And the rest of the Jews also played the hypocrite with him, so that even Barnabas was carried away with their hypocrisy. But when I saw that they were not straightforward about the truth of the gospel, I said to Peter before them all, ‘If you, being a Jew, live in the manner of Gentiles and not as the Jews, why do you compel Gentiles to live as Jews?’”** (Galatians 2:11-14). Peter did not want to upset the Jewish Christians from Jerusalem, but he ended up giving the impression that Gentile Christians were not really on the same level as Jewish Christians. His actions implied that if they really wanted to be real Christians, they would have to live like Jews and follow Jewish customs, and only then would they be worthy of having Jewish Christians eat with them.

So here was a public confrontation between two apostles. Paul accused Peter of hypocrisy before the entire group. Peter likely acknowledged that Paul was correct, for Peter himself knew that Gentile Christians were saved by faith in Jesus, just as Jewish Christians were saved by faith in Jesus. And Peter himself had no problem eating with the Gentile Christians before the Jerusalem visitors arrived.

It was not long before the Jewish Christians from Jerusalem made their position clear. We read in the book of Acts: **“And certain men came down from Judea and taught the brethren, ‘Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved’”** (Acts 15:1). Not only were they refusing to eat with the Gentile Christians; they were saying that the Gentiles would have to become Jews through circumcision and keep the Jewish Old Testament laws if they wanted to be saved. Faith in Christ would not be enough for salvation. They insisted that faith in Christ and also obedience to the Jewish laws were necessary for salvation.

These Jewish false teachers who claimed to be Christians were not satisfied to stir up the Antioch congregation. They made their way to the congregations in Galatia that Paul and Barnabas had just founded and spread their false teachings there as well. When Paul heard this, he wrote his New Testament letter to the Galatians, in which he taught very clearly and plainly: **“A man is not justified by the works of the law but by faith in Jesus Christ. ... By the works of the law no flesh shall be justified”** (Galatians 2:16). **“The life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me”** (Galatians 2:20).

Paul was amazed that the Galatians who had come to faith in Christ through the Gospel Paul that preached were so easily attracted to this false gospel that was not good news at all. He wrote to them: **“As many as are of the works of the law are under the curse; for it is written, ‘Cursed is everyone who does not continue in all things which are written in the book of the law, to do them.’”** (Galatians 3:10). In other words, if a person wants to be saved by the law, he must keep every part of the law perfectly or else he is under the curse of the law. Because we have not perfectly kept every part, we are all under this curse. But, as Paul stated in his letter, the Good News is this: **“Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us”** (Galatians 3:13). Jesus Christ did this by taking our sin upon Himself and being punished for our sin in our place on the cross. Jesus is the only way of salvation. We are saved alone by faith in Him and not by any observance of any law. Paul’s conclusion: **“You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. ... There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus”** (Galatians 3:26-28).

Meanwhile, back in Antioch of Syria, the controversy became so heated that **“they determined that Paul and Barnabas and certain others of them should go up to Jerusalem, to the apostles and elders, about this question”** (Acts 15:2). Most of the Christians in other cities along the way had no problem treating the Gentile Christians as Christians equal to

themselves. We know this because when Paul and Barnabas and the Antioch delegation went through Phoenicia and Samaria **“describing the conversion of the Gentiles, ... they caused great joy to all the brethren”** (Acts 15:3).

It was a different story when they got to Jerusalem, however. **“Some of the sect of the Pharisees who believed rose up, saying, ‘It is necessary to circumcise them, and to command them to keep the law of Moses’”** (Acts 15:5). The argument went back and forth for some time until Peter resolved the dispute by simply reporting how God Himself had created faith in the hearts of the Gentiles in Cornelius’ home and that God had even poured out on them the special gift of the Holy Spirit as He did the day of Pentecost. Peter said: **“God, who knows the heart, acknowledged them by giving them the Holy Spirit, just as He did to us, and made no distinction between us and them, purifying their hearts by faith. Now therefore, why do you test God by putting a yoke on the neck of the disciples which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear? But we believe that through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ we shall be saved in the same manner as they”** (Acts 15:8-11).

This is the only correct way to resolve doctrinal disputes. We let God resolve the dispute through His words and His works. We find God’s answers in the Holy Scriptures.

The Jewish Christians in Jerusalem looked up to Jesus’ brother James as their leader. They were all waiting for what he would say in response to Peter. James agreed with Peter and showed that the Old Testament itself clearly spoke of Gentiles who would seek the Lord and become part of His people. In conclusion James said: **“I judge that we should not trouble those from among the Gentiles who are turning to God”** (Acts 15:19). These Gentile Christians should not be troubled or pressured into thinking that they had to obey Jewish laws to be saved. Nevertheless, the path for Christian unity between Jew and Gentile could be smoothed if the Gentile Christians tried as Paul stated in his letter to refrain from certain things that were especially repugnant to Jews out of love for their Jewish brothers. So James suggested **“that we write to them to abstain from things polluted by idols, from sexual immorality, from things strangled, and from blood”** (Acts 15:20).

This suggestion was accepted by the apostles, the elders, and the whole church. They sent Paul and Barnabas, along with Judas Barsabas and Silas, to Antioch in Syria and to the Galatian congregations with the decision of the council on the controversy and with the suggestion of James. The letter made it clear who was in the right and who was in the wrong in this controversy: **“Since we have heard that some who went out from us have troubled you with words, unsettling your souls, saying, ‘You must be circumcised and keep the law’ – to whom we gave no such commandment – it seemed good to us, being assembled with one accord, to send chosen men to you with our beloved Barnabas and Paul, men who have risked their lives for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ”** (Acts 15:24-26). The letter then requested that they to refrain from the four things mentioned by James.

So **“they came to Antioch; and when they had gathered the multitude together, they delivered the letter. When they had read it, they rejoiced over its encouragement”** (Acts 15: 30-31). Later, when Paul returned to the Galatian congregations with his new companion Silas, they **“delivered to them the decrees to keep, which were determined by the apostles and elders at Jerusalem. So the churches were strengthened in the faith, and increased in number daily”** (Acts 16:4-5).

Sometimes Christians are tempted to minimize and downplay the importance of faithful Christian teaching when they carry out the Christian mission. Some suggest that we should concentrate on spreading the Gospel and not be so concerned about correct doctrine. But this was not the way the apostles carried out their mission. Doctrinal disputes need to be settled by the Word of God. We need to do both: we need to get the message correct, and we need to get the message out.

Questions

1. Why did Peter stop eating with the Gentile Christians in Antioch?
2. Who followed Peter’s example?
3. Why did Paul publicly rebuke Peter for his actions?
4. What was the false teaching of some who came from Jerusalem?
5. Where did they spread their false teaching?
6. What led Paul to write his letter to the Galatians?
7. How did Paul speak clearly about the only way to salvation in this letter?
8. For what purpose did the Antioch leaders decide to go to Jerusalem?
9. What were the two positions in this controversy?
10. How was Peter able to resolve the dispute?
11. What suggestion did James make, and why did he make it?
12. Which view was strongly condemned in the letter that was drawn up?
13. Where was this letter delivered?
14. How did the Gentile Christians respond to this letter?
15. What lesson does this controversy have for us today?
16. Why was it so difficult for the Jewish Christians to accept Gentile Christians?



Provided by the Church of the Lutheran Confession - Board of Missions

Missiology

Lesson 9 – Paul Brings the Gospel to Macedonia

The doctrinal controversy regarding the way for salvation for the Gentiles had been resolved. Now it was time for Paul and Barnabas to resume their mission. So **“after some days Paul said to Barnabas, ‘Let us now go back and visit our brethren in every city where we have preached the word of the Lord, and see how they are doing’”** (Acts 15:36). Paul’s plan was for him and Barnabas to return to the island of Cyprus and to the congregations of Galatia to give encouragement to the members of these young congregations.

Barnabas agreed that it was important to return to these new congregations, but he and Paul could not agree on who should travel with them. John Mark, a relative of Barnabas, had started out with them on their first journey, but had then left them to return to his home in Jerusalem. Barnabas was determined to give Mark a second chance. **“But Paul insisted that they should not take with them the one who had departed from them in Pamphylia, and had not gone with them to the work”** (Acts 15:38). This was not a doctrinal dispute, but a difference of opinion regarding Mark’s qualifications as a mission helper.

Neither Paul nor Barnabas were willing to yield to the opinion of the other. **“The contention became so sharp that they parted from one another”** (Acts 15:39). We are not told that Barnabas and Paul ever worked together after this time. They were still in Christian fellowship with each other and supported each other’s work, but their disagreement meant that they could no longer work together as missionary partners. The same thing happens occasionally among pastors, missionaries, teachers, and other Christian leaders in our time. In such cases it is sometimes better to work on separate projects rather than trying to work together in the same place. When such non-doctrinal disagreements happen, neither party should accuse the other of disloyalty to Christ or of false teaching because of such differences in judgment. In this case Paul later did acknowledge Mark as a faithful mission worker, when he wrote to Timothy and said: **“Get Mark and bring him with you, for he is useful to me for ministry”** (2 Timothy 4:11).

The Lord used this disagreement between Paul and Barnabas to further spread of the Gospel through two separate mission journeys instead of one. **“Barnabas took Mark and sailed to Cyprus; but Paul chose Silas and departed ... and he went through Syria and Cilicia, strengthening the churches”** (Acts 15:39-40). Luke tells us no more about the mission journeys of Barnabas and Mark. Mark later became the apostle Peter’s associate, and it seems that he wrote the Gospel of Mark as Peter’s companion. Historical accounts report

that Mark worked in Alexandria in Egypt and that Barnabas also continued to work as a missionary for some time.

On their journey Paul and Silas **“came to Derbe and Lystra”** (Acts 16:1) which Paul and Barnabas had visited on the first journey. There they found a young man who could be their assistant: **“Timothy, the son of a certain Jewish woman who believed, but his father was Greek. He was well spoken of by the brethren who were at Lystra and Iconium”** (Acts 16:1-2). Since Timothy was partly Jewish and yet uncircumcised because of his Greek father, and since the Jews among whom Paul was working would despise Timothy because of his lack of circumcision, Paul **“took him and circumcised him because of the Jews who were in that region, for they all knew that his father was Greek”** (Acts 16:3). Remember that Paul had refused to circumcise his helper Titus, who was a Gentile. The reason he refused to circumcise Titus was that there were false teachers present who insisted that Titus would have to be circumcised to be saved. Paul could not yield to such a demand. But in Timothy’s case there was no such demand, and Paul determined that Timothy would be better accepted by the Jews if Timothy, as a half-Jew, was circumcised.

It is important that missionaries today look for gifted and faithful young men whom they can train to be Christian pastors, teachers, leaders, and missionaries. There is hardly anything more important for the future of a Christian mission than to train young men in Bible knowledge so that they in turn can train the next generation. Paul later wrote to Timothy: **“The things that you have heard from me among many witnesses, commit these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also”** (2 Timothy 2:2).

When Paul, Silas, and Timothy had completed their work in Phrygia and Galatia they had to decide where they should go next. They decided to go work in the province of Asia. The central city of the province of Asia was Ephesus, a large and prosperous city. But **“they were forbidden by the Holy Spirit to preach the word in Asia”** (Acts 16:6). We don’t know how the Holy Spirit forbade their work there; perhaps it was through a Christian prophet, like Agabus. Today the Spirit might not use prophets to direct our mission work, but He may direct us in other ways, making it impossible for us to work in one place but opening a door for us to go somewhere else.

Since they were forbidden to go west to Asia, they thought they should go north to Bithynia, but again **“the Spirit did not permit them”** (Acts 16:7). So they went northwest to Mysia, and then down to Troas, which was a city by the sea. In Troas (also called Troy) **“a vision appeared to Paul in the night. A man of Macedonia stood and pleaded with him, saying, ‘Come over to Macedonia and help us’”** (Acts 16:9) This is not the usual way that God directs our mission work, but in this case, because they had been forbidden to go to other places, they concluded **“that the Lord had called us to preach the Gospel to them”** (the Macedonians) (Acts 16:10).

Did you notice the **“us”** in the previous sentence? Up to this verse the physician Luke, the author of the book of Acts, has referred to Paul and his companions as **“they”**. But now he says, **“us”**, and this means that Luke himself has joined Paul, Silas, and Timothy on their mission journey. And so he says: **“We sought to go to Macedonia”** (Acts 16:10). The account continues: **“Sailing from Troas, we ran a straight course to Samothrace, and the next day came to Neapolis, and from there to Philippi, which is the foremost city of that part of Macedonia, a colony. And we were staying in that city for some days”** (Acts 16:11-12). The missionaries were now in the continent we call Europe. The fact that Luke calls Philippi a colony means that it was occupied by retired Roman soldiers and it had certain privileges as a result. We also read that there was no Jewish synagogue in Philippi, no doubt because there were not enough Jewish residents there to establish a synagogue. Paul and Silas could not begin their work in Philippi in their usual way of visiting the synagogue on the Sabbath.

So what did they do? Luke reports: **“We went out of the city to the riverside, where prayer was customarily made; and we sat down and spoke to the women who met there”** (Acts 16:13). This did not seem to be a good beginning for the work in Philippi, but God had other plans. Luke reports: **“a certain woman named Lydia heard us. She was a seller of purple from the city of Thyatira, who worshiped God. The Lord opened her heart to heed the things spoken by Paul. And when she and her household were baptized, she begged us, saying, ‘If you have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come to my house and stay.’ So she persuaded us”** (Acts 16:14-15). As a worshiper of God, Lydia was acquainted with the God of the Jews, but she knew nothing about Jesus and His work. As Paul spoke the Gospel there by the riverside, the Lord used Paul’s words to open Lydia’s heart so that she came to faith in Jesus as her Savior. She and her entire household were baptized in accordance with Jesus’ instructions, and she then insisted on welcoming the four missionaries to her home. It seems that her business of trading in purple made her prosperous, and she used her prosperity to provide a center from which the Gospel of Jesus could go out in Philippi.

It is likely that the missionaries continued to gather for prayer at the riverside. Luke reports: **“Now it happened, as we went to prayer, that a certain slave girl possessed with a spirit of divination met us, who brought her masters much profit by fortune-telling. This girl followed Paul and us, and cried out, saying, ‘These men are the servants of the Most High God, who proclaim to us the way of salvation.’ And this she did for many days”** (Acts 16:16-18). Where did this girl get this ability to predict the future? How did she know who Paul and his companions were? This was the work of evil spirits. Similar incidents took place in the ministry of Jesus. Just as Jesus did not accept the witness of the devil and his angels, so also Paul was **“greatly annoyed”** that this poor slave kept following them and crying out.

Just as Jesus used such encounters with individuals possessed by evil spirits to demonstrate His power over Satan, so also Paul **“turned and said to the spirit, ‘I command you in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her.’ And he came out that very hour”** (Acts 16:18). Remember: Jesus had told His apostles, **“These signs will follow those who believe: In My name they will cast out demons”** (Mark 16:17).

Instead of rejoicing over the healing of their slave girl, the masters of this slave girl were more concerned over their loss of easy money. **“When her masters saw that their hope of profit was gone, they seized Paul and Silas and dragged them into the marketplace to the authorities. And they brought them to the magistrates, and said, ‘These men, being Jews, exceedingly trouble our city; and teach customs which are not lawful for us, being Romans, to receive or observe’”** (Acts 16:19-21). What Paul later wrote to Timothy is certainly true: **“The love of money is a root of all kinds of evil”** (1 Timothy 6:10). When people are deprived of their source of income, they become very angry, and they will easily turn to violence in their rage. This is not the last time Paul experienced such a reaction to his words and works.

Were the Christians’ customs really contrary to Roman law, as these men claimed? The Romans did not forbid Jews from practicing their religion, and Paul’s teaching was agreed with true Jewish worship. As a Roman citizen, Paul was just as Roman as these men were, as they found out later (see Acts 16:37-38). But in the heat of the moment the people and their leaders listened to the slave girl’s masters and **“the multitude rose up together against them; and the magistrates tore off their clothes and commanded them to be beaten with rods. And when they had laid many stripes on them, they threw them into prison, commanding the jailer to keep them securely. Having received such a charge, he put them into the inner prison and fastened their feet in the stocks”** (Acts 16:22-24).

How Christians, and especially Christian missionaries and leaders, react to persecution has a very important role to play in spreading the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Unbelievers generally react to persecution by striking back in anger and immediately making plans to get even. They may harbor thoughts of revenge in their hearts for years before they are enabled to act. There is no thought of forgiveness on their part, but only bitterness and hatred. The apostle Peter shows us that Christ’s reaction to persecution is to be our model, not the

example of the world. He wrote: **“Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that you should follow His steps: who committed no sin, nor was deceit found in His mouth; who, when He was reviled, did not revile in return; when He suffered, He did not threaten, but committed Himself to Him who judges righteously”** (1 Peter 2:21-23). And again, Peter wrote: **“If anyone suffers as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God in this matter”** (1 Peter 4:16).

Paul and Silas must have been sore from the beating they had received, and they were locked in uncomfortable prison stocks, but they did not complain. **“At midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them”** (Acts 16:25) They committed themselves to the Lord, and the Lord immediately acted. **“Suddenly there was a great earthquake, so that the foundations of the prison were shaken; and immediately all the doors were opened and everyone’s chains were loosed”** (Acts 16:26). It is easy for God to resolve any kind of difficulty or problem. Paul and Silas were free, and so were all the other prisoners who had listened to their prayers and hymns.

They all could have escaped at that moment, but Paul and Silas did not escape, and apparently the other prisoners did not escape either. The jailer no doubt believed that he would be killed for allowing his prisoners to be set free, and **“supposing the prisoners had fled, drew his sword and was about to kill himself. But Paul called with a loud voice, saying, ‘Do yourself no harm, for we are all here’”** (Acts 16: 27-28).

The jailer could never have anticipated such a turn of events. He knew something beyond his experience had just taken place. Perhaps he had heard how the slave girl had been following his prisoners and crying out that they were proclaiming the way of salvation. **“Then he called for a light, ran in, and fell down trembling before Paul and Silas. And he brought them out and said, ‘Sirs, what must I do to be saved?’”** (Acts 16:29-30). What a turn of events! Just a few hours earlier the jailer had been in complete control. He was placing his beaten and helpless prisoners in the innermost prison and fastening their feet in stocks. Now here he was, a man afraid of being in the presence of supernatural forces, trembling in the presence of his prisoners. At that moment he was concerned about his salvation, nothing less.

Paul and Silas at once directed the terror-stricken man to Jesus Christ: **“Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved, you and your household”** (Acts 16:31). Not just any kind of belief will do. Not any kind of faith saves. We should not emphasize the act of believing, but the object of the believing: Jesus Christ and what He has done to save us. The Lord Jesus will save you. Put your trust in Him. Rely on Him. He is the Savior of the world.

Paul and Silas did not stop with that one sentence. They explained what they meant. **“They spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all who were in his house”** (Acts 16:32). This was the opportunity Paul and Silas had been waiting for, and the Lord had opened the door for the Gospel in this miraculous way. The Holy Spirit worked through their words. He not not

only brought the jailer and his family to faith in Jesus Christ, but also brought forth fruits of faith in their lives. The jailer **“took them the same hour of the night and washed their stripes. And immediately he and all his family were baptized. Now when he had brought them into his house, he set food before them; and he rejoiced, having believed in God with all his household”** (Acts 16: 33-34).

This an example of an adult unbeliever hearing the Gospel for the first time, being instructed in the ways of the Lord, and wanting to be baptized all on the same day. It is also an example of the head of a household having his entire family baptized. We do not know the ages of those in the jailer’s household, nor do we know the ages of those in Lydia’s household who were also baptized with her. But is it not likely that there were small children and even infants in those households? There is no record in the Bible of anyone refusing to baptize a family member because they were too young. The Bible nowhere says that a person must be of a certain age to be baptized. On the contrary Peter said on Pentecost: **“Let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is to you and to your children”** (Acts 2:38-39).

“When it was day, the magistrates sent the officers, saying, ‘Let those men go.’ So the keeper of the prison reported these words to Paul, saying, ‘The magistrates have sent to let you go. Now therefore depart, and go in peace.’ But Paul said to them, ‘They have beaten us openly, uncondemned Romans, and have thrown us into prison. And now do they put us out secretly? No indeed! Let them come themselves and get us out.’ And the officers told these words to the magistrates, and they were afraid when they heard that they were Romans. Then they came and pleaded with them and brought them out, and asked them to depart from the city” (Acts 16:35-39). On this occasion as well as others Paul used his Roman citizenship to demand honorable consideration from those who had harmed him contrary to Roman law.

This then was the origin of the Christian congregation in Philippi. This group of God’s people amid a heathen city prospered under the Lord’s blessing. This congregation supported the work of Christian missions in other places from the very beginning. Many years later, when Paul was a prisoner in Rome, he wrote to this congregation: **“You Philippians know also that in the beginning of the gospel, when I departed from Macedonia, no church shared with me concerning giving and receiving but you only. For even in Thessalonica you sent aid once and again for my necessities”** (Philippians 4:15-16). The fruits of faith were evident in the case of Lydia, who opened her home to the missionaries, and in the case of the jailer, who washed their wounds and brought them food after their night in his prison. The generous spirit of these first two converts most likely had a healthy influence on the whole congregation.

After Paul and Silas were asked by the Philippian authorities to leave Philippi, **“they went out of the prison and entered the house of Lydia; and when they had seen the brethren, they encouraged them and departed”** (Acts 16:40). By this time a little congregation had

been formed, and Paul and Silas were ready to move on. It seems that their new associate, the physician Luke, stayed in Philippi, because when Luke continues his account, he says “they” rather than “we”: **“Now when they had passed through Amphipolis and Apollonia, they came to Thessalonica, where there was a synagogue of the Jews”** (Acts 17:1).

The three missionaries, Paul, Silas, and Timothy began their work in that city at this synagogue: **“Then Paul, as his custom was, went in to them, and for three Sabbaths reasoned with them from the Scriptures, explaining and demonstrating that the Christ had to suffer and rise again from the dead, and saying, ‘This Jesus whom I preach to you is the Christ’”** (Acts 17:2-3). Since Paul was addressing Jews and God-fearing Gentiles in the synagogues, he quoted many Old Testament Scriptures, calling attention to the many prophecies that foretold the promised Messiah’s humiliation and exaltation. The Old Testament was clear: When the Christ came, He would have **“to suffer and rise again from the dead”**. After pointing out the Messianic prophecies, Paul showed that Jesus of Nazareth was the complete and final fulfillment of these prophecies. Instead of objecting to a crucified Messiah, they should rejoice that Jesus showed that He was the Christ by His crucifixion and subsequent triumphant resurrection.

The Holy Spirit worked through Paul’s words **“and some of them were persuaded; and a great multitude of the devout Greeks, and not a few of the leading women, joined Paul and Silas”** (Acts 17:4). This was a great beginning; the many Greeks and leading women of the city could easily bring the Gospel to their friends and families. But this success of the Gospel among the Gentiles did not happen among most of the Jews. **“The Jews who were not persuaded, becoming envious, took some of the evil men from the marketplace, and gathering a mob, set all the city in an uproar and attacked the house of Jason, and sought to bring them out to the people. But when they did not find them, they dragged Jason and some brethren to the rulers of the city, crying out, ‘These who have turned the world upside down have come here too. Jason has harbored them, and these are all acting contrary to the decrees of Caesar, saying there is another king – Jesus’”** (Acts 17:5-7).

It is frightening to see Satan at work among the sons of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, as they rejected the testimony of the apostle Paul. They were just as vicious in their opposition to Jesus, as Paul himself had been in his younger days before his conversion.

It seems that the missionaries used Jason’s home as a center for their Gospel preaching, so the mob that was incited by the Jewish leaders thought they would find Paul and Silas at Jason’s home so they could drag them out to face the wrath of the city residents, who were being stirred up by the unruly mob. The Jews were not usually friends of the Roman emperor (Caesar), but just as Jesus’ enemies at His trial had pretended that they were protecting the interests of Caesar when they came to Pontius Pilate, so these Jews pretended that Paul and Silas were being disloyal to Caesar by saying that Jesus was their king.

Christian missionaries today must also expect vicious opposition, a similar kind of false charges, and hypocritical lies and slander. Enemies of the Gospel will use many tactics to ruin the reputations of Christians, especially Christian missionaries. Christians who are outsiders from other countries are sure to be subjected to accusations that they are bringing in foreign and unpatriotic ideas into the country and trying to change the customs and culture of the people.

This propaganda against the missionaries influenced the rulers of the city and the general public. **“They troubled the crowd and the rulers of the city when they heard these things. So when they had taken security from Jason and the rest, they let them go”** (Acts 17:8). Jason and his Christian partners were released, but only after they had promised to take care of the situation. **“Then the brethren immediately sent Paul and Silas away by night to Berea”** (Acts 17:10). They managed to escape from a very dangerous situation.

We learn more about the continued mission work in Thessalonica from the two letters the apostle Paul wrote to the congregation shortly after he and Silas escaped from the city. In his first letter Paul gives all the credit to God for the success of the Gospel. In fact, he traces their conversion to their **“election by God”** (1 Thessalonians 1:4). God had chosen them from eternity to believe in Jesus Christ, and therefore He worked through the Gospel proclaimed by Paul and Silas to bring them to faith in Jesus. Paul wrote: **“Our Gospel did not come to you in word only but also in power, and in the Holy Spirit and in much assurance, as you know what kind of men we were among you for your sake”** (1 Thessalonians 1:5). Notice that Paul mentions the way that he and Silas behaved in Thessalonica; they behaved in a manner that was in keeping with the message they preached for the sake of the Thessalonians. Paul and Silas did not want their behavior to hinder the working of the Gospel.

Paul then refers to the persecution the Thessalonians experienced because they turned to Christ: **“You became followers of us and of the Lord, having received the word in much affliction, with joy of the Holy Spirit, so that you became examples to all in Macedonia and Achaia who believe. For from you the word of the Lord has sounded forth, not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but also in every place”** (1 Thessalonians 1:6-8). The affliction the Thessalonians endured did not rob them of the joy of the Gospel. In fact, their coming to faith in Jesus became known in the entire region. They spread the Gospel by word and deed. Paul and Silas did not have to publicize or advertise what had happened in Thessalonica. **“Your faith toward God has gone out,”** Paul wrote, **“so that we do not need to say anything. For they themselves declare concerning us what manner of entry we had to you, and how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God, and to wait for His Son from heaven, whom He raised from the dead, even Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come”** (1 Thessalonians 1:8-10). Jesus’ resurrection was, as always, the central theme of the Gospel they heard, for the resurrection of Jesus assures us of the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection from the dead, and the promise of eternal life. This brings joy in the midst of affliction.

We learn more about the work in Thessalonica from Paul's first letter. He wrote: **"You yourselves know, brethren, that our coming to you was not in vain. But even after we had suffered before and were spitefully treated at Philippi, as you know, we were bold in our God to speak to you the Gospel of God in much conflict"** (1 Thessalonians 2:1-2). The persecution Paul and Silas endured did not lead them to change their message or their method. They simply went on to the next place and preached the same Gospel that had brought about their persecution in Philippi. Paul says: **"We speak not as pleasing men, but God who tests our hearts. For neither at any time did we use flattering words, as you know, nor a cloak for covetousness – God is witness. Nor did we seek glory from men, either from you or from others, when we might have made demands as apostles of Christ. But we were gentle among you, just as a nursing mother cherishes her own children. So affectionately longing for you, we were well pleased to impart to you not only the Gospel of God, but also our own lives, because you had become dear to us"** (1 Thessalonians 2:4-8). Selfish demands are out of place for Christian missionaries, as are flattering words and seeking glory or popularity. Their work featured gentleness and patience.

Paul and Silas did not expect or demand that the Thessalonians would pay them for their services. No, they took care of their own needs. Paul wrote: **"You remember, brethren, our labor and toil; for laboring night and day, that we might not be a burden to any of you, we preached to you the Gospel of God"** (1 Thessalonians 2:9). We know Paul supported himself in other places by making tents. Perhaps he did that also in Thessalonica. It was important, especially in Thessalonica, that Paul give them a good example of working hard to take care of his own needs, for some of the Thessalonians, as we learn later, liked to depend on others for their sustenance rather than working to support themselves.

Paul and Silas wanted not only to bring the Gospel to these people but also to encourage them to produce the fruits of faith in their lives. As Paul wrote to the Galatians, the Holy Spirit works in the lives of Christians through the Gospel to produce **"love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control"** (Galatians 5:22-23). Paul and Silas taught the Thessalonians about the Christian life by word and example. Paul reminded them: **"You are witnesses, and God also, how devoutly and justly and blamelessly we behaved ourselves among you who believe; as you know how we exhorted, and comforted, and charged every one of you, as a father does his own children, that you would walk worthy of God who calls you into His own kingdom and glory"** (1 Thessalonians 2:10-12). The power of the Gospel in the hands of the Holy Spirit was evident in Thessalonica, and Paul thanks God for this. He writes: **"We also thank God without ceasing, because when you received the word of God which you heard from us, you welcomed it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which also effectively works in you who believe"** (1 Thessalonians 2:13). Notice the power of God's Word. God's Word works to bring people to faith in Jesus, and then continues to work in their hearts to produce the fruits of faith.

Paul also talks about the persecution the Thessalonians have endured from their fellow Jews. He told them that they were not the only ones who have had to endure such persecution. He wrote: **“You also suffered the same things from your own countrymen, just as they (the Christians in Judea) did from the Judeans, who killed both the Lord Jesus and their own prophets, and have persecuted us; and they do not please God and are contrary to all men, forbidding us to speak to the Gentiles that they may be saved, so as always to fill up the measure of their sins; but wrath has come upon them to the uttermost”** (1 Thessalonians 2:14-16). It was bad enough that so many of the Jews rejected their own promised Messiah, but their sin was doubled by their doing everything they could do to prevent Gentiles from hearing the Gospel and being saved. For more on Paul’s feeling about the Jewish people, his own people whom he loved so deeply, read chapters 9 -11 of his letter to the Romans.

After the Thessalonian Christians had sent Paul and Silas away for their own safety, Paul was very concerned about them and the persecutions they had to undergo. Would they remain firm and faithful in their confession? So later, when Paul was in Athens, he told the Thessalonians that he **“sent Timothy, our brother and minister of God, and our fellow laborer in the Gospel of Christ, to establish you and encourage you concerning your faith, that no one should be shaken by these afflictions. ... For, in fact, we told you before when we were with you that we would suffer tribulation. ... I sent to know your faith, lest by some means the tempter had tempted you, and our labor might be in vain”** (1 Thessalonians 3:2-5).

Paul was always concerned about the congregations he founded. In this case he was overjoyed when Timothy came back to him with a good report. **“Timothy has brought us good news of your faith and love, and that you always have good remembrance of us, greatly desiring to see us, as we also to see you – therefore, brethren, in all our affliction and distress we were comforted concerning you by your faith”** (1 Thessalonians 3:6-7).

In the rest of his first letter to the Thessalonians Paul encouraged them to keep living the Christian life. He warns them about the dangers of sexual immorality and gives them information concerning the last days and Jesus’ return. In continuing to teach and encourage the Thessalonians, Paul was following the instructions of his Savior: **“Make disciples of all the nations, ... teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you”** (Matthew 28:19-20).

Paul wrote his second letter to the Thessalonians very soon after the first letter. In this second letter Paul encouraged them again to be faithful in the face of continued persecution and he assured them that there will be a judgment of **“everlasting destruction”** that will fall on those who reject the Gospel while the Thessalonians themselves will enjoy **“rest” “when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with His mighty angels”** (2 Thessalonians 1:9).

Even though Paul had been in Thessalonica only a short time, he had already informed them of the coming Antichrist. In this second letter He reminded them of what he had said concerning **“the coming of the lawless one ... according to the working of Satan”** (2 Thessalonians 2:9). Paul was thorough in his teaching; he even taught on doctrines (like the Antichrist) that are not essential for saving faith. He wrote: **“Do you not remember that when I was still with you I told you these things?”** (2 Thessalonians 2:5).

Paul reminds the Thessalonian Christians that they owe their faith in Christ and their membership in Christ’s Church to God alone. **“We are bound to give thanks to God always for you, brethren beloved by the Lord, because God from the beginning chose you for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth, to which He called you by our Gospel, for the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ”** (2 Thessalonians 2:13-14). God first chose them from eternity to be saved. Then, to carry out His gracious plan, the Lord called them by the Gospel – the Good News of Christ. This is the way the Holy Spirit works; He use the means of grace (the Gospel in Word and Sacrament) to carry out His eternal choice according to His gracious purpose.

After Thessalonica, next town Paul and Silas visited was Berea. **“When they arrived, they went into the synagogue of the Jews”** (Acts 17:10). Perhaps they expected the same kind of treatment from the Jews in Berea that they had received in Thessalonica. If so, they were pleasantly surprised. The Jews at the Berea synagogue **“were more fair-minded than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness, and searched the Scriptures daily to find out whether these things were so”** (Acts 17:11). These Bereans listened to Paul and Silas and heard them out. But the Bereans did not blindly accept their teachings. The Bereans studied the Old Testament every day to make sure that the missionaries were teaching them God’s truth. Certainly, this is a good example for us all to follow.

“Therefore many of them believed, and also not a few of the Greeks, prominent women as well as men” (Acts 17:12). Here, as in other places, the women are mentioned in particular. No doubt these women soon spread the good news they heard throughout the city. Yet the Bereans did not escape controversy and conflict. **“When the Jews from Thessalonica learned that the word of God was preached by Paul at Berea, they came there also and stirred up the crowds”** (Acts 17:13). Since Paul was the chief speaker, the unbelieving Jews from Thessalonica aimed their chief accusations at him. **“Then immediately the brethren sent Paul away, to go to the sea; but both Silas and Timothy remained there”** (Acts 17:14).

We do not hear any more about the Gospel work in Berea after this. No doubt the Bible-studying Bereans continued to grow in their faith. We read that **“Sopater of Berea accompanied him (Paul) to Asia”** (Acts 20:4) when Paul left Macedonia on his third mission journey. No doubt Sopater was with Paul when he went to Jerusalem to deliver the gift of money from the Gentile congregations to the Jewish Christians in the mother church.

Questions

1. What dispute did Paul and Barnabas have with each other?
2. How did they resolve this dispute?
3. Who became Paul's partners on his second journey?
4. Why did they not know where to go after visiting the Galatian churches?
5. Why is it important to find able men to assist in mission work?
6. How did they determine where they should go when they were in Troas?
7. Why did they have to begin their work differently in Philippi?
8. How did Lydia come to believe their teaching about Jesus?
9. What miracle caused the opposition to arise in Philippi?
10. Why were Paul and Silas beaten and imprisoned?
11. How was the Gospel of Jesus proclaimed at night in the prison?
12. How did God intervene in the life of the jailer?
13. Why should the emphasis be placed on the object of faith rather than on faith itself?
14. How did Paul use his Roman citizenship in Philippi?
15. Where did the work begin in Thessalonica?
16. How do we know that Luke did not accompany Paul to Thessalonica?
17. Why did Paul write two short letters to the Thessalonians after he left them?
18. What did Paul say about the unbelieving Jews in his first letter?
19. What did Paul say about the Antichrist in his second letter?
20. What kind of reception did Paul receive in Berea?
21. How did the Bereans use the Holy Scriptures?



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Missiology

Lesson 10 – Paul Brings the Gospel to Athens and Corinth

The next stop for Paul was Athens. Athens was the center of Greek culture with a remarkable history of famous thinkers like Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle. **“Those who conducted Paul brought him to Athens; and receiving a command for Silas and Timothy to come to him with all speed they departed. Now while Paul waited for them at Athens, his spirit was provoked within him when he saw that the city was given over to idols”** (Acts 17:15-16). What may have impressed other visitors as great art was idolatry in Paul’s eyes. There were shrines to gods and goddesses of all kinds. Even though Paul was alone, he did not waste his time in Athens. There was a Jewish synagogue there, and so **“he reasoned in the synagogue with the Jews and with the Gentile worshipers”** (Acts 17:17). We are not told of any results from this work, either positive or negative. But Paul also ventured out into the purely Gentile world. **“He reasoned ... in the marketplace daily with those who happened to be there”** (Acts 17:17).

Paul did manage to engage in conversation with **“certain Epicurean and Stoic philosophers”** (Acts 17:18). Paul **“preached to them Jesus and the resurrection”** but they could not understand very well what he was saying. **“Some said, ‘What does this babbler want to say?’ Others said, ‘He seems to be a proclaimer of foreign gods’”** (Acts 17:18). It seems they thought that Jesus was one such foreign god, and “Resurrection” was another.

Athens was a good place for to discuss such things. **“For all the Athenians and the foreigners who were there spent their time in nothing else but either to tell or to hear some new thing”** (Acts 17:21). What new thing was Paul talking about? They wanted to know more. These philosophers **“took him and brought him to the Areopagus, saying, ‘May we know what this new doctrine is of which you speak? For you are bringing some strange things to our ears. Therefore we want to know what these things mean’”** (Acts 17:19-20).

This was a golden opportunity for Paul to address the cultural elite residents of Athens, and his method for reaching them was considerably different from his method in the synagogue. He did not refer to the history of the Jewish people, nor did he quote the Old Testament prophets. Such things would have meant little or nothing to the Greeks. He started out by telling them his impression of their city: **“Men of Athens, I perceive that in all things you are very religious; for as I was passing through and considering the objects of your worship, I even found an altar with this inscription: TO THE UNKNOWN GOD”** (Acts 17:22-23). Apparently, the Athenians did not want to overlook any of the many deities they claimed to worship. Paul realized they knew very little about the only true living God in the

midst of all their idolatry. He wanted to make tell them about the one true God who has saved them.

Every human being has access to some information concerning the true God. Paul later wrote to the Christians in Rome: **“What may be known of God is manifest in them** (that is, the Gentiles, the heathen), **for God has shown it to them. For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse, because, although they knew God, they did not glorify Him as God, nor were thankful, but became futile in their thoughts, and their foolish hearts were darkened. Professing to be wise, they became fools, and changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like corruptible man – and birds and four-footed animals and creeping things”** (Romans 1:19-23). They **“exchanged the truth of God for the lie, and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator”** (Romans 1:25).

We call this knowledge of God the natural knowledge of God, that is, what we can know about God from nature – from observing the world and what is in it. What is it we can learn from creation? We can know that there is a God, or possibly a team of gods, who created the world and therefore they were there before the world existed, and they have incredible power and wisdom. Paul also added that the heathen have a natural fear of this God or gods. They know **“the righteous judgment of God, that those who practice such things** (the various sins mentioned in the previous verses) **are deserving of death”** (Romans 1:32). In other words, all human beings have a feeling that there is some kind of powerful Being out there to whom they are responsible and to whom they will have to give account. Paul also says that all human beings **“show the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness, and between themselves their thoughts accusing them or else excusing them”** (Romans 2:15). Having a conscience means having a consciousness of God and a knowledge of the law, and thus also having thoughts that excuse them or accuse them of doing wrong by their own thoughts, words, and deeds.

In his address to the heathen in Athens, Paul used their natural knowledge of God to teach certain things about God that they could easily grasp, because such things appeared true to their own thoughts and experiences. He said: **“God, who made the world and everything in it, since He is Lord of heaven and earth, does not dwell in temples made with hands, nor is He worshiped with men’s hands, as though He needed anything, since He gives to all life, breath, and all things. And He has made from one blood every nation of men to dwell on all the face of the earth, and has determined their preappointed times and the boundaries of their dwellings, so that they should seek the Lord, in the hope that they might grope for Him and find Him, though He is not far from each one of us; for in Him we live and move and have our being, as also some of your own poets have said, ‘For we are also His offspring.’ Therefore, since we are the offspring of God, we ought not to think that the Divine Nature is like gold or silver or stone, something shaped by art and man’s devising”** (Acts 17:24-29).

Some of the Greek poets had realized that they were the creatures of a Creator, who not only made them but also gave them all the blessings they enjoyed: their very life and breath, their ability to think and move. Therefore, they were not thinking clearly when they built all the shrines and temples for their gods. God had made them; they could not make God or gods. They needed God; God did not need them. The wisest among them would readily agree with what Paul was telling them, since it agreed with their own built-in knowledge of God.

In our presentation the Gospel, it is always wise to proceed from things the audience knows and can agree with to things which no one can understand, namely, the Gospel itself – the Good News of what God has done for the world through Jesus Christ. This is what Paul did in his address at Athens. And so, after describing the God they already knew to a certain extent, Paul went on to bring out the urgency of his message and to introduce them to Jesus Christ, God's Son. He told them: **"God ... now commands all men everywhere to repent, because He has appointed a day on which He will judge the world in righteousness by the Man whom He has ordained. He has given assurance of this to all by raising Him from the dead"** (Acts 17:30-31).

Paul wanted the Athenians to determine for themselves whether they were ready to face their Maker. God is calling all nations to get ready for the great Judgment Day when they will have to give an account for their lives. Are they ready for that day? God has already chosen the day when that will take place. He has already chosen the Man who will be the Judge on that day. We know who He is because He has risen from the dead. Paul certainly planned to continue his address by showing how this Man Jesus has prepared us for this Judgment Day by dying for our sins and winning for the world forgiveness of sins and eternal life. That is the Gospel.

But it seems most of Paul's listeners did not give him that opportunity. **"When they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some mocked, while others said, 'We will hear you again on this matter.' So Paul departed from among them"** (Acts 17:32-33). Nevertheless, there were a few who were willing to hear him out. **"Some men joined him and believed, among them Dionysius the Areopagite, a woman named Damaris, and others with them"** (Acts 17:34). No doubt a little congregation of Christians was formed in Athens, but we hear no more about them in the New Testament.

Even though Silas and Timothy had not yet joined him from Berea, **"Paul departed from Athens and went to Corinth"** (Acts 18:1). Corinth was a busy commercial city. Its location on an isthmus made it a natural center for land traffic between north and south and sea traffic between east and west. Corinth had a reputation as a place of loose sexual morals. Perhaps Paul was wondering whether the Gospel of Christ would flourish in such a wicked city.

Paul was by himself in Corinth for a while. **"And he found a certain Jew named Aquila, born in Pontus, who had recently come from Italy with his wife Priscilla (because Claudius had commanded all the Jews to depart from Rome); and he came to them. So, because he was**

of the same trade, he stayed with them and worked; for by occupation they were tentmakers” (Acts 18:2-3). Paul received only occasional financial support from others. He preferred to support himself as a tentmaker, and in Corinth he found a Jewish couple, Aquila and Priscilla, who were also tentmakers. He lived with them and worked with them for some time. The Roman Emperor Claudius had recently told all the Jews to leave Rome, and that is why this Jewish couple were now living in Corinth. We are not told if Aquila and Priscilla knew about Jesus at this time, but we know that later they were faithful and active Christians.

It is very likely that Paul met Aquila and Priscilla in the Jewish synagogue in Corinth, for Paul **“reasoned in the synagogue every Sabbath, and persuaded both Jews and Greeks”** (Acts 18:4). Apparently the synagogue services in Corinth were frequented not only by Jews, but by God-fearing Gentiles who had become acquainted with Old Testament Scriptures and joined the Jews in their worship.

After some time, Silas and Timothy finally left Macedonia and rejoined Paul in Corinth. At this point we are told that **“Paul was compelled by the Spirit, and testified to the Jews that Jesus is the Christ”** (Acts 18:5). As in so many other places, the Jews in Corinth vigorously opposed this message. **“When they opposed him and blasphemed, he shook his garments and said to them, ‘Your blood be upon your own heads; I am clean. From now on I will go to the Gentiles’”** (Acts 18:6). This was in keeping with the instruction Jesus had given to His twelve apostles before they went out on a preaching mission: **“Whoever will not receive you nor hear you, when you depart from there, shake off the dust under your feet as a testimony against them”** (Mark 6:11).

Paul did not have to go far to find another place where he could preach Christ and Him crucified. After Paul departed from the synagogue, he **“entered the house of a certain man named Justus, one who worshiped God, whose house was next door to the synagogue”** (Acts 18:7). Two contrary religious teachings were being taught side by side in Corinth. From one spot the true Gospel is being proclaimed publicly, but right next door, just as publicly, comes false teaching and blasphemy in fierce opposition to Christ and His Gospel. This same pattern continues to this very day in many places throughout the world. When we pray **“Thy kingdom come”**, we are praying for the Gospel of Christ to flourish and the enemies of the Gospel to fail.

The Gospel was making its way into people’s hearts in Corinth. Even **“Crispus, the ruler of the synagogue, believed on the Lord with all his household. And many of the Corinthians, hearing, believed and were baptized”** (Acts 18:8). Certainly there was joy in heaven among the angels of God, for Jesus had said: **“He who believes and is baptized will be saved”** (Mark 16:16).

But this was only the beginning of a large harvest of souls in Corinth. Paul received a special message from the Lord of the harvest, Jesus Himself, to give him courage and assurance for the task ahead of him in Corinth: **“The Lord spoke to Paul in the night by a vision, ‘Do not**

be afraid, but speak, and do not keep silent; for I am with you, and no one will attack you to hurt you; for I have many people in this city.’ And he continued there a year and six months, teaching the word of God among them” (Acts 18:9-11). After his experiences of being persecuted or rejected in Philippi, Thessalonica, Berea, and Athens, Paul was no doubt expecting the same thing to happen in Corinth. But Jesus assured him that that would not happen in Corinth. He and his partners were able to stay in Corinth for a whole year and a half. Surely the Word of God that Paul spoke did not return void, or without favorable results. We read that congregation in Corinth was made up of **“many people.”**

Although Paul was clearly the leader and main speaker among the missionaries, he wisely did not insist on doing all the work himself. In particular he did not administer many baptisms in Corinth. He did not want the people to become overly attached to him; he wanted them to be attached to Christ. In his first letter to the Corinthians, which Paul wrote on his third mission journey, he reminded them: **“I thank God that I baptized none of you except Crispus and Gaius, lest anyone should say that I had baptized in my own name. Yes, I also baptized the household of Stephanas. Besides, I do not know whether I baptized any other. For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the Gospel”** (1 Corinthians 1:14-17). Other members of the group were called to perform the baptisms.

What kind of people did the Holy Spirit bring into the Corinthian congregation? Paul wrote in his first letter: **“Not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called. But God has chosen the foolish things of the world to put to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to put to shame the things which are mighty; and the base things of the world and the things which are despised God has chosen, and the things which are not, to bring to nothing the things that are, that no flesh should glory in His presence”** (1 Corinthians 1:26-29). The congregation in Corinth was made up of unimportant people, for the most part. There were a few wise, a few mighty, a few noble people among them, but the rest would be labeled by the world as foolish, despised, and weak – nobodies. The same thing is true in our Christian congregations today. Jesus even thanked His Father that this is the way God works. He prayed: **“I thank You, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that You have hidden these things from the wise and prudent and have revealed them to babes. Even so, Father, for so it seemed good in Your sight”** (Matthew 11:25-26). God does not want anyone to glory himself in His presence.

Paul himself was no master orator or great speaker. He wrote to the Christians in Corinth of how he first came to them. **“I, brethren, when I came to you, did not come with excellence of speech or of wisdom declaring to you the testimony of God. For I determined not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified. I was with you in weakness, in fear, and in much trembling. And my speech and my preaching were not with persuasive words of human wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, that your faith should not be in the wisdom of men but in the power of God”** (1 Corinthians 2:1-5). The Gospel itself is the power of God and the wisdom of God, and that is what Paul spoke in Corinth, **“not in words which man’s wisdom teaches but which the Holy Spirit teaches”**

(1 Corinthians 2:13). The Holy Spirit formed the congregation in Corinth by means of the Gospel in Word and Sacrament, as He continues to do to today in many congregations around the world.

One reason that Paul was able to stay as long as he did in Corinth was that he enjoyed the protection of the Roman government. As usual, the majority of the Jews opposed him and his message. And so, **“when Gallio was proconsul of Achaia, the Jews with one accord rose up against Paul and brought him to the judgment seat, saying, ‘This fellow persuades men to worship God contrary to the law.’ And when Paul was about to open his mouth, Gallio said to the Jews, ‘If it were a matter of wrongdoing or wicked crimes, O Jews, there would be reason why I should bear with you. But if it is a questions of words and names and your own law, look to it yourselves; for I do not want to be a judge of such matters.’ And he drove them from the judgment seat”** (Acts 18:12-16). Gallio was not going to take sides in any religious dispute. He was there to judge and punish crime, not to determine who was right in religious questions.

In the United States we have what is called religious freedom. Each group is free to practice any kind of religion it pleases, as long as it does not involve committing crimes, such as murder or theft. Religious freedom is a precious gift from God, and we should treasure it and do what we can to protect it. Many countries around the world do not enjoy religious freedom, and therefore governmental authorities may not always protect the rights of Christians to worship the true God according to the Scriptures. Gallio was a wise ruler and did not want to interfere in matters of religion.

What happened next in Corinth brings no praise or credit to Gallio. We read: **“Then all the Greeks took Sosthenes, the ruler of the synagogue, and beat him before the judgment seat, but Gallio took no notice of these things”** (Acts 18:17). It seems that Gallio should have protected Sosthenes, but he just let it go and did nothing.

After this incident **“Paul still remained a good while”** (Acts 18:18) in Corinth. **“Then he took leave of the brethren and sailed for Syria, and Priscilla and Aquila were with him. He had his hair cut off at Cenchrea, for he had taken a vow”** (Acts 18:18). Apparently Paul had made a temporary Nazarite vow, which involved the growing of one’s hair. In a Nazarite vow, when the period of the vow came to an end, the person who made the vow would cut his hair and give the hair to the Lord. That is why this haircut is mentioned in the Bible.

From Corinth Paul sailed across the sea to Ephesus, the capital of the Roman province of Asia. Aquila and Priscilla, the tentmaking couple, went with him and stayed in Ephesus. Paul **“himself entered the synagogue and reasoned with the Jews. When they asked him to stay a longer time with them, he did not consent, but took leave of them, saying, ‘I must by all means keep this coming feast in Jerusalem; but I will return again to you, God willing”** (Acts 18:19-21). Paul had wanted to go to Ephesus earlier, but now he did not want to stay there. It seems he wanted to arrive in Jerusalem by the time of a certain Jewish festival. Perhaps this was in connection with his vow.

“And when he had landed at Caesarea, and gone up and greeted the church, he went down to Antioch” (Acts 18:22). When the text says he went up and greeted the church, this no doubt means that he went up to Jerusalem from the coastal city of Caesarea, and from Jerusalem (in the hill country), he then went down to Antioch in Syria, which another coastal city. It was from Antioch that Paul had set out on his first and mission journeys, and now it was time to set out again from Antioch on his third mission journey. One place he was sure to visit was Ephesus.

Questions

1. What was the city of Athens known for?
2. Where did Paul find opportunity to preach the Gospel in Athens?
3. What kind of religion was practiced in Athens?
4. What is meant by the natural knowledge of God?
5. What kind of success did the Gospel of Christ have in Athens?
6. What was the city of Corinth known for?
7. How did Paul support himself in Corinth?
8. Why was Paul unable to continue speaking in the Jewish synagogue in Corinth?
9. What kind of special encouragement did God give Paul in Corinth?
10. How many leaders and influential people became Christians in Corinth?
11. Why did Gallio not want to judge the case against Paul?
12. What is meant by religious liberty?
13. What problem arises for Christians when there is no religious liberty?



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Missiology

Lesson 11 – Paul’s Long Stay in Ephesus

It was the congregation in Antioch of Syria that first sent the apostle Paul into the Gentile world with the saving Gospel of Christ. On the first journey his partner was Barnabas. On his second journey his partner was Silas. We are not told of any particular partner on his third journey, but as we follow Paul on his journey, we read about many others who were with him at least part of the time. Luke’s account of this journey begins: **“After he had spent some time there (in Antioch of Syria), he departed and went over the region of Galatia and Phrygia in order, strengthening all the disciples”** (Acts 18:23). He must have visited once again the congregations in Derbe, Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch of Pisidia, as well as other congregations that are not mentioned specifically in Scripture. He was on his way to Ephesus to fulfill his promise to them: **“I will return again to you, God willing”** (Acts 18:21).

But before Luke tells us what happened when Paul reached Ephesus, he tells us about another development that affected both the Ephesians and the Corinthians. He reports: **“Now a certain Jew named Apollos, born at Alexandria, an eloquent man and mighty in the Scriptures, came to Ephesus. This man had been instructed in the way of the Lord; and being fervent in spirit, he spoke and taught accurately the things of the Lord, though he knew only the baptism of John. So he began to speak boldly in the synagogue. When Aquila and Priscilla heard him, they took him aside and explained to him the way of God more accurately”** (Acts 18:24-26).

Alexandria was a large city in Egypt. Many scattered Jews lived there. Apparently, some of them were acquainted with the teachings of John the Baptist, particularly his teachings on a baptism of repentance in preparation for the coming of the Messiah. Apollos was a fervent student of the Old Testament Scriptures, and God had given him the gift of eloquence so that he could teach others what he had learned from the Scriptures. Apollos moved to Ephesus (we are not told why) and as a Jew he attended the synagogue worship of the Jews. He was a good speaker, and he knew the Scriptures. But he did not know the whole story. We do not know how much he knew of the work of Jesus, the Lamb of God for whom John the Baptist had prepared the way. When the tentmakers Aquila and Priscilla listened to his preaching in the synagogue, they realized that Apollos did not know the whole story. So they talked to him after the service and explained to him the things he did not know or did not know fully. Through their help Apollos became a faithful preacher of the Gospel.

Apollos wanted to cross over from Ephesus to Corinth, where Paul had been Aquila’s and Priscilla’s teacher for one and a half years. The young congregation in Corinth had many problems, as we shall see. Apollos would be able to help them, so the small group of

believers in Ephesus wrote a letter to the Christians in Corinth, **“exhorting the disciples to receive him; and when he arrived, he greatly helped those who had believed through grace, for he vigorously refuted the Jews publicly, showing from the Scriptures that Jesus is the Christ”** (Acts 18:27-28).

Paul was the founder of the congregation in Corinth. He was their pastoral leader for over a year, and surely they had grown in faith and understanding through his ministry. But now Apollos was their pastor. He proclaimed the exact same message as Paul had proclaimed, and Apollos used the Old Testament Scriptures effectively to demonstrate that Jesus of Nazareth, the man crucified and risen in Jerusalem, was indeed the promised Messiah.

Later Paul wrote to the Corinthians about the relationship between himself and Apollos. He wrote: **“Who then is Paul, and who is Apollos, but ministers through whom you believed, as the Lord gave to each one? I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the increase. So then neither he who plants is anything, nor he who waters, but God who gives the increase”** (1 Corinthians 3:5-7). God gives His Church many ministers (servants), and these ministers do not necessarily have the same gifts. Paul claimed that he was not eloquent, but Luke says that Apollos was eloquent. Both of them knew the Scriptures very well, but their teaching methods were probably not exactly the same. The content of their message, however, was the same. We are read of any doctrinal disagreement between Paul and Apollos.

In a young congregation, and even in older congregations as well, there sometimes arises a conflict between two or more congregational leaders. This happened in Corinth, but not because Paul and Apollos disagreed with or fought with each other. It was because some of the members favored Paul over Apollos, and some favored Apollos over Paul, and there were others who believed that the apostle Peter should rank above both Paul and Apollos. Paul learned from Chloe’s family that there were **“contentions”** among the Corinthians. It was this situation in Corinth that Paul had to address in his first letter to the Corinthians. He wrote: **“Each of you says, ‘I am of Paul.’ or ‘I am of Apollos.’ or ‘I am of Cephas’** (another name for Peter), **or ‘I am of Christ.’ Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you?”** (1 Corinthians 1:12).

After a thorough discussion of God’s will in these matters, Paul concluded: **“Let no one boast in men. For all things are yours: whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas, or the world or life or death, or things present or things to come – all are yours. And you are Christ’s, and Christ is God’s”** (1 Corinthians 3:21-23). In other words, Paul and Apollos and Cephas were all gifts from God to the Corinthians, and they each brought God’s blessings to the Corinthians. Why pick one, when God has given you more than one? Rivalries among Christian leaders and factions following one leader over another have caused many problems in Christian groups. God’s word tells us to turn away and reject those teachers who teach something contrary to God’s Word, but we should accept faithful teachers and profit from the gifts God has given to us through each one of them.

“And it happened, while Apollos was at Corinth, that Paul, having passed through the upper regions, came to Ephesus” (Acts 19:1). Paul kept his promise to the Ephesians. One of the first things that happened when He reached Ephesus was that he found some believers in the Messiah who knew only the baptism of John. This had been the case also with Apollos (Acts 18:25) before Aquila and Priscilla had the opportunity to give him the full story of Jesus and the coming of the Holy Spirit. We do not know the exact connection between Apollos and these disciples, but their knowledge was limited to John’s baptism, just as his was.

Paul asked them: **“Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?” “So they said to him, ‘We have not so much as heard whether there is a Holy Spirit’”** (Acts 19:2). Paul then asked them: **“Into what then were you baptized?” They answered: “Into John’s baptism”** (Acts 19:3). **“Then Paul said, ‘John indeed baptized with a baptism of repentance, saying to the people that they should believe on Him who would come after him, that is, on Christ Jesus. When they heard this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus’”** (Acts 19:4-5).

You will notice that I have placed the quotation marks in a different place than most translations. I believe that it suits the context better to consider verse 5 as a continuation of Paul’s words about John’s baptism. In other words, the baptisms referred to in verse 5 are the baptisms of those baptized by John the Baptist when he carried out his work. However, it is also possible that the baptisms of verse 5 refer to the disciples or believers that Paul met in Ephesus.

It seems that their lack of knowledge was about whether Jesus was the Messiah, but about the Holy Spirit. In other words, they knew nothing about what happened on Pentecost, and how the Holy Spirit was poured out on the disciples at that time. So, in a marvelous way these twelve men now had a Pentecost of their own. The miracle of Pentecost took place once more, as also it had taken place in the home of Cornelius when Peter proclaimed the Gospel there. For we read in Acts 19:6: **“And when Paul had laid hands on them, the Holy Spirit came upon them, and they spoke with tongues and prophesied.”** In other words, they spoke languages that they had never learned, just like the disciples at Pentecost.

Paul had visited with the Jews at the Ephesus synagogue briefly on his second journey. Now he had the opportunity for more instruction. **“And he went into the synagogue and spoke boldly for three months, reasoning and persuading concerning the things of the kingdom of God”** (Acts 19:8). Even though the Jews gave Paul a long a time to proclaim the Gospel of Christ and prove its validity from their Old Testament Scriptures, the end result was the same as in other synagogues. **“When some were hardened and did not believe, but spoke evil of the Way before the multitude, he departed from them and withdrew the disciples, reasoning daily in the school of Tyrannus. And this continued for two years, so that all who dwelt in Asia heard the word of the Lord Jesus, both Jews and Greeks”** (Acts 19:9-10).

Despite the opposition of those Jews who had hardened themselves against the Gospel Paul preached, the Lord gave Paul an open door for His Word in a school building used by a

teacher named Tyrannus. The result was that the Gospel went out from this school building. Those who heard the Gospel there proclaimed it in their own communities. There were many communities in the adjacent countryside in the province of Asia, and all these communities had the opportunity to learn about Jesus and the way of salvation by faith in Him. It is very probable that during this time Christian congregations were formed in the seven cities referred to in Revelation 1:11: Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamos, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, and Laodicea. The book of Revelations calls these congregations **“the seven churches which are in Asia.”** It is very likely that the congregation in Colosse also came into existence at this time, for Paul later wrote to them: **“The grace of God in truth ... as you also learned from Epaphras, our dear fellow servant, who is a faithful minister of Christ on your behalf”** (Colossians 1:6-7). Paul had never been in Colosse, and yet the Gospel of Christ was brought to them by Epaphras, Paul’s fellow-minister, who had probably been trained by Paul in the school of Tyrannus.

At the end of his third mission journey, Paul addressed the elders of the Ephesian congregation and reviewed his Gospel work in their midst. He said to them: **“You know, from the first day that I came to Asia, in what manner I always lived among you, serving the Lord with all humility, with many tears and trials which happened to me by the plotting of the Jews; how I kept back nothing that was helpful, but proclaimed it to you, and taught you publicly and from house to house, testifying to Jews, and also to Greeks, repentance toward God and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ”** (Acts 20:18-21). Paul proclaimed repentance toward God and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ; he is proclaimed Law and Gospel. Paul proclaimed the Law to reveal and uncover sins against God, and Paul proclaimed the Gospel to show the love of God in Christ: how He took away our sins and won forgiveness and eternal life for us. This Good News to be grasped and claimed by all without any works or deeds, but simply by faith in Jesus. This is what Paul proclaimed, and it must be the message of every faithful missionary and preacher of Jesus Christ.

Moreover, Paul said to these leaders: **“I have not shunned to declare to you the whole counsel of God”** (Acts 20:27). He did not give them a shortened version of God’s Word. He gave them all of God’s teaching, just as Jesus had said: **“teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded”** (Matthew 28:20). Paul used all the gifts God had given him for the work in Ephesus. He said to them: **“Remember that for three years I did not cease to warn everyone night and day with tears”** (Acts 20:31).

As in many other places during Paul’s journeys, the Lord confirmed Paul’s teaching by giving him the power to do mighty miracles. **“Now God worked unusual miracles by the hands of Paul, so that even handkerchiefs or aprons were brought from his body to the sick, and the diseases left them and the evil spirits went out of them”** (Acts 19:11-12). These signs and miracles testified that Paul was a true apostle, chosen by God Himself to bring God’s message to the world.

Such miracles could not fail to make to impress the residents of Ephesus. Among those who were impressed were seven sons of a Jewish priest named Sceva. They decided that they also would use the name of Jesus to do miracles like Paul. They seemed to think that the very name of Jesus had some kind of magic power and that they also could harness this power for their own purposes. These seven traveling exorcists **“took it upon themselves to call the name of the Lord Jesus over those who had evil spirits, saying, ‘We exorcise you by the Jesus whom Paul preaches’”** (Acts 19:13). To their surprise **“the evil spirit answered and said, ‘Jesus I know, and Paul I know; but who are you?’ Then the man in whom the evil spirit was leaped on them, overpowered them, and prevailed against them, so that they fled out of that house naked and wounded”** (Acts 19:15-16). The name of Jesus cannot be used as a magic charm by persons who do not even know who Jesus is or what He has done.

This incident **“became known both to all Jews and Greeks dwelling in Ephesus; and fear fell on them all, and the name of the Lord Jesus was magnified”** (Acts 19:17). Those who had come to faith in Jesus among the Ephesians began to realize that Jesus was not just another superstition, but He was the real Savior. They began to realize that Jesus was true God, and that many of their former beliefs in spirits and magic charms were nothing but powerless and foolish ideas that needed to be eradicated. Therefore **“many who had believed came confessing and telling their deeds. Also, many of those who had practiced magic brought their books together and burned them in the sight of all. And they counted up the value of them, and it totaled fifty thousand pieces of silver. So the word of the Lord grew mightily and prevailed”** (Acts 19:18-20).

Beliefs in superstitious practices, various magic charms, and in spirits of various kinds are difficult to leave behind if one has been brought up with such beliefs since childhood. But belief in the true God of the Bible drives out all false beliefs. There is only one God, one Savior, one book of truth, and one belief that saves us, helps us, and protects us from evil. All other religions, religious beliefs, and books of magic and sorcery are worthless and deserve only to be thrown into the fire. They are not worthy of our belief when we may believe in the one true God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Paul endured many hardships for the Gospel’s sake. He listed many of these hardships in his second letter to the Corinthians (2 Corinthians 11:23-27). At the end of this list he says: **“Besides the other things, what comes upon me daily: my deep concern for all the churches”** (2 Corinthians 11:28). Because of this concern, Paul kept in touch with all the congregations he had founded. During his time at Ephesus, he was especially concerned about the young congregation in Corinth. Paul planned to visit Corinth along with the congregations in Macedonia (including Philippi, Thessalonica, Berea), for we read: **“Paul purposed in the Spirit, when he had passed through Macedonia and Achaia, to go to Jerusalem, saying, ‘After I have been there, I must also see Rome.’ So he sent into Macedonia two of those who ministered to him, Timothy and Erastus, but he himself stayed in Asia for a time”** (Acts 19:21-22). Corinth and Athens were both cities in Achaia.

There were many problems that developed in Corinth. Paul worked there for one and a half years, and then he was succeeded by Apollos. Paul and Apollos were co-workers, and there was no problem between them, but for some reason Apollos left Corinth after a time and returned to Ephesus, as we learn from 1 Corinthians 16:12. It is not possible to be absolutely sure of the sequence of events, but this is most likely what happened: Because of a problem of sexual immorality in the congregation at Corinth, Paul made a brief trip to Corinth from Ephesus to help resolve this problem. At the same time, he also encouraged the Corinthians to participate in a monetary gift he was gathering for the poverty-stricken Christians in Jerusalem. In fact, that is the very reason that Paul was planning to go to Jerusalem before going west to Rome. After he returned to Ephesus, Paul wrote a letter to the Corinthians in which he told them that they should excommunicate those in the congregation who were continuing their sexual immorality and defending it. This letter no longer exists today; the Holy Spirit did not see fit to preserve it for us. But Paul refers to this letter in the New Testament letter we know as 1 Corinthians: **“I wrote to you in my epistle not to keep company with sexually immoral people”** (1 Corinthians 5:9).

The Corinthians misunderstood what Paul had written in this previous letter. They thought he meant that they should have no dealings with anyone in the world who was sexually immoral. That was clearly impossible, as they would have to leave the world, so it seems they ignored what he wrote to them because it was something they didn't think they could do. When Paul wrote 1 Corinthians, he had to explain what he had meant with his instruction: **“I certainly did not mean with the sexually immoral people of this world, or with the covetous, or extortioners, or idolaters, since then you would need to go out of the world. But now I have written to you not to keep company with anyone named a brother, who is sexually immoral, or covetous, or an idolater, or a reviler, or a drunkard, or an extortioner – not even to eat with such a person. For what have I to do with judging those also who are outside? Do you not judge those who are inside? But those who are outside God judges. Therefore put away from yourselves the evil person”** (1 Corinthians 5:10-13).

It is important for a Christian congregation to understand right from the beginning that the Gospel of forgiveness of sins through Christ does not give believers permission to live as they please and follow no moral standards. In other words, forgiveness of sin is not a license to sin. This was especially difficult to understand for those congregations surrounded by an immoral culture, like that in Corinth and in other cities of the Roman Empire at that time. The same problem is prevalent in most countries of the world today. Sexual immorality is a serious problem throughout our whole world.

While Paul stayed in Ephesus, he was very much concerned about the Corinthians. That is why he sent Timothy to visit them, as he later wrote: **“I have sent Timothy to you, who is my beloved and faithful son in the Lord, who will remind you of my ways in Christ, as I teach everywhere in every church”** (1 Corinthians 4:17). The Bible does not tell us any more about Timothy's visit, however.

Meanwhile **“those of Chloe’s household”** reported the serious problem of the four factions in the congregation naming themselves after Paul, Apollos, Cephas or Peter, and Christ. Chloe’s family also reported that the serious case of fornication in the congregation was still unresolved, and the congregation was taking no action. Another problem was that members were suing one another in heathen courts instead of resolving their differences among themselves as Christians. Besides that, it was also reported that members were visiting prostitutes, as was so common in their culture.

Besides these problems brought to Paul’s attention by Chloe’s family, there were other questions and problems in the congregation that came to Paul’s attention through a letter written by some of the Christians in Corinth and delivered to Paul in Ephesus by Stephanas, Fortunatus, and Achaicus. These men also added their own oral report of the situation in Corinth.

This time Paul did not make a trip to Corinth to help resolve these problems. Instead, he wrote a long letter to them (1 Corinthians) in which he applied God’s Word to all of these problems, one after the other. This letter was very difficult for Paul to write because he felt he had to speak harshly to them and plainly tell them where their beliefs and their practices were wrong in the sight of God. In the letter we call 2 Corinthians Paul referred to his feelings during the writing of 1 Corinthians: **“Even if I made you sorry with my letter, I do not regret it; though I did regret it. For I perceive that the same epistle made you sorry, though only for a while. Now I rejoice, not that you were made sorry, but that your sorrow led to repentance. For you were made sorry in a godly manner”** (2 Corinthians 7:8-9).

One of the most difficult tasks of a pastor or missionary is to preach God’s law to members who are living in a way that is contrary to God’s Word. Such open sin cannot be ignored. This calls for patience, however, especially with new converts who, because of their background, may be accustomed to grievous sins without giving a thought that such conduct might be contrary to the will of God. Nevertheless, a Christian congregation needs to learn right from the beginning how to practice Christian discipline according to our Lord’s instructions and the example set by the apostle Paul.

Regarding the man living openly with his father’s wife in an adulterous relationship, Paul instructed the congregation to excommunicate him, that is, no longer to regard him as a Christian brother.

Regarding lawsuits among the members, Paul suggested that a better way would be to give in and yield to your brother if it is an earthly matter. If the matter remains unresolved, the Christians themselves should be able to make the right judgment, rather than to entrust the matter to heathen courts.

Paul’s instructions concerning sexual immorality were plain: **“Flee sexual immorality. ... Do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own? For you were bought at a price”** (1 Corinthians

6:18-20). Those who continue in sins such as these without repentance are not on their way to heaven. Paul makes it very clear: **“Do not be deceived. Neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals, nor sodomites, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners will inherit the kingdom of God”** (1 Corinthians 6:9-10). But Paul also made it clear that those who sinned in these ways would be happily received by Christ and His Church if they recognized their sin and turned to Christ for forgiveness. Members of the congregation had been involved in such sins, but Paul assured them: **“Such were some of you. But you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God”** (1 Corinthians 6:11). There is rejoicing in heaven when a sinner grasps the forgiveness of sins in Christ and begins to lead a holier way of life.

Paul carefully answered the questions raised in the letter from Corinth delivered by Stephanas, Fortunatus, and Achaicus concerning marriage. There is no sin in marriage itself nor in remaining single. But if a man or a woman gets married, he or she must be sexually faithful to their one and only spouse. **“Let each man have his own wife, and let each woman have her own husband”** (1 Corinthians 7:2). This rules out plural marriages or polygamy of any kind. It also rules out any unnatural combinations that have been legalized in some countries today, such as marriages between two men or between two women. Within a marriage of one man and one woman, sexual intimacy is expected. Paul says: **“The wife does not have authority over her own body, but the husband does. And likewise the husband does not have authority over his own body, but the wife does. Do not deprive one another except with consent for a time, that you may give yourselves to fasting and prayer, and come together again so that Satan does not tempt you because of your lack of self-control”** (1 Corinthians 7:4-5). Notice that just as a husband has a right to enjoy the body of his wife in sexual matters, so also does a wife have a right to enjoy the body of her husband in sexual matters. They are equal in that respect. Depriving your partner of sexual intimacy may lead to fornication. Therefore, such deprivation should be exercised only with mutual consent and only for a limited time for a good reason.

The single life has some advantages, but if the single person finds himself or herself being tempted to sexual sin outside of marriage, Paul’s instruction is plain: **“If they cannot exercise self-control, let them marry. For it is better to marry than to burn with passion”** (1 Corinthians 7:9).

Paul also strongly insists that **“a wife is not to depart from her husband. ... And a husband is not to divorce his wife”** (1 Corinthians 7:10-11). There may be some situations that call for temporary separation. There may even be situations where a legal divorce is possible. Jesus referred to sexual unfaithfulness as a situation that permitted a marriage to end (see Matthew 5:32). Paul refers to a case where an unbelieving partner simply abandons the believing partner and says: **“If the unbeliever departs, let him depart; a brother or a sister is not under bondage in such cases”** (1 Corinthians 7:15). A missionary or pastor needs special wisdom to give the proper God-pleasing instruction regarding marriage problems

and any related sexual problems. It is good if he can consult with other missionaries and pastors when such cases arise. It is also always good to learn as much as possible about the customs and laws of the area and country in which one is working.

The other problems Paul deals with in 1 Corinthians may arise in newly founded congregations today also. For example, Paul's discussion of eating meat that has been sacrificed to idols (1 Corinthians 8 and 10) can help the missionary determine to what extent Christians may go along with the customs of the country without becoming part of the idolatrous worship in that country. Paul's discussion of compensation for pastors and missionaries (1 Corinthians 9) can be helpful in determining whether church workers should follow Paul's pattern of tentmaking to support themselves or follow the principle stated by Paul in these words: **"Even so the Lord has commanded that those who preach the Gospel should live from (or make their living from) the Gospel"** (1 Corinthians 9:14).

Paul discusses the principles involved in celebrating the Lord's Supper in 1 Corinthians 10-11. These principles need to be explained very carefully to new Christians and to young congregations. What Paul wrote to the Corinthians is of great help in teaching about the Lord's Supper.

Paul addresses the role of women in the church services and meetings in 1 Corinthians 11 and 14. Many Christian churches in our day have been influenced by the worldwide feminist movement and have abandoned the clear principles given to us by God through Paul. God tells us to make a distinction between men and women in the home and in the church, **"for man is not from woman, but woman from man. Nor was man created for the woman, but woman for the man"** (1 Corinthians 11: 8-9). The man is rightfully the head of the house, as Paul teaches in Ephesians 5:22-33. It is not God's will that women be the speakers or teachers in the assembly, for Paul wrote: **"Let your women keep silent in the churches, for they are not permitted to speak"** (1 Corinthians 14:34). This agrees with what Paul later wrote to Timothy: **"I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man, but to be in silence. For Adam was formed first, then Eve"** (1 Timothy 2:12-13). Note the Paul does not appeal to the culture of his time, but the timeless pattern established by God at creation. These principles on women's role may agree with the culture of the country in which the missionary is working, or they may go against it. If it goes against the local culture, it will take careful instruction and patience on the part of the missionary to establish God-pleasing practice in the congregation. There are many ways in which women can serve their Lord, especially as helpers to their husbands and as teachers of other women and the children. Lydia, Priscilla, and Phoebe are all good examples of women in Paul's world that were important associates in his Gospel ministry.

Charismatic or Pentecostal churches are very prominent in our world today. These groups emphasize what they call special manifestations of the Holy Spirit, such as speaking in tongues, healing services, and emotional outbursts, rather than emphasizing the simple proclamation of the Gospel of Christ and careful instruction in the teachings of the Bible. The

Christians in Corinth were given special spiritual gifts from God, but they were, to a large extent, misusing these gifts. For this reason, Paul had to instruct the Corinthians in the proper use of spiritual gifts (1 Corinthians 12-14). What he stressed in his instruction was love towards others, the edification of the whole congregation, good order, and consideration of others. The church is like a human body with its many different members; each member has its own particular function that can benefit the whole body. Paul's concluding statement in his discussion of these matters was this: **"Let all things be done decently and in order"** (1 Corinthians 14:40). He also wrote: **"God is not the author of confusion but of peace"** (1 Corinthians 14:33).

There are different styles of worship in different places on earth. There is no command from God that we must all worship in the same way. Nevertheless, the content of our teaching must be the same as it is based on Holy Scripture. The way things are done, however, can vary from one culture to another. For example, the music used in worship in one country may not be considered as music appropriate for church service in another country. A missionary must remember that his job is to proclaim the Gospel and to teach the Word of God. It is not his role to change the style of worship in a different country unless that style is contrary to God's Word or does not build people up in their faith.

Chapter 15 in 1 Corinthians deals with the very important topic of Christ's and our resurrection. This is a topic that must be taught carefully in every Christian congregation, but especially in places where long-held superstitions abound regarding death and the hereafter. It may take a long time to eradicate false ideas about the spirit world that have become part of the culture of the land. Paul stresses the bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead as a very necessary part of the Gospel. In fact, without Jesus' resurrection from the dead, there is no Gospel. Since Christ rose from the dead, so shall He raise all the dead on the Last Day. But only those who die as believers in Jesus will rise for eternal life, as Paul writes: **"Each one in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, afterward those who are Christ's at His coming"** (1 Corinthians 15:23). Every human being must face the fact of his own mortality: each person is going to die. What then? What great Good News it is to learn that in Christ we have won the victory over death! **"The last enemy that will be destroyed is death"** (1 Corinthians 15:26). Paul explains what will happen to our bodies on that Last Day and concludes with these triumphant words: **"Thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labor is not in vain in the Lord"** (1 Corinthians 15:57-58). Those who reject Christ and His Gospel, however, will not share in this victory, as Jesus explained: **"He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned"** (Mark 16:16).

After dealing with all these many problems in 1 Corinthians, Paul reminds them of something very dear to his heart: the gathering of an offering from the newly founded congregations (which were made up mostly of converted Gentiles) for the very poor Jewish

Christians living in Jerusalem. He was very much concerned about this expression of Christian unity between congregations in different places with different backgrounds.

Today the Christian missionary must remind his listeners that every Christian believer and every Christian congregation is part of a worldwide enterprise, and it is important for Christians in one place to interact with Christians in other places, as long as they can do this without supporting false teaching.

While Paul was in Ephesus (from where he wrote 1 Corinthians), he faced a serious crisis that threatened his life as well as the work he had been doing over the past two years. Ephesus was known for its worship of the goddess Diana (also called Artemis). There was a temple to Diana in Ephesus that attracted people from all over the province of Asia and places far off. The silversmiths in Ephesus made a good living by making silver shrines of Diana to sell to the people who came there to worship the goddess. But because of Paul's preaching of Christ the sale of these shrines had fallen off. There is hardly anything that gets people more angry than the loss of income. We read that **"a certain man named Demetrius, a silversmith, who made silver shrines of Diana ... called them (other silversmiths) together with the workers of similar occupation, and said: 'Men, you know that we have our prosperity by this trade. Moreover you see and hear that not only at Ephesus, but throughout almost all Asia, this Paul has persuaded and turned away many people, saying that they are not gods which are made with hands. So not only is this trade of ours in danger of falling into disrepute, but also the temple of the great goddess Diana may be despised and her magnificence destroyed, whom all Asia and the world worship'" (Acts 19:24-27).**

Demetrius was mainly concerned about his loss of income, but he made it sound as though Paul and his new religion was threatening the prominence of the city. He succeeded in stirring up a huge crowd. **"When they heard this, they were full of wrath and cried out, saying, 'Great is Diana of the Ephesians!' So the whole city was filled with confusion, and rushed into the theater with one accord, having seized Gaius and Aristarchus, Macedonians, Paul's travel companions" (Acts 19:28-29).** When a mob gets worked up like this, it may result in violence. All the Christians were in danger, particularly Paul and his assistants.

Paul thought this gave him an opportunity to address the crowd, but his friends thought otherwise. **"When Paul wanted to go in to the people, the disciples would not allow him. Then some of the officials of Asia, who were his friends, sent to him pleading that he would not venture into the theater. Some therefore cried one thing and some another, for the assembly was confused, and most of them did not know why they had come together" (Acts 19:30-32).** Sometimes it is good to have friends in high places, and God uses such friends to protect His spokesmen. They recognized that Paul, the chief missionary, would get nowhere with this crowd. They did not want Paul to be torn apart by this mob.

Instead of letting Paul address the crowd, **“they drew Alexander out of the multitude, the Jews putting him forward. And Alexander motioned with his hand, and wanted to make his defense to the people. But when they found out that he was a Jew, all with one voice cried out for about two hours, ‘Great is Diana of the Ephesians!’”** (Acts 19:33-34). Very likely Alexander intended to convince the crowd that the Jews did not agree with Paul either and that the Jews were not to blame for this disturbance. But there was no way the people were going to let this Jew talk. No doubt the same thing, or worse, would have taken place if Paul himself had stood up to speak.

Finally, the city clerk quieted the crowd, saying to them: **“Men of Ephesus, what man is there who does not know that the city of the Ephesians is temple guardian of the great goddess Diana, and of the image which fell down from Zeus? Therefore, since these things cannot be denied, you ought to be quiet and do nothing rashly. For you have brought these men here who are neither robbers of temples nor blasphemers of your goddess. Therefore, if Demetrius and his fellow craftsmen have a case against anyone, the courts are open and there are proconsuls. Let them bring charges against one another. But if you have any other inquiry to make, it shall be determined in the lawful assembly. For we are in danger of being called in question for today’s uproar, there being no reason which we may give to account for this disorderly gathering”** (Acts 19:35-40).

It has happened throughout history God has protected His faithful Christians through men in government who recognize that Christians are no threat and should not be punished for their beliefs, as long as they do not commit any crimes. But sometimes God, for His own hidden purposes, allows mobs like this to take over and bring great distress to Christians and their leaders. We see this happen in many parts of the world today. Paul instructs us to pray for those in government: **“I exhort first of all that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks be made for all men, for kings and all who are in authority, that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and reverence”** (1 Timothy 2:1-2). Our God surely listens to our prayers in the name of our Mediator, Jesus Christ.

Shortly after this incident Paul wrote to the Corinthians: **“We do not want you to be ignorant, brethren, of our trouble which came to us in Asia: that we were burdened beyond measure, above strength, so that we despaired even of life. Yes, we had the sentence of death in ourselves, that we should not trust in ourselves but in God who raises the dead, who delivered us from so great a death, and does deliver us; in whom we trust that He will still deliver us, you also helping together in prayer for us”** (2 Corinthians 1:8-11).

Questions

1. What does the Bible tell us about the man Apollos?
2. What did Aquila and Priscilla do for Apollos? Why did they do this?
3. What special gift did God give to the twelve disciples in Ephesus?
4. Why did Paul have to do his teaching in the school of Tyrannus?
5. How did the sons of Sceva try to imitate Paul? What was the result?
6. Why did the Ephesians burn their valuable books?
7. Why are superstitious practices and beliefs so difficult to get rid of?
8. What did Chloe's family tell Paul about the situation in Corinth?
9. What were Paul's instructions to the Corinthians about sexual immorality?
10. What did Paul have to say about the divisions in Corinth?
11. How do we know that polygamy is contrary to the will of God for us today?
12. How were the Corinthians misusing their Spirit-given gifts?
13. What was Paul's teaching concerning death and resurrection?
14. Why was Paul gathering an offering from the Gentile churches?
15. What crisis took place in Ephesus that endangered Paul's life?
16. How did the city clerk handle the disturbance?



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Missiology

Lesson 12 – Paul’s Journey from Ephesus to Jerusalem

Finally, **“after the uproar (in Ephesus) had ceased, Paul called the disciples to himself, embraced them, and departed to go to Macedonia”** (Acts 20:1). What Paul was chiefly concerned with at this point was the reaction in Corinth to his letter called 1 Corinthians. He needed to know their reaction so that he would know how to talk to them when he arrived in Corinth. As he wrote in his letter: **“What do you want? Shall I come to you with a rod, or in love and a spirit of gentleness?”** (1 Corinthians 4:21).

As Paul left Ephesus, he was still waiting for a report from his assistant Titus. His original travel plan was to go to Corinth first, then to Macedonia, and then back to Corinth again before heading to Jerusalem to deliver the gift of money. But he changed his mind to give the Corinthians more time to straighten out their problems among themselves before he visited them. He wrote to them later why he changed his plans: **“I call God as witness against my soul, that to spare you I came no more to Corinth”** (2 Corinthians 1:23). So instead of going to Corinth first, Paul went to Macedonia first. On the way he hoped to meet Titus at Troas and hear his report from Corinth, but that did not happen: **“When I came to Troas to preach Christ’s Gospel, and a door was opened to me by the Lord, I had no rest in my spirit, because I did not find Titus my brother; but taking my leave of them, I departed for Macedonia”** (2 Corinthians 2:12-13). He was so concerned about hearing from Titus that he did not stay long in Troas, even though the door was open for the Gospel.

So Paul went from Troas to Philippi in Macedonia, where he was still troubled by the fact that there was no report from Titus: **“When we came to Macedonia, our bodies had no rest, but we were troubled on every side. Outside were conflicts, inside were fears”** (2 Corinthians 7:5). But then Titus showed up with good news from Corinth, and Paul was very happy. He says: **“God, who comforts the downcast, comforted us by the coming of Titus, and not only by his coming, but also by the consolation with which he was comforted in you, when he told us of your earnest desire, your mourning, your zeal for me, so that I rejoiced even more”** (2 Corinthians 7:6-7). Paul’s severe letter (1 Corinthians) had had its desired effect. After he got the report from Titus, Paul wrote to them: **“Now I rejoice, not that you were made sorry, but that your sorrow led to repentance. For you were made sorry in a godly manner, that you might suffer loss from us in nothing. For godly sorrow produces repentance leading to salvation, not to be regretted. ... We have been comforted in your comfort. And we rejoiced exceedingly more for the joy of Titus, because his spirit has been refreshed by you all. ... Therefore I rejoice that I have confidence in you in everything”** (2 Corinthians 7:9-16)

Included in the good news from Corinth was the good news that the man who had been living with his father's wife had repented of his sin. Paul had urged the congregation in 1 Corinthians to excommunicate the man, but now, since the man had repented of his sin, Paul urged the congregation to forgive him and take him back: **"You ought rather to forgive and comfort him, lest perhaps such a one be swallowed up with too much sorrow. Therefore I urge you to reaffirm your love to him"** (2 Corinthians 2:7-8). Just as the prophet Nathan told David his sins were forgiven as soon as he confessed them, so also a Christian congregation should not delay in forgiving someone who has repented of his sin.

Titus brought back to Paul a good report. Most of the congregation had accepted Paul's admonitions and warnings in 1 Corinthians. The man who had been guilty of fornication had repented of his sin. The congregation wanted to see Paul again and renew their friendship. Nevertheless, there was still a minority who had not listened to Paul's instructions. They claimed to belong to Christ, but they had no love for Christ's apostle Paul. They said of Paul: **"His letters ... are weighty and powerful, but his bodily presence is weak, and his speech contemptible"** (2 Corinthians 10:10).

This group claimed that Paul was not a true apostle because he did not accept pay for his work. Paul responds to this charge: **"Did I commit sin, ... because I preached the Gospel of God to you free of charge? ... In everything I kept myself from being burdensome to you, and so I will keep myself. ... Why? Because I do not love you? God knows!"** (2 Corinthians 11:7-11). At this point in his letter Paul showed that he was a true apostle of Christ by reminding them of all the persecutions and hardships he had faced because of the Gospel he preached. He wrote: **"I ought to have been commended by you; for in nothing was I behind the most eminent apostles, though I am nothing. Truly the signs of an apostle were accomplished among you with all perseverance, in signs and wonders and mighty deeds. ... Now for the third time I am ready to come to you. ... and I will very gladly spend and be spent for your souls; though the more abundantly I love you, the less I am loved. ... We speak before God in Christ. But we do all things, beloved, for your edification"** (2 Corinthians 12:11-19).

After meeting Titus in Philippi in Macedonia, Paul wrote the letter we call 2 Corinthians. This letter reveals the hardships, the trials, the joys, and the strong feelings of a missionary of Christ. He was expecting to be in Corinth soon, and so he urged them to have their offering of money for the poor Christians in Jerusalem ready for him by the time he got there. There are two chapters (2 Corinthians 8 and 9) that teach us still today about the spirit of stewardship we need. A careful study of these chapters will help congregations grow in their understanding of how God gives His people earthly blessings that they can then use in spreading the Gospel of Christ. The most important thing is that the gifts given for the Lord's work are given willingly. In Paul's words: **"If there is first a willing mind, it is accepted according to what one has, and not according to what he does not have"** (2 Corinthians 8:12). **"So let each one give as he purposes in his heart, not grudgingly or of necessity; for**

God loves a cheerful giver. And God is able to make all grace abound toward you, that you, always having all sufficiency in all things, may have an abundance for every good work” (2 Corinthians 9:7-8).

Very likely Paul wrote 2 Corinthians while he was in Macedonia, on his way to Corinth. Luke reports: **“When he had gone over that region (Macedonia) and encouraged them with many words, he came to Greece and stayed three months”** (Acts 20:2-3). Luke reports nothing of his activity during these three months. It is very likely that Paul wrote his letter to the Christians in Rome during this 3-month stay in Greece.

The book of Acts gives the general outline of Paul’s mission work. As we read the book of Acts, it is good that we also read and study the letters that Paul wrote during this time. One present-day missionary has written about these letters: “Paul is truly a ‘missionary’s missionary.’ His letters deserve constant restudy as one is faced with new situations in countries where the Gospel is first being planted.” Regarding Paul’s two letters to the Corinthians that deal with so many problems, this missionary has written: “How often do we not experience many of these same outward excesses in our young congregations in the mission fields!”

Paul’s second letter to the Corinthians is an honest account of the human weakness of God’s ministers in the face of serious responsibilities and grave difficulties. There is nothing more glorious than the Gospel ministry. **“We are ambassadors for Christ”** (2 Corinthians 5:20), **“but we have this treasure in earthen vessels”** (2 Corinthians 4:7). We are slandered, persecuted, misunderstood. We are burdened with concern for the spiritual welfare of those entrusted to us. We are so weak, and God does not always seem to answer our prayers – for example, Paul’s prayer concerning his thorn in the flesh (2 Corinthians 12:7-9), but God says: **“My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness”** (2 Corinthians 12:9).

Paul's letter to the Romans is a summary of the Gospel he preached everywhere. He had never been to Rome, the capital of the huge Roman Empire. He knew some of the Christians there, as we learn from the greetings he sent to them at the close of his letter. Among them were Aquila and Priscilla, his former tentmaking partners. Paul wanted the Christians in Rome to be his partners in a new mission project: proclaiming the Good News of Christ in Spain. Notice what Paul considered to be his particular calling: **"I have made it my aim to preach the gospel, not where Christ was named, lest I should build on another man's foundation"** (Romans 15:20). We cannot all be pioneer missionaries working in a new area, but we can all share Paul's zeal for preaching the Gospel in all the world to every human being.

He tells the Romans his plans: **"Having a great desire these many years to come to you, whenever I journey to Spain, I shall come to you. For I hope to see you on my journey, and to be helped on my way there by you, if first I may enjoy your company for a while"** (Romans 15:23-24). This was not the first time that God had other plans for Paul, however, as we shall see. Paul did eventually get to Rome, but as a prisoner. Whether he ever reached Spain we do not know for sure, although there are some historical accounts that say that he did.

Paul's immediate plans were clear, however: **"But now I am going to Jerusalem to minister to the saints. For it pleased those from Macedonia and Achaia to make a certain contribution for the poor among the saints who are in Jerusalem. ... When I have performed this and have sealed to them this fruit, I shall go by way of you to Spain"** (Romans 15:25-28). Paul asked them to pray for God's blessing on his plans: **"I beg you, brethren, ... that you strive together with me in prayers to God for, that I may be delivered from those in Judea who do not believe, and that my service for Jerusalem may be acceptable to the saints, that I may come to you with joy by the will of God"** (Romans 15:30-32).

Paul's plans changed already after he arrived in Corinth. His planned to sail from Corinth to Syria and then go to Jerusalem. But Luke tells us that **"when the Jews (in Corinth) plotted against him as he was about to sail to Syria, he decided to return through Macedonia"** (Acts 20:3). So back to Macedonia he went, and on his subsequent trip to Jerusalem he was accompanied by delegates from some of the congregations he had founded: **"Sopater of Berea accompanied him to Asia – also Aristarchus and Secundus of the Thessalonians, and Gaius of Derbe, and Timothy, and Tychicus and Trophimus of Asia. These men, going ahead, waited for us at Troas"** (Acts 20:4-5). Did you notice the word **"us"**? This means that Luke, the author of the book of Acts, was now traveling again with the group.

Paul's companions were already at Troas. Luke continues: **"But we sailed away from Philippi after the Days of Unleavened Bread, and in five days joined them at Troas, where we stayed seven days"** (Acts 20:6). It was the spring of the year, probably in the year 55 AD. By this time there was a group of Christians in Troas, and Paul took this opportunity to speak to

them: **“Now on the first day of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread, Paul, ready to depart the next day, spoke to them and continued his message until midnight”** (Acts 20:7). Notice that the group met on Sunday evening, not on the Sabbath, and that Paul talked a long time.

During that church service something remarkable took place. **“There were many lamps in the upper room where they were gathered together. And in a window sat a certain young man named Eutychus, who was sinking into a deep sleep. He was overcome by sleep; and as Paul continued speaking, he fell down from the third story and was taken up dead. But Paul went down, fell on him, and embracing him said, ‘Do not trouble yourselves, for his life is in him.’ Now when he had come up, had broken bread and eaten, and talked a long while, even till daybreak, he departed. And they brought the young man in alive, and they were not a little comforted”** (Acts 20:8-12). Even though the service was interrupted by this man’s death and miraculous healing, Paul continued talking, and the believers in Troas continued listening. It is wonderful when missionaries are full of such zeal to preach the Gospel, and the listeners are eager and willing to listen to what God’s messengers have to say.

Paul, Luke, and their associates traveled onward – Paul by foot, and the others by ship. Luke reports: **“Then we went ahead to the ship and sailed to Assos, there intending to take Paul on board; for so he had given orders, intending himself to go on foot. And when he met us at Assos, we took him on board and came to Mitylene. We sailed from there, and the next day came opposite Chios. The following day we arrived at Samos and stayed at Trogyllium. The next day we came to Miletus”** (Acts 20:13-15). Luke gives us many historical and geographical details. Historical and archeological search has shown that they are all accurate, although at one time many so-called experts questioned the information Luke provided. Since it was the Holy Spirit who gave Luke the words he used, we can be sure that everything happened just as he said it happened.

Since he was in a hurry to get to Jerusalem by Pentecost, **“Paul had decided to sail past Ephesus so that he would not have to spend time in Asia”** (Acts 20:16). At the same time, he wanted to see the leaders of the Ephesian congregation, where he had labored for three years. Therefore **“from Miletus he sent to Ephesus and called for the elders of the church”** (Acts 20:17). He recalled with them the blessing of God on the work he had done in their midst. His ministry among them was **“to testify to the gospel of the grace of God”** (Acts 20:24). He warned them that they would be troubled by false teachers who would lead some of them astray. He reminded them of a sentence that Jesus spoke that is not recorded in the four Gospels: **“It is more blessed to give than to receive”** (Acts 20:35).

Paul also told the Ephesian elders that he expected trouble in Jerusalem. It seems that in all his stops along the way the Holy Spirit was giving messages to Paul through various prophets about what was going to happen him in Jerusalem, but Paul was determined to go in any case. He told the Ephesian elders: **“Now I go bound in the spirit to Jerusalem, not knowing**

the things what will happen to me there, except that the Holy Spirit testifies in every city, saying that chains and tribulations await me” (Acts 20:22-23). **“And when he had said these things, he knelt down and prayed with them all. Then they all wept freely, and fell on Paul’s neck and kissed him, sorrowing most of all for the words which he spoke, that they would see his face no more”** (Acts 20:36-38). Paul had a close relationship with his fellow-workers in Ephesus, and they loved him deeply. **“They accompanied him to the ship”** (Acts 20:38), and Paul continued on his way, together with his companions.

Luke reports: **“Now it came to pass, that when we had departed from them and set sail, running a straight course we came to Cos, the following day to Rhodes, and from there to Patara. And finding a ship sailing over to Phoenicia, we went aboard and set sail. When we had sighted Cyprus, we passed it on the left, sailed to Syria, and landed at Tyre; for there the ship was to unload her cargo. And finding disciples, we stayed there seven days”** (Acts 21:1-4). The Christians in Tyre repeated the warnings that the Holy Spirit had given to Paul in other cities. **“They told Paul through the Spirit not to go up to Jerusalem”** (Acts 21:4).

The parting scene at Miletus was repeated in Tyre. **“When we had come to the end of those days, we departed and went on our way; and they all accompanied us, with wives and children, till we were out of the city. And we knelt down on the shore and prayed. When we had taken our leave of one another, we boarded the ship, and they returned home”** (Acts 21:5-6). They had only known Paul and his companions for a few days, but in that short time the Holy Spirit had brought about a bond of unity and mutual love. Wherever we go throughout the world, confessing Christians share a bond with each other that is even stronger than family ties. As Jesus once said: **“‘Who is My mother, or My brothers?’ And He looked around in a circle at those who sat about Him, and said, ‘Here are My mother and My brothers! For whoever does the will of God is My brother and My sister and mother’”** (Mark 3:33-35).

After leaving Tyre, Paul and his companions came to Ptolemais where there was also a group of Christians. They stayed with them one day and then traveled to Caesarea, one of the chief cities of that land. **“Philip the evangelist, who was one of the seven”** (Acts 21:8) lived in Caesarea. This is the Philip who had brought the Gospel to the people of Samaria and had encountered the man from Ethiopia riding in a chariot. We are told that Philip **“had four virgin daughters who prophesied”** (Acts 21:9). Whatever kind of prophesying these women did, we can be sure they did not do it in a way that was contrary to God’s order that women should not teach or have authority over men. Nevertheless; women are to use their gifts from God for the good of the Gospel ministry.

Paul and his companions stayed in Caesarea **“many days”** (Acts 21:10). While they were there, a Christian prophet named Agabus arrived from Judea. This is the same Agabus to whom the Spirit had earlier revealed the famine that had struck the land (Acts 11:28). This time Agabus had a special message for Paul: **“He took Paul’s belt, bound his own hands and**

feet, and said, ‘Thus says the Holy Spirit, “So shall the Jews at Jerusalem bind the man who owns this belt, and deliver him into the hands of the Gentiles”’ (Acts 21:11).

Paul had heard this warning from the Holy Spirit through other prophets before. His friends and associates believed that this was God’s telling Paul to change his plans and warning him not go to Jerusalem. Luke writes: **“Now when we heard these things, both we and those from that place pleaded with him not to go up to Jerusalem”** (Acts 21:12). But Paul believed it was his duty as God’s missionary to the Gentiles to bring the gift from the Gentile churches personally to the Jewish Christians in Jerusalem to show the unity of the Christian Church, which was made up of both Jews and Gentiles. So Paul did not listen to the advice of his friends. **“Paul answered, ‘What do you mean by weeping and breaking my heart? For I am ready not only to be bound, but also to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus’”** (Acts 21:13).

Since they were unable to change his mind, his friends stopped their pleading and said: **“The will of the Lord be done”** (Acts 21:14). They were then ready to go the rest of the way up to Jerusalem. Some of the Christians from Caesarea accompanied them, and among them was **“a certain Mnason of Cyprus, an early disciple, with whom we were to lodge”** (Acts 21:16). We can imagine Luke, the physician and historian, asking Mnason many questions about the early days of the Church, since apparently he had been a Christian for a long time.

Questions

1. For whom was Paul waiting as he left Ephesus on his third journey?
2. Why was Paul concerned about the letter, 1 Corinthians, he had written?
3. Why did Paul change his travel plans?
4. What good news did Paul receive when he got to Macedonia?
5. What happened after the adulterous man in Corinth was excommunicated?
6. Why is it important to forgive a repentant sinner at once?
7. Why were there still some in Corinth who did not accept Paul’s ministry?
8. What did Paul write about offerings of money in 2 Corinthians?
9. What were Paul’s plans as he wrote his letter to the Romans?
10. What strange thing happened during a church service in Troas?
11. Whom did Paul meet with in Miletus? What did he tell them?
12. Why did Paul’s friends urge him not to go to Jerusalem?
13. Why was Paul determined to go to Jerusalem?
14. How can we tell that Paul was a missionary who was greatly loved?



Provided by the Church of the Lutheran Confession - Board of Missions

Missiology

Lesson 13 – Paul’s Imprisonment in Jerusalem and Caesarea

Paul’s visit in Jerusalem began on a very happy note. Luke writes: **“When we had come to Jerusalem, the brethren received us gladly. On the following day Paul went in with us to James, and all the elders were present. When he had greeted them, he told in detail those things which God had done among the Gentiles through his ministry. And when they heard it, they glorified the Lord”** (Acts 21:17-20). At this time James, the brother of our Lord, was the head elder of the congregation at Jerusalem. He was respected by the Jewish Christians because he continued to follow the Jewish laws and customs, and it seems he was even respected by the non-Jewish Christians. Paul himself continued to follow many Jewish laws and customs, in keeping with his mission policy: **“To the Jews I became as a Jew, that I might win the Jews”** (1 Corinthians 9:20). He certainly did not have to keep the Jewish customs in order to be saved or even in order to live a Christian life, but he chose to live like a Jew in order not to put off Jews at the outset if they saw him, a Jew, living like a Gentile.

But the rumor had spread among the Jews in Jerusalem that Paul was instructing Jews to give up their Jewish ways. James was concerned about this rumor. He said to Paul: **“You see, brother, how many myriads of Jews there are who have believed, and they are all zealous for the law; but they have been informed about you that you teach all the Jews who are among the Gentiles to forsake Moses, saying that they ought not to circumcise their children nor to walk according to the customs”** (Acts 21:20-21). It is doubtful that Paul was guilty of saying this, since we know that he wanted Timothy, who was only a half-Jew, to be circumcised for the sake of the Gospel ministry among the Jews.

James was not one of those Jews who insisted that Gentiles must be circumcised to be saved. He had been a leader at the council in Jerusalem where that question had been raised and settled. The Christians from Jerusalem and elsewhere had agreed that they would not insist that Gentile Christians live like Jewish Christians. Therefore, he assures Paul: **“Concerning the Gentiles who believe, we have written and decided that they should observe no such thing, except that they should keep themselves from things offered to idols, from blood, from things strangled, and from sexual immorality”** (Acts 21:25).

But James was concerned that the Jewish Christians would turn against Paul if they believed the false rumors about him, so James suggested a way for Paul to show everyone that he himself, as a Jewish Christian, was still following the Jewish ways and customs: **“Do what we tell you: We have four men who have taken a vow. Take them and be purified with them, and pay their expenses so that they may shave their heads, and that all may know that**

those things of which they were informed concerning you are nothing, but that you yourself also walk orderly and keep the law” (Acts 21:23-24).

Paul was willing to go along with this plan. **“Then Paul took the men, and the next day, having been purified with them, entered the temple to announce the expiration of the days of purification, at which time an offering should be made for each one of them” (Acts 21:26).** This was the a Nazarite vow, which was given by Moses in the sixth chapter of Numbers.

Everything seemed to be going well, but **“when the seven days (according to the vow) were almost ended, the Jews from Asia, seeing him in the temple, stirred up the whole crowd and laid hands on him, crying out, ‘Men of Israel, help! This is the man who teaches all men everywhere against the people, the law, and this place, and furthermore he also brought Greeks into the temple and has defiled this holy place’” (Acts 21:27-28).** The Jerusalem Jews were not the ones to assault Paul; It was the Jews from Asia, where Paul had recently spent three years, who brought charges against him. These Jews from Ephesus had spotted Paul in the temple area. They had also seen Paul in the city together with one of their fellow-Ephesians, a Gentile Greek named Trophimus. They therefore jumped to the conclusion that Paul had brought Trophimus into the temple grounds, that is, into an area that was reserved only for Jews. There was a courtyard in the temple area for the Gentiles, but it was strictly forbidden for any uncircumcised Gentile to go beyond the posted barriers. They had not actually seen Trophimus in any forbidden area, but **“they supposed that Paul had brought” (Acts 21:29)** him into the temple.

In Jerusalem it was easy to stir up a crowd against anyone who could be accused of anti-Jewish views. Their wild charges against Paul had an effect. **“All the city was disturbed; and the people ran together, seized Paul, and dragged him out of the temple; and immediately the doors were shut” (Acts 21:30).** Missionaries like Paul are often the targets of slander, and they are accused of all kinds of offenses of which they are not guilty. Jesus had warned His disciples: **“They will lay their hands on you and persecute you, delivering you up to the synagogues and prisons. You will be brought before kings and rulers for My name’s sake” (Luke 21:12).** He had also assured them: **“Blessed are you when men hate you, and when they exclude you, and revile you, and cast out your name as evil, for the Son of Man’s sake. Rejoice in that day and leap for joy! For indeed your reward is great in heaven, for in like manner their fathers did to the prophets” (Luke 6:22-23).**

Paul’s life was in danger, for **“they were seeking to kill him” (Acts 21:31).** But Paul’s life was preserved by God through the Roman government. **“News came to the commander of the garrison that all Jerusalem was in an uproar. He immediately took soldiers and centurions, and ran down to them. And when they saw the commander and the soldiers, they stopped beating Paul” (Acts 21:31-32).** Since disturbances occurred frequently in the temple area, the Romans had set up a fortress with Roman soldiers directly overlooking the temple

courts. As soon as there was some evidence of a disturbance, the Roman soldiers could arrive immediately to preserve order and quell any riots.

The Roman commander had no idea what the commotion was about. He suspected that Paul was **“the Egyptian who some time ago stirred up a rebellion and led the four thousand assassins out into the wilderness”** (Acts 21:38), so **“the commander came near and took him, and commanded him to be bound with two chains; and he asked who he was and what he had done. And some among the multitude cried one thing and some another. So when he could not ascertain the truth because of the tumult, he commanded him to be taken into the barracks. When he reached the stairs, he had to be carried by the soldiers because of the violence of the mob. For the multitude of the people followed after, crying out, ‘Away with him!’”** (Acts 21:33-36). It looked as though Paul was going to be killed in Jerusalem just like his Master, Christ Jesus. When a mob gets worked up, violence is close at hand.

But Paul managed to speak in Greek to the commander before he was taken away. He said to him: **“I am a Jew from Tarsus, in Cilicia, a citizen of no mean city; and I implore you, permit me to speak to the people”** (Acts 21:39). Surprised that Paul spoke Greek, and learning that Paul was a citizen of Tarsus, the commander gave Paul permission to address the crowd. There on those stairs leading from the temple courtyard to the barracks of the soldiers, Paul **“motioned with his hand to the people. And when there was a great silence, he spoke to them in the Hebrew language”** (Acts 21:40). Paul considered this as a great opportunity to address many of his fellow-Jews and tell them the truth about who he was and what he was doing in Jerusalem. And of course he would use this opportunity to tell the Jews about their Messiah, Jesus of Nazareth.

The crowd became silent and listened to what Paul had to say. He told them first that he was born in Tarsus and brought up in Jerusalem with the famous Gamaliel as his teacher. He told them that he had fiercely persecuted the followers of Jesus at first. In fact, he had even received authority from the high priest to track down Christians in other cities and bring them back to Jerusalem for trial and punishment.

Paul then informed these Jews that the risen Jesus Himself, the Man they had crucified, had appeared to him when he was on the road to Damascus and said: **“I am Jesus of Nazareth, whom you are persecuting”** (Acts 22:8). Jesus then told him to continue on to Damascus and where he would be told what he should do. Since Paul had been blinded by the bright glory of Jesus, he had to be led by the hand into the city. Soon a Jewish Christian named Ananias visited him and was given power to restore Paul’s sight. Ananias then told the one-time enemy of Christ and all Christians: **“The God of our fathers has chosen you that you should know His will, and see the Just One, and hear the voice of His mouth. For you will be His witness to all men of what you have seen and heard”** (Acts 22:14-15). Then Ananias baptized Paul and the former zealous Jewish Pharisee who had hated Christ and Christians was now a Christian himself.

Paul then jumped ahead to a later time when he had come to Jerusalem preaching the Gospel of Christ to his fellow-Jews. At that time the risen Jesus had appeared to him in the temple and had said: **“Make haste and get out of Jerusalem quickly, for they will not receive your testimony concerning Me”** (Acts 22:18). Paul had dared to argue with Jesus, pointing out that he was eminently qualified to preach the Gospel to the Jews: **“Lord, they know that in every synagogue I imprisoned and beat those who believe on You. And when the blood of Your martyr Stephen was shed, I also was standing by consenting to his death, and guarding the clothes of those who were killing him. Then He said to me, “Depart, for I will send you far from here to the Gentiles””** (Acts 22:19-21).

As soon as Paul uttered the word **“Gentiles”**, the Jewish crowd went wild. This was the very reason they hated Paul so much. He was a Jew, but he was treating the Gentiles as equals. He was sharing the Jewish hope of the Savior with Gentiles and then claiming that the crucified and risen Jesus had commanded him to do so. This was too much. **“They raised their voice and said, ‘Away with such a fellow from the earth, for he is not fit to live!’ Then, as they cried out and tore off their clothes and threw dust into the air, the commander ordered him to be brought into the barracks, and said that he should be examined under scourging, so that he might know why they shouted so against him”** (Acts 22:22-24).

Jesus had been scourged. Now it looked as though His chosen missionary Paul would be scourged also. But Paul used his Roman citizenship to save himself: **“As they bound him with thongs, Paul said to the centurion who stood by, ‘Is it lawful for you to scourge a man who is a Roman, and uncondemned?’ When the centurion heard that, he went and told the commander, saying, ‘Take care what you do, for this man is a Roman.’ Then the commander came and said to him, ‘Tell me, are you a Roman?’ He said, ‘Yes.’ The commander answered, ‘With a large sum I obtained this citizenship.’ And Paul said, ‘But I was born a citizen’”** (Acts 22:25-28).

From this incident we learn that it is not wrong for a Christian to use legitimate efforts to escape suffering. Jesus does not command His disciples to seek persecution or martyrdom, but only to endure it if it happens despite efforts to avoid it. In this case commander rescinded the order to scourge him. **“Then immediately those who were about to examine him withdrew from him; and the commander was also afraid after he found out that he was a Roman, and because he had bound him”** (Acts 22:29).

On the very next day the commander brought Paul to stand before the Jewish high priest Ananias, the chief priests, and the Jewish council. The commander, Claudius Lysias, **“wanted to know for certain why he was accused by the Jews”** (Acts 22:30). In his early years, when Paul was known as the Pharisee Saul who was persecuting Christians, he had been highly favored by this Jewish council. But now Paul barely opened his mouth, **“and the high priest Ananias commanded those who stood by him to strike him on the mouth”** (Acts 23:2).

Paul immediately lashed out: **“God will strike you, you whitewashed wall! For you sit to judge me according to the Law, and do you command me to be struck contrary to the law?”** As a Pharisee, Paul was well-acquainted with Jewish law, and he knew how such hearings ought to be conducted. It seems that his temper got the best of him in this instance. Compare how Jesus reacted to a similar incident in His own trial before the Jewish court. When Jesus first opened His mouth in His hearing before Annas, we read that **“one of the officers who stood by struck Jesus with the palm of his hand, saying, ‘Do You answer the high priest like that?’ Jesus answered him, ‘If I have spoken evil, bear witness of the evil; but if well, why do you strike Me?’”** (John 18:22-23). Jesus calmly called attention to the evil action without calling anyone names or threatening judgment. As Peter wrote: Jesus **“committed no sin, nor was deceit found in His mouth; who, when He was reviled, did not revile in return; when He suffered, He did not threaten, but committed Himself to Him who judges righteously”** (1 Peter 2:22-23). The missionary, as an ambassador of Christ, should follow his Master’s example rather than Paul’s example here.

Paul quickly recovered from his burst of anger. When he was told that he had reviled the high priest, he responded: **“I did not know, brethren, that he was the high priest; for it is written, ‘You shall not speak evil of a ruler of your people’”** (Acts 23:5). How difficult it is to remain calm and controlled when we face such unjust treatment and hear slander and lies from our opponents!

As Paul now faced this council, he recognized from his many years in Jewish circles that some of the council members were Pharisees and others were Sadducees. These two groups were bitter rivals. Most of the priests themselves were Sadducees, who did not believe in angels or spirits or the resurrection of the dead. The Pharisees, on the other hand, accepted all of the Old Testament as God’s Word and concentrated on keeping the details of the law down to the last letter. Jesus had once told His disciples to be harmless as doves and as wise as serpents. Paul showed his wisdom now by calling out: **“I am a Pharisee, the son of a Pharisee; concerning the hope and resurrection of the dead I am being judged”** (Acts 23:6).

This remark set the Sadducees against the Pharisees in the council. **“The assembly was divided”** (Acts 23:7). Since Paul was a Pharisee and openly confessed the resurrection of the dead, some of the Pharisees took Paul’s side in the debate that followed. **“The scribes of the Pharisees’ party arose and protested, saying, ‘We find no evil in this man; but if a spirit or an angel has spoken to him, let us not fight against God’”** (Acts 23:9). This remark seems to reflect the earlier advice of Gamaliel, Paul’s teacher, when Jesus’ apostles had been brought before the council.

When Claudius Lysias saw that the dissension in the council was fierce, he was afraid that Paul, a Roman citizen, was in danger of bodily harm. Therefore he **“commanded the soldiers to go down and take him by force from among them, and bring him into the barracks”** (Acts 23:10). Once again God used the Roman government to save Paul from physical harm and possible death. **“On the following night the Lord stood by him and said, ‘Be of good**

cheer, Paul; for as you have testified for Me in Jerusalem, so you must also bear witness at Rome” (Acts 23:11). Now Paul knew that his plan to go to Rome would come to pass, for the Lord Himself gave Paul gave him this promise. But there would be many more dangerous adventures and frustrating delays before Paul would set foot in Rome. Missionaries need to learn that God’s timing is often very different from our own.

Already the next day Paul’s life was in danger. **“Some of the Jews banded together and bound themselves under an oath, saying that they would neither eat nor drink till they had killed Paul. Now there were more than forty who had formed this conspiracy”** (Acts 23:12-13). This band of assassins told their plan to the chief priests and elders: **“We have bound ourselves under a great oath that we will eat nothing until we have killed Paul”** (Acts 23:14). These leaders were so corrupt that they willingly cooperated with the gang. They would ask the commander to bring Paul down to them again for another hearing, so that they could ambush him and kill him on the way.

This time God used a young boy, Paul's own nephew, to thwart this plan. Somehow Paul's nephew learned of the plot against his uncle and was able to enter the barracks and warn Paul. Paul asked one of the Roman centurions to escort his nephew to Claudius Lysias, the commander. The boy reported: **"The Jews have agreed to ask that you bring Paul down to the council tomorrow, as though they were to inquire more fully about him. But do not yield to them, for more than forty of them lie in wait for him, men who have bound themselves by an oath that they will neither eat nor drink till they have killed him; and now they are ready, waiting for the promise from you"** (Acts 23:20-21).

The commander took this threat seriously and acted immediately. **"He called for two centurions, saying, 'Prepare two hundred soldiers, seventy horsemen, and two hundred spearmen to go to Caesarea at the third hour of the night; and provide mounts to set Paul on, and bring him safely to Felix the governor'"** (Acts 23:23-24). The commander also wrote a letter to Governor Felix, explaining why he was sending Paul to him; however, he covered up the truth of what had happened to save his own skin, reporting: **"This man was seized by the Jews and was about to be killed by them. Coming with the troops I rescued him, having learned that he was a Roman"** (Acts 23:27). Actually, the commander had thought at first that Paul was an Egyptian assassin and had given the orders that he be scourged before he learned that Paul was a Roman citizen. But he was correct in saying that the Jews wanted to kill him because **"he was accused concerning questions of their law, but had nothing charged against him deserving of death or chains"** (Acts 23:29).

The midnight ride went according to plan, and after a night at Antipatris the soldiers and spearmen returned to Jerusalem, while the horsemen took Paul to Caesarea and presented him to the governor. Felix learned that Paul was originally from Cilicia (where Tarsus was located) and determined that he would hear his case. **"He commanded him to be kept in Herod's Praetorium"** (Acts 23:35).

Five days later the high priest Ananias, some Jewish elders, and an orator named Tertullus came from Jerusalem to Caesarea and **"gave evidence to the governor against Paul"** (Acts 24:1). After words of praise for the governor, Tertullus presented the accusation of the Jews: **"We have found this man a plague, a creator of dissension among all the Jews throughout the world, and a ringleader of the sect of the Nazarenes. He even tried to profane the temple, and we seized him, and wanted to judge him according to our law. But the commander Lysias came by and with great violence took him out of our hands, commanding his accusers to come to you"** (Acts 24:5-8). Notice how the Jews twisted the facts in their favor, just as Commander Lysias had. Unbelievers in this world are always inclined to explain events to their own advantage; Christians, on the other hand, should always speak the truth, just like their Lord and Savior.

Paul had no lawyer like Tertullus to present his case before Governor Felix, so he himself was permitted to speak. He told the truth. He said in his own defense: **"You may ascertain that it is no more than twelve days since I went up to Jerusalem to worship. And they neither**

found me in the temple disputing with anyone nor inciting the crowd, either in the synagogues or in the city. Nor can they prove the things of which they now accuse me” (Acts 24:11-13).

As usual, Paul used this opportunity to confess his faith in Jesus of Nazareth as the Jewish Messiah before the governor and the others who were present. In his testimony he showed that he was a firm believer in the sacred writings of the Jews and trusted in the promises of the Messiah. He therefore believed in the resurrection of the dead and understood that Jesus of Nazareth was the Messiah because of His resurrection from the dead. This was the Way that he followed. In Paul’s testimony we have an excellent example of how Christian missionaries ought to testify when they are called on by authorities to defend themselves against false accusations. Pay close attention to Paul’s words: **“I confess to you, that according to the Way which they call a sect, so I worship the God of my fathers, believing all things which are written in the Law and in the Prophets. I have hope in God, which they themselves also accept, that there will be a resurrection of the dead, both of the just and the unjust. This being so, I myself always strive to have a conscience without offense toward God and men. Now after many years I came to bring alms and offerings to my nation, in the midst of which some Jews from Asia found me purified in the temple, neither with a mob nor with tumult. They ought to have been here before you to object if they had anything against me. Or else let those who are here themselves say if they found any wrongdoing in me while I stood before the council, unless it is for this one statement which I cried out, standing among them, ‘Concerning the resurrection of the dead I am being judged by you this day’”** (Acts 24:14-21).

Governor Felix had some knowledge of the Way, as it was called, so he was not willing to take a stand with the high priest Ananias against Paul at this time. **“He adjourned the proceedings and said, ‘When Lysias the commander comes down, I will make a decision on your case’”** (Acts 24:22). There is no report that Lysias ever did come down to Caesarea, so Paul remained a prisoner awaiting trial. Governor Felix did not consider Paul a threat to the government, so **“he commanded the centurion to keep Paul and to let him have liberty, and told him not to forbid any of his friends to provide for or visit him”** (Acts 24:23). Surely Paul used this opportunity to teach and train his friends and associates in the Christian Way.

Among those whom Paul tried to reach and teach during those days was Governor Felix himself. For Luke informs us that **“after some days, when Felix came with his wife Drusilla, who was Jewish, he sent for Paul and heard him concerning the faith in Christ”** (Acts 24:24). How does an ambassador of Christ address an unbelieving governor? Does he say only those things he knows the governor will want to hear? Not at all. Paul **“reasoned about righteousness, self-control, and the judgment to come”** (Acts 24:25). No one has any desire or feels the need for the Good News of Christ’s forgiveness and salvation if he does not first recognize that he is a sinner who will one day face the judgment of a holy God. Paul preached Law and Gospel, sin and grace. It seems the Law was having its effect on Felix, for

“Felix was afraid and answered, ‘Go away for now; when I have a convenient time I will call for you’” (Acts 24:25).

Although Paul remained as a prisoner of Felix in Caesarea for two more years, and Felix **“sent for him more often and conversed with him”** (Acts 24:26), it seems the governor was only hoping for money from Paul and his friends to induce him to let Paul go free. That bribe never came, and when Governor Felix was replaced by Governor Porcius Festus, **“Felix, wanting to do the Jews a favor, left Paul bound”** (Acts 24:27). We may wonder why God left His missionary in prison during this whole time, when Paul could have been bringing the Gospel to Italy and Spain, as he had planned. But God’s ways are not our ways. God had promised that Paul would preach the Gospel in Rome, and Paul could depend on that promise. This long delay was also part of God’s plan for Paul, and Paul had to learn, as we all do, that **“all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose”** (Romans 8:28).

Even after two years the Jewish authorities in Jerusalem were still intent on putting Paul to death. Therefore, when the new governor, Porcius Festus, went up to Jerusalem shortly after he became governor, **“the high priest and the chief men of the Jews informed him against Paul; and they petitioned him, asking a favor against him, that he would summon him to Jerusalem – while they lay in ambush along the road to kill him”** (Acts 25:2-3). They had no intention to give Paul a fair trial. All they wanted was to put him to death.

Festus did not agree to their proposal. Instead, he said that he would be going soon to Caesarea, where Paul was a prisoner. If they wanted a trial there, they should go to Caesarea also and bring their charges against Paul there. So once again Paul stood before his accusers, who **“laid many serious complaints against Paul, which they could not prove”** (Acts 25:7). Paul once more defended himself, saying: **“Neither against the law of the Jews, nor against the temple, nor against Caesar have I offended in anything at all”** (Acts 25:8). Paul was not willing to confess to any crime he had not committed.

Governor Festus wanted to stay on good terms with the Jewish leaders. Therefore he asked Paul: **“Are you willing to go up to Jerusalem and there be judged before me concerning these things?”** (Acts 25:9). This is exactly what the Jewish leaders wanted, for then they could carry out their assassination attempt. But Paul used his privilege as a Roman citizen and said: **“I stand at Caesar’s judgment seat, where I ought to be judged. To the Jews I have done no wrong, as you very well know. For if I am an offender, or have committed anything deserving of death, I do not object to dying; but if there is nothing in these things of which these men accuse me, no one can deliver me to them. I appeal to Caesar”** (Acts 25:10-11).

The Lord had promised Paul that he would have the opportunity to preach the Gospel at Rome. Since Paul had appealed to Caesar, he would be going to Rome. **“Festus, when he had**

conferred with the council, answered, ‘You have appealed to Caesar? To Caesar you shall go!’” (Acts 25:12).

But now Governor Festus had a problem. He was going to send his prisoner Paul to Caesar, but he did not know what he could write to Caesar concerning Paul’s offense. As Festus said later: **“It seems to me unreasonable to send a prisoner and not to specify the charges against him”** (Acts 25:27). After a few days Governor Festus was visited by King Agrippa (Herod Agrippa II, a descendant of Herod the Great) and his female companion Bernice. **“Festus laid Paul’s case before the king”** (Acts 25:14). In telling Agrippa about Paul’s case, Festus made the comment: **“When the accusers stood up, they brought no accusation against him of such things as I supposed, but had some questions against him about their own religion and about a certain Jesus, who had died, whom Paul affirmed to be alive”** (Acts 25:18-19).

The real reason for the Jewish hatred against Paul was not that he had brought Gentiles into the temple court, but that Paul was preaching the resurrection of Jesus from the dead. The Jewish leaders had succeeded in getting Jesus crucified, but they could not keep Him dead. The evidence for Jesus’ resurrection from the dead was all around them, and many of the Jewish people had become convinced by the evidence that Jesus was truly alive. Because they were not able to disprove the evidence, the Jewish leaders were determined to silence the preacher who most loudly proclaimed that resurrection: the apostle Paul. This was the real reason for their hatred and their violence, along with the fact that Paul was even spreading the account of Jesus’ resurrection among the hated Gentiles.

After hearing Festus describe the case against Paul, King Agrippa told Festus: **“I also would like to hear the man myself”** (Acts 25:22). So once again Paul was given the opportunity to proclaim Jesus before an audience of rulers and authorities. We are reminded of Psalm 119:46: **“I will speak of Your testimonies also before kings, and will not be ashamed.”** On the very next day, **“when Agrippa and Bernice had come with great pomp, and had entered the auditorium with the commanders and the prominent men of the city, at Festus’ command Paul was brought in”** (Acts 25:23).

After Festus explained the situation to the assembly, King Agrippa gave Paul the opportunity to tell his story. He said to the king: **“You are expert in all customs and questions which have to do with the Jews”** (Acts 26:3). He then talked about his background and his education. He had been a strict Pharisee, as the Jewish leaders knew very well. He was still a faithful Jew, accepting all the Old Testament promises concerning the Messiah. He now believed now that Jesus of Nazareth was indeed the promised Messiah, and that Jesus had proved that He was the Messiah by rising from the dead. Paul asked: **“Why should it be thought incredible by you that God raises the dead?”** (Acts 26:8). This was a doctrine taught and accepted by all Pharisees.

Paul explained that he himself had thought Jesus to be a fraud at first and had even persecuted the followers of Jesus both in Jerusalem and in other cities. But this all changed when the risen Jesus Himself appeared to Paul on the road to Damascus. He remembered Jesus' words to him very well: **"I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. But rise and stand on your feet; for I have appeared to you for this purpose, to make you a minister and a witness both of the things which you have seen and of the things which I will yet reveal to you. I will deliver you from the Jewish people, as well as from the Gentiles, to whom I now send you, to open their eyes, in order to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among those who are sanctified by faith in Me"** (Acts 26:15-18). Paul's life mission was there laid out for him, and he was merely carrying it out to the best of his ability.

Paul knew that it was his preaching of Jesus as the Messiah and his insistence that the Messiah had sent him out to the Gentiles that prompted the Jews to hate him. Paul said to Agrippa and the assembly: **"For these reasons the Jews seized me in the temple and tried to kill me"** (Acts 26:21). But he was still a faithful Jew, believing God's promises to His people and proclaiming the truth that Jesus of Nazareth was clearly the fulfillment of all these promises. Paul said: **"To this day I stand, witnessing both to small and great, saying no other things than those which the prophets and Moses said would come – that the Christ would suffer, that He would be the first to rise from the dead, and would proclaim light to the Jewish people and to the Gentiles"** (Acts 26:22-23).

At this point Governor Festus interrupted Paul with a loud cry: **"Paul, you are beside yourself! Much learning is driving you mad!"** (Acts 26:24). The Gospel of Christ seems like foolishness to the wise of this world. But Paul responded: **"I am not mad, most noble Festus, but speak the words of truth and reason. For the king, before whom I also speak freely, knows these things; for I am convinced that none of these things escapes his attention, since this thing was not done in a corner"** (Acts 26:25-26).

Paul was hoping for a better response from King Agrippa. He asked the king a direct question: **"King Agrippa, do you believe the prophets? I know that you do believe"** (Acts 26:27). Kings and rulers need salvation through faith in Jesus, just like everyone else. The king's answer was not altogether negative. He said: **"You almost persuade me to become a Christian"** (Acts 26:28). Paul replied by explaining his motivation and the motivation of every Christian, especially every Christian pastor and missionary: **"I would to God that not only you, but also all who hear me today, might become both almost and altogether such as I am, except for these chains"** (Acts 26:29). A Christian ambassador is always hoping, praying, and working toward this end: that all his hearers might come to faith in Christ and enjoy eternal salvation. We pray that through the words of God we speak, the Holy Spirit may work the miracle of conversion.

The hearing ended at this point. We do not hear of any immediate confessions of faith in Christ. But those who were present were convinced that Paul was innocent of the charges

against him. In fact, King Agrippa said to Governor Festus: **“This man might have been set free if he had not appealed to Caesar”** (Acts 26:32). But God’s plan was that Paul would go to Rome as a prisoner.

Questions

1. What did James ask Paul to do when he arrived at Jerusalem?
2. Why was Paul willing to go along with James’ request?
3. What accusation against Paul was brought by some Jews from Ephesus?
4. Why was Paul’s life in danger in Jerusalem?
5. Who rescued Paul from those who wanted to harm him?
6. Why did Paul become so angry when he faced the Jewish council?
7. Who discovered the secret plot against Paul’s life?
8. What did the Roman commander do to protect Paul?
9. How did Paul defend himself before Governor Felix?
10. Why did Governor Felix keep Paul in prison for such a long time?
11. What did Paul do when Governor Festus wanted him to go to Jerusalem?
12. What was Festus’ response to Paul’s account before King Agrippa II?
13. What was Paul trying to do in his speech before King Agrippa II?
14. How was God’s plan for Paul to go to Rome different from Paul’s plan?
15. Why is patience such an important virtue for a Christian missionary?



Provided by the Church of the Lutheran Confession - Board of Missions

Missiology

Lesson 14 – Paul’s Journey to Rome

The physician Luke (the author of the book of Acts) accompanied Paul on his journey from Caesarea to Rome, together with a believer named **“Aristarchus, a Macedonian of Thessalonica”** (Acts 27:2). Paul and other prisoners were put into the hands of a centurion named Julius, who had the responsibility of delivering them safely to Caesar in Rome. But it was not going to be easy. First they went by ship from Caesarea to Sidon. There **“Julius treated Paul kindly and gave him liberty to go to his friends and receive care”** (Acts 27:3). It seems that by this time there were Christians in Sidon who knew Paul.

The next stop on their voyage was Myra, a city of Lycia, on the southern coast of what is now the country of Turkey. **“There the centurion found an Alexandrian ship sailing to Italy, and he put us on board”** (Acts 27:6). Contrary winds had slowed them down before this, and now again the wind did not favor them. They finally reached the island of Crete and **“came to place called Fair Havens, near the city of Lasea”** (Acts 27:8). Even though Paul was only a prisoner, he had spent many days sailing on the Mediterranean Sea, so he gave Julius and the sailors his advice: **“Men, I perceive that this voyage will end with disaster and much loss, not only of the cargo and ship, but also our lives”** (Acts 27:10). Instead of listening to Paul, however, **“the centurion was more persuaded by the helmsman and the owner of the ship”** (Acts 27:11). They should have stayed in Fair Havens, but instead they tried to reach Phoenix, another harbor on the island of Crete, where they hoped to spend the winter before continuing their voyage.

This decision proved to be a foolish mistake, for as they were on their way to Phoenix, **“a tempestuous head wind arose”** (Acts 27:14), and they were driven out to sea. They took the smaller skiff on board, and they used cables to undergird the ship, so that it would not fall apart. The storm increased in intensity, and they threw the ship’s tackle overboard to lighten the ship. Day after day the storm continued, and the ship’s passengers feared the worst. Luke reports: **“Now when neither sun nor stars appeared for many days, and no small tempest beat on us, all hope that we would be saved was finally given up”** (Acts 27:20).

But Paul had God’s promise that he would get to Rome. And now God repeated his promise. He sent an angel to Paul at night, and this angel said to Paul: **“Do not be afraid, Paul; you must be brought before Caesar; and indeed God has granted you all those who sail with you”** (Acts 27:24). Earlier Paul had warned them that if they ventured out of Fair Havens, they would lose both cargo and passengers. But now after this word from God through His angel, Paul was able to assure Julius, the entire crew, as well as all the passengers on the ship: **“I urge you to take heart, for there will be no loss of life among you, but only of the**

ship” (Acts 27:22). “Take heart, men, for I believe God that it will be just as it was told me. However, we must run aground on a certain island” (Acts 27:25-26).

For fourteen days they had been driven to and fro by the wind in the middle of the Mediterranean Sea. Finally it seemed that they were nearing land. But the sailors did not trust the angelic message delivered to Paul. They figured that now was the time for them to get to land safely and let the rest of them die at sea. So they let down the skiff into the sea and hoped to sail safely to land in the skiff. Paul again had something to say, even though he was only a prisoner. **“Paul said to the centurion and the soldiers, ‘Unless these men stay in the ship, you cannot be saved.’ Then the soldiers cut away the ropes of the skiff and let it fall off” (Acts 27:31-32).** Now the sailors were unable to escape.

By now it seemed that the centurion and all the rest looked to the prisoner Paul for leadership and direction. Paul was happy to take this role. He said to them all: **“Today is the fourteenth day you have waited and continued without food, and eaten nothing. Therefore I urge you to take nourishment, for this is for your survival, since not a hair will fall from the head of any of you” (Acts 27:33-34).** **“And when he had said these things, he took bread and gave thanks to God in the presence of them all; and when he had broken it he began to eat. Then they were all encouraged, and also took food themselves. And in all we were two hundred and seventy-six persons on the ship. So when they had eaten enough, they lightened the ship and threw out the wheat into the sea” (Acts 27:35-38).** Paul did not hide his faith in God; he openly thanked God for the food that they were given. What a tremendous witness it is for Christ and the truth when Christians can be bold and confident of God’s presence and protection, even though everyone else is without hope and without courage!

The passengers were still in grave danger. They had come close to land, but the storm was still raging. **“Striking a place where two seas met, they ran the ship aground; and the prow stuck fast and remained immovable, but the stern was being broken up by the violence of the waves” (Acts 27:41).** Earlier the sailors had not believed the message given to Paul and they had tried to escape. Now it was the soldiers who were determined to save their own lives without consideration of the lives of the prisoners they were guarding. **“The soldiers’ plan was to kill the prisoners, lest any of them should swim away and escape” (Acts 27:42).** But Julius did not want the prisoner Paul to die, and so he **“commanded that those who could swim should jump overboard first and get to land, and the rest, some on boards and some on parts of the ship. And so it was that they all escaped safely to land” (Acts 27:43-44).** God had kept his promise to Paul that all 276 passengers would survive, including all the sailors, all the soldiers, and all the prisoners.

The island on which they landed was Malta. The storm had driven them westward, and they were much closer to Rome than before. But it was not sailing weather, and their ship had been destroyed. How would the natives of Malta treat them? As a witness of all these events, Luke must have been happy to report: **“The natives showed us unusual kindness,**

for they kindled a fire and made us all welcome, because of the rain that was falling and because of the cold.” (Acts 28:2). The natives of Malta were not believers in Christ, and yet by God’s providence they were kind to their visitors. Missionaries in dangerous situations often receive unexpected help from unbelieving strangers, who have their own reasons (guided by God providence) to give needed support and sustenance. God knows how to take care of His own children.

No one on the island knew who Paul was, but something happened very soon after they landed that called attention to Paul and his God. We read: **“When Paul had gathered a bundle of sticks and laid them on the fire, a viper came out because of the heat, and fastened on his hand. So when the natives saw the creature hanging from his hand, they said to one another, ‘No doubt this man is a murderer, whom, though he has escaped the sea, yet justice does not allow to live.’ But he shook off the creature into the fire and suffered no harm. However, they were expecting that he would swell up or suddenly fall down dead. But after they had looked for a long time and saw no harm come to him, they changed their minds and said that he was a god”** (Acts 27:3-6). Did not Jesus say to His disciples: **“These signs will follow those who believe; ... they will take up serpents and if they drink anything deadly, it will by no means hurt them”** (Mark 16:17-18)?

They soon learned from Paul’s own lips and from his actions that he was not a god, but that he was a messenger of the true God. A wealthy landowner named Publius took care of the shipwreck victims for several days. When his father **“lay sick of a fever and dysentery, Paul went in to him and prayed, and he laid his hands on him and healed him. So when this was done, the rest of those on the island who had diseases also came and were healed. They also honored us in many ways; and when we departed, they provided such things as were necessary”** (Acts 27:8-10). As always, wherever he was, Paul remained an apostle of the Lord Jesus who proclaimed Jesus’ name and did wonders in His name, as the Lord directed him. No doubt many of the Maltese natives came to know Jesus during Paul’s stay there. Luke and Aristarchus were also there to give testimony concerning the Savior of the world.

When the winter months were over, Julius found another ship to take his prisoners to Rome. Luke says that they went from Syracuse to Rhegium to Puteoli. The Gospel had spread already to Puteoli, and there were Christians there. Paul, Luke, and Aristarchus stayed with them for a week before going on to Rome. Somehow the news reached the Christians in Rome that Paul and his associates were on their way. Luke reports: **“When the brethren heard about us, they came to meet us as far as Appii Forum and Three Inns. When Paul saw them, he thanked God and took courage”** (Acts 28:15). God’s promise to Paul that he would preach the Gospel in Rome was about to be fulfilled.

In Rome at last, Paul was delivered to the captain of the guard, who permitted Paul **“to dwell by himself with the soldier who guarded him”** (Acts 28:16). This permitted Paul to talk to the individual soldiers who guarded him. Later Paul wrote to his Christian friends in Philippi: **“I want you to know, brethren, that the things which happened to me have actually turned**

out for the furtherance of the gospel, so that it has become evident to the whole palace guard, and to all the rest, that my chains are in Christ” (Philippians 1:12-13). Paul used this opportunity to proclaim the Good News of Christ to the soldiers guarding him. When he concluded his letter to the Philippians, he wrote: **“All the saints greet you, but especially those who are of Caesar’s household”** (Philippians 4:22).

Since Paul could receive visitors while he was awaiting his hearing before Caesar, he soon succeeded in contacting the sizable Jewish community in Rome. He explained to them why he was a prisoner in Rome: **“Though I have done nothing against our people or the customs of our fathers, yet I was delivered as a prisoner from Jerusalem into the hands of the Romans, who, when they had examined me, wanted to let me go, because there was no cause for putting me to death. But, when the Jews spoke against it, I was compelled to appeal to Caesar”** (Acts 28:17-19). These Roman Jews were willing to listen to what Paul had to say. They said: **“We desire to hear from you what you think; for concerning this sect, we know that it is spoken against everywhere”** (Acts 28:22). Christianity was thought of as a Jewish sect. Even today Christians are spoken against everywhere.

A day was set for the Jews in Rome to meet with Paul in his house, and they met all day long. Paul **“explained and solemnly testified of the kingdom of God, persuading them concerning Jesus from both the Law of Moses and the Prophets”** (Acts 28:23). What a wonderful Bible class that must have been! Paul attempted to prove to them from their own Old Testament Scriptures that Jesus of Nazareth was the Messiah, the Son of David, that God had promised. **“And some were persuaded by the things which were spoken, and some disbelieved. ... They did not agree among themselves”** (Acts 28:24-25). Paul warned them not to harden themselves against the Gospel of Christ, as had happened so often in Israelite history. His final word to them was this: **“Let it be known to you that the salvation of God has been sent to the Gentiles, and they will hear it”** (Acts 28:28). Then **“the Jews departed and had a great dispute among themselves”** (Acts 28:29).

Paul lived like this as a prisoner in Rome for two years; he received many visitors and carried out the work of a missionary without leaving his house. He **“received all who came to him, preaching the kingdom of God and teaching the things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ with all confidence, no one forbidding him”** (Acts 28: 30-31). This is how Luke’s book of Acts comes to an end. The book began with the apostles preaching the Gospel in Jerusalem, the center of the Jewish world. It ends with the preaching of the Gospel in Rome, the center of the Gentile world.

Questions

1. Why did Paul think a voyage to Rome would mean disaster?
2. Why did they not take Paul's advice concerning the voyage?
3. What happened on their way to the harbor at Phoenix?
4. What are some facts that show that the storm at sea was very dangerous?
5. What assurance did God give Paul during the storm?
6. How did the action of the sailors and then the soldiers endanger Paul's life?
7. How did all 276 passengers get to shore?
8. What made the natives of Malta think that Paul was a god?
9. What special powers did God give Paul on the island of Malta?
10. How was Paul encouraged as he got closer to Rome?
11. What were Paul's living conditions as a prisoner in Rome?
12. What was the outcome of Paul's day-long Bible study with the Jews?
13. How was Paul able to spread the Gospel of Christ as a prisoner?
14. Why is "From Jerusalem to Rome" a fitting heading for the book of Acts?
15. How does God protect missionaries on their travels today?



Provided by the Church of the Lutheran Confession - Board of Missions

Missiology

Lesson 15 – Paul’s Last Letters and Journeys

By the time Paul reached Rome, he had already written several letters that found their way into our New Testament: Galatians, First and Second Thessalonians, First and Second Corinthians, and Romans. While he was a prisoner in Rome, he wrote four more letters: Ephesians, Colossians, Philemon, and Philipians. What can we learn about mission work from these letters?

Paul wrote to the Ephesians from Rome during his imprisonment. Paul had spent three years in Ephesus, and he and they knew each other well. Paul began his letter with a comprehensive discussion of God’s plan of salvation, centered in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. **“In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace”** (Ephesians 1:7). Those who are brought to faith in Jesus Christ are told that God chose them from eternity to be His, and that their conversion from unbelief to faith was entirely a matter of God’s grace. **“For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast”** (Ephesians 2:8-9).

All those who are brought to faith in Christ become members of the Holy Christian Church, which is made up of all believers in Jesus Christ throughout the world and in all of history, from the days of Adam and Eve to the end of the world. One of Paul’s main points is that there is only one Church, which includes Jewish believers and Gentile believers, as well as believers from all races and cultures and countries. Emphasizing the oneness of Christ’s Church is a major part of every missionary’s work, despite the outward appearance of many divisions. Paul compares the Christian Church to a human body with many parts, each part having its own particular function. **“To each one of us grace was given according to the measure of Christ’s gift”** (Ephesians 4:7). Among the gifts Christ gives His Church are apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers. God gives these gifts to help the Church grow in faith and love in the constant struggle against their own sin and the workings of the devil.

Paul outlines the pattern of the true Christian life. The Gospel is the motivation for doing the will of God. **“Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God in Christ forgave you. Therefore be imitators of God as dear children. And walk in love, as Christ also has loved us and given Himself for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling aroma”** (Ephesians 4:32 – 5:2). Paul’s words to Christian husbands and wives, and to Christian parents and their children are especially noteworthy.

Paul wrote a similar letter to the Christians in Colosse, another city in the province of Asia. Paul had never been in Colosse, but one of his associates by the name of Epaphras had brought the Gospel to that city. Paul wrote this letter because the Christians in Colosse were troubled by false teachers who had introduced a religion that involved the worship of angels, the following of all kinds of food customs and other ceremonial laws, and the notion that faith in Christ was not enough for salvation.

The letter to the Colossians exalts Christ as the head of the Church. It tells us that **“in Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily”** (Colossians 2:9). We **“are complete in Him”** (Colossians 2:10), and do not need to advance beyond Him into all kinds of self-chosen ceremonies and self-chosen worship. Our Christian life is a fruit of our faith in Christ, which is the working of the Holy Spirit. Paul says: **“As the elect of God, holy and beloved, put on tender mercies, kindness, humility, meekness, longsuffering, bearing with one another, and forgiving one another, if anyone has a complaint against another; even as Christ forgave you, so you also must do”** (Colossians 3:12-13).

In his letter to the Colossians Paul refers to some of his fellow-workers, Aristarchus and Luke, who accompanied him on his voyage to Rome and were still with him, as well as Mark and Epaphras and a man named Demas, who abandoned Paul later on. Paul’s associate, Tychicus, delivered both of these letters to Ephesus and Colosse. No doubt these letters were shared with other congregations as well.

When Tychicus made the trip from Rome to Ephesus and Colosse, he was accompanied by a slave named Onesimus. Onesimus had run away from his master Philemon, who lived in Colosse. Onesimus had come to Rome and Paul became acquainted with him there. Onesimus also became a Christian. But Paul felt compelled to send Onesimus back to Philemon. Paul wrote the New Testament letter to Philemon to explain the situation and urged Philemon to take Onesimus back again and to regard him as a fellow-Christian. He also hinted that it might be a good idea to release Onesimus from his slavery.

From this short letter to Philemon we learn that Paul did not consider it his business to bring about social reform, that is, to eliminate slavery from the Roman Empire. He was a missionary of the Gospel of Christ, and that was his major concern. How happy Paul was to hear of the spread of the Gospel, **“which has come to you (the Colossians), as it has also in all the world, and is bringing forth fruit, as it is also among you”** (Colossians 1:6)!

It seems that the last letter Paul wrote from his imprisonment in Rome was his letter to the Christians in Philippi. At this time Paul was hopeful that he would soon be set free, for he wrote to the Philippians: **“I trust in the Lord that I myself shall also come shortly”** (Philippians 2:24). Paul does not mention Luke or Aristarchus or Mark in this letter; therefore, it is likely that they were no longer with him in Rome. But Timothy was with him and is named with him as the author of this letter.

The Philippians had heard that Paul was a prisoner in Rome. They had helped him with material gifts in the past, and they wanted to support him again once more. For this purpose they sent one of their leaders, a man named Epaphroditus, to bring financial aid or some other assistance to Paul. In this letter Paul calls Epaphroditus **“my brother, fellow worker, and fellow soldier, ... your messenger and the one who ministered to my need”** (Philippians 2:25). Paul was happy to receive their gift of love, writing to them: **“You have done well that you shared in my distress. ... Not that I seek the gift, but I seek the fruit that abounds to your account. Indeed I have all and abound. I am full, having received from Epaphroditus the things sent from you, a sweet-smelling aroma, an acceptable sacrifice, well pleasing to God”** (Philippians 4:14-18).

But after Epaphroditus reached Rome and found Paul, he got sick. Paul informed the Philippians that he **“was distressed because you had heard that he was sick. For indeed he was sick almost unto death; but God had mercy on him, and not only on him but on me also, lest I should have sorrow upon sorrow”** (Philippians 2:26-27). **“For the work of Christ he came close to death, not regarding his life”** (Philippians 2:30). The Gospel of Christ had worked in the hearts of the Philippian Christians, making them generous and kind and mission-minded. Paul did not accept financial help from all his congregations, but he did accept aid from the Philippians, for they knew what they were doing and why they were doing it.

After Epaphroditus recovered from his illness, Paul sent him back to Philippi with this letter to the Philippians. Since they were concerned about Paul's well-being as a prisoner, Paul assured them: **“I want you to know, brethren, that the things which happened to me have actually turned out for the furtherance of the gospel”** (Philippians 1:12). The Gospel of Christ was being preached in Rome, not only by Paul himself but also by others. **“Christ is preached; and in this I rejoice, yes, and will rejoice”** (Philippians 1:18). He was not afraid to die in Rome. He wrote: **“For to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain. ... I am hard-pressed between the two, having a desire to depart and be with Christ, which is far better. Nevertheless to remain in the flesh is more needful for you”** (Philippians 1:21-24).

Paul was happy to be able to do more work in the service of his Savior. He thought of the believers in Philippi as an oasis in the desert, **“children of God without fault in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world, holding fast the word of life”** (Philippians 2:15-16). **“Our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ”** (Philippians 3:20). This is what we pray for in the Lord's Prayer: that God's name may be hallowed by true teaching and godly living, that God's kingdom may come through the faithful preaching and teaching of God's Word, and that God's will may be done.

When the book of Acts ends, Paul is still a prisoner in Rome, awaiting trial before Emperor Nero. From accounts in church history, it seems that Paul was released a short time after sending Epaphroditus back home to Philippi with this letter to the Philippians. Whatever

journeys he made after his release are not known with certainty. He may have made that planned mission journey to Spain. Clement of Rome later wrote that Paul went west as far as he could. We know that he also traveled to the island of Crete, where he put his assistant Titus in charge of the congregations there. It seems he also went to Ephesus and put his assistant Timothy in charge of the congregations there. Paul wrote his first letter to Timothy in Macedonia. He wrote his letter to Titus in Nicopolis.

The letters to Timothy and Titus are pastoral letters, that is, letters from an older pastor to younger pastors to instruct them and encourage them in their work. From these letters we learn the purpose of our work, the qualifications of those who are to do it, and how to do the work itself. These books are invaluable for all Christian pastors and missionaries. We will be studying these letters later as we consider the qualifications of a missionary.

After his stay in Nicopolis Paul seems to have spent some time in Troas, Corinth, and Miletus. He was then arrested a second time and transported to Rome, where he was tried, convicted, and executed. Before his death Paul wrote his second letter to Timothy. Although the situation was bleak – both for himself and his Gospel ministry – because of persecution and false teaching, Paul wanted the great work of missions to go on after his death. Paul told Timothy that he must continue the work and be willing to face stiff opposition as a Gospel preacher. **“Do not be ashamed of the testimony of our Lord, nor of me His prisoner, but share with me in the sufferings for the gospel according to the power of God”** (2 Timothy 1:8).

Timothy needed to be a teacher of the truth, not a false teacher. Paul wrote: **“Hold fast the pattern of sound words which you have heard from me, in faith and love which are in Christ Jesus”** (2 Timothy 1:13). The Gospel preaching must continue after Timothy was gone. Therefore, Paul said: **“The things that you have heard from me among many witnesses, commit these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also”** (2 Timothy 2:2). We do not know how future teachers and preachers were trained in those days, but they passed on the Gospel to others in those days of severe persecution, a persecution that continued for many years.

At this time the textbook for training teachers was the Old Testament Scriptures, which was supplemented by the writings of the apostles and their associates. These later writings were gathered and preserved by the various congregations and copied again and again for future generations. Paul reminded Timothy: **“You must continue in the things which you have learned and been assured of, knowing from whom you have learned them, and that from childhood you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is given by inspiration of God (breathed out by God), and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work”** (2 Timothy 3:14-17).

During this second imprisonment in Rome Paul did not expect to be released. He wrote: **“The time of my departure is at hand.”** He was looking ahead to **“the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give to me on that Day, and not to me only but also to all who have loved His appearing”** (2 Timothy 4:6-8). He was still concerned with the work of his associates: Crescens, Titus, Tychicus, Mark, Carpus, Aquila and Priscilla, Erastus, and Trophimus. Luke, the author of Acts, was with him to the end. Paul’s eternal future was assured because of Jesus Christ and the work of the Holy Spirit. **“The Lord will deliver me from every evil work and preserve me for His heavenly kingdom. To Him be glory forever and ever. Amen!”** (2 Timothy 4:18).

Questions

1. Which four letters did Paul write as a prisoner in Rome?
2. Which doctrines are taught in Paul’s letter to the Ephesians?
3. How is Christ exalted in Paul’s letter to the Colossians?
4. Who was Onesimus, and why was Paul returning him to Philemon?
5. What happened to Epaphroditus after he delivered the gift from Philippi?
6. What comparison did Paul make between life and death in his letter to the Philippians?
7. What did Paul mean by saying we are citizens of heaven?
8. What evidence is there that Paul went to Spain?
9. How did Paul arrange for mission work to continue after his death?
10. What did Paul expect to happen to him at his death? What about us?



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Missiology

Lesson 16 – Objective Justification and Christian Missions

Many Christian missionaries who work in the world today do not have a clear understanding of the Bible's teaching concerning what we call objective or universal justification. Therefore, it is good at this point to review this teaching and show how it applies to our mission. As one teacher has said: objective justification provides the motive, the message, and the method in mission outreach.

The apostle Paul wrote to the Corinthians: **"If One died for all, then all died; and He died for all"** (2 Corinthians 5:14-15). All human beings are sinners, and Jesus died for them all. He died not only for the benefit of all, but in place of all. Thus, Jesus' death on the cross in place of sinful mankind has the same result as if all mankind had died for their own sins. In other words, the punishment endured by Jesus on the cross for all human sins was the payment for all sins. Since Jesus was punished for the sins of all sinners, all sinners have been freed from the punishment they deserve.

A few verses later in this letter, Paul spelled this out even more clearly. He wrote: **"Now all things are of God, who has reconciled us to Himself through Jesus Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation, that is, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing their trespasses to them, and has committed to us the word of reconciliation"** (2 Corinthians 5:18-19).

Notice that we do not reconcile God to ourselves by our actions or by who we are. God is the One who has done the reconciling, and He has done it through Jesus Christ, His Son. How did He do it? **"He (God) made Him (Jesus) who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him"** (2 Corinthians 5:21).

The question then becomes this: Who is meant by the **"us"** in 2 Corinthians 5:18 and the **"us"** in 2 Corinthians 5:21? Not just Jews! Not just white people! Not just professing Christians! Not just those born and raised in so-called "Christian" countries! No, if One died for all, then they all died. If Jesus took the punishment for sin in place of all sinners, then all sinners have had their sins punished. This is spelled out in 2 Corinthians 5:19, where we read: **"God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing their trespasses to them."** Paul is talking about the reconciliation of the world, not just some persons in the world; he is talking about the entire world: all sinners of every age and every place. All sinners the world over were enemies of God because of their sin – sin which God hates and must punish. But God counted the sins of the world as the sins of Christ, for He punished Christ in place of the world because He was bearing the sins of the world. He counted our

sins as the sins of Christ and punished Christ in full for all our sins. That is what was happening on the cross when Jesus cried out that God had forsaken Him. The curse of our sin was laid on Jesus, and He bore it all in His own body.

Since God counted the world's sins as Christ's sins and punished Him for them, God does not count the sins of the world against the world. These are wonderful words for us who are in the world: **"Not imputing their trespasses to them."** God does not count the sins of the world against the world. He does not impute their trespasses to them, that is, to the world. Since He does not count the sins of the world against the world, that means He declares the world forgiven; He declares the world righteous. The world becomes the righteousness of God in Christ.

This is what we mean by the term "objective justification" or "universal justification". God has declared the whole world forgiven and righteous because of Christ. It is called "objective" because it is a fact based on a factual happening regardless of whether it is believed or accepted or not. It is called "universal" because it is true for every individual sinner, because Jesus died for all, and God has declared the whole world righteous in Christ. In essence, this is what the Gospel or Good News is. God in Christ has won forgiveness for all, and therefore He has accomplished salvation for all and won eternal life for all. What better news could there possibly be?

When Jesus died on the cross and rose again, the status of the world before God was changed from an unredeemed world to a redeemed world, from an unreconciled world to a reconciled world, from an unjustified world to a justified world, from an unsaved world to a saved world.

What happened on the cross did not change God, for God is unchangeable; He has always desired the salvation of sinners; this has been His attitude from eternity. The Good News of Jesus Christ has been God's plan from the beginning.

What happened on the cross and at Easter did not change man either. But it changed his *status* before God. But this change in status cannot do the individual sinner any good until he or she knows about it and begins to trust in it. Unless someone tells a person about this status change, they cannot trust in it. That is why Paul wrote to the Romans: **"How shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher? And how shall they preach unless they are sent?"** (Romans 10:14-15). Those who have already been brought to faith in Christ by hearing the Good News become those who tell others of what Christ has done. They become preachers of the Gospel of Christ. And certain ones among the Christians are called by God through His Church to be missionaries and spokesmen on behalf of those who sent them. Their task is to be ambassadors for Christ to whom the word of reconciliation has been committed. As Paul wrote: **"Now then, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were pleading through us: we implore you on Christ's behalf, be reconciled to God"** (2 Corinthians 5:20). In other words, accept the Good

News we bring you. Receive the forgiveness and salvation that Jesus won for you. This forgiveness and salvation is for the world, for every individual in the world, and therefore also for you. Take it and trust in it. That is why God has brought this Good News to you.

But we must also understand that not everyone who hears this Gospel – the Good News that God has reconciled the world to Himself through Christ – accepts it or believes it or trusts in it. In fact, it is impossible for human beings to accept the Gospel of Christ when it is brought to them. Paul wrote to the Christians in Corinth: **“As it is written: ‘Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor have entered into the heart of man the things which God has prepared for those who love Him’”** (1 Corinthians 2:9). Why is that so? Paul explained: **“The natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him”** (1 Corinthians 2:14).

But what is impossible for human beings is not impossible for the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit works through the Gospel that is heard to change the sinner’s heart from unbelief to faith. **“So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God”** (Romans 10:17). **“God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ”** (Ephesians 2:4-5). Therefore, **“No one can say that Jesus is Lord except by the Holy Spirit”** (1 Corinthians 12:3). Jesus Himself said: **“No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him”** (John 6:44). Jesus said: **“It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh profits nothing. The words that I speak to you are spirit, and they are life”** (John 6:63). **“No one can come to Me unless it has been granted to him by My Father”** (John 6:65).

The Holy Spirit does His work of conversion and creating faith through the Word of God, as it is spoken or read or remembered from a previous hearing. He also uses God’s Word connected with the sacraments of Baptism and the Lord’s Supper. The Holy Spirit does not do His work outside of or apart from these means of grace: the Gospel in both Word and Sacrament.

This is why Jesus wants all His followers to proclaim and teach the Gospel. He said, **“Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature”** (Mark 16:15). Everyone needs to know that God has reconciled the world to Himself through Christ, so that the Holy Spirit will be able to use this message to persuade and convince sinners to trust in Christ and His work of reconciliation for their salvation. God does not want the precious Good News of what Jesus accomplished for the world to be wasted by not being heard by those who need to hear it. It is the Christian mission to bring this message to the world; it is the Holy Spirit’s task to use the Gospel of Christ to create saving faith in Christ in the hearts of sinners who hear the Gospel.

What is to motivate us believers in Christ to bring this Gospel to as many persons as possible? Paul answers that it is the love of Christ: **“The love of Christ compels us, because we judge thus: that if One died for all, then all died: and He died for all, that those who live should live no longer for themselves, but for Him who died for them and rose again”** (2 Corinthians 5:14-15). When we see Christ’s love reaching out to all sinners and crediting Christ’s righteousness to the whole world, this love of Christ moves us – even compels us – to bring this good news to the world.

How should we think about the individual sinners in the world? **“From now on, we regard no one according to the flesh”** (2 Corinthians 5:16). Rather, we regard every person we meet as someone for whom Christ died, as someone whom Christ redeemed, as someone whom God has declared righteous because of Christ’s reconciliation of the world to God. We no longer judge others as the world does. We do not see people as male or female, slave or free, Jew or Gentile, rich or poor, black or white or yellow or red or brown, young or old, healthy or sick, handsome or ugly, educated or ignorant. They are all persons for whom Christ died; they are all part of the world that Christ reconciled to God.

We have been made alive again spiritually by the Holy Spirit working through the Gospel. Jesus’ death had this very purpose: **“that those who live should live no longer for themselves, but for Him who died for them and rose again”** (2 Corinthians 5:15). Believers have Christ’s love for them and the world He has saved as a motive for wanting to bring the Gospel of Christ to others. **“We make it our aim ... to be well pleasing to Him”** (2 Corinthians 5:9). **“It is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me”** (Galatians 2:20).

Besides giving us the motivation for our Christian mission, the teaching of objective justification gives us the content of what we are to say to sinners. Paul says: **“We are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were pleading through us: we implore you on Christ’s behalf, be reconciled to God”** (2 Corinthians 5:20). So, on the one hand we say that God has reconciled the world to God through Christ. In other words, the reconciliation has already been completed. Nevertheless, when we say: **“Be reconciled to God”**, we are pleading with and imploring our listeners to take and receive the gift of reconciliation which

Christ has won for them. This implies that we must show sinners their great need for reconciliation. This means talking to them about sin and God's Law and the threat of punishment, but only as preparation for the good news of world reconciliation and world justification through Christ. What can give us greater joy than to share this good news with someone who recognizes their sins against God and the horrors of what they deserve because of their sins? For **"Jesus Christ the righteous ... is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the whole world"** (1 John 2:1-2).

As an ambassador for Christ, the missionary is deeply concerned that the message of reconciliation he brings will be received. He cannot on his own make people believe his message. Conversion cannot be forced or commanded. Conversion is the work of the Holy Spirit, and the Holy Spirit alone can bring it about. But the ambassador certainly wants his listeners to receive and benefit from the blessing he is bringing them. For that reason, a missionary will earnestly pray for God's blessing on the words he speaks. He knows the value of the blessing he is bringing because he treasures this blessing in his own heart. He knows that those who reject the Gospel he brings will be damned eternally, not because Jesus did not redeem them, but because they refuse to accept the Gospel, which is the only way by which they can be saved. He wants his listeners to be assured of their eternal salvation through faith in the Christ that he is proclaiming, so there will be a concern and an urgency in his message. There will be a sense of concern and urgency as he implores and pleads with his hearers to take God's free gift of forgiveness in Christ and enjoy its blessings now and for eternity. Paul wrote: **"We then as workers together with Him (God) also plead with you not to receive the grace of God in vain. ... Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation"** (2 Corinthians 6:1-2).

Since an understanding of objective justification is so important for the proper preaching of the Gospel, the devil has worked through the centuries to introduce various false teachings that lead away from this truth. Most missionaries today go astray in their presentation of the Gospel by telling people that God will forgive their sins if they, on their part, make a free will decision to accept Christ and follow Him. In other words, they say that God is making an offer to them, and it is up to them to use their free will to accept the message. They use this style of speaking: "If you believe, God will forgive your sins and save you." In other words, a person's salvation depends on the person.

These teachers are correct when they say that Jesus died for everyone on the cross and that He rose again. But they err when they imply that any sinner has the free will to accept Christ. The Bible clearly teaches that by nature we are all dead in sins and therefore cannot contribute a single thing to bring ourselves to spiritual life. God is the only One who can bring us to faith, and He does that through the preaching of the true Gospel of Christ. This true Gospel is that Jesus died for all sinners on the cross, that God has accepted Christ's sacrifice and that everyone's sins, therefore, have already been punished in Christ. Everyone

has forgiveness already because of Christ. It is not something that will be given to person only when and if they do something first.

Here are some examples of what we mean. Some people say: “God is willing to forgive your sins if you do good works of love others to earn your salvation.” Others say: “God is willing to forgive your sins if you are sorry for your sins.” Others say: “God is willing to forgive you if you believe.” In other words, man must contribute something to earn the forgiveness of sins for himself. All these statements are denials of the Bible’s teaching that we are saved by grace alone. Some of the preachers and missionaries who have placed conditions the Gospel by their “ifs” include Jacob Arminius, John Wesley, and Billy Graham.

Martin Luther, on the other hand, was taught by the Holy Spirit in Scripture that man can do nothing to contribute to his own salvation; salvation is entirely a gift of God. He wrote in the *Small Catechism*: “*I believe that by my own understanding or strength I cannot believe in Jesus Christ my Lord or come to Him, but instead the Holy Spirit has called me through the gospel, enlightened me with His gifts, made me holy and kept me in the true faith, just as He calls, gathers, enlightens, and makes holy the whole Christian Church on earth and keeps it with Jesus Christ in the one common true faith*” (*Book of Concord*, pp. 355-356, Kolb-Wengert Edition, explanation of the Third Article of the Apostle’s Creed).

On the other hand, the devil has led other teachers into an opposite error that changes the true Gospel into something that is not good news at all. John Calvin, for example, taught that from eternity God decided to save some people and decided to condemn everyone else. According to this teaching Jesus came into the world, not to save all sinners, but only those whom God wanted saved. Therefore, we cannot tell sinners the Good News that Jesus died for all, or that God has declared the whole world forgiven because of Christ’s atonement. We must even say that God does not want to save all sinners, but only those whom God chose to be His. This is not the true Gospel of Christ! It is contrary to what Scriptures clearly teach about Jesus’ death for all, about God’s desire to save all, and it certainly does not agree with the Bible’s teaching concerning universal reconciliation and universal justification.

We conclude this section by quoting from David Kuske, a Bible teacher who understands why the teaching of objective justification is so important. He has written:

“It is of little comfort for a troubled soul to hear an ambassador of Christ say to him: ‘Son, be of good cheer; the moment you believe your sins will be forgiven you.’ This is of little comfort to him because requiring faith as a condition which man must fulfill before being forgiven turns the blessed gospel into law. The law does make promises, but they are always conditional (e.g., “*If* a man does my statutes, he shall live in them”). The gospel promises are unconditional. The gospel then can only be an announcing of what God has done for us, never a suggestion of what we must still do. As soon as even one condition is attached to God’s gift of salvation, the gospel ceases to be the offer of a free gift, and it becomes instead the proposal of a bargain.

“But didn’t the jailer of Philippi ask: ‘What must I do to be saved?’ and wasn’t the answer given: ‘Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved’? Yes, but if we understand this statement of Paul in the light of what he writes a dozen times elsewhere, this exhortation by Paul is not a law order telling the jailer that there was only one big hurdle left between him and heaven. Instead it was an invitation which encouraged the jailer to stop thinking about what he must do and rather accept what Christ had done for him.

“This too is the way that we want to carry on our mission outreach, namely, according to our Lutheran heritage which is firmly founded on the Scriptural truth of objective justification. Luther wrote, ‘What sin, then, remains on earth? Nothing remains except the failure to accept this Savior and the will not to accept Him who puts away sin. ... Therefore the world is no longer punished or damned because of other sins, since Christ has wiped out all of them. Only the resolve not to acknowledge or accept Him remains sin in the New Testament.’

“May we then who by God’s grace have learned to know God as the one who reconciled all men to Himself in Christ and as one who has laid on us the responsibility of administering his word of reconciliation – may we be faithful ambassadors who in our mission outreach are compelled by Christ’s love to approach all men with this concerned and earnest appeal: **‘We implore you on Christ’s behalf: Be reconciled to God. God made Him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.’** And as we thus administer God’s-Christ-worked-world-reconciliation, may God bless His Word with rich fruit which redounds to His glory.”¹

¹ Kuske, David “Making Use of Our Lutheran Heritage: ‘Objective Justification’ in our Mission Outreach Based on an Exegesis of 2 Corinthians 5:18–19,” *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly*, Vol. 77, 1 (January 1980)).

Questions

1. What is meant by objective justification?
2. What is meant by universal justification?
3. Where is object/universal justification taught in the Bible?
4. What makes the Gospel of Christ such good news for sinners everywhere?
5. How can sinners lose out on the salvation that has been won for them?
6. What is the only way by which sinners can receive justification?
7. Why is it impossible for sinners to receive justification for themselves?
8. Whose work is it to persuade sinners to receive God's forgiveness?
9. How does this One do His work of persuading and converting sinners?
10. What is the missionary's part in this work?
11. What can the missionary not do in carrying out his mission?
12. What is wrong with the presentation of many missionaries today?
13. What is the difference between: "If you believe, you will be forgiven" and: "You have been forgiven. Believe it."
14. How did John Calvin change the Good News of Christ into bad news?
15. What did Luther mean when he said that unbelief is the only sin that remains on earth?



Provided by the Church of the Lutheran Confession - Board of Missions

Missiology

Lesson 17 – Universalism and Syncretism as Threats to Christian Missions

The Holy Spirit teaches universal justification in the Scriptures, but He does not teach *universalism*. What is universalism? It is the false teaching that all persons everywhere will eventually be saved regardless of whether or not they believe in Jesus Christ. There are many varieties of universalism, but all of them deny the clear teaching of the Holy Spirit. Obviously, if universalism is true, there is no reason for Christian mission work. There is no reason to devote time and energy to bringing the Good News of Jesus Christ to all corners of the world, if all persons do not really need to hear the Gospel of Jesus in order to be saved. If eternal life is the final fate of all persons everywhere, then there is no such thing as hell or eternal punishment. So-called Christian churches that accept universalism have no desire to bring the true Gospel of Christ to people to change them from unbelievers to believers or bring them out of the darkness into the light of Christ's kingdom. If such churches still conduct mission work, their mission is not to bring people to faith in Christ but to improve their living conditions in this world. That is all they hope to accomplish.

There was once a denomination in the United States that was known to teach universalism. This group later joined the Unitarians, who deny the doctrine of the Trinity. The merged group is now known as the Unitarian Universalist Association. This group, however, has remained fairly small. But the teachings of universalism have invaded many Protestant groups today. For example, many teach that Jesus is the Savior of the world, but that it is not necessary to have personal faith in Jesus to enjoy the salvation He has won for all. The so-called mainline Protestant churches have likewise given up the task of bringing people to faith in Christ in favor of sponsoring various social causes that they consider more important and necessary than preaching faith in Christ as the only way to eternal life. Even the Roman Catholic Church has made official statements that support universalism.

But if we want to be Christians, we need to be bound by what the Holy Spirit says in the Scriptures, not by what is considered the prevalent belief in our age. What do the Scriptures say? The answer is plain. Jesus Himself said: **"God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life"** (John 3:16). Eternal life is not promised to everyone, but only to those who believe in Jesus. Again Jesus said: **"I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me"** (John 14:6). Jesus taught that He would come again as Judge of all, and everyone would be separated into two groups: the one group entering **"eternal life"** and the other group enduring **"everlasting punishment"** (Matthew 25:46). Before He ascended to heaven, Jesus told His disciples: **"Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every**

creature. He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned” (Mark 16:15-16).

Christ’s apostles taught the same thing as their Master. Peter was filled with the Holy Spirit when he said concerning Jesus Christ: **“Nor is there salvation in any other: for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved” (Acts 4:12).** In fact, Peter claimed that this was also the message of the Old Testament prophets: **“To Him all the prophets witness that, through His name, whoever believes in Him will receive remission of sins” (Acts 10:43).** The Apostle Paul’s writings and his entire mission work are based on the premise that faith in Jesus is necessary for salvation. He wrote that God is **“the Justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus” (Romans 3:26).** Paul also clearly taught that those who reject Jesus and His work of redemption **“shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power, when He comes, in that Day, to be glorified in His saints and to be admired among all those who believe” (2 Thessalonians 1:9-10).** The testimony of Jesus’ apostle John is clear and plain: **“God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son. He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life” (1 John 5:11-12).** These testimonies could be multiplied many times over.

One of our confessions, the Brief Statement of 1932, summarizes this teaching in this way: *“Since God has reconciled the whole world unto Himself through the vicarious life and death of His Son and has commanded that the reconciliation effected by Christ be proclaimed to men in the Gospel, to the end that they may believe it (2 Cor. 5:18-19; Rom. 1:5), therefore faith in Christ is the only way for men to obtain personal reconciliation with God, that is, forgiveness of sins, as both the Old and the New Testament Scriptures testify (Acts 10:43; Jn. 3:16-18, 36).”*

Certain false-teaching groups such as Jehovah’s Witnesses and Seventh Day Adventists have long denied the teachings of eternal punishment and the existence of hell. Some of them teach annihilation, that is, that unbelievers are not punished eternally, but simply cease to exist. This teaching has also crept into some mainline Protestant churches as well. Even the present pope of the Roman Catholic Church (Pope Francis) has been quoted as telling an atheist that there is no hell (but the Vatican denies that the pope really said this). Obituaries of persons who die often speak of the departed as going to heaven, and this is stated even of those who were not followers of Christ. These are all universalist ideas that are common in our present world and often expressed by persons who claim to be Christians.

Another threat to Christian mission work is the notion of *syncretism*, which means the joining together of opposing religions; is the thought that Christianity is not a separate or unique religion but as basically the same as all other religions. Syncretists do not believe that Christianity is the only religion that saves. They think there is good in all religions, and there is nothing wrong with combining religions or taking what is good in each and mixing them together into some kind of world religion that fits everyone. Syncretism does not distinguish

between true teaching and false teaching but delights in bringing different beliefs and religions together. Syncretism tends to believe that there is no such thing as false teaching at all. One example of syncretism that is present in Africa is following Christian and traditional beliefs, such as voodoo, at the same time.

In the seventeenth century a German ruler wanted one single religion in his kingdom. Therefore, he attempted to force Lutherans and the Reformed into one church union. Those who objected to this union resisted his attempts, and some of them migrated to the United States or to Australia to escape such a forced union. Those who approved the union were guilty of the sin of *unionism*, and this term is still used today to describe the situation when those professing one doctrine form unions or cooperate with those who profess a different doctrine.

What does the Holy Spirit say about syncretism and unionism? His answer is clear. Jesus told His disciples: **“Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and the leaven of Herod”** (Mark 8:15). He compared their false teaching to leaven or yeast that gradually makes its way into the dough. False teaching spreads and grows and eventually drives out the true teaching if it is not eliminated. Likewise, Jesus told His followers: **“Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ravenous wolves”** (Matthew 7:15). Jesus taught His disciples that they should teach His Word and His Word only: **“If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed. And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free”** (John 8:31-32).

Christ’s apostles were therefore always concerned about the intrusion of false teaching. Paul instructed Timothy: **“Charge some that they teach no other doctrine”** (1 Timothy 1:3). **“If anyone teaches otherwise and does not consent to wholesome words, even the words of our Lord Jesus Christ, and to the doctrine which accords with godliness, he is proud, knowing nothing”** (1 Timothy 6:3-4). Paul regards even the smallest false teaching to be dangerous, warning the Galatians: **“A little leaven leavens the whole lump”** (Galatians 5:9). The only proper way to deal with false teaching and false teachers is to avoid them and not participate with them in any way. **“I urge you, brethren, note those who cause divisions and offenses contrary to the doctrine which you learned, and avoid them”** (Romans 16:17). The apostle John wrote: **“If anyone comes to you, and does not bring this doctrine, do not receive him into your house nor greet him; for he who greets him shares in his evil deeds”** (2 John 10-11).

We confess what is written in the *Brief Statement* about unionism: *“Since God ordained that His Word only, without the admixture of human doctrine, be taught and believed in the Christian Church (1 Pet. 4:11; Jn. 8:31-32; 1 Tim. 6:3-4), all Christians are required by God to discriminate between orthodox and heterodox church bodies (Mt. 7:15), to have church fellowship only with orthodox church bodies, and, in case they have strayed into heterodox church bodies, to leave them (Rom. 16:17). We repudiate unionism, that is, church fellowship with the adherents of false doctrine, as disobedience to God’s command, as causing divisions*

in the Church (Rom. 16:17; 2 Jn. 9-10), and as involving the constant danger of losing the Word of God entirely (2 Tim. 2:17-21)."

An orthodox church body teaches God's Word in its truth and purity without mixing in any false teachings. A heterodox church body may still teach the Gospel of Christ to some extent and may accept some or many of the doctrines of Scripture, but at the same time it tolerates the continued existence of false teaching in its midst. It is necessary for all Christians to compare what a person teaches with what God's Word teaches. Those who are church leaders should be especially on guard against the intrusion of error. The apostle Paul told the leaders of the Ephesian congregation: **"Take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood. For I know this, that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock. Also from among yourselves men will rise up, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after themselves. Therefore watch"** (Acts 20:28-31).

This teaching of God's Word makes it impossible for us to join in mission work with any group that promotes or tolerates any kind of false teaching. To many this is too great a hindrance to doing mission work, and they cannot accept God's command to separate from false teacher. But as far as God is concerned, He can work with few as well as with many. The apostle Paul certainly believed in bringing the Gospel of Christ to as many people as possible. But Paul resisted any attempt to change, pervert, or water down the Gospel to make it more acceptable to the world or to avoid persecution. As far as we are concerned, we should be ready to yield to others and make compromises for the sake of peace so long as it does not involve compromising God's word. When God's Word is involved, we dare not yield at all.

As we study church history, we see that syncretism and unionism tend to lead toward universalism. At first people are willing to work together with those who tolerate only a very little bit of false teaching, but then more and more false teaching is accepted and tolerated. For example, let us say we form a union of all those who call themselves Lutherans, even though some of these Lutherans tolerate false teaching. After a while we will be tempted to work together with some Protestant churches as well, because they teach the basically the same thing as we do in most areas of Bible teaching, even though we are not completely agreed on that the Bible says about Baptism and the Lord's Supper, for example. Then we might begin to think that we can make a bigger impact on the world if all the Christian groups join forces in one large group. What they teach in detail is no longer important as long as they call Jesus their Lord. After some time, we might begin think it is important to work together with the Roman Catholic Church as well. Perhaps the idea of having an earthly leader, like the pope, is not such a bad idea after all. Perhaps the teachings that they have added to the Bible are not so evil after all. It is easy to tolerate more and more false teaching, until we begin even to work together even with those religions that deny that

Jesus is the Son of God, such as the Jews and Muslims. After all, we do agree that there is only one God. And then eventually our syncretism leads us to universalism, namely, to believe that it does not make much difference what you believe about God or religion, because we will all reach the same place anyway. Many people really believe this, and some of them even want to be called Christians. The “mission work” that such people do is nothing more than social work, humanitarian aid, and political action. It is not preaching Christ and Him crucified and risen.

In 1910 many church leaders gathered for a conference in Edinburgh, Scotland, with the purpose of uniting all Protestant missions together to evangelize the whole world in one generation. At that time, they still generally believed in the authority of Scripture, the necessity of faith in Christ for salvation, and the importance of bringing the Gospel of Christ to every nation in the world. But the false teachings they tolerated when joining together became a leaven or yeast that grew and gradually prevailed, so that now we have such agencies as the National Council of Churches and the World Council of Churches that have almost nothing to do with the preaching of the true Gospel of Christ. Most so-called Lutherans in the world are full partners in these agencies and are thereby unfaithful to Christ, unfaithful to the Gospel, and unfaithful to the Lutheran confessions as well.

Perhaps it will be helpful to present two opposing views on various doctrinal questions. The one view will present the true Christian teaching. The other view will be the view of most leaders in the universalist and ecumenical camp. The Christian view will be Position A. The opposing view will be Position B.

Position A: Jesus Christ is the only way to heaven. Those who die without faith in Him are lost in hell.

Position B: Jesus Christ is not the only way to heaven. Sincere followers of non-Christian religions may also get to heaven. We must allow for the possibility of universalism.

Position A: The primary mission of the church is the proclamation of the saving Gospel of Jesus Christ. Genuine Christian love, of course, will always result in ministering to the earthly needs of people as well.

Position B: Christians should not seek to “convert” sincere followers of other religions who also teach concern for mankind. Instead, we should join our efforts with theirs in the true spirit of Jesus. Other religions are equally as valid as Christianity when the followers are sincere.

Position A: Confessional Lutherans should not join the World Council of Churches. Its primary emphasis is political and does not focus on bringing the Gospel of Christ to the world.

Position B: Lutherans should join the World Council of Churches and participate in improving human conditions in the world.

You may realize that the congregation or church body that you are a member of tolerates false teaching of one kind or another. In such cases the Lord Himself tells you what to do. You must leave that congregation or church body and find a group that is truly orthodox – one that supports and cooperates only with true teachers of God’s Word in bringing the true Gospel to the world.

An interest in mission work should never lead us to become indifferent to what God says about separating from error. It is also true that an interest in what God’s Word says about separating from error should never lead us to become indifferent towards mission work. Both are necessary and important.

Questions

1. What is the difference between universal justification and universalism?
2. Why is true mission work unimportant to universalists?
3. Show from Scripture that universalism is a false teaching.
4. What do Jehovah’s Witnesses and Seventh Day Adventists teach about hell?
5. Prove from Scripture that there is such a place as hell.
6. What is meant by syncretism?
7. What warning from Scripture do syncretists ignore?
8. What is meant by unionism?
9. What is God’s instruction concerning those who follow false teaching?
10. Why is it important for us not to join the World Council of Churches?
11. How does syncretism lead to universalism?
12. How do universalism and syncretism pose a threat to Christian missions?
13. What is our Lord’s instruction to Christians who find themselves in a heterodox church organization?



Provided by the Church of the Lutheran Confession - Board of Missions

Missiology

Lesson 18 – The Church Growth Movement as a Threat to Christian Missions

The Church of Jesus Christ grows in two ways: it grows in numbers, and it grows spiritually. Of the Christian congregation in Jerusalem, we are told: **“And the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved”** (Acts 2:47). On the day of Pentecost **“three thousand ... were added”** (Acts 2:41) to the church. In Acts 4:4 we read: **“And the number of the men came to be about five thousand.”** In Acts 5:14 we read: **“Believers were increasingly added to the Lord, multitudes of both men and women.”**

Another way in which the Church grows is in spiritual growth; it grows in faith and love. The apostle Paul wrote to the Christians in Thessalonica: **“May the Lord make you increase and abound in love to one another and to all”** (1 Thessalonians 3:12). Later he wrote again to them, saying: **“We are bound to thank God always for you, brethren, as it is fitting, because your faith grows exceedingly, and the love of every one of you all abounds toward each other”** (2 Thessalonians 1:3).

Notice that it is the Lord who causes both growth in numbers and growth in faith and love. It is the Lord who adds to the Church. It is the Lord who makes Christians increase in faith and love. The Lord brings about both kinds of growth through His Word and Sacraments, that is, through the means of grace. Therefore, if we want the Church to grow (and we certainly do), then we need to pray as Paul did for God’s blessings on our faithful and diligent use of the means of grace, that is, to bless the preaching of the Word and the administration of the Sacraments.

Therefore we state as our confession: *“Since it is only through the external means ordained by Him that God has promised to communicate the grace and salvation purchased by Christ, the Christian Church must not remain at home with the means of grace entrusted to it, but go into the whole world with the preaching of the Gospel and the administration of the Sacraments, Matt. 28:19-20; Mark 16:15-16. For the same reason also the churches at home should never forget that there is no other way of winning souls for the Church and keeping them with it than the faithful and diligent use of the divinely ordained means of grace. Whatever activities do not either directly apply the Word of God or subserve such application we condemn as ‘new methods,’ unchurchly activities, which do not build, but harm, the Church”* (Brief Statement of 1932, #22).

Whenever we pray **“Your Kingdom come”** (Matthew 6:10), we are praying that God would make His Church grow both outwardly and inwardly. God will answer our prayer and give us Church growth in accordance with His gracious will to save sinners.

How, then, can any movement called “the Church Growth Movement” be a threat to Christian missions? The problem is that the Church Growth Movement is not satisfied with the growth in numbers that comes about through the regular use of the means of grace. The leaders in this movement have come up with various earthly methods that they think will bring about faster growth. They want to remove various barriers that they believe hinder church growth.

One way to increase in numbers is to change the message that Christ has given us to make it less offensive to unbelievers. In other words, we make it easier for outsiders to join a Christian congregation by eliminating parts of the message that are difficult to accept. To say that Jesus is the only Savior of the world and that all non-Christian religions cannot save anyone is a hard saying for some people. To say that non-Christians will go to an eternal hell if they do not come to faith in Christ is a hard saying for many. To say that most modern scientists are wrong when they claim that the world evolved over millions of years is very hard for many educated people to accept. To say that certain sexual practices are contrary to God’s will makes some people turn away from the Gospel. When growth in numbers becomes more important than teaching God’s Word faithfully, then we have a definite threat to genuine mission work.

Did Jesus soften or change His message to make it easier to accept? No! He made it clear that faith in Him was necessary for eternal life. He said: **“This is the will of Him who sent Me, that everyone who sees the Son and believes in Him may have everlasting life”** (John 6:40). Many of His Jewish listeners did not like to hear words like this. **“Therefore many of His disciples, when they heard this, said, ‘This is a hard saying; who can understand it?’”** (John 6:60). **“From that time many of His disciples went back and walked with Him no more”** (John 6:66). Jesus did not water down the truth to attract more followers.

The apostle Paul was not willing to change God’s Word to make it more acceptable. He wrote: **“The message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing”** (1 Corinthians 1:18). **“We preach Christ crucified, to the Jews a stumbling block and to the Greeks foolishness”** (1 Corinthians 1:23). Nevertheless, **“it pleased God through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe”** (1 Corinthians 1:21).

If Paul had accepted circumcision as necessary for salvation, he could have gained more Jewish followers. If Paul had made light of the immorality of the Gentiles, he could have gained more Gentile followers. But the fact is that when the Gospel of Christ is proclaimed as God has given it, no one can accept it on his own or by his own will power. God is the only One who can convert unbelievers, and He has given us the way by which He does His work. No unbeliever chooses to become a Christian, rather unbelievers resist Christianity because it condemns with their sinful nature. No one is by nature friendly to the idea of becoming Christians.

Because conversion depends on God, we should not judge congregations, missionaries, and pastors by how many new members they have gained. Two pastors may be preaching the

exact same true message of Christ in similar ways. God may cause the one group to increase greatly, while the other congregation may not grow much at all, and even may be declining in numbers. Does this mean that the growing congregation is more faithful than the other? Not at all. If both preachers and congregations use the means of grace faithfully and faithfully preach the Word, they are both doing what God wants them to do. God blesses with growth as He chooses.

Apollos followed the apostle Paul as preacher in the congregation at Corinth. Some people were comparing Paul and Apollos and choosing one over the other. Paul responded to this by saying: **“Who then is Paul, and who is Apollos, but ministers through whom you believed, as the Lord gave to each one? I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the increase”** (1 Corinthians 3:5-6). What God requires of congregations and pastors and missionaries is that they be faithful in the use of the Word of God. **“It is required in stewards that one be found faithful”** (1 Corinthians 4:2).

Some groups who follow the precepts of the Church Growth Movement visit the people who live in a certain community and ask them what they would like a church in their neighborhood to teach and do. Based on the answers they receive, they plan their church, its teachings, and its activities. In other words, they give the people what they want, instead of giving them what they need: namely, the Word of God in its truth and purity, even if the Word hurts people at first. Catering to what people want is the Church Growth Movement at work, and many people join such churches because they are getting what they want: mainly pleasant surroundings, activities for the young and old, friendly sermons that make everyone feel good about themselves with no mention of sin or punishment; they experience just a pleasant time. But what good is a large church with many members who are having a good time on this earth if it does not provide what Jesus called the **“one thing”** that is needed (Luke 10:42), namely, God’s clear Word – both the Law that condemns and the Gospel that brings life? God has chosen to work through the preaching and teaching of that Word.

Questions

1. In what two ways does the Lord of the Church make His Church grow?
2. What is the means by which the Lord adds to His Church?
3. What is the only way to win souls for Christ’s Church?
4. What prayer did Jesus teach us that prays for growth among Christians?
5. What is the big flaw in the so-called Church Growth Movement?
6. What happens when growth in numbers becomes more important than the truth?
7. Prove that Jesus did not soften His message to gain more followers.
8. Show that Paul did not alter the Gospel in order to gain more members.
9. What is the only thing God requires of His missionaries?
10. Why is it dangerous to compare congregations on the basis of numerical growth?
11. What is wrong with the church trying to give people what they want?



Provided by the Church of the Lutheran Confession - Board of Missions

Missiology

Lesson 19 – The Charismatic Movement as a Threat to Christian Missions

Many of the fastest growing churches in the world today are churches that have been influenced by the charismatic movement. This is true especially of the Protestant churches that have developed in Central America and South America. But it is true of churches in other parts of the world as well.

The charismatic movement is characterized by what are considered special gifts of the Holy Spirit. We believe that the Holy Spirit works by means of the Gospel and the Gospel sacraments of Baptism and the Lord's Supper. But charismatic churches strive for additional gifts of the Spirit that, in their eyes, are more effective than the bare preaching of the Gospel and the use of the Sacraments.

There have been outbreaks of charismatic religion from time to time among Christians since the days of the apostles. The modern-day charismatic movement got its start in Arminian and Methodist groups that emphasized the importance of man's free will in making a decision for Christ. They developed various methods to bring about conversion to Christ, such as emotional appeals, a certain kind of music, and attempts to work up enthusiasm (feelings) in the assemblies.

So-called holiness churches began to emphasize that conversion from unbelief to faith in Christ was not enough. It was necessary to obtain a second blessing, in which the Holy Spirit would make you really holy. Some even claimed that through this second blessing they would become completely holy and without sin in their daily living.

In the last part of the nineteenth century some were not satisfied with the "first blessing" and the "second blessing". They taught that Christians should strive for a third blessing in which the Holy Spirit would enter into them and show Himself by strange body movements and the speaking in strange languages. They believed they were being baptized with the Holy Spirit and fire. One person described it in this way: "Those receiving the 'fire' would often shout, scream, speak in tongues, fall into trances, and even get the jerks." All these actions were supposedly caused by the Holy Spirit. It is the way a person could prove that he was truly a Spirit-filled Christian.

On December 31, 1900, one of these Holiness preachers in the state of Kansas in the United States laid his hands on the head of a female student, and she began to speak in a language that could not be understood by others. At first it was hoped that she was speaking a definite foreign language as the Christians did on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2), but they soon learned that what she was speaking was not a foreign language, but simply a language

of her own making. This tongue-speaking was imitated and promoted by many others, and soon Pentecostalism was spreading in the United States and many other countries in the world. Large Pentecostalist church bodies were formed, such as the Assemblies of God and The Church of God in Christ. These churches teach that speaking in tongues is a gift that every Christian should seek, and that it is the definite proof of the presence of the Holy Spirit.

The Pentecostalist churches have spread their version of Christianity throughout the world. The largest Protestant churches in South America are Pentecostalist churches. The Pentecostalists have used radio and television to spread their teaching everywhere. Among the well-known Pentecostalist preachers have been Oral Roberts, Jimmy Swaggart, and Jim Bakker. As is almost always the case with famous people, many of these popular preachers have been caught in scandals having to do with money or sex. They begin to think that because they have the Holy Spirit guiding them, they do not have to concern themselves with morality according to the Ten Commandments.

At first this tongue-speaking was prevalent only in Pentecostalist churches. But since 1960 preachers from other church bodies, such as Episcopalian, Methodist, Lutheran, and Roman Catholic churches, have begun to promote tongue-speaking and other so-called special gifts of the Holy Spirit. These churches and their leaders often lead members away from other churches because their worship is more exciting and emotional in an outward way. They claim to do miracles, heal the sick, and even receive direct messages from God. Their claim is that they are closer to the true apostolic church than other churches because they have the Holy Spirit and His special gifts just like the church in Corinth. But the fact is that the apostle Paul deemphasized the speaking in tongues which was occurring in Corinth, and urged instead speaking plainly in a language that everyone could understand. He also urged the Corinthians to act love toward others and worship in an orderly manner. In fact, Paul forbade the speaking in tongues in a church service if there was no one who could understand and translate what was being said. Read 1 Corinthians chapters 12-14.

What then are the dangers in Pentecostalism and the charismatic movement that threaten genuine Christian missions? Here is a short list:

- It emphasizes subjective religious experience over the teaching and study of the Holy Scriptures.
- It makes a distinction between ordinary Christians and tongue-speaking Christians.
- It is very doubtful that the speaking in tongues comes from the Holy Spirit since it generally promotes false teaching contrary to the Holy Spirit's authentic teaching in the Bible.
- It ignores doctrinal differences and practices fellowship among charismatics from different churches, regardless of their teachings.
- The Holy Spirit is given credit for all kinds of revelations that are man-made or even Satan-inspired.

Charismatic churches have attracted many followers, some of them from other Christian church bodies. These churches stress exciting worship: lifting hands, dancing, shouting, tongue-speaking, healing. Women often lead worship services contrary to Bible teaching. New antics are sometimes introduced to keep the excitement high. One example is so-called "holy laughter" and an emotionalism that is totally out of control. The apostle Paul wrote: **"In the church I would rather speak five words with my understanding that I may teach others also, than ten thousand words in a tongue"** (1 Corinthians 14:19). And again he wrote: **"If the whole church comes together in one place, and all speak with tongues, and there come in those who are uninformed or unbelievers, will they not say that you are out of your mind?"** (1 Corinthians 14:23). **"Let all things be done decently and in order"** (1 Corinthians 14:40).

The basic problem with the charismatic movement is that the Holy Spirit is separated from the means of grace which is the true means that the Holy Spirit uses. Charismatics believe that the Holy Spirit is working apart from the means of grace, but the Bible teaches that the Holy Spirit works through the means of grace: the Gospel in Word and Sacraments. **"It pleased God through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe"** (1 Corinthians 1:21).

In the days of Martin Luther there were many radical teachers who were claiming that the Holy Spirit gave them the words they spoke, but their teaching was either contrary to or went above and beyond what the Holy Spirit had already spoken in the Holy Scriptures. Luther called such teachers Enthusiasts, and he wrote the following in *The Smalcald Articles*: *"Enthusiasm clings to Adam and his children from the beginning to the end of the world - fed and spread among them as poison by the old dragon. It is the source, power, and might of all the heresies, even that of the papacy and Mohammed. Therefore we should and must insist that God does not want to deal with us human beings, except by means of His external Word and sacrament. Everything that boasts of being from the Spirit apart from such a Word and Sacrament is of the devil"* (Book of Concord, Kolb-Wengert Edition, p. 323). This is our confession still today.

Questions

1. What is meant by a charismatic church?
2. What is most likely the reason that charismatic churches are growing?
3. What is wrong with the Arminian emphasis on free will decisions?
4. What are some of the things that go on in charismatic churches?
5. What do these churches claim about the Holy Spirit?
6. What event took place on December 31, 1900, that marked a beginning?
7. How does the Holy Spirit truly do His work?
8. What are the things that the apostle Paul stressed in 1 Corinthians 14?
9. What does it mean that the Holy Spirit works only through the means of grace?
10. What evidence is there that charismatic churches ignore doctrine?
11. What is the source of many teachings attributed to the Holy Spirit?
12. If there are charismatic churches in your area, what are they like?
13. What did Luther mean when he talked about Enthusiasm and Enthusiasts?



Provided by the Church of the Lutheran Confession - Board of Missions

Missiology

Lesson 20 – Liberation Theology as a Threat to Christian Missions

The true Gospel of Jesus Christ is a message of liberation for all the sinners in the world. The true Gospel informs them that Jesus has liberated them from sin, death, hell, and Satan by His suffering on the cross in place of all sinful mankind and by His triumphant resurrection. The Holy Spirit uses this message to work in the hearts of individual sinners to create faith in Jesus Christ and the beginning of a new spiritual life that desires to please God in its thoughts, words, and deeds. As individuals are turned by God from unbelief and ungodliness to faith in Christ and given the fruits of faith, the nation in which these individuals live and work is gradually changed also. But there will always be opposition to the Gospel of Christ in this world, and the world as such will always remain evil.

Liberation theology has something different in mind. It is not interested in changing individuals through the means of grace and the gradual growth in godliness that is a fruit of faith. Liberation theology got its start in South America in the 1960s. The problem in South America and Central America has been the huge gulf between the very few who are very rich and the very many who are very poor. Many of the leaders in both church and state were among the very rich and did little or nothing to help those who were very poor. The teachers of liberation theology believed this situation should change. They believed that the Christian Church should act on behalf of the poor and oppressed and strive to eliminate oppression and poverty by any means necessary, including social revolution. In their view, churches, both Catholic and Protestant, should help overthrow the economic and political structures of the country in order to liberate the people from poverty.

This was not the method or mission of Jesus, His apostles, or the early Church. They worked by means of the Gospel to change the hearts of individuals. They did not seek to change the political and economic structures of the Roman Empire or of the Jewish culture. The apostle Paul did not start a campaign in his congregations to bring to an end the institution of slavery or to bring to an end the practice of crucifixion. These things gradually did come to an end when more people became Christians.

In its desire to bring down the power structure of a nation and give the power to the poor and oppressed, liberation theology is similar to the philosophy of Karl Marx. Various social revolutions in countries such as China and Russia and Cuba have succeeded in bringing down those who had been in power. But the usual result is that the leaders of the revolution become the new people in power, and they again take advantage of those under them. When hearts are not changed, nothing much changes, except that different people gain control.

In the days of Martin Luther, the peasants (poor farmers) wanted Luther to be their champion and bring down the structures that were oppressing them. But Luther preached the Law and Gospel to both the peasants and their overlords; he called attention to the sins of both classes and proclaimed the Gospel of *spiritual* liberation to both classes. What Luther preached was a spiritual reformation and a spiritual liberation, not a political or a social rebellion. In doing this, he was following the direction and example of Jesus and His apostles.

Another movement that is similar in nature to liberation theology is the “social gospel” movement in North America and elsewhere. Leaders in this movement also believe that the churches should take the lead in improving conditions in this world by changing the social order by acting together as a group. In fact, mission work in these churches emphasizes stirring people up to make changes in their government, culture, and economics, rather than emphasizing the preaching the Gospel of Christ.

To this very day many denominations and federations of church bodies are more interested in social work than they are in the preaching of the Gospel. Social and political matters are the topics of their sermons and their conventions. The National Council of Churches and the World Council of Churches have also been heavily involved in social and political questions. Liberation theology likewise is more interested in social and political change than in Christian doctrine.

All the old liberation theologians were socialists. They did not accept the Bible as the inerrant Word of God. They did not accept the concept of propositional truth. They believed in the inherent goodness of each human being. They did not present Jesus as the one sacrifice for human sin, but they presented Jesus as a revolutionary martyr for a cause. Liberation theology promised liberation but delivered continued enslavement to sin and death.

Liberation theology seems to be a close relative of any theology that takes up the cause of what is perceived to be an oppressed minority. Today we have radicals pushing feminist theology and wanting to overthrow the structures that have kept women from positions of power. What God says about the roles of men and women is ignored and despised. In matters of sex and gender there are those who believe homosexual men and women have been oppressed in the past and need liberation. This is a definite example of calling good evil and evil good, something clearly condemned in Isaiah 5:20: **“Woe to those who call evil good, and good evil.”**

Liberation theology tries to involve the church of Jesus Christ in matters of politics, economics, and social structure. But Jesus told His Church to preach the Gospel. As a church, we are forbidden to use earthly methods such as political force or governmental power or violent revolution.

The Augsburg Confession discusses such matters in Article XXVIII: *“One should not mix or confuse the two authorities, the spiritual and the secular. For spiritual power has its*

command to preach the gospel and to administer the sacraments. It should not invade an alien office. It should not set up and depose kings. It should not annul or disrupt secular law and obedience to political authority, It should not make or prescribe laws for the secular power concerning secular affairs” (Book of Concord, Kolb-Wengert Edition, p. 92). Bible passages quoted in this presentation were 2 Corinthians 10:4: **“The weapons of our warfare are not carnal but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds”** and Philippians 3:20: **“For our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ.”**

Likewise, the *Brief Statement* of 1932 says in #34: *“The Church may not employ any other means than the preaching of the Word of God.”*

The *Statement of Faith and Purpose* of the Church of the Lutheran Confession likewise says in Section I: *“We reject the idea of some that the main work of the church is to promote political and social causes. Our right of existence as a church body has been established by our Lord’s commission to ‘preach the gospel to every creature’ (Mark 16:15). Therefore we are committed to say with the Apostle Paul: ‘I am determined not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified’ (1 Corinthians 2:2). As individuals, Christians will show fruits of their faith by concern for social and political issues, letting their light shine before others to the glory of God.”*

Does this mean that we have no concern for the poor and the needy? Of course not! The congregation at Jerusalem did what they could to help the poor in their midst. The apostle Paul wrote to Timothy about the care of the poor widows. Luther advised congregations in his vicinity to set up funds of money that could be used to help the poor and needy. Many of our congregations also have some organized way of helping the poor and the needy, first our brothers and sisters in the Christian faith, and then also others in the community as we are able. It is written: **“Let us not grow weary while doing good, for in due season we shall reap if we do not lose heart. Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all, especially to those who are of the household of faith”** (Galatians 6:9-10).

Questions

1. In what way is the Gospel of Christ a message of liberation?
2. Where did the so-called liberation theology get its start?
3. What kind of liberation does this liberation theology emphasize?
4. Why can we be sure that Paul did not follow the tenets of this theology?
5. In what way does liberation theology follow the views of Karl Marx?
6. What did the peasants in Germany hope that Martin Luther would do?
7. What happens to the power structure after almost every social revolution?
8. Which groups in our day have adopted liberation theology as their method?
9. What do our Lutheran confessions say about the use of worldly methods?
10. How can Christians help the poor and needy in their midst?
11. What example of helping the poor is given us in the New Testament?



Provided by the Church of the Lutheran Confession - Board of Missions

Missiology

Lesson 21 – The Qualifications of a Missionary

Every Christian is qualified to spread the Gospel of Jesus Christ. The apostle Peter wrote to all Christians: **“You are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light”** (1 Peter 2:9). Everyone who is called out of darkness into the light of faith in Jesus Christ is qualified to proclaim His praises.

But Lord has also given to His believing people the special gifts of personnel who are particularly qualified to bring the Gospel to others. The Lord gave the apostle Paul to the early Christians as one who was gifted and qualified to serve as a missionary to the Gentiles. The Lord still supplies such gifts to His Church on earth today, and through His Church He calls such individuals to serve as missionaries to work in places near and far.

We Christians are to look for persons with the qualifications listed by the apostle Paul in his letters to Timothy and Titus. We need to train such persons as well as we can for their work and then send them out to proclaim the Gospel in the Savior’s name and in our name.

These are the qualification for the public ministry as listed by Paul in his first letter to Timothy: **“This is a faithful saying: If a man desires the position of a bishop** (spiritual overseer), **he desires a good work. A bishop then must be blameless, the husband of one wife** (literally a one-woman man), **temperate, sober-minded, of good behavior, hospitable, able to teach, not given to wine, not violent, not greedy for money, but gentle, not quarrelsome, not covetous, one who rules his own house well, having his children in submission with all reverence (for if a man does not know how to rule his own house, how will he take care of the church of God?); not a novice, lest being puffed up with pride he fall into the same condemnation as the devil. Moreover he must have a good testimony among those who are outside, lest he fall into reproach and the snare of the devil”** (1 Timothy 3:1-7).

Notice that almost all of these qualifications are moral qualifications, that is, qualifications having to do with a man’s character rather than his ability. They are qualifications that all Christians should pray for and strive for, since it is God’s will for all Christians that they fit the above description. But there is one qualification that has to do with ability rather than character, and that is being **“able to teach”**. This is an ability that not all Christians have, even if they possess all the other moral qualifications. Ability to teach can be learned to some extent, but some Christians have been given this gift in greater measure than others.

Notice also that it is only men who are qualified to be spiritual overseers in Christ's Church. The apostle Paul made this very clear when he wrote to Timothy: **"I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man, but to be in silence. For Adam was formed first, then Eve"** (1 Timothy 2:12-13). Women certainly may teach children and other women, but they are not to be put in a position that requires them to teach men or to exercise a supervisory function over men in Christ's Church.

In his letter to Titus Paul lists the same qualifications for pastors, missionaries, and other spiritual supervisors (overseers). **"I left you in Crete, that you should ... appoint elders in every city as I commanded you – if a man is blameless, the husband of one wife, having faithful children not accused of dissipation or insubordination. For a bishop must be blameless, as a steward of God, not self-willed, not quick-tempered, not given to wine, not violent, not greedy for money, but hospitable, a lover of what is good, sober-minded, just, holy, self-controlled, holding fast the faithful word as he has been taught, that he may be able, by sound doctrine, both to exhort and convict those who contradict"** (Titus 1:5-9).

Notice that the ability to teach refers to the teaching of God's Word. Pastors, missionaries, and other overseers must know God's Word well enough to be able to point out the false teaching and the ungodly conduct of those who oppose God's Word as well as to encourage those who have begun to trust in Christ and walk in His ways. Paul wrote to the Corinthians: **"It is required in stewards that one be found faithful"** (1 Corinthians 4:2). He needs to be faithful in his teaching of God's Word, and he needs to be faithful in carrying out all his duties.

Shortly before he died, Paul wrote to Timothy once again and reminded him of how an ambassador of Christ should conduct himself: **"In a great house there are not only vessels of gold and silver, but also of wood and clay, some for honor and some for dishonor. Therefore if anyone cleanses himself from the latter, he will be a vessel for honor, sanctified and useful for the Master, prepared for every good work. Flee also youthful lusts; but pursue righteousness, faith, love, peace with those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart. But avoid foolish and ignorant disputes, knowing that they generate strife. And a servant of the Lord must not quarrel but be gentle to all, able to teach, patient, in humility correcting those who are in opposition, if God perhaps will grant them repentance, so that they may know the truth, and that they may come to their senses and escape the snare of the devil, having been taken captive by him to do his will"** (2 Timothy 2:20-26).

Some of Paul's last words to Timothy give every missionary and would-be missionary something to consider very carefully: **"Preach the word! Be ready in season and out of season. Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching. For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers; and they will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables. But you be watchful in**

all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry” (2 Timothy 4:2-5).

We should also mention that there may be some people, both men and women, who have the necessary qualifications to serve as assistants and helpers in the work of the church. These do not need the ability to teach, and they do not serve as overseers, but they can be very valuable workers in service to the Lord. The apostle Paul refers to them as **“deacons”** (servants or ministers) and lists their qualifications as well: **“Likewise deacons must be reverent, not double-tongued, not given to much wine, not greedy for money, holding the mystery of the faith with a pure conscience. But let these also first be tested; then let them serve as deacons, being found blameless. ... Let deacons be the husbands of one wife, ruling their children and their own houses well”** (1 Timothy 3:8-10, 12).

Many translations use the word **“wives”** in 1 Timothy 3:11, but the Greek word for women is the same as the word for wives. A better understanding of this verse, then is that Paul is talking about female deacons (deaconesses) rather than the wives of deacons, so a preferable translation would be: **“Likewise, the women** (that is, female deacons or deaconesses) **must be reverent, not slanderers, temperate, faithful in all things.”** In his letters Paul refers to several women who helped him in his work, for example, Phoebe, whom he calls **“a servant of the church in Cenchrea”** and **“a helper of many and of myself also”** (Romans 16:1-2).

The Lord Jesus Himself called Paul to be a missionary to the Gentiles, even as He called all of His apostles personally and directly. But today the Holy Spirit calls pastors, teachers, and missionaries indirectly, that is, through Christians. The group of Christians who call may be a particular congregation, or a group of congregations such as a synod, or a committee appointed by a congregation or synod to issue a call in their name. Education and training alone do not make men pastors or missionaries. A qualified person is not a pastor or missionary until he has been called by the Church in one way or another and he has accepted that call. But since God’s word says: **“If a man desires the position of a bishop, he desires a good work”** (1 Timothy 3:1), it is good for young men and even for older men to desire to be called as pastors and missionaries and to prepare themselves by the study of Scripture and other special training for the possibility of receiving such a call into the ministry. But it is only a definite call from Christians that enables a person to serve as a pastor or missionary who then speaks on behalf of the Christians who called him.

Every mission call requires certain additional qualifications, depending on the nature of the call. People working in a foreign country need to know how to adapt to strange surroundings. They may need language skills to enable them to learn and speak other languages. It is good for a missionary to have good health, emotional stability, the ability to cope with emergency situations. It is helpful if they have had some pastoral experience, if possible. The Christians who issue calls to mission work need to keep all these things in mind and choose the most qualified men for this work.

Someone with chronic health problems – either himself or in his families – should most likely not be considered for mission work in foreign countries. But sometimes the Lord calls the least likely and blesses their work. One of the first Lutheran missionaries to a foreign country was Bartholomaeus Ziegenbalg. It was said that he was “deeply intense, zealous almost in the extreme, yet suffering from a chronic physical ailment and bouts of mental depression – one wonders how many mission experts today would consider him a likely candidate for pioneering a world mission field” (*Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly*, Summer 1985, p. 189).

Another author has written: “Persons who are given to introspection, who have an inferiority complex, or who are afflicted with phobias and frustrations of various kinds usually have a difficult time adjusting to the kind of communal life found in some parts of the mission field. Poor mental health and emotional immaturity account for almost 11% of all the dropouts in missionary work” (J. Herbert Kane).

Men who are set in their ways and have strong opinions about minor matters may not be the best candidates for mission work in foreign countries. Missionaries must be adaptable – not in Christian doctrine, but only in non-doctrinal matters. They need to be able to get along with associates and fellow-Christians who are quite different from themselves in matters of everyday living.

One publication that advertised for missionaries gave these qualifications: “Ability to mix with people, mix concrete, wade rivers, write articles, love one’s neighbor, deliver babies, sit cross-legged, conduct meetings, drain swamps, digest questionable dishes, patch human weaknesses, suffer as fools gladly, and burn the midnight oil. ... Persons allergic to ants, babies, beggars, chop suey, cockroaches, curried crabs, duplicators, guitars, humidity, indifference, itches, jungles, mildew, minority groups, mud, poverty, sweat, and unmarried mothers had better think twice before applying.”

Confessional Lutherans were slow to become active in attempting mission work in countries and cultures other than their own. Some of their leaders believed that the Great Commission of Matthew 28 applied only to Jesus’ apostles. The English missionary William Carey countered this mistaken view with the following three arguments:

“First, if the command of Christ to teach all nations be restricted to the apostles, or those under the immediate inspiration of the Holy Ghost, then that of baptizing should be so too; and every denomination of Christians, except the Quakers, do wrong in baptizing with water at all.

“Secondly, if the command of Christ to teach all nations be confined to the apostles, then all such ordinary ministers who have endeavored to carry the gospel to the heathens, have acted without a warrant, and run before they were sent.

“Thirdly, if the command of Christ to teach all nations extend only to the apostles, then, doubtless, the promise of the divine presence in this world must be so limited; but this is

worded in such a manner as expressly precludes such an idea. **‘Lo, I am with you always, to the end of the world’** (Mt. 28:20)” (*Christian History*, Issue 36).

Nevertheless, some of the first missionaries to bring the Gospel of Christ to countries other than their own were Lutherans. They may not all have been orthodox in all their teachings, but they were genuinely interested in sharing the true Gospel of Christ with those who had little or no knowledge of Him.

Questions

1. Where in the Bible do we find lists of qualifications for missionaries?
2. What do these lists have in common?
3. Which qualification refers to an ability rather than a man’s character?
4. Why should only men be pastors and supervisors of men in church work?
5. Who is eligible to be helpers and assistants in church work?
6. What position did the woman Phoebe have among the early Christians?
7. What special qualifications are desirable in those working in a foreign land?
8. Why does special education or special training in and of itself not make a person a missionary in Christ’s Church?
9. Prove that God can use some men even though they lack some qualifications.
10. How did William Carey show that Matthew 28:18-20 still applies today?
11. What are some of the things ordinary Christians can do to promote the preaching and teaching of the Gospel in foreign lands?
12. How can we encourage talented men and women to train for mission work?



Provided by the Church of the Lutheran Confession - Board of Missions

Missiology

Lesson 22 – The Methods and Tools of a Missionary

The methods and tools of a missionary may change from one place to another, and from one era in history to another. But it can be helpful to take a close look at the methods and tools other Christian missionaries have used in the past. No doubt we can learn something from them.

How did Jesus go about His work of preaching the Gospel? We know He used the Jewish synagogues where the Jews gathered for worship on the Sabbath. Much of His teaching was done in these synagogues and in the Temple at Jerusalem. But He also walked from town to town, teaching His followers as He went. Crowds gathered to hear His teaching on hillsides or by the seashore or in deserted areas. Since He was the promised Messiah, His teaching ministry was combined with a healing ministry, as the prophets of old had foretold. Jesus accepted invitations to the homes of tax collectors as well as Pharisees. He was willing to debate with His accusers and answer their questions. But, for the most part, He restricted His preaching and healing ministry to His own people, the Israelites, to whom the promises of the Messiah had been given.

Jesus also gave on-the job training to a small number of disciples (followers). He chose some of them to be His apostles, and He gave special instruction to them. Jesus at one point sent His twelve apostles to carry out a ministry similar to His own, giving them authority to preach and teach and also do miracles in His name. On another occasion He sent out seventy (or seventy-two) disciples to announce the Gospel and heal the sick in areas that He was planning to visit in the near future. These instructions are not specifically addressed to us today, and yet there is much we can learn from what Jesus said to those he sent out.

We read in Matthew 10:1: **“When He had called His twelve disciples to Him, He gave them power over unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to heal all kinds of sickness and all kinds of disease.”** Luke reports the same thing: **“He called His twelve disciples together and gave them power and authority over all demons, and to cure diseases. He sent them to preach the kingdom of God and to heal the sick”** (Luke 9:1-2). These men were chosen as His apostles, and this included Judas Iscariot, who later betrayed Him. At that time Jesus stressed that they were to be healers to call attention to the divine power of their Master to heal any disease, even to the point of raising the dead. Jesus said to them: **“Heal the sick, cleanse the lepers, raise the dead, cast out demons”** (Matthew 10:8). No doubt there would have been many who would have been willing to pay them a great sum for such cures. But Jesus told them: **“Freely you have received, freely give”** (Matthew 10:8). The idea that

preachers and missionaries should become financially wealthy through their labors does not come from Christ.

Moreover, Jesus instructed them: **“Do not go into the way of the Gentiles, and do not enter a city of the Samaritans. But go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel”** (Matthew 10:5-6). These words no longer apply to us, for we are to go into all the world and proclaim God’s Word to all, as Jesus later commanded all His disciples.

Their message was this: **“The kingdom of heaven is at hand”** (Matthew 10:7). They were to call attention to Jesus as the King whom God had sent to establish His kingdom. Their message was to be Christ-centered.

Those whom Jesus sent were not to take many possessions or demand special favors. But they could expect their hearers to provide for their daily earthly needs. Jesus said: **“A worker is worthy of his food”** (Matthew 10:10).

When they would enter a village, they would find a place to stay. They should not go shopping around for better accommodations elsewhere but stay at the house that first welcomed them. If a village refused to listen to them or rejected their message, they were to go to another village, but not before warning the people of the seriousness of their actions: **“Whoever will not receive you nor hear your words, when you depart from that house or city, shake off the dust from your feet. Assuredly, I say to you, it will be more tolerable for the land of Sodom and Gomorrah in the day of judgment than for that city!”** (Matthew 10:14-15). A visit from God through His messengers is a momentous occasion for any city. Jesus told them: **“He who receives you receives Me, and he who receives Me receives Him who sent Me”** (Matthew 10:40).

Jesus did not hide the sad truth from His apostles that they would be like sheep among wolves. They would be verbally and physically abused. They would be betrayed by their own families. Some of them would be killed because of their preaching of Jesus. He said to them: **“You will be hated by all for My name’s sake”** (Matthew 10:22).

This did not mean they were to put themselves in danger if they could avoid it. No, they were to **“be wise as serpents and harmless as doves”** (Matthew 10:16). When they were persecuted in one place, Jesus told them to **“flee to another”** (Matthew 10:23). How were they to respond when they were challenged by authorities? Jesus told them: **“Do not worry ... It will be given to you in that hour what you should speak; for it is not you who speak, but the Spirit of your Father who speaks in you”** (Matthew 10:19-20).

Jesus knew that they would face the same the hostility He faced in His ministry. In fact, Jesus knew what was going to happen to Him: He would be crucified. If such things happened to Him, His apostles could expect the same or similar things to happen to them. But not even a sentence of death should frighten them. Jesus said: **“Do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. But rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in**

hell” (Matthew 10:28). The eternal outcome is what counts, not life in this world. “He who finds his life will lose it, and he who loses his life for My sake will find it” (Matthew 10:39).

Jesus spoke similar words of instruction, warning, and encouragement when He sent the seventy (some manuscripts say seventy-two) **“two by two before His face into every city and place where He Himself was about to go” (Luke 10:1).** His last words to them certainly still apply to missionaries today who speak His Word faithfully: **“He who hears you hears Me, he who rejects you rejects Me, and he who rejects Me rejects Him who sent Me” (Luke 10:16).**

When we examine the methods and tools of Paul, the missionary to the Gentiles, we find that he also spoke the Word of God formally and informally in various places, such as the Jewish synagogues and meeting places, the marketplace, his own rented quarters, and people’s homes. We find that he traveled by ship, by foot, and on horseback. It seems that he spent most of his time in the larger cities rather than in the small villages. In Ephesus he did his teaching in the school of Tyrannus.

It seems Paul usually worked with partners, such as Barnabas and Silas and Luke. He gave on-the-job training to younger assistants, such as Mark, Timothy, and Titus, to whom he later entrusted a larger portion of the work. Timothy took charge of the work in Ephesus; Titus handled the work in Crete; and according to church historians, Mark took charge of the churches in Alexandria in Egypt.

Paul taught, as Jesus did, that the laborer is worthy of his wages, for he wrote: **“The Lord has commanded that those who preach the gospel should live from the gospel” (1 Corinthians 9:14).** Nevertheless, he determined that he, himself, would not use this right, so that he could not be accused of carrying out his ministry in order to accumulate wealth for himself. He was a tentmaker by trade, and he supported himself and his associates by this means, although he also accepted financial support from some of the congregations he served.

Paul did not just gather followers and then go on to another place to gather more followers. Rather, he appointed or had his congregations appoint elders, leaders, or pastors from among their members to oversee the work in the congregations. In doing this he was following his own teaching that God is not a God of confusion. And Paul did not ignore or neglect the congregations he had founded, but he remained in contact with them through letters, personal visits, or visits from his helpers. He considered the spiritual care of all the churches he founded to be his responsibility, and it was a major part of his work as a missionary. He was primarily a planter, but he was also involved in the continuing care of the congregations he planted.

It is clear from his letters and from the book of Acts that he was thorough in his teaching; he did not refrain from teaching the whole counsel of God. He did not feed his congregations only milk but he also gave them solid food as soon as possible. He did not compromise with false teaching or false teachers. He did not change his message to make it more acceptable to his hearers.

Some of the first Lutheran missionaries were Heinrich Pluetschau and Bartholomaeus Ziegenbalg. They were sent from Denmark to a Portuguese trading post in the far-off land of India. Their native languages were probably German and Danish. To carry out their work they spent much time and energy at first in striving to learn the Portuguese language of the traders and the Tamil language of the Indians. But they went beyond merely learning the Tamil language. They also attempted to become familiar with the Indian culture, literature and Hindu philosophy, so that they could better understand the thought processes of the Indian people.

They organized classes for instructing the people in the fundamentals of Christian doctrine. Their first converts were five Portuguese slaves. From the very beginning they held regular worship services in the German language for their own spiritual growth and the spiritual growth of their wives and children.

When they witnessed the gross idolatry of the heathen, they wrongly imitated the Old Testament kings and prophets by knocking off the heads of idols in heathen temples. That was God's command only for His Old Testament people in the land that God had given them, but this was not God's way nor Paul's way regarding the Roman and Greek gods and goddesses. The apostle Paul wrote: **"We do not war according to the flesh. For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal"** (2 Corinthians 10:3-4). Our only weapon is the Word of God, which is the sword of the Holy Spirit.

To provide employment for the natives they established a printing press and translated Christian materials into the Tamil language and other Indian languages. Even as Martin Luther profited greatly from the printing press to spread the teachings of Christ in German and Latin, so also these Lutheran missionaries used the printed word to scatter the precious Gospel seed. They even established a paper mill to supply paper for their printing projects.

They used their furloughs in Europe to inform the Christians back home of the blessings that God had brought them, and to stir up interest and support for this mission project. They also used their furloughs to plead for financial support, for one cannot expect at first that converts will have the means or the desire to support the work themselves.

They recognized that they could reach the people much more readily through native preachers because they would better understand the ways of the people. Therefore, they began a school (seminary) for the purpose of training Indian boys to become pastors and teachers. They began with eight students.

The people of India at that time (and still today to some extent) were divided into various castes. The two missionaries proclaimed the Gospel of Christ to all castes, but they directed most of their efforts to a middle-class caste, neither the upper elites nor the so-called untouchables.

In their worship they retained the traditional Lutheran liturgy of the old country with some adjustments for native music. They did not admit anyone into actual church membership without careful instruction in the Word of God. They organized a system of church discipline that was carried out by the native members themselves.

Since most of India was under British control at that time, they did what they could to be friendly to the British government. There were times when the authorities hindered their work and frustrated their efforts. It was necessary for them to exercise abundant patience.

It seems that we can learn more from the methods and tools used by Pluetschau and Ziegenbalg than from the methods and tools used by nineteenth and twentieth century missionaries. These later missionaries used the approach of establishing mission stations, large compounds with mission schools and dispensaries. Almost all the leadership was provided by non-local missionaries, who tried to establish the culture of their home countries in a foreign land. It seems that they considered their own culture to be much superior to the native culture, and therefore they emphasized the training of the illiterate and “primitive” heathen in the ways of their “more civilized” countries.

Instead of training natives to become leaders and establish their own churches and instead of training the people to become self-governing, the mission stations remained dependent on their mother churches for financial support and leadership. Sometimes the missions and their leaders became involved with the colonial government, which also treated the native peoples as underlings rather than equal associates.

As a reaction against colonialism and paternalism, some churches and foreign mission agencies developed what was called an “indigenous mission policy”. They sought to develop a local church that was self-supporting, self-governing, and self-propagating. This seems to be good policy, unless that the local church also develops its own doctrine that makes compromises on Bible truth to make it fit in better with native beliefs and native culture. If a mission is no longer faithful to Bible teaching in every way, it has become a heterodox (false-teaching) church, rather than a faithful confessional or orthodox church.

Another danger one faces in mission work is placing too much emphasis on outward growth in numbers, rather than on spiritual growth and thorough catechetical training. An emphasis on numbers results in a Christianity that has little depth and is easily blown away by false teachings and charismatic preachers that are not solidly grounded in God’s Word. This does not follow Paul’s methods, as illustrated by his letters to the Ephesians and the Romans.

A better way to conduct a Christian mission in our time is to concentrate on training national workers who are thoroughly instructed in God’s Word so that they can stand on their own theologically and understand and appreciate and totally agree with the orthodox Lutheran confessions. This means developing and translating and printing Christian literature in the language of the people that is totally faithful to Bible teaching and that is entirely Christ-centered. Since the Holy Spirit works through the means of grace, we need to bind ourselves to teaching the Word of God in its truth and purity and, at the same time, being good

examples of Christian living. Once there are a few national leaders who are on their way to becoming true confessional Lutheran theologians, they can develop an indigenous church without cutting off the ties to confessional Lutheran church bodies in other lands who may be able to aid in certain areas.

At all times we need to remember that our Lord wants us to make disciples of all nations, not only bringing the Gospel to them, but also **“teaching them to observe all things”** (Matthew 28:20) that Jesus has commanded us. One American Lutheran missionary in Africa has written: “Training nationals to become lay leaders, evangelists, pastors, professors and administrators of their church is the most important task” (E. Wendland: *The Missionary*, p. 5). “This should begin as soon as the mission is established.” Some kind of training school needs to be set up, “designed to prepare nationals to preach and teach in local congregations by giving them basic courses in Bible study, church doctrine and practice, ... also specific instructions concerning how to preach, teach, and conduct a church service.”

It is usually necessary to work through interpreters at first. But as soon as possible the training should be given in the language of the national workers and the people. Working through interpreters is not always satisfactory. Using materials written by non-Lutheran authors may at times introduce false teaching or confuse the use of Law and Gospel; it is best to begin by translating doctrinally sound materials and then continue by writing our own materials in the languages of the people.

Hymns and liturgies should be developed that are both faithful to God’s Word and understandable to the people – keeping with their way of singing and speaking. Pray to the Lord of the Church to provide the appropriate gifts of personnel to lead the study of languages to equip Christians with faithful forms of devotion and worship.

Today there have been many technological advances in communication and word studies that can be used in Christian mission work in almost any country of the world. But it is not enough just to supply all kinds of modern equipment if there is no one who knows how to use these tools or to maintain them. Therefore, along with the tools must come training to use these tools. Sometimes it may be better to hire commercial experts to do some work for us, rather than to try to spend a lot of precious time that could be better used in other ways. As we are able, we can of course use whatever God has provided for the transmission of the Gospel and the training in Christian doctrine and practice, including radio and television and other more recent inventions.

Questions

1. How did Jesus go about His work of preaching and teaching the Jewish people?
2. How did Jesus train His disciples to preach and teach?
3. What are some of His instructions that no longer applies to us today?
4. What warnings did He give His disciples that still apply to us today?
5. Why would rejection of their message have such serious consequences?
6. What did both Jesus and Paul teach about paying pastors and teachers?
7. Why did Paul prefer to support himself by making tents?
8. How did Paul provide for the continuation of the work after he moved on?
9. What tools did Martin Luther use to spread the Gospel in his day?
10. How did Ziegenbalg and Pluetschau begin their work in India?
11. What are some things that they did that we should not imitate or follow?
12. Why is language study so important in spreading the Gospel?
13. What mistakes did many 19th and 20th century missionaries make?
14. What is meant by an indigenous mission policy? Is it good or bad?
15. Why is it so important to train pastors who are native to the area?
16. What technological advances can we use in your country?
17. Why is it so important to emphasize Matthew 28:20 in our mission work?



Provided by the Church of the Lutheran Confession - Board of Missions

Missiology

Lesson 23 – The Problems of a Missionary

We know the problems Jesus faced in His ministry. We know the problems faced by the missionary Paul in his efforts to bring the Gospel of Christ to the Gentiles. We know the problems faced by Christian missionaries through the ages. It is not at all surprising that Christian missionaries today also encounter problems of various kinds: jealousy, sickness, opposition from family and friends, rejection, persecution, intimidation, temptation, depression, loneliness, government interference, family problems, disagreements with other missionaries, verbal and physical abuse, and finally death itself.

The mastermind behind all this opposition to the proclamation of the Christian Gospel is the devil himself. We read in Revelation 12:4: **“The dragon stood before the woman who was ready to give birth, to devour her Child as soon as It was born.”** Herod the Great tried to kill Jesus when He was just an infant. The devil tried to get Jesus to sin through strong temptation shortly after His baptism. He even used Jesus’ own disciple Peter to try to persuade Him to take the easy road and avoid persecution.

Having failed with Jesus, the devil is constantly hindering and obstructing the free flow of the Gospel in the world. **“Satan ... deceives the whole world”** (Revelation 12:9). In particular he tries to bring about the downfall of Christian preachers and other leaders in the flock. The devil is filled with **“great wrath, because he knows that he has a short time”** (Revelation 12:12). This rage is directed particularly toward the Christian Church, that is, all the believers in Christ throughout the world. **“The dragon was enraged with the woman”** (the Church), **“and he went to make war with the rest of her offspring, who keep the commandments of God and have the testimony of Jesus Christ”** (Revelation 12:17).

Jesus was opposed by all the leading governmental authorities of His time: Herod the Great, Herod Antipas, the Pharisees, the Sadducees, the priests Annas and Caiaphas, and finally even Pontius Pilate, who knew that He was innocent and yet condemned Him. His brothers did not believe in Him at first. His hometown people in Nazareth tried to throw Him off a cliff. On several occasions Jesus’ enemies had stones in their hands, threatening to kill Him. But it was that rejection of His message through indifference that hurt Him the most. He wept because the citizens of Jerusalem did not want for themselves and their children what He offered. He told the people of Chorazin, Bethsaida, and Capernaum – the cities where He spent much of His time – that they would be treated more severely because of their rejection of His message than would Tyre, Sidon, and Sodom. The culmination of all this

hatred came when they called for His crucifixion and ridiculed Him as He was atoning for their sins on Calvary.

Jesus frankly told His disciples that they could expect similar treatment. He said: **“If they have called the master of the house Beelzebub, how much more will they call those of his household”** (Matthew 10:25). **“They will deliver you up to councils and scourge you in their synagogues”** (Matthew 10:17). Some of Jesus’ last words to His disciples before His arrest were words of prophecy, telling them what they would face as His followers and ambassadors. He told them that His Father would give them **“another Helper, ... the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive”** (John 14:16-17). He warned them: **“If the world hates you, you know that it hated Me before it hated you. ... A servant is not greater than his master. If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you. ... They will put you out of the synagogues; yes, the time is coming that whoever kills you will think that he offers God service”** (John 15:18, 20; 16:2). But Jesus prayed for them: **“I have given them Your word; and the world has hated them because they are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. I do not pray that You should take them out of the world, but that You should keep them from the evil one”** (John 17:14-15).

When Jesus called Paul to be His missionary to the Gentiles, He told Ananias, the man who baptized Paul: **“I will show him how many things he must suffer for My name’s sake”** (Acts 9:16). What sufferings did Paul have to endure? Attacks by false teachers and the disloyalty of some of his converts (see Galatians). Persecutions by Jews and Gentiles (Acts, 1 Thessalonians). Dangers and deprivations all kinds (2 Corinthians 11). Physical weaknesses, particularly his thorn in the flesh (2 Corinthians 12). Disagreements with his co-workers, such as Barnabas, Mark, and Demas. The responsibility of spiritual supervision over all the congregations he founded (2 Corinthians 11:28). Unjust imprisonment over long periods of time (Acts). Finally, death as a martyr (2 Timothy). But for the most part Paul endured these sufferings in a joyful spirit, informing his friends in Philippi: **“I want you to know, brethren, that the things which happened to me have actually turned out for the furtherance of the gospel”** (Philippians 1:12).

The first Lutheran missionaries in India had their problems too. Bartholomaeus Ziegenbalg was burdened with a stomach ailment and sometimes fell into depression. He must not have been very intelligent either since he failed to pass his ordination examination the first time. Traveling to foreign countries was much more difficult in those days. The voyage by sea from Denmark to India took seven months, and it was a perilous journey. When he and Heinrich Pluetschau finally reached their destination, the authorities at first did not give them permission to come ashore.

At that time there were already pastors in India, including Lutherans, who were serving the European traders and their communities. For some reason these pastors resented the arrival of Lutheran pastors who intended to work among the natives of India. And it was a daunting

task because Pluetschau and Ziegenbalg had no knowledge of the Tamil language, and there was no such thing as a Tamil dictionary or grammar book to help them learn the language.

At one point they lost their financial subsidy from Denmark through an accident. The authorities of the Danish colony did not support the missionaries; Ziegenbalg was even imprisoned for four months on one occasion. But one problem that pervaded their entire stay in India was a total lack of understanding of their situation on the part of their Mission Board back in Copenhagen, Denmark. When the Mission Board later sent them more workers to help them in their work, friction developed between them and their new helpers.

The medical care they received in India proved to be inadequate. No doubt the difficulty of communication contributed to the problem. Nevertheless, they persevered for some time, and the Lord blessed their labors. The work they started continued long after their departure. Pluetschau did not last as long as Ziegenbalg, who remained in India until his early death.

Many years later William Carey came from England to work in India. He is sometimes considered the father of foreign missions because of his zeal for bringing the Gospel of Christ to those who did not know it. But it was not easy to convince others in England to support a mission venture in a foreign country. His father opposed his plans; even his own wife was not enthusiastic about his going to India. He did find a fellow-Christian to be his partner, but when they got to India, his partner decided to take up other work.

Carey carried out his work in a marshy area near Calcutta, where he could not find decent housing nor adequate nourishment. He had to constantly go from one place to another to find what he was looking for. He did not receive sufficient financial backing from England. All of this no doubt contributed to the sickness, jealousy, and insanity of his first wife Dorothy. One son died when he was five years old. The neglect of his other sons led them into delinquency. Through all of this he continued his work, even though he broke ties with the society back in England that sponsored his work.

He married a second time after his first wife died, and this second wife also suffered an early death. Some of his other family members and associates died also. His little mission had to undergo disease, grief, culture shock, and loneliness. Carey certainly worked hard, for he was devoted to this mission cause. But there was no Indian convert for seven years, and even after 28 years there were only 700 converts in a land of millions. He labored to translate the Bible into the language of the people, but at one point a fire destroyed much of his translation work. No doubt he attempted to do too much. In 41 years he did not take a furlough, but remained at his arduous task in India.

Mission pioneers often have to labor hard and long before they see fruit from their labors. But they do sow the seed, and in God's good time there is always a harvest. The stories of Ziegenbalg, Pluetschau, and Carey could no doubt be repeated many times over as we look at the work of missionaries who first brought the Gospel to North and South America from

Europe, and who later brought the Gospel back to Asia and Africa where Christianity first had its start. Now Christianity is growing more in Asia and Africa than anywhere else, whereas Europe is swiftly losing its Christian past, and it seems North America is heading in the same direction.

Mission work in foreign countries today is considerably different from what it was in earlier centuries. Think of the improvement in transportation, communication, and medical facilities. There are still many places that do not enjoy these advantages, but certainly it is easier to travel, and modern technology allows for speedy communication even in many remote areas. What would the missionary Paul have done with jet travel to every continent in the world, cell phones, electronic transmission, computers, and the speedy printing of literature in all kinds of languages, as well as the availability of dictionaries, grammars, and instant information on many topics, including Bible study? What is missing among us so often is zeal for the work and love for the Lord and compassion for the many billions of residents in the world that still do not know of Jesus or trust in Him as their Savior.

A missionary in our time still has problems, of course. One problem is opposition or lack of enthusiasm among members of his own family. People become so used to all the comforts and luxuries and conveniences of modern civilization that they hate to think of any of their friends or relatives being deprived of those comforts. A problem today that was not as much of an issue in times past is completing all the paperwork and undergoing all the examinations necessary to satisfy the bureaucracies of various governments.

In a global economy as we have today some things seem basically the same all over, especially in the large cities. But there is still a culture shock in moving from one's own country to another. There are many differences in matters of finance, shopping, cooking, medical care, dental care, social life, and various other matters that we do not even think about when we are in our native surroundings. In more remote areas the culture shock is greater than elsewhere, because of more primitive living and working conditions.

It generally takes a long period of on-the-job training before a missionary can begin to accomplish much of anything. At first, he remains a spectator, watching what others are doing rather than doing anything himself. He may find himself disagreeing with those who were working in the field before him. He may find himself having difficulty in conveying his situation with the board of missions that is promoting and financing his work. It may take a long time before he can understand the best way to deal with the native people, including the native pastors who understand each other but may not fully understand him, and whom he may not fully understand. What about native customs and traditions, such as polygamy or spirit worship? Certain native customs may seem harmless, but they are associated with heathen beliefs and possible idolatry.

Another difficulty may come from living near missionaries from false-teaching churches. We cannot work together with them, but nevertheless they may become our friends and we can

learn something from them regarding various practical matters and they can help us understand of the culture.

Often missionaries may want to do something that was easy for them to do in their home country, but on the mission field there is a lack of materials and tools and personnel to do the job that needs to be done. Most likely there will be frustrations caused by interminable delays, frequent interruptions, language misunderstandings, and the missionary's sinful flesh and the sinful flesh of his family and his associates. The education of the missionary's children may cause distress and separation. What kind of social life can there be for a family that does not fit in, or feels that it does not fit in?

Occasional furloughs are necessary for various reasons, sometimes to satisfy the laws of the land. Returning to one's native country can cause problems of its own. A missionary must find a place to stay when on furlough and it can be difficult to return to the mission field after a week or month in back home.

A Lutheran missionary in central Africa, E. H. Wendland, experienced the following during his furloughs to the United States. In 1965 his wife had major surgery. In 1968 he had to deal with the failing health of his parents. In 1971 two of his children were married. In 1973 he returned one year earlier than usual because he needed major surgery. In 1976 much of his furlough time was spent at Mayo Clinic because of malaria. In 1978 his furlough was marred by the tragic death of a son through an accident.

There is no doubt that being a missionary to a foreign land does not make for a problem-free life. But the same is true for every human being in every country, particularly for Christians and for Christian pastors, teachers, and other leaders. There are difficulties and problems and temptations in every kind of work. Paul wrote to the Corinthians: **"No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it"** (1 Corinthians 10:13). The apostles Paul and Barnabas told the new converts in Galatia: **"We must through many tribulations enter the kingdom of God"** (Acts 14:22). The apostle Paul wrote to Timothy: **"All who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution"** (2 Timothy 3:12).

If we remember the final destiny that God has provided for us through Jesus Christ, the **"salvation ready to be revealed in the last time"** (1 Peter 1:5), the **"inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that does not fade away"** (1 Peter 1:4), we shall be enabled **"for a little while"** to be **"grieved by various trials"** (1 Peter 1:6).

"Therefore let those who suffer according to the will of God commit their souls to Him in doing good, as to a faithful Creator" (1 Peter 4:19). **"Resist him (the devil), steadfast in the faith, knowing that the same sufferings are experienced by your brotherhood in the world. But may the God of all grace, who called us to His eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after you**

have suffered a while, perfect, establish, strengthen, and settle you. To Him be the glory and the dominion forever and ever. Amen” (1 Peter 5:9-11).

Questions

1. Why is Satan so intent on hindering the preaching of the Gospel of Christ?
2. Why does Satan direct his fiercest attacks on Christian pastors and leaders?
3. What similar problems faced Jesus and His chosen missionary Paul?
4. Why should Christian missionaries today expect to face many problems?
5. List some of the problems faced by Ziegenbalg and Pluetschau.
6. List some of the problems faced by William Carey.
7. Why is it good for pastors and missionaries to take vacations (furloughs)?
8. Why is loneliness such a problem in working far from home?
9. What blessings do missionaries enjoy today to counter loneliness?
10. If you have done some mission work, what problems have you faced?
11. What assurance do we have from our God with respect to these problems?
12. What is the missionary tempted to do to escape problems?
13. What specific problems does a missionary face in your area?
14. List some Bible passages that should help a pastor with his problems.



Provided by the Church of the Lutheran Confession - Board of Missions

Missiology

Lesson 24 – Every Christian and Every Pastor is a Missionary

Paul and Barnabas were sent out by the congregation at Antioch in Syria to bring the Gospel of Christ to cities and towns that did not know Christ. We call such people missionaries – people are sent by one group of Christians to proclaim the Gospel in another place. Other ministers remained in Antioch of Syria to work with the people in Antioch who were already Christians, to feed them with the Word of God and to encourage them to continue in the faith. In a sense these pastors were missionaries also, for they brought the Gospel to as many people as they could in the place where they were stationed. But their chief task was to shepherd those who were already Christians. The Christians in Antioch who were not pastors and teachers were also missionaries in a sense, for they were interested in sharing their faith in Christ with those who did not know Him or believe in Him. In other words, all Christians are involved in the great mission enterprise both by supporting missionaries and their own pastors, as also by talking about Christ in their own circles and in their own neighborhoods. All Christians have the privilege of supporting the great mission of Christ by living lives in line with the Gospel, and thus adorning the Gospel by their good works. Every believers in Christ is a priest for God and every Christian and every pastor is in fact a missionary.

The first letter of the apostle Peter was addressed to all the Christians **“in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia”** (1 Peter 1:1). He writes to all of them: **“You are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light”** (1 Peter 2:9). All of those called out of darkness into the light of faith in Christ proclaim the praises of God who called them. That is why we say in *Concerning Church and Ministry*: *“Scripture teaches that those who receive the Gospel as a personal, inward possession by faith do in and through that very experience become preachers of the Gospel. The Holy Spirit, who always accompanies the Gospel, not only creates faith by means thereof but in that very act also makes witnesses of those whom He enlightens and sanctifies. ... God so fashions His Christians that from within their new hearts they proclaim the Gospel; this is an inherent function of the new life within them”* (*Concerning Church and Ministry*, p. 25).

The Bible refers specifically to the **“eleven disciples”** (Matthew 28:16; also Mark 16:14) to whom Jesus spoke the words of the Great Commission (Matthew 28:18-20; also Mark 16:15-18). Nevertheless, we can hardly restrict the Commission to these eleven apostles, since Jesus concluded with the words: **“And lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age”** (Matthew 28:20).

Nor can we restrict the giving of the keys of heaven to Peter only (Matthew 16:19) nor just to the twelve apostles only (Matthew 18:18), for in Matthew 18 Jesus is speaking simply to **“disciples”** (Matthew 18:1), and His words in that chapter are certainly directed to all Christians. When Jesus breathed on His disciples on Easter Sunday evening, we know that Cleopas and his friend were among those who were present, for it is stated specifically that **“they (Cleopas and his friend) rose up that very hour and returned to Jerusalem, and found the eleven and those who were with them gathered together”** (Luke 24:33). It was to this larger group of His disciples that Jesus said: **“As the Father has sent Me, I also send you. ... Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained”** (John 20:21-23).

When Jesus spoke to His disciples before His ascension to heaven, He told them: **“You shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth”** (Acts 1:8). This work of witnessing continues among all the followers of Christ, even though the apostles themselves are no longer with us. The apostle Paul wrote: **“To each one of us grace was given according to the measure of Christ’s gift”** (Ephesians 4:7). All Christians are involved in the work of missions, but God also supplies His Church with special gifts: **“He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ”** (Ephesians 4:11-12). Notice that leaders are not to do all the work themselves; they are God’s special gifts given to the Church to equip all the Christians (**“the saints”**) to do the work of ministry, each in his or her own way as the Lord provides.

Therefore, this is our confession: *“The ministry of the keys, which is the ministry of the Word, has been committed to the holy Christian Church – therefore to each Christian man, woman, and child. Christians are to be personally active in this ministry in every possible way which is not in violation of God’s will and ordinance”* (Thesis I on the Ministry, Concerning Church and Ministry, p. 25).

When the apostle Paul was still the Pharisee Saul persecuting the Christians, **“they (the believers in Jerusalem) were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles. ... Therefore those who were scattered went everywhere preaching the word”** (Acts 8:1, 4). The apostles themselves stayed in Jerusalem during this crisis, but the scattered Christians were not quiet about their faith, and soon there were congregations of Christians throughout Judea, Samaria, and as far away as Damascus and Antioch of Syria. This was before Paul and Barnabas were sent out as missionaries to the Gentiles.

One student of the early history of the Church, Michael Green, has researched how the Church grew so quickly in the first and second centuries. Here are some of his comments:

“They were scattered from their base in Jerusalem and they went everywhere spreading the good news which had brought joy, release, and a new life to themselves. This must often have been not formal preaching, but the informal chattering to friends and chance acquaintances, in homes and wine shops, on walks,

and around market stalls. They went everywhere gossiping the gospel; they did it naturally, enthusiastically, and with the conviction of those who are not paid to say that sort of thing. ... In the early days the faith was spontaneously spread by informal evangelists. ... It was axiomatic that every Christian was called to be a witness to Christ, not only by life but by lip. Everyone was to be an apologist, at least to the extent of being ready to give a good account of the hope that was within them. And this emphatically included women" (*Evangelism in the Early Church*, Michael Green, pp. 173-175).

"Evangelism was the prerogative and the duty of every Church member. ... The ordinary people of the Church saw it as their job: Christianity was supremely a lay movement, spread by informal missionaries. The clergy of the Church saw it as their responsibility, too. ... This infectious enthusiasm on the part of such diverse people of differing ages, backgrounds, sex, and cultures was backed up by the quality of their lives" (*Evangelism in the Early Church*, Michael Green, p. 274).

"Unless there is a transformation of contemporary church life so that once again the task of evangelism is something which is seen as incumbent on every baptized Christian and is backed up by a quality of living which outshines the best that unbelief can muster, we are unlikely to make much headway through techniques of evangelism. Men will not believe that Christians have good news to share until they find that bishops and bakers, university professors and housewives, bus drivers and street corner preachers are all alike keen to pass it on, however different their methods may be" (*Evangelism in the Early Church*, Michael Green, p. 275).

"Together with this enthusiasm ... went a deep sense of the seriousness of the issues involved. These men really believed that men without Christ might suffer eternal and irreparable loss, and this thought drove them to unremitting labors to reach them with the Gospel" (*Evangelism in the Early Church*, Michael Green, p. 275).

"Evangelism today is often associated with the great public meeting. It is a remarkable fact that the early Church seems to have made very little use of this method of commending the Gospel. ... The emphasis lay on home and personal evangelism" (*Evangelism in the Early Church*, Michael Green, p. 279).

There is no doubt that Martin Luther clearly taught the universal priesthood of all believers in Christ. In subsequent years, however, not all those called Lutheran have emphasized this teaching. Perhaps some of them have even contributed to the notion that the only duty of ordinary Christians is to "pray, pay, and obey", as the saying goes. Therefore, it is our task today to increase the awareness of the calling of all believers concerning their mission of heralding the Gospel to all the world. The apostle Peter was talking to all Christians when he wrote: **"You also, as living stones, are being built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ"** (1 Peter 2:5).

Questions

1. In what way are all Christian pastors also missionaries?
2. In what way are all Christians also missionaries?
3. When do Christians become missionaries?
4. For whom are the words of the Great Commission intended?
5. To whom did Jesus give the ministry of the keys?
6. What do the keys open and close when they are used?
7. Show that some Christian congregations were not founded by apostles.
8. How did Christ's Church grow so quickly in the first and second centuries?
9. What makes evangelism such an urgent undertaking?
10. Why is the slogan "Pray, pay, and obey" a poor slogan for evangelism?
11. What Scripture led Luther to teach the priesthood of all believers?



Provided by the Church of the Lutheran Confession - Board of Missions

Missiology

Lesson 25 – The Mission of a Missionary

In some of the preceding lessons we have emphasized the difficulties and problems of a missionary, especially the persecution that Christian leaders may face from unbelievers. In this chapter we emphasize the joys of bringing the Gospel of Christ to those who do not know Him. For this purpose, we begin by quoting the writings of an American missionary who worked in Nigeria, Ghana, and Central Africa from 1937 to 1968. The missionary is Bill Schweppe, and his book is called *Ibibio*.

May 3, 1937: “Well, here we are in Africa. Life will not be impossible here.”

June 4, 1937: “We like it here and are very glad and thankful for this opportunity in our life. ... The work here is tremendous, and the responsibility is a heavy one. I really tremble when I think of it.”

June 14, 1937: “What a great door of opportunity and what a great challenge the Lord has placed before our church. Here God has placed hundreds of souls into our care and bids us bring them to the knowledge of the truth and to feed them with His Word. ... There were churches in Nigeria before our church took up the work there. But there never was real Christian instruction in any of the 31 churches which we took over. ... People were simply herded together, taught to repeat two sentences: ‘Jesus is the Son of God’ and ‘Jesus died for me.’ They were then organized as churches and then led to believe that all was well with them, that they were good Christians. As for the law of God, they never once heard of such a thing. ... We find people hardened in their sins, living on in their old heathen ways, in all their old heathen superstitions, consoling themselves with the one thought, ‘Jesus died for me. I can now do as I wish. The Lord has prepared a covering for everything.’ ... God has chosen us to bring the true Gospel of His grace for sinners to these poor souls so greatly in need. We dare not fail!”

July 5, 1937: “This work, although hard at times and discouraging, surely has its satisfactions and its rewards. This outside of the fact that it is the greatest work in the world, I wouldn’t trade it for anything.”

October 2, 1937: “One dare not think too much about the responsibility resting upon us. When Dr. Nau leaves later on this month, we shall have 6,000 souls in our following. ... I just looked in my record book and since the first Sunday in September I had 328 baptisms, 220 of these adults, 51 marriages, and 308 confirmations. All must

be examined first. You see, there is not much time to loaf! But see what a harvest field!”

November 27, 1938: “I have been busy enough in the past months. There seems to be no prospect of relief. ... The work is getting harder right along and we are without even hope of more men. It surely is a grind for the nerves. One would think the Lord would make somebody willing to come! ... In spite of it all my health has been perfect.”

The editor of this book adds the following note: “From July 1938 until June 1939 Schweppe held the fort, so to speak, as the lone American missionary with 6,000 souls and 39 congregations under his care.” It is no wonder that Leola (his wife) wrote home: “If some action isn’t taken to send a replacement and another man soon, I’m going to write to the Board myself. Bill can’t keep up like this very long!”

The Lord blessed the work in Nigeria. On December 31, 1960, there were 194 congregations, 33 preaching stations, 33,343 baptized members, and 13,645 communicants, served by 18 African pastors and 18 missionaries. How sad that the work did not continue to follow the sound doctrinal basis on which it began! The Lutheran church body in America which began this work in Nigeria later began to move away from sound Lutheran doctrine and practice and began to tolerate false teaching. By this time Missionary Schweppe had lost his life through an accident in Africa.

What can be more wonderful and more meaningful than to be an instrument of the Holy Spirit in bringing the saving Gospel of Jesus Christ to persons who were on their way to eternal damnation, which is what we all deserve because of our sins! The only remedy is the Gospel of Jesus Christ, and faith in that Gospel created by the Holy Spirit through the use of the Word of God and the Gospel Sacraments. It is certainly a special privilege to bring the Gospel to other people, even to other nations and tribes and peoples in the world.

The apostle Paul certainly regarded it as a special privilege to be God’s chosen missionary to bring the Gospel of Christ to the Gentiles. He wrote to the Ephesians: **“I became a minister (a servant of the Gospel of Christ) according to the gift of the grace of God given to me by the effective working of His power. To me, who am less than the least of all the saints, this grace was given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of God”** (Ephesians 3:7-8). Paul had been a rabid Pharisee who persecuted the Church of Jesus, but now he was a special ambassador for Christ through the grace of God. He wrote to the Corinthians: **“By the grace of God I am what I am, and His grace toward me was not in vain; but I labored more abundantly than they all, yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me”** (1 Corinthians 15:10).

By grace Paul was called to faith in his Savior Jesus Christ. By grace he and Barnabas were commissioned by the Christians in Antioch of Syria to be God’s chosen instruments to proclaim the name and work of Jesus among the heathen. Paul never forgot that his mission

was by grace alone. In this humble spirit he carried out his work. It was God's grace in Christ that motivated him to do all he could through the strength and abilities God gave him.

Every missionary today is likewise a product of God's grace. No one deserves to be a Christian, and no one deserves to be a Christian missionary. Our faith in Christ is the work of the Holy Spirit through the Word. Our training to serve as a missionary is a gift from God. Our call into the mission field is a gift from God. We do not make ourselves missionaries. God makes missionaries by bringing people to faith in Christ, by giving them the desire to share this faith with others, by training them in the Word of God, and finally by calling them to proclaim the Gospel in a certain area. At the conclusion of their first mission journey, Paul and Barnabas **"reported all that God had done with them, and that He had opened the door of faith to the Gentiles"** (Acts 14:27). Not only had God brought them to faith, trained them in the Word of God, and called them into mission work, but He had worked through them and their preaching to bring faith to Gentiles.

There are many problems in the world today. Problems are found in every country and in every culture – such problems as war, poverty, racism, addiction to alcohol or various drugs, the fear of terrorists and criminal gangs, the prevalence of immorality, as well as corruption in government and church bodies. You can probably add many other things to this list. But the basic problem in this world is the same as it has always been since Adam and Eve were driven out of the Garden of Eden: the problem is sin. This is true for the rich and the poor, for those living in one continent as well as for those who live in another continent. The apostle John wrote: **"The whole world lies under the sway of the wicked one"** (1 John 5:19). It is the Christian's task, and thus the missionary's task, **"to open their eyes, in order to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among those who are sanctified by faith in Me"** (Acts 26:18).

As one missionary has written:

"To experience what it can mean to people who have come out of the darkness of sin into the light of Christ's radiance is the most rewarding experience in all the world. Sometimes it seems that the odds are all against us. Heathen traditions are so deep-rooted. Human nature is so hard-hearted and obstinate. What hope does a foreigner have, he who can hardly speak the language and who comes with nothing but a Word which proclaims an unknown God as the only true God and a crucified Savior as the only hope of everlasting life? And yet we proclaim that Word – first to a handful here and there, in the most primitive of circumstances. The handful grows into a group of baptized believers, and perhaps after considerable trial and tribulation into a Christian congregation. One scarcely knows how it happens, yet it does, and as one sees this congregation come together to worship the Lord one can sense a difference. There is hope where once there was nothing but hopelessness, life where there once

was nothing but death, joy where there once was nothing but despair. The change has been gradual, almost imperceptible, yet nothing short of miraculous.

“What has brought about this miracle? Nothing else but the power of God’s Spirit working through the gospel. He has brought people out of a tradition so totally different that any human explanation is out of the question. He has nurtured the tiny embryo of faith, caused it to grow into a fellowship of believers known as the Body of Christ. The devil will try to destroy this handiwork of God. One can think of a thousand ways in which this might happen. Only the power of God working through Word and Sacrament can stop Satan’s treachery and bring success to this body of believers as they grow in the fruits of the Spirit.

“And they do grow! The Lord does open hearts. People are found who are willing to serve the Lord. Students are trained to become evangelists, and then pastors. Laymen are there who help preach and teach Sunday after Sunday. Choirs are organized which sing with joy in their hearts. Children – ill clad, unkempt children – come together who can sing like the angels. And people die and are buried in the hope of a risen Lord and Savior” (E. Wendland).

Some may say that mission work today should improve the living conditions of people, raise their educational level, and work to reduce corruption in government, but this is not what Christian mission work is. The work that Christ assigned to His Church is to preach the Gospel based on Holy Scripture, and to trust that the Holy Spirit will work through that Word to bring about the results He desires: the creation of Christians who know that their sins are forgiven and that Christ has defeated death by His death and resurrection, Christians in whom the Holy Spirit brings forth the fruits of faith in their lives.

A Christian missionary has God’s command to preach the Gospel of Christ. He has the means to convert unbelievers to faith in Christ, for the Gospel is that means. And he has God’s promise that this Gospel will bring forth results. It will indeed accomplish what God desires. Therefore, as Christians, as Christian pastors and teachers, and as Christian missionaries we should not be discouraged. In the words of the apostle Paul: **“Therefore, since we have this ministry, as we have received mercy, we do not lose heart. ... For we do not preach ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord, and ourselves your bondservants for Jesus’ sake. ... But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellence of the power may be of God and not of us. We are hard-pressed on every side, yet not crushed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed. ... Therefore we do not lose heart. Even though our outward man is perishing, yet the inward man is being renewed day by day. For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory, while we do not look at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen. For the things which are seen are temporary, but the things which are not seen are eternal”** (2 Corinthians 4:1, 5, 7-9, 16-18).

Questions

1. Why is the task of telling others about Christ a joyful experience?
2. What great opportunity was given to Missionary Schweppe from 1937 to 1968?
3. Why was Schweppe unwilling to trade his calling for another?
4. What great lack did Schweppe find at first in the congregations he served?
5. How did the Lord bless the preaching of the Gospel in Nigeria?
6. Why must we say that a missionary is a product of God's grace?
7. Why must the conversion of an unbeliever be considered a true miracle?
8. What are the eternal benefits of the preaching of the Gospel?
9. Give a definition of true Christian mission work.