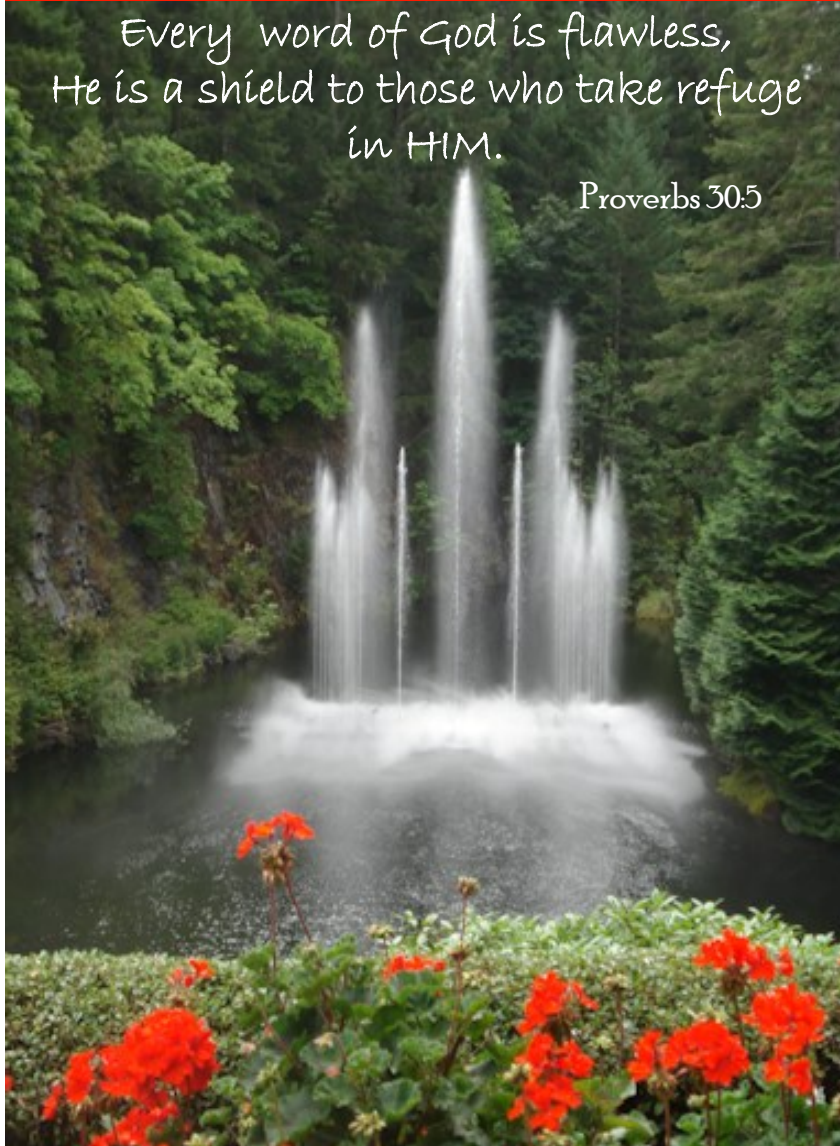


April 2024 Daily Devotional

Every word of God is flawless,
He is a shield to those who take refuge
in HIM.

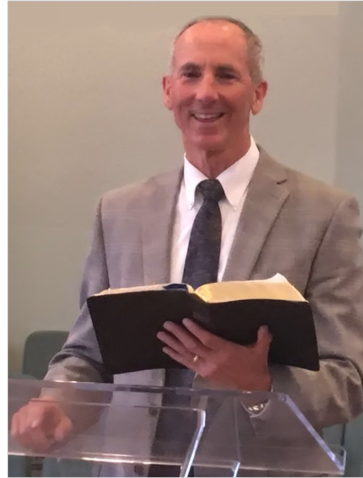
Proverbs 30:5



Vistoso Community Church

Foreword


As we spend time in both Matthew and Acts this month, we are going to be challenged by the idea of what it really means to repent! Let me suggest, that as you and I come face-to-face with the truths of God's Word on a daily basis, repentance is meant to be a regular and ongoing part of our lives if we are *abiding in Christ*, our Savior. After this month's devotionals, see if you don't agree with me!



At the very end of the month, we return to our exploration of the prophetic in our *Reading Ahead* discussion of prophecy. We will continue with additional *Reading Ahead* devotionals in May.

May God bless you in the reading and pondering of His Word.

In His grace,


Kevin Redig

All Scripture quotes have been taken from either the NKJV (1992 edition) or the NIV (1984 edition).

Book of Matthew—Repentance

Monday, April 1:

Read Revelation 2:1-5, 3:19-22

Today I have something very important for you to consider on the topic of repentance. Notice what Jesus has to say in Revelation 2:5:

“Remember the height from which you have fallen! Repent and do the things you did at first. If you do not repent, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place.”

The first thing to settle is the question of who is being told to repent? Go back to Verse 1 and you will see this statement is made to the church in Ephesus. Go back to Revelation 1:19-20 and you will see Jesus has a message for seven churches in Asia Minor. So you see, those being told to repent are church members—believers!

Do you remember I pointed out in an earlier devotional that repentance was often incorrectly taught to be a requirement for unbelievers to stop sinning. That definitely does not fit the use of repentance in today’s reading, does it? However, the understanding we have gained about repentance fits perfectly. For the believers in the church in Ephesus are being told in the strongest possible terms to change their minds! It has nothing to do with overt sin of some kind; rather, in their busy practice of religion, they have wandered away from an intimate and personal relationship with their Savior!



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Book of Matthew—Repentance

Monday, April 1:

Read Revelation 2:1-5, 3:19-22

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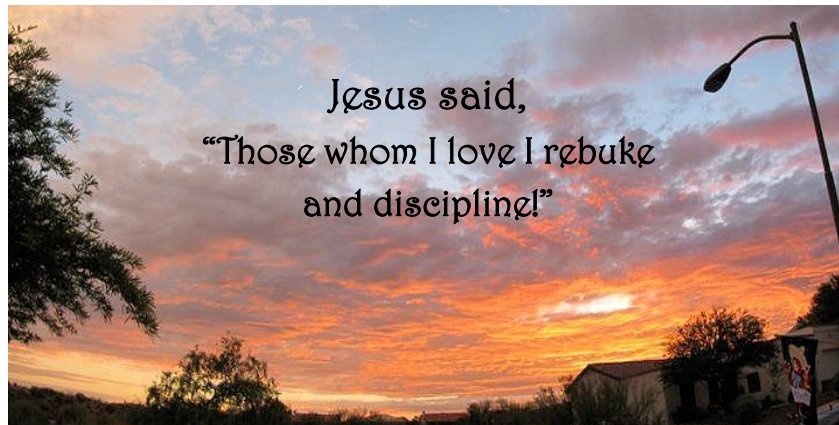
If they were to take this message to heart, it would bring about conviction in their minds. That change, in turn, would lead to confession of their sin and a return to a vital relationship with Christ rather than religious busyness! That leads me to our second reading for today:

“Those whom I love I rebuke and discipline.”

Revelation 3:19

Who is Jesus rebuking? Those whom He loves! Who would that be? It is the believers who make up the Body of Christ—His Bride! How are we to respond to His rebuke? What are we to do every time the Word of God convicts us? Why, we are to repent!

Here is a point of application for you: *We are going to do a lot more repentance after our salvation than before!* That is okay, because that is how it is supposed to be! Every time the Word of God convicts us of our need to change and align our thinking with God’s way of thinking, I trust we will be quick to do so!



Book of Matthew—Repentance

Tuesday, April 2: Read Matthew 23:1-36

After the challenging lessons contained in the parables of Matthew 21-22, how did the religious leadership of Jesus' day do in terms of repenting? Did they change their minds? Three times they sent groups in an effort to: trip Him up, ridicule Him before the people, and get Him into political trouble with the Romans. That's what hardness of heart looks like. They showed not even a whiff of conviction of their sin that might indicate repentance!

How does Jesus respond to this hardness of heart? First, He told the crowds and His disciples:

"The greatest among you will be your servant. For whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and whoever humbles himself will be exalted."

Matthew 23:11-12

Then Jesus proceeded to pronounce seven woes on Israel's spiritual leadership:

"Woe to you, teachers of the Law and Pharisees, you hypocrites ..."

Matthew 23:13

Here are just a few of the indictments Jesus brought against the religious leadership of His day:

- They taught the people falsely, leading them into error.
- They legitimized lying.
- They focused on minor issues while ignoring the intent of the Mosaic Law.
- They focused on externals while ignoring the condition of the heart.

Well, it is fair to say that Israel's religious and political leadership (they were one and the same at this time in their history) were an abysmal failure.

Continued on the next page.

Book of Matthew—Repentance

Tuesday, April 2:

Read Matthew 23:1-36 (Continued)

But how does this apply to the Church? Here is the fault God found with Israel in the day of Isaiah, and it was certainly still true in Jesus' day:

The Lord says: "These people come near to me with their mouth and honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. Their worship is made up only of rules taught by men."

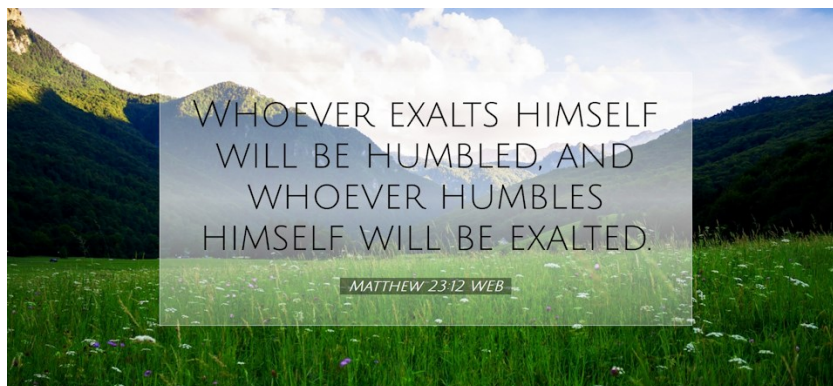
Isaiah 29:13

Now compare the above with these words of Jesus to the church:

"... To the angel of the church of Laodicea write, ... 'I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot. I wish you were either one or the other! So, because you are lukewarm—neither one or the other—I am about to spit you out of my mouth.' You say, 'I am rich; I have acquired wealth and do not need a thing.' But you do not realize that you are wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked. ..."

Revelation 3:14-17

Pray that our fellowship would hear a word of commendation from the Lord rather than a pronouncement of woe!



Book of Matthew—Repentance

Wednesday, April 3: Read Matthew 23:37-39

Has God in His sovereignty selected a small number who will be saved, while choosing to damn the rest? Although some theologies teach that, let's see what we can glean from today's very short reading. The first thing to note is the tone. Jesus is expressing His grief over not being able to do what He would like to do! What does Jesus long to do? Gather Israel to Himself! If His sovereignty was the only thing that mattered, then that is exactly what He would have done! What is more, He feels this very same way about mankind in general during this, the time of the Church:

The Lord is not slow in keeping His promise (to return) ... **He is patient with you, not wanting any to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.**

II Peter 3:9

Once again we see that if God's will was the only thing to take into account, then none would perish, but Scripture is clear they are going to! How can this be? Why can Jesus not gather Israel to Himself, and why will some not repent? Today's reading tells us:

"... but you were not willing!" Matthew 23:37

Note, first of all, it doesn't say that God was *not willing*, as some teach, it was man's unwillingness that was the problem! You see man's sin had created a barrier between himself and God—a barrier that man in his sinful condition could do nothing to remedy! So God took it upon Himself to address our need, and our need was nothing less than death:

"For the wages of sin is death ..." Romans 6:23

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Book of Matthew—Repentance

Wednesday, April 3:

Read Matthew 23:37-39 (Continued)

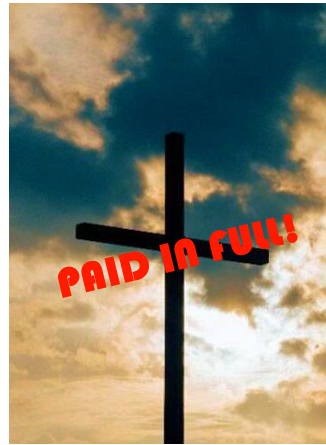
So Jesus paid those wages through His substitutionary death on the cross. We most certainly did not earn or deserve the Lord Jesus dying in our place!

But when the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared, He saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of His mercy. ...

Titus 3:4-5

The work of salvation is done, it is ours to receive by faith! Some will refuse to take what is being offered, they are not willing! Isn't that the very issue laid out in John 3:36 as clearly as it can be stated:

Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God's wrath remains on them.



The Pharisees, who loved their privileged position, power, and wealth were unwilling to come. They rejected the very One who came to save and then sought to keep others from believing as well. From the creation of Adam and Eve, it has apparently pleased God to allow us to make choices. That includes the decision to receive by faith the work of the Son as the sole means of salvation or to reject His free gift provided at such great cost! Thank the Lord that, as long as there is breath, there is the opportunity for friends and family members to yet believe.

Book of Matthew—Repentance

Thursday, April 4: Read II Timothy Chapter 2

In the past few days we have seen Jesus pronounce seven woes on the spiritual leadership of the Jewish people because of their abysmal failure to promote the spiritual soundness of the people. He also lamented over the people's unwillingness to come and respond to Him. Now let's see if we can apply what we have learned to the Church. To begin with, we must declare in no uncertain terms who is the head of the Church:

And God placed all things under His feet and appointed Him to be head over everything for the Church, which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills everything in every way. Ephesians 1:22-23

That would mean both the pastor and the members of the fellowship have specific roles and responsibilities under the headship of Christ. For the rest of today, let's look at the pastor's role. Here is my calling as briefly as I can describe it:

- To study:

Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a workman who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the Word of truth. II Timothy 2:15

- To preach:

Preach the Word: be prepared in season and out of season, correct, rebuke and encourage—with great patience and careful instruction. II Timothy 4:2

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Book of Matthew—Repentance

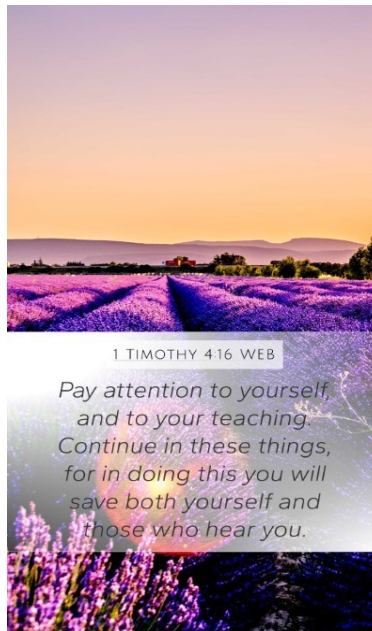
Thursday, April 4:

Read II Timothy Chapter 2 (Continued)

- To care for the *sheep*:
... **“Simon son of John, do you truly love Me more than these? ... Feed My lambs. ... Take care of My sheep. ... Feed My sheep.”** John 21:15-17
- Be a humble example:
Be shepherds of God’s flock that is under your care, serving as overseers—not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be; not greedy for money, but eager to serve; not lording it over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock. I Peter 5:2-3
- As for me personally, I try to take very seriously Paul’s admonition to his young protegee Timothy:

Be diligent in these matters (studying, preaching, nurturing); **devote yourself wholly to them, so that everyone may see your progress. Watch your life and doctrine closely. Persevere in them, because if you do, you will save both yourself and your hearers.**

I Timothy 4:15-16



1 TIMOTHY 4:16 WEB

*Pay attention to yourself
and to your teaching.
Continue in these things,
for in doing this you will
save both yourself and
those who hear you.*

This is not to *save* from eternal damnation, but to *save* the days God has given us on this earth. We do so by walking in the light of His Word!

Book of Matthew—Repentance

Friday, April 5: Read Ephesians 4:1-24

Now, what about the congregation, what role do they have? The answer to that question is too long for a daily devotional, but since we ended yesterday with pastors, let's start with how the congregation is supposed to respond to its pastor:

Obey your leaders and submit to their authority. They keep watch over you as men who must give an account. Obey them so that their work will be a joy, not a burden, for that would be of no advantage to you.

Hebrews 13:17

I must admit, I do indeed appreciate it when the members of the fellowship do not add additional burdens to the ones I already carry!

Allow me to make a few more observations: First, the congregation should be fully engaged in the process of growth. Here is how Paul describes what should be going on in a healthy church responding to sound teaching:

... to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ. Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of men in their deceitful scheming. Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into Him who is the Head, that is, Christ. From Him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work.

Ephesians 4:12-16

Continued on the next page.

Book of Matthew—Repentance

Friday, April 5:

Read Ephesians 4:1-24 (Continued)

Then, reflect on what a marvelous and compelling picture this makes of what the Church is called to be:

- Mature in Christ
- Built up in love
- Each part doing its work

But this will only happen when both pastor and congregation are fulfilling their specific roles within the Body of Christ under the headship of Christ.

Praise God for His design of the Church, and pray that each part will humbly fulfill its calling in service to others!

Jesus said, "... and on this rock
I will build MY church,
and the gates of hell
shall not prevail against it."



Back to the Book of Acts

Monday, April 8: Read Acts 2:1-14

Jesus told His disciples to wait for the gift of the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:4-5), the source of power (Acts 1:8). Now in Chapter 2, all of them have received the gift of the Spirit. (Acts 2:4) This very same Spirit of God is given to every born-again child of God in our day. Before we even begin to unravel this, I want you to pause for a moment and give thanks for the unique time in which we live, the time during which God is working through His Church! Although there were many miraculous occurrences during the Old Testament, the Holy Spirit was only given to a select few individuals and often only for a limited time. But part of the distinctive nature of the time of the Church is that every single believer is indwelt by the Spirit of God and meant to be filled by that very same Spirit.

This very Holy Spirit is the source of our gifting, enabling, and sealing. He is our teacher. What an extraordinary time in which we live! With the power of the Spirit potentially available to work in our lives, the very same power which raised Christ from the dead (Ephesians 1:19-20), is there any calling of God that cannot be accomplished in our lives as we learn to *walk by the Spirit*? Of course not! But, we can learn a valuable lesson about the world's attitude toward the ministry of the Spirit:

**Some, however, made fun of them and said,
"They have had too much wine."** Acts 2:13

There will always be those mockers who make light of the presence and capability of the Spirit of God. What should we do when that happens? Follow the example of Peter and the others: Move right on with ministry. Major in Jesus—who He is and why He came—and you will see the hand of God at work. This is exactly what we are going to see unfold in the second chapter of Acts.

Back to the Book of Acts

Tuesday, April 9: Read Acts 2:15-36

Yesterday's devotional drew our attention to the provision of the Holy Spirit, and we are going to continue to look at the importance of the Holy Spirit for the next few days. Let me ask you a question: How effective were Peter's ministry efforts prior to Acts Chapter 2? He sank when walking on water, correctly identified Christ as Messiah but then tried to dissuade Him from the cross, and denied the Lord three times! All in all, Peter was not particularly effective. Then, the Holy Spirit is poured out on him and what happens? He preaches and the people are *cut to the heart* (Acts 2:37) and *three thousand were added to their number* (Acts 2:41). Three thousand new believers! The difference was the Holy Spirit!

There is no ministry like that enabled by the Spirit of God. Often, we have mistakenly elevated those with communication or musical gifts to *rock star* status. The issue is not one of natural talents, but whether the Holy Spirit's ministry *is* enabled. Paul understood this, and we should too:

Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think of anything as being from ourselves, but our sufficiency is from God, who also made us sufficient as ministers of the new covenant ...

II Corinthians 3:5-6

This is particularly important in the context of our fellowship. For, although we may be past our physical prime, when it comes to doing ministry, that should be to our advantage as it forces us to the Lord's provision of the Spirit:

This is the Word of the Lord to Zerubbabel: "Not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit," says the Lord of hosts.

Zechariah 4:6

Is the Spirit sufficient to accomplish God's will through us—weak as we are? Of course, and to His glory!

Back to the Book of Acts

Wednesday, April 10: Read Acts 2:37-47

In yesterday's devotion on the results of Peter's sermon, we observed that there is no ministry like that accomplished through the Holy Spirit. Today we can add that there is no response like that prompted by the Holy Spirit. For Peter preached in the power of the Spirit, but that is only half the story. God has provided the Holy Spirit not only as an agent to be involved in the sending of the message, but also the receiving of that message.

Consider the problems that have to be overcome when communicating the truth of the Gospel to a spiritually dead person:

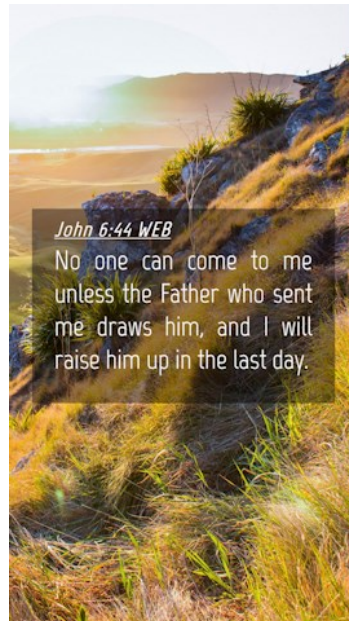
- The spiritually dead have no interest in spiritual things unless God initiates.

"No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him ..." John 6:44

- The spiritually dead have no means to understand spiritual truth unless the Spirit reveals it to them.

The man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God ... they are foolishness to him ... I Corinthians 2:14

What Peter really did in his spirit-enabled message is to give the Holy Spirit material to work with.



Continued on the next page.

Back to the Book of Acts

Wednesday, April 10: Read Acts 2:37-47 (Continued)

Peter did not provide entertainment, great oratory, or anything else. He presented the truth:

... Jesus Christ and Him crucified. I Corinthians 2:2

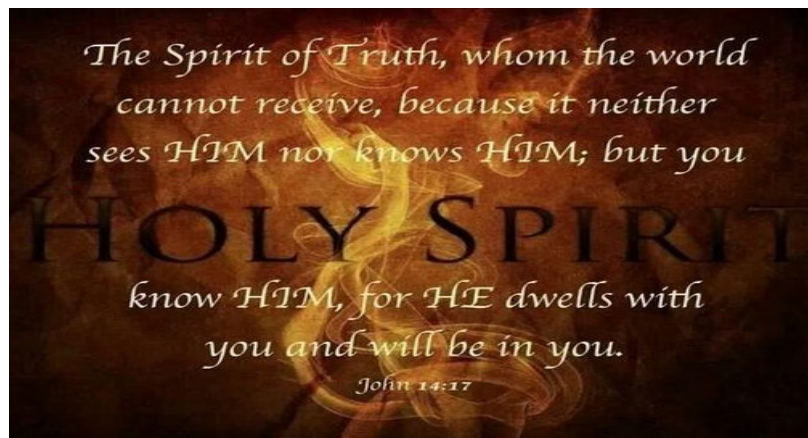
As His witnesses, our Lord and Savior is simply asking us to do the same, and then, in faith, allow the Spirit to work in the hearts of those to whom we minister. For then we can expect these results as Jesus promised:

"When He (the Holy Spirit) comes, He will convict the world of guilt in regard to sin and righteousness and judgment ..." John 16:8

We don't need to win the argument with a lost person. Rather, we can simply allow the Spirit of God to do so within the soul of the lost. What is the singular issue at stake? Look at the focus of the Spirit's conviction:

"... in regard to sin because they do not believe in Me ..." John 16:9

What is needed is always the same—response to the person and work of Jesus Christ.



Back to the Book of Acts

Thursday, April 11: Read Ephesians Chapter 4

There is so much to be learned from the beginning of the Church in Acts Chapter 2, that I am finding it hard to move on. Today, I want to draw your attention to the unity that is meant to exist within the Church. It stands out clearly in today's reading:

Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. Ephesians 4:3

At a minimum, believers in the Lord Jesus Christ who gather together and form a local fellowship are to have a unity that is based upon the peace each one has with the Father as the result of being clothed with the very righteousness of Christ and having the indwelling of the Holy Spirit.

Furthermore, today's reading goes on to describe seven unities that are meant to be understood by those who assemble together. These seven statements are the basis for ongoing unity:

There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to one hope when you were called—one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.

Ephesians 4:4-6

Connect this to our study in the Book of Acts. Acts 2:42 tells us what the Church was doing, and it is very closely related to that which would build unity as laid out in Ephesians Chapter 4:

They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and prayer. Acts 2:42

Continued on the next page.


Back to the Book of Acts

Thursday, April 11: Read Ephesians Chapter 4

What happened when those in the holy church devoted themselves to such activities? There was such unity within the fellowship.

And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved. Acts 2:47

I believe these lessons from Acts Chapter 2 teach us all we need to know about church growth!



And the Lord added to
their number daily those
who were being saved.

Back to the Book of Acts

Friday, April 12:

Read Acts 2:22-41 (the second time)

I trust you enjoyed reading this Scripture for the second time in the past few days! Would you not agree that any sermon that ends with these words is worthy of a closer look:

Those who accepted his message were baptized, and about three thousand were added to their number that day. Acts 2:41

For this reason, over the course of the next several days I would like to have you ponder a number of lessons that can be gleaned from Acts Chapter 2.

Our first lesson is that we can learn everything we need to know about repentance from seeing a real-life example right at the beginning of the Church! Peter has been hitting them hard with who Jesus is:

"... a man accredited by God to you by miraculous wonders and signs ..." Acts 2:22

God has raised this Jesus to life, and we are all witness of the fact. Acts 2:32

Exalted to the right hand of God, He has received from the Father the promised Holy Spirit and has poured out what you now see and hear. Acts 2:33

Now look at what follows:

When the people heard this they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and the other apostles, "Brothers, what shall we do?" Acts 2:37

Continued on the next page.

Back to the Book of Acts

Friday, April 12:

Read Acts 2:22-41 (the second time)
(Continued)

Peter's response in Verse 38 begins with the word "Repent!" Ask yourself, what does Peter want them to do when he tells them to repent?

As you know, this word has, by many, been distorted to mean something like stop your sinning. But, as we have learned, it is a compound word which means *to change your mind*. So, let's ask ourselves, does Peter harp on their sin or their wrong-headedness towards their Messiah? He does not! As it turned out, Peter's message struck a chord in their thinking!



What was it that caused the people to be cut to the heart? It was their realization that they had crucified their Messiah. When Peter told them to repent, did he want them to clean up their lives? No! He wanted them to change their minds about who Jesus was. And, based upon his speech and the working of the Holy Spirit, about 3,000 did change their minds at that very time and the church was off and running!

This is exactly the same kind of repentance we need in our day—a change of mind about who Jesus is and what He actually accomplished at the cross!

Back to the Book of Acts

Monday, April 15: Read Acts 19:11-22

The concept of repentance will come up many more times in the Book of Acts, so let's make an effort to correctly understand its role in salvation. Simply stated, *repentance* is correctly interpreted when we understand it to be the change of mind that occurs when people see themselves as sinners before a holy God in need of a Savior. This, in turn, sets them up to *believe* in the Savior that God has provided—the Lord Jesus Christ.

The common attack on this view of repentance is that it condones sin in the life of the believer and, therefore, in the Church. That is rubbish! This view just puts things in the proper order as we can see in today's reading. So there is a second lesson that we can learn from the start of the Church in Acts Chapter 2, and seen often in its early days. Look at what happens when:

... the name of the Lord Jesus is held in high honor: Many of those who believed now came and openly confessed their evil deeds. A number who had practiced sorcery brought their scrolls together and burned them publicly. Acts 19:17-19

First there was belief and then turning from sin. That is God's sequence. For to ask a lost person to turn from their sins as a condition of salvation is a grievous error on two counts. First, it is to ask a spiritually dead person to do something they can neither fully understand nor accomplish from a fallen source. Second, it is to add a component of works-based salvation and God clearly declares that salvation is apart from works. (Ephesians 2:9) The proper order is faith that leads to becoming a new creation in Christ. (II Corinthians 5:17) Then, this newly-created child of God can turn from sin, one aspect at a time, as the Holy Spirit reveals and convicts.

Back to the Book of Acts

Tuesday, April 16: Read I Corinthians 15:1-20

The Church started with the following message:

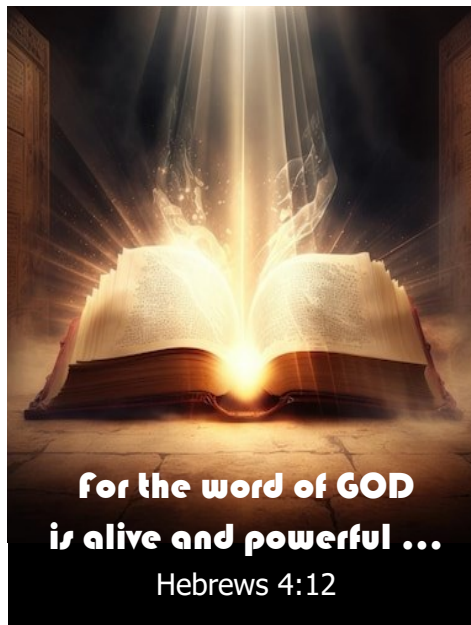
This man was handed over to you by God's set purpose and foreknowledge; and you with the help of wicked men, put Him to death by nailing Him to the cross. But God raised Him from the dead ... God has made this Jesus whom you crucified both Lord and Christ.

Acts 2:23-24, 36

Years later Paul summarizes the Gospel as follows:

By this Gospel you are saved ... Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and He was buried, that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, and that He appeared to ... more than 500 of the brothers at the same time ...

I Corinthians 15:2-6



**for the word of GOD
is alive and powerful ...**

Hebrews 4:12

The message of the Gospel is centered solely in the person and work of Christ and it doesn't matter if it is at the start of the Church or decades or even centuries later. The response that God is looking for on the part of man is faith in the salvation He has provided through His Son when anyone asks:

Sirs, what must I do to be saved?

Acts 16:30

Back to the Book of Acts

Tuesday, April 16:

Read I Corinthians 15:1-20 (Continued)

It doesn't matter if it is the words of Jesus to Nicodemus (John 3:14-15), or Paul to the Philippian jailor, the answer—the means by which lost mankind receives the salvation that God has provided—is to:

Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved ... Acts 16:31

I am reminding you of all this for one reason, we need to address an issue facing the Church in our day—an issue that is of great import to our role as Christ's ambassadors! A simple statement of the issue is this:

Is this Gospel message still relevant in our day?

If you listen to famous Christian speakers or read their books, you are going to be exposed to a message that goes something like this:

The message from Acts 2 is 2000 years old; it was preached to the Jews in Palestine—a specific people in a geographically small area; it involves historical events from which we are isolated. What we need now is a culturally and socially relevant message that will connect with the felt needs of our day. In short, the Gospel needs to be contextualized so that it will connect with people where they are in their lives.

Many voices in our day are saying the problem with Christianity is that it is irrelevant. Recent reports indicate that over 50% of Millennials and Gen X'ers have not been to church in the past six months. Therefore, many say that we must change the message to reach them! Well, what do you think? Is the Gospel message of Acts, the message by which the Church was established and grew, still relevant in our day?

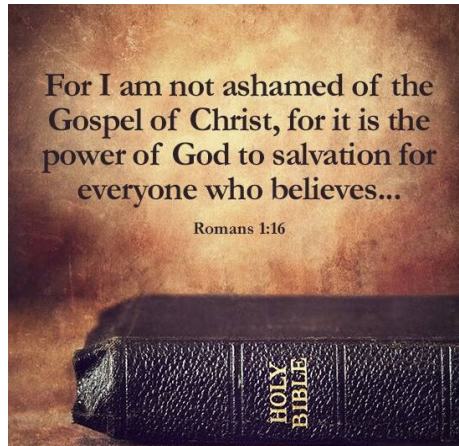
Back to the Book of Acts

**Wednesday, April 17:
Read Acts 17:16-34**

If you are going to be a witness for Christ—His ambassador—you had better know the message which you are called to communicate to the inhabitants of this lost world! Do we need, as many claim, to update the Gospel to make it *culturally relevant* to those who so desperately need to hear it? Let me restate the issue this way: You have a grandchild or great-

grandchild who seems to have behaviors and thought processes much different than yours, do they need an updated version of the Gospel in order to be saved? Do you see why this is such a weighty and important question?

Listen, we have tried making the message of Christianity more culturally relevant. The culture of the world told us the Biblical account of creation has been disproved by evolution and the *big bang theory* and so we gave away the foundation of the Bible. We have been told by both the world and those Christian leaders with name recognition that *customers* (lost people) need to see the Gospel as a product. We need to view the pastor as a CEO and the Church as a business! So, naturally the Gospel needs to be re-invented and repackaged on a regular basis in order to maintain market-share in the world. Lately, we have been told the Church needs to embrace the sexual norms of our day in order to remain relevant.



Back to the Book of Acts

Wednesday, April 17:

Read Acts 17:16-34 (Continued)

Let's cut to the heart of the matter and see what Paul did when confronting the intellectual elite of His day. He told this group of sophisticated intellectuals:

For He (God) has set a day when He will judge the world with justice by the Man He has appointed. He has given proof of this to all men by raising Him (Jesus) from the dead. Acts 17:31

Paul is relying on a truth the Bible makes abundantly clear:

... is appointed for men to die once, but after this the judgment ... Hebrews 9:27

Do you want proof? The fact of the resurrection is that proof! Paul completely bypassed the philosophical preferences of his listening audience—even offended some in the process—but he made sure the truth of God's saving grace was proclaimed. Why would we ever think we need to do otherwise?



Back to the Book of Acts

Thursday, April 18: Read I Timothy Chapter 2

Following the thought developed in yesterday's devotional, here is a principle for us to consider in the debate over cultural relevance:

Do not go to spiritually dead people to find out what's culturally relevant regarding salvation, go to the author of salvation.

Here is what God, through His word, says is relevant in our day:

- God, the creator of all things, is holy and lives in unapproachable light. (I Timothy 6:16)
- Man is not any of these things. Although made in the image and likeness of God, man rebelled and lives as an enemy of God—a mangled likeness of what he was meant to be.
- Unless something is done to fix this condition, mankind will spend eternity separate from his or her Creator.
- God has anointed one mediator between God and man—the Lord Jesus Christ. (I Timothy 2:5) As the one chosen by God, He is the one and only way whereby mankind might be redeemed from his or her lost estate.

Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name (person and work) under heaven given among men by which we must be saved. Acts 4:12

- The salvation available through this one Savior is a gift from God, and available to each and every person who will place his or her faith in who Jesus is and what He accomplished on the cross. (Romans 6:23)

Back to the Book of Acts

Thursday, April 18: Read I Timothy 2 (Continued)

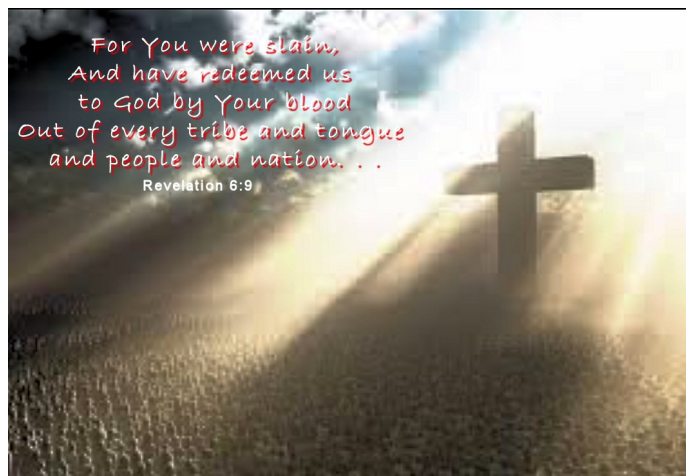
- As for the issue of culture, the blood of Christ:

**... purchased men for God from every tribe
and language and people and nation.**

Revelation 5:9

Are you still with me? The Gospel centered in Jesus Christ is the only culturally relevant message for mankind. We need to keep our hands off! For we do not need to change it to make it more relevant to our culture. It already is the ultimate in relevance! What we do need to do is to understand the message as deeply as possible and then convey the message as clearly as possible to those who need it. Can you imagine questioning whether a life preserver is culturally relevant to a drowning man?

Know the truth from God's perspective, communicate that truth, and leave it to the Holy Spirit to convict a confused heart. Do not get distracted by *noise* about cultural relevance from lost or confused people!



Back to the Book of Acts

Friday, April 19: Read Acts Chapter 3

As we have just finished discussing, we have a timeless and culturally relevant message to proclaim. Now in Chapter 3, we see a miracle of restoration.

By faith in the name of Jesus, this man whom you see and know was made strong. Acts 3:16

Marvelous as it is, the physical healing of this crippled individual is of minor consequence in comparison to the spiritual healing—the remission of sins.

You killed the author of life, but God raised Him from the dead ... Repent, then (change your mind about who Jesus was) **and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the Lord ...** Acts 3:15, 19-20

As Chapter 2 closed, we saw:

And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved. Acts 2:47

Now Chapter 3 begins with a miraculous healing, and we know the Apostles are boldly proclaiming a culturally relevant message. What could go wrong?

With all this going for it, we should certainly expect the Church to take off! It is going to, but it is also going to attract what the psalmist wrote of, what the prophets predicted for it, what Jesus prepared His disciples for, and the historical record is now going to prove. Specifically, the Gospel truth is going to bring persecution. Mark it down, in a fallen world ruled by Satan, *a truly relevant message of salvation is going to provoke a response*. The greater the response, the more likely it is that persecution will follow.

We will see exactly this happen as we move into Chapter 4 tomorrow.

Back to the Book of Acts

Monday, April 22: Read Acts 4:1-12

I mentioned yesterday that Jesus prepared His disciples for the response they were going to get from this world, Here is His warning:

"If the world hates you, keep in mind it hated Me first. No servant is greater than his master. If they persecuted Me, they will persecute you also."

John 15:18-20

We also see the history of the early Church prove Him right starting in Acts 4:1-4:

They seized Peter and John ... and put them in jail until the next day.

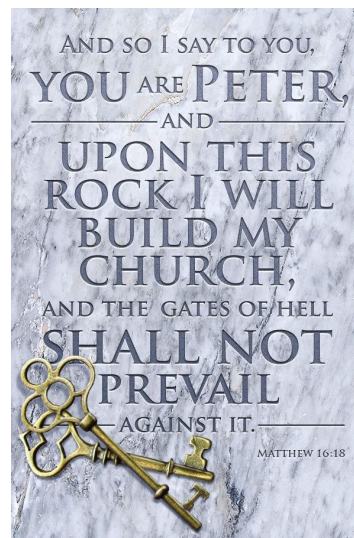
This situation brings some questions to mind. The first is: "Did this persecution stop the Church?" On the contrary:

But many who heard the message believed, and the number of men grew to about five thousand.

Acts 4:4

This is a perfect illustration of the promise of Matthew 16:18, for the "*gates of Hades shall not overcome*" the Church that is grounded upon the person and work of Christ! And here is a very important second question—why? Why would a *truly relevant message of salvation* provoke such a response?

This is a message that allows lost people—those estranged from God with a destiny in the Lake of Fire—to find



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Back to the Book of Acts

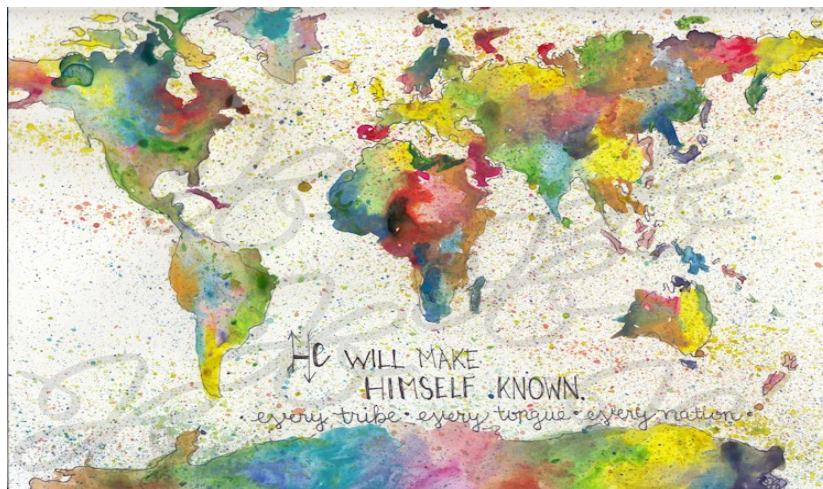
Monday, April 22: Read Acts 4:1-12 (Continued)

reconciliation and to change their eternal destiny to one of heaven. This is a message that is truly relevant in that it applies to all people of all nations. Why is there not great rejoicing and why do all people fail to embrace it?

These are very good questions! The answers include a recognition of the rebellious nature of lost man, and the spiritual warfare in which we are involved. For now, it is simply important to recognize that persecution is always going to come with Gospel response. Jesus prepared us for it, and the historical record of the entire Book of Acts is going to prove it to us.

If we are not prepared for it, we can very easily lose sight of our calling to be witnesses for Christ, especially in the face of persecution!

We will develop this topic further over the course of the next few days.



Back to the Book of Acts

Tuesday, April 23: Read Acts 5:12-33

So let's try to more fully understand the perplexing question, "Why in the world would the good news of salvation attract persecution?" Let me suggest a few reasons over the next days. The first reason can be found right in today's reading. As Peter and the others ministered the Gospel message of faith in Christ, and God attested to it by many signs and wonders:

... more and more men and women believed in the Lord and were added to their number.

Acts 5:14

Note the sole and simple means by which you were added to the Church—believing in the Lord. Now look at the response of the religious establishment:

Then the high priest and all his associates, who were members of the party of the Sadducees, were filled with jealousy.

Acts 5:17

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Back to the Book of Acts

Tuesday, April 23: Read Acts 5:12-33

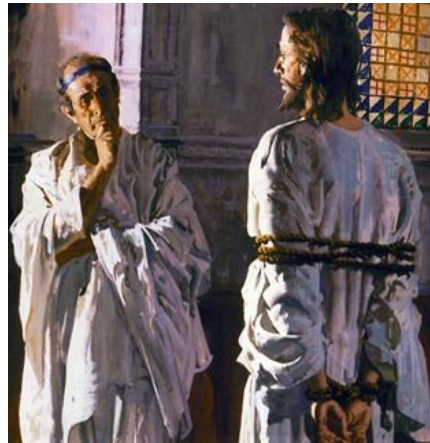
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The power, prestige, and material prosperity of the religious crowd are threatened by the message of the Gospel. This is neither the first nor the last time that jealousy or envy has led to persecution:

For he (Pilate) knew that it was out of envy that they had handed Jesus over to him. Matthew 27:18

When the Jews saw the crowds, they were filled with jealousy and talked abusively against what Paul was saying.

Acts 13:45



Perhaps the most telling example of the phoniness of religious zeal is in Acts Chapter 19:

There is danger not only that our trade will lose its good name, but also that the temple of the great goddess Artemis will be discredited ... and the world will be robbed of her divine majesty.

Acts 19:27

Many are being saved in Ephesus through the preaching of Paul. Yet, a silversmith named Demetrius starts a riot. Ostensibly, he is worried about the reputation of Artemis, when in reality his phony zeal is a cover for the risk to his pocketbook. Power, prestige, money—religion stands to lose all three in the face of the Gospel. Expect a negative reaction to this threat—even in our day!

Back to the Book of Acts

Wednesday, April 24: Read Acts 17

Yesterday we saw how Christians can undergo persecution at the hands of the religious establishment—anything from Islam and Buddhism to something closer to Christianity (think Spanish inquisition). Let me give you two more reasons for persecution. First, in Acts Chapter 17, Paul is in Athens and attempting to engage the intellectual elite of his day. Here is a snapshot of their response:

A group of Epicurean and Stoic philosophers began to dispute with him. Some of them asked, "What is this babbler trying to say?" Acts 17:18

When they heard about the resurrection of the dead, some of them sneered ... Acts 17:32

You see the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing. I Corinthians 1:18

Second, some simply sneer, others take it much further. Consider how fallen culture persecutes the righteous:

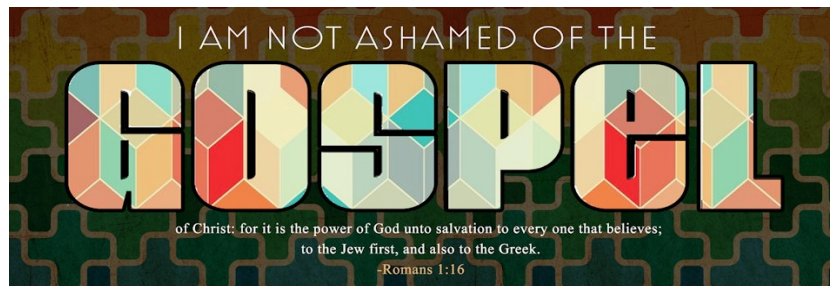
For you have spent enough time in the past doing what pagans choose to do—living in debauchery, lust, drunkenness, orgies, carousing and detestable idolatry. They think it strange that you do not plunge with them into the same flood of dissipation, and they heap abuse on you. I Peter 4:3-4

So despite the overwhelming nature of the good news of the Gospel, we should expect persecution to come from any or all of the following: the religious (political) establishment, the intellectual establishment, and the culture (society). I tell you this so you are ready for the tremendous pressure brought to bear in an effort to change the message! "If you Christians would just be more inclusive, tolerant, modern in your thinking ..." Should we listen to these voices which seek to make the Gospel more palatable? What do you think after our study in Acts?

Back to the Book of Acts

Thursday, April 25: Read Acts 4:12-36

Let's begin today with the question with which we closed yesterday, "*Should we listen to these voices which seek to make the Gospel more palatable?*" The early Church faced this very same question—let's see how they handled it.



In the first part of Acts Chapter 4, we have Peter and John being questioned by the religious establishment. Don't underestimate for a minute the tremendous pressure being brought to bear upon Peter and John. The text tells us that both Annas and Caiaphas were in attendance—the very same men behind the arrest and illegal trial of Jesus. Do the apostles soften the message, even temporarily, to save themselves? Not in the least, instead they quote Scripture:

The stone you builders rejected (the Lord Jesus Christ) **has become the capstone** (the One anointed by God to bring salvation) Psalm 118:22-23

Then they go on to boldly declare a truth we should all have memorized:

Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other Name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved. Acts 4:12

Salvation is found in no person and no work other than that of the Lord Jesus Christ! This is the kind of exclusive

Back to the Book of Acts

Thursday, April 25: Read Acts 4:12-36 (Continued)

claim that draws the ire of the world. Count on it!

Note that the religious establishment tells Peter and John to cease preaching in the name of Jesus. Their response:

Judge for yourselves whether it is right in God's sight to obey you rather than God. For we cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard.

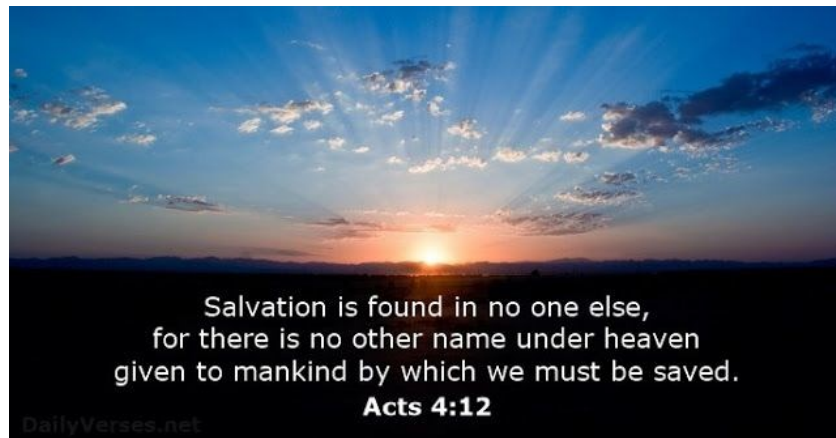
Acts 4:19-20

Naturally, the religious crowd issues threats against the disciples. Also note their response to these threats. The disciples gathered with the growing church and prayed:

Lord consider their threats and enable your servants to speak Your word with great boldness ... After they prayed, the place where they were meeting was shaken. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God boldly.

Acts 4:29-31

I think this decisively answers the question we have been pondering. Might we too be so bold in our witness!



Back to the Book of Acts

Friday, April 26: Read Ephesians 6:10-24

We have seen that the Gospel message is going to *draw fire* from at least three sources: religion, the intellectual elite, and the culture. Given the fact that the Gospel is such *good news* about how lost man can be saved from eternal death, why this depth of the resistance? We can see it is a threat to the power that religion holds over people, it is too simple for the elite, and it threatens the baser aspects of our culture. But surely there must be another reason why the persecution can so often be violent and unreasoning. It turns out there is, and we can find it in today's reading. Verse 12 tells us that our struggle is:

... not against flesh and blood ...

In other words, our struggle is not ultimately against religion, the intellectual elite, and society! No, our struggle is:

... against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.

Ephesians 6:12

You see, we know that:

... the whole world is under the control of the evil one.

I John 5:19

Satan has a demonic host that constitutes *the spiritual forces of evil* behind false religion, intellectual pride, and the culture. Now you know why the persecution of the Gospel can be so vehement and so unreasoning! For Satan is not only vehemently opposed to everything that God is doing, he also does not want to lose the subjects of his domain—the lost people of this world. Every time a person turns to the Gospel in faith, Satan loses a subject to the Kingdom of our Lord and Savior. (Colossians 1:13) What a glorious calling we have to be engaged in rescuing the perishing from the dominion of darkness into the Kingdom of Jesus Christ!

Back to the Book of Acts

Monday, April 29: Read II Timothy 3

Suppose that you understand what we have been covering the past few days, but you decide that you don't want to bring on the persecution that goes with sharing the Gospel. You think you'll just live a good life and leave the spreading of the Gospel to others. In other words, you decide to *check out* of the call to be a witness to Christ. (Acts 1:8) We make two mistakes if we try to avoid the persecution that goes with being a Gospel witness by being quiet. The first mistake is found in today's reading.

In fact, everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted, while evil men and impostors will go from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived. II Timothy 3:12-13

Keeping your mouth closed with respect to the Gospel is not enough to keep persecution from finding you. Just living consistent with who and what you are in Christ is enough to draw the ire of those who have made satisfying the flesh a way of life. They don't appreciate you drawing attention to their choices through the distinction of a life lived differently. Now you have another choice to make! Are you going to choose not only to be a silent Christian, but also to be a carnal Christian in order to avoid persecution? At some point, we should all be thinking, "Perish the thought!"

Here is the second mistake to avoid tucked away in the book of Philemon:

I pray that you may be active in sharing your faith, so that you will have a full understanding of every good thing we have in Christ. Philemon 1:6

If you are going to be persecuted either way, why not live for Christ and share the good news of His free gift of salvation. You may be persecuted, but also blessed for eternity!

More Reading Ahead

Tuesday, April 30: Read Revelation 11:15-19

As we return to *Reading Ahead*, an investigation of what is yet to come in God's redemptive plan, let's quickly recount what we have learned thus far: Jesus is coming again! Not only that, but an eternal kingdom is coming which is going to supplant Gentile rule of this earth, and replace it with Divine rule. In case you were in any doubt as to Who is going to rule in the coming Kingdom, today's reading leaves us in no doubt:

... "The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ, and He will reign for ever and ever!"
Revelation 11:15

Let me add Hebrews 1:8 to further reinforce our understanding:

But of the Son He says, "Your throne, O God, is forever and ever, and the righteous scepter is the scepter of His kingdom."

We may not understand everything about this kingdom, but it is pretty clear Jesus is coming, a kingdom is coming, and Jesus will fill the role of King over the coming kingdom. Now let me surprise you with something. Christianity, as a whole, has three different views of the coming kingdom. Consider the following brief descriptions:

- Amillennialism, which says there is no earthly kingdom to come.
- Postmillennialism, which says Jesus will return after the Church establishes a kingdom here on earth.

More Reading Ahead

Tuesday, April 30:

Read Revelation 11:15-19 (Continued)

- Premillennialism, which says that at the return of Jesus, He will establish and rule over an earthly kingdom.

Now it should be perfectly clear to you that these three different theologies do not even remotely say the same thing. At most, only one of them could be right. What is even more surprising, in view of the small sampling of Scripture we have looked at thus far, is that Premillennial-



ism, position number three, is the minority position among various Christian denominations.

What makes that especially surprising is that Premillennialism is the one that seems to best align with Scripture! Haven't we been reading passages that clearly say: Jesus is coming, a kingdom is coming, and Jesus is going to reign over that kingdom! Obviously, there is much more for us to consider.

VISTOSO

Community Church

He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit...*John 15:5*

1200 E. Rancho Vistoso Blvd., Oro Valley, AZ 85755 