

Reading Schedule for April 16-22, 2018

I mentioned in my sermon on April 8th that the believers in Jerusalem were scattered because of persecution. We will read that very thing on Tuesday of this week. The message goes out and people respond. A key player would be Saul, who we know as Paul. God will also speak to Peter about the inclusion of the Gentiles, preparing for the amazing receptivity of the Gentiles to the Gospel. As we learn from Romans 11, this is exactly how God had planned it to be. Let us continue the wildfire of the Gospel.

April 16 - Acts 7:35-60: “‘Look,’ he said, ‘I see heaven open and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God.’” (v.56) It is over 20 years ago that I heard a message about Stephen, and the fact that Jesus stood up for him. Everywhere else in Scripture it says that Christ is seated at the right hand of the Father. But in this text it says that he was standing. If someone arrives at my home and I am seated on the couch, I stand up and greet them into my home. So Jesus was standing up to greet Stephen and welcoming him in. He is thought of as the first martyr, and there would be a long train of other martyrs who would give their lives for the cause of Jesus Christ. Revelation highlights the honor that we will give to the martyrs. I do appreciate the challenge of being bold for the Gospel. Stephen demonstrates this very clearly. How does the story of Stephen challenge you; inspire you?

April 17 - Acts 8:1-25: “On that day a great persecution broke out against the church in Jerusalem, and all except the apostles were scattered throughout Judea and Samaria.” (v.1) You know I had to cite this verse as it gives recognition to believers being scattered throughout the region of Judea and Samaria. It is sometimes referred to as the “dispersion.” This “dispersion” led to the fulfillment of the promise of Acts 1:8 that the Gospel would go to the ends of the earth. In this chapter we read about Saul being the instigator of this intense persecution. But he would be dramatically converted (chapter 9) into the main spokesman for the Gospel spreading through the Gentiles. Now we also have an example of Philip spreading the message to Samaritans. It is hard to imagine being forced from your home, and having to move with the uncertainty of where you would even find shelter. Sometimes these kind of stretching experiences can lead to the best kind of things. The church has never been birthed in comfort. It has always been advanced through difficulties. How do you respond to this disastrous advancement?

April 18 - Acts 8:26-40: “Then Philip ran up to the chariot and heard the man reading Isaiah the prophet. ‘Do you understand what you are reading?’ Philip asked.” (v.30) Have you ever heard the phrase “divine appointment?” This was an example of a divine appointment. The Lord was already working in this Ethiopian as he was contemplating the truth of God through the prophet Isaiah. This man’s conversion would lead to a key person sharing the truth of the Gospel to other Ethiopians. The Holy Spirit directed Philip to approach the eunuch. What an amazing text for Philip to explain. He could quickly direct the message of Isaiah 53 to the truth about Jesus Christ. Let Philip’s example guide your steps as you are led by the Holy Spirit, willing to engage in a spiritual conversation as opportunity arises and then explain the truth about Jesus and how he has changed your life. May God give you an opportunity, even this week. How do you respond to this one-on-one encounter between Philip and a person seeking God?

April 19 - Acts 9:1-19: “‘Who are you, Lord?’ Saul asked. ‘I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting,’ he replied.” (v.5) If Saul had ever wondered about the resurrection, he wondered no more. He met the living Christ, who was not buried in a grave, but alive and active, touching the life of a man named Saul who would need to change his name to Paul because of the profound effect Christ made on his life. Paul is actually a Greek name that would give him quicker access to connection with the Gentile world. Paul would

refer to his testimony three different times in the Book of Acts as he shares his story about Christ’s impact on his life. You also have encountered the Lord in such a way that you came to believe that he was truly the Son of God and you needed his work of salvation in your life. You received him by faith and now he lives in you. Your story is very real as well. Please tell your story to someone this week, about how Christ came into your life. What do you learn about God through the conversion of Saul?

April 20 - Acts 9:20-43: “At once he began to preach in the synagogues that Jesus is the Son of God.” (v.20) I remember when I met the Lord as a 20 year old young man. I immediately began to talk about it with others. As with most people, that has cooled over the years, and now I wait for a clear opportunity to share about my faith in Christ. But when I was first saved, it didn’t matter. I would just share it with my fraternity brothers, classmates, and fellow baseball players. I don’t know that I was more fruitful at that time than I am 40 years later, but I didn’t hold back. That’s the message from God that is stirring in my heart – do not hold back. I don’t want to offend people or push them away so that I no longer have an opportunity to share about what Christ means to me. But I don’t want to miss an opportunity either. The Bible tells us that these are very opportune days, because the world is intensifying and people are experiencing incredible brokenness. The hope of Jesus can rescue them. How do you respond to Saul/Paul’s eagerness to share the Word and tell people about what happened to him?

April 21 - Acts 10:1-33: “He said to them: ‘You are well aware that it is against our law for a Jew to associate with or visit a Gentile. But God has shown me that I should not call anyone impure or unclean.’” (v.28) The strict Jewish traditions declare certain people unclean. Because of these manmade limitations, it was virtually impossible for Jews to associate with Gentiles without becoming unclean themselves. God gave Peter a vision that would be in-step with who he is as an inclusive God. The Jews were a people who were exclusive and all their energy went to keeping themselves separate from others. The Gospel is inclusive and we are called to reach out and befriend people who need the Lord. Peter would be a key example of how God wanted to change his perspective so that he would freely associate with Gentiles, even if it offended his fellow Jewish connections. I told you that the theme of these chapters is opening up the Gospel to the world. This is exactly what Jesus told his disciples to do, and now it is happening. We follow a marvelous heritage by spreading the Gospel. How might you spread the Gospel today?

April 22 - Acts 10:34-48: “So he ordered that they be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. Then they asked Peter to stay with them for a few days.” (v.48) As we come to the culmination of this exciting event of the Gentiles receiving the message of Christ, Peter then offers the next step of baptism. To be baptized into the name of Christ is a sign of identifying with that name and taking on Christ’s character. They had obviously received the Lord and identification of the Holy Spirit was strong and real, so the next step was to be baptized. Baptism is an outward sign of an inward work of God, which was very obvious in this case. You will notice that they were baptized after they received Christ so that this might be a public declaration of their allegiance to Christ and their identification with the Christian community. That is exactly how we affirm baptism in our ministry at New Harvest. Will you pray with me for the fruit of the Gospel and many more baptisms?

PRAYER: Pray for the spreading of the Gospel, which is our privilege and purpose as followers of Christ.