

Reading Schedule for April 29 – May 5, 2019

After one week of readings in the Book of Acts, you know why I wanted to revisit this inspiring account of the early church. This narrative gives us a picture of what God wants to do through his church.

April 29 – Acts 4:1-22: “When they saw the courage of Peter and John and realized that they were unschooled, ordinary men, they were astonished and they took note that these men had been with Jesus.” (v.13) I was drawn to verses 12 & 13 because both seem to share important information with us. People like Peter and John were not expected to speak so confidently before the supreme court of the land. They were ordinary men. They had not gone to rabbinical schools of any kind. But they had been taught by Jesus. One of our greatest testimonies is the difference others see in my life and your life since we have believed in Christ. In my opinion, the Lord is seen clearest in our lives when we face trials and difficulty with courage and deep faith. This is true in Peter and John. How do you respond to Peter and John’s example exemplified in these verses?

April 30 – Acts 4:23-37: “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.” (v.31) There is an interesting phrase in this verse that says, “they were all filled with the Holy Spirit.” But we realize that they had already been filled with the Holy Spirit previously. Too often we think of being filled with the Holy Spirit as a one-time deal. This is not true in the Book of Acts. As they prayed they were encouraged in the Holy Spirit and He gave them much boldness and courage. He also stirred them to share their belongings with each other. They had an amazing insight that their possessions were not their own, and so they could more easily share them with others. Their example of prayer and their generosity is inspiring for us today in a world of possession and preoccupation. How do you respond to that?

May 1 – Acts 5:1-11: “When Ananias heard this, he fell down and died. And great fear seized all who heard what had happened.” (v.5) There is such intensity to this event. I want you to see the significance of the church in this event. Honesty and integrity were essential to the early church in its vulnerable launch in a world of opposition. Dishonesty, greed and selfishness are always destructive in the church. But you can realize how crucial these beginning days were for the formation of Christ’s body called the church. The unity of the church is one of the clearest indications of the presence of God. The Lord calls us to unity, and this stark example of disunity and deception lives on so that we have a reverent understanding of the importance of Christ’s bride, the fellowship of believers who represent Christ in this world. How do you respond to this challenging event?

May 2 – Acts 5:12-42: “The apostles left the Sanhedrin, rejoicing because they had been counted worthy of suffering disgrace for the Name.” (v.41) This reminds me of something I read recently about the persecuted church. Believers who are being persecuted in many parts of the world do not ask us that God would take away the hardship they are going through, but rather that God would give them the strength to go through it. The apostles are clearly an example of this kind of tenacity. It is hard for us to think of persecution as a blessing, much less the

hardships that we go through. It is hard to envision the apostles being whipped as the victim would receive lashes on their bare skin. Tradition tells us that the victim would receive two blows to the back and then one to the chest. May the Lord help us to increase our understanding of hardship, and even persecution to the glory of God. What stands out to you?

May 3 – Acts 6:1-7: “Brothers and sisters, choose seven men from among you who are known to be full of the Spirit and wisdom. We will turn this responsibility over to them . . .” (v.3) I am reminded of Moses and how he was doing too much as people would line up to hear his counsel in Exodus 18. His father-in-law told him that what he was doing wasn’t good. Likewise, the apostles have many overwhelming tasks that could not be accomplished by them alone. This verse is about delegation and teamwork. I am personally thankful for the many partners I enjoy at our church. I identify with the apostles in the calling to minister the Word and to be a man of prayer. Having godly men and women involved in the leadership of the church is a delight to me. You and I are not meant to do the ministry as lone rangers. The quality of your ministry will be connected to the partnerships you form. How might you link arms with others in this journey of serving Christ and his church?

May 4 – Acts 6:8-15: “Now Stephen, a man full of God’s grace and power, performed great wonders and signs among the people.” (v.8) One of these leaders who the apostles enlisted for leadership and service is the godly man, Stephen. Stephen was used by God to perform miracles and preach boldly. Yet, his role in the church was to minister to the needy and make sure the widows were taken care of. Stephen was a strong, spirit-filled man who was going to stand firm in the face of devastating persecution. He will be the first martyr of the church. This will be the topic tomorrow, but the message I see in these verses is that godly people do not always receive affirmation in the world we live in. I encourage you to pray for the persecuted church and consider attending a night of discovery and prayer for those who are persecuted around the globe on May 9th at 7pm.

May 5 – Acts 7:1-60: “But Stephen, full of the Holy Spirit, looked up to heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God.” (v.55) The last two days we had short readings, but today we read the whole message and outcome of Stephen. There are important aspects of his speech to the religious leaders that surrounded him. But the verse I highlighted has a small phrase with a big announcement. It says that Jesus is standing at the right hand of God. Everywhere else it says that Jesus is seated at the right hand of God. But this reminds me of what Jesus said would be announced when his servants entered eternity: “Well done good and faithful servant.” In this passage, the message is Jesus standing with a sense of honor for the courage and sacrifice that Stephen displays for the Gospel. Stephen’s death would affect the life of a man named Paul (Saul) even though his life is cut short. Living a long life is not God’s goal for you and me. Accomplishing our purpose, whether a short life or a long life on earth, is the goal. Stephen fulfilled his purpose and is enjoying eternity with Jesus right now. How do you respond to this story of the first martyr?

PRAYER: Pray for our country and our leaders as we honor the National Day of Prayer this Thursday.