

Reading Schedule for April 30-May 6, 2018

These chapters are very impressive to me because they have to do with the spreading of the Gospel. One of my favorite episodes in the missionary work of Paul is his response when imprisoned in Philippi. He is in the dungeon of a prison as he and Silas pray and sing praises to God. All the while, the prisoners are listening, able to understand and identify the fact that Paul is the proclaimer of the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. May your missionary heart expand this week.

April 30 - Acts 15:22-41: “They had such a sharp disagreement that they parted company. Barnabas took Mark and sailed for Cyprus . . .” (v.39) The separation between Paul and Barnabas is upsetting to me. From a human point of view, this seems unnecessary. Of course, it doesn’t tell us very much about their disagreement, only that it centered on John Mark. However, I began to think about how God used this disagreement to double the missionary effort. Barnabas, with Mark, were sent to strengthen the churches in Cypress, and Paul went to the churches in Syria, Cilicia, and then Galatia. Both their companions, Mark and Silas, went on to have significant ministries for the Gospel. Isn’t it amazing that God can take our blunders and actually turn them around for good? It reminds me of the biblical statement that God turned a curse into a blessing. I’ve seen that in my life several times. What stands out to you in this reading today?

May 1 - Acts 16:1-15: “During the night Paul had a vision of a man of Macedonia standing and begging him, ‘Come over to Macedonia and help us.’” (v.9) You will notice in verse 7 that Paul is not allowed to press on in his missionary ambitions. But it wouldn’t be long, and the Holy Spirit would speak to Paul through a vision. Paul understood that God was guiding him. There is no doubt that Paul has fruitful ministry ahead. One of the strongest groups in the early church was the believers in Philippi. They were soon to hear about the Gospel and respond enthusiastically. One of my favorite New Testament letters is Paul’s writing to the Philippians. Without that vision, Paul would have missed this exciting opportunity. But since he was sensitive to God and obeyed, great things happened. I am very eager for the guidance of the Holy Spirit. When I am led by the Holy Spirit, I know I will be in step with God. Sometimes I can clearly identify God’s leading in my life, and other times it is not as clear. All I know is that when I am sure of his promptings that I want to obey, just like Paul did. What does it mean to you to be led by the Holy Spirit?

May 2 - Acts 16:16-40: “When he received these orders, he put them in the inner cell and fastened their feet in the stocks.” (v.24) This describes the situation for Paul and Silas. They are in the deepest part of the prison. No doubt this has to be the worst of the worst. It is most likely very dark, they are confined by chains, and their response is to pray and sing hymns to God. That sounds very natural, right? Not at all! But this is the interesting thing about the believers in the Book of Acts. They considered it an honor to suffer for the name of Jesus Christ. (Acts 4:24-30) Peter, in his letter, wrote about suffering as the normal experience for followers of Christ. They did not even try to escape, but used the opportunity to share the good news with the jailer and his household. This is one of my favorite stories in the Book of Acts because it reminds me that it costs something to serve the Lord. But like Paul and Silas, I want to remain joyful in the midst of any challenge or when I am confronted with opposition. How does this story inspire you?

May 3 - Acts 17:1-15: “Now the Berean Jews were of more noble character than those in Thessalonica, for they received the message with great eagerness and examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true.” (v.11) It is often a positive title to refer to yourself as a Berean. They are described as noble, which means to be fair, open-minded and thoughtful. Their desire to examine the Scriptures shows their intent on

finding the truth. The result was that many believed. The Book of Acts references the pattern of believers as ones who would seek out the truth through the Scriptures. From the very beginning, the early church was established on the teachings of the Apostles. This was synonymous with studying God’s Word and being nourished by it. As followers of Christ, we have the opportunity to conscientiously and eagerly seek God’s direction and will through the study of his Word. There is spiritual nourishment and truth that will set you free. How devoted are you to the Word of God?

May 4 - Acts 17:16-34: “For as I walked around and looked carefully at your objects of worship, I even found an altar with this inscription: TO AN UNKNOWN GOD. So you are ignorant of the very thing you worship—and this is what I am going to proclaim to you.” (v.23) The inscription of gods named Unknown in Athens is a part of a discovery of the Greek geographer, Pausanias. He also mentions such an altar in Olympia. There have been archaeological discoveries of the inscription “To the unknown god.” Paul speaks to them in their own language. He is earning the right to be heard. He uses their interest in an unknown god to present a personal God. He is getting their attention, and then telling them about the God who made the heavens and the earth; one who does not live in temples made by man. His presentation to those listening in Athens is impressive. He shows us the importance of finding common ground. This principle will help you in your efforts to build a bridge to others so that they might be open to hearing about the Gospel of Jesus Christ. What do you learn from Paul in this reading?

May 5 - Acts 18:1-17: “For I am with you, and no one is going to attack and harm you, because I have many people in this city.” (v.10) I have always been fascinated with this verse and its meaning. Up to this point, opposition was a part of Paul’s witness, and he would often leave the city and move on. But the Lord, in a vision, assured him that he would have successful ministry in Corinth, and would suffer no further harm. In obedience, Paul remained there for 18 months, during which time he wrote 1st and 2nd Thessalonians. God’s assurance was immediately confirmed by Paul’s deliverance from an attempt to condemn him before the proconsul. He had the privilege of introducing many in Corinth to faith in Jesus Christ. He stayed in Corinth longer than any other city except Ephesus, preaching the Gospel in order that through his preaching those whom God had chosen would come to faith. So too, the Lord has many in this city who have yet to respond, but are waiting for our witness. What does this say to you about persevering? What does this say to you about boldly sharing the message of Jesus Christ?

May 6 - Acts 18:18-28: “He had been instructed in the way of the Lord, and he spoke with great fervor and taught about Jesus accurately, though he knew only the baptism of John.” (v.26) Do you notice something about the ministry of Priscilla and Aquila that is so meaningful and refreshing? They did not belittle Apollos in front of anyone, but rather in private spoke to him more specifically about the Word of God. Explain means to elaborate or expound. We are encouraged to explain the Word of God to each other. We emphasize the importance of small group ministry and studying the Bible together. Individually we may be off, and not clear about the truth, but together we can seek God and be instructed through the Holy Spirit as we gather. Do not neglect the importance of relationship and small group connection. It also identifies the fact that Priscilla and Aquila did it together. Priscilla was very gifted as a lead woman, but she did it in cooperation with her husband. This is an important principle as well. How do you respond to the advancement of the Gospel in the early church?

PRAYER: Pray for the newcomers as we anticipate sharing lunch this Sunday as we meet with those newer to the church.