

Reading Schedule for May 22-28, 2017

You will notice in this week's reading that I have chosen to have us read longer sections of this narrative. That is exactly why I have done it, because it is more of a story of Paul's journey. Previously, we learned about Paul's connections to various people and churches, but now we will study his defense as he goes from one challenging situation to another. We will be reminded of the power of his testimony and hopefully be inspired by it.

May 22 – Acts 20:12-38: “Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers. Be shepherds of the church of God, which he bought with his own blood.” (v.28) I've always resonated with this verse because it is about being a leader in the church. But the note that I highlight is the importance of watching out for your own soul. What is happening in my life concerning my relationship to God? A few weeks ago, we learned about the importance of examining ourselves. This verse is like that to me. I want to be a faithful shepherd to the church of God, but I need to be aware of what is going on in my own life. This is not a focus that is self-centered. It is rather focused on personally evaluating my spiritual vitality. How am I doing in the Lord? How are you doing in the Lord?

May 23 – Acts 21:1-26: “He had four unmarried daughters who prophesied.” (v.9) Too often we forget about the importance of ministry through the heart and life of women. Too often the evangelical church can become male dominant. Philip's daughters prophesied in a way that meant they proclaimed the truth of God. The Bible recognizes other women who prophesied, Miriam, Deborah, Huldah, Noadiah and Anna. This is not a major point in this reading, but it is one that I wanted to notice. I affirm the ministry of women at New Harvest, and appreciate their leadership, gifting and sacrifice for the kingdom of God. What else do you notice in this reading that gets your attention?

May 24 – Acts 21:27-40: “When Paul reached the steps, the violence of the mob was so great he had to be carried by the soldiers.” (v.35) It is continually inspiring to me that Paul persevered. He faced violence, persecution, and the possibility of death everywhere he went. Tomorrow we will hear his defense as we have been inspired by his boldness. You may not have realized this, but Paul spoke Aramaic, as well as Greek, and possibly other languages. This would generate connection to the Jewish people, but it would also make him relevant to the Gentile world, which honored the universal language of Greek. Each chapter reminds me how significant Paul's contribution was to the early church, the New Testament, and the mission of Jesus Christ. I look forward to meeting Paul in heaven. What do you notice in this shorter reading today?

May 25 – Acts 22:1-30: “Then the Lord said to me, ‘Go; I will send you far away to the Gentiles.’” (v.21) The people listened intently to Paul, but the word “Gentile” brought out all their anger and exposed their pride. They

were supposed to be a light to the Gentiles, telling them about the one true God, but they had denounced that mission by becoming separatists and exclusive. God's plan would not be thwarted. The Gentiles would hear the good news through Paul, and even Peter. I mentioned this several times, that God's desire for his people was to spread the message of truth throughout the world. But they did not embrace that mission because of selfishness and legalism. They had an elitist approach to their religion. Be aware of people who say that they have better truth than you. How do you respond to these words?

May 26 – Acts 23:1-35: “But when the son of Paul's sister heard of this plot, he went into the barracks and told Paul.” (v.16) This is such an interesting aspect to the story. It raises a number of questions about how Paul's family would know where he is to come to his aid. This is actually the only biblical reference to Paul's family. Paul's nephew was able to see Paul, even though Paul was in protective custody, because Roman prisoners were accessible to their relatives and friends who could bring them food and other amenities. This child was used by God to help Paul in a very profound way. God can use anyone, even a child. How does this reading stir your heart?

May 27 – Acts 24:1-27: “As Paul talked about righteousness, self-control and the judgment to come, Felix was afraid and said, ‘That's enough for now! You may leave. When I find it convenient, I will send for you.’” (v.25) This is such a crucial point in the story, because this man was warming up to the truth of Jesus Christ. You might have people in your life who show an interest, which is good, but their personal response stays at arm's length with the Gospel. Many people are glad to talk about religion, as long as it doesn't touch their lives too personally. The Gospel is not effective until it moves from principles and ideas into a personal, life-changing dynamic. We see that in this story. How do you respond to this chapter?

May 28 – Acts 25:1-27: “Then Agrippa said to Festus, ‘I would like to hear this man myself.’ He replied, ‘Tomorrow you will hear him.’” (v.22) This king was son of Herod Agrippa I, and a descendant of Herod the Great. He had power over the temple; controlled the temple treasury; and could appoint and remove the high priest. Agrippa was of Jewish descent, and had heard about Paul. Paul made the most of a very difficult situation. He ministered to people in the prison, the military officials around him, and now to the king himself. Paul saw this as a new opportunity to present the Gospel. Rather than complain about the situation, he looked for opportunities to serve God and share the message. How does that challenge you? What does it mean to be a person on mission?

Prayers: Pray for our prison ministry as we begin to expand our efforts with a man incarcerated named Benjamin. Pray for the team as we meet this Thursday evening.