

A Museum of Thought from the Book of...

ACTS

Devotional Readings from the Book of Acts



Waukesha Bible Church
Patrick J. Griffiths

A Museum of Thought

Devotional Readings From the Book of Acts

Copyright © 2007 Waukesha Bible Church

Published by Torn Veil Publications

Reigning Grace is the Theology of Waukesha Bible Church

Waukesha Bible Church
553 W24079 Glendale Road
Waukesha, Wisconsin 53189
www.waukeshabible.org

All rights reserved. No part of this booklet may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means — electronic, mechanical, photocopy, recording, or otherwise — except for brief quotations for the purpose of review or comment, without the prior permission of the publisher.

Scripture taken from the HOLY BIBLE, NEW INTERNATIONAL VERSION®, Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984, International Bible Society. Used by permission of Zondervan Bible Publishers.

Preface

Since 1951 Waukesha Bible Church (WBC) has ministered to the Waukesha community. WBC is a Christ-Exalting, Word-Centered, Global-Impacting, Grace-Based Ministry. As a fellowship we are convinced that God is honored in the careful handling of His Word and in the acknowledgment that His Son, Jesus Christ, is enough for this life and in the life that is to come. We are equally convinced that God has entrusted us with this message. It is a message of life and not death; of freedom, not bondage. We wish to take this message to the ends of the earth until worshippers from every tribe, tongue, people and nation have been gathered to honor God.

A Word of Introduction

Local Churches have received from God a sacred trust. This trust is a mission. This mission is defined for us in Matthew 28:18-20, Acts 1:8, and 2 Timothy 2:2. This same mission is pictured for us by the early church in the activity of the apostle Paul beginning in Acts 13:1. The mission is to duplicate herself in the lives of others. Church health is not defined by numerical size or budgetary well-being, but by the degree to which they are intentionally engaging in the reproducing of local churches. Churches birth churches. God's safeguard against doctrinal defect and pastoral apathy is through the strengthening and establishing of local churches.

What is the Purpose of this Study?

The intent of all study is to ask the hard questions and to seek Biblical answers. Parroting standard answers without learning the truth first hand will produce an anemic faith. May it please our heavenly Father to open our eyes to the magnitude of His grace so that we might understand all that we are in His Son and all that He is for us.

A word about Torn Veil Publications

Torn Veil Publications (TVP) is the distributing arm of WBC and exists to shout the supremacy of God in all things by finding, celebrating, and declaring that He is enough in this life and in the life to come through the systematic study of Scripture and to share Him with every tribe, tongue, people, and nation. It is all designed as part of the WBC vision to spread a Christ-Exalting, Word-Centered, Global-Impacting, Grace-Based message to others.

Why “A Museum of Thought?”

AN INTRODUCTION

It is my desire to share with you a portion of my “walk with God” on a devotional level. This is personal and thus subjective. I find great joy in reading the Scripture, meditating on its truths, praying for the people of God, and enjoying who Christ is, what He has done, and who I now am in Him. These “musings” make up my “walk with God.” To better understand this idea I would like to explain why I have entitled this, “A Museum of Thought.” So without further ado, let us venture forth.

Let us begin by defining what a museum is. A museum is “an institution which collects, conserves, researches, exhibits, and interprets objects of lasting interest or value for the purposes of study, education and enjoyment.”

gondolin.rutgers.edu/MIC/text/how/organization_type_glossary.htm

“The English ‘museum’ comes from the Latin word, and is pluralized as ‘museums.’ It is originally from the Greek *mousetion*, which denotes a place or temple dedicated to the Muses (the patron divinities in Greek mythology of the arts), and hence a building set apart for study and the arts, especially the institute for philosophy and research.”

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Museum>

The verb “to muse” means “to be absorbed in thought, to ponder, loiter, waste time.” It literally means “to stand with one’s nose in the air” (or, possibly, “to sniff about like a dog who has lost the scent”).

<http://www.etymonline.com/index.php?term=muse>

I can only speak for myself and the experiences inside of my life, but we have lost interest in “musing.” The ability is there; as image bearers God made us “to muse.” But our western culture defies our abilities and robs us of a context “to muse.” We rush from one brain-deadening activity to the next, never realizing the consequences of such flittering action. It is as if we are consumed by a nervous quest that has no object and knows no end. Pausing and pondering flee from us as if in mortal combat. But as I “muse” over this, there is a real sense in which our lost interest in absorbed thought is to the detriment of our immortal souls.

Think about this idea in your own life. When was the last time you were absorbed in thought? When was the last time you sniffed out something that eluded you? I find great joy in reading and in journaling my “musings.” There is nothing profound, but such actions have provided occasions for personal and enriched worship of God through the various objects observed and in the process itself.

I have written for a number of years, but this is the first time that I have chosen to make them available for your “musing.” This type of writing is a witness to my communion

with God. It is a prayerful and worship-filled expression of my relationship with my God. I give it to you for stimulation, so that perhaps you might slow down and “muse” over those objects and experiences that cross your path on a daily basis. The movement of God is all around us. May the Holy Spirit slow us down to His beauty and may we take the time to see God’s hand in all things.

A word about the “journal:” The statements following the reference are the initial thoughts the Holy Spirit placed on my mind. The section “Making it Personal” contains additional thoughts to guide you in your meditation. Nothing I say is of necessary importance to you. I invite you to listen to the Holy Spirit’s instruction through the text of Scripture for yourself.

“A Museum of Thought” From the Book of Acts

1:3, 6 *“He. . . spoke about the kingdom of God.”*

Kingdom thinking plays an important role in the early church. See Paul in Acts 28:31. Unfortunately, we have separated the idea of the Old Testament kingdom from our New Testament Christianity. There is a rich theology of the kingdom of which we are ignorant. We need to revisit kingdom ideology in order to pray more appropriately the Lord’s thoughts when He said, “Your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven” (Matt. 6:10).

Look up the word “kingdom” in the book of Acts and write down your own impressions of its occurrence and usage (1:3, 6; 8:12; 14:22; 19:8; 20:25; 28:23, 31). Is this kingdom ever defined in Acts? How would they understand the kingdom that was spoken of by the apostles?

1:4 *“Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised”*

The gift forces it to be grace appropriated (2:33, 38, 39). If it is merited, it is a wage. The gift and Spirit baptism are connected.

Take a look back to Luke 24:49. What do you see as a necessary link between Luke 24 and Acts 1? Also, read Acts 2 and seek to understand the nature of this gift the Father promised to His people.

1:6 *“Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?”*

This verse strongly suggests there is still a future role for the nation of Israel in the Kingdom of God.

Do you think the early church saw itself as being different than the believing people of God up to this point? Do you think they saw the promises to Israel as something different than what they would be expecting?

1:7 *“It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority.”*

The Father has placed every event in its proper setting. Each event in life unfolds according to His wise and gracious master plan. Nothing He does is arbitrary or random. It is never without thought. You and I might see life as an unfolding of unconnected and unfortunate events, but God has a master plan and it is playing out

according to His wise oversight. May He grant to us the ability to embrace His control and provide for us a spirit of deep contentment and rest.

1:8 *"But you will receive power. . ."*

This power by baptism is ours today – we are living in Pentecostal power. We must step out by faith and live in that power.

How is what you have different than what they had? How do you believe the power was manifested in the first century church? How do you believe this power is manifested in the church of today? How have you seen or experienced the power of God in your own life and in the life of the church you attend?

1:9 *" . . . a cloud hid him from their sight."*

Words have meaning. Scripture does not use words as filler. Each one is placed specifically in an assigned pattern. What it might mean other than, "a cloud hid him from their sight," is not readily noted. This is true for every statement in Scripture.

The thought that every word in the original language of the Bible is important is referred to in theology as *verbal plenary inspiration*. *Verbal* means *words*, and *plenary* means *every*. The word "*inspired*" means *God breathed*. Thus, every word in the Bible is God breathed. How do you handle the written Word of God? Is the Word of God valued by you? How does this value show itself on a daily or weekly basis?

1:15ff *"Then they cast lots, and the lot fell to Mathias"*

Why did the original eleven believe Judas had to be replaced? Did they make the Psalmist say something he was not saying (1:20)? Does God override our eisegetical blunders for His purposes?

"Eisegesis" is the reading of our thoughts into that of the Scripture. Such a practice is inappropriate. "Exegesis" is the reading of the original author's thoughts out of the Scripture. God, using human instrumentality, works His meaning through individuals so that we might know what God wants. The practice of understanding God's thoughts is called "exegesis."

The early church saw the Old Testament as a revelation of Jesus Christ. They believed the Bible (i.e. Old Testament [Remember, there was no New Testament at this time]) spoke of Christ. As they read their Bibles, they saw in its stories His story, and thus used it in the manner found in 1:20 concerning the Psalms.

1:21-26 *"Show us which of these two you have chosen . . . then they cast lots"*

In the choosing of Judas' replacement, they planned but were trusting God as to the outcome. Notice verse 26 in light of Proverbs 16:33. This action on their part was a "work" of faith. I do not see how their process was outside God's will. They completely abandoned their actions to the overarching control of God to supersede their actions and work through their actions. God was not reacting to their process or decision. Their process and the outcome were viewed by them as God doing the work.

Are you trusting God in the moments of your life? Do you see Him working in the mundane and the routine? God's sovereignty does not exclude human planning nor human responsibility. His sovereignty is the foundation upon which life is to be lived. Such an understanding as theirs gives life hope knowing that He is in control and working out all things according to His purpose. Neither Judas' fall nor Matthias' appointment were outside of what God was doing.

1:24 *"Lord, you know everyone's heart."*

This is such a comforting thought. God knows my inner most thoughts. Nothing escapes His insight. He sees past my inability to articulate in words my soul love for Him. He knows my failures and "sins of the heart." Yet, in knowing all this, He still loves me, accepts me, forgives me, and gives to me without restraint His benefits and blessings. What affect does this truth have on your devotional life?

1:25 *"Judas left to go where he belongs."*

Very scary thought how Judas, an apostle, chosen by Jesus Christ, became the betrayer. This was his purpose, his role. Even if we reject the idea of pre-determining (i.e. "predestination") and embrace foreknowledge (i.e. "to know beforehand"), his destiny was unchanging.

Judas rejected the Christ and exchanged him for popularity and possessions. How tragic. How often do we find ourselves doing the same? What have you found more attractive than Christ? In what ways do you find Christ lacking in your personal and daily experiences? Like Judas, all who forsake Christ will find nothing but bitterness and death. May we never forget this truth.

2:2 *"Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven"*

The events on Pentecost were unexpected. No matter how often we condition ourselves to believe in the imminent (i.e. "in your face") nature of our faith, we are still surprised when God "shows up" and acts according to His Word. May God cause us to see the coming together of heaven on earth in this moment.

2:12 *"What does this mean?"*

It is still the question we are asking today, "What does this mean?" This is the question we must ask of every text. When studying the Bible there are two ideas that must be considered. The first is *meaning* and the second is *significance*. *Meaning* has to do with understanding what the original author meant to the original audience. *Significance* has to do with what the meaning of that text has to do with me, personally. *Meaning* deals more with interpretation and *significance* leans more toward application. It is the Holy Spirit who brings to light both *meaning* and *significance* in all of His people.

2:23 *"This man was handed over to you by God's set purpose and foreknowledge."*

Divine sovereignty and human responsibility are fully compatible. Neither negates the other.

Although we can find the idea of God handing Jesus over to be murdered repugnant, this is the consistent message of the Bible (cf. Isaiah 53:10). Just as it is impossible to negate human responsibility for the choices of human volition, so also it is impossible to negate predestination and foreknowledge in the purpose of God. If God did not hand Jesus over to this end as a part of His set purpose and foreknowledge, then what is the alternative and how do we "adjust" this verse to fit?

2:24 *"Freeing Him from the agony of death."*

In the gospel, death is defeated. The gospel is good news and Jesus is the gospel! In the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, death has died (cf. 1 Cor. 15:54-57). As believers, we no longer need to fear death. All of His people, because of His resurrection, now live in newness of life (cf. Rom. 6:4). Like Jesus, we are freed from the agony of death through His death and resurrection. There is great cause for celebration as we see the temporal nature of our present life and the eternal home that awaits us.

2:29 *"David died and was buried, and his tomb is here to this day."*

Notice how David has a death and buried statement, but Jesus has a resurrection (v.31). The resurrection of Jesus Christ is unlike anything else preceding it and is a first-fruit of a future resurrection for all of His people. One day, even King David will be resurrected from the dead. In what ways does the truth of the resurrection impact your life? Think about those who have died in faith and how a future resurrection "softens" the separation.

2:30 *“God had promised him on oath that he would place one of his descendants on his throne.”*

Is Jesus sitting on the throne of David at this time? This is a simple question in so far that Jesus is sitting on a throne at this time; but is it the throne of David or of His heavenly Father?

2:33 *“He has received from the Father the promised Holy Spirit”*

Compare 2:33 with 1:4 and 2:38, 39. The Holy Spirit’s ministry of baptizing is a promise made to Israel and her “spiritual” descendants. Jesus received the promised Holy Spirit (1:4). The event promised was fulfilled.

The gift of receiving the Holy Spirit is directly connected to the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. The two ideas are inseparably linked. The receiving of the promise is for all people whom the Lord calls. This includes both Jews and Gentiles. God’s promise is without ethnic discrimination. We have already seen what this promise fulfilled can look like in Acts 2. We will also note throughout the book of Acts the courage with which the believer testified of the good news. Are you aware of the promise fulfilled in your own life? What does this promise look like for you?

2:39 *“The promise is for you . . . and for all who are far off”*

Notice the Gentile inclusion in the promise. Take a moment and read Ephesians 2:11-22. Note especially verse 17. The language is very similar. The Jews were considered “near” and the Gentiles were “far off.” The promise was for both. From the beginning, God promised to “bless all people on earth through the Jews” (Gen. 12:1-3). His eternal purpose always included individuals from every “tribe, tongue, people, and nations” (Rev. 5:9). Missions is inextricably linked to the mission of the local church. How do you see the unbelieving? What are you doing to reach the un-reached? “Going and making disciples” is not for the select few, but for the church assembled. May God ignite us for the purpose of fulfilling His passion.

2:42-47 *“They devoted themselves to . . .”*

What they devoted themselves to was four-fold. The four ideas are synonymous.

Their devotion was to . . .

- The apostles’ teaching
- To the fellowship
- To the breaking of bread
- To prayer

Let us consider two of the four thoughts: first to the teaching, and second to the fellowship. The two ideas are not antithetical, but complimentary. The idea of being a

Bible student independent of a commitment to or “devotion” to a local church fellowship is abiblical. The two ideas are in harmony.

First, consider the apostles’ teaching. The “teaching” is prior to Paul’s revelation. What Jesus taught and what Paul will teach are complimentary, but distinct. To embrace the gospels without understanding Paul is similar to only knowing the teachings of John the Baptist and not having the fuller revelation of God (Acts 19:1-2). The gospels are not in error, but it is only a partial picture, a veiled or dim revelation.

Secondly, as His people we must be devoted to the fellowship. The mission of the local church is to proclaim Christ. People will be saved and gathered into churches where they devote themselves to teaching and the fellowship. The fellowship is a band, a community of kindred spirits through whom the power of God is manifested and celebrated. This is the power behind effective “church growth.” It is a mature church that is unified and stable.

The “devotion to the teaching” side is the responsibility of leadership. The teaching is not done exclusively by the leadership, but its expression is under the oversight of leadership.

The “devotion to the fellowship” is the outworking of the “deacons.” They enable this ministry. Whatever activity promotes “body life” is through the deacons (Acts 6) and “equipped saints” (Eph. 4).

What is your relationship to a local church? Jesus said, “For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also” (Luke 12:34). Look to see where you spend most of your spare time and discretionary gifting. The object of your affection indicates what you love. Where is the local church in your life? The early church had a vital relationship with their Lord and His church. May God do the same for us.

2:43 “. . . many wonders and miraculous signs were done. . .”

According to 1 Cor. 12, the body serving is still full of signs and wonders and miracles.

God is showing Himself to us through His people - let us open our eyes to His power. May God open our eyes to this truth.

- Works of God testimonies are the signs and wonders
- We should be “anointing with oil” and praying over people as an expression of our faith in God’s involvement in every area of our lives.

What are we doing that would mimic Acts 2:42-47 in our local church?

3:12 *"Why does this surprise you?"*

Why, when God works do we sit surprised? Do we expect so little from our Christianity?

We do not believe God is working. We see evil and believe in a devil, but why do we see good and fail to believe in a god? God is at work in and through His people. What proofs must He give us in order for us to believe (Luke 11:29)? What makes our unbelief any less wicked than the faithless people of His day? Our denial of His activity is a statement of non-belief. God is working in our midst. May we embrace Him in each moment of every day.

3:13, 14 *"You handed him over to be killed, and you disowned him before Pilate"*

Our sin is seeking lesser pleasures. By choosing the lesser we give up the greater joy/pleasure of finding our satisfaction in Him. Our choice of sin is no different than what they did when they gave up Jesus over the choice of Barabbas.

We struggle to put this in perspective. Somehow we always see ourselves far better than we actually are. We are a wicked people. I am a wicked person. I do not say this with glee or with a false sense of humility. It is a simple, though pungent thought. Until we see our appetite for lesser things, we will never turn toward the only soul satisfying relationship in the entire world. He continues to be enough in this life and in the life to come.

3:18 *"But this is how God fulfilled what he had foretold."*

God alone has the power to fulfill everything that He foretells. Every promise of God is to be fulfilled in the exact manner that He desires. Wow, what a comforting thought! Everything His cross-work secures will be fulfilled for His people. Every dotted "i" and every crossed "t" shall come to pass. Think about what awaits you as His child. Write this down, make a list; then with joy and gratitude praise His name.

3:21 *"Until the time comes for God to restore everything, as he promised long ago"*

Does this future restoration include nationality (i.e Israel)?

See also Acts 2:30. There is a consistent appeal to national Israel. What is happening in Acts is not different than what was happening in Luke. The story line is the same. It becomes more tangibly inclusive with Gentile invitation, but all of the elements are present in Luke that is now seen in Acts.

3:23 *“Anyone who does not listen to him will be completely cut off”*

Lost and damned.

We sometimes become “adjusted” and “comfortable” with the unbelieving around us. Yet in the absence of faith in Christ, they will continue to be lost and exist in eternal separation from God. What is your attitude toward the unbelieving? How are you proclaiming Christ to those around you?

3:24 *“All the prophets . . . have foretold these days.”*

Does the phrase “these days” refer to an “already not yet” event? Is it a partial fulfillment with a fuller expression to come?

There is a strong continuity between what existed in the Old Testament and what is happening in the New Testament. In some way, what God was beginning in the gospel is a part of what He promised with still more to come. We are not living in the fullness of completed purpose, but we are living in a richness of those promises as they are progressing toward their ultimate fulfillment. We would be foolish to keep everything in the future without any immediate enjoyment of it, but we would be equally foolish if we did not see that the best is still yet to come. How are you enjoying the present in light of the future, and what awaits you that will fill you with joy?

3:25 *“Through your offspring all peoples on earth will be blessed”*

How are the promises to Israel not being fulfilled in the Church? The early church was predominantly Jewish and Peter identified them as recipients of those promises made to the Jewish nation. If we are not careful, we will fail to see the significant continuity between the people of God from one redemptive economy to the next. Yet, we also need to see some ethnic element to the future program of God for a people group called “Israel.”

4:4 *“The number of men grew to about five thousand”*

Within a very short period of time the early church grew numerically large. They counted only men - the number was significantly larger than 5,000.

Throughout the book of Acts there is a pattern of noting numbers. Numbers are significant. The church always desires to reach as many people as possible. Numerical growth, however, is not always a sign of a healthy church. There is much growth that is unseen and it is the kind of growth that takes place in the trials of life. God is always growing His children, and He is always adding to His church those who ought to be

saved. Each spiritual gift is for the purpose of growing His church. In what ways can each of us be adding to the church?

4:13 *"They took note that these men had been with Jesus."*

What was it about the disciples that caused others to conclude that they "had been with Jesus?" They were public in their communication. They were fearless. They loved each another.

How does your conduct communicate your relationship with Jesus? There is something unique and different about the believing that is noticeably distinct from the unbelieving. May God cause us to shine as light in the dark places of this world.

4:19, 29 *"Judge . . . whether it is right in God's sight to obey you rather than God"*

How does this idea translate into countries where the gospel is forbidden and thus church planting criminal?

It has been said that the blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church. In what ways have we "softened" the militant aspect of the Christian church? In what ways can we become more forthright in our gospel proclamation to the unbelieving community? The church is an island in the midst of unbelief, but it is also a kingdom and we are in direct conflict with the kingdoms of this world. How can we regain the urgency of gospel proclamation?

4:24 *"Sovereign Lord"*

The Greek word translated "Sovereign" in the New International Version is our English word "Despot." It means, "Absolute ruler." In our English language it has a strong and negative connotation. It describes one who is a tyrant or dictator, but the word itself simply speaks of an "absolute power." This is who our God is. The sovereignty of God can never be separated from His nature. God's rule and power and the exercising or expression of it is always loving, just, gracious, merciful, and wise. Whatever God is, is expressed in His rule and the expression of His power. What does this mean to you? How does this bring you comfort right now?

4:27 *"Met together . . . to conspire against your holy servant Jesus."*

Often our view of life is fragmented and highly disjointed, but God sees all of life as one seamless whole. The fact that Herod, Pontius Pilate, the Gentiles and the people of Israel all worked together in the death of Jesus Christ is nothing short of miraculous. Sometimes we view events and wonder how in the world such disconnected pieces ever came together for the unfolding of an event. Yet, such confusion on our part is a result of failing to see God as the one who keeps the pieces connected and integrated with the

larger picture. Consider some event in your life that has brought you significant confusion and then add to it God. What does this do to your thinking? Write it down.

4:28 *"They did what your power and will had decided beforehand should happen"*

This idea or theme is consistent with the thought in Acts 1 when they chose Matthias. You acted, but God determined it, so that your choice carried out God's plan.

"They did what you determined." Is this just for big events, or is it related to smaller events? Who determines what is big and small? How do we know what has significance and what does not?

How can we "skate" around the idea of causation in predestination? Throughout Acts there are miracles, signs and wonders and fearless courage. May God grant us both.

To predestinate means to determine beforehand. What it is about God determining all things beforehand that is so offensive to us? What are the positive ideas inside of this idea of predestination? God is working in our midst daily. What are the signs and wonders you see regularly? Why or how do we often miss the daily dealings of God?

5:7ff *"About three hours later his wife came in, not knowing what had happened"*

Sapphira did not know that her husband was already dead! Her shock was significant, but short lived. She was blind to the work of God. She placed her public image over God's thoughts.

Before we judge this husband and wife too harshly, in what ways have we done the same? Although I do not believe God's judgment of sin is so direct and immediate with His people, there is always a consequence to sin and the choices we make. Let us seek to be a transparent and honest people. Such transparency and honesty might cost us position, power, and popularity, but in the end it is right.

5:19ff *"An angel of the Lord opened the doors of the jail"*

One act of God caused another group to suffer. Consider this same scenario in Acts 12:1-19 with Peter's "escape" and the consequences to the guards in verse 19.

Life is a series of connected links. Nothing we do exists in a vacuum. Everything we do is connected with other events. This is sobering and can be a source of great encouragement. All of the mundane and routine acts within any given day has an impact on other acts that we are blind to. Yet we must see that what we do in time has an eternal outcome. Think of those actions within your life that would appear isolated and uneventful. Now think of how that one singular act could have a reach beyond what you see.

5:39 *"But if it is from God, . . ."*

We must exercise great wisdom and discernment in understanding the working of God. How tragic it would be if we find ourselves opposing the work of God. Anytime someone sets themselves against the local church, no matter how good their motive might be, they will find themselves fighting against God. What they mean for evil, God will mean for good (Gen. 50:20), but this will not absolve them of the consequences of their choices (Acts 2:23).

6:13ff *"This fellow never stops speaking . . . against the law"*

The early church was accused of attacking the Law. They were accused of being antinomians. Chapter 7 is Stephen's response to the charge.

The Law has significance in the larger purpose of God's revelation. We would be foolish to look to the Law as a means of justification or sanctification. But we would be equally foolish to not see the Law for what it is. The Law is a revelation of God's character. In the Law we see Jesus (See also John 5:39 and Luke 24:44). In your Bible reading, how have you seen Jesus?

7:2 *"The God of glory appeared. . ."*

This is who our God is. He is the God of glory. God's glory radiates His nature outwardly. His glory expresses who He is and such displays are incapable of being beheld by mortals. It was this display that destroyed people in the Old Testament and it is this idea that makes the incarnation of Jesus Christ so magnificent (John 1:14).

7:22 *"Moses . . . was powerful in speech and action."*

How can Moses be powerful in speech, but claim inability?
cf. Ex 4:10

Often our greatest liability is also our greatest asset. What is perceived as a weakness is often our greatest strength. It is our inability that forces us to rely on His sufficiency. It is for this reason that Paul could say "I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me" (2 Cor. 13:9). What weakness do you have forcing you to rely on Christ? What do you consider to be your greatest asset and how can this also be your greatest liability?

7:38 *"Living Words"*

The words of God are living words. They impact life, sustain life, and they take life. They dispel darkness and nourish the weak. The Law of God were living words. Even today the Word of God is a living word (Heb. 4:12). What place does the Word of God have in your life? Are you turning to it on a regular basis? What has God been speaking to you through His Word of late?

7:39 *"Instead, they rejected him and in their hearts turned back to Egypt"*

How many times have our hearts turned back to Egypt? There is still within the regenerate an appetite for the old menu.

Like Lot's wife we often look back from which we came (see also Gen. 19:26; Luke 17:32). There are many patterns and habits that must be unlearned and mortified if we are to walk in the fullness of Christ. All that He is, is ours to enjoy if we only recognize it. What are those things that call you back to a life of death?

7:42 *"But God turned away and gave them over . . ."*

God gives people over to the consequences of their sin. It is a loving God who enables us to feel the weight of wrong choices. Sin's inherent demerit is for our good. Sometimes He uses us to be the instrument of confrontation for the sins of others.

7:50 *"Has not my hand made all these things?"*

What do we see that God has not made? What do we possess that He has not given? All of creation is a testimony and open declaration of God as a masterful and wise builder (Psalm 19). Today look around you, lift up your eyes to heaven, consider what lies at your feet, and then through these objects worship Him who alone is worthy. See also 17:24, 25, "The God who made the world and everything in it is the Lord of heaven and earth."

7:55, 56 *"I see . . . the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God"*

Jesus stood to receive Stephen into His Kingdom. Stephen was welcomed. What an incredible picture of heaven's warmth. God awaits His people. Each one is received with a loving embrace. The picture is similar to the celebration in Luke 15:6, 20 and 16:22. Let us not think that there is any less rejoicing when the Father embraces those who are His. Think about those who have preceded you in death. Think of their reception at the hands of the Father and heaven's hosts. Is this not a picture of great joy and comfort for those of us who continue to toil in time?

8:3 *"But Saul began to destroy the church."*

Can the church of God be destroyed, or will it prevail?

The church can be persecuted, abused, attacked, and neglected, but it can never be destroyed (cf. Matt 16; Rev. 4, 5). The church, as the body of Christ, is triumphant over sin and death (1 Cor. 15). There are many Sauls in the world who wish the church to be silenced. Fortunately, what God builds no man can destroy. How do you treat the local church? What is your relationship to it? How tragic if in our lives we failed to see the local church for what it is?

8:5 *"Philip . . . proclaimed the Christ there."*

The New Testament message was Christ crucified. How do we align with this singular focus? Can our culture and community accuse us of the same? Could they pick Him out in everything we do? What a penetrating thought. How does Christ fit into anything we do? He is the New Testament core.

9:15 *"Go! This man is my chosen instrument. . ."*

What was said of Paul can be equally said of you and me. God has specifically chosen everyone for tasks assigned. Life is not randomly lived. How the will of God works in and through the choice of man is a great mystery. It is left unexplained in the Scripture, but clearly taught that He does. Each and every day is to be lived to its fullest with a clear view to the eternal nature of singular events. Such joy comes when we see the inter-connectedness between each of the links that lead us to heaven's joy in the presence of God forever.

9:27 *"But Barnabas took him and brought him to the apostles"*

Barnabas is the New Testament picture of the discipler. He embodies 2 Timothy 2:2 and Matthew 28:19, 20. He was Paul's mentor and champion. What a wonderful picture of a student reaching further than his teacher; yet the teacher continuing in the ministry entrusted to him.

Who are you mentoring? Everyone should have a teacher and a student to whom they are accountable. Discipleship takes place in the context of relationships. Who do you have a relationship with whom you can instruct in the Christian life?

9:29ff *"He talked and debated . . . but they tried to kill him"*

The blood of the martyrs will always be the seed of the church. There is no such thing as a closed country. The program of God has no geographical boundaries. God does

not recognize the authority or government of man as a restricting agent in the outworking of His eternal purpose.

Were the disciples secretive in their proclamation of Christ crucified? What things have changed between them and us? Consider the 10/40 window, China, etc. How does this affect our view of church planting as a ministry of the local church?

10:38 *"Healing all who were under the power of the devil."*

This is where we are at. People within the community and within the church assembly are under the power of the devil. We are doing battle against spiritual elements. We must not kid ourselves into believing otherwise. There are many within our world whose sickness is a result of direct demonic activity. If demonic activity is real, why would angelic activity be any less real? If evil is in the world, so also is good. How does the idea of demonic involvement change the way you view sickness? How does the idea of angelic activity shape your thinking about the world around you? Consider Hebrews 13:2.

10:46, 47 *"Can anyone keep these people from being baptized with water?"*

Throughout Acts, baptism following conversion seems to be a significant event. Water baptism after faith in Christ is inseparable from carrying out the "Great Commission" of Matthew 28:18-20. Have you been baptized by water since your conversion to Christ?

11:3 *"You went into the house of uncircumcised men and ate with them"*

There will always be those who see evangelizing of the social outcast as inappropriate and unacceptable.

Jesus did not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance (Luke 5:32). Until we come to the end of ourselves we will never arrive at the beginning of God. Our targeted audience must be the poor, the imprisoned, the blind, and the oppressed (Luke 4:18). It is only because we are so self-absorbed that we find outreach so repugnant. We must be a place where the lost find their way, the blind see, the deaf hear, and the demonically oppressed find deliverance. This kind of ministry is the only expression of biblical ministry. To find this offensive is to be outside of what God is doing.

We might want to reach the Latino in Mexico, but what about Waukesha? Or the black man in Africa, but what about in Milwaukee? **"When the church becomes comfortable or inconvenienced, it becomes irrelevant."** Compare with v18. Notice how quickly those who criticized turned and praised God (11:18). There is hope for those entrenched fellowships that find outreach odious.

11:17 *“So if God gave them the same gift as he gave us, . . . who was I to think that I could oppose God”*

God is no respecter of persons when it comes to the distribution of His grace.

Think about those from whom you are withholding grace? What offense is so embittering that you cannot forgive? Think about what God has done for you; then ask yourself whether the greater offense exists between you and your peer, or between you and your God?

11:18 *“God has granted even the Gentiles repentance unto life.”*

God is large in His redemptive purposes. From the very beginning God had a purpose for everyone, everywhere, at all times. He has never been a “tribal” god who acts only for a select few. His purpose envelops even those who stand in open rebellion against Him. Today you and I are living proof of God’s inclusive love. Let us praise His name for saving even us!

11:26 *“The disciples were called Christians first at Antioch.”*

Early believers were disciples. They were later called Christians. How did we switch this around? It is to our harm that we have reversed the order. An important study within the writings of Luke would be on the idea of discipleship. We have really turned things around. Biblical discipleship is difficult, but normal, if it is flowing from a genuine conversion to Jesus Christ. Justification produces discipleship. The two ideas cannot be separated. To ask, “Are you a disciple of Christ?” is to ask “Are you a Christian?” and this is to ask “Are you saved?”

11:29f *“The disciples . . . decided to provide help for the brothers living in Jerusalem”*

The church networked. See further 15:22

It is to our detriment when all we see is ourselves. Each local church is a part of a greater whole. Each local church is a part of the church universal. The church universal cannot replace the local church and the local church cannot live in denial of the church universal. Somehow we must celebrate the unique contributions that each local church brings to the body and celebrate those differences. How do you view your local church? How do you view other local churches? Are you involved in a local church through which you maintain an element of identity?

12:5 *"The Church was earnestly praying to God for him."*

Prayer is a specific expression of body life. Prayer is a neglected area of biblical ministry, fellowship, and faith. What can you do to cultivate a spirit of prayer personally and corporately? How can you pray more individually and corporately? Consider looking up the various prayers of the New Testament (especially in Paul's letters). Consider what he prayed for and then use his prayers as a pattern to stimulate you in your prayers for others.

12:16 *"But Peter kept on knocking"*

Persistency sometimes pays off. Consider Luke 18:1. Although there are no "magic formulas," persistency in prayer is an identifying aspect of prayer. Often we have not simply because we asked not (James 4:2). Think of those things over which you labor. What motivates you to persist? Love is what drives you to persevere even when greatly inconvenienced. We should pray because the God we love delights in working through His people for the accomplishing of His eternal purpose.

12:19 *"Herod . . . ordered that they be executed."*

The answer to their prayers cost the soldiers their lives.

"One man's drought is another man's flood." Everything we pray for has implications. All actions exist in a context of influence. Nothing exists in a vacuum. Each action sets in motion other actions whose outcome is impossible to predict. Your life is inextricably linked to everything around it. We often find ourselves acting alone as if nothing we do matters, but what we fail to see is the interlocking of life on life. When the early church prayed for Peter's deliverance it cost the guarding soldiers their lives. Think about what you are asking before you come to the King of all things. When God answered the prayers of His people the death of the soldiers were a part of that plan. Their death was not random or arbitrary. All of the links within the chain of events leading up to and following from are all a part of God's grand theme. I cannot explain this or even understand it, but if this is not true, then there are significant events unfolding every day that God is not a part of and are truly random and accidental.

13:17 *God chose our Fathers
God made the people prosper
God led them out*

13:19 *God overthrew seven nations
God gave their land to His people*

13:20 *God gave them judges
God gave them Saul*

13:22 *God removed Saul
God made David their king*

13:23 *God brought the Savior*
13:30 *God raised Him from the dead*
13:32 *What God has promised He has fulfilled*
13:36 *When David had served God's purpose*

Paul had no apparent struggle with God's control in and over all things. Why do we fight this? The overwhelming evidence from the Old Testament and early church is that God was in control of each and every detail. This did not negate their appeal to the will of man, but the will of man never was a threat to the God of providence. **"God does as He desires with what is His and when He does it, it is always right."** Do you struggle with this idea? What is it that you find difficult? What is it that you find delightful? What are the questions that such a view promote?

13:39 *"Through him everyone who believes is justified from everything you could not be justified from by the law of Moses"*

Jesus did for us what could not be done by us. Jesus fulfilled the Law. What the Law could not do Jesus did. The Law cannot declare anyone right, but Jesus can. The linchpin is simple belief. But it is a belief that has as its object Jesus Christ (See further 15:10, 11).

The Law of God shows us who He is and what we are in contrast to Him. We will never be able to keep the requirements of God. Who He is, is so significantly different than what we are in and of ourselves. The fact that we are image bearers and unlike anything else created does not make us gods. The truth of the New Testament pushes us to embrace a message of Christ dispensed by the Father through grace as the only message that can rightfully be called, "Good news." How do you view the Law? How do you view Christ?

13:43 *"Urged them to continue in the grace of God" (14:3, 26; 15:11, 40)*

The grace of God is the means through which He dispenses the benefits of the cross-work of His only begotten Son to His people. It is on this same basis that all of creation enjoys the benefits of the cross. What does the grace of God mean to you? How do you see the relationship of grace to Jesus Christ?

13:48 *"All those who were appointed for eternal life believed."*

Regardless as to how one might play out the will of God in and through the will of man for the redeeming of man's immortal soul, somewhere someone is at the beginning of all this. I find it a cause for great celebration to see and have a God-centered worldview that places Him as an absolute ruler with a freedom of will that is governed only by His own perfect nature. I will always gladly submit myself to His unblemished desire

rather than that of finite and sinful men. May you come to joy in who God is for all nations.

13:52 *"The disciples were filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit . . ."*

Notice the contrast between their joy in v.52 with their circumstances in 13:45, 50; 14:2.

Why do we find non-acceptance and outright rejection and aggressive denouncement of the message so disheartening? Why as though filled by the Holy Spirit do we not rejoice? O God it is to our shame that we shrink from proclaiming the truth. We ask for what we already have - Now, we must simply act (cf. 14:5 constant threat).

14:2 *"Poisoned their minds"*

This is a sobering idea. It is possible to have your mind poisoned by the words and actions of others. It is also possible to poison the minds of others by your words and by your actions. Think about the negativity and criticism that surrounds most people. Just because something is true does not mean it is to be spoken. All events happen in a context and this is no less true of words. Be careful what you hear through gossip and what you share as gossip. It might be true, but there was a context in which it was originally spoken that "shades" its meaning and our understanding of it. What have you heard that has poisoned your mind against someone? What have you spoken that has poisoned someone else's mind? It is almost impossible to take back what has been done, but by confronting the error and apologizing for the wrong is a great way to begin the healing process.

14:9 *"[He] saw that he had faith to be healed"*

Somehow something as abstract as faith has a very tangible and concrete expression. Can people see our faith? Faith has as its fruit obedience. Such fruit is a work of the Holy Spirit to show outwardly the indwelling Christ. May He radiate from His people for the saving of souls.

14:19, 20 *"They stoned Paul . . . thinking he was dead. But . . . he got up and went back into the city."*

Bizarre! Do we really want the experience? To have resurrection you have to have death - Do I want to die?

Although we sometimes think it would have been "cool" to have been the apostle Paul, I am pretty sure most of us would not want to endure all that he encountered. Resurrection power is a result of death encountered. No one is resurrected who has not first died. There is a spiritual resurrection that all believers have but most do not

experience simply because they have not embraced their own death to self. Until we embrace our death to self, we will never know the power of His resurrection.

14:22 *"We must go through many hardships to enter the kingdom of God."*

This must be read in light of the journey up to this point in time. Paul knew of what he spoke. It is difficult for Western Christianity to understand what it means to suffer for one's faith. Not only is our culture Christianized, but our faith is comfortable and we do not wish to be inconvenienced. We have what is necessary to be bold in our verbal proclamation and in our living. May God grant to us a willingness to suffer for Him.

15:5 *"Then some of the believers who belonged to the party of the Pharisees . . ."*

The question raised was by believing Pharisees. The fact that Pharisees were prominent enough to note can suggest that Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus had influenced others.

There always seemed to be disputes within the early church and within the church historically. This is no less true today. They taught only what they knew. Once instructed they modified their teaching. How do you handle disagreements? Have you ever been in a divided fellowship? How were the differences handled? What could have been done better? May God grant to us a humility, teach-ability, and charity in doctrinal disputes so that the body would not be divided.

15:7 *"You know that some time ago God made a choice among you that the Gentiles might hear..."*

This is the theme of Acts and a theme of the entire Bible. God's desire for the nations has never diminished and will never fail. He will gather for Himself worshippers from every tongue, tribe, people, and nation. Today, you and I are a part of that eternal purpose in the mission of local churches. May we find great joy knowing that God is fulfilling His purpose through His people for the nations.

15:10-11 *"Why do you try to test God by putting on the necks of the disciples a yoke that neither we nor our fathers have been able to bear? No!"*

Legalism does not consist in rules and regulation (15:24-29), but in the motive behind it. The "rules" of chapter 15 were for strong/weak relationships and nothing more (See further 13:39).

Rules and regulations will never work in meriting what is granted by grace. Rules and regulations are helpful when dealing with strong/weak relationships and to protect us from doing wrong things and guiding us in doing right things, but we must never

believe that through the keeping of rules and regulations God's opinion of us is changing. Our relationship is always based on grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone.

15:24 *"We have heard that some went out from us without our authorization and disturbed you, troubling your minds by what they said."*

Trouble exists from within and from without. Why do we believe ministry is going to be easy?

This is a sad and sobering truth, but much ministry opposition comes from those who appear "religious," but in the end they are detrimental to the fellowship. May God grant to us wisdom to discern those who are harmful. May this wisdom give insight as to best deal with the trouble makers and to call them to repentance or to remove them from the believing fellowship.

15:32 *"Judas and Silas, . . . said much to encourage and strengthen the brothers."*

Prophets encouraged and strengthened (cf. vv.40, 41 Silas).

How much encouraging and strengthening are we doing within the fellowship of God? It always seems that gossip and rumor has more staying power and shelf life than the truth, but in the end the truth will always win. Who can you encourage today? Who can you strengthen today? Do not delay. Do it before you forget.

15:22; 16:4 *"As they traveled from town to town, they delivered the decisions reached by the apostles and elders in Jerusalem"*

Look at how the church networked and what it is today. See further 11:29.

Is this kind of networking possible today? I think there can be and should be a degree of communication between all evangelical churches. I pray God will enable us to be an instrument of healing to all churches in our community.

16:4 *"The decisions reached by the apostles and elders in Jerusalem for the people to obey"*

There was some kind of recognized authority in the apostles over the churches planted and whose authority the local elders and people embraced.

How would this play out with churches being so independent? What role do agencies have in facilitating the church universal? What about religious denominations? Consider your own fellowship and its part in an association much larger than its own

location. What steps would need to be taken in order to find fellowship with the larger body of Christ?

16:5 *"So the churches . . . grew daily in numbers"*

Consider the idea of "adding" and "numbers" in Acts. Numerical growth is important, but notice more so as to how it happened. Numerical growth was a consequence, not a cause of preaching Jesus and caring for the flock. There is nothing inherently spiritual about numerical decrease or increase.

It has been said, "What you win them with is what you will win them to." Paul had a singular passion and that was to preach "Christ crucified." In a consumer age, how can we preach Christ crucified? Are we overly concerned with the numerical growth of a church with little concern for the soul growth of a church?

16:6, 7, 14 *"Having been kept by the Holy Spirit from preaching the word in the province of Asia."*

It would appear "silly" to deny God's control over who does and does not hear the gospel (cf. 17:25, 26, 31; 18:21).

It appears as if we cannot embrace a God who controls every aspect of life, and yet neither do we desire to believe we are in control of most things. God is in control of everything. Man has a volition that acts. How God works in and through the will of man is unknown. That He does is non-negotiable. Why some hear the Gospel and others are kept from hearing is something we do not know. I would rather believe such knowledge is known to God without forfeiting His status as God as opposed to believing that such an outcome as to who hears and does not hear is determined by man's obedience. Neither history, geography, nor theology can support such a premise.

16:17 *"These men . . . are telling you the way to be saved."*

There is a way to be saved. There is an absolutism to the Christian faith. By default not every one is right or saved. Unless they came through the biblical way, they will be lost forever.

How did you come to know Jesus Christ as your Savior from sin? What impressed you most with your conversion to Jesus? Who do you know who needs to hear the good news of the cross? How can you tell them of Him?

16:23 *"After they had been severely flogged, they were thrown into prison"*

Where is this threat against the message of Christ in our community? What fear do I live with?

Think about how easy it is for us to live the Christian life. Most of our compromises are small and unnoticeable until we find ourselves just like the unbelieving. Our distinction from the unbelieving is not just in our behavior, but in our belief. Our response to the world around us is what makes the believer different than their unbelieving counterpart. Although I do not recommend reckless abandonment, I do believe we have lost a degree of militancy to the Christian life. Whether or not we wish to believe it, we are in a war against principalities, powers, and spiritual wickedness in high places. May the Holy Spirit awaken us to the nature of our Christian life.

16:27 *"When he saw the prison doors open, he drew his sword and was about to kill himself"*

Compare his reaction to that of 12:19.

The soldiers knew full well the outcome of their negligence. The outcome of our Philippian jailor is significantly different than that of the earlier event. God, in His wisdom, chose that one might live and the other die. Does this make God unjust or less loving? I think not. To believe it was simply fate or some impersonal series of arbitrary events makes the one unfortunate and the other "lucky." God has each of our lives planned for His glory, both the good and the bad. May you find great comfort in knowing the God who controls.

16:37, 40 *"Now do they want to get rid of us quietly? No! Let them come themselves and escort us out."*

You are always left with the impression that Paul was a feisty guy! Although Paul in his personality often appears gruff and combative, he also viewed himself as a nursing mother (1 Thess. 2:6-8). There is a time to draw the line in the sand and stand no matter what, and there is a time to be gentle and kind. May God give us the wisdom to know when each is required.

16:40 *"They met with the brothers and encouraged them."*

They were constantly encouraging each other. Who are we encouraging? Who am I encouraging (cf.20:2)? Oh God, may I seize moments afforded so that your power would be revealed. Throughout the book of Acts the church is seen comforting one another (Read - 11:23; 14:22; 15:32; 16:40; 20:12). It is a tragedy visited upon the local church when the assembly becomes a place of combat and not one of comfort. May the Holy Spirit break us to the joy of paraklatos.

17:6; 18:17 *“They dragged Jason and some other brothers before the city officials”*

Being associated with Paul was dangerous (cf. 19:29).

Often we associate with those from whom we can benefit. When was the last time we befriended someone who could give us nothing in return?

17:27 *“God did this so men would seek him . . .”*

In what way does the natural man seek God? See Romans 3:11. All men, because of being image bearers, seek for what only God can provide, but the natural/unsaved man will not answer the question of their souls with God’s provision. When you remember your seeking of God, what did it look like? Why did you seek God and others around you do not?

17:31 *“For he has set a day when he will judge the world with justice. . .”*

All of God’s dealings have a set or fixed time of fulfillment. Consider the thoughts of Acts 1:7. As you read through the book of Acts, consider whether or not the early believers saw a world that unfolded according to God’s control.

18:3 *“And because he was a tentmaker as they were, he stayed and worked with them.”*

Paul was a tentmaker while planting churches – this would significantly reduce our idea of living and retirement and alter how we do ministry.

Present day patterns of church work are based on historical precedence. Yet everything we do should be examined against the instruction found in Scripture. Much of Scripture is simply telling a story without having any direct application, but even here what they did can be profitable as we examine what we are doing. Think about the apostle and his church planting endeavors and his use of a vocation to support himself. How would this change the way we do ministry if we encouraged those pursuing vocational ministry to learn a trade?

18:5 *“When Silas and Timothy came . . . Paul devoted himself exclusively to preaching . . .”*

The idea presented in this passage appears to be very similar to the idea contained in Acts 6:1ff where the early apostles were distracted from a Word ministry because of involvement in “problem” solving activities. When Silas and Timothy came, they began to take away from Paul the problem solving activities, thus freeing Paul up to once more focus on a ministry of the Word and prayer. When a ministry is Word-centered, the overall ministry benefits (Acts 6:7). How can a fellowship free the elders up so that they can focus on a ministry of the Word, prayer, and oversight/shepherding? If the

elders become distracted by problem solving, then the Word and prayer will suffer and the overall fellowship will suffer. The structure of any fellowship is crucial to the overall health of the local church.

18:8 *“And many of the Corinthians who heard him believed and were baptized”*

Compare with 1 Corinthians 1:14 baptism and the Corinthian Fellowship.

Baptism is an essential part of biblical discipleship. The issue of baptism was a point of contention and through pride and arrogance brought division to the Corinthian fellowship. Often this proves to be our problem. Something God gives as a means of encouraging and blessing His people becomes a point of contention. What things do we divide over?

18:21 *“I will come back if it is God’s will.”*

We make our plans and surrender them to God’s will. We live believing His will is being performed. How often do you live with the realization that God’s will is performed? The overarching control of God does not dismiss the need and responsibility to plan and order one’s life. His will gives me peace in the performing of my plans when I realize that my plans are working out His will. Paul always lived in obedience to the overarching will of God.

19:1 *“There he found some disciples . . .”*

Notice how the early church called believers disciples, not Christians. We continue to do a great disservice to the body of Christ by identifying people as Christians without realizing the need for discipleship. How do you view yourself, as a Christian or as a disciple?

19:1ff *“No, we have not even heard that there is a Holy Spirit.”*

The Gospels are a chapter in a book. They give you more than what preceded them, but there is still more to come. To think we obey the Gospels would be tantamount to going to the Old Testament as a pattern of life for the New Testament disciple.

Do you know what the story line is from Genesis through Revelation? Is your Bible knowledge one of random and disconnected pieces? To read the books of the Bible apart from the larger picture is to read chapters of a book without knowing what the book is all about. In every story there are main characters and a plot. This is no less true in the Bible. Make it a personal goal to understand who the main characters are and what the plot is of the Bible.

19:26 *“Paul has convinced and led astray large numbers of people here in Ephesus and in practically the whole province of Asia.”*

Notice the communal impact of the gospel. See also 4:16; 13:44; 21:28, 31. Can the gospel of Jesus Christ impact the community in which we live? Can the work of Jesus Christ in and through the local church cause a city to be in an uproar? There is a fear we possess when we speak of such things. We might like the “press coverage,” but would we be willing to pay the price? What are some of the costs of being a disciple in the book of Acts? How does that relate to our culture and time?

Paul’s testimony to the Ephesian Elders:

20:19 *His compassion: I served the Lord with great humility and with tears (v.31).*
20:20 *His integrity: I have not hesitated to preach anything that would be helpful (v. 27).*
20:24 *His priorities: I consider my life worth nothing to me.*
20:31 *His contentment: I have not coveted anyone’s silver, gold, clothing.*
20:35 *His example: In everything I did, I showed you that. . . (He modeled truth)*

Although I believe there is little value in comparing oneself to someone else since personalities and gifting differs, with that said, what can we learn from the apostle Paul in his address to the Ephesian Elders?

20:24, 21:13 *“However, I consider my life worth nothing to me, if only I may finish the race and complete the task the Lord Jesus has given me.”*

Paul was willing to die for the Way, for Christ. The message of Christ transcended his own life and creaturely comforts. I believe Paul’s “militancy” would not be well received in the church today.

Each of us must examine our own life to see where we are in our desires for Christ and His Church. It is easy to lose oneself in this world and fail to see the larger One that is invading our world and will ultimately and fully be exposed.

20:27 *“For I have not hesitated to proclaim to you the whole will of God.”*

Paul taught the whole will of God. What did Paul mean by this statement, “The whole will of God?”

20:28-31 *“Even from your own number men will arise and distort the truth in order to draw away disciples after them.”*

The threat from within is formidable. How do we protect ourselves against consumerism? People leave without notice and without commitment to the fellowship.

Are these people healthy? Are they a “threat” to the health of a fellowship? Should leadership take note of these people and “warn” them against being divisive? Should other churches be notified of their departure from a fellowship? The idea of growing churches through shifting membership or transfer growth is an unhealthy approach to any church ministry. How can this be addressed by the leadership?

20:32 *“Now I commit you to God and to the word of his grace, which can build you up and give you an inheritance”*

Grace is our guardian and protector. Think about what the apostle Paul said in this verse. How is grace viewed by the apostle? How do you view grace? Think about what we typically believe we need in the Christian life and then think back to this verse. Is Paul overly simplistic?

21:4 *“Through the Spirit they urged Paul not to go on to Jerusalem.”*

Even though the primary tool through which the Holy Spirit works is the written Word, we must not negate secondary means such as circumstances and people. Although circumstances and people are highly subjective means, God does use them to guide us as we are sensitive to Him. The early church had a final and objective Word from God in the Hebrew Scripture, but God was still working in and through people to communicate His will for others. May God develop within us, a sensitivity to the Holy Spirit’s movement through His church. See also 21:11. The gift of prophecy was divinely received information for a specific audience. The utterance was not open ended.

21:10-14 *“When he would not be dissuaded.”*

The interplay in all of this is of interest. First, the prophet Agabus declares that Paul will suffer much in Jerusalem. Second, the people plead with Paul not to go Jerusalem. Third, Paul commits himself to going. Was Paul disobeying God by going to Jerusalem? Only one person knew whether or not he was disobedient and it was Paul. It was Paul’s sensitivity to the Holy Spirit and the promptings of his conscience that moved him to obedience. May God enable us to develop a sensitivity to the Holy Spirit’s leadership so that we might obey even in the face of significant concern.

Paul surrendered himself to the will of the Lord, yet the Lord appeared to be warning him of what awaited him in Jerusalem (See further 20:22-24 and 21:4, 11, 13). What might you have done in light of what you knew if you were the apostle Paul?

21:17-26 *“They have been informed that you teach all the Jews who live among the Gentiles to turn away from Moses”*

Paul’s message and his relationship to the Law – People understood it to be antinomian – how did Paul respond?

How do you understand your relationship to the Law of Moses? Are you under the Law of Moses or under the Law of Grace? Think carefully on this idea. Consider Acts 13:39 and Romans 5:20, 21 and 6:14.

Thousands of Jews believed in Jesus AND they were zealous of the Law. This would appear to be contradictory in light of Galatians and Acts 15. Verse 21 captures the rumor that was circulated concerning Paul. Was this a false assessment of Paul’s message and ministry? I personally believe this was a true reflection of what Paul preached. Note, however, that the issue seems to be around customs such as circumcision. Remember, Paul had Timothy circumcised in Acts 16:1-3. Paul did not see any wrong in circumcision if it was to reach people (1 Cor. 9:19-27). Paul did not believe the Law could justify and if anyone looked to the Law for justification, they were wrong.

The Law as a means of justification and sanctification was inadequate. The Law as an ethnic identifier was incapable of being eradicated from being Jewish. Thus, those customs that made one Jewish were capable of being kept, but those “ceremonies” that made one “religious” were to be discarded.

21:31 *“While they were trying to kill him.”*

If Paul was in jeopardy of being killed, why should we be treated any differently? Good grief, what trial am I enduring that in any way compares with Paul? Shame on me for my self-pity. Verse 32 says they were “beating Paul.” I repent of my self-pity. I resolve to boldly proclaim Christ crucified whatever might befall me. Let us resolve as a fellowship of disciples to scorn our sinful retraction in the face of bold proclamation and meet with resolved joy those who would hinder us from preaching “Christ crucified!”

22:4; 24:14,22 *“I persecuted the followers of this Way to their death”*

Christianity is called the “Way.” What does “way” suggest? Direction, path, distinct, it is a way that is distinguishable from other ways. It is set apart and looks different from other ways. Consider the following passages within the book of Acts (16:17; 18:25, 26; 19:9, 23).

22:19-20 *“And when the blood of your martyr Stephen was shed, I stood there giving my approval and guarding the clothes of those who were killing him.”*

Paul’s memory of his involvement with Stephen must have been very painful.

Think of your past. God makes no mistakes and no event in your life is a wasted moment. As painful as Paul’s memory was of His involvement in Stephen’s death, it was necessary in the shaping of who he would become in his service for Christ. Think of what God has done to you in order that He might work through you in the reaching of souls for Him. Such memories can be painful, but they yield occasions for deep expressions of gratitude for God’s mercy and grace.

23:2-5 *“Paul replied, ‘Brothers, I did not realize that he was the high priest.’”*

Notice Paul’s response toward unjust leadership. We must be very careful when we speak ill of leadership.

How many times have you and I lashed out at perceived injustice? It is to our shame. God places in all of our lives those who sit above us in positions of authority. Regardless as to their ineptness, they are our leaders and we must respect the position. This same principle is taught in Romans 13:1.

24:22 *“Then Felix, who was well acquainted with the Way”*

Well acquainted . . . but lost. It is possible to have all of the facts about Christ, but not know Christ. God help us to know Him intimately and personally. Often, these are the hardest people to reach. Their knowledge almost inoculates them against the truth. Let us pray for a “Christian” nation in name only, for the opening of their blind eyes.

24:26, 27 *“At the same time he was hoping that Paul would offer him a bribe, . . . when two years had passed.”*

Paul must have been very frustrated at times. . . unless he believed in the sovereignty of God over the details of life.

Paul was exactly where God wanted him to be at those moments in time. Was God controlling or reacting? Did he hold sway over Felix or did Felix’s “free” will hold God’s program in bondage? This is no small matter and one worthy of your energy to understand. You might not sound its depth, but there is great comfort to be found in knowing that God is in control of your moments.

25:19 *"About a dead man named Jesus."*

The idea of the resurrection was still foggy – in theory it was possible and believed. In actuality, it was improbable and rejected. What impact does the resurrection of Jesus Christ have for you? Consider 1 Corinthians 15 as you meditate on this truth.

26:7 *"This is the promise our twelve tribes are hoping to see fulfilled"*

This is still strongly ethnic – Israel, and not the church.

This is an area of study to which I am still "fuzzy." I am not so much concerned with my answer as I am in the journey. May God continue to give us a place where intellectual honesty can exist in the study of the Scripture for the saving of sinners and the holiness of saints.

26:18 *"To open their eyes and turn them from darkness to light, . . . "*

Salvation from sin is a significant transaction

- Our blind eyes are opened
- Our darkness gives way to light
- Our allegiance to Satan yields to God

As a result of this three-fold shift, we receive forgiveness of sins AND we receive a place among the sanctified.

Wow, such truth as this never ceases to amaze me and fill my heart with gratitude. What does the cross mean to you? Perhaps you weary hearing of Christ and His work in behalf of sinners. May God quicken your mind as such truths as these are opened before you and may you celebrate the impact of the cross in your waking moments.

26:22, 23 *"I am saying nothing beyond what the prophets and Moses said would happen"*

Jesus is in the Law. We fight against reading the New back into the Old, but everything tells us that Jesus is in Moses and the Prophets. We do not have to engage in eisogesis (i.e. reading into the biblical text a meaning that was never intended by the original authors) to find Him – He is there openly and clearly declared.

My prayer for my study and for you is that the Holy Spirit would open our eyes to the presence of Jesus in the biblical text. He is openly declared and to be embraced.

27:25, 26 *"I have faith in God that it will happen just as he told me. Nevertheless, we must run aground on some island."*

Deliverance from and fulfillment of promises does not mean it will happen without incidence.

Sometimes in the program of God we have to "run aground on the same island." But the island experience is not accidental or incidental (Acts 28). God is always working out His purpose and often it is marked by hardships and heartache. Never see where you are at as outside of what God is doing. Find Him in the moments and you will find the contentment and rest you seek.

28:4-6 *"This man must be a murderer. . . they changed their minds and said he was a god."*

Notice the fickle nature of humanity. On one hand they castigate him as a murderer and then on the other they consider him a god. Such is the nature of man. Let us not be surprised when from the mouth comes blessing and cursing. The same people who praise you will often become your worst adversaries. Thankfully, just the opposite can be equally true. Those who were once your enemies are now your greatest friends — such was the apostle Paul.

28:17 *"I have done nothing against our people or against the customs of our ancestors."*

Go back and read the thoughts in Acts 21:1ff. Is Paul saying certain aspects of the Law that are culturally defined are fine to continue? Perhaps. Historically in the missions movement there was a push to see nationals embrace the culture of the converting people. This is pitiful. There is nothing inherently wrong with one's culture. Certain aspects of it might be wrong, but to categorically dismiss all culture as sinful is to place unnecessary obstacles to preaching Christ and promoting discipleship. Define culture; then consider the culture you live in. What aspects of your culture would be considered wrong? What aspects of your culture should be left alone in preaching Christ crucified and pursuing biblical discipleship?

28:21 *"We have not received any letter . . . anything bad about you."*

Consider also 25:25. Paul did not have to go to Rome from a human perspective. Could the events of chapter 27 been avoided? This raises an interesting question concerning the purpose of God intersecting with the will of man. Is God limited in what He does? Is man? How do the two intersect?

28:22 *"... people everywhere are talking against this sect."*

Christianity was met with resistance initially. The opposition we face within any community is not to be surprising. What happened in the early church is continuing to this day. Let us be resolved in our standing in grace (Gal. 5:1). What "persecution" do you face that seeks to undermine your confidence in Christ?

28:25-28 *"God's salvation has been sent to the Gentiles"*

The Jews were cut off so that the Gentiles could be grafted in. This has been God's intent all along. Gentile inclusion was not an afterthought or in some way a secondary purpose or plan. God was not reacting to initial opposition by the Jews. From the very beginning of His purpose He intended to include worshippers from every tribe, tongue, people, and nation. May our view of His redemptive purpose be inclusive, intentional, and aggressive in the reaching of the lost.

28:30 *"For two whole years Paul stayed there in his own rented house."*

Often we want immediate results, yet Paul spent large blocks of time in prison. While there he embraced it as God's will and used it to preach Christ. Rest comes in contentment.

May God grant to us the ability to see beyond our immediate circumstances and to embrace the larger purpose of God for us and His creation.

A FINAL WORD

I trust you have taken the time to read each of the passages noted above. Each of our journeys is different but very much alike. Often our experiences are different, but the experiences are the journey and each of us must see our life in light of God's absolute truth. I pray (if you have not already a practice of "musing") this will begin a journey of "musing" for you. May the Holy Spirit move you to create your own "Museum of Thought."

May you find in your journey those who are of a kindred spirit and may God use them as tools of encouragement and strength when you find yourself in the deep place, the dark place, and the steep place. The message of the Bible is a message of Christ. He loves us without condition, He accepts us without requirement, He forgives us without limit, and He serves us without reward. May you always find Him to be enough in this life and in the life to come.