Luke wrote his Gospel and followed it with another account, the book of Acts. Luke recounts the discussion Jesus had with His disciples and their question. “Now that you’ve come back from the dead, will you restore the kingdom to Israel?” (1:6). They wanted to know who was going to be in charge? Jesus had defeated death, but could He overthrow the Romans?

In the Gospel and in Acts, Luke gives important attention to the Holy Spirit. He is the true source of power for believers, and Jesus alluded to this. He told the disciples they could not know what God had ordained by His own authority, but they would receive power when the Holy Spirit came on them (1:8). They had their marching orders. Tell the world.

Just a few days later, the Holy Spirit did indeed fall on the believers, and Peter’s sermon at Pentecost stirred two profound questions. As the people saw the signs, they asked, “What does this mean?” (2:12). Peter shared the transformative message of Jesus, and they asked, “What shall we do?” (2:37). The power of the Spirit changed thousands that day.

Thank Jesus for the power of the gospel and the privilege to share.

Saturday, November 11, 2017—Acts 3-5

On November 11, Americans make time to honor those who have served in defense of the nation. Veterans hear words and receive a variety of expressions of gratitude. Their service and sacrifice set them apart.

When the Holy Spirit arrived at Pentecost, He gave ability to do miracles and testify boldly. This made believers different. It also made them a threat to the religious establishment, so they jailed Peter and John. Peter proudly proclaimed, “Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved. When they saw the courage of Peter and John and realized they were unschooled, ordinary men, they were astonished and took note that these men had been with Jesus” (4:12-13). Being with Jesus set them apart.

Upon release, Peter and John joined with other believers who prayed together for the hand of God to protect and direct them. Their fervency in prayer led to another distinctive moment. The place where they prayed was shaken (4:31), and they began to share gladly with one another to encourage and to build the Kingdom.

What the religious leaders could not stop Satan tried to corrupt through the deception of Ananias and Sapphira, yet God moved mightily against them. The healing ministry and oppositional persecution increased as the Kingdom of God began to expand in Jerusalem. Peter declared the loyalty of all. “We must obey God rather than man” (5:29).

Pray for an awareness of Christ’s distinctiveness in you. Live out this distinctiveness in loyalty and boldness.

*Read the Bible Through 2017*

Week 45

Sunday, November 5, 2017—John 4-6

            Jesus, through divine wisdom working in human limitation, knew how to tell the good news so people would see beyond signs and truly believe. He shared boldly with a Jewish leader, Nicodemus, in Jerusalem. Then, He intentionally made His way into Samaria, a place Jews normally avoided, to share with a morally-questionable woman. Using the well by which they stood as a metaphor, He told her He had living water available. In the course of their fascinating conversation, He led her to faith, and she told her story to many others who themselves eventually believed (4:39).

            Jesus was ministering, teaching, and proclaiming the Kingdom because He wanted people to know Him and walk in His ways. After healing a man in Jerusalem, He told him, “See, you are well again. Stop sinning or something worse may happen to you” (5:14). He was restoring people so they could live as God designed them to live, yet many objected because He was doing this on the Sabbath. To them rules were more important than people. Undeterred, Jesus assured them Scripture attested to His life and ministry, but they were unwilling to see and believe.

            Jesus knew those who were seeing and believing needed further growth and deeper understanding (6:27). They needed not to marvel at the signs but to be in awe of Him Himself. He was the Bread of Life (6:35) sent from God for them. Praise God for His words of eternal life (6:68). Pray for a deeper faith and fuller obedience.

Monday, November 6, 2017—John 7-10

            Jesus had an amazing awareness of His calling from God and the timing of His ministry. At His first miracle, He was troubled by His mother’s request because He felt the timing was not right. As the Feast of Tabernacles approached, everyone was to go to Jerusalem, but Jesus knew this was not the time for Him to make His attendance a public event. He went privately but was still able to teach, doing so well the Temple guards said, “No one ever spoke the way this man does” (7:45), so they wouldn’t arrest Him. Many were confused about Jesus’ identity, but He was not.

            He was, in fact, the light of the world (8:12) and had come so those who held to His teaching would know the truth and find freedom. He called His listeners to repentance, and many put their faith in Him (8:30). He gave sight to the physically blind, and spiritually blinded those who could physically see. The blind man knew Jesus was from God (9:33), but the religious leaders did not agree. He made the stunning admission, “Before Abraham was I am” (8:58), equating Himself with God. He was the gate for the sheep and the good shepherd (10:1-11). No one was like He.

            Today, people have the same choice as in Jesus’ day. Who will Jesus be? He can provide light and direction, or He can be a stumbling block and an enigma. Pray for His light to penetrate any darkness, and pray for His leadership to communicate the truth and bring freedom.

Tuesday, November 7, 2017—John 11-13

Jesus received word His good friend Lazarus was sick. “This sickness will not end in death,” he said (11:4). Jesus knew what God was doing would bring Jesus glory, so He did not rush to see Lazarus but stayed where He was for two days. In our darkest moments, we can trust the love God has for us and the plans He has to bring glory to Jesus. His love and those plans may mean Jesus seems slow or delayed. What God is working will be beyond comprehension.

The depth of emotion Martha and Mary expressed led Jesus Himself to weep (11:35). Martha knew Jesus was the Messiah and that Lazarus’s faith would lead to his resurrection in the last day, but she never dreamed Jesus could raise him from the dead in the present. He called Lazarus from the grave after thanking God for working to develop belief in those who witnessed it. What an inconceivable honor Lazarus had in coming out of the grave! His life had been restored, and his Master was glorified.

Jesus became a target more than ever of the religious leaders, yet the people praised Him as He came into the city (12:12) and some of the leaders began themselves to believe (12:42). Lazarus, too, became a target as people came to Bethany to see him after Jesus raised him from the dead (12:9-11). The work of God ought to be so evident that His followers become dangerous to His enemies.

Pray to believe deeply, love sacrificially, and serve faithfully.

Wednesday, November 8, 2017—John 14-17

Headlines every day on webpages and newspapers cause stress, worry, fear, and sadness. The “new” of the news is usually something shocking, heartbreaking, anger-inducing, or confusing. Reading the news can lead anyone to profound unease and to a deep longing for comfort.

Jesus knew His ministry was coming to a close. His death was near, so He proactively spoke words of comfort to His disciples. What they were about to experience would be shocking, disturbing, terrifying, confusing, and more. In John 14-17, Jesus gave His Farewell Discourse to His disciples and pointed them (and modern believers) to the Holy Spirit, the indwelling Source of peace, hope, and direction.

His departure would be initially disturbing, yet He told them to rejoice because His return to heaven (16:7) would allow Him to send the Holy Spirit, who would allow them to know Him as never before and do even greater things than He had done (14:12). His indwelling would empower the obedience their love for Him demanded. The Spirit would be the connection which allowed them to abide in the life-giving Vine (15:1-17) and endure the hatred the world would express (15:18-16:4). With the Spirit, they would find peace.

Jesus closed in prayer—for Himself, His disciples, and all those who would follow Him. Robert Murray McCheyne, a 19th-century minister in the Church of Scotland, once said, “If I could hear Christ praying for me in the next room, I would not fear a million enemies. Yet distance makes no difference; he is praying for me.”

Thursday, November 9, 2017—John 18-21

The trial of Jesus was filled with lots of questions and few answers. One of the only definitive replies came from Peter, who three times said he was not associated with Jesus (18:15-18, 25-27). Otherwise, there was much discussion with little clarity. Pilate asked what charges the Jews brought, and their only reply was that Jesus was a criminal (18;30). Pilate asked Jesus whether He was the king of the Jews, and Jesus asked him whether this was his own idea or from others (18:34). To find Jesus guilty required the authorities’ avoiding the truth. In fact, Pilate wondered what truth truly was (18:38) and was ready to release Jesus, but the people pressed him to release Barabbas.

After being flogged, Jesus assured Pilate his power was given from above (19:11), affirming His understanding of the sin of the people and the sovereignty of God. Jesus was allowing the plan of God to proceed though He was innocent. Pilate proclaimed Jesus King of the Jews, and He suffered horribly on the cross until He died. While the circumstances were suspect, Jesus declaration was definite. “It is finished!” Sin’s price had been paid. The wrath of God was satisfied.

On Sunday morning, the tomb was empty, but the disciples did not understand what was happening. When Mary saw the risen Christ, she went and told them she had seen Him (20:18), and Jesus later appeared to them, filling them with joy (20:20) and sending them on mission.

Thank Jesus for the definitive truth of His mission and ours.

Friday, November 10, 2017—Acts 1-2

During Gulf War II, President George W. Bush flew a fighter jet onto an aircraft carrier and stood before a massive banner which read “Mission Accomplished.” There was still much work to be done in the Gulf region, but the initial action of vital importance had been done—Saddaam Hussein was no longer in power. Something new was possible.