

Tuesday, November 17, 2020—Galatians 1-3

The early church was an eclectic mixture of those who had been Jewish all their lives and come to faith in Christ and those who knew nothing of Judaism but learned of the salvation available in Jesus and embraced the message. These two divergent cultures provided a glorious picture of the breadth of the saving power of the gospel. They also provided opportunity for conflict as they learned to grow together.

The Jews had grown up knowing of the Law and the necessity of living by its standards. When James wrote his letter and called for works to accompany one's faith in Christ, many of those with a background in the Law resonated with his message. To be sure, James was not saying they had to do works to be saved. He said works were the proof of genuine faith.

Some false teachers spread the idea among the new Christian congregations of the necessity of following the Law in order to be saved. Paul wrote his letter to the churches in the Galatian region to combat this error. Having to live by the Law was not good news (1:6). God had rescued Paul from that error himself, and he lived out that message. If righteousness could be gained through the Law, Christ died for nothing (2:20-21). The Law was a tutor that explained holiness and the need for Jesus (3:24).

Thank God for faith in Jesus that leads to forgiveness and righteousness. Live by faith and lead others to do the same.

Monday, November 16, 2020—James 3-5

Massive ships cruise the oceans, directed by a rudder which is unseen and tiny in comparison. A horse has powerful legs and is ten times heavier than its rider, but a bit in its mouth can move it left and right. Likewise, the tongue is small in comparison to the body but can set the course and impact of a person's life—blessing or cursing with a few words.

James was writing to scattered believers and calling them to endurance and active faith. They could not allow difficulty to hinder or discourage. They also could not allow their mouths to be undisciplined. The mouth that praised God could not curse tyrants and frustrations. Walking with God would give them self-discipline and wisdom that would produce peace and righteousness—two much-needed commodities in their lives.

Without discipline, they would become self-centered which would lead to quarrels and fights among the believers. They needed to humble themselves before the Lord so He could lift them up (4:10). Resisting the devil's influence would cause him to flee. Otherwise, their lack of discipline would put them at odds with God, knowing good but not doing it.

James continually called them to self-evaluation. They needed to mourn over their sin and walk away from it. They needed to pray for patient endurance and refreshing encouragement. They needed to sing together and rely on their spiritual leaders. They needed to hold one another accountable and work toward authentic spiritual growth.

Pray for a mouth and a faith that display the power of Jesus.

Sunday, November 15, 2020—James 1-2

James had one of the most unique vantage points in the New Testament church. Jesus was his older brother. He had grown up watching Jesus on a daily basis. He saw Jesus leave the house and begin His ministry. He heard the concerns about Jesus' mental state, and he watched the crowds turn against Him. He saw Him die, and James saw Jesus rise again.

At some point, the truth broke through, and James became a follower. Then, he became the leader of all the believers in Jerusalem. When those believers were scattered around the world, he wrote them a letter to help them remain faithful in following Jesus. He wanted them to rejoice in their

suffering because God could use it to mature them (1:2-4). In fact, God had a crown of life waiting for those who persevered (1:12).

In this walk with Jesus, James urged his brothers and sisters to be quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to get angry (1:19). Jesus was not interested in using people who were like the world and its ways. He was looking for those who were self-controlled and others-focused (1:26-2:7).

The ultimate law for God's people was the law of love—love your neighbor as yourself (2:8). To do that, Christ's disciples had to love God first so He could give them the power of the Spirit to love others. If not, they would claim to have faith and yet have no deeds to show His true presence and power within them. Faith without works is no faith at all.

Pray for faith that produces good works that glorify Christ.

Saturday, November 14, 2020—Acts 13-14

Jesus told His disciples at Caesarea Philippi that the gates of Hades would not prevail against His church (see Matthew 16). Jesus said the organized Body, with Him as the Head, would have so much power that all the forces of idolatry and evil in the world would be powerless against it. The early church faced opposition from within and without, but God continued to demonstrate this overcoming, conquering power.

The church advanced from the Jews who assembled in Jerusalem for Pentecost to the Gentiles who lived in the surrounding regions. Gentiles led the church at Antioch, where believers were first called Christians, and that church became a missionary-sending body, appointing Paul and Barnabas to continue the advancement of the gospel and the church into the helpless darkness.

With mighty displays of power (13:4-12) and reasoned expositions of Scripture and God's history (13:13-43), Paul and Barnabas preached first to the Jews and then to the Gentiles. The enemies of the gospel stirred up dissension, but many believed, and the disciples were filled with joy.

Paul and Barnabas remained faithful as they traveled on their first journey. They preached good news (14:15). Some believed. Others resisted. They wanted people to know in a personal way the God who made them, loved them, and provided for them. Before they returned home, they checked in on the new disciples to strengthen and encourage them. "We must go through many hardships to enter the kingdom of God" (14:22).

Thank God for the power of the gospel. Share the good news.

Friday, November 13, 2020—Acts 10-12

Man looks at outward appearances. God looks at the condition of the soul. From the outside, Cornelius seemed to have it all together. He was a man of importance. His family feared God, and he gave generously to the poor. Something was amiss, however, so God gave Cornelius a vision, and then He gave Cornelius a visitor. Peter came and shared the gospel of Jesus Christ so Cornelius and his family could be transformed.

Peter changed in the process as well. God gave him a more mature view of the gospel to change Jew and Gentile alike. He saw how the call of God will take His people to unexpected, seemingly non-sensical places, to bring glory to Christ. Disciples are to obey no matter the situation.

The church, which consisted of Jews who had surrendered to the Lordship of Christ, wanted to hear Peter's report. They could not believe that uncircumcised Gentiles would be welcomed by God into His family through repentance, yet Peter gave them the news this was so (11:1-15). Soon, Jews and Gentiles were responding to the gospel all around the Roman world, and the church in Antioch began to flourish.

The growth did not make life in Christ any easier. Herod was intent on persecuting the church

(12:1), so he was arresting and killing some of the leaders. Faithfulness to Christ and His call, along with miraculous intervention (12:1-19), preserved the church while Herod was soon dead.

Pray for faith that is obedient, maturing, and glorifying to Christ.

Thursday, November 12, 2020—Acts 6-9

God loves variety. He has filled creation with millions of species of plants and animals. Within the human species, He has created thousands of skin tones, languages, and cultures to show the beauty and wonder of His highest creation. Anything God makes, Satan tries to corrupt.

As the early church grew, the enemy tried to divide the church along racial lines. Widows who spoke Greek felt neglected because the disciples were taking better care of the widows who spoke Hebrew. The apostles knew their ministry was vital to the health of the church, so they asked the church to appoint godly men to meet this need (6:4). Fervent pray and open communication will solve a number of problems in the church.

Satan does not back down easily. He stirred opposition against one of these new community servants, Stephen, who had to stand before the Sanhedrin to defend himself against false charges. Stephen gave a thorough review of God's history that supported God's plan and His saving work in Jesus. The crowd was incensed, and they stoned Stephen to death (7:1-60).

Another of these servants, Phillip, began to preach and teach outside of Jerusalem and saw God do powerful works through the proclamation of the Word (8:1-40). The Spirit had such freedom to work He was even able to change the heart and the life of one who assisted in the stoning of Stephen and was enforcing further persecution. Saul quickly became a target himself, because he was preaching Jesus (9:23).

Pray for Spirit-empowered solutions to God-sized problems.

Wednesday, November 11, 2020—Acts 3-5

In the eleventh hour of the eleventh day of the eleventh month of November 1918, world leaders signed the armistice that brought an end to World War I. That has become Veterans Day in the United States, a day to recognize the veterans of the armed services.

Those who go to the front lines to battle or those who preserve and defend the freedom that has been won are irreplaceable. The early church was full of front-line spiritual warriors as they moved forward under the power of the Holy Spirit to expand the Kingdom and defend the good news of Jesus. They fought with powerful prayer and proclamation.

Peter and John brought healing to a lame man, and when the crowd wanted to know what this could mean, they explained the gospel. If they repented, God would wipe out their sins and bring renewal to their souls like He had to the lame man's body (3:1-26). While the crowd was amazed, the religious leaders were disturbed by what they saw and heard, so they put Peter and John in jail. The next day, Peter and John shared the gospel with their accusers, boldly lifting up Jesus (4:1-12).

The foundational reliance on Jesus created rich fellowship among the believers (4:32-37), so Satan tried to dissolve that trust with a spirit of deception (5:1-11), but God quickly removed that obstacle. Outside forces again worked against the church and jailed the apostles, but God showed He is not limited by human power and schemes (5:12-42).

Pray you will serve Jesus faithfully and enrich your church family.