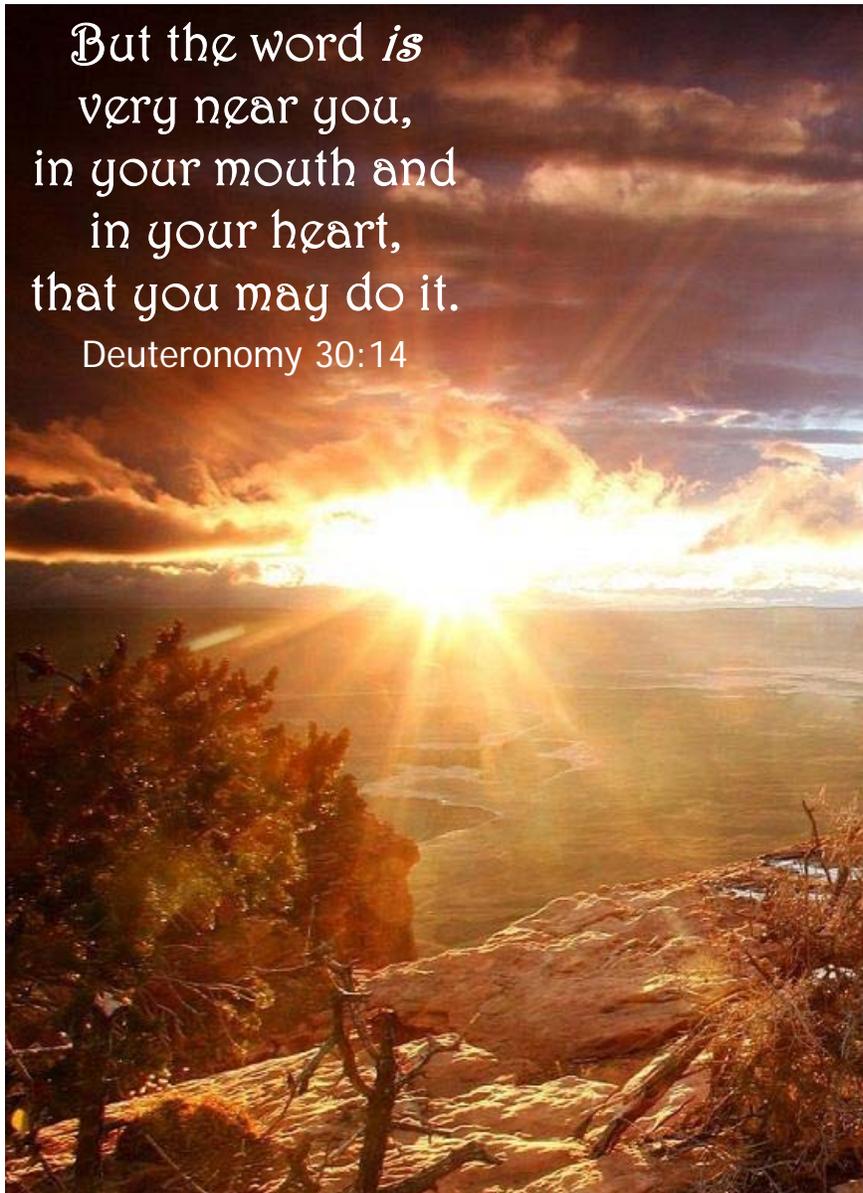


February 2019 Daily Devotional

But the word *is*
very near you,
in your mouth and
in your heart,
that you may do it.

Deuteronomy 30:14

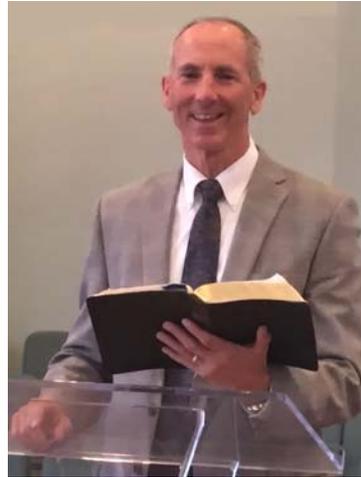


Vistoso Community Church

Foreword

This month we will spend most of our time in the Books of Daniel, Acts, and Ephesians.

I am also going to start something new this month. From time to time I will look at one specific foundational aspect of the Christian Life, and then pursue readings that teach us more about that particular subject. You'll find the first of these foundational teachings early in this month's Devotional. I hope these foundational lessons are a blessing.



In His grace,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Kevin Redig". The signature is written in a cursive style.

Kevin Redig

All Scripture quotes have been taken from either the NKJV (1992 edition) or the NIV (1984 edition).

Studies in Daniel

Friday, February 1: Read Acts 12

We are still considering what we have just learned from our study of Daniel, despite today's reading being from the Book of Acts. In fact, consider this to be one way to tie the Old and New Testaments together. Would you agree with me that in our day there seems to be a lack of what the Bible refers to as *The Fear of the Lord*? A study of the many Biblical references to this phrase will draw together three concepts: a recognition of the exalted nature and character of God; a respect for His capability—in particular His capability to reach into this world at any place and time of His choosing; and an obedience that results from understanding the aforementioned items.

Daniel showed up in Babylon with a fully developed *Fear of the Lord*, which is why he could be used by God as he was. Nebuchadnezzar developed a *Fear of the Lord* as the result of being on the receiving end of the exceedingly long reach of God. Belshazzar, although he had some knowledge of God, chose to show contempt for Him rather than having a *Fear of the Lord*, and he paid the ultimate price as a result.

The question for today is whether this principle is still in operation. Does it still behoove us to operate with a healthy *Fear of the Lord*? As an answer, consider Herod in Acts 12. He is bringing heavy persecution upon the fledgling Church, thinking that he can do so with impunity. And then he let the praise of men go to his head, and:

**. . .because Herod did not give praise to God, an
angel of the Lord struck him down.** Acts 12:23

Apparently, he failed to recognize who God was, or didn't think He could reach into his life.

Continued on the next page.

Studies in Daniel

Friday, February 1: Read Acts 12 (Continued)

And, let's not forget Ananias and Sapphira from Acts 5. In deceiving the people, apparently they thought they could deceive God too! Once again, this shows a distinct lack of understanding of what God is like.

So I ask the same question: "Does it still behoove us to operate with a healthy *Fear of the Lord*?" If we have learned anything from our study of Daniel, it is the answer to the question, "Who's in Charge?" Thus, despite the appearances in our day, the answer is the same every single day of the week—*The Most High God!* That is why:

The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom. . .
Proverbs 9:10



A New Topic of Study

Before heading back to Acts, we are going to add a new component to this year's devotionals. In addition to working through books of the Bible, we are going to begin to explore a study topic entitled: *The Basics of the Christian Life! (The Basics!)*. We will look at some of the key and foundational Scriptures which deal with everything from salvation to eternity. In this way, I hope we might reinforce a number of the fundamentals of the faith throughout the year. The format for these topical studies will be the same—a daily reading and a devotional thought—but the material will be more topical in nature.

The Basics!

Monday, February 4: Read Ephesians 2:1-10

We are going to spend several days investigating Ephesians 2:8-10. For today, let's consider Verses 8-9:

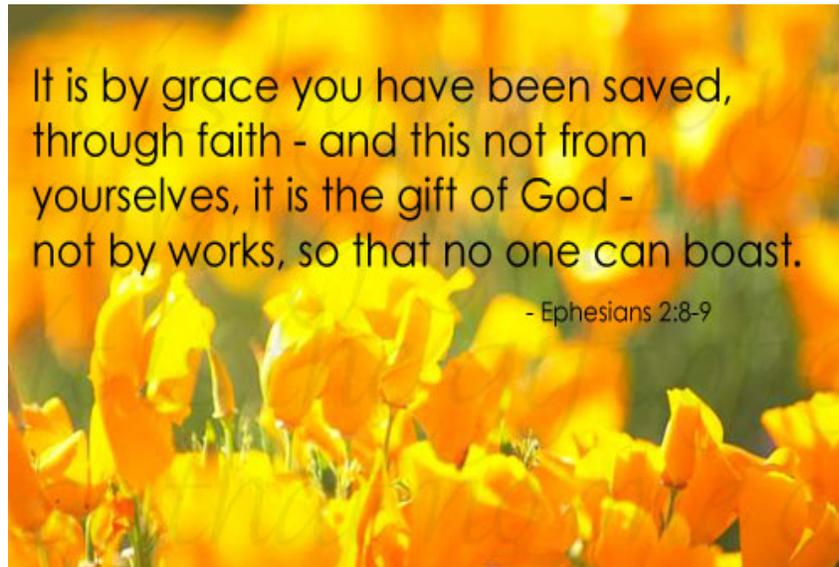
For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith, and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast.

The first thing we note is that we are *saved by grace!* On the one hand, this means no person has ever been saved by works they have performed. Excluding works in this way raises the ire of religion; nonetheless, on the authority of God's Word we can know it is true. For example:

And if by grace (and we have just read that we are saved by grace), **then it is no longer by works; if it were, grace would no longer be grace.** Romans 11:6

This is telling us that, when God provides in grace, He is not requiring works on our part.

Continued on the next page.



The Basics!

Monday, February 4: Read Ephesians 2:1-10 (Continued)

On the other hand, this means that God has provided everything necessary for man to be saved. He has done the work of salvation—and a mighty work it is! Furthermore, His provision of salvation is apart from any merit on our part. Have you ever paused to think about (and give thanks for) the stupendous nature of grace. For we are:

- Saved by grace (Ephesians 2:8)
- Given grace in exchange for grace (John 1:16)
- Built up by the word of His grace (Acts 20:32)
- Justified by His grace (Romans 3:24)
- Standing in God's grace (Romans 5:2)
- Under grace (Romans 6:14)

And, His grace is sufficient for each one of us. (II Corinthians 12:9)

There are many more verses telling of God's gifts of grace, these are just a sampling. No wonder the early Church was told to:

**. . .continue in the
grace of God.**

Acts 13:43

Given what we have received from the hand of God, why would we ever turn to our own works as an alternative?



The Basics!

Tuesday, February 5: Read Romans 4

We continue to work on Ephesians 2:8-9:

For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith, and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast.

If God has done all of the work of salvation and then in grace offers it as a *gift* to mankind, what specifically does He want from us? Our passage is very clear. God's part is the work of salvation, which in grace He has made available to mankind. Our part is to receive what He has provided *by means of faith*. In short, He wants us to trust in what He has done for us, to take Him at His Word, and believe in the sufficiency of the work of Christ on the cross. In this way, He gets the glory and we receive the blessing.



Now, how can we be absolutely sure we are correctly interpreting God's Word on this very important matter? Two items for you to ponder:

1. This is precisely the question the crowd asked Jesus in John 6:28:

What must we do to do the works God requires?

And here is the immediate response of Jesus,

"The work of God is this, to believe in the One He has sent."

John 6:29

The *work* is to believe in Jesus Christ.

Continued on the next page.

The Basics!

Tuesday, February 5: Read Romans 4 (Continued)

2. Is it possible that faith is a work? We have already seen that grace and works are not compatible, but what about faith? Paul helps us with this question in Romans 4:5:

However, to the man who does not work but trusts God. . .his faith is credited as righteousness.

Do you see it? Trusting God is contrasted against working. It is faith that leads to imputed righteousness, not works! This is the faith that caused Abraham to be justified before God (Romans 4:3), and it is the very same faith that will be credited to our account as righteousness (Romans 4:24).

So to answer the question we asked earlier, the response God is looking for is faith alone in Christ alone!



The Basics!

Wednesday, February 6: Read John 7

For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith, and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast.

Ephesians 2:8-9

Today, as we continue to unpack these verses, I want us to consider, "*What exactly is the gift of God?*" There are some who have wrongly concluded that the gift is faith. In other words, they contend that you cannot exercise faith (believe) on your own, God has to give you the gift of faith. Some actually go so far as to suggest that lost people pray for the gift of faith. What misguided advice to give a lost person when the Bible actually says:

If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink. He who believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.

John 7:37-38

As the passage makes clear, to drink is to believe, and it is a choice we make. So again, let's ask, "*What is the gift of God?*" The gift is our salvation, given in grace and received by faith. Let's firm this up in our thinking:

1. Greek grammarians are reasonably united that the pronoun translated *this* in the Ephesians verse we have been studying, because of its form in the passage, does not apply to faith but rather to the salvation God has provided in grace.
2. The context emphatically supports salvation as the gift. Go back to Ephesians 2:1-7, you will see one aspect of our salvation after another discussed—without faith being mentioned. So for eight straight verses Paul has been writing about salvation—that's the gift in view.

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The Basics!

Wednesday, February 6: Read John 7 (Continued)

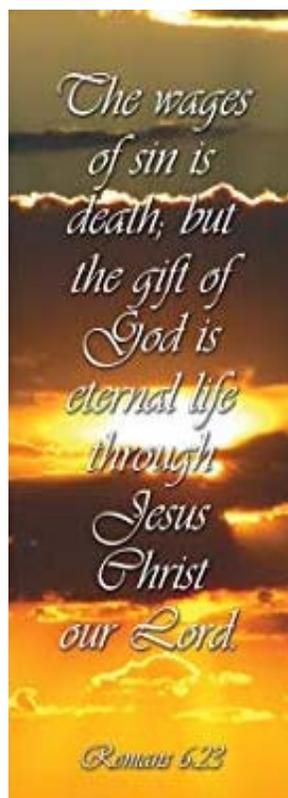
3. Lastly, let's look at other times when the word *gift* is used in Scripture:

- The gift of God is eternal life. (Romans 6:23)
- Justification is a gift. (Romans 5:16)
- The unspeakable gift that is Jesus Christ. (II Corinthians 9:15)

So these are all aspects of salvation. Do you notice anything conspicuously absent from the list? No usage of the word *gift* is ever attached to faith. Faith is not the gift!

Why is this important? It is important because we are to first of all know that God has provided everything necessary for every member of the human race to be restored to relationship with Him—to be saved! We are also to know that all this is available to us through the person and work of Christ!

Knowing all this, how could our role as witnesses be anything other than to proclaim this greatest of all gifts? We don't need to confuse people by encouraging them to seek faith. Instead, we need to lay out the truth and encourage them to lay aside their unbelief and turn, in faith, to the only One who can save them—the Lord Jesus Christ!



The Basics!

Thursday, February 7: Read Romans 3

For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith, and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast.

Ephesians 2:8-9

I would be remiss if we overlooked this final phrase in Ephesians 2:9, for it can be a very helpful double-check on the purity of the Gospel message we share with others. First, let's see how clearly this same principle is reinforced in the third chapter of Romans:

Where, then, is boasting? It is excluded. On what principle? On that of observing the law? No, but on that of faith.

Romans 3:27

You see, if we could work our way into heaven by observing the Mosaic Law, or any other system of works, we would have something to boast about. But boasting is excluded, because we receive both justification and eternal life by a response of faith and not by our works! And, since there are no works in salvation, there is no reason for man to boast.

I want you to listen very closely to both yourself and others when sharing the Gospel. Whenever a salvation testimony focuses upon what a person gave up, dedicated, surrendered, or stopped doing, you are hearing something more akin to a *braggamony* than testimony. However, we have a real testimony when it consistently focuses upon who Jesus is and what He accomplished for us on the cross, while we show up only as *minor players* who put our faith in the works God has accomplished. This type of testimony responds to the Biblical admonition,

Let him who boasts, boast in the Lord.

I Corinthians 1:31

The Basics!

Friday, February 8: Read Philippians 2

As we finish out this week of looking at Ephesians 2:8-10 in order to better understand one of the *Basics of the Christian Life*, we have yet to consider Verse 10:

For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.

This single verse will keep us from making a very important mistake! For, because works are excluded as the means by which we are eternally saved in Verses 8-9, far too often works are wrongly excluded from the Christian Life altogether. This verse tells us that saved people are *created in Christ to do good works*.

Do you see the distinction? We don't obtain the status of *in Christ* by any works we do, we obtain that status by faith in the all-sufficient work of Christ. But, once we are in Christ, it is absolutely God's intent that works flow from our new life in Christ. In fact, the passage goes on to make it clear that God has already prepared these works. This is a mind-boggling thought. If you are a child of God, then God determined ahead of time the kinds of things He wants you to accomplish and He gifted you for those works. He has provided everything we need for life and godliness. (II Peter 1:3-4) This means we should ask ourselves regularly, "Lord, am I accomplishing the works you prepared in advance for me to do?" I find this to be a very humbling question to ask! Thankfully, there is a piece of really good news in Philippians 2:12-13:

. . .continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you to will and to act according to His good purpose.

And, of course, part of that good purpose is to accomplish the works He has prepared for each of us!

Back in Acts

Monday, February 11: Read Acts 13:1-12

When we left Acts, Barnabas had gone to Tarsus to find Paul. After bringing him back, they spent an entire year in Antioch with a very fruitful ministry of discipling new believers. Now, in Chapter 13 we see that the growing and well-taught church in Antioch has quite an abundance of gifted leadership. So, just as He did in Jerusalem, God sends out witnesses. In this case, it is not by persecution, but by direct revelation recounted in Acts 13:2:

. . .the Holy Spirit said, “Set apart for Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.”

Right here in Acts 13 we have what is usually considered the first intentional sending of missionaries with the first of three such journeys by Paul. The map below illustrates the outgoing route of Paul’s first missionary journey in blue and the returning route in red.



The entire trip, including the start from Antioch itself, occurred within the boundaries of what is modern Turkey.

Continued on the next page.

Back in Acts

Monday, February 11: Read Acts 13:1-12 (Continued)

Now, consider the following important factors regarding Paul's missionary journeys:

- Because God called them and sent them, did that mean Paul (Saul) and Barnabas were going to have a trouble-free ministry experience? Absolutely not! In fact, in short order, they ran into a sorcerer and false prophet, and, before this journey is over, Paul is going to be stoned and left for dead. That's a *trial by fire*.
- We should expect at least some of the same when we engage in the ministry to which we have been called.
- The promise is not one of *smooth sailing*, but one of enablement:

He will never leave us nor forsake us! Hebrews 13:5

For what is the promise of Jesus at the end of our great commission?

"And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age." Matthew 28:20

If we are faithful in ministry, we can hope for the same blessing received by Paul and Barnabas at the end of today's reading:

When the proconsul saw what had happened, (a miracle) he believed. . . Acts 13:12

There is no greater blessing in ministry than to be used by the Lord to bring one more lost soul into the Kingdom of our Lord and Savior.

Back in Acts

Tuesday, February 12: Read Luke 22

If you continue reading in Acts 13, the very next verse of text begins with these words:

From Paphos, Paul and his companions sailed to Perga in Pamphylia, where John left them to return to Jerusalem. Acts 13:13

We have seen the missionary team has already run into some opposition and there is much worse to come. Apparently, all this is too much for John and he deserts the team. Perhaps you think I am reading too much into his departure. I would agree with you if it weren't for Acts 15:38, which makes it clear that is what happened:

But Paul insisted that they should not take with them the one (John) who had departed from them in Pamphylia, and had not gone with them to the work.

At this point, it is quite easy to see John the deserter as a failure. If this desertion happened in our day, there are some who would say John just wasn't cut out for missions work. Others would teach that he wasn't a *true* believer in Jesus because he didn't persevere through trials. Let me suggest that failure can still happen to Christians. Sometimes it is what is necessary to get rid of dependence upon self and shift to dependence upon the Word of God *and* the One who stands behind that Word. Today's reading is a reminder that John was not the first to fail in the ministry—and he won't be the last.

Continued on the next page.

Back in Acts

Tuesday, February 12: Read Luke 22
(Continued)

For Peter denied the Lord three times—clearly a blow to his view of himself. For, when his actions sunk in:

. . . **he went outside and wept bitterly.** Luke 22:62

No doubt John underwent similar self-recriminations on his way back to Jerusalem.



But what did Jesus do with the failed Peter? He commissioned Peter to feed and care for His sheep. The humbled Peter goes on to be greatly used by the Lord. Is it possible that John, too, could have overcome his failure? To answer that, let me give you his more common name: John-Mark or just Mark. This is the same John-Mark who wrote the Gospel of Mark, who became Peter's indispensable aide, and even was asked for by name by the Apostle Paul. (II Timothy 4:11) So let me add to an earlier observation: You can see the grace of God every time a lost person gets saved. Not only that, you can see grace once again when human failure is turned into that which brings glory to God. I trust that very same grace will be at work in your life and mine—to His glory!

Back in Acts

Wednesday, February 13:
Read Acts 13:13-43

As we pick up this first missions trip, Paul and Barnabas, have entered the Roman province of Galatia (Pisidian Antioch). What a hope-filled beginning as they are asked to speak in the synagogue. Consider:

1. Paul goes back to the Exodus and gives a very *Jewish* message leading up to Jesus as the Messiah because his audience is either Jews or converts to Judaism. They knew Jewish history and could make the connections. We will want to note how he deals differently with pagan Gentile audiences.

2. Despite the history lesson, Paul is never going to deviate from the message we find in Verses 38-39:

. . .through Jesus the forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you.

Can't you imagine them asking, "How do we get this forgiveness?" His answer is the same to this group of Jews in Galatia or Gentiles throughout Asia Minor:

Through Him everyone who believes is justified from everything you could not be justified from by the Law of Moses. Acts: 13:39

In short, justification before God comes through believing in Jesus and not through keeping the Law. This group of Jews has just received quite a shock.

3. Lastly, Paul warns them, ignore this message at your own peril. And this same admonishment is true today.

Paul and Barnabas were asked to speak again on the next Sabbath. Many continued in dialogue—probably throughout the week. Is it possible that the Jews scattered throughout the Empire will respond, while those in Israel persist in unbelief? We'll see in tomorrow's reading.

Back in Acts

Thursday, February 14: Read Acts 13:43-52

How quickly things can change when you are ministering the Gospel to others. A family member or friend in the midst of a crisis is attentive to the good news you share with them. But, a short time later, rejects it, and you wonder: "What happened?" Satan doesn't want to lose subjects, and he will do everything possible to oppose the Gospel. I know what you are thinking: "How did Satan get brought into this?" Consider this from James 3:14-15:

. . .if you harbor bitter envy and selfish ambition in your hearts. . .such wisdom does not come down from heaven but is earthly, unspiritual, of the devil.

You would think that if you were wrong about the means of salvation—as the Jews were—you would be glad to hear the truth, and, at the very minimum, search the Scriptures carefully to see if perhaps this message could be true. But what actually prompted what occurs next?

When the Jews saw the crowds, they were filled with jealousy and talked abusively against what Paul was saying." Acts 13:45

This wasn't a matter of upholding truth, but of jealousy! The world system we live in prompts such a response. It happens when we see someone else getting the attention, drawing a big crowd, or causing our side to lose power. I John 5:19 tells us who is behind this world system:

We know that we are children of God, and that the whole world is under the control of the evil one.

There is a bright spot reported in Verse 48:

. . .all who were appointed for eternal life believed.

That's because the Gospel is the power of God unto salvation for all who will believe! (Romans 1:16) Hold forth the message and let it do its work.

Back in Acts

Friday, February 15: Read Acts 14:1-13

Did Paul and Barnabas head back to Antioch in discouragement after being expelled from the region of Pisidian Antioch? No, they pressed on to Iconium. Today's focus is on Verses 1-3. Paul and Barnabas continue to preach Jesus and Him crucified, and the response is in Verse 1:

. . . a great number of Jews and Gentiles believed.

Note that there were no works, no promise to straighten up—nothing but belief in the person and work of Christ.

But the Jews who refused to believe stirred up the Gentiles and poisoned their minds. . . Acts 14:2

What they did follows naturally from the failure to believe. What think ye of Christ is the single biggest issue at stake for every human being! If you think I am overstating the issue, consider what Jesus says in John 3:36:

“Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God’s wrath remains on him.”

Unless something changes, that is the unbelieving Jews repent of their rejection of Christ, they will spend an eternity under the wrath of God. As I said, the single biggest issue for every human being is belief or rejection of Christ. Nothing else has ramifications that come even close. Let's not forget Verse 3, because the Lord:

. . . confirmed the message of His grace by enabling them (Paul and Barnabas) to do miraculous signs. . .

Then and now it would not have been unreasonable to ask, “Are you sure all we have to do is believe in what God accomplished through His Son on the cross?” What does the Scripture say? The Lord “confirmed *the message of His grace!*”

Back in Acts

Monday, February 18: Read Acts 14:14-28

People are responding in faith to the Gospel in Iconium and a church is planted. But Paul and Barnabas have to flee for their lives because of a plot to kill them. In Lystra, a healing leads people to believe that Paul and Barnabas are gods, and then, after agitators stir up the crowd, they stone Paul and leave him for dead. From there, Paul and Barnabas move on to Derbe where a great number believed. Then, on the return leg, they went back to each of the churches they had planted, appointed elders, and encouraged them in the Lord. Whew! Missions work can be very demanding! Two things to note:

1. Paul learned to keep his eyes on the Lord and nowhere else. For one day people thought him a god come to earth and the next they stoned him and left him for dead. He learned to simply keep going *knowing nothing but Christ and Him crucified*. (1 Corinthians 2:2)
2. Paul and Barnabas made a point of revisiting each church plant and encouraging them to remain true to the faith. Further, Paul told them:

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

After reading this chapter we should all be thinking, "No kidding!" Paul is not saying that going through hardships is a means of earning your way into heaven. He has been very clear that the Gospel consists of faith alone in Christ alone. What he is telling these new believers is that walking in the faith and engaging in any kind of ministry is going to have a cost, to require sacrifice, and entail hardships. Contrary to some popular teaching, the Christian Life is not meant to be all smooth sailing! But when it comes down to it, what could be better than Our Utmost for His Highest?

Back in Acts

Tuesday, February 19: Read II Corinthians 2

I want to spend a few days studying Paul and his attitude toward ministry. We have just concluded reading about his first missionary journey, and, in just a chapter and a half, he will be off on his second missions trip—this time with Silas and Timothy. In some ways, the second trip is more of the same—more churches planted, more nights in jail, and more riots fomented by those antagonistic to the message. During part of this trip, he spends quite a bit of time in Corinth and, not surprisingly, plants a church.

First and Second Corinthians are letters to this church as he tries to guide them to spiritual maturity. Paul's remarkable attitude toward the challenges of ministry can be an invaluable model for us. For I have to admit, that if I faced even a fraction of the animosity that Paul dealt with on a regular basis, both without and within the church, I would have packed it up long ago. Right here in II Corinthians 2:14 is something that can be very helpful:

But thanks be to God who always leads us in triumphal procession in Christ and through us spreads everywhere the fragrance of the knowledge of Him.

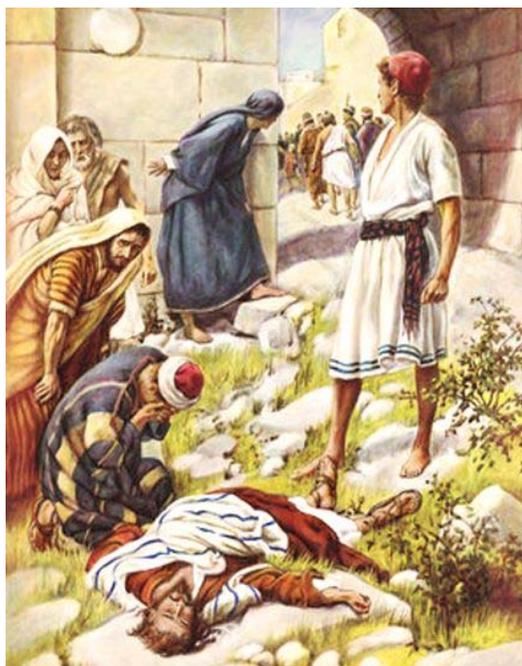
A first reading of this passage might give the impression that Paul's life in ministry is like a ticker-tape parade welcoming home a victorious team. Instead, he is describing himself as a conquered individual who is being led in Christ's triumphal procession. Christ is the victor and Paul sees himself as one going to die in the arena. That may not sit well with your view of the Christian Life, so we'll do some reinforcement tomorrow. In the meantime, look at how Paul views his challenging role in II Corinthians 2:15:

For we are to God the aroma of Christ among those who are being saved and those who are perishing. . .

Back in Acts

Wednesday, February 20:
Read II Corinthians 4

In our study of Acts, we have seen the difficulties faced by Paul during his first missionary journey—and they are just as challenging on his subsequent ventures. That's because advancing the cause of the Gospel in enemy-held territory is a very challenging undertaking. By enemy-held territory, I simply mean planet earth under Satan's control according to I John 5:19.



Despite the challenges, Paul delighted to be the *aroma of Christ* wherever he went. You may have thought I overstated his situation in yesterday's devotional until you read today's text. For Paul, speaking for those in ministry, says:

We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed. . . For we who are alive are always being given over to death for Jesus' sake. . . II Corinthians 4:8-11

The last verse in particular sums up the challenge of ministry—to give of self on behalf of someone else.

Back in Acts

**Wednesday, February 20:
Read II Corinthians 4 (Continued)**

Why would Paul, or anyone else, do this? There are ample reasons in the text for us to consider and emulate. Consider these two:

1. We see the first reason has to do with evangelism:

So then, death is at work in us, but life is at work in you.” II Corinthians 4:12

We may be called to make sacrifices for others. But, if it leads to their eternal salvation and/or spiritual growth, it is worth it.

2. A second reason involves the future:

. . . we know that the One who raised the Lord Jesus from the dead will also raise us with Jesus and present us with you in His presence. II Corinthians 4:14

This makes heaven take on a fellowship focus. We are going to be raised with those to whom we have ministered, and be presented with them in the Lord's presence! That could be you and a grandson or granddaughter or you and a friend or neighbor with whom you have shared the Gospel. What a glorious thought!

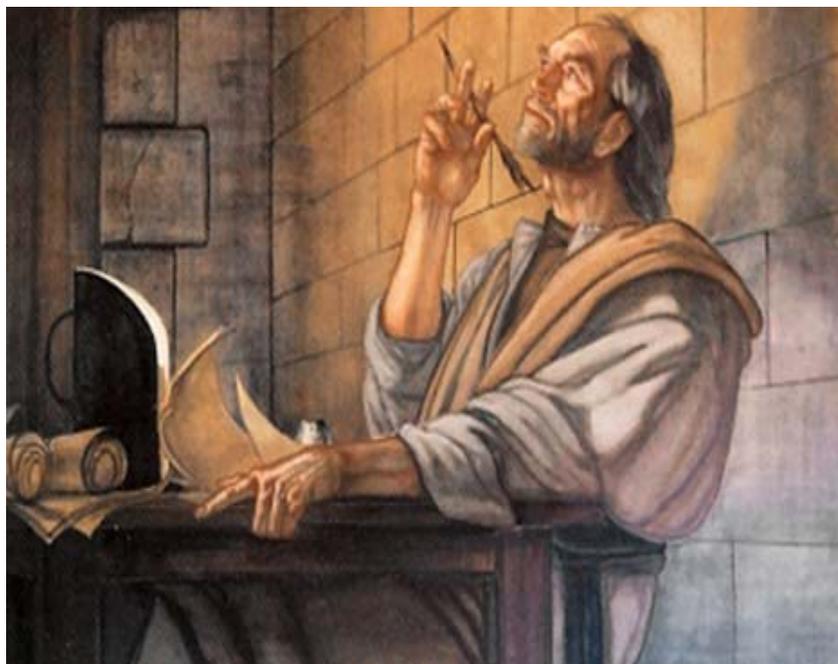
For God, who said, “Let there be light in the darkness,” has made this light shine in our hearts so we could know the glory of God that is seen in the face of Jesus Christ.
2 Corinthians 4:6

Back in Acts

Thursday, February 21: Read Philippians 1

I can't resist spending one more day on the remarkable attitude of Paul with respect to ministering to others. As we shift to a letter to the church in Philippi, we are dealing with a church Paul planted on his second missionary journey. His concern for that church has caused him to write about a number of matters.

So what is his location while he is writing? Is he having what we might call a furlough back in Antioch—a time of rest, recovery, and fellowship? On the contrary, he is writing this letter—more likely dictating it— from prison in Rome. We will eventually get to the backstory of how he ended up in prison as part of our study of Acts, but for now his incarceration continues to prove the point that engaging in ministry in enemy-held territory can be hard and costly at the personal level.



Back in Acts

Thursday, February 21: Read Philippians 1 (Continued)

Paul is writing partly to calm the concerns of the church in Philippi such as in his assurance in Philippians 1:12-13:

Now I want you to know, brothers, that what has happened to me has really served to advance the gospel. . . it has become clear throughout the whole palace guard. . .that I am in chains for Christ.

This is pretty remarkable for someone in prison, isn't it? Two more things are even more remarkable:

1. Paul just lays bare the attitude of his heart in Verse 21, when he tells this church body dear to him:

For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain.

Do you see what he is saying? If prison is the death of him, he is going home to be with the Lord and that would be gain. If he does not die in prison, it means he will keep right on serving as the Lord allows. I am confident that we can change our attitudes in any circumstance in which we find ourselves, if we will think through what *"to live is Christ"* means.

2. Philippians is a doctrinally rich book, but I especially love Philippians 4:22:

All the saints send you greetings, especially those who belong to Caesar's household.

Did you catch it back in Verse 13 that even the palace guard knew Paul was in chains for Christ? And now, the saints of Caesar's household send their greetings! Do you know what that means? The grace of God could even be seen in the household of the depraved Nero, for members of the palace guard were getting saved! That's because for Paul *to live is Christ!* We can do well to follow his example!

Return to Daniel

Friday, February 22: Read Daniel 6:1-15

As we transition into Daniel Chapter 6, we have another king, another kingdom, and another system of law. Could Daniel 4:17 possibly still apply?

“. . .the Most High is sovereign over the kingdoms of men and gives them to anyone He wishes. . .”

If so, that would make the verse apply to three straight kings. Proof is piling up! As the chapter begins, we meet King Darius. He was most likely more like a governor over the province of Babylon while Cyrus reigned over the Persian Empire. Daniel is close to 80 by this time and clearly an exceptional administrator. He is also a great role model for the effective walk and ministry that can be had right into old age. (Ahem!)

Now the other chief administrators were not pleased with Daniel, perhaps because he was a foreigner or perhaps because he was so blameless and upright that it eliminated some of the normal graft that was part of kingdom bureaucracy! Finally, they realized:

We will never find any basis for charges against this man Daniel unless it has something to do with the law of his God.

Daniel 6:5

There they have it, a *perceived* weak point! They can use his relationship with the Lord against him. And that's exactly what they do, using his zeal in prayer as a means to eliminate him. More on this tomorrow, but I have one practical question for you. If our lives were to come under very close scrutiny—consider an IRS inspector—would that inspector say the same thing about us as they did about Daniel: *We will never find any basis for charges against this man* unless it has something to do with his relationship with his Savior? I pray that it would be so!

Return to Daniel

Monday, February 25: Read Daniel 6:16-28

On Friday, Daniel's antagonistic peers had forced the king to obey the letter of the law. Daniel is thrown into the lion's den, and note the last words of King Darius to him:

**May your God, whom you serve continually,
rescue you.** Daniel 6:16

Wow! Not only can his enemies find no fault with his behavior, but those who observe him know that Daniel serves His God continually. More for us to emulate! What follows for the next ten hours has further application. The text of Daniel 6:18 tells us that the king:

**. . .spent the night without eating and without any
entertainment. . . And he could not sleep.**

Darius has little hope that his most trusted advisor will survive; and, from an eternal perspective, he has no hope for his future either. But, Daniel that next morning was:

**. . .lifted from the den, no wound was found on him,
because he had trusted in His God.** Daniel 6:23

Are you seeing the application? King Darius spent a restless and anxiety-filled night in the palace, while Daniel spent the night trusting in God. Darius had nothing greater than himself in which to trust—that always leads to anxiety when circumstances are outside of one's control. How was Daniel's night? Do you think he was in constant fear the lions might attack? No, I am certain he had a very peaceful night! How could I possibly know that? Because Isaiah 26:3 (KJV) tells us that our God will:

**. . .keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed
on Thee, because he trusteth in Thee.**

And that's exactly what the text tells us Daniel was doing—trusting in His God. And, on the authority of God's Word, I know God gave him peace in return. And, He will do the same thing for us.

Return to Daniel

Tuesday, February 26: Read I Peter 2

Daniel's deliverance from the lion's den is a dramatic example of God's faithfulness to those who are His own. But don't overlook what is, for all practical purposes, a testimony given by King Darius in Daniel 6:26-27:

"I issue a decree that in every part of my kingdom people must fear and reverence the God of Daniel. For He is the living God and He endures forever; His kingdom will not be destroyed, and His dominion will never end. He rescues and He saves. . ."

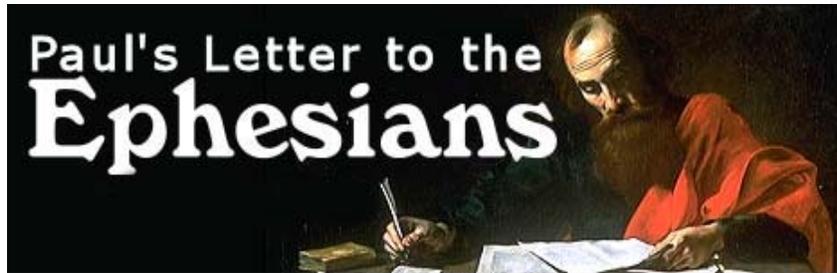
What a remarkable proclamation from a pagan king! We have no way to know if Darius has become a believer, apart from this testimony. But one thing is certain, this is a demonstration of the power of a life well lived. Daniel influenced Darius to the point he issued a decree promoting fear and reverence toward God. Daniel did it by living a blameless life and trusting in God! Both Chapters 2 and 4 of Peter's first epistle promote exactly this kind of life:

Dear friends, I urge you, as aliens and strangers in the world, to abstain from sinful desires, which war against your soul. Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day He visits us. I Peter 2:11-12

Daniel was an alien among pagans. We, too, are to see ourselves the same way, for our home is heaven and the world around us is growing ever darker. I find I Peter 4:19 to be an excellent summary of the life of Daniel—and of course, a command to us:

So then, those who suffer according to God's will should commit themselves to their faithful Creator and continue to do good.

There you have it—trust God and do good!



A Study in Ephesians

Wednesday, February 27:
Read Acts 28:11-31

We haven't actually skipped chapters and returned to the Book of Acts. Instead, we are beginning our reading of the book of Ephesians. Acts 28 gives us Paul's location and situation at the time he wrote his letter to the Church in Ephesus. Paul first visited Ephesus during his third missionary journey and eventually spent an extended period of time there preaching the Gospel and establishing the Ephesian church.

It is now many years later and Paul, after having been arrested and held for an extended period of time, exercises his right as a Roman citizen to appeal to Caesar. So off to Rome he goes where he is basically under house arrest.

When we got to Rome, Paul was allowed to live by himself, with a soldier to guard him. Acts 28:16

Being under house arrest allowed Paul the opportunity to minister to the Jewish contingent in Rome, and upon their rejection, turn his full attention to the Gentiles.

For two whole years Paul stayed there in his own rented house and welcomed all who came to see him. Acts 28:30

Continued on the next page.

A Study in Ephesians

Wednesday, February 27:
Read Acts 28:11-31 (Continued)

Again, I remind you that this was not a *vacation rental*, but a time of constantly being under armed guard with his life potentially in the balance. What did Paul do in Rome? For one thing:

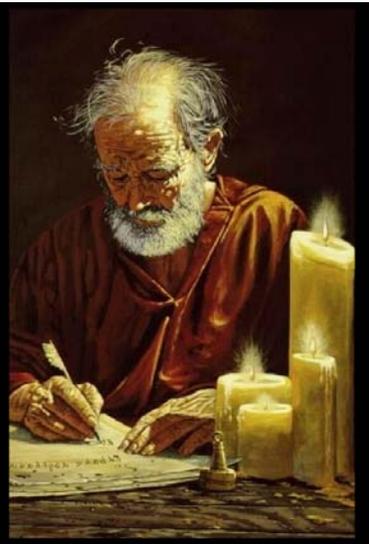
Boldly and without hindrance he preached the kingdom of God and taught about the Lord Jesus Christ. Acts 28:31

For another thing, Paul wrote a number of letters to churches with whom he had an affiliation. These are commonly referred to as the *prison epistles*. As we read through this great portion of Scripture, keep in mind that these were the kinds of things Paul was thinking about while he was under house arrest and eventually put to death at the hands of Romans.

What an example of maintaining Divine Viewpoint in the midst of trials!

*For two whole years
Paul stayed there in
his own rented house
and welcomed all who
came to see him.
Boldly and without
hindrance he preached
the kingdom of God
and taught about the
Lord Jesus Christ.*

(Acts 28:30-31)



A Study in Ephesians

Thursday, February 28:
Read Ephesians 1:1-10 and 4:1-3

Before we get into the specific content of the book of Ephesians, let me point out an element of structure. I refer to structure as something that God seems to have built into the form of the book, and not any of the many ways in which the book has been organized by those who have outlined it for you. If you read the book through, you will find two surprising things. First, the entire first three chapters focus upon the riches that are ours in Christ. Already in the third verse of the book, we read:

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ.

If you are a child of God, you can't name one spiritual blessing you don't already have. The reason? Note what many consider to be the most important prepositional phrase in the Bible: *in Christ*. For these blessings come to us as believers for one reason and one reason alone—because of our faith in Christ! And, as you read through right up to the end of Chapter 3, you are going to find one aspect after another of what God has done for us in Christ. One would think that the Christian Life is all about what God has done for the child of God through His Son—and it is!

Then the second surprising thing: In Chapter 4 there is a marked shift. For the first time God starts to lay out His intent for those who have been so abundantly blessed. Here is what we can learn from the structure of the book of Ephesians: In the plan of God, as revealed in Jesus Christ, it is blessing first and *then* the call to devotion. Far too many of us have spent too much time trying to live the Christian Life as if it were the other way around!

VISTOSO

Community Church

He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit...*John 15:5*

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