

Scripture Reading: [hear & see the Word] Acts 19:21&22:

“When these things were accomplished, Paul purposed in the Spirit, when he had passed through Macedonia and Achaia, to go to Jerusalem, saying, "After I have been there, I must also see Rome." So he sent into Macedonia two of those who ministered to him, Timothy and Erastus, but he himself stayed in Asia for a time.”

Acts 20:1-7: [Paul at Ephesus]

“After the uproar had ceased, Paul called the disciples to himself, embraced them, and departed to go to Macedonia. 2 Now when he had gone over that region and encouraged them with many words, he came to Greece 3 and stayed three months. And when the Jews plotted against him as he was about to sail to Syria, he decided to return through Macedonia. 4 And So'-pa-ter of Berea accompanied him to Asia-- also Ar-is-tar'-chus and Se-cun'-dus of the Thessalonians, and Gaius of Derbe, and Timothy, and Tych'-i-cus and Troph'-i-mus of Asia. 5 These men, going ahead, waited for us at Troas. 6 But we sailed away from Philippi after the Days of Unleavened Bread, and in five days joined them at Troas, where we stayed seven days. 7 Now on the first day of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread, Paul, ready to depart the next day, spoke to them and continued his message until midnight.”

Acts 20:13-17 [Paul at Troas]

“Then we went ahead to the ship and sailed to As'-sos, there intending to take Paul on board; for so he had given orders, intending himself to go on foot. 14 And when he met us at As'-sos, we took him on board and came to Mit-y-le'-ne. 15 We sailed from there, & the next day came opposite Chi'-os. The following day we arrived at Sa'-mos and stayed at Tro-gyl'-li-um. The next day we came to Mil-e-tus. 16 For Paul had decided to sail past Ephesus, so that he would not have to spend time in Asia; for he was hurrying to be at Jerusalem, if possible, on the Day of Pentecost. 17 From Miletus he sent to Ephesus and called for the elders of the church.

"A Traveling Apostle Builds Christ's Church"

We have often made reference to how Luke is providing an orderly account for his friend Theophilus.

- **Telling him it was an account of those things which are most surely believed among us!**

In the Gospel of Luke we learned about all that Jesus began both to do and teach and now the Book of Acts tells us the rest of the story! Last week we remembered the focus in Luke's Gospel on how Jesus set His face to go to Jerusalem at His appointed time to be the great sacrifice for sin. Jesus was raised in power & Luke's Gospel ends with the ascension of Jesus to the Father's right hand of power.

- **The Book of Acts picks up at that very same place, with Luke now giving us not one but two accounts of the ascension so we would not miss the importance of that event!**

In the 2nd part of his orderly account, the Book of Acts, Luke is telling the story of how the Holy Spirit, who was poured out on the Church at Pentecost, is going to bring glory to the Father by filling the earth with the Kingdom of His Son Jesus!

- **As he does so, we now see Paul focused on a trip to Rome!**

We have just a few more events to cover here on the 3rd missionary journey and then the remainder of Acts will be Paul's journey to Rome.

As we consider some of the details that Luke shares and see how Paul cares for the Churches that have been planted, there are also some big picture lessons for us to take away.

Paul was the Apostle to the Gentiles, but just as he preached to many Jews, so we know that many others worked around the world at this time as well...

- **Bringing the Good News to Jews and Gentiles throughout the world!**

Luke under the inspiration of the Spirit gives us a pretty complete picture of what took place in this part of the world, but similar things were taking place elsewhere as the Disciples followed the Great Commission they had been given. We see this in some of Paul's epistles: We read in the 2nd Epistle to the church of Corinth which Paul wrote on this very journey how Paul understood that God had entrusted a particular area for him to labor in:

2 Corinthians 10: "13 We, however, will not boast beyond measure, but within the limits of the sphere which God appointed us--a sphere which especially includes you. 14 For we are not overextending ourselves (as though our authority did not extend to you), for it was to you that we came with the gospel of Christ; 15 not boasting of things beyond measure, that is, in other men's labors, but having hope, that as your faith is increased, we shall be greatly enlarged by you in our sphere, 16 to preach the gospel in the regions beyond you, and not to boast in another man's sphere of accomplishment. 17 But "he who glories, let him glory in the Lord." 18 For not he who commends himself is approved, but whom the Lord commends."

In his letter to the Romans, which he also wrote on this trip, Paul gives us even more details of his understanding and a grand picture of the Gospel going to the Gentiles.

Romans 15:8 "Now I say that Jesus Christ has become a servant to the circumcision for the truth of God, to confirm the promises made to the fathers, 9 and that the Gentiles might glorify God for His mercy, as it is written: "For this reason I will confess to You among the Gentiles, And sing to Your name." 10 And again he says: "Rejoice, O Gentiles, with His people!" 11 And again: "Praise the Lord, all you Gentiles! Laud Him, all you peoples!" 12 And again, Isaiah says: "There shall be a root of Jesse; And He who shall rise to reign over the Gentiles, In Him the Gentiles shall hope." 13 Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit. 14 Now I myself am confident concerning you, my brethren, that you also are full of goodness, filled with all knowledge, able also to admonish one another. 15 Nevertheless, brethren, I have written more boldly to you on some points, as reminding you, because of the grace given to me by God, 16 that I might be a minister of Jesus Christ to the Gentiles, ministering the gospel of God, that the offering of the Gentiles might be acceptable, sanctified by the Holy Spirit. 17 Therefore I have reason to glory in Christ Jesus in the things which pertain to God. 18 For I will not dare to speak of any of those things which Christ has not accomplished through me, in word and deed, to make the Gentiles obedient-- 19 in mighty signs and wonders, by the power of the Spirit of God, so that from Jerusalem and round about to Illyricum I have fully preached the gospel of Christ. 20 And so I have made it my aim to preach the gospel, not where Christ was named, lest I should build on another man's foundation, 21 but as it is written: "To whom He was not announced, they shall see; And those who have not heard shall understand."

Paul was focused on the work that God had given him to do and did not stress about how things were going in the rest of the world, and even purposed to not interfere with where others were working!

- **Paul is used by the Spirit as the great example of how the Gospel would go to all the Gentiles and yet at the same time we see him working only in his sphere of influence!**

This is a great example for all of us: We are to see that God is taking all of history exactly where He wants it to go, and as He does, we strive to be obedient in the area that he has graciously given us to work.

- **If we are single, we are to be single to the glory of God**
- **If we are married we are to be married to the glory of God**

- If we are young, we are to use all the strength and energy of youth to the glory of God
- If we are old, we are to use all of our time and wisdom to the glory of God.
- If you are in between, well that means you have to do all the work! And yes, we do all of our homemaking, child rearing and vocational work to the glory of God!

The second lesson here can also be very encouraging for us as we set about to serve where God has placed us... Just as we learned in studying the many genealogies in the Old Testament, God loves all those details!

I included the map this week so we could more easily follow along with the many details given by Luke in these relatively short texts. Luke is giving an orderly account as he weaves the information around some of the major events like the riot in Ephesus that we studied last week and Paul's long sermon and resurrection of young Eutychus which we will consider next week. As Luke does so, he shares not only geographical details but also the names of many people along the way.

- BOTH should encourage our faith!
- The geographical details confirm that the story of God's salvation is a story grounded in real history!

There have been many, MANY attacks on the faith over the past few hundred years centering on the authority of THIS Book! Why should we put our trust in an old religious book that is two thousand years old, the skeptic will ask?

- The fact that it claims to be God's Book is reason enough don't you think?

It is, but how do we know that this is the Word of God unlike all the other religious books that claim to be inspired and/or helpful as well? We can begin by the fact that most do not make the claim that the Bible makes: To be the very Word of God.

Next, if a book claims to be from God then it needs to reveal who God is and explain the creation of the universe and what Dr. Schaeffer calls the mannishness of man! As I mentioned a few weeks ago, a favorite of the skeptics today is to make reference to the "Flying Spaghetti Monster" whenever anyone mentions God [*when I was younger it was a man made of green cheese living on the moon.*] Their point is that IF we are going to claim that the God of the Bible is real, then why can't they say that such things are real just as well?

When we believe in faith what God has revealed in His Word, then we know Him to be the all powerful God who not only was able to speak all there is into existence out of nothing, but did so as a loving God who has demonstrated love from all eternity among the persons of the Godhead: Father, Son and Holy Spirit!

- God had no need that had to be fulfilled by the creation.
- We have real meaning for the things we find most fulfilling in life: Love and relationships!
[share story of the young atheist]

We understand where we and all the world came from and we understand the significance of man...

- We are not simply a part in the great machine of the universe or a drop of water in the vast Pacific Ocean.

I could go on, but you may now be wondering what all of this has to do with the details Luke has shared?

As I said, those who reject God have tried for centuries to undermine the authority of His Word by claiming that it is as much a fairytale as the Flying Spaghetti Monster or Cinderella.

- They have worked hard to find contradictions in God's Word and to claim that there is no real history or science in the Scriptures.

On the contradiction front, let me just say that after hundreds of years and thousands of hours of work they have come up with maybe a dozen difficult passages that you can find very easily with an Internet search.

- **All of them were answered years ago and yet they go on pretending that the Bible is hopelessly filled with contradictions!**

We have talked at length about the science front, so I will just give you the homework in the later chapters of Job if you have any doubts about whether the Creator of the Universe actually knows about how it works!

- **What Luke, and many other Biblical writers, also give us is the confidence to know that the Scriptures are grounded in history.**

If we could not trust the Bible where it gives a reference that can be verified in the physical world, like a city or historical figure, then how can we trust the Bible when it gives us a spiritual truth like the blood atonement of our sins? If the Bible did claim that the moon was made of green cheese and the astronauts found only rocks when they landed on the moon the skeptics would have a valid point:

- **Why put your eternal soul in the hands of those who lied?**

The reality is that the Bible has given us numerous places and figures that can and should be verified. In fact, the Bible is so accurate that most of the archeological work from the Middle East that has been done in the past few hundred years has relied on what the Bible shares. One of my favorite examples is Pontius Pilate: A hundred years ago we had no evidence outside of the Bible that said such a governor of Judea existed and many skeptics insisted that the Bible was wrong at this point.

- **They had some real egg on their faces when Pilate's palace was discovered in 1961.**

As we follow along on the map and see what Luke has shared it should make us even more confident in our faith. Luke also gives the names of several people in these texts: Again this should be a great encouragement to us as we see how God uses His Saints to weave the great story of salvation.

Some of these men are mentioned only here, others appear again in some of Paul's letters or later in Acts and in the case of Timothy we know a great deal about him from the letters Paul wrote.

- **The Apostle Paul is taking the Gospel to the Gentiles as he was called to do and knows the regions where he is called to work.**

He does not just fly through town, make a few converts and move on. While some of his visits are brief, more times than not he spends a great deal of time planting the churches in this region. Paul makes sure they are founded on the proper foundation and does the necessary follow-up with additional visits by himself or others assigned to that work.

- **It is easy to pass over these passages on our way to the next exciting event, like the young boy falling out of the window!**

What we need to realize is that another entire series of sermons, perhaps as long as I spent on Luke or now on Acts, would be required to fully unpack what is going on in this region.

- **We have the various men and women who move about and minister.**
- **We have the various churches that are planted with all their blessings and problems!**

What material would we look to for such a series of sermons, or to carry on our own study over time?

- **Almost the entire Epistle portion of the New Testament!**

The Book of Romans was likely written from Corinth during this trip.

Both letters to the Church of Corinth revolve around this trip as well as Titus going to visit them and Paul's final visit.

- The churches at Ephesus, Philippi, Colossi and Thessalonica were planted in this region.

Paul wrote pastoral letters to Timothy and Titus who served with him here. And as I mentioned a few weeks ago, ALL of the seven churches that Jesus addressed letters to in Revelation are in this region.

- You could spend a life-time studying all of this and barely scratch the surface!

Since I want to finish our journey through Acts sometime next year, we are going to take just a few of the major points with us and leave most for further study in the coming years. As I have said, Luke makes it very clear that Paul has set his face to go to Rome, much as we saw Jesus going to Jerusalem in the Gospel of Luke. Jesus knew that the Lamb of God would be slain in Jerusalem and Paul knows that the Gospel will be proclaimed to all the world from Rome. We see Luke rejoining the party at Philippi where he had been left in chapter sixteen. He will remain with the Apostle Paul for the remainder of his journeys. Thus we will see the references again to "we went" and lots of details about the harbors and journeys on the sea:

- Luke really liked traveling by sea I suspect!

We also see at least seven traveling companions joining with Paul on his return to Jerusalem. We know from Paul's Epistles, that a primary purpose of this trip to Jerusalem was to bring the relief offerings from various Gentile Churches to the Saints suffering through a great famine in Judea.

[one of these we will read as we bring our gifts this morning!]

- It reminds us that an important part of building a strong church is building a church that is ready to serve.

Paul reminded the Corinthians that many of these churches gave not from their abundance but rather out of love they gave beyond what they could even afford to give. This is an important model for us to remember as our nation faces tough economic times:

- We have not really faced such challenges in the past fifty years.

And finally we see another example of how Paul was sensitive to the leading of the Spirit... He had planned to sail from Corinth and reach Jerusalem by Passover. However, the same Jews who could not get him convicted under Gallio, now decide to just use assassination!

- Paul avoids the danger and takes the longer route by land.

It is interesting that this is the pattern that we will see with his arrest in Jerusalem as well, which begins his long journey to Rome.

We all know the old saying that you can't see the forest for the trees. Sometimes we can be so focused on the majesty or qualities of all the individual trees in a forest that we fail to step back and appreciate the wonder and majesty of the entire forest.

- This can also be the case with God's great plan of salvation!

Edith Schaeffer used a similar analogy by thinking of God's great plans as a magnificent tapestry. Sometimes we are so up close and involved in the individual threads or small patterns that we do not step back and appreciate the entire work of art.

Sometimes we are looking at the back side thinking things are all messed up!

We need to learn more and more to trust the master Craftsman and Artist: The great Triune God who spoke all there is into existence and who knows exactly where history is going.

- **The tapestry that will be the whole of history will be truly majestic and as mere creatures I am not sure we will ever fully appreciate all that God has done.**

Actually that is one of the truly exciting parts of what the Bible reveals about eternity: We have an eternity of knowing more and more about our great God and having more and more glory that we can give Him which He so richly deserves!

I will close with a reminder of this from the Apostle Paul in his first letter to the Saints at Corinth as he reflected on his work in this region:

I Corinthians 3: 5 Who then is Paul, and who is Apollos, but ministers through whom you believed, as the Lord gave to each one? 6 I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the increase. 7 So then neither he who plants is anything, nor he who waters, but God who gives the increase. 8 Now he who plants and he who waters are one, and each one will receive his own reward according to his own labor. 9 For we are God's fellow workers; you are God's field, you are God's building. 10 According to the grace of God which was given to me, as a wise master builder I have laid the foundation, and another builds on it. But let each one take heed how he builds on it. 11 For no other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ."

Communion Meditation:

Psalm 23 " The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want. 2 He makes me to lie down in green pastures; He leads me beside the still waters.

3 He restores my soul; He leads me in the paths of righteousness For His name's sake.

4 Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil;

For You are with me; Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me. 5 You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; You anoint my head with oil; My cup runs over.

6 Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me All the days of my life; And I will dwell in the house of the Lord Forever."