

January to March 2021

“The Book of the Acts of the Apostles”

(Part 2)

by

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About the Author



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Married to Maria Celeste Ba-a Lagapa for the past twenty-four years, God has blessed them with three children: Theya, Thessa and Jose Trinipil II.

FRIDAY, JANUARY 1

ACTS 8:1-2

MATTHEW 28:18-20

*“Go ye therefore,
and teach all nations...”*

MUST GO!

Acts 8:1-2 describes a great persecution against the church in Jerusalem. The first casualty of that persecution was Stephen whom Saul heartily agreed to his execution. The Sovereign Lord had allowed this persecution to happen for a definite purpose. It was not to harm and discourage the believers. It was for them to obey the Great Commission to go (Matt 28:18-20)!

Great persecution: The believers were being pursued. You can imagine the hardships they went through. They fled to other parts of Judea and further north to Samaria, travelling miles to find a safer place. They were all scattered abroad. The Greek word Luke used for “scattered” (Acts 8:1) is where the term “diaspora” comes from. It literally refers to the act of scattering just like sowing seeds in a field. It was fitting to their experience for their dispersion was not for their suffering but for them to bring the gospel to places outside of Jerusalem.

Great lamentation: Devout believers buried Stephen, mourning the loss of a dear brother. It was an example of the reality of the threat of persecution. Brought before them was a marred and lifeless body. This could have caused more fear in the hearts of believers, but God meant it as a testimony for them to understand that “the way” they were in was worth dying for. This pushed them to move and flee from danger. Their relocation made their new homes outreach gospel stations.

Great persecution brings great lamentation. The fearful and sorrowful background of this passage should not hide God’s intended purpose for the believers to move abroad.

Do you have the burden to share the gospel with others? Are you scattering the seed of the good news to the people around you and others far from you? Will you promise to the Lord as you begin this year to make a start to fulfil the Great Commission? If you have been doing so, you can do more! Please do not wait for the Lord to send chastisement before you come out of your comfort zone and do His work.

THOUGHT: Am I ready to go and share the gospel?

PRAYER: Father, fill me with Thy Spirit and empower me to be Thy witness.

SATURDAY, JANUARY 2
ACTS 8:3-4
LUKE 19:10

*“Whosoever therefore shall
confess me before men,
him will I confess also before my Father...”*

OBEDIENCE FIRST AND NEVER COMPLAIN

The man named Saul spearheaded the great persecution. He ravaged and destroyed the properties of the believers and dragged men and women into jail. It would have been easy to murmur and complain against God in such a situation.

Scattered abroad: This dispersion was in line with the Great Commission to go to the other parts of Judea and the next province of Samaria. The original Greek word for “*scattered*” (Acts 8:1) is in the passive voice. It was not due to Saul’s ferocity but God’s felicity. It was the Lord’s pleasure that they did the business of the King. Likewise today, we must not be busy only for our own churches, we must go and share the gospel with those who are outside our church!

Preaching the Word: This was the primary end of this great persecution. Many times, we just see one side of the coin, but we have to see the other side also! Then we can understand its true worth! They were bringing glad tidings, announcing the good news in all the places they went. Surprisingly, they were not described as being in confusion and paranoia but were happily sharing the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. Luke carefully chose the word “*preaching*” (Acts 8:4) in the middle voice showing that they themselves actively and with pleasure preached the Word of God!

The Great Commission is a command and not an option. All who truly believe in the Lord Jesus Christ are to fulfil this commission according to the gifts that God has granted them. None is exempted and none is excused. If you are truly of the Lord, God will (whether you like it or not) awaken you out of slumber and prod you to rise up and do His Commission.

In the military, the unwritten rule is: “obey first before you complain.” For Christians, the teaching is: “*Do all things without murmurings and disputings*” (Phil 2:14). Are you obeying God? Or, in the first place, are you under His command? Do you desire to enlist in this exciting and blessed work of the Lord? Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and be one of His servicemen, obeying without thinking of complaining!

THOUGHT: Am I obedient to my heavenly Father?

PRAYER: Father, grant me the heart to obey and never rebel.

LORD'S DAY, JANUARY 3
ACTS 8:5-8
MARK 16:15-16

*“Go ye into all the world,
and preach the gospel
to every creature.”*

IN SAMARIA

Philip was one of the deacons chosen of God to help the Apostles when there was an internal dissension in the church (Acts 6). His primary function was to “*serve tables*” (Acts 6:2), but he was not limited to do that function only but foundationally as a believer, he was also to fulfil the Great Commission. Philip actively went to and taught in the regions beyond his main domain.

Given heed: The people with one accord gave heed to the words of Philip, a manifestation of the Lord’s preparation of their hearts. His words were authenticated with the miracles which he did. This was necessary for Philip at that time since there was no record yet that supported his ministry. Luke’s record, the response of the people to the word and the miracles signified the divine warrant of Philip’s ministry.

Great joy: There was manifested great joy in that city as people received the glad tidings of great joy. There was no exuberant celebration but a spiritual delight in the words and works of God in their midst. This joy is the fruit of the Spirit of God who indwells believers.

Preaching the gospel is not work limited only to those who graduate from Bible Colleges and Seminaries. It is a wrong mentality among professing Christians that since they pay their preachers and pastors some kind of remuneration, all the preaching of God’s Word is entrusted to them. The ordinary members in the pew should only faithfully give their tithes and offerings and that is enough. Let the trained do the work.

Is this the attitude of the members of your church? Are you excusing yourself from preaching God’s Word because you have paid your dues to God? Remember what prophet Samuel said, “*Hath the LORD as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the LORD? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams*” (1 Sam 15:22). Fulfil your vows and obey the Great Commission the Lord has commanded to all believers!

THOUGHT: Am I willing to share the gospel?

PRAYER: Lord, please prepare my heart and mind to speak for Thee.

MONDAY, JANUARY 4

ACTS 8:9-25

LUKE 6:45-46

“...for of the abundance of the heart
his mouth speaketh.”

WHO IS A TRUE CHRISTIAN?

Simon was a man in the city of Samaria who profited from of deceiving people. He professed Christ and was even baptised but later his true colours were exposed.

Not after wonders: Modern Christianity today is obsessed with signs and wonders. This is the third wave of the Charismatic-Pentecostal movement. It focuses on so-called miracles and spectacular signs that seduce the carnal affections of the natural man. This kind of Christianity is unbiblical for it denies the truth of God's Word and magnifies demonic works.

Not one who wanders: From this passage, we see the untruthful desire of Simon to promote himself and not God. Christians who seek signs and wonders will eventually resign and wander away from the Lord.

There are many impostor Christians today. A survey revealed that only 35% of so-called evangelical church-goers confess Jesus Christ as their Saviour and Lord. They are physically present in church but their hearts are not right with God. We need to check our own hearts, for the consequences are not just on this earth but will affect our eternal destiny (Matt 7:22-23).

A person who is not yet truly a believer can mimic a Christian. He can dress and talk like a real believer and yet in his heart is still a “*gall of bitterness*” (Acts 8:23). This is especially common among second generation Christians who are brought up in a Christian environment. They can talk and act like genuine Christians but actually they are fake ones. What is the antidote to this malady?

Simon's name made its way into the religious system during the dark ages: “simony.” This word is associated with the vice in the church of Rome where people can buy their way to a priestly position or towards a higher rank! Are you a false Christian? Do you know the danger of being a professing Christian without truly possessing Christ? Make sure you are indwelt by the Spirit of God who will guide you into all truth.

THOUGHT: Am I truly a genuine Christian?

PRAYER: Father, I thank Thee for Thy Son Jesus Christ, my Saviour, my Lord.

TUESDAY, JANUARY 5

ACTS 8:26-35

2 TIMOTHY 4:1-2

*“Preach the word; be instant in season,
out of season...”*

PREACHER OF GOD’S WORD

A true servant submits to the will of God. He does not choose the place where he wants to go and the work he wants to do. He is willing always to answer the call of God whenever and wherever. This was exemplified in the life of Philip. As soon as he heard the command from the angel of the Lord, he went without delay to the assigned place. However, it is not enough just to be there. The message relayed is of far greater significance.

Spirit-led: Philip’s approach and message was led by the Spirit of God. This is only possible if the person is indwelt and filled with the Holy Spirit. When a preacher is moved under the influence of the Spirit, he is careful to hear and obey every instruction to the jot and tittle. John 16:13 tells us what the Spirit of God is sent to do.

Scripture-based: The result of a Spirit-led preacher is Scripture-based preaching. Philip expounded scripturally the question that was perplexing the Ethiopian eunuch. He began with the Word of God and preached the Lord Jesus Christ. Those who are evangelising or ministering the Word must expound the Scripture and compare with other portions of the Scripture. The basic considerations are context, context and context. Apart from this, the preaching is in vain.

When we search the internet, we find all kinds of preachers from all over the world and from all shades of Christianity, including cults and modernists. Most of these preachers bank on their eloquence and Hollywood-style appearance to attract undiscerning Christians. It is vital for every true Bible-believing Christian to evaluate any preacher whom you might want to listen to from the internet.

Do you share the Word with the Spirit of God leading you? One sure measure is whether your message is Scripture-based. Do you base your sharing, counselling, evangelising and rebuking on the Bible? Read 2 Tim 3:16-17. Do you believe this? Make sure these two go hand-in-hand, for having one without the other is incomplete.

THOUGHT: Am I sharing the Word faithfully?

PRAYER: Lord, help me to be accurate in sharing the gospel.

WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 6

ACTS 8:36-40

COLOSSIANS 2:10-12

“...the circumcision of Christ:
buried with him in baptism...”

BAPTISING THEM

Romans 10:9 exhorts that if any confess with their mouth Jesus Christ as Lord and believe in their hearts that He is raised from dead, there is salvation. This profession is not an assurance of salvation, as only the Lord knows the heart of men. But by virtue of their claim, they can be baptised.

Believe: When the Ethiopian eunuch saw a body of water, he was aware of the necessity to fulfil all righteousness. Philip was quick to make sure that the biblical pattern given was that the person believes first. Salvation is by grace through faith, therefore, a person must believe before baptism. Baptism is not required for a person to be saved but is a sign, by public confession, of one who is truly saved.

Be baptised: Baptism is a church sacrament, an outward sign of an inward grace (Augustine). This means the person who submits to baptism is sure that at one point in his life, he has come to believe in Jesus. Philip's assertion in Acts 8:37 was right.

The mode of baptism, whether sprinkling or immersion, divides many churches today, and there is much debate. The emphasis of many is that theirs is the only means allowed in the Bible. The broad definition of the Greek word “baptizo” suggests that the mode of baptism is not what is critical. Immersionists claim Acts 8:38 as the proof of their stand because it says “*they went down.*” However, they then only immerse the one baptised when the same verse says, “*they went down both into the water.*” The above phrase, “*they went down*” (katabaino), simply describes to come and walk down into the water, and not necessarily going under the water. They could have gone down into knee-deep water since Gaza is a desert place and not much water was available in that region. To “*come up out of the water*” (Acts 8:39, anabaino) is just the exact opposite.

Have you believed but have not yet been baptised? Or are you baptised or have reaffirmed your faith but have not truly believed? The former is disobedience, but the latter is more serious for there is no salvation yet.

THOUGHT: Am I baptised because I have truly believed?

PRAYER: Father, Thou art worthy of praise for the salvation in Jesus.

THURSDAY, JANUARY 7

ACTS 9:1-2

JOHN 16:2-4

“...the time cometh,
that whosoever killeth you
will think that he doeth God service.”

A BURNING HATRED

One significant testimony of the power of the gospel of Jesus is the life of Paul. How his life turned 180 degrees is beyond human explanation. His burning hatred turned into burning love. But for now, we must see the burning hatred of Saul against the believers. Without Acts 9:1-2, the miracle of his conversion cannot be as highly appreciated as a great testimony of the power of God.

“Against the disciples”: In the whole Bible, the Greek word translated as “breathing out” appears only here in Acts 9:1. The word somewhat describes a raging bull, very furious and fierce in attacking. One can almost hear the sound of Saul’s violent breathing in pursuing the disciples of the Lord. He was ignorant of the truth, so he asked for sanctions from the high priest as if his actions were honourable before God.

To any “of this way”: Saul craved for the priestly authority to wage his vicious attack against those who were “of this way” (Acts 9:2), even if he had to travel to Damascus, about 120 miles north-east of Jerusalem. Distance could not prevent him from seeking to eliminate those believers whom he thought were infesting the synagogues. He had no respect of persons whether male or female. Saul was ready to bind them and bring them back to Jerusalem.

Today, this same burning hatred is in the heart of many people who are against the Christian faith. They may not have the liberty to wage such violent acts today, but time will tell. Read Matthew 24:9.

Be prepared for we know not when this will come. First, be aware that this kind of persecution will be waged against the disciples of the Lord. Second, make sure we are found “of this way,” the straight and narrow way of the Lord Jesus Christ. Third, have the assurance that whatever happens, we have the New Jerusalem ahead of us in His eternal Kingdom, in the New Heaven and the New Earth. Do you have this security?

THOUGHT: Am I prepared to face persecutions?

PRAYER: Lord, please strengthen me and keep me always in Thy grace.

FRIDAY, JANUARY 8

ACTS 9:3-5

LUKE 18:7-8

*“And shall not God avenge his own elect,
which cry day and night unto him...”*

THE ONES PERSECUTED

It is difficult to imagine a time of suffering when we have to flee for our lives. While the disciples fled, there must have been blessed moments of preaching the Word as they passed from village to village, but these did not erase the anxieties and uncertainties of their plight. It was as if they felt the pain their Lord Himself went through.

The Lord Himself: The pain was not bearable. The Lord felt the strife and pressure of the persecution (Heb 4:15). Jesus pointed out twice that He was the One whom Saul was persecuting.

The persecutor himself: While Saul was doing harm to the believers, he did not realise he was at the losing end. The Lord described it as Saul having a hard time, a rough and unpleasant experience. Saul was kicking against the pricks. “This is a proverbial sentence, taken from oxen or horses, which, when they are pricked with goads, do themselves no good by kicking, save only that they double the evil by causing the prick to go farther into their skins” (Calvin). It was a double jeopardy for Saul!

This should comfort us in times of persecution or hardship in our own life due to our faith. We know we are not alone in bearing the pain and burdens. The Lord, who is our loving Shepherd, is always there to carry us on His shoulders. When we are struggling with the trials and testing in life, do not forget our Lord and Saviour. He suffered too, and so He can feel for us. On the other end, those who oppose us are so blinded, not knowing that their evil pursuits will bring a double evil upon themselves.

How are you coping with the storms and tempests in your life? Are you rebelling and questioning God’s dealing with you? Do you not see the Lord together with you in the vessel? Let the lyrics of this children’s song ring in your ears: “With Christ in my vessel I can smile at the storm!” Let the Lord Jesus comfort you. Fret not against those who do evil against you. You will soon be comforted.

THOUGHT: Am I encouraged by the promises of God?

PRAYER: Father, great is Thy faithfulness, every day of my life.

SATURDAY, JANUARY 9

ACTS 9:6-16

JOHN 15:15-16

*“Ye have not chosen me,
but I have chosen you...”*

A CHOSEN VESSEL

When God saves a person, He has a mission for him. A single cell in a living organism has its own function no matter how small and invisible it may be. Everything in God’s decree is always good from His creation to His plan of salvation. Nothing is vestigial in the physical body of man, or non-functional in the spiritual body of Christ. Therefore, the very first question Saul uttered after his conversion must be a model for all who come to Christ by grace through faith.

The question: With fear and amazement, realising the privilege of personally meeting the risen Christ, Saul sought God’s purpose for him. Every believer must understand how great the mercy and grace of God are for Him to deliver him out of condemnation. The words that must come out of his mouth next to thanksgiving are to ask what God’s will for his life is. This authenticates the heartfelt gratitude of the newly converted.

The answer: Jesus’ answer, conveyed to Saul through Ananias, was: *“to bear my name before the Gentiles, and kings, and the children of Israel”* (Acts 9:15). This was a heavy task for Saul. It is an answer which we will not wish to hear for ourselves. He was to become an apostle to the Gentiles, people whose minds were not set to receive the truth of Christ, and who were ignorant of the prophecies about Him. He was to face kings, the magistrates of the land, whose authority and power were overwhelming. Lastly, he was to testify to the children of Israel, who were supposed to be the stewards of the oracles of God but were themselves blind to the truth of the Messiahship of Jesus of Nazareth.

Saul’s life before salvation was used by the enemy to carry out his purpose. His life was fixed through salvation, and then he could be of use to God.

Are you profitable as a vessel of the Lord’s? When you meet Him face to face, will He say to you, *“Well done, thou good and faithful servant: thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy lord”* (Matt 25:21, 23)?

THOUGHT: Am I greatly thankful to God for my salvation?

PRAYER: Father, all glory be unto Thee, to Thy Son, and to Thy Spirit.

THE BELIEVER'S HASTE

The words “*immediately*” (Acts 9:18) and “*straightway*” (Acts 9:20) come from the same Greek word which means “right away.” There is haste and speed in the action, not in carelessness but under the power and control of God. The book of Proverbs is filled with warnings against the sluggard, and slothful and lazy people. Such behaviour has no place in the ministry of the Lord. Mark repeatedly used this Greek word in his gospel to describe the servanthood of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Immediately received sight: At first, Ananias was reluctant to go to Saul. The reason is obvious, but he heeded the Lord's command. Immediately after Ananias told Saul of the Lord's errand, scales fell from Saul's eyes and his eyes were opened. Filled with the Holy Spirit, he submitted himself to water baptism. Then he partook of food, and he regained his strength. He remained with the disciples in Damascus, fellowshiping with like-minded brethren.

Straightway preached Christ: Saul did not delay starting the work which God had entrusted to him. Immediately he proclaimed the gospel. It was not difficult for Saul to preach the message, for it was repeatedly recorded in the Old Testament, and he was a scholar of it. One thing that he had to prove then was that the Messiah which the prophets of old foretold was Jesus Christ of Nazareth whom the Jews had crucified but was raised again from the dead. The people must have been amazed to see the immediate turn-around of Saul's theological discourse.

Immediately after salvation, we want to know more of His will by reading God's Word and by communing with Him in prayer. We want to fulfil all righteousness and be baptised in order to partake of the Lord's Supper. We desire to worship God and fellowship with believers that we may grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. What is happening now? Where is the haste in fulfilling His will and declaring His Word? Let us not delay. Let us do it right away!

THOUGHT: Am I qualified to serve the Lord?

PRAYER: O Master, grant me the strength to fulfil my tasks.

MONDAY, JANUARY 11
ACTS 9:23-31
LUKE 6:22-23

*“Blessed are ye,
when men shall hate you,
and when they shall separate you...”*

THE BELIEVER'S OPPOSITIONS

God's people are immortal here on earth while their assigned tasks are not yet completed. God in His mysterious ways delivers His children. A believer may also experience hindrances in ministry because of the opposition and rejection of the brethren. Nevertheless, the Lord has His way to help, and the believer should wait for it.

From enemies' hands: Satan works in the hearts of the enemy to carry out a murderous plot. It was deliberately arranged to put Saul to death. Their plan, however, was exposed. God, who knows everything, gave the disciples an idea of escape. He was let down by the wall in a basket. The enemies may work together to ensure the destruction of believers, but they are nothing compared to the omniscient God. Christians cannot be kept silent and immobile by the threat of the enemy. The Great Commission must continue, and the Lord always has His perfect means.

From brethren's fellowship: It was natural for the disciples in Jerusalem to be afraid of Saul when he was brought into their midst. They would suspect that he was only pretending in order to easily imprison or even kill the believers. These suspicions, which were valid, hindered the work of God. The Lord used Barnabas to help explain to the disciples in Jerusalem Saul's genuine conversion.

Saul's conversion brought rest for a season to the believers. The Lord gave them respite, for He knew their struggles because of the great persecution by the Jews. Threats and dangers are not secret things in the eyes of God. We can fully trust the Lord who holds the reins of our lives, for He knows our entire pilgrim journey here on this temporal earth.

Have you surrendered your life to God in everything? Are you limiting His control over your life? Will you now totally give yourself to the Lord?

THOUGHT: Do I trust in God's protection daily?

PRAYER: Father, Thou art worthy of praise for Thy providences.

TUESDAY, JANUARY 12
ACTS 9:1-8
MATTHEW 5:10-12

“...that ye may know that
the Son of man hath power
on earth to forgive sins...”

DIVINE HEALING

Luke turned his attention to Peter's ministry before recording Saul's missionary journeys. The miracles done by God working through Peter were supernatural signs authenticating his apostleship. It was not to boost his ego but to affirm God's divine appointment. It confirmed the Lord's authority upon Peter.

Raised a disabled man: The word for “*palsy*” in the original is where we get the English word “paralysis.” Aeneas was bedridden for eight years. Luke indicated that Peter found him in Lydda, and told him that Jesus Christ would heal him. The disabled man rose up straight away. This stupendous miracle is proven to be of God by the response of the people who turned to the Lord.

Raised a dead woman: Then, Peter was informed to go to Joppa without delay. It was a journey of no less than six miles from Lydda. There was a certain dead woman named Tabitha (her Aramaic name), or Dorcas (in Greek, meaning gazelle). She was known to be full of good works and compassion. Peter prayed and called her by name to arise. She woke up and when she was lifted up, he presented her alive to the brethren. Likewise, we see God's hand in this miracle as many believed in the Lord.

Today, there are many charlatans and impostors who claim to have power over sickness and diseases. Some show off their so-called miracles of raising the dead from their coffins. These are so unlike what happened in Peter's day, where there was no hype about human personalities. The fruit was that people turned to believe in the Lord, as Luke noted. Read Matthew 7:15-16.

Do you believe in the modern-day miracle-healers? As a believer, are you not content with the future perfect healing when you receive the glorified body? Of course, we must take care of our physical health as it is our human responsibility, so that we can be up and about doing the work of the Lord. We do not promote false miracles for the praise of men and embrace doctrines that exalt love of self and this world, leaving off the love of the Father!

THOUGHT: Am I keeping myself healthy in order to serve the Lord?

PRAYER: Father, may I live for Thy glory and honour alone.

WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 13

ACTS 10:1-8

JOHN 10:14-16

*“And other sheep I have,
which are not of this fold:
them also I must bring...”*

NO OTHER WAY

There are professing Christians who believe in the universal salvation of men, i.e. different religions bring us through different pathways to the same heaven. They use the illustration of climbing Mt Fuji where hikers can choose different paths which eventually wind up at the same mountain top. This is contrary to biblical teaching. The Scriptures tell us there is only one way to heaven: Jesus Christ is the only way.

Remembered: Cornelius was exceptional. Though he was a Gentile with a high position among the Roman soldiers, he was a pious man, fearing God. He was prayerful to the God of the Jews. He was remembered by God. Romans 3:10-11 describes all men in general. But God has chosen His own before the foundation of the world, and they will surely come to seek for His righteousness.

Required: Universalism is not a biblical doctrine. This passage informs us that devotion, good works and prayerfulness cannot earn a person a ticket to heaven. There is a necessary requirement. It is faith in the Lord Jesus Christ! Since faith comes by hearing and hearing of the preached words of God, Cornelius had to hear the gospel. Peter had to go and declare to him the way of salvation. The angels of God revealed this requirement to Cornelius.

The instruction was very specific. The place – Joppa. The person – Peter. The purpose – Peter must go and tell Cornelius what he was required to do. There is no other way, salvation is of the Jews (John 4:22). Read John 14:6.

Do you seek for other ways to heaven? Do you trust in different persons to be a co-mediatrix between you and God? Remember, “... *there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus*” (1 Tim 2:5). You cannot trust the dead to save you from eternal death. Only the living and true God is able to save man from eternal condemnation. Do you know Him? He is none other than Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world!

THOUGHT: Am I showing others how Jesus is the only way?

PRAYER: Father, Thy Word, is the light unto my path.

THURSDAY, JANUARY 14

ACTS 10:9-18

EPHESIANS 1:3-6

*“According as he hath chosen us in him
before the foundation of the world...”*

ELECT OF GOD

In God’s decree, there are people whom God has foreordained to hear the Word and be regenerated to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. They might be born in very far places and some from even uncivilised cultures. Nevertheless, if God has chosen them, He will arrange for evangelists to go and tell them of the gospel. This was the case with Cornelius, who no doubt was elected of God. His heart was already prepared, but he needed to hear the gospel which is the power of God unto salvation for all who believe in Christ (Rom 1:16).

Cleansed of God: The Lord made an interesting revelation to Peter through a vision, which changed Peter’s dealings with mankind. He realised God’s decree includes saving the Gentiles, not only the Jews. A great sheet was let down from heaven containing all manner of unclean animals. The Lord commanded Peter to prepare a dish out of them. As a Jew, he was reluctant. God was implying the cleansing of the elect of the Gentiles, which Peter must acknowledge and not call them common or unclean.

Called of God: Providentially, at the same time, the men of Cornelius came to the exact place to look for a specific person. The arranged meeting was a confirmation of God’s hand in bringing Peter to the house of Cornelius in order that he might preach the Word of God. Those who are called of God will surely be drawn to the Lord Jesus Christ. All who come to Jesus to truly confess Him as Lord and Saviour have been foreordained to be saved.

Though many will hear the general call of God through the preaching of His Word, only the elect will come to hear the inward call of the Spirit, enabling the person to believe. This is a mystery to many. However, this is by God’s grace and mercy. Nothing in the elected person made him qualified to be chosen. Cornelius was not elected because he was devout and God-fearing. He became so because God had chosen him before the foundation of the world.

THOUGHT: Am I living a life befitting of an elect of God?

PRAYER: Father, I praise Thee for unconditionally electing me.

FRIDAY, JANUARY 15
ACTS 10:19-23
LUKE 9:2-6

*“And they departed,
and went through the towns,
preaching the gospel...”*

THE LORD’S MESSENGER

God had arranged the events in the life of Cornelius, such that he heard the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. Even if that elected person is in the middle of the Amazon forest, the Lord will surely bring someone to him and present the gospel of salvation in the Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, it is the believer’s privilege to be called to minister even among the poorest of people or to the farthest place of the earth. Those who have experienced the mercy and grace of God are not fussy people who pick and choose where to be assigned as missionaries. It is an honour to be called to bring the good news even to the most unwanted place or people in the world’s eyes.

Arise and go: The Spirit Himself told Peter about the three men from Cornelius. Peter was commanded to go down and meet the servants so that he could go with them. Both parties may have been amazed at the events that happened, which were perfectly arranged. Those whom God has chosen will never be lost and shall find salvation through His appointed messengers.

Away he went: This must also be the attitude of God’s messengers. He who has received eternal life by grace through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ has the swiftness to act at the Lord’s bidding. The travel is estimated to be at least a thirty-six-mile walk from Joppa to Caesarea, requiring at least six hours. It was reasonable for Peter to travel the next day in order that they arrive at noon in Caesarea or else it would be dangerous if they travelled that day to reach their destination at night.

When God calls anyone to evangelise or to the field for missions, he must be available always. There must not be any excuses or delaying the work. If the privilege is forfeited, the Lord has other ways of bringing the gospel to that person. It is to your loss if you are a sluggard and hesitant to do the King’s business. Peter was in haste with carefulness in order to make sure the work was properly done in God’s perfect timing.

Will you make yourself available for the Lord’s work?

THOUGHT: Am I ready to go for missions, whether local or abroad?

PRAYER: Father, grant me the desire to labour for Thee wherever.

SATURDAY, JANUARY 16
ACTS 10:24-33
JOHN 6:44-45

*“Every man therefore that hath heard,
and hath learned of the Father,
cometh unto me.”*

PREPARED HEARTS

When God sends forth His messenger to a certain place, He prepares the heart of the recipients there to receive the good news. The Lord will give them listening ears and open minds to hear the gospel. This is the joy of the preacher when the Lord softens the hearts of the hearers and grants them understanding, and the Spirit convicts them of their sins. Repentance and faith in Christ will surely follow. Not all will get saved and not many may come to believe, but God’s Word will not return unto Him void (Isa 55:11).

Waiting: Cornelius was waiting for them. As a centurion, he knew very well how long the soldiers would take to travel to Joppa and back. That day he was in joyful anticipation and called his relatives and close friends to come. A heart prepared of God is excited for the Lord’s working not only for himself but also for the people around him. Cornelius was even prepared to fall down in reverential obeisance to Peter. But Peter was quick to stop him. This is a verse that Roman Catholics may have missed.

Wanting: Upon arrival at Cornelius’ home, Peter saw that it was not just one person waiting. Peter and Cornelius shared what had happened and the visions that they each had seen. Cornelius was thankful to the Lord for Peter’s coming and expressed on behalf of the people their eagerness to hear the Word. “To the end Peter may be more ready and willing to teach, Cornelius affirmeth that himself and the rest will be apt to be taught, and ready to obey God” (Calvin). Cornelius was right that what they wanted was what the Lord commanded Peter to tell them, not Peter’s own words. Preachers must take note of this.

Prepared hearts are ready to receive the Word. Does John 10:26-27 or Acts 10:33 apply to you?

THOUGHT: Am I praying for opened hearts to share God’s Word with?
PRAYER: Father, blessed be Thy name for the work of regenerating souls.

LORD'S DAY, JANUARY 17
ACTS 10:34-43
1 PETER 1:17-25

*"And if ye call on the Father,
who without respect of persons judgeth
according to every man's work..."*

NO RESPECTER OF PERSONS

God created all men for His glory. Man's chief end is to glorify God. Since the fall of man, that purpose has not been achievable to man. Unless the Lord regenerates one through the power of His Holy Spirit, no man can come to glorify Him as Lord. God has chosen some (out of all the corrupted ones) to bring honour to His name. This election is unconditional. From every nation, individuals are chosen without any conditions set, for all have sinned and are disqualified. This regeneration will bring the person to believe and trust in the Lord Jesus Christ.

From every nation: Peter now realised that God's Great Commission to go and teach all nations was not only for the Jews who were scattered, but for elect gentiles too. They shall fear God and be clothed with the Lord's righteousness, for they are also part of the family of God. Read Hosea 1:10.

For whosoever believes: The way to become a child of the living God is to believe. *"But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name: Which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God"* (John 1:12-13). It is only through believing the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. He, the sinless Son of God, alone went to the cross and shed His blood for the remission of man's sins.

Peter systematically presented the account of the life of Jesus of Nazareth. It was important to know who the biblical Christ is for believing in the Christ who is not taught in the Scriptures is tantamount to being deceived and still being under God's condemnation. The whole gospel was presented to them, which involved the life, death, resurrection and the return of Christ to judge the living and the dead.

In the Lord, there is no racial discrimination. There must not be any "second-class Christians" in churches.

THOUGHT: Am I reaching out to souls without discrimination?

PRAYER: Father, let me love the souls of men as Thou lovest them.

MONDAY, JANUARY 18
ACTS 10:44-48
LUKE 19:9-10

*“For the Son of man is come
to seek and to save
that which was lost.”*

SALVATION EXPERIENCE

The gospel is the power of God unto salvation to all them that believe (Rom 1:16). It is by the hearing of the preached Word of God that faith comes (Rom 10:17). The moment the person believes, the Spirit of God will indwell him to guide and lead him. *“For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God. For ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear; but ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father”* (Rom 8:14-15).

Baptised with the Holy Ghost: Calvin commented, “This visible sign representeth unto us, as it were in a table, what an effectual instrument of God’s power the preaching of the gospel is; for he poured out his Spirit as Peter spake, to the end he might show that he sendeth not teachers to that end, that they may beat the air with the vain sound of their voice, but that he may work mightily by their voice, and may quicken the same by the power of his Spirit, to the salvation of the godly.” Just like on the day of Pentecost, when they spoke in tongues, they were understandable words that Luke said magnified the Lord. This was very unlike today’s gibberish, unintelligible, and nonsense babbling of the mouth.

Baptised in the name of the Lord: Peter knew the sequence of the Great Commission. Once they believed, the next step was to fulfil all righteousness by subjecting themselves to the sacrament of water baptism. This was the outward sign of the inward grace that was working in the lives of Cornelius and his household. Peter prescribed baptism in the name of the Lord, which referred to the Triune God: the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.

The salvation experience of a person is a miracle in itself. The events that take place are not prescribed by man but by God. There is no exact pattern to follow, however, the essentials are the hearing of the gospel, repentance and faith. The second baptism sought by many charismatics today is nowhere to be found in the Scriptures. If we truly are biblical Christians, let us adhere to what is given in the Word of God and nothing else.

THOUGHT: Do I trust in the finished work of Jesus?

PRAYER: Father, I thank Thee for Jesus who paid for my sins.

TUESDAY, JANUARY 19

ACTS 11:1-3

ROMANS 3:27-30

*“Is he the God of the Jews only?
is he not also of the Gentiles?”*

THE JEWS AND THE GENTILES

Truly, the Book of Acts highlights the truth that when God works, Satan is doubly working against God. The enemy will use his minions whom he has placed in every corner of the church to disrupt her harmony. It is his desire to destroy the Christians' faith so that fewer and fewer will be active in the work of the Lord. Unknowingly and due to the immaturity of some, people in the church are moved to raise objections to the work of the Lord that will cause leaders and other ministries to be hampered and hindered.

Contention: The news was worthy of rejoicing. They should have remembered the words of the Lord in Luke 15:7. Yet there was no implication of joy and thanksgiving from the apostles and brethren in Judea. The Jews could not tolerate the idea of having Gentiles in the Church. The circumcision would later be imposed on them as an additional requirement from the law of Moses.

Condescension: The Jews saw Peter's act of going into the house of a Gentile and eating with them as a condescension on his part. This must have made an impact on Peter's heart because he later succumbed to the pressure and was rebuked by Paul. Read Galatians 2:11-12.

The Gentiles must be thankful to the Lord for including them in His great plan of redemption. Today, the majority of the Church is made up of Gentiles. We must not be proud. Read what Paul wrote in Romans 11:11-12.

As a Gentile church, what we must do is to pray for the Jews, and pray for Israel. Their full understanding of the truth is the Lord's delight and that must be our hearts' delight too. We are pro-Israel because we are pro-God of the Bible. Are you praying for Israel? Make it a part of your personal prayer list!

THOUGHT: Am I praying for the salvation of the Jews?

PRAYER: Father, help me love both Jews and Gentiles alike.

WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 20

ACTS 11:4-18

JOHN 8:17-18

*“It is also written in your law,
that the testimony of two men is true.”*

MINISTRY VINDICATED

A minister of God’s Word must be ready always to answer any enquiry regarding the work he is doing. Peter explained in order the events that had happened to let the hearers be clear about the issue raised, i.e. why Peter went to a Gentile home and ate with them.

Testimony of the missionary: Peter, in a chronological order, began from when he received the vision from the Lord. He described what he saw and how he heard a voice. He included how he argued with the Lord, resisting the unclean animals presented before him. He described how it was done three times and drawn up again into heaven.

Testimony of the Holy Spirit: Now Peter alluded to the Spirit of God leading and bidding him to go with the servants of Cornelius and the six brethren who accompanied him. He also declared how Cornelius also saw a vision from the Lord to call and invite Peter to come to his house. Peter then explained to them vividly how the Holy Spirit fell on them. He confirmed that as they had experienced on the day of Pentecost so the Gentiles likewise receive the gift.

“By which example we are taught, that those are not to be despised who, being offended through unadvised zeal, reprove any thing wrongfully; but that their consciences must be appeased by the Word of God, which are troubled by error, and that their docility is tried at least thus far forth.... Luke doth not only declare that these men held their peace, but that they gave glory also to God. Some are enforced by shame to hold their peace, who, notwithstanding, keep in that in their minds which they dare not utter” (Calvin).

Are you prepared to explain orderly the work of the ministry entrusted to you? Let us go on with our work and not be delayed by our own fears regarding questions from unbelieving people or even brethren in the church.

THOUGHT: Am I truthful about the ministry God has entrusted to me?

PRAYER: Father, help me to be faithful in the work Thou hast assigned to me.

THURSDAY, JANUARY 21

ACTS 11:19-21

ROMANS 8:26-28

*“And we know that
all things work together
for good to them that love God...”*

THE FRUIT OF PERSECUTION

Romans 8:28 is again proven clearly during the persecution of the Jews at the time of Stephen's death. They were in heaviness and fear brought about by threats, but all these caused them to preach God's Word in every place they went.

Farther places reached: “In like sort it came to pass, that the name of Christ, passing over mountains and seas, did flow even unto the farthest parts of the world” (Calvin). If there were no persecutions, no one would have travelled as far as Phenice or Phoenicia, a region of Palestine, across the seas to the island of Cyprus and as far as Antioch of Syria in the north from which Paul was sent to carry out more missionary journeys overseas. Men from Cyprus and from far down south in Cyrene of Egypt (north Africa) heard the gospel.

Further numbers believed: The “*hand of the Lord*” (Acts 11:21) was Luke's expression of the supernatural spread of the gospel. This divine intervention is manifested by the great number of people who came to believe in Jesus. They who were once adherents of the Jewish faith turned to the Lord. Having been illumined through the Holy Spirit they saw the fulfilment of the prophecies concerning the Messiah in Jesus of Nazareth. The suffering in the great persecution became a blessing in the great redemption of many souls outside of Jerusalem.

The focus of their work was on the Jews first as it did not yet dawn upon the Church that the Gentiles were also part of God's decree of salvation. When it was time for the Gentiles to be brought in, the Lord used the Jewish believers to become evangelists to them.

Are you in some dire straits? Trust in the Lord! Seek God's lesson out of this experience, and you will see that indeed His way is perfect and right and you have no right to question His good will in your life. Thank God for all the hardships and adversities in life, for by His supernatural intervention, all things work together for good and for His glory.

THOUGHT: Am I assured that God's purposes are always good?

PRAYER: Father, create in me a trusting heart in Thy power and providence.

FRIDAY, JANUARY 22

ACTS 11:22-26

1 THESSALONIANS 1:6-8

*“So that ye were ensamples
to all that believe...”*

ARE YOU A CHRISTIAN?

“Christian” was a derogatory term used to malign those who were following the Lord Jesus Christ, taunting the believers whose allegiance was to Jesus Christ and to one another. It is interesting that they were first called that name not in the church at Jerusalem but in Antioch (of Syria), a Greek-speaking city. To the world, it was a belittling title but to the believers, it was an excellent title to be associated with the King of kings and Lord of lords.

Graced of the Lord: The news came from the believers in Antioch. Barnabas, who was sent from Jerusalem, came and saw the outpouring of blessings of God upon the disciples. Grace may have included how the Lord granted them wisdom to understand and learn His words; how they loved to commune with God in prayers and supplication; how they manifested the fruit of the Spirit in their lives, expressing them in loving one another in the Lord; and how they continued to witness for Christ, resulting in much people being added unto the Lord. Barnabas rejoiced and encouraged them to set forth and keep on remaining in the Lord.

Gathered with the church: Barnabas found Saul and brought him to Antioch where they continued for a year, regularly gathering together as a church. They also taught the people the doctrines of Christ. This caused their lives to be more and more like Jesus’ and, inevitably, they were called Christians.

Today, we have so much politics and businesses in churches. What is your purpose of coming to church? Are you truly graced of God and gathering together with the saints in the name of the Lord? If you are just a nominal Christian coming only on Sundays to spend an hour or two under the shadow of the sanctuary, you have missed the point! Repent and believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will experience what is truly the excellence of being called a Christian.

THOUGHT: Am I living a Christ-like life?

PRAYER: Father, fill me with the Holy Spirit that I may live like Jesus.

SATURDAY, JANUARY 23

ACTS 11:27-30

1 JOHN 3:16-18

*“...whoso hath this world’s good,
and seeth his brother have need...”*

BROTHERLY LOVE

It is highlighted in the Scriptures that love for the brethren should not just be in words but according to deeds also. Genuine faith is always manifested in actions. The show of love by the brethren in Antioch to the apostles and saints in Jerusalem is an example of what true brotherly love is. They were new Christians, and further showed forth their new life in Christ in this passage.

Hunger coming: Prophets came from Jerusalem and one of them prophesied of a coming great famine. Agabus did not just announce this because of some vision or dream but was signified by the Spirit. The word “*signified*” (Acts 11:28) basically means to intentionally produce an impression to indicate something. This was from the Spirit of God. The dearth was a scarcity of food or failure of grain harvests such as famine that led to hunger. The prophet did not say it would only be in Jerusalem, but throughout all the world, including Antioch. But knowing that they had resources while the saints in Jerusalem could not attend to their livelihood because of the persecution, they were moved to send relief.

Help sent: It was not a forced collection of relief but a collection according to how the Lord prospered each of them. The word for relief is related to where we get the word deacon which describes arrangement for provision for the brethren in Jerusalem. They knew they would also experience the famine, but they were burdened for the needs of the believers in Jerusalem who had practically nothing. This is the Christian spirit lived out by the disciples in Antioch. Read James 2:14-16.

Do you feel this burden for Christian brethren in third-world countries? Or do you think they are just less fortunate to have been born there? Do you think it is by your own sweat that you have accumulated what you have and you do not want to share? Read your Bible, brethren, and see whether your thinking is according to God’s way!

THOUGHT: Am I loving the brethren in deed and in truth?

PRAYER: Father, give me a compassionate heart for those in need.

LORD'S DAY, JANUARY 24

ACTS 12:1-2

JOHN 11:25-26

*“...he that believeth in me,
though he were dead,
yet shall he live...”*

DEATH OF HIS SAINTS

King Herod Agrippa I entered into the scene in Luke's second treatise. This was Satan's way of sowing fear in the Christians. His aim was to stop the believers from preaching the Word. The death of Stephen may have imprinted fear in the minds of the believers, but James' execution intensified the fear causing the Christians to faint.

Mistreated the church: King Agrippa violently moved his tyrannical cruelty against the church. This was with Satanic influence for the attack was specifically directed towards the church and not the Jews in general. The king's evil character was used to cause harm and fear among the believers. There was one intention and that was to oppress the church in order to stop more people from turning to the Lord in repentance and faith. This is the devil's ancient desire against the people of God.

Murdered an apostle: King Agrippa killed James, the brother of John, who was one of those in the inner circle of Jesus' disciples. It was the devil's intention to cause the people to doubt the power of the Lord Jesus to protect His dear disciple. How much more vulnerable the rest of the common believers would be? We have to understand that God permits a believer to be taken away once his mission on earth is accomplished and that was so for James.

Calvin's comments on Psalm 116: "In these times, when innocent blood is shed, and the wicked contemnors of God furiously exalt themselves, as if exulting over a vanquished God, let us hold fast by this doctrine, that the death of the faithful, which is so worthless, nay, even ignominious in the sight of men, is so valuable in God's sight, that, even after their death, he stretches out his hand towards them, and by dreadful examples demonstrates how he holds in abhorrence the cruelty of those who unjustly persecute the good and simple."

How do you view the deaths of believers at the hands of wicked ones? Let us trust in the providential hands of God!

THOUGHT: Am I ready to meet my Saviour face to face?

PRAYER: Father, glory be to Thy name for life everlasting.

MONDAY, JANUARY 25
ACTS 12:3-4
MATTHEW 10:16-18

*“...ye shall be brought
before governors and
kings for my sake...”*

MORE THREATS

What King Herod did to James was outrageous, and his act upon Peter must have terrified the followers of Christ. It may be that some of the believers were agitated and provoked by the king's cruelty. The Church, however, is not called to arms and to fight against governments. We have a high calling under our heavenly government. The worst the world can do is to take our physical lives, but they can never take our souls from the hands of our loving Father in heaven.

Desiring to please the Jews: The king, realising his action was approved of and delightful to the Jews, continued to wage his power against the believers. The Lord certainly knew these things and allowing the Christians to go through another level of trial was necessary for them to grow further and go farther in their work for Him. This was during the Passover celebration so Herod waited for a few days before Easter to do more evil against the church.

Devising to kill more disciples: Peter was put into prison. He was heavily guarded by sixteen soldiers. To Peter and the believers in Jerusalem, this was seemingly the end with no possibility of escape.

There are things we cannot comprehend such as the way God deals in our lives. Things may not run according to our plans and desires. We may have tried to order everything biblically with the objective to glorify God alone, but somehow along the way this is lost. We ask where we went wrong when everything was prayed for and for the praise of God. This could have been troubling the minds of some believers. How could God allow His chief Apostle to be killed when he still had other things to do to strengthen the brethren?

How about you? Will you argue with the Lord? Let God be true and every man wrong in his ways! He knows best, and we must trust Him!

THOUGHT: Am I striving to do the work of the Lord?

PRAYER: Father, grant me the courage to face the trials and tribulations in my life.

TUESDAY, JANUARY 26

ACTS 12:5-16

MATTHEW 7:7-11

*“For every one that asketh receiveth;
and he that seeketh findeth...”*

DIVINE INTERVENTION

God’s power and glory are more notably displayed when believers submit themselves to the ordinance of man and let God manifest His might! The believers did not take up arms to deliver Peter out of prison. The account shows how, in His wisdom, God preserved His servant who had yet to do much work. James had his share of work and finished it well. Peter had to run further!

Sought by church prayers: The church was praying to God without ceasing for this specific concern. This was the only and best way to approach the problem. They knew that only God could deliver and save Peter. The prayer was unceasing in earnestness and with fervency. They knew they had a limited time to pray for Peter as the days of his planned execution was at hand.

Saved by God’s power: The angel of the Lord came to Peter while he was sleeping and led the apostle out of the prison. Everything that happened was all supernatural: from the appearance of the angel, a light shining in the prison, Peter’s chains falling off, to the iron gate opening on its own accord. The miraculous answer to the prayers however was doubted. When Peter came to the place where the believers prayed, they could not believe it was him at first, not until Peter persistently knocked on the gate did they open for him.

In prayer we seek God’s provision, wisdom, healing and many other requests which we know can only be answered by our Almighty Father. The problem is when we receive His answer, we sometimes attribute it to other causes. The worst is when we do not believe that He has already answered our prayers. It is disheartening to hear Christians praying without believing their prayers can be answered by God.

THOUGHT: Am I trusting in the omnipotence of God?

PRAYER: Father, grant me the confidence in Thy loving care.

WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 27

ACTS 12:17-19

LUKE 10:3-4

*“...behold, I send you forth
as lambs among wolves.”*

SCOT-FREE

The miraculous escape of Peter is not a norm to be expected when saints pray unceasingly. It is not that God cannot repeat such an act but it is up to Him to decide what is best for each of His saints. As one pastor said, we should not test God, God is the One who must test us! When we pray, we have to bless His holy name for His unspeakable mercies and grace upon us. We have to declare His wondrous works to all people that the glory and honour be to Him and not upon man.

Declared: Peter testified of God's power in his release. It is important that we testify for the Lord in how He has answered our prayers and the intercessions of the saints. The purpose is for glory and honour to be unto God who does the delivering and not to man who is delivered. Peter did show it was the Lord who brought him out of the prison. He also told the brethren to tell other leaders of the church about his state to put an end to their deep worry and anxiety over his execution.

Departed: Peter departed and went to another place. The reason is not mentioned but it was obviously to keep himself as well as the believers in that house safe. He made sure not to be captured again after being miraculously released by God. This was his responsibility to flee from the Roman soldiers who might try their best to get him back lest their lives be taken on his behalf. Indeed, the soldiers were killed when they could not find Peter.

Peter's escape troubled the soldiers who were in charge of him. The word “*stir*” means mental agitation with extreme anxiety and confusion. No one could really explain how Peter had gotten out scot-free. This shows how futile and useless man's strength and power are compared to God. If the Lord wills to release someone out of bondage, even the most secured cells on this planet will be powerless.

God's answer to our prayers is always powerful. Do you trust that the Lord's answer to your prayer is always the best?

THOUGHT: Am I living each day for the glory of God?

PRAYER: Father, remind me of my human responsibilities as I serve Thee.

THURSDAY, JANUARY 28

ACTS 12:20-23

MATTHEW 18:7-10

*“Woe unto the world because of offences!
for it must needs be that offences come...”*

DEADLY INTERMISSION

Luke took a sort of intermission from recording the acts of the Apostles to record the acts of their enemies. When man plays God, the worst judgment should be expected. One who is familiar with the Old Testament can remember the records in Daniel's prophecy. This passage in the book of Acts narrates God's punishment upon Herod. The Lord said that vengeance is His. It is not for man to take revenge and justice. God has already predetermined the condemnation of the wicked. Whether they suffer on earth or in hell and the eternal lake of fire, they surely will receive judgment for their sins in God's perfect time.

Set himself as God: The Greek word for *“highly displeased”* (Acts 12:20) does not occur anywhere else in the New Testament. It means to meditate on war or to purpose war in the mind and here, probably, to be “enraged” or “angry” at Tyre and Sidon. This could be posited in Herod's madness through vexing the church and violently executing the disciples. The cause of this hostility is not mentioned. What is observable here is his pride as he tries to play God. He was so flattered when senseless men associated his voice with that of a god.

Smitten by God Himself: “God himself did show a lively image thereof in the person of Herod. And assuredly men cannot extol themselves higher than becometh them, but they shall make war with God, who, to the end he may surpass all, commandeth all flesh to keep silence” (Calvin). The Lord has recorded what end He has prepared for the enemies of the church who murdered the saints. As Jesus felt the persecution towards the saints in the time of Saul, He was affected by how James was executed and the attempts made to kill Peter.

Herod became so proud he attempted to rule over others as god. He experienced the vengeance of God while on earth. His life ended because of his arrogance and haughtiness. He departed in a most degrading way – being eaten by worms. What will become of us if we are ridiculously puffed up without cause?

THOUGHT: Am I proud and thus bear a bad testimony for my Lord?

PRAYER: Father, teach me to be like my Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

FRIDAY, JANUARY 29

ACTS 12:24-25

MATTHEW 5:17-18

*“...I am not come to destroy,
but to fulfil.”*

GOD’S WORD INCREASES

God’s Word will continue to accomplish its purpose. It will continue to be fulfilled. Not one jot or tittle shall pass from the law until all of God’s decrees are established. Like a seed sown, it produces great increase: some thirty, others sixty, and others will have a hundredfold. Wherever the Word was preached, multitudes embraced it, and believers were added to the church because of it. Therefore, believers should not shy away from preaching God’s Word especially in this generation.

Vertically: The Word of God causes growth and increase. Like plants, the effect of giving out the gospel message is growth. The vertical increase is towards the glory of God. More and more, the name of God will be exalted and made known. His doctrines will spread far and wide to the praise and honour of His name. Even those who are outside the faith will have appreciation for the things of God, furthering His exaltation. They may not have the faith to believe in Him, but they can see the power of God manifested in the lives of believers.

Horizontally: The Word of God also brings an increase in the number of people. Thus, multiplication will mean the horizontal increase where many people come to believe and turn to the Lord. This not only involves people but also the extent of places reached by the gospel. More and more places were opened to the Word of God and the testimony of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Calvin comments, “Luke determined not only what had happened after that Herod was dead, but also by this example to encourage us, that we may be assured that God will do that, in all ages, which he then did, to the end the gospel may at length break through all impediments of the enemies, and that the more the Church is diminished, it may the more increase through the heavenly blessing.”

Is the Word of God changing your life as a Christian?

THOUGHT: Do I believe in an inerrant and infallible Bible?

PRAYER: Father, grant me humility of heart to receive Thy Word.

SATURDAY, JANUARY 30
ACTS 13:1-4
LUKE 10:1-2

“...the Lord appointed
other seventy also, and
sent them two and two...”

BIBLICAL MISSIONS

Missions work is not a business enterprise that needs feasibility studies. It is not also an agricultural venture that requires tests and experiments. It is a spiritual exercise that requires fasting and prayer. It is God's work and must receive a mandate from above to be carried out. The Book of Acts is often called by many as the Acts of the Holy Spirit. After the Lord Jesus Christ ascended to heaven, it was evident that the Holy Spirit was working through the believers, especially as they commenced the work of missions.

Separated: The word “*separate*” (Acts 13:2) has the idea of setting them aside for a special purpose. The believers in the church at Antioch were not ordinary men. Some of them were highly educated and greatly respected. They did not rely on themselves but were wholly dependent upon the guidance of the Holy Spirit. “There is no mention made here of the election made by the Church, because it was altogether a divine calling; the Church did only receive those who were offered them by the hand of God” (Calvin).

Sent: The church did not in any way doubt what they had heard from the Holy Spirit. They trusted the Spirit. They obeyed the voice of the Spirit and sent Saul and Barnabas. Being sent forth by the Holy Ghost indicated it was the Spirit's influence, authority, and continual direction. Without the first, they were not qualified to go; without the second, they had no authority to go; and without the third, they could not know where to go (Clarke).

After the Spirit spoke to them, they continued to fast and pray. They prayed for them and committed them to the great task of going into a different land to preach the Gospel.

In today's churches, there are extreme views about the Holy Spirit. The Pentecostals and Charismatics overly emphasize the role of the Spirit. There is also the opposite extreme, undermining the role of the Holy Spirit. Such views are against the teachings of the Scriptures.

THOUGHT: Will I go as a missionary to a faraway land?

PRAYER: Father, glory and honour be unto Thee for Thy missionaries.

OPPOSITIONS TO MISSIONS

Missions work is a war! It invades the enemy's territory. The missionary is in a battleground, not a playground. Following the Spirit's command, Saul and Barnabas without delay set forth to depart. They were not overly concerned with financial support and other needs most missionaries today are worried about. They went right away and followed the Spirit's charge given to them.

To turn away from the faith: To turn away is to misinterpret or distort from the faith. “When God works, Satan also works.” This was obvious when Saul (or Paul) entered the enemy's territory. When they reached Paphos at the opposite end of the island of Cyprus, Elymas, a sorcerer opposed them, when the deputy of the country desired to hear the Word of God. Paul was not intimidated, being filled with the Holy Spirit, he was courageous to face the enemy. This is Satan's way of preventing people from coming to Christ: he opposes every opportunity for them to hear God's Word. There are many subtle instances in life that keep people away from the Bible.

To turn away from the right: “*To pervert*” (Acts 13:10) comes from the same word translated “*turn away*” in Acts 13:8. The Holy Spirit gave Paul the courage and the power to resist the Devil's attack. He boldly confronted the enemy and exposed his evil intent. Paul by the leading of the Spirit confronted the enemy through the power of God. Elymas became blind according to the word of Paul.

There are many in charismatic circles who allude to Paul's confrontation with the devil and do likewise. But when we look at the epistles of Paul, he never advised nor mentioned these things to his disciples. This miracle authenticated Paul's message of salvation in Christ Jesus. The deputy believed in the doctrine of the Lord.

The Spirit works for the soul's salvation. The enemy's attack may seem frightful and terrifying but the Spirit can always conquer the enemy. God is always victorious! Let no ministry be done without the Spirit.

THOUGHT: Am I ready to face the challenges as an evangelist?

PRAYER: Father, may Thy grace be sufficient for me as I serve Thee.

MONDAY, FEBRUARY 1

ACTS 13:13

LUKE 9:23-24

*“For whosoever will save his life
shall lose it...”*

THE COST OF MISSIONS!

In battle, there are casualties, and likewise with missions. There are those who are discouraged along the way and give up. There are also many returnees because they expected missions work to be like a holiday. Today’s trend of short-term missions results in many casualties since they only taste the “honeymoon” stage. They can easily pack their clothes and return home. Certainly, such departures can impact other missionaries and the people in the missions fields.

Went away: John Mark left the missions team. The word “*departing*” (Acts 13:13) has the idea of deserting. This means he quits with a mind not to return to the missions team. “But it is plain, from Acts 15:38, that it was from some cause which was deemed blameworthy, and that his conduct now was such as to make Paul unwilling again to have him as a companion” (Barnes).

Went back: He turned back again to Jerusalem instead of going with the team to further regions. It carries the idea of turning away from the mission and returning to the place he came from. Turning back home suggests returning to his comfort zone for fear of the spiritual struggle out there.

For every called servant, going for missions must be a decisive act of going without expecting to return home. He must understand that wherever the Lord calls him to be, that place he must call home. As the hymn goes, “What matters where on earth we dwell? On mountain top, or in the dell, in cottage, or a mansion fair, where Jesus is, ‘tis Heaven there. O hallelujah, yes, ‘tis Heav’n, ‘tis Heav’n to know my sins forgiv’n; on land or sea, what matters where? Where Jesus is, ‘tis Heaven there.”

Do you hesitate to go for missions because you cannot exchange your flat or condo for a small cottage in a third-world country? Do you feel it is difficult for you to leave your family and relatives behind? Do you think resigning from your job or leaving your business to others is a task too hard to do? Count the cost!

THOUGHT: Am I willing to take up my cross to follow Jesus?

PRAYER: Father, strengthen me as I endeavour to serve Thee.

TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 2
ACTS 13:14-15
JOHN 17:6-8

*"I have manifested thy name
unto the men which thou
gavest me out of the world..."*

PROVIDENCE FOR MISSIONS

When God directs the missions work, there will always be an open door prepared for the missionary. Whether he sees it immediately or after many years, God has His own timing. It is all up to God. What the missionary must be confident of is that God does not send him without reason. The missionary must wait patiently for the purpose of God, looking ahead and trusting in His good hand to arrange everything for the missionary.

An open door: Antioch in Pisidia was in Asia Minor. It was the military and administrative centre of the province of Galatia, and was a strategic place from which the missions team could radiate to the neighbouring cities in the whole region. God brought the missionaries there, and the synagogue in the city was His open door for them. The Jewish communities always presented an opportunity for them as the Jews had been taught the prophecies concerning Christ. Paul and Barnabas, being Jews themselves, settled into the assembly without any restrictions.

An opportunity to exhort: By God's providence, the hearts of the rulers of the synagogue were moved to call for Paul and the team to say something. Indeed, the Lord had arranged their journey step by step and they were given the opportunity to speak. After reading the law and the prophets which prepared the hearts of the people in the assembly, Paul was invited to speak. It is probable that what was read were portions of the Scriptures that spoke of the Messiah. As the saying goes, "strike while the iron is hot," Paul wasted no time to proclaim the gospel.

Every missionary must always be prepared to speak up for his Lord. Read 2 Timothy 4:1-2. Remember that all believers are given the Great Commission, therefore we must all be ready to speak for our Lord. You may not be so eloquent and systematic in presenting the gospel, but when you pray to God for the Holy Spirit to open your mouth, He is faithful to supply the right words. Your testimony of how the Lord led you to believe in Him is already a wonderful message. Be prepared always!

THOUGHT: Am I thankful for the opportunities to share the gospel?

PRAYER: Father, may I rejoice over saved souls.

WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 3
ACTS 13:16-37
ROMANS 3:24-26

*“Being justified freely by his grace
through the redemption
that is in Christ Jesus...”*

THE EVANGELISTIC SERMON

The Bible has only one theme: the Lord Jesus Christ. Missionaries do not have to contextualise the Scriptures in order to fit it into the people of a certain country. The message to the Jews is the same message to the Gentiles. The way Paul presented here may differ because the Jews already had knowledge of the Scriptures whereas the Gentiles must start from the very basics. The theme and the content, however, are the same. The speaker is not to change the contents of the message just to tickle the ears of his hearers.

Promises of redemption: The Apostle Paul who was well-acquainted with the Old Testament made succinct summary from the birth of the nation of Israel to David in order to bring in the promised Redeemer, Jesus the Saviour. He supported this with the witness of John the Baptist about Jesus. He did not miss giving the invitation to them: *“to you is the word of this salvation sent”* (Acts 13:26). This word of salvation describes how Jesus suffered in the hands of the rulers of Jerusalem, was condemned to death and crucified on the cross to pay the penalty for man’s sins.

Promises of resurrection: The gospel does not end with the death of Jesus. Paul described Jesus’ eventful resurrection. This was testified not just by a few but by many who saw and communed with Him. Paul supported the resurrection of Christ with the Messianic Psalm 2:7. Jesus saw no corruption because God raised Him from the dead on the third day.

This is the message of salvation. Read Paul’s summary in Romans 10:9-10.

Do you know the verses that are useful for evangelism? It is important that you have a list which you can refer to and read to the unsaved. After you have given your personal testimony, back it up with Bible verses to prove that salvation is of the Lord and not just your own imagination!

THOUGHT: Am I faithful to the Scriptures in sharing the gospel?

PRAYER: Father, I thank Thee for Thy perfect Word.

THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 4

ACTS 13:38-43

HEBREWS 2:2-4

*“How shall we escape,
if we neglect so great salvation...”*

GOSPEL INVITATION

There must be a careful consideration in the invitation after the sermon. It is a practice in many churches that people are asked to raise their hands or to stand up, or are called to come to the altar or to pray the sinner's prayer with the preacher. I believe there are sincere believers who came to receive Christ through this way, but this must be prayerfully done in a manner where what is most important is not the number of those who “make a decision.” In this passage we do not have any implication that numbers were the most important. It is Satan's ploy to get churches to seek for numbers rather than genuine confessions, thus he succeeds in leading churches to promote “easy believism.”

To believe in Christ: The Apostle, though earlier had made an invitation, extended a concluding invitation to the Jews to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and be justified by Him. Justification here refers to the legal declaration of the sinner to be forgiven of his transgressions and iniquities and therefore just before the eyes of the Holy God. This was not possible by the Law of Moses because not one can perfectly keep that law. Only Jesus Christ, the perfect sinless Lamb of God has perfectly kept all the commandments and shed His blood on the cross for the remission of man's sins. Thus, only by believing in Him can a man be justified and reckoned righteous before God.

To believe not Christ: Paul warned that some would not believe, and would contradict what he had pronounced. He quoted Habakkuk to remind them. Those who lightly esteemed the offer of salvation were told to marvel, for they would be destroyed if they remained in unbelief.

Though the Jews rejected the message, the Gentiles who probably were proselytes looked forward to the preaching of the Word the following Sabbath Day. How we should pray that this will characterise our churches! We must pray with our Pastor and preachers that the people in our congregation will have the hunger and thirst for God's Word to desire to return the following Lord's Day for more exposition of the scriptures.

THOUGHT: Am I offering the gospel of salvation to all?

PRAYER: Father, grant me the heart to love the lost as Thou lovest me.

FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 5

ACTS 13:44-49

JOHN 10:25-28

*“My sheep hear my voice,
and I know them...”*

HEARERS OF GOD’S WORD

Not all who hear the Word will believe the message. How we wish every hearer will believe, but the Bible tells us there are those who judge themselves unworthy of eternal life. We must be comforted that we do our best to prepare the message and deliver it in the power of God. Whatever the harvest, it is all up to the Lord. Therefore, we give our utmost and leave the rest to the Lord. “What we can do, we must do, what we cannot do, the Lord will do” (Khoo).

Those who reject: The Jews who spoke against the message of Paul were filled with envy. They were full of jealousy seeing that almost the whole city came together to hear the Word of God. They should have rejoiced over the sight of many people seeking to know the Scriptures. But these people who still thought that Gentiles were not worthy to enter into God’s kingdom were in indignation at the number of people who came. When they contradicted and blasphemed, the Apostles told them that they themselves have judged their own unworthiness of everlasting life, and so the Apostles turned to the Gentiles.

Those who receive: They declared the Lord’s command that the Apostles were to be the light among the Gentiles that salvation may reach even unto the uttermost part of the earth. The Gentiles were very glad upon hearing this and they glorified the Word of the Lord. Notably, they who believed were ordained of God to eternal life. They were those who were chosen before the foundation of the world and they eventually believed.

The Word of the Lord spread and was preached everywhere in the surrounding cities of the region. This was the aftermath of the Gentiles believing in the gospel. They did not keep it to themselves. They were not fearful that others might come to believe but were desirous that many more would come to know and believe in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Do you desire that many should believe the Word? What are you doing to let others hear the gospel?

THOUGHT: Am I rejoicing over the souls who come to believe?

PRAYER: Father, I thank Thee for Thy salvation so rich and free in Christ.

SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 6

ACTS 13:50-52

MARK 6:10-11

*“In what place soever ye enter
into an house, there abide
till ye depart from that place.”*

FACING PERSECUTIONS

Persecution is a given in missions work. If you are truly serving the Lord, Satan will not leave you alone. If you do not experience any opposition, then you ought to be concerned. It may mean that you are not contradicting Satan’s plan and he agrees with what you are doing. If you are aware of this truth then you will not wonder and complain to God when you meet with obstacles, and barriers are set up in your path to stop you from doing God’s work. Instead, you will be ready to face them.

Forsook them: The envious Jews incited the people in their synagogues as well as the city leaders to persecute Paul and Barnabas. So they were cast out from their region. Remembering the words of Jesus in Luke 9:4-5, Paul and Barnabas forsook the place and proceeded to the next city, Iconium.

Filled with joy: Having known that persecution would really come, they were not disheartened. Instead, they were completely rejoicing over what had transpired and, being controlled wholly by the Spirit of God, they continued steadfastly in the work that God had assigned them.

“For we must mark Luke’s drift, that the faithful were so far from being troubled and shaken with those stumbling-blocks, how great soever they were, with the reproach of their teachers, with the disquieting of the city, with terrors and threatenings, also with fear and dangers hanging over their heads, that they did with the loftiness of their faith despise valiantly the gorgeousness, as well of their feigned holiness as of their power. And assuredly, if our faith shall be well grounded in God, and shall be thoroughly rooted in his word; and, finally, if it shall be well fortified with the aid of the Spirit as it ought, it shall nourish peace and joy spiritual in our minds, though all the world be in an uproar” (Calvin).

Do you expect the enemy’s opposition in your labour for the Lord? Be aware, for ignorance of it will bring you many discouragements in the ministry. Rather, be filled with the Holy Spirit such that when persecution comes you can still bear the fruit of the Spirit in your life.

THOUGHT: Am I steadfast in my faith even in times of persecution?

PRAYER: Father, help me to endure until the end, for Thy glory.

LORD'S DAY, FEBRUARY 7
ACTS 14:1-7
COLOSSIANS 4:2-4

*“...that God would open unto us
a door of utterance, to speak
the mystery of Christ...”*

OPEN DOORS NOT WINDOWS

The Lord had already instructed His disciples while they were under training that when persecution comes they must proceed to other places to continue their work. When God closes a door, He opens another. And when He continues to keep that door open, then stay. This is the joy in missions work. In spite of persecutions, every missionary has this confidence that wherever he is assigned by God, it is the best place for him.

Long period to preach: When they reached Iconium, the Lord gave them a new opportunity to preach, and many believed. The same principle applies here: “When God works, Satan also works!” The unbelieving Jews roused the Gentiles and poisoned their minds against Paul and Barnabas. In spite of the opposition, the Lord was pleased to allow Paul and Barnabas to stay longer to preach, give testimony and perform miracles.

More places to preach: Satan's rage heightened as they remained and many more opposed them. When violence surged, they proceeded to Lystra and Derbe and continued to preach God's Word there. This was truly under the direction of God, for out of these cities arose one of the most trusted disciples of Paul: Timothy.

The Lord alone opens doors for missionaries to enter. When we trust in this truth, we are not anxious, for the Lord directs the zealous evangelist to places where hearts are prepared to receive the gospel. Today's approach of missions, which is dependent on surveys and so-called “windows” for evangelism, is humanistic. It does not rely on the Spirit's leading but on man's own estimation of where the best places are for missionaries to go.

Are you applying the principles of the world in the church ministries you are involved with? Let us be reminded that spiritual works must be guided by the Spirit of God. It is not for man to determine where missionaries go, it is for God alone!

THOUGHT: Am I ready to follow wherever the Lord leads me?

PRAYER: Father, I praise Thy name for Thy longsuffering to usward.

MONDAY, FEBRUARY 8

ACTS 14:8-18

JOHN 12:37-38

“...he had done
so many miracles before them,
yet they believed not on him...”

A MIRACLE TO PROVE

This miracle may have brought the people to acknowledge the divine sanction of Paul and Barnabas as the Lord's missionaries. However, the real challenge was whether the missionaries would resist the seductive bait of the enemy. It is a great temptation for missionaries when they are looked up to by the local people to promote themselves as lords over them, and easily forget their primary duty and position.

The missionary's heart: This is again another stupendous miracle noted by Luke as he diagnosed that the man was lame from his mother's womb and had no power to walk. The crippled man, on hearing the Word from Paul, believed that he could be healed. With the Spirit's prompting, Paul (whose Christ-like heart was towards the weak and troubled) could sense the man's faith. And, by His grace, God performed a miracle authenticating Paul's words before the people.

The missionary's mind: The people were amazed and were intending to worship Paul and Barnabas as gods! This is similar to the serpent's temptation to Eve (Gen 3:5). Barnabas and Paul understood that the miracle happened not for their sakes but for the glory of God. They restrained the people from worshipping them, and preached unto them the God of the Scriptures.

As servants of God we have to have a firm understanding that whatever we do in His service must be for His glory alone (1 Cor 10:31). When we give in even a little to the temptation of rewarding ourselves with the flatteries of this world (which is so seductive), it would create a “crack in the dam.” Sooner or later it will destroy not only the servants but the church as a whole.

“Let Thy goodness like a fetter bind my wand'ring heart to Thee; prone to wander Lord I feel it – Prone to leave the God I love; here's my heart – O take and seal it, seal it for Thy courts above.” Let us take heed!

THOUGHT: Am I sure that my heart's desire is to serve the Lord?

PRAYER: Father, grant me a focused mind and a fixed heart for Thee.

TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 9

ACTS 14:19-20

PHILIPPIANS 1:21-24

*“For to me to live is Christ,
and to die is gain.”*

DYING FOR CHRIST

The ultimate end of persecution is to kill the missionaries. History tells us that countless missionaries have died at the hands of the people whom they loved and to whom they preached Christ. There are stories of cruel persecution: missionaries being slaughtered, cooked and eaten by the locals. There are more gruesome experiences to recall but these must not discourage missionaries from bringing the good news of salvation in the Lord Jesus Christ to far-flung regions.

Sanctioned: Every evil intention against the servants of God is sanctioned by Satan. He uses people who will execute his wicked plans. The Jews in their envy and pride were made instruments to stone Paul to death. Even those who are supposed to be learned in the Scriptures can be moved by the Devil to vent his loathing against God’s people. Let us be watchful and prayerful not to be used of Satan to persecute believers because of our jealousy and arrogance.

Spared: Paul was deemed to have been dead but he was not. When God’s servant still has work to accomplish for Him, God will preserve him. The Lord has foreordained His words to be written and He secures His writers to live and pen His precious promises. Paul was spared not only to preach the gospel but also to write the living and life-giving Word of God. Let us trust God’s perfect plan, no one dies before God’s determined time and no one can extend his life even a second beyond His decree.

When we serve God, all of Satan’s minions are up and active to find ways and means to destroy us. But we must place our reliance in the all-powerful and loving God. Read Matthew 10:28-31.

Are you hiding when opposition comes for fear of your life? Do you think you have power to keep it for a minute? Please be reminded that your life is not in your hands, and no place on this earth can hide you from Him who truly controls your time on earth!

THOUGHT: Am I ready to die for the sake of my Lord and Saviour?

PRAYER: Father, let me have Thy approval of my plans and actions.

WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 10

“Let the elders that rule well

ACTS 14:21-25

be counted worthy

1 TIMOTHY 5:17-18

of double honour...”

PRESBYTERIANISM PRACTISED

Paul here laid out for us a system of church government. He made appointments for the plurality of elders in every church. This is the biblical administration of the New Testament church. Many churches today depart from the apostolic pattern and adopt the worldly democratic form of congregational church governance, where even immature and undiscerning Christians decide the important church matters. Then, there are dictatorship forms where Popes, bishops and also pastors exercise one-man rule over the church even in handling church finances. Worse still, sometimes the pastor’s wife controls the whole church.

Ordained elders: Elders were appointed and installed in every church. “Elders” is in plural form in every church and hence includes both the pastor-teachers and ruling elders. To ordain signifies to decree by lifting up the hands, as they used to do in the assemblies of the people. “Paul and Barnabas do mark that this order was set down by Christ, when they assigned pastors to every church, lest, after their departure, doctrine should cease...” (Calvin).

Commending elders: These elders were committed or set before the Lord. Man’s laying on of hands upon the elders has no power to protect them from the power of the enemy. The Lord has to protect and embolden them to do the work that was appointed for them to do. The Apostles knew how they were furiously bombarded by Satan’s forces. Were it not for God who was their refuge and strength they could not have continued their work.

Plurality of elders is prescribed in the Bible not only for the proper administration of the church but above all for the proper indoctrination of God’s people. Read Ecclesiastes 4:9-12.

How is your church ruled? Are you governed by the plurality of God’s appointed leaders for good teaching and leading? Let us be mindful of God’s ordained church management so that His body can be properly taken care of.

THOUGHT: Am I prayerful and submissive to my church elders?

PRAYER: Father, I thank Thee for the church elders whom Thou hast placed over us.

THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 11
ACTS 14:26-28
LUKE 10:19-20

*“...but rather rejoice,
because your names
are written in heaven.”*

MISSIONS REPORT

Missionaries do not send themselves. They are under the guidance of the church leadership, and so, they report and give updates to the sending church not only about financial concerns, but above all about their ministry's spiritual matters in their missions stations. The church leadership will pray and seek the Spirit's leading as they make decisions based on the reports from their missionaries.

Recommended: Paul and Barnabas returned to the sending church. They acknowledged that it was the church at Antioch that commended them to the grace of God for the work which they had done. The church prayed for them and separated them for the work according to the wisdom of the Spirit of God. Their whole journey was blessed of God because of the prayer warriors who fervently interceded for them.

Rehearsed: They brought back with them news of their missions work to the brethren who had sent them. The church was also excited to hear about the work of the Lord from the mouth of the missionaries. They announced and reported all that God had done for and through them. They did not boast of any successes that were due to their own strength and wisdom, but they always pointed to God who was worthy of all honour. They also described how God in His mercy and grace not only saved Jews but also opened the door of salvation for the Gentiles.

Reporting to the home church regarding the ministries in the missions field is not for the purpose of getting more support in the next round of missions work. There are churches that misplace their priorities in missions. Their slogan is “no report, no support.” But church leaders must understand that whether there are converts or not, the missionaries are sowers and waterers, it is God alone who can give the increase. Church leaders, at the same time, must monitor the missionaries not out of suspicion but for purpose of considering their provision and protection.

We must support our missionaries so that the bulk of our church budget goes to missions work and our missionaries, not to banquets and festivals!

THOUGHT: Am I wholeheartedly supporting the missionaries?

PRAYER: Father, grant me a heart of missions in my church.

FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 12

ACTS 15:1-5

MATTHEW 24:23-25

*“...insomuch that, if it were possible,
they shall deceive the very elect.”*

HERETICAL GOSPEL

Some churches hold to a doctrine of the Scriptures and to certain methods of Bible interpretation that cause their church members to have a low view of the Bible, tearing them away from the Word of God. These are very dangerous. When these false doctrines creep into the church, they are like pathogenic viruses that can easily multiply to harm and destroy the spiritual body. They easily spread fast and furious especially among the spiritually immature ones who are still young in the faith (though they may have been longstanding members of the church).

Circumcise to be saved: Salvation is of God. It is by the grace of God through faith alone in Jesus. He lived a perfect life on earth to fulfil the law's demand, and then He died on the cross, shedding His precious blood for the remission of sins. He was buried and rose again on the third day, victorious over death that all who fully trust in Him will have life eternal in heaven. Yet, there were Judaisers who asserted that except a man be circumcised, he cannot be saved. Paul and Barnabas, having known the truth, debated and argued with these heretics.

Commandments to be justified: The Jews who came to believe in Jesus wanted to enforce on all Gentile Christians the keeping of the commandments of Moses for justification. These arguments brought Paul and Barnabas to Jerusalem to confer with the leaders of the first church.

The Westminster Confession of Faith 11.3 states, “Christ, by his obedience and death, did fully discharge the debt of all those that are thus justified, and did make a proper, real, and full satisfaction to his Father's justice in their behalf. Yet, inasmuch as he was given by the Father for them; and his obedience and satisfaction accepted in their stead; and both, freely, not for anything in them; their justification is only of free grace; that both the exact justice and rich grace of God might be glorified in the justification of sinners.” Read Romans 5:18-19. Can your own good works add to what Jesus has already done for you?

THOUGHT: Am I fully trusting that only Jesus saves?

PRAYER: Father, praise be to Thy name and thanks be unto Thee for the work of salvation wrought by Thy Son Jesus Christ.

SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 13
ACTS 15:6-12
MATTHEW 16:18-19

*“...I will build my church;
and the gates of hell
shall not prevail against it.”*

THE FIRST CHURCH COUNCIL

Heresies are allowed by God throughout history in order to hammer out the truth and put on record the faithful interpretation of God's Word. Here in Acts 15 is a record of the first church council called to settle the question of whether salvation is by grace alone or needs man's contribution such as circumcision. Orthodoxy is established and will stand throughout as the dogmas of the church of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Consider a matter: The apostles and elders assembled together to consider the concern that was raised. Read Proverbs 11:14 and 24:6. Councils are important in maintaining the orthodoxy of doctrines in the church.

Concur a decision: Although there was the presence of wise men, only the Spirit of God can lead men into truth. Peter stood up and testified how God (who knows man's hearts) bore witness when the Gentile believers also received the Holy Spirit just as Jewish believers did. He was referring to the salvation of Cornelius. Paul and Barnabas likewise testified of the power of God which was manifested among the Gentiles during their missionary journeys. The concurrence of the testimonies gave credence to the truth that the Jews were saved by grace alone and so also were the Gentiles.

Again the Westminster Confession of Faith states this truth: “For the better government, and further edification of the church, there ought to be such assemblies as are commonly called synods or councils: and it belongeth to the overseers and other rulers of the particular churches, by virtue of their office, and the power which Christ hath given them for edification and not for destruction, to appoint such assemblies; and to convene together in them, as often as they shall judge it expedient for the good of the church.”

Ecclesiastical councils are important for checking the spiritual temperature of the church. When heretical teachings creep into churches, the church councils manned by godly and mature leaders help to curb the eventual capitulating of believers to unbelief and apostasy.

THOUGHT: Am I functioning as part of the Church of Jesus?

PRAYER: Father, show me the ways where I can best serve Thee.

LORD'S DAY, FEBRUARY 14

ACTS 15:13-29

HEBREWS 13:7-8

*"Jesus Christ the same yesterday,
and to day, and for ever."*

DECREED DECISION

The decision has been made since the beginning of time as Acts 15:18 says, *"Known unto God are all his works from the beginning of the world."* This is our confidence when we rely always on the God of the Bible. We are not confused about what to do and how to respond to heresies. Surely, the Lord knows all these things and has prepared an answer to them. What we as believers must do is to refer to the Scriptures, never answering from our own understanding or human philosophies.

By the all-wise God: James, not the Apostle but the Lord's brother, being the moderator of the council found the portion of Scripture supporting the testimony of Peter. He quoted Amos 9:11-12. God declared even in the Old Testament that these things would happen.

By the all-gracious God: The implication of the decision went far beyond the mere question of circumcision. It revealed the abundant grace of God for the Gentiles. *"That ye abstain from meats offered to idols, and from blood, and from things strangled, and from fornication: from which if ye keep yourselves, ye shall do well. Fare ye well"* (Acts 15:29). They were exempt from all the ceremonial laws of Moses. It pleased all the members of the council and they sent brethren to publish the verdict!

"All the things which God does in the church and in the world, they were all foreknown and predetermined by him ... the work of the conversion of the Gentiles; this was fixed and resolved on by God in eternity; he knew it would be, because he had determined it should be; and accordingly he foretold it, and spoke of it in various periods of time before it came to pass; and therefore it should not be looked upon as some new and strange thing, that was never known, spoken or heard of: and this holds true of every other work of God..." (Gill).

Are we submissive to our church leaders' decisions that are based on the Scriptures and laid down in the Confessions of Faith of the past? May the Lord grant us humility of hearts and minds to obey our church leaders.

THOUGHT: Am I praying always for the Lord's under-shepherds over me?

PRAYER: Father, help me follow Christ by following my pastor in the Lord.

MONDAY, FEBRUARY 15
ACTS 15:30-35
JOHN 7:16-18

“...he that seeketh his glory
that sent him, the same is true,
and no unrighteousness is in him.”

THE LORD'S MESSENGER

The verdict of the church council was published. It was to be made known to all believers so that all doubts and questions regarding the said heresy would be removed. Till today, we are beneficiaries of such decisions. These are documents in the past which remain true and faithful till today and into the future of the church. These do not change with time or culture. God's truth is eternal!

Delivered the words: The verdict was disseminated to the rest of the local churches, especially the church in Antioch, through written documents. The letter was distributed by chosen men from among them who could be trusted not to add, subtract or misinterpret the context of the council's decision. It was not kept a secret but was read before the brethren and it encouraged and comforted the believers. Judas and Silas who were from Jerusalem strengthened the message with their own words as emissaries from the council.

Declared the Word: The resolution of a dispute must not lead the church to relax and be complacent. The enemy is relentless in his desire to destroy the faith of the believers. The strength of the people is not founded on the words of men but of God. Paul and Barnabas stayed for more days for the purpose of teaching and preaching God's Word. This was part of the Great Commission that says, “*Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you*” (Matt 28:20). Perhaps this is today's most neglected part of the Great Commission. Read Hebrews 4:12.

The council gave a sentence for the Gentiles not to be troubled with the Jewish requirements based on ceremonial laws. This was to emphasise the completeness of the work of redemption through the Lord Jesus Christ without having to do the works of the law. The council's sentence was important for the people to know. It delivered them from worries and troubles over the confusion which the Judaisers caused. Yet the most important antidote to false doctrines is the knowing and understanding of the right doctrines from the Scripture.

THOUGHT: Do I take heed of God's Word through His messengers?

PRAYER: Father, open my eyes to see wonderful things out of Thy Word.

TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 16

ACTS 15:36-41

LUKE 9:49-50

*“Forbid him not; for he
that is not against us is for us.”*

THE GRAVITY OF MINISTRY

Misunderstandings in the church are very common. Although we all have the mind of Christ, are indwelt by the same Holy Spirit and read the same Scriptures, our opinions still differ because we have different family backgrounds, cultures and habits of life. Even though we are guided infallibly and inerrantly, minor things can split companionship, fellowship and even churches. This may be sad, but the weakness of man prevails in many ways to cause divisions. Nevertheless, in divisions there is addition and even multiplications.

Determination: Paul encouraged Barnabas to visit the brethren in every city where they had established churches. This was a noble intention and must have been a prompting of the Spirit in order to strengthen the believers. Paul was determined to go *“and see how they do”* (Acts 15:36). This is the heart of a true missionary. He was not seeking his own fame and popularity or to make a name for himself. He wanted to know their spiritual estate. And Barnabas was determined to bring John Mark along.

Discernment: Paul rejected John Mark because he had earlier withdrawn himself from their missions team. He was a young man then, being as yet unacquainted with bearing the cross. When troubles came, he quickly terminated his missionary journey and returned home. This might have affected not only Paul but the church of Antioch as well. We understand that Paul excluded John Mark as he had yet to gain spiritual strength to fight the spiritual battle. Later when he had the “muscles,” Paul told Timothy, *“Take Mark, and bring him with thee: for he is profitable to me for the ministry”* (2 Tim 4:11).

Divine discernment is very important in our work for the Lord. God’s work is not a game to be taken lightly but must be done seriously for what is at stake is the eternal life of people. As Calvin said, “We ought to make more account of the truth than of the favor of all the whole world; but it is convenient that we ponder wisely what great weight there is in the matter which is in hand.”

THOUGHT: Am I serving God according to His prescribed way?

PRAYER: Father, Thy Word gives light in the way.

WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 17
ACTS 16:1-5
JOHN 17:6-8

“...I have given unto them the words
which thou gavest me;
and they have received them...”

BLESSED PROVISIONS

The loneliest assignment for a believer is to be a missionary in a foreign land. This does not equate to sadness for he knows the Lord Jesus' promise that He will never leave and forsake His own. But as humans, we desire to have fellowship and acceptance. This is why some Bible-believing missionaries succumb to cooperation with liberal and even cultic missionaries. Of course, this is spiritually very risky.

Well reported fellow-worker: In foreign missions, the Lord chooses and prepares somebody to assist the missionary in the ministry. He may not immediately surface but in God's own perfect time a co-labourer will be available. Timothy was such a disciple. He was a true witness of the Lord that made him well known among the brethren. His excellence was not in any skill or talent but in testifying for the Lord Jesus Christ. He encouraged Paul greatly and accompanied the Apostle in planting churches and pastoring the believers.

Well established faithful believers: As a result the churches were made strong. The belief and behaviours of the believers were made firm and resolute, keeping God's Word. This attracted more people to find out about the Christian faith. They increased in number daily as many came to hear the pure teaching and preaching of God's Word.

The Lord knows our limits. When we wait upon Him, the provision of blessings will come at the perfect moment. We do not have to compromise and cooperate with modernistic and charismatic missionaries in the same missions field as us. Let us hold fast to the promises of God and, in due time, He will fulfil His faithful promise.

When I was about to give up the ministry entrusted to me because of the dwindling number of people coming, I had planned to call it quits. Unexpectedly, God raised up two brethren to co-labour with me. I thank the Lord that aside from my family, who encourage me to persevere on, God Himself has His own perfect way and timing to send fellow workers to share the burden.

THOUGHT: Am I steadfastly labouring for the Lord?

PRAYER: Father, I praise Thy timely provision of co-workers.

THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 18

ACTS 16:6-10

JOHN 16:13-15

“...when he,
the Spirit of truth, is come,
he will guide you into all truth...”

MISSIONS POSSIBLE

As we desire to reach the uttermost part of the world to fulfil the Great Commission, we must remain sensitive to the leading of the Holy Spirit as to the destination of our missions. There are places where we know have great needs, but if the Spirit of God prevents us from going there, we ought rather to submit than argue with God because of our own “good” intentions. We have to remember that missions work is not our personal operation, but God’s Great Commission. We have to depend on the plan of the Great Commander.

Forbidden: We may well ask, “Why should the Spirit forbid a missionary to go to a place of his own desire?” The answer simply is: because the work has been pre-arranged by God. When we insert our own plans, we ruin the design or we will do things in vain. Paul intended to go into Bithynia, but the Spirit did not permit him. It was all ordered by the wisdom and will of God. “Thus Almighty God at pleasure orders the candle of the gospel to be removed out of one room into another, sends it from one place and people to another, and accordingly ought all places and persons to prize it highly, and improve it faithfully” (Burkitt).

Foreordained: Paul was instructed through a vision of the Macedonian call. God alone knows best the direction of our ministries. It is best to entrust all to Him so that everything will be done according to His will. His will is always the best, our intentions may be logical and practical but His is what is needful. Paul did not question God’s will. He immediately endeavoured to go to Macedonia.

When the Lord gave the Great Commission, He did not offer a blank sheet of paper for us to draw up our own plans. He laid out the blueprint of the design. We just have to wait and see which part of the great design we fit into and do that work with utmost diligence. In that way, our work will not be wasted and we can be very sure we are co-labourers in God’s Kingdom, and not building our own empires.

THOUGHT: Am I obedient to the leading and guidance of the Holy Spirit?

PRAYER: Father, give me a humble heart that is willing to obey and follow Thee.

FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 19

ACTS 16:11-15

JOHN 21:15-18

“...thou shalt stretch forth thy hands,
and another shall gird thee...”

SPIRIT-LED DESTINATIONS

Submission to the will of God in missions work, and even in our daily lives, does not mean instant success and reward according to the world's standard. It must include waiting for God's perfect season to open the door for audiences whose hearts are prepared to believe. The exact time is in the hands of the Lord. There are missionaries who waited for a decade before a single convert confessed Christ. However, having one soul come to Christ is more than enough reward for the privilege of going into missions.

An opened assembly: Luke described what seemed to be very smooth travel. The Spirit of God provided for their needs and transport to reach their destination, i.e. east of what we call Europe today! Acts 16:10 records the beginning of the “we” records of Luke which means Luke himself was travelling with Paul and the others. When they arrived in the chief city of Macedonia, called Philippi, the Lord opened an opportunity for them. *“And on the sabbath we went out of the city by a river side, where prayer was wont to be made; and we sat down, and spake unto the women which resorted thither”* (Acts 16:13).

An opened heart: Only the Lord can regenerate a depraved heart with the Spirit of God by His grace, granting man the faith to repent of sins and believe in Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour. Lydia, the first convert, paid attention to the missionaries' preaching and the Spirit of God applied the words to her heart. She believed and was baptised together with her household.

It is recorded that William Carey, the Father of modern missions, preached daily for seven years without a convert. He was not a gifted preacher when he was preparing for ordination in 1785. He was rejected when he gave his first sermon as a candidate. It took two more years for him to be eventually ordained to the ministry. Yet, he was described as a man whose love was so great that he would pay any price, make any sacrifice and undergo hardship, to bring the gospel of Christ to as many as possible. His first convert came in the last months of his seventh year of missionary work. It is worth the labour!

THOUGHT: Do I rejoice when souls are saved?

PRAYER: Father, lead me to one unsaved soul today!

SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 20

ACTS 16:16-18

1 PETER 5:8-9

“...the devil,
as a roaring lion, walketh about,
seeking whom he may devour.”

RESIST THE DEVIL!

As we have repeatedly mentioned, Satan and his cohorts are doubling their efforts to keep people from believing in Christ. They have many tactics to find the Achilles' heel of the Christian. If it is not in opposition and persecution, they flatter to seduce you with adoration and promotion. If we are not careful, we may find ourselves falling into a trap which is difficult to get out of. Thus, this passage reveals to us the nature of praise from the devil.

A spirit of divination: A woman who was a fortune-teller was possessed by the spirit of divination. The word translated “*divination*” (Acts 16:16) is used only in this verse throughout the Bible and refers to a python or a giant snake. Satan used her to do what the modern churches today are practising: self-esteem or the positive mental attitude. What she said apparently was true, but it was exaggerated to fuel pride and arrogance in the hearts of the missionaries that they might sin and receive God's chastisement.

A spirit of grief: This evil-inspired lady kept repeating the “praise” for many days which grieved Paul. The Apostle was greatly disturbed and annoyed. Certainly, this is not the kind of praise that is from above. When the Apostle could not take it, he commanded the evil spirit to come out of her in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. The devil left and the grievous words stopped. There is no need for us to be praised especially if it is from the devil. This will not give us comfort or joy, but grief!

Satan uses every opportunity to tempt the people of God to sin and be chastised by Him. This spirit of divination is particularly of the same wavelength as those who are in the “word faith movement.” They do not just flatter others, but most of all they flatter themselves. They claim to have the powerful words of God at Creation which is nothing more than faith in their own faith. This is foolish and ridiculous yet many so-called Christians today are caught in this deception. Do not be fooled by Satan.

THOUGHT: Am I living in a Christian's battleground? Or a playground?

PRAYER: Father, shield me from all the attacks of the enemy.

PHYSICAL PERSECUTION

We have learned that serving in the missions field is entering enemy's territory. We must therefore be ready to face not only spiritual dangers but real, actual, physical attacks. It is not a holiday, unlike how some churches would lure our young people to go to the missions field with touristy and scenic places highlighted rather than evangelism. As a result, our missions trips today are nothing but tours and sight-seeings.

Beaten with many stripes: Satan was angered having been thwarted in his plan using the woman with the spirit of divination. Paul was arrested and others were brought to court being falsely accused. They were accused of disturbing the city, throwing the people into confusion and causing chaos. Without proper trial the city leaders of Philippi commanded the people to beat them. This is the punishment by scourging. The Jews had a limit of forty stripes upon a man, but the Romans did not have such a law. The stripes were wounds caused by a whip-like instrument that lashed the body of the persecuted.

Bound in an inner prison: They were thrown into prison without any just and fair trial. A special charge was left to the jailor to guard them securely. So, the jailor put them into the inner prison and had their feet fastened to the stocks. In such an incarceration, no man could escape. Such an ordeal was most undeserving for people who brought nothing but good news to the people. Yet, the Lord allowed this. Thus we learn that our sole comfort is not in this world, but in the world to come.

As our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ experienced such a terrible and violent persecution on the cross, so also must His followers. Any sacrifices on our part will not pay for any bit of our sins. Yet, any of our pains or anguish must remind us of the immeasurable sufferings our Saviour went through to deliver us out of condemnation. Being reminded of such sorrows and travails, our love and devotion to our Saviour and Lord must increase. Do we shun such terrible situations in life?

THOUGHT: Am I prepared to suffer for my Lord?

PRAYER: Father, I look forward to Thy promise of eternal life.

MONDAY, FEBRUARY 22

ACTS 16:25-34

MATTHEW 5:14-16

*“Let your light so shine before men,
that they may see your good works...”*

MISSIONS FIELD

Every place can be a missions field. Students have their campus as their missions field. Workers have their workplace. Even for those who are converted in prisons, their cells serve as their missions field. As Christians, every place is practically our field of missions. We do not have to go abroad or move to other regions to be regarded as missionaries. We can be a local missionary in our own village!

A place to worship God: Wherever God puts us, we can glorify Him there. Paul and Silas who were stuck in the inner part of the prison could still worship and serve the Lord: “... even when they lay bound with fetters, he saith that in prayer they lauded God, whereby it appeareth that neither the reproach which they suffered, nor the stripes which made their flesh smart, nor the stink of the deep dungeon, nor the danger of death, which was hard at hand, could hinder them from giving thanks to the Lord joyfully and with glad hearts” (Calvin).

A place to preach God: The jail was also their missions field. When a great miraculous earthquake shook the prison, it opened the doors and loosed the prisoners’ chains. The jailor seeing the situation wanted to end his life but Paul prevented him. Knowing the background of Paul and Silas, the jailor was made ready to receive the gospel. One of the most well-known verses in the Bible follows, as Paul and Silas were quick to answer: “*Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house*” (Acts 16:31).

The hearts of the missionaries were ready to worship God in prison for they knew that wherever they were, God had put them there to do His work. The Lord providentially made the place of bondage a place where true freedom was granted. The man who was at the edge of hell was snatched to a secure place, and his loved ones as well. This is the great mercy and grace of God for His elect. He is not limited to save in the synagogues and other places of worship, but even in the most dreaded of places His power to save is boundless!

THOUGHT: Am I a light that manifests the glory of God?

PRAYER: Father, grant me the desire to always glorify Thee.

TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 23
ACTS 16:35-40
1 PETER 2:17-20

“...when ye do well,
and suffer for it, ye take it patiently,
this is acceptable with God.”

LEGAL MISSIONS

We Christians are subject to the authority of the government that rules over the place where we do missions. We are not to be law-breakers, otherwise we cannot invite these leaders to the saving knowledge of God. We must submit to the government and uphold the law and order of the place. We must be models to others. As people of God we acknowledge that the authorities in this world are appointed by the Lord Himself.

Legal rights: What the officials of the city did was illegal. They commanded the people to beat and imprison Paul and Silas without any fair and just trial. They needed to be taught the right thing so that their society would not be plagued with cruelty and debauchery. The magistrates realised their fault and they feared. There was no spirit of vengeance in Paul's answer. He demanded not any persecution against those who abused them. He just wanted them to understand that they were wrong.

Legal responsibilities: The missionaries did not create trouble in Philippi. As responsible members of the society, they obeyed when they were told to depart from the city. They first visited the household of Lydia and they comforted them before they left. The word translated “*comforted*” (Acts 16:40) also means exhorted. Paul declared the Word of God which is the true source of comfort. Only the promises of God have the power to assure the hearts of men and grant peace beyond understanding.

Read Romans 13:1-4. To be Christ-like is to be submissive to the government. Christians are not called to cause trouble in society. Do you? Do you pray for the leaders of your country so that more opportunities for witness will be opened?

THOUGHT: Am I a good testimony as an upright citizen of my country?
PRAYER: Father, I praise Thee for Thy sovereign will over our government leaders.

WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 24

ACTS 17:1-9

JOHN 3:17-18

*“He that believeth on him
is not condemned: but he that
believeth not is condemned already...”*

THESSALONIAN MISSIONS

In every missions field, the scriptures must be the basis in preaching and teaching. After being released from the Philippi prison, Paul and Silas went to Thessalonica via Amphipolis and Apollonia. As usual Paul first visited the synagogue where he knew the Jews could be found. He always followed the pattern: *“to the Jew first”* (Rom 1:16). Having found a synagogue, the Apostle Paul expounded from the Old Testament the prophecy fulfilled in the Lord Jesus Christ. As the city was full of idolatry, Paul’s message pointed out this grave sin among the Thessalonians.

Reasoned out of the Scriptures: There were some who were determined to listen. The Thessalonians listened to Paul’s preaching for three Sabbath days. The idea of *“reasoned”* in Acts 17:2 refers to the preaching, *“opening”* (Acts 17:3) to expounding and *“alleging”* (Acts 17:3) to setting forth the Word of God. Paul never forgot the resurrection as the climax of his gospel presentation. Some of those who listened believed, specifically mentioned were the Greeks, the Gentiles. And there were not a few who believed but a great multitude.

Removed out of the city: However, the unbelieving Jews were envious and gathered people in marketplaces to cause trouble and to attack the believers. As they could not get to the Apostles, they proceeded to harm the new believers who had received the missionaries. There will always be those who receive the vent of anger from the enemy. They wanted Paul ejected from their place, or might even have wanted him killed if possible.

The missions in Thessalonica in spite of rejection brought forth fruit that Paul commended in his letter to them. Read 1 Thessalonians 1:5-7.

Let not the Word of God preached to us be wasted and bear no fruit. May those whom God had moved to bring to us the gospel have good memories of us. Let us in turn be good testimonies that others too may receive blessings from us as we have been blessed in the past.

THOUGHT: Am I trusting in the power of the gospel to save?

PRAYER: Father, let my life be a holy vessel of blessings.

THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 25

ACTS 17:10-15

JOHN 5:38-40

*“Search the scriptures;
for in them ye think
ye have eternal life:...”*

BE A BEREAN

Many churches today lack the attitude exemplified by the Berean believers. As we are now at the tail end of the last days and many deceptions are coming into the churches, all the more must we imitate the Berean Christians. Yet, many professing Christians not only reject the Word, but are also criticising the Word. Many more are not even spending time in God's Word but are busy pursuing the things of this world. This malady will lead them into Satan's seduction and they will be deluded even to believe lies.

Searched the Scriptures: Paul and Silas were sent away by the brethren to the next city which was called Berea. The Berean believers were commended for their positive attitude towards the Word of God in contrast to the believers in Thessalonica. They searched the Scriptures daily as to whether what the preachers taught them was really according to the Scriptures.

Secured the preacher: When the Jews of Thessalonica came to Berea to persecute Paul, the Berean believers protected the Apostle and brought him to Athens. The recipients of the blessings from the preachers were most loyal to keep them safe in order that they could still continue to preach. They loved the Word and they loved also the human instruments God used to bring the Word to them.

There was a diligent reading of the Scriptures and searching into it whether what Paul preached was found in the Scriptures. This is the prime duty incumbent upon all who have the Bible in their hands. This attitude is important especially when there are many deceivers today.

In these last days, we must not be naïve. If you search the Internet, you will find thousands of preachers from all shades of Christianity. We must be watchful and prayerful, and not engage with the poisonous and false teachings on the Internet. Stick with your pastor if he is appointed by God and is faithfully expounding the Scriptures to you. Otherwise, as you search daily the Scriptures, please seek God's leading for you to go to a church that truly feeds you from God's Word.

THOUGHT: Am I an example of what it means to be a Christian?

PRAYER: Father, help me to walk aright that I may glorify Thee.

FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 26
ACTS 17:16-21
JOHN 4:23-24

*“God is a Spirit:
and they that worship him must
worship him in spirit and in truth.”*

THE MISSION TO ATHENS

Athens was the most celebrated city of the ancient world. However, it was wholly given to idolatry. There is a sarcastic saying of the Roman satirist that it was “easier to find a god at Athens than a man.” When Paul first reached Athens, he was alone.

Debated with the Jews: While waiting for Silas and Timothy to arrive, he went to reason with the Jews in their synagogue. Paul also fearlessly confronted the Jews and the religious people in marketplaces.

Discoursed with the Philosophers: Paul met “*certain philosophers of the Epicureans, and of the Stoicks*” (Acts 17:18). The philosophy of the Epicureans “was a system of atheism, and taught men to seek as their highest aim a pleasant and smooth life and were called the ‘Sadducees’ of Greek paganism” (Easton). The Stoics “taught that there was one Supreme Being, but many subordinate gods, and that man had similar faculties to the gods. Intellect was to be their guide, and pleasures and pains of the body were not to be regarded. From this sect the English word ‘stoic’ is derived. Pantheism, fatalism, and pride were the leading features of the stoics” (Morrish).

“Athens then had more that was splendid in architecture, more that was brilliant in science, and more that was beautiful in the arts, than any other city in the world; perhaps more than all the rest of the world united. Yet there is no account that the mind of Paul was filled with admiration; there is no record that he spent his time in examining the works of art; there is no evidence that he forgot his high purpose in an idle and useless contemplation of temples and statuary. His was a Christian mind; and he contemplated all this with a Christian heart. That heart was deeply affected in view of the amazing guilt of a people that were ignorant of the true God, and that had filled their city with idols reared to the honour of imaginary divinities; and who, in the midst of all this splendour and luxury, were going down to the gates of death” (Barnes).

Do we have the burden to evangelise?

THOUGHT: Am I worshipping other gods (self, money)?

PRAYER: Father, convict my heart to love Thee with my all.

SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 27
ACTS 17:22-34
LUKE 18:24-25

*“How hardly shall they
that have riches enter
into the kingdom of God!”*

AGAINST IDOLATRY

Many of today’s popular messages from the pulpit are rich with the idea of health and wealth. The prosperity gospel is so attractive that without it, sermons are judged as boring and bigoted. What we need to do is to revive that kind of preaching that brings hard-hitting messages against sin. One of the reasons many are taken in by movements cooperating with the Roman Catholics is the lack of preaching against idolatry.

Worship in ignorance: The people in Athens were very religious but ignorant of the truth. They worshipped idols which they admitted they did not know. However, God demands that man worship Him in truth, which is according to the Bible. Paul explained that God is man’s Creator and He must not be represented by statues and images created by man. He is Spirit and He must be worshipped in spirit and in truth.

Worship by repentance: The idea of repentance is not just sorrow for sin but a change of mind in respect of one’s sins, God and self. Repentance is part and parcel of saving faith. A faith that saves receives Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour and as God’s perfect provision to take away sins and set man free from condemnation. It also acknowledges that He will be man’s righteous Judge when He comes again. Paul’s preaching highlighted the fact of Christ’s resurrection (1 Cor 15:19).

“There were some who were ordained to eternal life, to whom the Gospel came in power, and they received the love of the truth, and their hearts and affections were knit unto the apostle; and they followed him, and kept to him, and privately conversed with him, and believed his doctrine, and in Jesus Christ, whom he preached unto them; to these the Gospel was the savour of life unto life, when to the scoffers and mockers it was the savour of death unto death: and this is the fruit and effect of the Gospel ministry...” (Gill).

We have to continue sharing the Word of God with all power and boldness, trusting in the Spirit of God to accomplish what He has ordained.

THOUGHT: Do I love the treasures of this world?

PRAYER: Father, search my heart and know my thoughts.

LORD'S DAY, FEBRUARY 28

ACTS 18:1-11

MATTHEW 28:18-20

“...lo, I am with you always,
even unto the end of the world. Amen.”

THE CORINTHIAN MISSION

In doing missions work, one has to be ready for opposition from unbelievers. If missionaries think they will be welcomed with garlands and feasts when they arrive, they are mistaken! One thing missionaries must be sure of is that they have truly received from God their call to the missions field. This assurance of calling will see them through the many difficulties in the field. God will keep His workers secure while they achieve the goals He has for them in the missions field.

Foes: Paul presented the gospel to the Jews to convince them that Jesus is the Messiah of God. But the Jews resisted the message and blasphemed the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. Paul was not intimidated and told them of the danger of the coming judgment upon them who heard the saving words of eternal life but remained hardened and rejected the Lord Jesus.

Friends: Paul found comfort in the fellowship of Aquila and Priscilla. When Silas and Timothy arrived from Macedonia, Paul was encouraged. He preoccupied himself in testifying to the Jews that Jesus is the Christ. Best of all, however, was the comforting vision of the Lord Jesus speaking to him. The Lord reminded the Apostle of the promise that He would always abide with him. This is by far the greatest comfort for us too as it is promised in His Word.

It is highly possible that Paul was at this time much discouraged by the violent opposition of the Jews, his very life in danger. Yet, God was pleased to give him this vision and His words to assure His faithful servant to continue regardless of the tough situation he was in. Read Acts 18:9-10. Paul must go on preaching.

Every servant of God, in one way or another, at certain times, will face depressing situations that may cause him to want to give up. Let us remember the call of God to us and be comforted that He never changes in His appointment. He will see you through all the way until He says, “*Well done, thou good and faithful servant*’ (Matt 25:21), come home.”

THOUGHT: Am I ready to do God's will in spite of adversities?

PRAYER: Father, I thank Thee for Thy faithful promises.

MONDAY, MARCH 1

ACTS 18:12-17

MARK 6:4-6

*“And he marvelled because
of their unbelief..”*

PROVIDENTIAL INDIFFERENCE

Our God is mighty to do things beyond man's imagination. In Acts 18:12-17, He allowed even the indifferent magistrate to cooperate with His decrees. This providential act of God in the midst of evil and wicked intentions helped the believers in their work for the Lord. This is amazing to believers and astonishing to unbelievers.

Indifference to religion: This is another proof of the historical accuracy of Luke's record when he referred to Gallio as the proconsul of Achaia. As to the assault against Paul in Corinth for his teachings, Gallio was not bothered by the Jews' complaints. He was *“no judge of such matters”* (Acts 18:15).

The Jews failed in their evil intentions to have the Apostle executed by the Romans. Gallio probably thought what Paul warned later that the Jews have *“foolish questions, and genealogies, and contentions, and strivings about the law; for they are unprofitable and vain”* (Titus 3:9).

Indifference to repression: The Greeks vented their madness at the chief ruler of the synagogue, Sosthenes. Although the cruelty was done before the deputy Gallio, he was not concerned about their violence. Gallio remained cold-hearted towards their actions and refused to condemn Paul. It was a sorry state for Sosthenes, but I believe Paul was more than glad to receive the beating rather than be executed by Gallio. Paul recognised Sosthenes in his first epistle to the Corinthians as a brother indeed!

God's providential hand is able to control even the lives of the enemies. Read Paul's explanation in Romans 9:14-16. Pharaoh was raised up in order that God might show His power. (Read Romans 11:33.)

Are there perplexing times in your life? How have you been dealing with people who are indifferent to you? Are you on the verge of giving up because of their cold-heartedness towards you? Trust that God allows them to come your way for a purpose which you will understand later. Do not underestimate your God Almighty!

THOUGHT: Am I harbouring grudges against some people?

PRAYER: Father, help me to love those I am struggling to love.

TUESDAY, MARCH 2

ACTS 18:18-22

LUKE 9:23-24

*“...take up his cross daily,
and follow me.”*

THE BEST HELP

Jesus reminded us that we must make sure we do not sin when we vow, or we had better not make a vow. Paul gave us an example of how he planned for his trip in order to fulfil his promise to God. We are limited in many ways, nevertheless, if we have vowed something to God we must with utmost desire carry it out.

Persistence: Paul said goodbye to his brethren as he made a vow signified by the shaving of his head. Calvin explained, “Therefore, he did shear his head for no other cause, save only that he might apply himself to the Jews, who were as yet ignorant, and not thoroughly taught; as he doth testify that he took upon him the voluntary observing of the law, from which he was freed, that he might gain those who were under the law, (1 Corinthians 9:20).” He was entreated to stay longer, but he did not in order to pursue his vow.

Preparedness: Acts 18:18-22 is the planned itinerary of Paul’s travel. He did not miss his primary obligation of teaching in Ephesus and arranged for his return. He sailed from Ephesus to Caesarea, proceeding to Jerusalem then to Antioch. It was the Apostle’s desire to return again to Ephesus, and the Lord providentially granted this in his third missionary journey. God has the power to order the events in a Christian’s life for the fulfilment of wishes that are in line with His will.

It is a common saying that if you fail to plan, you plan to fail. When we promise the Lord to do something for His ministry, we ought to give time for planning and praying in seeking the Lord’s will. We are not to serve God “que sera, sera” (whatever will be, will be). We have to commit everything to God with our utmost diligence. “Self-help with God’s help is the best help!” (Rev Timothy Tow).

Are we sincere in our business for the Lord? Do we take every step to make sure that His ministry or missions work is implemented in the best way for His glory? As we have promised the Lord to serve Him, let us do our best and let Him do the rest.

THOUGHT: Am I diligently doing my part in the work for the Lord?

PRAYER: Father, I thank Thee for giving me the privilege to serve Thee.

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 3

ACTS 18:23-28

1 TIMOTHY 4:12-13

*“Let no man despise thy youth;
but be thou an example of the believers...”*

MISSIONS FOLLOW-UP

The third missionary journey was necessary to assess the believers in the churches that the Lord had established. Missions work is not “touch and go,” but “teach and do.” We have to continue teaching and exhorting the people that they may apply what was taught. This requires time and re-visitation of the places. However, this will mean a lot to the believers in the missions field. It will encourage them to continue in their faith and be steadfast in their service for the Lord.

Strengthening the disciples: Paul travelled the same overland route which he used during his second missionary journey (Acts 15:41). It was through a narrow mountainous pass called the “Cilician Gates.” He made firm and established the faith of the believers in Galatia and Phrygia. This was done by further teaching them the doctrines of the Christian faith. This confirmed the genuineness of their faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Strengthened disciples: Acts 18:24-28 is an evidence of strengthened believers. We cannot expect missionaries to remain in a place and be there forever to nurture the believers. The biblical principle in 2 Timothy 2:2 is important for every missions work and church ministry. Having learnt from their teacher Paul, Aquila and Priscilla expounded to Apollos “*the way of God more perfectly*” (Acts 18:26) when Apollos knew “*only the baptism of John*” (Acts 18:25).

Paul’s missionary journeys were not in vain as he was zealous in strengthening the believers. Those who were strengthened went on to strengthen others also. Let this be the heart of every believer in the church: to become an instrument in building others up in the faith. Let there be no envy or pride of promoting yourself, having “secret ingredients” so that no one can get ahead of you.

Do you feel insecure when some church members are strengthening others? Or do you not want to grow and are lazy to learn God’s Word leaving the pastor and teachers to do all the work? Both the former and the latter are hindrances to the work of the Lord!

THOUGHT: Am I praying for young believers to grow and mature?

PRAYER: Father, grant me the wisdom to edify my brethren.

THURSDAY, MARCH 4

ACTS 19:1-7

ROMANS 8:8-9

“...Now if any man have not
the Spirit of Christ,
he is none of his.”

PROFESSOR OR POSSESSOR?

There are professors of Christ who become followers of the ways and practices of Christians but are never possessors of Christ. Therefore every leader of the church must seek the Lord's discernment so that continuous indoctrination can be done to lead the people to genuine faith in Jesus Christ. If they remain just knowing Jesus Christ without having received Him, they would remain outside of the Kingdom of God though they are inside the church.

The indwelling of the Spirit: Paul realised that there were disciples who were ignorant or unsure of the existence of the Holy Spirit. This was a gross lapse for this was already taught in the Old Testament. However, this was evidently true for even Nicodemus did not understand the concept of how unless a man is born again “*of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God*” (John 3:5). These disciples knew only of repentance but they did not have faith in the finished work of the perfect life of the Lord Jesus Christ, His death on the cross, and His resurrection. Without it, there is no true confession and no indwelling of the Spirit of God, which is the mark of the inward grace in every believer.

The filling of the Spirit: The indwelling is manifested in the filling of the Spirit which means the life of the believer expresses the working of the Spirit in his life. The disciples who were indwelt by the Spirit demonstrated the Spirit's controlling power when they spoke other languages and declared the wonderful works of God. This established the presence of God's Spirit in their lives, confirming their possession of Christ's saving grace in them. (Read Galatians 5:18, 22-25.)

Is your life under the control of the Spirit of God? Or are you still being controlled by the works of the flesh? Do you hear the still small voice of the Spirit of God convicting you of your sins and calling you to confess your sins to the Father for forgiveness? Are you hungering for the truth of God's Word to nourish your spiritual life? Are you thirsting for spiritual things in life rather than seeking after the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life?

THOUGHT: Am I filled with the Spirit of God?

PRAYER: Father, help me to be always moved and guided by Thy Spirit.

FRIDAY, MARCH 5

ACTS 19:8-10

2 TIMOTHY 2:14-15

*“Study to shew thyself
approved unto God...”*

BIBLE COLLEGE MOVEMENT

Here we can see an example of how God began the Bible College movement. He arranged a situation where Paul could systematically teach the disciples. Paul also saw the need for daily instruction to equip the disciples.

Separated the disciples: Paul for three months taught and convinced the disciples about the Kingdom of God. However, when there were those who acted stubbornly and refused to change their minds, he withdrew from them and set apart those who were willing to learn. Once he found a public place, a lecture hall of Tyrannus, he taught daily in this first Bible School. Though a one-man faculty, he continued because of his burden to impart to his students the precious Word of God.

Scattered the disciples: The curriculum was for two years. He lectured from the Scriptures alone, and nothing else. We can discern that the graduates of this Bible College did not remain in Ephesus but were moved to go and preach in other places what they had learned. Asia heard the Word through this small band of Bible College graduates. The people, both Jews and Greeks, heard nothing but the Word of Jesus Christ.

“Luke doth not mean that the men of Asia came thither to hear Paul; but that the smell [savor] of his preaching went throughout all Asia, and that the seed was sown far and wide; so that his labor was fruitful not only to one city, but also to places which were far off; and that cometh to pass oftentimes, that when the truth of God is preached in one place, it soundeth where the voice of the minister cannot sound, being spread abroad far and wide; because it is delivered from hand to hand, and one doth teach another. For one man were not sufficient, unless every man were for himself diligent to spread abroad the faith.” (Calvin).

As one said, “Without the Bible College the church will die!” Pray for the Bible College movement.

THOUGHT: Am I contributing to the training of God’s ministers?

PRAYER: Father, show me how I can be of help to Thy workers.

SATURDAY, MARCH 6

ACTS 19:11-20

JOHN 14:10-12

*“...He that believeth on me,
the works that I do shall he do also...”*

AUTHENTICATIONS OF FAITH

In these days of deception, every Bible-believing Christian must be watchful and prayerful and be discerning of false believers. Satan's attacks against the church may take many forms. The Lord, however, will reveal and expose those who are not truly His, those who are impostors. We thank the Lord for His promise that the elect shall not be deluded to believe a lie, but that the Lord will keep them from being deceived.

Special miracles: The Lord authenticated Paul's divine appointment through special miracles. Diseases were healed and evil spirits fled by God's power. There were also false believers, however, who presumptuously assumed power to cast out demons using Jesus' name. Instead, they were overpowered by the devil. This caused many to fear Jesus' name!

Spiritual manifestations: Many who practised magical arts confessed their wickedness. They voluntarily brought those scrolls which they used. This was a true manifestation of their regeneration in Christ. They surrendered everything from their dark past. The amount is estimated to be fifty thousand days' wages or it would require over 150 people working a full year to equal the financial value of those scrolls! (Arnold)

I remember the time my wife and I came to truly believe in the Jesus Christ of the Bible. We had to take out all our rosaries, prayer booklets, charismatic CD's of contemporary Christian music (CCM) and many others to throw them into the rubbish bin. (No burning was allowed in the country we were in!) Of course, burning is the best way so that others may not be able to get hold of and use those items for themselves.

Do you still hide some memorabilia of your old religion? Do you still keep the idols and altars in your homes because they are an ancestral inheritance and are expensive possessions? Read 2 Corinthians 6:16.

THOUGHT: Am I clear in my conscience, having surrendered everything to God?

PRAYER: Father, convict me by Thy Spirit to give up all evil things in life.

LORD'S DAY, MARCH 7

ACTS 19:21-22

JOHN 20:20-21

*"...as my Father hath sent me,
even so send I you."*

BURDENS IN MISSIONS

Anyone who has done missions work will long in his heart to go again. Somehow it is not in the hearts of missionaries to stay at home. They have the compulsion from the Spirit of God to go and teach, baptise and teach. If you have this heart to go then God has endowed you with the gift of a missionary. There are places that need the gospel, and yet there are places that are needful of strengthening. A missionary may desire to be at different places at the same time!

Purposed to go: The Holy Spirit placed in the heart of Paul to go to Jerusalem passing through Macedonia and Achaia, after which he also resolved in his mind to go to Rome. This burden was purely of the Spirit. Paul had learned that it was not his own preferred plan that must be done but that which was according to the guidance of the Spirit. The missionary is to pray and seek for the Lord's will as to where He wants him to go. Different places may come to mind and burdens may be real and reasonable, but only God's will must be done!

Preferred to stay: With the burden from the Spirit of God, Paul also had to attend to the needs of some brethren in other places. Paul preferred to stay first in Asia for a season. As the Spirit grants us the burden to go, He has places also for us where we have to remain for a season. This is not to confuse the missionary. He must simply submit to the will of the Lord. Nothing is better than to do the Lord's bidding.

There may be some burden in our heart to go to a certain place to serve. You may be convinced of the heavy burden in your heart to go, and you may have made arrangements to go there. Then suddenly, a change of events may come, and you may have to remain and serve where you are. These are some trying times in the life of God's servants. We thank the Lord we are not left to confusion. The Lord has given people in spiritual authority over us to point the way to us. As under-shepherds of God over us, they must be submitted to. God's Word will confirm it and the Spirit of God will grant us peace to follow His will.

THOUGHT: Am I willing to follow the Lord wherever He leads me?

PRAYER: Father, I thank Thee for the burden to labour for Thee.

MONDAY, MARCH 8
ACTS 19:23-41
1 CORINTHIANS 8:4-6

“...we know that an idol is
nothing in the world, and that
there is none other God but one.”

THE EVILS OF IDOLATRY

Idolatry is the worship of idols, images, anything made by hands, or that which is not God. It is a gross sin that dethrones God and defiles men. It replaces the worship of God with idols such as images of other gods. In modern society, idolatry is seen in men's love for money and vanity. These are the basic principles of idolatry which Satan uses to deceive people from worshipping the living and true God.

Gain: There was a serious public disturbance that was started by Demetrius, a silversmith, who gained much out of the shrines of Diana which he made. He gathered all who were like him – profiting from the business of idol-making. He campaigned against Paul's teaching of the vanity of idols. The city was thrown into confusion when they shouted, “Great is Diana of the Ephesians” (Acts 19:28). The tumult was sparked by their fear of losing gain if their idols became unprofitable because of Paul's teaching on the living and true God in the person of Jesus Christ.

Vain: The confusion made them vainly gather without knowing why they were there. Some cried one thing and some another. Read Psalm 115:4-8.

The worship of idols is promoted by people who are interested in making money. They know their gain will be no more when idolatry is gone. They encourage people and justify the idolatrous way of worship because they know they can gain from it. This worship of non-existing things makes the worshippers vain in their imaginations. They worship gods patterned after created beings, which is evil and false. Their desire is only for money to provide their life with vanities.

Do you still hold on to your idols instead of destroying them? What are the idols in your life aside from religious images and relics? Are you not becoming idolatrous also because of your love for gain which makes life vain? Let us examine ourselves to see whether we are truly in the faith that we may be found pleasing before His eyes.

THOUGHT: Do I keep myself away from every form of idolatry?

PRAYER: Father, guard my heart and mind from all vain things in life.

TUESDAY, MARCH 9
ACTS 20:1-12
1 CORINTHIANS 16:1-3

*“Upon the first day of the week
let every one of you
lay by him in store...”*

THE LORD’S DAY

The Lord’s Day, the Christian Sabbath, is the day when the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ is remembered. This is so because on this day His death, His resurrection and His coming again is commemorated. This is also the time to worship God by hearing His Word and learning from the Scriptures. Since this is the Christian’s Sabbath (rest) day, Bible-believing Christians must rest in Him not just spiritually but also physically just as the Old Testament commands in keeping the Sabbath Day.

Coming together to break bread: After visiting and following up with the churches in Macedonia and Achaia, Paul and several brethren went to Troas, where they stayed, on the first day of the week. The assembly was breaking bread. This proves that the first day of the week (or Sunday) is the day when Christians should commemorate the Lord’s Supper and is therefore the Christian Sabbath.

Coming together to hear the Word: On the Lord’s Day, Paul preached unto the brethren though he was to travel the next day. Paul’s zeal to preach the Word was not bound by time. He was not inhibited from preaching even until break of day. A man falling asleep vividly described the length of Paul’s lecture, but that did not deter him from preaching on until he had to depart.

“As it is the law of nature, that, in general, a due proportion of time be set apart for the worship of God; so, in His Word, by a positive, moral, and perpetual commandment, binding all men, in all ages, He hath particularly appointed one day in seven, for a Sabbath, to be kept holy unto Him: which, from the beginning of the world to the resurrection of Christ, was the last day of the week; and, from the resurrection of Christ, was changed into the first day of the week, which, in Scripture, is called the Lord’s Day, and is to be continued to the end of the world, as the Christian Sabbath” (WCF 21.7).

Are we mindful to keep the Lord’s Day (not the Lord’s Hour) holy?

THOUGHT: Am I keeping the whole Lord’s Day holy?

PRAYER: Father, may we remember the Lord’s Day for Thy glory.

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 10

ACTS 20:13-21

1 TIMOTHY 1:12-14

“...for that he counted me faithful,
putting me into the ministry...”

FAITHFUL MINISTRIES

As Paul journeyed back to Jerusalem, he decided to have a short visit with the elders of the Ephesian church. The under-shepherd's heart reflected the Great Shepherd's love and care for His flock. Being in a hurry, he called for them to meet him. He reminded them how they had seen him serve and testify of the Word, and therefore they too must in like manner faithfully do so.

Ministry of service: Calvin explained, “To serve the Lord is taken in this place, not for to worship God in holiness and righteousness, which is common to all the godly; but it doth signify to execute a public function.” Paul called to mind his way of serving the brethren with humility of mind, not with pride. He did not serve hypocritically but with sincerity. He served fearlessly in the midst of many dangers. The Apostle desired that the Ephesian elders serve in the same way.

Ministry of Scriptures: Paul “*kept back nothing that was profitable*” (Acts 20:20). What were these “*profitable*” things? He was referring to the message he testified to both the Jews and Gentiles. This is the treasure that was entrusted to him. The Word of God is mighty to save everyone who believes. This gospel calls for “*repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ*” (Acts 20:21). Paul solemnly declared both sides of the gospel coin: turning away from sin and turning towards the Lord Jesus Christ, receiving His grace to believe.

Church ministries must not only be a service to others but must be focused on God's Word. Otherwise it will be nothing more than a social club or charitable organisation. At the same time, ministries must not just be for the accumulation of God's Word, but also for the application of it by the believers. Or else it is just an academic, intellectual engagement with the Bible, producing scholars and intellectuals. This two-pronged ministry of Paul is a biblical pattern which makes for a profitable ministry.

THOUGHT: Am I truly serving the Lord under my church's ministries?

PRAYER: Father, show me how I can serve Thee rightly.

THURSDAY, MARCH 11

ACTS 20:22-31

1 CORINTHIANS 4:1-3

“...as of the ministers of Christ,
and stewards of the mysteries of God.”

FAITHFUL MINISTERS

Each believer receives at least one gift from God to exercise within the body of Christ. Some may be given more tasks by God, some less. He knows each of our abilities for He is our Creator. He designed each one of us differently. But ministers, ordained of God, must perform the following roles to function well in their respective ministries. Failure to perform any of these will render his ministry incomplete.

Witness for the gospel of grace: Paul's sufferings throughout his missionary journey did not move him to leave the ministry, for he counted more precious the accomplishment of his task, to testify of the gospel of the grace of God in Christ Jesus, than his own life. Read 1 Corinthians 15:1-4.

Warn against grievous wolves: It was necessary for Paul to warn the elders of the attacks of the enemy from without and from within. Grievous wolves shall come and enter to devour the flock and there will be false leaders among them who shall be teaching contrary to the Scriptures and cause many to depart from the faith. Thus Paul did not fail to warn them “*night and day with tears*” (Acts 20:31). This is a needful ministry in the church in these last days when there are false teachers and false believers, and there is so much deception both from the world and from within the church.

Apostasy or falling away is one of the signs of the soon return of our Lord Jesus Christ. Apostasy will therefore surely come as Paul said in 2 Thessalonians 2:3: “*Let no man deceive you by any means: for that day shall not come, except there come a falling away first.*” Satan shall do his best to deceive the church and many shall be taken in by his subtle ways. The ministers of God are given the charge to feed the flock with God's Word as well as to warn them against poisonous false doctrines.

Every Christian must desire to be always found on the Lord's side. Are you receiving the preaching from your faithful ministers that are based on the infallible and inerrant Scriptures?

THOUGHT: Am I faithfully discharging my duties as a Christian?

PRAYER: Father, grant me the zeal to pray for my church ministers.

FRIDAY, MARCH 12

ACTS 20:32-38

LUKE 6:37-38

*“Give, and it shall be given unto you;
good measure, pressed down...”*

BLESSINGS TO GIVE

“Hereby perceive we the love of God, because he laid down his life for us: and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren. But whoso hath this world’s good, and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him? My little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue; but in deed and in truth” (1 John 3:16-18). There are practical things in life that we must attend to as we keep one another strengthened in the faith.

Supplies in life: Paul commended the elders to God for their assurance of a heavenly inheritance. As spiritual heirs of the abundant riches in Christ, they were not to be concerned about the physical supplies. Paul himself set an example in providing for his own needs. He therefore understood what it meant to be a struggling, needy person. Read what Jesus said in Luke 14:12-14.

Sacrifices in life: Paul needed to go even though he wanted to stay with the believers in Ephesus. It was a heart-wrenching farewell where he knew he would not be coming back again to them. Yet, for believers, deep in their heart, such sacrifices are necessary for the work of the Lord to continue. It was also a blessing to let Paul go for then more people would hear the gospel of Christ.

A missionary, Jim Elliot, in his famous quote, said, “He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain that which he cannot lose.” Indeed, Christians must have a generous heart of giving both physical and spiritual supplies to those who are in need. This is a mark of one who is truly assured of his eternal inheritance in heaven.

Do you have this heart to give to those who are materially and spiritually lacking? Let your life be a good example, manifesting the love of God in your life. Love not in words only but by your good works!

THOUGHT: Am I giving back to the Lord and to others without grudging?

PRAYER: Father, I thank Thee that I can give what Thou hast first given me.

SATURDAY, MARCH 13

ACTS 21:1-16

MATTHEW 16:21-23

“...he must go unto Jerusalem,
and suffer many things...”

THE LORD’S WILL

There are critics of the Bible who comment that Paul was disobedient to the leading of the Spirit of God at this particular period of time; that perhaps Paul became proud and thought he had enough experience to do things according to his own perception. This is, of course, far from the truth. Paul in fact obeyed the prompting of the Holy Spirit that, in spite of the threat, he was not just ready to be bound but even to die for the Lord.

Warned by the disciples: Paul met some of the disciples in Tyre and, through the Spirit, they warned Paul not to go to Jerusalem. However, Paul was not intimidated and continued with his plan to go to Jerusalem in spite of the warning. “The Lord showed to these brethren, of whom Luke maketh mention, what should come to pass; yet, nevertheless, they know not what is expedient, and what Paul’s calling doth require...” (Calvin). They were moved to prevent him because they foresaw the sufferings that Paul was about to face as the Spirit revealed to them.

Warned by a prophet: The reason the disciples prevented Paul from going was made clear in Agabus’ prophecy. The Spirit revealed what was about to come into Paul’s life but was not preventing him from going. In fact, Paul was so ready for these things to happen that he said, “*I am ready not to be bound only, but also to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus*” (Acts 21:13). This is the heart of one who truly knows the will of God for his life. No suffering or imprisonment, not even death, can keep such a man from obeying the Lord.

Knowing the perfect will of God in our lives as Christians, may our hearts be ready to follow Him. Are you ready? Are you assured of the Lord’s direction in your life? Make sure it is not your own understanding but the guidance of the Spirit of God as you seek His purposes in the holy Scriptures. Keep on studying God’s Word and keep on knowing His will!

THOUGHT: Am I ready to suffer for the Lord Jesus Christ’s sake?

PRAYER: Father, grant me the grace to submit to Thy holy will.

LORD'S DAY, MARCH 14

ACTS 21:17-26

JOHN 9:28-29

*"...Thou art his disciple;
but we are Moses' disciples."*

ACCUSED AS AN APOSTATE

Paul kept to what Moses and the law had prophesied concerning the Messiah to the best of his ability. Yet he was labelled an apostate of the Jewish religion. Strictly speaking, Paul was the most faithful and zealous messenger of the Old Testament prophecies. He was always pointing everyone to the Lord Jesus Christ, the central theme of the Old Testament.

Forsaking Moses: The Jews who were converted to Christianity accused Paul of teaching contrary to their belief. It was alleged that Paul taught the people to forsake Moses' law, eg. the circumcision. The Jews falsely accused him for being an enemy of Moses and an apostate of the Law. These reports reached the ears of the church leaders in Jerusalem. As he was reputed to be of the Jewish rites and customs, he caused many Jewish converts to be offended.

Forbidding the law: The Jews, though they had received the gospel, thought that the ceremonial laws still had to be observed. Paul in condescension to their weakness and to prevent their taking offence, and to prove that the accusations against him were groundless, submitted to the advice of the apostles to conform himself to some of the Jewish ceremonies and purifications. Paul knew these were not needful but they were also not unlawful to the Christians. Read what Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 9:19-23.

May we have the heart of Paul to condescend that others may be drawn to Christ. Let us, however, be careful that we do not go against the Scriptures. We must never compromise our faith as laid down in the Bible just to please unbelievers. We can join the wedding receptions or visit the wake of our unbelieving relatives and friends but do not participate in their idolatrous services and practices. Do you?

THOUGHT: Am I willing to humble myself for the sake of lost souls?

PRAYER: Father, make my heart beat like Thine, that I too may love the undeserving.

MONDAY, MARCH 15
ACTS 21:27-36
MATTHEW 26:55-56

*“But all this was done,
that the scriptures of the prophets
might be fulfilled...”*

PAUL'S ARREST

The prophecy of Agabus was fulfilled. Paul knew this would come and he was ready. In fact, he did not resist the mob. The Lord prepared him to face this arrest in order to obey God's will. As followers of Christ, we must be ready to go through what the Lord Jesus Christ went through in His life while He was on earth. How can we call ourselves followers of Christ if we leave Him when it is rugged and uphill?

Accused publicly: When the Jews (who came from Asia where Paul had missions work) saw him, they publicly blamed him with false claims. They accused him of teaching *“against the people, and the law, and this place”* (Acts 21:28). He was labelled being against the Jews, the laws of Moses, and the Temple. He was also accused of bringing a Gentile into the temple which was unlawful for the Jews. All these were false allegations, but people believed them and were about to kill Paul when, by God's providence, Roman soldiers arrived.

Arrested providentially: When the chief captain arrived, they stopped beating Paul. The chief captain inquired as to why they wanted to kill Paul. In the confusion, the people were unable to say why and how the tumult started. The Lord in His perfect timing delivered Paul from this near-death experience. He had been through similar experiences before, and he knew that when God again extended his earthly life, his work on earth was not yet complete.

Paul in this passage understood that the will of God for him was to face persecution. Although there were several warnings given, the Apostle knew it was God's will for him. Every believer must also be ready to face persecution and to bravely suffer for the Lord's sake always. Read 2 Corinthians 4:16-18.

Are you prepared to face adversities in life? Do you realise how much the Lord Jesus Christ suffered for us that we may be saved to the uttermost? Let us understand that these earthly sufferings are but temporary, and the glory that awaits us is for eternity!

THOUGHT: Am I submissive to the will of God even unto death?

PRAYER: Father, give me the grace to face difficult circumstances in life.

TUESDAY, MARCH 16

ACTS 21:37-22:21

JOHN 1:10-11

*“He came unto his own,
and his own received him not.”*

MY COUNTRYMEN

Our countrymen are always dear to our hearts. Some may be arrogant and unfriendly but when bad things happen to them, we will and should also feel the pain. There is a nationalistic spirit that binds people of a nation together in times of challenges and adversities. Paul too had his own people in his heart, not for any other reason, but their salvation. *“Brethren, my heart’s desire and prayer to God for Israel is, that they might be saved”* (Rom 10:1).

As a Jew: He introduced himself as a Jew. He did not hate his own people in spite of what they had done to him and how he almost died at their hands. His intention was to convince them of his allegiance to the Mosaic Law so he pointed out his tutelage under the great teacher Gamaliel. He asserted his obedience to the Jewish law and his zeal to Jehovah, God of the Hebrews. He then recalled how he persecuted the church, giving consent to stone Stephen. He went on to describe how he became a believer of the Lord Jesus Christ. He concluded his testimony with the commission to go to the Gentiles.

In Hebrew: He spoke to them in their own language. This was to present clearly to the people as to who he was and how he went around Asia, Macedonia and Achaia to preach the gospel. He condescended to the level of the common Jews that they would see he was innocent and the false allegations of some of the Jews were baseless.

In dealing with his own people, Paul expressed his love and loyalty to his own people. He did not demolish them by pointing out their ignorance and blindness to God’s fulfilment of the Old Testament prophecies in Jesus Christ. He was patient with them to explain carefully the mercy and grace of the Lord upon his life, so that they might receive his testimony.

THOUGHT: Am I burdened to reach out to my own countrymen?

PRAYER: Father, cause me to reach out to my own people for their salvation.

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 17
ACTS 22:22-29
1 PETER 2:13-14

*“Submit yourselves to
every ordinance of man
for the Lord’s sake...”*

SECULAR FAVOURS

“Paul evidently shows an appreciation for the functions of government, under God, in maintaining law and order and promoting justice” (Tow and Khoo). The government is ordained of God to rule and manage a certain kingdom or state. God has given to the populace the rights and privileges as citizens of such. The government can be used by God to provide for and to protect His children. Christians can avail themselves to these God-given provisions and care.

Roman citizen: Paul was rejected by his own people. They wanted him dead. Instead of listening to the testimony of Paul, they became hardened. The chief captain ordered an interrogation with whipping, the Roman way to torture prisoners so that they might disclose their crimes. Paul, with God’s wisdom, revealed that he was a Roman citizen. Being such, it was not lawful for them to scourge him without due process of law.

Roman freeborn: Paul further said that he was even freeborn, born a Roman citizen. Upon hearing this, those who examined Paul left, and the chief captain was fearful. Calvin thought that “the chief captain was afraid, because Paul was bound at his commandment, that he might be scourged, because this was to do injury to the body of a citizen of Rome, and to break the common liberty, and that [although] it was lawful to put a Roman in prison.” Read Titus 3:1.

Are we praying and interceding for the leaders of our country? If not, you should include this in your prayer lists, both personal and in the church. Let us be good citizens of our countries and contribute to the good of the general populace. May we be thankful for the Lord’s appointed leaders and pray that they too may come to the saving grace of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

THOUGHT: Am I thankful for the government of my nation?

PRAYER: Father, I pray for the salvation of my government leaders.

THURSDAY, MARCH 18
ACTS 22:30-23:10
MARK 14:55-56

*“...all the council sought
for witness against Jesus
to put him to death...”*

DECEITFUL LEADERS

The Sanhedrin was the great Jewish council of seventy elders whose jurisdiction was the supreme judicial and administrative council of the Jews. They were people with the highest standard of morality and statesmanship aside from being knowledgeable of the Scriptures. They must be models of what is holy and righteous living, being teachers of the sacred law of Moses and the prophets.

Dishonest council: Paul was brought before the Sanhedrin. He attempted to persuade them of his clear conscience before God, yet he was slapped upon the high priest's order. Paul rebuked the high priest for the unlawful act, and he was accused of dishonouring God's high priest. He criticised and corrected the wrong attitude of Ananias. Paul sounded disrespectful but such tones were necessary to reprove the fault of the chief priest. Paul knew well that he should not speak harshly against the high priest, but such an act from one who was supposedly the highest among the leaders of Jewish community required a forceful reproof. Paul stood as a good witness of what one should be who is a commoner and a spiritual ruler.

Divided council: Paul appealed to the hearts of the council by stating his religious and educational background. In the process, he created a disagreement between the two groups of council members. A bone of contention was cast between the Sadducees (who denied the resurrection) and the Pharisees (who believed in the resurrection). The Lord confounded them and they were divided to the point that the Pharisees declared Paul as one of God and an innocent man.

Read Luke 12:11-12. Man's tendency is to craft his own human reasoning which is not according to the Scriptures. We must rather spend time in prayer and seek the cleansing of our hearts and minds that we may be filled by the Spirit of God and be sensitive to His leading.

THOUGHT: Do I forgive even those who falsely accuse me?

PRAYER: Father, I thank Thee for the assurance of Thy abiding presence.

FRIDAY, MARCH 19
ACTS 23:11
MATTHEW 11:28-30

*“For my yoke is easy,
and my burden is light.”*

THE LORD’S COMFORT

What can comfort and encourage us if not the timely words of God read under the Spirit’s illumination? The canon of Scripture has already been set. We must not expect additional revelations from the Lord for we already have the perfectly inspired and preserved Word of God. There are special revelations, however, to people whom the Lord has chosen for a special purpose. But this is not the norm for all believers.

Be of good cheer: This was the Lord’s command to Paul: “*Be of good cheer, Paul*” (Acts 23:11). The Lord assured him that God is sovereign over all and is in control of everything! No man or council can thwart His divine plan. Let us not forget that our Lord has decreed everything from the beginning until the end. Who is able to change His declarations?

Bear witness at Rome: What comfort it is to a faithful servant of God to be able to continue the work he is assigned to do. He does not seek for pleasures even in the midst of persecution. Paul rejoiced greatly, knowing that his part of the work of evangelism in Rome would be fulfilled.

Calvin commented, “Therefore, let us learn, even in most extreme afflictions, to stay ourselves upon the word of God alone; and let us never faint so long as he quickeneth us with the testimony of his fatherly love. And because oracles are not now sent from heaven, neither doth the Lord himself appear by visions, we must meditate upon his innumerable promises, whereby he doth testify that he will be nigh unto us continually. If it be expedient that an angel come down unto us, the Lord will not deny even this kind of confirmation. Nevertheless, we must give this honor to the word, that being content with it alone we wait patiently for that help which it promiseth us.”

Where do you get comfort in times when you are disheartened and depressed? Let no other book in the world, but the Bible alone, be your source of encouragement!

THOUGHT: Am I drawing comfort from the God of all comforts?

PRAYER: Father, empower me to carry on in spite of the many obstacles.

SATURDAY, MARCH 20

ACTS 23:12-35

JOHN 7:1-2

*“...he would not walk in Jewry,
because the Jews sought to kill him.”*

PRESERVATION PROVIDENCE

God always has His way of preserving His servants. When their assignment is not completed yet, God will by His mighty hand keep them so that they can finish the work. We take comfort in this that if we are doing the work of God, we are assured of His enablement to finish it. Read Philippians 1:6.

Conspiracy planned: God's control in the life of a Christian does not imply a red-carpeted journey. Evildoers are relentless in their pursuit to destroy believers as this is Satan's commission for them. Here, there were more than forty people who had organised themselves and had taken a vow that they would neither eat nor drink till they had killed Paul. The Greek word means “they anathematised themselves” implying the seriousness of the vow they had bound themselves to.

Concealment performed: However, the Lord exposed the plan to the chief captain through a young boy. “Walls have ears” and the evil plot was told to the authorities. The providence of God was remarkable in bringing this conspiracy to the knowledge of Paul's nephew. The Lord moved the heart of the chief captain to transfer Paul to another place, Caesarea. It was approximately 160 km from Jerusalem (as the crow flies). He was transported like a very important person: heavily guarded by 200 soldiers with 70 horsemen and 200 spearmen.

As Peterson wrote in his hymn, “All things work out for good, we know – such is God's great design; he orders all our steps below for purposes divine, for purposes divine. ...So now the future holds no fear, God guards the work begun; and mortals are immortal here until their work is done, until their work is done.”

Nothing comes along our way, bad or good, that has not been allowed or ordered by the Lord. “Some day the path he chose for me will all be understood; in heaven's clearer light I'll see all things work'd out for good, all things work'd out for good!”

THOUGHT: Am I thankful for God's providential working in my life?

PRAYER: Father, pardon me for not trusting Thee for my life's future.

LORD'S DAY, MARCH 21
ACTS 24:1-9
ROMANS 8:26-28

*“And we know that all things
work together for good
to them that love God..”*

FALSE ACCUSER

False accusation is at its worst when it comes from our own kinsmen or religious men, whom we love, who presumably know Christ. We cannot hate them, for they have a special place in our hearts while they try to destroy us. Here Paul was examined before Felix the governor with the high priests and elders who hired an orator to accuse Paul.

Flattering words: The orator, Tertullus, put forth their accusation. He flattered the governor Felix, probably hoping that he might obtain favour on behalf of the high priests and elders for Paul's execution. The eloquent liar employed vain praises that he may darken the mind of the judge. Read Psalm 12:2.

Fabricated words: Tertullus is a very good picture of a false accuser. He accused Paul of events which he did not know of, much less witness. As Calvin observed, “Tertullus doth aim at a double mark. The first is this, that Paul may be delivered to the Jews, because they be very skillful in matters which concern the worship of God and the law of Moses. But and if he deny this, he layeth to his charge a crime worthy of death, because he procured contention among the people. They knew that the Romans did hate nothing more, therefore they urge that the sorest against Paul.”

It is easy to be weary and troubled when obvious lies are spoken against us. It is easy to give up: pack up our things, and leave the ministry. There have been many times in my life when I almost threw in the towel and said, “Enough is enough.” It is not easy to endure being falsely accused as a leech that sucks up money for oneself. I thank the Lord for His all-sufficient grace. It is far greater than the temptation to give up! It is not our name that matters. It is what the Lord has entrusted us with that we may fulfil it according to His way.

Never give up! We have the Omnipotent God on our side! As long as we do things according to His ways, false accusations will not cause us to surrender or to be defeated!

THOUGHT: Am I threatened to give up by false accusations hurled at me?

PRAYER: Father, help me trust in Thee who knows everything about me.

MONDAY, MARCH 22

ACTS 24:10-21

1 PETER 3:14-16

“...be ready always to give an answer
to every man that asketh you
a reason of the hope...”

BIBLICAL APOLOGETICS

Paul's apologetics is the example for our biblical defence of the faith. He did not give proof or evidence to show that he was not guilty. He declared the gospel in order that the people may know it. He confessed his faith and what he believes in so that the hearers might confess Jesus Christ as their Lord and Saviour only. This will open eyes to see. This is the very first step in defending the faith.

What I believe: Paul cheerfully defended himself without anyone's assistance, except, of course, the Holy Spirit's, whom the Lord Jesus promised to all His believers. Paul confessed himself to be a Christian and showed to them how Christ is the fulfilment of the revelation to Moses and all the prophets. He worshiped the God of his fathers, for Jesus Christ is the same as Jehovah of the Old Testament. Jesus Himself said, "*I and my Father are one*" (John 10:30).

What I do: Paul again mentioned that it was because of Jesus' teachings that put him on trial. It was the hope of the resurrection that moved him to go from place to place in order to bring the good news of life eternal for all who believe.

It is tempting to rebut unbelievers with facts and figures about Christianity in order for them to believe. Indeed, we have history, archaeology, and even scientific evidences on our side. These are more than enough to destroy the arguments of the ungodly. Nevertheless, their blindness and ignorance will prevent them from seeing the truth. That is why believers are mandated to presuppose the Scriptures (rather than evidences) as the ultimate criterion of truth in all of their thinking and practice.

God's Word is the starting point, and the self-attesting foundation of all thought and intellectual commitment. Since the Scriptures are an expression of the mind of God (1 Cor 2:16), they are God's logical thoughts. We must presuppose the primacy of Scriptures alone as providing the foundation of all proof. Do you start and end with the Bible in defending the faith?

THOUGHT: Am I aware of the depravity of every man without Christ?

PRAYER: Father, remind me of the gospel which has the power to save.

TUESDAY, MARCH 23
ACTS 24:22-27
MATTHEW 13:37-40

*“..but the tares are the children of
the wicked one; The enemy that
sowed them is the devil..”*

WILES OF THE DEVIL

The enemy will do his best to make believers fall away from their faith. In his time of imprisonment, Paul surely wanted to be released. It would be a great temptation for him to use whatever means available to get himself freed from incarceration, and to justify that it was for the sake of God's work. However, if the means of deliverance is sinful, the believer must immediately disqualify such a means. Jesus warned us in Matthew 10:16: *“Behold, I send you forth as sheep in the midst of wolves: be ye therefore wise as serpents, and harmless as doves.”*

Bribe: Paul was delivered from the wicked intention of the governor. Felix was influenced by greed and sought a bribe. The governor hoped to receive money from Paul in exchange for Paul's release. But Paul did not give in to the temptation for he knew he was innocent. He knew what justice was and he would not be found guilty of attempting to purchase what was his due. The Lord promised him that he would go to Rome to testify for the Lord there.

Benefit: Paul remained for two years in Caesarea. Felix was determined to show favour to the Jews, and let Paul be in custody until the new governor, Porcius Festus, took over. Felix wanted to gain the favour of the Jews for his own benefit, “to secure their favour, and to prevent them, if possible, from accusing him for the evils of his administration before the emperor” (Barnes).

Satan, who is the god of this world, will use people from all strata of society to deceive the believers. From paupers to princes, the technique of temptation is the same – lies and vanities. Paul was steadfast in the good and righteous ways of the Lord and did not engage in sinful ways that would forfeit him from the commission God had given him.

Are we willing to suffer for righteousness sake? Read Ephesians 6:10-13.

THOUGHT: Am I aware of the many temptations of the devil?

PRAYER: Father, please help me not to sin against Thee.

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 24

ACTS 25:1-9

JOHN 8:44-45

*“..He was a murderer
from the beginning, and
abode not in the truth..”*

ROARING LIONS

Peter warned, *“Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour”* (1 Pet 5:8). Satan is always ready to pounce on believers. Thank the Lord that as His beloved children, we are secure in the palm of His hand and nothing can touch or harm us without His permission.

Laying in the way to kill: In Acts 18:10a, the Lord said to Paul, *“For I am with thee, and no man shall set on thee to hurt thee.”* This promise was made in relation to Paul’s fear for his life. Today’s passage buttresses God’s faithfulness when He fulfilled it in Paul’s life. The high priest and the chief of the Jews desired favour from Festus, the new governor, to send Paul to Jerusalem to be investigated. However, their plan was to kill Paul along the way. Providentially, Festus did not accede to their request.

Laying many grievous complaints: Acts 25:7 tells us that the Jews went again to Caesarea to accuse Paul. They laid many grievous complaints against Paul. Yet, they could not prove their charge. Here we can see God’s providential wisdom in Festus. God has power over unbelievers as well!

Calvin commented *“..let us note that the wicked can never be bridled, but they will speak evil of good men, and will impudently slander them; for they resemble the nature of Satan, by whose spirit they are led. Therefore, whereas we be commanded to stop the mouth of the wicked, it must not be so taken as if he shall be free from all backbiting, whosoever shall behave himself uprightly, but that our life may answer for us, and may wipe away all blots of false infamy.”*

The attacks of the enemy will be endless so long as Satan is not yet cast into the Lake of Fire. While he is trying to harass believers today, his is a desperate act because he knows he has not much time left as Christ is coming soon. If Satan is so active, are we doing our part to finish what God has given us?

THOUGHT: Am I prepared to face death for the sake of my Saviour?

PRAYER: Father, may I be ready to face what Thou hast prepared for me.

THURSDAY, MARCH 25

ACTS 25:10-27

MATTHEW 22:20-22

“...Render therefore unto Caesar
the things which are Caesar’s...”

APPEAL TO MAGISTRATES

Read what Paul himself wrote in Romans 13:3. Some rulers may be cruel and immoral, but God has placed them in that position for a purpose. Paul was willing to submit to these magistrates.

Unto Caesar: Another promise was made by God to Paul and was fulfilled in this passage: *“Be of good cheer, Paul: for as thou hast testified of me in Jerusalem, so must thou bear witness also at Rome”* (Acts 23:11). The Lord had appointed him to go to Rome. When he appealed unto Caesar, the Lord caused Festus to agree with the pleading. Paul must face Caesar. This was God’s providence that he would surely arrive in Rome. Since he appealed to appear before the court of Caesar, it was the responsibility of the Roman authorities to bring him safely to Caesar.

Unto the governor: In Acts 9:15, the Lord said to Ananias about Paul, *“Go thy way: for he is a chosen vessel unto me, to bear my name before the Gentiles, and kings, and the children of Israel.”* Paul evidently preached to Festus, the newly arrived governor. Acts 25:19 tells us of how Festus knew the gospel. It was not only Festus who heard the words of God, but also King Agrippa and Bernice who providentially were there. This is Agrippa II the son of Agrippa I who was introduced in the name of Herod in Acts 12, the one who killed James by a sword. They belonged to the Herodian family. Agrippa II was the tetrarch in the north eastern part of Palestine.

There are many people who know about the Lord Jesus Christ. In fact, they may agree that He is the Son of God who came into this world to save sinners. They may be well aware of the life, death of the Lord Jesus Christ, and even His resurrection and ascension. Yet they do not fully trust and believe in their hearts that Jesus Christ is the only way, the truth and the life. They do not repent of their sins and confess Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour and believe in their heart that He rose from the dead.

Have you come across people like this? Continue with doing your part to testify and invite them to believe in Jesus. Salvation is of the Lord.

THOUGHT: Am I praying for the salvation of my national leaders?

PRAYER: Father, please grant wisdom to our country’s leaders.

FRIDAY, MARCH 26

ACTS 26:1-23

1 CORINTHIANS 15:16-19

*“If in this life only
we have hope in Christ,
we are of all men most miserable.”*

THE RISEN SAVIOUR

Paul received his commission directly from the resurrected Christ. It was the compelling reason for his willingness to suffer and die for the task he was given. It was not his own feelings that moved him. The power of the resurrection motivated him to go and preach the gospel. No one will be able to persevere in the hardship of serving God, especially in missions fields, without encountering the risen Christ.

The hope of the resurrection: Paul was introduced by Festus to King Agrippa. Paul was presented as the one whom the Jews declared that *“he ought not to live any longer”* (Acts 25:24). He was allowed to defend himself. He acknowledged that King Agrippa was an expert *“in all customs and questions which are among the Jews”* (Acts 26:3). The word *“expert”* (Acts 26:3) describes someone who is thoroughly acquainted with something. Paul recounted the conversion experience he had with Jesus. This was Paul’s message: the hope of the resurrection which is in the Lord Jesus Christ, when God resurrected from the dead.

The meeting with the resurrected: Paul declared to them what really happened during his conversion. He did not change his testimony and did not compromise but maintained the truth of what had happened to him. He met the resurrected Saviour and that made him turn 180 degrees to repentance and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. Paul truly believed he met his resurrected Saviour.

Read John 11:25-26. Paul made it his marching order to proclaim to all the people that they who confess the risen Christ have eternal life.

So also must we who have experienced true salvation in Christ. Our experience with Christ must move us to continue witnessing to others. We are assured of that hope of the resurrection through our encounter with Him as we live our lives for His glory and honour. Whether they be ordinary men or high officials in our countries, let us be brave and bold to present the gospel of salvation.

THOUGHT: Do I believe in my heart that Christ is risen from the dead?

PRAYER: Father, open my mouth to declare the resurrection of Christ.

SATURDAY, MARCH 27
ACTS 26:24-32
MATTHEW 19:21-22

*“But when the young man
heard that saying,
he went away sorrowful...”*

ALMOST PERSUADED

Many people know what the truth is. They are convinced of the truth that they are sinners and accept without question that they are worthy of judgment. They agree that there is no other way but Christ. They understand it is only by faith in Jesus Christ that they can be saved. The enigma, however, is that they never truly believe. They never take the step forward to repent of their sins and confess Jesus as their Lord and Saviour.

Knows the gospel: Paul knew King Agrippa’s background of living in a Jewish nation and pleaded with him to believe. The “*knoweth*” in verse 26 means intellectual apprehension or understanding. However, without the Spirit, one can never fully understand the gospel.

Agrees with the gospel: Paul was confident of King Agrippa’s knowledge of the prophets. Now he wanted the king to proceed from knowing to agreeing. Agrippa’s answer to Paul’s question in Acts 26:27 did not mean that he was on the brink of becoming a Christian, but that he realised that Paul was trying to use Agrippa’s belief in the prophets to lead him to agreement with what Paul had said about Christ. It was an expression of Agrippa’s contempt towards Paul’s persuasion. Agreeing is far from receiving Jesus. “*Almost*” is the distance between agreeing and truly believing, and it is as far as hell is from heaven.

We have to understand that there is nothing that can overcome the reluctance of the human heart to believe the gospel, except by the grace and mercy of God. Nevertheless, we must do our best to explain the way of salvation. This must be accompanied with earnest prayer to God.

What assures success in evangelism is the truth that the Lord has chosen those whom He will save before the foundation of the world (Eph 1:4). If you are unsure whether you are one of God’s elect, the only way to settle the matter is to “*confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved*” (Rom 10:9). Will you?

THOUGHT: Do I care about those who have not yet believed?

PRAYER: Father, give me a heart to win more souls for Thee.

LORD'S DAY, MARCH 28
ACTS 27:1-44
2 CORINTHIANS 11:25-27

*"...thrice I suffered shipwreck,
a night and a day
I have been in the deep..."*

PROMISED PLACE

The Lord had told Paul that he would reach Rome. Nevertheless, the means and the manner of going there were not up to him. As servants of God, we have to submit to whatever arrangements the Lord has for us. It may not be smooth sailing but God will see us through to reach our God-assigned destination.

As a prisoner: Paul knew, even before this trip, that he must go to Rome. The Lord personally told him that he must bear witness in Rome (Acts 23:11). So when the time came for their journey to Italy, he was not surprised, nor reluctant. Though a prisoner, he enjoyed the liberty to visit the brethren. He was eager to meet and edify the Christians in any and every place they passed through.

As a leader: Paul, by God's wisdom, admonished the centurion and ship owner with what God had foreordained to happen on their journey. The people in-charge did not believe him, and that was a testimony against them. Indeed, a tempestuous wind called Euroclydon arose and crossed their path. Paul saw the disaster they would be facing, so much so that they unloaded some of their cargo. Moreover, the surroundings were very dark and further gave them trouble and distress. They were also hungry and tired. Most of them were already afraid and discouraged but not Paul who assumed leadership in that situation.

Paul exhorted his companions to be of good cheer. Though it was a seemingly fearful and disturbing situation, Paul encouraged them to be calm. An angel of God appeared and told him that not one among the crew and prisoners would die. The Lord guided them to locate a creek with a shore and allowed them to manoeuvre the ship towards it. The ship ran aground and the front part stuck fast into the sand preventing the vessel from overturning.

The Lord's protecting and guiding hand upon Christians is obvious in times of calamities. Can you recognise it?

THOUGHT: Do I fear natural disasters will affect my livelihood?

PRAYER: Father, grant me the courage to face life's calamities.

MONDAY, MARCH 29
ACTS 28:1-10
LUKE 16:29-31

“...If they hear not Moses
and the prophets,
neither will they be persuaded...”

PROMISED SIGNS

Read Mark 16:17-18 for Jesus’ promises to His disciples. These promises were fulfilled in Paul’s life (Acts 28:1-10).

Shall take up serpents: They got safely onto the island called Melita. Providentially, they were warmly welcomed by the local people. The word “*barbarous*” means that the people of Melita were non-Greek-speaking people. When Paul was helping to gather sticks for the fire, a venomous viper fastened onto his hand. But Paul was not harmed by the viper and by this incident he was proven to be innocent. “*Behold, I give unto you power to tread on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy: and nothing shall by any means hurt you*” (Luke 10:19).

Shall lay hands on the sick: Paul was used by God to heal the chief man’s father who had dysentery and fever and other diseases on the island. This made them highly favoured by the people. There was a sudden change inwardly that touched the locals and moved them to honour and treat with kindness Paul and his companions. God used signs and miracles during the Apostolic times to authenticate His messengers and their message of salvation in Christ Jesus. Today, with the completed revelation of God – the Bible – God gives us His message without the means of signs and miracles.

These miraculous events that happened manifested the amazing grace of the Lord upon them. Who could have imagined that by the tempestuous guidance of a storm, the Lord was leading them to people who needed the gospel? How marvellous is God’s way which is far higher than man’s searchings! Storms are not disasters to believers. They are expeditors.

Do you know the reason for God putting you in your present place? Was it just because you desired that your children be near the school of your choice? Or are you in that area because there is a soul waiting for you to witness to? Or maybe you are the one in need of the gospel and by the Lord’s goodness He has brought you to this location to hear the gospel message? Nothing is by chance. It is God’s opportunity for you to believe!

THOUGHT: Do I trust in the Word and not seek signs and wonders?

PRAYER: Father, I thank Thee for Thy forever preserved Word.

TUESDAY, MARCH 30

ACTS 28:11-29

JOHN 17:15-18

*“As thou hast sent me into the world,
even so have I also sent them
into the world.”*

THE ENDS OF THE WORLD

The Scriptures truly cannot be broken. God has promised and it shall be fulfilled to the jot and tittle. Not only was the journey to Rome a fulfilment of a promise but the preaching of the Word was the exact fulfilment of God's Great Commission.

Arrived in Rome: In spite of the sea mishap, Paul was successfully transported smoothly to Rome. They landed first at Syracuse in Sicily, the chief city of that island. From Syracuse they came to Rhegium, a city in Italy. From Rhegium they came to Puteoli. And from Puteoli they went forward towards Rome. We do not know whether they travelled by foot, or whether they had beasts provided for them to ride on (Acts 23:24), but to Rome they must go, and this was their last leg.

Access to preach: There probably were but a few brethren in Puteoli, yet Paul found them. Either they had heard of him, or he had searched them out, and they got together. They desired Paul and his companions to tarry with them seven days, that is, to stay at least one Lord's Day with them and to assist them in their public worship that day. In Rome, Paul was favourably treated by the centurion and was placed under house arrest instead. Although he was a prisoner, he was not placed under isolation in a common jail. Paul dwelt by himself, in some convenient private lodgings where his friends had access to him, even though a soldier was appointed to be his guard.

It is important for Christians to understand that our God whom we trust is always abiding with His children. There will always be limitations in life but His arrangements should not be doubted. It is at these times that His presence can be real to us. The truth is He is always with us but it is usually only when nobody is around that we notice the Lord is beside us.

Do you know that He is always abiding with you? Do you commune with Him always? Let us not miss the blessed privilege to talk with Him.

THOUGHT: Am I desiring to go even to the uttermost part of world?

PRAYER: Father, let me go and teach the gospel to all nations.

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 31
ACTS 28:30-31
LUKE 24:46-48

*“And that repentance and
remission of sins should be preached
in his name among all nations...”*

THE CONTINUING COMMISSION

Every believer has this Commission to fulfil. While we are waiting for His coming, every believer must fulfil this task.

Teaching all nations: Paul did not waste time. Three days after, he called for the chief of the Jews. Paul did this not only out of an extraordinary love which he had for the people, but also because the Apostles were commanded to go to the lost sheep of the house of Israel (Matt 10:5-6). The rejection of the Jews caused them to leave Paul. He announced to them that because of their unbelief, the *“salvation of God is sent unto the Gentiles, and that they will hear it.”*

Teaching all commandments: The Apostle showed an excellent example of constancy in that he offered himself so willingly to all those who were desirous to hear him. Paul was sent by God to preach and teach the whole counsel of God unto the Gentile believers in Rome. This was in fulfilment of the Lord’s Great Commission to make disciples and to teach them *“whatsoever I have commanded you.”*

The Lord providentially gave Paul the opportunity to witness to the people in Rome. It is known in history that long before organised missions work had been done in the countries of Europe, the Christian faith had already spread through Roman soldiers and workers who happened to travel around the Empire during that time. The Lord by His sovereignty had already performed a perfect work of missions through the Christians converted through Paul and other Christian ministries in Rome.

We have to understand that God’s plan throughout the ages has already been laid out, and it is for us to obey and to use whatever gifts God has given us. We are not making history by ourselves. It is His story. It is our great privilege to take part in God’s great plan and serve Him. How about you? What will you do to continue this commission laid down for us?

THOUGHT: Am I prepared to obey and fulfil the Great Commission?

PRAYER: Father, take my life and let it be consecrated to Thee! Amen!

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