

**January 11<sup>th</sup>, 2009**

## **Harvesting a Wasteland**

### ***Laying Down Bedrock***

(John 4:38)

*"I sent you to harvest where you didn't plant; others had already done the work, and you will gather the harvest."*

NLT

(Acts 1:8)

*"But when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, you will receive power and will tell people about me everywhere — in Jerusalem, throughout Judea, in Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."*

NLT

(Galatians 6:9-10)

*"So don't get tired of doing what is good. Don't get discouraged and give up, for we will reap a harvest of blessing at the appropriate time. Whenever we have the opportunity, we should do good to everyone, especially to our Christian brothers and sisters."*

NLT

### **Introduction "Harvesting a Wasteland"**

#### ***What is "Harvesting a Wasteland" and why is it important to us?***

Harvesting a wasteland is the mission and purpose of Jesus on earth. It describes in a way that we can get our mind around the thoughts and feelings of God for us.

- **He makes something out of nothing**
- **He takes what is broken and puts it back together**
- **He saves and heals those who the world wounds and throws away**
- **He gives life to what the enemy kills**
- **He loves what is unlovable**
- **He is a home for the homeless - That is who Jesus is.**

The word *harvest* is a farming term used to describe the time or season for gathering a crop that has been planted – grown – and ripened. Jesus often used the harvest as a spiritual metaphor to explain how his followers are to be a part of the process of planting and harvesting within peoples lives and their souls. The idea of a *harvest* important to us because it is the way God (through the love and sacrifice of Jesus) has chosen to save the lost dying in our world (sowing and reaping – planting and harvesting). If it means nothing to us it reveals either extreme apathy for humanity and our eventual outcomes, or that we have little to no interest and understanding of who we are and who God is.

***What is a wasteland?***

A wasteland is what Jesus came for. A wasteland is a land and the people living in that land that have become tired, broken, lost, and hopeless. A wasteland is a land of... the wasted

- Wasted Opportunities
- Wasted Time
- Wasted Resources
- Wasted Lives

***How do you harvest a wasteland?***

Good question. The simple short answer is – you love God, you teach His truth, and you care for one another in fellowship, communion, and prayer. The more complex longer answer is found within the pages of the Acts of the Apostles. It within the recollections of Luke one of the disciples of Jesus that history has a “play by play” of the first actual spiritual harvest of a wasteland. One day after he had spent the morning doing something completely anti-religious Jesus explained to His disciples...

*Do you think the work of harvesting will not begin until the summer ends four months from now? Look around you! Vast fields are ripening all around us and are ready now for the harvest. The harvesters are paid good wages, and the fruit they harvest is people brought to eternal life. What joy awaits both the planter and the harvester alike! You know the saying, 'One person plants and someone else harvests.' And it's true. I sent you to harvest where you didn't plant; others had already done the work, and you will gather the harvest." (John 4:35-38) NLT*

Most of what Jesus said and did with His disciples was to prepare them for the harvest once He was gone. The greatest part of their preparation was not to know what to do but know once and for all who they were. Mission – Purpose – Role – and Outcome were all important pieces of what was to come, but not nearly as important as knowing who they were and why... that was the heart of their preparation and once that was settled in them and among them the harvest would be gathered.

The world around them at that time was indeed a wasteland - but Jesus had planted good seed in that wasteland, the Holy Spirit had watered it, and the apostles would gather a harvest from it. We are going to look at these men and women and pray that God will show us the truth about gathering a harvest in the wasteland of our world. I want to know what I do not know and see what I have not seen so that I too can gather

and be gathered. We live in a vast wasteland - look around you, fields are ripening all around us and are now ready for the harvest.

**January 18<sup>th</sup>, 2009**

**“We Are All Witnesses”... (Acts 1:1-11)**

*Dear Theophilus:*

*In my first book I told you about everything Jesus began to do and teach until the day he ascended to heaven after giving his chosen apostles further instructions from the Holy Spirit. During the forty days after his crucifixion, he appeared to the apostles from time to time **(in fact, on thirteen verified occasions)** and proved to them in many ways that he was actually alive.*

***(1 – Ate meals with them 2 – Talked with them about pre-crucifixion plans and purposes 3 – Performed a miracle 4 – Re-issued His previous promise of the Holy Spirit to them 5 – Gave specific and strategic instructions for the future 6 – Comforted and re-assured them / renewed their hope / addressed their doubts and unbelief)***

*On these occasions he talked to them about the Kingdom of God **(purposes)**. In one of these meetings as he was eating a meal with them, he told them, "Do not leave Jerusalem until the Father sends you what he promised **(resources)**. Remember, I have told you about this before. John baptized with water, but in just a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit **(comfort)**."*

*When the apostles were with Jesus, they kept asking him, "Lord, are you going to free Israel now and restore our kingdom?"*

"The Father sets those dates," he replied, "and they are not for you to know (**re-direct – focus**). But when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, you will receive power (**reassurance**) and will tell (**be a witness**) people about me (**identity**) everywhere — in Jerusalem, throughout Judea, in Samaria, and to the ends of the earth (**mission**)."

It was not long after he said this that he was taken up into the sky while they were watching, and he disappeared into a cloud (**reality**). As they were straining their eyes to see him, two white-robed men suddenly stood there among them. They said, "Men of Galilee, why are you standing here staring at the sky? Jesus has been taken away from you into heaven. And someday, just as you saw him go, he will return (**urgency**)!" NLT

### ***The Calf Path - a Poem***

*One day, through the primeval wood,  
A calf walked home, as good calves should;  
But made a trail all bent askew,  
A crooked trail as all calves do.*

*Since then three hundred years have fled,  
And, I infer, the calf is dead.  
But still he left behind his trail,  
And thereby hangs my moral tail.*

*The trail was taken up next day  
By a lone dog that passed that way;  
And then a wise bell-wether sheep  
Pursued the trail o'er hill and glade,  
Through those old woods a path was made.*

*And many men wound in and out,  
And dodged, and turned, and bent about  
And uttered words of righteous wrath  
Because 'twas such a crooked path.  
But still they followed-do not laugh-  
The first migrations of that calf,  
And through this winding wood-way talked,  
Because he wobbled when he walked.*

*This forest path became a lane,  
That bent, and turned, and turned again;  
This crooked lane became a road,  
Where many a poor horse with his load  
Toiled on beneath the burning sun,  
And traveled some three miles in one.  
And thus a century and a half  
They trod the footsteps of that calf.*

*The years passed on in swiftness fleet,  
 The road became a village street;  
 And this, before men aware,  
 A city's crowded thoroughfare;  
 And soon the central street was this  
 Of a renowned metropolis;  
 And two centuries and a half  
 Trod in the footsteps of that calf.*

*Each day a hundred thousand rout  
 Followed the zigzag calf about;  
 And o'er his crooked journey went  
 The traffic of a continent.  
 A hundred thousand men were led  
 By one calf near three centuries dead.  
 They followed still his crooked way,  
 And lost one hundred years a day;  
 For thus such reverence is lent  
 To well-established precedent.*

*A moral lesson this might teach,  
 Were I ordained and called to preach;  
 For men are prone to go it blind  
 Along the calf-paths of the mind.*

*And work away from sun to sun  
 To do what other men have done.  
 They follow in the beaten track,  
 And out and in, and forth and back,*

*And still their devious course pursue,  
 To keep the path that others do.  
 They keep the path a sacred groove,  
 Along which all their lives they move.  
 But how the wise old wood-gods laugh,  
 Who saw the first primeval calf!  
 Ah! Many things this tale might teach-  
 But I am not ordained to preach.*

*-Sam Walter Ross*

The most unique and lasting thing about the apostles and followers of Jesus was that they were all witnesses to what they had witnessed. By that I mean that they were the ones who had seen heard and been touched by Jesus – and then had lived (for at least fifty

more years) on to tell anyone who would listen to them about what they what witnessed. The “witness to what they had witnessed” was simply this... Jesus, who declared Himself to the world to be the true path to eternal life, and the only way to God the Father was and is exactly who He said He was. As their story unfolds for us we can see and understand that as long as they were willing to give a witness to what they had witnessed they themselves became targets. They all by virtue of witnessing not only the murder of Jesus but the alive and resurrected Jesus became an active threat to the continued greed and hypocrisy of Judaism and to tyranny and brutality of Roman rule. They had seen the path – walked the path - and were now the logical choice of Jesus to harvest the wasteland. All they had to do was just witness to what they had witnessed and the harvest *would come in*. They now knew what they didn’t know... how to get more with less – how to get something out of nothing – and they knew how to love the unlovable as Jesus loved them; and they had been witnesses to the greatest love of all – a love to die for. But many people other than His disciples and friends had witnessed him die – that was not the complete path. Seeing or witnessing Jesus die was not what would ultimately pose the biggest threat to the Pharisees or Rome – they wanted the people to witness his murder... that they felt would effectively shut down any willingness to follow in His path and go on with His message. *No Jesus – no message – no threat*. However, being witness to Jesus resurrected (after he had been murdered in public) made all of them who witnessed Him alive as dangerous as He was. They could all witness to the world what they had witnessed (what had happened and how to find the path) the living Messiah (the truth - and the life). Eventually they would all be killed for what they were a witness to – but not before they had all carved a path and gave witness to the world of what they had witnessed and harvested the wasteland.

**THINK ABOUT THESE TWO QUESTIONS...**

**Have you witnessed Jesus alive in you?**

**Are you a witness to what you have witnessed?**

**January 25<sup>th</sup>, 2009**

**“Who Are These Guys... Really?” (Acts 1:14-26)**

*The apostles were at the Mount of Olives when Jesus ascended, so they walked the half mile back to Jerusalem. 13 Then they went to the upstairs room of the house where they were staying. Here is the list of those who were present:*

*Peter,  
John,  
James,  
Andrew,  
Philip,  
Thomas,  
Bartholomew,  
Matthew,  
James (son of Alphaeus),  
Simon (the Zealot),  
and Judas (son of James).*

*They all met together continually for prayer, along with Mary the mother of Jesus, several other women, and the brothers of Jesus. During this time, on a day when about 120 believers were present, Peter stood up and addressed them as follows: "Brothers, it was necessary for the Scriptures to be fulfilled concerning Judas, who guided the Temple police to arrest Jesus. This was predicted long ago by the Holy Spirit, speaking through King David. Judas was one of us, chosen to share in the ministry with us." (Judas bought a field with the money he received for his treachery, and falling there, he burst open, spilling out his intestines. The news of his death spread rapidly among all the people of Jerusalem, and they gave the place the Aramaic name Akeldama, which means "Field of Blood.") Peter continued, "This was predicted in the book of Psalms, where it says, 'Let his home become desolate, with no one living in it.' And again, 'Let his position be given to someone else.' "So now we must choose another man to take Judas's place. It must be someone who has been with us all the time that we were with the Lord Jesus — from the time he was baptized by John until the day he was taken from us into heaven. Whoever is chosen will join us as a witness of Jesus' resurrection." So they nominated two men: Joseph called Barsabbas (also known as Justus) and Matthias. Then they all prayed for the right man to be chosen. "O Lord," they said, "you know every heart. Show us which of these men you have chosen as an apostle to replace Judas the traitor in this ministry, for he has deserted us and gone where he belongs." Then they cast lots, and in this way Matthias was chosen and became an apostle with the other eleven. NLT*

**So who were these guys - really?** They were first and foremost the men that Jesus chose. They were not pawns or yes men by any stretch of the imagination – twelve losers getting used. We should remember that they were friends of Jesus and from out of their friendship and love for each other He was able to ask them to take whatever they had to a whole ‘nother level. With the murder of Jesus they had seen more than what they could handle and it broke them down, which made them appear not to be the men they needed be. Which leads us to a significant truth... more than anything Jesus did not chose these

guys for who they were - but rather who they were not.

(1 Corinthians 1:27-29) *Instead, God deliberately chose things the world considers foolish in order to shame those who think they are wise. And he chose those who are powerless to shame those who are powerful. God chose things despised by the world, things counted as nothing at all, and used them to bring to nothing what the world considers important, so that no one can ever boast in the presence of God.*

But getting to the point of where they were that day in Jerusalem had not been an easy, ideal, or preferable journey.

***Until then they were not what you would call...***

**Courageous** – the events of Gethsemane

**Secure** - wanting to know who would first in the kingdom of heaven

**Saints** – consistently doubt filled

**Rabbis** – common men with limited understanding and education

**Leaders** – scattered under pressure

**Loyal** – fell asleep, betrayed and denied

**Spiritual** – lacking discernment and compassion

**Credible** - questionable character and ability

**Impressive** – not distinguished, lacking in conviction and commitment and passion

Had they been any of these things they would have been crucified along with Jesus but they were not.

**JOHN**

*JEWISH/FISHERMAN – DIED IN ISOLATION ON THE ISLE OF PATMOS*

**JAMES**

*JEWISH/FISHERMAN - MARTYRED IN JUDEA BY HEROD AGRIPPA*

**PETER\***

*JEWISH/ FISHERMAN – MARTYRED IN ROME*

**ANDREW**

*JEWISH/FISHERMAN – MARTYRED IN GREECE*

**PHILIP\***

*JEWISH/OCCUPATION UNKNOWN – MARTYRED IN UPPER ASIA*

**THOMAS**

*JEWISH/OCCUPATION UNKNOWN – MARTYRED IN INDIA*

**BARTHOLOMEW**

*JEWISH/OCCUPATION UNKNOWN – MARTYRED IN ARMENIA*

**MATTHEW**

*JEWISH/TAX COLLECTOR – MARTYRED IN NADABAH, ETHIOPIA*

**JAMES (SON OF ALPHEUS)\***

*JEWISH/OCCUPATION UNKNOWN – MARTYRED IN JERUSALEM*

**SIMON (THE ZEALOT)**

*JEWISH/OCCUPATION UNKNOWN – MARTYRED IN BRITAIN*

**JUDAS (SON OF JAMES)**

*JEWISH/OCCUPATION UNKNOWN – MARTYRED IN EDESSA, (MODERN) TURKEY*



***MATTHIAS (JUDAS REPLACEMENT)***  
*JEWISH/OCCUPATION UNKNOWN – MARTYRED IN JERUSALEM*

Stephen was one of the first men to suffered early Christian persecution. He was stoned to death outside the gates for the faithful manner in which he preached the Gospel. After this, a great persecution was raised against all who professed belief in Christ as the Messiah. The fate of the Apostles and close disciples followed in succession.

James the Great, the elder brother of John the Apostle, was beheaded in A.D. 44. Philip, who served in Upper Asia was scourged in Phrygia, thrown into prison and later crucified (A.D. 54).

Matthew the tax collector served the Lord in Parthia and Ethiopia where he was slain with a halberd (a shafted weapon with an axe-like cutting blade and a speared end) in the city of Nadabah, A.D. 60.

James the Less, the brother of the Lord, served the church in Jerusalem and wrote the book of James. He suffered martyrdom at the age of ninety-four by being beaten and stoned by the Jews.

Matthias, the man who was chosen to replace Judas as an apostle, was stoned at Jerusalem and then beheaded.

Andrew, the brother of Peter, preached the gospel to many Asiatic nations and was crucified on a cross at Edessa. The ends of his cross were fixed transversely in the ground, thus the derivation of the term, St. Andrew's cross.

Mark was converted to Christianity by Peter and served as amanuensis (he wrote for Peter). He was dragged to pieces by the people of Alexandria.

Peter, the apostle, was sought by Nero to be put to death. Jerome wrote that Peter was crucified with his head down and his feet up, because he thought himself unworthy to be crucified in the same form and manner as the Lord.

Paul was really persecuted several times. He was scourged, stoned, and finally, Nero had him beheaded by a sword.

Jude, the brother of James, commonly called Thaddeus, was crucified at Edessa in A.D. 72.

Bartholomew preached in several countries and translated the Gospel of Matthew into the language of India. He was cruelly beaten and then crucified by in patient idolaters.

Thomas, doubting Thomas, preached the Gospel in Parthia and India. He excited the rage of the pagan priests and was martyred by being thrust through with a spear.

Luke the author of Luke and Acts travelled with Paul through various countries and was suppose to have been hanged on and olive tree by the idolatrous priests of Greece.

Simon the Zealot preached the Gospel in Mauritania, Africa, and even Britain where he was crucified in A.D. 74.

John, the Apostle whom Jesus loved, was sent from Ephesus to Rome where he was put into a cauldron of boiling oil. He escaped by a miracle, without injury, but was then banished to the Isle of Patmos and there he wrote the book of Revelations. Nerva, Domitian's successor, said he was the only apostle who escaped a violent death.

There are ten primitive persecutions mentioned in *Foxe's Book of Martyrs*. The first mass persecution occurred under Nero in A.D. 67. He was the sixth emperor of Rome and is remembered as the one who set Rome aflame and then blamed the Christians for the deaths and destruction caused by the fire. He had some Christians sewn up in skins of wild beasts and thrown to the dogs. Some Christians were dressed in shirts made stiff with wax, fixed to axletrees, and set on fire in his gardens, in order to illuminate them. Rather than diminished the spirit of Christianity, this persecution increased the devotion and commitment of Christianity. The second persecution happened under Domitian in A.D. 81. Anything bad that happened whether it was famine, pestilence, or earthquakes he blamed the Christians and put them to death. The third primitive persecution occurred under Trajan in A.D. 108. Christians were beaten, beheaded, and devoured by wild beasts. About ten thousand Christians were put to death. The fourth persecution took place under Marcus Aurelius Antoninus in A.D. 162 and the fifth persecution is credited to Severus in A.D. 192. Christians were burned at the stake, had hot tar poured on their heads, beheaded, placed in boiling water and ravaged by wild beasts. The sixth persecution took place under Maximus in A.D. 235. At this time, numerous Christians were slain without trial and buried indiscriminately in heaps (mass graves), sometimes fifty or sixty cast into a pit together. The seventh persecution happened under Decius in A.D. 249. At this time, the principle person martyred was Fabian, the bishop of Rome, who beheaded on January 20, A.D. 250. The eighth persecution occurred under Valerian in A.D. 257. Once again every manner of torture was used to mock those claiming to be Christians and for the entertainment of the rulers and their guests. The ninth persecution occurred under Aurelian in A.D. 274 when Felix, bishop of Rome was martyred. The tenth persecution took place under Diocletian in A.D. 303. This was commonly called the Era of the Martyr's and was occasioned partly by the increasing number and luxury of the Christians. The manner of persecutions was carried out with racks, scourges, swords, daggers, crosses, poisons, and famine.

February 1<sup>st</sup>, 2009

### **“The Real Pentecost” (Acts 2:1-13)**

#### **Acts 2:1-13**

*On the day of Pentecost, seven weeks after Jesus' resurrection, the believers were meeting together in one place. 2 Suddenly, there was a sound from heaven like the roaring of a mighty windstorm in the skies above them, and it filled the house where they were meeting. 3 Then, what looked like flames or tongues of fire appeared and settled on each of them. 4 And everyone present was filled with the Holy Spirit and began speaking in other languages, as the Holy Spirit gave them this ability.*

*5 Godly Jews from many nations were living in Jerusalem at that time. 6 When they*

*heard this sound, they came running to see what it was all about, and they were bewildered to hear their own languages being spoken by the believers.*

*7 They were beside themselves with wonder. "How can this be?" they exclaimed. "These people are all from Galilee, 8 and yet we hear them speaking the languages of the lands where we were born! 9 Here we are — Parthians, Medes, Elamites, people from Mesopotamia, Judea, Cappadocia, Pontus, the province of Asia, 10 Phrygia, Pamphylia, Egypt, and the areas of Libya toward Cyrene, visitors from Rome (both Jews and converts to Judaism), 11 Cretans, and Arabians. And we all hear these people speaking in our own languages about the wonderful things God has done!" 12 They stood there amazed and perplexed. "What can this mean?" they asked each other. 13 But others in the crowd were mocking. "They're drunk, that's all!" they said.*

*NLT*

**To help us better understand what took place** in what was called the “upper room gathering” for the apostles and followers of Jesus on the “Day of Pentecost” (a traditional observance of Judaism – the last day of the fifty days of Passover) we can break this passage into three main dialogues.

**Dialogue One** – The *two-fold* manifestation that was to have taken place in what is known “the upper room” of Jerusalem. What it meant for the believers who were there - and what it should mean and look like for believers today.

- *The faith of all the believers is validated - God comes through with His promises*
- *The miraculous is still possible – God would reveal His power in His followers.*
- *It meant that there would be credibility for the apostles – God would go before them and prepare the way.*
- *Dia-meri-zomenai [orig/Grk]; being divided and distributed- the power of the Holy Spirit was given to them all.*
- *We should be inspired and moved to experience and be a witness of the power of Holy Spirit in our piece of the world.*

**Dialogue Two** – The significance of the attention and interest from a diverse gathering of language, culture, curiosity, and hostility that was caused by the miraculous nature of the Pentecost manifestation (wind storm and dialect). What was their response to the unique witness from the upper room believers and the power of God generated from this improbable experience?

- *Between twenty to twenty-five different dialects [both Jewish and non-Jewish] Parthian, Medesian, Elamite, Mesopotamian, Judean, Cappadocian, Pontusian, Asian, Phrygian, Pamphylian, Egyptian, Libyan, Cyrenian, Roman (both Jews and converts to Judaism), Cretan, and Arabian.*
- *Increased curiosity for the seeker of truth – and renewed frustration for the hostile and cynical.*

**Dialogue Three** – The real purpose and power of Pentecost to inspire real change and

ignite great faith within the lives of the disciples to go on and finish their mission – the gospel of salvation in Jesus.

- *As living witnesses to the resurrected Jesus the apostles were somewhat troublesome to Rome and Judaism... but as men and women on a mission they were now a dangerous threat.*
- *The Pentecost experience was to validate, empower, and reassure and those who had been a witness of the death and resurrection of Jesus.*
- *The unique combination of a **changed life** and the **courage to tell about it** was how God had planned to distribute the message and hope of the gospel of Jesus.*
- *They would need that comfort, confirmation, and power - their very lives depended on it.*

February 8<sup>th</sup>, 2009

**“From Flaky Fisherman to Fearless Farmer”**  
(Acts 2:14-41)

***Historic Timeline for Peter’s  
Descent to the Upper Room***

**One** – Peter [Simon] from Bethsaida in Galilee, is introduced to Jesus by his younger brother Andrew while living in Capernum – they become very close friends.

**Two** - Jesus performs the miracle of the nets and fish one night while Peter is out fishing with Andrew, James, and John. Peter answers the call to follow Jesus as a disciple.

**Three** – In his apparent frustration and disgust with Peter Jesus calls him a “devil”.

**Four** – Jesus gives the disciples an “out” Peter responds, “where else would we go Jesus only you have the words of life.”

**Five** – In a moment of pure faith and obedience Peter gets out of the fishing boat and walks miraculously on the water to Jesus.

**Six** – Peter refuses to let Jesus wash his feet at the last Passover meal... only to retract moments later and vow his undying support and allegiance to Jesus. Jesus tells Peter that he will deny him three times before sunrise.

**Seven** – In the Gethsemane garden during Jesus final hours Peter reacts to the arrest of Jesus by cutting the ear off Malchus, one of the Sanhedrin court.

**Eight** – Peter does deny Jesus just like Jesus predicted.

Peter hides in fear and shame during the beating, crucifixion and death of Jesus.

**Nine** – Peter goes face to face with the resurrected Jesus... Peter do you love me?

**Ten** – gathered with the others in the upper room on the day of Pentecost, Peter responds to the curiosity and hostility of the large crowd gathered at street level.

**Eleven** – Under the influence of the power of the Holy Spirit Peter and the other eleven apostles come to stand in large window (breeze-ways) openings to engage and converse

with the crowd at street level (8 to 10 feet below).

**Twelve** – Peter under the anointing of Holy Spirit, delivers the gospel of Jesus Christ to a crowd of Jews and non-Jews alike [from twenty to twenty-five different countries and languages]

To you from Judea and to all of you travelers who are staying here in Jerusalem for the Judafest... what you are hearing today is the raw truth. First, no one here in this room is drunk... come on, it's nine o'clock in the morning on the Sabbath – get real. What you are seeing and hearing is something you religious people already know... it was spoken of by the prophet Joel; who wrote, *In the end times, God says, I will pour out my Spirit on anyone who is seeking for me. Your sons and daughters will fearlessly proclaim the gospel of Jesus, your young men will see visions, and your old men will dream dreams. In those days I will pour out my Spirit on any person seeking me - men and women, boys and girls, Jew and Non-Jew, and they will proclaim the truth. And I will create a hunger for the truth through unexplainable events and supernatural phenomena from both heaven and the earth below with obvious signs and warnings — crazy stuff like blood and fire and clouds of smoke. The light that people have always taken for granted will be turned into darkness, and the seasons and the weather will be unpredictable and dangerous, this is real... and it is all coming down before the big and amazing day of the Lord arrives. And remember 'anyone who calls out for mercy in the name of Jesus will be saved.'*

You remember that don't you? Now, "Jews need to listen up – its time to get over yourselves! There is a new sheriff in town and his name is not Moses... God was making a new plan for everyone when He sent Jesus – the old plan did not work. You have had this perfect window of opportunity to Jesus the Messiah. He was right there with you – every day doing miracles, teaching in your temple, and touching and loving the people. He was who He told you He was – and you knew He was who He said He was – you're not ignorant, just arrogant! And even though God gave you your Messiah in the flesh you lied and denied - but He knew you would blow that up too. And you did - with the muscle of Caesar's "intimidators" to back you up you set Jesus up to be "the bad guy" – you nailed Him and I mean that literally – you nailed Him to a cross and murdered him. Did

you think for second though that He didn't see it coming? Of course He did, – He told us what to expect and we all hid in a panic room downtown so... been there–done that. But in spite of your plot and our betrayal God released him from the horrors of death and raised Him back to life again... and showed us all that death can never keep a good man down... and believe me, Jesus is the only good man we have ever known.

But don't just take my word for it listen to what King David said about him:

*'I see the Lord and I know He is always with me so you will never completely shake my world, for he is right beside me. No wonder my heart is filled with joy, and my mouth shouts out His praises! I have hope – and I can definitely chill in that hope. For you will not leave my soul in some crypt made for the dead, and you will never let the Holy One to decay in the grave. I am not on some random path, You have shown me the way of life, and you will give me strength and joy in your presence.'*

"So, Dear brothers, try and wrap your minds around this! David wasn't referring to himself when he spoke the words I just quoted, David the King died and was buried, and his tomb is just a few blocks from here. David the great King was also a prophet, and he knew God had promised with an oath that one of his own blood descendants would one day fill His throne as the Messiah. David was looking into the future and predicting the Messiah's resurrection. He was trying to tell us that the Messiah we have believed for would not be left wandering around in the cemetery like some character from the “dawn of the dead.” He was saying “the body of the Messiah would never rot or decay in a grave.” Guess what – He didn't, Jesus was only three days down!

David's prophecy *was* speaking of Jesus, we know it and so do your priests – and we here in this room all saw with our own eyes Jesus alive after they killed Him. God raised Him from the dead. We also saw Him ascend into the clouds and now He sits on the throne of highest honor in heaven, at God's right hand. And the Father, just like he had promised, gave him the Holy Spirit to pour out on us, and all of you have seen and heard the evidence of that today as this witness was spoken to you in the power of the Spirit - you even heard it in your own languages from people who do not know how to speak your language.

There are some pretty smart people here today. You know this better makes sense better than I do... David himself never ascended into heaven, yet he said,

*'The LORD said to my Lord, Sit in honor at my right hand until I bring your enemies to their knees, and make them a footstool under your feet.'*

So let it be clearly known by everyone in Israel (we bow to only one God and serve only one King)— we are witnesses and as long as we have breath to breathe we are going to tell the truth about what we saw and heard... that God has made this Jesus that you crucified to be both Lord and Messiah!"

*February 15<sup>th</sup>, 2009*

**“The Un-Church Church”**

**(Acts 2:41-3:1)**

***“Those who believed what Peter said were baptized and added to the church — about three thousand in all. They joined with the other believers and devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, sharing in the Lord's Supper and in prayer.***

***A deep sense of awe came over them all, and the apostles performed many miraculous signs and wonders. And all the believers met together constantly and shared everything they had. They sold their possessions and shared the proceeds with those in need. They worshiped together at the Temple each day, met in homes for the Lord's Supper, and shared their meals with great joy and generosity — all the while praising God and enjoying the goodwill of all the people. And each day the Lord added to their group those who were being saved. NLT***

It is clear to me that the formation of the Church of Jesus among these simple and common people even in all of its messy imperfection and rough edges was pure and pleasing to God. In their inability they found the ability – in their simplicity and unorthodox ways they found a profound knowledge and wisdom that really frustrated critics and amazed the curious and all those who witnessed it. *They were the first church*

*but yet the word church wasn't even in use so you would have to call them kind of an un-church. Meaning they did not meet the standards of men and religion but then, knowing what I know of the standards of religion and church-world in our day they certainly would not hit the mark in 2009. In our day its trendy and cool to say our church is not about religion - we are about relationships and community. But then when the truth needs to be told and the difficulty of loving and being loved by messy people with messy stories and weird families starts to surface there is no courage and everyone runs for the door. So, I guess to be like the first church you have to first be an un-Church. All they did was follow Jesus, learn to love and be loved like Jesus, they even unraveled temporarily, then they witnessed Jesus resurrected and alive, and then unbelievably they pulled themselves (messy, unsure, unreligious) together around His promise and mission – and changed their world.*

Ten years ago this May this community was founded and formed around the truth and vision of this very passage of scripture. Ten years later I am asking myself...

*Am I any closer to this truth and the Un-Church vision that I am called to than I was then?*

*Does my commitment and heart to love and be loved by God and those around me make sense to people or when they hear me talk about it do they wonder - what is that guy talking about?*

*Do I have the heart and soul of these people in the book of Acts who eagerly gathered themselves around the teaching of the gospel truth?*

*Do I share as they did the simple joys that they found within true fellowship and communion?*

*Do I know as they did that the building of great faith is done in prayer for and with the ones I love and am loved by?*

*Am I harvesting a wasteland in my life like the first un-church did, or am I sitting in just another church doing church stuff until I get to old to do it anymore?*

Can you take a moment with me today and weigh -in on a couple of these questions? I've asked some of our community to do just that, and I would like to hear what they have come up with...



February 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2009

**“Lord of the Harvest” (Acts 3:1-26)**

*Peter and John went to the Temple one afternoon to take part in the three o'clock prayer service. 2 As they approached the Temple, a man lame from birth was being carried in. Each day he was put beside the Temple gate, the one called the Beautiful Gate, so he could beg from the people going into the Temple. 3 When he saw Peter and John about to enter, he asked them for some money.*

*4 Peter and John looked at him intently, and Peter said, "Look at us!" 5 The lame man looked at them eagerly, expecting a gift. 6 But Peter said, "I don't have any money for you. But I'll give you what I have. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, get up and walk!"*

*7 Then Peter took the lame man by the right hand and helped him up. And as he did, the man's feet and anklebones were healed and strengthened. 8 He jumped up, stood on his feet, and began to walk! Then, walking, leaping, and praising God, he went into the Temple with them. 9 All the people saw him walking and heard him praising God. 10 When they realized he was the lame beggar they had seen so often at the Beautiful Gate, they were absolutely astounded! 11 They all rushed out to Solomon's Colonnade, where he was holding tightly to Peter and John. Everyone stood there in awe of the wonderful thing that had happened.*

*12 Peter saw his opportunity and addressed the crowd. "People of Israel," he said, "what is so astounding about this? And why look at us as though we had made this man walk by our own power and godliness? 13 For it is the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, the*

*God of Jacob, the God of all our ancestors who has brought glory to his servant Jesus by doing this. This is the same Jesus whom you handed over and rejected before Pilate, despite Pilate's decision to release him. 14 You rejected this holy, righteous one and instead demanded the release of a murderer. 15 You killed the author of life, but God raised him to life. And we are witnesses of this fact!*

*16 "The name of Jesus has healed this man — and you know how lame he was before. Faith in Jesus' name has caused this healing before your very eyes.*

*17 "Friends, I realize that what you did to Jesus was done in ignorance; and the same can be said of your leaders. 18 But God was fulfilling what all the prophets had declared about the Messiah beforehand — that he must suffer all these things. 19 Now turn from your sins and turn to God, so you can be cleansed of your sins. 20 Then wonderful times of refreshment will come from the presence of the Lord, and he will send Jesus your Messiah to you again. 21 For he must remain in heaven until the time for the final restoration of all things, as God promised long ago through his prophets. 22 Moses said, 'The Lord your God will raise up a Prophet like me from among your own people. Listen carefully to everything he tells you.' 23 Then Moses said, 'Anyone who will not listen to that Prophet will be cut off from God's people and utterly destroyed.'*

*24 "Starting with Samuel, every prophet spoke about what is happening today. 25 You are the children of those prophets, and you are included in the covenant God promised to your ancestors. For God said to Abraham, 'Through your descendants all the families on earth will be blessed.' 26 When God raised up his servant, he sent him first to you people of Israel, to bless you by turning each of you back from your sinful ways." NLT*

### ***Lord of the Harvest***

**This incidental but intentional conversation with the poor lame beggar at the Beautiful gate of the Temple gives us some insight into the priorities and mission to think and act like Jesus. What was most important from here on out for these guys and gals was what they knew in their heart and spirit to be most important to the “Lord of the Harvest.” John and Peter were now themselves... harvesting the wasteland.**

**One** - It is obvious that the “having all things in common” had not put extra money in the pockets of Peter and John. This was not about getting wealthy off of the generosity and sacrifice of obedient and hopeful Christians. They said, “*we do not have silver and gold – but what we do have we are going share it with you*”... A rich man is the man who has high ideals and great compassion, and who lives in the presence of God and in the service and pursuit of truth. Have your riches in your mind, in your heart, in your thoughts, and in your purposes and plans.

**Two** - The response to the lame beggar shows God’s true plans and ideas for poverty and wealth. In God’s way you can be giving someone less and actually be giving them more. The poverty of the apostles or follower of Jesus was in material possessions only; and therefore it was no poverty at all. The poor man is the man who has nothing but money.

**Three** - Peter and John model for us that prayer and compassion are not things; they are loving, seeking and responding to the heart of God. This does not have to happen with

money or sacred temples made with the hands of men.

March 1<sup>st</sup>, 2009

**“The Stone the Builders Rejected”  
(Acts 4:1-12)**

*While Peter and John were speaking to the people, the leading priests, the captain of the Temple guard, and some of the Sadducees came over to them. They were very disturbed that Peter and John were claiming, on the authority of Jesus, that there is a resurrection of the dead. They arrested them and, since it was already evening, jailed them until morning. But many of the people who heard their message believed it, so that the number of believers totaled about five thousand men, not counting women and children.*

*The next day the council of all the rulers and elders and teachers of religious law met in Jerusalem. Annas the high priest was there, along with Caiaphas, John, Alexander, and other relatives of the high priest. They brought in the two disciples and demanded, "By what power, or in whose name, have you done this?"*

*Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them, "Leaders and elders of our nation, are we being questioned because we've done a good deed for a crippled man? Do you want to know how he was healed? Let me clearly state to you and to all the people of Israel that he was healed in the name and power of Jesus Christ from Nazareth, the man you crucified, but whom God raised from the dead. For Jesus is the one referred to in the Scriptures, where it says, 'The stone that you builders rejected has now become the cornerstone.' There is salvation in no one else! **There is no other name in all of heaven for people to call on to save them.**"*

**NLT**

**A Timeless Timeline for  
“The First Official Un-Church Day at the Temple”**

- Lame Beggar is healed at the Gate called Beautiful when Peter says... *I'll give you what I have. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, get up and walk!"*
- Crowd gathers in and around The Court of Women because of the excitement from the miracle that had just taken place right before their eyes.
- Peter preaches to the crowd “Jesus and the resurrection of the dead in Christ.” This is a point of contradiction to religious laws of Judaism. The Sadducees confront Peter and John quickly to minimize the impact of the healing of the lame beggar on the masses.
- The first known arrest of an apostle or disciple of Jesus is made within the Court of the Gentiles in front of a crowd of about five thousand new Christ followers. The arrest of Peter and John was not a popular move among the people.

- Peter and John are questioned the next morning the by High Priests, Annas and Caiaphas. “*Whose name is credited to the miracle of the lame man*”? Peter responds... “*Jesus of Nazareth, the one you crucified – but God raised from the dead.*”
- The Apostles officially and publicly become rejected from the religion of men with the following line... ‘*The stone that you builders rejected has now become the cornerstone.*’ *There is salvation in no one else! **There is no other name in all of heaven for people to call on to save them.***”
- They sense the moment of truth created for them by the Holy Spirit and seize favor with the people preaching the resurrecting gospel of love and the promise of heaven in the name of Jesus.

### Cornerstone Metaphors in the Context of Acts 4:11

**Gonias** (*Grk*); meaning - keystone, chief-stone, or headstone – the most beautiful and visible upper cornerstone.

- Jesus, *the chief cornerstone* of who unites all other stones of different kinds within the walls of the building (Jew and Gentile) and made to fit.
- Jesus, *the headstone* that is at the highest summit of the building strengthening all other support or blemished stones. (the weak find strength)
- Jesus, *the keystone* the most beautiful stone - lifted up and visible from the corner of the street for all to see. (all rejected stones can have hope to be found and made beautiful)

Note: Not the same as **Akrogoniaios**; foundation stone or lower and unseen cornerstone.

March 8<sup>th</sup>, 2009

“Gotta’ Serve Somebody”

(Acts 4:13-31)

*The members of the council were amazed when they saw the boldness of Peter and John,*

*for they could see that they were ordinary men who had had no special training. They also recognized them as men who had been with Jesus. 14 But since the man who had been healed was standing right there among them, the council had nothing to say. 15 So they sent Peter and John out of the council chamber and conferred among themselves. 16 "What should we do with these men?" they asked each other. "We can't deny they have done a miraculous sign, and everybody in Jerusalem knows about it. 17 But perhaps we can stop them from spreading their propaganda. We'll warn them not to speak to anyone in Jesus' name again." 18 So they called the apostles back in and told them never again to speak or teach about Jesus. 19 But Peter and John replied, "Do you think God wants us to obey you rather than him? 20 We cannot stop telling about the wonderful things we have seen and heard." 21 The council then threatened them further, but they finally let them go because they didn't know how to punish them without starting a riot. For everyone was praising God 22 for this miraculous sign — the healing of a man who had been lame for more than forty years. 23 As soon as they were freed, Peter and John found the other believers and told them what the leading priests and elders had said. 24 Then all the believers were united as they lifted their voices in prayer: "O Sovereign Lord, Creator of heaven and earth, the sea, and everything in them — 25 you spoke long ago by the Holy Spirit through our ancestor King David, your servant, saying, 'Why did the nations rage? Why did the people waste their time with futile plans? 26 The kings of the earth prepared for battle; the rulers gathered together against the Lord and against his Messiah.' 27 "That is what has happened here in this city! For Herod Antipas, Pontius Pilate the governor, the Gentiles, and the people of Israel were all united against Jesus, your holy servant, whom you anointed. 28 In fact, everything they did occurred according to your eternal will and plan. 29 And now, O Lord, hear their threats, and give your servants great boldness in their preaching. 30 Send your healing power; may miraculous signs and wonders be done through the name of your holy servant Jesus." 31 After this prayer, the building where they were meeting shook, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit. And they preached God's message with boldness. NLT*

**I don't believe Bob Dylan understood the implication of his words when he wrote...**  
*"well it may be the devil, or it may be the Lord – but your gonna 'serve somebody'"?* **Just like** I don't believe either Peter or John (or any of the Christ followers) could have anticipated or expected the reaction of the people that day after Peter grabbed the hand of the lame man in front of the Temple gate and said, *"in the name of Jesus – get up and walk."* But when beggar jumped up and ran around praising God (all heaven broke loose) and it stirred the people and ignited within them the spirit of truth. It reminded them of the words of life once spoken to them by Jesus the Messiah. Out in the center of "The Court of the Gentiles" the place where everyone could find God the true heart of God the Father was revealed.  
***The God who said to them through His Son, Jesus...***

*I want your mercy – and not your sacrifice*  
*I want what is inside of your heart – not simply what you know in your head*  
*I want your weakness – not just your strength*  
*I want your surrender – not just your submission*  
*I want relationship – not just rules and routines*  
*I want your love – not just your obedience*  
*I want your everything - not just something*

The lame beggar was them – symbolic of the people (lame, rejected, hopeless, and even helpless). His healing said to the people...

***God loves us – He will heal us – He will lead us through the most difficult times of life.***

It also immediately reminded them of the corrupt and ugly side of the religion of men where there is no mercy or grace – only judgment. But it wasn't until the next morning when Peter and John (now under arrest) stood looking into the eyes of the same men responsible for crucifying Jesus that they really did understand the words they were saying. They "really got it" and I don't mean that they finally got "Jesus or God" because *they had gotten who God was back that day in Galilee, when after having seen Jesus die, the resurrected Jesus walked through a locked door into the tiny room where they were all hiding and spoke (the famous words) to them "peace be with you."*

***No, I think they finally got who they were that morning.*** Right then and there; standing in front of the High Priest. ***Not only did they get who they were - but they got what they were supposed to do about it.*** They fully understood that moment this was not about them, that they had been made to love and be loved by God, and that...

- ***They were going to serve Him with their life.***
- ***They were going to serve Him in the Temple or in the city.***
- ***They were going to serve Him in jail or out of jail.***
- ***They were going to serve Him in Jerusalem or far away from Jerusalem.***
- ***They were going to serve their Master and Savior Jesus Christ – and they were not going to serve men or the religion of men.***

So when Caiaphas (the same Priest who had said of Jesus, "*let one man die for all*") ordered them to never teach or preach about Jesus or in the name of Jesus - the immediate response from them was not from the head or impulsive emotion. It was from ***deep conviction*** and a ***greater sense of destiny***. So they with courage said, "*Do you think God wants us to obey you rather than him? We cannot stop telling about the wonderful things we have seen and heard.*" And now it was on. And so it is for us today...

March 15<sup>th</sup>, 2009

**“One Heart, One Mind”**

**(Acts 4:32-35)**

*All the believers were of one heart and mind, and they felt that what they owned was not their own; they shared everything they had. 33 And the apostles gave powerful witness to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and God's great favor was upon them all. 34 There was no poverty among them, because people who owned land or houses sold them 35 and brought the money to the apostles to give to others in need.*

From the Day of Pentecost to the “healing of the lame beggar” the apostles had seen over five thousand people receive the message of the resurrected Christ. Thousands accepted the gospel of Jesus as their personal belief and way to faith in God. Each day the apostles and these believers gathered in the Court of the Gentiles just inside the temple walls to ***pray together – worship together – break bread together – learn together – and serve together***. As the apostles taught the gospel of Jesus, the people heard about the return of the Messiah and witnessed the promise of the Spirit. It was undeniable - there was a powerful movement of faith underway. And miracles and generosity highlighted a contagious hunger for truth and a genuine affection and love for one another. Persecution and violence would soon come but it did not stop the Jesus movement (we are evidence of that here today). Each day in the temple characterized the courage and faithfulness of the apostles (*remember they had been ordered never to preach the name of Jesus again*). Every day the Jesus movement gathered influence and favor because the apostle's daily practice of *all things common* was effectively eliminating the poverty among the people. The people now had hope and with hope they felt empowered. These were ordinary men and women but they were men and women now filled completely with the Holy Spirit and sharing a message of faith, hope, and love. Day by day the people were becoming *united as one*. The original Greek language that Luke used to describe what was happening within the people... *eén kardía mia kaí psuché mia* – *in one heart and one soul*. The ancient Russian Orthodox desert dwellers would later use the term **“edinidushee”** to describe brothers and sisters in the faith who through prayer, service, and sacrifice had reached a *“oneness of soul.”*

**Each day the apostles taught the people the very things Jesus had taught them...**

- To love God and each other openly and honestly
- To pray the way Jesus had taught them to pray
- To give generously and to forgive quickly
- To seek the Kingdom of God and to know the truth

- To worship God freely and to follow Jesus
- To serve from sacrifice and to live for the faith

This teaching allowed the gospel message to spread even faster and even more effectively. The “one heart one mind” of the people allowed the voice of the apostles to be heard each day from five thousand voices with the same spirit and veracity as the apostles. Five thousand people now spoke with one voice! The news of miracles traveled out of the city and throughout the region upon hearing the news people would travel to the city just hear and become part of the movement of Jesus. The burden of ministry was not upon a few but all and each one shared in the care and ministry to the broken, rejected, despised, unclean, unfit and un-churched. This oneness of heart, soul and voice made ministry just as Jesus intended it to be – in the people - for the people - from the people. It gave the people a glimpse of the kingdom of heaven Jesus had spoke about. The movement of Jesus had...

### **One Heart - One Mind**

**A Clear Message and a Single Purpose** – *Jesus was the Messiah who came to die to set the people free. He was resurrected to save all who believed Him.*

**Not One Voice - But One Voice in Many** – *To love and be loved by God through the power of the Holy Spirit, in Jesus Christ the Son of God.*

**One Common Goal** – *To spread the Good News gospel, serve the sick, feed the hungry, house the homeless, give hope to the brokenhearted, free the captive, to walk in peace with one another in the joy of the Lord until the return of Jesus.*

**March 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2009**

**“Scary Movie - The Original Soundtrack”**

**(Acts 5:1-11)**

*Now a man named Ananias, together with his wife Sapphira, also sold a piece of property.*



*With his wife's full knowledge he kept back part of the money for himself, but brought the rest and put it at the apostles' feet.*

*Then Peter said, "Ananias, how is it that Satan has so filled your heart that you have lied to the Holy Spirit and have kept for yourself some of the money you received for the land?"*

*Didn't it belong to you before it was sold? And after it was sold, wasn't the money at your disposal? What made you think of doing such a thing? You have not lied to men but to God."*

*When Ananias heard this, he fell down and died. And great fear seized all who heard what had happened.*

*Then the young men came forward, wrapped up his body, and carried him out and buried him.*

*About three hours later his wife came in, not knowing what had happened.*

*Peter asked her, "Tell me, is this the price you and Ananias got for the land?" "Yes," she said, "that is the price."*

*Peter said to her, "How could you agree to test the Spirit of the Lord? Look! The feet of the men who buried your husband are at the door, and they will carry you out also."*

*At that moment she fell down at his feet and died. Then the young men came in and, finding her dead, carried her out and buried her beside her husband.*

*Great fear seized the whole church and all who heard about these events.*

### ***Scary Movie – Original Soundtrack***

This whole thing says... "skip over me and move on to the next passage in Acts; teach about something more uplifting and encouraging." I read these eleven verses probably twenty times – each time asking God what are you saying to me here – what do you want to teach me? What possibly can I say to our community from these verses that will not be perceived as manipulative or intimidation? Each time I would read the verses all I could think about was this being an original script for some Hollywood scary movie. I mean... think about it... this whole story is very scary. What makes it even scarier is that these were actual events taking place in real time. As frightening as the story of Ananias and Sapphira is - it is equally intriguing. So, I closed my eyes and tried to put myself into the story (not a lead character, but a face in the crowd) frame by frame. I could not help but create in my mind possible but probable scenarios around the events that led to their death. I imagined a husband and wife who had become a part of this amazing movement of faith and community – all around them there is openness filled with love and

generosity, and sharing and caring for God and the people who were coming to God. They had undoubtedly come to the faith sometime in the weeks that followed the Upper Room experience during Pentecost. They more than likely had known the lame beggar who was healed in the temple courts. During that time they had surely been witness to miracles, supernatural intervention, and most importantly they had been without a doubt involved at some significant level with the ministry going on each day in the temple. It was probably there that they had become committed to Christ, and embraced together the “all things in common” message of the apostles. I imagined that they had sold other possessions and shared it with those in need and the joy of generosity had encouraged them to do more. Or, maybe this was the first time they had sold their land and the sight and touch of the money was a temptation to great for them to overcome. Maybe they had never seen that much money before. Or what if they were able to sell the property at a higher price only because during the sale they had revealed their intentions to the buyer – they were giving all of the proceeds to the poor. I don’t know. I do know that at some point they both were consumed by greed.

*Wait a minute!* At this point I open my eyes and push the pause button on my scary movie. Now I got it. I got what this whole thing is about.

- It is not about a God who kills two people because He caught them in a lie.
- It is not about stealing or cheating with money or offerings that belong to God.
- It is not about Peter possibly taking on a “celebrity” status, and then using Holy Spirit power to kill people who sin.
- It is not about providing nineteen centuries of preachers with “do right or die in hell” sermon material.
- Finally, this was not about scaring the hell out of some religious rebels so that the church could make more money.

No, this was about something even scarier than all of that put together. Something so scary that left unchallenged could bring down the movement of faith.

***This story was about the corruption and deception that comes from greed. This story is about the death greed brings to everyone and everything that it touches – collateral damage. Greed never kills just one thing – greed kills everything around it.***

Until now, among the people there was no greed. There was one heart and one mind among them and there was favor with all of the people. There was unselfish, unconditional love. There was grace and compassion. There was concern and caring. There was mercy and generosity. There was forgiveness and faith. There was truth - and from the truth there was hope for all who received the truth. This was the first “big picture” sign of what might come upon the people if they were to become consumed with greed. If this growing and vibrant community of faith were to become greedy the collateral damage from it would quickly divide and then kill the movement of faith. If this community were to become greedy they would become selfish and turn viciously on one another. They would be overtaken by accusations, jealousy, dishonesty, and the words and actions of death rather than life. If this particular community became greedy the message of love and hope would be destroyed among them and instead of favor they would become irrelevant to the people. And we all know without love we Christians are

pretty much irrelevant. At some point Ananias and Sapphira allowed greed to overcome all that was good in them. In the end their story was about an all-consuming greed - that caused an irresistible compulsive lie - that then resulted in their death. Unchallenged greed consumes people like me and you, and eventually kills all that we touch; it may not cause us to fall down dead but it would be scarier – it could mean the loss of life in Jesus. Honestly, I do not know why Ananias and his wife were killed that day – none of their sins were unforgivable or reversible. As Peter said... the money was theirs all along. But their greed caused them to challenge the Holy Spirit. At that point for them it was over.

In our real time, we Christians in our greed (and the spin of our greed), challenge and lie to the Holy Spirit everyday in what we think, say, or do. That should be scary to us. In this greed we cause death all around us and there is collateral damage that could possibly last for generations. I just know that no matter how many times I read this story - it is scary. I know that it was scary enough back then to stop (for the time being) greed from destroying the movement of faith and the gospel of Jesus Christ among these people. The people were frightened by what happened... but maybe they were frightened not so much by the death of Ananias and Sapphira, but by the greed that caused their death.

The word of truth for me and for us in all of this is... ***We would be wise to allow this story of greed frighten us all to some (spiritually healthy) degree. It is the same greed that is causing death all around us...***

**greed** *n* – an overwhelming obsession and desire for excess; to desire to have more of something than is actually needed

**Prayer:** “Lord, deliver me from any and all forms of greed. Let me truly seek first Your kingdom, and not the kingdom of men. You tell me that you will **“meet my needs according to Your riches in glory.”** Help me Lord to let that be enough. You tell me, **“do not fear the things that can threaten my life or my things here on earth”** – but rather You say, **“fear those things that threaten my soul and my eternal life in You.”** Lord, we can see that greed is powerful and scary and that it can kill our soul. This is not what you want for my family or me. Greed is not what You want for this community at Reunion. So lead me – lead us all Lord, away from every kind of greed... **gluttony, avarice, wrongful desire, stinginess, voracity, and any unhealthy appetite that we have for the things of this world.** Lead us into You Lord God! Lead us deep into the heart of Your Son Jesus! Lead us by Your Spirit down the path that is good and pleasing to You – for Jesus Name sake, and not our own.” Amen

**March 29<sup>th</sup>, 2009**  
**“Jailhouse Rock”**  
**(Acts 5:12-42)**

*Meanwhile, the apostles were performing many miraculous signs and wonders among the people. And the believers were meeting regularly at the Temple in the area known as Solomon's Colonnade. 13 No one else dared to join them, though everyone had high regard for them. 14 And more and more people believed and were brought to the Lord — crowds of both men and women. 15 As a result of the apostles' work, sick people were brought out into the streets on beds and mats so that Peter's shadow might fall across some of them as he went by. 16 Crowds came in from the villages around Jerusalem, bringing their sick and those possessed by evil spirits, and they were all healed.*

*17 The high priest and his friends, who were Sadducees, reacted with violent jealousy. 18 They arrested the apostles and put them in the jail. 19 But an angel of the Lord came at night, opened the gates of the jail, and brought them out. Then he told them, 20 "Go to the Temple and give the people this message of life!" 21 So the apostles entered the Temple about daybreak and immediately began teaching.*

*When the high priest and his officials arrived, they convened the high council, along with all the elders of Israel. Then they sent for the apostles to be brought for trial. 22 But when the Temple guards went to the jail, the men were gone. So they returned to the council and reported, 23 "The jail was locked, with the guards standing outside, but when we opened the gates, no one was there!"*

*24 When the captain of the Temple guard and the leading priests heard this, they were perplexed, wondering where it would all end. 25 Then someone arrived with the news that the men they had jailed were out in the Temple, teaching the people.*

*26 The captain went with his Temple guards and arrested them, but without violence, for they were afraid the people would kill them if they treated the apostles roughly. 27 Then they brought the apostles in before the council. 28 "Didn't we tell you never again to teach in this man's name?" the high priest demanded. "Instead, you have filled all Jerusalem with your teaching about Jesus, and you intend to blame us for his death!"*

*29 But Peter and the apostles replied, "We must obey God rather than human authority. 30 The God of our ancestors raised Jesus from the dead after you killed him by*

*crucifying him. 31 Then God put him in the place of honor at his right hand as Prince and Savior. He did this to give the people of Israel an opportunity to turn from their sins and turn to God so their sins would be forgiven. 32 We are witnesses of these things and so is the Holy Spirit, who is given by God to those who obey him."*

*33 At this, the high council was furious and decided to kill them. 34 But one member had a different perspective. He was a Pharisee named Gamaliel, who was an expert on religious law and was very popular with the people. He stood up and ordered that the apostles be sent outside the council chamber for a while. 35 Then he addressed his colleagues as follows: "Men of Israel, take care what you are planning to do to these men! 36 Some time ago there was that fellow Theudas, who pretended to be someone great. About four hundred others joined him, but he was killed, and his followers went their various ways. The whole movement came to nothing. 37 After him, at the time of the census, there was Judas of Galilee. He got some people to follow him, but he was killed, too, and all his followers were scattered.*

*38 "So my advice is, leave these men alone. If they are teaching and doing these things merely on their own, it will soon be overthrown. 39 But if it is of God, you will not be able to stop them. You may even find yourselves fighting against God."*

*40 The council accepted his advice. They called in the apostles and had them flogged. Then they ordered them never again to speak in the name of Jesus, and they let them go. 41 The apostles left the high council rejoicing that God had counted them worthy to suffer dishonor for the name of Jesus. 42 And every day, in the Temple and in their homes, they continued to teach and preach this message: "The Messiah you are looking for is Jesus." NLT*

*\Acts\Chapter 5\5:11-16\Authority and faith - Acts\Chapter 5\5:15\Casting shadows*

Authority and faith: -- This is a beautiful picture of the apostles leading the infant Christian community and proclaiming a "obey God rather than man" testimony to their Risen Lord, displays to us the great truth on which the Christian Church is founded. Besides the obvious thrilling story of the apostles being supernaturally released from jail we can also find here the principles of spiritual authority and the existence of spiritual office within the structure of the ministry of the Church. Not a religious legalism or bureaucratic hierarchy -- office and authority that was eagerly and cheerfully recognized and submitted to. Not positions and titles given to undeserving men and women using authority and power -- but influence and position given to passionate and responsible men and women to help meet the needs of the growing body of Christ. Their office (position) was of Divine appointment and came out of unique blend of experience, training, and direct calling from Jesus Himself. It also came at a great personal cost -- these apostles had forsaken all and followed Jesus; in the end, they even gave their life. The authority, power and influence came with their office (position). But the position they held came from God through authority of Jesus. They had unwavering faith and with it came authority. It all worked and worked well because they became the men of faith Jesus

asked them to become. They were common men, chosen and trained by Jesus – to be like Jesus. Without that transformation then they would just become another group of religious leaders with some seriously dangerous power and control issues. **Their authority and power was from Christ** and as long as they were who they were supposed to be (in Christ) they were legitimate, and so was their work. Without the genuine heart and love of Jesus then there is no spiritual authority or spiritual office – period. Remember... without love we Christians are pretty much irrelevant.

Nothing has changed. In our day many have lost sight of that truth – so they mistake large crowds and commercial success for legitimate spiritual authority and social influence. This is nothing more than a form of godliness and the influence and work of men. It certainly cannot be considered to apostolic authority and office. It doesn't meet the criteria. Today, if and when that kind of spiritual authority and influence exists the criteria for it is simple. However, like most things that are hard, difficult, and require personal risk no one wants to tell the truth about the truth... lets take a shot at it.

- **Sacrifice** - *They left all and followed Jesus – it cost them everything.*
- **Generosity** - *They gave of what they had and shared with those in need – it gave them favor with the people.*
- **Love** - *They included everyone who was excluded by the religion of the day (Judaism) – it gave life to the gospel and gathered the community of Jesus.*
- **Veracity** - *They did not vary in the message of the gospel when they preached – it gave them favor with God.*
- **Determination** - *They would not be silenced from preaching the truth – it infuriated their enemies.*
- **Genuine** - *They did not fall to the corruption and divisiveness of greed – it empowered the movement of faith.*
- **Courage** - *They were not intimidated or controlled by the authority of religious men – it broke the bondage of fear and gave them freedom.*

Now here is the piece to this that is truly jailhouse rock. Because the disciples had surrendered themselves and lived in sacrifice – generosity – love – truth – determination – genuineness and courage they could never be held in complete bondage. These were free men in Christ – free from all bonds, chains, bars, cuffs, and ropes; most of all free from the control of evil men. And on this particular day there was no jail on earth that would hold them either. Was this spiritual authority and position held by Jerusalem's newest and hottest? Or was this the power of the sovereign God working mightily in the lives of common regular men who had **done all** to follow and obey their Lord? The truth is found in the latter. They did not get the authority and position until they became in Christ who they were supposed to become. It wasn't "you have spiritual authority and a position of power and influence, now you can become in Christ who you are supposed to become." Spiritual authority and positions of power and influence come to the faithful – everything else is a fraud. That is God's criteria not mans.

Now, about the jailhouse rock... In Christ we are free – that is the truth. However, if you don't embrace the truth you do not get free. There is nothing that can hold us in bondage if we are willing to walk in the truth – truth that is Jesus – truth that is surrender! Yes there is only one way to God; and that is through Jesus Christ. But there are many ways to Jesus... worship, prayer, saying His name, humbling your heart, crying

out, shutting up, giving up... surrender.

April 5<sup>th</sup>, 2009 –

**“Ministry Burnout” (Acts 6:1-7)**

April 12<sup>th</sup>, 2009

**“Stephen and the Resurrection of Hope”**

**(Acts 6:8-15, 7:1-60)**

Now Stephen, a man full of God's grace and power, did great wonders and miraculous signs among the people.

Opposition arose, however, from members of the Synagogue of the Freedmen (as it was called)--Jews of Cyrene and Alexandria as well as the provinces of Cilicia and Asia. These men began to argue with Stephen, but they could not stand up against his wisdom or the Spirit by whom he spoke.

Then they secretly persuaded some men to say, "We have heard Stephen speak words of blasphemy against Moses and against God."

So they stirred up the people and the elders and the teachers of the law. They seized Stephen and brought him before the Sanhedrin.

They produced false witnesses, who testified, "This fellow never stops speaking against this holy place and against the law.

For we have heard him say that this Jesus of Nazareth will destroy this place and change the customs Moses handed down to us."

All who were sitting in the Sanhedrin looked intently at Stephen, and they saw that his face was like the face of an angel.

Then the high priest asked him, "Are these charges true?"

To this he replied: *"You stiff-necked people, with uncircumcised hearts and ears! You are just like your fathers: You always resist the Holy Spirit!"*

*Was there ever a prophet your fathers did not persecute? They even killed those who predicted the coming of the Righteous One. And now you have betrayed and murdered him--you who have received the law that was put into effect through angels but have not obeyed it."* When they heard this, they were furious and gnashed their teeth at him.

But Stephen, full of the Holy Spirit, looked up to heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God. "Look," he said, "I see heaven open and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God."

At this they covered their ears and, yelling at the top of their voices, they all rushed at him, dragged him out of the city and began to stone him. Meanwhile, the witnesses laid their clothes at the feet of a young man named Saul.

While they were stoning him, Stephen prayed, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit."

Then he fell on his knees and cried out, "Lord, do not hold this sin against them." When he had said this, he fell asleep.

"God does not dwell in temples made with hands."

Stephen was one of the first men to have suffered early Christian persecution. He was stoned to death outside the gates for the faithful manner in which he preached the Gospel. After this, a great persecution was raised against all who professed belief in Christ as the Messiah.

April 19<sup>th</sup>, 2009 –

### **"The Invasion of the Body Snatchers"**

**(Acts 8:1-39)**

*Saul was one of the official witnesses at the killing of Stephen.*

*A great wave of persecution began that day, sweeping over the church in Jerusalem, and all the believers except the apostles fled into Judea and Samaria. (Some godly men came and buried Stephen with loud weeping.) Saul was going everywhere to devastate the church. He went from house to house, dragging out both men and women to throw them into jail.*

*But the believers who had fled Jerusalem went everywhere preaching the Good News about Jesus. Philip, for example, went to the city of Samaria and told the people there*



*about the Messiah. Crowds listened intently to what he had to say because of the miracles he did. Many evil spirits were cast out, screaming as they left their victims. And many who had been paralyzed or lame were healed. So there was great joy in that city.*

*A man named Simon had been a sorcerer there for many years, claiming to be someone great. The Samaritan people, from the least to the greatest, often spoke of him as "the Great One — the Power of God." He was very influential because of the magic he performed. But now the people believed Philip's message of Good News concerning the Kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ. As a result, many men and women were baptized. Then Simon himself believed and was baptized. He began following Philip wherever he went, and he was amazed by the great miracles and signs Philip performed. When the apostles back in Jerusalem heard that the people of Samaria had accepted God's message, they sent Peter and John there. As soon as they arrived, they prayed for these new Christians to receive the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit had not yet come upon any of them, for they had only been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. Then Peter and John laid their hands upon these believers, and they received the Holy Spirit.*

*When Simon saw that the Holy Spirit was given when the apostles placed their hands upon people's heads, he offered money to buy this power. "Let me have this power, too," he exclaimed, "so that when I lay my hands on people, they will receive the Holy Spirit!" But Peter replied, "May your money perish with you for thinking God's gift can be bought! You can have no part in this, for your heart is not right before God. Turn from your wickedness and pray to the Lord. Perhaps he will forgive your evil thoughts, for I can see that you are full of bitterness and held captive by sin." "Pray to the Lord for me," Simon exclaimed, "that these terrible things won't happen to me!"*

*After testifying and preaching the word of the Lord in Samaria, Peter and John returned to Jerusalem. And they stopped in many Samaritan villages along the way to preach the Good News to them, too.*

*As for Philip, an angel of the Lord said to him, "Go south down the desert road that runs from Jerusalem to Gaza." So he did, and he met the treasurer of Ethiopia, a eunuch of great authority under the queen of Ethiopia. The eunuch had gone to Jerusalem to worship, and he was now returning. Seated in his carriage, he was reading aloud from the book of the prophet Isaiah.*

*The Holy Spirit said to Philip, "Go over and walk along beside the carriage." Philip ran over and heard the man reading from the prophet Isaiah; so he asked, "Do you understand what you are reading?"*

*The man replied, "How can I, when there is no one to instruct me?" And he begged Philip to come up into the carriage and sit with him. The passage of Scripture he had been reading was this:*

*"He was led as a sheep to the slaughter. And as a lamb is silent before the shearers, he did not open his mouth. He was humiliated and received no justice. Who can speak of his descendants? For his life was taken from the earth."*

*The eunuch asked Philip, "Was Isaiah talking about himself or someone else?" So Philip began with this same Scripture and then used many others to tell him the Good News about Jesus. As they rode along, they came to some water, and the eunuch said, "Look!*

*There's some water! Why can't I be baptized?" He ordered the carriage to stop, and they went down into the water, and Philip baptized him.*

*When they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord caught Philip away. The eunuch never saw him again but went on his way rejoicing. Meanwhile, Philip found himself farther north at the city of Azotus! He preached the Good News there and in every city along the way until he came to Caesarea. NLT*

### ***The Invasion of the Body Snatchers***

- **Jerusalem was no longer a safe place for Christians. There is now aggressive opposition and severe consequences for teaching or preaching the gospel of Jesus in public and in private.**
- **From the point of Stephen's violent death the apostles now begin to pray and listen to the Holy Spirit as to opportunities and plans for ministry outside the immediate influence and danger of Jerusalem.**
- **It was becoming clear that people from every religion and culture were open to the gospel of Jesus. Reports from neighboring regions return news of the gospel reaching more unbelieving cultures and religions.**
- **The Holy Spirit becomes a dynamic focal point for the belief and validation of Christ among not only unbelieving Jews - but non-Jews as well. God chooses not only to draw men and women to Him by the power of the Holy Spirit, but now to change and re-direct (convert) them mind, body, and soul as well.**
- **It was common practice for teachers and holy men to lay hands on someone when seeking to impart anointing or share a blessing. The apostles used this practice simply because it was what they knew. They laid hands on the sick and prayed for healing – they laid hands on the poor and prayed for provision – they laid hands on new believers and prayed for the favor (blessing) and immediate extraordinary influence of the power of the Holy Spirit.**
- **The evidence of this was not in merely in unknown tongues or supernatural manifestation – that alone would be too small and too self-serving (sorcerers could even do that). The core evidence of the blessing and influence of the Holy Spirit was found within the love of God that had captured these people. Love for a God that they now could know directly and personally; love for one another that could eliminate hostility and hatred. Finally, that they too (not just priests, holy men, or apostles) would become a living witness of the redeeming power of the love of Jesus Christ the Son of God.**
- **God through the power of the Holy Spirit would use anyone, anywhere, at**

**anytime with anybody. Phillip was the first to experience as he led the Ethiopian to Jesus and then into the waters of baptism – only to be snatched away supernaturally and moved to another region to be a witness of the life-changing gospel.**

April 26<sup>th</sup>, 2009 –  
**“I Saw the Light”**  
**(Acts 9:1-31)**

*Meanwhile, Saul was uttering threats with every breath. He was eager to destroy the Lord's followers, so he went to the high priest. 2 He requested letters addressed to the synagogues in Damascus, asking their cooperation in the arrest of any followers of the Way he found there. He wanted to bring them — both men and women — back to Jerusalem in chains.*

*3 As he was nearing Damascus on this mission, a brilliant light from heaven suddenly beamed down upon him! 4 He fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to him, "Saul! Saul! Why are you persecuting me?"*

*5 "Who are you, sir?" Saul asked.*

*And the voice replied, "I am Jesus, the one you are persecuting! 6 Now get up and go into the city, and you will be told what you are to do."*

*7 The men with Saul stood speechless with surprise, for they heard the sound of someone's voice, but they saw no one! 8 As Saul picked himself up off the ground, he found that he was blind. 9 So his companions led him by the hand to Damascus. He remained there blind for three days. And all that time he went without food and water.*

*10 Now there was a believer in Damascus named Ananias. The Lord spoke to him in a vision, calling, "Ananias!"*

*"Yes, Lord!" he replied.*

*11 The Lord said, "Go over to Straight Street, to the house of Judas. When you arrive, ask for Saul of Tarsus. He is praying to me right now. 12 I have shown him a vision of a man named Ananias coming in and laying his hands on him so that he can see again."*

*13 "But Lord," exclaimed Ananias, "I've heard about the terrible things this man has done to the believers in Jerusalem! 14 And we hear that he is authorized by the leading priests to arrest every believer in Damascus."*

*15 But the Lord said, "Go and do what I say. For Saul is my chosen instrument to take my message to the Gentiles and to kings, as well as to the people of Israel. 16 And I will show him how much he must suffer for me."*

*17 So Ananias went and found Saul. He laid his hands on him and said, "Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus, who appeared to you on the road, has sent me so that you may get your sight back and be filled with the Holy Spirit." 18 Instantly something like scales fell from Saul's eyes, and he regained his sight. Then he got up and was baptized. 19 Afterward he ate some food and was strengthened.*

#### *Saul in Damascus and Jerusalem*

*Saul stayed with the believers in Damascus for a few days. 20 And immediately he began preaching about Jesus in the synagogues, saying, "He is indeed the Son of God!"*

*21 All who heard him were amazed. "Isn't this the same man who persecuted Jesus' followers with such devastation in Jerusalem?" they asked. "And we understand that he came here to arrest them and take them in chains to the leading priests."*

*22 Saul's preaching became more and more powerful, and the Jews in Damascus couldn't refute his proofs that Jesus was indeed the Messiah. 23 After a while the Jewish leaders decided to kill him. 24 But Saul was told about their plot, and that they were watching for him day and night at the city gate so they could murder him. 25 So during the night, some of the other believers let him down in a large basket through an opening in the city wall.*

*26 When Saul arrived in Jerusalem, he tried to meet with the believers, but they were all afraid of him. They thought he was only pretending to be a believer! 27 Then Barnabas brought him to the apostles and told them how Saul had seen the Lord on the way to*

*Damascus. Barnabas also told them what the Lord had said to Saul and how he boldly preached in the name of Jesus in Damascus. 28 Then the apostles accepted Saul, and after that he was constantly with them in Jerusalem, preaching boldly in the name of the Lord. 29 He debated with some Greek-speaking Jews, but they plotted to murder him. 30 When the believers heard about it, however, they took him to Caesarea and sent him on to his hometown of Tarsus.*

*31 The church then had peace throughout Judea, Galilee, and Samaria, and it grew in strength and numbers. The believers were walking in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit.*

*NLT*

### ***I Saw the Light – Conversion***

***Saul Converted to Paul*** – a new name, a new identity

***Death Converted to Life*** – the Spirit gives life, Jesus is life

***Persecution Converted to Rescue*** – no longer destroying all that we touch, a lifeline to those who are perishing

***Lies Converted to Truth*** – walking out of the place of fear and suspicion, into the light of freedom and liberty

***Desperation Converted to Hope*** – the scramble and chaos of survival calmed by the promise of a better tomorrow

***Darkness Converted to Light*** – the futility of deception abruptly and immediately remedied by the revelation of love

***Hatred Converted to Love*** – hostility, anger, aggression, frustration, ignorance held accountable by compassion, grace and mercy

***Blind Converted to Sight*** – the unseen, the unknown, the unheard given form, made known, and heard... I was blind but now I see

**May 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2009**

**“Rising Up”**

**(Acts 9:32-43)**

*Peter traveled from place to place to visit the believers, and in his travels he came to the*

*Lord's people in the town of Lydda. 33 There he met a man named Aeneas, who had been paralyzed and bedridden for eight years. 34 Peter said to him, "Aeneas, Jesus Christ heals you! Get up and make your bed!" And he was healed instantly. 35 Then the whole population of Lydda and Sharon turned to the Lord when they saw Aeneas walking around.*

*36 There was a believer in Joppa named Tabitha (which in Greek is Dorcas ). She was always doing kind things for others and helping the poor. 37 About this time she became ill and died. Her friends prepared her for burial and laid her in an upstairs room. 38 But they had heard that Peter was nearby at Lydda, so they sent two men to beg him, "Please come as soon as possible!"*

*39 So Peter returned with them; and as soon as he arrived, they took him to the upstairs room. The room was filled with widows who were weeping and showing him the coats and other garments Dorcas had made for them. 40 But Peter asked them all to leave the room; then he knelt and prayed. Turning to the body he said, "Get up, Tabitha." And she opened her eyes! When she saw Peter, she sat up! 41 He gave her his hand and helped her up. Then he called in the widows and all the believers, and he showed them that she was alive.*

*42 The news raced through the whole town, and many believed in the Lord. 43 And Peter stayed a long time in Joppa, living with Simon, a leatherworker. NLT*

## ***Rising Up***

### ***Characters:***

**One** - the paralyzed man named Aeneas. Aeneas was bedridden and could not walk.

**Two** – the seamstress named Tabitha. Tabitha (grk; Dorcas) was a generous women who used all of her resources and talent to do good things for people who could not do for themselves. Tabitha had become ill and died.

**Three** - Peter the disciple of Jesus, who since Pentecost had become one of the more dynamic and aggressive apostles and was now (because of the danger) traveling to regions and communities outside of Jerusalem to preach the gospel and pray for the sick.

### ***Setting:***

**Joppa** (the seaport), and **Lydda** (the travelers rest) were the small communities that these two miracles took place. With only ten miles distance between them they both were very small towns in comparison to Jerusalem - but very large towns in the strategic opportunity they held to expand the gospel of Jesus around the world.

**Facts: Two miracles** – Aeneas resident of Lydda is healed instantly as Peter calls on him to *rise up* and make his bed. He responds immediately gets up makes his bed and walks. Upon urgent request Peter travels (with escort) on to Joppa to pray for the woman Tabitha. When he arrives in Joppa he kneels in Tabitha's room and prays. He pauses from his prayer turns to her lifeless body calls her name and asks her (as he did Aeneas) to rise up. Tabitha's eye's open to Peter's request and with his assistance she rises up and

returns to her life!

***Observations:***

**One** - These miracles literally ***opened the door*** to thousands of Jews, Gentiles, pagans, agnostics and atheists finding their faith in God by coming to a relationship with Jesus. The miracles they witnessed overpowered the contradiction of their unbelief.

**Two** - Peter was not looking to project himself into the spotlight of fame (for example) To Aeneas he says... *"Jesus Christ heals you!"* To Tabitha he sends everyone out of the room before he prays for her. These are clear indicators that Peter was committed to the gospel of Jesus rising up and not the reputation and exploits of man.

**Three** – The location of Joppa and Lydda make them strategic for communicating the “good news.” Joppa was a seaport community that welcomed travelers and pilgrim’s headed to Jerusalem from around the world. Lydda was the first travelers rest on the only road in the region headed east on the 2-3 day journey to Jerusalem. If they were large cities the miracles would have been isolated and lost in a vacuum amidst the many events and life of a big city. As smaller communities anything of the miraculous magnitude would be the only thing a traveler would hear about as they passed through. This created a rapid grass roots type communication method (like the present day text) for the gospel of Jesus.

***Conclusion:***

The miraculous is a sign to the unbeliever to believe. Both of these small communities entertained and serviced an extremely high volume of people and traffic. The news they heard while passing through now became available to whomever and wherever they traveled and then beyond. The gospel of Jesus was spread like a virus as a grass roots movement of the people. When someone miraculously ***rises up*** it never impacts just that one. It impacts all who see and hear.

***In Christ you are rising up***

***The community at Reunion is rising up***

***Tell every unbeliever what you have seen and heard***

***Tell everyone who needs it***

***Tell them to rise up***

**May 10<sup>th</sup>, 2009**

**Mother's Day**

**"The Love of God – It's for Everyone"**

**(Acts 10:1-48, 11:1-18)**

**(Acts 10:1-21)**

*In Caesarea there lived a Roman army officer named Cornelius, who was a captain of the Italian Regiment. 2 He was a devout, God-fearing man, as was everyone in his household. He gave generously to the poor and prayed regularly to God. 3 One afternoon about three o'clock, he had a vision in which he saw an angel of God coming toward him. "Cornelius!" the angel said. 4 Cornelius stared at him in terror. "What is it, sir?" he asked the angel. And the angel replied, "Your prayers and gifts to the poor have been received by God as an offering! 5 Now send some men to Joppa, and summon a man named Simon Peter. 6 He is staying with Simon, a tanner who lives near the seashore." 7 As soon as the angel was gone, Cornelius called two of his household servants and a devout soldier, one of his personal attendants. 8 He told them what had happened and sent them off to Joppa. 9 The next day as Cornelius's messengers were nearing the town, Peter went up on the flat roof to pray. It was about noon, 10 and he was hungry. But while a meal was being prepared, he fell into a trance. 11 He saw the sky open, and something like a large sheet was let down by its four corners. 12 In the sheet were all sorts of animals, reptiles, and birds. 13 Then a voice said to him, "Get up, Peter; kill and eat them." 14 "No, Lord," Peter declared. "I have never eaten anything that our Jewish laws have declared impure and unclean." 15 But the voice spoke again: "Do not call something unclean if God has made it clean." 16 The same vision was repeated three times. Then the sheet was suddenly pulled up to heaven. 17 Peter was very perplexed. What could the vision mean? Just then the men sent by Cornelius found Simon's house. Standing outside the gate, 18 they asked if a man named Simon Peter was staying there. 19 Meanwhile, as Peter was puzzling over the vision, the Holy Spirit said to him, "Three men have come looking for you. 20 Get up, go downstairs, and go with them without hesitation. Don't worry, for I have sent them." 21 So Peter went down and said, "I'm the man you are looking for. Why have you come?"*



### **Vision – Cornelius**

The vision of Cornelius took place between 37 or 38 A.D. and is a landmark event in the unfolding story of the preaching of the gospel of Jesus during this time. It becomes the overriding (Judaism) message and criterion for the love of God - and just who it is that is loved by God. Cornelius was a professional soldier who had worked himself through the ranks as a Centurion officer (100 men) to Captain and command of a “regiment” or “cohort” which was six hundred men. Historical research reveals that evidence that there were five of these cohorts in and around Caesarea and Jerusalem during this time. The last time Cornelius was historically traced was around A.D. 69 in Palestine. There is more to Cornelius than meets the eye. A devoutly spiritual man; his friends and family knew him as kind, generous, and driven by his sense of seeking to know God. To the Jews who learned to appreciate him he was considered a “Gentile God-fearer.”

Nonetheless, Cornelius prayed daily and His heart and his mind were open to God. His vision is a simple one. The angel comes to him one day while he is at prayer and says... *“Your prayers and generosity have been welcomed by God as an offering. Send for a man name Peter, he is living in Joppa, he will tell what this means.”* Cornelius, fearfully wastes no time, and immediately sends three men for Peter.

### **Vision – Peter**

Peter the apostle, (fresh off the healing of the cripple Annias and the miraculous raising of the dead of Tabitha the Seamstress), is living in Joppa with Simon the Leather-worker. On the same afternoon that the attendants of Cornelius arrive in Joppa, Peter (at the home of Simon) while waiting for a late lunch falls into deep sleep. During this deep sleep Peter too has a vision.

The heavens open up and from them what appears to a sheet with four corners rolled open. As the sheet unfurls before him it reveals animals, reptiles and birds. Some are clean and some are unclean by Jewish religious custom. The voice of the Spirit calls to Peter to kill and eat. The vision comes three times. The reply of Peter (because there is always a reply from Peter and usually in three's) is not what God wanted to hear.

*“No, Lord,” Peter declared. “I have never eaten anything that our Jewish laws have declared impure and unclean.”*

And, with impeccable timing there is the Peter we have all come to know and love...

**“No Lord, you will never wash my feet”**

**“No Lord, I will never deny you”**

**“Lord, you know that I love you”**

Peter's responses did not fit God's will then and they certainly would not fit here either. **The Spirit of God says to Peter... “Do not call something unclean if God has made it clean.”**

And as Peter within the next twelve hours would discover the vision he received was not about food... clean or unclean. It was not about him having permission from God to eat unclean food. It was not about the law or the lawless or who was keeping and who wasn't. It was about something far more important to the heart of God than rituals, legalism, and religion - it was about His love... the love of God. The love for everyone.

**(Song – The Love of God)**

**Revelation – Cornelius and Peter**

The revelation Cornelius would receive was that he was accepted and loved by God and he did not need to be approved by men and their religion. God would baptize Cornelius with the Holy Spirit and the evidence would be the gift of *glossalaia* – *a new tongue*. This was not only a sign for Peter, but for all at that time who did not believe that God loves all men, and He approves all men who seek Him. It was the revelation that the love of God is for everyone.

The revelation for Peter was the beginning of many lessons that God was no longer exclusively on the Judaism train (I guess you would call that a “Jew Jew train”). The moment that Peter walked into the greeting room of the gentile Cornelius, and he knelt at Peter’s feet love could no longer be denied – he would have access. This was the revelation and message that Peter and all of the apostles must quickly embrace. ***Those who God makes clean we cannot call unclean. Those who God loves and approves - we cannot deny love. The Love of God - for everyone.***

**May 17<sup>th</sup>, 2009**

**(Acts 12:1-25)**

**“Love - The Cost of Freedom”**

*About that time King Herod Agrippa began to persecute some believers in the church. He had the apostle James (John's brother) killed with a sword. When Herod saw how much this pleased the Jewish people, he also arrested Peter. (This took place during the Passover celebration.) Then he imprisoned him, placing him under the guard of four squads of four soldiers each. Herod intended to bring Peter out for public trial after the Passover. But while Peter was in prison, the church prayed very earnestly for him.*

***Peter's Miraculous Escape from Prison***

*The night before Peter was to be placed on trial, he was asleep, fastened with two chains between two soldiers. Others stood guard at the prison gate. Suddenly, there was a bright light in the cell, and an angel of the Lord stood before Peter. The angel struck him on the side to awaken him and said, "Quick! Get up!" And the chains fell off his wrists. Then the angel told him, "Get dressed and put on your sandals." And he did. "Now put on your coat and follow me," the angel ordered. So Peter left the cell, following the angel. But all the time he thought it was a vision. He didn't realize it was actually happening. They passed the first and second guard posts and came to the iron gate leading to the*

*city, and this opened for them all by itself. So they passed through and started walking down the street, and then the angel suddenly left him. Peter finally came to his senses. "It's really true!" he said. "The Lord has sent his angel and saved me from Herod and from what the Jewish leaders had planned to do to me!"*

*When he realized this, he went to the home of Mary, the mother of John Mark, where many were gathered for prayer. He knocked at the door in the gate, and a servant girl named Rhoda came to open it. When she recognized Peter's voice, she was so overjoyed that, instead of opening the door, she ran back inside and told everyone, "Peter is standing at the door!" "You're out of your mind!" they said. When she insisted, they decided, "It must be his angel." Meanwhile, Peter continued knocking. When they finally opened the door and saw him, they were amazed. He motioned for them to quiet down and told them how the Lord had led him out of prison. "Tell James and the other brothers what happened," he said. And then he went to another place. At dawn there was a great commotion among the soldiers about what had happened to Peter. Herod Agrippa ordered a thorough search for him. When he couldn't be found, Herod interrogated the guards and sentenced them to death. Afterward Herod left Judea to stay in Caesarea for a while.*

### ***The Death of Herod Agrippa***

*Now Herod was very angry with the people of Tyre and Sidon. So they sent a delegation to make peace with him because their cities were dependent upon Herod's country for food. The delegates won the support of Blastus, Herod's personal assistant, and an appointment with Herod was granted. When the day arrived, Herod put on his royal robes, sat on his throne, and made a speech to them. The people gave him a great ovation, shouting, "It's the voice of a god, not of a man!" Instantly, an angel of the Lord struck Herod with a sickness, because he accepted the people's worship instead of giving the glory to God. So he was consumed with worms and died.*

To grow our faith and deepen our relationship with Christ we must search for the heartbeat of God the Father - and begin to think at various levels the very thoughts of Jesus. This is where Peter, James and the apostles were at this time. What I mean by that is...

***(Philippians 2:1-5)*** *Is there any encouragement from belonging to Christ? Any comfort from his love? Any fellowship together in the Spirit? Are your hearts tender and compassionate? 2 Then make me truly happy by agreeing wholeheartedly with each other, loving one another, and working together with one mind and purpose. 3 Don't be selfish; don't try to impress others. Be humble, thinking of others as better than yourselves. 4 Don't look out only for your own*

interests, but take an interest in others, too. 5 You must have the same attitude (thinking) that Christ Jesus had. **(1 John**

**5:20)** And we know that the Son of God has come, and he has given us understanding so that we can know the true God. And now we live in fellowship with the true God because we live in fellowship with his Son, Jesus Christ. He is the only true God, and he is eternal life.

**(Eph 1:15-18)** Ever since I first heard of your strong faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for God's people everywhere, 16 I have not stopped thanking God for you. I pray for you constantly, 17 asking God, the glorious Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, to give you spiritual wisdom and insight so that you might grow in your knowledge of God. 18 I pray that your hearts will be flooded with light so that you can understand the confident hope he has given to those he called—his holy people who are his rich and glorious inheritance.

Because of the strong influence of bible verses like this and others, like you hear Christian people say things like... “to know God”, “knowing the heart of the Father”, or “having the mind of Christ” and “to think like Jesus” Phrases like these are obviously church speak or what I call *Christ-ebonics*. But we have to look past how we say it – because we need to know that there is real spiritual freedom in knowing God and in thinking like Jesus. The apostles, James and Peter, had that spiritual freedom. James (the brother of John) was killed Herod Agrippa, for what He knew about God, and because he thought like Jesus. Peter his long-long friend, was put in prison by the same man for the same reason, and without a miraculous escape, would have been killed as well.

What this tells us is that there is a cost for spiritual freedom. Yes, Jesus has paid for our sin (yours and mine), and our salvation. But make no mistake, there is a cost to you and I for the freedom to follow, to teach, to worship, and to love and be loved after the heart of God. There is a cost to think the thoughts of Jesus. **Know this: the heart of God and thoughts of Jesus are as they were in Peter and James world – they are really offensive to what is inside the heart of man and the thoughts that men think in our world.**

*How is that freedom?*

*It is freedom because we can choose to follow or not.*

*It is freedom because we can be in Him - not always do for Him.*

*It is freedom because we do not have to hate, or punish, or get even with people  
we do not like.*

*It is freedom because we not have to judge, or fix, reject or destroy people that  
are different or do not agree with us.*

*It is freedom because we do not have to be someone we were not made to be.*

*It is freedom because we don't have figure God out everyday - or always be  
right about who He is, what He does, and why He does it.*

The freedom we talk about is His love. The freedom James and Peter experienced? Was loving and being loved by Jesus. His love like then is just an open door to a place in Him... a place He has made welcome for all kinds of people who believe in Him. If we can fully embrace that reality and the people in it - then we can continue forward from there to understand the next level of spiritual freedom... and what it cost.

***JESUS DOES NOT SHUT OUT ANYONE***

***WHO SEEKS A PLACE IN HIM***

***(ACTS 13:39)***

*Everyone who believes in him is declared right with God—something the law of  
Moses could never do.*

***AS FOLLOWERS OF JESUS IT IS EXPECTED THAT WE EXTEND TO OTHERS WHAT CHRIST HAS  
FREELY EXTENDED TO US.***

***(John 13:34, 35)***

*So now I am giving you a new commandment: Love each other. Just as I have  
loved you, you should love each other. Your love for one another will prove to the world  
that you are my disciples."*

What Jesus asked of us was that we give a sincere, non-pretentious, prejudice-proof, and religion-free invitation to others for a life together *with us in Him*. Dietrich Bonhoeffer put it best when he wrote, *“Love for our neighbor and for one another should stretch widely across all space and distance; and should be equally distributed throughout every portion of it – in the same way the sun casts out light. Christ invited us to share the perfection of the heavenly Father by imitating His indiscriminate gift of that light (love).”*

Bonhoeffer was just confirming that we should love not only completely, but love completely consistent with the truth we know of the heart and character of God and the thinking of Jesus. In doing this we can experience the spiritual freedom that James, Peter and the rest of the apostles experienced. The cost of that freedom will be revealed as we go deeper into the love of God, and who He has called His followers to be.

We know from the teaching of Jesus and from how He has personally reached out to us that His love is indeed open and that it knows no limits. Jesus has called us to love people in the same way *“in the same way I have loved you, love one another...”* It is also clear there can be no disconnect between preaching the message of Christ’s love and how we are to live with others in His love.

(Romans 12:9-10)

*Don't just pretend to love others. Really love them. Hate what is wrong. Hold tightly to what is good. Love each other with genuine affection, and take delight in honoring each other.*

This is the point of revelation where we the community of Christ at Reunion can discover that we must go beyond ourselves to follow the heart of God and the mind of Jesus. ***Some will even have to get beyond their own personal religion*** in order to do it. We are to make a place in Jesus for everyone who seeks Him, a place that is welcome, open, and free. The cost of this kind of place is in the relationships (the ones we keep and the ones we lose). Yes, it is an open free space but to love and be loved like Jesus - there is a cost. If it sounds like a contradiction it is not – it is a paradox, and Jesus paid for it.

The cost was His life – the price was His love. He died so we might be free from sin and death. He did that with love – and love is the cost of freedom.

To love and be loved by God and the people of God without fear or presence of rejection, manipulation, or hostility is like being let out “church-jail.” There is as we said, a critical moment where people who will love and be loved the way Jesus intended, discover there is a cost for the kind of freedom that love brings. The apostles counted the cost and paid the price – we got next...

**May 24<sup>th</sup>, 2009**  
**The Missionary Man**  
**(Acts Chapters 13 & 14)**

*Verses 1-4: Among the prophets and teachers of the church at Antioch of Syria were Barnabas, Simeon (called "the black man"), Lucius (from Cyrene), Manaen (the childhood companion of King Herod Antipas), and Saul. 2 One day as these men were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, "Dedicate Barnabas and Saul for the special work to which I have called them." 3 So after more fasting and prayer, the men laid their hands on them and sent them on their way. 4 So Barnabas and Saul were*

*sent out by the Holy Spirit.*

***Telling the Missionary Man story...***

- **First missionary journey of Paul is birthed (answering the call) [verses 1-3].**
- **Paul the apostle (one who is sent) goes from the community of believers with a spiritual covering and accountability [verses 13:2-4, 14:27,28].**
- **A specific mission (what) of preaching the gospel to a world inclusive of Gentiles, Political Rulers, and the Jews (verse 6-12, chapter 9:15,16). A life altering journey and adventure not a Pay Per-view ministry event .**
- **A clear revelation (why) (verses 13:46-49).**
- **The right traveling companions (who) with common calling and mission – commitment to love (verses 13, 14).**

***Relatable Observations and Relevant Questions...***

*Paul the apostle was a “made” man.*

*What were you “made” for?*

*Do know your life mission?*

*Are you on it?*

*If yes, how is it going?*

*If no, what are you waiting for?*

*My name is steve; I was made for...*



**May 31<sup>st</sup>, June 7<sup>th</sup>, 2009**

**Getting On the Same Page as Jesus**

**(Acts - Chapter 15)**

*(Acts 15:4-21)*

*When they arrived in Jerusalem, Barnabas and Paul were welcomed by the whole church, including the apostles and elders. They reported everything God had done through them. 5 But then some of the believers who belonged to the sect of the Pharisees stood up and insisted, "The Gentile converts must be circumcised and required to follow the law of Moses."*

*6 So the apostles and elders met together to resolve this issue. 7 At the meeting, after a long discussion, Peter stood and addressed them as follows: "Brothers, you all know that God chose me from among you some time ago to preach to the Gentiles so that they could hear the Good News and believe. 8 God knows people's hearts, and he confirmed that he accepts Gentiles by giving them the Holy Spirit, just as he did to us. 9 He made no distinction between us and them, for he cleansed their hearts through faith. 10 So why are you now challenging God by burdening the Gentile believers with a yoke that neither we nor our ancestors were able to bear? 11 We believe that we are all saved the same way, by the undeserved grace of the Lord Jesus." 12 Everyone listened quietly as Barnabas and Paul told about the miraculous signs and wonders God had done through them among the Gentiles. 13 When they had finished, James stood and said, "Brothers, listen to me. 14 Peter has told you about the time God first visited the Gentiles to take from them a people for himself. 15 And this conversion of Gentiles is exactly what the prophets predicted. As it is written: 16 'Afterward I will return and restore the fallen house of David. I will rebuild its ruins and restore it, 17 so that the rest of humanity might seek the Lord, including the Gentiles—all those I have called to be mine. The Lord has spoken—18 he who made these things known so long ago.' 19 "And so my judgment is that we should not make it difficult for the Gentiles who are turning to God. 20 Instead, we should write and tell them to abstain from eating food offered to idols, from sexual immorality, from eating the meat of strangled animals, and from consuming blood. 21 For these laws of Moses have been preached in Jewish synagogues in every city on every Sabbath for many generations."*

- **The First Council at Jerusalem**
- **Tensions among the Leaders**
- **Moving from Doing to Listening?**
- **From Heroism to Daily-ness**
- **Getting Beyond Walls of Personal Religion to Finding Heart of God**
- **The Past - The Present - The Future**
- **I Was a Stranger and You Welcomed Me**

**THE SIXTEEN THINGS YOU JUST GOTTA' DO  
TO GET ON THE SAME PAGE AS JESUS**

*(Romans 12)*

**ONE - GIVE YOURSELF TO GOD... SURRENDER**

**(vs. 1)**

**TWO - CHANGE YOUR THINKING**

**(vs. 2)**

**THREE – GET REAL... YEAH, REALLY**

**(vs. 3)**

**FOUR - JOIN THE GROUP AND BE ALL YOU CAN BE**

**(vs. 5)**

**FIVE - KNOW YOUR ROLE**

**(vs. 5, 6)**

**SIX – NOW, KINDLY ROLL WITH IT**

**(vs. 7, 8)**

**SEVEN - ...LOVE ME TENDER, LOVE ME TRUE**

**(vs.9)**

**EIGHT - HATE EVIL... PERIOD**

**(vs. 9)**

**NINE - GET A GRIP ON WHAT IS GOOD**

**AND DON'T LET GO**

**(vs. 9)**

**TEN – BE LEGIT, STEP OFF, AND HONOR SOMEONE ELSE**

**(vs. 10)**

**ELEVEN – GET UP, GET OVER IT, AND BE**

**GLAD YOU GET TO**

**(vs. 11)**

**TWELVE – BE AVAILABLE TO BE ENCOURAGING**

**(vs. 12, 13)**

**THIRTEEN - PRAY FOR THE VILLAINS IN YOUR LIFE**

**(vs. 14)**

**FOURTEEN - WALK CLOSE - WALK TOGETHER – USE THE MAP (vs. 15,16)**

**FIFTEEN - DO THINGS RIGHT ALL THE TIME – NOT JUST SOME OF THE TIME**

**(vs. 17)**

**SIXTEEN – ATTENTION ALL STALKERS... FORGET ABOUT PAY-BACKS**

**(vs.19)**

**June 14<sup>th</sup>, 2009**

**An Apprentice, An Exorcism, and some Midnight Madness, or Just Another Day in the Life of... Paul and his Friends, Paul and Silas Go Euro! or possibly, Don't Taze me Bro!**

**Text: Acts Chapter 16**

**Reading: Acts 16:22-40**

*A mob quickly formed against Paul and Silas, and the city officials ordered them stripped and beaten with wooden rods. 23 They were severely beaten, and then they were thrown into prison. The jailer was ordered to make sure they didn't escape. 24 So the jailer put them into the inner dungeon and clamped their feet in the stocks. 25 Around midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the other prisoners were listening. 26 Suddenly, there was a massive earthquake, and the prison was shaken to its foundations. All the doors immediately flew open, and the chains of every prisoner fell off! 27 The jailer woke up to see the prison doors wide open. He assumed the prisoners had escaped, so he drew his sword to kill himself. 28 But Paul shouted to him, "Stop! Don't kill yourself! We are all here!" 29 The jailer called for lights and ran to the*

dungeon and fell down trembling before Paul and Silas. 30 Then he brought them out and asked, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" 31 They replied, "Believe in the Lord Jesus and you will be saved, along with everyone in your household." 32 And they shared the word of the Lord with him and with all who lived in his household. 33 Even at that hour of the night, the jailer cared for them and washed their wounds. Then he and everyone in his household were immediately baptized. 34 He brought them into his house and set a meal before them, and he and his entire household rejoiced because they all believed in God.

35 The next morning the city officials sent the police to tell the jailer, "Let those men go!" 36 So the jailer told Paul, "The city officials have said you and Silas are free to leave. Go in peace." 37 But Paul replied, "They have publicly beaten us without a trial and put us in prison—and we are Roman citizens. So now they want us to leave secretly? Certainly not! Let them come themselves to release us!" 38 When the police reported this, the city officials were alarmed to learn that Paul and Silas were Roman citizens. 39 So they came to the jail and apologized to them. Then they brought them out and begged them to leave the city. 40 When Paul and Silas left the prison, they returned to the home of Lydia. There they met with the believers and encouraged them once more. Then they left town.

- **Spiritual Relationships and Reliable Friends for the Journey (vs.1-3)**

*Paul – Spiritual Father*

*Timothy – Spiritual son*

*Luke – Spiritual brother*

*Silas – Spiritual brother*

- **Direction, Movement, and Decisions (vs. 6-9)**

*Sensibility and Practicality (Romans 12:17-21)*

*Prophetic Word (1 Timothy 4:13-16)*

*Revelation of Truth (Ephesians 1:1-23)*

*Visions and Dreams (Acts 2:17-21)*

- **Evil Spirits and the Occult (vs. 16-18)**

*The one who is in you is greater... (1 John 4:4)*

*Darkness has no authority over Christ in us... (Luke 10:18-20)*

*I will fear no evil... (Psalm 23, 1 Peter 3:13-16)*

*We encounter evil – we do not search for it (Acts 13:16-19)*

- **Paying a Price for the Gospel (vs. 22-24)**

*If the world hates you, keep in mind that it hated me first... (John 15:18,19)*

*In this world you will have trouble... (John 16:33)*

*I assure you that everyone who has given up a house or brothers or sisters... (Mark 10:29-31)*

**June 21st, 2009**  
**To An Unknown god**  
**(Acts chapter 17)**

*Acts 17:13-31*

*But when some Jews in Thessalonica learned that Paul was preaching the word of God in Berea, they went there and stirred up trouble. 14 The believers acted at once, sending Paul on to the coast, while Silas and Timothy remained behind. 15 Those escorting Paul went with him all the way to Athens; then they returned to Berea with instructions for Silas and Timothy to hurry and join him.*

*16 While Paul was waiting for them in Athens, he was deeply troubled by all the idols he saw everywhere in the city. 17 He went to the synagogue to reason with the Jews and the God-fearing Gentiles, and he spoke daily in the public square to all who happened to be there.*

*18 He also had a debate with some of the Epicurean and Stoic philosophers. When he told them about Jesus and his resurrection, they said, "What's this babbler trying to say with these strange ideas he's picked up?" Others said, "He seems to be preaching about some foreign gods."*

19 Then they took him to the high council of the city. "Come and tell us about this new teaching," they said. 20 "You are saying some rather strange things, and we want to know what it's all about." 21 (It should be explained that all the Athenians as well as the foreigners in Athens seemed to spend all their time discussing the latest ideas.)

22 So Paul, standing before the council, addressed them as follows: "Men of Athens, I notice that you are very religious in every way, 23 for as I was walking along I saw your many shrines. And one of your altars had this inscription on it: 'To an Unknown God.' This God, whom you worship without knowing, is the one I'm telling you about.

24 "He is the God who made the world and everything in it. Since he is Lord of heaven and earth, he doesn't live in man-made temples, 25 and human hands can't serve his needs—for he has no needs. He himself gives life and breath to everything, and he satisfies every need. 26 From one man he created all the nations throughout the whole earth. He decided beforehand when they should rise and fall, and he determined their boundaries.

27 "His purpose was for the nations to seek after God and perhaps feel their way toward him and find him—though he is not far from any one of us. 28 For in him we live and move and exist. As some of your own poets have said, 'We are his offspring.' 29 And since this is true, we shouldn't think of God as an idol designed by craftsmen from gold or silver or stone.

30 "God overlooked people's ignorance about these things in earlier times, but now he commands everyone everywhere to repent of their sins and turn to him. 31 For he has set a day for judging the world with justice by the man he has appointed, and he proved to everyone who this is by raising him from the dead."

- ***Bobblehead gods... some things never change. Idolatry – the intrigue and addiction to money, fame, power, control, toys, self, substance, and lies; all things that become our “bobblehead gods”***
  
- ***Philosophy 101... big and free thinking, open ideas, concepts, opinions, theory, rhetoric, examination, (and when there is no truth it is all just intellectual BS).***
  
- ***Love the Lord your God, with all... He made us to love and be loved – He loves us in ways that are deep and profound and out beyond us – He calls us to reach out for His love, and to move towards a love that in all the ways, we do know yet.***

- ***And they will turn to you for a testimony... forming and living out our faith as a daily experience of faith - this is what pleases God. It is also the process that reveals to us what faith in a living God is all about. And that is our testimony; we move from worshipping the unknown to the known.***

**June 28<sup>th</sup>, 2009**

**The Obedience of man and the Favor of God  
(Acts chapter 18)**

***Acts 18:1-17***

*Then Paul left Athens and went to Corinth. 2 There he became acquainted with a Jew named Aquila, born in Pontus, who had recently arrived from Italy with his wife, Priscilla. They had left Italy when Claudius Caesar deported all Jews from Rome. 3 Paul lived and worked with them, for they were tentmakers just as he was.*

*4 Each Sabbath found Paul at the synagogue, trying to convince the Jews and Greeks alike. 5 And after Silas and Timothy came down from Macedonia, Paul spent all his time preaching the word. He testified to the Jews that Jesus was the Messiah. 6 But when they opposed and insulted him, Paul shook the dust from his clothes and said, "Your blood is upon your own heads—I am innocent. From now on I will go preach to the Gentiles."*

*7 Then he left and went to the home of Titius Justus, a Gentile who worshiped God and lived next door to the synagogue. 8 Crispus, the leader of the synagogue, and everyone in his household believed in the Lord. Many others in Corinth also heard Paul, became believers, and were baptized.*

*9 One night the Lord spoke to Paul in a vision and told him, "Don't be afraid! Speak out! Don't be silent! 10 For I am with you, and no one will attack and harm you, for many people in this city belong to me." 11 So Paul stayed there for the next year and a half, teaching the word of God.*

12 But when Gallio became governor of Achaia, some Jews rose up together against Paul and brought him before the governor for judgment. 13 They accused Paul of "persuading people to worship God in ways that are contrary to our law."

14 But just as Paul started to make his defense, Gallio turned to Paul's accusers and said, "Listen, you Jews, if this were a case involving some wrongdoing or a serious crime, I would have a reason to accept your case. 15 But since it is merely a question of words and names and your Jewish law, take care of it yourselves. I refuse to judge such matters." 16 And he threw them out of the courtroom.

17 The crowd then grabbed Sosthenes, the leader of the synagogue, and beat him right there in the courtroom. But Gallio paid no attention.

- **LIVING IN FAITH - NOT FEAR**  
     **no fear – fear no evil – who shall i fear –**  
     **nothing to fear but fear itself – perfect love** **drives out all**  
**fear**
- **OBEDIENCE – IS IT REALLY A MYSTERY?**  
     **Aggressively Close the Gap between what you** **believe**  
**and how you live**  
     **Go back to what you know is true**  
     **Distrust and Openly Confirm Feelings and**  
     **Emotional Impulsiveness**
- **GOD’S FAVOR IS ESSENTIAL**  
     **God of “my space”**  
     **Greater Things**  
     **Check Yourself – Trust His Promises**

**July 5<sup>th</sup>, 2009**

**Built to Last**

**(Acts chapters 19 & 20)**

*Acts 20:16-24*

*Paul had decided to sail on past Ephesus, for he didn't want to spend any more time in the province of Asia. He was hurrying to get to Jerusalem, if possible, in time for the Festival of Pentecost. 17 But when we landed at Miletus, he sent a message to the elders of the church at Ephesus, asking them to come and meet him.*

*18 When they arrived he declared, "You know that from the day I set foot in the province of Asia until now 19 I have done **the Lord's work humbly and with many tears**. I have **endured the trials that came** to me from the plots of the Jews. 20 I **never shrank back from telling you what you needed to hear**, either publicly or in your homes. 21 I have **had one message for Jews and Greeks alike**—the necessity of repenting from sin and turning to God, and of having faith in our Lord Jesus.*

*22 "And now I am bound by the Spirit to go to Jerusalem. I don't know what awaits me, 23 except that the Holy Spirit tells me in city after city that jail and suffering lie ahead.*



*24 But my **life is worth nothing** to me **unless I use it for finishing the work assigned me by the Lord Jesus**—the work of telling others the Good News about the wonderful grace of God.*

***BUILT TO LAST***

- **BE HUMBLE AND PASSIONATE (20:19)**
- **ENDURE THE TRIALS THAT COME FROM OUR ENEMIES (20:19)**
- **NEVER BE AFRAID TO SAY WHAT NEEDS TO BE SAID (20:20)**
- **BE CONSISTENTLY CONSISTENT WITH WHO YOU ARE (20:21)**
- **USE YOUR LIFE TO DO WHAT GOD HAS CALLED YOU TO DO (20:24)**

**July 12<sup>th</sup>, 2009**

**Why All This Weeping? The Lord's Will Be Done  
(Acts Chapter 21)**

*Acts 21:1-14*

*After saying farewell to the Ephesian elders, we sailed straight to the island of Cos. The next day we reached Rhodes and then went to Patara. 2 There we boarded a ship sailing for Phoenicia. 3 We sighted the island of Cyprus, passed it on our left, and landed at the harbor of Tyre, in Syria, where the ship was to unload its cargo.*

*4 We went ashore, found the local believers, and stayed with them a week. These believers prophesied through the Holy Spirit that Paul should not go on to Jerusalem. 5 When we returned to the ship at the end of the week, the entire congregation, including wives and children, left the city and came down to the shore with us. There we knelt, prayed, 6 and said our farewells. Then we went aboard, and they returned home.*

*7 The next stop after leaving Tyre was Ptolemais, where we greeted the brothers and sisters and stayed for one day. 8 The next day we went on to Caesarea and stayed at the home of Philip the Evangelist, one of the seven men who had been chosen to distribute food. 9 He had four unmarried daughters who had the gift of prophecy.*

*10 Several days later a man named Agabus, who also had the gift of prophecy, arrived from Judea. 11 He came over, took Paul's belt, and bound his own feet and hands with it. Then he said, "The Holy Spirit declares, 'So shall the owner of this belt be bound by the Jewish leaders in Jerusalem and turned over to the Gentiles.'" 12 When we heard this, we and the local believers all begged Paul not to go on to Jerusalem.*

*13 But he said, "Why all this weeping? You are breaking my heart! I am ready not only to be jailed at Jerusalem but even to die for the sake of the Lord Jesus." 14 When it was clear that we couldn't persuade him, we gave up and said, "The Lord's will be done."*

**One of the keys to Paul's obedience of God was his burning desire and energetic acceptance of the will of God for his life - even above his own. He refused the obstacles, excuses, rebellion of his own will when it conflicted with the will of God. This meant for Paul that he would...**

- **Push Past Emotion**
- **Turn a Deaf Ear to the Distracting Influence of Friends**
- **Refuse all Self-Justification**
- **Move Continually Into a Faith Place**
- **Trust in God**

**July 19<sup>th</sup>, 2009**

**Confessions – What I've Done**

**(Acts Chapter 22)**

**Acts 22:1-23**

*"Brothers and esteemed fathers," Paul said, "listen to me as I offer my defense." 2 When they heard him speaking in their own language, the silence was even greater.*

*3 Then Paul said, "I am a Jew, born in Tarsus, a city in Cilicia, and I was brought up and educated here in Jerusalem under Gamaliel. As his student, I was carefully trained in our Jewish laws and customs. I became very zealous to honor God in everything I did, just like all of you today. 4 And I persecuted the followers of the Way, hounding some to death, arresting both men and women and throwing them in prison. 5 The high priest and the whole council of elders can testify that this is so. For I received letters from them to our Jewish brothers in Damascus, authorizing me to bring the Christians from there to Jerusalem, in chains, to be punished.*

*6 "As I was on the road, approaching Damascus about noon, a very bright light from heaven suddenly shone down around me. 7 I fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to me, 'Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?'*

*8 "'Who are you, lord?' I asked.*

*"And the voice replied, 'I am Jesus the Nazarene, the one you are persecuting.' 9 The people with me saw the light but didn't understand the voice speaking to me.*

*10 "I asked, 'What should I do, Lord?' "And the Lord told me, 'Get up and go into Damascus, and there you will be told everything you are to do.'*

*11 "I was blinded by the intense light and had to be led by the hand to Damascus by my companions. 12 A man named Ananias lived there. He was a godly man, deeply devoted to the law, and well regarded by all the Jews of Damascus. 13 He came and stood beside me and said, 'Brother Saul, regain your sight.' And that very moment I could see him!*

*14 "Then he told me, 'The God of our ancestors has chosen you to know his will and to see the Righteous One and hear him speak. 15 For you are to be his witness, telling everyone what you have seen and heard. 16 What are you waiting for? Get up and be baptized. Have your sins washed away by calling on the name of the Lord.'*

*17 "After I returned to Jerusalem, I was praying in the Temple and fell into a trance. 18 I saw a vision of Jesus saying to me, 'Hurry! Leave Jerusalem, for the people here won't accept your testimony about me.'*

19 *"But Lord," I argued, 'they certainly know that in every synagogue I imprisoned and beat those who believed in you. 20 And I was in complete agreement when your witness Stephen was killed. I stood by and kept the coats they took off when they stoned him.'*

21 *"But the Lord said to me, 'Go, for I will send you far away to the Gentiles!'"*

22 *The crowd listened until Paul said that word. Then they all began to shout, "Away with such a fellow! He isn't fit to live!" 23 They yelled, threw off their coats, and tossed handfuls of dust into the air.*

### ***Confession...***

**I am Jew, just like all of you. I have done the same things that you all have done. I have harassed and made life miserable for every person that I could find who was professing that Jesus of Nazareth was the Son of God. I crossed boundaries both moral and ethical to do this. In fact I think there were times I think that I began to enjoy it. I was over the top – some I had beaten, some thrown in jail, others I did humiliating things to in front of their own family and friends. I had others that I hounded so fiercely that it destroyed their lives and for some – I was (plain and simple) the cause of their death. In fact, one of your very own martyrs a man they called Stephen (a young and bold whom you had stoned just down the street from here – maybe some of you can remember me, I was there holding the cloaks and congratulating those who pummeled him to death with rocks.**

**Honestly, I did not come back to Jerusalem to fight with you or even speak against you. Just three days ago (because I am a Jew) I was in the temple with for four of your own for purification and I even paid for them to take the Nazarite vow (shaved head) - we were honoring God in the traditional Jewish ways that would make all of you very happy. However I have to tell you... I am not the same man as I was when I left here many years ago. I was on my way to Damascus from Jerusalem (on a tip from one you) to order the beatings and imprisonment of some more of those the believed in “the way.” Believe it or not, I was literally struck down off my horse and blinded the light that hit me like a ton of bricks. A voice spoke and said, “Saul why are you doing these things to me”? I know that none of you are going to want to hear this, but this is a true confession... the voice was the voice of Jesus! Now, from there I was led on into Damascus and a good Jew named Ananais came and prayed for me. He prayed that I would see again – and I did. He told me that the God of our fathers wanted me to know His will and to see the Righteous One... and believe me, I did. He also told me to call on the name of Jesus and confess to Him what I’ve done. Ananias said if I did this *mercy would come, and wash away what I’ve done.* He said, *love would come, and that I would be forgiven for what I’ve done.* Later he told me privately that he did not want to pray for me, because he was afraid of me. He was afraid - because of the horrible things I was doing to the followers of Jesus. Well guys, I came immediately back to Jerusalem**

and to the very temple you drug me from yesterday afternoon. I went there and began to pray and I fell into what felt like some kind of a trance... but listen, while I was in that condition Jesus spoke to me in a vision and said to me, *“leave Jerusalem because no one will listen to what you say about what I have done.”* I spoke back and said, *“yes they will Lord... they know that I have hated Your followers, and it will be powerful for them to see how I now follow Him as my Lord”...* but Jesus said to me, *“Go, I am sending you far away to the Gentiles”!*

*Today this ends...*

**Make a Decision – Confront What I’ve Done**

**Make Confession – Tell Jesus What I’ve Done**

**Let Mercy Come - Forgiveness For What I’ve Done**

**Let Love Come - Jesus Loves Me No Matter What I’ve Done**

**July 26<sup>th</sup>, 2009**

**It's Bigger Than This**

**(Acts Chapter 23)**

*Acts 23:1-11*

*Gazing intently at the high council, Paul began: "Brothers, I have always lived before God with a clear conscience!"*

*2 Instantly Ananias the high priest commanded those close to Paul to slap him on the mouth. 3 But Paul said to him, "God will slap you, you corrupt hypocrite! What kind of judge are you to break the law yourself by ordering me struck like that?"*

*4 Those standing near Paul said to him, "Do you dare to insult God's high priest?"*

*5 "I'm sorry, brothers. I didn't realize he was the high priest," Paul replied, "for the Scriptures say, 'You must not speak evil of any of your rulers.'"*

*6 Paul realized that some members of the high council were Sadducees and some were Pharisees, so he shouted, "Brothers, I am a Pharisee, as were my ancestors! And I am on trial because my hope is in the resurrection of the dead!"*

*7 This divided the council—the Pharisees against the Sadducees— 8 for the Sadducees say there is no resurrection or angels or spirits, but the Pharisees believe in all of these. 9 So there was a great uproar. Some of the teachers of religious law who were Pharisees jumped up and began to argue forcefully. "We see nothing wrong with him," they shouted. "Perhaps a spirit or an angel spoke to him." 10 As the conflict grew more violent, the commander was afraid they would tear Paul apart. So he ordered his soldiers to go and rescue him by force and take him back to the fortress.*

*11 That night the Lord appeared to Paul and said, "Be encouraged, Paul. Just as you have been a witness to me here in Jerusalem, you must preach the Good News in Rome as well."*

**Gods Plans our not our Plans – Gods Ways are not our Ways.** Though Jerusalem was a birthplace for Christian belief, Jerusalem was not the end all to end all of the Christian faith - it was only a place to begin. At this time the dogmatic Judaism of Jerusalem could not influence an entire world, but Rome... the power of Rome could.

**Gods Plans are Bigger than Ours**

**Men give Titles - God gives Influence.** Jerusalem was a delusional monument unto itself. Jerusalem had become purely a religious and sectarian society. The economic engine was religion. Controlled by arrogant leaders at every level and motivated primarily by a relentless lust for power. Their pious titles and hierarchical system had

only limited influence and exclusive access. Their's was a self-centric system filled with evil schemes, blatant manipulation, unrestrained greed, hypocrisy and corruption. Play the game and get a title. The... *Sadducee (elitists separated to only written law), Pharisee (blue collar separated to only oral law), Sanhedrin (rulers of the law) – Rabbi (teachers of the law), Levite (care-takers), Nazarite (vow-takers), Dayan (judge), Mohel (circumciser), Shochet (slaughterer), Sofer (scribe)*. Too often these were clumsy and corrupt men with titles who in the end stood as an obstruction between men and Jesus.

**The Influence of God is Bigger than the Titles of Men**

### **Don't Fear the Glory and "Bigness" of God**

Paul would physically never be free again. That could cause even a brave man to fear unless that man had a revelation of the glory of God. In which case, the fear of man is small, momentary, and quickly fades away – the glory of God is big, all-powerful and will last forever. But the spirit of Paul never again be in bondage and his voice would never ever again be silenced... we still hear it today. God's plan for Paul was bigger than Jerusalem. The gospel of Jesus would now soon be preached from the lips of a man held in chains 24/7, deep within the walls of a Roman prison, to the most influential leaders in the world. The news of the gospel would spread uncontrollably around the world from the mouths of both believers and non-believers, fueled by the power of God right from gates of the greatest antichrist city in the world!

**Embrace the "Big-ness" of God's Plan and then Experience the Glory of God**

**August 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2009**

**Conviction**

**(Acts Chapter 24)**

*Acts 24:14-26*

*"But I admit that I follow the Way, which they call a cult. I worship the God of our ancestors, and I firmly believe the Jewish law and everything written in the prophets. 15 I have the same hope in God that these men have, that he will raise both the righteous*

*and the unrighteous. 16 Because of this, I always try to maintain a clear conscience before God and all people.*

*17 "After several years away, I returned to Jerusalem with money to aid my people and to offer sacrifices to God. 18 My accusers saw me in the Temple as I was completing a purification ceremony. There was no crowd around me and no rioting. 19 But some Jews from the province of Asia were there—and they ought to be here to bring charges if they have anything against me! 20 Ask these men here what crime the Jewish high council found me guilty of, 21 except for the one time I shouted out, 'I am on trial before you today because I believe in the resurrection of the dead!'"*

*22 At that point Felix, who was quite familiar with the Way, adjourned the hearing and said, "Wait until Lysias, the garrison commander, arrives. Then I will decide the case."*

*23 He ordered an officer to keep Paul in custody but to give him some freedom and allow his friends to visit him and take care of his needs.*

*24 A few days later Felix came back with his wife, Drusilla, who was Jewish. Sending for Paul, they listened as he told them about faith in Christ Jesus. 25 As he reasoned with them about righteousness and self-control and the coming day of judgment, Felix became frightened. "Go away for now," he replied. "When it is more convenient, I'll call for you again." 26 He also hoped that Paul would bribe him, so he sent for him quite often and talked with him.*

**The theme is conviction – and it is not a popular one. Felix was convicted in his heart of who he was. As Paul spoke with him each time of the gospel of Jesus the Holy Spirit confronted Felix with the truth of his life. In his conviction he went face to face with his dishonesty, deception, corruption, and even the truth of his relationship with his wife. But conviction is not without hope – in fact conviction comes so that we might have hope (Romans 2:1-4). There is no record of Felix acting upon his conviction, only that he promised Paul that when it was more convenient he would consider it again. That was conviction nineteen hundred and fifty years ago... But what is conviction to me?**

**CONVICTION IS...** the process of being confronted by one's own conscience with the revealed truth of God's expectations of us. The idea of conviction is a major theme of Scripture, but the word "conviction" is not that often used. The active agent of conviction is the Holy Spirit.

**We often mistake conviction for judgment... that is a common error. To find our answer we can frequently ask ourselves why do we feel uncomfortable or uneasy when we worship? Or why when there is a strong teaching from scripture do we**



push back, disconnect and even become angry? We often hear ourselves say when we experience this, “The church is judging me.” But look closer. Is the church and the people really judging? How can they judge what they do not know? Perhaps the Holy Spirit of God is convicting you or us with the truth? Because, God does know. And because He knows He chooses to convict us all by His Spirit - and that is love. Eventually a final judgment will come to us all and with it heavy consequences; but until then we experience the slippery slope of self-judgment that comes to those who continually reject the Spirit of God and choose in their own rebellion and stubborn will to remain in sin. So let’s clear it up in words we can wrap our minds around.

- **CONVICTION IS AN OPPORTUNITY CREATED BY THE LOVE OF GOD**
- **JUDGMENT IS A CONSEQUENCE CREATED BY THE SIN OF MAN**

**(John 16:7-11) The words of Jesus...**

*“But in fact, it is best for you that I go away, because if I don't, the Advocate won't come. If I do go away, then I will send him to you. 8 And when he comes, he will convict the world of its sin, and of God's righteousness, and of the coming judgment. 9 The world's sin is that it refuses to believe in me. 10 Righteousness is available because I go to the Father, and you will see me no more. 11 Judgment will come because the ruler of this world has already been judged.”*

**THE HOLY SPIRIT CONVICTS US OF OUR**

- ***Unbelief***
- ***Right and Wrong – Good and Evil***
- ***Godless Thoughts, Words, and Deeds***

**THE SPIRIT DOES THIS THROUGH...**

- ***The Word of Truth***
- ***The Revelation of Truth***
- ***The Truth of Creation***

**(Romans 2:1-4) The words of Paul...**

*“You may think you can condemn such people, but you are just as bad, and you have no excuse! When you say they are wicked and should be punished, you are condemning yourself, for you who judge others do these very same things. 2 And we know that God, in his justice, will punish anyone who does such things. 3 Since you judge others for doing these things, why do you think you can avoid God's judgment when you do the same things? 4 Don't you see how wonderfully kind, tolerant, and patient God is with you? Does this mean nothing to you? Can't you see that his kindness is intended to turn you from your sin”?*

**August 9<sup>th</sup>, 2009**

**You Can't Keep a Good Man Down**

**(Acts Chapter 25,26)**

**(Acts 25:9-11)**

*Then Festus, wanting to please the Jews, asked him, "Are you willing to go to Jerusalem and stand trial before me there?" 10 But Paul replied, "No! This is the official Roman court, so I ought to be tried right here. You know very well I am not guilty of harming the Jews. 11 If I have done something worthy of death, I don't refuse to die. But if I am innocent, no one has a right to turn me over to these men to kill me. I appeal to Caesar!"*

**(Acts 26:19-32)**

*And so, King Agrippa, I obeyed that vision from heaven. 20 I preached first to those in Damascus, then in Jerusalem and throughout all Judea, and also to the Gentiles, that all must repent of their sins and turn to God—and prove they have changed by the good things they do. 21 Some Jews arrested me in the Temple for preaching this, and they tried to kill me. 22 But God has protected me right up to this present time so I can testify to everyone, from the least to the greatest. I teach nothing except what the prophets and Moses said would happen— 23 that the Messiah would suffer and be the first to rise from the dead, and in this way announce God's light to Jews and Gentiles alike."*

*24 Suddenly, Festus shouted, "Paul, you are insane. Too much study has made you crazy!"*

*25 But Paul replied, "I am not insane, Most Excellent Festus. What I am saying is the sober truth. 26 And King Agrippa knows about these things. I speak boldly, for I am sure these events are all familiar to him, for they were not done in a corner! 27 King Agrippa, do you believe the prophets? I know you do—"*

*28 Agrippa interrupted him. "Do you think you can persuade me to become a Christian so quickly?"*

*29 Paul replied, "Whether quickly or not, I pray to God that both you and everyone here in this audience might become the same as I am, except for these chains."*

*30 Then the king, the governor, Bernice, and all the others stood and left. 31 As they went out, they talked it over and agreed, "This man hasn't done anything to deserve death or imprisonment."*

*32 And Agrippa said to Festus, "He could have been set free if he hadn't appealed to Caesar."*

**Active Word****(God is Good)**

Scripture tells us ...

- *The Lord is Good and His love endures forever*
- *Taste and see that the Lord is Good*
- *Give thanks to the Lord for He is good*
- *Praise the Lord for the Lord is good*
- *The Lord is good for those whose hope is in Him*
- *The Lord is good a refuge in times of trouble*
- *“No one is good - except God alone”*

**Revelation Word****(The Goodness of God is With Us)**

Scripture reveals to us...

- *God loved us so much - He sent His Son to us*
- *God is with us - and will watch over us wherever we go*
- *His presence is with us - and He will give us rest*
- *The Lord goes with us - He will never leave us or abandon us*
- *We should not be afraid - for He is with us*
- *We know Him – for He lives with us and will be in us*

**Prophetic Word****(The Goodness of God Will Keep Us)**

The scripture promises us...

- *The Lord will keep you from all harm – He will watch over your life*
- *The Lord gives us authority to overcome the power of the enemy*
- *Do not worry about the future – the future will worry about itself*
- *Nothing can harm us – if we are eager to do good*

**Word of Truth****(In Jesus Christ, I Find My Good)**

The scripture reminds us...

- *In Jesus, I have the strength to manage and overcome the evil that is in me*
- *When I love God, He does a good work in me*
- *Bad friends, corrupt the good that is in me*
- *I should not get bored or tired of doing good*
- *I am the work of God's hands, I was created in Christ Jesus by His plan to do good works*
- *If I run a good race I will finish strong and God will reward me for the good I have done*

**YOU CAN'T KEEP A GOOD MAN DOWN IF HE...**

- ◆ *Believes in the Good*

- ◆ *Trusts Completely in the Lord*
- ◆ *Lives Openly and Honestly Before God*
- ◆ *Loves and Does not Hate*

**August 16<sup>th</sup>, 2009**

**The Perfect Storm (Part 1)**

**(Acts Chapter 27)**

*Acts 27:1-2*

*When the time came, we set sail for Italy. Paul and several other prisoners were placed in the custody of a Roman officer named Julius, a captain of the Imperial Regiment. 2 Aristarchus, a Macedonian from Thessalonica, was also with us. We left on a ship whose home port was Adramyttium on the northwest coast of the province of Asia; it was scheduled to make several stops at ports along the coast of the province.*

*Acts 27:3-6*

*The next day when we docked at Sidon, Julius was very kind to Paul and let him go ashore to visit with friends so they could provide for his needs. 4 Putting out to sea from there, we encountered strong headwinds that made it difficult to keep the ship on course, so we sailed north of Cyprus between the island and the mainland. 5 Keeping to the open sea, we passed along the coast of Cilicia and Pamphylia, landing at Myra, in the province of Lycia. 6 There the commanding officer found an Egyptian ship from Alexandria that was bound for Italy, and he put us on board.*

*Acts 27:7-12*

*We had several days of slow sailing, and after great difficulty we finally neared Cnidus. But the wind was against us, so we sailed across to Crete and along the sheltered coast of the island, past the cape of Salmone. 8 We struggled along the coast with great difficulty and finally arrived at Fair Havens, near the town of Lasea. 9 We had lost a lot of time. The weather was becoming dangerous for sea travel because it was so late in the fall, and Paul spoke to the ship's officers about it.*

*10 "Men," he said, "I believe there is trouble ahead if we go on—shipwreck, loss of cargo, and danger to our lives as well." 11 But the officer in charge of the prisoners listened more to the ship's captain and the owner than to Paul. 12 And since Fair Havens was an exposed harbor—a poor place to spend the winter—most of the crew wanted to go on to Phoenix, farther up the coast of Crete, and spend the winter there. Phoenix was a good harbor with only a southwest and northwest exposure.*

*Acts 27:13-26*

*When a light wind began blowing from the south, the sailors thought they could make it. So they pulled up anchor and sailed close to the shore of Crete. 14 But the weather changed abruptly, and a wind of typhoon strength (called a "northeaster") caught the*

*ship and blew it out to sea. 15 They couldn't turn the ship into the wind, so they gave up and let it run before the gale.*

*16 We sailed along the sheltered side of a small island named Cauda, where with great difficulty we hoisted aboard the lifeboat being towed behind us. 17 Then the sailors bound ropes around the hull of the ship to strengthen it. They were afraid of being driven across to the sandbars of Syrtis off the African coast, so they lowered the sea anchor to slow the ship and were driven before the wind.*

*18 The next day, as gale-force winds continued to batter the ship, the crew began throwing the cargo overboard. 19 The following day they even took some of the ship's gear and threw it overboard. 20 The terrible storm raged for many days, blotting out the sun and the stars, until at last all hope was gone.*

*21 No one had eaten for a long time. Finally, Paul called the crew together and said, "Men, you should have listened to me in the first place and not left Crete. You would have avoided all this damage and loss. 22 But take courage! None of you will lose your lives, even though the ship will go down. 23 For last night an angel of the God to whom I belong and whom I serve stood beside me, 24 and he said, 'Don't be afraid, Paul, for you will surely stand trial before Caesar! What's more, God in his goodness has granted safety to everyone sailing with you.' 25 So take courage! For I believe God. It will be just as he said. 26 But we will be shipwrecked on an island."*

#### ***What Do we Know About Storms?***

- *Storms will come in our life*
- *Some storms we can prepare for – some we cannot*
- *Every storm is different and yet, every storm is the same*

#### ***Is There Really Such a Thing as a Perfect Storm?***

- *We never know it until its over*

#### ***If so, What Do We Know About the Perfect Storm?***

- *It is filled with a sense of destiny (meant to be, defining moment, life altering)*
- *It is a paradox (fear-calm, doubt-belief, terror-peace, chaos-calm, tragedy–triumph)*
- *It is bigger than man – but smaller than God (perspective, truth, clarity)*
- *There is always a “zero moment” (every thing logical, practical, personal seem senseless)*
- *There is an abyss for the dying (the darkness of hopelessness) and a world for the living (the light of hope)*
- *Every detail becomes etched deep within our soul (we learn every important lesson that must be learned – lesser storms never again phase us)*

**August 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2009**

**The Perfect Storm Part II (The Shipwreck)**

*Acts 27:27-44*

*About midnight on the fourteenth night of the storm, as we were being driven across the Sea of Adria, the sailors sensed land was near. 28 They dropped a weighted line and found that the water was 120 feet deep. But a little later they measured again and found it was only 90 feet deep. 29 At this rate they were afraid we would soon be driven against the rocks along the shore, so they threw out four anchors from the back of the ship and prayed for daylight.*

*30 Then the sailors tried to abandon the ship; they lowered the lifeboat as though they were going to put out anchors from the front of the ship. 31 But Paul said to the commanding officer and the soldiers, "You will all die unless the sailors stay aboard." 32 So the soldiers cut the ropes to the lifeboat and let it drift away.*

*33 Just as day was dawning, Paul urged everyone to eat. "You have been so worried that you haven't touched food for two weeks," he said. 34 "Please eat something now for your own good. For not a hair of your heads will perish." 35 Then he took some bread, gave thanks to God before them all, and broke off a piece and ate it. 36 Then everyone was encouraged and began to eat— 37 all 276 of us who were on board. 38 After eating, the crew lightened the ship further by throwing the cargo of wheat overboard.*

*39 When morning dawned, they didn't recognize the coastline, but they saw a bay with a beach and wondered if they could get to shore by running the ship aground. 40 So they cut off the anchors and left them in the sea. Then they lowered the rudders, raised the foresail, and headed toward shore. 41 But they hit a shoal and ran the ship aground too soon. The bow of the ship stuck fast, while the stern was repeatedly smashed by the force of the waves and began to break apart.*

*42 The soldiers wanted to kill the prisoners to make sure they didn't swim ashore and escape. 43 But the commanding officer wanted to spare Paul, so he didn't let them carry out their plan. Then he ordered all who could swim to jump overboard first and make for land. 44 The others held onto planks or debris from the broken ship. So everyone escaped safely to shore.*

***The Shipwreck – Luke's Incredible Story***

- *14 days of night*
- *A prophetic word and a promise*
- *Cutting lose the lifeboats*
- *Anchored to the rocks*
- *Swim to safety*

***The Shipwreck – The Story Confirmed***

- *Archeologist – Bob Cornuke and the Malta Miracle*

### ***The Shipwreck – Living to Tell the Story***

- **Considering Others First** - *"Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ."* The emaciated appearance of all on board, through lack of food, touched Paul's generous heart. The terror and anxiety of the past fourteen days and nights had, taken a psychological and physical toll, and wiped out their appetite. Paul, used wisdom to renew their interest in eating much needed food (vital for survival) by calming their fears: *"God has promised that not one single hair will fall from the head of any of you."* A genuine care and love for people is displayed in actions not just words. Paul in his ministry consistently displayed in his conduct what he taught; putting others first is an essential attribute of a Christian who can help others live through life's many shipwrecks.
  
- **Calm and Self-Control** - *"I am leaving you with a gift—peace of mind and heart. And the peace I give is a gift the world cannot give. So don't be troubled or afraid."* In the middle of the most chaotic and potentially dangerous of scenes -- the furious hurricane -- the reeling, plunging, shattered ship -- the 276 terror-stricken men – the calm and self-control of Paul trusting God and living in faith! This kind of calm and self-control is needed to survive a wreck of this kind. Ships do wreck, some sink – we know this... but people do not have to perish and die because of it.
  
- **Putting Faith into Practice** – *"For I am not ashamed of this Good News about Christ. It is the power of God at work, saving everyone who believes"* Paul modeled for us that in times of trouble and crisis it is no time to be ashamed of the hope that we have in Jesus. His public prayer was a sign everyone on the ship that his faith was intact and that God would deliver them all safely. The scripture tells us *"in everything give thanks"* – that includes even when our ship has wrecked. Give thanks to God, and live to tell the story!
  
- **Commanding Influence** - *"I will not die; instead, I will live to tell what the Lord has done."* The words and conduct that Paul spoke during this shipwreck crisis were inspired by the power of the Holy Spirit. It was the power of the Spirit that gave Paul (at the most crucial times, when the most critical decisions had to be made) a commanding influence with the captain and all 276 passengers on board the ship. He started with no voice and no influence, but in the end, when it mattered most (with people's lives at stake) God gave the influence needed to save those lives. His words and demeanor struck new energy and put hope into the heart of all. A soul that is strong with the goodness of God can indeed energize and influence others – sometimes that is all that is needed to stay alive and live to tell the story!

## **Survivors and Superstitions (Acts Chapter 28)**

*Acts 28:1-10*

*Once we were safe on shore, we learned that we were on the island of Malta. 2 The people of the island were very kind to us. It was cold and rainy, so they built a fire on the shore to welcome us.*

*3 As Paul gathered an armful of sticks and was laying them on the fire, a poisonous snake, driven out by the heat, bit him on the hand. 4 The people of the island saw it hanging from his hand and said to each other, "A murderer, no doubt! Though he escaped the sea, justice will not permit him to live." 5 But Paul shook off the snake into the fire and was unharmed. 6 The people waited for him to swell up or suddenly drop dead. But when they had waited a long time and saw that he wasn't harmed, they changed their minds and decided he was a god.*

*7 Near the shore where we landed was an estate belonging to Publius, the chief official of the island. He welcomed us and treated us kindly for three days. 8 As it happened, Publius's father was ill with fever and dysentery. Paul went in and prayed for him, and laying his hands on him, he healed him. 9 Then all the other sick people on the island came and were healed. 10 As a result we were showered with honors, and when the time came to sail, people supplied us with everything we would need for the trip.*

### ***The Survivors***

***Having survived the storm, the shipwreck, and the swim to shore in very cold water they meet the barbaric islanders.***

***They find the Maltese welcoming as they build a fire for the survivors to warm themselves from the cold and rain.***

***Paul... helps by gathering wood for the fire, but is bit on the hand by a poisonous snake as he kindles the fire.***

***The superstitious islanders immediately assume Paul is a murderer who survived the storm only to be brought to justice by a poisonous viper.***

***They wait for him to foam at the mouth, convulse and die. He does not. Now their superstitions lead them to believe Paul is a "god."***

***As a "god" Paul is welcomed by the island elite in an official capacity. While being given the "red carpet treatment" Paul prays for the father of Publius the "Grand Poobah" of Malta.***

***After the healing of the father of Publius, numerous others are healed from sickness and disease as Paul shares the gospel of Jesus and prays the prayer of faith.***

***So much for superstition.***

### ***Survivors and Superstitions***

#### **Don't be Superstitious – Be a Believer**

Superstition is in reality nothing more than ignorant judgment. Ignorance is an excuse,



and judgment is a sin.

**Don't be Proud – Be Open and Real**

More often than not you will get better treatment from the lowly than you will the great. Open up to people you perceive beneath you – you will find that they can lift you up.

**Don't be Foolish – Be Wise**

You have to expect that vipers and poisonous snakes of opposition and deception will leap out and fasten upon your hands when your hands sincerely begin to work for Jesus. You will be misjudged at times – it will happen. Be wise enough to shake it off see work of our enemy and keep going. The enemy cannot harm you.

**Don't be Flake – Be a Rock**

In the end if you are firm and un-movable in your faith and love for God you will stand and be the rock that Christ builds His kingdom with. You will have the respect of friends, family, and enemies. In the end the world will see God in you.

**September 6th, 2009**

**...Now it All Makes Sense**

**(Acts Chapter 28)**

*Acts 28:11-16*

*It was three months after the shipwreck that we set sail on another ship that had wintered at the island—an Alexandrian ship with the twin gods as its figurehead. 12 Our first stop was Syracuse, where we stayed three days. 13 From there we sailed across to Rhegium. A day later a south wind began blowing, so the following day we sailed up the coast to Puteoli. 14 There we found some believers, who invited us to spend a week with*

*them. And so we came to Rome. 15 The brothers and sisters in Rome had heard we were coming, and they came to meet us at the Forum on the Appian Way. Others joined us at The Three Taverns. When Paul saw them, he was encouraged and thanked God. 16 When we arrived in Rome, Paul was permitted to have his own private lodging, though he was guarded by a soldier.*

*Acts 28:17-27*

*Three days after Paul's arrival, he called together the local Jewish leaders. He said to them, "Brothers, I was arrested in Jerusalem and handed over to the Roman government, even though I had done nothing against our people or the customs of our ancestors. 18 The Romans tried me and wanted to release me, because they found no cause for the death sentence. 19 But when the Jewish leaders protested the decision, I felt it necessary to appeal to Caesar, even though I had no desire to press charges against my own people. 20 I asked you to come here today so we could get acquainted and so I could explain to you that I am bound with this chain because I believe that the hope of Israel—the Messiah—has already come."*

*21 They replied, "We have had no letters from Judea or reports against you from anyone who has come here. 22 But we want to hear what you believe, for the only thing we know about this movement is that it is denounced everywhere."*

*23 So a time was set, and on that day a large number of people came to Paul's lodging. He explained and testified about the Kingdom of God and tried to persuade them about Jesus from the Scriptures. Using the law of Moses and the books of the prophets, he spoke to them from morning until evening. 24 Some were persuaded by the things he said, but others did not believe. 25 And after they had argued back and forth among themselves, they left with this final word from Paul: "The Holy Spirit was right when he said to your ancestors through Isaiah the prophet,*

*26 'Go and say to this people:*

*When you hear what I say, you will not understand.*

*When you see what I do, you will not comprehend.*

*27 For the hearts of these people are hardened, and their ears cannot hear, and they have closed their eyes—so their eyes cannot see, and their ears cannot hear, and their hearts cannot understand, and they cannot turn to me and let me heal them.'*

*28 So I want you to know that this salvation from God has also been offered to the Gentiles, and they will accept it."*

*30 For the next two years, Paul lived in Rome at his own expense. He welcomed all who visited him, 31 boldly proclaiming the Kingdom of God and teaching about the Lord Jesus Christ. And no one tried to stop him.*

- Under Guard in Rome (Grk; *akolytos*) without hindrance Paul wrote the Prison

Epistles: Ephesians, Colossians, Philemon, and Philippians the letters are hand delivered by Tychicus and Onesimus.

- Onesimus, (meaning; profitable or useful) a runaway slave boy is befriended by Paul. Their relationship becomes one of mentor to disciple or student.
- During this imprisonment time (besides ministry guests) Paul is off and on with Luke, Aristarchus, and Epaphras the evangelist who introduced and brought Onesimus to Paul.
- Released for a short time (some say there is strong evidence that he went to Spain) and was then re-arrested. Paul then wrote the Pastoral Epistles: 1 Timothy, Titus, and 2 Timothy
- In early 64 AD, Nero, so tortured by the movement of Christianity burns a third of Rome (his own city) and blames the fire on the Christians. From that incident he justifies and declares all out war against anyone who follows gospel of Jesus. Nero launches one of the most bloody and horrifying persecutions/assaults against Christians in all of history.
- By late 64 AD, most (not all) apostolic theologians and historians agree that Paul (63 to 64 years old) upon his second arrest was quickly taken out (ordered by the bloodthirsty and psychotic Nero) and beheaded by sword in Rome.

### ***...Now it all Makes Sense***

In the year 110 AD, when Ignatius, the bishop of Antioch (Syrian) was on his way to Rome to be thrown to the wild beasts, he wrote a letter to the Christians of Ephesus in which he echoes Paul's letter (written 46 years earlier) to Philemon. He tells the people of Ephesus to obey the bishop and leadership with an undisturbed mind, and he mentions the bishop of Ephesus' name no more than fourteen times during the letter. The bishop's name was Onesimus, and Ignatius incorporates the same puns on his name in which Paul had indulged. (Paul – "Let me have this profit from you" – Ignatius – May I always have profit from you if I am worthy). There are many church historians who say that the slave boy who was mentored by Paul in the last month's, weeks and days of his life and the Useful/Profitable (Onesimus) the bishop of Ephesus are one and the same. If this is true (and there is not any evidence to contradict it) then you need to hear the rest of this story. Scholars have concluded almost unanimously that Onesimus the bishop of Ephesus was largely responsible for painstakingly and diligently preserving, collecting, and then editing the surviving body of Paul's letters to the Christian Church. That would explain why the letter to Philemon was preserved and included perhaps. It is not doctrinal or religious but personal and practical dealing primarily with the returning and releasing of a slave. Consider the implications of this scenario and now it all makes sense.

### ***...Making Sense Today***

- ***In Jesus, God's love has—Released You***
- ***In Jesus, God's Love has – Restored You***
- ***In Jesus, God's Love has – Rebuilt You***

- *In Jesus, God's Love has – Renewed You*

*Now It All Makes Sense*