

Paul: Mission & Message

Memory Text: “Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended; but one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.” (Philippians 3:13, 14)

Setting The Stage: Without a doubt one of the most prominent figures in the NT was Paul. As noted last week he was born in Tarsus (south-central Turkey) an important town on the trade route between Syria and western Asia (Acts 22:3). He was born of Diaspora Jews and was from the tribe of Benjamin. As a Pharisee he was probably married. However, we really only know of his sister and nephew (Acts 23:16).

Paul was a Roman citizen (Acts 22:25-28), educated in Jerusalem under the famous rabbi, Gamaliel (Acts 22:3). His trade was tent making (Acts 18:3). He was a Pharisee (Phil 3:5) known for their strict observation of all the laws of God, however he experienced a tremendous conversion experience that led him to dedicating the rest of his life to the message and mission of Jesus Christ (Acts 9).

Paul “developed the Christian concept of salvation history, all centered on the life, death, and resurrection of Christ.” Paul’s background as a Pharisee helped him to be a successful missionary to both Jew and Gentile. With his knowledge of the OT and scribal expansions of the same, he was able to extract timeless biblical truths from the tightly woven fabric of Jewish tradition and custom to make meaningful applications of the truth to all those he ministered to. He was able to differentiate between truth and later cultural additions to the same.

Paul wrote 14 of the 27 books of the New Testament. **What are those letters?** Romans, 1 & 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, 1 & 2 Thessalonians, 1 & 2 Timothy, Titus, Philemon, and Hebrews.

What characterized the letters of Paul? “His letters included doctrinal teaching and practical application of the same. His letters provided counsel, encouragement, admonition, and reproof on issues surrounding personal faith, relationships, and church life.”

What was the core of Paul’s messages? Jesus Christ and Him crucified (1 Cor. 2:2).

Were Paul’s missionary endeavors successful? Paul preached the gospel from Syria, through Turkey and Greece, and then into Italy. Within a decade Paul established churches in four provinces of the Roman Empire.

Sunday – Greeks & Jews

1 Corinthians 1:22-24

1 Corinthians 1:22-24. By speaking of Jews and Greeks Paul designated the most prominent classes of his day. The Jews were impressed by the supernatural (think Exodus and wilderness wondering) – miracles and wonders, while the Greeks were impressed by intelligence and reason. However, the preaching of the cross was a stumbling block (or the “trigger of a trap”) to the Jews. The idea of the Messiah being crucified was extremely offensive. The preaching of the cross was madness to the Greeks. The idea that someone who had been crucified could be God and save men was sheer nonsense. However to those who see God’s plan of salvation as wise, the cross is the power of God.

It’s evident that people relate to truth in different ways. What can we learn that will help us in our witnessing experience? Like Paul who didn’t miss the spiritual and cultural heritage of his audience but used them as an entry point for sharing Jesus, we too should start with those things that people can identify with and prayerfully leading the discussion toward talking about Jesus – an art that requires prayer, patience, and practice (“The weather’s been hot lately. Speaking of which, the political season is heating up. What do you see as the main issues? Guns? National security? Do you think that after settling the issue that we’ll truly be safe? Will evil always exist? Do you mind if I share what I think?”)

When Paul preached to the Jews he based his sermons on the history of Israel, linking Christ to King David, and emphasizing the OT prophecies pointing to Christ and foretelling His death and resurrection (see **Acts 13:16-41**).

When Paul preached to the Gentiles He talked about God as Creator, the entry of sin, and salvation through Jesus (see **Acts 17:22-31**). He started where the people were then sought to lead them to Jesus. He relied on the convicting power of truth and the Holy Spirit. What is your faith based on? What reasons do you have for believing like you do?

Monday – Soldiers & Athletes

1 Corinthians 9:24-27; 2 Corinthians 10:4, 5

How do you explain to a fish that has been submerged under water all its life what dry is? A fish has no comparison. A fish has no reference. When you’re dealing with two unequal worlds, how do you communicate? Awareness is largely the product of comparison. Those that have travelled, how do you help the person you’re talking to appreciate what you’ve experienced? You do it by using some form of attachment. “You know how we... Well over there they...” You use what is familiar to those you’re talking to, to explain to them something unfamiliar.

Jesus used comparison to explain the kingdom of God to people. Paul also employed this method to illustrate what the life of a follower of Jesus looks like. Paul used two

main metaphors – the athlete and their games, and the Roman soldiers.

In Greek times, the games were held in honor of Zeus. The first Olympics is traditionally dated to 776 BC. They continued to be celebrated when Greece came under Roman rule, until the emperor Theodosius I suppressed them in 394 AD as part of the campaign to impose Christianity as the state religion of Rome. The games were held every four years, or olympiad.

During the celebration of the games, an Olympic Truce was enacted so that athletes could travel from their countries to the games in safety. The prizes for the victors were olive leaf wreaths or crowns. The games were also used to help spread Hellenistic culture throughout the Mediterranean. The statue of Zeus at the Olympics was counted as one of the seven wonders of the ancient world.

Running was the main sporting event, although more elements were added over the years – boxing, wrestling, pankration (a combination of both), chariot racing, and pentathlon (wrestling, stadion, javelin, long jump, and discus). Paul drew on the games to make profound spiritual points.

1 Corinthians 9:24-27: “Do you not know that those who run in a race all run, but one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may obtain it. And everyone who competes for the prize is temperate in all things. Now they do it to obtain a perishable crown, but we for an imperishable crown. Therefore I run thus: not with uncertainty. Thus I fight: not as one who beats the air. But I discipline my body and bring it into subjection, lest, when I have preached to others, I myself should become disqualified.” (see also 1 Tim. 6:12; Heb 12:1, 2)

Rome ruled the world in the days of Paul. Roman soldiers were made up of various ethnic and national groups. Soldiers pledged loyalty to the emperor who promised rewards at the end of their term of service. Paul drew on the life of a soldier to again make profound spiritual points.

2 Corinthians 10:4, 5: “For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds, casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ.” (see also Eph. 6:10-18; 1 Tim. 6:12) Faith is a fight because we war against self, sin, and Satan. Faith can be a race as it requires stamina and perseverance. **What metaphor best describes your experience and why?**

Tuesday – Paul & the Law

Romans 3:31; Romans 13:8-10

What was Paul’s view on the law? In English translations of Paul’s letters the word “law” is used 130 times. Paul put forth great effort to show that “law” carried

several meanings. In his writings he used the word “law” broadly in reference to rules for religious ceremonies, civil law, health laws, and purification laws. He talked about the “law of Moses” (1 Cor. 9:9) as well as the “law of God” (Rom. 7:25). While the average Jew would understand what law Paul would have been referring to as they read the context, it’s no so easy for us. The good news is, it can be.

I want to show you something that will help you avoid some confusion on this subject. **2 Kings 21:8.** God commanded some things and Moses commanded some things. God gave law and Moses gave law. The Bible makes it clear that there are two branches of law. There is the moral law – that’s the 10 Commandments. But then you also have the ceremonial law, which deals with sacrifices and so on. There is a big difference between the two.

I’ve had it said to me, and you may have heard it too, “You don’t have to worry about that law, it’s been done away with.” What law has been done away with? **Deut. 10:1-5.** And then you find in the book of Exodus that they were written with the finger of God (Ex. 31:18). This is the moral law - God wrote, on tables of stone, called 10 commandments, put inside ark, and written with God's finger.

Now let’s look at the ceremonial law. **Read Deut 31:24-26.** Notice as you continue to read the Bible on this subject that Moses/ceremonial law was written in a book, called the book of law, placed in side of ark, it would be a witness against them, and written by Moses. They were also known as ordinances (2 Chron. 33:8). Moses' law also contained altars, offerings, annual feasts, new moons (Ezra 3:2, 4, 5), including meat & drink offerings, and ceremonial Sabbath days such as the feast of trumpets, etc. (Lev 23:13, 24). Which law was done away with?

Ephesians 2:14, 15: “For He Himself is our peace, who has made both one, and has broken down the middle wall of separation, 15 having abolished in His flesh the enmity, that is, the law of commandments contained in ordinances, so as to create in Himself one new man from the two, thus making peace.”

Colossians 2:14: “Having wiped out the handwriting of requirements that was against us, which was contrary to us. And He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross

Which law was done away with at the cross? The ceremonial law of course! The eternal law of God, the foundation of the God’s throne, cannot be abrogated. If the law could have been abolished then Jesus need not have died on the cross for our having transgressed it. That’s what Paul meant in Rom. 3:31 when he said that faith establishes the law. All ten of God’s commandments are valid today and are to be kept by God’s grace. Genuine obedience doesn’t constitute legalism, anymore than a husband and wife’s marriage vows constitute legalism.

Wednesday – The Cross & the Resurrection

1 Corinthians 2:2; 15:12-22

1 Cor. 2:2. Central to Paul's teaching and practice was the cross of Jesus. The subject of the cross was not taught in a vacuum however. Paul taught that the law gives a knowledge of sin (Rom. 4:15). The law is the mechanism that drives a person to Jesus, the only One who can wash away their sins (1 John 1:7). At the cross we are to experience repentance and the assurance of sins forgiven, yet there's more.

Romans 4:25: "Who was delivered up because of our offenses, and was raised because of [with a view to] our justification."

According to this verse, what else is equally important to our salvation? In the resurrection of Jesus full justification is to be realized as the believer experiences reconciliation with God and a new life in Christ.

Why is the resurrection of Jesus important to our salvation? Because without it Christ could never have accomplished our entire redemption. The cross assures us of the pardon of sin, but the resurrection assures us of the power over sin, and ultimately the presence of sin when Jesus returns.

The resurrection assures us that what Christ has done has been approved by the Father (Acts 2:36; 3:13-15; 1 Cor. 15:15, 17, 18) and that God's purposes are being accomplished through Him (Acts 17:31). The resurrection proves the truth of Jesus' claim about Himself (Rom. 1:4), and the certainty of His promises of salvation to you and me (1 Cor. 15:20, 22).

What is the purpose of the resurrection if when a person dies they go straight to heaven? The teaching of the immortality of soul which is seen in reincarnation, praying to saints, eternally burning hell, and many New Age practices, undermines two key teachings of the Bible – the second coming of Christ and the resurrection. There would be no need for Jesus to come again (John 14:1-3; 1 Thess. 4:16, 17) if the saints go to heaven when they die, and there would be no need for a resurrection of the saints (1 Cor. 15:50-55) for the same reason. We can be sure that the devil is the perpetrator of the lie of the immortality of the soul.

Thursday – Getting Along

Acts 15:38-41; 2 Timothy 4:11

There is no question that Paul was a hard working individual who had a strong personality and intense focus ("I press toward the goal for the prize..."). It's often seen that people like Paul have few friends and yet many admirers. However Paul knew the value of team work. Often Paul was accompanied by two or three fellow workers. Several of them are mentioned in the Bible – Barnabas (Acts 13:2); Judas and Silas (Acts 15:22); John Mark (Acts 15:37); Timothy (Acts 16:1-3); Erastus (Acts

19:22); Tychicus (Col. 4:7); Aristarchus and Justus (Col. 4:10, 11); and Demus and Luke (Philemon 24).

New Testament ministry is team ministry:

Mark 6:7: “And He called the twelve to Himself, and began to send them out two by two, and gave them power over unclean spirits.”

Luke 10:1: “After these things the Lord appointed seventy others also,[a] and sent them two by two before His face into every city and place where He Himself was about to go.”

Acts 11:27-30: “And in these days prophets came from Jerusalem to Antioch. Then one of them, named Agabus, stood up and showed by the Spirit that there was going to be a great famine throughout all the world, which also happened in the days of Claudius Caesar. Then the disciples, each according to his ability, determined to send relief to the brethren dwelling in Judea. This they also did, and sent it to the elders by the hands of Barnabas and Saul.”

What are the benefits of team work in God’s work? Support and encouragement. More can get accomplished for the Lord.

But there are some challenges that can come when working together as a team. Paul and Barnabas realized this. **Acts 15:38-41.** First, team ministry teaches that even completely committed Christians may experience difficulties and heartache in attempting to work together. Second, there is problem of placing the wrong person in the wrong position on the team (quarterback/point guard). Third, ministry is purely voluntary meaning at the slightest provocation people can quit or move on. Fourth, because each person carries a responsibility, if one forgets or reneges on his/her duty, it can hinder the work or provide added stress to faithful parties.

The solution to the challenges of team work is in accepting your God-given place in the church and doing what you do as unto the Lord, as Paul and others exemplified in their ministry. Eventually John Mark redeemed himself in the eyes of Paul, and Paul exhibited forgiveness and understanding toward Mark (2 Tim. 4:11).

Appeal: The ministry and message of Paul continues to provide inspiration and encouragement to God’s people everywhere. While none of us can be a Paul (because he was Paul), you can be you and allow God to use you in wonderful ways to bring Jesus and His truth to others. God has equipped you with varying tools that can be used in His service. Know what those tools are and employ them in the building up of the church. What do you say?