

1999

Friday, January 22nd - Acts 16: 1-3

Paul may have lost Barnabas as his missionary companion (Acts 15:39,40), but he gained the godly Silas, and additionally gained perhaps his most faithful fellow-laborer and dearest son in the faith, Timothy. It was the intention of Paul to strengthen the brethren in all the churches he and Barnabas had planted. While such strengthening no doubt took place, we learn that Paul and his new missionary team were themselves strengthened by Timothy's acquisition. Those who determine to spend themselves giving strength to others by ministering the gospel to them, discover that their giving results in no impoverishment for themselves, but rather enrichment. Our Lord sees to it that whatever cost His servants bear in faithful service to His body is richly compensated.

Saturday, January 23rd - Acts 16: 1-3

Paul, due to his steadfast determination to strengthen the churches with a team of men of tried and true spiritual strength, had lost Barnabas. We learn further that the apostle returned to Derbe and Lystra, a region where he previously almost lost his life (Acts 14:19,20). What holy zeal and passion we find in this man, Paul. He demonstrates willingness to bear greatest cost in his service for His Redeemer. He will neither let his dearest friend nor his bitterest foes stop or divert him from his faithful and fruitful service to Christ. Such holy passion sets for us an admirable example to follow. And, as Paul's revisiting this region results not in his death, but in his gaining the choicest of disciples in Timothy, we have incentive, as well as example, that we might serve likewise in our callings.

Sunday, January 24th - Acts 16: 1-3

These verses briefly set out the resumé of Timothy. The young man had a mother and a grandmother in the faith (2 Tim. 1:5), but no father in Christ. His natural father was a Greek, thus accounting for Timothy's not having been circumcised in the flesh, though by his mother's faithfulness the young man was circumcised in heart. Timothy manifested fruits of his conversion sufficient not only to warrant his being called a disciple, but also to have gained an excellent and expanding reputation amongst the brethren in the region of Lystra and Iconium. Paul saw promising potential in Timothy, and thus desired to recruit him to the missionary team. Yet, the relationship between these two men was at its outset and ever thereafter more deeply personal and tenderly affectionate than that of fellow workers on a mission. Timothy became Paul's adopted son in the faith (1 Tim. 1:2; 2 Tim. 1:2). Through his sacrificial service, in which he refused to dodge a region where he earlier had been stoned, Paul found not only a fellow servant in Christ, but a beloved son. Through his faithful discipleship in Christ, wherein he followed not the example of his natural father, but sought first the kingdom and righteousness of his heavenly Father, Timothy gained not only a spiritual mentor but a most beloved surrogate earthly father. Let us marvel at the wisdom, power, and love of God in His bringing these men together and knitting their hearts in love. Surely similar blessing awaits us as we seek first our Lord's kingdom and righteousness (Mt. 6:33).

Monday, January 25th - Acts 16: 1-3

Timothy's natural endowments did not much commend him to the rigors of missionary service or to the challenges of pastoral ministry. He was as delicate in constitution as was John Mark, whom Paul had earlier rejected. He was young (1 Tim. 4:12); he was tender, perhaps even timid (2 Tim. 1:3-8); he did not bear stress well (1 Tim. 5:23); and, of course, while his mother was a believer, his father was an unconverted man. Yet, Timothy had what it took to stand for Christ in trial and triumph. He fulfilled the requirements of 1 Tim. 3:1-7 for office in the Church; he had sure prophecies uttered concerning him (1 Tim. 1:18); and he had a sincere faith and the indwelling Spirit of power, love, and discipline (2 Tim. 1:5-7). Spiritual adequacy far outweighs all natural inadequacies.

Tuesday, January 26th - Acts 16: 3

In view of the deliberations and declarations of the Jerusalem Council (Acts 15), what are we to make of Paul circumcising Timothy? This verse tells us that Paul did so under the rule of a principled expediency. Jews in the region wherein Timothy would begin his work, knowing that his father was Gentile, knew further that Timothy was uncircumcised. Since Timothy was half Jewish through his mother, he should have been circumcised on the eighth day after his birth. What his natural father failed to do, his spiritual father rectified, and in so doing a potential scandal was removed from Jews amongst whom Paul and Timothy would be ministering. In this way, to the Jews Paul and Timothy became as Jews in order to win some of the Jews (1 Cor. 9:20).

Wednesday, January 27th - Acts 16: 4, 5

Paul and his fellow missionaries did not strengthen the churches they visited by telling them pleasing stories or providing for them entertaining diversions. Instead, the apostle declared the decrees of the Jerusalem Council. Those decrees were biblically based regulations for Christian living. We further read of the churches being strengthened in the faith. Nothing truly strengthens churches like decent and orderly practice of the faith and deep and full preaching of the faith. By the intake and application of sound doctrine drawn from the whole counsel of God, believers grow in the grace and knowledge of Christ. Such advancement in quality does not preclude, but rather prompts growth in the Church's numerical quantity as well. Those truly growing in the faith tend to lead others into the same way of blessing.

Thursday, January 28th - Acts 16: 6-8

From their strengthening of the churches in the region of Derbe and Lystra, Paul and his companions turned to the northwest, seeking to carry the gospel into new territory. Their steps and stays were guided by their good triune Shepherd, who leads and makes His people lie down according to His will, not their wants (Ps. 23:2). After they passed Pisidian Antioch, it would have been logical and according to their custom to preach Christ in the next region to which they came, namely, Asia Minor. Yet the verses before us alert us to the fact that He who commissioned His servants to make disciples of all nations, at times forbids them to minister in certain places. The Holy Spirit accordingly forbade them to preach in Asia Minor. To emphasize that such prohibition accorded with the Lord's great commission, we are further told specifically that the Spirit of Jesus, who had issued the commission, prohibited them entering Bithynia, just south of the Black Sea. Hence, Paul and company turned due west from Bithynia and stopped at Troas, directly across the Aegean Sea from Macedonia. When our Lord closes certain doors for ministry, it is only to lead us to those doors which He has opened for us.

Friday, January 29th - Acts 16: 6-8

Why were Paul and company forbidden to preach in Asia Minor? It surely was not that the people there were unworthy of the gospel. If our merit determined our receiving gospel ministry, we would all yet be strangers to redemption in Christ. In fact, the gospel would later come fruitfully to Asia Minor, as we learn from the letters to the seven churches in that region recorded in Rev. 1-3. Thus, the prohibition represents a delay, not a permanent deprivation of gospel preaching in that region. It also represents the positive divine purpose of sending the gospel into Europe, whose head and heart were at Rome. Thus would Paul's steps reach much farther than he could at that time have asked or imagined. How far will our Lord take our willing and obedient feet?

Saturday, January 30th - Acts 16: 6-10

Doors were closed in Asia Minor so that Paul and his co-laborers in Christ might be led to an open door to Europe. At Troas, on the shore of the Aegean Sea, God gives two significant things to the missionary team: 1) a divine vision indicating where Paul and his fellow servants are to labor, and 2) Luke, the godly physician. We note this second aspect because from v.10 onwards the narrative is no longer in third person

but in first person plural. Yet Luke's humility and godly sense of priority are seen in the fact that he makes the vision of the beseeching Macedonian primary, whereas his own joining the mission is subtly secondary. Those servants of Christ serve best and most fruitfully who determine that Christ, His work, and His other servants should increase, while they themselves decrease.

Sunday, January 31st - Acts 16: 9, 10

We are not to expect visions to lead our steps today. However, in our seeing this vision through this Scriptural account, we learn that by the providence of the Lord we are led to do substantially what is here represented. When our Lord opens a way of service for us, we should enter into such service immediately, as did Paul and his companions. We should also have confidence that we are being led by the Lord to people whom He has prepared—to fields white and ready to harvest, as the appealing Macedonian portrays. Finally, we should understand that our service is to be that of rendering help to needy souls. That help is ultimately in the name of the Lord. We give greatest help not when we seek only to meet perceived needs, but when we seek to minister Christ and His gospel to that deepest need shared by all men in every place and generation, namely, their guilty and corrupting sin, and resultant alienation from God and misery of soul.

Monday, February 1st - Acts 16: 9, 10

The Macedonian man appealing to Paul in the vision was no specific individual, but rather a representative of the western world. In all of Paul's western missionary travels, Scripture does not record that the apostle ever met any one man fitting the description of this appealing apparition. What Paul did encounter were such things as arrest in Philippi and indifference in Athens. Men do not perceive their truly helpless condition. However, our gracious God knows of such need, and shows it to His servants so that with confident diligence they may carry the gospel seed to plant fruitfully in what may initially appear as most unwelcoming soil.

Tuesday, February 2nd - Acts 16: 10-12

From these verses we detect the true servant's attitude in Paul and his companions. As soon as they are convinced of the Lord's calling them to Macedonia, they immediately make their way to that destination. Neither do they allow themselves to be diverted nor to be delayed along the way. Though their boat stopped at an island and an entrance port along their course across the Aegean Sea, the men did not tarry at either Samothrace or Neapolis but made straight for Philippi, the leading city of the district to which God had summoned them. True servants of Christ go to the heart of the work to which their Lord calls them.

Wednesday, February 3rd - Acts 16: 12, 13

Though it is obvious that the company of missionaries made directly for Philippi, it is also clear that once they arrived things were not as welcoming as perhaps, from the vision, they might have expected. No one meets or greets them. Nor, from the account of these verses, did it clearly appear to Paul and the others to whom or how they should preach. Thus, the missionaries sat for a considerable number of days, doing nothing except, no doubt, planning and praying. When they do begin overt ministry, it is clear that by their choice of day and place they aimed at Jews living within Philippi. The target audience turns out to be but a few women. Philippi, being a Roman colony, outlawed Jewish synagogues, and, to the shame of the resident Jewish men, it appears to have been only the women who retained what public devotion they could to the God of Abraham amidst such pagan pressures. Nothing in this situation looks like an open door inviting gospel ministry. The Lord's doors rarely appear as doors, but, rather as walls. We need but recall how the Jews under Moses were led out of Pharaoh's reach through the Red Sea, and into Canaan under Joshua through a flooded river Jordan. Faith gives fortitude where sight would prompt fainting.

Thursday, February 4th - Acts 16: 13-15

We can read on in Scripture to find Paul writing in most commending terms to a flourishing church at Philippi. His letter to the Philippians abounds with affirmation and gratitude to God for the sound church which was growing amidst the Roman colony of Philippi. That robust church, we learn from these verses, had a most humble beginning. Paul finds but a few ladies gathered at the place for prayer. He does not despise the small and unlikely congregation to which God had called him. Thus, the apostle began to declare the gospel, and one of the women—a commercial trader from Asia Minor, the region where Paul was forbidden to preach—was effectually called to salvation. Lydia, a worshipper of God, a woman who hungered for righteousness, was satisfied with heavenly manna and the gift of eternal life on that day. She who was saved immediately became an instrument of salvation, as we gather from the baptism of Lydia and her household. Therefore, as John Calvin well remarks, "...from that frail shoot a famous church sprang up, whose praises Paul sings in splendid terms." (*New Testament Commentaries*, vol. 7, p. 72.) We must learn to judge any work of Christ never by its humble beginning, but always by its glorious perfection (Phil. 1:6).

Friday, February 5th - Acts 16: 14, 15

When Paul met Lydia she was far from her native city and outside the gate of her city of residence. Through the apostle's preaching of redemption in Christ, Lydia found her true home in the Lord, and immediately made her house available to Paul and company as their home and base of operations in Philippi. Christ in the heart makes a soul at home anywhere, and prompts one to exercise grateful and generous hospitality.

Saturday, February 6th - Acts 16: 16-18

These verses may or may not describe a second conversion, but they certainly tell of the liberation of a poor slave-girl who was possessed by a demonic spirit. The main point of Luke's recounting the incident is that it might be evident how tricky and costly true ministry is. For Paul had to exercise great discernment and faithfulness in handling this situation as he did. He would also pay a great price of suffering for his faithful and resolute action, though that would lead ultimately to greater triumphs of grace. Christian service which is truly faithful and fruitful is carried on amidst such subtle opposition and such intimidating fury that it becomes impossible to perform without one's being full of the Holy Spirit.

Sunday, February 7th - Acts 16: 16-18

Paul returned to the place of prayer, ground which had already borne spiritual fruit. On his way there he was met by a girl suffering multiple bondage. She had human masters profiting from her occult powers, and she was a slave to a demonic spirit. Whether Paul and his co-laborers knew all of this about her when they first met her or learned it about her as she repeatedly saluted them is hard to determine. It is most remarkable that she who was enslaved and possessed by the father of lies should hail the apostle's company with such an accurate description of their relation to and mission for the Lord. Far too many Christian servants would be heartened by such salutation. Perhaps these missionaries were themselves for a time tempted to think this girl the most accurate fulfilment to that point of the vision of the beseeching Macedonian which Paul saw in Troas. Yet, far from her vocal attentions being welcomed and reciprocated, we read that Paul was mightily annoyed over such advertisement. Credulity and easy affirmation are not marks of a truly spiritual man. We are not to believe every spirit, but we are to test them (1 Jn. 4:1).

Monday, February 8th - Acts 16: 16-18

True discernment reveals why Paul was rightly annoyed. Had he accepted the girl's testimony, he would have as much as declared to all in Philippi and beyond that there was no real difference between the glorious grace of God in Christ and the glib counterfeits of Satan. Paul rightly reckoned that even when the devil speaks the truth, he lies. For Satan here sought to conceal himself with a deceitful declaration of truth, so that his dark spirit might be accepted into the company of the servants of light. One shudders to imagine where that spirit would have led this holy band. Paul not only resists such inveigling, he turns the true light

of Christ upon the evil of the girl, thus liberating her by the truth and power of God's self-disclosure in Christ.

Tuesday, February 9th - Acts 16: 19-22

The devil who inspired the slave-girl enticingly to flatter Paul and his brethren, finding that stratagem resisted, resorts to inspiring her masters with murderous rage. Satan most desires to avoid detected. When he is detected, he seeks to entice, appearing as an angel of light. When he fails to entice, he intimidates, dropping all guises and appearing in his true colors as a lion seeking someone to devour. We do well never to think that the less troubling coverings of Satan change his character into anything other than that of a liar, deceiver, and destroying enemy.

Wednesday, February 10th - Acts 16: 19

The value system of the natural man is portrayed clearly in this reaction of the slave girl's masters to her liberation from Satan's thrall. They do not rejoice with her in her freedom, nor do they see in her miraculous cleansing from the evil spirit a gracious and potent cure for their own enslavement to sin and Satan. Instead, they perceive matters as though the name and power of Jesus Christ had robbed them. These men prefer to profit at the expense of others bearing inconceivable misery. The world is full of such men. Indeed, we all are naturally that way. Thanks be to God, who has made us into new creatures who truly care for the welfare of others.

Thursday, February 11th - Acts 16: 19

Worldly men do not bear loss of profit well. These men soon transform their disappointment into rage and hateful retaliation against Paul and Silas, servants of the Christ by whose name the slave-girl had been released from her spiritual bondage and her masters relieved of their ability to make ill-gotten gain through her. Such rage was not warranted, as her gain could be their gain as well. Such retaliation would prove ultimately futile, though initially successful. How could they who had been instrumental in releasing a captive from the grasp of the strong man, Satan, be themselves imprisoned? We need never fear either the threats or the initially painful touch of the wicked. In vain do they rage and take counsel against the Lord, His Anointed, and His servants (Ps. 2).

Friday, February 12th - Acts 16: 19-21

For their good deed done to glorify Christ and for the benefit of a suffering girl, Paul and Silas are charged with multiple crimes. They who brought peace to an oppressed soul are charged with disturbing the peace. Their Master had faced the same charge (Lk. 23:5). They are called Jews, as though, amongst Romans, that were a crime in itself. Finally, they are charged with seeking to convert Roman citizens to their Jewish religion. This last charge was, at that time, a capital crime throughout the Roman Empire. Note how the wicked would pervert the gospel from the supreme blessing it is into the greatest of crimes. Note further how the enemy of Christ and His servants, when once he has been exposed and discomfited, aims in return not merely to discomfit the godly but to destroy them. Christian service is deadly serious business.

Saturday, February 13th - Acts 16: 19-21

Paul and Silas are seized. Apparently, Timothy and Luke were not arrested. This difference in treatment may be accounted for from the fact that the latter two were not the leaders and they each were part or totally Gentile. While Timothy and Luke were not clear of all danger, and while they, no doubt, shared sympathetically the pain of Paul and Silas, the selection of the team leaders for ill treatment points up the greater cost of Christian leadership. He who stands nearest the Captain in battle will draw the most shots. Let us count such cost before we aspire to lead in ministry.

Sunday, February 14th - Acts 16: 22

We see from the precipitate and punishing treatment the magistrates gave Paul and Silas how ready those civil leaders were to believe the worst about the Lord's servants. They were men presumed guilty and treated accordingly without a hearing or any due process of law. Nor was it only the magistrates so operating. The crowd was incited, and the crowd, in turn, put pressure on the magistrates to punish the objects of their anger. A similar dynamic obtained between the Jewish mob and the Roman governor, Pilate, before whom Jesus was sacrificed to political expediency. Sin drives men into a blind rage, and plays on the cowardice and moral weakness of civil rulers of men, thus clouding out the truth which saves and sets men free. But God will not let his truth to be long under such clouds, nor His servants to be long without vindication and victorious fruitfulness. As a tomb could not hold God's Son, so a Philippian prison will prove inadequate to hold Christ's servants. Crowds and chief magistrates may rise up against the Lord's servants; God will raise up His men above them all.

Monday, February 15th - Acts 16: 23, 24

How different the reality in Macedonia was from the vision (vv.9,10). Instead of Paul and his co-laborers finding a people hungering for the saving help of the Lord, they encounter a hostile people, produce few converts, most if not all being women, are arrested, stripped, beaten with rods, thrown in a prison, are there placed in the dungeon, and secured in stocks. They thus were stripped of more than their robes. In a furious burst they had their honor, their health, their possessions, their liberty, their personal comforts, and their ability to communicate with the very people they had come to served ripped from them. About all they had was the breath of life which they gasped in a virtual tomb. The doors of service our Lord opens for us lead us into many deaths before they lead to life and liberty for ourselves and those whom we serve.

Tuesday, February 16th - Acts 16: 25

About all that Paul and Silas possessed in the world at this point were their own bound and broken bodies. To the natural eye their prospects looked grim, as though they would soon lose what little remained to them. Yet, by the employment of their lips, it is evident that Paul and Silas saw themselves surrounded by divine blessing. These godly, suffering servants exercised the power of prayer—a power which can never be taken from any believer, nor bound by the most oppressive circumstances. Through such praying, their eyes were opened, as had the eyes of Elisha's servant been opened (2 Ki. 6:15-17), to see themselves surrounded by the grace and glorious provision of the Lord. Therefore, they were led to sing praises to God. Those songs gave their fellow prisoners something to hear and heed. The melodic praises indicated that the singers possessed the power of light in darkness and the love of God in grim pain and deprivation. As Tertullian well said: "Legs feel nothing in stocks when the heart is in heaven."

Wednesday, February 17th - Acts 16: 25-28

In answer to the prayers of Paul and Silas the Lord sent an earthquake. Was the earthquake sent to free Paul and Silas? Were those servants of the Lord praying for such freedom from prison? Judging from Paul's prison epistles, wherein he neither indicates that he prayed for such release, nor asks his readers so to pray for him (Eph. 6:19), we may safely conclude that Paul and Silas did not pray for their own release, but rather for the release of the citizens of Philippi from their bondage to sin. The Lord's servants did not pray for their physical freedom because they were already free men, being bound by no jail, but rather being bound to their Lord in grateful and loving service. That is why when the prison doors were opened and the prisoners' chains were unfastened Paul and Silas stayed put, persuading their fellow inmates not to flee, and preventing the jailer from killing himself. Servants of Christ should not use their Christian liberty to please themselves, but rather to penetrate the hearts of those held in sin's bondage with the liberating gospel of Christ.

Thursday, February 18th - Acts 16: 25-30

It is amazing that men beaten, bound in stocks, and entombed in deepest prison can wield power to shake the earth and render their prison walls rubble, their fetters broken fragments. Here God manifests His power through the prayerful cries of His earthen vessels, Paul and Silas. Had the point simply been to release Christ's servants, an angel could have done so as silently as was done earlier with Peter (Acts 12:5-11). Yet in this case, the earthquake manifested the power of God to prisoners and jailer alike, arraigning them together as guilty sinners before the divine tribunal. At the same time, the Lord vindicated His servants, demonstrating that He would shake Heaven and earth for their blessing. That is why the prisoners kept to their places in awe, and why the jailer threw himself as a convicted sinner before Paul and Silas, seeing them neither as convicted criminals nor bound prisoners, but as what they were, agents of the living God, authorized to lead slaves of sin into the glorious freedom of salvation.

Friday, February 19th - Acts 16: 27

The earthquake came from the hand of God moving in answer to His servants' prayers. The jailer put the worst construction upon this demolishing work of God, thinking that his life must be forfeited since he had lost his prisoners. The natural man always places the most sinister construction upon the works of God. When the Lord draws near to us, let us not misconstrue His providence as being to us a curse rather than what it is, namely, our supreme blessing.

Saturday, February 20th - Acts 16: 28-32

Paul and Silas demonstrate a loving care for the jailer and a commitment to costly service for his sake. The hand of God in the earthquake and gracious love of God incarnate in the apostle and his companion turned the jailer's world upside down. In a flash he realized that he was the prisoner in need of liberation. He thus cries to know the way of salvation. Those who were his prisoners now serve as his guides to Heaven, telling him to believe in Jesus as Savior and Lord. The result, he is informed, would be his own salvation and that of his household who would have a good example and covenant warrant to follow the head of their household into his glorious, newly found liberty in Christ.

Sunday, February 21st - Acts 16: 30-34

In answer to the jailer's question (v.30), Paul and Silas give a concise summary (v.31), which they expand before an expanded audience (v.32). The result is the most complete transformation. The jailer becomes a physician. He whose sins were washed away, as represented by his baptism, washes the bodily wounds of Paul and Silas. He who had lived in spiritual bondage and alienation from God, was set free and adopted into the family of the faithful. Thus he treats Paul and Silas no longer as prisoners, but as brothers, leading them out of jail and into his own home. He who had been fed heavenly manna feeds the ministers from his own table. He who was in despair and on the verge of self-destruction, now rejoices with his whole household as the indwelling Holy Spirit gave to them all a growing apprehension of the riches of salvation. Thus this jailer, so greatly helped, becomes in turn a helper. Paul's Troas vision continues to be fulfilled and carries on in its fulfillment to and beyond our day. For Paul and Silas and we pray to, praise, and serve a Redeemer who transformed His accursed cross into a victory chariot, and who likewise transforms His servants' jails into places of expanding jubilee.

Monday, February 22nd - Acts 16: 35

God had done the greater work of delivering the jailer and his household from the thrall of sin and Satan. It remained for the Lord to effect the lesser work of freeing Paul and Silas, not simply from their physical jail, which release was accomplished by the divinely sent earthquake, but from the arrest and charges of the civil authorities in Philippi. It would seem from this verse that as the Lord had shaken the earth and demolished the jail, so He had shaken the hearts and minds of the chief magistrates, disposing them rightly to reconsider the rash beatings and imprisonment they had ordered for Paul and Silas. What a difference a day makes! Our afflictions do not last as long as we fear they might. Faith sees this and sings in the dark night, and is vindicated in the light of day.

Tuesday, February 23rd - Acts 16: 35, 36

On the first day of the Philippian jailer's new life in Christ, he had the blessed privilege and pleasure of announcing to Paul and Silas the good news of their release. Perhaps never was a jailer more delighted to declare the release of his prisoners. Yet, while the jailer, a babe in Christ, is understandably happy to make such an announcement, there were defects in it which would militate against the future liberty, peace, and security not only of Paul and Silas, but also of the infant church at Philippi. The jailer himself seems to sense the tenuous nature of this release order. He bids Paul and Silas not to come out of the jail (they were already out of that and in the jailer's house, v.34), but to go out of the region, quietly accepting the condescension of the magistrates (evxelqo,ntej poreu,esqe evn eivrh,nh). The liberty, security, and peace of the Christian is not founded on the shaky reed of a civil magistrate's caprice. We must not think or act as though it were.

Wednesday, February 24th - Acts 16: 35-37

What the jailer sensed, Paul says—the offer of release is fraught with defects which require to be corrected. Four sinful crimes committed by the authorities against Paul and Silas are cited: 1) Public beating; 2) no trial; 3) unwarranted imprisonment; 4) all committed against Roman citizens. By his refusal to be secretly sent away, Paul actually serves to save the magistrates from their commission of a fifth aggravation, namely, the burial of evidence of their crimes. There are other substantial reasons for Paul's declining the magistrates' release. We do well to follow Paul's example, prayerfully examining and considering the hidden snares and buried seeds for future problems which are wrapped in the apparent generosity of the world's offer of peace and liberty.

Thursday, February 25th - Acts 16: 35-37

Paul is not being needlessly or perversely difficult when he declines the magistrates' offer of release. He is rightly sensitive to a number of important principles and considerations. He will not accept freedom without due vindication as a basic matter of justice. The magistrates had beaten and imprisoned these men without just cause. For Paul and Silas to leave on the terms suggested by the magistrates would be for the Lord's servants practically to indicate their indebtedness to the caprice of the worldly, rather than their stand on justice. Also, Paul and Silas demonstrate a care for the infant church at Philippi. Had these ministers of the gospel left town as proposed, they would have been physically free, but still bound by a cloud of general suspicion of their guilt. This would have inhibited their effectiveness in future service. It would also leave the believers at Philippi living and laboring under a similar cloud of suspicion, that the gospel brings confusion and sedition (vv.20,21), rather than peace and submission to all authority under God. Had Paul and Silas been concerned primarily for their personal liberty, they would have been blinded to these important considerations. How much is our own witness and fruitfulness in Christ's service compromised and retarded because we too readily accept the world's terms of peace?

Friday, February 26th - Acts 16: 35-37

We cannot help but wonder why Paul did not announce the critical matter of his Roman citizenship sooner, thus preventing a beating and imprisonment for himself and Silas, and the consequent embarrassment for the civil magistrates. Perhaps things happened too quickly to allow the announcement. Perhaps Paul was too slow to realize the need to make the declaration. If that was the case, the apostle learned from this and later corrected any possible tardiness (Acts 22:25-29). However, Paul and Silas may have allowed themselves to suffer by design, if not their own, then certainly by the Lord's design. For this incident, costly as it was to the missionaries, provided a most powerful disincentive for the magistrates to act in future from rash and prejudiced motives. Such a lesson would benefit other believers in Philippi and would serve to make the magistrates themselves more inclined to identify and show respect for not only innocent citizens of Rome, but also holy citizens of heaven dwelling and serving in their midst.

Saturday, February 27th - Acts 16: 37

That which Paul later wrote to the Philippians, telling them to have the attitude of Christ Jesus, who humbled Himself to serve, suffer, and die on the cross (Phil. 2:5-8), the apostle himself did at his first coming to Philippi. He who could have spared himself suffering by asserting his Roman citizenship, suffered so that the jailer and his household would join him in heavenly citizenship. He also suffered so that the world would know that the servants of Christ are, despite the slanders of the wicked, most innocent and powerfully connected people, to whom respectful attention should be afforded.

Sunday, February 28th - Acts 16: 38, 39

The magistrates were finding it harder and more costly to get Paul and Silas out of prison than it had been to put them into prison. They rightly feared, for they had demonstrated contempt for Rome and its emperor by their mistreatment of two of Rome's citizens. They who were commissioned to uphold the law, thereby became themselves breakers of the law. Accordingly, they humbled themselves and provided that public vindication which Paul and Silas demanded. They further appealed to the missionaries for grace, asking forgiveness for the punishment they had meted out to them, lest they find themselves punished, should Paul and Silas press the actual crimes against them with anywhere near the insistence with which they had pressed the apparent crimes against the Lord's servants. Thus did Paul and Silas arraign those who had acted as their judges and executioners before the higher court, not only of Rome, but of heaven. It is soberingly regrettable that the magistrates begged the missionaries to leave the city. Such urging showed that they, like Joseph's brothers after the death of their father, Jacob (Gen. 50:15-21), could not credit the forgiveness they received as the truly liberating force which it was, but feared it to be based on caprice, which might later revert to charges against them. Did they drive away Christ, the source of propitiation for their sins, when they urged the Lord's servants to leave? No. Jesus had raised up a church in Philippi which remained long after Paul departed. If any of these magistrates later profited from that local testimony to the Savior, we shall see them in glory.

Monday, March 1st - Acts 16: 40

Paul and company left the city, but they lingered for a time in the region. They exchanged their prison pulpit for a pulpit in the house of Lydia. There, amidst their brethren in Christ, they spoke words of encouragement and fortifying comfort. Words from ones so recently wounded and powerfully restored by the Lord had great weight and authority then, and continue to have weight and authority now as well. Thus were those liberated from an earthly prison forged together with their brethren in Christ with bonds stronger than any prison or parting could break. Though Paul left this infant church so that he might continue his missionary journey, the church remained prayerfully and materially supportive of the apostle, as he himself gratefully acknowledged in Phil. 4:15,16. The apostle had brought to them a message of peace. It was a message proclaimed in word and deed. The Philippians were left with the rich blessing of peace which passes understanding and which results not from avoidance of suffering, but from triumph in suffering; peace conferred only by the God of peace Himself (Phil. 4:6-9).

Tuesday, March 2nd - Acts 16: 40

The attentive reader will note that Paul and Silas left something else behind at Philippi in addition to their powerful testimony and an infant church. This verse says *they* departed. From v.10 we learned that Luke joined Paul's team at Troas. By Luke's writing *they*, rather than *we*, departed, we are informed that Luke remained at Philippi until he rejoined Paul towards the end of this second missionary journey (Acts 20:5,6). Notwithstanding the characteristically subtle notice Luke humbly intimates of his remaining at Philippi, we surely are right to think that this godly physician was a wise and loving gift from Paul and from God to the infant Philippian church. We may calculate how faithfully and with what blessed effectiveness he served the church by the many glowing commendations Paul issues to the saints at Philippi in his Scriptural epistle to them. Our Lord wisely, lovingly, and effectively deploys His servants to achieve optimal edification in the Church.

Wednesday, March 3rd - Acts 17: 1-3

We do not know why Paul and company passed through such major cities as Amphipolis and Apollonia without note being taken by Luke of any ministering of the gospel having been offered in those places. Perhaps Paul was prompted by the Holy Spirit to pass through those cities without stopping, as he had been earlier forbidden to minister in Asia (Acts 16:6,7). Perhaps also he did minister in those cities, and the Scriptures simply do not record such ministering and its result. As with Jesus, so with His apostles, they did many other things which, if they were all written, the resulting number of books would be vast (Jn. 21:25). One thing is certain. Though Paul's custom of preaching Christ had cost him a severe beating and imprisonment in Philippi, such maltreatment did not inhibit his faithful service in other cities of Macedonia, such as Thessalonica. Only the Holy Spirit's direction and empowering could lead a man to persevere in a course which consistently proved to be full of trials and suffering. By the sovereign and gracious superintending of the Holy Spirit, the gospel came to Thessalonica via a tried and true servant of Christ.

Thursday, March 4th - Acts 17: 1-3

Though Paul was the apostle to the Gentiles, his custom, guided by Scriptural and covenantal considerations, was to preach the gospel to the Jews first. Thereby a testimony to Christ would be established in such Gentile cities as Thessalonica and spread from Jew to Gentile. Since Paul was addressing Jews, he reasoned with them from the Scriptures which together they acknowledged to be the infallible Word of God. From the Scriptures, Paul demonstrated the necessity for Messiah's suffering, death, and resurrection, then demonstrated that Jesus fulfilled such prophetic prediction. Far from the suffering, death, and resurrection of Jesus being an embarrassing and scandalous impediment to preaching the gospel, it is the foundation and pinnacle of true preaching and effective evangelism.

Friday, March 5th - Acts 17: 2, 3

The precise form of reasoning used by the apostle was that of drawing out scriptural prophecies and then setting alongside (paratipe,menoj) them the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. The life of Jesus and the light of Scripture do not only form a perfect, complimentary match, but the former is the eternal basis and perfect fulfillment of the latter. One can reason no more truly, powerfully, or effectively than from the written and living Word of God.

Saturday, March 6th - Acts 17: 2-4

Paul's ministry in Thessalonica met with far more immediate and extensive results than had been the case at Philippi. We read that some of the Jews in the synagogue believed, and that they were joined in the faith by a great many Gentile proselytes and leading women. This great company of converts did not simply give mental assent to the gospel message, they committed themselves entirely to the divinely appointed messengers, as children would gratefully and lovingly devote themselves to their father in the faith. True conversion to Christ always begets commitment to the body of Christ and loving submission to those whom God has raised up to be leaders in that body (Heb. 13:7,17).

Sunday, March 7th - Acts 17: 5-9

The results of Paul's ministry were not only positive in terms of converts (v.4), but negative in terms of persecution. Those Jews who would not have peace with God in Christ arose in bitter hostility against the Lord and His servants. The gospel is a stimulating, dividing force. It stimulates love for Christ, His servants, and His ordinances in those effectually called to salvation. It stimulates hatred for Christ and all pertaining to Him amongst those refusing the redeeming love and sovereign lordship of the Son of God (Ps.2). We may be grieved, but we must never be dissuaded from our service to Christ when we see how men are divided as a result of our faithful service. Jesus tells us Himself that He came to bring a sword of division (Mt. 10:34).

Monday, March 8th - Acts 17: 5

Many of those professing to be the covenant people of God go to war against the Prince of Peace and His bride. These Jews, we are told, were jealous, not for the honor of God, but for their religion which they had perverted into a false way of salvation by works. The tools they employ betray their sinful motives as truly as does the fact that they oppose the Lamb of God slain to take away men's sins as though He were an oppressive tyrant. The Jews gathered and used idle vagrants who frequented the market place (tw/n avgorai,wn) to form a mob against the true Messiah. Despite what they profess, when men resort to dirty tactics in their opposition to the pure gospel of the holy Christ, they show their true wicked perversity.

Tuesday, March 9th - Acts 17: 5-7

The Jews and their mob did not find Paul and Silas, so they settled for an abusive arrest of Jason and other brethren, who were but newborn babes in Christ. Evil men would lay hold of God Himself, if they could, and try to destroy Him. When they fail to lay violent hands upon the divine Master, they aim their malice toward His servants. When they fail to apprehend Christ's leading servants, they focus their ire on His following servants. As wicked Herod destroyed innocent babies, so those opposed to Jesus will stoop so low as to attack spiritual infants. We do well to see this and help new converts to see it as soon as possible.

Wednesday, March 10th - Acts 17: 6, 7

The enemies of Paul and his fellow missionaries charge them generally with reversing the world's order, and particularly with acting and teaching seditiously against Caesar. Regarding the first charge, it is a begrudging tribute to the diligent effectiveness of Paul and company that they should be charged with affecting the whole world. In fact, the apostles and disciples of Christ did not turn the world upside down. Adam's sin did that. The servants of the Savior proclaimed a turning of the world right side up, with the divine image in man which was shattered by sin being restored in Christ, and with men alienated from their creating God being reconciled to Him by the Redeemer. Regarding the second charge, both Jesus and His apostles taught men to honor and submit to Caesar, as part of their reverent service to God (Mt. 22:21; Rom. 13:1-7; 1 Pet. 2:17). What is right and truly reasonable, the wicked would distort into rashness and rebellion. Their false charges issue from their own sinful hearts and rebound upon their own guilty heads.

Thursday, March 11th - Acts 17: 8, 9

Popular sentiment and righteous principle often run along contrary tracks. Though there were many more converts to Christ in Thessalonica than in Phillipi, the vast majority of the citizenry in both places arose in violent opposition against those converts. Such irrational malice of both mob and magistrates subsided only when Jason posted bond for his release, based clearly upon the condition that Paul and company leave Thessalonica. Again we see how suicidally determined the wicked are to turn away from themselves the blessing of salvation. We also note, again, how costly it is for Jason and his brethren to stand for the Christ to whom they were so recently converted. These new converts were thrown into the deep end of the pool of discipleship at the very outset of their pilgrimage. They have not been alone in this, but have had the company of many throughout church history.

Friday, March 12th - Acts 17: 10

Paul and Silas were in Thessalonica for at least three Sabbaths (v.2), but were forced to leave soon after fruit from their ministerial labors began to grow. Could something lasting be established by so short a stay? From Paul's letters to the church at Thessalonica we see the answer to be a resounding yes. They who were regenerated amidst such tribulation, became outstanding and enduring trophies of the saving grace and sustaining power of the Lord (1 Thess. 1:6-10). They stood amidst trying and costly opposition because they rightly apprehended in the gospel and faithfully applied to themselves not human persuasion but divine power (1 Thess. 2:13). They stood, for they were well taught the true way to view their sufferings (2 Thess. 1:3-5), and they understood the essence and end of spiritual warfare (2 Thess. 2:1-12). The plain preaching of Christ crucified made them new creatures and more than conquerors in their tribulations. The

anemic and superficial seeker-friendly evangelism so popular in our day may avoid stirring up mob reactions, but it also fails to make true soldiers of the cross.

Saturday, March 13th - Acts 17: 10, 11

Paul shows no signs of growing weary in doing good. The counsel he gives, which tells us that in due time we shall reap, if we do not grow weary (Gal. 6:9), was wrought out in his own life. His Spirit-sustained perseverance leads him to richly prepared soil for the gospel in Berea. There he again employed his tried and true evangelistic method of preaching Christ from the Scriptures, to greatest effect. Let us likewise persevere in serving Christ faithfully and testifying to His gracious and saving provision in all places and seasons. Our Lord may lead us through several comparatively lean harvests before He leads us to a rich harvest like that which Paul experienced in Berea.

Sunday, March 14th - Acts 17: 11

This verse gives a most glowing commendation of the Bereans. They are characterized as being noble-minded, meaning that they hungered for those excellent glories which only God could provide and has provided richly in Christ. They received Paul's preaching ministry eagerly, as ones who at last were having their deepest and most vital craving fulfilled. They further steeped themselves in daily study of the Scriptures to confirm the accuracy and reality of Paul's teaching, and, to their delight, they found the blessed message to be better than what they had asked or expected. These qualities are not found in the natural man. They betoken a preparation of the heart and mind by God's Holy Spirit. The Spirit created a spiritual hunger in them which the gospel and only the gospel could satisfy. May He do likewise in us (Ps. 119:18).

Monday, March 15th - Acts 17: 12, 13

A very few precious souls were converted to Christ in Philippi. More were converted in Thessalonica. But in Berea we read that many believed the gospel. No indigenous opposition to the ministry of Paul in Berea is recorded, apparently because so many there did believe. However, such opposition was imported, as Satan, too, perseveres and prompts his wicked servants to persevere in persecuting the apostle who proclaimed peace and blessed liberty to those who had been in bondage to sin and to the devil. Yet we should note that Satan is obliged to spread his slaves thinly, as the gospel was spreading throughout Macedonia and was bringing many souls captive to Christ. Our enemy has limited resources with which to afflict us; our Lord has infinite resources with which to fortify us unto victory.

Tuesday, March 16th - Acts 17: 14, 15

Paul, as the apostle and increasingly effective leader of the mission team, was becoming a marked man. The brethren—meaning the apostle's co-laborers, in agreement with the new Berean converts—accordingly took prudent steps to preserve Paul by sending him away from his persecutors. Silas and Timothy remain at Berea to nurture the new converts. In fact, Timothy would be re-assigned to nurture the new converts in Thessalonica (1 Thess. 3:1,2). The servants of the Lord, therefore, appear thinly stretched as well. Yet we should learn from this that one of such servants is sufficient to fortify the saints so that mobs of persecutors would fail to destroy their faith or fellowship. Salt and light are divinely designed to be spread. Though such widespread deployment may be costly to the Lord's servants here, we shall all be more than well compensated as we gather in holy and glorious communion in our heavenly home.

Wednesday, March 17th - Acts 17: 14, 15

What became of this Berean church which began with such great promise? There are no extant epistles to the church, nor are there references in Scripture to it other than here in Acts. Since most apostolic letters to churches recorded in the New Testament were corrective, such silence may indicate a golden growth in the church at Berea. We do find Sopater, a member of this church, later named as part of Paul's missionary

team (Acts 20:4). Notices or lack thereof in this life may be telling. But since we are told by our Lord that many who are first in earthly estimation will be last in heavenly esteem, and vice versa, we should realize that only in the perfect light of glory shall we see who is greatest and who is least in the kingdom of God. Meanwhile, whether earthly notice is taken of us or not, let us endeavor to live lives of faithful devotion to and service for Christ, knowing that we shall never be disappointed with His commendation for our service.

Thursday, March 18th - Acts 17: 16, 17

It is evident that Athens was not a planned target for Paul's missionary work, so much as it was for him a city of refuge from his enemies. Yet Paul was not the sort of man to sit quietly in such a major city, endeavoring merely to survive. The holy apostle was deeply agitated at the pervasive sight of that religious delusion in Athens which would rob God of His glory and deprive men of salvation. Indeed, since Paul elsewhere declares that those worshipping idols in reality worship demons (1 Cor. 10:19,20), he determines to challenge the darkness of this demonic stronghold which fancied itself a source of light and learning. From the apostle's action we learn that all places should be viewed as pulpits for the publication of the good news of salvation.

Friday, March 19th - Acts 17: 16, 17

Paul initiates a two-pronged attack against the demonic darkness of Athens. He proclaimed Christ in the synagogue and in the market place. In both places we read that he vigorously dialogued with his hearers (diele, geto, an intensive middle). Never had the men of that great and ancient city, renowned for their learning, rhetorical greatness, and love of wisdom, heard such powerful and true reasoning. Christ is masterful Lord of all learning, and of all life. He enables His servants to teach infinitely valuable lessons to the most sagacious teachers (Ps. 119:98-100).

Saturday, March 20th - Acts 17: 16, 17

We do well to understand something about the Athens in which Paul found himself. In 4 B.C. the city-state reached an unequalled height of western civilization. Art, literature, democratic government, and philosophy all flourished supremely in Athens. More than mere vestiges of that earthly glory remained in Athens during Paul's day. The conquering Romans had recognized the superiority of the Athenians, and left them a free city-state allied to Rome. Athens appeared in need of nothing. Yet, as Paul rightly perceived, the fact that the city was full of idols and the population was distracted by worldly art, philosophy, and commerce, as well as false religion, indicated that Athens, too, was in need of the gospel, her citizens in need of salvation. For all of its apparent impressiveness, worldly culture provides no more than a poor fig leaf covering for man's essential sinfulness.

Sunday, March 21st - Acts 17: 18

Amidst men who fancied themselves philosophical and rhetorical masters, Paul proclaimed Christ crucified and resurrected. The Epicureans were disciples of Epicurus (341-270 B.C.) who saw pleasure as man's chief end. They defined pleasure as a life of tranquility, free from disturbing passions and superstitious fears. The Epicureans maintained that the gods were indifferent toward men. The Stoics were disciples of Zeno (340-265 B.C.). They aimed at living in harmony with nature, stressed the primacy of man's rational faculty, promoted self-sufficiency, and were pantheistic, believing that what men called the gods represented the world soul. These philosophers were different from each other, but united in their contempt for Paul and his teaching. Christ was the last thing these philosophers thought they needed, but redemption in Christ was the only thing Paul offered to them as the one thing necessary.

Monday, March 22nd - Acts 17: 19-21

The philosophers took Paul from the market place to the Hill of Ares (Mars), where master philosophers congregated to declare and debate their views. Scripture does not designate these philosophers as being like

the Bereans, noble-minded. Instead, the philosophers are portrayed as being proud, sophisticated, and contemptuous of views other than their own. The noble-minded are humbly and gratefully receptive of and submissive to truth. These sophisticated Athenians, though they profess interest in truth (v.20) are actually interested only in things new, not true (v.21). Should the gospel be shared with such proud, vain, and vacuous souls? Despite their hard, sophisticated exterior, their hunger for the novel betrayed an inner emptiness, a dissatisfaction with the husks of worldly wisdom upon which they had been feeding. They, too, were in need of heavenly manna.

Tuesday, March 23rd - Acts 17: 22, 23

Paul presents the gospel to these worldly wise but heavenly ignorant men. He does not cite Scripture texts of which they were unaware, but challenges them with the truth of Scripture and the inconsistency of their own lives. The apostle acknowledges their inherently religious nature, as manifested by the religious paraphernalia evident in Athens. He then shows how such manifestation of a natural theology was inadequate to save them, but served only to leave them without excuse for their sinful alienation from the God whom they acknowledged (Rom. 1:20-23). The convicting inconsistency of their religion was seen in their altar dedicated to the unknown God. Paul points to their admitted ignorance, telling them that despite all of their learning, they remained in darkness with respect to the most important thing in life. How woeful that men should strive for the trinkets of this transient world and be content to remain in ignorance with respect to the one thing necessary. These Athenians represent the natural man at his highest and best. They were men always learning, but never able to come to a knowledge of the truth. Were it not for the saving grace of God, we would all remain in perpetual ignorance of the one thing necessary. Thus, the Lord's servant proclaims to the men of Athens that which they never would or could discover on their own, namely, eternal life through communion with God in Christ.

Wednesday, March 24th - Acts 17: 22, 23

The Athenians were religious, but they were without a saving, personal relationship with the living God. Although men suppress the truth in unrighteousness (Rom. 1:18), they cannot completely suppress their knowledge of the God in whose image they have been made and in whose world they live. Religion represents man's thoughts about God. The gospel brings men into a blessed knowledge of God's thoughts and gracious, redeeming deeds respecting men. The men of Athens, as all natural men, had religion. Indeed, they had superstition, as the word translated, *very religious* (deisidaimoneste,rouj) can also indicate. What they lacked was a reconciled relationship with God.

Thursday, March 25th - Acts 17: 22, 23

The Athenians had erected an altar to *an* unknown god. By their not using the definite article, *the*, they confessed that there may have been many gods of whom they lived in ignorance. In fact, their altar resulted not so much from theological or philosophical reflection as from practical desperation. Diogenes Laertius, a Greek author writing in the third century A.D. (*The Lives of Eminent Philosophers*, vol. 1, p. 110), tells of a plague afflicting Athens in the sixth century B.C. A man from Crete named Epimenides was sought for his counsel, since the Athenians had sacrificed to all their known gods to no avail. Epimenides instructed the men of Athens to gather a flock of sheep, release and follow them, and when any one of them lay down, offer that one in sacrifice to an unknown god. This they did, and the plague left Athens. But while they were content to receive common goodness from God, the men of Athens never showed any inclination to know and serve the Lord. Our God causes His rain to fall on the just and the unjust. That men blindly acknowledge the divine Giver of such gifts is fine so far as it goes. But it does not go far enough. Men knowing, trusting, and obeying the Giver is far more vital than their receiving some of His common gifts. A plague on the body is one thing; the plague of plagues on the soul is quite another. Those who seek first to know the God of sovereign grace will find that God removes both plagues.

Friday, March 26th - Acts 17: 23

Man at his most educated and highly cultured can but give God lip service. The natural man ever resorts to God only in emergencies, and then he seeks relief from his suffering, not from his sin; he seeks the fruit of salvation without the root of a personal commitment to the Savior. The natural man serves himself with his mind, heart, and hands, seeking to feed himself the husks of this finite, fallen world, and to secure himself on the ever shifting sands of time. He is content to remain in ignorance of the God who created him, sustains him, and alone can redeem, reconcile, and receive him into eternal glory. Were not this God proclaimed to us, we would all—from highest to lowest—live in sinful darkness and die in guilty ignorance of and alienation from the only source of salvation.

Saturday, March 27th - Acts 17: 23

Paul declares that the impersonal thing (*what*, w-l) the Athenians worshipped in ignorance, was a person, near at hand (*this one*, tou/to), whom Paul knew, loved, served, and proclaimed to them. Too many professing believers practically treat God as an inanimate set of regulations set down in a lifeless book. Such professors offer worship in ignorance. True and acceptable worship is offered not in such ignorance, but in spirit and truth. God has revealed Himself in Christ, and we are to grow in His grace and knowledge (2 Pet. 1:2,3,5,6,8; 3:18). Jesus declared, in His high priestly prayer, that eternal life was not one's receiving divine gifts while remaining in ignorance of the Giver, but rather one's knowing the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom God has sent (Jn. 17:3).

Sunday, March 28th - Acts 17: 24-26

In these verses, Paul declares that the God of whom the Athenians were ignorant is the Creator of all things on earth and in heaven, material and spiritual, visible and invisible, and that He is sovereign over all (v.24). The apostle further declares God to be self-sufficient, needing nothing from man, but rather being Himself the source for all that man needs (v.25). Then Paul asserts that God is the sustainer of all things, governing all things at all times by His sovereign providence (v.26). This is not an insignificant God of whom any person in Paul's day or in our own day can afford to live in ignorance.

Monday, March 29th - Acts 17: 26

When the apostle declares that God made every nation from one, meaning one man, he is not simply asserting our common humanity. We must recall that he says this amidst a people fractured by differing philosophies and devoted to various and sundry deities. Variety of religion is not the spice of life. It betokens corruption. It shows that the order of nature has been violated by men having torn themselves from their creating God and their created brethren to pursue personal and perverse desires and speculations. Fractured humanity argues undeniably that men are separated from their common foundation in God.

Tuesday, March 30th - Acts 17: 27

In this verse, Paul tells men wise in their own estimation what their true, God-intended course is, namely, to seek God. Such seeking is neither difficult nor unpleasant. For God is not hidden; it is sinful man who hides himself and suppresses the knowledge of God. We must never mistake our blindness for an indication that there is no light. The heavens and earth are telling the glory of God (Ps. 19). Yet man determines not to seek, not to know God, not to glorify and enjoy Him forever. Man's ignorance of God is not due to lack of evidence, but rather is due to the perversity of man's heart. As Augustine said of God: "Thou hast made us for Thyself, and our hearts are restless until they find their rest in Thee." That restlessness stirs all men to seek. But rather than seek God, they seek satisfaction in the paltry and perishing things of this finite and fallen world. When men envy swine the husks upon which they feed, they should realize that their quest has misled them. They should seek their way home. But sin makes them unwilling and unable so to seek.

Wednesday, March 31st - Acts 17: 27

All who are not asking, seeking, knocking to know God are abusing all of their powers, possessions, and all of the circumstances of this life. This is not to say that sinful men are able to seek and find God; it is simply to remind us that we are without excuse for our indolence in the pursuit to know the one thing necessary.

Thursday, April 1st - Acts 17: 27, 28

Paul proves his assertion that God is not difficult for seekers to find by quoting bits from two poets held in high regard by the Athenians. The first citation comes from the Cretan, Epimenides (referred to in an earlier reading). The quartrain, from which Paul quotes here and in Titus 1:12, reads:

They fashioned a tomb for thee, O holy and high one—

The Cretans, always liars, evil beasts, idle bellies!

But thou art not dead; thou livest and abidest for ever;

For in thee we live and move and have our being.

These words attribute men's failure to apprehend God to their own suppression of truth, rather than to truth being inadequately manifested. Paul also quotes from either Aratus of Cilicia or Cleanthes, each of whom wrote that men are offspring of God. If spiritually blind, pagan poets can apprehend God—albeit vaguely, for they refer to Him as Zeus—those who seek Him with all their heart can surely find Him.

Friday, April 2nd - Acts 17: 29

The Athenians' failure to live up to the light even of natural theology was evidenced by their idolatry. If we are God's offspring, and we live and move, think and feel, why do men seek to worship God, the Source of human life, through lifeless idols? Do such lifeless things accurately represent the human soul, let alone the infinitely more majestic and sublime God, the Source and Giver of life, in whose image our souls are made? When men try to represent God in ways other than those given by divine self-disclosure, they invariably make God appear less than man, and make themselves to become more stupid than beasts (Rom. 1:22,23).

Saturday, April 3rd - Acts 17: 30

The apostle declares that the reason God suffered men to indulge their ignorance regarding Him is not that He is an indulgent God. Those who suppress the truth in unrighteousness are subject to the wrath of God every moment (Rom. 1:18). However, the Lord administers His common goodness by His exercise of patience, which is intended not to confirm men in sin, but to lead them out of it (Rom. 2:4). With the coming of Christ and the publication of the gospel, men have no reason to rely on divine patience to delay their condemnation. They have, rather, a sure hope whereby they may be reconciled to God in Christ, never again to be subject to condemnation (Rom. 8:1). The clarion call now is for all men to repent—to turn from their sin and then from their flimsy, fig-leaf excuses for sin, such as custom, culture, education or lack thereof—and to turn to the wisdom, love, power, and riches of God in Jesus Christ.

Sunday, April 4th - Acts 17: 30, 31

Some Bible students maintain that Paul was practicing a seeker friendly form of evangelism in Athens. They say that the apostle began by affirming the Athenians where they were, and built bridges from there to

Christ. However, Paul does not begin by commending the men of Athens for their manifest religiousness. He condemns them for their idolatry (the word in v.22, *deisidaimoneste,rouj*, has the connotation of superstition), rather than commending them for the idols which filled their city and filled his spirit with hot provocation (v.16). He condemns them for their ignorance of the one true God, and for their failure to seek Him or serve Him. He condemns them for their suppressing what truth they did apprehend. Thus, in vv.30,31, the men of Athens—who fancied themselves so wise, so cultured, so rich in the things of this world—are by Paul arraigned before the throne of divine judgment as men who were wretched, miserable, poor, blind, naked, and, worst of all, complacently careless of their sin and guilt. This is convicting law work, as John Calvin rightly remarks, saying: "Therefore let us remember that the teaching of repentance flourishes only when men, who would naturally desire to delude themselves, are awakened by fear of God's judgment; and that the only proper teachers of the Gospel are those who are heralds or court officials of the supreme Judge..." (*NT Commentaries*. Vol.7, p.125).

Monday, April 5th - Acts 17: 31

Paul would have every man live every day in light of the last great day of judgment. He proclaims that God, who has called for all people to repent, has also set with certainty a day of judgment. The judgment of God will not be based upon appearances or guesses as to what lies hidden in the shadows of undetected human action or the recesses of any human heart. It will be a righteous judgment, rendered by and through the God/man, Jesus Christ, whose divine appointment for such judging of all men is sufficiently proven by His resurrection from the dead. The Greeks had no concept of a final day, still less of a final reckoning before God. But there are many more things in heaven and earth than were dreamed of in the philosophies of these Athenians. The conceptual limits of man do not determine the limits of reality. Hence, Paul declares this vital truth, and so should we.

Tuesday, April 6th - Acts 17: 31

The apostle declares that the resurrection of Jesus is proof sufficient to convince all men that Jesus is the Judge of the living and the dead. He who vanquished death by His having vanquished sin, the cause of death, is alone fit to be the Advocate for those who look to Him for salvation (1 Jn. 2:1,2), and to be the Judge of those refusing to submit to Him by faith. It is the resurrected Christ who has the keys of death and of hell (Rev. 1:18). Those keys He uses to lock in His enemies and to release His beloved brethren from death and hell.

Wednesday, April 7th - Acts 17: 32

The sword of the Spirit which is the Word of God divides men. Most of the Athenians sneered at Paul's proclamation of resurrection. Rather than follow the liberating truth proclaimed by the herald of God, they chose to limit themselves to the false and enslaving negation of Aeschylus, who wrote in *Eumenides*: "Once a man dies and the earth drinks up his blood, there is no resurrection." However, some asked to hear more from Paul. The division made by the proclamation of the Word of God is one wherein some of those people who were unified in sin and death with all other natural men, are called to righteousness and life. This is a blessed, saving division which we should never be reluctant to cause.

Thursday, April 8th - Acts 17: 32

Those who said they would hear Paul's teaching again were not simply politely dismissing the apostle while determining themselves to procrastinate regarding the claims of Christ. As J. A. Stewart has written: "...they wanted to believe it. For that pagan world was in the grip of fear. Neither philosophy nor mythology, neither astrology nor mystery cult, had been able to roll back the dark shadow of irrevocable fate. The race was in bondage to a destiny decreed and fixed for ever in the unfriendly stars, and the terror

of a hostile cosmos held the human spirit in thrall. So these men at Athens resolved to hear the apostle again; for wistfully they hoped his message might be true." (*A Faith to Proclaim*, p.117).

Friday, April 9th - Acts 18: 33, 34

The Athenians who had brought Paul to the Areopagus (v.19), had, after hearing him, dismissed him. The apostle did not stay to plead with them. Christ knocks at the door, but He does not force the lock or break the door down (Rev. 3:20). Thus, Paul left Mars Hill. He did not, however, leave as he had come, virtually alone except for those who brought him there wanting to have their ears tickled with new teaching. Some people joined him, not only as companions, but as believing brethren in the redeeming bonds of Christ. Those believers heard the words of the living God through the message of Paul, and they accordingly heeded the effectual calling of the Lord. Two prominent believers are named. Dionysius, we are told, was an esteemed member of the Mars Hill congress of philosophers. He, like the Pharisee Nicodemus (Jn. 3:1ff) and like Paul himself, renounced his respectable natural endowments and attainments, counting them but rubbish, in view of the surpassing riches of Christ (Phil. 3:4-14). Damaris must have been somewhat prominent herself, and she, too, took up the way of the cross. There were others in addition to these two. Here at Athens was a harvest at least as rich as the one had been at Philippi. Lives and destinies were changed because one man faithfully took a stand on Mars Hill and proclaimed Christ as Lord of all.

Saturday, April 10th - Acts 17: 33 - 18: 1

Paul not only left Mars Hill, he soon thereafter left Athens and proceeded to Corinth. What were the lasting fruits of his labors in Athens? We know from 17:34 that a testimony for Christ had been planted there. The early Church historian, Eusebius, reports that Dionysius became the first bishop of Athens (*Ecclesiastical History*. Vol. 3, 4:11; iv.23.3), though Paul himself refers to the household of Stephanas at Corinth as the first fruits of Achaia (1 Cor. 16:15,16), wherein Athens was situated. As with the church at Berea, so with the church at Athens, Scripture records nothing after Paul's visit. However, the later Greek Church Fathers and the Eastern Orthodox Church did not arise from nothing. The last day shall reveal how what Paul planted in Athens flourished or foundered.

Sunday, April 11th - Acts 18: 1-3

Corinth had a most favorable geographic location. It occupied a junction of sea routes to its west and east, and a junction of land routes to its north and south. It was a political and commercial rival of Athens until, in 146 B.C., the city was destroyed by the Romans in retribution for Corinth's revolt against Rome. Julius Caesar rebuilt the city in 46 B.C., and by 27 B.C. it was the capital of the Roman province of Achaia. Commercial prosperity and culture flourished in the Corinth of Paul's day. The citizens of Corinth were notoriously sensual and sexually lax. Yet for all of their success and self indulgence, the hearts of many at Corinth were hungering for that satisfaction which comes only through the heavenly manna of the gospel. Therefore, God graciously directed Paul to go to that great city which was rich in worldly goods, but exceedingly poor with respect to spiritual treasures. Many who had fed upon the unsatisfying husks of earthly trinkets were about to be filled with bread from heaven (vv.10,11). We should never think that outward success betokens inner satisfaction.

Monday, April 12th - Acts 18: 1-3

Upon his arrival in Corinth, Paul encountered a Jewish couple who had been at least twice uprooted from their home. Aquila had left Pontus to relocate in Rome. Very likely, business concerns dictated that move. From Rome, he and his wife, Priscilla, had been exiled with all the Jews, by the emperor, Claudius. This couple welcomed Paul into their home in exile. The result was not simply that Paul had a roof over his head. It is likely that Paul led these two to faith in Christ, thus serving to feed them with heavenly manna, to clothe them with perfect righteousness, to found them upon the unchangeable Rock, and to usher them into their true family, home, citizenship, and glorious inheritance. Those who serve Christ's servants never

suffer, but rather are blessed immeasurably by the One who came not to be served, but to serve, and to give His life as a ransom.

Tuesday, April 13th - Acts 18: 3, 4

Paul worked with his hands at Corinth so that he could offer the gospel freely to others. We never know when those practical gifts and commercial abilities our Lord gives to us will serve to higher purpose. We know precisely how Paul reasoned in the synagogue. He tells us himself that when he came to Corinth, though he was capable of making a cultured and philosophical presentation to suit the taste of the cosmopolitan Corinthians, he determined to know and to preach nothing except Christ crucified (1 Cor. 2:1,2). Some believe that this straightforward approach was adopted after the disappointing results of Paul's more sophisticated apologetic used in Athens. In fact, Paul preached Christ crucified in Athens as well (17:30,31), and fruit resulted there (17:34). Nothing is more reasonably persuasive than the authoritative offer of free salvation through Christ.

Wednesday, April 14th - Acts 18: 5

When Silas and Timothy joined Paul, they brought with them news from Thessalonica (1 Thess. 3:1-8), and financial gifts from Philippi (Phil. 4:15,16). The news encouraged Paul, while the gift enabled him to cease his tent making and give himself completely to the ministry of the gospel. Faithful living and faithful giving hearten ministers of the Lord, and help them fulfill that full-time proclamation of Christ to which they have been called by God.

Thursday, April 15th - Acts 18: 6

Before any sign of encouragement shows for Paul's labors, the familiar pattern of Jewish resistance against Christ and His servant recurs. The Jews in Corinth not only resisted, they blasphemed. As the slave girl and others who repeatedly noted Peter's connection with Jesus moved Peter from denial to cursing (Mt. 26:69-75), so Paul's persistent testimony regarding Jesus drove the Jews from resistance to blasphemy. If the coming of light and liberating truth in Christ does not kill sin and give new life, it arouses sin and ripens it for judgment. Both the exposure and the expunging of sin are necessary components of gospel ministry.

Friday, April 16th - Acts 18: 6, 7

Paul's response to the Jews who resisted the gospel in Corinth was similar to the response he and Barnabas gave in Pisidian Antioch to the resisting Jews there (Acts 13:46). Yet, as the Jewish rejection of the gospel in Corinth was stronger than the rejection in Antioch, so Paul's response is stronger at Corinth. In essence, the apostle tells the Jews that they shall have their own way. They who stood in solidarity with those who had called upon themselves the guilt of their having shed the blood of Jesus (Mt. 27:25), would find themselves without an Advocate in the day when they would have to account for their sinful lives before a holy God. If the blood of Jesus is not savingly applied to a man, then that man will personally pay the awful penalty for his own sin. As if to provide a prelude to the awful fate of these Jews, the servant of the Savior departed from them, leaving them to their own chosen, Christless lives and eternal destiny. Paul's strategic retreat led him to more receptive spiritual soil, namely, to Titius Justus (who may also have been called Gaius, Rom. 16:23; 1 Cor. 1:14), a worshipper of God, not a blasphemer. Had the apostle persisted with the blaspheming Jews, he would have been casting pearls before swine, contradicting the teaching and example of Jesus (Mt. 7:6).

Saturday, April 17th - Acts 18: 8

Not all of the Jews in the synagogue were hardened into adamant resistance against Christ. The leader of the synagogue himself believed in Jesus as the anointed Savior and sovereign Lord. Crispus was not alone in his conversion. He was joined by his entire household, and they were joined by many Corinthians who turned to Christ. Together these new believers received baptism, although not at the hands of Paul. The

apostle later reminded these Corinthian Christians, when they began to foster divisions in their fellowship, that he only baptized Gaius (Titius?) and Crispus and the household of Stephanas (1 Cor. 1:14-16). Yet for Paul to glean such positive fruit, he had first to persevere through the trials of repeated encounters with harshly resisting Jews in the synagogue. The hard and dirty work of plowing always precedes sowing and harvesting.

Sunday, April 18th - Acts 18: 9, 10

We gain insight from these verses into the personal cost Paul bore for his faithful ministry which was beginning to bear fruit. The apostle was worn down by his hardships and encounters with hard opponents at Corinth. So low was he that God fortified him with direct encouragement. In the night, when things looked bleak, when encouraging realities were hidden in darkness, the Lord came to Paul with the light of His loving presence, His powerful protection, and His sovereign ordering of all circumstances. The strength of our heavenly Father is not only made perfect in our weakness, but it is ministered to us in perfect timing.

Monday, April 19th - Acts 18: 9,10

God tells Paul literally to stop fearing (Mh. fobou/). After the fruit gathered in the lives of Crispus and many others (v.8), why should Paul have been afraid? In answer we say that the divine treasure is in earthen vessels (2 Cor. 4:7). Paul perhaps had succumbed to physical exhaustion and spiritual depression, as Elijah had done after his victory on Mt. Carmel (1 Ki. 18,19). The apostle tells of his having come to Corinth in fear (1 Cor. 2:3). Yet, where the Spirit of God prevails, fear cannot remain. For the Lord convinces His servants of His love, power, and wisdom, thus imparting to them a spirit of power, love, and discipline (2 Tim. 1:7) whereby they proclaim the gospel with highest fidelity. Fear is antithetical to faith and inhibits faithfulness. Fear regards self; faith regards Christ. Our Lord never condones the former, but always commends the latter.

Tuesday, April 20th - Acts 18: 9,10

The inhibiting power of fear in gospel proclamation is evident by our Lord's connecting Paul's speaking to his being fearless. Only when their fear is vanquished can the Lord's servants declare rightly the gracious promises of Christ. Therefore, Paul receives three directives: 1) to stop fearing, 2) to go on speaking, and 3) not to be silent. The first and last are negative directives, prohibiting fearful timidity. The central imperative urges that plain and public declaration of Christ which had so enraged Paul's blaspheming opponents. When fear is bound, our tongues are loosed to tell of the Savior.

Wednesday, April 21st - Acts 18: 9,10

The Lord links three incentives to the three imperatives. The incentives provide the power for Paul to carry out the imperatives. The first positive incentive is foundational to all the others, and is linked especially to the first negative directive. God assures Paul of His blessed and enabling presence. If our God is with and for us, what fear or foe can prevail against us? The second incentive is not merely a prediction, but also a divine promise that no attack against Paul will harm him. It is not a promise of freedom from attacks, but assurance of invincibility in all attacks. Neither fears within nor foes without can harm those made more than conquerors by the love of God in Christ. The final incentive promises fruitfulness for Paul's faithful labors. God had called the apostle to Corinth neither silently to survive as he made tents, nor to fall before his enemies, but to be the loving father of many spiritual children in Christ (1 Cor. 4:15). The divine incentives ever overmatch the divine imperatives.

Thursday, April 22nd - Acts 18: 11

With submissive trust in the Lord and gratitude to Him for His fortifying directives and promises, Paul settled in Corinth for a year and a half. The calling and equipping of God had made the apostle to be at home in that great foreign city, which was largely hostile to the gospel. Through Paul's obedient, diligent, and consistent ministry of the Word of God, many strangers and even enemies in Corinth were, with the passing of each day, transformed into the apostle's spiritual children, dear friends, and beloved brethren. Even if our God calls us to serve Him in hostile regions, our trusting obedience to His leading enables us to be happily and fruitfully at home there.

Friday, April 23rd - Acts 18: 12, 13

Paul's faith in the divine promise that he should suffer no harm in Corinth is soon put to the test. Jewish opposition to the apostle's ministry was nothing new to him. Yet, whereas previously the Jews stirred up local mobs (Acts 14:19) or accused Paul before city magistrates (Acts 16:19ff), at Corinth Paul was accused before a Roman proconsul. A conviction before Gallio would have had wide ranging effects, reaching far beyond a single city or locality. The proconsul's decision would have set a precedent for Roman governors in other regions as well. Accordingly, the Jews would need only bring the same charges against Paul anywhere within the Roman Empire, and the apostle would be found guilty, would be imprisoned or worse, and his missionary work stopped. We should learn from this that our trust in the promises of God will be tested, not by slight aggravation, but by deadly serious opposition. Let us, then, be like our father, Jacob, and cling to God, refusing to let Him go until He bless us by fulfilling His promises to us.

Saturday, April 24th - Acts 18: 12, 13

The charge against Paul, that he persuaded men to worship God contrary to the law, has the subtlety of the devil in it. For what the Jews really meant was that Paul's preaching violated the law of Moses (which, of course, it did not). However, by the way they state the matter, it could be taken by the proconsul as meaning that Paul was in violation of Roman law. The civil laws of Rome allowed a certain freedom of worship for adherents to those religions recognized and sanctioned by Rome. Judaism was one such religion. The Jews were contending that Christianity was neither a legitimate development from Judaism nor a religion sanctioned by Rome. Paul would appear to have no defense against this charge. Yet God had pledged His defense, which must, did, and always shall prevail.

Sunday, April 25th - Acts 18: 14, 15

The serious charges brought against Paul would appear to make null and void the promise God made to protect his apostle (v.10). Yet the promise was not that no man would *attack* Paul; rather, it was that no one would succeed in *harming* him. From these verses we see how easily God dispels the threatening clouds of His enemies. Paul does not so much as open his mouth in self-defense. Instead, the judge to whom these Jews appealed exercised initiative to dismiss the charges. Thus, we have here an example of the flaming missiles of the evil one being rendered ineffectual via the apostle wielding the shield of faith, whereby he, with vital grasp, held onto the promise of God. Similarly will our wielding the shield of faith quench all such missiles hurled against us (Eph. 10:16).

Monday, April 26th - Acts 18: 14, 15

We see from these verses that the planned attack against Paul, far from harming him and the cause he represented, served rather to enhance his security and the security of the Church. As a result of Gallio's dismissal of the charges against Paul, the spread of Christianity throughout the Roman Empire was made far easier for several years after this time. Those challenging the divine promise thusly served unwittingly to fulfill it. Hence, we never need fear the attacks of the wicked when we are sheltered in our Lord as in a refuge.

Tuesday, April 27th - Acts 18: 14, 15

Gallio was an intriguing character. He was born the son of Seneca, the rhetorician, and was the brother of Seneca, the philosopher. During the reign of Tiberias, he was adopted by Lucius Gallio, and hence took his adoptive father's name. He was a man of wit, candor, and charm. His brother, Seneca, said of him that no one was so pleasant to all men as was Gallio. We should see the hand of the Lord, preparing Gallio as an instrument to serve for Paul's protection as well as for the furtherance of the gospel. Gallio, like Pilate before him, saw through the malice of the Jews. But whereas Pilate capitulated to Jewish pressure to have Jesus crucified, Gallio refused to be made a tool in the hands of malicious Jews for the destruction of those who posed no threat to Rome. Our Lord knows how to prepare and use of all sorts of instruments in the preservation and promotion of His servants and of His cause.

Wednesday, April 28th - Acts 18: 14, 15

Gallio was no believer (as far as we know). Yet he, like the Persian, Cyrus, was used by God to bless the Church. Gallio's dismissal of the charges against Paul resulted not from gross judicial carelessness or incompetence. Pagan though he was, he saw that despite Jewish contentions, Paul's gospel was not a novel, deviant religion, but rather grew out of the soil of Judaism. The implications were that since the Jewish religion was sanctioned within the Roman Empire as a legitimate religion, so was this fulfillment of Judaism allowed throughout the Empire. What a reverse and defeat for the wicked was worked by their attack against Paul and against the promise of God. Persecution is thus pressed into service promoting those who stand on the divine promises.

Thursday, April 29th - Acts 18: 16

If a pagan judge drove Paul's accusers away from his earthly judgment seat, think how much more we can expect our accusers to be driven away from the judgment seat of our God, who has redeemed us, and whose Son is our Advocate.

Friday, April 30th - Acts 18: 16, 17

The Jews were not simply driven away from Gallio's judgment seat, the leader of their synagogue was beaten by the crowd. It is unclear whether the crowd here was Jewish or Gentile. In support of the former, some maintain that the routed Jews took out their frustrations on Sosthenes who had so ineffectually presented the case against Paul. In favor of the latter, Corinth was predominantly Gentile, and the Gentiles nursed perpetual resentment against the Jews. Thus, on seeing the Jews discomfited, the Gentiles were emboldened to vent their frustrations against them. What we do know is that Gallio stayed aloof from this illegal, mob beating, an indication that he was overruled by God in his dismissal of the charges against Paul, more than his being a man essentially ruling from just and impartial principles applied to all under his authority. Sosthenes followed Crispus (v.8) as ruler of the synagogue, and, judging from 1 Cor. 1:1, he followed Crispus into the faith. Did this beating serve to drive him to seek true peace and refuge in the Lord? If so, it was, as many beatings are, a supreme blessing for him.

Saturday, May 1st - Acts 18: 18, 19

Paul stayed on in Corinth and capitalized upon the advantage he had won through Gallio's decision. But the apostle did not remain there permanently. In fact, this verse records the conclusion of Paul's second missionary journey. For some reason of which we are unaware, Paul hastened back to Jerusalem, then on to his home church in Syrian Antioch. He took Priscilla and Aquila with him, at least as far as to Ephesus. We are further told that at one of the Corinthian ports, Cenchrea, the apostle cut his hair, apparently ending a temporary personal vow (Num. 30:2), which had at least one component of the Nazarite vow (Num. 6:5). Was Paul's vow that he would not fear or flee from his divinely assigned work at Corinth until the Lord dismissed him from it? We do not know, but we gather from Paul's example that vowing to God remains a legitimate discipline for followers of Christ. Vows—or promises to God—are to be undertaken freely, but when once undertaken, are to be kept perfectly. Such vows, and any concomitant reminders we may adopt along with them, are good stimulants for our performance of godly duty.

Sunday, May 2nd - Acts 18: 19-21

In Paul's day, Ephesus was the greatest commercial city of Asia Minor. It was situated about 230 miles due east and across the Aegean Sea from Corinth. It was the capital city of the Roman province of Asia, yet was at the same time a free Greek city, maintaining its own senate and civil assembly. It was designated warden of the temple of Artemis, which temple was considered one of the seven wonders of the ancient world. Additionally, its populace had a strong predisposition towards magic and the occult. The last thing we would expect Paul to find in Ephesus would be a favorable hearing for the gospel. Yet, in Ephesus the apostle was more warmly received than anywhere he had previously visited, with the exception of Berea. We can never judge by demographic studies alone, what God has prepared in the hearts of men with respect to their being open to the claims of Christ.

Monday, May 3rd - Acts 18: 19-21

Perhaps more remarkable than the positive reception Paul received at Ephesus is the apostle's declining the Ephesians' invitation that he tarry with them. The New Testament Received Text contains a phrase which offers an explanation for Paul's declining to stay. It says that it was necessary for Paul to be in Jerusalem for the feast (Passover, which in A.D. 52 was in early April?). Why Paul felt the necessity to be in Jerusalem for that specific feast is unknown. We do know that he would have felt no religious necessity to celebrate the feast, which was a ceremonial shadow which had now been fulfilled in Christ. More likely, he wanted to take advantage of the convocation of many Jewish pilgrims so as to share Christ with as many of his countrymen as possible at one time. Scripture makes next to nothing of Paul's visit to Jerusalem (cf. v.22), and keeps our focus, instead, on developments in Ephesus. Was Paul wrong to pass up this promising invitation from the Ephesians? It appears unlikely that he was, since he consciously commits himself and his plans to the providential will of God. We should observe from this that God's leading in ministry is not always indicated by positive response to the gospel. For wise and holy divine reasons, at least initially, someone less than an apostle would have to serve to satisfy the spiritual hunger of these eager Ephesians.

Tuesday, May 4th - Acts 18: 22

This verse cryptically records Paul's visit to Jerusalem. The apostle landed at Caesarea, in Samaria, went up (in elevation) to Jerusalem in Judea, greeted the church at Jerusalem, then proceeded to his home church at Antioch in Syria. From this briefest mention of Paul's visit to Jerusalem we can detect nothing of such overriding importance as to compel him to leave the promising situation in Ephesus. Yet, it was from Antioch that Paul launched his third and most extensive missionary journey—a journey which led him almost directly to return to Ephesus where he stayed for more than two years (Acts 19:8,10), accomplishing intensive and extensive ministry for Christ. At times, a people hungering for the Word must be deprived of their minister of the Word, only that they might receive him back again refreshed and more fit than ever to feed them the heavenly manna.

Wednesday, May 5th - Acts 18: 22, 23

Paul's third missionary journey re-traced the steps, at least initially, of his first two missionary journeys. Hence, we are told of his revisiting the brethren in Galatia (i.e., Derbe, Lystra, Iconium, and Pisidian Antioch), strengthening the brethren there. We were told that Paul had earlier passed through Phrygia, which was the eastern portion of Asia, he having been by the Holy Spirit forbidden to go into the western region of Asia (Acts 16:6). On that earlier visit, Paul was led northwest to Mysia and Troas, from where the apostle was beckoned by divine vision to enter into Macedonia (Acts 16:7-10). On this third missionary journey, no such divine indicators prevented Paul from launching into western Asia, which he did, making a line for Ephesus, where we find him in Acts 19:1. We (and he) shall find that Paul's ministry in Ephesus was preceded by the ministry of others. Imperfect though that preparation was, in the divine economy it set the stage for some of Paul's most fruitful service. How wonderful it is to observe the perfection of the Lord's leading and timing.

Thursday, May 6th - Acts 18: 24, 25

Although Paul was not in Ephesus, the Lord was still working there. As John the Baptist preceded Jesus, so Apollos preceded Paul, preparing the way of the Lord at Ephesus. We are introduced to Apollos by the Scriptures telling us that he was an eloquent Jew, mighty in the Scriptures. What we are not told is that he was a believer or a disciple. He had been instructed in the way of the Lord, as had been John the Baptist, who had preached that repentance which made ready the way of the Lord (Mt. 3:1-3). Indeed, Apollos may well have received his instruction from John, with whose baptism alone he was familiar. The eloquent Alexandrian taught accurately the Old Testament shadows, which pointed to Jesus. However, one's knowing personally by saving faith the Redeemer, and teaching accurately the things concerning Him, are two very different things. Apollos taught, in short, a message of the promise of salvation, not of its provision in Christ. Yet our Lord is pleased to use not only imperfect men, but also imperfect teaching to prepare people for teaching which is more accurate. We must despise neither the day of small things, nor the day of preparatory things.

Friday, May 7th - Acts 18: 24-26

God may graciously use a man and his message despite their defects. Yet, the Lord takes steps to rectify those defects. In this case, Priscilla and Aquila were prompted by the Lord to refine Apollos. Their gracious, faithful, and patiently considerate dealings with Apollos are exemplary. They act to better this great and gifted man, not to tear him down by focusing on his deficiencies. Far from their envying his gifts, they work to enhance them. Their loving consideration is evident by their taking him aside so that he might receive correction in private. Faithful were the wounds of these blessed friends, and exceedingly fruitful, too. May we be ones like Priscilla and Aquila, serving to make gifted teachers greater.

Saturday, May 8th - Acts 18: 27, 28

The graciousness of Priscilla and Aquila is matched by the humility of Apollos. The eloquent and powerful teacher was not above receiving teaching himself from a woman and her husband who was a manual worker. Those who are truly wise, who sincerely hunger and thirst for truth, can and do learn lessons from those lesser than themselves. Wise Solomon tells us to submit to the instruction of an ant (Prov. 6:6). Apollos hungered for the truth, and therefore he recognized the authority wielded by Priscilla and Aquila, who themselves had been led by Paul into a growing understanding of the grace and knowledge of the Lord. Great men do not but grow greater when they humbly submit themselves to be taught more accurately the way of God.

Sunday, May 9th - Acts 18: 27, 28

Apollos was not only corrected, he was truly converted through the ministry of Priscilla and Aquila. That conversion re-oriented him not only toward God, but also with respect to the direction of his calling. Thus, Apollos wanted to travel west, to Achaia, specifically to Corinth, where he would water that which the apostle Paul had planted (Acts 19:1; 1 Cor. 3:5,6). His going to Achaia was done in most decent and orderly fashion. He sought and received the blessing of the infant church at Ephesus to go. He was further furnished by the sending brethren with a letter asking the disciples in Corinth to welcome him. The grace and truth of God never lead men to act out of concert with their brethren. Orderly, corporate procedure ever marks the way of divine blessing. Not least in this process, Apollos proved to be a great source of blessing to the saints in Achaia, by his refutation of the Jews who refused to see Christ in all the Scriptures. By Apollos leaving Ephesus to water what Paul had planted in Corinth, the way was open for Paul to return to Ephesus to water what Apollos had planted there. The hand of God is so wonderfully evident through all of these movements. May it be likewise evident in our movements.

Monday, May 10th - Acts 19: 1, 2

Under the superintendence of God and with the blessing and sending of their local churches, Apollos left Ephesus for Corinth, there to build upon the foundation laid by Paul, while Paul came to Ephesus to improve the work begun by Apollos. The disciples Paul encountered in Ephesus were the fruit of Apollos' efforts. We have seen how Apollos preached—until Priscilla and Aquila led him to full faith in the redemption accomplished by Jesus—an incomplete, preparatory salvation. Thus, we are not surprised to see that Paul detected some inadequacy in these disciples of Apollos. Accordingly, the apostle inquired into the nature of the personal experience of salvation of these disciples. They who confessed their ignorance of the Holy Spirit as much as confessed their ignorance of Christ, for the Holy Spirit is the other Comforter, sent by Jesus upon completion of His earthly work (Jn. 16:7). It is the ministry of that Comforter to draw and point men to Christ (Jn. 16:13,14; Rom. 8:9; 1 Jn. 4:2). These disciples were not yet converted men, but they were not long to remain in that state. Preparation leads to consummation. Shall we play a preparatory or consummating part in someone's salvation this day?

Tuesday, May 11th - Acts 19: 3, 4

The deficiency in the faith of these Ephesians disciples is made clear by these verses. Their baptism (used here in the sense of their indoctrination) was that of the forerunner of Jesus, John the Baptist, who preached repentance, but not regeneration. John wrought conviction; Christ works conversion. Thus, Paul preaches not the Holy Spirit to these men, telling them that they need to be baptized in the Holy Spirit, but he preaches Christ to them. Advocates of a second blessing and second, Spirit baptism for those baptized in the name of Jesus, draw support for their belief and practice from this passage. Yet, to the careful reader it is clear that these disciples were in need of regeneration and conversion to Christ—the first blessing and the one thing necessary.

Wednesday, May 12th - Acts 19: 5-7

Paul later wrote to the church at Ephesus that there is for Christians, "one Spirit,...one Lord, one faith, one baptism..." (Eph. 4:4,5), and that is what we see in these verses. Paul does not baptize these disciples in the Holy Spirit subsequent to their conversion. He baptizes them in the name of the Lord Jesus, and when the apostle laid his hands upon them in that rite of baptism, the erstwhile deficient disciples were converted by the working of the Holy Spirit. As it was in Jerusalem at Pentecost (Acts 2:4), in Samaria (Acts 8:14-17), and with the Gentile, Cornelius (Acts 10:44-48), so here at Ephesus, a special, extraordinary effusion of the Holy Spirit's indwelling presence is given through an apostle to a special group of men initially believing in Jesus. These twelve men, whose deficient discipleship was rectified extraordinarily, are the last believers recorded in Scripture to have spoken in tongues and to have prophesied at their conversion. These signs may no longer accompany conversions to Jesus, but the substance is wonderfully the same.

Thursday, May 13th - Acts 19: 8

The priority of Paul's ministry at Ephesus was one of expounding the Word of God. The apostle took his stand and based his ministry upon the publication and personal application of truth, not upon such spectacular phenomena as took place through his hands with the twelve recently converted disciples. Therefore, when he entered the Ephesian synagogue, it was not with a determination to perform signs and wonders, but rather to publish the liberating and life-transforming doctrine of Christ crucified. Spectacle may come and go, but the Word we have constantly with us, especially if we treasure its precious potencies within our hearts.

Friday, May 14th - Acts 19: 9, 10

Nowhere was Paul initially received with more readiness than at Ephesus (18:19,20). However, in these verses we learn that initial receptivity to the gospel by a people does not always indicate a lasting welcome for the message of eternal life. Hence, we read of the old pattern of resistance to Paul's ministry emerging after three months of such ministry in Ephesus. This resistance at first was not so personal and deadly as what Paul had experienced in such places as Lystra (Acts 14:19), Philippi (Acts 16:19ff), Thessalonica, and

Berea (Acts 17:5,13). The opposition would later swell to great proportion. Here it initially takes the form of men speaking against the way of salvation, the way of truth, the way of eternal life through Christ. Those who speak ill of the message of salvation will soon endeavor to do evil against the messengers of salvation. Accordingly, Paul takes evasive steps, not so much to protect himself, as to nurture without distraction those who were true and responsive disciples of the Way (Jn. 14:6).

Saturday, May 15th - Acts 19: 9, 10

When men demonstrate adamant opposition against the truth, and when such men are in the majority of a company of people purportedly gathered to worship the Lord, true teachers of the faith are obliged to separate themselves and the precipitate of faithful ones from the obstinate mass. This Paul does. Later, he advises Titus to avoid such men after two warnings (Tit. 3:10). The treasure those obstinate men drove out of their synagogue was of infinite value. Partakers of eternal life, living stones in the temple of God, thus were removed to a public lecture hall. The facilities for gathering saints need not be plush, but only adequate for the Word to be spoken and heard.

Sunday, May 16th - Acts 19: 9, 10

Paul's strategic retreat enabled him to preach and teach for two years relatively undisturbed. What he presented was neither enticing stories nor entertaining spectacle. The apostle taught the whole counsel of God (Acts 20:27). From the school of Tyrannus the message of salvation was faithfully and fully proclaimed, sounding forth as a trumpet and shining forth as a beacon of light, so that all who lived in Asia heard the message of truth, with many believing it, and being reconciled to God and to each other in Christ. Nowhere had so many Jews and Gentiles been so blessedly blended than in and around Ephesus.

Monday, May 17th - Acts 19: 11, 12

Miracles accompanied the message of salvation at Ephesus. The priority, however, set out in this passage of Scripture, is the message first, last, and always, with miracles occasionally granted by God to confirm the apostolic authority. That such miraculous works of God were precious and potent can be appreciated by the fact that mere bits of cloth conveyed from Paul to the sick a healing potion, and to the demon possessed a cleansing power. Satan's whole power and empire of evil were no match for those blessed handkerchiefs. If God shows us how He can make the devil flee at the wave of a rag, it follows that when we wield the far more substantial shield of faith, Satan shall also be reduced to impotence.

Tuesday, May 18th - Acts 19: 13, 14

Miracles apart from the message of salvation degenerate into magic. As Pharaoh's magicians could reproduce certain of the wonders performed by Moses more readily than they could or would accept and teach the law of God he promulgated, so here we read of certain Jewish exorcists attempting ignorantly to imitate Paul's miracles without due regard for the message of salvation. The worse than fatal error of their way is seen in the form of their adjuration. They speak not of Jesus from a personal relationship, but speak about Him from whom they gathered the mere name, as a charm, from Paul's reverent devotion to and faithful teaching concerning the Person of Christ. A second-hand relationship with the Savior secures one no blessing in this life, or salvation from hell in the afterlife.

Wednesday, May 19th - Acts 19: 15, 16

It is better not to name the name of Jesus at all, than to do so in ignorant and superstitious presumption. When men merely know about Jesus, without their personally and savingly knowing Him, it affords them no protection from demonic power. Therefore, they who would be exorcists, find themselves not commanding demonic powers to leave the poor possessed man, but rather being themselves subdued by the demons. These verses do not necessarily indicate that the foolishly wicked sons of Sceva were themselves possessed by the demons (though they may have been), but it does clearly indicate that they were wrestled

down, beaten, and stripped of their clothing. The demons serve unwittingly to expose the impotence and hypocrisy of those who are not truly clothed in the righteousness of Jesus.

Thursday, May 20th - Acts 19: 17

God's sinless use of the sins of demons punishing the hypocritical and presumptuous sins of the sons of Sceva served to beget in the general citizenry of Ephesus a sober fear of God. Careless sinners grew careful neither to take the Lord's name in vain nor to despise the teaching of His apostle. For the godly, this fear took the form of reverence. They saw in Word, and in the divine works of miraculous mercy and just judgment, nothing but cause to magnify the name of Jesus. The implication is that many magnified Him by their conversion to Him, and by their confession of Him as Savior and Lord.

Friday, May 21st - Acts 19: 18

As the judgment of the Lord upon the presumptuous sons of Sceva stripped those men of their clothing, and, more deeply, exposed their hypocrisy, so that judgment becoming known throughout Ephesus laid bare the souls of many of the people in that city. Conviction led to confession, which, in turn led to repentance, as the people not only confessed, but also forsook their worthless, wicked ways. Whenever the discipline of the Lord is manifested, we all ought to submit ourselves to the searching power of godly conviction and the cleansing power of confession.

Saturday, May 22nd - Acts 19: 19, 20

The reforming process in Ephesus did not stop with conviction and confession. In these verses we read of the godly repentance which was widespread throughout Ephesus. Those who turned from their sins also turned with as permanent commitment as possible from the literature which fed their sins. The books were burned, not stored away, not given away, not sold. Complete destruction of sinful stimulants is the only right way to deal with them. The monetary value is here listed to show how many books were burned, and to tell us that our money is better burned than spent on sinful literature. Finally, in addition to the people turning away from their occult practices and supporting literature, we read that they turned to the way and Word of the Lord, lest their hearts, having been swept clean, be re-inhabited by seven worse demons.

Sunday, May 23rd - Acts 19: 21,22

These verses mark the beginning of the end of Paul's ministry in Ephesus. The same Holy Spirit who had settled Paul in Ephesus for two years, so that the apostle could minister deeply and expansively to the believers there, also called him to leave Ephesus and proceed to the completion of his third missionary journey. Paul proposed to return to Jerusalem after having revisited the churches in Macedonia and Achaia. From there he intended to visit Rome and beyond (e.g. Spain, Rom. 15:22-29). We should see in this how the heart of God prompts and the hand of God moves His servant to fulfill his mission to bear the Lord's name before Gentiles and kings (Acts 9:15). The cost of such faithfulness has been apparent already, but shall be moreso when we learn that Paul finally did arrive at Rome as a prisoner (Acts 25: 10-12; 28:16ff). It is not only through many tribulations that we enter the kingdom of God (Acts 14:22), but also through many tribulations and dark providences that we run the race set before us, finishing our pilgrimage faithfully and fruitfully.

Monday, May 24th - Acts 19: 22

Paul sends two of his faithful co-laborers ahead of him into Macedonia. It is well in the Lord's service when pastors have faithful fellow elders upon whom they may rely to support their ministry. Such support takes various forms, such as work to prepare people to receive the Word preached, or work to nurture in believers the Word already preached. Happy is the pastor and happy are the people who have in their midst servants like Timothy and Erastus, the latter, apparently, having been the city treasurer of Corinth (Rom. 16:23), before he left that work to serve in the ministry of true, eternal riches.

Tuesday, May 25th - Acts 19: 23-27

It would surely have been agreeable to Paul and to the disciples at Ephesus had the apostle departed in peace, leaving the church there to enjoy peaceful circumstances. However, in the holy and wise providence of God, such was not to be the case. Coinciding with the diminishment of Paul's mission team, a disturbance erupted which swelled to great proportions. The disturbance was ignited against Paul as Christ's apostle and against the church at Ephesus as a body of people following Christ. In particular, the opposition was against the faith not so much in principle as in practice, hence the designation, *the way*, implying a way of faith and life. This marks the third wave of opposition against the Christians at Ephesus. The first two waves came in the form of Jewish contradiction (Acts 19:9) and Jewish counterfeit miracles (Acts 19:13ff). This wave came from Gentile greed. Many and varied are the attacks against the Church. But no weapon that is formed against us shall prevail (Is. 54:17).

Wednesday, May 26th - Acts 19: 23, 24

A great disturbance can often have small beginnings. One man, a silversmith, sparked this conflagration. His business seemed legitimate, acceptable, and successful, so long as it was covered by the darkness of ignorant paganism and occultism. In fact, his trade appeared respectable and pious, for he employed his creativity and artistry in the service of a purportedly divine being. Yet, when the light of the gospel shines forth, the fig leaves of man-made respectability show their woefully inadequate nature. Such exposure can lead to conviction and conversion, or to hardening and more determined opposition, as in the case of Demetrius. Yet, such exposure is necessary, if the former response is to be evoked from those divinely called to eternal life. Hence, Jesus tells us not to hide our lights (Mt. 5:14-16), and Paul tells us that we who were formerly darkness should now walk in the light and expose the darkness for what it is (Eph. 5:8-14).

Thursday, May 27th - Acts 19: 24, 25

The Artemis here mentioned was apparently different from the Greek goddess of the moon and of the hunt, the twin sister of Apollos. The Ephesian Artemis was considered the ancient goddess of Asia Minor, the mother of gods and of men. In all probability, this false goddess was fabricated from a fallen meteorite (cf., Acts 19:35). Here we see how absurd and perverse men are in their natural sinfulness, exchanging the truth of God for a lie, and worshipping the creature rather than the blessed Creator (Rom. 1:20-23, 25). It is no wonder that those aiming no higher than to profit in cold, dead cash, should worship a dead rock fallen from the heavens. Piety, not material profit, motivates believers, who by faith lay hold of true, lasting riches in the life and love of the living God.

Friday, May 28th - Acts 19: 26, 27

The poverty of the apologetic employed by Demetrius is evident to all except those blinded by greed for gold. He notes how Paul successfully refuted wrong religion, rightly calling idols lifeless and powerless inventions of men rather than representations of gods. This faithful challenge issued by the apostle persuaded men and turned them in droves away from their impoverishing darkness and to the enriching light of Christ. Paul, like Elijah on Mount Carmel, exposed the vacuity of false religion. Yet, Demetrius not only remained adamantly entrenched in his own darkness and poverty of soul, he incited the craftsmen to follow his example. They would not let themselves consider whether Paul's argument and God were true. Their burning concern was with how the propagation of the gospel was threatening further to cut their monetary profits and undermine the ridiculous adoration afforded Artemis, whereby these men made their profits. In short, see how the worldly reckons that if something hurts him, it must be wrong, when, in fact, only that which kills him (i.e., the cross) is true and right and will save him.

Saturday, May 29th - Acts 19: 26-28

No one in the audience hearing the cavil of Demetrius considered that gods capable of being dethroned were no true gods at all. They were all too blinded by their fear of loss of monetary income. Hence, in

opposition to the persuasive presentation of truth offered by Paul, the craftsmen are incited to cry out the bald and void assertion that the Ephesian Artemis was great. A bankrupt philosophy is one devoid of meaning, which simply demands that it be accepted at face value. We find modern examples of this in such things as existentialism, materialism, nihilism, and the uncritical pursuit of personal peace and prosperity. All of these things are vacuous, and those having and holding to them may only prosper thereby when they foist them upon others.

Sunday, May 30th - Acts 19: 29

The mindless greed of Demetrius, far from persuading men, as Paul's preaching of the truth was doing, united them in a mad rush into the theater. They dragged Paul's companions with them, surely intending them no good. We see from this the violent and powerfully irrational reaction of men when the truth touches their idols. Now Demetrius, who refused to submit to the truth of God in Christ, has stirred all of Ephesus up into a blind fury, all because of greed. As John Calvin rightly said of men who think with their pockets or their bellies, instead of their brains, "...the belly is deaf and blind, so that it permits no fairness." (*NT Commentaries*, vol. 7, p.162). Demetrius, therefore, stirs up a whole city against the truth, rather than submit to the truth himself. Thanks be to God that we are increasingly liberated from the thrall of destructive greed.

Monday, May 31st - Acts 19: 29, 30

We see from the treatment afforded Gaius and Aristarchus that it was a costly business being Paul's traveling companion. Do we suppose that these co-laborers of the apostle would trade places with Demetrius, who was trying desperately to regain his lost profits at the expense of his own soul? It is said of Moses that he chose rather to endure ill treatment with the people of God, than to enjoy the passing pleasures of sin (Heb. 11:24,25). Gaius and Aristarchus demonstrate the same priority, as does Paul himself, who required restraint from the brethren, lest he venture into the fray. Fellowship in the suffering of Christ proves attractive more than repelling to those who have experienced its exquisite sweetness.

Tuesday, June 1st - Acts 19: 30, 31

Paul received appeals from influential friends within the rioting theater, and restraint from the disciples who were outside of the theater, both of which prohibited the apostle from entering the theater. Why did Paul want to go to these maddened people? Did he intend to offer concessions, to tone down his message, to modify the gospel and so please rather than save men? We are not told what Paul hoped to gain by his entry into the riot. We are certain he would not have sold out the gospel to save himself or his friends. Paul knew that it would be better to lose his life as a martyr than to sell his birthright to eternal life. We further may observe from this incident how wonderfully knit together is the body of Christ. Paul is willing to suffer with his suffering brethren. However, he submits to the wisdom of the other church members, avoiding confrontation with the irrational mob. Accordingly, the apostle and his two friends all survive this riot. Let us learn from this neither to fear suffering for Christ's sake and with our brethren, nor rashly and needlessly to court suffering when the Lord would have us exercise wise patience.

Wednesday, June 2nd - Acts 19: 32

The Scriptures tell us that those who worship idols will become like them (Ps. 106:4-8). Here we see the truth of the Word demonstrated. The men forming this mob resolve themselves into a mindless mass, as incapable of right thought as the dead rock which they called Artemis. Whenever sin reigns, chaos results. Our God is a God of order, who has brought cosmos out of chaos in both creation and redemption.

Thursday, June 3rd - Acts 19: 33, 34

Apparently, the Jews in this mob tried to put up a spokesman, most likely to distance themselves from Paul and his gospel. Was this Alexander the Coppersmith who did Paul much harm (2 Tim. 4:14,15)? Whether

he was or not, since he was a Jew and not a worshipper of Artemis, he was shouted down by the mob, and the riot ran its course for more than two hours. Like petulant children they mindlessly and loudly chanted of the greatness of their false goddess. One is reminded of the cries and desperate antics of the prophets of Baal on Mount Carmel. Neither our cries to our God in prayer, nor our proclamations of the Word of God to men are the sort of empty repetition we find here. There is glorious substance and prevailing power in our prayers and in the word of our testimony, for our God lives and rules sovereignly over all.

Friday, June 4th - Acts 19: 34

The riot ran on for more than two hours. From where did these men get the rage and energy so to carry on for so long? We may safely conclude that the craftsmen were joined and augmented by many others in Ephesus who had their own reasons for hating the gospel. Calvin well remarks, "Therefore it is bound to happen that there are as many enemies armed to resist Christ, as there are desires of the flesh holding sway in the world." (*NT Commentaries*, vol. 7, p.161). When it seems that the whole world is ceaselessly against us, let us resolve to stand, if need be, against the whole world, if the whole world is against us because we are for Christ.

Saturday, June 5th - Acts 19: 34

It is a shame that idolaters will with open enthusiasm proclaim the name and assert the greatness of a fabricated deity, while we tend to be somewhat reticent in our proclaiming of the name of our truly glorious and gracious Redeemer. As the apostles prayed for boldness in their testimony (Acts 4:29,31; Eph. 6:19,20), so should we.

Sunday, June 6th - Acts 19: 35, 36

The empty bombast of this riot is seen when we observe that a single petty civil official quells it with his words. The town clerk was an administrative officer who acted as liaison between the city government and the Roman provincial administration. His essential job, however, was that of being a secretary and recorder of government actions and decrees. He speaks with much confidence and reasonableness, reminding his hearers that facts are self-authenticating, having in themselves a better support than the will and voices of men. He further advises that if the crowd is so minded, they may deal with the issue legitimately and soberly in the civil law courts. The clerk appears sincere, although, in what he says about Artemis, he is sincerely wrong. In sum, he declares what Elijah on Mount Carmel declared: "If the Lord is God, serve Him; if Baal, serve him." (1 Ki. 18:21). Here the challenge is to let Christ and Artemis be tested in court. No one in the crowd took up this challenge, for they all knew how such a contest would end.

Monday, June 7th - Acts 19: 37

The town clerk has told the crowd that they have strong reasons not to act rashly, and in this verse he indicates to them how they have, in fact, acted with rashness. His words exonerating Paul's companions of the charges of temple robbing and blasphemy against Artemis are not to be understood as indicating that Paul and his co-laborers endorsed or showed respect for false gods. His words do show, however, the wisdom and care these ambassadors of Christ exercised in their ministry. They simply and faithfully preached Christ crucified, and eschewed self-enrichment or negative polemics so thoroughly that no one, apart from blind prejudice, could credit that they were in any way crass, greedy, or irreligious. May even the pagan pragmatists of the world be compelled to say the same of us.

Tuesday, June 8th - Acts 19: 38-41

The clerk tells Demetrius and his enflamed craftsmen to test their case in the civil courts or else hold their peace. Neither Demetrius nor anyone else moves to take the matter for legitimate judgment in open court. They know but do not declare with words that in any fair contest between advocates of Christ and adherents to false religion, the Lord's servants would prevail. They are further sobered by the recognition

that they may have to face unpleasant consequences for their rash and irrational indulgence. Their having vented their confused and riotous passions in open assembly would not be tolerated by their Roman overlords. None of them are willing to pay a price or to suffer martyrdom for Artemis, and they further know that Artemis' vaunted greatness pales in comparison to Roman might. Thus, in fear they slither away quietly to nurse their fantasy religion.

Wednesday, June 9th - Acts 19: 38-41

That this pagan riot flared up and fizzled out of its own accord reveals to us a vital truth about the godless. They who take counsel together against the Lord and His Anointed, who would lay violent hands on the servants of Christ, and boast of the greatness of their pretend deities, have within themselves the seeds of their own destruction. That is why He who sits in the heavens laughs them to scorn (Ps. 2:1-6). Meanwhile, the servants of Christ are upheld and vindicated, while the work of Christ carries on unimpeded. In an evil day, when Satan and his minions do their worst, Christians who are strong in the Lord and put on the full armor of God shall always stand and outlast the satanic storms (Eph. 6:10ff).

Thursday, June 10th - Acts 19: 38-41

Demetrius succeeded only in igniting a flash in the pan. His lack of principle and integrity, as well as his lack of true devotion to Artemis are seen in the fact that he carries his charges against the Lord's servants no farther than the two hour cacophony in the theater. He knew he had no real case before the tribunals of man. Still less will he stand before the throne of the only living God, whose truth he had spurned, and whose faithful servants he had maligned. Perhaps this sinful silversmith eventually repented. John, who later pastored the church at Ephesus, wrote a letter to Gaius (likely the Gaius here dragged into the Ephesian theater, v.29). In it he mentions Demetrius as receiving a universal good testimony (3 Jn.1,12). If this was the same Demetrius, he, like Paul, would have counted his idolatrous monetary gain as loss, and his monetary loss as gain in view of the infinite and eternal treasure of salvation in Christ (Phil. 3: 7,8).

Friday, June 11th - Acts 20: 1

We may trace Paul's ministry in Ephesus, beginning with his brief and favorable initial visit (Acts 18:19-21), and continuing with his return to exercise a two year teaching ministry (Acts 19:1,10). Upon his return, he found defective disciples (Acts 19:1-5), whom he led to saving faith in Jesus; devoted disciples, whom he led out of the synagogue and into a public building (Acts 19:8,9); and counterfeit disciples, such as the sons of Sceva, whose dangerous dabbling with demons served to prompt great numbers of the citizens of Ephesus to convert to a heavenly citizenship (Acts 19:13-20). Finally there was the riot (Acts 19:26ff). That Paul had planted and nurtured well this church is evident from the fact that Ephesus became a most important center of Gentile Christianity. The apostle John served long as pastor of the Ephesian church, and in the letters to the seven churches in Rev. 1, Ephesus heads the list. That such a church grew from the mire of paganism and the morass of occultism and materialism is a testimony to the sovereign grace and redeeming power of the Lord. Such disciples as those in Ephesus were well instructed in the faith. They hungered for and received deep and rich teaching in the whole counsel of God, as we learn from Paul's testimony (Acts 20:27), and from his scriptural letter to the Ephesians—a letter which many consider to be the theological Alps of the New Testament. May Paul's writings similarly instruct and exhort us, that we might grow in the grace, knowledge, and strength of the Lord.

Saturday, June 12th - Acts 20: 1-3

These verses record in most brief compass the conclusion of Paul's third missionary journey. From Asia, Paul returned to Macedonia, passing through it and giving faithful exhortation to the saints to whom he ministered along the way. His terminus was Greece, most likely Corinth, where he spent three months also exhorting, no doubt. We may envision how much more strong, sweet, and powerfully penetrating was the apostle's preaching on this return visit to these places, for he himself had matured and grown in grace

through all he had experienced since his last visit to these regions. In the Lord's service, the best wine always is served last.

Sunday, June 13th - Acts 20: 1-3

Paul was becoming increasingly a marked man, as the Jews plotted apparently to ambush the apostle at sea. The discovery of the plot led Paul to retrace his steps over land through Macedonia, and to hug the coasts on his return through Syria, to Jerusalem, where the stage was set to catapult him to Rome. We should see the hand of God's wisdom and blessing in this providential leading. For a direct sea route from Corinth to Syria would not have yielded the blessing to the Macedonian believers, or to those saints at Troas (vv.6ff) or to the Ephesian elders at Miletus (vv.17ff), which this revised route did. We do well to look to give and receive blessing, even and especially when our God leads us through ways which cross our initial plans.

Monday, June 14th - Acts 20: 4

This verse notes the traveling companions of Paul. They were representatives from the Gentile churches who had contributed to the gift for their needy brethren in Jerusalem (Rom. 15:22-29). They were also fruit of Paul's ministry throughout the regions associated with the various names. These men were living trophies of divine grace, the harvest of the apostle's faithful labors in the gospel, precious and beloved sons in the faith, and brethren and friends in Christ. From Macedonia were Sopater and Aristarchus. About the former we know only that he came from Berea; of the latter we are told he was Paul's *fellow prisoner* (Acts 19:29; Col. 4:10) and *fellow worker* (Philemon 24). From Galatia came Gaius (Acts 19:29, and likely 3 Jn. 1) and Timothy (1 & 2 Tim.) From Asia came Tychicus, a *beloved brother and faithful minister* (Eph. 6:21), and a *beloved brother, faithful servant and fellow bond-slave* (Col. 4:7). Also from Asia came Trophimus, whom Paul *left sick at Miletus* (2 Tim. 4:20). Add to these brothers Luke, the beloved physician, and then contrast the mindless rabble-rousers in Ephesus with these men of character and charity, who served diligently and sacrificially for God's glory. What makes the difference is neither Artemis, nor material profit, but Christ. The gospel which Paul preached was raising up everywhere majestic ones of the earth.

Tuesday, June 15th - Acts 20: 5, 6

Paul divided his team, sending the main body ahead to Troas on the west coast of Asia Minor, from whence the apostle had earlier received the vision beckoning him to enter Macedonia (Acts 16:8-10). Paul, with Luke (cf. *we* references), remained in Philippi until after the days of Unleavened Bread, not because the apostle still observed and endorsed such shadows of Christ, but because, in his transitional day from shadows to substance, they gave him a good opportunity to preach Christ. Hence, we note how Paul turned the most incidental circumstances to advantage for his sharing the gospel. Let us likewise learn to gather up crumbs of time and logistical transitions, and use them by our Savior's direction and for His glory.

Wednesday, June 16th - Acts 20: 7

This is the first mention of Christians gathering for worship on Sunday, the first day of the week, which eventually in Scripture is designated the Lord's day (Rev. 1:10). We know that this verse and the following passage refer to formal worship, for we read of the sacrament of the Lord's Supper being observed, and the Word being preached. It is clear that the preaching of the Word predominated in that service, as, indeed, it did most services then, and should do now. The apostle was not stingy in his feeding the flock heavenly manna. No man called to preach the Word should be.

Thursday, June 17th - Acts 20: 7-9

We learn that not everyone could follow and feed upon every point of Paul's long sermon. The pastor's job is richly to set the table. The people are called to partake of the spiritual food according to the varying capacities of each. But in this case, Eutychus does not simply feed until he was full and then turn off his

attention. He became a casualty of this long sermon. We should not think him lazy, for the Holy Spirit draws our attention to the material cause of his sleep. It was not a sluggish soul or body, but the burning lamps in the upper room which lulled Eutychus into that sleep which cost him his life. The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak. We must all pray that we neither enter into temptation nor succumb to the weakness of the flesh.

Friday, June 18th - Acts 20: 9, 10

Such a serious casualty occasioned by a late-night, prolonged sermon, would seem to argue that Paul had been excessively long in his preaching and insensitive to the needs of his hearers. However, the passage goes on to record for our instruction and admonition some amazing things. It is undeniable that Eutychus died from this fall. We may correctly assume that when Luke, the physician, writes in v.9 that the young man was dead, the description was true and accurate. Thus we may be shocked into thinking that the preaching and hearing of long sermons can be a dangerous affair. Yet Paul, after the fashion of Elijah (1 Ki. 17:21) and Elisha (2 Ki. 4:34) lay down on top of Eutychus, covering his corpse not with the earth of a grave, but with his own living body, and it pleased the Lord to infuse miraculous power from this apostolic act into the body of Eutychus, thus raising the man from death to life. We may not presume upon such miraculous events in our day, but even that miracle then was a sign pointing to the substance which we do have in our day. The substance is that the gospel is the power of God unto salvation. No man loses anything, except his sin and his old, cursed life, by his attending to its preaching. By our application of the Word, we are made more than conquerors in all things, even death (Rom. 8:31-39). Neither the supposedly great Artemis of the Ephesians, nor any of our modern idols can do that!

Saturday, June 19th - Acts 20: 11, 12

Of such paramount importance are the ordinances of Christian worship that not even a death and miraculous raising from the dead are allowed unduly to intrude upon them or distract from them. After Paul raises Eutychus, he resumes his ministering by his administering the sacrament of the Lord's Supper. When we feed upon Christ in His Word and Supper, we have a full, eternal life of which the raising of Eutychus, wonderful as it was, served as but a token. Indeed, far from the young man's fall, death, and miraculous raising from the dead abruptly ending the worship of God's people, it served blessedly to prolong it through the dark night to the light of day. Truly we learn from this that the ordinances of our Lord are better than physical rest or life itself.

Sunday, June 20th - Acts 20: 11, 12

The indication from v.11 is not that Paul continued to preach until daylight, but rather that he conversed with the disciples in fellowship after the formal service had ended (compare *te o`milh,saj* in v.11 with *te to.n lo,gon* in v. 7). A blessed and necessary part of our digesting the preached Word is found in our fellowship together after a service. By such holy and loving lingering we comfort one another as we each share diverse facets of the Savior whom we have by faith apprehended through the preaching of the Word.

Monday, June 21st - Acts 20: 12

The death and raising of Eutychus was a remarkable token of divine love and power. It served to seal the authority of the ministry of God's Word. It surely had a most uplifting effect upon Eutychus himself, who went into the light of that dawning new day with miraculously renewed life. It had a strengthening and comforting effect upon the church at Troas, as we are told that they were greatly comforted by the results of gospel ministry in their midst. These things, being written for our admonition, should fill us with more than a moderate measure (*ouv metri,wj*) of comfort in our blessed Lord and His empowering ordinances.

Tuesday, June 22nd - Acts 20: 13

From Troas, Paul's missionary team departed to continue their return trip to Jerusalem. The distance from Troas to Assos is about twenty-five miles. The Word of God records for us the incidental detail that Paul made the journey over land, while the rest of his team proceeded by ship. The apostle, we are told, arranged this division of his force, but we are not informed as to the reason for this arrangement. Scholars speculate that Paul's health made it difficult for him to sail, or that the apostle was intent upon visiting brethren along the way, such visits obviously being impossible from a sea voyage. Whatever the reason, we should note that there are times, under the providence of God, when those who are united in love, in the Spirit, and in their mission, divide from one another physically in order that, with greater consideration for one another and efficiency in their work, they may pursue their united mission.

Wednesday, June 23rd - Acts 20: 14, 15

These verses tell us that from Assos, the reunited mission team pressed ahead, stopping at several ports. From Assos to Mitylene, the capital city on the island of Lesbos, the voyage covered about thirty miles. Depending upon the wind speed and direction, the trip would have taken anywhere from three to ten hours. No activity other than their stopping is recorded at Mitylene. From there they sailed opposite Chios in one day—a distance of at least fifty miles. Once again, only an overnight stop is recorded. From there they sailed at Samos—another fifty miles—and after another night's stop, they covered twenty miles to Miletus. There are days during our pilgrimage and service for Christ when it seems that nothing more happens than our sitting and waiting. Yet, we do well to remember that in such times we are being conveyed to places of significant service, and that we are being prepared for such service along the way.

Thursday, June 24th - Acts 20: 16

This verse records for us something of the tension which ever characterizes our seeking lovingly to work out our salvation in this fallen, finite world. On the one hand, nothing would have pleased Paul more than a stop in Ephesus to renew ties of loving fellowship with the church which he had pastored for more than two years (Acts 19:8,10). On the other hand, had the apostle set foot in Asia, he would have been lovingly obliged to delay his return to Jerusalem, for the nurturing of love takes time. The goal of Paul's return to Jerusalem was that he be there on the day of Pentecost, not so that he might celebrate a festival which was but a shadow of Christ's coming, but rather so that he could take advantage of the situation of gathered pilgrims to point many of them to the substance of salvation. Thus, a love for the lost dictated Paul's determination to resist indulging his love for and his being loved by his brethren in Ephesus. The love of God in Christ—which love now resides in our hearts—is a costly, giving love. In this life, while it unites us together in affectionate intimacy, it also impels us at times to separate from one another so that the good news of this redeeming and reconciling love may be spread wider. As my friend, William Still, used to say, the holy huddles are upstairs, not down here. We need to understand, respect, and practice this principle.

Friday, June 25th - Acts 20: 17

Although for holy reasons the apostle denied himself the pleasure of sharing loving fellowship with the church at Ephesus, he found a way briefly to share choice blessing with them, and, through the account of Scripture, with us. Paul sent for the elders of the Ephesian church to visit him during his stop at the port of Miletus. In this way, Paul could convey his loving greetings to and receive loving greetings from the church at Ephesus without delaying unduly his return to Jerusalem. It was an arrangement prompted by the love of Paul, which love sought and, under the loving superintendence of his loving Lord, found a way to express itself even within the strict confines of these circumstances. The result was Luke's recording of a most poignant and significant address—the only address Paul gave to Christians which is recorded in Acts. He who had repeatedly addressed Jewish (e.g., Acts 13:16ff) and Gentile unbelievers (e.g., Acts 14:15ff), in the following address pours out his heart and soul to his brethren in Christ. Sometimes the most brief and seemingly impromptu meetings amongst believers prove to have deepest and most lasting significance.

Saturday, June 26th - Acts 20: 18-21

From what Paul says to the Ephesian elders, we may determine that the love which directed the apostle to arrange this brief encounter took the form of positive affirmation and negative admonition. Paul, acting from intelligence and not mere general suspicion, begins his address with an apologetic note, in which he defends his ministry at Ephesus. He did this, no doubt, because opponents there had already begun to denigrate the work of the apostle since he had left Ephesus. When the Lord moves a strong, faithful minister from a particular congregation, it does not take long before tares, previously held in check, spring up amidst the wheat, insinuating all sorts of criticisms against the previous, faithful minister and his ministry.

Sunday, June 27th - Acts 20: 18-21

In these verses, the apostle appeals directly to the elders' personal recollection of his total commitment to holy living and loving service amongst them. It is amazing to note how men can so easily forget that faithfulness which they had seen with their own eyes during a long-term demonstration. Yet, we must never be surprised to learn how fickle all men, including ourselves, can be. Adam soon forgot the goodness of his Creator when confronted with the serpent's insinuations; and even the redeemed are commanded to remember the Lord's day, as well as the precious promises and wonderful provision of the Lord—all of which we are prone to forget. We must, like Paul, faithfully dispel wicked insinuations when they are arrayed against us and our Christian service. We also must resist insinuations against faithful brethren when the wicked attempt to ply us with them.

Monday, June 28th - Acts 20: 18-21

Paul presents himself in these verses as a model servant of Christ. We should observe from this both how our Lord serves us and how we, in Christ, should serve one another. Some may wonder how the apostle could speak in such glowing terms of himself when the Scriptures tell us to let another's lips praise us (Prov. 27:21). Paul is not proudly boasting about himself. He is rather speaking truthfully against the lies which had sprung up against his ministry. The apostle simply reminds the elders of what they had observed and experienced, but were in danger of forgetting, namely, that Christ had sent to them a most faithful, loving, and diligent minister of the Word. Thus, Paul really boasts of the generous grace of Christ, not of himself.

Tuesday, June 29th - Acts 20: 18

The total commitment of Paul to his ministerial calling is made evident in this verse. He reminds the Ephesian elders that from the day of his entry into Asia Minor he was with them at all times. He was neither an occasional visitor nor a part-time pastor. He demonstrated constancy over a period of time long enough for true character to be manifested. Counterfeit servants of Christ can succeed in passing themselves off as being genuine when they show themselves briefly to a congregation. It is a hallmark of a true minister of the Lord that he manifest enduring integrity.

Wednesday, June 30th - Acts 20: 19

In addition to the constancy of enduring, Christ-like character manifested by Paul, the apostle's ministry was characterized by other godly virtues. Leading among these was the virtue of humility. Sin so mars people's lives and makes them so sore and miserable that only the most tender and gently humble approach to them will have healing and transforming effect. It is no great feat to condemn guilty sinners for their sin. It requires the humbly ministered reconciling grace and loving power of the Lord to convince them that they are loved by a Savior so humble that He stooped to bear the punishment due their sins (Phil. 2:8).

Thursday, July 1st - Acts 20: 19

The basis for Paul's constant diligence in his ministry in Ephesus was that he consciously and without reservation was serving the Lord. The apostle was not amongst them as a vacationer or a private visitor. He

was a man on a mission for his sovereign Master. All true and fruitful ministry must aim infinitely higher than serving for the good of other men. It must aim first and foremost for the glory of God. Then greatest good will come to many people through such ministry.

Friday, July 2nd - Acts 20: 19

Contrary to popular opinion, those who are truly humble know that they are such, and, when the situation warrants, they speak of their humility to others. Moses, for example, writes of his humility (Num. 12:3), Jesus speaks of His (Mt. 11:29), and here Paul reminds the Ephesian elders of how he had served the Lord with sincere humility. Meekness is a quiet grace, but not a non-existent one of which no one is aware. Indeed, all faithful and fruitful service for Christ requires humility, whereby the servant's attitude is ever that articulated by John the Baptist when we spoke of his relative importance to Jesus: "He must increase, but I must decrease." Modesty and meekness in gospel ministry beget mighty results.

Saturday, July 3rd - Acts 20: 19

Another factor characterizing Paul's ministry in Ephesus was that of sincere, loving sympathy. The apostle speaks of his tears in this verse and in v.31. His was no stoical or apathetic service. He gave himself, body, heart, and soul in his service for Christ. It moved his heart when he beheld men in their miserable alienation from God, and it broke his heart when men resisted or rejected the Lord and His gracious and glorious salvation. Those who are unfeeling towards the plight of sinners are unfit to minister in the name of our heavenly High Priest, the Lord Jesus, who tenderly sympathizes with us in our weaknesses (Heb. 4:15,16).

Sunday, July 4th - Acts 20: 19

Another aspect of Paul's service to which he draws our attention was its cost, in terms of the opposition he bore as he pursued a faithful ministry. That he persevered in face of serious and extensive opposition reveals the incomparable confidence Paul had in his Lord and His Word. It also manifests that indomitable courage with which our Lord endues all of His saints, servants, and soldiers. He who invariably has told His servants not to fear, has also provided for them complete, battle-tested armor for their protection amidst the adverse men and forces they will face in their living and service.

Monday, July 5th - Acts 20: 19, 20

Too many in our success-oriented day wrongly conclude that if a ministry is opposed, the minister must be doing something wrong. Here and elsewhere in God's Word we learn that we must not be surprised when we suffer the fiery attacks of men and devils (1 Pet. 4:12-14). Rather, we should expect them (2 Tim. 3:12), and reckon ourselves in a truly woeful state when all men speak well of us (Mt. 5:10-12; Lk. 6:26). When the godless—especially the godless who are religious hypocrites—become our opponents, it is an indication that Jesus is our friend (Phil. 1:28).

Tuesday, July 6th - Acts 20: 19, 20

The faithfulness and perseverance of Paul's ministry are touched upon in v.20. He says he did not shrink from declaring the gospel to the Ephesians. The wording, like that we find in Rom. 1:16, alerts us to the reality of that which we experience when we determine to open our mouths for Christ. A host of things conspire to mute our publication of the Word. We may feel inadequate to declare such sublime things. We may feel afraid to arouse opposition against ourselves as we declare our allegiance to Christ. We may fear offending and alienation unregenerate friends. All such embarrassment must be overcome before we faithfully and lovingly declare the message of salvation. Holy boldness, not self-conscious bashfulness, marks true gospel ministry. Such boldness is not a natural attribute for sinners. We must pray to God for it (Acts 4:29), and, when He grants it to us, we must exercise it for His glory and for the good of others.

Wednesday, July 7th - Acts 20: 19, 20

The temptation for us to shrink in shame comes not so much when we faithfully serve the Lord by our good deeds, as it does when we determine to declare the truth of Scripture. This is so because men always welcome deeds of charity, while they hate and oppose those who declare a clear and authoritative message which convicts them of their sins. Paul did not hold back from inflicting such convicting hurt upon his hearers. He knew, and so should we know, that men must be hurt to be truly helped. It is only those crucified with Christ who gain thereby eternal life (Gal. 2:20). The convicting word of the cross, which can seem such a painful curse, is thus the only source of true and lasting blessing; the only truly profitable thing in this world; the one thing necessary.

Thursday, July 8th - Acts 20: 19, 20

The flattery, the non-interference, and the unlimited tolerance which men may prize, are in fact unprofitable and injurious to men. The Word of the cross, which seems so cursed, is the only thing which truly benefits men. Thus, Paul reminds the Ephesian elders that he did with them as he had done with the Corinthians, namely, he had determined to know and to publish nothing amongst them except Christ crucified (1 Cor. 2:1,2).

Friday, July 9th - Acts 20: 19, 20

The apostle's ministry was not one of his performing entertaining diversion or indulging in uncritical affirmation and psychological stroking of his hearers. Paul's was a teaching ministry. While the saying may be that Christ is better caught than taught, it is impossible that men be blessedly infected with the gospel apart from faithful teaching. Nor is such teaching, if it is to be truly effective, to be limited to public or private ministry. Paul practiced both at Ephesus, alerting us to the necessity for both the proclamation of the Word to congregated hearers and personal follow-up.

Saturday, July 10th - Acts 20: 21

The character and content of Paul's teaching are summed up in this verse. The apostle was neither with the Ephesians as an amiable self-improvement instructor, nor as a smooth salesman or master of ceremonies for a plethora of programs, and certainly not as a casual nice guy or entertainer. He was with them as one giving sober and vital testimony regarding things which transcend life and death. The solemnity of apostolic ministry resulted from Paul's rightly grasping the serious plight of his hearers, the sacred nature of his commission, and the glorious majesty of his Lord. Those glib gospel presentations so prevalent in our day neither comprehend nor convey any of this.

Sunday, July 11th - Acts 20: 21

The content of Paul's teaching was Christ incarnate, crucified, resurrected, and ascended. The incarnation rendered the Son of God capable of accomplishing sinful man's redemption. By His atoning death, Jesus effected redemption, and by His resurrection God the Father placed His seal of approval upon His Son's redeeming work. By Christ's ascension, our Redeemer ever lives to make application of His saving work to His people. The sovereign application of that work regenerates men dead in sin, prompting and empowering them to repentance and faith. With repentance, men change completely in their orientation and disposition. By attitude and action they no longer flee as guilty sinners from God, but forsake their sin and enter holy communion with God. This they do positively by faith in the reconciling work of Christ. Teaching about the person and work of Christ is the only teaching which brings lasting and most blessed change to needy sinners. No other teaching has such paramount importance for time and eternity.

Monday, July 12th - Acts 20: 21

Paul did not restrict his proclamation of Christ in any way. He neither targeted Jews to the exclusion of Gentiles, nor vice versa. He appealed to all men to be reconciled to God in Christ. Indeed, we may appreciate from Paul's letter to the Ephesians that he proclaimed Christ not only to Jew and Greek (Eph. 2:11-22), but also to men and women, parents and children, masters and slaves (Eph. 5:22-6:9). The appeal of the gospel is not limited to any nationality, social or economic group, age or gender.

Tuesday, July 13th - Acts 20: 22, 23

From his reviewing his past ministry (vv.18-21), Paul refers to his future ministry (vv.22-25). He tells the Ephesian elders that the same commitment to Christ which had led him faithfully and fruitfully to come to them with the gospel was now leading the apostle away from Asia and to Jerusalem. Neither the promise of money nor the likelihood of greater ministerial influence prompted the apostle's determination to pursue this course. Nor had his love for the Ephesians diminished in any way. It was because Paul sense the clear calling of God's Holy Spirit that he was returning to Jerusalem. The only assurance he had from divine intimation was that he would suffer for his faithfulness. How, we may wonder, can the assurance of such sufferings be incentive in gospel ministry? Clues to the answer may be found in what God said about Paul at his conversion: "...for I will show him how much he must suffer for My name's sake." (Acts 9:16); and in what Paul himself had to say about his afflictions, namely, that such loss he counted as gain (Phil. 3:8), and that such persecutions he found only sanctifyingly to empower him (2 Cor. 12:9,10). In gospel service, the Lord has higher regard for the sanctification of the worker than He does for the success of the work.

Wednesday, July 14th - Acts 20: 22-24

Paul counts the cost of his afflictions to be negligible, not only in view of the glory to be revealed to him (Rom. 8:18), but also in view of the surpassing value of his knowing and serving Christ (Phil. 3:8,9). Such right reckoning enabled him to run the race set before him with endurance (Heb. 12:1,2), for he was not distracted by self-regard but rather empowered by his trusting surrender to his Lord. This made Paul a finisher. He did not begin a work, only to abandon it when the going became rough and costly. Paul, like the God he served, completed that which in holy commitment he began (Phil. 1:6).

Thursday, July 15th - Acts 20: 24

Paul's service was characterized by the words of his Lord: *It is finished* (Jn. 19:30). We read in 2 Tim. 4:1-8 of how Paul completed his life's course. The Christ who indwells all believers is a finisher, encouraging and empowering His people to be finishers. We not only have the example of Paul, and, more importantly, the example of Jesus to encourage us in the race set before us (Heb. 12:1,2), but we have the Holy Spirit of God indwelling us, prompting and empowering us to work out our salvation (Phil. 2:12,13). Let us then, in our faithful service for Christ, persevere with a confidence which outweighs any consciousness of cost.

Friday, July 16th - Acts 20: 25

Part of the cost Paul was obliged to bear in his ministry was his being parted from his many dear friends and loving brethren at Ephesus. Yet the apostle did not shrink from bearing this trial, knowing that it was an essential and inescapable part of the earthly pilgrimage of the saints. Our Lord, in His providence, assigns us various works and places of service in his kingdom on earth. While the thoughts and occasional experiences of our huddling together with our brethren in this life make us happy, our Lord tends to scatter us as salt and light throughout this needy world. The only lasting holy huddle will be in heaven, and for that we must await our Lord's timing, not our own desiring.

Saturday, July 17th - Acts 20: 26

Paul left the Ephesians as he had come to them and ministered amongst them, namely, with a clear conscience before God and man. We may wonder how Paul, who was not even remotely a murderer in Ephesus, could find it necessary to clear himself of the blood of the people there. The answer lies in his

divine calling. As Ezekiel, who was made a watchman by the Lord, was responsible to warn sinners of their deadly ways, lest he be held in some measure responsible for their death (Ezek. 3:16-21), so Paul's calling from the Lord made him a watchman over the souls of men. The apostle gave faithful warning to sinners and faithfully presented to them the Savior. Apparently, not a soul in Ephesians could rightly say that Paul failed to give admonishment and loving appeal for them to be reconciled to God. May our consciences be so clear!

Sunday, July 18th - Acts 20: 26, 27

How did the apostle clear himself of the blood of all men at Ephesus? The answer we find in v.27. Nothing less than and nothing other than Paul's teaching the whole counsel of God as contained in Scripture could save men from their sins and deliver them from death. Once again (cf., v.20), Paul says that he did not shrink from declaring to them the full revelation of God's holy purposes. The apostle did not add contemporary or entertaining spice to the truth he preached; he did not tone down the convicting aspects of Scripture; nor did he skip unpleasant or challenging aspects of the Word. He preached a whole, unadulterated gospel, declaring both man's sin and God's salvation. He portrayed a whole Christ, ignoring or apologizing for none of His person or work. Such a ministry, and only such a ministry, produces a whole Christian character in those partaking of that ministry. It is no wonder, then, that Paul later charges Timothy (and, indeed, all pastors in all ages) to preach the Word (2 Tim. 4:1-5). It is only the whole counsel of God solemnly declared which reveals the true depths of man's need, the true cause of his misery, and the true height and wonder of the grace and glory of God and His salvation. The ministry of this one thing necessary should be seen by all pastors and people to be of paramount importance, thus prohibiting the incorporation of any other thing into such ministry.

Monday, July 19th - Acts 20: 28

Paul does not leave the Ephesian elders without giving to them a challenge. By their rising to the challenge, they would carry on the work which Paul had begun in their midst, building on the foundation he so faithfully laid (1 Cor. 3:10; Eph. 2:20). The apostle calls upon the elders to be on guard. The facts of spiritual life demand vigilance and sobriety. Such vigilance is incumbent upon leaders in the Church, but also upon every member of the body of Christ as well (Eph. 4:3). Since our Lord prepares for us a table in the presence of our enemies (Ps. 23:5), we must never grow slack in our guarding against the wiles of those enemies, namely, Satan and wicked men.

Tuesday, July 20th - Acts 20: 28

First and foremost, spiritual leaders must be on guard for themselves. Personal devotion to Christ must take priority over service to others. Indeed, apart from such personal devotion, service to others degenerates into an empty show. We do well to recall that Jesus commended Mary for her devotion to Him, while he chided Martha for ranking service to Him higher than such devotion (Lk. 10:38-42). Spiritual leaders do well especially to note this, lest their sense of ministerial responsibility overshadowed their personal communion with the Redeemer. Additionally, spiritual leaders are special targets of Satan's attacks, and so they must be the first to don the full armor of God. Not only does their own welfare depend upon their doing this, but also the welfare of the flock depends upon it.

Wednesday, July 21st - Acts 20: 28

The officers of Christ's Church are admonished to be on guard for themselves not only for their own benefit. They are to be clad in the whole armor of God so that they may stand, even in evil days (Eph. 6:10ff), and so standing they shall be able effectively to shepherd the flock under their charge. Such leaders have at the same time an awesome responsibility and an amazing privilege in their call to guard the flock. There is an extensive responsibility as well, for they are to guard all the flock, even and especially those tending to hover around the fringes of the fellowship, who so render themselves especially vulnerable to demonic devices, and accordingly require great investments of time and energy from their spiritual

overseers. Nothing less than the fearless, faithful, and selflessly diligent love and power of Christ are called for in the fulfillment of this charge. By God's grace, nothing less is provided for those called to leadership in the Body of Christ.

Thursday, July 22nd - Acts 20: 28

The apostle reminds elders of the authority and responsibility of their calling in the second half of this verse. The fact that the Holy Spirit has made such men overseers, endows them with highest authority. The truth that the flock so to be shepherded belongs to God, having been purchased with His own blood, reminds officers of their responsibility to shepherd the flock with all due loving care and gracious respect. Elders of this flock are to guard it with their very lives, just as the Good Shepherd laid down his life for these very sheep. They are also to be true and tireless in their efforts to guide and feed each and every member of this flock, which is the Lord's own precious possession. No higher, more responsible calling for men exists. No more true and tangible tokens of the love and care of God for His people can be found than that the officers He places over His people should portray the sacrificial and effectual love of Jesus (Jn. 17:12).

Friday, July 23rd - Acts 20: 29

Paul speaks of the increased need for vigilance amongst the Ephesian elders after his departure. It would seem that the apostle had already departed from the church at Ephesus, for here he is but paying these elders a passing visit. Yet, from what he said in v.25, about their never seeing his face again, we may gather that Paul speaks of his final and permanent removal from ministerial influence in that church. The protective strength which the apostle had been exerting on behalf of his Ephesian brethren would be appreciated especially after its removal. There are men in the Church who stand and keep a tide of evil from invading the body of Christ. We may find it easy to take such towers of sanctifying strength for granted, until they are, in the providence of God, called away. Let us not wait until then before we gratefully appreciate and pray for such protectors.

Saturday, July 24th - Acts 20: 29

The spiritually mighty keep out of the Church enemies who are vicious and destructive. Paul here characterizes them as *savage wolves*. They are not merely hirelings who do neither good nor harm in the Church; they aim mercilessly to destroy the flock of the Lord. Though they are essentially destructive, we learn, from such places as Mt. 7:15-20, that they may appear to be delightful fellows. Many a church has been ruined by gregarious men who may be popular and jovial, pleasing many with their innovations purportedly designed to make worship more meaningful to saints and acceptable to sinners. Such men promise and provide greater earthly competence for believers, but at the price of causing souls to languish for lack of sound, biblical teaching. Spiritual wolves in sheeps' clothing are the worst of all wolves.

Sunday, July 25th - Acts 20: 29, 30

It is not clear whether the wolves spoken of in v.29 are the same men as those spoken of in v.30. Sometimes spiritual wolves are planted, like tares amongst the wheat, and show themselves only when they bear evil fruit. Such a man was Judas. At other times, such wolves enter a church after a strong pastor has vacated it, and then such wolves recruit and motivate a discontented confederacy of church members to abandon the narrow way which leads to life. The clear point is that evil men, like packs of wolves or rats, are never alone. Faithful elders must expect to find them both conspiring within and coming from without the fellowship. Not everyone who calls Jesus *Lord* is truly of the kingdom of God (Mt. 7:21-23), nor is everyone who salutes us as *brother*. It is a sobering but inescapable fact that leaders especially must test the spirits of those in the flock (1 Jn. 4:1ff).

Monday, July 26th - Acts 20: 29, 30

Paul describes the tactics of the ravenous wolves in v. 30. The fruit by which we are to know and judge them is not that they inflict obvious, physical damage upon the sheep. Rather, they speak perverse things, namely, things contrary to the sincere milk of the Word. Such perverse teaching actually did arise in Ephesus after Paul's departure. We read of the apostle instructing his son in the faith, Timothy, who followed Paul as pastor in Ephesus, to challenge those who were propagating perverse doctrine in the church there (1 Tim. 1:3-7; 4:1-3; 2 Tim. 2:16-19; 3:1-5). We may perhaps form a most accurate estimation of the seriousness and resoluteness with which we should challenge such perverse teaching when we read how Paul calls those teaching anything contrary to the gospel accursed (Gal. 1:6-9). Perverse teaching cannot be tolerated, nor can we be compensated for it by fine music, plentiful programs, and attractive facilities. It is the ministry of the Word alone which makes men wise unto salvation (2 Tim. 3:15-4:5), and when that ministry becomes perverse, nothing but its purging and reformation can save and sanctify sinners.

Tuesday, July 27th - Acts 20: 30

Another fruit by which spiritual wolves may be known is that they draw men not to Christ, but rather after themselves. Ministers with egos and personal ambitions are living contradictions. The very term, *minister*, derives from the word *minor* (as opposed to *magister*, meaning, *master*), thus telling us that humility is essential in true Christian leaders. False teachers operate under the perverse maxim that Christ and the means of His grace must decrease while they and their personal followings increase.

Wednesday, July 28th - Acts 20: 31

In this verse, Paul reiterates the call for vigilance which he issued in v.28. Here he adds his own example of diligent and sympathetic ministry as a model for the Ephesian elders to follow. The apostle himself not only fed the sheep, but also guarded against the wolves. Such positive and negative ministry, such building with one hand and keeping a sword in the other (Neh. 4:7) is not unusual, but normative ministry. One who is so sincerely sensitive to the plight of sinners that he sheds tears for them as he admonishes them respecting their need to outgrow ignorance of the devil's wiles will neglect neither feeding the flock nor fighting against its enemies.

Thursday, July 29th - Acts 20: 32

The only resources the apostle indicates to be available to these Ephesian elders for their vital ministerial responsibilities are the Word of God (v.32), and prayer (v.36). He indicates no other resources, for God provides no others. Men may manufacture and market gimmicks and theological and sociological fads, but such things are delusive aids for sanctification and ineffectual in spiritual warfare. The Word and prayer are not only adequate, but are abundantly sufficient to fit Church leaders for their every good work (2 Tim. 3:16,17; Eph. 6:17,18).

Friday, July 30th - Acts 20: 32

Paul commends these elders to God and to the Word of His grace. Here we may distinguish between the Lord and His Word, but we may not separate them. Scripture uniformly indicates that our help is not in a book, but in the living God of mercy and redeeming power. Yet Scripture also makes clear that our help is in the *name* of the Lord, meaning God as He has revealed Himself to us in Scripture. It is only as we by faith perceive God and feed upon His great and precious promises in His Word that we are built up (oivkodomh/sai) not only as individuals, but as members of the household of God (Eph. 2:19-22). By the Word we are sanctified, and such sanctification and our dwelling amongst those sanctified form the personal and corporate inheritance of the children of God. In short, our feeding on the Word of God transforms us into the likeness of the God of the Word.

Saturday, July 31st - Acts 20: 33, 34

The apostle did not labor to enrich himself with worldly trinkets. In attitude, he was free from coveting any man's money. Indeed, his heart was set on the true and lasting treasure of Christ, and such focus made him despise the world's goods (Phil. 3:8). This godly attitude enabled Paul to lead a life of practical diligence. Although he taught that ministers were entitled to be supported by the churches they served (1 Cor. 9:1-18), the apostle declined this entitlement for himself in the Gentile churches which he served. He did this so that he could serve for free, ministering the gospel of God's free grace (1 Cor. 9:12, 15, 18; 2 Cor. 11:7-12; 2 Thess. 3:7-12). Hearts set heavenward despise the things of earth, but, paradoxically, are of most earthly good. Nothing is so practical as true spirituality.

Sunday, August 1st - Acts 20: 35

Paul reminds his hearers that his personal diligence was not exercised only to relieve them of a burden of providing him material support. He was also setting for them an example to be followed. True Christian economy is one of self-denial which makes available resources for others who are in need (Eph. 4:28). The way of the cross is fruitful, securing blessing for the one bearing his cross daily, and providing blessing for others in need. Those who so give to the poor are in reality lending to the Lord (Prov. 19:17; Mt. 25:34-40). Paul, following the precept and example of Jesus, was himself an incarnate example of this truth.

Monday, August 2nd - Acts 20: 36

The apostle here seals his precept and example with prayer. A prayerless ministry of the Word will be a powerless ministry of the Word. Prayer without a ministry of the Word degenerates into aimless, sentimental, and carnal chatter. Both the Word and prayer are essential for faithful, fruitful ministry. By his teaching, Paul pointed these elders to God, and by his prayer he engaged the interest and power of the Lord in their life work. The teaching of spiritual things is profitless without prayer, but exceedingly profitable with and by prayer. Moreover, nothing knits hearts closer and more lastingly together as when brethren bow together before the throne of God's grace. Such a knitting was especially necessary for Paul and these elders at this point, where they were separating for the duration of their earthly pilgrimage, to be reunited at the throne of Christ's glory—the very throne to which now they lifted their hearts and voices in prayer.

Tuesday, August 3rd - Acts 20: 36

Though physical posture is not an essential component of prayer, neither is it a negligible component. Here Scripture notes that the apostle knelt as he lead these elders in prayer. Such kneeling indicates one's humble submission to and devoted trust in the God to whom one prays. It is a posture denoting reverence for the Lord of glory and is, alas, far too rare in our day of casual self-centeredness. We do well to remind ourselves, by our physical posture, that our highest place is found when we are lying low at our Redeemer's feet.

Wednesday, August 4th - Acts 20: 37, 38

The gospel makes men neither unfeeling stoics nor cold rationalists. In fact, it is only the regenerate who have warm hearts, filled with holy, loving passion. Here that passion demonstratively breaks forth. The grave elders of Ephesus do not steel themselves against expressing their grief over the fact that they would never see Paul again in this life. Nor does the sure consolation that they would be blessedly reunited with the apostle in glory prevent them from showing how greatly they would miss Paul prior to that blessed reunion. Every one of them (pa,ntwn) wept greatly, and each, in turn, wrapped his arms around Paul's neck and kissed him. These demonstrations of deep and tender affection are most remarkable when we recall that apart from the reconciling grace of God in Christ, these men would never have met and would have been content to live out their wretched lives as strangers to God and to one another. The hearts of the regenerate cannot but feel intense pain at the thought of even temporary separation from their beloved brethren. Nor should the arms and lips of the regenerate fail to express grateful and affectionate regard for their faithful spiritual leaders who, in the Lord's providence, are being removed from their company.

Thursday, August 5th - Acts 20: 37, 38

This poignant scene, in which the Ephesian elders demonstrate their deep affection and high regard for the apostle Paul, is more than an adequate compensation for the malicious and widespread opposition which Paul endured from his enemies. Likewise, the love of the brethren, expressed in words and deeds, should make the things we suffer for our faithfulness to Christ pale into insignificance, as being not worthy to be compared with such exquisite love. The fact that these elders treasured every second they could have with Paul is evident by their accompanying him to the ship, thereby prolonging their time together as much as possible. We, too, should treasure our time together in the bonds of Christ's love and fellowship. Too soon shall we be separated from each other, either by the seas of this world or by the final crossing of the Jordan River.

Friday, August 6th - Acts 21: 1-3

As Luke briefly recounts the voyage of Paul and his missionary team from Miletus to Tyre, several fascinating details may be observed. First, we should understand from the word in v.1 translated, *parted*, that Paul's leaving the Ephesian elders was as difficult and painful for him as it was for them. The participle, *avpospasqe.ntaj*, is formed from the verb *avpospa,w*, meaning literally, *I tear away*. Faithful service to Christ can be at times painfully wrenching, compelling us to leave those whom we love most. But while our Lord gives us that very deep and strong love which binds us to others—especially to our brethren—we must ever keep that love secondary to our love and service for Him.

Saturday, August 7th - Acts 21: 1-3

A glance at a map of the eastern Mediterranean will help us follow Luke's plotting of their course from Miletus to Tyre. They skirted the islands of Cos and Rhodes, landing at Patara. Cos was a small, fertile island, known for its wine, silk, and cotton, and was the home of Hippocrates, the so-called father of medicine. Rhodes was famous for its Colossus, the huge statue of Apollo. Patara was near the mouth of the Xanthus River, where Apollo was supposed to have issued oracles. Paul and his companions were neither sightseers nor, so far as we are told, sowers of gospel seed in these places. Their aim was simply to transfer ships at Patara and make as straight a way as possible for the Phoenician coast, from which they could make their way to Jerusalem. Thus, they booked onto a cargo ship, seeking speed, not style, in their voyage. They passed to the south of Cyprus, the island from which Barnabas came (Acts 4:36), and which Paul and Barnabas had evangelized from east to west (Acts 13:4-6). Thus they came to Tyre, where the most precious cargo unloaded by the ship was Paul and his team. The smooth swiftness of the voyage would contrast greatly with the stormy reception Paul would receive on land. In Christ's service, smooth sailing to an assignment does not always betoken easy work at the assignment.

Sunday, August 8th - Acts 21: 4

At Tyre, Paul found disciples of the Lord. How those disciples came to be in Phoenicia may be explained by Acts 11:10 (also see Ps. 87:4) where we read of persecution subsequent to Stephen's martyrdom scattering the brethren, some of whom came to Phoenicia spreading the gospel. These disciples, who arose through such persecution, sought repeatedly to dissuade Paul from his goal of reaching Jerusalem. Paul resolutely refused to heed their counsel. Was the apostle right or wrong in his resolution? The event shall show us. Meantime, let us note that at times sincere and spiritual brethren may seriously disagree as to which course they should take. Prayer and patience then become especially necessary so that disagreement not become division amongst brethren.

Monday, August 9th - Acts 21: 4-6

We are told that the disciples at Tyre sought to dissuade Paul through the Spirit. We are not told how Paul responded in word to this counsel, but when, after seven days, he and his party boarded a coast-running boat heading from Tyre to Ptolemais, thus taking Paul nearer to Jerusalem, we may observe that the

apostle's action clearly indicates his rejection of the counsel. It is a very serious thing when one rejects sincere counsel inspired by the Holy Spirit. However, as we shall learn, the Spirit merely intimated the suffering awaiting Paul at Jerusalem (v.11), while the disciples' conclusion from this that Paul should avoid Jerusalem and its persecutions was their own inference from the Spirit's intimation. The truly spiritual character of the Tyrian disciples is demonstrated not via their counsel, but via their loving and prayerful commendation of Paul to his course. They take no personal offense at his rejection of their counsel, but show by their prayerful and affectionate sending off of the apostle that they were a people committed to a diligent preservation of the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. We do well to be like them, and even moreso to be like Paul, staying the course our Lord sets for us, being undistracted even by the sincere, loving, spiritually plausible, but ultimately erroneous cries of our beloved brethren. Recall how Jesus likewise refused the counsel of a beloved disciple (Mt. 16:21ff).

Tuesday, August 10th - Acts 21: 7

Paul draws ever closer to Jerusalem and to the sufferings he knew—by the Spirit's warning—awaited him there. Along the way, he enjoyed the fortifying consolation of fellowship with brethren. At Ptolemais he enjoyed such fellowship for a day, while in Caesarea he stayed for many days (v.10). Brief as well as prolonged periods of Christian fellowship have their encouraging effect upon the servants of the Lord. In this, as in all things, we must not despise the day of small things.

Wednesday, August 11th - Acts 21: 8, 9

At Caesarea Paul found Philip, whom he perhaps had never met, but with whom Luke's account has made us familiar. We last read of Philip in Acts 8:40. There we were told that the deacon/evangelist settled in Caesarea, where he fulfilled his higher office of evangelist by his preaching the Word of God. Scholars estimate that about twenty years had passed between Philip's settling in Caesarea and this visit of Paul to him there. In that time, Philip had remained faithful and fruitful, as evidenced by his own godly and spiritually gifted family. Paul never stayed for twenty years in any one place in his life, but rather was directed by the Lord to spread the Word widely. Yet the same Lord who called Paul to an itinerate ministry also called Philip to a settled ministry. Our heavenly Master Builder knows best where and in what capacity to assign His workers.

Thursday, August 12th - Acts 21: 8, 9

Luke reminds us of Philip's two offices in v.8. Philip was first a deacon, called and equipped by God and elected by his brethren to serve in a ministry of mercy in the church at Jerusalem. But he, like Stephen, also had a gift for proclaiming God's Word. It was in pursuit of this latter, higher calling that Philip came to and settled in Caesarea, where he most likely met his wife and raised his family. Not all, but some in the Church are like Philip, becoming conscious of higher gifts and callings as they enter into and seek faithfully to fulfill lesser, though significant and necessary callings.

Friday, August 13th - Acts 21: 10, 11

Another servant of Christ, to whom Luke's account has already introduced us, also makes his appearance at Caesarea. The prophet, Agabus, had earlier predicted the famine which took place throughout Judea in about the year 46A.D. (Acts 11:27,28). He came to Caesarea at this time no doubt for the express purpose of confirming by prophetic word and deed what the Holy Spirit had intimated through the disciples at Tyre (v.4), namely, that Paul would surely suffer in Jerusalem. In the earlier prophecy of Agabus, it was clearly right that the church take action to avoid suffering the effects of the famine. In this prophecy concerning Paul, it is not so clear that evasive action is divinely intended. When our Lord tells us and helps us to count the cost before we pursue His service, it is not intended that we avoid bearing that cost by our balking at His service. We do well to bear in mind always that we not only serve a Savior who set His face resolutely to go to Jerusalem, there to suffer and die for our redemption (Lk. 9:51), but we also serve a Lord who calls upon us to deny ourselves, take up our cross, and follow Him (Lk. 9:23).

Saturday, August 14th - Acts 21: 10-12

It is critical that we note what the prophecy of Agabus does not say. It does not express a prohibition or counsel against Paul's entering Jerusalem. It simply says that Paul will be bound by the Jews and handed over to the Gentiles—acts which did, in fact, occur, and did so as a result of Paul's going to Jerusalem. But that the apostle should not expose himself to such afflictions was an inference drawn from the prophecy by Paul's loving brethren. The high and loving regard in which Luke and the other members of Paul's missionary team held the apostle led them, therefore, to join with the disciples at Tyre in counseling Paul not to go to Jerusalem. The chorus of loving brethren counseling against Paul's intended course thus grew significantly. There are times when spiritual leaders should hear and heed the voice of their brethren (Acts 19:30,31), and there are other times when they must not. In fact, the most significant spiritual work is often accomplished without the full understanding or consent of those who most benefit from that work. Did any of the disciples counsel Jesus to go to the cross?

Sunday, August 15th - Acts 21: 12, 13

There should be no doubt that deepest and most sincere human love for Paul on the part of his co-laborers prompted their cries for the apostle to forsake his plans to enter Jerusalem. From the surest source of intelligence, namely, God's Holy Spirit, they knew that his entrance to that city spelled for him certain suffering, imprisonment, even perhaps death. Thus, out of love for Paul and genuine and legitimate concern for the welfare of especially the Gentile churches, they sought to preserve the apostle to the Gentiles. But there are times when even the highest human love can serve as an obstacle to one's highest devotion to and loving service for God. Hence, Paul tells them to calm their cries, declaring himself resolutely set to suffer and die for the name of the Lord Jesus. In this way, Paul followed the Captain of his salvation, who did not let the love of His disciples (Mt. 16:21-25), or of His earthly family (Mt. 12:46-50; Mk. 3:21, 31-35) stop Him from going to the cross.

Monday, August 16th - Acts 21: 13

This verse reveals to us the basis for Paul's determination to go to Jerusalem. There are those in the Church who, despite our Lord's rebuke of busy Martha, (Lk. 10:40-42), nevertheless defend the so-called practical sister who was distracted from her Lord. There are those who, despite our Lord's commendation of Mary, who anointed Jesus with the costly ointment (Jn. 12:1-8), nevertheless criticize her. Likewise, there are those who insist that Paul is sinfully stubborn in his determination to go to Jerusalem. Yet the apostle declares himself willing to suffer and to die for the name of the Lord. Such willingness gives anyone having it the clearest insight into God's will and calling. Selflessness is required for anyone to follow Jesus into the depths of His sufferings (Lk. 9: 23,24). This sacrificial willingness issues from a pure heart, which sees the living God (Mt. 5:8), Who is higher than the highest and better than the best of things. Here Paul pours out his life as a drink offering (2 Tim. 4:6), and who shall say that the Christ who poured out Himself to death would despise such an offering? Only those truly willing to die for Christ can ever rightly live for Him.

Tuesday, August 17th - Acts 21: 14

Paul's resolve was seen by all to be as fixed as the decrees of God. Therefore, his would-be counselors fell silent. They harbored no resentment, they took no offense over Paul's rejection of their counsel. They who differed over timing and tactics became united in the prayerful commitment to and trust in the Lord's will being done. In this, these disciples must be commended. Theirs is the resolution reached by Jesus in Gethsemane, where the prayer was, *not my will, but Thy will be done*. We perhaps should reach this holy resignation more often than we do.

Wednesday, August 18th - Acts 21: 14

Was it God's will that Paul go to Jerusalem and suffer beating, arrest, imprisonment, and final shipment to Rome as a prisoner? No new churches were founded by his ordeal. Few Scriptural epistles were written because of it. What, then, was the fruit of this painful and costly effort? First, it accorded fully with the divine calling of Paul to apostolic service (Acts 9:15,16). Next, the course was well set to nurture Paul's own personal growth in grace (2 Cor. 12:7-10). Finally, there were many incidental gospel seeds sown in this way of suffering. The Jews in Jerusalem, Felix, Festus, and Agrippa—all heard clear gospel testimony. The sailors shipwrecked with Paul and the people on Malta all heard in word and saw in deed the truth of the gospel. Finally, the saints and even soldiers in Rome were at last ministered to by the apostle. These incidental seeds surely have borne fruit far beyond the reckoning power of any man. Only our Lord can and does bring so much life out of the death of His servants. Read of an earlier example, where the very corpse of Elisha gave life to a dead man (2 Ki. 13:20,21).

Thursday, August 19th - Acts 21: 15, 16

Although Paul was alone in his resolve to go to Jerusalem, he was not alone in his actually going there. Luke and the other co-laborers with Paul accompanied him, as did disciples from Caesarea. The Caesarean disciples took Paul to where another disciple, Mnason, was staying in Jerusalem. Luke's noting that Mnason was literally an archaic disciple (avrcal,wl maqthh/) from Cyprus alerts us to the intriguing possibility that Paul, here in Jerusalem at the last stage of his earthly service, was being served by a man who was part of the fruit of the apostle's first missionary endeavor (Acts 13:4ff). Saints may determine to walk alone, but rarely find that they are obliged to do so. The fruit of their faithfulness rises up to bless them along the way.

Friday, August 20th - Acts 21: 17

Whatever malice the Jews in Jerusalem bore toward Paul, the brethren in the church there did not to any degree share it. It is a testimony to their exercise of charity that they refused to believe the rumors which were being spread concerning Paul's teaching (v.21). It is a testimony to the integrity of Paul that such rumors were viewed as incredible by those with true discernment. Here, then, was a reunion of rejoicing between Paul and the saints of the church at Jerusalem. Each stood, served, and accepted one another in the grace and power of the Lord. While politically minded ones would have viewed Paul as a hot potato to be shunned, there was nothing but a graciously loving reception awaiting him by this church. Such loving commitment is the Lord's doing, and it is marvelous in our eyes.

Saturday, August 21st - Acts 21: 18, 19

These verses tell of Paul's reporting to the leadership in the church at Jerusalem. With characteristic modesty, the apostle to the Gentiles gave a report, telling not of what wonderful things *he* had done, but of the wonders which *God* had done among the Gentiles. His report was full and detailed, relating each and every occurrence. The more fully a faithful servant of the Lord reports his service, the more evident it should become to all that God has been the ultimate Worker, and that He should receive all thanks and glory.

Sunday, August 22nd - Acts 21: 19, 20

Not only does Paul rightly tell that God was the true cause of his success, but the leaders of the Jerusalem church rightly perceive the same, and accordingly glorify the Lord. It is good that we, in our Christian service, be accountable to the Church, for then we shall not only serve more circumspectly, but we shall also, in our accounting, give our brethren greater cause to glorify God.

Monday, August 23rd - Acts 21: 20, 21

Paul had returned to a situation in Jerusalem and in the church there which was charged with potential danger. The leaders of the church had exercised charitable trust in Paul's integrity, and so they were kept

from being themselves unduly affected by the false charges which were being circulated concerning Paul's teaching. Yet, rumors were growing, and tensions were rising, even amongst those who had believed in Jesus. Paul did, in fact, teach freedom from the ceremonial law, which Christ had fulfilled (1 Cor. 7:19; Gal. 5:1-12). However, he was no despiser of the law, which he declared to be a tutor to lead men to Christ (Gal. 3:24,25). We note, respecting those circulating the charges against Paul, how there was a tendency for them to resist having done with the elementary things of the Lord and press on to a mature understanding. They who close their ears and hearts to any fuller and truer teaching about redemption find that they become rumor-mongers, fearfully viewing teachers of the truth as though they were wicked deceivers of men. It is better when believers maintain grateful and loving zeal for the living Lord, rather than their being supremely zealous for the Law, or for any systematic formulations of the Word of God. Zeal without grace and knowledge will turn men into persecutors of the truth, rather than submissive lovers of it.

Tuesday, August 24th - Acts 21: 22-24

The elders of the Jerusalem church gave advice to Paul in an attempt to clear up the rumors and charges against the apostle. The action they suggested was clearly calculated to be a demonstration to all that Paul's teaching was a legitimate development from Judaism, and not something antithetical to it. It is good that we do all we can legitimately to remove from the Church those stumbling blocks which scandalize weaker brethren. However, good intentions must be guided by the truth of God in Christ, lovingly wrought out in action. Anything other than that will prove an exacerbation of the problem, rather than a solution to it.

Wednesday, August 25th - Acts 21: 22-24

We must be charitable as we, from this great historical distance, seek to judge whether or not the elders' counsel to Paul was good. Even so, there appears to be an inherent weakness in the Jerusalem church. They who had believed in Jesus and taught the gospel for more than two decades, show themselves to be very little liberated from the ceremonial laws. Accordingly, rather than focus their energies upon the task of teaching converted Jews that the ceremonial laws had been wonderfully fulfilled in Christ, they determined it easier to do a public relations stunt with Paul. Theirs was not the only church to let custom have priority over Christ. Our responsibility now is not to judge the failure of this Jerusalem church, but rather to pray and work so that we do not likewise fail.

Thursday, August 26th - Acts 21: 23-26

The counsel here given appears to be wise and principled. The four men spoken of in v.23 are clearly converted Jewish members of the Jerusalem church, for they are referred to by the elders in the terms, *We have four men*. As Jews, they had been trained to observe such ceremonial elements as the Nazirite vow (Num. 6:1-21). While Christ had fulfilled these ceremonial aspects of the law of Moses, it is clear that the early church elders and apostles rightly gave to those aspects a gradual, respectful burial. At the same time, the Jerusalem elders assured Paul that they respected Gentile freedom from such customs (v.25). Therefore, Paul could in good conscience submit to this counsel and act on it, seeking to be a Jew to the Jews (1 Cor. 9:20). Yet the event will show that this counsel was inadequate to remove the animosity against Paul. Respectful observance of ceremonial cleansing is no substitute for the washing of regeneration and the renewal in the Holy Spirit. Nor is it an effective shield against the hatred of those determined to have a less radical cleansing than that of the soul by the blood of Jesus.

Friday, August 27th - Acts 21: 26

It is to Paul's credit that he adopted the advice given him by the Jerusalem elders. The thing they advised, however, rather than clear away the charges against him, served to stir up anger and charges to a fever pitch. We may wonder why Paul was not more resolute in his urging the Jerusalem elders to take their stand in the liberty of Christ. Yet, we have reason to believe that had he been so resolute and resistant against their counsel, they would have been inclined to give credence to the charges. Hence, Paul submitted to counsel which was not in itself wrong, but which in this instance was inadequate to remove the calumny

against him and his teaching. There are times when people, such as these Jerusalem elders, cannot learn except by the failure of their plans. In this case, however, Paul condescends, not they, to pay the painful price for their failure.

Saturday, August 28th - Acts 21: 27, 28

What the Jerusalem elders had failed to factor into the formulation of their counsel was the instigation of the Jews from Asia. In fact, from what v.27 says about the days of purification being almost complete, we gather that the indigenous Jews at Jerusalem were somewhat silenced, if not convinced, by Paul's action with the four men in the temple. We must learn ever to reckon on outside (i.e., Satanic) instigation. With such interference from the Asian Jews, the inherent inadequacy of the Jerusalem elders' counsel becomes apparent. True, godly counsel takes into account all factors, including Satanic instigation, and can stand in all situations and withstand all attacks. The leaders of the Jerusalem church, precisely because they had failed radically to commit themselves to liberty and security in Christ, were weak and defenseless against such Satanically inspired onslaughts. No wonder that the Jerusalem church became increasingly a spiritual backwater, with leadership being assumed by the churches in Syrian Antioch, Rome, and even Corinth, where the gospel had taken more radical, culture-challenging root. Let us, then, learn to be strong in Christ, and not think that customs provide any refuge in the evil day.

Sunday, August 29th - Acts 21: 27-29

Paul, in his farewell to the Ephesian elders at Miletus, referred to the Asian Jews who opposed and plotted against him (Acts 20:19). Some of those Jews had traveled, like Paul, to Jerusalem for the festival of Pentecost (Acts 20:16). Yet by their deeds they demonstrate how far their hearts were from worshipping the true, living God. They cry out against Paul as though he were a deceiving enemy invading and defiling the holy temple. It is their sinful blindness which leads them to mistake Trophimus for one of the four Jewish believers whom Paul had taken into the temple. This mistake led them to issue a malicious charge, not only against Paul's teaching, but also against his action with the four men. The seriousness of the charge that Paul had brought Greeks into the temple may be appreciated when we learn that such a deed was deemed a capital crime by the Jews, and ratified by Roman law (cf. Josephus. *Jewish Wars*, VI:2.4). We should observe from this event how dangerously astray men allow themselves to be led when their hearts are set on religious custom and habit of ritual instead of being prepared to hear, see, and apply to themselves the purifying and liberating truth of God.

Monday, August 30th - Acts 21: 27-29

Scripture records that Paul had his troubles in Asia with Gentiles, not with the Jews (Acts 19:23ff). Yet the apostle alludes to Jewish plots against him in Asia (Acts 20:19), and here we see how those Jews brought a life threatening charge against Paul in Jerusalem. Latent enemies may spring into action against the Lord's people when time and circumstance change. They who seem to be not a great threat in one place can become a supreme threat in another. Sleeping or lurking enemies are not dead enemies. We must ever watch and pray.

Tuesday, August 31st - Acts 21: 30

Popular sentiment is often wrong. We see from the reaction of the majority of the people in Jerusalem that it is easier to stir up a crowd than it is to move a single man with true conviction. Thus, we see the crowd uncritically adopting the rash and wrong charges of the Asian Jews, and they together are galvanized to eject Paul unceremoniously from the temple. John Calvin comments on this, saying, "...in this corrupt nature perverseness is added to foolishness, so that those, whom it would be difficult to move to right action with many exhortations, willingly and with no trouble fly to defend a bad cause." (*NT Commentaries*, vol. 7, p. 206). Jesus pronounces a woe upon those who court the favor of the crowds for this very reason (Lk. 6:26). It is infinitely better that we have the world against us, and Jesus for us, than to have the reverse.

Wednesday, September 1st - Acts 21: 30, 31

This angry mob, incited by the Asian Jews, intended to dispatch Paul not only from the temple but also from this life. Their rashness is seen in how they show no desire to investigate the charges, but rather determine to proceed to immediate execution of the man so charged. Thus, rashness breeds ruthlessness. Here is the sheer, irrational rage of Satan on display. How unlike the loving, patient, and peaceable fruit of the Holy Spirit is the spirit motivating this crowd! Satan and the wicked do not simply aim to annoy the saints of God, but determine to annihilate them if possible.

Thursday, September 2nd - Acts 21: 31, 32

What the murderous Jews fully intended to do, and, by weight of their number, were fully able to do, they did not do. Their rage against Paul was restrained, not by their fear of God or regard for the truth, but due to their fear of unbelieving Roman soldiers. Theirs was not true, religious zeal, but rather an unprincipled pragmatism, which respected brute force above all. The Lord knows how to contain the murderous ire of the enemies of His servants. Though ten thousand are arrayed against us, we need not fear them if our God is for and with us (Ps. 3:6). Yet, we should note that while Paul was saved by the Roman commander, it was not before the apostle had suffered a beating. Fidelity to the Lord does not secure us from all verbal or physical attacks of the wicked. Our Lord does not promise to keep us from sore trials, but rather He promises that He shall make us to be more than conquerors in all trials (Rom. 8:31-39).

Friday, September 3rd - Acts 21: 33

The Roman commander delivered Paul from the mob, but did not grant the apostle his liberty. Instead, he bound the apostle with chains and began to interrogate him. Here the prophecy of Agabus is fulfilled (Acts 21:11), for the Jews at Jerusalem were instrumental in having Paul bound and remanded to the Gentiles. Yet, never were chains more welcomed by a man, for in this instance they saved Paul's life. The most grim prophecies for the servants of Christ ever contain in them the light and life of salvation.

Saturday, September 4th - Acts 21: 33-36

These verses make clear that Paul was in a human sea of death, which had been churned up by the malice of the Asian Jews. The unreasoning hatred of the mob is seen as Paul's interrogation was constantly being interrupted by those attempting to answer for him the critical questions put to him regarding who he was and what he had done. These Jews neither wanted to know themselves nor did they want anyone else to know the answer to those questions. The pagan Roman commander shows relatively more patient and just determination to know the facts. Thus, the resources of Rome are used as soldiers carry Paul through the screaming mass of humanity into the soldiers' barracks. Religious zeal without the grace and knowledge of Christ makes men more irrational and vicious than atheistic pagans. Irreligion is bad. False religion is worse.

Sunday, September 5th - Acts 21: 36

Twenty-seven years prior to these people crying out, *Away with him*, with respect to Paul, another crowd of Jews cried out the same thing with respect to Jesus (Lk. 23:18; Jn. 19:15). The angry opposition against Paul, the beating he suffered, the murderous determination of the crowd, and his arrest by the Romans—all do not seem to add up to a successful mission for the apostle. Yet, we do well to keep in mind the calling of God wherein the apostle was told he would suffer for Christ (Acts 9:16), the will of God to which Paul had been prayerfully commended by the church at Caesarea (Acts 21:14), and the example of Jesus, by whose sufferings His people are redeemed. These are the guiding features which make what appear to be awful sufferings and disastrous failures to be but momentary light afflictions, working for the apostle an eternal

weight of glory (2 Cor. 4:16-18). Similarly do our sufferings and failures experienced in our service for Christ serve for our glorious good.

Monday, September 6th - Acts 21: 37, 38

At this point, Paul speaks his first words. During all of the upheaval against him, he, like his Lord, remained silent as a lamb. As the Proverbs are full of warnings against our arguing with a fool, so the apostle knew he would waste his words and feed the conceit of the crowd were he to try and reason with the perverse Asian Jews or the rabble they had aroused. But when he was held in custody by legitimate civil authority, he opens his mouth to make a request. His very speech, wherein he employed the universal language then prevailing, causes the Roman commander surprise. We learn from v. 38 that the commander, as well as the rioting crowd, entertained mistaken notions of who Paul was and what he was doing. We should learn from this that men of the world almost always have wrong understanding respecting the servants of Christ, and it is not until we open our mouths to communicate with them that the truth about who we are and Whom we represent can be made known.

Tuesday, September 7th - Acts 21: 38, 39

The commander suspected Paul of criminal activity. The Egyptian here mentioned is written of by Josephus (*Jewish Wars*, II:13.5 and *Antiquities*, XX:8.6). Paul sets the record straight, but not for his personal defense so much as for the opportunity to gain permission to address unmolested the people who sought his death. Though the rioting Jews cried out, *Away with him*, the gracious and loving apostle knew that were they to have their request, they would hear the God and Judge of all men say to each of them in the final day, *Away with him*, as He cast each one into eternal outer darkness (Mt. 7:23; 25:41). We serve our merciful Savior well when we return blessing to those who curse us (Lk. 6:28).

Wednesday, September 8th - Acts 21: 38

The commander had misjudged Paul. He would learn later how badly he had misjudged the apostle (Acts 22:24-29). We do well not to follow his example, lest we occasion grief, pain, or stumbling for those we hold in low esteem, who are in fact held in highest esteem by the Lord. A charitable and considerate judgment of others will keep us from mistreating any of the Lord's beloved children.

Thursday, September 9th - Acts 21: 40 - 22: 2

To the Gentile commander, Paul demonstrated through his Greek speaking genuine sympathy with the Gentiles. So convincingly did he speak that the commander granted Paul's request to address the rioting mob, whom Paul saw not as a threatening crowd, but as people (v.39), as his fellow countrymen whom he truly loved (Rom. 9:1-5). From there Paul went on to demonstrate his affinity with the Jews. His appearance before them by leave of the Roman commander was, no doubt, startling to them. His gesturing hand (apparently now free of a chain) quieted them. But his speech in their language stilled them yet more. We should do all in our power to remove personal offense from and establish genuine affinity with those to whom we address the claims of Christ. Woe be to them if they are offended at a faithful testimony regarding the Savior. Woe be to us if they are offended by our lack of meekness, sympathy, and love, through which we badly misrepresent our merciful Lord.

Friday, September 10th - Acts 22: 3

Paul continues to demonstrate his affinity with the Jews. He in this verse strengthens the bridge between them and himself. He testifies to his preeminently Jewish birth and education, as well as to his zeal for God. These things he does not renounce. *I am (not was) a Jew*, is his sincere declaration. Here he speaks truly, although he intends to declare the whole truth in due course, whereby these natural endowments and attainments will pale in comparison (Phil. 3:7,8). The apostle then acknowledges the Jews' sincere, but mistaken, zeal for God. Such Jewish heritage and zeal for God Paul shared with his audience. This, which

they had in common, is where he begins his testimony. From here he will endeavor to share what, by God's grace and power, he became in Christ, so that his hearers may share citizenship in the world of grace with him, too. Let us learn from this truthful and lovingly considerate sharing of Paul's how we also may become faithful and fruitful bridge-builders with people who are strangers to Christ.

Saturday, September 11th - Acts 22: 4, 5

Another point of contact and affinity Paul shared with the Jews was his treatment of those who followed Jesus as the way, truth, and life (Jn. 14:6). Yet, although he understood by personal experience—demonstrated at high levels and with extensive reach—the mentality which sought zealously to persecute believers in Jesus, this was a point at which Paul no longer had affinity with these Jews. He speaks in the past tense when he says, *I persecuted this Way*. Thus, at this point Paul begins his testimony to the redeeming power of God in Christ, which power had so changed his attitude and actions. By God's grace, love, and power, he who was set to destroy the Church became her greatest champion. Surely only the power of God could work such blessed, dramatic, and lasting change in a man like Paul, or in ones such as ourselves. Let us join the apostle in telling others about this change in our lives and priorities.

Sunday, September 12th - Acts 22: 6, 7

This is the second time Paul's conversion is recorded in Acts. It will not be the last time (cf., Acts 26:1-23). Each telling adds details which all together present a fuller account of what actually happened to Paul at his conversion. In fact, at any man's conversion, more happens to him than he at first can apprehend, understand, or declare.

Monday, September 13th - Acts 22: 6, 7

Paul recounts that he was arrested by a light brighter than the natural sun shining at its height and in its greatest strength. Indeed, he was arrested by the divine source of all light. The glory of that light prostrated Paul's body, but the divine authority of the voice prostrated his heart and convicted his soul. That voice called Saul, the persecuting Pharisee, to account before God. The enormity of Saul's sin was for the first time shown him by the Lord revealing that the Pharisee's persecuting of despised Christians was tantamount to his persecuting the living God. Through these words of testimony, Paul similarly arraigns his hearers, as well as those reading the Scripture account, before the living God who shall judge all people. Paul could not give an acceptable account of his persecuting the Lord through his persecuting the Lord's servants. No man can answer such a charge. Thus, let us be careful not hurtfully to touch the Lord's people.

Tuesday, September 14th - Acts 22: 8

In the convicting light of the glorious risen Christ, the proud Pharisee was humbled to the point of becoming himself a pupil, asking questions of the Master Teacher. Saul, being so prostrated and rendered teachable, received in answer to his question the most inconceivable revelation, which revolutionized his entire life. The Lord, Who had prostrated him and Who had brought deepest conviction to him, was the Jesus Whom the Pharisee had despised and Whose followers he persecuted. With that revelation, Saul was made to realize that he had been opposed to good and to the God he professed to worship. So, too, the Jews persecuting Paul were in reality opposed to the God for Whom they professed to have great zeal (v.3). Only Jesus can open the eyes of men's hearts, showing them how blind they have been in their sinful neglect of or opposition to Him.

Wednesday, September 15th - Acts 22: 9

Some read a contradiction between what Paul says in this verse and what is recorded in Acts 9:7. Here Paul says that the men with him saw the light but did not hear the voice of Jesus. In Acts 9:7, we are told the men heard the voice, but saw no one. There is, of course, no contradiction. The men saw the light, but did not perceive the person of Jesus. They were hearing the voice (literally, *of the voice*), without understanding it (avkou,ontej me.n th/j fwnh/j), and therefore Paul rightly says in his account that they did not hear the voice with understanding (th.n de. fwnh.n ouv h;kousan). Apparently, the men perceived sound, but no speech comprehensible to them. That was because at that time Jesus was speaking to Paul, not to anyone else with him. The Savior personally and effectively called Paul from death to life. Even so, Jesus continues by His sovereign grace and timing to single out individuals to hear His calling of them, while at the same time others but indistinctly perceive the divine dealings with those being effectual called.

Thursday, September 16th - Acts 22: 10

The divine authority and gracious, redeeming power of Jesus was manifested by His accomplishing a complete and rapid change in Paul. He who, with what he thought to be righteous zeal, had previously hated Jesus and hounded His followers, was instantaneously made one who submitted his heart, soul, and hands to Jesus. The first thing Paul did after Jesus revealed Himself to him was to ask the Lord for marching orders, saying, *What shall I do?* Paul had a new Lord, a new Master, a new Commander Whom he from then on served with loving gratitude and most sincere veneration. A sure sign of conversion in anyone is his longing to know the will of the Lord so that he might do it.

Friday, September 17th - Acts 22: 10

In answer to Paul's question, Jesus does not set out the whole course of this new disciple's life. Instead, our Lord gives direction a step at a time. Paul was told to arise from his reverential prostration and proceed into Damascus, from where he would learn what further steps to take. Similarly does our wise and patient Lord guide us a step at a time through our pilgrimage. His Word is a lamp to our feet (Ps. 119:105), showing us only that which we need to take the next step of our advancement in service and sanctification.

Saturday, September 18th - Acts 22: 10, 11

The man who was fully determined and humanly equipped to enter Damascus as an imposing instrument of the law of God—armed with writs of temple authority and warrants for arrest—was led into the city as a blind, helpless child. Such a child he was, in fact, in the school of Christian discipleship. Only the regenerating and converting power of God could have reduced this threatening enemy of the church into being a harmless pupil of Jesus who would grow into a mighty helper of the body of Christ.

Sunday, September 19th - Acts 22: 12, 13

Here Paul introduces Ananias, along with his impeccable Jewish credentials. He was a man devoutly committed to knowing and doing God's Word. His spiritual integrity and industry were observable by all the Jews who knew him. It was through the instrumentality of such a man, one truly converted to Jesus and thus circumcised in heart, that Paul received his sight. Surely it should have been remarkable to the Jews that one so devout should help the man they were at that time trying to kill. By our associates, as well as by our works, we are truly known.

Monday, September 20th - Acts 22: 14-16

From Paul's testimony we learn that Ananias had a larger part to play in the apostle's initial steps of discipleship than we could have gathered from the Acts 9 account alone. We learn from Paul how Ananias was used by God as a teacher of the Word and an administrator of the sacrament of baptism for Paul. Thus, Ananias was used not only to open Paul's physical eyes, but also and especially he was used rightly to focus the apostle's spiritual eyes (Eph. 1:18ff).

Tuesday, September 21st - Acts 22: 14

Ananias spoke by inspiration and with authority of the one, true, living God, Who had graciously established a covenant of salvation between Himself and the patriarchs and their children. By this God, Paul was appointed to three things: 1) to know God's will. He would know the divine will by his personal experience of salvation, as well as by direct, inspired, propositional revelation being given to him by the Lord (Gal. 1:12); 2) to see the Righteous One. The apostle's privilege was to see and his responsibility was to show not simply a written standard of righteousness, but the living source thereof, Who lovingly imputes righteousness to all who believe in Jesus; and 3) to hear messages directly from the mouth of God, and, by implication, to teach and to write what he heard so that what we read in Scripture that Paul had written is the very Word of God to us (1 Cor. 11:23).

Wednesday, September 22nd - Acts 22: 15

Here we learn that the abundant, blessed privileges graciously given to Paul were not for his sake alone. The rich and powerful divine investment made in the apostle was also for the sake of all men, making some clearly and consciously accountable for their rejection of Christ, while drawing others to conviction, conversion, and adoption as children of God. The blessing of our God never terminates upon those initially receiving it, but passes through them to others—all redounding to the glory of the gracious, divine Giver.

Thursday, September 23rd - Acts 22: 15

We have not seen with our eyes or heard with our ears what Paul saw and heard on that critical day on the Damascus road. Though we know and love Jesus, we have not seen Him (1 Pet. 1:8). Yet, by the providence of God, the apostle Paul serves as the eyes and ears of countless souls, living in every generation from his day to the end of time. Through Paul's witness, recorded twice from his own lips and once in Luke's account of his experience (Acts 9:1ff; 22:3ff; 26:9ff), we see and hear the infallible essence of what Paul perceived on the Damascus road.

Friday, September 24th - Acts 22: 16

As Peter saw no reason to delay administering baptism to those who clearly manifested regeneration in Christ and renewal by the Holy Spirit (Acts 10:47), so Paul testifies that the godly Ananias, after instructing the erstwhile Pharisee in the rudiments of the faith, called for the application of baptism to the newly converted Saul. The fact that Ananias called Paul to this action shows that men generally tend needlessly to delay their receiving baptism. Such delay must be overcome, for the Christ who strikes proud sinners down also lifts them up in newness of life. In short, our Lord is more confident in His work for and in us, and is more ready to receive its evidences in the lives of converted sinners than we are to credit it and act upon it. Thanks be to God that those dead in sin respond to the divine call, as surely as Lazarus responded to Jesus calling him from the tomb.

Saturday, September 25th - Acts 22: 16

The convicting work of Christ demolishes the old man, but the converting work of Christ raises up a new creature. Hence, Ananias told Paul to arise and receive baptism, the initiatory sacrament of the Church, which sacrament was instituted by Jesus (Mt. 28:19,20). Three discrete elements are to be noted in this verse. First, Paul was to be baptized, a command given in the imperative aorist middle (ba,ptisai), meaning a once for all action wherein the subject is both passive and active. Paul passively received baptism from Ananias, but he actively consented to be baptized, the new nature in him recognizing the appropriateness of his receiving the sacrament. Secondly, Ananias mentioned Paul's sins being washed away, also in the imperative aorist middle (avpo,lousai ta,j a' marti,aj). This refers to the spiritual reality of the Lord's application and the sinner's appropriation of the cleansing blood of Jesus, to which water baptism corresponds as sign to thing signified. Finally, Paul is to call on the name of Jesus, meaning that he is to continue to manifest trust in and obedience to his saving Redeemer and sovereign Lord. Though we can

distinguish the sacramental sign from these vital spiritual realities, Scripture neither separates nor confuses them, and neither should we.

Sunday, September 26th - Acts 22: 17, 18

In the account of his conversion, which Paul gives to the Jews at Jerusalem, he mentions nothing about his evangelism and trials at Damascus (Acts 9:19-25), but proceeds directly to tell of his return to Jerusalem. He does so to make clear to the Jews that his ministry to Gentiles issued not from his own whim or petulant determination. Therefore, Paul tells the Jews truly that after his conversion he returned to his people at Jerusalem. He further tells them that he entered the temple and occupied himself in prayer. In all of this, Paul proceeded piously and with loving commitment to his fellow Jews and the ordinances of the old economy. Finally, Paul relates how he was overcome by God—put into a state of ecstasy (evksta,sei)—and given direct, divine orders to leave Jerusalem. In addition, he tells faithfully the reason God gave him for his marching orders from Jerusalem, namely, the Jews' indisposition to receive Paul's testimony regarding Christ. Thus, the apostle makes clear that it was due to divine command and to the callousness of the Jews that he left Jerusalem to minister elsewhere. There are reasons for every move we make. May ours be as good and godly as were Paul's.

Monday, September 27th - Acts 22: 19-21

In these verses, Paul informs his Jewish audience how reluctantly he left Jerusalem. The apostle tells how he sought to reason with the Lord against his being sent away from Jerusalem. The spiritual babe reckoned that his great change and his being so well known and respected in Jerusalem would open many doors for him to share Christ. But the sincere thinking of babes is no match for the infinite wisdom and sovereign grace of God. Accordingly, Paul was overruled by his Lord and told to go to the Gentiles. We may be sincere, loving, and zealous in our determination to market the gospel, but it is our Lord who directs us to the part of His vineyard to which He assigns us for His glory, for our fruitfulness, and for the good of many others.

Tuesday, September 28th - Acts 22: 19-21

Paul's revealing to his audience his spiritually immature folly in his seeking to convince God that he should stay in Jerusalem to testify of Jesus, was to the end that the Jews might know how reluctantly he had left them. Paul's was a deep, true, loving concern for his fellow countrymen (Rom. 9:1-5; 10:1,2). He was a Jew of the Jews, a Pharisee of Pharisees, a man zealously convinced that the pious Stephen was deserving of death. When such a man was radically and thoroughly changed by his conversion to Jesus, that man should have been, we would naturally think, the prime choice to be apostle to the Jews. Yet, in the unfathomable purposes and providence of the Lord, this converted Jew of the Jews would be practically fruitless in his ministry among the Jews, while he proved exceedingly fruitful ministering to Gentiles. We who are Gentiles should marvel that the Lord sent to us not the least, but the greatest trophy of His redeeming grace. Let us further note, through Paul's example of obedience, how essential it is that we trust and obey our Lord in all things—especially when He overrules our good sense with His perfect wisdom, grace, and love (Prov. 3:5,6).

Wednesday, September 29th - Acts 22: 22, 23

It is significant that Scripture notes how the Jews listened to Paul telling of his own conversion, but exploded into a violent reaction when the apostle made mention of his divine commission to preach to the Gentiles. Testimony regarding the true Christ, Who is graciously proclaimed to the world, was and is still unacceptable to the Jews. They who proudly conceive of themselves as being worthy of salvation due to their endowments and attainments will have nothing to do with a merciful Savior of sinners. So adamantly do they oppose saving grace that they renew their cries for Paul's death, and emphasize their hatred with all of the commotion recorded in v.23. Such haters of saving grace richly deserved the woes Jesus pronounced:

Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, because you shut off the kingdom of heaven from men, for you do not enter in yourselves; nor do you allow those who are entering to go in. (Mt. 23:13).

Thursday, September 30th - Acts 22: 24

Paul had failed to persuade the Jewish mob or to acquit himself before them. The fault lay in the hearers, not in the speaker, for the Jews demonstrate a malicious prejudice whereby they refuse even to open their minds to the possibility that God could have redeeming purposes for the Gentiles. Thus, the pragmatic force of Rome, in the person of the commander, once more intervenes. Yet, pragmatists will ever do what is expedient, not necessarily what is right. Accordingly, we find the commander neither seeking to reason with the irrational, rioting crowd, nor remanding Paul for a judicial hearing where his accusers would bring charges against him. Instead, the commander determines to torture the truth out of Paul. There are times when every heart around us is closed to and every hand is raised against our testimony to the truth of God in Christ.

Friday, October 1st - Acts 22: 24, 25

The unprincipled rage of the crowd is evident. The unprincipled rashness of the commander is apparent in his determination to scourge Paul. It was, at that time, against the law for a Roman citizen to be scourged, or even for one to be chained without being legally charged with a crime. The commander mistakenly assumes that Paul could not be a Roman citizen entitled to such protection. Thus, he who had initially misjudged Paul, thinking him to be a seditious instigator (Acts 21:37,38), continues to misjudge the man in his custody. In this, though he is relatively more civil than the murderous Jews, he is just as culpable for his mistreatment of the servant of Christ and rejection of the testimony that servant gave. The prejudice of the commander also leads him into violation of the Roman law he was responsible to uphold. All men, no matter how highly educated or powerfully placed, judge poorly and act against their own interests when they refuse to accept the testimony and servants of the Lord.

Saturday, October 2nd - Acts 22: 25

Paul, along with Silas, submitted to an illegal beating and imprisonment at Philippi (Acts 16:22-24, 35-39). Here at Jerusalem, however, Paul asserts his rights as a Roman citizen to prevent himself from being beaten. Was he trying to save himself the pain or the commander from violating the law? Perhaps both factors motivated the apostle. Indeed, far from self-preservation being a low and sinful concern, we are rightly told by our Larger Catechism #135 that the duties of the sixth commandment include, *...all careful studies and lawful endeavors, to preserve the life of ourselves and others....*At Philippi, Paul and Silas submitted to abuse by the magistrates in order that the demonstrated prejudice of those magistrates might thereafter serve as a check against them proceeding with rash prejudice against the saints in the infant church at Philippi. No such considerations obtained at Jerusalem. Hence, Paul demonstrates no inconsistency when he here avails himself of the shield afforded by his Roman citizenship. Those whose citizenship is in heaven do well rightly to understand and employ the benefits of their earthly citizenship as well.

Sunday, October 3rd - Acts 22: 26, 27

Paul asserts his Roman citizenship before the centurion charged with scourging him. It is a tribute to the integrity of both Paul and the centurion that the latter found the claim credible enough to halt the preparations for the scourging and report to his commander. Had Paul lacked integrity, the centurion would have shrugged off the claim to Roman citizenship as a desperate ploy on the part of a criminal. The gravity and moral authority of Paul gave credence to his claim. Had the centurion lacked integrity, he would have proceeded with the scourging and let his commander take any possible blame. We never can tell when the forming of integrity in ourselves or the finding of and relying upon it in others may serve to save us from harm. Therefore, let us seek to cultivate integrity in ourselves and identify and encourage it in others.

Monday, October 4th - Acts 22: 27, 28

The closer Paul is examined, the more substantial he is seen to be. The commander, perhaps with doubting amazement, asked Paul whether he were, in fact, a Roman citizen. The apostle gave a simple affirmation, which, nevertheless, carried weight. For if a man had made the claim to Roman citizenship falsely, he would have faced more serious punishment than a scourging. Yet, the commander expresses astonishment, if not incredulity, when he declares that it had cost him a great deal of money to purchase his own Roman citizenship. Since this commander's name was Claudius (Acts 23:26), he very likely purchased his citizenship during the reign of Claudius, under whose reign Roman citizenship became increasingly available for those with sufficient buying power (Dio Cassius. *History* lx: 17.5). The implication is that Paul, a pitiful man, already badly beaten and torn by this crowd, could not possibly have the wherewithal to have procured Roman citizenship. To this implication the apostle declares that his claim was more sure than that of the commander, for Paul had been born a Roman citizen, inheriting that status from his father, who obtained it we know not how. Not only this apostle, but every believer in Christ, is more substantial in reality than he appears to be in and to the world. The closer a worldly man is scrutinized, the more poor, wretched, and miserable he is seen to be. Closer scrutiny of a saint reveals his imperishable wealth, his high status as a servant, soldier, and son of God, and his felicity in all situations in heaven and on earth.

Tuesday, October 5th - Acts 22: 29

The revelation that Paul was a Roman citizen threw a new light upon all of the proceedings. Now the commander, who was acting as judge of Paul, is himself reduced to being guilty of a crime against a citizen of the Roman Empire. Well was he afraid, for his ignorance, prejudice, and rashness had led him to commit that crime. Yet, if men so greatly fear offending citizens of an earthly kingdom, how much greater cause they have to fear offending a citizen of heaven and a son of the living God!

Wednesday, October 6th - Acts 22: 29, 30

When the truth is known concerning Paul, he is set free and the commander is bound to a more circumspect proceeding. The truth of who we are and what we are about in Christ can also set us free and oblige those around us to afford more careful respect to us. Deception, boasting, exaggerating the truth could never have these wonderful effects.

Thursday, October 7th - Acts 22: 30

The procedure outlined in this verse is the appropriate one to which the commander should earlier have resorted. Magistrates cannot countenance matters being settled by the brute force of a mob or the torture of a prisoner. Accordingly, Paul was set free on the presumption of his innocence, but was summoned to answer charges which the ecclesiastical court was told to formulate and bring against him. Those refusing to prefer their charges in an open court of law are obliged to hold their peace. Certainly our eternal rewards shall be determined not by a mob or a capricious and ignorant civil authority, but by the God Who is the righteous Judge in the open court of His justice.

Friday, October 8th - Acts 23: 1, 2

Paul appears before the Sanhedrin, where Ananias presides as high priest. According to F. F. Bruce, Ananias received his office from a brother of Herod Agrippa, and was one of the most disgraceful profaners of the sacred office. He misappropriated to himself tithes due to other priests, and resorted to violence and even assassination to attain his ends. (*The Book of Acts*, pp. 449, 450). With a duly respectful countenance and fraternal address, Paul opens his defense. He was testifying of his clear conscience before God, when Ananias demonstrated his thuggery by ordering Paul to be struck on the mouth. Hence, the apostle suffers unrighteous blows as did his Master before Annas (Jn. 18:22). The tawdry and capricious nature of the highest courts on earth is seen clearly through how they handle truly righteous men. Here in the highest court of a professing covenant people, a man is punished even before he was charged, tried, or

convicted. The wicked prejudice of this high priest is far greater than the ignorant prejudice of the Roman commander. If a man cannot get a fair trial in the highest civil and ecclesiastical courts, where can he get one? Thanks be to God that our acquittal has been determined in heaven's court.

Saturday, October 9th - Acts 23: 2, 3

Paul's rights were clearly violated by the blow he received. From his offended sense of justice he responds, telling the offending judge that his puny blows will not begin to compare with, but will richly deserve, the righteous wrath of God's hand. The apostle's indignant words proved prophetic. In 66 A.D., Ananias, due to his pro-Roman sentiments and policies, was apprehended by the Jewish insurgents at the outbreak of their rebellion against Rome. He was dragged from an aqueduct in which he had tried to hide, and put to death (Josephus. *Jewish Wars*, II:17.9). Thus, Paul's response was not sinful reviling or retaliation, but righteous prediction backed up by His righteous God. Woe be to any who injuriously touch the Lords' servants.

Sunday, October 10th - Acts 23: 3-5

The fickle members of the Sanhedrin express their shock at Paul's righteous response, although by their silence they had condoned Ananias' wicked abuse of authority. To their charge that he reviled God's high priest, Paul answers most intriguingly. He expresses regret for his having said what he did, but in such a way that ultimately lays blame on Ananias. The apostle says he was not aware that Ananias was high priest. It is possible, due to Paul's long absence from Jerusalem, that he did not recognize Ananias. However, it seems more probable that Paul is saying that he did not perceive, by the renegade action of Ananias, the character or actions of a high priest. Furthermore, Paul cites a portion of a verse (Ex. 22:28) which places Ananias under the rubric not of God's high priest, but of ruler over the people. Rulers compromise, if not sacrifice entirely, the respect due to them when they act like gangsters. Thus, I do not believe that Paul apologizes for his words, but rather expresses his sorrow that the wicked actions of Ananias made such words necessary. If any think the apostle's language too strong, read what Jesus had to say about the scribes and Pharisees in Mt. 23. No more scathing words could have been uttered against the wicked, hypocritical rulers of the people. There are times when it is right to castigate a hypocrite.

Monday, October 11th - Acts 23: 6

The capricious blow ordered by Ananias and the uncritical countenancing of it by the other members of the Sanhedrin sufficiently convince Paul that the council before which he was being tried was, due to sinful ignorance and prejudice, incompetent to give him a fair hearing. Paul perceived by the fruits of their actions that they were really wolves in sheep's clothing (Mt. 7:15-20). The apostle perceived something else as well, namely, that he was amidst a house divided. Pharisees and Sadducees differed greatly from each other in the doctrines they held. When men lack a common commitment to truth and principles of righteousness, they also lack essential cohesion amongst themselves. Men alienated from God are alienated from one another, and, upon closer examination, their associations break down until they are quite alone amidst a sea of enemies. The integrity of Paul exposed this dreadful division.

Tuesday, October 12th - Acts 23: 6

What are we to make of Paul's tactic? Should he have resorted to turning members of the Sanhedrin against each other, instead of his keeping to the point of defending himself and testifying of Jesus? Due to the manifested judicial prejudice of the court, the situation in which Paul found himself was clearly desperate. Do desperate times call for desperate measures? During such crises the vital need is for clear thinking, characterized by quick and accurate decision-making, and faithful, decisive action. The ability so to think and act in a crisis does not arise in the crisis, but is acquired and cultivated by faithful living prior to crises. David's seemingly desperate endeavor to engage Goliath arose not on the spur of the moment, but resulted from much previous practice (1 Sam. 17:32-36). How are we now preparing for the crises we have yet to face?

Wednesday, October 13th - Acts 23: 6

The question remains: Was Paul right to divide the house? In answer, we must acknowledge that Paul did not cause the division, but merely exposed it. Sin caused the division. Sin disintegrates individual lives and corporate bodies. Men who cling to their sin, though they may for a time commit to a coalition with others, never experience true cohesion or communion with them. Societies based on anything but Christ contain within themselves the seeds of their own destruction (Rev. 17:16, 17). In fact, it is only God's wise and holy will that holds disparate sinners together for a season. When it serves for the welfare of His people, the Lord lets the inherent confusion and animosity between sinners reign, each man turning his sword against his fellow (1 Sam. 14:20). Thus, Paul is employing a legitimate tactic whereby he may as one man conquer his divided foes. Here is a man acting as more than a conqueror in this awful situation.

Thursday, October 14th - Acts 23: 6

Was Paul speaking the truth when he claimed to be a Pharisee? As the Christian apostle asserted his Roman citizenship before the Roman commander, so here the Christian Pharisee asserts before this Jewish body that he is a Pharisee. In fact, Paul's is not merely a tactic to weaken his opponents by exploiting their division, but an appeal for his fellow Pharisees to realize their true unity with him in the covenant hope of Israel and resurrection unto eternal, glorious life in Israel's Redeemer. Hence, Paul highlights a facet of who he was in order to draw those committed to that facet of the truth into an acceptance of the whole, liberating truth of God in Christ. May our Lord make us to be so sensitive, so quick thinking and right acting in our dealings with unregenerate opponents who have at least some ground of common agreement with us.

Friday, October 15th - Acts 23: 7, 8

In these verses, Luke explains to the world the nature of the division Paul perceived. This explanation helps us to understand that the division of the Sanhedrin was inherent in it, and not caused by Paul's claim. Such a house divided by humanistic rationalism and crass materialism on the one hand, and pietistic hypocrisy, spiritual pride, and legalism on the other hand, was, indeed, badly divided and destined to fall in 70 A.D. with Rome's sacking of Jerusalem.

Saturday, October 16th - Acts 23: 9

Though Paul appeals for his fellow Pharisees to join him in the full truth of God in Christ, they go no farther than to endeavor to acquit him of the charges against him. The grounds which they urged for the acquittal were inadequate. Paul had seen neither spirit nor angel, but had, in fact, been encountered by the glorious, resurrected God/man, the unique and true Redeemer of Israel. Yet in their statement here, the Pharisees expose the essential inadequacy of their position. Legalists are ever focusing upon their doing nothing wrong, and thereby acquitting themselves before God. The positive heart of the covenant they professed to embrace, namely, vital, loving communion with the Lord Himself, they are content to hold in vague terms of hypothetical possibility, not in terms of a concrete reality vitally and personally embraced.

Sunday, October 17th - Acts 23: 9, 10

Passionate rioting, not righteous conviction, erupts with Paul's cry. Nothing displays men's small-mindedness and lack of righteous principles and grace more than when they let blind passion reign in them. These men clearly do not have the peace of God which results from one's being in a right relationship with Him. Thus, they, who desperately needed to hear Paul's testimony concerning salvation in Christ, drowned out that testimony by their hawking cries and rough handling of the messenger of God. Their ungodly passions injured themselves far more than they did injure or could have injured Paul.

Monday, October 18th - Acts 23: 10

It is not the Pharisees who come effectively to Paul's rescue, but the pagan Romans. Once again the commander saved Paul from death (Acts 21:31,32). He did this not out of any personal devotion to the apostle, but rather from his duty to maintain lawful peace and order. Yet, though the commander was blind to the fact, the preserving hand of God moved this civil servant to snatch the servant of heaven from the jaws of death. As Paul truly wrote, the magistrate is a minister of God (Rom. 13:4). The Lord's servants need never fear multitudes of enemies rioting against them. He Who fed his faithful prophet through the ministry of an unclean raven (1 Ki. 17:5,6), and who preserved His apostle through a pagan soldier, knows how to turn all things—including the least likely persons and circumstances—into servants for our good (Rom. 8:28).

Tuesday, October 19th - Acts 23: 10, 11

Paul's return to the barracks definitely represented a retreat. We may easily put ourselves in the apostle's place. He was compelled to testify of Jesus Christ Whom he had seen and by Whom he was saved. Yet, his testimony to Jesus and the glorious transformation the Savior had wrought in Paul's own life, when given in Jerusalem, resulted not in regeneration and repentance but ignited a riot. Surely, the apostle who so loved his fellow Jews (Rom. 9:1-5), and who so longed to bring the gospel to them (Acts 20:16; 21:13), felt that his ministry had failed completely. At times, our faithfulness to the will of the Lord (Acts 21:14) can result in obvious pain and apparent failure. If the holy apostle experienced such disastrous response to his faithful testimony, should we expect clear sailing and easy successes from our endeavors for the Lord?

Wednesday, October 20th - Acts 23: 10, 11

The Jews are rioting, while Paul is preserved within the barracks of a pagan, worldly power. Who would plan such a thing? Who would consider this to be successful ministry? The closer we examine this situation, the more it appears a complete failure and waste of Paul's time, energies, and gifts. Very likely, the apostle was himself tempted to view his Jerusalem campaign in such grim terms. But from what the Lord says in v.11 we should learn how greatly human and divine assessments of situations vary. Paul was discouraged—perhaps profoundly so—by all he had experienced. The Lord saw nothing but cause for Paul to be encouraged. Whose assessment is right and worthy of acceptance?

Thursday, October 21st - Acts 23: 10, 11

Paul's time in Jerusalem had been tumultuous. His submission to and carrying out of the counsel of the elders in the Jerusalem church resulted in a riot from which Paul was saved by godless Rome. In the hands of the pragmatic Roman commander, Paul was saved from a scourging not by his claim to heavenly citizenship, but by his claiming his natural, Roman birth. Paul is then extracted from the prejudiced Sanhedrin by his claim to be a Pharisee; and, when riot once more erupts, he is saved again by pagan Rome. Where is God and where are the marks of divine blessing in all of this? Men—especially those more interested in successfully marketing the gospel, than in faithfully proclaiming it—do not see the Lord or His blessing in any of this. Yet the Lord stood by His servant when at his lowest, owning him, encouraging him, reckoning him faithful and fruitful in the little thing of testifying to the cause of Christ at Jerusalem, and assigning him to the greater change of being His witness at Rome. What failures of ours does our Lord view today as faithfulness to Him and His cause? What discouragements of ours does our Lord view as encouragements and stepping-stones to higher service?

Friday, October 22nd - Acts 23: 11

At the perfect time, the Lord comes to His servant. In the Roman barracks surrounded by seething Jews, in the darkness of night, and in the darkness of Paul's personal discouragement, the Lord draws near to and stands beside His suffering soldier of the cross. Jesus fortifies Paul, calling his service—which seemed to men a series of desperate failures—not failure, but solemn testimony to His cause. In our darkest hour, our Lord knows where we are. He knows how to stand beside us and grant to us His perfect, fortifying assurance that makes us not victims of but more than conquerors in our most grim circumstances. The

divine commendation quells all of the roars of our enemies and stills our own troubled consciences. This word, this brief visitation, this crumb of divine manna, provided for Paul a feast to fortify his soul to persevere in faithfulness. It should feed and fortify us as well.

Saturday, October 23rd - Acts 23: 11, 12

The encouragement Paul received from the Lord came after the apostle had experienced much trouble and before he encountered much more trouble. Paul knew what he had so far encountered, but what lay ahead was unknown to him. The murderous plot, hatched and developed in secrecy, was another situation demanding the protection and encouragement of God for His servant. The divine commendation given in v.11 encouraged Paul for what he had so far experienced and accomplished. The implicit divine promise, that Paul should witness for Jesus at Rome, fortified the apostle with sure hope for all of his further steps. Our Lord knows perfectly how and when to give His blessed consolation and assurance to His servants.

Sunday, October 24th - Acts 23: 12, 13

These verses make clear the serious and determined nature of the threat forming against Paul—a threat of which the apostle was, until its exposure, unaware. Servants of Christ have more numerous, more subtle, and more murderously determined enemies working against them than they know. These enemies lay treacherous and well-concealed snares. However, we do well to recall that our unseen friends and helpers exceed by far in power and authority our unknown and unseen foes. Those who are with and for us ever exceed those who are against us (2 Ki. 6:15-17; Rom. 8:31ff).

Monday, October 25th - Acts 23: 12, 13

The depth and seriousness of the Jews' hatred for Paul is evident from the fact that they bind themselves by an oath. The urgency of their malicious mission is seen in their determination not to eat or drink until they had killed Paul. They were committed to depriving themselves of the means for sustaining their lives until they had taken the apostle's life. Since men cannot live without water for more than a few days, their mission was made to them most urgent. It would be their lives or Paul's life within days. Their oath resembles that uttered by the wicked queen, Jezebel, against the life of Elijah. When she heard that Elijah had slain the prophets of Baal, she cried against the Lord's prophet: *So may the gods do to me and even more, if I do not make your life as the life of one of them by tomorrow...* (1 Ki. 19:2). Nor were there only a few in this conspiracy. We are told that more than forty undertook the murderous oath. The wicked hate the righteous with a deadly determination. Yet, our God frustrates that determination, exposing how meaningless such oaths are on two counts: 1) they are not carried out; and 2) the wicked, who sanction their oaths with their own lives, do not carry out the sanction against themselves. The wicked may have vicious determination, but their oaths are void of sincerity and power.

Tuesday, October 26th - Acts 23: 14, 15

Not only were there more than forty men involved in the conspiracy against Paul, the chief priests and elders joined the plot. We perceive how ungodly and morally corrupt the leadership of the Jews was from this incident. Murderous conspirators feel free boldly to disclose their plot to these supposedly religious leaders. Moreover, far from these leaders expressing shock at the conspirators' plan, they allow themselves to become part of it, lying to the Roman commander in order to have Paul caught and killed in transit. These murderous Jews together show no regard for the commandments of God which forbid murder and lying. They thus show themselves truly to be of their father, the devil, whom Jesus characterized as having been a liar and murderer from the beginning (Jn. 8:44). They plot against the Lord and His servant, just as the kings of the earth are shown to do in Psalm 2. Well did this crew deserve to be exposed, frustrated, and, in 70 A.D., destroyed by the Romans whom they tried to dupe in their plot. The fury of the wicked is hellish, but the hand of the Lord vanquishes our enemies and their evil designs.

Wednesday, October 27th - Acts 23: 11-15

How could Paul escape this deadly snare, so seriously planned and secretly set? The enemies of the Lord's servants are more numerous, varied, committed, well-connected, and concealed than Christ's servants can ever know. Paul manifests only serenity in face of such danger. Was his bliss based on his ignorance of the plot? That is not likely, as the calm assurance with which Paul reacts when he learns of the plot indicates (v.17). Paul had reason to trust—and he did trust—the Word of the Lord (v.11). God told Paul that he *must* witness at Rome. That divine determination and declaration would anticipate and overcome any and all opponents of the Lord's plan and purpose. It is the heritage of all of the Lord's servants, that no weapon formed against them should prosper (Is. 54:17).

Thursday, October 28th - Acts 23: 16

The deadly seriousness of the enemies of Christ's servants and their carefully planned and concealed plots may appear as cause for great alarm. The essential vanity and foolishness of such wicked plots and those devising them is seen when God uses weak vessels to expose and frustrate them. Paul's nephew discovered the conspiracy. God has His men in the right place at the right time. Paul had not been totally rejected by his Jewish family after his conversion. His sister's son was apparently converted. The young man discovered and delivered critical intelligence to the apostle. God uses one man telling the truth to ruin the deceptive and murderous conspiracy of more than forty men, along with the chief priests and elders. Our heavenly Master needs no majority to accomplish His purposes. One man standing with and for the Lord has an infinite advantage over a host of the ungodly.

Friday, October 29th - Acts 23: 17

Although Paul had received divine assurance that he should witness for Christ at Rome (v.11), yet the apostle shows himself ready responsibly to employ appropriate means to accomplish what God had promised. We do not see Paul ignoring the intelligence brought to him by his nephew. He does not speak only to God in prayer regarding this plot, but he also sends word discretely through his nephew to the Roman commander. The promises of God rightly apprehended by faith do not make us indolent or irresponsibly presumptuous. Rather, we are to make diligent use of appropriate means at our disposal, knowing that the divine counsel, decree, and promise include our right use of such means. As our *Confession of Faith* rightly says, the liberty and contingency of second causes are not undermined, but rather established by the decrees of God (*WCF* III:1).

Saturday, October 30th - Acts 23: 18, 19

These verses give further testimony respecting the integrity and credibility of Paul. Had the apostle lacked such virtues, neither his nephew nor the young man's story would have been heard or believed by the Romans. We are also given an account of how careful the commander had become in his investigation of anything pertaining to Paul. The Roman commander, who would earlier have in careless ignorance scourged Paul (Acts 22:24ff), was now converted into a most sensitive and considerate servant of the apostle. God is here drawing together His own concert of Paul's nephew, the Roman centurion, the commander—to which concert will later be added many Roman soldiers (v.23)—in order to frustrate the conspiracy against Paul. The God who is Himself for us (Rom. 8:31), and who causes all things to work together for us (Rom. 8:28), is at the same time effectively against our foes.

Sunday, October 31st - Acts 23: 20, 21

Luke, in his account, could have simply recorded that Paul's nephew discovered and reported the plot against the apostle. Yet, by inspiration of the Holy Spirit, Luke records in these verses the report Paul's nephew gave to the Roman commander. By this we can see the detailed and thoroughly accurate intelligence the young man had gathered concerning the conspiracy. Our God, who can open a donkey's mouth to speak (Num 22:28), also opens the ears of His instruments to hear, and their hearts to understand,

what the wicked are planning. Through this, the Lord brings to light what the wicked delude themselves into believing is hidden in darkness (Ps. 35:1-8). We who serve the all-seeing and all-knowing God need never fear that we shall suffer for lack of vital intelligence.

Monday, November 1st - Acts 23: 22

Our Lord sees to it that the concealed snares of the wicked are exposed and frustrated. At the same time, He ensures that His plans for our preservation are effectively covered by a screen of discretion. What God exposes, no man can cover; and what He hides, no man can discover (Ps. 27:5; 31:19-21).

Tuesday, November 2nd - Acts 23: 23, 24

The might and authority of Rome are now engaged for the safety of the servant of Christ. Paul had more than forty fasting conspirators against him, but he has more than four hundred well-equipped soldiers with him. Such earthly protection was but a token of the heavenly host surrounding the prisoner of Christ (2 Ki. 6:16,17). He who trusts in the God of heaven as his refuge and shield, shall not find himself in a crisis without plenty of earthly resources and shields.

Wednesday, November 3rd - Acts 23: 25-30

The soldiers guarding Paul represented the power of Rome. The letter written by the commander represented the authority of Rome. God had surrounded His servant with legitimate as well as potent protection. Our God can turn the greatest earthly power into the servant of His people when the wicked threaten those people. How did Luke come to know the contents of this letter? Was Paul allowed to read it, and did he report its substance to Luke? Did Luke research it amongst the official papers in the archives at Caesarea? We do not know. What we do know is that as our God used Paul's nephew to convey intelligence of the conspiracy, so He used some means to convey the substance of the commander's letter to Luke, and through Luke to us. Our Lord wants His people to know—as we come to know through this letter—that worldly magistrates can be moved by His hand to bless His people.

Thursday, November 4th - Acts 23: 26

Here, at the introductory line of this letter, we learn for the first time the name of the Roman commander whom we met in Acts 21:31. The name, *Lysias*, is Greek, while the name, *Claudius*, is Roman. The man in all likelihood took the Roman name when he bought his Roman citizenship (Acts 22:28). Men may procure new names and new positions in this life, but the essential thing is that one be given a new name, status, and hope by the Lord (Rev. 2:17). The new name, new character, new standing, and new hope we receive in Christ come to us free of charge, though they are infinitely precious, having been procured by Jesus paying an infinite price.

Friday, November 5th - Acts 23: 26

Felix is designated by the commander as, *the most excellent governor*. He was, in fact, far from being an excellent man. Felix was the brother of the Emperor Claudius' favorite freedman, Pallas, and he received his position as procurator of Judea through that relationship. The Roman historian, Tacitus, wrote of Felix, saying that, "...with savagery and lust he exercised the powers of a king with the disposition of a slave." (*History*, v: 9). Felix, in Paul's case, will demonstrate his avarice and his being subject to political influence

(Acts 24: 26,27). Men may call such a character *most excellent* out of politeness or conventional respect, but such characters as Felix must, with all men, appear before God, the righteous Judge, who will not be impressed with their petty titles. All men without Christ, whatever earthly titles they may hold, will then be weighed and found wanting. Thanks be to God that we have eternally upon us the name which is above every name.

Saturday, November 6th - Acts 23: 27, 28

A mixture of truth and misrepresentation is found in this letter. It is true that the commander rescued Paul from the Jews' death-grip. Yet he did not do so because he knew Paul to be a Roman. At first the commander thought Paul to be a seditious Egyptian (Acts 21:37,38), then was ready to scourge him as a no account trouble-maker (Acts 22:24). It was only after the commander learned that Paul was a Roman that he released him from his chains and put him before the Sanhedrin to face charges. The truth regarding Lysias' manifold miscalculations and mistaken actions in his dealings with Paul the guilty commander seeks to cover with his silence. Worldly men ever fudge the facts to make themselves look better in the dim light of this fallen, shadowy world. Scripture gives us the true picture, and in the day of judgment men will have to give account of who they truly are and what they truly have done. Thankfully, we who are in Christ have a perfect Advocate who will speak for us in that day.

Sunday, November 7th - Acts 23: 29, 30

In v. 29, the commander acknowledges that the Jews' controversy with Paul was religious, not civil. No criminal charges were brought by the Jews against the apostle. Why then did not the commander set Paul free? The conditions under which he had apprehended Paul, as well as the knowledge the commander had of the plot against Paul's life led Lysias rightly to keep the apostle in custody. Freedom amidst such determined hostility would have meant certain death for Paul. Accordingly, the commander sent Paul to Felix, the regional procurator, providing for the apostle a protective escort and a letter recommending that Felix give serious attention to Paul's apparent innocence. God was through this arrangement shielding His servant, moving him a step at a time to his final assignment of testifying for Jesus at Rome. Similarly, our Lord moves powers in heaven and on earth to protect us in our service for Him.

Monday, November 8th - Acts 23: 31, 32

While Paul was nearest to Jerusalem and most exposed to threat from the Jews, he had 470 Roman soldiers protecting him. Once they reached Antipatris (about 35 miles from Jerusalem), the 400 soldiers left the escort and returned to their garrison. Paul was thus left with 70 cavalry soldiers. When earthly resources diminish for us, we should not wrongly reckon that the arm of our Lord has grown tired of shielding us, but rightly reckon that the hand of our God is at work for us, progressively removing us from danger.

Tuesday, November 9th - Acts 23: 33-35

Paul arrived at Caesarea safely. He was conducted there by the martial might of Rome and introduced to the procurator with the commander's letter, representing the authority of Rome. Once Felix, by ascertaining the place of Paul's birth, made certain that the apostle was a Roman citizen, Paul was further accorded almost royal treatment, being kept not in a jail, but in the official residence of Felix, which had been opulently constructed and appointed by Herod the Great. While the Jews were intent upon killing Paul, God was protecting him and ensuring that the best the world could offer was put at his disposal. Though His hand is unseen, God makes things as small as ravens (1 Ki. 17:2-6) or as great as the Roman Empire work for the welfare of His servants.

Wednesday, November 10th - Acts 23: 1

Paul's conspirators may have been frustrated, but his persecutors followed him to Caesarea. There the apostle would face a most imposing and sophisticated prosecution by the Jews. No one less than the high

priest, Ananias, came to press the charges against Paul. He was accompanied by elders from the Sanhedrin, and together they were represented by a professional attorney. Judging by the name of the attorney, Tertullus, he was likely himself a Roman. This force formed a juridical Goliath against a single servant of Jesus—a servant who came dressed in the name of the Lord and armed only with the truth of the Lord. Those serving Christ in any age may find themselves up against most formidable foes. Yet, we know who always prevails.

Thursday, November 11th - Acts 24: 2, 3

Tertullus begins his prosecution with a course of standard flattery for the judge. The peace Felix attained was accomplished through ruthlessness which hurt the Jews as much as anyone. The reforms he carried out were repressive. If Tertullus and his clients were not in the court and power of Felix, they would not have flattered him, but would instead have cursed him. The professed attitudes of worldly men change with the wind. The attitudes, words, and actions of followers of Christ remain constant in season and out of season.

Friday, November 12th - Acts 24: 4

In this verse, Tertullus utters a subtle line. He expresses sensitivity for the personal comfort of Felix. He apologizes for taking up his time, and promises that he shall quickly make things clear so that the judge will be able to see what a criminal Paul is. The wicked ever think it a quick and easy task to cast the righteous in a sinister light. But we shall see Tertullus fail to have Paul condemned as a criminal. The apostle shall stand before Felix and in the highest courts of Rome as a tower of innocence and integrity. Only justice which is severely perverted can find servants of Christ guilty of any crime.

Saturday, November 13th - Acts 24: 5, 6

The oily attorney finally states the charges against Paul. Two of the charges are religious, namely, that Paul caused religious dissensions, and that he had desecrated the temple. One charge is civil, namely, that the apostle was ring leader for a sect deemed seditious by the Romans. The religious charges are laid in hopes that Felix would remand Paul back to the Sanhedrin, thus ensuring a certain death sentence. The civil charge had as its aim Paul's execution by the Romans. Clearly the Jewish agenda was Paul's death, not a discovery and vindication of the truth. Here the Jews were guided not by the skill of an attorney so much as by the malicious subtlety of the devil, the accuser of the brethren, who weaves his lies to have the appearance of truth.

Sunday, November 14th - Acts 24: 6, 7

The *Received Text* (RT) of the New Testament, upon which the King James Version is based, has a longer v.6 and a v.7 which many modern translations leave out. Notwithstanding disputes regarding the authenticity of the longer reading (see a King James Bible or consult marginal reading in modern versions), the substance of what Tertullus says, as recorded in the RT fits his overall presentation. He claims that the Jews arrested Paul, yet their mobbing him and almost killing him can hardly be characterized as an arrest. He further claims that Lysias took Paul from the Jews violently, when, in fact, the commander stopped the violence rather than incite or inflict it upon the crowd. These Jews not only twist the Scriptures in their refusal to acknowledge Jesus as the Christ, they also twist the truth about their actions. All such twisting will result ever and only in the twisters' own destruction (2 Pet. 3:16).

Monday, November 15th - Acts 24: 8, 9

Tertullus concludes his prosecution of Paul with an expression of confidence that he had painted so clear and true a picture of Paul's offenses that anyone with eyes to see would judge him guilty. The Jews certainly accepted and urged the lies about the apostle. Yet, this confidence is based on delusion. The wicked deem all men vulnerable to their blackening attacks. They likewise deem all judges as susceptible to delusion as they themselves are. The wicked think it easy to demonize the righteous, and to have them

condemned. However, lies do not so easily stick to the righteous, nor are they, whom heaven's Judge has justified, so easily condemned, even by sinful earthly judges.

Tuesday, November 16th - Acts 24: 10, 11

The simplicity and sobriety of Paul's defense contrasts completely with the extravagance, subtlety, and flattery of Tertullus' prosecution. Paul does not flatter Felix. Rather, the apostle acknowledges the governing and judicial experience of the procurator, expressing confidence that Felix would be guided in his deliberations by his experience which made him attuned to the pestiferous ploys of the Jews. Paul then admits that he came to Jerusalem, not to stir up a riot, but rather to worship God. He does not exaggerate, he does not color the truth, he does not hide facts. Sincere servants of Christ need never expand or sanitize versions of what they have done. Our deeds in the Spirit, however they may be misconstrued by wicked and rash men, can stand the closest scrutiny of earth's courts as well as that of the courts of heaven.

Wednesday, November 17th - Acts 24: 12

Paul denies that he discussed anything or spoke so as to cause trouble anywhere. He was truly in Jerusalem not even to evangelize, but to worship God. This is the true key to our understanding Paul's determination to be in Jerusalem for Pentecost (Acts 20:16). The great apostle went to Jerusalem not so much to work for Christ as to worship Him. Yet, whereas Paul's service for the Lord was everywhere hated and opposed by the Jews, in Jerusalem his worship of the Lord galvanized the Jews into a satanically inspired, murderous mob. We do well to note from this that while Satan hates and resists those working *for* the Lord, he unleashes his special fury against those devoting themselves *to* the Lord. Read Mt. 26:6-13 to see this same hatred against devotion to Christ.

Thursday, November 18th - Acts 24: 13

With Paul's admission that he entered Jerusalem to worship God (v.12), his defense essentially rests. In this verse the apostle rightly maintains that the burden of proof lay with the Jews, and that they had failed to establish it. Deeds wisely and timely done, such as Paul's worshipping God in the temple at Jerusalem during Pentecost, can stand up in any court. Such deeds need no elaborate and desperate defense.

Friday, November 19th - Acts 24: 14, 15

At this point, Paul shifts from the defense to the offense. He had adequately cleared the field of the false charges against him, but he did not stop there. Now he positively confesses what he believes as a testimony to his accusing countrymen and to Felix, his earthly judge. Paul declares that he lives according to the Way, namely, a pilgrimage begun by regenerating grace and justifying faith in Jesus, leading through sanctification and unto glory. In this, he declares that he serves the one, true, living God, that he knows and believes the whole counsel of God, and that he aspires in all of this not after earthly comfort and competence, but eternal life through the resurrection wherein sheep and goats would be finally, fully, and forever separated by the Judge of all men. Such testimony as this brought a challenge, and, indeed, charges against all in the court who were not at peace with the Lord of the Way.

Saturday, November 20th - Acts 24: 16

By expressing the basis of his life and service in vv.14,15, Paul declared the true standard by which his life would be judged. Paul was accountable not to fallen, finite judges, who could be swayed by subtle lies and pleasing flattery, or misled by insufficient or erroneous information. The apostle was accountable to an omniscient Judge who knows men's thoughts and intentions as well as their most secret actions (Heb. 4:12). His aim, by the grace and power of God's Holy Spirit, was to maintain a clear conscience before that supreme Judge, and then, so far as possible, before men. Implicit in this declaration is a challenge for all men so to live, and thus to enjoy the undisturbable peace and fortifying assurance of a clear conscience before God and men, wrought by faith in and obedience to the perfect God/Man, Christ Jesus.

Sunday, November 21st - Acts 24: 17, 18

Paul returns to his behavior in Jerusalem, going over the ground again and in greater detail in light of the perspective of his commitment to the highest standards of the Way. He declares that he returned to Jerusalem to bless his countrymen by his presentation of alms, and to worship his God by presentation of offerings. That such activity represented neither crime nor sin was made evident by no one in Jerusalem objecting to it until the Asian Jews came to stir up the riot. The true worship of God harms no one. It honors and pleases the Lord and it benefits man—not only the worshipper, but all men whom the worshipper is directed and empowered by the Lord to serve with time, talent, and treasure.

Monday, November 22nd - Acts 24: 18-21

Paul was pursuing pure worship, but the Asian Jews sought to pervert it into a capital crime. Those Jews, Paul insinuates, were the cause of the riot. Yet, having done their worst, they were nowhere to be found so as to answer for their wicked deeds. They may evade their accountability to a Roman procurator, but they would not evade their accountability to Paul's God and their Judge. Meanwhile, Paul concerns himself with accounting for his own actions. Thus, he admits his crying out in the Sanhedrin, a cry which was true and which truly occasioned the revealing of the essential division of that ecclesiastical court. Paul does not confess his cry (that he was being tried for the resurrection) as a wrong he had done. Rather, he repeats the true issue here before Felix, endeavoring to turn the trial to that central and essential issue for which all men must stand trial. Better that we be persecuted in earthly courts for our belief in the resurrected Christ, than that we live comfortably with wicked men, only to find ourselves one day facing the resurrected Christ not as an Advocate, but as an offended Judge.

Tuesday, November 23rd - Acts 24: 22-27

The effects of Paul's defense are set out in vv.22ff. If we judge by immediate appearances, it would seem that the apostle had achieved little, if anything, by his defense. Paul remained a prisoner. The Jews remained hostile toward him. Felix, who manifested some degree of spiritual conviction (v.25), seems to have remained as politically pragmatic and corrupt as ever. We may wonder why the Word of God records this seeming waste of more than two years of the great apostle's life and ministry. Yet, there should be no doubt that Paul was where God wanted him, and was doing what the Lord had assigned him. There are seasons when our Lord appears to forget His servants, allowing them to waste away in forgotten and fruitless corners. Yet, who can calculate what growth in grace takes places in a saint's soul when he is so divinely placed? Who can calculate what seeds are planted for future harvest? Let us neither fear nor flee from such apparently wasting seasons (2 Cor. 4:16-18).

Wednesday, November 24th - Acts 24: 22, 23

Paul may have had some justifiable hope that Felix would see through the malice of the Jews and dismiss their fabricated and groundless charges (v.10). But his hopes were disappointed. Felix delays final determination of Paul's case on the pretext of his requiring more evidence from Lysias. In reality, Felix had hidden agendas (vv. 26,27) which had nothing to do with justice. Thus, the apostle remains a prisoner, yet with a degree of freedom to minister. Only the light of glory will reveal how wisely and fruitfully Paul used his limited freedom. We are sure that he worked to plant many gospel seeds. Nor was he alone in his confined ministry. The representative of Roman law may have let Paul down, but the apostle's brethren did not. The imprisoned servant of Christ is not forsaken, but rather is ministered to by his brethren in Christ. Such consolations may seem small, but they are more than sufficient, being crumbs from the Master's table, and thus more than a feast for those humble enough and with faith great enough to feed upon them (Mt. 15:21-28). Earthly judges and rulers may disappoint our hopes, but our God who is our true hope, never disappoints. He simply redirects our hopes to be fixed entirely upon Him and His provision.

Thursday, November 25th - Acts 24: 24

We were told in v.22 that Felix had a somewhat detailed knowledge of the Way. That knowledge did not result in his embracing the Way or submitting himself to the Living Way, Truth, and Life (Jn. 14:6). But when Felix was joined by his wife, Drusilla, together they sought to hear more from Paul. The Roman procurator and his wife certainly needed to know Christ by faith. The blindness and waywardness of their lives were evident in how they met and married. Drusilla was the youngest daughter of Herod Agrippa I. As a girl, she was engaged to marry a Syrian prince, but the engagement was broken when the prince refused to be circumcised. She was then given in marriage to Azizus, king of Emesa (a petty state in Syria). When she was but sixteen, Felix saw her, was smitten by her remarkable beauty, and connived with a magician to lure her from her husband to himself, she thus becoming Felix's third wife (Josephus, *Antiquities* XX:7:1ff). For all of the high worldly position of this couple, they were but sinners in need of salvation. Felix had sinfully attained his wife; she had sinfully consented to his overtures. Whatever the sin, however deep, dark, and damaging it may be, faith in the living Redeemer, Christ Jesus, is the only saving provision. Paul offers nothing other than, nothing less than Christ, and neither should we when we have opportunity to address needy, guilty sinners.

Friday, November 26th - Acts 24: 24, 25

From yesterday's reading we came to know something about the sinfully contracted marriage of Felix and Drusilla. Hence, we can better appreciate why Paul speaks to them concerning righteousness and self-control, which they obviously lacked. He further arraigned them, as it were in anticipatory fashion, before the throne of God's final judgment. The prisoner wrongly charged and unjustly held thus presents this guilty governor and his wife with the only way to have their sins forgiven, namely, through faith in Christ Jesus. If ever two people needed an Advocate to stand for them at the final judgment, it was they. However, rather than avail themselves of the loving and merciful forgiveness afforded by Jesus, these two take their leave, preferring to hide amid distractions rather than stand as renewed souls before God. Better to be a Paul in prison with Christ than a Felix on the governor's seat without Christ.

Saturday, November 27th - Acts 24: 24, 25

Felix, when confronted by spiritual realities, grows fearful. For relief he tries an inadequate solution as old as the days when Adam sought to hide in the garden from God. Felix claims that he is busy with pressing, practical affairs to the extent that he must relegate the consideration of the state of his immortal soul to some spare time to come. So far as we know, that time never came, though Felix did summon Paul again repeatedly (v.26). It may have been different with Drusilla. The Word does not say that she grew frightened and took to flight. Were seeds of faith planted and did they grow up to fruition in her? We shall not know until the light of the final day. Meanwhile, let us note that now is ever the day of salvation—not some future time men presume they shall have.

Sunday, November 28th - Acts 24: 25

Paul is a prisoner in chains. He has no weapons except the Word of the Lord, no armor except the spiritual armor of God. Yet when he speaks of spiritual realities, the man who had power of life and death over him is reduced to fear, as though he were arraigned before his own judge. In vain did Felix seek comfort by dismissing Paul, for though the messenger of salvation was sent away, the message could not be so easily cast off. This demonstration of the convicting authority and power of the Word of God vindicates the wisdom of God in ordaining that Paul stand trial before Felix.

Monday, November 29th - Acts 24: 26, 27

These verses reveal to us that Felix, like most men, had hidden agendas in his dealings with Paul and the Jewish accusers. The governor should have had the dispensing of impartial justice as his highest concern. Instead, we learn that he sought personal profit, hoping for a bribe from Paul and political support from the Jews. Such hidden agendas, alas, drive most dealings in this fallen world. They shall not, however, remain forever hidden. Nor shall they be allowed by God ultimately to prevail. What monetary profit can

compensate for the loss of one's immortal soul? What political support can secure one from the judgement of the omniscient and righteous Judge of heaven and earth? Thanks be to God that we in Christ have purer and higher motives which are commended, rather than condemned, by our Lord.

Tuesday, November 30th - Acts 24: 26

After Felix fearfully dismissed Paul, we are told that the governor frequently thereafter sent for the apostle in order to talk with him. It would seem that conviction was leading to conversion for Felix, except for the fact that Scripture reveals the governor's true motive in his talks with Paul. Here we are reminded that, for those dead in sin, money and even the hope for money can speak louder than moral imperatives. Felix put to death his conscience rather than his sin. He lived in hope of receiving bribe money—a ridiculous hope in view of Paul's massive integrity—and spurned the sure hope of glory in Christ. He would have been infinitely richer and happier had he lost every penny to gain Christ (Phil. 3:8).

Wednesday, December 1st - Acts 24: 26, 27

Felix kept Paul in prison for more than two years. He confined Paul not because the apostle was guilty of any crime, but because the governor hoped to extort ill-gotten financial gain from Paul, while at the same time sacrificing justice to please the Jews. Felix, a man patiently a prisoner to his passions, was a slave to many low urges and wicked people. He shows himself to be a base lackey, not fit to govern. Yet in the providence of God this man received a clear offer of that salvation which would give him peace, make him right with God and man, and more than a conqueror in any situation. He declined eternal treasure. Hence, he passed from the scene, living out the rest of his life before facing the heavenly Judge, before whom neither money nor Jewish support would do him any good. Meanwhile, Paul remained in prison as more than a conqueror, as an ambassador in chains, seeking to be faithfully bold in Christ more than to be at civil liberty (Eph. 6:18-20). Of those two, whom do we most admire and seek to imitate?

Thursday, December 2nd - Acts 25: 1-3

Two years passed. Paul remained in prison, while the Jews continued to nurse their murderous malice towards him. Here was a seemingly unending stand-off. Yet, after two years things began to change. A new governor succeeded Felix. Porcius Festus ruled only briefly, but his succeeding Felix seemed to make things better for the Jews and worse for Paul. Festus was appointed procurator by Nero (Josephus. *Antiquities* xx:8:9), and from the account of him in Acts we find him to be, as was Felix, ready to do the Jews a favor (Acts 25:9). Festus was inexperienced as governor of Judea, and he appears to have thought and acted in pragmatic terms, reckoning that the powerful Jews at Jerusalem could do more to make or break him than could the single, pathetic, and bothersome prisoner left to him by Felix. But we shall see even in this apparent change for the worse that God causes all things to work for good for His servant.

Friday, December 3rd - Acts 25: 4, 5

Paul's enemies wasted no time seeking to exploit the inexperience of the new governor. They asked Festus to send Paul for trial in Jerusalem. Festus refused the request, not because he cared for Paul but because he cared for his own ease. Festus wanted to stay in Jerusalem for only a few days. He was intent upon returning to Caesarea, the seat of regional government, and did not want to inconvenience himself by sending a prisoner to Jerusalem, then having to return there himself to hear the trial. God sinlessly uses even the selfishness of ungodly men to preserve His servant.

Saturday, December 4th - Acts 25: 6, 7

Once more the Jews bring their charges against Paul. The accuser of the brethren perseveres in his wicked attacks, using these wicked men against Paul. The implication of the wording in v. 7 is that they had multiplied their charges. However, they could not multiply their proof in support of the charges, for they had none. The righteous must expect repeated attacks from the wicked. At the same time, the righteous, so

long as they are clad in the armor of God, should expect to withstand all such attacks. The devil seems tireless, but he is never triumphant.

Sunday, December 5th - Acts 25: 8

Although the Jews multiplied their charges, Paul's defense remained unchanged. He who is righteous before God and men need not embellish his innocence. We do well to stand unchangeably in the strength of the Lord in the evil day (Eph. 6:10ff), and resist the temptation to be lured from our refuge by the magnified and multiplied accusations of the wicked.

Monday, December 6th - Acts 25: 9, 10

Festus may not have been infected with avarice as Felix had been, but he was driven by the same pragmatic political instincts which characterized his unjust predecessor. Thus, Festus shows himself to be no impartial judge, no righteous governor, but a capricious dispenser of political favors. Such an attitude, if acted upon, would have in Paul's case been deadly. Yet, the apostle, who surely knew of the plot to ambush him in transit to his trial at Jerusalem, mentions nothing about that. It is sufficient that he put the burden on Festus to give reasons why the trial should be transferred to Jerusalem. There was, of course, no legitimate reason for such a move. Festus could hardly have revealed his true motive in seeking the transfer. Yet, the governor, knowing he should dismiss the charges against Paul, refuses to do so. The righteous may fall into the power of the wicked, but never into their authority. Festus had power to send Paul to Jerusalem but not authority to do so. Considering that Felix had been removed for his improprieties as governor (Josephus. *Antiquities*, xx:8:9), Festus did well to respect the bounds of his authority. It is always authority, not sheer power, which determines the issue for God's people.

Tuesday, December 7th - Acts 25: 11, 12

Neither the malice of the Jews nor the caprice of Festus can budge Paul or secure his conviction. Yet the stand-off reaches a critical stage at this point. Paul rightly determines that so long as he stood before his hostile and murderous Jewish enemies to be tried by a manifestly corrupt judge, he was bound not to receive a fair hearing or just judgment. Thus, the apostle takes the initiative. He declares that he is willing to be punished for wrong, but that he is not willing to be a victim to the political caprice of Festus. Therefore, Paul appeals to the highest court, namely, to Caesar at Rome. Festus agrees to send Paul to Caesar. Thus, the apostle's determination to visit Rome (Acts 19:21) and the Lord's decree to send Paul to Rome (Acts 23:11) coalesce through Paul's appeal and the decision of Festus. Here is a clear instance of God causing all things to work together for His glory and for the good of his servant.

Wednesday, December 8th - Acts 25: 11, 12

It may surprise us that Paul appealed to Caesar when we bear in mind that it was Nero who was Caesar at that time. However, Nero's madness, wickedness, and persecution of Christians did not break out until A.D. 64. Paul's appeal was made in A.D. 59, when Nero was still under the tutelage of the Stoic philosopher, Seneca, and had as prefect of the praetorian guard a tower of honesty and integrity, Afranius Burrus. Paul had favorable experience with Roman courts previously (recall Gallio in Corinth, Acts 18:12ff). But the apostle's trust was in God, not in any man, and so while he appealed to Caesar, he committed himself to the Lord, and to fulfilling the Word of the Lord which told him that he would testify of Jesus in Rome (Acts 23:11). That the apostle would be going to Rome as a chained prisoner made little difference to him, for he knew the gospel could not be chained. Such knowledge gave him confidence, while knowing that he was inseparable from the love of God made him more than conqueror even in those grim circumstances.

Thursday, December 9th - Acts 25: 13

Before Paul was sent to Rome, he was to have further opportunity to testify before other worldly rulers (cf., Acts 9:15,16). King Agrippa and Bernice came to Caesarea to pay their respects to the new governor, Festus. These two were vile characters who, though highly placed in terms of worldly position, had no respects to offer worth anyone's receiving. We may here recall Herod Agrippa's death in Acts 12, where he, being a worm of a man was fittingly eaten by worms. This Agrippa was that Herod's son, and Bernice was that Herod's daughter. Agrippa and Bernice were brother and sister to each other and respectively to Drusilla (Acts 24:24). Bernice was married to her uncle, another Herod. After that Herod's death, it was reported that Bernice lived incestuously with her brother, Agrippa. She contracted another marriage with Poleme, king of Cilicia. She demanded that he be circumcised, and he agreed, due mainly to her riches. But Bernice soon left Poleme to live once again incestuously with her brother, King Agrippa (Josephus. *Antiquities*, xx:7:3). Thus, these rulers lived more like beasts—like rats—than like men and women made in the image of God. One need not look in the gutters to see evidence of human depravity. Those on earth's thrones often exceed in licentious depravity what the lower classes of men could never conceive or execute.

Friday, December 10th - Acts 25: 14-16

The implication of v.14, which says that Festus and the incestuous couple spent many days together at Caesarea, is that they indulged themselves in idle leisure. When they apparently ran out of diversionary topics for discussion, Festus brought up the matter of Paul's imprisonment and the charges against him. The wicked give little serious thought to their abusive offenses against the righteous. They shall be made painfully to ponder such offenses in the final day.

Saturday, December 11th - Acts 25: 14-16

The reason Festus mentions Paul's case to Agrippa is found in vv.26,27. The procedure for appeals to Caesar required that the lower court send a record of the case to the higher court. By his own account, Festus could record no charges against Paul. Why then, it should be asked, had Felix left this man in prison? Why did Festus keep him in prison? There were reasons for Paul's detention, but they did not include the apostle's guilt. The malice of the Jews conspired with the avarice and political corruption of the Roman governors to keep Paul in jail. The afflictions of the righteous result not from their deserving, but rather from the evil determination of the ungodly. Yet, what the ungodly intend for evil, God overrules for good (Gen. 50:20). Therefore, we need never fear the persecutions of the wicked, but rather should open the eyes of our hearts to see the blessing of God in such persecutions (Mt. 5:11,12). Then we shall be preserved from fearful despondency and bitter despair.

Sunday, December 12th - Acts 25: 16

Festus gives an account of his dealings with Paul slanted very much in favor of himself. The governor presents himself as a diligent upholder of the law. It was according to his adherence to Roman law, Festus claimed, that he would not hand over a man without him having faced his accusers. Had not Paul two years previously done just that? Had Agrippa been so inclined to scratch the procedural surface of this case, he would have asked this. Then Festus would have been on the spot and Paul would have been out of prison. But a man as morally guilty as Agrippa would not be inclined to scratch or to let be scratched surface appearances. Only genuine innocence invites and practices holy scrutiny (1 Jn. 4:1).

Monday, December 13th - Acts 25: 17

In this verse, Festus casts himself as a judge diligent to render justice. The fact that Paul had not been convicted of the charges against him, and yet remained in prison, belied the claim of Festus that he was a diligent dispenser of justice. Yet the corrupt governor could hardly state the true reason that he kept Paul (namely, that he wanted to do the Jews a favor, v. 9). Even law breakers are compelled to give the appearance that they respect and uphold the law. How wonderful that those in Christ need not put up such pretense, but rather delight themselves in the law God has written upon their hearts.

Tuesday, December 14th - Acts 25: 18, 19

By Festus minimizing the charges against Paul, he tacitly admits that they are groundless. According to Festus, the whole fuss was over some minor points of contention with the religion Paul and the Jews shared. In fact, Festus could be presenting the case in even more contemptuous terms. For the word translated *religion* (deisidaimoni,aj) was likely from the mouth of the rather cynical Festus (cf., Acts 26:24) uttered negatively, as *superstition*. Festus could not more clearly have confessed himself as being incompetent to try such a case. Yet, he kept Paul in prison, wrongly presuming the apostle's guilt rather than his innocence. The so-called minor points at issue were not superstitions, but entailed the substance of salvation, a matter which could not be more vital and less criminal or sinful.

Wednesday, December 15th - Acts 25: 18, 19

It is shocking to read how casually Festus mentions Paul's testimony to the resurrection of Jesus. Paul did more than assert that Jesus had been raised from the dead. The apostle bore solemn testimony to that unique and amazing truth. Moreover, Paul marshaled evidence to support his testimony. Read 1 Cor. 15:1-8, especially v.6 for some of that evidence. All of this, Festus chose to treat as of no account. In doing so, he did more to reveal his own character as an ignorant swine, than he did to impugn the priceless pearl of Christ's resurrection.

Thursday, December 16th - Acts 25: 20

At this point, Festus tells a bald lie. He did not seek to remand the case to the ecclesiastical court at Jerusalem so as to make certain that Paul got a more intelligent and competent trial. In v.9 we are told that it was because Festus wanted to do the Jews a favor that he tried to have Paul sent back to Jerusalem. The godless must lie to cover their guilty tracks, even before their fellow sinners. What shame will be theirs when, in the inescapable and all revealing light of the last day, their every thought, intention, and undetected deed will be fully revealed.

Friday, December 17th - Acts 25: 21

Festus further misrepresents Paul. The apostle did not appeal to be held in custody of Festus. He rather appealed for Festus to exercise his judicial authority to acquit and release him (v.10). It was Festus' failing to do that which obliged Paul to seek a just decision from a higher court. When Felix and Festus persistently refuse to acquit Paul, despite their knowing that he was innocent, echoes are heard of Pilate's failure to release Jesus (Mt. 27:17-26). When ungodly judges stand on pragmatism rather than righteous principle, they become dupes of the wicked, serving to miscarry justice and cover their own crimes with lies. Such corruption leads to bondage. Only the truth and a commitment to righteousness set men free.

Saturday, December 18th - Acts 25: 22

Agrippa did not point out the logical errors or procedural improprieties in Festus' handling of Paul's case. We would not expect a man so heedless of the moral law that he would live as though married to his own sister to be too scrupulous regarding any regulations. Besides, Agrippa was curious to hear Paul. Agrippa, who had a reputation for knowing the Jewish law, clearly did not abide by that law. He satisfied his curiosity rather than formed his character by the law. Hence, he most likely sought diversion from the apostle, whom he designated as *the man*. But in Paul, he would find himself confronted by more than a man, even the risen Jesus, whom Pilate designated *the man* (Jn. 19:5), unwittingly declaring Jesus to be God's perfect Man for all ages. When men toy with Christians and their testimony of Christ, they find that they have grabbed a tiger by the tail.

Sunday, December 19th - Acts 25: 23

The day came for Paul to give his fullest, most eloquent, and powerful testimony to date. Gathered to hear him were the vile and corrupt characters who had engineered themselves into places of power in this fallen world. Agrippa and Bernice gathered with Festus and other notables amid impressive pomp and shows of power. Festus commands and the single, languishing prisoner is brought before them. The prisoner is shorn of all but the imperishable robe of righteousness, the peace of a justified status with God, a sanctified conscience before Him, the great and precious promises of the Lord, the sure hope of glory, and every other spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ. Infinitely more rich, noble, and powerful is that single Christian prisoner than all the pompous crew put together. That crew needed their pomp, as a fig leaf to cover their empty hearts and naked and miserable souls. Neither the gospel nor its herald needs carnal adornment.

Monday, December 20th - Acts 25: 24, 25

Festus addresses Agrippa as king and the others as gentlemen, inviting them to examine the prisoner for guilt. Festus declared that thus far he could find none in Paul. The apostle, being right with God, was also right with his fellow man. The Jews hated Paul without cause; the Romans held him without reason. Let Festus, Agrippa, even Caesar himself try Paul—none would or could find any guilt in him. Paul would rightly have been acquitted in any court on earth or in heaven. The same could not be said of his accusers, or of his judges, or of these gentlemen gathered to amuse themselves by listening to this prisoner. They were bound by worse than chains and prison cells. They carried guilt and bore corruption which their shallow pomp could never cover or wash away. Better that we be innocent prisoners for Christ than guilty, pompous fools without Him.

Tuesday, December 21st - Acts 25: 25-27

Though he was charged by determined and capable enemies, and examined repeatedly by two judges and their high ranking associates, no guilt could be found in Paul. Yet, the apostle was retained as a prisoner to be sent for further trial at Rome. This rightly embarrassed Festus, who virtually begged Agrippa and company to find or fabricate charges to justify Paul's continued imprisonment and pending trial before Caesar. Paul's situation was like that of his Master. Though Jesus was innocent, He inexorably went to the Cross; though Paul was innocent, he just as inexorably was treated like a criminal. In this fallen world, innocence is to sinful men an embarrassing, inconvenient exception to the rule of corruption. It is an exception which some may acknowledge and even admire begrudgingly. However, all who are not born again into the Kingdom of God will eventually conspire to imprison or destroy that innocence. This is what our Master and His apostle chose to encounter. We do well to count the cost as we follow the Lamb.

Wednesday, December 22nd - Acts 25: 25-27

Paul was no more than was Jesus a helpless, though innocent, victim of the malice of wicked enemies and the corrupt incompetence of worldly judges. Jesus went to the cross by the ordaining of God and by His own willing determination. In the same way, Paul went to Rome by divine decree (Acts 23:11) and by his own insistence. The apostle would thereby arrive at the capital of the Roman Empire not as he would have expected. In Paul's prayers and plans to visit Rome (Acts 19:21, Rom. 1:15), it is unlikely that he ever thought he would arrive there as a prisoner. How greatly the life of this once proud and respectable Pharisee had changed. He had become all that he once hated and sought to imprison and put to death. He who had sought and largely attained the respect of men, all the while being guilty before and alienated from God, now was at righteous peace with God, but deemed worthy of imprisonment and death by men. We need not wonder which state Paul preferred (Phil. 3:1-11). It is for Paul as we should reckon it to be for ourselves, better to be an ambassador for Christ in chains of men's making, than to be free amongst men while bound by the power, dominion, guilt, and corruption of sin.

Thursday, December 23rd - Acts 26: 1-3

A great contest now begins between representatives of worldly power and the prisoner of Jesus Christ. Festus had shown himself an incompetent and capricious judge (Acts 25:9). Agrippa and Bernice were morally depraved, living as they were incestuously. These corrupt characters and many others like them (Acts 25:23) composed the court convened to hear Paul's defense. The apostle had up to this point endured the repeated charges of the Jews, their murderous hostility and intriguing, as well as corrupt and incompetent judges. Yet all arrayed against him could not convict him of any crime or sin. Still, Paul remained in prison, as though he were a convicted criminal. Now he is called upon to make yet another defense for himself. We might expect to find him wearied of doing so, yet he expresses sincere gratitude for yet another opportunity to testify of saving grace in Christ. We should never grow weary of telling the story of that redemption which not only has delivered us from sin, but which also defends us against the onslaught of sinners.

Friday, December 24th - Acts 26: 1-3

Paul does not concentrate upon the moral depravity so evident in Agrippa, thus treating the king with contempt. It is the prerogative only of the King of kings so to laugh such morally bankrupt earthly monarchs to scorn (Ps. 2:1-5). Instead, the servant of Christ rightly concerns himself with the background and training of Agrippa, which equipped him accurately to analyze Paul's case. In spite of Agrippa living in violation of God's holy Law, he retained a personal inclination to study and know all that pertained to the Jews. It is a curious phenomenon that so many of these Herods were fascinated with spiritual things (Lk. 23:8,9). However, passionate fascination is infinitely removed from saving faith. Therefore, for the glory of God, for the good of King Herod Agrippa's own soul, and, last of all, for his own defense, Paul admonishes the king to listen patiently to the greatest, the most vital and eternally significant testimony that monarch would ever hear.

Saturday, December 25th - Acts 26: 4, 5

In these verses, Paul recounts his Jewish and Pharisaic roots. He says essentially the same thing he did in his earlier defense (Acts 22:3ff), except that here he merely alludes to his upbringing, since, before this company of Jewish leaders, he and his background were well-known, whereas the rioting crowd in Jerusalem had not been so familiar with his personal history. Paul declares that he was a Hebrew of Hebrews, and, as a Pharisee, he set the standard for diligent observance of the rules of that strict sect. No man could or would have charged Saul of Tarsus with crime or sin. By his declaring this, Paul not only engages his Jewish audience, he also sets the stage for showing how necessary is that gracious divine redemption in Christ for all men, especially those less compliant with the Law than had Paul been. If the best of men need salvation, how much more necessary is it for the worst?

Sunday, December 26th - Acts 26: 6, 7

In this defense before Agrippa, Paul emphasizes the fact that he is on trial for the hope of Israel. It may seem a strange counter charge for Paul to make that the Jews persecuted him because he stood for their hope. Yet the Jews had practically smothered the true hope of Israel with their perversions of the law and additions to it. A hope, which is not seen, may more easily be distorted than one that has been realized. The pure and ancient promise of God to the patriarchs reached its fulfillment in the person of Jesus Christ. It was the letter of the Law by which the Jews sought to perfect themselves, in complete contradiction to the hope of gracious divine redemption so clearly spoken of in the Law and portrayed in the temple and its sacrifices and offerings. Such self-perfection was neither the hope of Israel nor the intention of God. The living Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of Jew and Gentile, was the promise of God to Abraham and his true children (Gen. 22:8-14; Jn. 8:56; Heb. 11:17-19).

Monday, December 27th - Acts 26: 6-8

The hope of the Jews was eternal life through Messiah who would raise the dead. The Pharisees, at least, believed this in theory. Thus, they were aroused to Paul's defense when in the Sanhedrin he cried out that

he was on trial for the resurrection from the dead (Acts 23:6). However, the scandal for the Jews was that the promise had become provision in the person of Jesus, who had been crucified and raised from the dead, according to the testimony of Paul and the rest of the apostles. The Jews refused to believe in the resurrection as an event having actually occurred for Jesus, the first born of the new creation. Were the Jews to credit Christ's resurrection, they would be obliged to credit all of His claims. Hence they gave lip service to their belief in the resurrection, while in their hearts they amputated that major doctrine so as to avoid their surrender to Jesus as their gracious Redeemer. Many today maintain the same refusal.

Tuesday, December 28th - Acts 26: 8

True children of Abraham should have no more trouble believing that God could raise the dead than their father had (Heb. 11:17-19). As to the actual fact of Christ's resurrection—in distinction from the granting of resurrection as a theoretical possibility—is it credible that the small band of fearful disciples could have overcome the guards at the tomb to remove the body of Jesus and fabricate a resurrection? Would such disciples have suffered and died for such a fabrication?

Wednesday, December 29th - Acts 26: 8-10

There is plenty of evidence for the resurrection of Jesus. Only those set in a determined hardness of heart remain blind to it. Since the evidence is obvious, Paul does not tabulate it, but he rather goes on to tell of his own hardness against the testimony to Jesus. God did not convert Paul with logical argumentation, but rather through manifesting the risen Christ to him. Accordingly, the apostle does not argue but testifies of God's saving work, rightly reckoning that God would use that, and not superiority of speech or wisdom, to win some of his hearers to Christ (1 Cor. 2:1-5). If God could convict Paul's heart, which was as zealously hardened against Jesus as any could be, He could do the same with any member of this pompous audience.

Thursday, December 30th - Acts 26: 9-11

Paul tells how he himself had experienced that religious zeal without knowledge which issued from irrational rage and led to irreligious endeavor. Paul, prior to his conversion, not only charged believers in Christ, as the Jews were now charging the apostle, but he also repeatedly succeeded in convicting the saints and having them punished for their fidelity to Jesus. In fact, the unconverted Paul was in certain respects worse than his accusing Jewish enemies. The Jews merely wanted Paul executed. While Paul had put more than his share of Christians to death (v.10), his real aim was to compel believers to renounce their faith in God through Christ Jesus (v.11). Making men martyrs is bad; making them blasphemers is infinitely worse. What power on earth could withstand such an awful foe? Yet, the believers in Christ had greater than a power on earth.

Friday, December 31st - Acts 26: 11-14

No power on earth could withstand the determined assaults of Saul of Tarsus. Yet, the higher power of heaven's King intervened. Christ arrested the proud Pharisee, not while he was alone, not while he slept, not while he endured personal crisis and thus sensed his vulnerability. At the very height of his murderously zealous career—while Saul marched with soldiers to Damascus with religious authority and commission to do his worst—Christ encountered him. Nor did the Pharisee sneak about at night to do his murderous work, but with bold confidence, in full light of day, Saul proceeded to attack the Church. In his strength, Saul was met by infinitely greater strength; in the brightest natural light, he was met by heavenly light, the glorious brightness of which revealed the darkness of this natural world and of the heart of the natural man. What could these puny Jews with their murderous charges against Paul do to him, when the apostle had surrendered to and now enjoyed the protection of such heavenly majesty, might, power, and authority?

Saturday, January 1st - Acts 25: 13, 14

In his first testimony, Paul said that at the sight of the heavenly light he fell to the ground (Acts 22:6,7). In this account we learn that the celestial glory subdued not only Paul, but all who were with him. In his first testimony, he said it was a very bright light (Acts 22:6), while here he indicates the degree of brightness, that it blazed brighter than the sun at its greatest intensity. This is the third time we have had an account of this event (Acts 9, 22, 26), yet it never ceases to strike us with awe. Each telling reveals more details of the glory of God. The puny pomp of Paul's judges is as dingy rags in comparison with the holy glory of the Lord—which glory now resided in the heart of the prisoner before those judges.

Sunday, January 2nd - Acts 25: 14

Saul recounts how the risen Christ addressed him in the language of the covenant people. The Pharisee was asked why he had been persecuting Christ through his persecuting the Church of Christ. Implicitly, the Jews and the judges before whom Paul at this point stood should have been convicted by this testimony. He who attacks the Church or any member thereof, attacks the Head of the Church. The risen Judge demands that such persecutors give an account for their attacks, but they cannot. Men may think themselves justified in ignoring or attacking Christ, His Church, and His ordinances, but when they come face to face with Him, they shall be seized by a guilty silence.

Monday, January 3rd - Acts 25: 14

In the earlier accounts (Acts 9:4; 22:7), the phrase about kicking against the goads is omitted. Here that significant detail is mentioned, and it informs us of several things. We learn that Paul had been under the convicting goads of Christ prior to his Damascus road experience. The Pharisee must have been conscious of his master's prodding hand through the testimony of the Christians he persecuted—especially Stephen. Indeed, when we read of the triumphant glory with which Stephen died (Acts 7:54-60), we cannot avoid concluding that Paul was among those cut to the quick by Stephen's testimony (Acts 7:54), covering his ears to avoid hearing the convicting truth (Acts 7:57). The apostle knew from personal experience what it was like to suppress the truth in unrighteousness (Rom. 1:18), just as his current hearers were also doing. The way of such suppression is hard.

Tuesday, January 4th - Acts 25: 14, 15

Saul had never heard his name called as he did that day on the Damascus road. The voice of Christ, calling and repeating the name of Saul, conveyed to the Pharisee the knowledge that he had come face to face with his Master, whom he rightly addressed as *Lord*, and against whose wise, loving, and righteous proddings he had been kicking in defiance. Saul knew he had come face to face with One who knew him better than he knew himself, One who had divine right to direct all of his life. Saul came face to face with Jesus, who had been crucified but who clearly had been resurrected from the dead. Nothing in life or death, heaven or hell could hide the guilty Pharisee—or any other man—from the penetrating gaze of the living One, who was dead, but is alive forevermore (Rev. 1:18).

Wednesday, January 5th - Acts 26: 16

The Lord leads Saul from his pondering a most convicting question, to which he had no answer, to a gracious re-direction of the Pharisee's life. Paul tells how he was commissioned a minister of God's Word and a witness to the resurrected Christ. The witness of Paul would be infallible and authoritative, for Christ revealed Himself directly to His apostle, not only on the Damascus road, but at various times thereafter (Acts 22:18-21; 23:11). Saving grace establishes new direction for a believer's life, as well as a course of living devotion to the Lord.

Thursday, January 6th - Acts 26: 16-18

The previous accounts of Paul's conversion in Acts 9 and 22 mention nothing of this commission given by Christ to Paul. Whether the apostle received the commission while he was on the Damascus road, or

thereafter, through Ananias (Acts 9:15,16) and his own Jerusalem trance (Acts 22:17-21) is immaterial. Paul testifies truly that he was a chosen and commissioned servant of the risen Christ. When men hear the words of this apostle, they are hearing the very words of God through him.

Friday, January 7th - Acts 26: 16, 17

The risen Christ gave Paul advance warning of Jewish and Gentile hostility against his mission. Thus, when Paul encountered such hostility (Acts 9:23-25; 13:44-46; 14:19; 16:19ff; 19:23ff), he was not disheartened by it, but rather strengthened in the sure knowledge that the Christ, whose omniscience forewarned him, was also the sovereign Lord, whose omnipotence would protect and sustain him. Nor should we be surprised by fiery ordeals which come against us as we seek to live godly lives in Christ Jesus (2 Tim. 3:12; 1 Pet. 4:12-14).

Saturday, January 8th - Acts 26: 17, 18

Christ promised to deliver Paul not from hostile enemies, but from the harm they intended him. Indeed, the Lord was sending His servant into the very thick of those who would oppose him. Yet, Paul was equipped with the full armor of God for the purpose neither of merely surviving his enemies' attacks, nor of destroying them, but of converting them. Thereby Jew and Gentile would be delivered from the true and most deadly of enemies—sin and Satan. Thus, even as Paul was at this point surrounded by his accusers and judges, he was right where he and his Lord wanted him to be, declaring saving grace to those surrounding him.

Sunday, January 9th - Acts 26: 17, 18

Paul was commissioned to accomplish a most delicate and infinitely difficult mission. No power on earth could do what he was called by Christ to do. He was to open blind eyes of the heart so that men would turn from the dark, cold, emptiness of their alienation from God to the light of His liberating truth and empowering love. He was to liberate captives from the evil and impoverishing domination of Satan, turning them to the God of grace, in whom they would receive the infinite riches of forgiveness of sins, inheritance in glory, and sanctification—all through their faith in Jesus. This Paul did, through the grace and power of the Lord. And though the apostle is long dead, still his testimony rings loud and clear from Scripture with its full power of salvation.

Monday, January 10th - Acts 26: 19

This verse may be said to contain the motto of Paul's Christian life. From heaven's glorious King he was graciously granted a vision of the glorified Redeemer, and commissioned to declare to men blinded by sin and Satan what he saw. He did not refuse, neglect, grow slack or fail in his calling (2 Tim. 4:7), and we are infinitely the gainers thereby.

Tuesday, January 11th - Acts 26: 19, 20

By the arrangement of God, Paul became a seer for all men. What he beheld of the heavenly vision of the glorified Christ was, by God's directing and Paul's diligent obedience, published to all men, enabling them, through the apostle's eyes and faithful proclamation, to see and serve Christ. Paul is not merely giving a personal defense here. He is publishing tidings for all men in all ages, bringing every thought captive to Christ, leaving every soul accountable to Him.

Wednesday, January 12th - Acts 26: 21

Due to Paul's obedience to the commission of the glorious and gracious God of all the earth he was being persecuted. In the very act of his worshipping this God, whom the Jews professed to worship, the apostle

was seized with murderous intent by the Jews. The nature of God and the terms of His salvation are such that men either surrender to them or seek to destroy them. The Jews would not have been content to ignore or merely imprison a man like Paul, who so clearly proclaimed the gospel. Devotion to Christ or attempted destruction of Him are ultimately the only two alternatives for all people.

Thursday, January 13th - Acts 26: 22

Despite the wicked and murderous intention and endeavor of the Jews, Paul stood before his accusers and judges as a vibrant witness to Christ. The preserving power of God upheld the apostle because he obediently and faithfully proclaimed to all men—to the Jew first, but also to the Greek (Rom. 1:16)—the fulfillment of the ancient covenant of grace. That fulfillment and Paul's declaration thereof were in perfect conformity to the Law and prophets; obviously, the murderous ire of the Jews was not.

Friday, January 14th - Acts 26: 23

Paul summarizes his testimony here into a pure distillation of the gospel. Christ came not to rule in a carnal, worldly sense over a proud people who thought themselves perfect. He came to serve, to suffer, to die for a sinful people, as the Lamb of God to take away their sins. The resurrection of Jesus authenticated not only the Old Testament types, shadows, and prophecies which pointed to the fact that the Christ had to suffer (Lk. 24:25-27), but also validated the claims of Jesus that He was the Christ. No liar or deluded person making the claims of Jesus would ever be resurrected. That God raised Jesus from the dead proclaims by glorious deed that Jesus is the light of God come into this dark world to give light and life to all who believe in Him.

Saturday, January 15th - Acts 26: 24

The weight and penetration of such testimony as Paul was giving causes Festus to cry out, ridiculing the apostle. Here is the nervous ranting of a heart convicted but not converted. There is no evidence to support the contemptuous assertion of the governor. It is simply made as a desperate attempt to evade the claims of Christ. Festus represents a whole class of people in all ages who insanely and suicidally seek to cover the light of the world with contemptuous words.

Sunday, January 16th - Acts 26: 24, 25

The ridicule Festus casts at Paul is itself ridiculous. How could learning, how could the acquisition of knowledge, make one insane? Is Festus really asserting that ignorance is sane bliss? Yet, Paul does not treat the ridiculous charge with the contempt it deserves. He respectfully counters the charge that he is insane with an avowal that he speaks the sober truth. By his doing so, Paul clears the precious gospel of this charge and implicitly offers again the saving good news to Festus. The treasure of the truth of God in Christ is self-authenticating. It does not need our feeble reasoning support and argumentation. A sober offering of the gospel is sufficient to convict and convert the chosen of God, while, at the same time, silencing the carplings of those refusing its liberating power.

Monday, January 17th - Acts 26: 25, 26

Paul turns from the contemptuous Festus and appeals to Agrippa. Once men show themselves to be committed swine, the pearls of truth are not to be cast before them (Mt. 7:6). Paul therefore turns to the king who had demonstrated at least a curiosity concerning spiritual things, and who had himself sought the learning which Paul had acquired and which Festus despised. Here the apostle's appeal is to the knowledge of Agrippa. The more a man knows the truth, the more apparent it is to him that what God has done in Christ accords with the truth.

Tuesday, January 18th - Acts 26: 26, 27

- Acts 26: 26, 27

In v. 26 Paul appeals to Agrippa's knowledge. In v. 27 the apostle appeals to the king's conscience. Paul very pointedly asks Agrippa whether he believes that which he knows from Scripture. Belief goes beyond mental apprehension to personal application. Yet, Paul is asking in a very particular sense whether Agrippa believes the prophets of the Old Testament. He is not asking whether the king believes their message so much as whether he believes that they are the inspired spokesmen of God. In this latter, limited sense, Paul has no doubt that Agrippa believes and says so. Yet, it is but the shortest of steps from one's believing the authority of Scripture to his believing its message of salvation. How could one believe that God said something and not believe in what God said?

Wednesday, January 19th - Acts 26: 28

The wording of Agrippa's response to Paul is somewhat ambiguous. The phrase, *in a little* (VEn ovli,gwl), most naturally should be taken to mean *in a little time*. By this Agrippa may mean that time for reflection will persuade him to be converted, or that if Paul's reasoning goes on for much longer, the king will bow the knee to the King of kings. Thus, Agrippa confesses the powerful effect of Paul's testimony. However, Agrippa does not allow a little more time. His is a case of the many who are almost persuaded to embrace the Savior. To them, the fact that life or death, heaven or hell should depend upon their personal faith and trust in Jesus Christ is too much. For Agrippa, the fact that this issue should be thrust upon him so personally by a prisoner prompts him to seek to evade the claims of Christ. After all, Agrippa is also confessing that for him to be persuaded fully would mean his stepping down from being a king to being a common Christian, a servant of Christ. Surely he knows now that such a stepping down would have lifted him from sin, Satan, and the fires of hell to the very height of glory.

Thursday, January 20th - Acts 26: 29

Paul emphasizes that he did indeed intend for his appeal to be personally for Agrippa, as well as universally for all others. No person could possibly be the loser for his trust in and service for Christ. What loss may be suffered is only apparent, and is rightly counted as rubbish in comparison with the infinite value of one's knowing Christ (Phil. 3:7, 8). Paul desires that all men know Christ as he does, if possible, without the sufferings endured by the apostle. But even in his chains, Paul was an ambassador for Christ in chains (Eph. 6:20). As such, his chains were more valuable and noble than Agrippa's crown.

Friday, January 21st - Acts 26: 30-32

Agrippa, Bernice, and Festus all quickly harden themselves against the convicting power of Paul's testimony. They resume their pompous professional pose and withdraw to deliberate over Paul's case. They do what others before them had done, namely, recognize Paul's innocence in fact, but refuse so to recognize it judicially. Paul's appeal to Caesar could have been rendered unnecessary had these judges dismissed the charges against him. Unlike Paul, these earthly rulers determine to be disobedient to the heavenly vision shared with them by the apostle. They turn aside not only from Paul, but from Paul's Lord. They seek to wash themselves of responsibility for Paul's plight, but they fail to do so as patently as they had failed to be washed of their sins by the Christ whom Paul proclaimed (v.18) and whom they refused. Paul's case set out the evidence and claims of Christ which demanded a verdict. These judges endeavor to pass the case along to someone else, but they were from that day onwards accountable to the Judge of all men. Due to their refusal to commit to Christ, in the last day they will not be judges but will be themselves judged and found wanting.

Saturday, January 22nd - Acts 26: 32

Ultimately, it was not Paul, referred to as *this man* by Agrippa, with whom the king and company had to do. They had been arraigned before the God/Man, Christ Jesus, and He would not fail righteously to exercise His judicial authority over them. Nor was it in their power to set Paul free or to bind him. The

apostle was free from condemnation in Christ, and his chain only bound him to his divinely appointed duty and privilege to testify of Christ in Rome. It was Agrippa and his friends who were in bondage of the worst kind, and, alas, they refused to be set free by the gracious and glorious Son of God.