

Sunday, September 3, 2023 *"Paul's Journeys Part2"*

Philippians 4:11-13 Acts 18:23 to 28

We continue to look at Paul's Journeys as he responded to Christ Jesus call to preach his story of good news to others. After Paul had been saved, Jesus called him to tell others his story and the Message of Jesus Christ.

Paul's 3rd journey was about 4 years and took him to revisit the churches he had established in his first trip. He also went to Ephesus, where he taught many people first in the synagogue and then in a hall. He baptized people in the name of Jesus with the Holy Spirit. And he performed many miracles. By staying in one location for a longer period of time, Paul received and answered correspondence from the churches which needed his help and guidance. Biblical scholars state that what is included in our New Testament books are only a few of the letters which had been exchanged. And when one studies each of the letters, it is almost like playing "Jeopardy!" as Paul's responses are given to questions asked by the church. Often the concern which is the basis of the question is answered by Paul through his teachings which we learn are not only for that particular church but all churches which focus on Jesus Christ. This is why these letters are so important for our understanding of what the role and rules of churches were like then and how the church has evolved through history. Whether it is through leadership that was well trained or by those who took on the role of leader because the Spirit of God moved so many people to seek answers.

As Paul was travelling to the churches and teaching, preaching and healing those in need, he knew that what he was doing was not agreed to by the Jewish synagogue leaders and followers. He was Jewish, a Roman citizen yet was a learned man who in his own words was called by Christ to tell his message to the ends of the world. AT that time the world was small- and when Paul travelled to Corinth this is when the message started to head westward and beyond because people believed that Jesus came to die and rise again for the purpose of forgiveness and the gift and promise of eternal life.

Paul believed this message wholeheartedly- he put his life on the line many times he went to jail, and even saved those in prison with him. He wrote letters to the young churches

who needed help yet did this under the watchful eyes of both the governors of the times and with the knowledge of both the governors Felix and Festus and eventually King Herod Agrippa II. Festus did not know what to do with Paul because his message was appealing to so many people yet there were uprisings and problems galore.

Paul appeals to the fact that he is a Roman Citizen and deserves to be heard in a Roman court but this takes time for him to get there! Shipwrecks and people opposing him hinders his speedy trial and when he does arrive in Rome he is put under house arrest. He cannot leave the house but because he is in one location for a while Paul is able to write to the churches and individuals with whom he has shared ministry to teach and encourage them what he has learned.

Paul's missionary journeys are regarded as being successful—Paul was a church planter and he not only planted seeds of hope for the sake of Christ's gospel, he followed up with letters, visits of encouragement and sending others to help as needed. He saw the plight of orphans and widows not being cared for and had the churches receive special gifts to assist them. But what is amazing about Paul's life is that he did what he could while facing persecution for martyrdom against the accepted religion of the state for that time. He knew and believed in Christ Jesus for Jesus had changed his life. He even tried to convert King Herod Agrippa II for his salvation because Paul believed that all should come before Christ for all had sinned.

Paul's ministry was not just sitting and talking it was taking action. It was putting his life at risk for Jesus' sake. Paul took upon himself the ministry which he shared with others in order that people would come to know the living Christ as Saviour. SO that they would be reconciled with God and know the righteousness of God. His main theme in the letter to the Romans emphasizes this: Romans 1:16-17 All people are sinful and stand condemned before a perfect and righteous God. It is only through faith in Christ and his sacrificial death on the cross that mankind can renew a right relationship with God."

Paul's missionary journeys are examples of a life lived fulfilling Christ's call to serve. Now today many of us are probably not going to do what Paul did because the message of Jesus

Christ has been shared around the world, right? Everyone has heard about him and there is no need to be like Paul and pick up and go to where people are? Or is there?

How many of us who are listening realized the depth of Paul's outreach lasted so long? OR that it began with Jesus speaking to him and leaving him in Rome under house arrest later being martyred for his faith? When we think of people of faith who live out their lives we must look at who we are right now and the context in which we live.

Paul's opposition arose in the synagogues of the local community and with those who questioned his authority as one who persecuted Christians until he shared his Damascus light story of Jesus. But how many of us have a story to tell and are willing to tell it?

Where is the opposition today? Opposition is not in the gathering space we call the church, but in social media for this is where most people will turn before they go anywhere or do anything. Since the pandemic a business/ church or news/ learning anything is only as good as what is presented online or livestreamed/ televised or shared in some way. But do we recognize this? Paul's world is not like today—nor are we like 1st century churches. But what is common to both is simply the message of Jesus Christ which has not changed. We are still sinners who fell short of God's glory and in need of forgiveness and reconciliation. We are people who need Christ Jesus in our lives to help us to live right with others and in service to God.

IN Paul's early churches, those opposed to his teachings were people who had been raised in the established and accepted teachings of the synagogues. Today especially in the last 5-10 years the church has gone through significant transition which includes many people who are from different faith backgrounds or no experience in a church setting. But what is being sought is community- to share to be and know how Jesus makes a difference in one's life.

Paul emphasized this as he ministered to others- he looked at the needs of the people, responded and then shared Christ's message. This is how we too are now sharing in ministry. We need to meet people where they are so that we might find common ground.

As we reflect on Paul's ministry and journey—his life was not easy- but Jesus never promised him or us a life of easy. All Jesus did was ask Paul, why he persecuted his followers. Once Paul realized what Jesus was doing in asking this, his eyes were closed so that he could see a new way to live. And when Paul could see again, he needed to learn more.

What do we need to do? We need to learn more about Jesus; about his ministry and about what we are called to say and do as brothers and sisters. This means taking time to read the Bible, to understand the stories and the teachings and to make these stories known to others through what we say and do. Paul's life and journeys impacted many people. Our lives may do the same-if we believe and follow Christ; if we learn and grow in faith and tell others the good news that we have received and how we live it out.

Paul's missionary journeys took place in 1st Century after Christ rose from death. Here we are 20 centuries later figuring out how they still impact our lives as we learn how to be the church and put our faith in Christ Jesus. This is something worth doing and we will do so if we have faith strong enough to touch the lives of others in Jesus' name.

Billy Graham states: Our faith becomes stronger as we express it; a growing faith is a sharing faith. How are you sharing your faith?

Let us pray.

God of grace and love, we praise you and thank you for Paul's story and how his life and faith impacted so many people as your church was being established. From his teachings we learn who we might be and become as a church family and as faithful people whose lives have been touched by your Spirit. When we consider Paul's life journey we are grateful to know his story; help us to fully live our lives in you as we continue to fulfill our life's journey. We ask this as we come to you and share our thoughts in silence. >... Amen