**Round Top Church Christian Fellowship**

Two Weeks till the Resurrection - April 4, 2021

 ***Pacifying Sinful Culture Does Not Work - Acts 21:1-40***

*Pastor ~ Matthew Diehl*

March 21st In the Year of Our Lord

(Anno Domini A.D.) 2021

(Unless otherwise noted, NAS is quoted.)

Once again, we begin our review of Acts with a travel log (Verses 1- 8) that provides details of importance. The New Testament has many eyewitness accounts. Luke is the writer of Luke-Acts. We get the sense that Luke’s account of Paul’s journeys is from an “eyewitness”, due to the amount of detail. This chronicling of travel is not an overview or cliff note version of events. The reason all these cities are recorded in Paul’s travels is because it is important for the audience to see the Gospel that he carried touched many towns and cities. We know this is true because the Good News of Jesus Christ spread rapidly by personal testimony in the first century.

The travel log also provides an authentic personal message. If you were to go on vacation and traveled by foot or boat, every stop is important. You would take pictures and be able to give a description of each place. We travel by car or plane and are photo-junkies. I bet each of us have hundreds (if not a few thousand) photos in our cellphones. The detail proves that these accounts are not fables or mythological stories but personal accounts worthy to be passed onto others.

**Acts 21:1** When we had parted from them and had set sail, we ran a straight course to Cos and the next day to Rhodes and from there to Patara;

 2 and having found a ship crossing over to Phoenicia, we went aboard and set sail.

 3 When we came in sight of Cyprus, leaving it on the left, we kept sailing to Syria and landed at Tyre; for there the ship was to unload its cargo.

 4 After looking up the disciples, we stayed there seven days; and they kept telling Paul through the Spirit not to set foot in Jerusalem.

 5 When our days there were ended, we left and started on our journey, while they all, with wives and children, escorted us until we were out of the city. After kneeling down on the beach and praying, we said farewell to one another.

 6 Then we went on board the ship, and they returned home again.

 7 When we had finished the voyage from Tyre, we arrived at Ptolemais, and after greeting the brethren, we stayed with them for a day.

 8 On the next day we left and came to Caesarea, and entering the house of Philip the evangelist, who was one of the seven, we stayed with him.

**Phillip’s Four Daughters**

 Here is another example of women gifted by God that live the ministry He has planned for them. There is not any detail given describing how Phillip’s four daughters carried-out their calling. We can assume because they are called “prophetesses” that they spoke an audible language. We do not know if they spoke on Sunday morning in a worship service. We do know they were not quiet. We know that they were unable to go home to ask their husbands a question after a worship service (1 Corinthians 14:34-35). How do we know this? Because they were not married (daughters had not known a man - verse 9).

 9 Now this man had four virgin daughters who were prophetesses.

See also Acts 2:17 AND IT SHALL BE IN THE LAST DAYS, God says, THAT I WILL POUR FORTH OF MY SPIRIT ON ALL MANKIND; AND YOUR SONS AND YOUR DAUGHTERS SHALL PROPHESY, (Nehemiah 6:14, Luke 2:36, Judges 4:4, Exodus 15:20)

**Agabus, the Prophet**

 The next account concerns Agabus who does something dramatic with Paul. We see here again that Paul receives a warning that if he goes to Jerusalem there will be trouble for him. Last week, we noted that Jesus told Paul when He commissioned him on the road to Damascus that there would be pain and suffering (Accts 9:16) for him due to the ministry he would perform.

**Acts 21:**10 As we were staying there for some days, a prophet named Agabus came down from Judea.

 11 And coming to us, he took Paul's belt and bound his own feet and hands, and said, "This is what the Holy Spirit says: 'In this way the Jews at Jerusalem will bind the man who owns this belt and deliver him into the hands of the Gentiles.'"

 12 When we had heard this, we as well as the local residents began begging him not to go up to Jerusalem.

 13 Then Paul answered, "What are you doing, weeping and breaking my heart? For I am ready not only to be bound, but even to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus."

 14 And since he would not be persuaded, we fell silent, remarking, "The will of the Lord be done!"

**Jerusalem at Last**

 15 After these days we got ready and started on our way up to Jerusalem.16 Some of the disciples from Caesarea also came with us, taking us to Mnason of Cyprus, a disciple of long standing with whom we were to lodge.

 17 After we arrived in Jerusalem, the brethren received us gladly.

**Paul Reports to James and the Elders**

 18 And the following day Paul went in with us to James, and all the elders were present.

 19 After he had greeted them, he began to relate one by one the things which God had done among the Gentiles through his ministry.

 20 And when they heard it they began glorifying God; and they said to him, "You see, brother, how many thousands there are among the Jews of those who have believed, and they are all zealous for the Law;

 21 and they have been told about you,

that you are teaching all the Jews who are among the Gentiles to forsake Moses,

telling them not to circumcise their children nor to walk according to the customs.

 22 "What, then, is to be done?

They will certainly hear that you have come.

 23 "Therefore do this that we tell you. We have four men who are under a vow; 24 take them and purify yourself along with them, and pay their expenses so that they may shave their heads; and all will know that there is nothing to the things which they have been told about you, but that you yourself also walk orderly, keeping the Law. (Numbers 6:1-6)

 The meeting Paul had with James and the Elders reveals the balancing act that members of the “Way” had to carry-out living in a Jewish dominated culture. The leader’s goal is to have Paul carry-out the Nazarite vow in order to witness that he has not rejected the Law of Moses. In addition, we see there is a distinct difference between Jewish and Gentile converts through the eyes of James and the Elders. The Gentile converts are asked not to do a few things as decreed in Acts 15 at the Jerusalem Council. (Abstain from eating meat sacrificed to idols and from sexual misconduct.) Gentiles are not viewed as having to closely adhere to the Law of Moses.

19 "Therefore it is my judgment that we do not trouble those who are turning to God from among the Gentiles,

20 but that we write to them that they abstain from things contaminated by idols and from fornication and from what is strangled and from blood. (Acts 15:19-20)

It is obvious that the leadership is still in a transformation mode. Their understanding of the Gospel Message is developing. Paul appears to be the leading voice accurately teaching the pure Gospel (Saved By Faith, Ephesians 2:8), while James and the Elders in Jerusalem are processing through Jesus’ teachings. In fairness, James and the Elders are in the capital city of the Jews and are surrounded by an oppressive religious legal system that could order their execution. The appeasement to the Law of Moses as a mechanism to be made right with God and to stay in good standing with God is almost a necessity if they want to stay alive. Paul had been traveling about Asia and Greece, populated mostly by pagans, running into trouble with Jews because he went to Synagogues. In Jerusalem, the whole population, excluding Romans and a few foreigners, were Jewish. But note – that Paul did not stop the pure Gospel Message during his mission trips which did get him arrested and left for dead.

**Concerning Gentiles**

 25 "But concerning the Gentiles who have believed, we wrote, having decided that they should abstain from meat sacrificed to idols and from blood and from what is strangled and from fornication."

**Pacification - Show of Allegiance to the Law of Moses – Nazarite Vow**

 26 Then Paul took the men, and the next day, purifying himself along with them, went into the temple giving notice of the completion of the days of purification, until the sacrifice was offered for each one of them.

 Christians today need to see this pacification attempt by James and the Elders as a descriptive account, not a prescriptive command. To be clear, we do not attempt to reach drug addicts by joining them in injecting drugs to show that we identify with their lifestyle. We do not attend gay and lesbian weddings to show that we are tolerant of their sexual behavior. God cares about with whom we have intimate relations. Unbiblical relationships destroy a person as they are happening. This is why God does not want us to practice their behavior or provide pacification statements encouraging their lifestyle. These unbiblical relationships (acts) are dishonoring to God.

24 Therefore God gave them over in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, so that their bodies would be dishonored among them. (Romans 1:24)

Regardless of what anti-biblical behavior we witness, we, as Disciples of the Resurrected Lord Jesus Christ, are responsible to lovingly tell someone the truth from God’s eternal Word. We do not go along with them to show we care. We show we care by telling them the truth. We do not lie - in an attempt to pacify their friendship. Their rebellion against God is not placed upon as a failure on our side of the salvation ledger. No Christian Missionary ever sent anyone to Hell. No human being has the authority to make anyone go to Hell. Individual human beings direct their own paths and are solely responsible for their eternal destination. God has revealed Himself to everyone through the creation from the beginning of the creation. Therefore, all people haven’t any excuse (Romans 1:18ff). True, God uses missionaries, (as part of the creation) like Paul, to deliver His Word. However, God demands that missionaries are accurate with His Word.

Jesus directed His response to the individual when He responded to Nicodemus in John 3.

3 Jesus answered and said to him, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God."

 4 Nicodemus said to Him, "How can a man be born when he is old? He cannot enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born, can he?"

 5 Jesus answered, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit he cannot enter into the kingdom of God. (John 3:3-5)

 The reality is that unless a person is born again, Jesus declares they “cannot see the kingdom of God”. So, pacifying a person, who has not surrendered to God, does not point them into repentance (turning their heart) so they can “see the kingdom of God”, but directs their attention to a passive approval of their condition.

 This pacification attempt by James and the Jerusalem elders did not work. DID NOT WORK. Paul was still illegally arrested by the mob and beaten. The only reason Paul lived is because the Romans were made aware.

**Jews from Asia Recognize Paul - Claim Paul is Against:**

 **Jewish People, Law, Temple, and Allowed Greeks in Temple**

 27 When the seven days were almost over, the Jews from Asia, upon seeing him in the temple, began to stir up all the crowd and laid hands on him,

 28 crying out, "Men of Israel, come to our aid! This is the man who preaches to all men everywhere against our people and the Law and this place; and besides he has even brought Greeks into the temple and has defiled this holy place."

 Nothing could be further from the truth. Paul had devoted his life to reaching the Jewish people. He did become frustrated and thought he should stop witnessing to them, but the Holy Spirit redirected his life to them. We see this throughout the book of Acts. Paul is rejected by many of the Jews. However, many did surrender to God’s Gospel Message. Within this group of Jews, who converted from Judaism to the “Way”, they struggled with their understanding of the Law of Moses and its application through the message of saved by *faith* alone.

**Evil Doesn’t Seek Any Rule of Law**

**Evil Easily Provoked**

**Evil Pursues Death of Opposition**

 29 For they had previously seen Trophimus the Ephesian in the city with him, and they supposed that Paul had brought him into the temple.

 30 Then all the city was provoked, and the people rushed together, and taking hold of Paul they dragged him out of the temple, and immediately the doors were shut.

**Romans Have More Adherence to Rule of Law Than Jews**

 31 While they were seeking to kill him, a report came up to the commander of the Roman cohort that all Jerusalem was in confusion.

 32 At once he took along some soldiers and centurions and ran down to them; and when they saw the commander and the soldiers, they stopped beating Paul.

 33 Then the commander came up and took hold of him, and ordered him to be bound with two chains; and he began asking who he was and what he had done.

 34 But among the crowd some were shouting one thing and some another, and when he could not find out the facts because of the uproar, he ordered him to be brought into the barracks.

 35 When he got to the stairs, he was carried by the soldiers because of the violence of the mob;

 36 for the multitude of the people kept following them, shouting, "Away with him!"

 37 As Paul was about to be brought into the barracks, he said to the commander, "May I say something to you?" And he said, "Do you know Greek?

 38 "Then you are not the Egyptian who some time ago stirred up a revolt and led the four thousand men of the Assassins out into the wilderness?"

 39 But Paul said, "I am a Jew of Tarsus in Cilicia, a citizen of no insignificant city; and I beg you, allow me to speak to the people."

 40 When he had given him permission, Paul, standing on the stairs, motioned to the people with his hand; and when there was a great hush, he spoke to them in the Hebrew dialect, saying,

 In today’s religious climate, we see a similarity in the stance of James and the Elders of the Jerusalem local Church. The fallen secular religious authorities and culture presses such leaders until they succumb to their demands. We see this throughout many religious congregations today. So far, the results have been catastrophic. Due to pacification to the secular fallen pagan culture, all elements of society have been infected. The political, educational, economic and religious groups have succumbed to ungodly teachings and practices. All in the name of tolerance, which really means accept and approve. Let us ask the question – Does heaven tolerate/pacify sin to be present in its sphere? NO. Does the love of God acknowledge everyone as they are? Yes, God’s love acknowledges but does not approve everyone’s behavior and beliefs.

**James 2:19** You believe that God is one. You do well; the demons also believe, and shudder.

In contrast to pacification, Jesus did not hold back from telling the Samaritan Woman at the well about her life practices. God cared about her relationships, who her husbands had been, and her lifestyle. God as Jesus did not let the conversation go with any kind of allowance for her sinful life choices. Jesus’ love for her did not allow her to leave without telling her “all the things that she had done” (John 4:29).

We see the same teaching Jesus provides us with the woman caught in adultery in John 8:11. Jesus directed her to stop doing adulterous acts. There was not any pacification. Jesus does not let her go from His presence without saying, “From now on, sin no more". And so is God’s Word to us today**. AMEN**