

Week 46

November 12 - November 18

Acts 12:6-19:20; 1 Corinthians 1-3; Galatians 1-6; 1 Thessalonians 1-5; 2 Thessalonians 1-3

One of the themes that run throughout this week's passage is that of speaking boldly. The theme is interwoven through a variety of subjects. We have examples of those who spoke the gospel boldly. We have examples of those who confronted others boldly. We have examples of those who boldly had to tackle some difficult issues. I know you will be encouraged and/or exhorted in some area of your life as you read these passages.

November 12th

Acts 12:6-14:20. "Speaking Boldly"

There are some astounding things that take place in today's passage: Peter's escape from prison, Barnabas and Paul are commissioned and sent out, Paul chastises the sorcerer and the people of Lystra nearly murdered Paul. Yet running through all those stories is the evidence of men boldly on fire for the Lord. In the face of danger, imprisonment, ridicule and death they still spoke the truth boldly. In fact, the phrases "spoke out boldly" and "preaching boldly" even appear in the text (13:46; 14:3).

The apostle Paul made a request of the church in Ephesus that had to do with boldness; "Pray on my behalf, that utterance may be given to me in the opening of my mouth, to make known with boldness the mystery of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in chains; that in proclaiming it I may speak boldly, as I ought to speak" (Eph. 6.19-20). The phrase that interests me is the last, "as I ought to speak." The obvious question is if that is how we should speak the gospel, are we doing so?

November 13th

Acts 14:21-28; Galatians 1:1-3:23. "Confrontation"

Several years ago, at a very large public meeting I challenged the speaker on a point he had made. He spoke about unity and then publicly condemned another member of the group with an accusation that was false. The parents of the accused couple were hurt and left. I felt compelled to say something. I didn't want to confront one of my peers, but I stood and asked him to clarify his purpose and support his allegation. Following the meeting I heard from some who supported what I said and others who did not.

Peter was guilty of saying one thing and doing another. At the public meeting he sided with a group of Judaizers who taught that conditions were to be added to salvation. Paul disagreed and during the public meeting challenged Peter. Since Peter's stance affected everyone at the meeting Paul felt a public statement among the same group was necessary. The issue was not the love Peter had for the Lord or the love Paul had for Peter, yet sometimes we need to confront others with the truth.

November 14th

Acts 15:1-21; Galatians 3:24-6:18. "Conflict Resolution"

Paul and Barnabas "argued forcefully and at length" with a believer teaching other believers something they felt was wrong. As leaders, Paul and Barnabas were obligated to confront those who taught Christians a false teaching. Disciples of Christ must get to a point where they can discern the truth, but if that is not happening then the shepherd or mature leader must step in and protect the other brothers and sisters from deception. There will be times this reaches a point of conflict and the passage in Acts 15 reveals how the church in Antioch and Jerusalem resolved conflict. The group of leaders met together to first communicate openly in order to clarify the argument. Their conversation was productive. Their attitude was one of genuine concern with regard to one another and the topic. Peter, whom had just been confronted by Paul on the very topic being discussed, stood to testify how he had previously believed in error. James stood later and summarized the reports and drew up the decision as he quoted from the books of Amos and Isaiah.

November 15th

Acts 15:22-17:15. "Unpopular Decisions"

Without a doubt we know that Christ is the head of the church and our true Shepherd. Yet we also know that He has appointed some as elders and deacons. As we read yesterday, these are to meet together to ensure that truth is sought and godly direction is kept. As an issue emerges, they look to God and His Word and then make a decision they abide by and in turn expect the congregation to abide by (Acts 15:25; 16:4). I can tell you that this is a great responsibility and not to be taken lightly (James 3:1). I can also tell you that their decisions don't always make everyone happy. Over the years I have even seen some elders put off making a decision because they knew someone would have a complaint concerning it. Fortunately, that is not the case with the majority I have served with. They carry out the task before them humbly submitting before God. Do we have the same response? Do we humbly submit to those in leadership?

November 16th

Acts 17:16-18:3; 1 Thessalonians 1:1-5:11. "Ready to Explain"

"If you are asked about your Christian hope, always be ready to explain it" (1 Peter 3:15)

Years ago, I stood on Mars Hill at the Areopagus and thought of today's passage from Acts. Paul walked around Athens, Greece, as he waited for Silas and Timothy. But as he walked, he tried to observe the culture. He noticed what they valued, prioritized, believed, etc. As he was there he "went to the synagogue to debate with the Jews and the God-fearing Gentiles, and he spoke daily in the public square to all who happened to be there. He also had a debate with some of the Epicurean and Stoic philosophers." Some people then took Paul to the Council of Philosophers so they could hear more.

I was once invited to a family's home for dinner, but what I didn't know was that they had invited their neighbors and others in order for all of them to ask me questions about God, church, the Christian life, and many other things. When given an opportunity to talk about your Christian hope will you be ready to explain it?

November 17th

Acts 18:4-23; 1 Thessalonians 5:12-28; 2 Thessalonians 1-3. "The Power of More"

Paul visited Corinth which even surpassed Athens in importance at the time. According to what he wrote later, he arrived there "in weakness, timid and trembling" (1 Cor. 2:3). On one hand Corinth, Greece, was a refined, splendid and educated place. But on the other hand, it was better known for its wickedness and immorality. The temple to Aphrodite was built on the large hill behind the city and it housed an enormous number of religious prostitutes.

Corinth was a great ministry opportunity but it was also a great challenge. Paul apparently felt alone in his endeavor as God encouraged him with the words, "Don't be afraid! Speak out! Don't be silent! For I am with you, and no one will harm you because many people here in this city belong to me" (Acts 18:9-10). Elijah the prophet needed the same encouragement. He felt he was alone until God informed him otherwise: "You are not the only one left. I have 7,000 others who have never bowed down to Baal!" (1 Kings 19:18; Rom. 11:4). There is boldness and encouragement in fellowship.

November 18th

Acts 18:24-19:20; 1 Corinthians 1:1-3:23. "Bold Encouragement"

Apollos was on fire for the Lord. He knew the Scriptures well and was a gifted speaker. However, he didn't have the whole story. He knew the story from the Old Testament up through John the Baptist's message. More than likely he was encouraging people to prepare for the coming Messiah. Priscilla and Aquila were mature believers who could sense the passion and heart of Apollos. They saw his potential but also knew he needed some instruction. As Apollos heard about Jesus, he no doubt saw Scripture come alive. With this knowledge the church at Ephesus sent him west with great recommendations and "he proved to be of great benefit" in evangelizing others. In fact, his new message, using the Scriptures, was fresh and beautiful; "The Messiah you are looking for is Jesus."

Each party demonstrated boldness. Apollos continued preaching the gospel boldly. And, with a certain degree of boldness and compassion Priscilla and Aquila "took Apollos aside and explained the way of God more accurately," and in doing so they changed the lives of many through the changed life and message of Apollos.

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