

Reading through Acts, (By Dr. Luke) – Part II

Something new! Our weekend reading will now be the text of the Sunday message. Use this to prepare your heart (*if before, which we would heartily recommend*) or to reflect following the message. Monday through Friday readings will be the book of Acts, written by Dr. Luke as “part 2” of his careful account (which began with our reading of the gospel of Luke).

We recommend you have a notebook and pen for answering questions and recording your thoughts and insights. Bring this notebook with you to Faith Group for discussions and prayer times. Select a quiet place and consistent time to read and pray. We also recommend you pray for a moment before you read God’s word and ask for his illumination by the power of the Holy Spirit as you read.

Abbreviations: TAI – *Think About It* PP – *Prayer Point*

Monday, April 18 – Acts 4:1-4

TAI: Why were the authorities annoyed with Peter and John? Why would this be a problem for them? What was the response to the message? Give it some thought: looking back to the message in chapter 3, what brought about such a significant response to Peter’s message?

PP: Think about places in the world where Christians are today being imprisoned for their faith. Pray for them to have courage, boldness, great faith, and perseverance. Pray that the believers in our church would have similar spiritual strength and conviction! Pray that for yourself.

Tuesday, April 19 – Acts 4:5-12

TAI: What was the question asked of Peter and John? Restate Peter’s answer in sermon points: how many points does he make? What is ‘politically incorrect’ about Peter’s answer in our day? Why does he speak of Jesus as the cornerstone? What enabled Peter to give this answer?

PP: This prayer point will be frequently mentioned as we read the book of Acts: ask God to fill you with his Holy Spirit! Ask him to help you, and our church family, put Christ always in the center as our Savior, Lord, and message to the world. Pray for missionaries who are taking the name of Jesus to the most under-reached people groups in the world.

Wednesday, April 20 – Acts 4:13-17

TAI: What astonished the authorities who interrogated Peter and John? You’ll recall from our earlier reading (when the eleven moved to replace Judas) the requirements for being an apostle. Why does Dr. Luke carefully note that “they recognized that they had been with Jesus”? Why are “uneducated, common” people capable of so much when it comes to the gospel and impacting others?

PP: Pray for our church to grow in our understanding that ministry is not “for the clergy” but for every believer, gifted and filled with the Holy Spirit. Ask God to help you minister to others, testify of Christ’s power in your life, and share boldly the true gospel.

Thursday, April 21 – Acts 4:13-18 repeated but expanded from yesterday

TAI: Why did seeing the healed man standing there leave the authorities speechless? Why did it create a dilemma for them? Why was there little hope that their warning to Peter and John would work? Can you think of a situation where the testimony of a changed life also “stopped the tongues” of those who would prefer to stamp out the gospel?

PP: Pray that our church would see lives powerfully transformed by the good news of Jesus Christ. Pray for those currently taking the evangelism course offered by Faith University and taught by Pastor Moe. Pray for those on your Sacred Seven list.

Friday, April 22 – John 19:16-42 Good Friday

TAI: Why did Jesus say, “It is finished”? What was finished? Why do you think this day is referred to as “Good” Friday?

PP: Pray for our Good Friday service this evening, and Pastor Dana reading three original poems. It will be a service of music, poetry, and the Lord’s Supper – all pointing to Christ. Pray for our Easter celebration of the resurrection. Ask God to prepare your heart and mind for the grand glory of Christ’s resurrection from the dead!

Weekend, April 23-24 – John 20

TAI: Ponder the wonder of Easter: Jesus Christ rising from the dead to conquer sin, death, and Satan for all who believe!

PP: Praise God for the hope and confidence we have for eternity because the Lord is risen – He is risen indeed!

Monday, April 25 – Acts 4:13-22 Expanded from last Thursday

TAI: What is the response of Peter and John to the order “not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus”? How had the people responded to the miracle they had seen? Give some thought to how you would respond if you were told to stop speaking of Jesus and telling what he has done for you.

PP: Pray for those around the world persecuted for speaking and teaching in the name of Jesus. Ask God to give you boldness in speaking of Christ in your neighborhood, sphere of friends and co-workers, family, etc. Pray again today for your Sacred 7. Praise God for what he has done.

Tues., April 26 – Acts 4:23-31 We will spend two days on this marvelous prayer.

TAI: There is much we can learn from studying a prayer like this one. Ask God, “Lord, use this passage to teach me more about prayer.” How does the prayer open? Carefully read Psalm 2, which is quoted in the prayer. How is the psalm used in this prayer? Why is it used?

PP: Open your prayer time with a burst of praise and adoration to God. Tell him that truly he is your Sovereign Lord and Creator. Express to God your confidence that those who oppose his grace and gospel will not triumph in the end, and that you trust in him. Tell God you love him.

Wednesday, April 27 – Acts 4:23-31 *Another day on this marvelous prayer.*

TAI: It must have been disconcerting to face such powerful opposition as Herod and Pilate. But who has truly planned this? What did the Christ-followers request? What were they confident God would do? What happened in the place where they prayed? What was the outcome?

PP: Express your confidence to God that He is truly in control no matter what. Ask him to give you boldness and the fullness of the Holy Spirit. Rejoice in the marvelous miracles God has done, and will do, as we worship and trust in him. Thank him for such a great salvation!

Thursday, April 28 – Acts 4:32-37 *Another passage worth two days reflection.*

TAI: Write a sentence describing the atmosphere in the new church at this time. What descriptive words did you use? Include as many as you can find in this paragraph.

PP: Ask God to give our church this kind of atmosphere, charged with passion for Christ and devotion to him! Ask him to transform us into a united, generous, bold, caring community.

Friday, April 29 – Acts 4:32-37 *Reflecting again on this grace-filled church.*

TAI: What is it about the gospel that transforms Christians into generous people? Why should a church be a family characterized by generosity? Do you personally find that it is more blessed to give than to receive? Do you enjoy encouraging others, like Barnabas?

PP: Ask God to give you a generous, giving heart! Rejoice in opportunities God gives you for giving. Ask him to work powerfully in our church body so that we love to share, give, and trust him to meet our needs. Ask God to help you be “A Son (or Daughter!) of Encouragement.”

Weekend, April 30-May 1 – Romans 7:1-6 *The text for Sunday’s message.*

TAI: What is the meaning of the marriage illustration Paul uses here; what point is he making? Once again we see the importance of our union with Christ (v. 4) and the crucial importance of the resurrection. Whose presence in us characterizes this new life of freedom from captivity?

PP: It has been a familiar theme in both our Acts readings and Romans – the presence and fullness of the Holy Spirit. Once again, ask God to fill you anew with the Holy Spirit. And since he used faithfulness in marriage as an illustration, pray for your marriage (if you are married) or for the marriages of others in your sphere of life. Pray for someone in marital distress.

Monday, May 2nd – Acts 5:1-11

TAI: Why is this account a vivid contrast to what came just before it? To whom did they lie, according to Peter? How is that instructive to us about our sin? When you read about these deaths, what is your emotional reaction? Does any other Scripture come to mind? Describe the fear that Dr. Luke tells us came over the entire church.

PP: Admit to God that you shudder to think that “the wages of sin is death.” Ask God to give you a pure heart to tell the truth and not live in deceit. Pray that our church will have a healthy fear of the Lord, which is the beginning of wisdom.

Tuesday, May 3 – Acts 5:12-16

TAI: Ponder this extraordinary scene as God worked through “the signs of the Apostles.” Again, what set an apostle apart from others? (We covered this when the apostles replaced Judas in Acts 1.) Read Matthew 9:35-38. How does that description of Jesus’ ministry dovetail with this passage?

PP: Pray a prayer of worship, praise, and adoration as you contemplate the extraordinary power of God. Thank God for saving your sin-sick soul by his great grace. Ask God to make our church a place for both the healing of hearts and the healing of wounded and sick lives, by his gospel and the presence and power of the Holy Spirit.

Wednesday, May 4 – Acts 5:17-26

TAI: What motivated the high priest and party of the Sadducees? Dr. Luke includes many remarkable details in this account. Which ones stand out to you? Why were the authorities afraid to bring in the apostles by force? What assurance does this passage give you about your life as you obey him and bear witness to Christ?

PP: Thank God for his protection from the harm that the Evil One and his people would like to bring you. Rejoice in the protection God is providing to missionaries and Christian workers living in very difficult places. Ask God for courage to live wholeheartedly for him and the gospel.

Thursday, May 5 – Acts 5:27-32 Note: *Today is the National Day of Prayer*

TAI: What is the heart of the apostles’ response to the authorities? Is this your attitude as well? Special note: Did you catch that all three persons of the Trinity are clearly mentioned here? Note each of the three: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

PP: Ask God to give you the heart attitude of the apostles, namely, “We must obey God rather than men.” Rejoice in prayer for the glorious gospel of God. Thank God for the Holy Spirit living in you as you obey God rather than men.

Friday, May 6 – Acts 5:33-42

TAI: Gamaliel spoke up to the hateful, angry authorities with common sense. What truth did he speak into the situation? How did God use his words to protect the apostles? How did the apostles respond to this incident? Is their attitude in the face of persecution the same as your own?

PP: Ask God to help us overcome our wimpy attitude when faced with criticism or persecution. Thank God for opportunities to be “counted worthy to suffer dishonor for the name” of Christ! “God, give us boldness and courage to speak clearly of Jesus Christ our Lord.”

Weekend, May 7-8 – Romans 7:7-14 *Yes, it’s Mothers Day!*

TAI: Review all the *question/answer* “*By no means!*” statements in Romans 6 & 7. They are crucial for understanding this section of Romans, and its “Unshackled” message. How is this one different from the previous ones? What is the difference between the law and sin?

PP: Many of us will want to pray a prayer of Thanksgiving today for our mothers, and a prayer of intercession for mothers in these challenging times. Pray for Pastor Dana preaching this Sunday on this passage. Believers, rejoice that in God's great grace you have been Unshackled.

Monday, May 9 – Acts 6:1-7

TAI: What was the nature of the controversy which erupted in the church? What priorities did the Twelve want to protect in the midst of this trouble? What was the wise outcome of this incident? What is noted about the new leaders chosen? What can we learn from this about the priorities and qualities needed in church leaders? How did they commission them?

PP: Ask God to help us protect prayer and study of the scriptures in the lives of our Pastors and leaders. Ask God to help us all share the load of day-to-day ministry so that leaders can take time for growth in God's word and prayer. Once again, ask God to fill you with his Holy Spirit and faith.

Tuesday, May 10 – Acts 6:8-15

TAI: What kind of man was Stephen? How did his opposers attack Stephen? What can we learn from this about how the Evil One attacks believers? What piece of our spiritual armor is needed to overcome these assaults? Why do you think Dr. Luke wrote of Stephen's "angelic" face?

PP: Put on all your spiritual armor for today! Pray through Ephesians 6:10-20 and "each piece put on by prayer" as the hymn says. Ask God to give you discernment to ignore the Father of Lies when he speaks falsehoods about you, other believers, or church leaders. Ask God to give you the fullness and character of Stephen!

Wednesday, May 11 – Acts 7 and 7:1-22

TAI: Today we will ponder the first section of Stephen's sermon in response to his critics. But it would be wise to read the entire chapter, quickly, so that you get an overview first. How does Stephen open his defense before the high priest? Why do you think he is telling this detailed history? What can we learn from this? Why is this his defense?

PP: Thank God for the Old Testament. Thank God for giving us this inspired history and narrative, also rich with wisdom and poetry and prophesy. Thank God for revealing to us the entire span of his salvation plan, from creation to the cross and then to eternity.

Thursday, May 12 – Acts 7:23-51

TAI: As Stephen's narrative sermon of Jewish history continues, think about *why* he includes the details that he includes. Why tell the story of the golden calf, for example? What was Stephen trying to communicate to his listeners? How does this apply to us today?

PP: Confess to God your own struggles with idolatry. What idols tend to choke God out of your life? Admit that to God. Thank God that he did not leave us in our idolatry, but made a way for us through the cross of his Son, Jesus Christ. Pray for those lost people still enslaved by their idols. Pray for your Sacred Seven list.

Friday, May 13 – Acts 7:51-60

TAI: Perhaps now it's clearer: why did Stephen weave into his message so much Old Testament history? Why did the listeners become so enraged? *You may wonder if you could endure harsh suffering for the Lord. What do we learn about such endurance from this telling of the stoning of Stephen?* Does Stephen's statement in v. 60 remind you of another's similar statement? Why do you think Dr. Luke says of Stephen that "he fell asleep"?

PP: Thank God for the tremendous example of Stephen! Thank God that in great persecution he fills us with his Holy Spirit and even prepares to receive us to glory! Ask God to give you boldness and courage and the fullness of grace and the Holy Spirit as you live by faith and witness to others.

Weekend, May 14-15 – Romans 7:15-25

TAI: Do you find the ongoing struggle with indwelling sin rather mystifying? Does Paul's description of this struggle help you with insight? How does your "fight of faith" seem similar or different than Paul's? How does Paul go from *wretched* to *thanks*?

PP: Pray for the preaching of this passage to close our ***Unshackled*** series. Express your thanks to God for his Son, Jesus Christ, and that by grace through faith we are justified in his sight.