

“Journeys and Destinations – Strong Encouragement”
Pastor Wally Contreras
February 15, 2021

“...and on the next day he went on with Barnabas to Derbe. When they had preached the gospel to that city and had made many disciples, they returned to Lystra and to Iconium and to Antioch, strengthening the souls of the disciples, encouraging them to continue in the faith, and saying that through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God. And when they had appointed elders for them in every church, with prayer and fasting they committed them to the Lord in whom they had believed.” (Acts 14:20b-23)

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Pastor Wally took some time to review what the Gospel message was that Paul preached going to 1 Corinthians 15:1-8 as his point of reference: “Now I would remind you, brothers, of the gospel I preached to you, which you received, in which you stand [on which you have taken your stand - NIV], and by which you are being saved, if you hold fast to the word I preached to you— unless you believed in vain. For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. Then he appeared to more than five hundred brothers at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have fallen asleep. Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles. Last of all, as to one untimely born, he appeared also to me.” In a blog posted on www.ligonier.org by R. Fowler White, he pointed out: “Notice first the weightiness of the Apostolic gospel: its truth affects our past (“which you received”), our present (“in which you stand”), and our future (“and by which you are being saved, if you hold fast to the word I preached to you”). The gospel is of “consequence beyond measure” to those who receive it.” To what degree do I agree or disagree with Mr. White’s statement, but more importantly, why?

Upon what do I believe my co-workers, friends and/or family members would say I have taken my stand? Explain.

The Gospel which Paul preached consists of 4 parts:

- 1) That Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures (Isaiah 53)
- 2) That [Jesus] was buried
- 3) That [Jesus] was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures (Hosea 6:1-3; Psalm 16:10)
- 4) That [Jesus] appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve...and many others.

What “Gospel” message have I been preaching (“To discourse on the gospel way of salvation and exhort to repentance; to discourse on evangelical truths and exhort to a belief of them and acceptance of the terms of salvation.” – Webster’s 1828 Dictionary)? Is it the Truth, the whole Truth and nothing but the Truth, or something else? Explain.

N.T. Wright once said that “In accordance with the Scriptures” doesn’t refer to a few select verses in the Old Testament, but to the entirety of the story of Israel climaxing in the death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus the Messiah.” Why is it important that I know and understand that something that was done or happened was “in accordance with the Scriptures”?

How often have I, when I see that something is “in accordance with the Scriptures” actually gone back to find and read the Scriptures being referenced by that statement...or do I simply assume that the statement to be true – that somewhere in the Old Testament there is such a reference - and move on reading the text?

Pastor Wally said that “purposeful” discipleship (discipleship that results in people sticking it out) involves: 1) strengthening the soul and 2) encouraging people to continue in the faith. C.H. Spurgeon once said: “It seemed, sometimes, to be rather repelling men than attracting them to say to would-be disciples, “If you will follow me, do this, and do that,”—perhaps, some very trying ordeal; yet that was the Savior’s usual habit.” Are there things in my past that keep me from purposeful discipleship of someone...that is telling me “I’m not good enough” to be a disciple to someone?

John Piper pointed out: “The word discipleship never occurs in the Bible. The term is ambiguous in English. It can mean my discipleship, in the sense of my own pattern of following Jesus and trusting him and learning from him. That is my discipleship. It could mean that. Or it can mean my activity of helping others be disciples in that sense of learning from him, growing in him... it can mean the whole process of conversion, baptism, and teaching the ways of Jesus as it is used in Matthew 28:19–20: “Go therefore and make disciples.” And here is what he means. “Baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you.” That is a very long process. That is like a lifetime of process. So get them converted. Baptize them. And then spend a lifetime teaching them to obey all that Jesus said. That is what the verb “disciple” in the New Testament would include...Every Christian should be helping unbelievers become believers by showing them Christ. That is making a disciple. And every Christian should be helping other believers grow to more and more maturity. That is making a disciple. And every Christian should be seeking to get help for themselves from others to keep on growing. And that is also our discipleship. And every church should think through how all of these kinds of biblical disciple-making find expression in their corporate life.” Wait a minute!...”spend a lifetime teaching [someone] to obey all that Jesus said”? I didn’t sign up for that, or did I? Explain.

To highlight Piper's point that "every Christian should be seeking to get help for themselves from others" C.S. Lewis once penned the following: "My Dear George, I shall be completely alone at the Kilns...from Aug 11 to Aug 19th and am like to fall into a whoreson (wretched or hateful) melancholy. Can you come and spend all or any of this time with me?" C.S. Lewis was wrestling with personal demons, still struggling to keep his way pure. It is also demonstrates the depth of his commitment to following Christ. How am I doing when it comes to discipling myself? Explain.

To whom can I/do I go when it is likely that I'll "fall into a [wretched or hateful] melancholy" and why?

How am I doing when it comes to discipling others? Explain.

C.H. Spurgeon in Spurgeon's Morning and Evening (Evening, January 6th, 2021) once said that, "...the hand of the Lord may also be felt in another manner, strengthening the soul and lifting the spirit upward towards eternal things. O that I may in this sense feel the Lord dealing with me! A sense of the divine presence and indwelling bears the soul towards heaven as upon the wings of eagles. At such times we are full to the brim with spiritual joy, and forget the cares and sorrows of earth; the invisible is near, and the visible loses its power over us; servant-body waits at the foot of the hill, and the master-spirit worships upon the summit in the presence of the Lord." If one of the strategies of purposeful discipleship is to "strengthen the soul" of someone as Pastor Wally indicated, then what exactly does that look like?

Pastor Wally asked if I judge God by my circumstances or if I judge my circumstances by who God is...well, have I ever thought that God was displeased with me because things went wrong or because I faced some difficulties? If so, how so? If not, why not?

So, basically Acts 14:20b-23 tells me that Paul and his missionaries made a follow-up visit on the disciples (Christians) to make sure that they were strengthened, encouraged, and warned that many tribulations lay ahead, but it is through these tribulations that we "must enter the kingdom of God". Recalling last week's discussion about "comfortable and convenient" Christians, does my discipleship end with strengthening and encouraging someone or am I willing to strengthen and encourage someone in spite of tribulation? Explain.