

## SAVING THE WORLD

**“For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whosoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him” (John 3:16-17).**

There can be little doubt that the plan of God is to save the world. Nothing could be more clear! Every soul is precious to God. He is not willing that any should perish, but all come to repentance (2 Pet. 3:9). Jesus expressed the scope of the gospel to His disciples just before ascending into heaven. He sent them:

- To make disciples of all nations (Matt. 28:19).
- To preach the good news to all creation (Mk. 16:15).
- So that repentance and forgiveness of sins would be preached in his name to all nations beginning at Jerusalem (Lk. 24:47).
- Jesus sent them as God sent Jesus. Jesus made this clear when He said: **“As the Father has sent me, I am sending you” (John 20:21).**
- As Jesus sent them to all the world He made it clear that their ministry would be empowered by the Holy Spirit - **“But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth” (Acts 1:8).**

## SALT AND LIGHT

The task of saving the world was not just given to the twelve apostles. It is also the job of every believer. Please consider these words of Jesus:

**“You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled underfoot. “You are the light of the world. A town built on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven” (Matt. 5:13-16).**

If there had only been ten righteous people in Sodom God would not have destroyed it (Gen. 18:32). The “salt” and “light” of only ten people would have been enough influence for good to save Sodom. Sadly, their light didn’t shine and their salt was trampled under foot.

## VINE AND BRANCHES

Another example of our part in world evangelism involves the “vine” and the “branches”. Jesus said: **“I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener. He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful. You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you. Remain in me, as I also remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me. I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing. If you do not remain in me, you are like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned. If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you**

wish, and it will be done for you. **This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples**" (John 15:1-8).

Please note that fruit does not grow on the vine, it grows on the branches. Branches are an essential part in God's plan! This means that you are a part of God's plan to save the world. In order to bear fruit, however, you must "remain" in connection with the vine!

## JERUSALEM

As you know, the church began in Jerusalem and there can be no doubt that the church had an affect on the city. The church was salt and light to Jerusalem.

- The church began in the upper room with 120 disciples (Acts 1:15)
- After one sermon 3,000 converts were baptized (Acts 2:41).
- Then the Lord added to their number daily (Acts 2:47).
- Then the number of men who believed was about 5,000 (Acts 4:4).
- Then multitudes of believers were added both of men and women (Acts 5:14).
- Then the number of disciples was increasing (Acts 6:1).
- Then a large company of priests became obedient to the faith (Acts 6:7).
- Then **"Day after day, in the temple courts and from house to house, they never stopped teaching and proclaiming the good news that Jesus is the Christ"** (Acts 5:42).
- Then the Sanhedrin had to admit that the teaching about Jesus had "filled Jerusalem" (Acts 5:28).
- Then, as Jesus directed, the gospel began in Jerusalem, but soon spread to Judea and all Samaria, and then to the ends of the earth.
- Then when the church was scattered by persecution those that were scattered preached the word everywhere they went (Acts 8:4).
- Then by the time Paul wrote to the Colossians the gospel had already been preached to "every creature under heaven" (Col. 1:23).

## ANTIOCH IN SYRIA

As Jerusalem was the cradle of Jewish Christianity, Antioch in Syria was the cradle of gentile Christianity. Since Antioch was the first church to welcome gentiles, it is significant that the disciples were called Christians first in Antioch (Acts 11:26). Nicolas was from Antioch and was full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom. He was one of the seven in the Jerusalem church chosen to care for widows (Acts 6:1-6). Nicolas, however, was not born a Jew, he was a proselyte.

- Those scattered by the persecution in connection with the death of Stephen traveled as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus, and Antioch preaching only to the Jews (Acts 11:19).
- However, some men from Cyprus and Cyrene went to Antioch and preached to the Greeks. They were successful and a great number of people believed and turned to the Lord (Acts 11:20-21).
- When the church in Jerusalem heard this they sent Barnabas to Antioch and we are told again that a great number of people were brought to the Lord (Acts 11:22-24).

- The growth of the church continued when Barnabas went to Tarsus, found Saul, and brought him to Antioch. **“So for a whole year Barnabas and Saul met with the church and taught great numbers of people” (Acts 11:25).**
- The church at Antioch was concerned with saving the whole world and set apart Barnabas and Saul for their first missionary journey (Acts 13:1-3).
- All of Paul’s three missionary journeys began and ended in Antioch.
- It is obvious that the disciples in Antioch were letting their light shine!

## PHILIPPI

Philippi, was a city of Macedonia, the foremost of the district, and a Roman colony. It was the scene in 42 B.C. of two battles in which Mark Antony and Octavian defeated Brutus and Cassius. It was named for Philip of Macedon.

Philippi was the first city in Europe where Paul and his company preached the gospel. They came to Philippi as a result of a vision. **“During the night Paul had a vision of a man standing and begging him, ‘Come over to Macedonia and help us’. After Paul had seen the vision we got ready at once to leave for Macedonia, concluding that God had called us to preach the gospel to them” (Acts 16:8-10).** Obviously the Holy Spirit was guiding Paul!

Luke, the beloved physician, was with Paul in Philippi and records in Acts chapter 16 that the gospel affected every segment of society. Lydia was rich and her whole household became Christians. The Philippian Jailer was a middle class worker and his whole family became Christians. A slave girl was at the bottom of the social ladder and she too became a follower of Jesus. The whole gospel is for the whole world!

Paul and Silas did something in Philippi that is difficult to explain (See Acts 16:16-24). Even though they were Roman citizens, they allowed themselves to be stripped and severely beaten in public. At a later time Paul avoided being beaten by merely saying to a centurion: **“Is it legal for you to flog a Roman citizen who hasn’t even been found guilty?” (Acts 22:25).** It is possible that the crowd was so angry that they refused to listen, but it is also possible that God guided Paul and Silas to suffer this unjust beating to achieve a greater harvest of souls.

Please consider:

- Paul and Silas were not discouraged by being unjustly beaten and imprisoned with their feet in the stocks. In fact at midnight they were praying and singing hymns.
- As they were praying God sent a violent earthquake which caused the prison doors to fly open.
- Fearing that the prisoners had escaped the jailer was about to kill himself.
- Paul shouted: **“Don’t harm yourself we are all here!” (Acts 16:28)**
- The jailer wanted to be saved and brought Paul and Silas to his own house, washed their stripes, and then he and his whole household were baptized the same hour of the night.
- The jailer set food before them and was filled with joy because he and his whole family had come to believe in God.
- Everyone in Philippi knew about the earthquake, but on the next day the city became aware that Paul and Silas were very much a part of the story.

- Their story became public when the magistrates ordered Paul and Silas to be released. Paul explained to the officers: **“They beat us publicly without a trial, even though we are Roman citizens, and threw us into prison. And now do they want to get rid of us privately? No! Let them come themselves and escort us out”** (Acts 16:37).
- This alarmed the magistrates and they came to the jail to appease Paul and Silas.
- IT SEEMS THAT GOD ORCHESTRATED THIS EVENT SO THAT THE MAGISTRATES AND THE WHOLE CITY WERE EXPOSED TO THE LIGHT OF THE GOSPEL!
- The church at Philippi was strong and generous and was concerned about world evangelism. Even though Paul was only at Thessalonica for three Sabbath days, they sent him aid again and again (Phil. 4:16).
- When Paul set out from Macedonia they were the only church that sent him money (Phil. 4:15).
- When Paul was imprisoned in Rome they sent Epaphroditus to minister to his needs (Phil. 2:24-30).
- Obviously the church at Philippi was letting their light shine!

## EPHESUS

The city of Ephesus was the leading city and also the capital of the Roman province of Asia. The name Ephesus means "desirable." The Temple of Diana/Artemis was in Ephesus and was one of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World. It was supported by 127 Ionic columns, each towering 60 feet tall. The temple covered an area 130 x 60 yards, making it four times larger than the Parthenon in Athens. The believers in Ephesus were letting their light shine for after only two years everyone in Asia, both Jews and Greeks, heard the word of the Lord (Acts 19:10). So many people abandoned idolatry that the silversmiths who made pagan idols feared they were going out of business (Acts 19:23-27).

Furthermore: **“A number who had practiced sorcery brought their scrolls together and burned them publicly. When they calculated the value of the scrolls, the total came to fifty thousand drachmas. In this way the word of the Lord spread widely and grew in power”** (Acts 19:10-20).

Obviously, the brethren in Ephesus were letting their light shine!

## FOUR LEPERS

Ben-Hadad, the king of Aram, laid siege to Samaria and there was a great famine in the city (2 Kings 6:24). The famine was so severe that a donkey’s head sold for eighty shekels of silver and the people were eating their own children. The king of Samaria blamed the prophet Elisha and sent someone to cut off his head. Elisha prophesied to the man: **““Hear the word of the Lord. This is what the Lord says: About this time tomorrow, a seah of the finest flour will sell for a shekel and two seahs of barley for a shekel at the gate of Samaria.”** The officer on whose arm the king was leaning said to the man of God, **“Look, even if the Lord should open the floodgates of the heavens, could this happen?”** **“You will see it with your own eyes,”** answered Elisha, **“but you will not eat any of it!”** (2 Kings 7:1-2).

Here is how this amazing prophecy came true! **“Now there were four men with leprosy at the entrance of the city gate. They said to each other, “Why stay here until we die? If we say, ‘We’ll go into the city’—the famine is there, and we will die. And if we stay here, we will die. So**

let's go over to the camp of the Arameans and surrender. If they spare us, we live; if they kill us, then we die." At dusk they got up and went to the camp of the Arameans. When they reached the edge of the camp, no one was there, for the Lord had caused the Arameans to hear the sound of chariots and horses and a great army, so that they said to one another, "Look, the king of Israel has hired the Hittite and Egyptian kings to attack us!" So they got up and fled in the dusk and abandoned their tents and their horses and donkeys. They left the camp as it was and ran for their lives. The men who had leprosy reached the edge of the camp, entered one of the tents and ate and drank. Then they took silver, gold and clothes, and went off and hid them. They returned and entered another tent and took some things from it and hid them also. Then they said to each other, **"What we're doing is not right. This is a day of good news and we are keeping it to ourselves. If we wait until daylight, punishment will overtake us. Let's go at once and report this to the royal palace."** (2 Kings 7:3-9)

- The lepers reported this good news to the royal palace.
- The king sent men to verify that the story was true;
- **"Then the people went out and plundered the camp of the Arameans. So a seah of flour sold for a shekel, and two seahs of barley sold for a shekel, as the Lord had said" (2 Kings 7:16).**
- **"Now the king had put the officer on whose arm he leaned in charge of the gate, and the people trampled him in the gateway and he died, just as the man of God had foretold when the king came down to his house. It happened as the man of God said to the king: 'About this time tomorrow, a seah of flour will sell for a shekel and two seahs of barley for a shekel at the gate of Samaria'" (2 Kings 7:17-18).**
- We too, like the lepers, have good news to share! Perhaps also if we tarry, "some punishment will overtake us!"
- We need to let our light shine!

#### BEING SAVED IS THE MOST IMPORTANT THING IN THE WORLD

C. S. Lewis, the famous apologist, once said: *"Christianity, if false, is of no importance, and if true, of infinite importance, the only thing it cannot be is moderately important."* Lukewarmness is not a virtue, it makes God sick to his stomach (Rev. 3:16).

"Lukewarmness", however, seems to be the norm for the modern church. When the covid-19 pandemic hit the United States, for example, the government shut down churches for the benefit of public safety. Liquor stores, however, and other secular venues were allowed to remain open. Sadly, many churches meekly submitted to putting their light under a bowl. The church in Jerusalem faced the same problem, but reacted differently. When Peter and John were commanded not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus **"Peter and John replied, 'Judge for yourselves whether it is right in God's sight to obey you rather than God. For we cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard'" (Acts 4:18-20).**

As we have already pointed out **"Day after day, in the temple courts and from house to house, they never stopped teaching and proclaiming the good news that Jesus is the Christ" (Acts 5:42).**

Remember! Let your light shine, for if you gain the world and lose your soul you have made a bad bargain (Matt. 16:24-26).