

Living Word Weekly Bible Study (February 27- March 4, 2017)

Monday: Mark 4:33-35

The “other” side was the eastern side of the Sea of Galilee. This region represented the northern edge of the Decapolis, considered by the Jewish mind as the most pagan of territories. The inhabitants of the region were the 7 nations that God drove out in Joshua 3:10, that was foretold in the 1st verse of Exodus 33, that enabled Joshua to cross the Jordan safely to the Promised Land. “This is how you will know that the living God is among you and that He will certainly drive out before you the Canaanites, Hittites, Hivites, Perizzites, Girgashites, Amorites and Jebusites” (Joshua 3:10). The disciples would not have been familiar with this land---for this was an off limit, unclean, very threatening place for them---almost certainly they would have been scared to be going over to the pagan region. This was the land of Beelzebub, the land of the devil, a land of Baal worship and the fertility cult.

Now to the Jewish mind, the sea was a frightening thing---representing chaos. That is why in the Book of Revelation (Rev. 21:1), heaven is described as having no sea. So, crossing the sea meant crossing the abyss---crossing chaos. Furthermore, in their minds, the storm that developed was no coincidence, but surely a sign by Beelzebub to stay away. The disciples could not have been more scared.

Mark 4:37-41

What the disciples were really saying is – who is this guy who not only controls the weather but has control over evil. Even the forces of evil succumb to His power.

Mark 5:1-13

So, why pigs? The pig was sacred in the pagan region, the sacred animal of the fertility cult. Sending the pigs into the lake meant the pigs were drowned, along with the evil spirits, and buried in the abyss, which in the Jewish mind was equivalent to hell.

Mark 5:14-20

So here’s Jesus, He went across the Sea, the dreaded abyss, to confront evil straight on, just to heal one man. But notice that He did not allow Legion to join and follow Him, despite his pleas. Instead, Jesus told him to go home and tell everyone what the Lord has done for you. Wow, you talk about a tough mission field! Here is one guy that is known as a notorious lunatic, left alone to spread the Word. So what happens next? We pick up the story again near the end of Mark 7 and continue into Mark 8. Jesus and the disciples return to the region.

Mark 7:31

Then Jesus left the vicinity of Tyre and went through Sidon, down to the Sea of Galilee and into the region of the Decapolis.

Mark 8:1-9

Later, Jesus overhears the disciples who are discussing what they had witnessed. Previously, in Mark 6:39, on the other side of the lake, they had witnessed Jesus feed 5000 of their countrymen with only 5 loaves and 2 fish, but were left with 12 baskets. Now in the center of pagan country, they had witnessed Jesus perform a very similar miracle feeding 4000 with only 7 loaves, leaving 7 basketfuls of leftovers. Beginning in verse 17, Jesus says: **Mark 8:17-21.**

Mark 8:17-21

Just as Jesus spoke to His disciples in parables, He also used His miracles to make His points. Notice that when Jesus was speaking to the Jews, He fed them. He left 12 basketfuls – symbolically to the Jews as the 12 tribes of Israel. However, when He went to the pagan side to heal and speak, He left 7 basketfuls – symbolic of the 7 pagan nations

driven out in Joshua. Incredible symmetry, and incredibly symbolic to His audiences. So what is His point (He is the Messiah of ALL the world---Israel and the Gentiles)?

But there is something else here.

Remember, Legion pleaded with Jesus to take him with Him, but Jesus told him to stay and tell everyone what had happened to him. The result was really unbelievable – the next time Jesus came to the region, He was met by thousands who came to hear from and be healed by Him. One missionary – 4000 came to hear Jesus. I think this element of Legion’s story has been lost. It is more than the miracle of the pigs, but also a tremendous lesson of evangelism. In my opinion, Legion should be remembered in the evangelism Hall of Fame right next to Paul. A simple message that we all can benefit from. We do not need to be Bible scholars to tell other people about Jesus – we only need to share what He has done in our lives.

Tuesday: John 1:40-42

Notice what Andrew does and how he goes about reaching his brother and his friends. Andrew has an encounter with Jesus and his life is radically transformed. He becomes excited and seeks whom he can tell first. Jesus impacts him greatly and he wants to share that impact with others. God then uses him to transform the lives of others. God can, and will use you, too! As a Christian, your life has been transformed; now, consider to whom you can tell your story. The key precepts are to be transformed, be excited, and then share with others His impact on you!

Step 1 - Pray: Remember, God WANTS the people you know to be saved. So begin by picking out three people you know (people you interact with on a regular basis) and begin to pray for them to be open to hearing the Gospel.

Step 2 – Pray for you. Again, God WANTS the people you know to be saved. He wants your witness to be powerful, so pray that God would reveal to you the right time and the right place to witness.

Step 3 - Pray some more: Make your list of three people, and keep those people in prayer on a regular basis! Get others to pray for them, too!

Step 4 - Look for opportunities: Pray for open opportunities to tell others in love and with care. Pray for the bravery to tell them! Remember, never argue or confront; allow the Spirit to work! Get together with others and pray for people on their lists, too (Matthew 18:19)!

Step 5 - Cultivate relationships: Relationships are valuable. Do not befriend people just to witness to them; be real and sincere; be open and care! Let them see Christ in you before you open your mouth about God! But, do not just invite them to church events; find interests to share in, too! The more they know you and see character and fruit in you, the more their hearts and minds will be willing to hear from you! The saying, "people do not care what you have to say until they know you care," is very true!

Step 6- Talk: Saint Francis said: “But as for me, I desire this privilege from the Lord, that never may I have any privilege from man, except to do reverence to all, and to convert the world by obedience to the Holy Rule rather by example than by word.” In other words, preach Christ with passion and conviction, and, if necessary, use words!

Step 7 – Pray some more: Continue to pray for them.

Step 8 – Pray even more. It is the Holy Spirit, and not us that convicts people of the truth!

Step 9- Pray even more than that. You're getting the hint right? Who are your three people?

Wednesday: Acts 8:12, 26-40

Philip knew who he was in Christ! He knew that his role in helping others come to know Christ was to obey God and be a person that God could count on. God is the One who can do extraordinary things! So, no matter what happened, Philip leaned on and trusted God. God's timing is perfect and our efforts are never a waste, whether we lead one

person, hundreds of people, or no people, as long as we are striving and are obedient. The question you need to ask yourself is: Do I really trust God? And, if so, am I truly open to being used by God? Philip was a person in whom others could see the Lord! Philip's lifestyle, words, and deeds bore witness to Christ. For that reason, he was chosen to reach the eunuch (Acts 6:3-5). He was a man whose passion was to glorify Christ as Lord. He was not self-seeking; he did not seek power, glory, or personal desires; he only sought only to glorify Christ! Our lives must demonstrate that we know Jesus Christ and that His fruit is working in us.

We must realize that any effort is fruitless without the Holy Spirit! We do not do the work of changing or converting someone---that is solely the work of the Spirit. We are the instruments whose call it is to go and do. Philip obeyed, took the opportunity, and went. We may not get direct orders from Jesus or an angel like he did, but we can pay attention to the opportunities around us and make the most of them! It is the Spirit working in us that makes us contagious and uses us to influence others. God is the One who gives us the opportunities, the willingness, and the ability to witness. The Biblical teaching is clear: witnessing cannot be looked at lightly, or as something we do when it is convenient or when we feel like it. Witnessing comes from our devotion and love for Jesus, and from being loving enough to others that we want them to know the joy of Jesus. Because of what Jesus has done for us, we are excited and want to share with others.

To witness, we need to be usable. We need to tune ourselves before we go out, just as a musician tunes her instrument before the performance and not afterward. We can only do this with an intimate, growing faith, maturing in God's Truth and our spiritual formation. We need to see the hurt of those around us, and not be so involved with our own lives that we look right past others. We are to share with others with truth and compassion. We are never to be condescending, overbearing, judgmental or confrontational. We are to bear witness in love and with grace. God gives us opportunities (far more than most of us realize---because we are not paying attention) and we respond with our faith and obedience.

- What does it mean to be usable?
- Are you usable?

Thursday: Acts 10:1-8

This story is one of the real turning points in church history. Here, for the first time, a Gentile (someone who is not Jewish) is admitted into the fellowship of the church. Cornelius was a Roman centurion stationed at Caesarea, the Roman headquarters of Palestine. In the Roman military, there was the legion. It was a force of about 6,000 men. In every legion there were ten cohorts. A cohort, then, had 600 men, and the cohorts were broken down into groups of 100, called centuries. Over each of these centuries was a centurion. These centurions were the backbone of the army; they were the real soldiers, the ones who really got things done---they were the sergeant majors. Cornelius knew what it was to give and take orders, to be loyal, and to show courage.

Cornelius was a God-fearer; which was the Jewish label for Gentiles who had abandoned their pagan faith and who believed in the God of Israel. They did not adopt the Jewish ways, but they attended the synagogues and worshiped the one true God. The Bible tells us that he was a generous man who gave to those in need, and he was a man of prayer. Certainly, Cornelius was a very good man; to have such a good reputation with the Jews, for such a reputation among the centurions was very rare.

- Google “God-fearer” and “Jewish proselyte”. Which was Cornelius?

Friday: Acts 10:9-16

Although Peter had certainly come a long way, he was still not where God wanted him to be; he still had barriers in his mind which separated Jews from the rest of humanity. So God granted him a vision that he might understand that barriers and walls are against the will of God. Peter was light years ahead of the typical Jew; for orthodox Jews believed that God simply had no use for Gentiles.

It is clear that Peter had come a long way because here we see that Peter was staying in the house of Simon (Acts 9:43, 10:5). Why do you suppose that Luke gives us this little detail? What is the significance (Read Numbers 19:11-13)? This is why Simon’s house was on the seashore, outside of town, for he would not have been welcome in town. The fact that Peter was staying here shows how the Gospel had already begun to turn his life around. About noon Peter went on the rooftop to pray. The roofs were flat, and people frequently went on the roofs to escape the dark, dirty, cramped homes. Plus, if Simon was a tanner, it would have had a very foul odor. Here on the roof during his prayer, he has an image of the great sheet. On this sheet was all sorts of animals, and the Lord God instructed Peter to kill and eat the animals. Clearly, PETA would have real problems with God! Peter was appalled. Being a good Jew he had never eaten such things. Leviticus 11 was very clear, in order for an animal to be clean, it had to chew the cud and have cloven hooves. The voice told him that he had no right to declare anything unclean that the Lord God has declared clean. This happened three times, so there could be no mistaking the message. God was teaching Peter in dramatic fashion that what Paul was doing was His will; that the Gentiles Paul was bringing into the church were members in good standing of the family of God. The Gentiles who were once unclean and separate had been through the blood of Jesus Christ made clean and made one.

- Why was God now declaring things to be clean that once were declared unclean?

Saturday: Acts 10:17-33

In this passage, some very surprising things are taking place. Once again, let us remember that the Jews were quite convinced that all other nations were outside the love and mercy of God. The truly orthodox Jew would have had absolutely no contact at all with any Gentile or even with any Jew that did not strictly adhere to the law. No Jew would have ever consented to be a guest in the house of a someone who was not a good Jew. With that in mind, what Peter did is truly remarkable. It might be easy for us to do, but put yourself in Peter’s place. What if your entire life you were told something was wrong, was a sin, would anger God, and now you are being told to do it. Notice that when the messengers of Cornelius came to the house, they did not try to enter. They were respecting the custom of the Jews. But Peter broke away from Jewish custom and invited them in, and showed them hospitality. Then, when Peter left with them and entered Caesarea, Cornelius met him at the door, no doubt questioning whether Peter would consent to enter into his house. When Peter crossed that threshold some ancient and powerful barriers began to crumble. That is what the call of the Christian remains today.

- What are some of the “unclean” places God is calling us to go into in order to witness?

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