

WHITE MEMORIAL

PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

Men's Bible Study

Acts

Lesson 6

Read Acts 12-14

3 Questions:

Q1: In Chapter 12, James is killed and Peter is thrown into jail without cause. What has happened in your own life (if you are willing to share) that you were accused of without cause? And, on another note, what is the church doing in response to Peter being thrown in jail? How often do you respond this way when something bad is happening?

Q2: In Chapter 13, Paul and Barnabas come upon BarJesus and false spirituality. Have you ever come across a spiritual or supernatural event that was not true? Or maybe was true? How did you respond? If you have not come across a supernatural event in your life, how might you imagine you would deal with it – joy, skepticism, concern, disillusionment, what?

Q3: In Chapter 14, Paul heals a disabled man and later in the chapter gets stoned by the Jews. Have you ever seen a person radically change physically or emotionally because of the gospel? And thinking of your worst physical ailment, how have you dealt with it with God? How did Paul deal with being stoned?

3 Insights:

I1: The first half of Acts (Chapters 1-12) is concerned with the mission of the young church to Jerusalem and Judea with forays into Samaria and to various Gentiles. In other words:

1. Jesus had been announced as the true Messiah.
2. The Jewish leaders, starting with the high priests, have tried to squash this.
3. Saul of Tarsus has been converted into a new person and a new name, Paul.
4. And now Herod, having attempted to kill off the church's main leader (Peter), dies of a fatal disease.

We will continue to see how Luke structures his material into a series of confrontations. In the 2nd half of Acts, the missions of Paul pick up and we see that Paul is regularly opposed, put on trial, hauled in front of magistrates, and so on. The 2nd half of Acts is where we see the Spirit truly moving in the early church.

I2: As Frederick Buechner so eloquently writes in "Telling the Truth, the Gospel as Tragedy, Comedy and Fairy Tale," we see tragedy, comedy and fairy tale play out in Chapter 12. As Buechner states "*to understand what the gospels are all about, you have to understand their unblinking reflection of everyday reality. There is no place here for either saccharine, happy endings or soft-boiled hope. Rather, the gospels record the tragedy of human failure, the comedy of being loved overwhelmingly by God despite that failure, and the fairy tale of transformation through that love.*" In Chapter 12, the tragedy is the death of James and the imprisonment of Peter. The fairy tale/hope is Peter escaping prison and the comedy is Peter going to the women's home to not be recognized. In all of it, the end of Chapter 12 is a combination of tragedy, comedy and fairy tale. Luke writes about Herod trying to be a God (comedy), dying by worms (tragedy) and then Luke telling us more people accepted God (fairy tale/hope).

I3: In Acts Chapter 14, we see several things going on that seem to be part of Luke's humor and his seriousness. The chapter starts with "they went as usual into the synagogue." Does it not appear that Luke is tongue and cheeking them and saying "well of course, where else would they go." They went as usual to the synagogue. As usual. As we know, the synagogue at this time was not just a place of worship. It was the main community center for Jews in each locality, the place where they came together to address and settle all kinds of issues. It was often called "the public square." In addition, once the main text is read in the synagogue, visitors have time to give a word. In this case, after Paul heals the disabled man, he gives a word that makes the people believe Paul and Barnabas are "god-like figures." Again, the "people" see humans in higher status than they should be. For Herod, it led to death. For Paul, he tried to dissuade the people and he in turn was stoned for it by the Jews. As we know, you can never underestimate what people can do to each other.

3 Links to further study:

L1: Here is NT Wright talking about Acts 14. Enjoy hearing this and how Acts truly leads to so much of the rest of the New Testament:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yh8R7VinR_o

L2: Please consider picking up and reading Frederick Buechner's book "Telling the Truth, the Gospel as Tragedy, Comedy and Fairy Tale." It is truly one of the great reads in Christian literature and Buechner does a great job in bringing the Bible alive through this narrative. An amazon link to the book is attached:

https://www.amazon.com/Telling-Truth-Gospel-Tragedy%20Comedy/dp/0060611561/ref=sr_1_1?ie=UTF8&qid=1519933806&sr=8-1&keywords=telling+the+truth+the+gospel+as+tragedy+comedy+and+fairy+tale

L3: Please look at the video of the powerful movie "The Stoning of Soraya M." It is the deeply disturbing story of an Iranian woman whose husband arranges for her murder through an abusive judicial process that culminates her being stoned in public. **It is graphic and hard to watch.**

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gr_2UA-6hlw&has_verified=1

It will give you insight into the brutal nature of stoning and what Paul and other Christians went through in the early Church days.