



DEVOTIONAL TIME

01-05-2015 @ 0900

“To Believe in the ‘Amazing!’”

Acts 13:39-41

AWESOME GOD

Our God is an awesome God!
He reigns from Heaven above
With Wisdom, Power, and Love!
Our God is an awesome God!

Acts 13:39-41

“All of you...are to know for sure that it is through Jesus that the Message about forgiveness of sins is preached to you; you are to know that everyone who believes in Him is set free from all the sins from which the Law of Moses could not set you free. Take care, then, so that what the prophets said may not happen to you: ‘Look, you scoffers! Be astonished and die! For what I am doing today is something that you will not believe, even when someone explains it to you!’”

QUESTIONS FOR TODAY

- Have you ever found yourself “astonished” at the way God “worked on your behalf” in a place and at a time “the Lord felt very far away”? Did “scoffers” make you even more uncertain?
- How do you cultivate “knowledge” that your sins are forgiven? What “belief” drives your assurance in this matter? How do you “explain” that to others?
- Is God doing something “amazing” in your life right now? How are you ready to testify to the Goodness, Wisdom, and Power of the “Loving One” who is acting on your behalf?

It’s one thing to *know about* God; it’s something else entirely to **know God!** Many who come to occupy pew space within the Church today remain “uncertain” (if not nearly ignorant) of the promises of God. For far too many, it all sounds “too good to be true”! Take the “forgiveness of sins”. There are modern skeptics who insist, “No Galilean carpenter who lived thousands of years ago has a thing to do with my choices today, especially since he wound up nailed to a cross!” While being willing to admit Jesus of Nazareth actually lived, these doubters dismiss any claim of divinity, let alone a power to relieve “believers” of the burden of “sin”. The notion of “knowing Jesus” is laughable to these hard core “scoffers”. But those of us who have “tasted Grace” and known “our hearts were burning within us” as the “Word of God” resonated there, can testify that Jesus is alive, risen, and true to all He has promised! He still works “wonders of wisdom” within our minds, and enlivens our spirits with Grace and Favor. When we fall short on occasion, we can still turn to Him for Mercy and Restoration. Life in Him is still a challenge, for the world around us continues to provide “distractions, temptations, and maledictions”. We who would “do the Christian thing” or “speak like Jesus” are often misunderstood, misrepresented, and maligned by those who insist on self-sufficiency and the relentless search for power, privilege, and pleasure. We seek power, too, but only that which comes from the Spirit of God to bless and transform needy souls. We rejoice in privilege also, but our “privilege” lies in identity as “children of God”, a privilege we are glad to share with all people of faith and good will. The pleasure in which we revel arises from helping others come to “know the True God, and Jesus Christ whom He has sent.” God, grant us the Grace of Awestruck Appreciation! You constantly immerse us in more wonders than we can name. Help us begin anew to reflect on Your Generosity, so we are ever ready to help others appreciate it, too. Make us patient in the face of unbelief, pure of heart when we are confronted by pride, and persevering when fear and anger oppose our best efforts to testify to Your Good News. It is a beautiful world, even in its imperfection. It is a new year in which to glorify You. May we make the most of every opportunity this world and this year may hold for renewal and growth!



DEVOTIONAL TIME

01-06-2015 @ 0900

"Prepare for the Insults!"

Acts 13:42-46

AWESOME GOD!

Our God is an awesome God!
He reigns from Heaven above
With Wisdom, Power, and Love!
Our God is an awesome God!

Acts 13:42-46

"As Paul and Barnabas were leaving the synagogue, the people invited them to come back the next Sabbath, and tell them more about these things. After the people had left the meeting, Paul and Barnabas were followed by many Jews, and by many Gentiles who had been converted to Judaism. The Apostles spoke to them and encouraged them to keep on living in the Grace of God. The next Sabbath, nearly everyone in the town came to hear the Word of the Lord. When the Jews saw the crowds, they were filled with jealousy; they disputed what Paul was saying and insulted him. But Paul and Barnabas spoke out even more boldly!"

QUESTIONS FOR TODAY

- Can you remember a moment when you finally got up the nerve to "speak up for the Lord", only to be faced with debate, rejection, and insults? How did you respond?
- Have you known any "believers" who actually got jealous of the popularity of another church because the other church "drew a larger crowd" than they did?
- What is it like to "live in the Grace of God"? How does it deepen the way you "pray"? Does it change the spirit with which you "sacrifice"? Is your "service" more "Christ-like"?

Competition is often beneficial; it forces people to grow, to "raise the bar", to explore new possibility when "old solutions" no longer meet current need. But negative competitive spirit is another matter! We humans can be so testy and disagreeable when we feel threatened. Luke describes the jealousy of the Jews in this new town, who are jealous because Paul and Barnabas are drawing larger crowds than they have. Think about it; Paul and Barnabas are leading these people to a Gospel relationship with God, but since they are not doing the old-fashioned way, it can't be right. In fact, they are so upset with the Apostles they begin to argue with them, even resorting to insults. (Have you ever known anyone who insulted another church or group of believers because they were different? Have you ever done that?) Paul and Barnabas are doing exactly what God has asked them to do, and they are being insulted. Have you ever been insulted or attacked because you spoke out for Jesus Christ? In today's world you are going to stand a very good chance of being attacked if you witness for Jesus Christ. Many in today's world are being very careful and very quiet about their faith for this very reason. Entire churches are learning to remain "respectable" and "acceptable" in their communities by "keeping quiet" about Jesus Christ. Now notice how Paul and Barnabas handled the critics and the insults: "Paul and Barnabas spoke out even more boldly!" In the book of Acts, Luke shows us a very different way of living out our faith than what we tend to see today. Someone issues a guideline: "You may not use the name of Jesus because someone may be offended", and believers say "OK". "You can't pray in the name of Jesus", and the believers say "OK". God, grant us the Grace of True Courage. Jesus Christ has revealed Gospel Love for us. He went through crucifixion and death for us! Make us willing to go through similar suffering for Him! This year, we may need to speak out even more boldly; it is no time to remain quiet in the face of opposition! If Acts is to be our example, Lord, empower us to exercise our vocal cords and live out our faith for love of Him, and You!



DEVOTIONAL TIME

01-07-2015 @ 0900

“How Many Watts Have You Got in Your Light?”

Acts 13:46-47

AWESOME GOD!

Our God is an awesome God!
He reigns from Heaven above
With Wisdom, Power, and Love!
Our God is an awesome God!

Acts 13:46-47

“But Paul and Barnabas spoke out even more boldly: “It was necessary that the Word of God should be spoken first to you. But since you reject it, and make yourselves unworthy of Eternal Life, we will leave you and go to the Gentiles. For this is the commandment that the Lord has given us: ‘I have made you a light for the Gentiles, so that all the world may be saved.’”

QUESTIONS FOR TODAY

- At this moment, can you think of “believers” you know personally, who routinely “keep their witness to themselves”, sharing it very seldom, (if ever)? How often do *you* “share witness”?
- Do you “let your light shine” for God, or “dim it down” out of fear of what “witness” might cost you in terms of social standing or respectability?
- Are you ready to “*be a light*” in a world darkened by disbelief? Does the Good News “burn like a fire in your heart” with a force so bright you can’t help but share it wherever you go?

Today’s selection from the Book of Acts shows us exactly what we believers are called to be: “light shining into the darkness” of this world. Jesus Christ entered this world to bring all of us forgiveness and Eternal Life. This is the Good News that the Bible reveals. But how *good* do we truly believe this “Good News” really is? Is it worth facing stubborn adversity? Is it worth the discomfort of heated debate? Is it even worth enduring an insult or two? Our willingness to share this Good News, regardless of the cost to us, tells the entire world how much value we place on it. Paul and Barnabas are not fools, and know all too well what they are up against. Paul, (having taken a willing part in the persecution of this early Church,) knows full well just how far these “opponents of the Gospel” are willing to go to keep the Apostles quiet. But the “Grace and Love” of Jesus Christ is so precious to them they are willing to “turn up the light” of the Gospel Message. In fact, they will “turn it up” until it is literally “a Beacon shining from the mountain top”, no matter what it may cost them! How brightly is our “Christian light” shining as we deal with all of those around us? How many people do we meet on any given day? How do they “know the Love of Jesus” in any encounter with us? When was the last time we spoke up louder and with even more boldness when we were asked to “tone it down”? In our “society of litigation”, many today have been frightened into silence. There is an old children’s church song, “This Little Light of Mine”, that many of us need to relearn and apply with a new enthusiasm in our world today. The song warns us not to “put our light under a bushel basket”, but rather to let it shine, and to let it shine “all over”! It also exhorts us not to “let Satan blow it out”. We have been called to “*be the light*” to our families, our neighborhoods, our cities, our work places, and as far as we can possibly go. We have not been called to be mere “pew warmers” in our churches, but to be lights to *all* with whom we meet and associate. God, grant us the Grace of Risky Discipleship. Plant Your Love deep within our hearts, and let it begin to “burn” there with new power, a power so compelling Your Grace is worth any price the world may seek to impose. As we get this new year going, Lord, let us do some crucial maintenance on the light of our “faith witness”! Make us truly “dangerous”, Lord, so we dare to see what You will do in, with, and through us as our “lights shine” brighter and brighter!



DEVOTIONAL TIME

01-08-2015 @ 0900

"You Have to Know Whose You Are!"

Acts 13:48-52

AWESOME GOD!

Our God is an awesome God!
He reigns from Heaven above
With Wisdom, Power, and Love!
Our God is an awesome God!

Acts 13:48-52

"The Word of the Lord spread everywhere in that region. But the Jews stirred up the leading men of the city and the Gentile women of high social standing who worshiped God. They started a persecution against Paul and Barnabas and threw them out of their region. The Apostles shook the dust off their feet in protest against them, and went on to Iconium. The believers in Antioch were full of joy and the Holy Spirit."

QUESTIONS FOR TODAY

- Have you ever caught yourself worrying about your "place at the table", or trying to "improve your popularity"? Has this endeavor included tamping down any outward displays of faith?
- Have you ever noticed people facing ridicule for expressing their faith? Did you choose to "stay out of it" since "it was none of your business"? Did your *fear* drive that decision?
- How does your faith bring you "fullness of joy and the Holy Spirit"? Do you detect the "action of God" in your daily life? Your work? Your play? Your relationships?

New Year's resolutions can be tricky! Everybody wants to *get better* in some way, or *be better* by an ideal "measure" of some sort. Overcoming old inertia to make a first effort is one challenge, but then comes the need to progress, to stick with the commitment day by day. Physical improvement is good; mental improvement is better; spiritual improvement is best...because it will last the longest! Take a resolution to "be a better witness for the Lord" for example. Did you make one this year? Are you truly ready to "fight the good fight" that true "witness" is going to bring your way? Luke "pulls no punches" here, clearly showing us what we may be up against if we choose "authentic Christianity", daring to "let our light shine" for Christ before the world. Consider the experience of the Apostles Paul and Barnabas; they are only proclaiming Salvation through Jesus Christ, and announcing the Eternal Life it brings. In short order, they discover that not everybody is a fan of this "New Doctrine" of Salvation through Jesus Christ. Luke clearly points out that even though we may find many who are hungry for the Good News, and even though many of those may "accept and believe", we will nonetheless find ourselves opposed by those who find the Gospel a "threat"! After a while, they will insist in the strongest terms that "we have overstayed our welcome". Notice that Paul and Barnabas were not merely "asked to leave"; they were thrown out of the region! At this moment in our lives, how many of us would be willing to be thrown out of our current locales? How comfortable have we become in our present locations? Have we gotten so settled that we are not about to do anything to jeopardize our prospects of remaining right where we are? If we are the Church of Jesus Christ, do we not need to proclaim Him, even at the cost of being cast out of our communities? God, grant us the Grace of Evangelical Mobility. As Paul and Barnabas simply shook the dust off their feet in protest, and moved on, trusting You to sustain them in all they would face. As they knew they were Yours, may we also learn we are Yours! Convince us of this so thoroughly we are willing to become an "absurdity before the world" with faith so solid we place our entire life on our "Knowledge of Jesus Christ", in whom we have Eternal Life! Christianity comes with a cost, but it's worth it!



DEVOTIONAL TIME

01-09-2015 @ 0900

"Where Are the Miracles?"

Acts 14:1-3

AWESOME GOD!

Our God is an awesome God!
He reigns from Heaven above
With Wisdom, Power, and Love!
Our God is an awesome God!

Acts 14:1-3

"The same thing happened in Iconium: Paul and Barnabas went to the synagogue and spoke in such a way that a great number of Jews and Gentiles became believers. But the Jews who would not believe stirred up the Gentiles, and turned them against the believers. The Apostles stayed there for a long time, speaking boldly about the Lord, who proved that their Message about His Grace was true by giving them the power to perform miracles and wonders!"

QUESTIONS FOR TODAY

- Have you ever thought about driving some distance just to see what is being billed as a "Holy Ghost Miracle Rally"? Did you ever wonder why God "wasn't working" where you were?
- Did you ever "look around", seeing all the pain and suffering in the world, and wished you had some of the "mojo" of biblical saints who were able to work miracles in the Power of God?
- What would you "give" to be able to "serve" in a similar capacity?

Many today are desperately hungry, deeply desirous, or at least quietly curious to see a genuine "display of Godly Power", or what might be called a "miracle". Our guide, Dr. Luke, is giving us another lesson (if we truly want to learn it) about how God often works through our lives. He points out that the apostles stayed "speaking boldly about the Lord, who proved that their Message about His Grace was true by giving them the power to perform miracles and wonders." They *spoke boldly* about the Lord. Are we ready to "step up to the plate", and dare to speak out boldly about the Lord? They understood the risk they were taking by speaking boldly for the Lord, and chose to honor God with their obedience. God then honored them by giving them the power to perform miracles and wonders. Since God treats all of us the same, we can reasonably believe that God may be waiting for us to "step up", and "stand upon His Promise"! God is ready, able, and willing to justify the faith of any who will testify boldly to His Love and Fidelity. When we tell the world about God, the Grace He has made known through His Word, and put our lives on the line for the Truth we proclaim, our God stands ever ready to "back up His Word"! What about us? Do we *believe* in God's Word to the point we will put our lives on the line for it? We like "talking the talk" of "all that God can do", but are we willing to "walk the walk" of total trust in God, regardless of how we (and the God who backs us) may be "put to the test" in public? The Apostles stood before the public, and boldly proclaimed what God could and would do – THEN – God responded with prevailing Grace, and did His part in Power. Faith is only as "powerful" as the totality of our trust! Unless we are "prayed up" enough to truly believe in God, and aware of His Power already at work in us, we will never know His Love well enough to speak boldly about Him. Once we know His Love to that extent, we will stand up, face the world, and risk "speaking out boldly", and see the "Power of God" perform miracles and wonders beyond our wildest expectations. God, grant us the Grace of Holy Boldness! Make us ready in this brand new year to speak the Word of Hope Your Son entrusted to us. Help us hear the Message of Acts, so we share it with confidence! Like those first "pioneers of the Good News", we must "know You" in truth, "love You" with assurance, and "serve You" with clear voice and helping hands. You *will* do the rest!