

ACTS: SOME HIGHLIGHTS – Part 1

We started our study of the book of Acts in 2019 and now, two years later, we have wrapped up that study. But before we completely walk away from this book which is SO SIGNIFICANT in instructing us about the very early years of the church, I thought, for this and next Sunday, I would highlight some portions...some verses or even parts of verses...that I would not want us to miss.

But before we do that, let's talk a bit about reading and studying the Bible.

The **Navigators**, an organization based out of Colorado and that works most principally with college age students has taught, through the years, that our taking the Word of God into our lives can be summarized under 5 points. And for that they have used the human hand as a memory device.

1. First we **HEAR** the Word of God. Your being here this morning fits under that. Many of you, in addition, may listen to various preachers over the radio throughout the week. I was talking to a man this past week about that and at that time expressed my **hesitancy** to "jump on the bandwagon" of any of these radio or television preachers. I have lived long enough to be "burned" by more than a few of these preachers (their lives coming crashing down in an avalanche of corruption or vice) and so I tend to think, "Let's wait until the guy **has been DEAD** for a year or two, and THEN, after that, assuming nothing damning turns up, THEN let's listen to him on the radio." But we all, at least in America, can easily HEAR the Word of God
2. We **READ** the Word of God. This is part of what we call the "Devotional Life." Be it early in the morning, or late at night, we open our Bibles and read. Many Christians fail to do this. By and large these are **weak Christians**. Think of the person beside you...if you know them well. Do they have a devotional life? If you are married to them you likely know the answer to that question. And then ask yourself, "Are they a **STRONG** Christian or a **WEAK** Christian?" There is likely a connection between the strength of their Christian life and their devotional life.
3. We **STUDY** the Word of God. Today there are many aids to studying the Bible: commentaries, concordances, books and

podcasts galore. You don't have to know Hebrew or Greek because of these many aids that exist to help you. There are even "study Bibles" in which most of the work has already been done for you.

4. We **MEMORIZE** the scriptures. Just this past week we had one of our Men's Discipleship Group quiz days: an hour of quizzing one another on our memory of Bible verses we have learned during the past year or even earlier. For even a **single word wrong**...the penalty (which the others all enjoy watching) is to do **10 push-ups**. If I can make it through one of those mornings and do only 10 or 20 push-ups, I'm feeling pretty good. But either we have memorized these verses or we haven't. We can't just bluff our way through. And the truth is, **you CAN memorize Bible verses**, no matter your age, if you truly WANT to.

Let me tell you a brief story here: some years ago I was mentoring a man from the Water Street Mission. He was an older man who had pretty much destroyed his life and body through continual use of alcohol and drugs. If you named a drug, he had used it. He was an addict to the core. But now he was living at the mission and my job was to spend time with him, each and every week, talking to him, mentoring him, praying for him, befriending him, and helping him grow spiritually.

Well, this man, when it came to memorizing scripture was a **disaster**. I recall wanting him to simply learn the books of the New Testament in order: Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, Acts, Romans... But when it came for him to repeat them back, he could hardly get past Mark or Luke. Week after week after week: disaster. And so I concluded, "You talk about frying your brain on drugs...that's this guy. He's hopeless."

And then one day I mentioned that I had lived near Detroit in 1968, the year that the Detroit Tigers won the World Series. And he said, "Oh, yeah, that was the year the Tigers beat the St. Louis Cardinals." "You're right!" I said. "Yes, they beat them 4 games to 3," he said. "Mickey Lolich

was voted the Most Valuable Player." Even I, a big Tigers fan as a kid, didn't remember that.

And so I began questioning him with questions like: "Who played catcher for the Tigers in '68?" "Oh, that was Bill Freehan." "Huh. What position did Al Kaline play?" "Al Kaline was a right fielder."

About that point I pulled out my smartphone and asked, "Who won the 1993 World Series?" "Ah, that would have been the Toronto Blue Jays over the Phillies." I then looked up something even more obscure: "Who played 1st base for the Yankees in 2005?" And this fellow said, "That would have been Tino Martinez."

He was right. Indeed, this fellow was **a walking dictionary** of baseball trivia. And with that I learned that drugs had not fried his brain. **He simply didn't WANT to learn the books of the New Testament in order.**

We each can do (and we DO DO) what we want. You can memorize Bible verses if you WANT.

5. We **MEDITATE** on the scriptures...particularly on those verses that we have memorized. It is one thing to take into our lives the scriptures; it is another thing to **USE** them...to **apply them**. And we do that by meditating...by thinking upon them.

So here we are and we have these Bibles.

I'm using the English Standard Version of the Bible – a modern translation. You may have the King James Version, or the New International Version or the New American Standard Version or some other version. I wouldn't get too hung about that.

In many ways it would be ideal if we all used the **SAME** version. And those who are advocates of using the King James Version **ONLY** will make that point. But I think the bigger issue is that we get into the Bible that we have.

If you are looking to BUY a Bible, I would recommend the English Standard Version. Almost all conservative Bible Schools and Seminaries now make use of the ESV, the English Standard Version. So that is what you are going to increasingly run across.

And if you are buying a Bible I would encourage you to buy one that has **cross-references**, usually found in a center column. With the aid of cross-references, one Bible verse can lead you to another in an entirely different part of the Bible. This is helpful for doing a Bible study.

And once you have a Bible, **write your name in the front**. I have picked up more than a FEW **REALLY NICE Bibles** through the years that had no name in them. It is like I have always said: "One of the perks of being a pastor is **you never have to buy a Bible or an umbrella**," for people are forever forgetting those and leaving them behind. So put your name in your Bible.

Then, when you start reading, keep a straight edge and an ink pen with you. Here you have this **REALLY NICE NEW BIBLE**, and I am **AMAZED** that people will underline some verse with the most **crooked lines**. It looks like a 5 year old got hold of their Bible. Keep things neat and tidy and orderly.

For me I not only underline but then will use, be it in reading the Bible or reading a book, **a star system**. One star beside a line or paragraph means "This is pretty significant." Two or more stars means "This is **REALLY** important."

Some people are into highlighting, using highlighters, but I have never done that.

But don't be afraid to mark up your Bible.

As many of you know, I have, over the past 5 or 6 years been into riding a one-wheel electric unicycle...or what some people call a Solowheel. You can view me over YouTube talking about my Solowheel riding in a 10 minute instructional called "How to Ride a Solowheel." A couple thousand or more people have watched it and I have heard back from people all over the world as to how that video helped motivate them to learn to ride.

But it is common to run across used electric unicycles for sale

that are banged up, scuffed up, even broken due to the rider having "crashed" so many times. But that is to be expected. It shows that the seller really USED the Solowheel.

The same goes for our Bibles. **Don't be afraid to mark it up**: to underline, to highlight, to write in notes and so forth. I used an NIV Bible for years but it is almost useless anymore: it is **so marked up**, the pages, here or there, coming out, and so forth. Well, better that than having a Bible that is 10 or 20 years old and it looks brand new. You may want that for a car...or for a spouse...but not for your Bible!

Alright...into Acts...some highlighted passages...

Acts 1:6-8

Depending upon the circles in which one fellowships, one would almost get the impression that some people – some Christians – have never read these verses. For here are the disciples and they want to know the answer to a WHEN question: "Will you AT THIS TIME restore the kingdom to Israel." And what was Christ's response? "**It is not for you to know times or seasons.**" Yet how many books can any of us find at some Christian bookstore that are all about trying to fix times and seasons for Christ's return?

One of the things that I LOVE about Burning Hearts is that we have a statement of faith that says (and I quote) "We believe that any and all attempts to fix a date or timeline for his (meaning Christ's) return **are misled.**" Amen! Some sanity coming to evangelicalism!

Like many of you I grew up in the church. I grew up hearing about Christ's return...at any moment...and that it was going to be preceded by a rapture of the church, meaning that all the Christians were going to suddenly disappear. And then I remember coming home one day and no one was in the house. And do you know what entered my 10-year old mind: THE RAPTURE HAD OCCURRED AND I HAD BEEN LEFT BEHIND!

Listen, I believe – because the Bible teaches – a rapture of the church. But it comes WITH the return of Christ and the destruction of this

world.

But I had grown up hearing these elaborate plans... and seeing these detailed diagrams...and I don't think I or anyone was the better for having heard or seen those plans.

Better is simply to **be ready for the end of the world** (or more likely your DEATH from being in a car accident or maybe trying to ride a Solowheel). So we should all be **ALWAYS READY to face God** in judgment. But to be consumed with the question, "Will you at this time...?" No, that is a WASTE of TIME.

Acts 2:36-41

Repent and be baptized.

Now I believe we all do well by considering ALL OF THE SCRIPTURES, and from them trying to get the BIG picture.

So let's turn way ahead to Acts 16...

Acts 16:25-34

Here, in Acts 16, we have a very different audience: a Gentile jailer versus a group of serious minded Jews back in Acts 2. And to these two different audiences we have what appears to be a very different message:

The one group is told to repent and be baptized;
the second group (this man) was just told to believe.

But the second man, like the first group was **also baptized**. And the second man, as seen by his actions, **was truly sorry for his sins**.

The conclusion that I reach...and it seems reasonable to me...is that for **any** person coming to Christ, we should expect or see three things:

1. **Repentance** of sins
2. **Believing** on the Lord Jesus Christ (trusting that what he did for us, in suffering on the cross, was **sufficient PAYMENT** for the penalty due us for our own personal sins), and
3. **Being baptized** as a public announcement of who we are and what we now believe.

And I'm willing to push things further here and ask, what seems like a very basic question, and that is if one can be or will be saved who has **only one** of these three items or **even two** of these three items? Will such a person be saved? I think we need all three.

I have never understood those that say they believe yet have never been baptized. How can they read the New Testament and come to the conclusion that THAT seems okay?

Some denominations teach that unless you have been baptized you are lost. Some others teach that baptism is even **the very MEANS of getting right with God**. I don't know that I have ever seen it that way but to NOT BE BAPTIZED seems like **clear disobedience** to me.

And so it has been my delight to baptize some even in the middle of winter. Somewhere I have a photo of me standing **barefoot in SNOW** waiting to go into some VERY COLD WATER so as to publicly baptize a young man (Mark Heisey) who was being deployed the next day and he wanted to make certain he had been baptized BEFORE he was deployed only to face the enemy and maybe even die. Good for him!

But there needs to be a **point of turning** in our lives...a day when we turn FROM SIN and TOWARDS JESUS. If you have never had such a day, then even now, flee to Christ! Turn from your sin and flee to Christ! And then be baptized.

Lastly, for today...

Acts 4:12

Whenever I think on this verse I recall being at a dinner with a bunch of pastors and their wives and during the meal somehow, one of the pastor's wives, brought up the idea that the Bible teaches that only in Christ can a person be saved, and then she referenced Acts 4:12, but she gave the wrong reference and pretty much misquoted the verse. I could have (and maybe even should have) sat there silently, but I didn't. And so I said, "It's Acts 4:12 where we read that there is salvation in no one else for there is ONE

NAME, under heaven, given among men, by which we must be saved." The woman and those at the table **seemed stunned** that I knew the verse and its reference. And that, in turn, stunned me. For I thought surely every pastor knows that verse!

The other story associated with that verse goes back to a time when I sold an Efel wood stove. I had put an ad in the newspaper (this was WAY back) and this guy came to see it and buy it. Somehow...I don't recall how...he learned that I was a Christian, or religious, or whatever. And then he made the **fatal mistake** of letting me know that he had studied the Bible. This was not an LBC student. It was some guy wanting me to know that **I shouldn't try and waste my time witnessing to him** because he had ALREADY STUDIED the Bible. So I said,

"Oh, well, then if you have studied the Bible you undoubtedly know Acts 4:12. What do you make of that verse?" He, of course, had NO IDEA what Acts 4:12 was and, honestly, probably didn't even know where to find the book of Acts in the Bible (that he has supposedly studied). When he tried to sluff off my question, I said, "Well, that is quite a claim to make, is it not, that there is salvation ONLY to be found in Jesus Christ."

Acts 4:12 is a great verse to underline (with a nice straightedge) in your Bible. You have HEARD it, now READ it, STUDY it, MEMORIZE it and MEDITATE on it. And then, USE IT in witnessing to someone about how there is salvation to be found in Jesus, and only in Jesus.