

SHINE Devotional

Week 44 – Lesson 1



The Island of Love

Scripture reading Acts 13:4-5

“So they, being sent forth by the Holy Ghost, departed unto Seleucia; and from thence they sailed to Cyprus. And when they were at Salamis, they preached the word of God in the synagogues of the Jews: and they had also John to their minister.”

Aphrodite, the Greek goddess of love, found her mythical origin in the island nation of Cyprus. In present times, this island nation presents some of the most beautiful beaches, tourist attractions, and safety in the middle east. Located northwest of Israel, during the time of Acts it was a bustling port island. Legends of Mark Antony tell how he gave this jewel of the Mediterranean to Cleopatra as a gift. King Richard’s tale continues the yarn of love when he is storied of residing in this island for a year and romancing a local maiden. If you Google Cyprus today, images fill one’s screen with exotic beaches, caverns, and historical landmarks declaring the fabled history of this island paradise. One could imagine honeymooning in such romantic place or celebrating a special anniversary.

In this environment, God unleashed the Gospel. The church of Antioch desired to share the Gospel with others. Jews needed Jesus, Gentiles needed Jesus, the world needed Jesus. Paul, Barnabas, and John Mark set sail with the support of their church. Their mission was simple - share Jesus. The greatest love story ever penned was told in the heart of Love Island. The myths of false love were confronted. The guilt of illegitimate sexuality met the satisfying grace of knowing the Creator. The systems of self-indulgent gratification and pagan hedonism heard the gracious words of the Savior. The love of God was known. Cyprus met Jesus and the world would never be the same.

The Gospel confronts false narratives. The nature of Christianity is to illustrate the emptiness of the worldly system and demonstrate the satisfaction of the Gospel. Remember the love of God in your life today. Take a moment to recount the goodness of Christ. It will bring greater satisfaction than even a vacation album of a trip to Cyprus.

SHINE Devotional

Week 44 – Lesson 2



Dave Ramsey and ELPs

Scripture reading Acts 12:25, 13:5 & 13

“And Barnabas and Saul returned from Jerusalem, when they had fulfilled their ministry, and took with them John, whose surname was Mark.” “And when they were at Salamis, they preached the word of God in the synagogues of the Jews: and they had also John to their minister. Now when Paul and his company loosed from Paphos, they came to Perga in Pamphylia: and John departing from them returned to Jerusalem.”

About a decade ago, the name “Dave Ramsey” became familiar to me. My family members and other Christians leaders used his name almost in a verb form. I heard, “You need to Dave Ramsey this or that” and wondered what they meant. In the last several years, I came to understand the concepts of debt snowballs and smart financial planning and have tried to implement these concepts. Those who follow his methods know the term ELP (endorsed local provider). These ELPs learn from Ramsey. They understand his methods and philosophy and secured his endorsement.

Learning from a mentor and implementing their strategies is common. The Bible term for this process is discipleship. The three verses highlighted above mention a companion to Saul and Barnabas. His name was John Mark. John Mark accompanied his uncle, Barnabas, and Saul in the very first mission trip recorded in the New Testament. The church of Antioch facilitated the small band of evangelists as they travelled to Cyprus with the Gospel. What experience or benefit did John Mark bring to the team? By the time we read verse 13, the Scripture records that John Mark was a liability. He deserted the team and went home to his mother in Jerusalem. Imagine the disappointment. Consider the loss of hope when this older adolescent or early twenties individual walked away from the struggle. Paul was furious. Barnabas was broken hearted.

There is a great lesson to learn in these verses. Investing your life in another life is never a waste. Giving your skills to someone else is always worthwhile. Sometimes an ELP will disappoint. Disappointment does not exempt us from this principle. The believer’s life must be spent in someone else’s life. Who are you investing in today? Is there a little boy or girl in the next room who you need to invest in right now? Is there a family member who needs a word of encouragement? Who is receiving your ELP today?

SHINE Devotional

Week 44 – Lesson 3



Where I Come From

Scripture reading Acts 13:6-8

“And when they had gone through the isle unto Paphos, they found a certain sorcerer, a false prophet, a Jew, whose name was Bar-jesus: Which was with the deputy of the country, Sergius Paulus, a prudent man; who called for Barnabas and Saul, and desired to hear the word of God. But Elymas the sorcerer (for so is his name by interpretation) withstood them, seeking to turn away the deputy from the faith.”

Las Vegas is one of the most diverse cities in the entire world. In this city, people from southeast Asia, western Africa, Europe, and central America all find a home. Our casinos and easy money lifestyle provide opportunity for almost anyone to find an income and financial success in a relatively small amount of time. In this mass integration of so many diverse cultures arise many opportunities to learn and experience varied traditions and cultures.

Christianity celebrates cultures. It values diversity. God’s people have held this value since the time of Moses. Moses married an African woman. Boaz took a foreigner in marriage. Esther’s union with a pagan king was celebrated. Even the harlot Rahab found refuge in the love of a Hebrew man. Each of these individual’s nationality and upbringing means little in their story. The preeminent characteristic of their lives is seen in their allegiance to God. The first mission trip also illustrates the acceptance of diversity.

In our reading today, a Jewish man antagonized the missionaries. Verse 6 points out his nationality, perhaps to share that he knew better or expose his egregious villainy. In our story, the mission field fell under the auspices of the Roman government, whose leaders trusted this Jewish man implicitly. It appears he was skilled at mixing in enough truth to validate his erroneous ways. When the missionaries were afforded the opportunity to have an audience with the deputy who desired too hear the Word of God, the only hindrance to their message was a person who knew better, but sacrificed his virtue for validity. Bar-jesus abandoned principles for power. He stood in direct opposition to God’s Word.

Is there a value, tradition, or opportunity standing in the way of your service to God today? Regardless of our background, we all face the same future - an appointment with Jesus Christ.

SHINE Devotional

Week 44 – Lesson 4



Shovels

Scripture reading Acts 13:9-10

“Then Saul, (who also is called Paul,) filled with the Holy Ghost, set his eyes on him. And said, O full of all subtilty and all mischief, thou child of the devil, thou enemy of all righteousness, wilt thou not cease to pervert the right ways of the Lord?”

It is a spade, not a trough, not a fig...it’s a shovel. Call a spade a spade. This expression used in contemporary vernacular originated over five centuries ago with the writing of Erasmus. This linguist reportedly became frustrated with Plutarch’s illusionary writing and offered the insight, “Call a spade a spade.” The phrase took on a more abrupt definition around the turn of the last century. *Brewer’s Dictionary of Phrase and Fable* defined it in 1913 as being “outspoken, blunt, even to the point of rudeness”, adding that it implies calling “things by their proper names without any ‘beating about the bush’”. (according to Wikipedia)

Christians understand the need for grace and mercy. They are recipients of these virtues in their salvation. Believers seek to model the care of our Savior in their interactions, but there are times when civility ends and bluntness takes the lead. Saul gets it. He is ready for the challenge. The former persecutor of Christians transforms into its fiercest proponent. Verse 10 records the exchange. His abrupt manner was not fleshly or carnal. It was of God. The same God who upended tables in the temple was working through Saul to blast a hypocritical traitor. In five railing accusations, Saul dismantled the pious pretense of the villainous counselor.

The stark contrast between truth and error shines brightly. Bar-jesus was subtle, mischievous, demon possessed (perhaps), evil, and a pervert. The missionaries shined authenticity, virtue, godliness, holiness, and purity. The differences could not have been more vivid. The abrupt scoffing of the villain was met with strong confidence of the Christian. Believers must speak truth. We must SHINE as lights. When error screams in opposition, believers must boldly confront it. David killed Goliath, Moses stood up to Pharaoh, and Saul confronted Bar-jesus. He called a spade a spade.

SHINE Devotional

Week 44 – Lesson 5

Right-Handed



Scripture reading Acts 13:11

“And now, behold, the hand of the Lord is upon thee, and thou shalt be blind, not seeing the sun for a season. And immediately there fell on him a mist and a darkness; and he went about seeking some to lead him by the hand.”

The best athlete in my circle of friends growing up was Travis. He could run fast, kick a ball, throw, shoot, and catch better than any of us. Though my other friends had their abilities and strengths, Travis had skills in any sport. He had a unique characteristic: he was left-handed. Left-handed people hit a ball more smoothly, bat with greater fluidity, and enjoy some advantages in other aspects of athletics. Between 10-12% of our population are left hand dominate. Outside of using scissors, left-handed people got it good!

To relate with us, God will often use anthropomorphic (assigning human characteristics to nonhuman things, hello Mickey Mouse) expressions to describe himself. Today’s Scripture speaks about *“The hand of God being upon thee.”* The book of Habbakuk was the last passage of Scripture to mention God’s hand, and it speaks of His right hand. *“His right hand”* in Scripture is the demonstration of His might. Power flowed from the right hand of God. For the believer, God’s right hand provides salvation. *“For they got not the land in possession by their own sword, neither did their own arm save them: but thy right hand, and thine arm, and the light of thy countenance, because thou hadst a favour unto them”* (Psalm 44:3).

Those who know the Lord and follow His plan find comfort in the hands of God. Those who denounce Him and persecute His children discover His right hand is no comfort at all. To them, God’s hand executes pain and sorrow instead of comfort and salvation. Such is the place of the sorcerer. Bar-jesus falls blind to the hand of God. The same God of comfort confronts sinners. Saul knew well this chastening, and after a season his eyes were open to the Gospel. Perhaps, Bar-jesus enjoyed the same privilege. Take inventory of your life. Are you in a place of God’s blessing or chastening? It’s good to know the right hand of God.

SHINE Devotional

Week 44 – Lesson 6



Hope and Change

Scripture reading Acts 13:7 & 12

“Which was with the deputy of the country, Sergius Paulus, a prudent man; who called for Barnabas and Saul, and desired to hear the word of God. Then the deputy, when he saw what was done, believed, being astonished at the doctrine of the Lord.”

“This is the most important election of our lifetime!” We hear this phrase every 2-4 years. No doubt, the stakes of civic responsibility grow each year. Elections determine direction, and direction steers values for a community or a nation. Christians must involve themselves in the political process. Service, voting, and volunteerism are part of the great American heritage. There are times when our ideals and positions must be defended. The cacophony of talking heads fills our airwaves and lures Christians to align their positions with donkeys or elephants, but the tired arguments of partisan bickering usually fail to persuade anyone.

Barnabas and Saul had performed a miracle. Saul struck a sorcerer with blindness in the presence of the leader of the country, Sergius Paulus, who governed Cyprus with the backing of Caesar. The missionaries’ message produced enough commotion in his province to garner his attention. He was a sincere and astute man; the Bible calls him prudent. He wanted answers from these Jewish travelers. In their meeting, he saw the impotence of his most trusted advisor on display. He witnessed the chastening hand of God exercised without delay, and learned about Christ from the preachers. Of the three events, only one had lasting consequence - The Word of God. It was the missionaries’ teaching (doctrine) that produced salvation for Sergius Paulus. It was the power of Christ’s Gospel that impacted eternity. The blindness experience changed things for a season, but 100 years from now when Christians fellowship in Heaven, very little will be said about blindness. Much will be said of God’s Word. The Roman leader became a believer. Christians today enjoy the same privilege of Saul and Barnabas. We have the Word. Never substitute what is eternal for what is temporary. Allow your politics, positions, and perspectives to be centered around God’s Word. Therein lies the greatest power.