

"We All Are One in Mission"

 **Declaring God's praise with courage (vv.1-9)**

 **Receiving God's Word with caution (vv.10-12)**

In the name of Christ-crucified and risen, dear fellow missionaries of our Lord:

How easily do you give up? On Call Day at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Mequon, Wisconsin, in May of 1986, our Mission Counselor Bob Hartman asked, "How patient are you?" "I don't give up easily," I replied, "especially not when the Lord tells me to do something." He asked because my assignment was to not hold worship services for a year, but ring door bells instead to gather a congregation. Looking back twenty-two years, I confess there were many times I felt like giving up. You know why? Because I suffer from the same cow-sheep-goat syndrome you do. A.K.A., "The grass is always greener on the other side of the fence." People think it must be great to be a pastor and only work an hour or two a week. One pastor asked, "You call this work?" 24/7 duties between the high points of worship and Bible Class make that other grass look greener. But I was blessed by a year in the workaday world where a simple lesson came through clearly: Building cabinets is more fun as a hobby. Being able to study God's Word and share with God's people as your livelihood really is a privilege because as hymn writer Howard M. Edwards III just reminded us: **"We All Are One in Mission."** (CW 566) – busy...

 **Declaring God's praise with courage (vv.1-9)**

In a world where religious differences often erupt in bloodshed, it's amazing what easy witnessing opportunities we have in "the land of the free and the home of the brave." While grandson Dane was doing so well in the hospital last week, I walked past a security desk where a guard was talking to a housekeeper in a burka. "Is that Arabic I hear?" "No, Somali," they replied. "But we know Arabic from reading the *Quran*." "I've read the *Quran*," I told them, which opened up a whole lot of questions, especially from the man who has an interesting curiosity about Christianity. Later a fellow Christian asked me, "Did you tell them the Bible is the Holy Book and the *Quran* is not?" "No, because they already knew I believe that and they think the opposite." My opportunity for **Declaring God's praise** came when the man wondered why a loving father would send his son to die. It gave me great pleasure to explain how God's Son, Jesus Christ, volunteered to do what no one else could. He lived the perfect, holy life under God's law, then died the innocent death which God said paid for all our sins. I looked at the guard and his fellow Muslim and told them as simply and clearly as I could, "God loved you so much that He allowed His only Son Jesus to come and die for you."

But is that really **Declaring God's praise with courage**? It was late evening with hardly anyone else around. We were having a friendly conversation without a single firearm in sight. That opportunity can hardly rank up there with the **courage** we see on Paul's Second Missionary Journey.

Remember what happened in Acts 16, right before our text? You've heard of Lydia the seller of purple in Philippi whose whole family was baptized. You might even recall the jailer of Philippi who asked the classic question: **"What must I do to be saved?"** He heard from Paul and Silas the great answer about nothing to do. **"Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved – you and your household."** Sure enough, the whole family was instructed, baptized and filled with joy in Jesus. But Paul and Silas still had welts on their backs because the Roman soldiers whipped them bloody and chained them without trial. Nervous magistrates had to come personally and release Paul and Silas from their illegal imprisonment. First they went to Lydia's house, then they left town when they were good and ready.

Enough **courage**? Not yet. For three Sabbaths in the next town of Thessalonica Paul built on their Jewish religious training in the Old Testament, setting Jesus' life and ministry side-by-side with

ancient prophecies. What a match! Many were convinced that *the Christ had to suffer and rise from the dead*. They believed Paul's courageous declaration: *"This Jesus I am proclaiming to you is the Christ."*

Why would that upset anyone? Jealousy needs no reason. Irrational envy among Paul's fellow Jews gathered a mob, assaulted the home of a believer named Jason and dragged him into court shouting, *"These men have turned the world upside down and now they come here!"* (Acts 17:6 KJV updated) To escape the turmoil Jason and the others were forced to post bond before they could go home. That night the Christian brothers *"sent Paul and Silas away to Berea."*

Brutal beating in Philippi did not stop them from **Declaring God's praise with courage** in Thessalonica. Would the mob action there silence them in Berea? This is truly remarkable. Think how upset you get if high hopes crash and burn. For instance, we all get sick, but if you were planning to retire and then got diabetes – how disappointing! Or if you drive an old "beater," breaking down is normal as potholes. But your brand new car? God really blessed our 1300 home visits in 1986-87. Getting into a church in three years was fast then, and takes ten or twelve years these days. But God used Paul to build a congregation in three weeks...and then he had to flee for his life. Would that put a damper on your witness? While our English translations limp, the context and the Holy Spirit's Greek original tell us Paul and Silas didn't just arrive and enter the synagogue. They *came close beside* their fellow Jews in Berea without any bitterness or resentment from Thessalonica because they left their fears behind. They came **with courage – Declaring God's praises**, and found to their delight that the Bereans were...

Receiving God's Word with caution (vv.10-12)

Once a woman in Vadnais Heights kept answering the door somewhat angry. Her husband finally told me that her parents had helped a door-to-door evangelist who disappeared with almost \$30,000 of their generosity. I told him I couldn't blame her. How could she know I was any different?

Actually, there was a way she could know, something she should have done. See it in Berea? *Now the Bereans were of more noble character than the Thessalonians, for they received the message with great eagerness and examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true.* They had reason to be cautious because travelling religious teachers were everywhere. But faithful **caution** took the noble Bereans in the right direction. With their Jewish Bible, what we call the Old Testament, they gave Paul an examination. Every day they listened closely to what he said, then looked up the prophecies he quoted from the Old Testament. Laying Paul's words side-by-side with the Holy Scriptures of the Bible equipped the Bereans to judge his message. As I tell every adult and teen instruction class, "Don't believe what I say; check it out." Whereas people can get shot for questioning the *Quran*, the Bible is the only religious book that flat out tells you, *"Test everything. Hold on to the good. Avoid every kind of evil."* (1 Thessalonians 5:21f NIV) "Pastor, you mean I can ask questions?" That's right, my friend, all the questions you want. If I don't know or the Bible doesn't say, I'll tell you. Because **We All Are One in Mission**, it's healthy to be **Receiving God's Word with caution – eager, willing caution**.

The original Greek word for *eager willingness* (προθυμία) is more literally *pro-spirit eagerness*. It's in the classic stewardship chapters (2 Corinthians 8, 9) we discussed this week in our Elders-Board for Lay Ministry Bible study. The Berean secret for *eager willingness* was studying God's Word. What a great way to unite as **One in Mission**, especially when we apply lessons from the School of Outreach to our Gospel ministry. Laziness with God's Word is a grievous sin. But eager study of that Word will raise your **courage** in thankful **praise** to say good things about our God to everyone you meet.

Never give up? Never give in? Not when souls are at stake. One fine Christian woman in my home congregation had her husband living far, far away in Alaska. Friends and family rightly told her his desertion had ended their marriage. But she knew of a relationship far more important than their marriage. So she kept praying and witnessing. Years later I heard that one of our pastors in Alaska ran into her husband and the man finally converted to Christ. He helped build a mission church up north. Now they're back together again, truly **One in Mission**. God make us stubborn in Christ alone. Amen.