

**Be Concerned**  
**Acts 25:1-26:32**

The book of Acts is an account of the working of the Holy Spirit in the early church, promised by Jesus Himself before His ascension that the Spirit would work mightily. We have seen in our study the supernatural power of the Holy Spirit perform miraculous work in the lives of people who willingly yielded themselves to His power. People who were transformed internally through the saving grace of God took that same message of eternal hope to others shaking the very core of the established world order. Neither the political or religious world had ever seen anything like the movement of Christianity as it swept through the Roman Empire.

In its pursuit to take the world for Christ to build His eternal kingdom, not on earth but in heaven it wielded no weapons, it amassed no rallies or demonstrations, it brokered no treaties or political ties. Casual conversation, stirring sermons and changed character were the tools used to point people to Christ. Conviction, confession and commitment led to an amazing work of God to reach multitudes. It began with 12 men and quickly spread like wild fire to hearts that yearned for peace and forgiveness from the only One who could give it. Among the most dramatic changes that took place in the life of an individual was that of Paul who was so gripped by the gospel, so controlled by the Spirit we could say today that we owe our salvation to him because of his obedience to preach the truth of God's Word in Europe. Oh that we might see such a movement sweep through this land.

Over the past several weeks in our study of Acts we have seen the leading of the Holy Spirit move to fulfill the will of God for the Apostle Paul to whom was given the promise that he would get to Rome to testify there of God's saving grace. God's will included events that would from a human

perspective be considered unusual, events that would cause us to question the wisdom of the Almighty to bring to pass His promise to the beloved Apostle. Unorthodox it may be, but nonetheless it was the method by which God used to get the Apostle to this destination. Imprisonment and a series of trials have brought him to this place in our study.

We have noted in these recent weeks four compelling truths that we should remember if we seek to follow the Lord, trusting His lead in our lives.

Be courageous even when we don't understand God's ways and wisdom.

Be confident that God will do what He said.

Be consistent in our walk.

Be clear in our message.

In our own strength we cannot hope to live in the world as it is today. Discouragement, despair and destruction are formidable foes that stand against us. We need the empowering work of the Holy Spirit to help us in these four areas to get through this life.

Today our passage is about our need to be concerned.

It was one of the darkest days in our history. There have been many dark days on this path we have come to know as freedom. We read in history books and watch documentaries about the struggle for independence from tyranny that forged this nation over 200 years ago. The oppression of a ruler fueled the outrage of individuals enough to spark a revolution among the 13 colonies that populated the eastern seaboard. On one hand it was a bright day as the bells of independence finally echoed when the shackles of tyranny were broken. Yet in the wake of this new freedom were the lives of countless individuals who had sacrificed themselves for the sake of this pursuit. They were husbands and fathers, brothers and cousins, grandfathers and uncles, friends and neighbors. Preachers and politicians, farmers and fishermen,

shop owners and stonemasons, rich and poor, male and female, young and old – they were the types of people who spawned a new kind of patriot, one who would not tolerate the mounting insidious attacks on what these colonists had endured for far too long from those who would hold them in its powerful and painful grip. And so they fought, and fought hard to throw off the mantle of autocracy in order to be draped with the robe of independence. So it was that in those dark days the light of liberty shone brightly.

Fast forward some 90 years later and another period of darkness hovered over our nation like a moonless night in the deepest cave. The right of freedom for all peoples was being fought for. The enemy did not storm our shores or breach the walls of our towns. It was an internal battle. In some cases friends and neighbors weren't fighting side by side with each other, they were fighting against each other. The phrase "all men are created equal" had taken on a new meaning and the fight to give all men in this country that right struck a deep chord that threatened to sever the very strands that for nearly 100 years had bound her together. It is estimated that as many as 620,000 died in the Civil War. Some historians believe the number to be closer to 700,000. In that war alone the casualties surpassed the number of casualties in all the other wars from the Revolutionary War through Viet Nam. They were fighting for an ideology that was deeply engrained. Regardless of the side – Union or Confederate – it was a fight for freedom of one kind or another. Yet, the Emancipation Proclamation rang in a new era of liberty.

50 years later more dark days would follow with World War I, then World War II, the Korean War, the Viet Nam War, and the Gulf War. Each has had its cost. We speak most often in terms of economic gains or losses when it comes to war, mostly what it is costing our nation in defense funds that reach astronomical figures that boggle the mind. Rarely do we speak of the greatest cost to retaining our

freedom – the cost to families whose husbands or fathers or sons or daughters who will not be coming home - the families whose lives were forever changed because of their sacrifices.

There are other dark days: Civil unrest of the 1960's spawned by racist hatred, there was the siege on the Branch Davidian compound in Waco, TX in 1993, the bombing of the federal building in Oklahoma City in 1995, all dark days that to some degree affected America.

There is one more day of darkness in our recent history. It was on this day 10 years ago that the threat of tyranny reared its ugly head on our shores to once again threaten the fragility of freedom.

At approximately 8:45a.m. on September 11, 2001 the first of four hijacked commercial planes found its target slamming directly into the North tower of the World Trade Center. Approximately 20 minutes later another plane bore down on and crashed into the South tower. In just over an hour's time structural failure to both buildings resulted in their catastrophic collapse. Twin buildings that had proudly stood for nearly three decades succumbed to the destructive forces that toppled them in a heap of twisted steel, broken glass and smoldering rubble.

Half an hour after the attacks on the twin towers the third plane descended on and struck the capital of our defense – the Pentagon, while the fourth plane was retaken by brave individuals who would not allow it to be used as a missile aimed at the capital, but instead crashed it in an open field in Pennsylvania. You may well remember where you were and what you were doing on that dreadful day. In the wake of the chaos 2,977 victims had lost their lives. This number included those in each of the four passenger planes, the two towers and the Pentagon. Of the deaths 55 were military personnel, the rest were civilians or rescue personnel comprised of New York City police and

firemen, EMT's, and the Port Authority police personnel.

On this, the 10 year anniversary we remember the most horrific attack on US soil since its inception. On the official 9/11 memorial website is this caption:

**We shall never forget  
We shall keep this day,  
We shall keep the events and the tears  
In our minds, our memory and our hearts  
and take them with us as we carry on.**

Death and tragedy have a way of impacting and affecting us in so many ways – some good and some not good. In a combined study between the University of Michigan and the University of Washington following the attack researchers concluded that individuals had a strong need for spiritual support in coping with the tragedy following 9/11. It wasn't just New Yorkers, but a phenomenon that occurred throughout the nation. In the weeks that followed millions flocked to churches as a way to find hope and answers amid the despair and lingering questions of why, but according to the Barna research team who have followed the trends of spiritual life in America over the past 10 years since the attack their analysis reveals that within just a few months the spiritual lives of the nation's population was back to pre-attack levels. What it means is that their faith did not last.

I don't know in what ways that day may have affected you. Maybe for a short time your pursuit of seeking God accelerated. Maybe it had no significant impact on your faith because you already believe God's sovereignty and power and purpose in it all. But folks, we need to be concerned. We need to be concerned about our own spiritual well-being and we need to be concerned about the spiritual climate of the nation, but if history shows us anything as we read through the Biblical accounts of Israel who also endured dark days, we

see that even in the midst of national tragedy that brings people to their knees before God, such spiritual fervor is often short lived. Time and time again following a national disaster of some kind when events returned to normal they soon forgot about any commitments previously made to God. Like those following 9/11 their faith didn't last.

We need to be concerned that we don't abandon faith when things return to normal following some devastating storm that occurs in our life. In those moments of despair when we cry out to God for deliverance let us not fail to remember the vows we made to God when He helped us through a tough time whether national or personal.

Folks, we need to be concerned and remember how brief life is. We need to be concerned about the life of those who have yet to make a personal decision for Christ. Only God knows the day and time in which His finger will point our way or toward someone we know and a last breath will be drawn either naturally or tragically. We need to be concerned that we and they are ready to meet God.

Paul provides us with an example of someone who was concerned about the eternal well-being of individuals. He was always ready to give an answer for the hope that was in him. Turn with me to **Acts chapters 25 and 26**. Governor Felix has been replaced by Governor Festus. Taking some time to visit his constituents and get the lay of the land he traveled to Jerusalem. It was there that the chief priests sought an audience to discuss their case against Paul. From the previous chapter you will recall that Paul has been in prison in Caesarea now for two years. Their request was not to finally bring justice against this trouble maker. We read in the opening verses the reason for their request. Follow along beginning at **verse 1**.

They wanted to bring justice to bear by their own hands. Once again we see their evil attempts to ambush and assassinate Paul, but Festus informed

them that they should bring their charges to Caesarea where the prisoner was being held. After about two weeks the court was convened to hear the charges and to give Paul an opportunity to defend himself. Wanting to placate the Jews Festus asked if Paul was willing to return to Jerusalem to face charges there. Knowing that it would not fare well for him in Jerusalem Paul clearly stated his right as a Roman citizen and appealed to Caesar. (Read vs. 4-12.)

Paul would shortly be on his way to Rome in fulfillment of the promise given him by the Lord.

Shortly after that King Agrippa II with his sister Bernice arrived for a State visit. It was customary for rulers to pay respect to a new ruler. When the matter of Paul's case was discussed Agrippa requested to hear Paul as well. At the hearing, Festus addressed King Agrippa and indicated that after his own examination he had not found Paul guilty of any crime, but because Paul had appealed to Caesar he was forced to comply with the request. Festus hoped that Agrippa having a more thorough understanding of Judaism might be able to shed some light on specific charges that could be sent to Rome about Paul.

Chapter 26 begins with Agrippa giving Paul the floor to speak in his defense. I want you to notice something about Paul that I think is commendable. At Paul's conversion the Lord graciously revealed to Ananias the commission that Paul was given by the Lord, but Ananias was hesitant to go and visit Paul because of the reputation that had preceded him. But the Lord informed Ananias that **“this man is my chosen instrument to carry My name before the Gentiles and their kings and before the people of Israel.”** (Acts 9:15) On the different occasions when Paul has given his defense it is not with the intention of persuading the court to release him, he is more concerned about giving an accurate defense of his faith so that one more person might hear the gospel and perhaps be convicted to repent and turn to Christ. Whether before the Sanhedrin,

Felix, Festus or Agrippa the content of his defense does not change – this is who I was before I had a life altering experience with the living Christ, this is who I am after that experience, this is what I believe and why I believe it. He supported his claims not just through his personal experience, but through the Old Testament prophecies that teach about the coming Messiah and His resurrection. It was his hope that his testimony would convict someone to trust Christ.

Paul was concerned that his testimony be consistent and accurate so that its truth could penetrate the heart of his hearers regardless of their position. He wasn't as concerned about a favorable ruling with regard to his innocence; he was more concerned about the souls of men. The heart of God for the souls of man beat within Paul.

## II Peter 3:9-13

When it comes to meting out judgment on the world for its rejection of His Son, God is not powerless, as some believe, to bring that about. Neither is He uncaring about the state of the people of the world. His delay is not indifference; it is out of patience and compassion for people so that they might turn to Him in repentance for salvation that leads to eternal life. God is concerned about our eternal well-being otherwise destruction would have occurred a long time ago.

Look at the example of Noah. For a hundred years God delayed His judgment so that men might turn to Him, but no one except Noah's family trusted God to deliver them from the impending judgment He was about to unleash for the world's wickedness

We need to be concerned for the souls of those around us because the judgment of God is coming and it will come when least expected, just as a thief comes at night. We need to be concerned that people are ready. Scripture tells us that as it was in the days of Noah, so it will be in the last days before Christ returns. People will be going about

their daily lives unconcerned about any judgment that is about to fall. On September 11, 2001 people got up and readied themselves for work just as they had done the previous day and previous week and previous year. They boarded planes without an inkling of what was about to happen that would forever seal their eternal destiny. Where would many of them be today in eternity had a friend been concerned enough to share Christ or had they read that tract or gospel booklet given to them? What decision would they have made for eternity had they only kept, and read and heeded that little testament given to them? What answer will a Pastor give to the Lord who asks why he didn't give an invitation at the end of a message for a person to respond to the Spirit's wooing voice to turn to Christ and away from sin? Were it not for the fact that He will wipe away all tears we may otherwise spend eternity pondering the two word question "what if..." What if I had taken the time to share Christ? What if I had been bolder in my witness? What if I weren't so concerned about what other people thought of me or what I believe? Paul didn't care. We read that Festus interrupted the Apostle's speaking and claimed that Paul was crazy for such beliefs. After D.L. Moody got saved he started witnessing to everyone he could. He was branded with the nickname "crazy Moody." What if Festus had been more concerned about the real truth of God's Word and eternal life than he was about getting to the truth about the allegations of his prisoner? What if King Agrippa had been more concerned about his eternal position than his earthly popularity?

Kids, what would happen if there was more concern for the spiritual well-being of your friends than being popular or getting good grades or making the team? What would happen if you rocked your school for Christ? In two weeks you'll have an opportunity to make a stand for Christ. See you at the Pole is happening Wednesday, September 28.

(SHOW SYATP VIDEO CLIP)

Will you go and stand with other Christian kids to form solidarity between you to be concerned about the eternal destiny of your friends and classmates? Will you commit to pray for them and to speak to them and to invite them to events where they can hear the gospel? Jesus promised that when we go in the power of the Holy Spirit, that same Spirit will enable us to be witnesses of what Christ has done for us and what He can do for them. It is that same Spirit who creates that concern in us for the lost.

What would happen if employees rocked their work place for Christ? What would happen if we rocked our neighborhoods for Christ? What if, like Paul, we were concerned for the lost concerned enough to share the gospel?

The Bible says in **Hebrews 9:27** that **"it is appointed once for man to die, but after that comes the judgment."**

That Paul speaks about receiving forgiveness of sins is testimony to the fact that there will be judgment for those very sins if a person chooses not to repent and turn to Christ.

**John 3:16-18, 36**

People die every day. Some die from natural causes. Illnesses and diseases or just old age claim the lives of people. There isn't a thing medicine can do to sustain them any longer. Others die from unnatural means like on 9/11. They die at the hands of others who intentionally determine to end that life. Or they die at the hands of someone who unintentionally didn't mean to but it happened. Still others believe that because of all of life's uncertainties and hardships it's just not worth it anymore and they take their own life. Whether people want to believe it or not the Psalmist speaks of God knowing the very number of days we will live, the very number of breaths we will take. What if we knew that number? What if we knew when that day was coming? Would it make any difference in how we live or when we prepare for

eternity? Would we be more concerned about our own eternal destiny or the eternal destiny of others? The point is we don't know when that day is coming for any of us and we need to be concerned enough to act, either to repent and trust Christ for salvation or to tell others about God's saving grace.

Whether in death or at the judging hand of God our world will end. Peter asks the sobering question in the passage we read: **“since everything will be destroyed in this way, what kind of people ought you to be?”** He then gives the response: **“You ought to live holy and godly lives as you look forward to the day of God and speed its coming.”** Then he concludes in **verse 14 “be at peace with Him.”** How can you be at peace with the Lord? It begins with a personal relationship with Him. We cannot know the peace of God unless we are at peace with God.

There is coming a day when we will all stand before the eternal judge. Were we concerned enough in this life to make preparations to spend it with the Lord? Were we concerned enough in this life to share that news with others? In his defense Paul gives the summary of the gospel. First he quotes the words of the Lord who was speaking to him. We find that in **verses 17-18 (chapter 26)**.

Then in **verses 19-20** he speaks about his obedience in taking the message to others, preaching to others about repentance and turning to God, the proof of their repentance would be visible through doing good deeds. In writing about this passage John MacArthur notes that repentance “is a change of mind that changes behavior.” Paul is not saying that good works will save a person but that good works will prove the person is saved.

**Ephesians 2:8-9**

**James 2:18**

Paul closes his defense and testimony with a question. How about it King Agrippa, are you ready to believe the prophets who spoke about the

coming Messiah fulfilled in Christ and if you believe it are you ready to trust Him for salvation? Again, Paul showed his concern for the eternal well-being of a soul who needed Christ and put the question to the King. Unfortunately as Jesus attested to Nicodemus that the light has come, there are those who love darkness more than the light. King Agrippa was one who knew the truth but refused to repent and turn to God for salvation. That didn't stop Paul from being concerned enough to share the gospel and ask for a response. As we have seen over these weeks, he was courageous, he was confident, he was consistent, he was clear and he was concerned.

As we remember the events of 9/11 we need to be concerned about the eternal well-being of others. Are we concerned enough about our own destiny to act on making the most important decision of our lives? Are we concerned enough about the spiritual well-being of others to share the gospel with them?

You may or may not know the name Bill Gothard. When he was in high school he made a commitment to share Christ with his every one of his classmates. In his freshman or sophomore year of school he got the names, addresses and birthdays of all his classmates. On their birthday he sent them a card with a note inviting them to experience a new birthday, a spiritual birthday through a personal relationship with Christ. In his senior year he sent cards to every student in a school of several thousand kids. How concerned are we that people know about Christ? Today we remember the lives of those who were taken. Let's be concerned about those who remain and how brief life is. Call us crazy, call us insane, call us deranged, call us whatever let's not let that stop us from boldly going to tell others about Christ no matter who it is. Life is too short and uncertain to put it off.