



PAUL'S JOURNEYS 2025

Daily Devotional

Monday, August 25 - Thursday, September 11

Dear Traveler,

Saul of Tarsus... Paul the Apostle... a Jew... and a citizen of Rome. His profound experience of Jesus radically changed him from a persecutor of Christians to a life of preaching the good news, and spreading the gospel to Gentiles. The churches he established and the letters he wrote laid the foundation for Christianity as we know it today.

How incredible it is that many sites where Paul traveled and shared the good news about Jesus are still standing today. We will stand in those places, and walk on those stones! Today as we prepare for this once-in-a-lifetime experience, we want you to know how honored we are that you have chosen to share this journey with us. May your experience of these places, historic sites, and even the modern cultures draw you closer to Jesus, to scripture, to each other, and to the community of faith around the world!



And now, as we go, let's make the most of every moment and have some fun together as we carry the call "to be a light"! We hope that these daily reflections will guide our thoughts along the way.

Grace, peace, and gelato,

- Pastor Dave and Cyndi

For this is what the Lord has commanded us: "I have made you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring salvation to the ends of the earth." - Acts 13:47



PAUL'S JOURNEYS 2025

Monday, August 25, 2025

Preparation

Philippians 1:3-6

I thank my God every time I remember you. In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now, being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.

There are a lot of days in life when we are working on and through the mundane. This is not one of those days. This is the day before a great adventure. It's the beginning of a quest, of a pilgrimage. It's the day before arriving in, walking through, and experiencing places you've read and heard about all your life. These are days when you will make memories that will go with you for the rest of your life. So how do you prepare for such days? First, you plan well. Logistics free you up to be in the moment. There is no reason to be at the foot of the Acropolis worried about a forgotten toothbrush... so plan well. Be a minimalist.



Second, be present in the context as well as the moment. Paul walked the streets you will walk. He prayed over problems in the cities you'll visit. He lived, ate his breakfast, slept, prayed, and worried on the same pathways you will climb... and he learned a few things along the way. He became convinced that "he who began the good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus." The context of this trip is a promise fulfilled. Paul's vision, call, and mission grew into a fulfillment for which he scarcely could have hoped. All of those mundane days of life were working together for good. That's part of the context of these days. All the impossibilities, kingdoms, emperors, oppression, taxes, money, oppositions from the religious right and left, and people working to deceive... all were overcome. Bring your impossibilities and be reminded of God's deep time and master plan for you.

Remember, the context includes your partnership in the gospel right alongside Paul. We are answering the same vision and called to the same work - God's kingdom, alive on earth as it is in heaven. Be prepared.

"I HAVE MADE YOU A LIGHT..."
- ACTS 13:47A



PAUL'S JOURNEYS 2025

Tuesday, August 26, 2025

Departure

Romans 15:23

But now I have finished my work in these regions, and after all these long years of waiting, I am eager to visit you.

The day has finally come. The details are finalized. The preparations are all but finished. It's an unimaginable reality that in a few short hours you can travel to the other side of the world. The days ahead will provide opportunities for new experiences. There will be new foods to try, new sights to see, and new cultures to experience. What makes a good traveler? At least one thing is the willingness to leave behind, "the way it is back home." I want to encourage you to be a learner. Be open to trying things you've never tried. Don't go looking for a little bit of home in the wonderful places we will visit. If we wanted that, we could just stay home! Instead, open up your heart, mind, and attitude to be a learner. Come back really changed. Come back knowing things about Greece, Turkey, and Italy that you've never known or understood before.

While you're at it, remember that God has some new things for you, too! Be a learner. As Paul closes his letter to the Christians in Rome, he expresses his eagerness to finally see the city in person. We share that in common. He mentions that he has completed some of the work and now is moving on to the next thing God has in store. We're all on that journey. Completing some things in the previous seasons of our lives. What's next? What is yet to be learned and yet to be dreamed? May this day open your heart to all that is ahead, not only on this trip, but in all of your days to come.



"I HAVE MADE YOU A LIGHT..."
- ACTS 13:47A



PAUL'S JOURNEYS 2025

Wednesday, August 27, 2025

Arrive in Athens

Read: Acts 17:16-34

Acts 17:18-19

A group of Epicurean and Stoic philosophers began to debate with him. Some of them asked, "What is this babbler trying to say?" Others remarked, "He seems to be advocating foreign gods." They said this because Paul was preaching the good news about Jesus and the resurrection. Then they took him and brought him to a meeting of the Areopagus, where they said to him, "May we know what this new teaching is that you are presenting?"

We're here! Today as you take a deep breath and start to recover from jet lag, think about this: Tomorrow we'll ascend to the Acropolis, and off to the left are the steps to the Areopagus. It's the place where Paul was invited to share the message of the gospel to the sophisticated minds of ancient Athens. For most humans on the planet it would have been an incredibly intimidating moment. Entering into the center of all the highest human debates on life, politics, humanity and so very often, the very meaning of life. For Paul, however, it was the opportunity of a lifetime. He had prepared for the moment. He was thoughtful, well read, attentive, and had learned the art of empathy. He didn't waste time in meaningless judgement. He listened, saw life from their perspective, and offered the benefit of his insight, study, and experience. You could say that Paul was able to speak clearly because he was in his righteous right mind.

How is your mind? When we offer God the opportunity to prepare us, He begins to work in our thoughts, in what we read, and in our experiences to help us find our righteous minds. God was completing the work he had begun in Paul, and the world's greatest minds were challenged with higher thoughts and new hope. God prepares us in advance. He did it for Paul, and He offers that kind of providential care to you and me. Allow space for God to use the experiences of this day to prepare your righteous mind for your future with wisdom, provision, hope, and peace.



"I HAVE MADE YOU A LIGHT..."
- ACTS 13:47A



PAUL'S JOURNEYS 2025

Thursday, August 28, 2025

Athens & Ancient Corinth

Read: Acts 18:1-18

Acts 18:1-5, 18

After this, Paul left Athens and went to Corinth. There he met a Jew named Aquila, a native of Pontus, who had recently come from Italy with his wife Priscilla, because Claudius had ordered all Jews to leave Rome. Paul went to see them, and because he was a tentmaker as they were, he stayed and worked with them. Every Sabbath he reasoned in the synagogue, trying to persuade Jews and Greeks. When Silas and Timothy came from Macedonia, Paul devoted himself exclusively to preaching, testifying to the Jews that Jesus was the Messiah... Paul stayed on in Corinth for some time. Then he left the brothers and sisters and sailed for Syria, accompanied by Priscilla and Aquila. Before he sailed, he had his hair cut off at Cenchrea because of a vow he had taken.

Rudyard Kipling wrote, "If you can keep your head when all about you others are losing theirs and blaming it on you." This could sum up Paul's experience in Corinth.

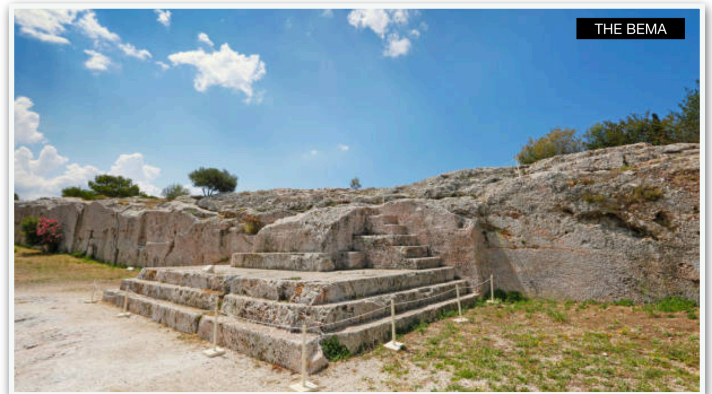
Corinth was the regional sin city. It was prosperous, cosmopolitan, and indulgent. Here Paul began spreading the gospel among the Jews and they lost their heads! It was then that he shifted his preaching to God-fearing Gentiles.

During his 18 months in Corinth with Priscilla and Aquila, he was a tentmaker. Shortly after he arrived, Silas and Timothy joined him. Paul was building a network in Corinth, while mentoring and praying with Silas and Timothy to expand the mission. While here, he wrote 1 and 2 Thessalonians to encourage those believers to stand firm. Paul kept his head when it seemed everyone around him was losing theirs!

The work that God began in Paul was a work of relationship. Paul was learning to build a deep, strong, and committed team. His commitment to his ministry and relationships are highlighted by the renewal vow he took at the port of Cenchrea.



TEMPLE OF APOLLO



THE BEMA



GALLIO'S SEAT

"I HAVE MADE YOU A LIGHT..."
- ACTS 13:47A



PAUL'S JOURNEYS 2025

Today as you visit Corinth, think about how Paul's network transformed the world. Reflect on the community you're building. Reflect on your family and their needs and challenges. Can you keep your head when those around you are losing theirs? As you think about Paul's work in Corinth, enjoy community, and pray for the precious people that make up your network and remember that He who began the good work will be faithful to see it through to completion!

- Written from Corinth: 1-2 Thessalonians, Romans, Titus
- Written to the Corinthians: 1 Corinthians (Ephesus), 2 Corinthians (Macedonia)



"I HAVE MADE YOU A LIGHT..."
- ACTS 13:47A



PAUL'S JOURNEYS 2025

Friday, August 29, 2025

Thessaloniki

Read: Acts 17:1-9

Acts 17:5-7

But other Jews were jealous; so they rounded up some bad characters from the marketplace, formed a mob and started a riot in the city. They rushed to Jason's house in search of Paul and Silas in order to bring them out to the crowd. But when they did not find them, they dragged Jason and some other believers before the city officials, shouting: "These men who have caused trouble all over the world have now come here, and Jason has welcomed them into his house. They are all defying Caesar's decrees, saying that there is another king, one called Jesus."

Most of us judge our lives and overall happiness by what is happening today. We think in terms of results. We seem to think that if I am getting things right and God is with me, then everything will go smoothly and I will not have troubles. When we run into chaos, hardship, and disruption we can be so easily discouraged and often angry. God invites us to a much bigger picture about life. We're invited to see, feel, and think about things differently.

Paul writes, "Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day. For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen, since what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal." (2 Corinthians 4:16–18)

A few verses later He reminds them that God's grace shows up most in our weaknesses. Paul learned these lesson in places like Thessaloniki. The account in Acts offers a picture of unjust powerful people making false claims against Paul and his companions. They stir up violence and all kinds of trouble and Paul flees the city. It must have seemed that this city was lost. The work here was a wasted effort, yet here we are two millennia later walking in the steps of Paul, reading the letters he wrote to the church that formed there. In all things God was working for the good. The appearances, unfair treatment, prejudices and meanness can't derail God's plan. All we're asked to do is give God our hearts and offer Him our best. We're invited to follow and serve Him today with all of our heart... and leave the outcomes to Him. Lay a few worries aside today remembering that God sees the fulfilled promises ahead, when all we see are troubles.

- Written to Thessalonica: 1-2 Thessalonians (Corinth)



"I HAVE MADE YOU A LIGHT..."
- ACTS 13:47A



PAUL'S JOURNEYS 2025

Saturday, August 30, 2025

Philippi & Kavala (Neapolis)

Read: Acts 16:11-40

Acts 16:25-29: *About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the other prisoners were listening to them. Suddenly there was such a violent earthquake that the foundations of the prison were shaken. At once all the prison doors flew open, and everyone's chains came loose. The jailer woke up, and when he saw the prison doors open, he drew his sword and was about to kill himself because he thought the prisoners had escaped. But Paul shouted, "Don't harm yourself! We are all here!" The jailer called for lights, rushed in and fell trembling before Paul and Silas.*



In 1738, Charles Wesley tried to capture the emotions of his recent conversion in a new hymn. He entitled that hymn, "And Can It Be". The chorus celebrates: "And can it be that I should gain, an interest in the Savior's blood? Died He for me, who caused His pain? For me, who Him to death pursued? Amazing love! How can it be, that Thou, my God, shouldst die for me?"

As Charles sought words and images that described his newfound freedom, he found this scene from a prison in Philippi as an appropriate metaphor. He wrote: "Long my imprisoned spirit lay, fast bound in sin and nature's night; Thine eye diffused a quickening ray, I woke, the dungeon flamed with light; My chains fell off, my heart was free, I rose, went forth, and followed Thee."

Today may be the perfect day to think of places in your life that need to be set free. Often our minds need to experience release from invasive thoughts that can ruin almost any occasion. For some, it is feelings that seem chained to habits and emotions that cause sadness, depression, or anxiety. For others, it is spiritual angst. We just want God to help us figure it out, to understand, and feel some genuine peace and joy.

This is a city where the power of God shook the whole city - a place where two praying and singing itinerant missionaries were set free! They didn't run, instead they stayed put, because they knew that God wanted more than just their freedom from that jail cell. He wanted to see people freed from the things that bound them. Paul and Silas offered that freedom to this city, and it became a center for people finding freedom for decades to come. Today, pray for freedom for any part(s) of you that feel bound!

- Written to Philippi: Philippians (Rome)

"I HAVE MADE YOU A LIGHT..."
- ACTS 13:47A



PAUL'S JOURNEYS 2025

Sunday, August 31, 2025

Thessaloniki & Athens

Read: Acts 17:16-34

Acts 17:22-25: *Paul then stood up in the meeting of the Areopagus and said: "People of Athens! I see that in every way you are very religious. For as I walked around and looked carefully at your objects of worship, I even found an altar with this inscription: to an unknown god. So you are ignorant of the very thing you worship - and this is what I am going to proclaim to you. "The God who made the world and everything in it is the Lord of heaven and earth and does not live in temples built by human hands. And he is not served by human hands, as if he needed anything. Rather, he himself gives everyone life and breath and everything else.*

Take a minute today, especially tonight, to look up at the Acropolis. Beautifully positioned, it is an iconic view of a culture that not only shaped the world for generations, but continues to influence much of our thinking today. The roots of democracy were debated there. The concepts of understanding the highest human values and nature of the divine that came to occupy the earliest books ever circulated were developed in conversations on that hill.



It's hard to look at the Acropolis and not think of Jesus' words, "You are a city on a hill that cannot be hidden." There's also a lesson in that view. On this hill, the Apostle Paul stood in the midst of the greatest of human wisdom and sophistication and said, "What you worship as unknown, I now make known to you!" What Paul made known was the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Greek philosophy may still influence us culturally, but it no longer dominates. It is remembered like that hill as a past wisdom. All of the enchantments of those heady days of sophistication are now remembered in ruins and artifacts, while the gospel that Paul shared that day continues to transform lives and bear fruit into the 21st century. Today that gospel dominates the world with roughly 30% of the population identifying as Christian. It has the largest following of any religion on the planet. If you were looking for a solid investment for your time and energy, this is the place to invest! The gospel is an investment that endures time, bears fruit, and changes lives! Today reflect on your role of being a light on a hill... *"I have made you a light."*

"I HAVE MADE YOU A LIGHT..."
- ACTS 13:47A



PAUL'S JOURNEYS 2025

Monday, September 1, 2025

Mediterranean Sea (Piraeus)

Read: Philippians 4:4-9

Philippians 4:6-7: *Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.*

We all need a break. Today is a transition day. By lunch today, the required activities of the day should just about be finished. There's a lot to explore. You're on a ship, in the Mediterranean Sea, where the ancient world first forged travel and commerce!



These waterways became a constant companion for Paul. He spent many days "at sea". He almost lost his life in a shipwreck on these waters. In all of it, he learned to take advantage of the moments and to reflect. It is easy to stay busy all day. It is easy to keep going, to keep planning for tomorrow, to rearrange and repack one more time, but I hope that you'll find some time today to take a break. Not just a break from activity - although a good nap might be good for your body and soul - but a break from your anxiety!

Paul suggests that the way to get space from your anxiety is not to ignore it, or to power through, or to make some arterial declaration about your faith. He suggests that when we find ourselves anxious, we quiet down and do something about it. We address it head-on. We offer our worries to God, who promises to be working in all things for our good! We make a list, a petition, and offer it up to the higher power that can actually do something to work things out. We take a few minutes and really reflect on our blessings until our hearts and minds are truly thankful. With our requests laid out and with thanksgiving settled over our spirit, the promise is that the peace of God, much bigger than our own understanding will settle over our hearts and minds. Find some time to stare out at the water. Tonight walk outside and fix your eyes on the same stars at which Paul gazed.

Let your soul rest, reflect, and be renewed.

"I HAVE MADE YOU A LIGHT..."
- ACTS 13:47A



PAUL'S JOURNEYS 2025

Tuesday, September 2, 2025

Mykonos

Read: Philippians 4:10-19

Philippians 4:11-13: *I am not saying this because I am in need, for I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances. I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. I can do all this through him who gives me strength.*

The little island of Mykonos has a long history of both neglect and seats of power. It was settled long ago and some attribute it's name to the Ancient Greek "Myron", which simply means "pile of stones". Others attribute the name to a more romantic idea, tying it in to the the mythological hero Mykonos, who was the grandson of the Greek god Apollos.



In ancient times, Mykonos was a very poor island with little agricultural production. The Romans made it a part of the Byzantine empire and controlled it until the twelfth century. Several empires ensued, but in 1537, a general of Suleiman the Magnificent sailed into port and the island became a part of the Ottoman Empire. In the Greek war for independence in 1830, the island returned to its roots as a part of the Greek nation. Since then it has prospered and become a major tourist destination.

Mykonos represents a great deal of endurance - through good times and bad, hardship and prosperity. It seems the perfect place to reflect on Paul's words, as he certainly knew times of plenty and times of need, times of peace and success, and seasons of imprisonment and suffering. That's how life works, good times and bad, peaceful and anxious.

Today you look on an island of incredible beauty. Maybe as you soak it all in, you can see in it a metaphor about God's care for you. In all circumstances and in all seasons, you can do all things because God is pouring His strength into your life. Paul reminds us in his letter to Corinth, that "His strength is made perfect in our weakness." Walk through the metaphor today, breathe in His strength, and breathe out your fears.

"I HAVE MADE YOU A LIGHT..."
- ACTS 13:47A



PAUL'S JOURNEYS 2025

Wednesday, September 3, 2025

Ephesus, Turkey (Kusadasi)

Read: Acts 19:1-41

Acts 19:10-12: *This went on for two years, so that all the Jews and Greeks who lived in the province of Asia heard the word of the Lord. God did extraordinary miracles through Paul, so that even handkerchiefs and aprons that had touched him were taken to the sick, and their illnesses were cured and the evil spirits left them.*

Paul lived in Ephesus for three years. It was the longest stay of his entire missionary career. From this beautiful city, Paul wrote the letters to the church in Corinth. Based on Acts 19 you could reasonably say that Paul had some of his best days in Ephesus. Many were converting to his message and lives were being radically changed.



Imagine the setting - a major Roman port city, full of wealth, culture, and everything that Rome had to offer! For the rich ruling class of Rome, nothing was out of reach - no luxury, no indulgence, no personal pleasure. There was complete freedom of expression and personal preference, yet the message of the gospel was good news!

In our world, we often believe that the freedom to do anything we want is the highest ideal. Ephesus teaches us that absolute freedom is a burden that weighs down the soul. Paul came with a message of a forgiving God who invites us to the highest level of human existence, to self-discipline, and to a sound mind. The Ephesians were overwhelmed by the message of a loving God who freely forgives, pays the price for our failures, and invites us to life in a kingdom of grace and excellence. It was irresistible! Paul's message was not just a new philosophy or another religion, but an invitation to a relationship!

Once introduced, God's power became a visible, tangible part of everyday life. There is power for each of us of our needs and fears. Think about places in your life that need God's power. Lean in to the relationship with Christ. He promises that when we draw near, He will draw near to us. There's no better place to walk closely in His presence, than in a city where the seeds of the early church were planted. As you walk in this city, never forget that you are part of the faithful fruit of that original outbreak of God's power!

- Written to Ephesus: Ephesians (Rome), 2 Timothy (Rome)
- Written from Ephesus: 1 Corinthians

"I HAVE MADE YOU A LIGHT..."
- ACTS 13:47A



PAUL'S JOURNEYS 2025

Thursday, September 4, 2025

Santorini, Greece

Read: 1 Corinthians 12:31, 13:1-13

1 Corinthians 13:4-8: *Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. Love never fails. But where there are prophecies, they will cease; where there are tongues, they will be stilled; where there is knowledge, it will pass away.*

Read the words slowly and let them linger... phrase by phrase. Each phrase is full of poetic beauty, while also speaking a challenge into our spirits about the true nature of love. It seems appropriate to think about the attributes of love woven through beautiful prose, while looking out over one of the most beautiful places in the world!

It's easy to get caught up in the moment and forget the central point of Paul's thoughts. In chapter 12, he had talked about how people are gifted with talents that are unique to every person, and how we as humans desire to have the most best abilities. We want to be talented and gifted. Then Paul pulls a profound bait and switch by offering a more excellent way - an invitation to desire the greatest of all gifts... real love!

It is easy in life to be tempted to "do" instead of to "be". It is easy to be busy blessing those around us with activity instead of presence. Paul invites us to a different way of thinking. There is no greater gift than the gift of your presence, kindness, care, compassion, empathy, and understanding. How often are you fully present with people in your life? Do you notice strangers? Do loved ones get the best of you? Are you free to fulfill the list of qualities that Paul says make up the greatest of all human giftedness? Today reflect on who you are invited to "be". "Do" less... "be" more!



"I HAVE MADE YOU A LIGHT..."
- ACTS 13:47A



PAUL'S JOURNEYS 2025

Friday, September 5, 2025

At Sea

Read: 2 Corinthians 12:1-10

2 Corinthians 12:8-10: *Three times I pleaded with the Lord to take it away from me. But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me. That is why, for Christ's sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong.*

Paul has been forced into defending himself to those who had no business judging or criticizing him. He had done nothing but pour out all of his time, energy, and money for the well-being of the people in Corinth and the surrounding area.



The people in Corinth had begun to be divided by church politics. Politics always divide people whether inside or outside the church. In Corinth, the situation had deteriorated to the point that it was no longer enough to be in favor of one side over the other, it had come to the point of tearing your opponents apart. So Paul defends himself, bragging on all that God had done in his life. Then suddenly, about halfway through this discourse he realizes how foolish it is and stops dead cold and proceeds to tell another story! This new story is about a terrible physical malady that kept him off balance and on his knees. He's not a super-apostle, he's just a man that God has used imperfectly who may be able to heal others, but has not been able to heal himself. He makes a humble and deeply true proclamation, "When I am weak, then I am strong."

In life we are sailing our own ship. We're headed to our ultimate destiny. It's always tempting to spend too much time in the lowest part of the ship killing rats. Rats in life are people who are unfair, critical, judgmental, and have no authority, expertise, or right to tear us down. Rats are problems we can't control. Paul realizes that he has been killing rats and suddenly stops, crawls out of the bottom of his ship, and gets up on deck! He clears his head and looks out at the beauty and hope of the real journey. And... he realizes that the rats don't really matter - rather, it's the grace of God made perfect in our obvious weakness. Take some time today to get out of the lower parts of your ship and take in the beauty, privilege, and grace of the journey that God has invited you to enjoy.

"I HAVE MADE YOU A LIGHT..."
- ACTS 13:47A



PAUL'S JOURNEYS 2025

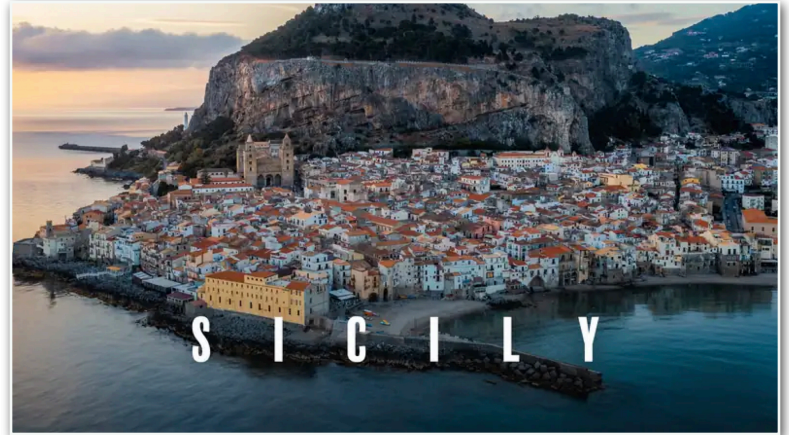
Saturday, September 6, 2025

Sicily, Italy (Messina)

Read: 2 Corinthians 12:11-21

2 Corinthians 12:14-15: *Now I am ready to visit you for the third time, and I will not be a burden to you, because what I want is not your possessions but you. After all, children should not have to save up for their parents, but parents for their children. So I will very gladly spend for you everything I have and expend myself as well. If I love you more, will you love me less?*

A few weeks ago I went to my grandson's baseball game. As we unloaded, I heard my daughter say, "If you're going to play baseball, you have to carry your own equipment!" She was channeling a conversation she heard as a child a few hundred times. With four girls, any trip was a challenge, but we liked to ski and that involved lots of equipment. Early on the rule was, "If you're going to ski, you have to carry your own equipment!" It's a pretty good concept. We should carry our own stuff.



In Galatians, Paul writes that we should "bear one another's burdens," but then a verse later he writes, "everyone should carry their own load." We help each other, but we also pull our own weight. Paul is still defending himself to the unreasonable critics in Corinth. He is reminding them that he has always carried his own equipment. He has done his part to not be a burden to the people around him. That's a breakthrough moment of maturity. We should all reach a point where we carry our own load and commit to not be a burden to other! But Paul doesn't stop there - he suggests that there is a hierarchy of care, and we ought to buy into it. Children don't save up for their parents, parents save for their children. Paul is choosing to take a parental role to the baby Corinthian Christians. He could be resentful. He could be angry. He could be selfish. Instead he recognizes that he is invited to outlive and out serve those in Corinth who do not appreciate his sacrifice!

Paul concludes by asking a rhetorical question, "If I love more, will you love less?" It's a question worth reflecting on today. Where might you need to carry more of your own equipment? Where might you be invited to serve like a parent serves their children? It might even be to your own children or grandchildren, who do not always seem to appreciate the sacrifice. Jesus said, "Whoever wants to be greatest among you should be the servant of all." Linger over this thought, If I love more, will others love less?

"I HAVE MADE YOU A LIGHT..."
- ACTS 13:47A



PAUL'S JOURNEYS 2025

Sunday, September 7, 2025

Pompeii & Herculaneum (Solerno)

Read: Acts 19:21, 21:19-36, 23:12-35, 24, 25:10-12, 26:32

Acts 21:19-21: *Paul greeted them and reported in detail what God had done among the Gentiles through his ministry. When they heard this, they praised God. Then they said to Paul: "You see, brother, how many thousands of Jews have believed, and all of them are zealous for the law. They have been informed that you teach all the Jews who live among the Gentiles to turn away from Moses, telling them not to circumcise their children or live according to our customs."*

Pompeii and Herculaneum are snapshots of the Roman world in which Paul lived. The cities of Beit She'an and Sepphoris inside Israel reflect much of the same architecture and style as these cities. Paul was navigating cultures, trafficking in cities that were cosmopolitan, secular, and indulgent. At the same time, he also held tightly to his Jewish roots which were conservative, traditional, and even pious. He lived between the cultures trying to spread the good news of God's grace and forgiveness to both Jews and Gentiles. In walking that thin line, Paul seemed to make everyone unhappy!

This point is vividly illustrated in today's highlighted verses. Paul has returned from his third missionary journey with the great news that many Gentiles have given their lives to the cause of Christ. They have left behind their pagan beliefs and turned to serving the one true God. Even many of the Jews were converting to faith in Christ! But before the good news could be celebrated, he had to address a problem. Some of the Jewish believers had believed rumors about Paul, saying that he had turned his back on his Jewish roots, forsaking Moses and the levitical laws.

This conflict is the beginning of Paul's ultimate journey to Rome. The accusation will turn into false charges. False charges will turn into trials among Jewish leaders and finally an appeal to Caesar for justice. Paul's Roman Empire was full of life, beauty, creativity, and confusion. Paul believed that his call was to stand between the culture and God and help everyone he could in all the ways he could for as long as he could... and even in the midst of the trouble, he did.

Where are you stuck in the middle? Are you stuck between friends who disagree about faith or politics or culture? Maybe it's your own family struggling to get along over current world issues? Be a peacemaker. Stand in the gap. Love anyway. Do the right thing anyway. Be fair anyway. Do all the good you can in any way you can for as long as you can! He who began the good work, will be faithful to see it through to completion!



"I HAVE MADE YOU A LIGHT..."
- ACTS 13:47A



PAUL'S JOURNEYS 2025

Monday, September 8, 2025

Rome (Civitavecchia)

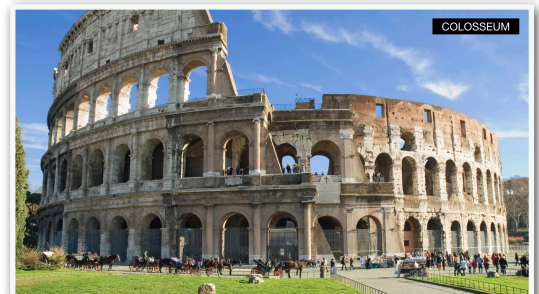
Read: Acts 27-28

Acts 28:14-16: *There we found some brothers and sisters who invited us to spend a week with them. And so we came to Rome. The brothers and sisters there had heard that we were coming, and they traveled as far as the Forum of Appius and the Three Taverns to meet us. At the sight of these people Paul thanked God and was encouraged. When we got to Rome, Paul was allowed to live by himself, with a soldier to guard him.*

Welcome to Paul's destination. After shipwrecks, setbacks, and persecutions slowed him down, he made it to Rome! He arrived at the center of this great empire, and found much of what he expected - a grand city, incredible architecture, intellectualism, rationalism, superstition, and sophistication beyond wisdom. He found wealth, power, and indulgence. He found about what you would expect to find in any major metropolitan city around the world! But Paul also found things he never expected - a community, people he'd never met who traveled miles and miles out of their way to greet him. He found friends in Christ who would visit him, offer money, and support to meet his daily needs. He found people eager to be set free from old habits and ways of living, people open to the gospel of Jesus!

These are the streets he walked. The Colosseum hadn't been built yet - much of that area was a part of Nero's private palace gardens. The Forum was the heart of ancient Rome. This valley between the Capitoline and Palatine hills would have been just a few of the sites that Paul himself would have passed on his way to house arrest. No one in their right mind would have thought that Paul's message had the slightest chance of enduring past the grandeur of ancient Rome, but God chose the foolish things to confound the wise, and the weak things to bring down the strong.

Perhaps you feel outnumbered, overwhelmed, and alone. Never forget that you are part of the community of faith - a family that will stick with you. That's how you got here.... together... with fellow pilgrims... on a journey of faith. Don't underestimate how life changing and powerful this fellowship is! And don't forget how the power of God is the only thing that really stays the same, yesterday, today and forever.



"I HAVE MADE YOU A LIGHT..."
- ACTS 13:47A



PAUL'S JOURNEYS 2025

Tuesday, September 9, 2025

The Vatican

Read: **Romans 8**

Romans 8:18-28: *I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us. For the creation waits in eager expectation for the children of God to be revealed. For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the freedom and glory of the children of God. We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time. Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption to sonship, the redemption of our bodies. For in this hope we were saved. But hope that is seen is no hope at all. Who hopes for what they already have? But if we hope for what we do not yet have, we wait for it patiently. In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us through wordless groans. And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for God's people in accordance with the will of God. And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.*

In the post modern world, most of us are challenged by delayed gratification. We labor over slow traffic, slow service, and even slow internet that might slow us down a few microseconds. So when Paul speaks of the long-delayed fulfillment of God's peace and promises, it's a lot to take in. At the same time, it is a powerful hope.

Long before there was a Catholic Church, Vatican Hill graced the city of Rome. This tiny country is named after the hill upon which it sits. It's one of history's great ironies. Vatican Hill evolved into the site of imperial entertainment. It was popular in the first century among the wealthy of Rome and became the site for the Circus of Nero. As a place of entertainment, it became the natural spot for the martyrdom of early Christians, including St. Peter. His death and burial here led to the transformation of the area into a place of pilgrimage.



"I HAVE MADE YOU A LIGHT..."
- ACTS 13:47A



PAUL'S JOURNEYS 2025

This place of death and suffering is now sacred ground. In honor of the cause of Christ, today it houses many of the most priceless treasures in the world. It is a testimony to delayed gratification! "Who hopes for what they already have?" asks Paul. And if we do not yet have it....we wait patiently. Let today testify to the faithfulness of God in all circumstances and remember that in all things God is working for the good. Trust Him even when fulfillment is delayed and we feel our bodies, spirits, and minds "groaning" under the strain. Soak in the beauty of the day, but remember that this beauty is a tribute to the faithfulness of God - and you know Him....personally!

"I HAVE MADE YOU A LIGHT..."
- ACTS 13:47A



PAUL'S JOURNEYS 2025

Wednesday, September 10, 2025

Paul's Rome

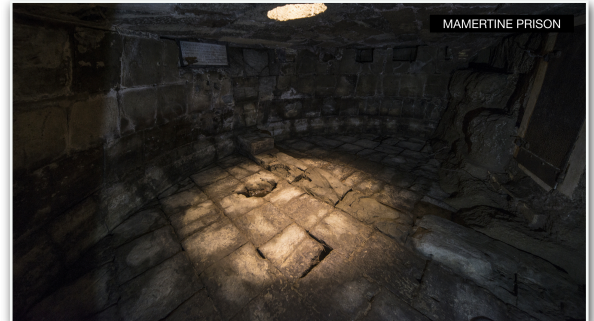
Read: Romans 12

Romans 12:1-8: *Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God - this is your true and proper worship. Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is - his good, pleasing and perfect will. For by the grace given me I say to every one of you: Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the faith God has distributed to each of you. For just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, so in Christ we, though many, form one body, and each member belongs to all the others. We have different gifts, according to the grace given to each of us. If your gift is prophesying, then prophesy in accordance with your faith; if it is serving, then serve; if it is teaching, then teach; if it is to encourage, then give encouragement; if it is giving, then give generously; if it is to lead, do it diligently; if it is to show mercy, do it cheerfully.*

Paul implores us to offer our bodies as living sacrifices. He wasn't morbid or melodramatic. He wasn't really thinking about his own death and martyrdom, even though he anticipates that things might eventually end up there. No, he's talking about something besides death. He is talking about being a "living" sacrifice.

We are invited to a different way of living. We don't conform to the things that culture tells us are most important. We don't get overly frightened by politics and new waves of cultural change. We have already settled some basic questions about life. Even sickness, suffering, and death don't get to worry us too much. For us to live... is Christ. When we die, we will not lose, but gain. That's how Paul came to see it. In the mean time, I am here to serve. I am here to speak life, hope, light, and peace to the people with whom I share life, as well as to the strangers I encounter along the way. I am an ambassador for Christ, bringing with me a secret He knew and freely shared. He taught that the things we see that seem most permanent and important are temporary at best, and the things that are invisible, spiritual, and often ridiculed by our culture, are the real truths and the only things that have eternal significance. Paul lived as a living sacrifice - so when the moment came to offer his life, he was already most of the way to that sacrifice. Imagine the moment Paul was free and met Jesus face to face... the second time. Allow these truths, Paul's words, and testimony to renew your mind today.

- Written from Rome: Ephesians, Colossians, Philemon, Philippians, 2 Timothy
- Written to Rome: Romans (Corinth)
- Written to the Corinthians: 1 Corinthians (Ephesus), 2 Corinthians (Macedonia)



"I HAVE MADE YOU A LIGHT..."
- ACTS 13:47A



PAUL'S JOURNEYS 2025

Thursday, September 11, 2025

Reflections for the Journey Home

Read: **Romans 14**

Romans 14:1-13: Accept the one whose faith is weak, without quarreling over disputable matters. One person's faith allows them to eat anything, but another, whose faith is weak, eats only vegetables. The one who eats everything must not treat with contempt the one who does not, and the one who does not eat everything must not judge the one who does, for God has accepted them. Who are you to judge someone else's servant? To their own master, servants stand or fall. And they will stand, for the Lord is able to make them stand. One person considers one day more sacred than another; another considers every day alike. Each of them should be fully convinced in their own mind. Whoever

regards one day as special does so to the Lord. Whoever eats meat does so to the Lord, for they give thanks to God; and whoever abstains does so to the Lord and gives thanks to God. For none of us lives for ourselves alone, and none of us dies for ourselves alone. If we live, we live for the Lord; and if we die, we die for the Lord. So, whether we live or die, we belong to the Lord. For this very reason, Christ died and returned to life so that he might be the Lord of both the dead and the living. You, then, why do you judge your brother or sister? Or why do you treat them with contempt? For we will all stand before God's judgment seat. It is written: "As surely as I live," says the Lord, "every knee will bow before me; every tongue will acknowledge God." So then, each of us will give an account of ourselves to God. Therefore let us stop passing judgment on one another. Instead, make up your mind not to put any stumbling block or obstacle in the way of a brother or sister.



Welcome home! You probably have aches and pains, jet-lag, and want to eat something familiar and comforting! The world is a big place. It is full of stories and cultures and all kinds of people who share all kinds of opinions. Through Paul's world travels, he learned that the greatest lesson of grace - don't believe yourself to be smart enough to judge others! What a relief! Judging is a job we don't need to take on, a burden we shouldn't want to bear. As you settle in... take some time to reflect on how these past 16 days have changed you.

- What moments stood out the most?
- What changed in your friendships with others?
- What did you learn that surprised you?
- What decisions did you make about changes you want to make?
- How will you be different going forward?

Rest in God's deep time and in His greater narrative. You didn't just see some things, you celebrated the story of which you are a...VERY... IMPORTANT... PART! Be blessed!

"I HAVE MADE YOU A LIGHT..."
- ACTS 13:47A