

“A GREAT AWAKENING BEGINS”
Psalm 25:1-10, Mark 3:7-12, Acts 13:38-52
November 23-24, 2024

Have you ever gotten an idea or a thought so ingrained in your mind that you focus your whole life on it? And has that thought or concept become so real to you that nothing else makes sense or compares to that thought or concept? Sure, we all have guiding principles in our lives that determine how we live and what we do and how we believe.

But have you ever had those thoughts or concepts challenged to the point of them being demonstrated as being wrong? Your whole life flashes before your eyes as everything you’ve built your life upon suddenly becomes empty and meaningless. There is a huge void because that guiding principle of your life is no longer guiding you.

At that point in your life, you are left wondering what life is all about, or you find yourself wandering from one thing to another to try to fill in the gaps that have been left with the disapproval of the concept that once ruled your life. What do you do? Who do you turn to for help? Where can you find hope for a fulfilling life principle that you can trust again?

Today, Psalm 25 gives us a specific guideline that can help us to find the truth for our life. David calls out to God, saying, “*In You, Lord my God, I put my trust*” (vs. 1). THERE! It is the Lord God Almighty who is our hope and stay, our firm foundation in which we can put our trust. And David goes on to say, “*I trust in You; do not let me be put to shame, nor let my enemies triumph over me. No one who hopes in You will ever be put to shame, but shame will come on those who are treacherous without cause. Show me Your ways, Lord, teach me Your paths. Guide me in Your truth and teach me, for You are God my Savior, and my hope is in You all day long.*” (vs. 2-5).

These are words of truth that we can put our life dependence upon! This is the way to

life, following the ways of the Lord our God so that He may guide us and lead us into a blessed life.

But we have to take the whole Scriptures as truth, lest we begin to pick and choose what we want to have as truth. ALL of God's Word is truth, and we must take each verse in contexts to all of the other verses. It can be so easy for us to take one verse and build our life upon that one-verse-foundation, and be way off base to what God's whole Word says. The whole Bible is our Book of Life, and each part of it is for us to learn from, grow in our faith by, and live according to, so that God may use us to bring hope and life to others.

Psalm 119:105 tells us, "*Thy Word, O Lord, is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path.*" It is the whole of God's Word that guides us and gives us foundation for our faith.

Now, it is true that each section of the Bible was written for a specific time as God led His people. But even though the Bible spans millennia, that does not mean that only parts of it are true for us today. Every word of the Bible is God's Truth for us. And it is that Truth that starts in the Old Testament times, moves into the Gospel period, and throughout the Epistle eras that gives us a history of the people of God learning to depend upon the Lord God Almighty. Every word in this Book (the Bible) is for every one of us today, and it is valuable for guiding our lives toward faithful living in our world.

Paul even expresses this truth in 2 Timothy 3:16-17, saying "*ALL Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking correcting and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.*"

So what about those who don't know this Book (the Bible)? Their whole lives may have been built upon concepts, thoughts or principles that are derived from the world, and they are living into it as hard as they can go. Yet, when confronted with the Truth of the Bible, their

mindset is changed, they are able to see beyond the lifeless principles of the world, and they are able to find true life as they come to know the whole truth of the Bible.

And we see that when we look at our next portion of the Book of Acts, chapter 13 verses 38-52. Listen to these words. (READ Acts 13:38-52)

Paul and Barnabas had been invited to speak to the people in the synagogue in Pisidian Antioch. They had been asked to share a “*word of encouragement*” (Acts 13:15) with the people, and Paul begins by giving them a short history of God’s people of Israel. Then he tells them about Jesus being the fulfillment of the prophecies of the Messiah. And the people began to listen to how Jesus died and rose again, to bring salvation from sin to everyone who would believe in Him.

Paul was addressing a group of Jews and God-fearing Gentile proselytes about the salvation that only Jesus can give to those who believe in Him. Only Jesus forgives our sins and justifies us in God’s sight to be once again pure and holy (13:38). It is no longer the sacrificing of animals that makes us right with God. Jesus has paid the price for our sins as God’s perfect Sacrifice, and as we believe in Him, His blood poured out at the cross of Calvary covers our sins and frees us from all our iniquities. It’s not through our keeping the Law of Moses that brings us this justification, for the law is there to expose our sins, not justify us from our sins. We need not seek to be put right with God by obeying the law. Obedience to the law helps us to live well and find God’s presence with us. It is only Jesus that brings forgiveness of our sins.

The words Paul gives gets the people in the synagogue that day so excited that they want to hear more from Paul and Barnabas the next Sabbath. But their desire to learn more about Jesus is so great, that even after the service ends, the people are talking with Paul and Barnabas about Jesus’ salvation to everyone who believes. So they encourage them to live by God’s grace.

This is vital, because now the Salvation of God is offered to ALL people, no longer just the Jews (13:39). And it was not required for a person to become a Jew before they could believe in, and receive Jesus. People of every tribe and nation could now find forgiveness of their sin through faith in Jesus, and that faith in Jesus brings justification before God. Paul made it clear that Jesus is the One who makes it all happen.

And along with those words of encouragement also comes a word of warning. Paul warns all those who would hear his words of Jesus and then reject them, not believing that Jesus is the Messiah and Savior of the world. He uses the words of the prophet Habakkuk (1:5) to warn about the danger of rejecting what the Lord God has done to bring eternal life to the earth, that the scoffers would “*wonder and perish*” (13:41). God has done a magnificent work through His Son, Jesus, and He calls for all people to see it and repent of their wickedness.

God knows our sins, our imperfections, and our rebellion toward His ways. Yet He loves us enough to grant us forgiveness and grace when we turn back to Him through Jesus, so that we might live as His people. But we must humble ourselves before the Lord, claim Jesus as our Savior, and seek to follow ALL His ways, and then He will allow us to be His children. If we continue to sin and disregard God’s laws and commandments, He will eventually let us go our own way, to our own destruction.

So it is good for us to recognize our need for the Lord to guide our lives. It is good for us to learn of His commands throughout the Bible so that we might seek to follow all of His ways. It is good to identify the love of God in our lives and to seek Him with all our heart, soul, mind and strength as we live faithfully with Jesus as our Savior. For then He brings encouragement to us and He blesses us, so that we can be effective in the work that He has for us to do.

“The story is told of a native in a foreign country who had never seen a mirror before.

The missionaries brought one over. This native girl had never seen what she looked like. She walked up and for the first time in her life looked at the mirror and saw herself. The mirror had been nailed to a tree for everyone's use. Not liking the image before her, she took the mirror off the tree and slammed it to the ground. She did not like what the mirror had to say so she got rid of the mirror.

“When we come before the mirror of God's Word, the first thing we will see is ourselves. And many of us don't want the mirror to tell us the truth because we won't like what it tells us.”¹ We, like the native girl, would rather destroy the mirror than seriously look at who we are.

In light of the mirror of the Word of God, many of the Jews rejected the words of Paul and Barnabas. That rejection came from their jealousy of seeing the whole city's population come to listen to Paul and Barnabas teaching about God's Salvation through Jesus. Within just one week, Paul and Barnabas had gotten the people to come hear them and turn their hearts to the Lord. The Good News of the Gospel of Jesus Christ was so life transforming that Jew and Gentile alike claimed the name of Jesus as their Savior. There was a great awakening of the people to God's promises of a Savior, and lives were changed by the Truth of God's Word.

And as jealousy often does, it turns the hearts of those inflicted with it to want to make themselves look like the truth. So seeing the success of Paul and Barnabas, the Jewish leaders began contesting and contradicting their words to the point of committing heresy.

It is then that “*Paul and Barnabas answered them boldly: ‘We had to speak the Word of God to you first. Since you reject it and do not consider yourselves worthy of eternal life, we now turn to the Gentiles. 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”*” (Is. 49:6)” (Acts 13:46-47).

¹ (Tony Evans, *Tony Evans' Book of Illustrations*, [Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers, 2009] pg. 307, #919)

It was Jesus' instruction to all of His disciples that they go to the Jews first in order to proclaim the Salvation of God and call them to become the harbingers of Truth to the world. But since they rejected God's Messiah, and rejected eternal life through Him, just as they had done in Jerusalem, Paul and Barnabas would now turn to all of the non-Jews with the Good News of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. And it is to the Gentiles' delight that they receive the Gospel of Jesus.

It had been God's plan that His covenant people of Israel be the "*light to the Gentiles*," but since they had rejected Jesus as the Savior, God used Paul and Barnabas (along with many others) to be the ones to take the Good News of God's Salvation to the world. And "*the Word of the Lord spread through the whole region*" (13:49). The light of Jesus Christ shown so brightly in Paul and Barnabas that everyone who received their words as truth came to know Jesus as their Christ, the Savior.

Despite the persecution that arose from the Jews, the Word of God changed the life-perspectives of many people, and they were filled with hope, and joy, and new purpose, and eternal life.

Now, you need to know that today we come upon this very same scenario. There are some who reject the Truth of Jesus Christ in the Word of God (the Bible), and they do their very best to try to contradict that Truth, even to the point of committing heresy. They are so intent upon keeping their own worldly life-foundational-guidelines, and promoting them as the real truth, that they will work hard to eliminate the voices of those who are speaking God's Truth. Or they will twist the Truth of God's Word enough to get people to believe something that is not Biblical as being the real truth. So the war continues between the lies of the world and the Truth of God's Word. That's why it is so important that followers of Jesus study their Bibles and become so familiar with God's Word, that they can identify the lies of the world.

But look at the difference in the people who believe each perspective. Those who believe in and live according to the world's ways are most often very miserable people. They live life as hard as they can. They are likely to use others to get what they want, and they care little about anyone else except themselves. They lie, they cheat, they steal, they even kill to get their own way, and their life is one mistake after another. There is no joy in them. They are empty and lonely, but often they are rich and powerful, being rewarded by the world for their stand.

Contrast that with the life of a person focused on following the Truth of God. These folks, believers in Jesus Christ, have a purpose. They are most often focused on supplying the needs of those around them. They care about people. They have direction and they have great joy within them, even though they are often hated by the world around them. They have the confidence that this world is not all there is, for they are assured of eternal life with Jesus beyond this life. They have hope, love, peace, kindness, and joy.

And it all happens when we live faithfully according to God's commands, allowing the Holy Spirit to empower us and use us to help others come before the mirror of God's Truth in the Bible.

Throughout history, great awakenings have occurred as the faithful followers of Jesus present the Truth of God's Word. Be it in churches, in the restaurant, in the park, along the beach, in homes, wherever we go, we have the chance to be the light of Jesus Christ in our world to give others the opportunity to find eternal life through Jesus.

But you can count on there being those who oppose you to try to get you to stop sharing the Good News of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Paul and Barnabas were "expelled" from Pisidian Antioch by their own Jewish brothers and sisters when they rejected Jesus as the Messiah. And it was that expulsion from the city that took them missionaries to other cities in the area.

Wherever they went, Paul and Barnabas were effective in sharing the Good News of what God had done through Jesus Christ. Jews and Gentiles became followers of Jesus because of their boldness and willingness to take the message of Salvation to all the people. And God used them to spread the Gospel of Jesus to the whole Roman world, to the point of even bringing members of the family of Caesar into faith in Jesus Christ. And the great awakening began as hundreds and thousands took what they heard to those around them, having found new life in Jesus Christ.

“And the disciples were filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit” (13:52). This would become the mark of the Christian believers throughout history as they took that look into the mirror of God’s Word, saw changes that needed to be made in their life, and then turned to Jesus to help them make those changes.

Now it is our turn to continue the work of Paul and Barnabas as we receive Jesus as our Savior, and then share that joy He gives to us with those around us. Oh, there will be those who oppose you, but by the help of the Holy Spirit, you can become a living testimony of the hope we have in Jesus who transforms our lives from death to life.

So I invite you to keep growing closer to the Lord Jesus Christ, allow Him to reveal His Truth to you so that you might live for Him each day of your life. You’ll discover that you, too, will have the great joy of the Lord in you.

Let’s pray. Father, thank You for the witness of Paul and Barnabas who stepped out in faith to take the Lord Jesus to all the people. I pray that You would give us that same boldness to live for You, relying upon the Truth of Your Word to guide us and direct our way as we strive to follow You. Let Your Spirit loose through us so that great awakenings may begin here, too. Fill us all with Your joy, for we pray this in the great Name of Jesus Christ, our Lord. AMEN.