19.
'Stepping forward in faith'

Acts 17.[10-15]

Background

Throughout the Scriptures, the call of God involves *movement*. It's relational more than intellectual, practical more than philosophical. It always was, and it always is.

Abram was called to *go* and in faith he obeyed and went, *'even though he did not know where he was going'* (Heb.11.8). God's demand to the king of Egypt through Moses was a simple and repeated, *'Let My people **go**'* (eg Ex.8.1 and Ex.9.1 etc): and they *went* (kicking and screaming some of the time, for sure – but they went). Movement always.

Because that's who *God* is and what *He* does: He travels the 'miles' from heaven to earth in the incarnation: He makes the long journey from the crib to the cross: and He pioneers a path through the jungle of sin for His people to bring them safely home.

And His call to us through the pages of Scripture is thus full of movement. Come. Follow. Go. And we are either moving *towards* Him and pressing forward *with* Him, or we are stepping away *from* Him. Movement always.

You see all three in these 6 verses in Acts 17 describing Paul's ministry at Berea. Many of the Bereans, we're told, 'received the message (and the One to whom the message points) with great eagerness' and 'believed': that's to say they took that step of faith towards the Lord Jesus and entrusted themselves to Him. In rather stark contrast, a number of people from Thessalonica were on the move geographically, travelling close on 50 miles to stir up the crowds against this gospel preaching: and on the move spiritually, too, distancing themselves from the Lord of life. In the midst of it all, of course, the apostle Paul himself was on the move again in the service of the Lord, with barely a moment to draw breath.

It's easy to become rather static in our walk with the Lord (notice the progression of thought in the opening verse of Psalm 1 – walking, standing, sitting: slowing to a standstill). Which is why this study picks up on Psalm 1, and then on the experience of Joshua, to illustrate what the Bereans exemplify, namely the degree to which a right and regular study of the Word of God not only ensures movement, but the *right* sort of movement in the Lord's service! **'Days' (1), (6)** and **(7)** are the ones to start with!

1) Monday 10th July – become a Berean!

Read Acts 17.10-12

".. they .. examined the Scriptures every day .." (Acts 17.11)

The Bereans are renowned now for the manner in which they applied themselves to the Scripture: expectantly (with great eagerness), carefully (they examined the Scriptures), discerningly (to see if it was true) and daily (every day). Do as they did!

> How does the example of the Bereans described here challenge you in regard to your reading of the Bible?
>
> What practical action does their example prompt you to take?
>
> In what ways does sharing in a Community Group help you in developing this approach to the Scriptures?
>
> How can you avoid the 'discipline' of a regular study and pondering of the Scriptures becoming a mere 'duty' rather than a continuing delight?

Prayer: *I am full of good intentions, Lord, when it comes to reading Your Word! Help me to set aside the time each day to hear what You are saying through Your Word.*

2) Tuesday 11th July – on the go!

Read Acts 17.13-15

".. the believers immediately sent Paul to the coast .." (Acts 17.14)

Poor Paul rarely had time to settle before he was on the move again! As such, he is an example of discipleship, a core component of which is our being sent out by the Lord as His heralds. One way or another Jesus will keep His people on the go!

> In what ways have you been aware of the Lord keeping *you* 'on the go'?
>
> What today might parallel such intensity of ill-feeling towards the preaching of the gospel that they travelled some 45+ miles from Thessalonica?

Prayer: *Make me willing each day, O Lord, to go to everyone You send me to, and to say whatever You command me, confident that You are with me and will rescue me.*

3) Wednesday 12th July – feed on Scripture

Read Psalm 1.1-3

".. like a tree planted by streams of water .." (Ps.1.3)

The book of psalms gives expression to the experience of the believer in the face of life's trials and triumphs, its sorrows and joys. You're best equipped to cope with them all when you're refreshed and nourished constantly by the Word of God.

What does it mean to *meditate* on the Word of God and how do you go about that in your own circumstances?

How does your delighting in the law of the Lord and meditating on it day and night issue in a real fruitfulness in your living?

Prayer: *Your Word is a lamp to my feet and a light for my path. My heart is set on keeping Your decrees to the very end, O LORD, they are the joy of my heart.* [Ps.119]

4) Thursday 13th July – rooted in the Word of God

Read Psalm 1.1-6

".. the Lord watches over the way of the righteous .." (Ps.1.6)

Roots are important. That's the big difference between trees and chaff: the latter have no roots and get blown to oblivion. 'Rooting' yourself in the Scriptures by a constant meditating on them will give your living and (your minis-tree!) stability and strength.

The psalm begins and ends with a contrast: what prompted you to make that definite choice to follow Jesus and to put down those roots in His Word?

What has been your experience of the Lord 'watching over' your way as His follower? Thank Him for His watch over you!

Prayer: *Your eye is always on me, Lord! Thank You that You watch over my going out and coming in, guarding my ways and using my life in the service of Your Kingdom.*

5) Friday 14th July – step forward boldly

Read Joshua 1.1-6

".. get ready to cross the river Jordan .." (Josh.1.2)

A fresh challenge for a man who'd already had enough challenges to last a lifetime! Joshua could only contemplate picking up the baton from Moses and crossing the river Jordan in the assurance that the Lord would be with him. Tackle your challenges thus!

What have been the biggest challenges you've had to face, and the biggest challenge you're presently facing?

What reasons was Joshua given for being 'strong and courageous' and how do they apply to you?

Prayer: *Thank You, Lord Jesus, that You have come to be our Shepherd, leading me always forward, guaranteeing Your presence with me and Your protection around me.*

6) Saturday 15th July – savour the Scriptures!

Read Joshua 1.7-9

".. keep this Book of the Law always on your lips; meditate on it day and night .." (Josh.1.8)

However big and daunting the task or the challenge may be that you're called by the Lord to embrace, your feeding on the Word of God will give you daily strength. Read it, 'chew' it, do it. Savour His promises, rejoice in His presence, trust in His power.

> What instances have there been in your own life where your tackling the tasks and responsibilities entrusted to you has been helpfully informed by your reading of Scripture?
>
> Why does a constant (or at least regular) reading and meditating on the Word of God result in a person being 'prosperous and successful'?
>
> The charge to 'keep this Book of the Law always ***on your lips***' (v.8) suggests the idea of 'preaching' the Bible to yourself: how might you do that and how might it help you?
>
> How, in your present circumstances, might you best be able to be pondering the Word of God 'day and night'?

Prayer: *Speak to me constantly through Your Word, O Lord. I long to hear Your voice, to be instructed in Your ways, and to be encouraged in the assurance of Your grace.*

7) Sunday 16th July – love the Lord your God!

Read Joshua 23.1-16

".. every promise has been fulfilled: not one has failed .." (Josh.23.14)

He'd lived for 110 years: he'd experienced the lot. Slavery. Deliverance. The sea being parted. Thousands fed and watered in the wilderness. The Jordan crossed. The land now theirs. And all God's doing. Faithful to His promises, great in His love and power.

> 'You are to hold fast to the Lord your God' (v.8): in what areas of your life do you find that most challenging and difficult?
>
> How would you answer someone who suggested that Joshua's message here is very 'legalistic' – effectively, 'Obey and you'll be rewarded'?
>
> What steps might you take to ensure that you are *'**very careful** to love the Lord your God'* (v.11)?
>
> As you read Joshua's exhortation here, what attributes of God are impressed on you, prompting fresh praise and worship in your heart?

Prayer: *What a wonderfully faithful God You are, O Lord, true to all Your promises! Help me to rest and rejoice in Your promises, and empower me to live for Your glory.*