**January 14, 2018**

***The Last Days!*** What happens next?

Life Lessons from Four Apostles

Turning the World Upside Down (It’s not for cowards.)
Or, If I’m doing God’s work God’s way, why is it so hard?
Acts 17:1-15

***The God-Ordained Mission: Disciples and Churches***

From Asia Minor, Paul is directed to Macedonia (Acts 16). He goes first to Philippi, then to Thessalonica (Acts 17), continuing Jesus’ mission and in obedience to His command (Matthew 28:18-20; Acts 1:6-8). Jesus said that rather than speculate on the future, the task is making disciples and planting churches for those disciples to grow. The Holy Spirit arriving in power at Pentecost (Acts 2) sets it all in motion.

***The Deep-Rooted Opposition: Resistence and Rebellion***

Things could hardly have gone worse. Paul and Silas are illegally beaten and thrown into jail in Philippi (Acts 16), and then driven from Thessalonica after only three weeks (Acts 17). The opposition, Jew and Gentile (Acts 16:20, 21; 17:5-9), is out to protect the status quo (power, money) coopting civil law when advantageous, ignoring it when it is not. The greatest sustained opposition comes from ethnic Israel, who crucified Messiah and now go from town to town to disrupt those who carry the gospel to the nations (Acts 13:44, 45, 49, 50; 14:1-6, 19-23). This is typical of Israel’s history, as Jesus, and later Steven, reminded them. Matt. 23:29-39; Acts 3:17–4:31; 7:51-53; 2 Chron. 33:9; 36:11-16

***The Double-Edged Result: Suffering and Joy***

The Apostles model the suffering of Jesus in their lives and explain to the disciples and churches that such suffering is NORMAL and EXPECTED in these last days. This means that when suffering because of Jesus actually happens (and for the most part, it has not happened here), we should not be surprised. 1 Peter 4:12-19
We should note, however, that it is happening in many places, and we are not exempt. In “the last of the last days,” Antichrist will arise and persecution will intensify. Jesus, Peter, Paul, and John all say the same things. Matt. 10:16-39; 1 John 2:18

(Note: Persecution is not the same as bad weather, health issues, or foiled plans. And it certainly is not our reaping the effects of poor choices. We must never assume that because we don’t have everything we want, or because God has not rescued us from our own folly, that He has somehow abandoned us. Proverbs 19:3)

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***Last Days Life Lessons***

1. The gospel embraced inevitably changes lives and profoundly challenges the contrasting culture, resulting in conflict. 1 Thess. 1:8-10

2. We should believe God’s Word, pursue holiness, rejoice in Jesus, and not be surprised when our culture rejects our message. Jn. 15:18-21

3. It is embracing the gospel of grace which identifies God’s people, true Israel, not whether we are born Jew or Gentile. Rom. 9:6-8

***Going Deeper--For Growth Groups:***

1. Why do you think a gospel of love and free forgiveness is opposed?

2. Most of the early opposition to the gospel came from the Jews. Why?

3. Why do you think we aren’t being persecuted for the gospel? If and when we are, will you attend church meetings?