Lownes Free Church Sunday Morning – February 4, 2018

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

Life Lessons from Four Apostles

Faith: The Fruit of Christ-Centered Ministry

What is the “new normal” for those who follow Jesus?

1 Thessalonians 2:13-16

 Paul has thanked God for the Thessalonians (1:2) and now he thanks God for their faith. Paul has told us that his ministry among them was a success (2:1), and why (2:2-12): because His message was bold, his motives pure, his methods compassionate and his model (example) authentic. But what was the end of Paul’s labor? Joy-producing, courageous faith that God rewards.

**[*Saving faith produced by a God-honoring ministry means that* . . .]**

 (We know we have the “real thing” when. . .)

***We have received the gospel as God’s greatest gift. . .*** v. 13

 Words are many, but when God speaks, especially through Jesus (Heb. 1:1, 2), nothing else matters. God’s Word arrests us as the most precious of messages. The result is life change (“at work”) by faith (“in you who believe”). Matthew 13:45, 46; Isaiah 66:1-6; Romans 1:16, 17; 3:21-25

***As evidenced in the willingness to give up everything, even our lives, for the joy of knowing Jesus. . .*** v. 14

 The Thessalonians were imitators of the earliest believers who also were persecuted, accepting their fate willingly and joyfully. This is not enjoyment OF the suffering, but joy IN it. Hebrews 10:32-39

  ***In contrast to those who incur God’s wrath by rejecting gospel grace and even keeping it from others***. vv. 15, 16

 Ultimately every person will be in one of two camps: those who have heard and loved God and those who have hated Him and rejected His Word, plan, and promises. Life is a temporary test for an eternal placement either in joy or suffering. Hebrews 10:19-31

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 Be sure to qualify any statements you make or opinions you hold about “The Jews.” Paul refers to the history of Israel’s continued rejection of God and their part in the Crucifixion. Matthew 23:29-39; Acts 3:17–4:31; 7:51-53; 2 Chronicles 33:9; 36:11-16; etc.

 But he also explains that despite their sins, they, too can be forgiven, and that one day (after “the times of the gentiles”), more will be. See Romans 9-11.

 There is no place for anti-Semitism, into which even the Reformers fell, causing more persecution of the Jewish people. Modern Israel is NOT the regathered people of God promised in Ezekiel and other places, nor has the church somehow replaced Israel as the people of God. There is but ONE true Israel, made up of all who believe in God’s promises and grace, past, present, and future. Romans 2:28, 29; Philippians 3:3

***Last Days Life Lesson***

 ***When we embrace the gospel as our greatest treasure, it transforms us, empowering us to follow Jesus in suffering, even from those who oppose God’s grace and therefore incur His wrath.***

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

1. What we do with a gift demonstrates how and if we treasure it. What do you think it means to receive God’s Word AS God’s Word? What are some ways to do that? What are the results?

 2. Paul says that God’s Word was “at work in you who believe.” How does God’s Word work in us? What do you think is the process?

3. Paul’s critique of the Jews has been used throughout history as an excuse for anti-Semitism. How can we counter such arguments?