Lownes Free Church Sunday Morning – February 11, 2018

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

Life Lessons from Four Apostles

The Heart of a Shepherd

What should characterize those who lead God’s People?

1 Thessalonians 2:17–3:13

Paul has thanked God for the Thessalonians and their faith. Now he reveals his heart. Three qualities define God’s faithful shepherd:

***Love: A relentless, joyful, sacrificial passion to help others win their necessary spiritual battle with suffering.***  2:17–3:5

Paul’s passion is difficult to characterize, even more difficult to imitate. First, the urgency: “heart, eagerly, desire, wanted, glory, joy, bear.” Then, the reality: Suffering at the hands of God’s enemies is the believer’s destiny. Third, the priority: The will to overcome any and all obstacle to build into lives just because they matter. Finally, the dimension: the battle is not with people but for people against Satan. People and their spiritual well-being ARE the joy and reward for ministry.

***Communication: A joy-driven, prayerful, personal connection with others to foster their growth in Christ.*** 3:6-10

This is not a bored minister biding his time with distractions. Paul’s life is bound up in others, and his passion is “keeping up” with them and knowing how their spiritual lives fare. When we finally grasp what life is about, people are proper preoccupation.

***Faith: Full trust in the power and promise of God to establish and keep beloved souls until Christ’s return.*** 3:11-13

Unless the Lord builds the house, its foundations are laid in vain. Paul knows that all of his love and hard work are the human means, but ultimately, spiritual success lies in God and God alone. Acts 20:32

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Western culture has, so far, escaped the persecution experienced by first century believers and millions in other cultures since then. Our battles are mostly personal, relational, and private conflicts with greed, materialism, lust, pride, and garden variety selfishness. The popular remedies have been counseling and one-on-one discipleship. We “need” each other less, or so it would seem.

But if we are “destined for suffering” (1 Thessalonians 3:3; Acts 14:22; Romans 8:16-18), then we do need one another. We need mutual love and communication which grow out of God’s promises and the structures of family and church. This requires, not CEO’s, presidents, or dictators, but gentle shepherds. John 10:11-15; 1 Peter 5:1-5. Loving leaders do not control people in a cult-like dependency, but rather encourage independent thinking and following Jesus and Scripture, not their own rules.

***Last Days Life Lesson***

***Churches are established and God’s people grow***

***when they are blessed with faith-filled shepherds who maintain healthy, loving connections to strengthen them in their trials.***

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

1. Make a list of the “compassion” and “love” terms Paul uses in this passage and Acts 20:17-38 to describe his passion. Where does this intensity originate and how is it maintained?

2. Good shepherds care for people without manipulating them. What are the differences between loving and enabling, care vs. obsession?

3. What does it mean for people to be our joy and crown? How do we know when a shepherd (servant-leader) cares for us?