



August 18, 2024

“Why Help?”

Sunday school at 9:30, Service at 10:30.

News:

Camp starts August 29th

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For the Kids: Why do we help others?

ACTS 12:18&19 ~

The king had already announced the upcoming execution of Peter, so instead he ordered the execution of the soldiers.

This was probably in April of 43 A.D., then 11 months later, Agrippa traveled to Caesarea.

ACTS 12:20-25 ~

Agrippa's grandfather Herod the Great named the harbor Sebastia, and the city Caesarea in early March of 10 B.C. in honor of Augustus.

Agrippa was “very angry” with the Phoenicians who had probably sided with the governor of Syria, Vibius Marsus, against Agrippa.

Phoenicia got nearly all their grain from the Jews.

Fill out the other side, detach this part of the page, and place it in the offering plate or the prayer/suggestion box in the lobby or with an Elder or Deacon of the church.

God Bless You!

Blastus arranged an audience with Agrippa, but he set the stage to his advantage.

Agrippa adorned himself like a god (Josephus Antiquities: 19.343).

Agrippa was struck by an angel because he cultivated his own veneration instead of humbly pointing to God.

The final verse is a hinge verse and as such is not necessarily chronological.

ACTS 13:1-3 ~

Why mention that there were “prophets and teachers” at Antioch?

One of the roles of the church is to ascertain what God has already done in Heaven and then confirm that on earth.

- Simeon who was called Niger:
- Lucius of Cyrene:
- Manaen who was raised with Antipas:

A big part of giving to this church does advances the Gospel to the Lost.

ACTS 13:4&5 ~

Again, the emphasis is on the fact that the Holy Spirit sent them out.

Why?

We can start by looking at what preceded it inwardly and then outwardly.

Are you the hero in the story? Is it about you?

What’s the key to changing that?

Write a brief note – detach and place in the offering, or the prayer box, or give it to a Deacon or Elder.

Name _____ Address _____
 Phone _____ Email _____

WELCOME CHILDREN: Have you ever helped someone who needed help or shared what you had with someone who didn't have enough? How did it make you feel?

Did it make you feel good? Did it make you feel like you were a good kid? Did you feel a little proud of yourself like you were a hero? Maybe someone said, "Good job," and you felt your chest puff out a bit?

Have you ever needed any help or needed someone else to share what they had with you? When you needed help would you have liked it if the one helping you acted like they were better than you because they could give you the help you needed?

When we see and remember that we have been helped before, and that someone has shared with us before, then we can then help and share with someone else without making them feel less, feel poor, or feel like they owe us something in return. That's a nicer way to help or to share, don't you think?

DISMISS CHILDREN:

Last week we closed with Peter's miraculous release from the grip of evil by a matter-of-fact angel. We saw

how the Christians meeting at Mary's house were shocked by their answered prayers and then how Peter gave instructions for them to tell James and the brothers, meaning James the brother of Jesus and the other leaders of the church. Peter then departed, shaking the dust of Jerusalem off of his sandals.

Acts 12:18&19, 18Now when day came, there was no small disturbance among the soldiers as to what could have become of Peter. 19When Herod had searched for him and had not found him, he examined the guards and ordered that they be led away to execution. Then he went down from Judea to Caesarea and was spending time there.

Luke employed a common literary technique that was popular 2,000 years ago when he wrote "there was no small disturbance." It is using a gross understatement to draw someone's attention to the opposite reality. We get it, because it's a technique that we still use today. In this case, it means there was a massive disturbance. This was more serious than a heart attack.

The king had already teased the masses about the upcoming execution of Peter that was to take place later that very day. The posters had been designed,

ordered and hung all around town. Add space was taken in the paper. The trailer had been edited and released. The news outlets were abuzz reporting on the impending event. Social media was inundated, the popcorn had been buttered, and everyone was more than ready... But the principal player in the main event was missing! There was no Peter to execute.

Why this outrageously disappointing and awkwardly mortifying turn of events? Oh, yeah, the soldiers lost him.

Due to anger and embarrassment the king ordered the soldiers who had been charged with guarding Peter to be executed in his place. It may have only been the four soldiers of the specific watch, but it could have involved more soldiers than that leading to the “no small disturbance among the soldiers.” There would have been all kinds of maneuvering to assign blame to others and deflect it from oneself given the severity of the situation. Accusations, and recriminations, and prayer to whatever gods the whole company of soldiers worshipped.

The four soldiers on watch would have been mercilessly tortured to determine if anyone else was

complicit in Peter's escape. That's what "he examined the guards" means. Once the king was satisfied with the investigation the assumed conspirators would have been scourged and then publicly executed for the entertainment of the people.

The public execution of Roman soldiers was probably just as enjoyable to the Jewish masses as the murder of Peter would have been. They were likely satiated.

This probably took place immediately after the Passover in 43 A.D. so basically the first part of April, then 11 months later, in March of 44, Agrippa traveled from his palace in Jerusalem, in the province of Judea, to his palace in Caesarea, in the province of Samaria.

Acts 12:20–25, 20Now he was very angry with the people of Tyre and Sidon; and with one mind they came to him, and having won over Blastus the king's chamberlain, they were asking for peace, because their country was supported with grain from the king's country. 21On an appointed day, after putting on his royal apparel, Herod took his seat on the rostrum and began delivering an address to them. 22The people repeatedly cried out, "The voice of a god and not of a man!" 23And immediately an angel of the Lord struck

him because he did not give God the glory, and he was eaten by worms and died. 24But the word of the Lord continued to grow and to be multiplied. 25And Barnabas and Saul returned when they had fulfilled their mission to Jerusalem, taking along with them John, who was also called Mark.

You might remember that Agrippa's grandfather Herod the Great built a massive artificial harbor on the seacoast out of concrete that could cure underwater. The key to this concrete was volcanic ash from what is now Naples, Italy. It is estimated that Herod had nearly 50 shiploads of this ash delivered halfway across the Mediterranean Sea to complete the harbor.

In addition to the port, Herod built the city around it complete with a hippodrome, theatre, pagan temples, a massive market for the people, and a palace for himself. He dedicated the harbor and port facilities as Sebastia, and the city as Caesarea in early March of 10 B.C. in honor of his benefactor Caesar Augustus. The Caesarea bit is easy, Sebastia is Greek for Augustus.

Every year thereafter, the people from the region held an annual rededication celebration and this is the

setting for our events here with Agrippa. That's what Luke means in verse 21, "On an appointed day." This is early March 44 A.D.

A further detail is given in verse 20, informing us that at the time there was a dispute between Agrippa and the Phoenicians who were represented by the powerful cities of Tyre and Sidon.

Specifically, Agrippa was "very angry" with the people of Tyre and Sidon. Why? Well, we can't be sure, but I mentioned last week that once Agrippa arrived in Jerusalem to actively rule as king of the Jews, the Jewish people became even more nationalistic than they had been before. Many scholars think that the Jewish War with Rome culminating with the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple had its roots here with Agrippa.

We can easily see in the Gospels how nationalistic the Jews were even when they were being actively oppressed by Roman governors and their troops. Now that they had their own king, descended of Jewish royalty, ruling over the entire area that had once belonged to their ancestors, the nationalistic Jewish people were ecstatic.

Agrippa actively fueled that nationalistic fervor because it elevated him as its focal point and brought him glory and adoration. He began building a Jewish national security force of Jews and fanned the flames of national patriotism to the point that the Roman governor of Syria, Vibius Marsus, based in Antioch, became exceedingly concerned.

Vibius Marsus sent a flurry of official letters to the emperor Claudius warning that Agrippa was posing an ever-increasing threat to the Empire. It is highly likely that the Phoenicians, always wary of the Jews, had sided with Vibius Marsus and agreed that Agrippa was a threat.

The problem was Phoenicia got nearly all their grain from the Jews. This was particularly problematic because they were now two years into the great famine. The Phoenicians were no doubt desperate.

They contacted the king's chamberlain, Blastus, and convinced him to arrange an audience with Agrippa. A chamberlain is technically the most senior official in the household. In this case the royal household. He was a bit like the head butler supervising all of the household

staff, bodyguards, maids, cooks, etc. Blastus would have reported directly to Agrippa and would have wielded considerable influence with him.

While Agrippa agreed to meet with the Phoenician delegation suing for peace and a new grain deal, he set the stage to his advantage. He would humiliate the foreign delegation to the pleasure of the Jews. Agrippa timed his meeting to coincide with the festival celebrating the dedication of the city and, as such, there was a packed house with no room to spare.

Agrippa adorned himself like a god and then made a speech that would have denigrated the Phoenicians and probably all other non-Jewish people and states.

The massive Jewish crowd full of the elite class as well as others were euphoric, they were gleefully elated by the spectacle of their magnificent king humiliating their ancestral enemies. This was good stuff.

The Jewish historian and general, Josephus recorded it this way in his book *Antiquities*: Jos. Ant. 19.343. “Now, when Agrippa had reigned three years over all Judea, he came to the city Caesarea... and there he exhibited shows in honor of Caesar. At which festival, a great

multitude was gotten together of the principal persons, and such as were of dignity through his province. Agrippa put on a garment made wholly of silver, and of a contexture truly wonderful, and came into the theatre early in the morning; at which time the silver of his garment being illuminated by the fresh reflection of the sun's rays upon it, shone out after a surprising manner, and was so resplendent as to spread a horror over those that looked intently upon him; and presently his flatterers cried out, one from one place, and another from another, that he was a god; and they added, "Be thou merciful to us; for although we have hitherto revered thee only as a man, yet shall we henceforth own thee as superior to mortal nature." Upon this the king did neither rebuke them, nor reject their impious flattery. A severe pain also arose in his belly and began in a most violent manner. Accordingly, he was carried into the palace; and the rumor went abroad everywhere, that he would certainly die in a little time. And when he had been quite worn out by the pain in his belly for five days, he departed this life."

According to God's Word, Agrippa was struck by an angel because he arrogantly flaunted his power and cultivated his own veneration instead of humbly pointing to God as the King of Jews should certainly

do. He persecuted the church for his own glory and paid dearly.

Being eaten by worms was not uncommon. Many people back then had intestinal worms so when a person had a burst appendix or other abdominal condition of extreme bloating this was the result. It would have been a very painful way to go. Many scholars believe that Agrippa was assassinated by poison on the orders of his old friend Claudius. One thing kings and emperors never tolerated from anyone was a threat to their own position and power.

Even though Agrippa, the most powerful man in the area, had tried to destroy the church by murdering her leaders, Jesus prevailed – the church grew.

The final verse of the chapter is a hinge verse taking us to another setting and as such is not necessarily chronological. When we tell a complex story as Luke was doing in the Book of Acts, we must choose whether to displace the story geographically, or chronologically, but we must do one or the other.

Here's what I mean, Luke told us about the famine prophecy in Antioch and how Barnabas and Saul took

the relief money from there to Jerusalem. He told us that James had been killed and that Peter was arrested. In doing that he had to bring up Agrippa. He completed the story about Agrippa's demise. Now he gets back to Barnabas and Saul. Luke is displacing things chronologically instead of geographically.

If he did it the other way around, he would jump between Antioch, Jerusalem, and Caesarea, multiple times to keep everything happening in its chronological sequence, but he'd be bouncing us back and forth geographically.

Again, in a complex story you can't have it both ways. You either keep everything chronologically or temporally accurate – sequenced in time and continuously jump back and forth spatially between scenes or locations or geography.

I feel like we need an example. My brother and I go hunting together, but we split up for the day. We come back and both tell Jerry about our individual adventures. Jerry decides to tell all of you about it. Why, only Heaven knows.

Now, he could tell you about Rob's day and then talk about mine. That wouldn't be correct temporally – chronologically, in time sequence. It would seem as though Rob completed his adventure before I started mine. To keep things accurate chronologically He could jump back and forth between our two stories. He would be constantly changing spatially or geographically. It's a choice and most times we do a combination of both. I bring it up because you have to recognize what the writer is doing in order not to get confused.

Well, all that to say, that Barnabas and Saul were accompanied by John Mark, the cousin of Barnabas and the son of the wealthy widow Mary, as they travelled back to Antioch. Likely several months to a year before Agrippa died in Caesarea.

We have pivoted to the next scene... Acts 13:1–3,
1Now there were prophets and teachers at Antioch, in the church that was there: Barnabas, Simeon who was called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen who had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch, and Saul. 2While they were serving the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, "Set Barnabas and Saul apart for Me for the work to which I have called them." 3Then, when they had

fasted, prayed, and laid their hands on them, they sent them away.

Why mention that there were “prophets and teachers” at Antioch? It’s the same reason that Luke names them and explains that they were “serving the Lord and fasting,” as well as stating that the Holy Spirit was the one giving orders through them... God wants us to know with absolute certainty that this First Missionary Journey of the Apostle Paul was completely legit.

It wasn’t like the two dudes were at a coffee shop and hatched a hair-brained idea about founding Christian churches where none existed before. This was God’s doing and His people recognized what God wanted to do and complied.

There are people today, Christian and otherwise, who base their life decisions on prophecies. They read their horoscope, see an astrologer, consult with a spirit guide, or listen to people who claim to be prophetic. The Lord told me that you should...

Whatever you think about that, this was not that. Both Barnabas and Saul had already had several confirmations by others about what God was calling

them to do. The churches in both Jerusalem and Antioch could see and sense the call upon these two men and we know that, at least in the case of Saul, he was repeatedly led forward by the Holy Spirit as an Apostle.

As I have said before, one of the roles of the church is to ascertain what God has already done in Heaven and then confirm that on earth. That's what Baptism is all about and it is what Ordination is all about. The leaders in Antioch were seeking the guidance of the Holy Spirit through service ministry, through prayer, and through fasting and they received what God wanted them to receive.

The men named were all well-educated high-status leaders in the church and outside of the church. Barnabas and Saul we already know. Simeon who was called Niger was almost certainly another Roman citizen, Hellenistic Jewish man with significant training. Niger means black as some commentaries note, but it was used as a cognomen for Roman citizens of note, just like Paullus, or Paul.

Next is "Lucius of Cyrene." He has a Grecco-Roman name but given his prominence in the church at the

time it is likely that he was Jewish. If so, we probably have another well-educated, Roman citizen, Hellenistic Jew.

Then there was Manaen who was a childhood playmate raised in the Royal Court of Herod the Great with Agrippa's uncle Herod Antipas. You might remember that "Joanna the wife of Herod's steward," was financially supporting Jesus (Luke 8:3). She may have influenced Manaen.

The whole church would have then gathered together as these Elders laid hands upon Barnabas and Saul and anointed them with oil, commissioning them as Apostles representing the church at large, but specifically their church.

In ordaining and sending the men the church would have also supplied their needs to go forth and be able to present the Gospel free of charge to the unsaved. That's what we did several years ago with Justin, Rebecca and their kids.

That's what a big part of your giving to this church does... It supports outreach missions and part of your generous giving provisions me, in order that I may, not

only encourage you with the Truth, but also share the Truth with the unsaved, free of charge. Without cost to them, many, many people have heard about Jesus because of our arrangement.

Acts 13:4&5, 4So, being sent out by the Holy Spirit, they went down to Seleucia and from there they sailed to Cyprus. 5When they reached Salamis, they began to proclaim the word of God in the synagogues of the Jews; and they also had John as their helper.

Seleucia was the port city on the coast north of where the sewage from Antioch emptied into the sea at the mouth of the Orontes River. The guys made their way the 15 miles or so to Seleucia and waited until there was a cargo ship going to Cyprus. There weren't any scheduled transports for folks back then.

They sailed across the way about 60 miles to Salamis, which probably took the better part of a full day. Once there they began sharing the Gospel where they had a natural in. The local synagogues.

Again, the emphasis is on the fact that the very Breath of Almighty God sent them out on this first Christian Missionary Journey. These men were sent by God

through their church specifically to travel to areas where there were no churches in order to preach and teach the Word of God, presenting the Gospel of Christ with the goal that some might turn and be Saved by belief in Jesus and advance the Kingdom of God on earth through the expansion of the Christian Community.

Why? Why in the world would people in Antioch care about that? The church commissioned and sent out a well-provisioned team as Apostles establishing new beachheads in the spread of the Gospel and the Salvation it announces. It cost them time, effort, and money as well as the loss of some of their best and brightest members so that a bunch of strangers could hear about Jesus. Why?

Really, why? And from the perspective of the guys going on the journey – why would they agree to go – what did they get out of it? Travel to foreign places where bad weather, illness, accidents, criminals, and hateful people would all conspire against you – for what purpose?

To correctly answer that question for them 2,000 years ago and for us sitting here today we can start by

looking at what preceded it inwardly and then outwardly.

I'm going to start with the external although that comes after the internal. Notice that Barnabas and Saul were first trusted by God through His physical agents, the church, to take the charity collected around Antioch and deliver it to the church in Jerusalem.

We could talk about a lot of different things that their charity mission accomplished, like the further bonding between the two Hellenistic men and the original Apostles and disciples of Jesus. Here, I want to focus on the giving aspect. Barnabas and Saul were faithful in the discharge of their duties. They lovingly, joyfully, peacefully, gently, humbly, delivered the helpful gift given by God through the church at Antioch through those men to the ones desperately needing it.

“Faithful in a little; trusted with more.” Ideally, why did the people up north give to those in the south and why were Barnabas and Saul so eager to do the heavy lifting?

I have seen quite a lot of giving in my time. What I've noticed is that it is nearly impossible for the one who is

providing something needed to the one needing it without the giver of that gift feeling superior to the one receiving it. We have dead word slogans like “Give the poor a hand up instead of a handout,” but it is trite nonsense when it comes to the attitude of the giver.

“Give a man a fish and you feed him for one day, teach a man to fish and you create a guy who won't work anymore.” Well, something like that. The point is whether you teach a man to fish or give a woman a hand up, you are still the hero in the story. It's about you.

Take that attitude to the ministry field where we proclaim Christ Jesus to the unsaved and they will sense your attitude of superiority. We make even the sharing of the Gospel about us. Want proof?

Have you ever talked to another person about God and had them react with less than enthusiastic agreement. I'm talking about a conversation where the other person does not believe what you believe about the Lord and your explanation isn't moving them towards acceptance – ever had that?

Did you get frustrated, irritated, annoyed, disappointed, angry? Did the conversation devolve into a disagreement or an argument or a fight? That outcome is the result of you giving the gift of the Gospel and feeling superior as the giver – it is about you making it about you.

What is vital and rarely taught is that in ministering God's Grace to others, it cannot ever be about you. You exist as a conduit between that other person and God. You are merely a herald of Christ's Message to the other person. What they do with that information is 100% between them and God.

Barnabas and Saul had proved that they could be the conduits for a lavish gift to a needy group without making it about them and so the Breath of God promoted them to be Christ's Apostles to advance Christianity beyond its borders at that time.

Now, how? That's where we go back to the first bit, the internal, or inward preceding cause. Just like forgiveness, as an example, the ability to give the greatest treasure the world has ever known to people who need it more desperately than anything else in

existence without feeling superior is to recognize yourself in them.

It's the same with a little – giving a homeless guy five bucks all the way to a lot – sharing the Gospel with the unsaved. It starts by understanding a fundamental truth expressed by the idea that, “There, but by the Grace of God, go I.”

“I’m a smarter ant,” “I’m a bigger ant,” “I’m a harder working ant,” “I’m a better ant” ... “Yeah, but you’re all ants.” Jesus chose you – you didn’t choose Him. John 15:16&17, Jesus speaking... 16You did not choose Me but I chose you, and appointed you that you would go and bear fruit, and that your fruit would remain, so that whatever you ask of the Father in My name He may give to you. 17This I command you, that you love one another.

How does the command to love fit with “I chose you”? I so hope that you can see the connection. When we think that we chose Christ we cannot help but feel superior to those who haven’t chosen Him. That superiority quickly spreads to include all Christians who don’t do Christianity the right way and baby, there is no love in that.

Love for others comes when I realize that I am just the same as them and that by the unimaginable Grace of God I was plucked out of the mirey clay. I can then have the proper attitude that I owe it all to Christ. Everyone has sinned and fallen short and therefore everyone needs the exact same remedy. We all need the Blood of Jesus that cost Him His life.

If I'm no different than anyone else and someone acted as the conduit for God to reach me and then God asks me to do the same for someone else... How can I refuse... How can I comply and feel superior?