

Seminary Anniversary and Spiritual Emphasis Week

Asia-Pacific Nazarene Theological Seminary

November 14 – 16, 2017

Theme: WHATEVER HAPPENS, WALK WORTHY!

November 14: “Whatever Happens, Keep the Faith”

Philippians 1:27, Acts 27:25, Acts 23:11

Introduction

1. Philippians 1:27. “Whatever happens, conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ.”
2. Acts 27:25. “So keep up the courage, men, for I have faith in God, that it will happen just as He told me.”
3. Acts 23:11. “The following night the Lord stood near Paul and said, “Take courage! As you have testified about me in Jerusalem, so also you must testify in Rome.”

How do these three fascinating passages relate, and how do they fit into our Seminary anniversary chapel? The context will be foundational for the three sermons this week as we focus on living and leading faithfully!

I. Let’s look at the context of our Acts 27:25 text.

To get our answer, take a fascinating journey with me through the later part of Acts. Acts 20-28.

Paul has just completed his third missionary journey. He took an offering for the Jerusalem church. In Acts 20-22, On his way to Jerusalem, he stopped to visit with the Ephesians elders and the Christians at Tyre and Caesarea. They begged him not to go. "Trouble awaits you!" As predicted, Paul was arrested in Jerusalem (21:27). He had gone to temple to pray. A riot broke out. Paul was taken to Sanhedrin, then placed in jail.

While in jail, God gave him a vision (Acts 23:11). "The following night the Lord stood near Paul and said, Take courage! As you have testified about me in Jerusalem, so you must also testify in Rome." Following the vision, however, the Jewish leaders plotted to kill Paul and he was transferred to a jail in Caesarea.

In Acts 24-25, Paul was brought before governors Fetus and Felix and remained in prison for two years. He appeared before King Agrippa. In Acts 26-27, Paul's request was finally granted--sent to Rome for trial. On the way to Rome, he encountered typhoon and experienced a ship wreck.

In Acts 27:25, without food for 14 days and in a midst of a shipwreck, Paul encourages the approximately 276 shipmates with the words of our key text, "So keep up the courage men, for I have faith in God that he will do it, just as he told me." In Acts 28, Paul finally arrives in Rome. In Rome, he was placed in jail, or house arrest, again.

II. So What? What can we learn from this fascinating story about faith and the faithfulness of God to His vision and direction to us?

1. Paul's experience reminds us that...delays may occur.

God told Paul he would go to Rome, He did not tell Paul when, how, how long it would take before the vision would be fulfilled. After God gave Paul the vision in Jerusalem (in Acts 23:11)! Paul was placed in prison for two years.

For Paul, for you and me, delays often occur. Progress may not seem as evident at times in your work, your calling, your plans.

For APNTS. A vision was given to our denominational leaders in the mid-1970's for a second graduate theological seminary in the denomination.

Missiologist Dr. Donald Owens, a PhD in anthropology from the University of Oklahoma, was appointed in 1977 as the founding president of a graduate level seminary to serve the Church of the Nazarene in the Asia and Pacific regions. There was no campus. No faculty. Questions remained. Would APNTS be an extension of the Nazarene Theological Seminary in Kansas City? Dr. Owen's targeted mid-1978 for the opening of the school.

Even when the Philippines was selected later that year as the country for the new school, the question remained as to the location of the school – Baguio or Manila? Manila was finally selected as the site for the graduate school because of its urban setting.

The former Children's Gardens Orphanage property in Taytay, Rizal was finally purchased in 1979 for \$425,000. The cottages on the campus needed improving. New administration and classroom buildings were necessary. A faculty needed to be assembled even as several classes were taught in modular format during 1980-83. APNTS formally began as a Seminary in November 1983 with faculty in place, including Dr. Floyd Cunningham! Owens Hall dedicated in January 1984!

When God give to us a vision and speaks a word of direction to us, delays may occur in the realization of that vision! We need to remember this lesson!

2. Paul's experience reminds us that... suffering, hardship and hassles may result. After the vision to Paul in Acts 23, there was a plot to kill him. He was manipulated (24:26), and received threats of death (23:21). He encountered a typhoon (22:14, 18), a shipwreck (27:27) and was without food for 14 days.

You (we) may have been tempted, at times, to wonder why the problems, sickness, hardships, hassles, when you are following God's calling.

The temptation we face, often, when overwhelmed with sufferings, hardship and hassles, in the form of sickness, financial challenges, multiple assignments, hunger and language complications is to give up and forget that God has spoken a word of direction to us and given to us a vision for our lives.

Founding APNTS President, Dr. Don Owens, was also serving the Asia Pacific regional director of the Church of the Nazarene. Once the Seminary was opened and functioning, Dr. Owens felt he should return to his other assignment as regional director. The new Board of Trustees and the leaders of the denomination elected me in April 1984 as the second APNTS president. I traveled to Manila in July of that year for the beginning of the new school year and my family moved to Manila several months later.

Very soon I realized that students enrolled at the seminary from outside of the country could only enter the country on a tourist visas, which needed renewal frequently and with significant cost. The only way to resolve this was for APNTS to be "Recognized" (or accredited) by the government. With this recognition, our students could receive "student visas." I started the process of meeting with the Government education officials in December 1984. After many delays and closed doors, the recognition was officially given to the Seminary in August 1888.

For APNTS, for students, for pastors, the temptation is to give up on the vision God has given to us about our future when we face multiple delays, sufferings hardship and problems. For APNTS, for students, pastors and lay-leaders...be encouraged Paul's experience!

3. Paul's experience reminds us to... push ahead, don't look back!

Paul could have thought about his friends and their advice. (21:14) They urged him not to go (21:12). They pleaded with him. In Act 26:32, he could have questioned his own judgment "This man could have been set free if..." Paul could have said, "Did I make a mistake?" For Paul, doubts could have arisen! But for him, he pushed ahead. He did not turn back. God had spoken. [*Speaking between lines, on this paragraph*]

Paul's faith was in the God who gave to him the vision and direction for his future. Perhaps we are tempted at times to look back and ask: Why? What if?

We are sometimes tempted to doubt when faced with some "typhoon" and "shipwreck" experiences in our journey of faith. We may ask ourselves in these moments, "Did I make a mistake?" I asked this question on my first night in Manila. "Did I make a mistake?" God was gracious and patient with me. You and I, and, yes, this seminary we love, can learn from Paul's experience!

On his journey to Rome, he affirmed his faith to those traveling with him! So keep up your courage, men, for I have faith in God that it will happen just as he told me. Can you or I give such a strong testimony in the midst of our most stressing challenges?

That's transforming faith!

4. Paul's experience reminds us that we must...Believe Him, regardless of the cost!

Paul's journey, my journey, your journey, gives us new meaning to the song, "In His time, in His time, He makes all things beautiful in His time. Lord, please show me every day. As You're teaching me Your way, that You do just what you say, in Your time."

God's word to Paul was finally realized. He arrived in Rome. Just as God had spoken. Was everything easy? No. Prison faced him...again. Did he complain? No. Instead, he evangelized the guards and witnessed to those around him. He nurtured believers.

Paul accepted the situation, the place, where God placed him, and "bloomed" where he was planted. He embraced the place where he found himself. And God used him profoundly in exactly that setting!

And do you know what else Paul did while under house arrest? In Rome, he wrote the "Prison" Epistles. Philippians, Colossians, Ephesians, Philemon.

From Rome, under house arrest, Paul wrote these words to the church at Philippi, "Whatever happens, conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ."

Remember the song, "In His Time?" "In His time, In His time, God makes all things beautiful in His time, Lord, please show me every day as you're teaching me your way, that you do just what you say, In your time!"

For you...for me, for APNTS—there will be problems...at home, at school, with friends, or finances. There may be a death of a family member, loss of a job, a low grade, or misunderstandings, disappointments. Even rejection.

Yet, with a strong faith in God, He will make a way... and hold us steady...until He shows us His way." God will make a way, when there seems to be no way, He works in ways we cannot see, He will make a way for me, He will be my guide, hold me closely to His side, With love and strength for each new day, He will make a way. God will make a way."

Conclusion

Whatever happens to you as you follow His calling, (at APNTS and beyond), whatever happens, walk worthy...by keeping the faith – living by faith and dying by faith - as did Paul (Acts 27:25). “Keep up the faith, men, for I have faith in God that he will do it, just as he said he would!” In the midst of delays and setbacks, suffering and hardships. Push ahead, don’t look back! Believe God, regardless of the costs.

I believe this is true also for APNTS. For sure, the Seminary has changed since 1983, in ways we could not envision in the early days of APNTS. Then, we had no computers. Only two landline phones. No mobile phones. No Neilson Center. No Geneva Hall. No Power Point technology! But, we had a mission and a vision we believed was from the Triune God!

And, now, in 2017, students from Myanmar and China and eleven other countries attend the Seminary. Doctoral programs are now offered through APNTS. A “LAMP” academic program of studies for undergraduate students are now offered on campus and off.

The impact of APNTS is far and wide. For example, an Indonesian student graduated from APNTS and pursued his doctorate in Taiwan. He was teaching in Mongolia when two Russian-Korean students of his at the school, along with a lady from Mongolia, asked their teacher for a place to continue their studies for Christian Ministries. He recommended APNTS. They came to APNTS and have now graduated and serving in Asia! And there are many other stories like this one.

For APNTS, for you and for me, we are challenged to live and die by radical trust and faith in the God who called us and gave to a vision of our future is faithful to His word to us, in His time!

In the midst of the delays, suffering, typhoons, and even shipwrecks in our ministry. Whatever happens, “keep your faith in God that he will do exactly what he said he would do”

In our lives, our families, our churches and in the seminary! In His time!

Closing Chorus: In His Time

“In His time, In His time, God makes all things beautiful in His time.

Lord, please show me every day as you’re teaching me your way,

that you do just what you say,

In your time!”