

Series: Acts
Title: Discerning Who God is With
Text: Acts 23: 12-15
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When folks are searching for a church they commonly seek a church with plenty of activity. Folks look for a place where a number of people attend. Often, people look for someone where important people meet or where the preacher is widely known.

Proposition: IT IS A MISTAKE TO LOOK AT THE OUTWARD APPEARANCE TO DETERMINE WHO GOD IS WITH. THE BELIEVER DISCERNS WHO GOD IS WITH BY WHERE THE GOSPEL OF CHRIST IS PREACHED.

We know from Acts 23: 11 that the Lord Jesus is with the apostle Paul. Paul had Christ, he had the gospel and the Lord was with Paul to deliver him so that he could preach the gospel. These other men were opposed to Christ and to Paul, yet they possessed many of the very things that people look for when looking for a church.

I. Zeal does not determine who God is with (Acts 23: 12.)

- A. They were united--they banded together
- B. They bound themselves under this curse--they were zealous
- C. Yet, it was zeal without knowledge

Romans 10: 2: For I bear them record that they have a zeal of God, but not according to knowledge. 3: For they being ignorant of God's righteousness, and going about to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted themselves unto the righteousness of God. 4: For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth. 5: For Moses describeth the righteousness which is of the law, That the man which doeth those things shall live by them. 6: But the righteousness which is of faith speaketh on this wise,... 8: But what saith it? The word is nigh thee, even in thy mouth, and in thy heart: that is, the word of faith, which we preach;

Application: The only tie that binds believers together is Christ Jesus. One of the strongest ties that will bind men together for evil is hatred of the Lord Jesus Christ.

II. The number of people does not determine who God is with (Acts 23: 13.)

They had more than forty men whereas Paul was all alone, just one man.

A. God shall save a multitude no man can number. But in every age God saves remnants.

1. Out of the multitudes in Noah's day, only 8 souls went into the ark
2. Out of the millions who came out of Egypt--2 went into Canaan--Joshua and Caleb
3. Isaiah said that if God had not left us a remnant we would be like Sodom and Gomorah.
4. At Pentecost 3000 were called at once but the multitude, the majority, believed not.

B. The word of God tells us it shall become worse and worse, as we see in our day.

2 Tim 3: 1: This know also, that in the last days perilous times shall come. 2: For men shall be lovers of their own selves,...4: lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God; 5: Having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof: from such turn away....12: Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution. 13: But evil men and seducers shall wax worse and worse, deceiving, and being deceived.

2 Thess 2: 1: Now we beseech you, brethren, by the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, and by our gathering together unto him, 2: That ye be not soon shaken in mind, or be troubled, neither by spirit, nor by word, nor by letter as from us, as that the day of Christ is at hand. 3: Let no man deceive you by any means: for that day shall not come, except there come a falling away first, and that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition; 4: Who opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God, or that is worshipped; so that he as God sitteth in the temple of God, shewing himself that he is God.

III. The place with men of high esteem does not determine who God is with (Acts 23: 14)

A. Chief priests and the elders were with these men--these were the most highly esteemed among men

B. Our God chose to send his Son in a lowly manner.

Is 53: 2: For he shall grow up before him as a tender plant, and as a root out of a dry ground: he hath no form nor comeliness; and when we shall see him, there is no beauty that we should desire him.

C. The Lord Jesus chose base men to spread the gospel.

1. Fishermen, a publican.

2. Paul is one of the most learned men the Lord used but because he preached the gospel the wise and prudent desired to kill him.

3. Here is how the wise and prudent regarded the Lord's messengers:

Ac 4:13 Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were unlearned and ignorant men, they marvelled; and they took knowledge of them, that they had been with Jesus.

Matthew 13: 54: And when he was come into his own country, he taught them in their synagogue, insomuch that they were astonished, and said, Whence hath this man this wisdom, and these mighty works? 55: Is not this the carpenter's son? is not his mother called Mary? and his brethren, James, and Joses, and Simon, and Judas? 56: And his sisters, are they not all with us? Whence then hath this man all these things? 57: And they were offended in him.

Acts 4: 26: The kings of the earth stood up, and the rulers were gathered together against the Lord, and against his Christ.

D. The Lord Jesus thanked the Father for this:

Matthew 11: 25: At that time Jesus answered and said, I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes. 26: Even so, Father: for so it seemed good in thy sight.

E. Why did the Lord chose this way?

I Corinthians 1: 19: For it is written, I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and will bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent....26: For ye see your calling, brethren, how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called: 27: But God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty; 28: And base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen, yea, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are: 29: That no flesh should glory in his presence.

Illustration: Children's question, "Why do my friends make fun of me when I tell them we meet in a firehouse?"

- Natural man discerns by the natural senses
- Natural man is impressed with zeal
- Natural man is impressed with numbers
- Natural man is impressed with learned men
- Natural man loves to receive honor from other men, to justify themselves before men.

But remember, that which is highly esteemed among men is an abomination in the sight of God.

We know by the scriptures that the Lord Jesus Christ, God our Savior, is with Paul. But put yourself in the time and place in which Paul lived.

- These men who opposed Paul were united,
- They were zealous,
- They had the majority with them.
- They compassed land and sea making proselytes

Here is this one man, Paul,

- He has left them, saying they have a zeal without knowledge
- He is declaring salvation by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone--a message contrary to what the rest were saying.

If you were there, how would you have known whether Paul was telling the truth or whether these men were telling the truth? The same way the believer knows in our day?

III. THE BELIEVER KNOWS WHERE GOD IS BY GOD'S WORD

A. Believer's know by the Holy Spirit in our heart. (I John 2: 18-22)

1. Ye know all things--we know in part, but through the teaching of the Holy Spirit the believer knows all things. We know and believe:

- The Father, who is the God of truth;
- Christ, the Son of God, Truth itself;
- The Spirit of God, who is the Spirit of truth;
- The Gospel, which is the word of truth;
- The Scriptures, which are the Scriptures of truth,

Those who are born of God believe everything God says in this book because God says it. Believers no longer use ourselves, and our experiences, or the precepts of men as the filter to determine whether or not the doctrine is true. Every doctrine which exalts our sovereign God and Savior Jesus Christ we receive. We rejoice that it makes salvation not by our: choosing but God's electing grace, not the will of our flesh but the irresistible will of God the Holy Spirit, not our running but God's own works in the finished work of Christ.

2. Those born of God know and believe that Jesus is the Christ. He is ALL OUR SALVATION.

- Jesus is God with us--fullness of Godhead bodily, express image of God.
- Jesus is satisfaction for our sins
- Having been born of his Spirit, Christ abides in us and we in him and he is our sanctification
- We are complete in CHRIST

Heb 9:12: Neither by the blood of goats and calves, but by his own blood he entered in once into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption *for us*....10:14: For by one offering he hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified.

3. We know that no lie is of the truth.

- God foreseeing some good in us is a lie--there is none good, no not one (Rom 3: 10.)
- The free will of man is a lie--there is none that seeketh after God (Rom 3: 11.)
- Man coming to Christ by his intellect is a lie--there is none that understandeth (Rom 3: 11.)
- Righteousness by man is a lie--it is God that justifieth, Christ that died (Rom 8: 33, 34.)
- Sanctification by man's works is a lie--"as he is so are we in this world". Having this word abiding in us, we have washed our hands of the lie that "we are now made perfect by the flesh" (1 John 4: 17; Galatians 3: 3; Heb 10: 14; Heb 2: 11; Heb 9: 13, 14; 1 Corinthians 1: 30.)
- We really believe God when he promises: "I will take you one of a city, and two of a family, and I will bring you to Zion: And I will give you pastors according to mine heart, which shall feed you with knowledge and understanding" (Jer 3: 14-15.)
- We really believe God when he says, "Behold, I am against them that prophesy false dreams, saith the LORD, and do tell them, and cause my people to err by their lies, and by their lightness; yet I sent them not, nor commanded them: therefore they shall not profit this people at all, saith the LORD" (Jer 23:32 .)

You may not be able to find one lie in the things that are said by false prophets. Everything Balaam said was true. IT IS WHAT THE FALSE PROPHET WILL NOT SAY.

4. Notice what John says: the believer not only knows all things, he holds to them from the beginning--I John 2: 24-27.

Question: If you made a profession under a gospel that you now say is full of lies, can you really hold on to that which you heard from the beginning? The believer's beginning is when God enters into the heart made new by grace and teaches us in spirit and in truth? Then you can hold on to that which you heard from the beginning.

2 Timothy 1:13 Hold fast the form of sound words, which thou hast heard of me, in faith and love which is in Christ Jesus.

Paul's beginning was not when he was taught the lie and believed the lie that salvation is in the will of man, the will of the flesh, and of earthly relationship. Paul's beginning was on the road to Damascus when he was born again of the Holy Spirit him and taught the truth of who God is and

how he saves in Christ Jesus. Not only did Paul repent, let go of that lie and take hold of the truth, but he said:

Galatians 1:8: But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed.

Not one of the apostles preached another gospel to those saints than I preach to you now. John did not preach: man's goodness, man's will, man's works, he preached the Word of life, Christ Jesus. When John says hold to that which ye heard from the beginning he means WHEN HE PREACHED THE GOSPEL TO THEM.

The wise and prudent will hear the first part this message--"not many wise, not many noble", God chose "base things" and he will begin to defend learning, wisdom, scholarship.

But when he hears that God really does teach a sinner so that from the beginning he knows "all things", the wise and prudent will begin to defend how little a sinner must know to be saved.

In both cases, he is defending a fleshly a profession made under a lie, understanding by his own seeking and his own learning and he is denying the power of God to teach the truth in the heart of his children.

The Lord said Why do ye not understand my speech? even because ye cannot hear my word (John 8:43) All that ever came before me are thieves and robbers: but the sheep did not hear them (John 10: 8; John 10: 19-31)

HERE IS WHAT I WANT YOU TO GO HOME WITH:

1. Never let anyone discourage you, by pointing to the large assemblies where they hold back the truth of the gospel.

- Zeal without work of grace in the heart is nothing
- The number of people at a place does not mean God is necessarily there
- The education and reputation and renown of men is not to be looked upon
- Natural man flocks to the places where men receive honor of one another

Isa 8:20: To the law and to the testimony: if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them.

2. Where you hear Christ speak to your heart declaring he is All, where you are shut up to Christ and away from yourself, FOLLOW HIS VOICE (I John 4: 4-6.)