

Multi-tasking in a Time of Concern
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Have you ever tried to multi-task? Many people do so to their own peril. E.g., I know of someone who was texting and driving and as she were coming to a stop accidentally hit a curb and did some damage to her car. E.g., I recall in high school there was a girl who was in track practice and she turned her head to say something to someone and as she was running around the football field she ran into the goal post and hurt herself— ouch! But there are other times when multi-tasking does not have such risks. E.g., one of the things I love is going to an elliptical machine and watching the news or a movie— that is awesome! Before I know it my exercise routine is done! E.g., I recall reading about NT scholar F.F. Bruce who would take his lecture notes and publish them as a book— so his preparation for teaching his courses were often research for books. Well, we live in an age of coronavirus where we have to stay at home, but wouldn't it be nice to stay at home and at the same time get some good things done for Jesus? The apostle Paul shows us how, as he himself knew what quarantine was like, first-century AD-style.

READ Acts 28:23-31 (p. 150)

CONTEXT: Paul has just arrived in Rome for his trial before Caesar. He arranged a meeting with the Jewish leaders.

“As Paul settles in at Rome in his own ‘apartment’, he gets an audience with the Jewish leaders who know nothing good or bad about Paul except that his sect is viewed widely in great disfavor.” Paul gets to Rome and arranges a meeting with the Jewish leaders with the hope of setting his side of the story straight— he has done nothing wrong, the Romans were about to release him but the Jews in Jerusalem objected so Paul appealed to the emperor in Rome— who at the time was Nero, who was starting his downward, vicious turn in character and rule. In a sense, Paul would like to see if they would be for him and not against him— he is kind of testing the waters. E.g., it kind of reminds me of President Ronald Reagan when he was about to go under surgery for a near-assassin’s bullet wound, he asked the doctor, “Are you a Republican or a Democrat?” Paul wants them not so much for him, really, but much more *for the gospel*, “the hope of Israel” (v 20). But the Jews reveal at this point all they have heard is about this new sect Christianity, against which it is spoken everywhere. This, beloved, is not necessarily a bad thing. E.g., I have heard a politician say he did not care so much whether he was loved or hated, just so long as people talked about him! If we are disliked because of the gospel, that is ok, *as long as it is for the right reasons!* E.g., in Friday’s *Times-Picayune New Orleans Advocate* (April 3, 2020, 6B) there was a cartoon about Moses standing on a mountain holding the Ten Commandments and he looks up to the heavens and asks, “Think we need something in here about preachers ignoring a pandemic and putting lives at risk?” and the word from heaven comes, “Nah. . . Nobody’s *that* stupid. . .” We as Christians, if we are disliked, even hated, may it be because we have stood for biblical truths, the gospel message, and not because we have put lives at risk now or because we were impatient or hyper-critical, etc. The early Christians were, more times than not it seems, disliked because of the right reasons— they

proclaimed a Messiah Savior who had been crucified for our sins and raised from the dead— and because of that the faith spread extremely rapidly.

READ vv 23-24. “After hearing the gospel explained in some detail on Jesus and on His being the fulfillment of the Old Testament, the Jewish leaders received it with mixed results: some believed and others refuse.” We don’t know whether this was 50%-50% or something else, or how interested those who sided with Paul’s message. This seems to have been a disappointment to Paul, as probably a large part of his audience rejected the gospel, as we see from what Paul says after this. And it still is an disappointment today. E.g., I recall talking to a woman who grew up Jewish and came to Christ in college, and both her parents were upset with her over this, and as the years went by one of her parents came to Christ, while the other one never did to her knowledge. It breaks our hearts to see people refuse the gospel. E.g., I recall talking to a guy years ago about the gospel, and taking a lot of time explaining the faith to him and answering his questions, and I recall the disappointment I had when he said he did not want to follow Jesus.

READ vv 25-31. “Since the Jewish leaders lacked a solid reception to the gospel, Paul quotes from Isaiah 6:9-10 as a rebuke to them, and then turns and offers the gospel to the Gentiles with unhindered boldness, for they will listen.” This rebuke comes from the famous passage where God asks Isaiah, “Whom shall I send to my people?” And Isaiah says, “Send me!” And this is the message God had for him to give the people of Israel. The idea is that Israel already is approaching God like this, hearing His Word read but never truly understanding, or even desiring to understand. They see and hear, but really don’t see and hear. This is the Jews of ancient Israel, and it is the Jews of Paul’s day, and it is often the reaction of both Jews and other non-believers today, even those who have been raised in the church. This passage which Paul quotes ends in words we cannot miss— “and I would heal them”. E.g., it is like a fictitious story I once

heard of a man who on a cold winter, snowy day saw a lot of birds in a tree, so he thought how cold they must be, and then he saw his barn, which was warmer inside, so he opened the big barn doors and tried to coax the birds into the barn to get warm and have shelter, but they would not go— they did not understand his intentions. The man thought to himself, if only I could become a bird, they would listen to me and go into the barn and be safe— and it hit him, that is what our God has done for us in Jesus! God became flesh, one of us, and is trying to coax us into safety. The question is, will we trust Him, and obey Him?

“How does the way Paul handles his ‘quarantine’ guide us in our corona-quarantine?” The fact that Paul is chained to a guard and unable to leave freely from his dwelling does not prevent him from multi-tasking for the gospel. He apparently earned a living, probably making tents, and got financial help from the church in Philippi, and he welcomed one and all who wanted to hear about Jesus. Apparently he was using his fellow Christians in Rome to get in touch with people and invite them over. We may be prevented from such in-person meetings, but surely our technology today allows us to overcome this inconvenience. There are two central questions we must ask ourselves: (1) what are my resources— a cell phone? A computer? A webcam on my computer? A car? Good health? And (2), how can these resources be used for Jesus’ glory without endangering others? E.g., this week I got an email from Second Harvesters needing volunteers with food sorting and packing— I have the health to do this, and I would love to do this, but I also know I would be exposing myself to others which could threaten my mother-in-law’s health who lives with us. But others who don’t have this situation at home could do this. Let us ask God how He would have us multi-task this week as we approach Good Friday and Easter.