

Our Chapter in Church History

Psalm 78:1-8 and Acts 29 on September 12, 2021

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Today is Kick-Off Sunday and we're doing things a bit differently than a normal Sunday. This is going to be a bit of a shorter sermon. At the end, there is a prayer of commissioning for the ministries right here in our local church. Not just for the ministries though, but for each and every believer. For Christ-followers, "*opting out*" of serving Jesus, is NOT really an option. We are all in and sold out as we become fully devoted followers of Jesus together.

Please turn in your Bible to Psalm 78. All throughout human history, for thousands and thousands of years, God has been calling His people to pass along their faith to future generations. About 3,000 years ago the Psalmist recorded Psalm 78. Psalm 78:1-8 says, "My people, hear my teaching; listen to the words of my mouth. I will open my mouth with a parable; I will utter hidden things, things from of old—things we have heard and known, things our ancestors have told us. We will not hide them from their descendants; we WILL tell the next generation the praiseworthy deeds of the LORD, his power, and the wonders he has done. He decreed statutes for Jacob and established the law in Israel, which he commanded our ancestors to teach their children, so the next generation would know them, even the children yet to be born, and they in turn would tell their children. Then they would put their trust in God and would not forget his deeds but would keep his commands. They would not be like their ancestors—a stubborn and rebellious generation, whose hearts were NOT loyal to God, whose spirits were NOT faithful to him."

Brother or Sister in Christ, for "Our Chapter in Church History," may we not be like the ancestors mentioned in verse 8. May we not be "a stubborn and rebellious generation, whose hearts were not loyal to God, whose spirits were not faithful to him." Instead, may we be faithful to the LORD and heed the call in Psalm 78:4, "We will not hide them from their descendants; we will tell the next generation the praiseworthy deeds of the LORD, his power, and the wonders he has done." This Psalm doesn't just remind us of one particular generation, nor does it remind us of just the youngest generation. This Psalm reminds us of generation after generation after generation, right up to the generations that are alive today, as well as every

generation that will follow, right up until the Lord returns. In other words, we are called to disciple people in our church from the youngest person to the oldest. From “The Greatest Generation” to the “The Silent Generation” to the Baby Boomers, to Gen X, to Gen Y (aka Millennials), to Gen Z, and now even to “Generation Alpha” (which is what some people are now starting to call our youngest generation of souls).

Psalm 78 connects nicely with the Great Commission, which came along about 1,000 years later in history. Our Lord Jesus told His disciples in Matthew 28:19-20, “Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you....” Our mission is to pass along our faith to every generation; to make disciples in EVERY generation. A disciple¹ can be defined as a learner or a follower of Jesus. Disciplemaking² is why our church exists right here on the corner of Carr Lake Road SW and Washington Avenue SE.



¹ μαθητής = “learner, pupil, disciple” ① one who engages in learning through instruction from another, pupil, apprentice (in contrast to the teacher...) ... ② one who is rather constantly associated with someone who has a pedagogical reputation or a particular set of views, disciple, adherent.” Arndt, W., Danker, F. W., Bauer, W., & Gingrich, F. W. (2000). A Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament and other early Christian literature (3rd ed., p. 609). Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

² μαθητεύω = “① to be a pupil, with implication of being an adherent of the teacher.” Arndt, W., Danker, F. W., Bauer, W., & Gingrich, F. W. (2000). A Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament and other early Christian literature (3rd ed., p. 609). Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

This is where our church building sits. You can see our Sanctuary from this angle. On the left edge you can just barely make out our bell tower, with the little cross on top. We've been on this particular corner since 1989, but we've "officially" been in this community since about 1924.

Here at E-Free Bemidji we are "becoming fully devoted followers of Jesus together." We are here to... Win, Build, and Equip:

To **WIN** the spiritually lost to salvation.

To **BUILD** spiritually mature followers.

To **EQUIP** Christians to use their spiritual gifting to disciple others.³

Over the past year or so, we've been working our way through the New Testament book of Acts. Here we've seen a snapshot from early on in Church History: a generation of believers who took up the mandate to pass along their faith. This morning let's fast forward to the very end of the book of Acts. Normally, I don't like skipping to the last page of a book, before I've officially read all of the other pages leading up to it. But, for today, let's make an exception.

Spoiler alert: here's how the book of Acts ends. Acts 28:30-31 says, "For two whole years Paul stayed there in his own rented house and welcomed all who came to see him. He proclaimed the kingdom of God and taught about the Lord Jesus Christ—with all boldness and without hindrance!" In other words, when the book of Acts gets to its very final verses, the gospel of Jesus Christ is STILL going forth; the story is NOT over! There are still people left who need to be "taught about the Lord Jesus Christ." Or, to put it another way, church history was still being written even after Luke finished writing the book of Acts. We might call this Acts chapter 29. In fact, I would suggest that Acts 29 is happening right now at E-Free Bemidji!

With that in mind, let's wrap up with two important discipleship questions:

1) How will you grow in your own, personal discipleship this fall?

Colossians 1:28 reminds us, "He (*Christ*) is the one we proclaim, admonishing and teaching everyone with all wisdom, so that we may present EVERYONE fully mature in Christ."

2) Which ministry do you plan to serve in, in order to help others grow in their discipleship this fall? Colossians 1:29 says, "To this end I strenuously contend with all the energy Christ so powerfully works in me."

³ See 1 Corinthians 15:58.

Brother or Sister in Christ, we are SO BLESSED to be part of what God is doing in this world. We have an amazing opportunity to bring God glory, by making disciples right here in our own Bemidji community. Let's honor our Lord Jesus Christ, by doing our part to advance His Great Commission mandate!

Here's a prayer of commissioning that I'd encourage you to pray out loud right now: "Heavenly Father, I pray for myself as a believer in Jesus Christ. I want to be faithful to Jesus' Great Commission. Please help me to be effective in making disciples right here at E-Free Bemidji, on this corner of Carr Lake Rd. and Washington Ave. Please prepare the hearts of the spiritually lost, so that I am able to win them to salvation. Please prepare my heart as a believer, so that I will be hungry for opportunities to be built up in my own faith, as I continue to become a more and more fully devoted follower of Jesus. And Lord, please help me as a believer, to joyfully use the gift that you've equipped me with, in order to volunteer and serve others in their discipleship. May the words of Colossians 1:28-29 truly be lived out in my life: May Christ be the One I proclaim. May I admonish and teach everyone with all wisdom. May I do my part to present everyone fully mature in Christ. Heavenly Father, to this end (to our maturity in Christ), may I strenuously contend, with all of the energy that Christ so powerfully works in me. For Your glory, I now commit myself to the work of Your Kingdom. Together with the E-Free body of believers, I commit myself to our discipling mandate. In the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, amen."