

Good morning to you all, and virtual greetings.

In another time, another circumstance [another realm?] I would be expecting to talk with you face to face this Sunday, but as you well know, you're reading [my] written word sent via the internet. I write, however, just as Luke did [presumably the author] in Acts, in presumable solitude, pen to paper to be read by others. Yes I'm typing my previously penned words, just as the gospel greats did as well as Paul many years ago. Here ends the similarity but is why you won't see me on video today. [If it's good enough for them... 😊]

Yes lockdown has changed many things, and more reading time is certainly available, so I've asked for the three NT readings to be included. It has also taught us things like independence, self-reliance, patience, ..... name some more and refer to what you have learnt in morning tea. We are learning to use technology creatively to virtually come together and listen, pray and learn from each other and from the written Word. Surely a good thing. Somehow though I feel we are making history. "Unprecedented" has become common place, and we know the world is not what it was.

Let us go back in time to when Luke wrote in Acts, and where he challenged conventions and for good reason. "Men of Athens, I see that in every way you are religious!" This was not a complement! Luke observed the crutches being used, pointing out that the Lord of heaven does not live in temples built by human hands, Idolatry [gold silver and stone images] however skilfully made, don't cut it with God. We have by necessity done without our church building and regular church gatherings, [no doubt harder for some than for others], and we have had to rely upon the word of God sometimes written, sometimes spoken, as we seek to learn God's will for us at this time.

This is no different from the recipients of Paul's letters and the readers of the Gospels, and the countless millions who have since sourced scriptural writings until just recently when we can read scripture online.

Peter says in 1 Peter 3:13-22 that we are blessed for suffering what is right, and reminds us to be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope you have. Sounds easy enough! My tip is to practice a little so that with "gentleness and respect, and keeping a clear conscience," you can give a credible and plausible reason for your faith and the subsequent hope you have in the promised of God. Maybe time to pen out a testimony? However when responding to an audible question simplicity can't be over rated and maybe more effective than complex testimonials. Using "I" phrases, [I find that when I'm confronted .... etc] can be more effective than blatant statements that assume the questioner has had a similar experience of God. Often it's good to pray that God will give you the words.

John, in his Gospel, quotes Jesus as saying "If you love me, you will obey what I command", and says that we will have a counsellor forevermore. What a deal! The theme "it's all about love" is further explored in Chapter 14, vs 21, later.

'Love' is a very bandied around word of course, ... *love is all you need* [Beatles] *Its gonna take a lot of love* [Neil young] *Love is love* [recent marriage debate] and tough love, so called when it is needed in difficult situations when the easy thing is to compromise, comply with correctness or whim, or to keep the peace. [Pray for our leaders at this present time] The most profound example of love is surely what God did for us as humans, sending His Son to teach us, provide a perfect example and ultimately pay the price of our sin on the cross, asking His father to forgive us at the same time. Now this is true love! Now in vs 21. Whoever has my commands and obeys them, he is the one who loves me. He who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I too will love him and show myself to him. Yes it's all about love! God bless you all as we progress into another week, come what may.

-Steve.