

Acts 20: 1-12; “Paul Encourages the Brethren”, Sermon # 71 in the series – “Laying the Foundations”, Delivered by Pastor Paul Rendall on April 24th, 2022, in the Morning Worship Service.

So Paul decided to leave Ephesus after this uproar that had taken place over Demetrius’ objections to Paul’s preaching that there was only one God. He had accomplished a great deal in the past 2 to 3 years there in Ephesus. The gospel of Christ had been preached in many synagogues and in many places in Asia. And the idolatry of the people of that region had been confronted. Paul had exposed it to be false worship. And so, after the uproar ceased, he called the disciples to himself, he embraced them, and he departed to Macedonia. He went back over to those places that he had preached and established churches, and it says in verse 2 that he encouraged them with many words.

I want to speak to you today about Paul’s ability to encourage the brethren. I want to convey to you the truth that if we can learn how he encouraged the brethren in those days, then perhaps we will be able to encourage one another in similar ways. I want to open up this thought by speaking to you, 1st of all, about Paul’s encouragement to the saints by his words of exhortation. (verses 1 and 2) 2nd – His encouragement to the saints by his faithfulness in ministry. (verses 3-6) And 3rd – His encouragement to the saints by His calm perseverance in preaching in the midst of providential difficulties. (verses 7-12) May this message be a means to the end of our learning to be an encouragement to each other.

1st of all – Paul encouraged the saints by his words of exhortation.

We see Paul’s encouragement by his words to the saints at a number of points here in these first 12 verses of this chapter. When the uproar had ceased, there at Ephesus, and the mob was dispersed by the word of the town clerk, Paul called the disciples there to himself, and he embraced them. He knew that he was going to have to leave, rather than stay. The Lord Jesus was calling him on to other places, so that he would fulfill his ministry as an apostle, and a preacher, and teacher to both the Jews and the Gentiles. He had been there at Ephesus for more than two years, and his love for the brethren there was very evident. He embraced them, before he left.

This is a very valuable piece of information that we are given here, for it shows us how much he loved the brethren. We need to remember that this great apostle, who proved himself by the grace of God to be able to hold forth the truth in situations where he was opposed, was also a very personable, warm, and friendly person towards those whom he ministered to. He did not hide his love for them. He made it plain to them by his embracing them. Do you have a holy affection for those who preach the gospel to you? Do I have this kind of affection for you. I trust that you know that I do.

But turn over to 1st Thessalonians chapter 2, and you will see what Paul’s affections for the brethren were like there. They were the same as they are portrayed here. And we will see how they were related to his exhortations to them. 1st Thessalonians 2, verses 1-8. “For you yourselves know, brethren, that our coming to you was not in vain.” “But even after we had suffered before and were spitefully treated at Philippi, as you know, we were bold in our God to speak to you the gospel of God in much conflict.” “For our exhortation did not come from error or uncleanness, nor was it in deceit.” “But as we have been approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel, even so we speak, not as pleasing men, but God who tests our hearts.”

“For neither at any time did we use flattering words, as you know, nor a cloak for covetousness – God is witness.” “Nor did we see glory from men, either from you or from others, when we might have made demands as apostles of Christ.” “But we were gentle among you, just as a nursing

mother cherishes her own children.” “So affectionately longing for you, we were well pleased to impart to you not only the gospel of God, but also our own lives, because you had become dear to us.” These words reveal much about Paul’s heart as he ministered the gospel and the word of God to people in this place. He was not speaking from error or deceit. He was not in any way speaking from selfishness or uncleanness. He did not use flattering words as a cloak for covetousness, or to get something from them. But he and his co-workers were gentle among them, he says. Gentle like a nursing mother feeding her child. Let me give you the milk of the word because I love you in the bonds of Christ. I will give it to you often, very personally, very affectionately, so that you will be nourished by the word and you will profit by it. This is how he was.

So affectionately did he long for them to profit by his ministry, he and the others with him were well pleased to impart to them, not only the gospel, but also their own lives. Because they had become dear to him. A good minister of Christ Jesus will live in just this way, when he sees that the people who he is preaching to, are receiving the gospel and God’s word, and they are living it out in their lives. He ministers to them by giving to them much of his own life. He is willing to spend and be spent for them, for they have become dear to him. This by the way, is how the gospel normally goes forward in any place. It is when the minister has an affectionate love for the people that he ministers to. And there is also then, an affectionate love of the brethren for one another and for their minister. Where this exists, the grace of God will spread to more and more people.

Well, Paul knew that he had to leave. The Spirit was leading him on to Jerusalem, where he knew would he would find much conflict. But he longed to see the brethren in every place he could before he came there. And so, it says, when he left to go on his way, it says in verse 2 that when he had gone over that region that he encouraged those he was able to meet, with many words. And then he came to Greece and he stayed three months there. This word, “encouragement”, which we find here in verse 2, in the New King James, is translated in the King James and the New American Standard Bible as “exhortation”. “When Paul had exhorted them”.

The word in the Greek is παρακαλεσας. It means that in exhorting and admonishing them of what they should do in terms of holding fast the truth, that he spoke in such a way that it would encourage them to think and live out that truth. He spoke many words to them in this way, and he prayed they would lead them on to obedience to God, and to their being faithful in living their lives to Christ. Let me ask you now, if you have a gift and a desire to encourage the brethren as you exhort them? If you have the gift of exhortation, you ought to study to be an encouragement to the brethren as well. In Romans chapter 15, verse 14 Paul says – “Now I myself am confident concerning you, my brethren, that you also are full of goodness, filled with all knowledge, able also to admonish one another.”

The word in the Greek here for admonish is νουθετω, where we get our word – Nouthetic. You have heard of nouthetic counseling. You want to instruct a person on how they can change their sinful behavior and or attitudes in accordance with biblical doctrine. But you want to do so in the right way. What Paul is saying here is that when you go about to exhort a brother in relation to how they ought to live their Christian life, you should make sure that you are filled with the grace of spiritual goodness, and that you relate the knowledge of the Bible to the person who you are speaking with out of the fullness of your heart; that you really love that brother or sister with the love of Christ.

Exhortation in this sense is not simply telling that person what they need to know, to correct them in their understanding, but what you are conveying to them also, is your great love and concern for them personally. This comes out in your attitude, your countenance, how you look at people, and in the way that speak to them; out of your humility and gentleness. This should be

true of all of us in the vast majority of cases in which we are trying to exhort or admonish other brethren. We should greatly desire to encourage them with our exhortations.

2nd – His encouragement to the saints by his faithfulness in ministry. (verses 3-8)

Verse 2b – “And Paul came to Greece and stayed there 3 months.” And when the Jews plotted against him as he was about to sail to Syria, he decided to return through Macedonia.” “And Sopater of Berea accompanied him to Asia – also Aristarchus and Secundus of the Thessalonians, and Gaius of Derbe, and Timothy, and Tychicus and Trophimus of Asia.” “These men, going ahead, waited for us (That is, Luke and Paul) at Troas.” “But we sailed away from Philippi after the Days of Unleavened Bread, and in five days joined them at Troas, where we stayed seven days.” What was happening here was that the Holy Spirit was leading Paul, in relation to his preaching ministry, to be in just the places that He would have him to be, to fulfill both his ministry of preaching and also building up the saints.

His concern was for all the churches, that they would be faithful to the word that he preached them. Paul always prayed for them all, for their greatest good. And he pray to be faithful to the greatest number of saints that he could in these cities and areas that he came to. This was not easy for him to sort these things out, but he managed to accomplish all that was really a concern to him, and to the Lord, even through many dangers, toils, and snares. He went to Greece again and he stayed there three 3 months, it says. I am sure that a good portion of his time was taken up in preaching and teaching those disciples who were won to Christ when he was there before.

This would be Dionysius the Areopagite, and Damaris, and probably a great number of other people who had been persuaded to believe in Christ in that city of Athens and that region where so many people had no doubt heard of Paul and the gospel, which he preached in every place. While he was there, a plot was contrived by the Jews, against him, just as he was about ready to set sail for Syria, and so he decided to return through Macedonia. So, Paul was being opposed wherever he went by the legalistic Jews who did not want him to preach about Jesus and the great salvation which is in Him.

While he was in Macedonia, he wrote the church at Corinth, the book of 2nd Corinthians. In that letter we find Paul’s deep concern for the saints there, that they would not believe false reports about him or his ministry, but that they would remember that he had given them every indication by his speech and conduct that he was a true apostle. He says in 2nd Corinthians 6: 3-13 – “We give no offense in anything, that our ministry may not be blamed.” “But in all things we commend ourselves as ministers of God: in much patience, in tribulations, in needs, in distresses, in stripes, in imprisonments, in tumults, in labors, in sleeplessness, in fastings; by purity, by knowledge, by longsuffering, by kindness, by the Holy Spirit, by sincere love, by the word of truth, by the power of God, by the armor righteousness, on the right hand and on the left, by honor and dishonor, by evil report and good report; as deceivers, and yet true; as unknown, and yet well known; as dying, and behold we live; as chastened, and yet not killed; as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, and yet possessing all things.” “O Corinthians!” “We have spoken openly to you, our heart is wide open.” “You are not restricted by us, but you are restricted by your own affections.” “Now in return for the same (I speak to as to children, you also be open)

This was Paul’s very real experience as an apostle. And this was his revealing his heart to those brethren who were dear to him in Corinth, brethren whose affections were restrained from being an encouragement to him! But even though this was so, I want you to see that he was faithful in relation to all of his ministry. He was faithful to appeal to them concerning his loving affection for them as his brethren, even though their affections were restrained toward him. In 2nd

Corinthians 7, after he had admonished the brethren there to separate themselves from all idol worship, and all that was unclean in their culture and society, he said to them in 2nd Corinthians 7: 1-7 – “Therefore, having these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God.”

“Open your hearts to us.” “We have wronged no one, we have corrupted no one, we have cheated no one.” “I do not say this to condemn; for I have said before that you are in our hearts, to die together and to live together.” “Great is my boldness of speech toward you, great is my boasting on your behalf.” “I am filled with comfort.” “I am exceedingly joyful in all our tribulation.” “For indeed when we came to Macedonia, our bodies had no rest, but we were troubled on every side.” “Outside were conflicts, inside were fears.” “Nevertheless God, who comforts the downcast, comforted us by the coming of Titus, and not only by his coming, but also by the consolation with which he was comforted in you, when he told us of your earnest desire, your mourning, your zeal for me, so that I rejoiced even more.”

Did Paul sometimes become downcast? Yes, he did. But God comforted Him. And because of that, I want you to see from these things, how Paul was able even though he experienced all of these difficult things, to encourage these many saints in these many churches by his zealous love for them. He convinced them by all that he was suffering, that he was a faithful minister and apostle to their souls, so that they would be spiritually safe, believing right doctrine, yes, but also that they would see his love for them, and that they would respond to him in this same way. And we see that they did eventually come to this, and Paul heard about it through Titus. Brethren, I pray that you would see the love that I personally have for you all in Christ, in this same way. I pray that you will reciprocate it, so that we can together bear much fruit for God.

Indeed, I think I can say, that it has been the case, that together we have persevered in this good work of holding fast the truth of God’s word and loving one another for many years. I pray that we will continue to grow in our understanding of how we can see this church built to the glory of God and bear much fruit for Him. I pray that you will open your hearts to me, as mine is to you, and that together we would through prayer and faith, see many people in this community come to understand the gospel and be saved, and join with us. Let us remember all that Paul went through so that we will ourselves learn to encourage one another and strengthen each others hands in this good work.

3rd – Paul’s encouragement to the saints by His calm perseverance in preaching in the midst of providential difficulties. (verses 7-12)

Here, Paul finally comes to Troas and rejoins his traveling companions, and meets with the church there. They were 7 days in Troas, ministering there. There are a few things here which I believe we should take notice of, for the strengthening of our faith in relation to our worship. After a few days there, it says in verse 7 – “Now on the first *day* of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread, Paul, ready to depart the next day, spoke to them and continued his message until midnight.” It is evident from this passage that Paul knew that Sunday was the Christian Sabbath, the Lord’s Day, for there is no mention here, or in any place in the book of Acts, of his observing the Jewish Sabbath, or Saturday, as the day of public worship for the church of Jesus Christ.

It was on the first day of the week, or Sunday, that disciples came together, and they did so to worship God and to break bread, or to observe the Lord’s Supper together. The reason that we observe Sunday as the Christian Sabbath is because the 4th commandment of the 10 commandments was not ceremonial when it was given. It was moral. And it still is today. When Christ rose from the dead, it was on Sunday. And since Christ fulfilled the law, including this

commandment, the day changed from Saturday to Sunday, and therefore we as Christians should observe this day as a Christian Sabbath, as the one day in the week that we give to the Lord, to rest from our labors and to worship Him at church.

Paul had much to say that day, and when he preached to them on the evening of that day, it says that he spoke to them and continued his message until midnight. There were many lamps burning in the upper room where they were gathered together. Paul evidently spoke for a very long time. In one of the windows sat a certain young man named Eutychus, and he really did want to listen. He really did want to hear what Paul had to say. But after fighting it for some time, and trying to blink away his drowsiness away for quite a while, he was overcome by sleep; and as Paul continued speaking, he fell down from the third story and was taken up dead.

What an awful thing to have happen to a young man who I believe really wanted to hear what Paul had to say. We could draw certain conclusions from this that may not be appropriate, such as – Let this be a warning to you concerning sleeping during a sermon. Look what happened to Eutychus! Well, yes, we certainly ought to try to stay awake when the sermon is being preached. But we could also make a wrong application of this to long preaching. A preacher ought never to preach long sermons! Well, Paul, at least in this case, would disagree with you. It is true that a preacher can go too long to really hold his hearers attention. And he should avoid that, if he really wants them to drink in all that he saying; things which would be for their good and their building up and strengthening of their faith.

But it does appear, from this passage, that Paul thought it necessary to preach that long, and the congregation was lovingly and respectfully listening to him and drinking it in. Eutychus was simply overcome. He was not bored. That being said, I think that the thing that we should focus on from what is said here, is what happened after he fell from the window, and died when he hit the ground. It says that Paul went down, fell on him, and embracing him said – Do not trouble yourselves, for his life is still in him. In other words, Paul by the power of Christ was able to raise him from the dead, and in this good way, he brought encouragement to all of the disciples it says in verse 12.

What is also remarkable is that after this, they went back upstairs, they observed the Lord's Supper together and then Paul spoke with them a long time, it says in verse 11, even till daybreak when he departed. The thing that I want to impress upon you in closing, is this. God can, and oftentimes will, through the preaching of word, bring His resurrection power to bear in such a way, by the power of the Spirit, that a believer's mind and body, as well as their soul, can be strengthened and refreshed by the preaching of the word, rather than wearied. Much depends upon your spiritual appetite and interest. I pray that in the case of our congregation here, that that your appetite and interest for the word of God will be strong, and I will try not to preach sermons which are too long for you to bear.