
SERIES: A SURVEY OF THE BOOK OF ACTS**ACTS CHAPTER 20****“THE BEGINNING OF THE END”**

We have been traveling with Paul, the great missionary, on three missionary trips. When we come to the 20th chapter of the Book of Acts we come to the beginning of the end of the ministry of preacher Paul, for we have come to the point in time where his traveling slowly turns from that of the missionary to that of a martyr.

He never ceases to preach and teach Jesus Christ until Nero beheads him at the end of the long, long trail, which begins in this chapter. The apostle Paul was a man of indomitable courage and of great fortitude and perseverance. The Scriptures indicate that he was not a strong man and that he had considerable sickness.

How he accomplished all that he did while traveling and living under the adverse circumstances which he faced could only be due to the fact that God was with him and gave him a tremendous drive and purpose in life coupled with grace sufficient to meet every eventuality. It was only because God's grace was sufficient for him that he was able to go on in spite of the difficulties that he faced. Paul did not have anything available to him from God that we do not have. We, too, have grace sufficient for every exigency.

As we come to chapter 20, Paul is preparing to leave the town of Ephesus where he had been for three years. We reviewed his three-year ministry in Ephesus in the previous chapter. You will remember that the pagans in Ephesus had a town meeting in the amphitheater where they praised the goddess Diana. When it was all over, Paul called the disciples together and calmly bade them farewell and left.

Paul is about to travel hundreds of miles by sea and land in route to Jerusalem where he will be arrested and taken to Rome where he will eventually be put to death. And so he begins that long, long trail that leads at last to his execution. Here, in this chapter, is the beginning of the end.

Let us observe and learn as the aged apostle wraps up his third missionary journey and his illustrious itinerant ministry begins to come to a close.

THE FINISH OF HIS MISSION. Vs. 1-5

Paul is now getting ready to leave the area of Ephesus and Macedonia on his way to Jerusalem. Notice how he takes his departure from the believers he had seen come to Christ and mature under his ministry. There was:

A. The tender embraces. v.1

"And after the uproar has ceased, Paul called to him the disciples, and embraced them, and departed to go into Macedonia."

Ecclesiastes 3:5 reminds us that there is *“a time to embrace, and a time to refrain from embracing.”* This certainly was a time for embracing! Paul’s exodus from Ephesus where he had seen many come to Christ and where he had made many friends was a sad time. Saying “Good-byes” is not easy when one loves fellow believers. Holy hugs were in order!

B. The loving encouragements. v.2

“And when he had gone over those parts, and had given them much exhortation, he came into Greece.”

After Paul wrapped up his ministry in Ephesus, he moved on to where he had established churches previously and encouraged them. The word *“exhortation”* comes from two Greek words which, when translated, are *“beside”* and *“to call.”* Put together, they mean, *“to call alongside, to aid, to help.”*

We should encourage one another – that is, come alongside to aid and help one another. Paul, before he left, called the disciples together and encouraged them. He probably knew that he would never see them again and so he encouraged them. We can imagine that he said something like this: “Do not give up”; “Keep true to Jesus”; “Trust in the Lord in all circumstances of life”; “Love one another”; “Keep looking for the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ”, etc. The ministry of encouragement is needed today just as much as it was needed in Paul’s day. Every Christian should be an encourager!

C. The band of escorts. v.4

“.....and they’re accompanied him into Asia”

Notice who these men were and from where they came: they were all trophies of grace - Paul’s children in the faith. If he had not told them of the great companion, the Lord Jesus Christ, they would not be his companions now!

Here are seven saintly souls who sailed with the old soldier! Thank God for faithful friends in the ministry, people who support and encourage their spiritual leaders!

THE FELLOWSHIP MEETING. vs. 6-8

Paul is back at Troas again and the believers there are called together for a meeting where Paul preached. Who would not desire to hear the apostle Paul speak? This was an opportunity not to be missed.

A. There was the fellowship of the saints.

“Now on the first day of the week, when the disciples came together....”

Here is another instance when the New Testament believers met, not on the seventh day, but on the first day of the week which Justin Martyr calls Sunday, on which day, he says, “all, both in city and country, met in one place for religious worship; and on this day, it appears from hence, and from other places, that the apostles and primitive churches did meet together for religious exercises; so they did at Troas at this time.”

A deaf man, who never missed a church service, was approached one Sunday by a member who asked him, "Why do you come to church each service when you cannot hear anything?" The deaf man said, "I come to let people know that I am on God's side!"

There are many good reasons for God's people to gather together, one of which is good, Christian fellowship. There is nothing like it! Don't miss an opportunity to have a family reunion with other of God's children.

B. There was the fellowship of the supper.

"to break bread"

It is wonderful to have saintly get-togethers but this was not a grand entertainment feast for the apostle Paul and his company, before they departed. This was the Lord's Supper, a worship service.

C. There was the fellowship of the sermon.

"Paul, ready to depart the next day, spoke to them and continued his message until midnight."

A farewell sermon was in order after the observance of the Lord's Supper and Paul was not one who had to have his arm twisted to get him to preach. I wonder what he preached about. Was it truth that he was to write to the church at Rome or one of the other churches? Whatever the theme of his sermon, wouldn't it have been the experience of a lifetime to hear him speak?

How do you listen to a sermon? Some listen casually – that is, half-heartedly. They come to church out of habit just to see or be seen and have no appetite for the Bread of Life. They listen as though they were bored with the Bible. Others listen critically – that is, they have not come to be fed but to analyze the theology, sentence structure, grammar and over-all presentation and manner of the speaker. Some listen comprehendingly – they listen intently in order to glean every tidbit of truth they can get to help them to know God and to live life in a topsy-turvy world. How do you listen? Jesus said, "Take heed how you hear." (Luke 8:18)

THE FATALITY AT MIDNIGHT. Vs. 8-12

Let us get the picture clearly in our minds: it is Sunday evening, the church is packed, Paul was preaching when he is suddenly interrupted by an unusual development. But I do not want to get ahead of myself. First, consider:

A. The setting of the meeting. v.8

"and there were many lights in the upper chamber, where they were gathered together."

The meeting hall was on the third floor of the building (v.9); the meeting was on Sunday evening and there were many candles lighted to illuminate the proceedings; it must have been warm in the hall for the windows were open, either because of the body heat of those gathered and/or the many candles or, it could have been warm weather. Such an atmosphere tends to make one drowsy.

B. The sermon for the meeting. V.9

"..... Paul was long preaching"

Notice three statements about Paul's preaching:

- In verse seven we read *"Paul preached unto them and continued his speech until midnight."*
- Verse nine, *"Paul was long preaching....."*
- And verse eleven says that Paul *"talked a long while, even till daybreak."*

Here was an all-night preaching marathon! There are not many churches today that would want Paul for a pastor! For a couple of reasons:

(1) Many church congregations will not tolerate long sermons – long ball-games, long parties, long movies are ok – but long spiritual instruction is not tolerated by the majority of church goers.

(2) Few churches there are that have Sunday evening services. The mantra of the masses that do go to church is: "One and done!" One spiritual feast per week satisfies them. Twenty-one meals per week to keep bodies going (3 meals per day X 7 = 21) but only one per week for the soul. No wonder we have spiritual dwarfs and weaklings!

C. The sleeper in the meeting. Vs. 9,10,11,12

"and there sat in a window....."

When the saints from the area heard that Paul was preaching that night, they all came. They would not often have the opportunity to hear him. Therefore, the auditorium up on the third floor of the building in which they were meeting was packed. It was so filled that at least one fellow, Eutychus, sat in an open window.

As Paul preached, this fellow in the window went to sleep and fell out and down three floors to the street level and was killed. Notice that verse nine says that he *"was taken up dead."*

There have been many jokes made about this story. Some of them are:

- Don't jump to any conclusions until the preacher finishes his message!
- This boy really fell for the preacher!
- We should be out and out for Christ and in and in with the saints or we will be soon down and out!

This story gives some satisfaction to most preachers to know that at least one person went to sleep when the great apostle Paul was preaching! Seriously, it is dangerous to fall asleep in church. Some people may never go to sleep in church physically, however, there are those who are asleep mentally and spiritually every service. The word of God is preached, Christ calls for their souls or their services but they are asleep. It is dangerous!

A minister preached every Sunday to a cold, sleepy congregation. One Sunday night after he had done his best he went home in despair and laid down and went to sleep. That night he had a dream. He dreamed that he was in the pulpit making an appeal for people to come to

Christ. Some of them were asleep, some more moving restlessly about, and some were looking at their watches wishing that he would finish his sermon.

Then, in his dream, he saw the church door open and the Lord Jesus was standing there. He said to the minister, "Come with me. I want you to go down to hell with me and preach to the people there. They will be glad to hear your message!"

IV. THE FAREWELL IN MILETUS. vs.17-38

"From Miletus he sent to Ephesus and called for the elders of the church."

On his journey to Jerusalem, Paul could not spare the time to visit Ephesus again, therefore he sent for the leaders of the church to meet him about 40 miles away in Miletus. This farewell to the Ephesian elders, perhaps more than any other passage in the Book of Acts, reveals the heart of the great apostle. Here we shall see his tenderness, his sympathy, his affection and his tears. In his conversation with them he reviews his ministry:

A. His walk among them. vs.18-21

1. In all seasons – *"And when they had come to him, he said to them: "You know, from the first day that I came to Asia, in what manner I always lived among you...." (v.18)*

2. In all situations – *"....serving the Lord with all humility, with many tears and trials which happened to me by the plotting of the Jews;" (v.19)*

3. In all types of service - *"How I kept back nothing that was helpful, but proclaimed it to you, and taught you publicly and from house to house...." (vs.20)*

In summing up his ministry among them Paul did not exaggerate. Some of the people to whom he had ministered and who had observed his lifestyle and ministry were standing there in his presence. He was reminding them of what he had endured for the sake of the gospel and in doing so was encouraging them to, after his departure, be faithful as he had been.

B. His witness to them. v.21-24

1. Paul's congregation – *"....testifying to Jews, and also to Greeks...."*

Paul's message, as ours should be, was universal for *"there is no distinction between Jew and Greek, for the same Lord over all is rich to all who call upon Him."* (Rom. 10:12)

2. Paul's communication – *"repentance toward God and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ."* Repentance toward God, for it is against God that we have sinned; faith in the person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ *"for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved."* (Acts 4:12)

3. Paul's consecration - vs.22-24

Paul's consecration is seen in several statements that he made:

- His destination – *"And see, now I go bound in the spirit to Jerusalem, not knowing the things that will happen to me there, except that the Holy Spirit testifies in every city, saying that chains and tribulations await me."* (v.22-23)

- His determination – *“...But none of these things move me; nor do I count my life dear to myself, so that I may finish my race with joy....”* (v.24a)

- His desire – *“...and the ministry which I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the gospel of the grace of God.”* (v.24b)

- His declaration - *“And indeed, now I know that you all, among whom I have gone preaching the kingdom of God, will see my face no more. Therefore I testify to you this day that I am innocent of the blood of all men. For I have not shunned to declare to you the whole counsel of God.”* (vs.25-27)

D. His warnings for them. vs.28-31

1. Watch! – *“Therefore take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood.”* (vs.28)

2. Warn! - *“For I know this, that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock. Also from among yourselves men will rise up, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after themselves. Therefore watch, and remember that for three years I did not cease to warn everyone night and day with tears.”* (vs.29-31)

E. His weeping with them. vs.32-38

1. His trust - *“So now, brethren, I commend you to God and to the word of His grace, which is able to build you up and give you an inheritance among all those who are sanctified.”* (v.32)

2. His testimony – *“I have coveted no one’s silver or gold or apparel. Yes, you yourselves know that these hands have provided for my necessities, and for those who were with me. I have shown you in every way, by laboring like this, that you must support the weak. And remember the words of the Lord Jesus, that He said, ‘It is more blessed to give than to receive.’”* (vs.33-35)

3. His tears – *“And when he had said these things, he knelt down and prayed with them all. ³⁷ Then they all wept freely, and fell on Paul’s neck and kissed him, ³⁸ sorrowing most of all for the words which he spoke, that they would see his face no more. And they accompanied him to the ship.”* (vs.36-38)

Summation

When Paul entered the ship, his freedom as a missionary, in a sense, ended. For when he reached Jerusalem, which was his destination, he was arrested and finally taken to Rome as a prisoner.

Paul has spent many years of missionary traveling service. He had seen many people turn to Jesus Christ as their Savior; he had seen many churches established; he had seen many believers strengthened in the faith.

Later, just prior to his death, he could say, *“I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith; henceforth, there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness*

which the Lord, the righteous Judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing." (II Timothy 4:7,8)

Conclusion

What, from this chapter, can help me today as a disciple of Jesus Christ? What lessons from the life of the apostle Paul can I take away from this chapter?

1. One person can make a difference in this world. Everywhere the apostle Paul went, when he left, they knew he had been there! He left an indelible imprint of Jesus Christ on every life that he met. He was a difference maker!
2. God has grace for both leaders and followers in the church. Not only have we seen that Paul faced opposition but the church leaders and members along the way also faced difficult situations and God has grace for them all.
3. We must all be on guard to protect our personal lives and that of our church fellowship from anything or anyone that would hinder God's work among us. We should do all that we can to promote love and unity in the Lord's work.
4. God's work is not totally dependent upon any one man. Paul eventually left the earthly scene completely but God's work is yet going on today. When Paul left the cities and churches in which he ministered, the Lord did not leave!
5. I believe that the greatest challenge that comes from this passage of scripture is a challenge for all of us to live consistent, compassionate and committed lives for Jesus Christ. Paul went on to Rome to be martyred. We may not be martyred but we will pass from this earthly scene some day and we want to leave behind, as Paul did, a testimony of a consistent, compassionate and committed life.

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