

2072 - CONSTRAINED by the SPIRIT - Acts 20:22-24

PRELIMS. Paul is on his way back to Jerusalem. He is at Miletus and has called for the elders of the Church at Ephesus to meet him. They come immediately and he **reminds** them of his ministry among them. He **served** the Lord, not himself, he **wept** with them, he had severe **trials** and he *did not shrink from declaring* what was good for them. He emphasised **repentance** and **faith** on the Jesus Christ!

There are some people who **must know** their future - they plan their **retirement** in their 30's because they want to **be sure** of their future. They want to know about their **pension** and **insurances** and make all kinds of **securities** for their future so that they can **relax** knowing they will be ok. Now it is **wise** to plan and prepare for what you know is going to happen - but you can overdo it - so that it is not a matter of wisdom at all, but of **insecurity** and **selfishness!** There are those who are **fearful** and must have everything 'tied down'/fixed! Such people are **easily disturbed** about local and world financial forecasts re the **world economy** which may affect their future.

Paul was **not** like that at all! He **did not** know the future in **specific** terms! *And now behold I go to Jerusalem constrained by the Spirit, not knowing what will happen to me there* [22] But he knew that **whatever happened**, he was in **God's hands**. He knew that *imprisonments and afflictions did lie ahead* - but that was not his big concern! His concern was for the **Church of God**. That the *gospel of the grace of God* would continue to be proclaimed.

Now Paul was *constrained by the Spirit!*? Is this *constraining by the Spirit* something we Xns today can experience? Or was it something confined to the apostolic age? Well, surely it is something that Xns, walking with God do experience. God's Spirit **works** in the **heart/soul** of His people, **urging** them to right goals/ends! Our 'holy' struggles against the flesh is the work of God's Spirit. *I toil, struggling with His energy that He powerfully works within me* [Col 1:29]

The *desires of the Spirit* that Xns have, are to **keep** them *from doing the things* their natural desires want them to do! In the Xns heart, there is the work/energy of the Spirit **opposing** the desires of the sinful flesh, *these are opposed to each other!* There's a **constraining!**

Not knowing the future! Not knowing the future is all part of living by **faith!** There are **no step-by-step maps** given to any believer of the life ahead of us. Trusting God, **day by day** is our calling from God. Our **confidence** must be in God - not in our plans. Sol: ***Do not boast about tomorrow, for you do not know what a day may bring*** [Pro 21:7] Don't boast about your plans and the money you are going to make in the future. James says *Today or tomorrow we will go into such and such a town...trade and make **profit** - yet you do **not know** what tomorrow will bring* [Jam 4:14] Jesus the **Barn-Builder** '*Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years; relax, eat, drink be merry*' ... '*Fool, this night your soul is required of you* [Luke 12:19]!

Paul **did** know in a **general way** what lay ahead. **Same as you/I!** The *Holy Spirit testifies to me in every city that **imprisonments** and **afflictions** await me* [23] (The **normal** problems!) And we know some things are certain - we will get **old**, we will **die**. And that we will likely have a fair share of **problems** - for such is life for everyone! Job: *Man who is born of a woman is few of days and **full of trouble*** [Job 14:1] Sol re man: *For all his days are **full of sorrow** and his work is a **vexation*** [Ecc 2:23] *All this **negative** stuff 'touched' God's heart - **therefore** He **sent** *Good News* into the world!

Paul's **one burning desire** - yes, in the midst of all His suffering, only one thing really mattered to him. What was that? That he would **accomplish** the '**assignment**' given to Him by God. He was 'set apart' for a particular work. *when He who had **set me apart** before I was born, and who called me by His grace...**in order that I might preach Him among the Gentiles*** [Gal 1:15], he did not hesitate. His one desire was that he would **finish** and **complete** the **big thing** God laid upon Him - His work of preaching the gospel *if **only** I may **finish my course** and the **ministry** that I received from the Lord* [24]!

I love the way **The Message** paraphrases these verses [23,24] Paul says about his future: "I **do know** that it won't be any picnic, for the Holy Spirit has let me know repeatedly and clearly that **there are** hard times and imprisonment ahead. But that **matters little**. What **matters most to me** is to finish what God started: the job the Master Jesus gave me of letting everyone I meet, know all about this **incredibly extravagant generosity** of God." What a name to give to

the gospel = ‘**incredibly extravagant generosity of God**’!

Friends - **all** of us have one **big thing** from God to do in this life! Yes, we have a 1,000 minor things to attend to - but there is ‘**one general yet specific ministry**’ we have been given which we must complete. That ministry is to **live the life** God has **mapped out** for us **in faith - including** all the **obstacles** He has placed in the way. God wants us to **overcome** by **faith** and **love** to Him, all that is against us! God will be **glorified** in each of our lives when we **continue** and **finish the course** He has given us by **trusting** in Him and His Word.

We all have to run the **race that is set before us**, not someone else’s race but the race God has placed before **us** - for each one of us have a **different** race to run. **No one** has the **identically** same race as anyone else! God is **glorified** in the **variety** of **skills/ability/expertise** His people need to live by **faith** in His ‘course’ for us. God delights in seeing His people **struggle**, yes, struggle, **in faith** in the various situations God has placed them in. He **delights** in seeing His **grace abounding** in the lives of His people.

Paul had to **wrestle/work out/decide** how best to deal with the problems in Colosse. Listen to him: *I want you to know **how great a struggle** I have for you **and** for those at Laodicea... [Col 1:1]. **What** struggle? The struggle of **encouraging** them, for they were filled with **doubt** and **lacked** assurance! He struggled *that their hearts may be **encouraged**, being **knit together in love**, to **reach** all the riches of **full assurance** of understanding and the **knowledge of God’s mystery** [Col 2:1,2]. God was **glorified** in Paul’s efforts with them!**

*...if **only** I may finish my course and the ministry that I received of the Lord [24] That **one** thing was Paul’s main desire. It was the **same** with the Psalmist **One thing** have I asked of the Lord, **that** will I seek after: **that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to gaze upon the beauty of the LORD** [Psa 27:1]. David said in the previous Psalm *O Lord, I love the habitation of Your house and the **place where Your glory dwells** [Psa 26:8]!* Do **you** love church? Do you love where **God’s Name** is honoured? It wasn’t just David that loved being in God’s house - the Sons of Korah did also *How lovely is **Your dwelling place**, O Lord of hosts. My soul **longs**, yes**

***faints** for the courts of the Lord; my heart/flesh **sing** for joy [Ps84:1]*

How **completely** Paul was **committed** to this one thing! *I do **not account my life of any value nor as precious to myself*** - as long as he finished his course and ministry!! What he is saying is that there was **nothing in life** that he would give in exchange for the **privilege** of serving God. Wiersebe says Paul uses **4 illustrations** of his ministry: (1) an **accountant** because he adds up assets and liabilities - and comes out a winner! It cost him much suffering, but he gained heaven. (2) a **runner** because he had a course to run and there was a finishing line and get the victor's crown! (3) a **steward** because he was given something and had to hand it back! He would receive a 'well done good and faithful servant'! (4) a **witness** because he was to **testify** regarding Jesus Christ. It was **acceptable** by many sinners since he gave it! His testimony **influenced** so many by-standers!

So it was not just **proclaiming** the gospel that Paul engaged in, but he was also a **witness** to the **sufferings** of Christ. Peter can join him saying *So I exhort the **elders** among you, as a fellow elder and a **witness of the sufferings of Christ**, as well as a partaker in the glory that is going to be revealed [1Pet 5:1]*

Lest you feel that being a Xn is a very **sad business**, let me repeat what Paul said: ***as** we **share abundantly in Christ's sufferings**, so through Christ we **share abundantly in comfort too** [2Cor 1:5].*

When he wrote the epistle to the Romans, he ended his letter by saying: ***Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword? As it is written, "For your sake we are being killed all the day long; we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered." No, in all these things we are **more than conquerors** through Him who loved us. For I am **sure** that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, **nor anything else in all creation**, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord [Rom 8:35cf]. **Suicide bombers** - are prepared to die in order to get **revenge** on those they disagree with - Jesus was prepared to die, in order to **love** and **save** those who disagreed with Him!***