

Be Steadfast

Acts 20:1-6a

By Phillip G. Kayser at DCC on 11-16-2008

Introduction –

The passage we just read may not seem like it has much to offer us. It seems to just be a recitation of places, names and dates. But when you read 2 Corinthians and Romans in light of this paragraph, all kinds of things come to light. And when you read this paragraph in light of 2 Corinthians, you suddenly realize that this small paragraph is condensing an entire year of ministry and a pile of information into just a few phrases. I see four major themes in this section. Verses 1-2 show steadfastness in ministry in a time of great depression. Verses 2b-3a show steadfastness in love even when Corinth had abused him. Verses 3b-6 show steadfastness in great danger. And the fourth theme is steadfast commitment to community when it would have been easy to be cynical.

I. His trip to Macedonia – a time of deep depression (vv. 1-2 with 2 Corinthians)

You won't be able to see the first major theme here unless you read this passage in light of 2 Corinthians 1-7 which describes in much more detail the timeframe of verse 1 and the first half of verse 2. The text here says simply, **“After the uproar had ceased, Paul called the disciples to himself, embraced them, and departed to go to Macedonia. Now when he had gone over that region and encouraged them with many words...** Up through that statement, and before Paul gets to Greece, all kinds of things have happened. I've given an extensive outline of the events with Scriptures to document them, but I won't go over those in this morning's sermon. I've just given them for background information. Instead, let me briefly summarize.

Paul has been rejected by Corinth, vilified and attacked by some of the leaders, and according to 2 Corinthians was deeply wounded. But what was most discouraging was that there didn't seem to be any repentance in response to the previous two letters that he had sent (a letter that we don't possess – sometimes called the lost letter of Paul and the subsequent letter of 1 Corinthians). He had originally planned to travel to Corinth first, but the rift between the two is so great that he doesn't think it would be wise to go there until they are more receptive. In fact, a brief visit before was a very sad

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experience. Instead he sends Titus to try to patch things up. Paul himself traveled up the Asian coast from Ephesus to Troas where a great door of opportunity for ministry had opened for him (2 Cor. 2:12). He ministered there for some time, hoping throughout that time to hear from Titus about what is happening in Corinth. But when Titus doesn't appear, Paul continues on his trip by crossing the sea to Philippi. Apparently he suffered a shipwreck during this time and almost lost his life. It was a harrowing experience. 2 Corinthians 11:25 speaks of three shipwrecks that Paul had experienced up through the end of verse 6 of this chapter. He is going to experience another shipwreck later in this book. And that verse says that he spent a night and a day in the deep (which I interpret to mean that he was floating in the open sea). Paul's health is a wreck, and he speaks of this whole time in Macedonia as a time in which he is weak in body and very depressed in spirit. Let me read you some sample Scriptures:

“For we do not want you to be ignorant, brethren, of our trouble which came to us in Asia; that we were burdened beyond measure, above strength, so that we despaired even of life. Yes, we had the sentence of death in ourselves, that we should not trust in ourselves but in God who raises the dead, who delivered us from so great a death, and does deliver us...” (2 Cor. 1:8-10)

“... out of much affliction and anguish of heart I wrote to you, with many tears, not that you should be grieved, but that you might know the love which I have so abundantly for you.” (2 Cor. 2:3-4)

“Furthermore, when I came to Troas to preach Christ's gospel, and a door was opened to me by the Lord, I had no rest in my spirit, because I did not find Titus my brother; but taking my leave of them, I departed for Macedonia.” (2 Cor. 2:12-13)

At some point he finds out that the leaders in Corinth accuse him of lying, fickleness and unreliability, claiming that in the first letter he had said he would come to Corinth first and then go to Macedonia. But (they complain) now he has gone to Macedonia first and not to Corinth. He can't win for losing. They didn't want him to come, but then when he doesn't come they accuse him of lying and unreliability. Later when he arrived in Macedonia he said that this overwhelming sense of discouragement continued, though God's grace sustained him. He said,

“We are hard-pressed on every side, yet not crushed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed – always carrying about in the body the dying

of the Lord Jesus, that the life of Jesus may be manifested in our body. For we who live are always delivered to death for Jesus sake, that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh. So then death is working in us, but life in you. (2 Cor. 4:7-12).

“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 your consolation...” (2 Cor. 7:5-7)

At some point in Macedonia Titus arrived with the good news that Corinth had repented and wanted to be restored to fellowship with Paul. But Paul still spends a couple chapters defending his actions because there are some false apostles who still are attacking him. He affirms his love for the church and that the reason he didn't go to them first was that he wanted his next visit to be cordial, not severe. If he had come before they had repented, he feared that he would have had to call down God's judgment. He also says that he had *never* communicated firm plans to visit Corinth first. He said that he had spoken of an intention or desire to come to them (2 Cor. 1:15 – a quite different word), but that his firm plans (2 Cor. 2:1 uses the word “determined”) were to go to Macedonia first. I won't go through all of his reasoning. It's there in your outline. But it is clear from 2 Corinthians that Paul still has to defend himself on several fronts.

Now here is the point of this first section: despite depression and weakness of body, Paul proved steadfast to the Lord and to his fellow-believers; he continued in ministry. Despite so many difficult things having happened to him, Paul continues to be concerned for his fellow believers. He ministered to the churches of Philippi and Thessalonica. Romans 15:19 says that during these two verses he had travelled as far as Illyricum (Yugoslavia – Bosnia, Croatia, Serbia, Montenegrin) on the north of Macedonia. He wrote the book of 2 Corinthians to Corinth during this time. He praised the Corinthians. He sought their welfare. According to Acts 20:1-2, he traveled all throughout Macedonia serving the Lord. He was steadfast in ministry despite feeling horrible. [Skip outline down to point C.]

A. Order of events

- 1. Paul seems to have made his way along the coast to Troas (2 Cor. 2:12), hoping to hear from Titus on the result of his**

previous confrontational letter to Corinth (2 Cor. 2:13). This was a change from his original plans:

a) Original tentative plan¹ (apparently communicated in the “lost epistle” while he was at Ephesus – see 1 Cor. 5:9) was to go from Ephesus to Corinth, to Macedonia, back to Corinth and on to Judea. (This is alluded to in his defense in 2 Cor. 1:15,16.)

b) Paul changes his mind about making Corinth the first place he would visit. This change of plans is recorded in 1 Corinthians 16:5-9, Acts 20:1-2 and 2 Cor. 1:15-2:2.

c) The reasons for the change of plans were

(1) A brief visit prior to the writing of 1 Corinthians had proved to be most unpleasant and unproductive (2 Cor. 2:1-2) and Paul wanted Titus to mediate the serious rift (2 Cor. 2:13; 7:6,13,14; 8:6,16). Note that the visit in Acts 20:2-3 is planned in 2 Corinthians 12:14 and 13:1 to be the “third time I am coming to you.”

(2) There was serious sin in their midst (1 Cor. 5:1ff; etc) and Paul wanted to see full repentance before he came to them so that he doesn’t have to severely come to them “with a rod” (1 Cor. 4:18-21; cf. 11:34; 16:2ff; 2 Cor. 1:23). If thorough repentance was not forthcoming, Paul would bring the severest discipline against them (2 Cor. 13:2).

d) However, because of this change in plans, Paul is accused by his opponents in the Corinthian church of fickleness and unreliability (see 2 Cor. 1:17-20). Added to all the other attacks, this adds greatly to Paul’s feelings of deep depression (2 Cor. 1:8; 2:13; 7:5).

e) Paul responds with a defense of his actions (1 Cor. 1:12-2:2):

¹ The Greek of 2 Cor. 1:15 “intended” is desire, and is weaker than the word “determined” 9j 2 Cor. 2:1).

(1) Of Paul's tentative plans to a) go straight from Ephesus to Corinth, b) to return from Macedonia for a second visit to Corinth and c) to take companions from Corinth to take the gift to Judea, only the first plan was changed (cf. 1 Cor. 16:5ff).

(2) Paul makes clear that he had never communicated firm plans to visit Corinth first, but only desires (see footnote 1). His determined plans (articulated in 1 Corinthians 16) were being kept.

(3) The need to change his tentative plans/desires was their fault – he was not welcome in Corinth, and he was seeking to gently bring them to repentance. Furthermore, the only reason he changed his plan was to spare them judgment (2 Cor. 1:23).

(4) He is astonished that his flexibility for the purpose of not causing them pain would be used against him by Corinth.

(5) His previous desires/intentions are subject to God's will. Nevertheless, when he made his new plans in first and second Corinthians, he did not make them "according to the flesh" but "according to the Spirit." His "yes" in the Lord meant yes and his "no" meant no. He was not double minded. Everything he did was according to a Biblical purpose.

2. Not hearing from Titus in Troas (2 Tim. 2:13), Paul moves on to Macedonia (Acts 20:1) and visits the churches of Philippi and Thessalonica (Acts 20:2). 2 Corinthians is likely written in Philippi.

B. Despite the great depression that Paul was experiencing in Acts 20:1-2 (see 2 Corinthians 1:8 followed by 2:13; 7:5-6), he continued to minister to friends and adversaries alike (Acts 20:1-2a)

- 1. He found great joy in the churches of Philippi and Thessalonica**
- 2. He ministered 2 Corinthians to the Corinthians.**

C. Lessons from Macedonia

1. Don't allow peer pressure to dictate your actions; don't live by the fear of man.

And (skipping over the outline down to point C) there are five lessons that I learn from his stay in Macedonia. First, don't allow peer pressure to dictate your actions. Despite the pressure of the Corinthians who accuse Paul of planning in the flesh and not planning in the Spirit (2 Cor. 1:17); despite their accusations of his being uncaring and fickle (2 Cor. 1:17); despite their saying that his "No" does not mean "No" and his "Yes" does not mean "Yes" (2 Cor 1:18-22), Paul did not cave into their demands and manipulations. It's just like a little kid trying to manipulate a parent who has said, "No," by responding, "You hate me. You don't love me." It would have been easy to give in to them. The pressure was great. But he did what he knew to be right before the Lord, and trusted God for the outcome. Initially (for about a year) it seemed that doing the right thing was not working. But eventually it paid off and Paul said that he was glad that he followed God's leading rather than their pressures.

If we live more by the fear of man than by the fear of God, we will constantly make mistakes. Galatians 1:10 comments on Peter's caving in to peer pressure out of the fear of man, and Paul said, "**For am I now seeking the favor of men, or of God? Or am I striving to please men? If I were still trying to please men, I would not be a bond-servant of Christ.**" So that's the first lesson – don't allow peer pressure to dictate your actions. Yes, listen to people. Yes, consider other options. Yes, be open-minded. But if you know what the Lord wants, you can't cave in. Look to the Lord. Don't live by the fear of man. Don't seek your approval from man. God made Adam and Eve to need approval. That's why we are constantly searching for approval. But it was the approval of God that was in the original design. The fall messed that up and made sinners seek approval of men rather than God. That is a struggle we must win if we are to be effective leaders.

2. Learn flexibility

A second lesson that I see is Paul's flexibility. He tentatively planned to leave Ephesus earlier in the year, but God changed his plans through an incredible door of opportunity. Then later, he tentatively planned or desired to go to Corinth, but God changed his plans to visit Corinth later. He tentatively planned to get to Macedonia quicker, but he explains in 2 Corinthians, "**when I came to Troas to preach Christ's gospel, and a door was opened to me by the Lord...**" Paul had learned to be flexible in his

plans based on God's opportunities and guidance. And we must learn to do the same. It is rigidity that makes some leaders ineffective.

3. Don't let spiritual depression rob you of your ministry energy.

Third, don't let spiritual depression rob you of your ministry energy. Oh what energy Paul showed for God's cause in these two verses! He embraces them, preaches throughout the region, and speaks encouraging words. And that, despite depression. All leaders experience depression on occasion, as can be seen from the lives of Moses, Elijah, David, or modern greats like Augustine, Calvin, Luther, Charles Spurgeon, and Jonathan Edwards. Satan often uses depression to make people so preoccupied with themselves and their own misery that they stop being involved in ministry. One time Luther was so depressed that he closed the door to all ministries and stayed alone. His wife, Kathryn tried unsuccessfully to encourage him. Finally, she took a different tack. She went around the house dressed in black funeral clothes, prompting Luther to ask if she was going to a funeral. She said, "No, but since you act as though God is dead, I wanted to join you in mourning." Her humorous reproof got him out of his gloom. But we need to constantly be on guard that depression does not rob us of ministry energy. If anyone had good reason to quit, it was Paul. Yet he fought his despondencies by looking to the Lord.

Charles Spurgeon said,

I am the subject of depression so fearful that I hope none of you ever get to such extremes of wretchedness as I go to. But I always get back again by this – I know that I trust Christ. I have no reliance but in him, and if he falls, I shall fall with him. But if he does not, I shall not. Because he lives, I shall live also, and I spring to my legs again and fight with my depressions of spirit and get the victory through it. And so may you do, and so you *must*, for there is no other way of escaping it.²

Fathers, you will sometimes be so depressed from issues of finances, problems at work, tiredness and other issues that you will be tempted to give in to your feelings. Instead of spreading encouraging words like Paul did here you will be tempted to let your family suffer with you. But you need to resist those feelings and continue to minister the kind of joy to your family that Paul ministered in the book of Romans, written at this time. Certainly,

² Sermons, volume 12, p. 298.

you will still need to correct (as Paul did with the Corinthians). But you can't let your misery rub off on everyone else. Leaders learn how to fight their depression and be steadfast in ministry to their family.

4. Don't be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

The fourth lesson is "Don't be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good." Paul had plenty of evil thrown at him by Corinth, but he still loved them and ministered to them. We will look at that more under point II, which deals with restored joy in reconciliation. But here I just remind you that Paul's love and ministry to Corinth came before they repented. It came while they were still mean to him. If you want a challenge to your faith like Caleb asked for when he said as an eighty year old, "Give me this mountain," then ask God to give you grace to be steadfast in ministry to the very people who don't appreciate you. That will require supernatural grace. That will be living by faith. That's the stuff that heroes are made of in Hebrews chapter 11. Do you want to be a hero like those in Hebrews 11? Then be steadfast in positive ministry to your family.

Obviously your position is not that of an apostle. Perhaps you are only a child having to respond to the ugliness of a brother, sister or parent. Or perhaps you are a mother who has to respond to the ugliness of a bad attitude in a husband. Or perhaps you are a father who is trying to be a gracious leader when you are being undermined at every point. Well, look to Paul for encouragement in 2 Corinthians. It's a great book on leadership during discouraging times. He continued to engage in a year of ministry, love and joy-giving to those who didn't deserve it. He was steadfast in ministry by refusing to be overcome by evil. He declared a war of love.

My children have had to do this with each other. One child might pick on another one, and he or she has to be dealt with privately and disciplined. But I also talk with the picked-on child to teach that child how to declare a war of love and not be made upset or bitter. I tell them, you are going to face such sinners all your life, and you might as well learn this lesson of grace with your brothers and sisters. And the child will start to bake cookies for her persecutor, say nice things to her persecutor and in other ways engage in a war of love. Every one of our children has had to do this at some point or another. Don't just read Scripture as historical abstractions. Apply these Scriptures to your own lives. You have every opportunity to live the life of Hebrews 11 by faith; to imitate the apostle Paul, right in your home.

5. Learn that leaders must face emotional pain.

Fifth lesson: learn that leaders must face emotional pain. In fact, I sometimes tell those who want to go into the pastoral ministry, if you can't take emotional pain, you're not ready. All pastors face emotional pain and abuse from time to time, and if they can't take it, they will be finished. But you know what? It's not just pastors. Leaders of *all* stripes need to be prepared to face pain triumphantly. Don't think you can be a father without having pain. Every one of us needs to learn that suffering is part of being steadfast in Christ.

II. Paul's trip to Greece – a time of reconciliation and restoration (vv. 2b-3a)

A. Despite the abuse that Paul had received from the Corinthians, Paul ministered to them for three months (Acts 20:2b-3a).

Now let's move on to Paul's trip to Greece. Beginning near the end of verse 2: "**he came to Greece and stayed three months.**" We know from other Scriptures in your outline that the place in Greece where Paul stayed was Corinth. This three-month stay shows that there was true reconciliation. Too often apologies are made, and people are restored to superficial conversation, but they still tend to avoid each other. But talking about pleasantries is different than being truly involved in each other's lives. Paul had true reconciliation. If I had time to go through 2 Corinthians 7, I would show you fourteen principles of conflict resolution that Paul had used to be reconciled to the Corinthians. He sought to win people, not just an argument. And he was successful. Paul was closer to the Corinthians afterwards than he was before. And he says that Titus was closer to the Corinthians afterward. And you can see that in 2 Corinthians 7, but also in this phrase in Acts. Despite being hurt and abused, Paul got close to these guys again. He pursued them, and spent three months with them. To me that shows the awesome power of grace.

B. Paul wrote the book of Romans from Corinth (implication of Romans 15:25-27 with 1 Cor. 16:1-4; 2 Cor. 8-9 and references to people in Rom. 16:1,23; 1 Cor. 1:14; 2 Tim. 4:20).

The second thing that I detail in your outlines is that Paul wrote the book of Romans from Corinth during this three-month stay. And when you look at the joy shown forth in Romans, you can see that Paul did not allow pain to rob him of his joy. That too is a lesson that we must learn. But let me

make five additional lessons from this little phrase, which describes his time in Greece.

C. Lessons

1. Don't let bitterness divide you (2 Cor. 6:11)

The first lesson is that we should never allow bitterness to creep into our hearts and to divide us one from another. If you think you have a right to be bitter and a right to be divided from another person, spend some time reading through the book of 2 Corinthians and tell me if you have been treated worse than Paul. Paul worked his tail off in Corinth, but was still criticized for not working enough. Furthermore, they didn't pay him a dime. It's one thing to be expected to work hard when you are paid, but they had unrealistic expectations. Paul says that they had shut their hearts off from him (2 Cor. 7:2). They said, "**his bodily presence is weak, and his speech is contemptible**" (2 Cor. 10:10). If you were a preacher, how would you like that response to your preaching? Some people were obviously saying, "I have utter contempt for Paul's sermons. He doesn't speak well. And besides, his bodily presence is weak. He ought to just quit." Some in Corinth were calling Paul a fool (2 Cor. 10:16), while others called him inferior (2 Cor. 11:5), and still others claimed that he did not love them (2 Cor. 11:11). But Paul refused to let bitterness creep into his heart or to allow such bitterness to divide. He called for openness and said, "**O Corinthians! We have spoken openly to you, our heart is wide open. We are not withholding our affection from you, but you are withholding yours from us.**" (2 Cor. 6:11) This is the hardest step to take in conflict management. It is getting people who have emotionally cut themselves off from each other (whether husbands and wives or members of the church) to be vulnerable and open with each other again. And we aren't just talking about being civil – we are talking about having open hearts. Opening your heart to that person who has hurt you involves 1) acceptance of that person. It involves 2) deeper communication with that person. It involves 3) love for that person. It involves 4) tactful honesty about your own failings and theirs. But don't let bitterness make you close yourself off from another person.

2. Don't let bitterness make you blind to the positive in others (see Paul's praise in 1 & 2 Corinthians)

Second, don't let bitterness make you blind to the positive that is in others. Paul praises the Corinthians for all of their strong points in both first and second Corinthians. But our tendency is the opposite. Our tendency is to

only see the negative in those that we are bitter against. Isn't that true? I sometimes coach people to write down fifty things about that other person for which they can thank God. Initially they have a hard time finding anything to thank God for. But as I give them suggestions, they begin the process and find that it changes their perspective and their feelings. Paul no doubt did this in some way or another. It's amazing all the things he found for which to praise the Corinthians.

3. Don't let bitterness rob you of your spiritual joy (2 Cor. 6:10; 7:4; 1:24)

Third, don't let bitterness rob you of your spiritual joy. Paul has supernatural joy undergirding him and giving him perspective even in the midst of deepest discouragements. He told the Corinthians that his experience was "**as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing**" (2 Cor. 6:10). You see, those are not opposites. You can have this supernatural joy even in the midst of sorrow. A chapter later he said, "**I am exceedingly joyful in all our tribulation.**" (2 Cor. 7:4). How can he say such a thing? Many people think that is a contradiction. Yet it is only because they don't know supernatural joy. It is not our own man-made joy that sustains us. Scripture says, "**the joy of the LORD is your strength**" (Neh. 8:10).

And Paul wanted their joy. He said in 2 Corinthians 1:24, "**Not that we have dominion over your faith, but are fellow workers for your joy.**" He was working for their joy. If you have lost your joy, I want you to get it back. But circumstances alone will not achieve this. Only drinking constantly from the fountain of God's grace will keep your joy kindled. And I strongly encourage you to read John Piper's books on joy to learn how to gain it. It is the heritage of all God's people. But it must be sought. It must be worked at.

4. Take advantage of providential opportunities (Rom. 16:1)

The fourth lesson from Greece is that you need to learn to take advantage of providential opportunities that God gives to you. In Romans 16:1 Paul gets wind of the fact that Phoebe is planning to travel to Rome. So Paul grabs this opportunity to send Rome a letter.

5. Imitate Paul's diligent work ethic (see references to this period in Romans)

The last lesson from Greece is that we should imitate Paul's diligent work ethic. We saw some weeks ago that Paul knew how to rest. But these verses show Paul working his tail off before he goes on another vacation.

III. Paul's changed travel plans to Syria – trust in God's protection (vv. 3b-6)

A. The Pilgrim ship to Asia was loaded with Jews – a perfect opportunity for Jews to dispose of Paul (v. 3b)

But let's quickly move on to the third major point here – Paul's changed travel plans to Syria. Paul wants to go back to Antioch, his sending church, and take a rest. He needs a rest. His body is worn out. Verse 3 goes on to say, **“And when the Jews plotted against him as he was about to sail to Syria, he decided to return through Macedonia.”** Paul has his tickets to Syria and then to Jerusalem, and he is about ready to get on a ship when he discovers a problem. This was a time of year when Jews would pack the ships to travel to the Jerusalem festival. Some Jews apparently found out that Paul is sailing, and they secretly decide to kill him on board and throw him over. So Paul has to learn to adjust his plans on the fly. It's a good characteristic of leaders.

B. God's guidance protects them (v. 3b implied)

Of course, this also implies guidance from the Lord. Paul may have found out through someone who overheard, but it is likely that God simply warns him of the danger.

C. Paul travels one direction (v. 3c,6a) while his companions travel another direction with the money (v. 4-5)

But in any case, Paul travels in one direction while his companions travel in another with the money. Paul goes the opposite direction of where he was intending to go to throw the Jews off from his scent. He heads up to Philippi (way up north) and then finds another ship to go back south again. It's like he is pretending to go the opposite direction from Jerusalem. He also takes the prudent precaution of staying separate from the money until the present danger is over. There is no point in risking both Paul and the money. So his traveling companions go one direction while he goes another.

D. They join up in Troas (v. 6)

Then they join up with Paul in Troas. Verse 6 says, **“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.”**

E. Lessons

1. Risk is unavoidable in ministry, but try to minimize risk

There are three more lessons we can learn from these verses. First, risk is unavoidable in ministry. Like Paul we can try to minimize risk, but risk is unavoidable. If Paul wanted to avoid danger from the Jews altogether he would have had to quit his missionary charge. But we can't avoid our responsibilities just to avoid risk. When things looked like they were about to fall apart in Y2K there were some who thought we were being foolish to move downtown. But I believe God called me to do so. When you are following the Lord's will there will always be risks.

2. Depend upon God's guidance for protection

Second, we can depend upon God's guidance for protection. There have been a number of times when God has given me forewarning of impending danger when I have been in Asia. Some people think God doesn't do that any more. You can believe that if you want, but I find God's presence to be a most necessary thing in missions. And I depend upon it.

3. Our lives are immortal until our work is done.

But the third lesson that I learn is that our lives are immortal until our work is done. Though there was danger, and though Paul tries to avoid danger, it is also true that the Jews simply could not kill Paul until it was his God-given time to die. It doesn't mean that he deliberately jumps into trouble, but the knowledge that we are invincible until it's God's time can be a real encouragement to those who suffer from anxiety. You are immortal until your work on earth is done.

IV. The church Paul works with – the importance of community (vv. 1-6)

A. Notice that much of the time in Acts 20:1-6 was involved in raising funds for the poor in Jerusalem (see Acts 24:17; Rom. 15:25-28; 1 Cor. 16; 2 Cor. 8-9; etc).

Let's close off this sermon by looking at the way this passage speaks of the importance of community. This is the fourth major theme. First of all, most of the year that is covered in verses 1-6 was spent in trying to raise funds for the poor in Jerusalem. Paul says so explicitly in chapter 24:17 as well as in Romans, 1 Corinthians and 2 Corinthians. Romans 15 says, "**But now I am going to Jerusalem to minister to the saints. For it pleased those from Macedonia and Achaia to make a certain contribution for**

the poor among the saints who are in Jerusalem. It pleased them indeed, and they are their debtors. For if the Gentiles have been partakers of their spiritual things, their duty is also to minister to them in material things. Therefore, when I have performed this and have sealed to them this fruit, I shall go by way of you to Spain..." This shows that mutual ministry of the saints transcends the local church. They are traveling over a thousand miles to deliver mercy ministries funds to Jerusalem. Paul has engendered a love for the whole church in all his churches. And when we leave this denomination, I would urge you to continue to have a love for this denomination and other denominations in the Lord. We are having a strategic move, but not a breaking off of fellowship.

B. Notice that Paul's churches support Jerusalem, not vice versa.

1. Lesson - The importance of self-supporting, indigenous congregations.

But there are three additional lessons we can learn from this. Notice that it isn't the mother church that is supporting the daughter church, but vice versa. In terms of missiology this is intriguing. It is quite different from the older pattern of missions that some have followed. Some mission agencies have put churches in other countries on the dole to help them out, but even after 100 years the churches have never been weaned from this need of money. Unlike Paul's churches, they have not quickly become self-supporting and indigenous. So this informs missions practice.

2. Lesson - The finances were for need, not a centralized bureaucracy. Jerusalem was poverty-stricken.

But the opposite extreme is also avoided. This was not a constant thing, but a special offering for the poor. It wasn't giant centralized agencies, buildings, bureaucracies, etc that were supported by the churches. It was the poor. There is no evidence that the New Testament church had "askings" to support massive centralized agencies like our denomination does. General Assemblies weren't every year. They were only called to decide on doctrinal or other major issues. So this passage shows that Paul avoided making all churches dependent on the mother church or of making the mother church a bloated organization dependent on the local churches. Both are extremes.

3. Sending churches are often the least expected ones.

Thirdly, sending churches are often the least expected ones. You might have expected the churches that were around the longest to do all the church planting. But Jerusalem hardly did any missions. It was Antioch that

was the big sending church. But more important than even Antioch was that these city churches that Paul planted were in turn planting their own churches everywhere. Missionaries like Paul got the ball rolling, but it seems that the pattern was not big agencies planting churches. It seems that the pattern is like what we have done in Omaha – local churches planting other churches. That’s where the bulk of the growth occurs in the New Testament – at the local church level. Pray for us as we strategize on starting a new preaching point.

C. Notice the number of people that accompany Paul

I want you to notice too the number of people that accompanied Paul with this large gift of mercy ministries money. Let’s read verse 4: “**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.**” This is a very interesting listing. Macedonian churches were represented by Sopater, Aristarchus and Secundus. The Galatian churches were represented by Gaius and Timothy. The Asian churches were represented by Tychicus and Trophimus. And according to 2 Corinthians, the Corinthian churches were represented by Titus and two other unnamed brethren. And all of them were accompanying the gifts that had been raised by those churches. This was a large delegation. But I think Paul deliberately established it. And I think this sets a great precedent for the modern church.

- 1. Macedonian churches were represented by Sopater, Aristarchus and Secundus.**
- 2. Galatian churches represented by Gaius and Timothy**
- 3. Asian churches represented by Tychicus and Trophimus**
- 4. The Corinthian churches represented by Titus and two other brethren (see 2 Corinthians 8:1-6; 16:24**
- 5. Lessons**

a) Be above suspicion or reproach

What are some lessons that we can learn just from point C? Well, I think the most obvious lesson is that we should be above suspicion or reproach. I have talked to pastors who think it is silly that our church has such careful regulations about money. They just have one person handling all of the money. When I insisted as the treasurer of EMF and then later of

HCMC (with hundreds of thousands of dollars going through my hands each year) that I needed accountability, and when I insisted that someone count money with me and that I have an audit once a year, they thought that was strange. They said, “Phil we trust you.” And I said, “Well, I trust me too. I wouldn’t have any temptation with this money. But that’s not the point. It’s the principle of the matter. We must be above reproach.” I doubt Paul did this because he thought he was vulnerable to the temptation to steal. I doubt he had any temptation to swipe money. But he wanted to be above reproach. It’s for testimony sake. He had learned the hard way from Corinth that pastors can be falsely accused. With this large group accompanying him, that is not possible.

[Another reason for this large group that I didn’t include in your outlines might have been to protect the money.]

b) Be accountable

A second lesson is that we should be accountable. If Paul needed accountability, who are we to think that we are above it? This is what the body is about. This is what Presbytery and a session is about. We all need accountability.

c) Have safeguards in place, even if they are cumbersome.

A third lesson is that we should have safeguards in place, even if they are cumbersome. It might be thought that having two identical tally sheets for counting money, and three counters, and one person depositing and another writing checks is a bit cumbersome. But so were Paul’s safeguards in these verses. Nowadays you can’t be too careful. Apparently in Paul’s day that was true as well. Some people think I am being legalistic when I insist on having someone with me when I am counseling a woman. But I think it is Biblical to have safeguards, even if they are sometimes cumbersome.

D. Luke the physician rejoins Paul (“we” in verse 6)

1. Paul had left Luke in Philippi in Acts 16:17.

The last issue of community that we see here is hinted at in the word “we” in verse 6. Commentators point out that this means that Luke had once again joined the team as it headed back to Jerusalem. The last time Luke used the term “we” or “us” was in Acts 16:17 when he was dropped off to help the church plant in Philippi. Apparently the church is well founded, and Luke can move on to assist Paul elsewhere.

2. Luke now leaves Philippi to assist Paul.

3. Lessons

a) Find encouragement through church friends.

What are some lessons we can learn from Paul's community relationship with Luke? We know that Luke was a dear friend of Paul's. And it is important that all of us seek to find encouragement through our church friends. There was a mother who illustrated how just our presence can sometimes be a huge encouragement. She had her daughter over for dinner, and the daughter was pouring her heart out to mom on all her woes. She had a number of difficult problems that she was facing. And the mother was thinking to herself, "What can I possibly say to help her? I feel so powerless right now." While she listened attentively, she was unable to even come up with good words of comfort and wisdom. She didn't know what to say. But at one point the daughter said, "Thanks for sitting with me, Mom. I feel better now." And that was the end of it. The daughter's outlook on her situation had completely changed. The mother had done the very thing that her daughter needed – she listened.³ Apparently Luke listened well too, because he recorded Paul's whole story in this book. But the point is that we need friends. Even Jesus had friends in Peter, James and John.

b) God cares about our bodies

But Luke was a help in other ways. According to Colossians 4:14 Luke was Paul's beloved doctor of physician. Paul's body was worn out, and beat up, and weak, and sickly. He needed the care of a doctor. And we need to realize that God cares about our bodies. What a beautiful provision from God's hand. Take care of your body. And value good doctors.

c) God raises up workers at the perfect time

The third lesson is that God raises up workers at the perfect time. Luke was needed at this time when he was at his lowest, and about to be imprisoned. And God makes sure that the work in Philippi is done so that Luke can join him.

We might think that our church needs a given ministry worker, and we wonder how we are going to live without one. But God knows how to raise up such in his perfect timing.

³ SOURCE: John Ortberg and Ruth Haley Barton, *An Ordinary Day with Jesus, Leader's Guide* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001), 82.

I hope you have been encouraged by these six verses in Acts 20. They aren't just about names, places and dates. They are a call to be steadfast in ministry.

Conclusion for leaders

- 1. Persevere**
- 2. Maintain good attitudes**
- 3. Trust God**
- 4. Connect**

My final exhortation to you is to be steadfast in positive ministry. Persevere, maintain good attitudes, trust God and connect with the body. This is what Paul did. And I exhort you to do the same. Amen.

Be Steadfast

Acts 20:1-6a

By Phillip G. Kayser at DCC on 11-16-2008

Introduction –

- I. His trip to Macedonia – a time of deep depression (vv. 1-2 with 2 Corinthians)
 - A. Order of events
 1. Paul seems to have made his way along the coast to Troas (2 Cor. 2:12), hoping to hear from Titus on the result of his previous confrontational letter to Corinth (2 Cor. 2:13). This was a change from his original plans:
 - a) Original tentative plan (apparently communicated in the “lost epistle” while he was at Ephesus – see 1 Cor. 5:9) was to go from Ephesus to Corinth, to Macedonia, back to Corinth and on to Judea. (This is alluded to in his defense in 2 Cor. 1:15,16.)
 - b) Paul changes his mind about making Corinth the first place he would visit. This change of plans is recorded in 1 Corinthians 16:5-9, Acts 20:1-2 and 2 Cor. 1:15-2:2.
 - c) The reasons for the change of plans were
 - (1) A brief visit prior to the writing of 1 Corinthians had proved to be most unpleasant and unproductive (2 Cor. 2:1-2) and Paul wanted Titus to mediate the serious rift (2 Cor. 2:13; 7:6,13,14; 8:6,16). Note that the visit in Acts 20:2-3 is planned in 2 Corinthians 12:14 and 13:1 to be the “third time I am coming to you.”
 - (2) There was serious sin in their midst (1 Cor. 5:1ff; etc) and Paul wanted to see full repentance before he came to them so that he doesn’t have to severely come to them “with a rod” (1 Cor. 4:18-21; cf. 11:34; 16:2ff; 2 Cor. 1:23). If thorough repentance was not forthcoming, Paul would bring the severest discipline against them (2 Cor. 13:2).
 - d) However, because of this change in plans, Paul is accused by his opponents in the Corinthian church of fickleness and unreliability (see 2 Cor. 1:17-20). Added to all the other attacks, this adds greatly to Paul’s feelings of deep depression (2 Cor. 1:8; 2:13; 7:5).
 - e) Paul responds with a defense of his actions (1 Cor. 1:12-2:2):
 - (1) Of Paul’s tentative plans to a) go straight from Ephesus to Corinth, b) to return from Macedonia for a second visit to Corinth and c) to take companions from
 - (1) Corinth to take the gift to Judea, only the first plan was changed (cf. 1 Cor. 16:5ff).
 - (2) Paul makes clear that he had never communicated firm plans to visit Corinth first, but only desires (see footnote 1). His determined plans (articulated in 1 Corinthians 16) were being kept.
 - (3) The need to change his tentative plans/desires was their fault – he was not welcome in Corinth, and he was seeking to gently bring them to repentance. Furthermore, the only reason he changed his plan was to spare them judgment (2 Cor. 1:23).
 - (4) He is astonished that his flexibility for the purpose of not causing them pain would be used against him by Corinth.
 - (5) His previous desires/intentions are subject to God’s will. Nevertheless, when he made his new plans in first and second Corinthians, he did not make them “according to the flesh” but “according to the Spirit.” His “yes” in the Lord meant yes and his “no” meant no. He was not double minded. Everything he did was according to a Biblical purpose.
 2. Not hearing from Titus in Troas (2 Tim. 2:13), Paul moves on to Macedonia (Acts 20:1) and visits the churches of Philippi and Thessalonica (Acts 20:2). 2 Corinthians is likely written in Philippi.
 - B. Despite the great depression that Paul was experiencing in Acts 20:1-2 (see 2 Corinthians 1:8 followed by 2:13; 7:5-6), he continued to minister to friends and adversaries alike (Acts 20:1-2a)
 1. He found great joy in the churches of Philippi and Thessalonica
 2. He ministered 2 Corinthians to the Corinthians.
 - C. Lessons from Macedonia
 1. Don’t allow peer pressure to dictate your actions; don’t live by the fear of man.
 2. Learn flexibility
 3. Don’t let spiritual depression rob you of your ministry energy.
 4. Don’t be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.
 5. Learn that leaders must face emotional pain.

- II. Paul's trip to Greece – a time of reconciliation and restoration (vv. 2b-3a)
 - A. Despite the abuse that Paul had received from the Corinthians, Paul ministered to them for three months (Acts 20:2b-3a).
 - B. Paul wrote the book of Romans from Corinth (implication of Romans 15:25-27 with 1 Cor. 16:1-4; 2 Cor. 8-9 and references to people in Rom. 16:1,23; 1 Cor. 1:14; 2 Tim. 4:20).
 - C. Lessons
 - 1. Don't let bitterness divide you (2 Cor. 6:11)
 - 2. Don't let bitterness make you blind to the positive in others (see Paul's praise in 1 & 2 Corinthians)
 - 3. Don't let bitterness rob you of your spiritual joy (2 Cor. 6:10; 7:4; 1:24)
 - 4. Take advantage of providential opportunities (Rom. 16:1)
 - 5. Imitate Paul's diligent work ethic (see references to this period in Romans)
- III. Paul's changed travel plans to Syria – trust in God's protection (vv. 3b-6)
 - A. The Pilgrim ship to Asia was loaded with Jews – a perfect opportunity for Jews to dispose of Paul (v. 3b)
 - B. God's guidance protects them (v. 3b implied)
 - C. Paul travels one direction (v. 3c,6a) while his companions travel another direction with the money (v. 4-5)
 - D. They join up in Troas (v. 6)
 - E. Lessons
 - 1. Risk is unavoidable in ministry, but try to minimize risk
 - 2. Depend upon God's guidance for protection
 - 3. Our lives are immortal until our work is done.
- IV. The church Paul works with – the importance of community (vv. 1-6)
 - A. Notice that much of the time in Acts 20:1-6 was involved in raising funds for the poor in Jerusalem (see Acts 24:17; Rom. 15:25-28; 1 Cor. 16; 2 Cor. 8-9; etc).
 - B. Notice that Paul's churches support Jerusalem, not vice versa.
 - 1. Lesson - The importance of self-supporting, indigenous congregations.
 - 2. Lesson - The finances were for need, not a centralized bureaucracy. Jerusalem was poverty stricken.
 - 3. Sending churches are often the least expected ones.
 - C. Notice the number of people that accompany Paul
 - 1. Macedonian churches were represented by Sopater, Aristarchus and Secundus.
 - 2. Galatian churches represented by Gaius and Timothy
 - 3. Asian churches represented by Tychicus and Trophimus
 - 4. The Corinthian churches represented by Titus and two other brethren (see 2 Corinthians 8:1-6; 16:24)
 - 5. Lessons
 - a) Be above suspicion or reproach
 - b) Be accountable
 - c) Have safeguards in place, even if they are cumbersome.
 - D. Luke the physician rejoins Paul ("we" in verse 6)
 - 1. Paul had left Luke in Philippi in Acts 16:17.
 - 2. Luke now leaves Philippi to assist Paul.
 - 3. Lessons
 - a) Find encouragement through church friends.
 - b) God cares about our bodies
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