

Acts 20: 13-19; “Paul’s Humility & His Tears”, Sermon # 72 in the series –
“Laying the Foundations”, Delivered by Pastor Paul Rendall
on May 1st, 2022, in the Morning Worship Service.

At this time I want to focus our attention upon Paul’s statement of verse 18 of our text. When he summoned the elders of Ephesus to himself, he said to them – You know, from the first day that I came to Asia, in what manner I always lived my life among you. In other words, his manner of life before them, was an open book to them. They were reading the book of his life by observing his ministry, and all the things that he said and did, very closely. And when they did this, they found that it was something that helped them to better understand how Christ would have them to live their lives, and that they should minister to people in the same way that he did.

So, in this message I want to bring out to you the 2 very important things which characterized Paul’s manner of living that glorified God. 1st of all – His serving the Lord with all humility. 2nd – His serving the Lord with tears in relation to the plotting of the Jews. Brethren, if we will take notice of the way that Paul served Christ, we ourselves will see the value of serving the Lord in these same ways, as we seek for Christ’s glory to be advanced in all the earth.

1st of all – Let’s think about Paul’s serving the Lord with all humility. (verses 17-19)

Well, the apostle Paul was going to leave Troas, and he was headed for Jerusalem. He hoped to be there in good time, to be there for the day of Pentecost. It was not that he felt obligated to observe that Jewish feast, but he knew that it would give him opportunity to preach the gospel to more of his fellow countrymen. It would give him time to meet with the church there, and it would be a very good time also, he knew, to present to them the collection of money that he brought with him; a collection that he had taken from all the Gentile churches.

He was going to bring this money to church in Jerusalem, to give to the poor. He had made mention, over and over again, to the churches that he ministered to, of the great number of poor and persecuted brethren there in Jerusalem. He had made this appeal to the churches to help them. And so they generously gave to this cause. It says in verse 13 that Luke and the others of Paul’s traveling companions went ahead to the ship, and they sailed to away to Assos. They let Paul go on foot from Troas to Assos, at his request. He probably wanted to spend that time alone with God.

It was no doubt true that he needed a little time to regroup from all that had taken place there at Ephesus over the past 3 years. He also knew that he needed time to prepare his own heart for what lay ahead. What lay ahead for him, he did not actually know. But he did know this, that the Holy Spirit had testified to him, in every city, that bonds and afflictions awaited him. But this did not deter him. None of those things moved him. He simply wanted to be faithful to fulfill His ministry. Part of his ministry was being a faithful apostle and pastor to other pastors. He knew that he could not take the time to go back to Ephesus at that point, but he thought that he had just enough time to summon the elders of Ephesus to come to him, when he got to Miletus.

To them he revealed his great heart for serving Lord. And he would exhort them to serve the Lord in the same way that he himself did. The term “elder” here is synonymous with the term “pastor”. The word for pastor in the Greek is ποιμενοσ. He is a spiritual shepherd of God’s people, His sheep. Paul mentions this in verse 28 of this chapter, where he says – “Take heed to yourselves and to all the flock among whom the Lord has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood.”

But here he mentions that even though he was an apostle, even though he had been given so very much by Christ, in terms of gifts and graces, that he served the Lord as a humble man. He

was not proud of himself, but He had said in 1st Corinthians 15: 10 that he labored more than all the apostles. Yet it was not him, he said, but the grace of God which was with him. So his boast was in the Lord Jesus, and he stated it many times, in the letters that he wrote, that he was a bondservant of the Christ. Romans 1: 1 – “Paul, a bondservant of Jesus Christ, called to be an apostle.” When he gave a list of spiritual responsibilities to the believers in the church of Rome, he said in Romans 12, verses 10 and 11 – “Be kindly affectionate to one another with brotherly love, in honor giving preference to one another; not lagging behind in diligence, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord.”

So, let me ask you whether you see your obedience in relation to Christ Himself, in this way that Paul did; that you are serving Christ as your Master, when you share the truth of the Bible with others. You are serving Him as your Master when you manifest your love for the brethren in the many ways that you are called to do. Let me ask if you see yourself this way? Perhaps you see yourself as someone who is independent, and strong-minded, in relation to what you know, and in relation to what you want do for Christ. And I would say that this can be a good thing in certain ways. It is good to hold strong convictions of truth, and it is right to be determined to do what is right at all times. You believe that you know what you want to do for the Lord.

But what we are talking about here is whether you are serving the Lord with all humility. We are not talking merely about self-confidence. Do you consciously ask the Lord in prayer – What can I do to serve you, Lord, today? Whether it is some little thing or some big thing, it is important to God, and it is important to yourself, in the way that you view yourself, that you learn to see Christ as your Master in a joyful sense. You are not simply keeping His commandments as an independent agent of Christ’s. You remember your obligation to Him personally; that He is your Master and your Lord. You take your orders from Him. If you are making progress in your relationship to Him, you remember this with joy every day.

You see Christ, by faith, as the One who set you free from your bondage to sin. And by His grace you have been made willing to do God’s will at every point. Do you think of yourself this way? This is what it means to be a Christian, when you realize that Christ has called you to be His personal servant in righteousness. Do you remember the Old Testament picture of this which is given in Exodus chapter 21, verses 1 and 2? Let me read it to you. “Now these are the judgments which you shall set before them: If you buy a Hebrew servant, he shall serve six years; and in the seventh he shall go out free and pay nothing.” Now, we know little of slavery in our generation, but if we think about it, this law is the picture of God’s goodness in relation to Christ’s redemption, this slave’s being able to go out free after 6 years of service. If you believe in Christ, you are the Lord’s freed man.

But let me read you verses 5 and 6. “But if the servant plainly says, ‘I love my master, my wife, and my children; I will not go out free, then his master shall bring him to the judges.’ “He shall also bring him the door, or to the doorpost, and his master shall pierce his ear with an awl; and he shall serve him forever.” Ah, there it is. You see, being a servant of Christ your Master means that if you love Him, you do not want to go out to be free of serving Him. You want to stay in His service permanently, all of the rest of your life. You know it will cost you some amount of pain in this regard, but you think it is certainly worth it.

Sometimes a Christian does not understand what God is calling them to do, in terms of their service to Him; that it is perfectly voluntary. Well, you should know, if you do not, that it is. You have been redeemed. You have been set free from sin. But God wants to know, what you want to do with your freedom. How will you serve Christ your Master? Do you love Him enough to really serve Him? Then you will not want to be free of serving Him. You want Him to take the awl and

pierce it through your ear to the door, spiritually speaking. I will give my ear to hearing His commands. Sometimes, sadly, a Christian may not so much want to be a servant as much as they would like to be someone great in God's kingdom. They may not understand that there is a cost to serving Christ. You undergo the same baptism that He was baptized with, of sufferings.

You remember how the disciples James and John had come to Jesus in Matthew chapter 20, and they wanted to sit at Jesus' right hand and His left in His kingdom. And He said that it was something that had already been prepared for those whom the Father had prepared it for; that is, for those who suffered in the greatest sense, to see His kingdom advance in truth and righteousness. Those appointed by the Father would be the ones who would sit at Christ's right hand and left. The other disciples, when they heard that James and John had asked for this highest of positions in the coming kingdom, they were greatly displeased it says, with the two brothers.

But Jesus called them to Himself and He said to them – “You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and those who are great exercise authority over them.” “Yet it shall not be so among you; but whoever desires to become great among you, let him be your servant.” “And whoever desires to be first among you, let him be your slave – just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many.” I think that sometimes words like “servant” and “slave” do not sit well with some Christians. It seems demeaning to them.

They remember that in John chapter 15, verse 15, that Jesus says – “No longer do I call you servants, for a servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all things that I heard from My Father I have made known to you.” They think that they would like to be the friend of Jesus, but not His servant. Yes, Jesus did say that He calls us His friends, and how encouraging it is. But just two verses before that, in verse 13, He also said – “Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one's life for his friends.” “You are My friends if you do whatever I command you.”

So, the way that we ought to think of this statement is in terms of what Christ is doing in our lives to make us more like Himself. That is, He would have us to have a humble attitude in everything concerning our own glory. And He is expecting that we would seek, instead, for glory to come to God for all that He has done for us. You remember that Jesus said that John the Baptist was the greatest of the prophets, and yet John himself said that, “A man can receive nothing unless it has been given to him from heaven.” “You yourselves bear me witness that I said, ‘I am not the Christ,’ but ‘I have been sent before Him.’” And in John 3: 30 he said – “He must increase, and I must decrease.”

So it is as we humble ourselves in this very way, as John did, and as the apostle Paul did in relation to Christ Himself, and what He did, that we will find that we will be able to fulfill the ministry that He has called us to do, to serve Him, as well. Think of Paul's words in Ephesians 3, verse 8 – “To me, who am less than the least of all the saints, this grace was given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ, and to make all see what is the fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the ages has been hidden in God who created all things through Jesus Christ.”

Let me ask now if you personally see what is the fellowship of this mystery is? It is the mystery of the gospel of grace; of how Christ can take a person like Paul, who formerly was a blasphemer and a persecutor, and make him one of His most useful saints. And following his conversion Paul really saw himself in this way, as less than the least of all the saints. You can see here that Paul was given this grace to do these great things in relation to the preaching of God's word. But his being able to do them did not really have relation to his own greatness, but rather Christ's! And

so, my brethren, whatever gift or ability that God has given to you, it is intended by Him that you would use that gift, not as a means of promoting your own greatness, but Christ's. And if you will learn to consider yourself in this way that Paul did, then you will find that you will truly make progress in ministering for Christ.

2nd – I would like us to look at Paul's serving the Lord with tears in relation to the plotting of the Jews. (verse 19b)

He says that he served the Lord with all humility, and with many tears. This is truly an amazing thing, that Paul served the Lord in this way. Well, what was Paul weeping about? If you look a bit farther on in this chapter, in verses 29-31 you will know at least part of the answer to this question. He says to the elders of Ephesus – “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.” “For 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.”

This was one of the great reasons that Paul shed tears before the disciples. It was to warn them against the false doctrine of the legalists, the savage wolves ; who, knowing that if the apostle Paul was no longer around, they could come into the church and they would not spare anyone in the flock. They would try to spiritually tear them apart and devour them, by preaching damning doctrines. And Paul also said that, what was just as bad or worse, there would also be men who would arise from among themselves, who would speak perverse things to draw away the disciples away after themselves.

A good portion of this agitation in Christian assemblies, Paul was saying, would come about due to the plotting of the Jews who formed schemes against Paul's being able to spread the truth of the gospel of Christ in the various places where he came, to preach the gospel. Paul was opposed in every place, by the unbelieving Jews, and yet the power of God was with him to give him the fruit of conversions for his labors among them. I think that what we need to conclude from the manner of Paul's life, is that false doctrine coming into the church is something to weep over, and, it is something also to warn the brethren against. Paul said that he did this day and night with the elders and with the other believers in the church there at Ephesus, for a period of three years.

If this was the case with him, then we should also pray to come to the place spiritually where we have hearts of indignation toward the false doctrines of legalism. Those doctrines which add men's works to the doctrine of justification through faith in Christ, are legalism, plain and simple. Men who are proud of themselves and their own righteousness, they add things to the gospel; such as a ceremonial or sacramental salvation, or their own ability to persevere in doing good works and practicing righteousness. They say that people ought to trust in their own righteousness in order that they might obtain salvation through that way. And thus the doctrine of justification by faith in Christ alone is undermined.

To counter this tendency in fallen human nature, Paul said in Philippians chapter 3, verse 9, that he wanted to be found in Christ, not having a righteousness of his own which was from the law, but that which is found through faith in Christ; the righteousness which is from God by faith, that he might know Him and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings. Therefore we can say this: Every Christian who is strong in doctrinal truth ought to have a heart that is tender enough to weep over those in our midst who may be being influenced by such false doctrines, for we know that they will lead people down to hell.

Usually men who promote these doctrines are proud men who want to control the obedience of others so that they will follow them implicitly. They are like Diotrephes in 3rd John verse 9, who liked to have the preeminence among them. He would speak against apostolic doctrine with malicious words and would not receive correction from the apostles on his unloving and controlling practices; yet all the while, he was claiming to be a Christian. When we see such men, let us warn the brethren against their believing in their false words and their unloving practices. And may we be willing then, to weep in front of the brethren to keep them in the way of truth.

The wonderful thing about the apostle Paul was that he was also a man who wept over the lost, and what is even more amazing, he specifically wept over his fellow countrymen, the Jews. Let me read you his words in Romans chapter 9, verses 1-5. "I tell you the truth in Christ, I am not lying, my conscience also bearing me witness in the Holy Spirit, that I have great sorrow and continual grief in my heart." "For I could wish that I myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren, my countrymen according to the flesh, who are Israelites, to whom pertain the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the service of God, and the promises; of whom are the fathers and from whom, according to the flesh, Christ came, who is over all, the eternally blessed God." "Amen."

These same people, his countrymen the Jews who were persecuting him, he had great sorrow and continual grief for them in his heart, because they did not believe in the gospel of Christ. He had such strong sorrow and grief that he wished that he himself would be accursed from Christ if they could be saved. He knew that he could not see this happen to himself. God would not answer that prayer. But it was his desire. Let me ask you in closing if you can see that this desire in Paul's heart was born out of his great love for Christ and what Christ had done for him. Do you have this same desire in your heart, to see unworthy sinners come to faith in Jesus Christ because you remember that He died for unworthy you? Then you will learn to serve Him in humility and with tears, even as Paul did.

In 1st Timothy 1: 12-17, Paul expresses himself in this way: "And I thank Christ Jesus our Lord who has enabled me, because He counted me faithful, putting me into the ministry, although I was formerly a blasphemer, a persecutor, and an insolent man; but I obtained mercy because I did it ignorantly in unbelief." "And the grace of our Lord was exceedingly abundant, with faith and love which are in Christ Jesus." "This is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief." "However, for this reason I obtained mercy, that in me first Jesus Christ might show all longsuffering, as a pattern to those who are going to believe on Him for everlasting life." "Now unto the King eternal, immortal, invisible, to God who alone is wise, be honor and glory forever and ever." "Amen."