

Acts 20:1-6 [56]-ENCOURAGING+CHANGED PLANS

PRELIMS. Paul is in Ephesus - preaching. There has been a **riot** and the Town Clerk has brought peace by saying there were no grounds for condemning the preaching of the gospel and they were liable to be prosecuted for disturbing the peace.

MINISTRY is for ENCOURAGEMENT

“After the uproar ceased, Paul sent for the disciples” Paul may have been in hiding as he had to be **protected!** However, Paul could not keep quiet for long! Like His Saviour, he had to be about his Father’s business! And what **exactly** was that? How would **you describe** Paul’s work, the work of ministry?

Well, the gospel is not called the Good News for nothing! Twice in two verses we have the word **encouragement** used – which of course, is always ‘good news’! *“...after encouraging them”* and he *“had given them much encouragement”* [1,2] Paul’s **work** was **encouraging** people, giving them **hope!**

The Church’s work is **always** to give **hope & encouragement** – that is the Church’s **main** business! It’s the **medium** for **announcing** and **delivering** God’s blessing on humanity! God created the Church as His **agent** for dispensing hope, mercy, love. God does not do it miraculously (except exceptionally) – He always uses means, and the means are His Church/people!

Why did Jesus say to His disciples – and said it in front of 1,000s of people *“Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven. For He makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust”* [Mat 5:44,45]

Ans: Because they were to **reflect** the image of their Father in heaven – who loves His enemies and bestows blessing after blessing on them! They were to follow His example to such a degree that they will be **recognised** as ‘sons of God’! **True** love embraces the **whole** of humanity. The true sons of God

have been given the same kind of love as the Father has! When John wrote “*See what **kind** of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called **sons of God***”, he went on to talk of loving one another [1John 3:1cf]

The Church’s **primary** task is **not** to discourage or even **condemn** people – but rather to provide hope and help. Of course, it is very necessary to **define sin** in its **awful colours** and to delineate the **terrible consequences** of sin, **when** we come to **explain** the problems of life! But we do not immediately launch into a tirade of condemnation on people as soon as we meet them! Some people actually feel **guilty** if they do not tell people they are sinners. Rather, if we ought to feel guilty, it ought to be for **failing** to tell people of the faithful love of God to all His creatures. God’s patience with our **unbelief** and **self-centredness**! *Look at the leper “*But he went out and **began to talk freely** about*” his **healing**! The Demoniac “*went away and **began to proclaim** in the Decapolis how much Jesus had done for him*”[Mk 1:45, and 5:20]

Every person who comes to the Church should **encounter** hope/encouragement! They should **experience** love, not just **hear** about it! Every person who met Jesus received a message of hope or actual help! You do not find Jesus going around ‘pulling-up people’ for their **shortcomings**! When Jesus saw people, he read ‘I can **help** him’! Some Xns when they see people read ‘He needs a **rebuke**’! Quite a difference!

Paul **encouraged** the Ephs and then went on to **greatly encourage** the believers in Macedonia which is modern day Romania/Bulgaria/Albania! He **was** an encouragement to them. **How** could a man whose **public image** was so poor, “***bodily presence is weak, and his speech of no account***”[2C10:10] encourage people? Paul was no ‘oil painting’! Well, just in **the same way** as a man who was “*like a root out of dry ground; he had no form or majesty... no beauty*” and who actually “*made*

*Himself **nothing***”[Isa 53+Phi 2] made the **biggest impact** any man made in history? How was it that Jesus affected and **changed** more people than anyone else. Even the writings **about** Him today still affect great numbers people? How?

By having the **greatest leadership quality** anyone can have! Ie by being **an example** - especially in choosing, if necessary, **suffering - if it benefitted others!** That’s how Jesus won the hearts of His followers. Not only was He authentic, genuine, correct/right in what he taught, not only was His life moral and upright, but he chose to **suffer** when it benefitted **others!**

Jesus did **not** just choose suffering as a ‘way of life’ like an ascetic **unnecessarily** denying himself something legitimate. There are those like **David Blaine** who go through ‘suffering’ to prove something to **themselves** or for **attention**. They ‘make a show’ of their suffering, but might not do any real good for humanity! No, Jesus’ suffering was for some moral or **excellent** purpose - always for the **promotion/welfare** of **other** people!

It has been proved that when a leader works hard at **personal cost** to themselves, that leader **will recruit** a lot of **volunteers!** When leaders are **inconvenienced** in their leadership, it is **then** that people start believing in their Cause! I read this week ‘Most leaders [in the world] are not willing to die for others [although some do], because no one has been willing to die for them. They have not had a model to follow. But we [Xns] **do** have a model – Jesus...The Bible has no place for specialist evangelists who do **nothing** but **preach publicly**’ [Fernando p543] All the Biblical preachers suffered in their ministries. Jesus, Paul, Peter **died** for the Cause of Jesus Christ!

Now some people, as soon as they **hear** about suffering, immediately **feel guilty!** ‘I do not suffer for Christ, therefore I am not a good Xn’! And they begin to look for **opportunities** to put themselves into some ‘painful’ situation **unnecessarily!** And the real reason for doing this, is to make them **feel better**

about their faith, rather than answering a ‘call’ of God!
Suffering for Christ is a very **special calling** (and **privilege!**)

It’s **God** in His **Providence** who ‘calls’ us, we do not ‘call’ ourselves. It is God who puts us **in** a certain situation, in which we have to make a decision which will either **honour** Him, or make life more comfortable for ourselves!

Now there are **different levels/degrees** of suffering! We can ‘suffer’ in many ways – perhaps simply in a **choice** of where we will go tonight! We might feel **constrained** to spend a few minutes in prayer for someone, but then we will miss our favourite TV programme! God calls, we respond! We can go to the prayer meeting or to the football match. We ‘sacrifice’ our own ‘desires’ in order to honour God! That is ‘suffering’ too!

As we said if we show leadership in being ‘**inconvenienced**’ we **will recruit** members! So here with Paul! Look at the **committed followers** “*Sopater...Aristarchus...Secundus...Gaius...Timothy...Tychicus...Trophimus*”[4] from **all parts!**

It was on this journey to Macedonia that Paul wrote 2nd Cors which again shows Paul’s **main theme** in his ministry – he starts off by talking “*of the God of **all comfort** who comforts us in all our affliction, so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction, with the comfort with which we ourselves are **comforted** by **God***”[2C1:4] Ministry of **comfort!**

Paul went from Macedonia down to Greece and “*spent about three months*” there [2,3] Then Paul **changed plans!** God had ‘**intervened!**’ Here is an **example** of Paul **not deliberately** walking into ‘suffering’ It has been made known to him that “*a plot was made **against him by the Jews***” so “*he **decided** to return through Macedonia*”![3c] **Instead** of a sail on the Mediterranean sea, he went back through Macedonia and Asia! Quite an inconvenience!! He would probably **miss** his desired Pentecost in Jerusalem! But then he was **comforting others!**