

Acts 20: 22-24; “That I May Finish My Race”, Sermon # 74 in the series –
“Laying the Foundations”, Delivered by Pastor Paul Rendall
on June 12th, 2022, in the Morning Worship Service.

At this hour I want to speak to you about the apostle Paul’s running his race and finishing his ministry well. I think that this message will be important for us to hear so that each of us will be able to do the same. The apostle Paul says in 1st Timothy 1, verse 16, that the reason that he obtained mercy from God was that in him first, Jesus Christ might show all longsuffering, as a pattern to those who are going to believe on Him for everlasting life. Paul was saying that Christ had called him as sinner to learn, very really and very practically the truth about the greatness of the grace of Christ, not only in his conversion, but also in living his Christian life.

He would testify of the greatness of God’s grace to him, and in Him. In this regard he would become a pattern for all those who are going to believe in Christ. To understand how he was a pattern, we must look more carefully at these words of our text. 1st of all – Paul is a pattern to all Christians in his going bound in the Spirit to Jerusalem. 2nd – Paul is a pattern to all Christians in his seeing his Christian life as a race. And 3rd – Paul is a pattern to all Christians in his testifying to the gospel of the grace of God. The Lord wants us to learn from Paul’s life experience, and live it out in our lives so that we might glorify God. May each of us here receive these truths.

1st of all – Paul is a pattern to all Christians in his going bound in the Spirit to Jerusalem. (verses 22 and 23)

Paul says to the elders of Ephesus – “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.” What does Paul mean here when he says that he was going bound in the spirit to Jerusalem? Some of the translations have the word “Spirit” capitalized, and others have it as a small “s”. The word in the Greek is pneuma and so it could refer either to Paul being bound in relation to the Holy Spirit’s working in his heart and mind, to go to Jerusalem. Or it could mean that in his own spirit that he felt bound to go to Jerusalem.

I believe that it is worded in this way to indicate that it was both. When Paul said that the Holy Spirit was testifying to him in every city, saying that chains and tribulations awaited him, I believe that the testifying that was being done, came to Paul through the prophets in the churches of those various cities. It is not as though Paul did not receive direct revelation from the Holy Spirit to his own spirit concerning these things. He no doubt did. But what the Spirit was telling him was often confirmed by many prophets in the churches in these various cities that he went to. We will see an example of this in Acts 21: 10 when Agabus who was a prophet, came down from Judea to plainly tell Paul that this would be the case.

The Holy Spirit’s working in the apostle Paul’s life, to lead him in his personal ministry, was very experientially real to him. No doubt this was because of the fact that the Lord knew that His purpose for Paul’s life as an apostle and a prophet and a teacher of the Gentiles needed to have this revelatory element in it. It was needed so that he would be able to fulfill his ministry and have the confidence that he needed that it was the Lord who was leading him to be able to go forward to Jerusalem, knowing that he would have this great opposition to his preaching and his ministry. Being bound in the Spirit, Paul knew that it was the Lord’s will that he would come into just these kinds of difficulties, so that the gospel of Christ’s grace would be fully preached.

Paul was bound in and to the Holy Spirit’s purpose. And he would follow the Holy Spirit’s Providential guidance and leading. The Lord, the Holy Spirit, was working powerfully with Paul’s own spirit so that the truth would be fully proclaimed in every place that he went. Paul was, I

believe, also bound in his own spirit. He felt compelled to go up to Jerusalem. He knew it was his duty to His Master, the Lord Jesus Christ, who had laid hold of him to do this very thing. Listen to how he words it in Romans chapter 15, verses 15-19: “Nevertheless, brethren, I have written more boldly to you on some points, as reminding you, because of the grace given to me by God, that I might be a minister of Jesus Christ to the Gentiles, ministering the gospel of God, that the offering of the Gentiles might be acceptable, sanctified by the Holy Spirit.” “Therefore I have reason to glory in Christ Jesus in the things which pertain to God.” “For I will not dare to speak of any of those things which Christ has not accomplished through me, in word and deed, to make the Gentiles obedient – in mighty signs and wonders, by the power of the Spirit of God, so that from Jerusalem I have fully preached the gospel of Christ.”

Here we see what it meant for Paul to be bound in his own spirit. He realized that grace had been given to him by God so that he might be a minister of Jesus Christ to the Gentiles. He was not only an apostle, but God had also made him a missionary preacher. This grace was given to him, he says, so that he might minister the gospel of God in a very widespread way in many places, to the Gentiles. The results of his labors, in preaching and teaching and ministering the truth concerning Christ, they bore great fruit. Paul saw these results of converted Gentiles as an offering to God; an offering which he hoped might be sanctified by the Holy Spirit.

That is, that the Holy Spirit would use what had been accomplished in the lives of these Gentiles by grace, as a witness. And Paul was bound in his own spirit to hope that the fruit of his labors being blessed by God in this mighty way, would be seen by the unconverted Jews in Jerusalem, so that they would want to learn more about the greatness of the grace in Christ, and be saved. He knew that the Holy Spirit could sanctify his labors, and the fruit of his labors in this very way. The Holy Spirit could set his labors apart to His own purpose. Paul was glorying in Christ Jesus in the things which pertained to God. He would not dare to speak, even to other Christians, of any of those things that Christ had not accomplished through him in word or deed.

That is, in a way of boasting, that somehow the Gentiles had become obedient to the gospel and the word of God because of anything in him which made him able to bring it about. Their salvation was all of grace, and it was attested, he says, in mighty signs and wonders, by the power of the Spirit of God so that from Jerusalem, he had fully preached the gospel of Christ. But now he was coming back to Jerusalem once again. And Paul knew that he must come back. He knew that he would suffer opposition. He would be persecuted. But all of this would be a part of God’s plan for him. This is why he was bound in spirit.

Now, I am trying to point out to you, that in this regard Paul was a pattern for all Christians to follow. The Lord has called each of us who is a Christian to follow Him and learn from Him and to be conformed more and more to His image. He has called each one of us to be witnesses to His grace. Each one of us has received a gift and a measure of faith. He expects us to use it to promote His glory, to tell of His glory, and the glory of His grace. Let me ask you now, whether you are doing that? Do you see your Christian life in this way? If you are faithfully following Christ and studying to do His will in every particular, you will be opposed for it from people who have not yet received special and saving grace.

But they are listening. And if the Holy Spirit is striving with them, they will learn from your lips and your life more about grace. Paul did not yet understand all the particulars of the trials that he would go through. But the Holy Spirit was telling him that He would use those trials for the furtherance of the gospel. It is a similar thing in your life, dear Christian. People will see the way that you live, and they will hear the things that you will say, and they will not understand, without grace. But the Holy Spirit is right there in your life, in your heart, working in this powerful

way, showing you more and more of the truth of the Bible. He is showing you and leading you to understand how you can bear fruit to God in righteousness and holiness.

And He is the One who, at times, will so work in you that you will be bound in your spirit until you can become more obedient to the purpose for which He called you; to glorify Him with your life. You may even find that there will be times where you will be compelled to do that which might be risky to your good reputation, or even your life, in order that Christ might be magnified by you in your life. Paul had to go to prison for preaching the gospel. Eventually he laid down his life for the gospel. He was bound in his spirit to fulfill all that the Lord had called him to be, to do, and to become, by His mighty grace.

In Philippians 1: 20 he says, that he did these things, “according to his earnest expectation and hope that in nothing he would be ashamed, but with all boldness, as always, so now also Christ will be magnified in my body, whether by life or by death.” “For to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain.” So Paul is a pattern for us in regard to his being bound in the spirit. You do not have revelatory direction from the Spirit in living your life to God, but you do have the Spirit speaking to your heart, through the blessed word of God.

The Spirit does speak to your spirit; not with audible words, but by His motions and promptings in your mind and your heart. He is not merely an influence, but a Divine Person who is leading you. He will be leading you on, and His intent is to make you more useful for service to God and to Christ. He is with you always. He is the Comforter and the Helper. He is the Paraclete, One who is called alongside to help you. And as you respond in faith, ready and willing to obey God’s word, your spirit will feel bound to do what He is calling you to do, in particular. You remember His words in Acts 13: 2 – “Now separate to Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.

2nd – Paul is a pattern to all Christians in his seeing his Christian life as a race.

Verse 24a – “But none of these things move me; nor do I count my life as dear to myself, so that I may finish my race with joy...” Paul is not moved by the bonds and afflictions that he will have to face. He is not living his life for himself, or to please himself. He does not count his life as dear to himself, so that he might finish his race with joy. Paul calls his living out his Christian life over the totality of his life following his conversion to Christ, a race. He does this in a number of places in his letters. We should take a look at a couple of these. What kind of a race was Paul running?

Well, turn with me over to 2nd Timothy 4: 6-8 – “For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure is at hand.” “I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith.” “Finally there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give to me on that Day, and not to me only but also to all who have loved His appearing.” So, here we have another example of Paul’s revelatory knowledge of his own situation, that his departure from this life was at hand. He says that he has finished the race. He has lived his life fighting the good fight of faith. He has kept the faith.

He has, by faith in the Son of God, who loved him and gave Himself for him, lived up to all the truth of God’s word in his following Christ and serving Christ. He has nothing left to do, but to lay down his life for all that he believed, all that he taught, and all that he consistently lived for as an apostle and a Christian man. He was ready to lay down his life for His Master’s cause. He was, he says, already being poured out as a drink offering. Just as the wine and the oil were poured out upon the sacrifice before it was offered, even so the apostle had the joyful prospect of finishing his race with joy. He would lay down his life in His Master’s service and be ushered into His presence to receive his reward.

What brought him this joy at such an hour? It was that that he had not run in careless or haphazard or lazy way, but he had run in an earnest, zealous and diligent way, thinking all the time of how he might please His Master - Christ. Look with me at 1st Corinthians 9, verses 19-27. "For though I am free from all men, I have made myself a servant to all, that I might win the more; and to the Jews I became as a Jew, that I might win Jews; to those who are under the law, as under the law, that I might win those who are under the law; to those who are without law, as without law (not being without law toward, but under law toward Christ), that I might win those who are without law; to the weak I became as weak, that I might win the weak." "I have become all things to all men, that I might by all means save some."

"Now this I do for the gospel's sake, that I may be partaker of it with you." "Do you not know that those who run in a race all run, but one receives the prize?" "Run in such a way that you may obtain it." "And everyone who competes for the prize is temperate in all things." "Now they do it to obtain a perishable crown, but we for an imperishable crown." "Therefore I run thus: not with uncertainty." "Thus I fight: not as one who beats the air." "But I discipline my body and bring it into subjection, lest, when I have preached to others, I myself should become disqualified."

Here we see what Paul learned from Christ in living his life to God. He lived it in such a way that he could win the prize. Since Christ was His Savior, His Master, His Lord, and His Friend, he knew that he was free from all men. That is, he was not bound to any man's arbitrary rule, but lived his life independent of the judgment of all men. Yet, even though he knew that he could do this, still he freely and willingly used his Christian liberty to deny himself and to serve other people. In this way of Christ's love, he sought to win as many people as he could, to the Lord. He became a servant to Jews and Gentiles and the weak, that he might by all means save some of them. He became all things to all men. Let me ask you whether you see your Christian life in this way?

Yes, it is a race. And every Christian competes to win the prize. But in the competition it is not so much that you are running against other Christians to beat them in the race. You are running to receive the crown of righteousness which the Lord will give to you on the final day, when He returns. He watches you closely as you run, and will reward you accordingly. In relation to other Christians you want to run in such a way that you provoke them to love and good deeds. You do not run to prove that you are faster than them or stronger than them or wiser than them. And you do not fight with them. Instead you fight for them. You fight the good fight of faith for them, as well as for yourself, so that they also may win the prize when they run.

In regard to running this race you discipline your body and bring it into subjection where you need to. You do not let the appetites of your body master you, but you master them. You do this so that you will not be disqualified. I hope that you are running the race of the Christian life in this fine way, to the glory of God. If you do, you will have joy in your running and joy when you see Christ face to face. And for the minister, even joy in giving your account to God.

3rd – Paul is a pattern to all Christians in his testifying to the gospel of the grace of God.

Verse 24b – "And the ministry which I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the gospel of the grace of God." This is the main work of the minister and it is also the main work of any Christian. That is, to realize the importance and significance of God's grace as the only way that a person can be saved, and then to preach and to live accordingly. Paul testified to the gospel of the grace of God every time he preached. In all of his messages he preached Christ as the One who was crucified for sinners and raised from the dead. He preached that Christ fulfilled the law, and that it was on this basis, that God imputes Christ's perfect righteousness to all sinners who

believe in Him. Irrespective of the greatness of your guilt and shame, God will save you from all of your sins if you will believe in His Son. And once you have believed through grace, you will then go on to live your life unto God, by grace.

Take Paul as your pattern. Even as he lived his life by the power of Christ's wisdom and grace being imparted to him by God's Spirit, even so can you. That is the greatness of Christ's grace. He has all power in heaven and earth. He has given you His Spirit if you have believed in Him. And the Father will, through Christ's intercession for you, and by the power of His Spirit, continually supply you with this grace, so that you can live to His glory, and run the race of life and finish well. This is what every true Christian testifies to. Will you not pray to testify to the grace of God in the things that you say and in the things that you do to keep God's word? That is what God is looking for, from you.