



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

Acts 20:17-31 & 31-35

“An Historical, Doctrinal, Devotional Study of Saint Paul’s Life and Ministry”

TRANSCRIPT

[Message] We have been looking at Paul’s ministry on his third missionary journey and specifically concerning his ministry in Ephesus, since the apostle spent over two years, almost three years there. It’s, I think, very instructive for us to pay a closer attention to the things that transpired there. And when one looks at the apostle’s ministry and compares the picture that is given in the Book of Acts, with the picture that is given in the epistles, it is remarkable how many references there are to the ministry in Ephesus, and also how much of the content of the New Testament gathers around the church that was formed by the Lord in Ephesus.

Now we were looking at the difficulties that occurred on Paul’s missionary journey, on his third missionary journey when he came again to Ephesus and the tumult and riot occurred there caused largely by the objection of a certain silversmith by the name of Demetrius to the ministry that the apostles and their friends were giving. Because, of course, it meant to them the loss of their business, since they were the ones who were making silver shrines and since those who embraced the Christian faith embraced with it the doctrine that idols were nothing, they were losing business. And as

a result of the loss of their business, they were very much disturbed, and the result was riot and tumult in the city of Ephesus when the apostle came there.

We saw of course that what happened there gathered around the three men, Demetrius, and then the Jewish man Alexander, who was drawn out of the multitude, the Jews putting him forward because they didn’t want to be identified with the difficulties that were occurring because of the Christians, and then finally, the town clerk. The town clerk sought to appease the people, and as a result of that the latter part of chapter 19 of the Book of Acts records the things that the town clerk said. One of the commentators who has written some rather interesting things concerning the ministry of the apostles in the Book of Acts, has said with reference to the church, that “the church persecuted has always been the church pure, and therefore the church powerful. The church patronized has always been the church in peril, and very often, the church paralyzed.” There’s a lot of truth in that. When the church is persecuted, the chances are it is purer, and therefore more powerful, but when the church is patronized, the tendency of the church then is to fail to recognize the peril and pat themselves on the back because they are making waves in the community of the world, forgetting really, that they can never be at harmony with the world.

We see for example today in our Dallas paper there’s a series of articles in the *Dallas Morning News* over the influence of religion in the city of Dallas. There’s a great deal of emphasis in the city of Dallas on religion, and a great deal of Christian testimony, and the articles in the paper if one is not careful, might give the genuine Christians the feeling that they’re really making a tremendous impact on the city of Dallas. And the fact that the church, the true church, the true evangelical church is not persecuted here may be something to be something of a warning to us, an admonition for us that perhaps our ministry is not as forthright and plain and clear as it could be.

What I want to do tonight is do something a little different, rather than continue the study of the Book of Acts and Paul’s ministry systematically. What I’d like to do tonight is to stop for a moment and to talk about some of the things that characterize Paul’s ministry from a more personal standpoint. And what I would like to do is to take a look at his companions, because sometimes it’s overlooked that the apostle’s ministry was not altogether his own ministry, but he was helped a great deal by the people who were associated with him. And then I’d like to take a brief look at his sufferings, what he refers to in various places about his sufferings in Ephesus, look for a moment at the message that he preached, and its emphases that are set out in the Book of Acts as the things that he preached, and finally say just a word about the apostle’s personal life and how he supported himself in his ministry. We tend I think at times to get the impression that the apostle was just simply an ideal man who was pastor of a church, but in his case not of a specific church but an itinerant minister who traveled around, and everybody supported him, and they were in a sense pushing him in his evangelistic activity and he was really an early day Billy Graham or something like that. The picture is of course something that modern people like to think about, but it’s not really true to the apostle at all. But let’s take a look at these factors, and I think some of those things will emerge as we look at just what Luke and Paul have to say about his companions, his sufferings the kind of ministry that he carried on, and what he did while he was ministering the word.

It’s striking really to see how many people were associated with Paul in the ministry in Ephesus. And I’d like to just list some of them, look up a few of the passages in order for us to see that they were with Paul in Ephesus and then just comment upon the particular way in which they fitted into the ministry. Now of course, the first one that we might think about would be Apollos, because he was a man who was one of the companions of Paul in his ministry in Ephesus. You may remember that in Acts chapter 18, near the end of Acts 18, after the apostle had left Ephesus, Luke says

that Apollos came to Ephesus, and there he went into the synagogues, and he preached.
We read in verse 26 of Acts chapter 18,

“And he began to speak boldly in the synagogue: whom when Aquila and Priscilla had heard, they took him unto them, and expounded unto him the way of God more perfectly. And when he was disposed to pass into Achaia, the brethren wrote, exhorting the disciples to receive him: who, when he was come, helped them much which had believed through grace: For he mightily convinced the Jews and that publicly, shewing by the scriptures that Jesus was the Christ.”

Now if we had just this before us, we might surmise that what happened was that Apollos came to Ephesus when the Apostle Paul was not there and while Aquila and Priscilla were there because they had accompanied Paul there, at the conclusion of his second missionary journey from Corinth. Paul was not there and he had his ministry and then he went on over to Corinth, and there he carried on this ministry of mightily convincing the Jews publicly, showing through the scriptures that Jesus was the Christ. But, now we have some other things said, and I want to ask you to turn with me to 1 Corinthians chapter 16 and verse 12, in 1 Corinthians chapter 16 and verse 12, the apostle writes, “As touching our brother Apollos, I greatly desired him to come unto you with the brethren: but his will was not at all to come at this time; but he will come when he shall have convenient time.”

Now there are several things I want you to notice about this. Remember that when Paul wrote 1 Corinthians, he wrote it from Ephesus, so he is in Ephesus when he writes 1 Corinthians. Now he says here in verse 12, “As touching our brother Apollos, I greatly desired him to come unto you with the brethren, but his will was not at all to come at this time.” So it’s fairly plain from this that Apollos is with the Apostle Paul in Corinth at this

moment. So, what has happened it seems is that Apollos had been in Ephesus, there Priscilla and Aquila had instructed him more perfectly in the way of the Lord, he had expressed a desire to go to Corinth and he had gone there with letters of recommendation, there he had ministered to the Christians, and he had also gone into the synagogue and he had carried on a very effective ministry in the city of Corinth. But in 1 Corinthians, we find him back in Ephesus. One asks the question and of course there’s no certain answer with regard to it, “Why is Apollos back in Ephesus now?”

Well, there are some things that were said in Paul’s letter to the Corinthians in his first letter to them that might be the reason that Apollos is back. Apollos had a very effective ministry in Corinth. He was a man who was so effective, that Paul tells us when he wrote the Corinthians that he’s heard there are divisions in the church there and some are saying, “I am of Paul.” And some are saying, “I am of Peter.” And some are saying “I am of Christ.” And some are saying, “I am of Apollos.” So evidently, Apollos had so affected some of the believers in Corinth, that he had gathered a little group of people behind him. And not willingly though, so it seems, and in fact, I’m inclined to think that those commentators who suggest that he probably went back to Ephesus because he was embarrassed over the fact that some made too much over the effectiveness of his ministry. If you remember in the context of 1 Corinthians chapter 3, the apostle makes it very plain that the ministers of the word of God are just servants, its God who gives the increase. He said, “I planted, Apollos watered.” He never was, so far as we can tell, ever at odds with Apollos, and Apollos was never at odds with Paul. Paul was very appreciative of his ministry, and so I gather that Apollos thought that it would be best for him to leave Corinth, because some people were giving him greater adulation than should have been given to him.

So, he is back in Ephesus at the moment, and you’ll notice the apostle said, “I wanted him to come back to you, but he does not feel it’s the will of God at this time to

come.” So Apollos then is one of the companions of the apostle, and no doubt, one who was extremely effective in the ministry of the word, and I think particularly at Corinth, because Corinth was a Greek city, and the Greeks loved wisdom, and Apollos, it is said by Luke was an eloquent man. Incidentally, that term *logios*, which is used and translated probably properly, eloquent, was a word that in classical Greek referred to an individual who was an extremely well educated and cultured individual.

Now we know he was that kind of person, and so he would have been the kind of person, that would have appealed to the Corinthians, for after all, remember what Paul says in 2 Corinthians and chapter 10, about what people said about him and his ministry. For his letters say they, are weighty and powerful, but his bodily presence is weak and his speech contemptible. You see the apostle spoke like Yankee, and Apollos spoke like a Southerner, and so they did not particularly like his speech there in Corinth. At least that’s the report that the apostle mentioned. So you can see then that Apollos was a man who would have appealed to them. Well he was one of Paul’s companions, and no doubt responsible for some of the success of the work of the Lord.

Another man who was one of Paul’s companions, and who is very familiar to you I know is Timothy. Timothy is the young man who was a convert of the Apostle Paul, and one who was what I would call an apostolic legate. He was not himself an apostle, he was not a pastor of a church, there is no such thing in the New Testament as the pastor of a church, its impossible to find. No letters were written to the pastor of a church. Timothy was a representative of the Apostle Paul, and carried out his instructions, just like Titus, they both were apostolic legates. And Timothy had come to the knowledge of the Lord ultimately through the apostle; he speaks of him as his child in the faith. In 1 Corinthians, chapter 4 and verse 17, (I’m making a lot of noise up here, and I don’t particularly like this. I don’t know the reason for it either. That got it? What did I do Richard? [Comment from audience member] Tightened it or something, okay, I’m

sorry; I hate to see you disturbed like that. Dick was jumping about six inches every time it happened.) [laughter] 1 Corinthians 4 and verse 17, the apostle is writing again from Ephesus, and he says, “For this cause have I sent unto you Timotheus, who is my beloved son, and faithful in the Lord, who shall bring you into remembrance of my ways which be in Christ, as I teach every where in every church.” So Timothy had been in Ephesus also with the apostle, and was useful to him in carrying out the ministry. If you’ll turn over to chapter 16, and verse 10, speaking again while in Ephesus, Paul says, “Now if Timotheus come, see that he may be with you without fear: for he worketh the work of the Lord, as I also do.” It’s a magnificent commendation of this young man Timothy; he was a man in whom the apostle could put trust in the true sense. In Acts chapter 19 in verse 22 we read this, “So he sent into Macedonia two of them that ministered unto him, Timotheus and Erastus; but he himself stayed in Asia for a season.” So Timothy then was another one of the companions of Paul and had a part in the ministry at Ephesus.

A third man who is mentioned in that verse is the man whose name is Erastus, verse 22 of chapter 19, “Timothy and Erastus.” Now we learn from Romans chapter 16 verse 23, and also some other information from 2 Timothy 4:20, that Erastus was the town’s or the city treasurer. Now if you’ll turn to Romans chapter 16 and verse 23, we’ll read that. Remember that the apostle wrote Romans from what city? Well, he wrote Romans from Corinth. So here in Romans 16:23 he says, “Gaius mine host, and of the whole church, saluteth you. Erastus the chamberlain (and that word is a word that means treasurer) the treasurer of the city saluteth you, and Quartus a brother.” So here is Erastus according to Acts chapter 19 now in Ephesus with the apostle. So he was the city treasurer, and he was a convert it seems from paganism.

By the way, in one of the very interesting things that archeologists have uncovered, part of the society of archeologists who have worked in Greece on scriptural archeology, discovered many years ago, a slab from old Corinth, from the old part of the

city and on that slab is the name of Erastus, and also that it was at his expense that a particular road was constructed. But it’s also said that he an ideal, that is a name of an office, and that’s a little higher office than a treasurer, one who is responsible for larger projects so far as highways and roads are concerned. So evidently this man was very influential in the community, he became a Christian and he must have prospered, and as a result of prospering he came to be a high official, and then was responsible for the gift of a road to the people of that city. He probably is the person mentioned in the New Testament. So, Erastus, another person who helped the Apostle Paul the city treasurer of the city of Corinth.

You know when the apostle came to Corinth, he said he determined not to know anything among them save Jesus Christ, and him crucified. That illustrates, I think, a rather interesting thing, that there are people who think that when you preach the gospel to educated people you ought to preach it in an educated way. Well of course I’m sure you’re supposed to use correct grammar, you don’t stand in front of people who are educated and say “ain’t” all the time, and say I come to you and I come and did this and I come and done that, and so on. But so far as preaching the gospel is concerned, the important thing in the preaching of the gospel is to preach the gospel and not try to, at least Paul would seem to suggest, not try to do it in flowery language, and certainly not preach it philosophically. And it’s interesting to me that he came there he said he determined not to know anything but Jesus Christ and him crucified.

And out of it has come a church, and some of those in the church were men evidently of substance and standing in the community. Remember he said not many mighty, not many noble. He didn’t say not any mighty or not any noble. Erastus was one who was influential who came to faith because Paul preached the gospel. I’ve often thought that’s one of the reasons for the success of some men like Billy Graham, who’s never had a theological education. And speaking as a theologian and listening to other

theologians, they all would agree that his message has many theological flaws here and there in it, but the essence of the gospel is there and it’s that that God has blessed because he’s been faithful in preaching that. He hasn’t tried to preach it as a philosopher or as a learned man, but he’s just given the message. And God has blessed and has brought a number of individuals of substance and standing to faith through the preaching of Dr. Graham. Now we call him Dr. Graham. Well he deserves something like that in the sense that God has blessed his ministry.

Another man who was in Ephesus at the time was Titus. Titus is referred to in 2 Corinthians chapter 12 verse 17 and 18. And here the apostle writes, I’m going to read these verses, 2 Corinthians 12:17 and 18, “Did I make a gain of you by any of them whom I sent unto you? I desired Titus, and with him I sent a brother. Did Titus make a gain of you? Walked we not in the same spirit? Walked we not in the same steps?” In other places the apostle makes it plain that Titus took a letter from him to the church at Corinth while he was in Ephesus. Later on you know he became so disturbed because he didn’t know how Corinth had responded to the letter that Titus had brought and so he was anxious to go and he left Ephesus at the end of his visit there and went north and went to Troas. And waited there and Titus had not come back he said he was so disturbed in his spirit that he couldn’t wait there. And he went on around and finally met Titus returning from Corinth in Macedonia. And as a result wrote what is 2 Corinthians.

Incidentally, Paul wrote we know four letters to the Corinthian Church, three were written from Ephesus, and the one, 2 Corinthians was written from Macedonia somewhere, perhaps Philippi. We don’t know the precise place. So that our 1 Corinthians is really 2 Corinthians, and our 2 Corinthians is really 4th Corinthians. But if you stand up on Sunday morning and say please turn to 4th Corinthians, you might be by the elders ushered out of the pulpit. [Laughter] Still that’s what we learn from the study of the New Testament. In the first letter, he says I wrote you in the epistle, not to do this.

Well 1 Corinthians appeals to a letter written before 1 Corinthians, so 1 Corinthians is 2 Corinthians. Well at any rate, Titus is one of the men and it is Titus who took 3rd Corinthians to Corinth. And then Paul wrote 4th Corinthians, our 2 Corinthians from Macedonia. Now we don’t have to say too much about Titus, you of course know the place that he has in the New Testament.

There is another man who was one of Paul’s companions in Ephesus and his name is Gaius. In Acts chapter 19 in verse 29, we read this, “And the whole city was filled with confusion: and having caught Gaius and Aristarchus, men of Macedonia, Paul’s companions in travel, they rushed with one accord into the theatre.” Now I read just a minute ago a reference to Gaius who lived in Rome, names like Gaius were very common, and so there are more than one Gaius in the New Testament, although there is more than one Gaius in the New Testament. And this Gaius is from Macedonia, he was one who was also helpful in the apostle’s ministry.

In Acts chapter 19 in verse 29 we have reference to another man, Aristarchus, and he too is called a man of Macedonia. And still another man who was useful in the Apostle’s ministry in Ephesus was a man by the name of Sosthenes. And I’d like for you to turn to 1 Corinthians chapter 1 and verse 1. 1 Corinthians chapter 1 and verse 1, Paul in, remember now he is in Ephesus and he writes 1 Corinthians to the church in Corinth, really remember 2 Corinthians and he wrote 1 Corinthians, and he said in the very 1st verse, “Paul, called to be an apostle of the Lord Jesus Christ, through the will of God and Sosthenes our brother.” Now if you turn back to Acts chapter 18 and verse 17 when Luke is describing Paul’s ministry in Corinth, we read these words, “Then all the Greeks took Sosthenes, the chief ruler of the synagogue, and beat him before the judgment seat. But Gallio cared for none of these things.” So there was a Sosthenes who was the chief ruler of the synagogue in Corinth and then the Apostle says here that he is writing from Ephesus and he is associating himself in his letter with Sosthenes the brother.

Well there’s been a lot of speculation about whether this Sosthenes is the one who was the chief ruler of the synagogue in Corinth. It’s likely that he’s was not. If it was the chief ruler then the beating did him some good, he became a Christian. [Laughter] But that’s not the way that you ordinarily become a Christian of course. [Laughter] But at any rate, it’s probable that he’s another man, the name Sosthenes was also a fairly common name in ancient times and so this Sosthenes is different. But he’s one who is associated with Paul in Ephesus. Now I think you can see that what we have here is a large group of individuals who are carrying on ministry in Ephesus, and we really shouldn’t think of the apostle as the one who did everything himself. And that’s not all, there is a man by the name of Stephanas, and another by the name of Fortunatus and still another by the name of Achaicus, and I’d like for you to look at 1 Corinthians 16, well let’s first of all look at 1 Corinthians chapter 1 verse 14 through verse 16. Now remember again he’s writing from Ephesus, and he’s writing to the Christians at Corinth he says in verse 14 of 1 Corinthians 1,

“I thank God that I baptized none of you, but Crispus and Gaius; lest any should say that I had baptized in mine own name. And I baptized also the household of Stephanas: besides, I know not whether I baptized any other. For Christ sent me not to baptize, but to preach the gospel not with the wisdom of words, lest the cross of Christ should be made of none effect.”

Incidentally that is clear evidence that baptism is not part of the gospel. Because he says, “Christ sent me not to baptize, but sent me to preach the gospel,” so it’s clear that in sending him to preach the gospel, but not to baptize, that baptism is not part of the gospel, he says, “Not with wisdom of words lest the cross of Christ should be made of

none effect.” Now turn over to the 16th chapter of this same 1 Corinthians, and keep in mind, that Paul is writing this from Ephesus, and here in verse 15 we read,

“I beseech you, brethren, (ye know the house of Stephanas, that it is the firstfruits of Achaia, and that they have addicted themselves to the ministry of the saints,) that ye submit yourselves unto such, and to every one that helpeth with us, and laboureth. I am glad of the coming of Stephanas and Fortunatus and Achaicus: for that which was lacking on your part they have supplied.”

So Paul is in Ephesus and now he writes to the Corinthians, and he says I am very glad that these three men have come. And they have supplied things for the apostle which make up some of his lack. Evidently he was lacking in some financial resources, and they brought him some help from the city of Corinth. Now they also brought some other things to the apostle, they brought him evidently a number of questions which the church in Corinth had. And one can go back through the Corinthian epistle, and can pick out some of the things that undoubtedly they did ask him for the church in Corinth, because there’s a little expression that occurs in the Greek, and you can see evidence of it in the English text in a number of places. For example in chapter 7 verse 1 we read, “Now concerning the things whereof ye wrote unto me.” So you see, the Corinthians had written a letter to him. And Stephanas and Fortunatus and Achaicus had evidently brought that letter from Corinth, and now Paul’s answering their questions, “Now concerning the things whereof ye wrote.”

And do you know they wrote about marriage and divorce and they were troubled about those things in those days, because they discovered as they studied the scriptures that all of the different possibilities that arise in the lives of individuals were not handled by the word of God. In other words, the cases and the apostle gives here his mind with

reference to certain questions that they had asked. So he sets out some principles which are to be applied in the situations that may arise. I wish he had written two chapters instead of one, because there are a few other questions that I would have liked to have asked him now in the light of the experience that we have today. But at any rate, that was one of the questions.

Now you notice chapter 8 verse 1 begins, “Now as touching things offered unto idols.” That’s the same construction in the Greek text, I read that, “Now concerning.” And so evidently they had questions about eating meat that had been sacrificed to the pagan idols.

And then in chapter, well I did skip one in chapter 7 verse 25, the apostle had said, “Now concerning virgins I have no commandment of the Lord” and he writes answers to that question.

And then in chapter 12 in verse 1, what do you imagine they might have asked the apostle? Well what’s one of the questions that troubles some Christians today in nineteen eighty-three? Well, it’s the question of spiritual gifts isn’t it? And speaking in tongues, and so the apostle begins the 12th chapter, “Now concerning spiritual things, brethren, I would not have you to be ignorant.” And verse 3 identifies them and verse 4 as being spiritual gifts. And so he answers in three chapters questions concerning spiritual gifts.

In chapter 16, what other question do you think the people often have in Christian activity? Well, I know you’d have eventually come upon it, it’s money. And so in chapter 16 in verse 1 we read, “Now concerning the collection for the saints.”

And then they’d asked a question about Apollos, and I think some of them said, “When is Apollos coming back to visit us?” Because he’s with Paul now, and so in verse 12 we read, “As concerning our brother Apollos.” So they had asked about marriage and divorce, they’d asked about what about individuals who had been separated from their spouses because they’d been deserted, what about them? What about things sacrificed to

idols? What about spiritual gifts? What about money? And what about Apollos, when is Apollos coming back? So Stephanas, Fortunatus and Achaicus had come and they too were there with the apostle in Ephesus. I wonder if these three were members of the same family. It’s not, it doesn’t say that they are or not.

Now I’ve left out a couple of others that you already know about, and when you add all of these together, you have quite a company of Christians in Ephesus, and Paul in the midst of them. The two I’ve left out of course are Aquila and Priscilla. They had been with Paul remember when he was in Corinth. He had lived with them and worked with them and then when Paul left Corinth on his second missionary journey, and went over to Ephesus, we are told in the New Testament, that they went with him. Acts chapter 18 verse 2, verse 19, verse 26, and 1 Corinthians 16:19 indicates of course that they are there with the apostle. I’d like for you to see what is said about them. In 1 Corinthians 16:19 Paul says, “The churches of Asia salute you. (You the churches in Greece, particularly Corinth) Aquila and Priscilla salute you much in the Lord, with the church that is in their house.”

So Aquila and Priscilla not only have a ministry, effective ministry of Bible teaching, bringing Apollos to a deeper understanding, a more accurate understanding of the truth, but they evidently were people of means, and being people of means, they had the church meet in their home. You know I’ve had some people say when churches begin say, “Well I’d like to have a church meet in my house, but they sure do make a mess. [Laughter] Just think about it, every Sunday coming in and trampling on my new carpets and maybe breaking an item or to here, and then have to get the house ready for them every Saturday night.” Well, your just saying you’re not like Aquila and Priscilla, they had a church in their house and all the saints came there and met there. They got their names in the word of God, and who knows about you? And by the way if you’ll turn back to Romans chapter 16 you’ll see this wasn’t an accident, they didn’t just look

around and say, “well, where’s a house big enough and nice enough for us to meet?” and all eyes centered on Aquila and Priscilla. And they couldn’t bring themselves to say we don’t really want them, and so they said, “Well okay, come to our house.”

In Romans chapter 16 verse 5, now the apostle’s writing this from Corinth, and evidently Aquila and Priscilla now have moved to Rome, headquarters for their business has now been transferred to Rome, and so we read, “Likewise, greet the church that is in their house.” Now who is he talking about? Well verse three says, “Greet Priscilla and Aquila, my helpers in Christ Jesus who have for my life laid down their own necks unto who not only I give thanks, but also all the churches of the Gentiles, likewise greet the church that is in their house.” So here are Aquila and Priscilla, they’ve been in Ephesus, they had a church in their house there, they had to move to Rome, they said, “We’ll have another church in our house in Rome.” Magnificent couple and one can not help but think that a great deal of success of the early church is traced to these companions that the apostle Paul had.

Well, what about Paul’s sufferings? Well he tells us some things, you may remember or may not remember that in one of the messages previously, I’ve forgotten whether it was last week or the week before, in 1Corinthians chapter 15, I may ask you to turn there and I read the passage in verse 32 where the apostle writing to the Corinthians again from Ephesus says, “If after the manner of men I have fought with beasts at Ephesus, what advantageth it me, if the dead rise not? Let us eat and drink; for tomorrow we die.” And I just made reference to the fact that the apostle uses this figurative expression to speak of the things that he has suffered because of his profession of the Lord Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. Some have thought that the Apostle is really talking about physical suffering in the sense of beasts, or really being thrown into an amphitheater and having to contend with some beasts there. Well that’s not likely because Paul remember was a Roman citizen, and he would have been prevented from

having to do that. He’s speaking figuratively and he’s talking about the sufferings he faced as a servant of the Lord Jesus Christ. He probably includes that tumult caused by Demetrius.

Now there are other places where the apostle speaks of his sufferings too, turn with me to Acts chapter 20 and verse 17. In Acts chapter 20, in verse 17 remember now he’s speaking to the Ephesian elders, and I want to talk about that in our next study because that’s such an interesting message the apostle gives. It’s the only message incidentally that we have record of which Paul gave to a church. So it will give us something of what he said to a church. But in Acts chapter 20 verse 17 through verse 19, the apostle says, well Luke writes,

“And from Miletus he sent to Ephesus, and called the elders of the church. And when they were come to him, he said unto them, Ye know, from the first day that I came unto Asia, after what manner I have been with you at all seasons, serving the LORD with all humility of mind, and with many tears, and temptations, which befell me by the lying in wait of the Jews”

So the apostle speaks of his ministry at Ephesus, and we are not to think of it as being a very pleasant thing outwardly. He speaks of temptations, he speaks of tears, he speaks of the Jews who were lying in wait to slay him. Here is a man who suffered constantly in this successful ministry in Ephesus.

Now what did he preach when he was in Ephesus? Well in Acts chapter 20 we have some indications of it, and I’d like to read a few verses here of the things that he preached so he says when he was in Ephesus. In verse 20 and verse 21 of Acts chapter 20, he says as he speaks to the elders,

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“And how I kept back nothing that was profitable unto you, but have showed you, and have taught you publicly, and from house to house, testifying both to the Jews, and also to the Greeks, repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ.”

The apostle used constantly in his preaching the term repentance and faith, so any true preaching of the gospel in this age, should include within it what Paul means and what Luke means by use of the term repentance. Verse 24 the apostle says, “But none of these things move me, neither count I my life dear unto myself, so that I might finish my course with joy, and the ministry, which I have received of the Lord Jesus, to testify the gospel of the grace of God.” He characterizes the gospel as the gospel of grace. So grace was a leading theme in his preaching. Grace, you here people talk about sovereign grace others talk about the doctrines of grace. Paul speaks of the gospel of grace. That’s a leading theme in his writing; we’ll talk about it a little next week. He also says, verse 25 through verse 27, “And now, behold, I know that ye all, among whom I have gone preaching the kingdom of God, shall see my face no more.” So he preached the kingdom of God. Unfortunately he doesn’t tell us precisely what he meant by that, we have to conclude that from other things, and I’ll again speak about that next week, the Lord willing.

Well to sum it all up he says in verse 27, “For I have not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of God.” So there was nothing that the apostle held back. He didn’t say, I better not preach election, that’s too divisive, I better not talk about predestination, because Erastus doesn’t like that, he has some leaning toward Arminianism or what. He went on he preached all the counsel of God. That’s something for every preacher to remember, he’s not responsible to pick and choose in his message. He’s an ambassador, and an ambassador is to give the message of his superior. And that’s what we are to do

as Christians. So his preaching, grace, repentance, faith, the kingdom, all the counsel of God.

And finally, our time is up, I want to mention just one thing, again, we sometimes have the wrong impression of the apostle, we think of him as maybe an executive, he’s the senior pastor of the group, he’s the one who is the organizational president of the institution and everybody else is kind of a flunky. There are some elders who help him out and some deacons who help the elders, a few others who preach too, but Paul is the man, he’s the pastor. It’s amazing a person can read the Bible over and over and over again, and come to that conclusion and actually yield to it and seek to carry out a ministry most effectively, I don’t deny that effective ministries can be carried out in that, but most effectively in something that does not have any substantial support in the New Testament.

Listen to what the apostle did with reference to his own ministry and his own support, in 1 Corinthians chapter 4 in verse 11 and verse 12, again writing from Ephesus, he describes what he does, what he’s doing, he says, “Even unto this present hour we (Sosthenes and I and the others associated with me) we both hunger, and thirst, and are naked, and are buffeted, and have no certain dwelling place.” He didn’t say come on over to my place I have a lovely home, I have a lot of bedrooms, a lot of baths, I have a swimming pool in the backyard and just everything real nice come on over. He said, “We have no certain dwelling place.” And he says, “We labour, working with our own hands.” He worked! With his own hands, imagine that, a preacher working! [Laughter] I used to work. I was eight years in business, so I used to work. Only apostle worked with his own hands. “Being reviled we bless, being persecuted we suffer” and so on. In Acts chapter 20 verse 33 you’ll have to stop with this, Acts chapter 20 verse 33 through verse 35, the apostle says as he’s talking to these Ephesian elders now, he says,

“An Historical, Doctrinal, Devotional Study of Saint Paul’s Life and Ministry” by S. Lewis
Johnson
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“I have coveted no man's silver, or gold, or apparel. Yea, ye yourselves know that these hands have ministered unto my necessities, and to them that were with me. (Now not only did I support myself, but I actually helped in the support of others who were with me.) I have showed you all things, how that so labouring ye ought to support the weak, and to remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he said, It is more blessed to give than to receive.”

Luke omits some of these marvelous little side lights that one gains from Paul’s epistles as he writes to the some people about whom Luke gives historical information. Well we’ll have to stop. We will continue our study of Paul’s ministry as he leaves Ephesus in our next time.

[Prayer] Father, we are grateful to thee for these passages that we have looked at, and we thank Thee for the whole company of faithful men and women who so wonderfully labored suffering persecution and trials and difficulties and temptations and tears, but yet made it possible for the church of Jesus Christ humanly speaking to be established and ultimately to come to us in its ministry. We are grateful ...

[RECORDING ENDS ABRUPTLY]