

PAUL'S THIRD MISSIONARY JOURNEY

Acts 18:23-20:38

Key Verse: 20:32

“Now I commit you to God and to the word of his grace, which can build you up and give you an inheritance among all those who are sanctified.”

After the third missionary journey, Paul wanted to visit Jerusalem and go to Rome. Today's passage covers Paul's third missionary journey, during which the main event was Paul's farewell speech to the Ephesian elders.

I. Paul strengthened all the disciples (18:23-28)

Look at verse 23. "After spending some time in Antioch, Paul set out from there and traveled from place to place throughout the region of Galatia and Phrygia, strengthening all the disciples." On his first and second journeys, he mostly did mass evangelism; he did not pay attention to discipleship training. But on his third journey he makes a strenuous effort to train disciples. Obviously he decided to raise many disciples. Maybe this was the reason he made a vow by shaving his head at Cenchrea (18:18c). He did not shave his head to become a Buddha monk, but to train disciples.

At Ephesus there was a brilliant and eloquent scholar of Alexandria named Apollos, who spoke with great fervor about Jesus, accurately. But his message was incomplete because he knew of the baptism of John the Baptist but not about the Holy Spirit. He mainly taught the baptism of repentance but not the grace of Jesus Christ or the help of the Holy Spirit. So Priscilla and Aquila, who had joined Paul at Corinth, invited Apollos to their home and explained the way of God more adequately (24-26). As a result, Apollos was able to prove from the Scriptures that Jesus is the Christ (27,28). We must teach the work of the Holy Spirit as a part of discipleship training. There are many incomplete Bible teachers who teach many other good things. These days many preachers do not teach the meaning of Jesus' suffering, death and resurrection. They also do not teach the sacrificial life of Jesus. Rather, many preach welfare Christianity. But we must know that Christianity is not a philosophy of Esau. As the main point of discipleship training we must teach people the work of the Holy Spirit,

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and that Jesus is Christ the Lord.

II. God's work at Ephesus (19:1-41)

First, teaching about the Holy Spirit (1-7). While Apollos was at Corinth, Paul came to Ephesus, a metropolis in the western part of the Roman Empire, now known as Asia Minor. Ephesus was a strategic city, and it was the seat of Diana worship, which was a symbol of impurity and drew great throngs of people to its festivities. When Paul arrived in Ephesus, he found some disciples and asked them, "Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?" They answered, "No, only John's baptism." Paul explained that John's baptism was a baptism of repentance, but the baptism of Jesus is the baptism of the Holy Spirit (Lk 3:16). What happened when Paul explained about Jesus who gives the baptism of the Holy Spirit? Verse 5 says, "On hearing this, they were baptized into the name of the Lord Jesus." There was a great work of the Holy Spirit. They were eager to be baptized in order to identify themselves as Jesus' people. The Holy Spirit came on them. According to John's Gospel, the Holy Spirit is the invisible Jesus; the Holy Spirit teaches the truth of God and comforts his people and empowers them when they are fearful. They also spoke in tongues. This speaking in tongues is different from the kind done by modern people, who want to escape from present realities. This tongue-speaking meant that they spoke the secret things of God, forgetting all their profane language. They also prophesied. In the past they were slaves of petty desires, and could not see beyond their noses. Now they could see the future and say something about it.

Second, teaching about the kingdom of God (8-22). Paul entered the synagogue and spoke boldly there for three months, arguing persuasively about the kingdom of God. The theme of his three-month lecture was the kingdom of God. Our theme in Bible teaching should be the kingdom of God. But some Ephesians refused to believe and publicly maligned the Way. So Paul left the synagogue and rented the lecture hall of Tyrannus. There he witnessed to Jesus and planted the hope of the kingdom of God for two years. The result was remarkable. All the Jews and Greeks who lived in the province of Asia heard the word of the Lord (10). God also did extraordinary miracles through Paul. Even handkerchiefs and aprons that had touched him were taken to the sick, and their illnesses were cured and the evil spirits left them (12).

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In the midst of a great work of God, a funny event happened through seven comedians who were the seven sons of Sceva, a Jewish chief priest. They went around and tried to invoke the name of the Lord Jesus over those who were demon-possessed. They would say, "In the name of Jesus whom Paul preaches, I command you to come out." What happened? "One day the evil spirit answered them, 'Jesus I know, and I know about Paul, but who are you?' Then the man who had the evil spirit jumped on them and overpowered them all. He gave them such a beating that they ran out of the house naked and bleeding" (15,16). Because of this event, people were seized with fear, and the name of the Lord Jesus was held in high honor. Many who believed in Jesus came out and openly confessed their evil deeds. In this way the word of the Lord spread widely and grew in power (20). Paul's work was fruitful when he preached the good news of the kingdom of God.

Third, reaction to the work of God (23-41). A riot arose in reaction to Paul's preaching (23). A silversmith named Demetrius, who made silver shrines of Artemis, brought in no little business for the craftsmen. He stirred up his coworkers and slaves, saying that the honor of the goddess Artemis of the Ephesians had been damaged because of Paul. But in actuality, he was more worried about his income source. Demetrius stirred up his fellow workers and the whole city. "When they heard this, they were furious and began shouting: 'Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!'" (28) How was the mob stopped? The city clerk worried about the possibility of a riot. Rome was tolerant but Rome did not like any social disorder that would cause trouble to its government. If a riot ever occurred, the city's mayor was held responsible for it. So the city clerk did his best to put down the riot; he succeeded. God used the city clerk to protect his servants.

III. Paul's farewell to the Ephesian elders (20:1-38)

Paul left Ephesus and set out for Macedonia, and finally he arrived in Greece. Macedonia was the northern part and Achaia the southern part of the country commonly called Greece (1-4). After staying there three months Paul came to Troas, where around seven years before he had seen the vision of the Macedonian begging him to come there. The disciples at Troas observed the Lord's Supper weekly and studied the Bible diligently. Paul was teaching the Bible. He talked on and on, until

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midnight. Eutychus, who had worked hard all day on the bottom of society, sank into a deep sleep; then he fell to the ground from the third story and was picked up dead. Paul came down and threw his arms around him and said, "Don't be alarmed. He is alive." Then he went upstairs again and broke bread and ate. After talking until daylight, he left (11).

Then Paul's mission team sailed for Assos. From Assos they went to Mitylene. They arrived off Kios and crossed over to Samos and on the following day arrived at Miletus. From Miletus Paul sent to Ephesus for the elders of the church. When they arrived, Paul made a farewell speech to them. We learn several things from his farewell speech.

First, Paul served the Lord with great humility and with tears. Look at verse 19. "I served the Lord with great humility and with tears, although I was severely tested by the plots of the Jews." Paul served the Lord among the Ephesians with great humility, just as Jesus had served the flock of God. In order to serve sinners Jesus renounced the glory and power of the kingdom of heaven and emptied himself and made himself nobody. The greatness of Jesus is based on his humbleness. In his humbleness he became a friend of tax collectors. He became eyes to the blind. Jesus humbled himself like a man of many iniquities and transgressions so that he might take up all our infirmities and transgressions. Jesus humbled himself to obey God's will to die on the cross like a criminal. Here we learn that Paul is great because he learned Jesus' humbleness. One young man wanted to be a great servant of God like Paul. So he asked a guest speaker who had 2,000 members in his church, "What is the first secret of a successful ministry?" "Humbleness," answered he. "What is the second secret?" he asked. "Humbleness," answered he. "What is the third?" he asked in desperation. "Humbleness," answered he. This young man wanted to be proud and at the same time be a great servant of God. So he despaired at the answer. Jesus said, "Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth" (Mt 5:5). Humble people not only win many converts, but also they inherit the earth.

Second, Paul taught them to turn to God in repentance and have faith in Jesus. Look at verse 21. "I have declared to both Jews and Greeks that they must turn to God in repentance and have faith in our Lord Jesus." Paul helped people to acknowledge God who is Almighty and who is holy,

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holy, holy. The people of Paul's time lived without God. They were godless and merciless. Paul taught them to turn to God in repentance. Repentance exactly means turning to God. Those who live as slaves of money must turn to God and live for the glory of God. There are many who say, "I'm okay; I don't have to repent." But Romans 3:10 says, "There is no one righteous, not even one." Paul also taught people to have faith in Jesus. Jesus said, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me" (Jn 14:6). Let's remember, "turn to God in repentance and have faith in our Lord Jesus."

Third, Paul's attitude toward God's high calling (22-24). Look at verses 22-24. "And now, compelled by the Spirit, I am going to Jerusalem, not knowing what will happen to me there. I only know that in every city the Holy Spirit warns me that prison and hardships are facing me. However, I consider my life worth nothing to me, if only I may finish the race and complete the task the Lord Jesus has given me--the task of testifying to the gospel of God's grace." Paul determined to visit Jerusalem before going to Rome. On his third journey, while in Ephesus, Paul realized that God was leading him to Rome. Rome was the center of the Gentile world. Paul saw God's vision to spread the gospel to the whole world through Roman roads. So he said in 19:21b, "After I have been there (to Jerusalem), I must visit Rome also."

Why did Paul want to visit Jerusalem? At that time Paul had one great purpose. The Jerusalem church was materially very poor. So Paul aimed to take offerings from all his Gentile churches as a contribution to the church at Jerusalem (Ro 15:25,26). Paul was compelled by this plan for two reasons. First, he wanted to emphasize the unity of the church; he wanted to see the Gentiles belong to the body of Christ, together with the Jerusalem church. In short, he wanted to enlighten his people to their high calling as "a light for the Gentiles." Paul wanted the Jerusalem church, by the help of the Holy Spirit, to recognize that the offering from the Gentile churches was the work of God. Paul had a broken spirit because of his own people's obstinacy. Secondly, he wanted the Gentile believers to learn a giving spirit. For Christians, acts of love are more important than just talking. Paul showed his acts of love in order to move the hearts of the Jerusalem church members. To complete his mission, Paul gave his life.

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Fourth, "Be shepherds" (28-31). Paul had many things to say as his final words. But he did not say, "Be nice;" he said to the Ephesian elders, "Be shepherds." Of course Paul knew that shepherd life was not easy. But he encouraged them to be shepherds because Jesus was a good shepherd who laid down his life for sinners. Read verse 28. "Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers. Be shepherds of the church of God, which he bought with his own blood." Paul knew that after he was gone, savage wolves would come in among them and not spare the flock. Paul gave the Ephesian elders an example of how to be shepherds over the flock of God. Look at verse 31. "So be on your guard! Remember that for three years I never stopped warning each of you night and day with tears." Shepherding is different from being an office clerk. A shepherd must keep his flock day and night, not for one or two days, but for at least three years.

Fifth, "Live by the grace of God" (32). Look at verse 32. "Now I commit you to God and to the word of his grace, which can build you up and give you an inheritance among all those who are sanctified." In short, Paul committed the elders to God's grace. What could Paul say to them when he would not see them again? Paul committed them to God's grace through his Son Jesus. God's grace is that he did not punish us because of our sins; instead he gave his Son to save us from our sins (Jn 3:16). God's grace is God's sacrificial love. God's grace is God's forgiving love. There are two kinds of people. One kind lives by emotional feeling. This kind of people live sorrowfully and die sorrowfully (Ro 8:6). The other kind lives by God's grace. Paul encouraged them to live by God's grace so that they might build themselves up in God's grace. Paul prayed that they might live by God's grace and inherit the kingdom of God. When we remain in God's grace, we lose many bananas. But we can have the peace of God. Also, we can forgive others, remembering God's immeasurable grace. Finally, we can inherit the kingdom of God. In his greetings to Christian brethren Paul always used the word "grace." "Grace, mercy and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord" (1 Ti 1:2b). 2 Timothy 2:1 says, "You then, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus." We must help our sheep to build themselves up in God's grace.

Sixth, "It is more blessed to give than to receive" (33-38). Paul was not a salary man; he supported himself as a tentmaker, even though he worked harder than anyone else. Read verses 33-35. Paul supported

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himself because he remembered Jesus' words, "It is more blessed to give than to receive." Let's see how they loved each other through this farewell scene. Look at verses 36-38. "When he had said this, he knelt down with all of them and prayed. They all wept as they embraced him and kissed him. What grieved them most was his statement that they would never see his face again. Then they accompanied him to the ship."

In this passage we learn that we must preach the good news of the kingdom of God. Also we deeply realize that we must be shepherds of our sheep like Paul. Above all, we must build ourselves up in God's grace and inherit the kingdom of God.