Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time*

Loving the Church
Scripture: Selected Scriptures
Code: 80-5

Acts 20:1-17, 36-38

I want you to open your Bible with me as we come to the Word of God...to the 20th chapter of Acts...the book of Acts chapter 20. The Lord has impressed upon my heart...that basically coming off of last week's glorious day together...and considering the fact that we have many dear pastors with us this Lord's day, it might be well to share this passage rather than the one we had intended. And I can confess to you that I'm not really sure why it is the Lord sometimes prompts my heart, but I've learned through the years, from time to time, when He does, that I ought to change and respond to that.

It's not because there's some great homiletics on this passage with which I can entertain you...or some great and profound difficulty which I can clear up for you...or some clever story that I can insert into this particular format. I really don't know why it is that the Spirit of God has impressed this passage on my heart. It may well be for me more than you, to be honest with you. But I...I want to share with you what's here.

And as you look at the 20th chapter of the book of Acts, it doesn't appear to be that profound. In fact, if you were to look, say, at verse 4 and read, "There accompanied him into Asia Sopater of Berea, and of the Thessalonians, Aristarchus and Secundus and Gaius of Derbe, and Timothy, and of Asia, Tychicus and Trophimus." You really couldn't get too thrilled about that. I don't see that it would really change your life. And then if you were to go over to verse 14 and read, "And when we met at Assos, we took him in and came to Mitylene. And we sailed from there and came the next opposite Chios, and the next day we arrived at Samos, and tarried at Trogyllium, and the next day we came to Miletus." And that doesn't do a whole lot for you either.

It's one of these passages that could be easily bypassed as just so much information unrelated to spiritual life. But it isn't. There's a reason why the Spirit of God gives us these simple narrative passages. And one of the primary reasons is to illustrate the great doctrinal concepts. We need the epistles, because we need to understand the flow of logic. We need to understand the clear articulation of great theological truth. But we need the book of Acts, because we need to see it fleshed out. We need to see it lived. It isn't enough for us to have information. We need models, don't we? It's isn't enough for us to know something. We have to see it in action. And so in the book of Acts, we see a man by the name of the Apostle Paul, who's in the process of writing his epistles. And while he's writing them, he's living them.

And as we go to Acts, we move away from the concept to see the practice of that man's life...and he was, indeed, a living epistle. What he taught, he lived. What he called for, he demonstrated. And in this chapter...and we're only going to be able to look primarily at the first half of it...I see Paul's great love for the church...and that's really what's on my heart to speak to you today. To remind myself of my own commitment to demonstrate love to the saints, to remind you, since you have newly affirmed your commitment to this church, to remind you of what it means to love the church. And those of you who have come to visit with us from other churches, to remind you of how it is that your love for the church needs to be manifest...and the implications and results of such love.

Paul said, in writing to the Ephesians, "Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for it that He might sanctify and cleanse it by the...by the washing of water, by the word, that He might purify it, that He might present it to Himself, a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle, any such thing...but that it should be holy and without blemish." In other words, Paul said Christ loved the church, and He loved the church so much, He gave His life for the church in order to make the church pure. He loved the church and not to want the church to be all it could be. To make the church become all it could be. And, as the Apostle Paul lines up behind Christ, we're going to find that he loves the church, too. Jesus loved the church enough to offer redemptive sacrifice for the church. Paul loves the church enough to offer sacrificial service to the church.

And we see in this passage, not so much statements that he loves the church. We can find those all throughout his epistles. He talks about how much he loves the believers, how much he loves the saints, how much he longs for the saints. Those are words. They're important words, but we need to see it in action. And so that's what we're gonna see here. In fact, here, there's no statement about Paul loving the church. It's just all over the page by demonstration...and I really believe this is so important. Now when I say Paul loved the church, I don't mean he loved the organization. I mean he loved the people, for the church is the people. The church is the saints. He loved the people, as Christ loves each and every one in His church. And for Paul, his entire life was one consuming love affair with the church, with the saints of God, to the point even that He gave His life for that.

In Colossians chapter 1, he said, "If...if I, who serve the Lord have to suffer, I will rejoice in my sufferings for you." In other words, "I am willing to pay any price for your sake," he says to the Colossians..."and to even fill up in my own body the affliction intended for Christ, for His body's sake, which is the church...the body of Christ, the church," he says. "I love so much that I am willing to endure anything for you, even accepting afflictions that are intended for Christ, that I must receive as His representative if it means your salvation and your maturity." You see, he really lived out what John said in 1 John 5, when he said, "If you love the Lord, you love whom the Lord loves. If you really love the Lord, you love the people the Lord loves. You can't love the Lord and be indifferent to the people He loves."

And Paul loved the Lord, and he loved his church. He loved the church with his whole heart, and he didn't concern himself with whose church it was in a human sense. It wasn't his church. It never was his church. In fact, in verse 28 of this 20th chapter, he says, "It is the church of God which He purchased with His own blood." There was never any thought in Paul's mind that it's my church, or even that it's our church. The thought was it is the church of God. It is the church of the living God. It is the church of Christ, which He purchased with His own blood. And therein lies the preciousness of it, and therein lies the lovability of it. And he longed to see its people matured and Christ-like and perfected, and that's why he warned every man and taught every man that he may ultimately present every man perfect in Christ Jesus.

And I really think bottom line, in any ministry, it isn't so much great intelligence or great giftedness or great knowledge or great leadership or great boldness or great speaking ability or whatever that makes the difference. The difference is made in great love for Christ and His church. Where that love is great, that ministry is impactful...and Paul writes to the Thessalonians, 1 Thessalonians 2:7 and says, "You remember that when we were with you, we were gentle among you as a nursing mother cherishing her children." And he says, "We loved you so much that we were delighted to share with you not only the Gospel of God but our own lives also, because you became so dear to us. It wasn't just that we said, 'We have a responsibility to give you the message,' it was way more than that. We loved you so much we gave you ourselves.'" It's amazing that he could say that to the Thessalonians since he spent such a brief time there...but he loved the church. He loved the church. And I believe in this passage, Luke, the writer of Acts, passes on to us in the narrative the profound, deep love Paul had for the church and gives to us, to me, to you, a great incentive to love the church in the way that Paul loved the church.

Now, very briefly, the setting for the 20th chapter of Acts is the end of the third of Paul's missionary tours into the Eastern Mediterranean area. He has just concluded a ministry at Ephesus. In fact, it ended in a riot which wasn't uncommon in Paul's ministry, because where there was strong presentation of the Truth of God, there was strong antagonism. And the riot of Ephesus has just ended, and we find him here in the 20th chapter ready to go to Jerusalem. The end of his third missionary journey, and he senses that this is a final farewell. He senses that...that he may never see these beloved people again. And so there's a certain amount of pathos here, a certain amount of sensitivity to their need, a certain generosity and graciousness on the part of Paul that oughta be marked out, as he says farewell to some who have become very beloved to him in his missionary term through Eastern Mediterranean areas.

And so, as he leaves on his way back to Jerusalem, knowing that he may well meet the end of his life there, having already been warned by the Prophet Agabus that he will be bound and tied up and incarcerated. And as he points out in verse 22, he goes "bound in the Spirit to Jerusalem, not sure what's going to befall me there, except that the Holy Spirit witnesses in every city, saying that chains

and afflictions await me." So he knows that he may become a permanent prisoner. He knows this may be the end of it all, and so there is an unusual sensitivity in his heart toward his beloved church...and it isn't just the church in one place, but all around this area.

Now, as we see him move through the first 15 or so verses here, I want you to notice the things that indicate and demonstrate his love for the church. The first one is his affection...his affection, verse 1, "And after the riot was ceased...that is the uproar, the riot that occurred in Ephesus when the gospel was preached and miracles were wrought by God through Paul, and the town turned against that, and his great riot came...when that had all diminished, "Paul called unto him the disciples, all the believers of Ephesus and...it says...embraced them." I just wanna camp, if I might, for a moment on that word "embraced." Because we might go by that thought too fast. That's a very wonderful, wonderful word. It gives us an opportunity to get an insight into the Apostle Paul. The Apostle Paul was not so aloof, was not so above and beyond, was not so authoritative, was not so busy, so indifferent, so anything that he was not available to touch the people in a very intimate way.

Now, the word "embrace" refers to a greeting. It is used really, technically, to express the idea to draw to oneself...to draw to oneself. It became a common way to express affection. It really refers to a kiss on the cheek, an embrace with a kiss on the cheek. Something not common to our culture, but even today common to other cultures. The New Testament calls such a kiss of friendship, such a holy kiss, philama, the kiss of love. And in the early church, it was done between men and men, and men and women. Obviously, I should say men and men, and women and women. Obviously, if it was done between men and women, it could pose some problems. But between men and men, and women and women, it was a demonstrable way to demonstrate affection. Goes all the way back to Genesis 48:10, where you have Jacob and Joseph's son engaging in it. In 1 Samuel 20, isn't it, David and Jonathan. Second Samuel chapter 19, David and Barzillai, David out of gratitude for the provisions that were given to him by that man. And then you come to the New Testament, and in five separate New Testament epistles, we are instructed to greet one another with a kiss of friendship, a holy kiss, a loving embrace, however you wanna translate it.

Paul embraced them. You don't need me to remind you that even psychologists have realized that that kind of touch and that kind of affection has a great affect on people. It tends to break down barriers very rapidly. I remember being gone for a long time and coming back, and I saw one of the men that I work with at the church on the staff, and I hadn't seen in a long time, and I went up to him and just threw my arms around him and hugged him. And, later on, he wrote me a note and said, "Of all the things you've ever done in my life in terms of passing on Biblical truth to me, the greatest thing you ever did was hug me that day. I'll never forget it." Apart from all the lessons, it was the demonstrated affection that indelibly impressed in his mind where my heart was...and that was the way it was with Paul. He loved the church, and there was no sense of aloofness, and there was no bitterness, and there was no animosity that would prevent him from going beyond any trouble to embrace a fellow believer.

There's another word that's used, and that's "kataphilio," and when you add a preposition to a word, you intensify it. This is to kiss affectionately or to embrace fervently, and it was used, for example, by Matthew and Mark to describe Judas' kiss. It wasn't just the normal kiss on the cheek, but it was very aggressive and very affectionate, and it was very hypocritical. And the Prodigal, when he came home in Luke 15 verse 20 and was kissing his father, again kataphiliois used, affectionately, intensely. It is also used in Luke chapter 7 of the woman who repeatedly kissed Jesus' feet, and it is used in Acts 20 verse 37. Look at it. It says, "And they all wept much and fell on Paul's neck and kept on affectionately kissing him." Remarkable, isn't it? The early church affection, they did that to Paul because Paul had taught them that that's what was to be done. It was more than custom. It was genuine love. So Paul gave us a personal demonstration of his affection.

Now, I'm quite sure that every time he saw a believer he didn't go through this...but he did when he sensed that there were times of sorrow or times of need in those sensitive times. And he knew this was a farewell, and he knew this was the time for him to demonstrate affection. This was a time to pull those folks into his own heart and let them know he...how much he loved them, even though he may never see them again. It's that ability to be sensitive to the fact that the people around you need to be loved and need to be appreciated, and the need to know you care, and it isn't just as simple as always something at arm's length. Sometimes it...it needs an embrace. And all of us need to learn that, don't we? And I think Paul was simply doing what the Savior would've done. We don't have a lot of incidents in the New Testament about how Jesus touched His disciples, but one of the beautiful ones that I recall, of course, is at the Lord's table, together, when they were in that Passover, and the Bible says that John was leaning on Jesus' breast.

I mean I guess your reaction to that would be if I was in the presence of Jesus Christ, I'd be afraid to get near Him. But that's not the way He was. He projected such intimacy and tenderness and affection, that John felt completely at ease reclining on His chest. And Paul has that same warmth, that same affection, that same tenderness. He is not distance, and he is not unapproachable. There's no reason to put barriers between us. I don't care whether you're the pastor and the congregation. There's no reason for a barrier there. Intimacy and affection should be able to be demonstrated. It breaks down so many things.

I remember a man in the church who was set against me in the early years here and let it be known. On one occasion I knew of a great need in his life and some hurt in his life, and I went up and just put my arms around him one time and said, "I'm gonna pray for you." Well, that one act, and at the time I was young, I didn't even know what I was doing, except I just felt prompted in my heart to do that, changed everything. Within less than a week, he called me and said, "I wanna meet with you. I wanna share my heart with you." And all that had been built up, broke down immediately. We need that kind of affection, and we see it with Paul in just the simple thought that he got all the disciples together and went through the crowd and embraced them. His unashamed affection shows us his

love for the saints. We need that.

Secondly, his giving, and I...I'm not saying all that can be said about this passage, but just what is essential to our thought. But notice it says after he embraced them, he departed to go to Macedonia. He was in Ephesus. Ephesus is in modern-day Turkey, ancient Asia Minor. Greece or Macedonia is across on a peninsula, and you must cross the Aegean Sea. So to go from Ephesus across to Macedonia, you must take a ship across the Aegean Sea, and that was Paul's plan. Why? Well, notice in verse 2, "And when he had gone over those parts, he went over to Macedonia and went all through that area"...which would be Philippi, Thessalonica, Berea, all around that area. And you say, "Well, I look at that, and I don't know what he did there." I could tell you what he did. What he did there was collect money for himself, to build a retirement home for old apostles? No...no. To get a new wardrobe? No, not even that. To get first-class passage on a ship? No, not that. No, he was collecting money for the poor saints of Jerusalem, wasn't he? He was collecting money for the needy saints of Jerusalem who couldn't buy their daily food and lodging. He realized the deprivation of many of the believers in that large and bustling city of Jerusalem. He realized they had some needs physically, and, even though the Jerusalem church was not his church and, in fact, some of whom had a...a very difficult time dealing with him because he was so much involved in the Gentile world, some of them looking down on him. Some of them sort of unnerved by his dominance in the church, feeling he wasn't as Jewish as he ought to be, and perhaps had betrayed some of the tradition.

So that wasn't his church. He didn't start it. He had never really shepherded that church, and he was a problem for many of the people in that church because of his tremendous Gentile orientation. But, nonetheless, he knew they had a need, and so his whole goal was to collect money to meet the need, that they might have their physical need met. And, in so doing, that there might be a conciliation between the Jew and Gentile in the church of Jesus Christ, because he ministering to the Gentile church, and the Jewish church over here in Jerusalem were so antagonistic just by virtue of history and heritage, that the prayer of our Lord that they may be one in the...in the outward sense had not yet been fulfilled. And he thought, "If I can take the money to them from Gentile churches, perhaps it'll begin a love relationship between Jew and Gentile. If I can get the Gentiles to reach out in love to the Jew, and maybe the Jews will reach back in gratitude to the Gentile and will pull this thing together." And that was in his heart to do that.

And so, as he moves in verse 2, it is to continue the collection of money through the Macedonian region...and he's visiting all the churches there. Back in chapter 19 verse 21, it says he "intended or purposed to go to Macedonia to visit all the churches." We know the reason: to make collections. We know that because, when he wrote 1 Corinthians from Ephesus before he even went over there, in 1 Corinthians 16, he said, "I want you to start collecting the money, so that when I get there, I can get the money and send some guys along with the money. I'll take the money and the men back, so that we not only give them the money, but we give them our own hearts in the men that are gonna be present representing each church."

So, from Ephesus, he had told the Corinthians, "Start the collection...start the collection." Then, as he went to Macedonia and traveled more in there, all the churches, he stopped and wrote the second letter to the Corinthians and reminded them of how much the Macedonians were giving. Remember chapter 8 of 2 Corinthians? That the Macedonians, out of their deep poverty, are giving generously, and so he writes a second letter to the Corinthians and...and says, "I wanna remind you to give generously and, remember, that whatever you give, God will return to you, and remember the example of Christ who, for our sakes, became poor. That we, through His poverty, might be made rich." And he gives them those great truths in 2 Corinthians 8 and 9.

So here he is, concerned about a collection, but not for himself. Not for himself. You say, "What about himself?" Oh, when he wrote 1 Corinthians, he said...you remember in chapter 9 when he wrote it from Ephesus, he said to them, "Look, I have a right to be supported. I have a right to be supported. Soldiers are supported." You remember that little picture he gives there in the 9th chapter? But he says, "I choose to waive the right, so that I don't make the gospel chargeable to anybody. So I choose not to receive anything. So whatever I collect...he says...I'm gonna give away." The heart of giving, his love for the church demonstrated. And would you be reminded of the end of chapter 20 of Acts, he says, in verse 33, "I have coveted no one's silver or gold or clothing. Yes, you, yourselves, know that these hands have ministered unto my necessities and them that were with me. Myself and everybody with me, I've earned their keep. I've worked with my hands." He was a leather worker, a tent maker. He says, "I've worked with my hands for my own resources and the resources of everybody with me, and I have shown you...verse 35...all these things, how that so laboring, you ought to support the weak. I've shown you that, if you love the church, you will work hard to meet the needs of others. You will not be preoccupied at what comes to you." See? Why? Because our Lord Jesus laid it out. "It is more blessed...what?...to give than to receive."

We can't be in the church for what we get. We're in the church for what we give...what we give. We can't be concerned about how much we receive of pay, of benefits, how much accrues to us of prestige or whatever. Paul is utterly abandoned to the needs of the church, to give, to give, to give. Is it little wonder that the churches under his influence were giving churches? And so he was appealing to all these different people to get the money and send it to the needy saints. He had so much to say about giving. He told the Corinthians in his second letter, "Learn this. Learn that anything you give is an investment with God upon which you will receive a dividend." You remember that? Second Corinthians 9, "Sow sparingly, reap sparingly. Sow bountifully, reap bountifully," he said. And he said, "If you give, God will give back to you. Bread for your food, and He will increase your fruits of righteousness." And he also told them that giving was to be sacrificial. They were to give like the Macedonians, who gave generously out of deep poverty. And he also told them that giving was not a matter of what you have, because the Macedonians had very little and gave very much. So don't say, "I don't have much." That isn't the issue. The issue is to give what you have. And he also told them that it's to come from your heart, whatever you choose you give.

In his first letter to the Corinthians, he said, "As everybody purposes in his heart between you and the Lord, whatever you dis...discern God wants you to do, do." And he also said, 2 Corinthians 8, "It isn't law, because God doesn't want you to give out of necessity, because the Lord loves...what kind of a giver?...cheerful giver." A hilarious giver, a joyful giver, and it is to be generous, and it will result in blessing. And so Paul not only taught giving in the church, but he gave...he poured out his gifts to the church. He sets a tremendous example, which we all struggle to live up to. But we know he loved the church because he made such investment in the church. He's been moving around that area for 12 months just collecting money, collecting money. Nothing for himself. Tirelessly, at the risk of his life so that he can send it...not only send it...but take it and bring others with him to give to the poor saints of Jerusalem.

You know, C.S. Lewis once says...once said, "It is easier to be enthusiastic about humanity with a capital H than it is to love individual men and women." I think we understand that. He said, "Loving everybody in a general way may be an excuse for loving nobody in particular." Well, Paul gives us a pattern of loving somebody and attaching that love to an act of sacrificial giving. He gave because it was more blessed to give than receive. That's Biblical love. Biblical love is not an emotion. It's an act of self-sacrifice. So when you ask yourself how it is that we're to love the church, we're to love the church, one, in an unembarrassed affection, and, two, in an unselfish, sacrificial giving. God knows that. He's put it in His Word in precept. He's patterned it in the Apostle Paul.

There's a third thing that I see in Paul here that demonstrates to me his love for the church, and it's just implied here, again. But it sort of oozes out between the lines. It says in verse 2, "And after he had gone over all these parts and had given them much exhortation, he came into Greece." Now Greece is a term referring to Achaia. Achaia was the southern province. Macedonia was the northern province. The two together, along with some others at the top, make up modern Greece. But the southern one was Achaia. The northern one, Macedonia, was Philippi, Thessalonica, Berea. The southern one, Corinth, Athens, Cenchrea, which was the port city for the southern part. So he went down into the south, in the area known as Achaia, or as it's called here, Greece. But before he did that, he gave them much exhortation.

His love for the church, thirdly, is seen in his teaching...his teaching. Paul was a wanted man by this time in most of the world. The growingGreek world was definitely set against him. He was also hounded by a sort of synagogue Ku Klux Klan...fanatics who wanted to do away with him because of their believing he was attacking Judaism. He knew he would not be able long to work openly in the Eastern Mediterranean area. In fact, when he had crossed originally as he wrote 2 Cori...Corinthians 1...when he crossed after writing 1 Corinthians in Ephesus, as he crossed into Macedonia where he wrote...wrote 2 Corinthians, he wrote in chapter 1 verses 8 to 10 that, "I now have upon me the sentence of death." And it may have been that he was sensing that he was closing in on that moment when his life would be taken from him. So he sensed his time is running out. But instead of being

preoccupied about his own safety and about his own security and his own comfort, instead of feeling despair or sorrow or hopelessness or helplessness or wanting everybody to converge on his needs and his future and his safety and his security, he merely goes about doing what he always did without changing. He just went around exhorting, and that is to say he called people to obedience to the truth he preached.

Perfecting the saints with more dedication than ever. Writing epistles. Preaching. Teaching. Calling people to obedience. The trip to Jerusalem, this whole thing takes on the markings of a farewell trip. And even though it may have been in his own mind that he saw this as his swan song, thought it later on turned out that God gave him a few more years, even with that, he never stopped doing what he knew was the priority for him to do. He used his gift, if I can put it that way. He used his gift. He maximized his calling. Kind of like Peter, who says, "I'm not gonna stop putting you in remembrance of these things, so when I'm gone you'll never forget them."

Here's the mark of a caring servant, tirelessly, selflessly, incessantly, he is driven by their needs, not his own. He has no thought for his own. He teaches and teaches and teaches because that's his calling. And when someone says, "You're gonna get thrown in prison." He says in verse 24, "That does not move me. That does not digress my...my thought. That does not divert my track. I go this way because I don't mind that. I know this: I do not count my life here unto myself. All I wanna do is finish my course, and the course has been laid out by what Christ Himself has given me to do, and I wanna be faithful to discharge it."

And he says in verse 25, "I know that you all among whom I have gone preaching the Kingdom of God shall see my face no more. But I testify to you this day, I'm pure from the blood of all men, for I have not shrunk from declaring unto you all the whole counsel of God. You may never see me again, but you're not gonna say, 'He didn't tell us. He didn't tell us. He didn't...he didn't minister. He didn't serve as God called him to serve. He left us halfway.'" You can't say that. He had this tremendous sense of urgency about filling up his ministry. It's what he said in the letter to the Colossians chapter 1, "To fulfill the ministry that God has given me, the stewardship, the orchinamia, the management responsibility." He had this overwhelming sense of responsibility to complete what God had called him to do. Oh, would to God that we all had that.

I remember my grandfather lying on his deathbed saying to my father...my dad said, "Then what do you want?"

He said, "I just wanna preach one more sermon. I just wanna preach one more sermon." He never did. Cancer took him, but that's the spirit. That's the heart of the true servant of God, who's not looking for how soon he can get it over with, but who wants to do it till the day the Lord removes him. So much love. So much urgency to use the gift that God had given him. Maybe yours is the gift of showing mercy. You oughta have the same urgency. Maybe it's the gift of giving. You oughta have

the same urgency. Maybe it's the gift of faith in prayer. You oughta have the same urgency. Maybe it's the gift of teaching or preaching or whatever. So to be consumed by something because you love the Lord and you love His people. He didn't use the church. He loved the church.

And then it says at the end of verse 2 that he came to Greece. Say, what'd he do down there? Well, he went to the house of Gaius, also called Titus Justice, who lived in Corinth. What'd he do there? Well, he got a secretary, which everybody in the ministry needs. Secretary named Tertius. What did he do with him? Dictated Romans...dictated Romans. First Corinthians in Ephesus. Crossed the Aegean Sea. Wandering around the north. Writes 2 Corinthians. Goes down. He's preaching, teaching, exhorting, stops and writes Romans. Ever and always maximizing his gift. And as the Spirit of God poured that truth into his heart, he penned it in obedience. The one who loves the church feeds the flock. The one who loves the church uses his gifts, nourishes, protects, cares. So we see in this man an unembarrassed affection and an utterly unselfish giving and an untiring teaching, untiring use of gifts.

There's a fourth thing, and this kinda ties in with that last one. His persistence...he was such a persistent man. I don't like obstinacy, but I like persistence. The difference is one is non-teachable. The other's teachable. Paul was teachable, and once he got the truth, he was off for good. Persistent. Verse 3, he comes into Corinth and writes Romans there in Achaia and stays three months. And the Jews plot to kill him as he's about to set sail to Syria. He would go down to the little port of Cenchrea. By the way, Phebe was from Cenchrea, and she's the one that delivered the letter to the Romans. So he wrote Romans, gave it to Phebe. She sailed with it out of Cenchrea over to Rome with the Roman epistle. He was gonna get a boat out of Cenchrea and head for Syria, which is on the coast by Palestine, going back to Jerusalem. The Jews found out about it, this sort of synagogue Ku Klux Klan fanatical group, and they wanted to kill him. Probably they'd throw him overboard. So he realized that he couldn't do that, but he was definitely gonna get that money to Jerusalem. Nothing was going to deter him. So he purposed a return through Macedonia. He's gonna go back all the way up north and walk all that long, long journey, clear back up to Philippi to catch another boat outta there, where these Jews aren't gonna be there to bother him.

And the were...they were Jews who had dogged his steps a long time, and the intensity was heightened by a lot of incidents that had been happening. But he was undeterred. He...he wasn't the kind of a runner who gets on the track and says, "What are all these hurdles in this lane? I'm not gonna run till you get rid of 'em." He was a man who saw an obstacle as something to go over, not to make you stop. So his plans were changed. He had hoped to go by the Passover to Jerusalem. Naturally, he wanted to be there for the Passover. But now he couldn't, so he'd have to delay about 50 days and hope to get there by Pentecost 50 days later. And hatred dies hard, and it was hot on his heels, and he knew that. And even as he wrote the Roman letter from Ephesus, he knew the heat was on. "Pray for me," he says in Romans 15:30...31, "that I may be delivered from them that do not believe in Judea. Pray for me, 'cause I know the heat's up."

But his efforts were so persistent. He's so loving and so faithful to the task to get that money to those needy saints, his own comfort is not the issue. He wasn't going there because he was gonna be the speaker at the Jerusalem Congress. He was going there because he had something to give poor folks. But he was undaunted in his persistence. Goes all the way back to Macedonia to go another way, and there accompanied him...verse 4..."into Asia Sopater of Berea, and of the Thessalonians, there was Aristarchus and Secundus, and Gaius of Derbe and Timothy, and of Asia, there was Tychicus and Trophimus, these, going before, tarried for us at Troas."

Remember I told you he was not only collecting money, but he was collecting individuals to go, too, with the money. Sopater, Aristarchus and Secundus came from the Macedonian churches. Gaius and Timothy came from the Galatian churches. Tychicus and Trophimus came from the Asian churches. And the churches in Achaia were represented by Timothy and other unnamed individual mentioned in 2 Corinthians chapter 8. So the unity of the church is visible in all these guys, and they all go to Troas, and they wait for Paul. Well, how could they get there so far ahead of Paul? Well, on the journey, you can be sure Paul was very busy, because everywhere he went where they would care for him, he would no doubt minister to them. And then verse 6, "And we sailed away." We means Luke is back...Luke is back. He probably had been left in Philippi, and now when Paul goes all the way back to the north to Philippi, he meets him again and, together, they sail away from Philippi over to Troas, across the north part of the Aegean Sea to meet the other guys, to get on the trip. It's only a short cruise, really, but it took five days. I don't know why. Must have stopped here and there. I don't know where you'd stop, but...either that or was some rough winds up there...or a leaky boat.

But isn't he persistent...isn't he persistent? And no matter what anybody says to him, he still goes where...where he goes. In verse 19, he says, "I serve the Lord with all humility of mine, with many tears and trials which befell me by the plots of the Jews, but I kept back nothing that was profitable, and I kept going, and I taught you publicly, and I taught you from house to house." In other words, you just can't stop the guy. Persistent...love that. He loved the church. He loved the church so much he sacrificed his own comfort, his own ease. He wore out his body. If they hadn't chopped his head off, he probably would've fallen over dead soon, anyway. He had an unembarrassed affection, unselfish giving, just a unwavering commitment to teach, this persistence.

And we really only have time for one more very briefly. That's his availability. It's a good place to close. Another mark of one who loves the church is availability. We said that last week, didn't we? If you love the church, you'd be available. If you love the church, you serve it. If you love God's people, you'd serve God's people. If you love God, you'd love His people. If you love His people, you'd serve them. Look at his availability, and just notice what he's been through. Twelve months of tiring work, writing epistles, preaching, teaching, exhorting, walking tremendous distances, sailing on...on poor ships in poor conditions. Finally, he comes to Troas, and he meets these men, and he

starts to get the whole plan together, and he stayed seven days. But on the first day of the week, which was the day the Christian community in Troas came together to break bread, Paul preached to them. Can't you know that was a big day for them?

"Guess who's in town? We have a guest preacher, the Apostle Paul." Oh, man, what a thrill. So he preached to them, ready to depart on the next day. Here he was going on the next day on a long ship journey, all the way to Syria and then Jerusalem. And yet he said, "Sure, I'll preach to you." You say, "Well, if he's smart, he'll go in and give 'em a brief homily and get some sleep." No, he continued his speech until midnight. True...that's true spirituality, isn't it? It's not so amazing that he continued till midnight. What is amazing is they were there at midnight, listening. May their tribe increase.

So there they are in Troas, and they're in an upper chamber, which is a private home. Probably whoever was the wealthiest guy had the biggest house and the church, and the upper chamber, it must have been three stories up, because we'll see later that there was a third story loft. So here are the people in an upper chamber and maybe a loft a little above that, as they often did. And it's packed with people, and it's stuffy in there...the winter is over, the warming trend has come, and they'd been there a long time. He probably started a little after sunset, around 6:00 or 7:00 or something like that. He's been talking five hours, preaching...and there were many lamps in the upper chamber, and they were oil lamps, see. And those oil lamps gave off an aroma, a certain fume. And additionally, they absorbed some of the oxygen, and it was already depleted by the pressed crowd that was in that place, and so it got very hot and very stuffy, and the sermon was very long. And that's the indication of verse 8, that there were many lights to let us know why it got so stuffy, and the fire eating up the oxygen and putting off the fumes. "And there sat in a window, a certain young man named Eutychus." Now he was by the window, which is not glass, but just an open hole in the wall, probably maybe could've had a wooden lattice around it...in it I should say. But he got tired, and I think he...it was the heat and the stuffiness, and it says there, "Being fallen into a deep sleep," and it's a present participle, and it gives you the idea that it was a sort of a continual battle that finally he lost. And he just...he tried and tried and tried to listen, and it's comforting to know that somebody even fell asleep in Paul's sermon. You don't know what that does to encourage me.

"And he fell asleep because was Paul was long preaching, and he sank down. He slumped in his sleep and fell out of the window from the third loft and was taken up dead." And don't forget, the one who wrote this was Luke, and he was a doctor, and he checked his pulse, and he was dead. That's a good way to break up a meeting, to be honest with you. Boy, would the critics be on him. "We had this preacher one night, I'm telling you, he preached so long, a guy actually fell out of the window and died. We've got to get a committee to shorten up the sermons."

I don't know if anybody from Eutychus' family sued Paul or not, but we'll go on in the text. Certainly...certainly, this was an extraordinary situation. So what happened in verse 10? "Paul went down and fell on him." So why did he do that? Probably because he recognized that the Old

Testament prophets Elijah and Elisha had done that and raised the dead. The Spirit of God prompted his heart. He did exactly what they had done and literally wrapped himself around them. That's the verb there that's translated embracing, and says, "Trouble not yourselves. His life is in him." And as his body was pressed against the body of young Eutychus, he could feel the heart begin to beat and breath begin to touch his face.

And verse 12 says, "They brought the young man alive and were not a little comforted." What a...what a funny way to say something. I would have said they were ecstatic. The Bible, very underplayed, says, "They were not a little comforted." They were a lot comforted...a lot excited. But what did they do after they raised him from the dead? The only right thing. Verse 11, "They brought him back up, broke bread, and Paul went on, talked a long while, even until the break of day." He...he wasn't through. No. Listen, he raised the guy from the dead at midnight, brought him back up. He had six hours to go...and if you have a resurrection to carry the sermon through, have a resurrection.

Some pastor preached a long sermon, and a lady came to him and said, "You preached too long."

He said, "Well, Paul preached till midnight."

She said, "Yeah, but he can raise the dead, and until you can do that, you better shorten yours up."

So the guy is brought back up, and the message goes on. You know what I love about this? This is all night long. This is a weary man, but this is an available man, is he? He is available. I love that about him. And that's the heart of one who loves the church. God help me to be more available...to be more faithful...to speak the Word as long as there are those who will listen to the Word. But that's not the end of it. Look at verse 13 as we bring it to a conclusion. "And we went ahead to the ship and sailed to Assos...Luke says...there intending to take in Paul...what do you mean? Why wasn't he onboard?...for so had he appointed himself minded to go afoot."

Now wait a minute. What is this? All these guys that have been waiting in Troas listed back in verse 4, along with Luke, got on a boat at Troas and sailed to Assos, 20 to 30 miles away. Paul decided to walk. This guy has preached all night long. You understand? He's probably preached ten hours. He has not slept, and now he walks the distance. Why? Very simple. It was common in those days for anyone taking a journey to be accompanied on the journey by the people he was leaving. That was common courtesy. And if you notice, the end of verse 38, when Paul finally did leave Miletus, the last line is, "And they accompanied him to the ship." It was common courtesy, and Paul was so committed to minister to those people that he said, "Look, they have so much on their heart, you guys take the boat, I'll walk the whole distance with these people." Now that's availability, isn't it? God bless that kind of man. And it may be that you're looking at a ministry and wondering why it isn't all it ought to be...or you're looking at a church and wondering why it isn't all it ought to be, and it might be

not the fact that there's a limit to your giftedness or a limit to the capability or the knowledge or the intelligence. But maybe somewhere along the line, there's not the cultivation of love that brings the kind of result that Paul experienced.

And what is the result? Got to chapter 20 verse 36, "And when he had thus spoken, he knelt down and prayed with them all. They all wept much and fell on Paul's neck and kept on kissing him, sorrowing most of all for the words which he spoke that they should see his face no more." They were all over him, crying, tears running down his neck. They were kissing him. Why? They loved him. Why did they love him? Because what? He loved them. He loved them. For the love of the church.

I hope you love the church. I hope you love the people here. I hope you love them because Christ loves them. God help me to love them more. I...I know you love them, even as Paul said to the Thessalonians, "Yes, I know you're taught of God to love, but I want your love to abound...what?...more and more, more and more so that there might be no question but that we see this as Christ's church. And since we love Him, we love whom He loves, whom He redeems." God help us to love each other in ways that are demonstrated such as in the case of Paul.

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