**The Travels and Epistles of Paul**

(Acts 20:1-6)

By Pastor Ricky Kurth

 A man and his wife were traveling through Florida one day, when they saw a sign saying they were entering the city of Kissimmee. Immediately, they began to argue about how to *pronounce* Kissimmee. He thought it should be pronounced *Kiss-*immee, while she thought the emphasis should be in the last syllable, making it Kissim-*mee.* So they decided to stop for lunch and ask someone. The husband walked up to place his order, and told the girl behind the counter, “My wife and I can’t decide how to pronounce the name of this place. Will you please tell us where we are—and say it nice and slow, so we are able to get it right. The girl shrugged and said, “Sure. *Bur-ger King.”*

Well, speaking of *traveling,* here in Acts 20, the apostle Paul is in the city of Ephesus in Asia, but he’s about to do some traveling of his own. The story begins in verse 1 of our text, where we read:

 **“And after the uproar was ceased, Paul called unto him the disciples, and embraced them, and departed for to go into Macedonia” (Acts 20:1).**

Now the “uproar” that it’s talking about here is the one we saw in the previous chapter, where 25,000 people rushed into the outdoor theater in Ephesus and tried to kill Paul for saying there’s no such thing as gods made with hands. The Ephesians worshipped a god made with hands named Diana, so they wanted to put an end to Paul’s preaching in short order.

 And I don’t know about you, but if something like that happened to me, I think I could use a hug! Evidently Paul could too, for that’s what it means when verse 1 says he “embraced” those disciples after that murderous mob was dismissed. But as you can see in verse 1, those hugs were also *goodbye* hugs, for he was leaving to go into Macedonia.

 But don’t get the wrong idea from that. Paul wasn’t leaving Ephesus because they tried to kill him. As we saw in our last lesson, the townclerk in Ephesus had managed to calm things down, and talk them out of their plans to kill him. So Paul could have stayed and kept preaching if he wanted to.

 The real reason he decided to leave town is that he knew his work in that area was done, as we saw back in Acts 19:1,9,10, where Luke wrote:

 **“Paul...came to Ephesus...disputing daily in the school of...Tyran-nus...two years; *so that all they which dwelt in Asia heard the word of the Lord.”***

Once all Asia heard the word of the Lord, Paul knew his work in Asia was done. And *that’s* why he left Ephesus, as we see a few verses later when it says,

 **“So...Paul purposed in the spirit, when he had passed through Macedonia and Achaia, to go to Jerusalem...” (Acts 19:20,21).**

So Paul was planning to leave Ephesus before that huge uproar even got started. And he knew exactly where he wanted to go, and where he wanted to stop on the way.

 You see, while he was in Ephesus, he’d gotten some reports about the church in Corinth that he’d planted back in Acts 18, and how *carnal* and *sinful* they were. That made him so upset that he fired off that rip-snortin’ epistle to them that we call the Book of I Corinthians. In that epistle, he really *laid into them,* and he *warned* them that he was going to come and straighten them out further *in person,* as he told him in I Corinthians 16:5,8:

 **“Now I will come unto you, *when I shall pass through Macedonia:* for I do pass through Macedonia...*But I will tarry at Ephesus until Pentecost.”***

And that’s where we are here in Acts 20:1, with Paul passing into Macedonia.

 But Paul had *also* heard something about the Corinthians that made him even *angrier.* He heard there were some Corinthians who doubted that he was an apostle. And they were saying that he wouldn’t *dare* come and show his face in person in Corinth. So Paul *also* wrote in that first Corinthian epistle,

 **“Now some are puffed up, as though I would not come to you. *But I will come to you shortly...*and will know, *not the speech of them which are puffed up,* but the power....What will ye? *shall I come unto you with a rod,* or in love, and in the spirit of meekness?” (I Corinthians 4:18,19,21).**

He gave the ones who doubted his apostleship a choice. If they accepted his apostleship, he’d come to them *meekly.* If they didn’t, he planned on coming and using the “rod” of his apostolic authority, and send some of them home to meet their maker, as Peter did with some unsaved people in Acts 5. I mean, he planned to kick butt and take down names, as that old saying goes!

 But after all that big talk on Paul’s part, he didn’t end up *going* to Corinth as he said he would. And the men who doubted his apostleship had *a field day* with that! They started saying things like how Paul would have made a good politician the way he promised he’d do one thing, and then didn’t do it. So Paul wrote them *another* letter in which he said,

**II Corinthians 1:15-17,23; 2:1: *“I was minded to come unto you before...*And to pass by you into Macedonia, *and to come again out of Macedonia unto you*...When I therefore was thus minded, did I use lightness?...I call God for a record upon my soul, that *to spare you* I came not as yet unto Corinth....I determined this with myself, *that I would not come again to you in heaviness”* (II Corinthians 1:15-17,23; 2:1).**

The ones doubting Paul’s apostleship were saying that he didn’t come because he was the kind of guy who made promises lightly, and then didn’t keep them. So imagine their surprise when they received that second letter and heard it was *to spare them* that he didn’t come! Paul was afraid of what he might do to them if he had to “play the heavy,” as they say, and come with a heavy hand of judgment.

 So he did what you and I should do when we get angry. He decided to take some time to cool off before going to Corinth, as we see in verse 2 of our text. After leaving for Macedonia in verse 1, it says,

 **“And when he had gone over those parts, and had given them much exhortation, he came into Greece” (Acts 20:2).**

Now here you have to wonder what kind of sorry Christians they had in Macedonia if they needed “much” exhortation from God’s Word. But Paul had established *two* churches in Macedonia, and both of them were *outstanding* assemblies. The Thessalonian church has been called “the model church,” and the Philippian church was so dear to Paul that they were probably his favorite. But Paul knew that *even these* churches needed exhortation from God’s Word.

 So if you ever get to thinking that *you* don’t need it, you’re thinking more of yourself than the apostle Paul were if he were here. You need to be in church on Sunday and let the Word of God exhort you. I know I say that a lot, but everything God doe sin the dispensation of grace revolves around the local church assembly. And you’re going to find your Christian life is a tough row to hoe without it, as any number of stranded grace believers will tell you.

 But here there is something that you should know about Paul. As he was exhorting the brethren here, he was going through a tough time himself. As he later looked back on that time in his life, he wrote,

 **“...when I came to Troas to preach Christ's gospel, *and a door was opened unto me of the Lord,* I had no rest in my spirit, *because I found not Titus my brother:* but taking my leave of them, *I went from thence into Macedonia”* (II Corinthians 2:12,13).**

And Macedonia is where Paul is doing all this exhorting here! That means he had come to Macedonia feeling so spiritually *broken* that he hadn’t entered an open door to preach. And Paul *never* passed up an open door to preach! He *invented* doors when he had to! But he was evidently so troubled here that he wasn’t his usual apostolic self.

 And do you know what? I’m no better than Paul. There are times when I preach or write articles to exhort God’s people that I have a lot of things going on in my own personal life, just as Paul did. When that happens, I do what Paul did and just continue to serve the Lord. Paul knew that that’s the best way to deal with *all* of life’s troubles, and I know it, and now you do too.

 You say, “How troubled could he have been? He was the great apostle Paul, after all.” Well, later in that same epistle he wrote,

 **“...when we were come into Macedonia, our flesh had no rest, *but we were troubled on every side;* without were fightings, *within were fears”* (II Corinthians 7:5).**

Do you ever feel that way? Troubled on every side? Without are fightings in your family, fightings at work, fightings in your country? Within are fears of what all that fighting will *do* to your family, your job, and your country? Do you know where to look for comfort? To the Lord, of course! But do you know where to *find* the Lord’s comfort in the dispensation of grace? If you’re not sure, look where Paul found it in the next verse of that epistle:

 **“Nevertheless God, that comforteth those that are cast down, *comforted us by the coming of Titus”* (II Corinthians 7:6).**

Paul found God’s comfort in the fellowship of his coworker Titus. And that’s *another* reason you need to be in church. You need the fellowship of others just as much as you need the exhortation from God’s Word that you get in church. Don’t be looking to God to comfort you, and then ignore the place where you’re most likely to *find* His comfort.

 But the coming of Titus wasn’t the only thing that comforted Paul that day, as he went on to say in that passage:

 ***“And not by his coming only,* but by the consolation wherewith *he* was comforted *in you,* when he told us your earnest desire, your mourning, your fervent mind toward me; *so that I rejoiced the more”* (II Corinthians 7:7).**

Paul was *also* comforted by the comfort Titus brought him from Corinth. You see, it was here in Macedonia that Titus told Paul how *well* the Corithians took it when they read that rip-snortin’ first epistle. They took it like *men,* and “mourned” over their sin, and fervently *loved him* for the shellacking he had given them.

 And then Paul told them something that shows you that, in many ways, he was just like you and me. He said in II Corinthians 7:8,

 **“For though I made you sorry with a letter, I do not repent, *though I did repent.”***

Here Paul admits that after he wrote that first epistle, threatening to come and spank them with that rod, he *repented* that he had written it. After he wrote it, he did what I often find myself doing. He began to second-guess himself.

 How about you? Did you ever hit “Send” on an email, and then later think to yourself, “I wish I hadn’t said the things I said in that letter!” It makes me feel good to know that even the great Paul wasn’t always sure he did the right thing, the way I myself often feel.

 But sometimes our regrets turn out all right, as we know they did for Paul here, for he finished that passage by saying,

 **“I rejoiced...for I perceive that the same epistle hath made you sorry....Now I rejoice, not that ye were made sorry, *but that ye sorrowed to repentance:* for ye were made sorry after a godly manner, *that ye might receive damage by us in nothing”* (II Corinthians 7:7-9).**

As you can see, Paul was fixin’ to inflict some *damage* on them with that rod, but changed his mind when he heard they repented.

 Now the Corinthians still had a long way to go spiritually at this point. But they had shown a willingness to change. And that’s really all God expects of you, no matter where you’re at in your spiritual life this morning.

 Now before we read on to verse 3 of our text, I need to point out that it was from here in Macedonia that Paul *wrote* that second epistle to the Corinthians. We know this because *in* that epistle, he wrote:

 **“...when we were come *into Macedonia...*we do you to wit of the grace of God bestowed on the churches *of Macedonia...*I boast of you *to them of Macedonia...*if they of Macedonia come with me...” (II Corinthians 7:5; 8:1; 9:2,4).**

And the reason you should *care* about where II Corinthians was written, the reason you should care how the things we’re reading here in Acts jives with what we read in Paul’s epistles, is that it proves that the Bible is the Word of God, the way all these things mesh together and line up.

 Oh, sure, you have to piece things together, as we’re doing here, but that’s actually even *more* proof that the Bible was written by God. When the police question two suspects, if their stories don’t jive, they know they’re lying, of course. But if they jive *too easily,* they immediately suspect what they call *collusion.* That is, they know that the suspects got together to *rehearse* their stories to *make* their stories match easily.

 And the fact that these comparisons between Acts and Paul’s epistles are *not* easy to piece together is proof that the stories are true, and that the Bible writers *didn’t* get together to make them easily mesh.

 Well, after Paul wrote II Corinthians from Macedonia, verse 2 says he went to Greece to make that visit he promised the Corinthians. Corinth was located in the Achaian section of Greece. Verse 3 then says,

 **“And there abode three months. And when the Jews laid wait for him, as he was about to sail into Syria, he purposed to return through Macedonia” (Acts 20:3).**

Now if you’ve ever wondered how long it took Paul to write one of these epistles we’ve been talking about, we know it didn’t take longer than three months, for it was during Paul’s three months in Greece that he wrote The Epistle to the Romans. We know that because at the end of that epistle, he wrote,

 ***“Gaius mine host...*saluteth you...” (Romans 16:3).**

We know that Gaius was a Corinthian, for Paul wrote to the Corinthians and said,

 **“I thank God that I baptized none *of you,* but...*Gaius”* (I Corinthians 1:14).**

Gaius was one of the Corinthians, and he hosted Paul for three months while he wrote Romans. And here you thought *you* had houseguests that didn’t seem to ever want to leave!

 But as Satan watched Romans being written, he knew he had to try to *stop it.* So it’s not surprising to read in verse 3 that the Jews “laid wait” for him. That means they set a trap to try to *kill* him. But Paul got wind of it, and managed to escape them.

 Now the way that he escaped them is different than the way God came to his rescue when he was in jail in Philippi. There, God sent an earthquake to spring the apostle out of prison. But God was slowly phasing out the dispensation of miracles. And here, Paul was saved from this murderous plot by thinking the situation through as an adult son, and rescuing *himself.*

How? Well, did you notice verse 3 says that Paul was about to sailto *Syria,* but after he heard about this assassination plan, he purposed to go to Macedonia instead. Evidently he knew the Jews waiting for him with a trap by the ship, so he took a land route to Macedonia instead.

 And now that the dispensation of miracles is fully past, we have to save ourselves form difficult situations in the same way Paul did here, by thinking things through as adult sons and rescuing ourselves. Although sometimes it helps to do what the Beatles said to do, and get by with a little help from your friends at church!

 But after this attempt on his life, Paul made *another* smart adult son decision. He decided not to *continue* his travels without some *bodyguards.* Verse 4 of Acts 20 says,

 **“And there accompanied him into Asia Sopater of Berea; and of the Thessalonians, Aristarchus and Secundus; and Gaius of Derbe, and Timotheus; and of Asia, Tychicus and Trophimus” (Acts 20:4).**

Now did you notice that those bodyguards came from a number of different places? That’s because Paul was carrying *money* from those places, and they were *also* there to guard *the money!*

 And I’m talking about a *lot* of money. Money Paul collected to give to the saints he mentions in Romans 15:26:

 **“...the poor saints which are at Jerusalem.”**

 You’ll remember that at Pentecost, we read,

 **“...in Jerusalem...they were all filled with the Holy Ghost... *Neither was there any among them that lacked:* foras many as were possessors of lands or houses sold them, and brought the prices of the things that were sold...*and distribution was made unto every man according as he had need”* (Acts 1:8; 2:4; 4:34,35).**

God miraculously empowered those Jewish kingdom saints to live *unselfishly* for each other to help them get through the Tribulation, when believers won’t be able to buy or sell without the mark of the beast. With supernatural enabling like that, they didn’t lack for a thing!

 But when the Jews rejected the kingdom, God withdrew that enabling Spirit, and suddenly the saints in Jerusalem who knew no lack became the *poor* saints in Jerusalem. And since they became poor due to no fault of their own, God made sure they got a little help from *their* friends in Galatians 2:9,10, where Paul wrote,

 **“James, Cephas, and John...gave to me and Barnabas the right hands of fellowship; *that we...should remember the poor;* the same which I also was forward to do.”**

 Those apostles asked Paul to help those poor saints, and Paul was forward to do that by going around taking up *collections* in his Gentile churches. He then went and *delivered* the proceeds of those collections to the believers in Jerusalem, as he explained when he told the Romans,

 **“...now I go unto Jerusalem *to minister unto the saints.* For it hath pleased them of Macedonia and Achaia *to make a certain contribution* for the poor saints which are at Jerusalem” (Romans 15:25,26).**

Paul collected money from the saints in the Achaian section of Greece and Macedonia, and was now heading to Jerusalem to give it to those poor saints here in Acts 20.

 And what does Paul teach us about how churches should handle the money they collect? It you forgot, we find out when we read what happened when Paul sent Titus to pick up the money that the Corinthians had collected in II Corinthians 8:16-19:

 **“Titus...went unto you. *And we have sent with him the brother, whose praise is in the gospel throughout all the churches;* And not that only, *but who was also chosen of the churches to travel with us with this grace*...”**

When Paul sent Titus to collect their money, he chose a man to go with him to make sure Titus wasn’t tempted to abscond with all that cash. And not just any man! He sent a man who it says the churches *also* chose to go with him. That means he was a man who was trusted by both Paul *and* the churches.

 And we know why he sent that man, for he went on to say,

 **“Avoiding this, that no man should blame us in this abundance which is administered by us: *Providing for honest things,* not only in the sight of the Lord, *but also in the sight of men.* And we have sent with them our brother, *whom we have oftentimes proved diligent in many things...”* (II Corinthians 8:20-22).**

Paul sent that man with Titus to keep things honest in the sight of men, saved and unsaved men. And he sent *another* man who was known for his diligence in other things as well.

 This is why we print a financial statement every year at the church that I pastor, so that saved men in our church will know we spent the Lord’s money honestly. And if our books are ever audited, *unsaved* men will know it too.

 This is important, for when unbelievers hear that a church got caught being dishonest with money, they use it to attack the Lord’s work, and discredit Christianity. And some of them use it as an excuse not to listen to the gospel of salvation that churches try to share with them. So churches who misuse money are going to have an awful lot to answer for at the Judgment Seat of Christ, where our service for the Lord will be judged.

 I know a grace church where the treasurer embezzled the church’s money right before the turn of the century, thinking that all the bank’s computers would fail and wipe out all trace of what he did in that y2k scare. Remember that? Well, he went to jail, and the church’s reputation was damaged. And I don’t have to tell you, some people never forget things like that.

 This was so important that Paul expressed the same thought in I Corinthians 16:1-3, where he told the Corinthians:

 ***“...concerning the collection for the saints,* as I have given order to the churches of Galatia...do ye. Upon the first day of the week let every one of you lay by him in store, as God hath prospered him....And when I come, *whomsoever ye shall approve by your letters, them will I send to bring your liberality unto Jerusalem”* (I Corinthians 16:1-3).**

 Paul allowed some of the Corinthians to go with the money they collected because he knew that believers aren’t just concerned that their money will be stolen. He knew they also want to make sure that it is spent in the way they were told it would be spent.

 I get a lot of emails at Berean Bible Society from believers asking us to give them money, and often the reason they’re asking sounds like a very good and worthy cause. However, I always explain that God’s people give BBS money to spend on promoting the grace message, and we dare not betray their trust by spending it on something else.

 And all of these bodyguards from all those different places in verse 4 of our text were similarly there to make sure that the money they collected for the poor saints at Jerusalem actually *got* to those saints, *and* to help safeguard the money.

 You see, it was well known that Paul was taking up that collection. You can’t keep something like that a secret. That’s why, when Paul was listing all the dangers he faced in the ministry, he mentioned “perils of robbers” (II Cor. 11:26). I doubt he was worried that robbers would jump him in a dark alley and take *his* money. He’d probably *give* a robber his money as he gave him the gospel! No, Paul was concerned that robbers would take *the Lord’s* money, so he traveled with those bodyguards.

 Well, we now that it is here in the Book of Acts that Luke, who wrote Acts, joined up with Paul and his entourage, for in the final verse of our text we read,

 **“These going before tarried for us at Troas” (Acts 20:5).**

The “us” there means that Luke was waiting for Paul in Troas, so maybe Paul needed some medical attention from Dr. Luke.

 Or maybe he just needed the comfort of another old friend—the kind you’ll find at the church I pastor, or any sound grace church where the Pauline virtues of faith, hope and love are found.