

PAUL: A MODEL OF ENCOURAGEMENT
ACTS 20:1-12

INTRODUCTION AND REVIEW

Benjamin West (PROJECTOR ON--- BENJAMIN WEST) was one of the most famous of the early American painters, although he spent most of his adult life in England. Part of the incentive for remaining in England was the fact that he was commissioned by King George III to paint the royal family.

His most famous work was probably "The Death of General Wolfe" (THE DEATH OF GENERAL WOLFE), which portrayed the death of this British general in the victory over the French in the Battle of Quebec in 1759. It was the most reproduced work of art in eighteenth century England.

Benjamin West attributed his start in art to an incident that happened when he was very young. (PROJECTOR OFF) One day when his mother was out of the house, he decided to paint a picture of his sister. He got out some bottles of ink that he found around the house and started in. Before long he had a real mess on his hands. His mother came home to find ink all over the place. But instead of getting mad at her son, she picked up his picture and said, "**What a beautiful picture of your sister!**" Then she planted a big kiss on his cheek. Benjamin West later said, "**With that kiss I became a painter.**"

All of us need positive encouragement. Contrast Benjamin West's experience with a discovery that Bill Glass once made. (BILL GLASS) Bill Glass played football for the Cleveland Browns. In his post-football life he became an evangelist and spoke often in prisons. On one occasion he asked a crowd of about a thousand inmates how many of them had parents who told them that they would end up in prison one day. According to Bill Glass almost all of the inmates raised their hands. (PROJECTOR OFF)

One of the first things that attracted me to my wife was that she had a gift of encouragement. She seemed to have this knack for encouraging other people, and encouraging me. Romans #12 v. 8 describes encouragement as one of the gifts of the Holy Spirit. We may not all have that same gift. But we all can develop greater skill at being encouragers. We need more encouragers. The passage before us today and the example of the Apostle Paul provide us with helpful tips on how to be better encouragers.

I.

In v. 1 of Acts #20 we are going to look at EPHESUS: ENCOURAGEMENT IN PERSECUTION. (PROJECTOR ON--- I. EPHESUS: ENCOURAGEMENT IN PERSECUTION) We have been studying the third missionary journey of the Apostle

Paul. The time setting is the mid-fifties AD. Paul spent the biggest chunk of time during this trip at the city of Ephesus in the Roman province of Asia. (EPHESUS MAP)

We saw last time, two weeks ago, that he was already planning to leave when a riot broke out. Some of the tradesmen had been losing money from a decline in sales of religious objects to visitors coming to see the famous temple of Artemis. It seems that a lot of people were becoming Christians and weren't buying religious idols any more. So the silversmiths stirred up a riot and hauled two of Paul's missionary friends into the town theater. (EPHESUS THEATER) The instigators could not find Paul. The meeting was chaotic. Finally the town clerk managed to get the attention of the crowd and dismissed the meeting, defending Paul and his Christian friends, warning that their Roman overlords might not be happy to hear about this riot.

Paul may have moved along a little faster than he otherwise would have. Perhaps the Christians feared for his safety and encouraged him to leave also. In any event v. 1 tells us that after the uproar had died down, Paul got the Christians together and "encouraged" them.

The original Greek word that Paul used was *parakaleo*, (PARAKALEO) which literally means "to call in." Our English versions of the New Testament translate the word sometimes as "encourage," sometimes as "comfort," and sometimes as "exhort." As it is used in the New Testament it can be defined as **"stimulation to right living, especially in the face of adversity."** Encouragement in the way that the Biblical writers use the term does not convey the attitude: "That's OK. It doesn't matter. Everything is excusable." Biblical encouragement is based on right doctrine and it focuses on right behavior. It has to do with stimulation to right behavior, recognizing a situation of adversity and realizing the Christians serve a sovereign God of grace as well as of power. (PROJECTOR OFF)

We are not specifically told what Paul said to the Ephesian Christians. Given what recently happened with the riot at Ephesus the Apostle probably encouraged and exhorted the Christians to hang in there, even though they were taking flack from the Ephesian businessmen who were losing business and from other idol worshippers who resented religious people who worshipped an invisible God.

The persecution that we face in our society is usually less intense than what the Ephesian Christians faced. But there is the incident involving Charlie Kirk which reminds us of the anger that some of our opponents have. We do get criticism from secularists when we speak out against abortion and gambling and sexual immorality and transgenderism. Sometimes our opponents are motivated by economic reasons whereby their pocketbook could be threatened if Christians get their way. Sometimes they just resent being told that we are accountable to a sovereign God and that certain behaviors are contrary to His will.

There are some of us who take flack in our work for the Christian standards and values that we hold dear. There are a few of us in the congregation who get considerable

opposition from our families, or extended families, or friends for our Christian style of life. For those of us in these situations encouragement is important. We need support from other believers. Even though we may know the truth in our heads about God's view of our circumstances, we benefit from being reminded of it by fellow believers.

II.

In the events described in v. 2 I suspect that there was a slightly different form of encouragement in which the Apostle Paul was engaged. (PROJECTOR ON--- MACEDONIA: ENCOURAGEMENT IN GROWTH) I have labeled it MACEDONIA: ENCOURAGEMENT IN GROWTH. At the end of v. 1 the writer Luke says that Paul left for Macedonia, which is where Thessalonica and Berea and Philippi were located. (MACEDONIA MAP) Then v. 2 says, **"When he had gone through those regions and had given them much encouragement, he came to Greece."**

In his Second Epistle to the Corinthians Paul is probably referring to this time setting when he says in #2 vv. 12 & 13 (2 CORINTHIANS 2:12), **"When I came to Troas to preach the gospel of Christ, even though a door was opened for me in the Lord, (2 CORINTHIANS 2:13) my spirit was not at rest because I did not find my brother Titus there. So I took leave of them and went on to Macedonia."** Putting some other clues together it seems that Paul was especially concerned about problems in the church at Corinth. So he sent his associate Titus to Corinth to see if he could help straighten things out. (MACEDONIA MAP) For some reason Paul was expecting that Titus might meet him in Troas. When Titus didn't show up, Paul went ahead to Macedonia. Probably he met up with Titus in Philippi. From there he wrote Second Corinthians.

In going through these districts of Macedonia, as Luke describes it in v. 2 of our passage, Paul was no doubt revisiting churches that he had established on his second missionary journey. He was stopping at Philippi and Thessalonica and Berea. Luke says that Paul was giving these Christians much exhortation, much encouragement. Paul was not just a fly-by-night evangelist who blew into a town, did his preaching, and then took off again without establishing any close ties with people who responded. Paul developed close relationships with these Christians. He lived among them. He later wrote to them. He prayed for them. He revisited them when he had the opportunity.

It seems that these churches in Macedonia were doing well spiritually. They didn't have any major conflicts. (PROJECTOR OFF) They were growing in size and maturity. They had some opposition, but they were persevering in the faith. Still the Christians there needed encouragement. They needed encouragement in growth. They didn't have the New Testament yet to serve as a manual of the Christian life. They had practical and doctrinal questions, and there were new Christians who continued to be added to their numbers. Their need was for encouragement in growth.

That encouragement in growth is something that all of us need today. That need is perhaps most evident in newer Christians. It is just a natural thing for those of us in that situation to have lots of questions and perhaps a few doubts and certainly some rough

edges that need work. There is a need for Biblical encouragement. We need to be on the lookout to encourage those especially who are newer in the faith.

III.

Verse 3 then focuses on what happened in "Greece," which was the common term for the Roman province of Achaia. (PROJECTOR ON--- ACHAIA: ENCOURAGEMENT IN DIVISION) Thus our subject here will be ACHAIA: ENCOURAGEMENT IN DIVISION. The only church that we know with certainty existed at this time in Achaia was at Corinth. Paul had also been in Athens for a little while. But only a few people had responded to his preaching there. Whether a church got off the ground there at this time, we don't know. But we do know from the two New Testament letters to the Corinthians and from references in Acts that Paul gave a lot of attention to the church at Corinth. So probably Paul spent all or most of his time during this part of his journey at Corinth. The first part of v. 3 indicates that he spent three months in Achaia.

Some weeks ago we looked at Paul's first trip to Corinth, and I pointed out that the city had the reputation for being one of the wildest, if not the wildest, city in all of the Roman Empire. (CORINTH ANCIENT) It was a port city. So there were lots of seamen in town, and there were many laborers pulling small boats across the isthmus from one sea to the other and carrying goods across from the bigger boats. Then, too, Corinth was the center of worship for the Greek goddess of love, Aphrodite. So Corinth was sin city. (PROJECTOR OFF)

But often the most blatant sinners are the most open to the gospel. The opponents of Jesus called Him "the friend of sinners," because there were prostitutes and tax collectors who were hanging out with Him. By contrast it was the religious intellectuals who were most vicious in their opposition to Jesus. In Achaia it was at Athens, the center of the cultural and intellectual world, where Paul got his coldest reception. It is often intellectuals who are most resistant to the gospel.

So at Corinth many had become followers of Jesus. But there is a special difficulty that comes from dealing with Christians who come from difficult backgrounds. They bring baggage into the Christian life. They have behavior patterns and thinking patterns that usually take a while to overcome. In trusting in Jesus as one's Savior there is instant forgiveness, and there is the granting of eternal life, and there is coming of the Holy Spirit into the individual's life to give him or her new power. But the Christian life is also a growth process. In coming to Christ we do not become instantly mature and put together. With these Christians from wild backgrounds at Corinth there was a lot of maturing that had to be done. Understandably there were disputes and arguments and divisions among these new Christians.

Thus in vv. 10 & 11 of 1 Corinthians #1 (PROJECTOR ON--- 1 CORINTHIANS 1:10) Paul says, **"I appeal to you, brothers, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree, and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be united in the same mind and the same judgment. (1 CORINTHIANS 1:11) For it has been reported to me by Chloe's people that there is quarreling among you, my**

brothers.” Typically divisions and cliques and arguments among Christians are reflections of other problems. In reading through 1 Corinthians you will thus find that there were moral problems and pride problems and spiritual problems with which these Christians were struggling. (PROJECTOR OFF)

Jesus made it plain that unity among His followers is important to Him and important to our impact upon the world. This unity needs to be encouraged. Paul's example with the Corinthian Christians reminds us that we need to work at being people who encourage unity, especially among fellow believers.

The problem is that it is easy to become negative and cynical and critical. There are ways of being about people, even mature Christians, that can bug us and bother us. It is tempting to complain about people to other people. When somebody hurts us, it is easier to talk about that person to others rather than to do the right thing and seek reconciliation with the offending party.

The Biblical principle is that if we are upset with someone, we either need to drop the issue and forgive the person, or we need to go and talk to that person. We shouldn't really be complaining about other people. Every church needs Christians who are encouragers, especially encouragers who promote the unity of the church. That encouragement may take the form of exhortation to be careful about what we say to and about others and the attitude that we have.

Verse 3 also indicates that Paul was planning on heading to Syria at the end of this three month period in Achaia. He was going to take a ship, but he found out about a plot that somebody had formed against him. Perhaps some of the people at Corinth who hated his message were planning on killing him on the ship and dumping his body overboard. Anyway he changed his travel plans and began his trip back east by going overland through Macedonia.

IV.

In vv. 4-6 then we come to the subject of JERUSALEM: ENCOURAGEMENT IN MATERIAL NEED. (PROJECTOR ON--- IV. JERUSALEM: ENCOURAGEMENT...)

Luke writes, **“Sopater the Berean, son of Pyrrhus, accompanied him; and of the Thessalonians, Aristarchus and Secundus; and Gaius of Derbe, and Timothy; and the Asians, Tychicus and Trophimus. 5 These went on ahead and were waiting for us at Troas, 6 but we sailed away from Philippi after the days of Unleavened Bread, and in five days we came to them at Troas, where we stayed for seven days.”**

From these verses alone we might not be clued in to what was going on. But by reading the Corinthian letters we can figure out that these guys were taking money to Jerusalem for the Christians there. A famine was under way in Israel, and Jews who had become followers of Jesus had been cut off from the usual sources of material support that might be available through the synagogues and other religious institutions. Paul was aware of this need, and he was supervising a collection that was being taken up from

Christians in this part of the world. The money would help the Jewish Christians in Israel and it would also serve to promote the unity of the whole church, in that it was mostly Gentile churches in the west who were supporting mostly Jewish churches in the east.

The different men mentioned in v. 4 were apparently representatives of the various churches throughout the region. (THIRD MISSIONARY JOURNEY RETURN) Notice also that the personal pronoun “us” appears in v. 5. Probably Luke joined Paul when he got to Philippi on his way to Troas. We noted some weeks ago that our author Luke was probably from Philippi. He may have served as the representative of the church at Philippi for this famine relief effort. You will also notice in the remainder of this book that there are more details given than in other parts of Acts. Luke in earlier parts of the book was relying on information received from other sources. The rest of this book seems to be his eyewitness account of what happened.

There were a number of reasons for bringing these different men along on the trip to Jerusalem. For one thing it insured the integrity of the finances. There wouldn't be any doubts about the handling of the money when there were representatives of the local churches along. Then also they served to protect the money. They were carrying a lot of cash. Back in that time they didn't have personal checks or cashiers' checks or travelers' checks. They had coins. To avoid dangers of theft and robbery it was helpful to have a number of men along to guard the purse. These representatives also had the opportunity to receive additional training and teaching by just being with the Apostle Paul. Also in getting to Jerusalem they would participate in strengthening ties between the western and eastern branches of the church by having personal contact with the leaders of the church in the Jerusalem area.

When the plot to hurt Paul was revealed, it seems that most of the representatives continued on by boat to Troas. Paul went overland through Macedonia. When he got to Philippi, it seems that he picked up Luke. Together they went on to Troas.
(PROJECTOR OFF)

In the end this famine relief trip must have been a great encouragement to the Christians in Jerusalem. They had a material need, and people whom they had never met and who mostly came from a different ethnic background helped meet that need.

There are people in the sphere of influence of many of us who have tangible, material needs. One way that we can be an encourager to them is to help them out materially. It is a great thing to do that individually, maybe even without the recipient knowing that it is you doing the giving. As a church we try to do that with people in our midst. We have a deacons' fund that we use for that purpose. There is a slot on the stand in the foyer that is marked “deacons' fund.” You can leave contributions there any time that you would like.

V.

Finally we come to TROAS: ENCOURAGEMENT IN DEATH (PROJECTOR ON--- V. TROAS: ENCOURAGEMENT...), which is the subject of vv. 7-12. In v. 7 we read, “On

the first day of the week, when we were gathered together to break bread, Paul talked with them, intending to depart on the next day, and he prolonged his speech until midnight." Many Christians point to this meeting on Sunday night as an indication that churches at this time had already begun the habit of meeting on Sundays for worship. Probably the reference to breaking bread is referring to a celebration of the Lord's Supper.

We need to be cautious about reading too much into this verse. For this meeting on Sunday night could also be related to the fact that it was the last chance for the church to meet with the Apostle Paul. He was leaving the next day. A bit stronger indication that the church was meeting on Sundays is probably 1 Corinthians #16 vv. 1 & 2 (CORINTHIANS 16:1), which say, **"Now concerning the collection for the saints: as I directed the churches of Galatia, so you also are to do. (1 CORINTHIANS 16:2) On the first day of every week, each of you is to put something aside and store it up, as he may prosper, so that there will be no collecting when I come."** Why were they taking up collections on Sunday? It was probably that Sundays were the days when the church met as a whole. This was the day on which the Lord rose from the dead. This was the day on which the Holy Spirit came upon the Christians at Pentecost.

We should also keep in mind that the New Testament nowhere commands that Sunday is the day upon which Christians should meet. In fact Paul says in Romans 14 v. 5 (ROMANS 14:5), **"One person esteems one day as better than another, while another esteems all days alike. Each one should be fully convinced in his own mind."** There is a long tradition of having Christians meet on Sunday. It's a good day on which to meet. But we should not look at Sunday in quite the same way as the Sabbath was to be viewed in Old Testament times. As Christians we are commanded to meet together regularly. There is no specific command to do it on Sundays. The Old Testament gives us a good model about having a day of rest. But we do not have the same New Testament rules about how Sunday should be treated in the way that Jews did in the Old Testament about the Sabbath. (PROJECTOR OFF)

Paul had been through Troas before, but he had not been responsible for starting the church there. The Christians of the city, however, must have known of Paul, and the opportunity to have the apostle with them for a week was one not to be passed up. Although it had probably been a working day for most of the Christians, they were eager to come at night and spend as much time as they could soaking up instruction and encouragement from him.

It was a long meeting, and we find in v. 9 that there was a young man, perhaps a teenager, who was sitting on the window sill in this third floor room who started to nod off to sleep. There is a source of encouragement here for us pastors. Most of us have parishioners who nod off during their sermons from time to time--- of course no one in our congregation. If even the great Apostle Paul had that happen to him, we shouldn't feel so bad.

Some of the older commentators who talk about this passage see what happened to the young man as a sign of judgment on the fellow for not paying attention and a warning to all church goers about God's view of people who fall asleep in church services. The text contains no such judgment. We need to keep in mind that this fellow had perhaps worked a full day. It was midnight. Paul had probably talked already for a couple of hours. So I can understand how anybody could have fallen asleep.

Certainly what happened seemed to be tragic at the time. What a terrible thing to have someone die while attending a church meeting! What could have been forever a positive memorable meeting with the apostle of Christ was going to be colored by the fact that one of their members died on that last evening with Paul. Keep in mind also that the author Luke was a physician by trade. So when it says in v. 9 that this poor fellow Eutychus was picked up dead, it seems to me that we need to accept the idea that he had indeed died. Dr. Luke no doubt would have been called upon to examine the boy. In his professional judgment he was dead.

But v. 10 says, **"But Paul went down and bent over him, and taking him in his arms, said, 'Do not be alarmed, for his life is in him.'"** Paul, with the power of the Holy Spirit, brought this guy back from death to life. Do you suppose this had something to do with why the meeting went on for the rest of the night? If I saw somebody brought back from the dead like that, I think that I would have trouble getting to sleep that night.

Eutychus is a name that at least some scholars say was common among slaves in the Roman Empire. The name literally means "fortunate." Indeed this Eutychus was fortunate.

Still we might have questions about this miracle. It's the only time in the Biblical account that Paul is said to have been involved in bringing someone back from the dead. Why this guy? Why now? Why don't things like that happen today? We can't perhaps answer these questions definitively. But certainly we know that Paul was given amazing power by God at certain times. This was a time that needed it. Then also it may be helpful to keep in mind that there were two occasions in which Jesus raised someone from the dead. One was the famous story recorded in the Gospel of John involving Lazarus. The other was the incident that Luke recorded in his gospel involving the son of the widow from Nain. Luke also says in Acts 8:36 that Peter had restored a woman named Dorcas to life after she had died. Now we have an incident involving Paul.

Several weeks ago I pointed out that Luke records in Acts a number of incidents from the life of Paul that parallel experiences that Peter had. My suspicion is that Luke was showing that Paul was just as much an apostle as Peter was. Miracles like this affirmed in a public way the apostolic authority of Peter and Paul. They were a way of affirming to this early church that did not have a New Testament yet that they needed to listen to and obey what these guys were saying.

Notice then the last verse. Verse 12 says, **"And they took the youth away alive, and were not a little comforted."** This word "comforted" is our Greek word *parakaleo*. It is

the same word that was translated as “encouraged” in v. 1 and in its noun form “encouragement” in v. 2. In this situation of tragedy and death Paul was again acting as an encourager. He was bringing comfort to a family and to a body of Christians who had just seen one of their members die.

This is not the normal form that encouragement takes in situations of death. We don’t even know of another instance where Paul exhibited this kind of power. But Paul wrote about death in other places, and he told Christians about what they have to look forward to after physical death. He wrote to his Christian friends in Philippi, **“For to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain.”** In another place he said, **“To be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord.”**

The church of Christ needs more Christians who know how to be encouragers in situations of death. It’s my perception that people often don’t know quite what to say or do when a friend loses a loved one in death. Because they don’t know what to say and because they fear that they might say something wrong, the tendency is often to withdraw. But that isn’t what a good encourager should do. If there is ever a situation where a friend needs to draw near, it is in situations of death. The truth is that one really does not need to say much. Just be there. It is fine to say that if you need anything, let them know. The more effective thing is to think of something practical that might be needed and offer to do that, whether it be notifying others or offering transportation or suggesting a time for lunch or going along to the mortuary or bringing over food.

Your church leaders did a great job when my wife died a few months ago. People just showed up. They hung around. People expressed support. People brought over food.

There is always a danger that we will become preoccupied with our own need for encouragement. Lest we fall into that trap it may be helpful to remember that Paul himself was faced with adversity from almost each of these different areas. We have seen that he was often being persecuted for his faith. He continued to grow spiritually, though obviously he was a mature Christian at this time. But we saw a couple of weeks ago that there was a time at Corinth when he was stressed out and in need of encouragement. Then also he was often having to deal with situations of conflict and division among Christians. There were times, too, when he ran out of money and had to go to work with his own hands. As to whether there were people close to Paul who had died during these missionary journeys, we don’t know. But we do know that there were several occasions when he came close to dying. The point is that even in the midst of trying circumstances Paul trusted in God to enable him to be an encourager to others. His own trials didn’t keep him from encouraging others.

Actress Celeste Holm once remarked, **“We live by encouragement and die without it--- slowly, sadly and angrily.”** That may be especially true in the field of acting. But it is also true in the church of Jesus Christ. We need encouragers. Will we determine to trust God to make us better encouragers?