

Paul's Testimony

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[0 : 00] Acts chapter 20, and if we could read just a few verses from verse 18. And when the elders were come to Paul, he said to them, You know that from the first day that I came into Asia, after what manner I have been with you at all seasons, serving the Lord with all humility of mind and with many tears and temptations, which befell me by the lying in wait of the Jews.

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

And now, behold, I go bound in the Spirit unto Jerusalem. This evening I'd like us to look at this passage which we have read.

And what we have here is a testimony of Paul. Now you know and I know what a testimony is. That's when someone comes up to the front at a special meeting, or at a conference, or some other kind of organized gathering, and they're asked to give something of their experience of God in their lives, of how they became a Christian, of how God has dealt with them.

And you know, people tend to like testimonies. They tend to like to listen to testimonies. Testimonies that are interesting, because usually they're quite varied, because God works in different ways.

[1 : 41] Now in these verses that we have, we have Paul's testimonies. Not of how he became a Christian, but his testimony of himself as a servant of God.

And he paints for us, you could say, a picture, a self-portrait of himself. Now if I did that, in the words that Paul uses, you might think, well, Eric, aren't you boasting a bit?

And probably I would have been, because I don't think it would be totally true. But what Paul is writing here, with the help of the Holy Spirit, is his experience as a servant of God.

I'd like us to look at these characteristics tonight. There's about five or six characteristics that show up in Paul's testimony of himself as a servant of God.

But before we get there, I want to ask a question. It's a question in some ways to get our interest. And it's this. What has the Apostle Paul got in common with Donnie?

[2 : 47] Now you didn't expect that. What's he got in common? Do you see he's got something in common with Donnie? Now I know David's over there, and I'm going to ask the same. What's the Apostle Paul got in common with David?

What's he got in common with me? Or what is the connection, I should say, between ourselves, maybe all of us tonight, and the Apostle Paul?

Now I don't intend to give that answer until the end, or towards the end of our thoughts tonight. But that's something I want to leave with us. We'll come to it. What connection has the Apostle Paul with maybe all of us tonight?

And it's something definite. Let's go back to Paul's testimony then. And just so we have some idea of when Paul says these words, if I just give a brief summary of the earlier verses.

Paul is a man in a hurry. His destination is Jerusalem. Now in these days, they didn't have cars. They had to travel by land, by road, by sea.

[3 : 56] And if you read these verses, from verse 13 onward especially, even before that, you see Paul is in a hurry. He's not stopping at any place for much longer than two or three days.

Maybe a month. Because he is determined, and as verse 16 says, to get to Pentecost, to Jerusalem, by the day of Pentecost.

Obviously Paul knew why he wanted to get there for that time. Now because he was speeding, because he was rushing, he was bypassing certain places.

And he was bypassing the place of Ephesus. But he loved the people there. And he had spent time there. And so he wanted to speak to the elders.

And so he sent a message to them. And he said, look, I'm bypassing Ephesus. But I'll be down the road a little bit. Can you come and see me? And that's what these elders did.

[4 : 54] There was no problem. That's what they wanted to do. They wanted to see Paul. And Paul then spoke to them about himself.

He spoke to them about his testimony. And that's what I'd like to pick up now. These four or five, six characteristics of the servant of God.

The first thing we can see is that Paul says that he served the Lord with humility. And the servant of God, the genuine servant of God, will always be a person of humility.

humility. We read that in verse 19. Paul says that he's been amongst them and he has served them by serving the Lord with all humility.

Humility. And that was something that Paul could say honestly. But truly he served the Lord with humility. Not with pride. Paul wasn't a man who would come in and start lording it over.

[5 : 57] If you wanted Paul for your minister, he would be a good man to have. Because he would be a humble man. He wouldn't be proud. He wouldn't be lording it over.

But he would be a man who would desire to serve the Lord. He wouldn't be a man who had selfish ambition within. His only desire would be that of a servant.

What can I do for Jesus? How can I be of some help? And not the dictator that sometimes we can get in these days. When we think of humility, we think of a brokenness within.

And very often humility comes by a stubborn heart being broken. And no doubt that happened in Paul's life. That maybe his stubborn heart, his proud heart had to be broken by the Holy Spirit.

So that he could see himself as God saw him. So he could be someone who was humble. And someone who was useful. We see Paul's humility in one or two ways.

[7 : 06] We know that Paul was a tent maker. And we know that at Ephesus, because the people weren't rich, he decided that he would work as a tent maker.

He would work in some way to support himself and his friends so that they wouldn't be a burden upon the others. Now in these days a good orator, a good speaker could command a fee.

And people would pay to listen to them. But Paul wasn't like that. He was someone who was humble, who was willing to pay for himself so that he wouldn't be a burden upon others.

He didn't have high views of himself as a great orator. He was there with humility. Again we see Paul and the example of him. He calls himself the least of the apostles.

I wonder if anyone has called themselves the least of the ministers. You know, sometimes in the minister's hearts you tend to think or hope that maybe you're up there amongst them. But not Paul.

[8 : 07] He's the opposite. You see, a humble heart will say, I am the least of the apostles. I'm the least of the brethren. Now Paul was a super saint in many ways.

But yet he had a true value of himself. And that's what comes through humility. That's what comes through with a broken heart and through fellowship with the Holy Spirit.

I am the least. And then he says again by way of example, by the grace of God I am what I am. How many people will say, I've got where I am because of my abilities.

I've got where I am because of my intellect, because of my contacts, because of myself. But Paul doesn't say that. And a good part of the New Testament was written by Paul.

And Paul ministered and evangelized a good part of Asia and Europe. And he doesn't say that I did it through my abilities. He says, by the grace of God I am what I am.

[9 : 15] And by God's grace he has done what he has done. And again there's this idea of humility coming through. How we need that. How I need that.

How you need that. A true humility in spirit. The Holy Spirit who indwelt the Lord Jesus was a spirit that was in many ways meek and lowly.

And if we are to emulate the Lord Jesus then we too are to be meek and lowly. Knowing that true humility within. But secondly we can see that Paul wasn't just someone who was humble.

And as we go through these things I hope that this week that you'll think about these things. That when you're at your work you'll think about these things. That I will think about these things. That as we seek to be true servants of God that we will seek to be humble.

And when we feel pride rearing up within that we'll squash it down. That we'll ask the Lord to take it away and replace it with that spirit of meekness.

[10 : 24] But the second thing we see about Paul in his testimony is this. He was compassionate verse 19 He was a man of many tears.

But not just in verse 19 but also further on in verse 31 he says Watch and remember that for three years I ceased not to warn you with tears.

With tears. Now many people when they speak about the Apostle Paul or when they think about the Apostle Paul or read the Apostle they think here's the hard man.

That's what many people think of Paul. Here is a hard man. Such a hard man. Such an intellect. He was a professor. He was someone there who dealt in a cold way with these things.

In some ways some people might think that Paul wasn't human. But here's his testimony. It is that for three years he warned on night and day with tears.

[11 : 30] And Paul's ministry wasn't a cold formal business. Paul is not so hard hearted that he can't feel for people who are lost.

No he feels so much that he is ready to weep. His words are watered by his tears. And how do we know that this is true?

Because at the end of the chapter when Paul said to them that they won't see him again what did they do? They wept. They wept because they loved him. They wept because they knew he was human.

Because he was compassionate towards them. when we read the epistles you don't read much about hell fire brimstone damnation with Paul.

That's because Paul didn't know that these things were true. He knew them to be true but he wept. He wept over those who were lost.

[12 : 34] He wept over those who were going to hell. And his heart was filled with compassion for them. And so Paul's preaching was filled with a love and tenderness.

His words moistened by his tears. What a change in Paul. Paul before he was a Christian was a hard man. Paul was someone who could take men and women and maybe young people and put them in prison or even have them killed.

And you've got to be hard to do that. But what a change. Such a soft heart. Such a compassionate heart for those who are lost.

For those who are sinners. Wasn't he just emulating the Lord Jesus when Jesus looked over Jerusalem? You remember that in a few days the people of Jerusalem were going to kill Jesus.

And no doubt when Jesus looked at Jerusalem he knew the kind of people they were. The hypocrites. The sinners. the self-righteous. What did Jesus do?

[13 : 43] He wept. He wept over them. Because he knew that in 40 or 70 years time there was going to be a judgment on Jerusalem.

And he knew that Jerusalem was going to be destroyed. And so Jesus was moved to weep. His heart was tender with sin. and the true servant of God in many ways you could say the useful servant of God is someone whether it be man or woman boy or girl there will be someone who is compassionate with sin.

And they will have a deep love and concern for others. Here's a question for us for you and for me. when's the last time that we cried?

When's the last time that we cried over anything? And I don't just mean the lost. I mean anything. When is the last time that the tears came down our face?

And then we ask the question how hard is our hearts? You see you need a hard heart when you don't cry. You need a hard heart when you don't feel.

[14 : 58] But Paul was someone who felt deeply as did the Lord Jesus. And as a servant of God there was compassion. And if we haven't cried then maybe we should ask that the Lord would soften our hearts.

So yes we would be ready to feel and be ready to cry over those who are needy of those who need help.

The third thing we see about Paul is this. He was also faithful. In verse 20 and 21 we read I kept back nothing that was profitable to you but I've showed you and taught you publicly from house to house testifying both to Jews and to Greeks two things repentance towards God and faith in Jesus Christ.

Paul was faithful and Paul was faithful over these three years in teaching this message that was committed to him. When Paul became a Christian the Lord Jesus commissioned him to preach the gospel to the Gentiles to bring this good news to these people.

What is that? It is repentance towards God and faith towards the Lord Jesus Christ. And in Paul's time at Ephesus publicly and from house to house he was faithful to that message.

[16 : 27] Day after day, week after week the same message. And for the apostle Paul he had no theories to defend. He had a revelation to declare.

That was his purpose. That was the task that was given him. To declare the full counsel of God. And a good servant, a faithful servant is one who will be faithful with what God has commissioned them to do.

Now then, in Paul's time, no doubt, that if Paul sought popularity, he might have maybe adjusted the message. You know, that can happen sometimes.

We maybe don't give the full message because if we do, we feel that people might not like us so much. We feel that we might not be so popular as we will be if we tone the message down.

But not Paul. As a true servant of God, he was faithful and he preached the whole message. Repentance towards God and faith towards Christ.

[17 : 36] Paul, when he preached, Paul, when he spoke, he only sought the praise of God and not the popularity of men. Now, I know myself as a minister.

minister, it is sometimes easy to omit a little bit of something because you want the people to enjoy your sermon. You want the people to go out the door thinking what a wonderful minister that is.

But that wasn't Paul's way. Paul's way was the truth is true and he was always faithful to it. Now, in this coming week, well, we've not all been called to be ministers.

We've not all been called to be like Paul, but yet God has called us to serve in a certain place. And he's given us abilities and he wants us to be faithful where he has put us, with the abilities that he has given us.

And when the opportunity might come, if it is given to us, the Lord wants us to be faithful in what we say, as Paul was. Fourthly, three more things.

[18 : 46] Paul was also submissive. This is part of his testimony. In verse 22 and 23 we read these things.

And now behold, I go bound in the spirit unto Jerusalem, not knowing the things that shall befall me there, save, save, that the Holy Ghost witnesses in every city, saying, that bonds and afflictions abide me.

In other words, the Holy Spirit has told Paul that in the cities that he's going to, his lot is going to be a hard one. His lot is going to be a difficult one.

He doesn't know exactly how, but in other words, it's not going to be nice. And here is Paul rushing towards Jerusalem.

He's racing to get there. Why? When he knows that he's going to have a hard time. When he knows that there's just bonds and afflictions, it is because he was submissive to God's will.

[19 : 54] You see, when Paul was commissioned to the gospel, the Lord told him that, yes, Paul was going to suffer. Paul was going to suffer greatly, and we read of his suffering in many places in the New Testament.

you don't see Paul objecting. We don't read of Paul running away. We don't read of Paul shouting to God and saying, why?

But you see him just fulfilling his task with submissiveness. Not offended at God, but believing the words that he wrote in Romans, no doubt.

All things work together for good to those who are called by God. That God's grace was sufficient for him. In spite of the thorn in his flesh, whatever that was, in spite of the afflictions, he knew God's promises were, yes, I'm a man in Christ.

My grace is sufficient. All things work together for good. And so Paul is submissive in God's will. Now again, maybe this week, maybe during this time, it could be that you're going through a difficult time.

[21 : 07] It might be hard. And you ask the question as I would, maybe why? But yet we need to have this trait that Paul had, this submissiveness in a sense to God's will for us.

We don't understand, we don't fully comprehend or know, but yet we believe that yet his grace is sufficient, that yet these things will work out for our good as we pray that God's will would be done in our lives as it is in heaven.

The fifth thing we see about Paul is this, he was devoted, completely devoted. In many ways, people might think that he was overzealous.

Paul was someone who is an extremist, but no, he was just someone who was devoted to the task that was given him. And that was preaching the gospel.

Verse 24, what does he say in verse 24? But none of these things move me. That's the afflictions, that's the troubles. And he says then, neither can't I my life dear unto myself, so that I might finish my course with joy and the ministry which I have received of the Lord.

[22 : 30] That's his compelling desire in life. That is his devotion. It is to finish his course with joy. It is to fulfill the ministry given to him by the Lord Jesus.

And that was to preach the gospel. That was to bring the good news to the Gentiles. And he says later on that he is innocent of the blood of all men.

Again, he was faithful in the task. He was so devoted he could actually say that. That he is free from the blood of all men.

It was his meat, it was his drink to do the will of God. Again, no doubt that is a reminder to us of the Lord Jesus. That when Jesus came into this world it was for one reason.

It was to give his life as a sacrifice for sin. For your sin and my sin. So that we could repent of our sin and so that we could trust Christ. And again Jesus was devoted.

[23 : 36] That was his life. That was his ministry. And Paul as a servant of God, he had that same devotion in his life.

And then finally, we see that Paul was someone who was courageous. What was he? He was a person who had humility. And that's something that we need today.

That's something that Christians need, humility. Again, maybe even more so, there needs to be compassion. We need to be people who feel, people who can weep and cry over the needs of others.

the servant of God will be faithful day by day. The servant of God will be someone who is submissive in God's will for them.

They will be devoted and God willing, they will be courageous. When Paul went to prison, do you think he was afraid?

[24 : 41] I think he was afraid. When Paul saw people coming at him with their fists, and with other implements to beat him, do you think he was afraid? I would be afraid.

I'm sure you would be afraid and I've no doubt that Paul in a sense was afraid too. But yet God gave him a courage to overcome that fear.

God gave him the ability to rush to Jerusalem knowing what was waiting for him and he had courage to do it. But what was it that gave Paul the courage?

Now we come back to the question. What is the connection between Paul and Donnie? Willie, David, myself, maybe you. What's the connection between Paul and us?

It was this, that he had courage. He had courage to go to Jerusalem to tell of the work of the gospel amongst the Gentiles.

[25 : 42] you see there were certain Jewish people and they would have kept the gospel for themselves. These believing Jews would have said that Jesus was only for the Jewish people.

But Paul knew that that wasn't true. And Paul knew that the gospel was for the Gentiles. And Paul knew that that was a ministry that had to be undertaken by the church.

And Paul knew that although he was going to these cities and he was going to be put in prison or to be beaten or mocked, he had the courage to do so because it was for the Gentiles.

And who are we tonight? I believe probably most of us, maybe all of us, were Gentiles. If it wasn't for Paul's courage, if it wasn't for Paul's devotion, if it wasn't for his compassion, and his conviction, would I be here tonight or would you be here tonight?

And the possible answer is that no, we would not be. But it was because of Paul's ministry and his faithfulness, because he accepted the beatings in taking the gospel to the Gentiles, that we are here tonight.

[27 : 00] What's the connection between Paul and us? It is that he took the gospel, to the Gentiles. He took the gospel in a sense to us, to you and to me.

And we need courage. We need the courage that God the Holy Spirit can give us. And we need the conviction that Paul had as well. We can be thankful to the Apostle Paul.

I want us to be thankful to the Apostle Paul tonight. I want us to see that what he did was for you and for me. I want you that when you read it, and myself as well, when we read these things, we read ourselves into it.

This is not dated. This is not just for the people of that time. Paul did it for you and for me. Let me ask one more question in finishing.

In 50 years' time, is someone going to thank God for you or for me? Are they going to be able to look back and say, I thank God for that person, that servant of God, that man, that woman, because of their humility, because of their compassion, because of their faithfulness, because of their courage, because of them, I am now here, tonight.

[28 : 33] In 20 years' time, God willing, if we are here, are people going to thank God for us? Well, may it be so, and may it be that as we read the life of Paul, and we see his testimony, and with God's help, we seek to emulate it, as he sought to emulate the Lord Jesus, and may people, even in 20 years, 50 years, 200 years time, be able to read our history, and to be able to say, thank you, Lord, for them.

Thank you, Lord, for them.