

Close of Paul's Third Missionary Journey Acts 21:1-17

by J.R. Miller

The sermon emphasizes the importance of love, bravery, and duty to God, using the example of Paul's life and ministry to illustrate these principles.

Scripture: Proverbs 3:5-6, Matthew 28:19-20, Luke 9:62, John 13:35, Acts 21:4, Romans 12:10, Philippians 2:4, 1 Thessalonians 5:11, 2 Timothy 4:5, 1 Peter 4:10

Topics: "Friendship in Christ", "Courage in Duty"

Description

J.R. Miller reflects on the emotional parting of Paul and the Christians in Tyre, emphasizing the deep connections formed through love and service. He highlights the importance of not misinterpreting divine guidance, as the disciples warned Paul of danger, yet he remained committed to his mission. Miller illustrates that true friendship is built on genuine love and selflessness, as exemplified by Paul's willingness to face suffering for the sake of the Gospel. He also notes the vital role of women in ministry, as seen in Philip's family, and concludes that knowing our future can hinder our faith, urging believers to remain steadfast in their duties despite challenges. Ultimately, Miller encourages Christians to prioritize their commitment to God over personal safety or comfort.

Transcript

Life is full of parting and meetings, of letting go things that are past and laying hold of things in the future. The missionaries and these friends had been together but a week, and yet they had become so attached to each other, that their parting was tender. Wherever true Christians meet, they are at once drawn to each other in holy affection. Jesus said that his disciples should be known in the world, not by their dress, nor by their creed, nor by any other external mark--but "by this shall all men know that you are my disciples--if you have love one to another."

Wherever we go, we will find something to do and may leave blessings. The ship which carried Paul's party stopped at Tyre to unload its cargo. This would require a week. But Paul was not the man to sit upon a ship's deck in idleness for a week, with a whole city of needy people close to him. He improved the opportunity. He left the ship and sought out the Christians who were in the city and did all he could for them during his stay. Here is a good suggestion for those who may be detained in some places for a while. Instead of passing the time in sight-seeing or in idleness, let them look up the Christian people of the place or let them find those who need help.

Not all human interpretations of divine teachings are right. These disciples at Tyre knew through the Spirit that danger lay before Paul if he went to Jerusalem. Then they inferred that he ought not to go on his way. "Through the Spirit they urged Paul not to go on to Jerusalem." These friends probably considered the forewarning of danger, a providential indication that Paul ought not to go on. We must be careful, however, in interpreting God's purposes in his providence. Difficulties looming up in the way of our advance, are not always divine intimations that we should stop in our course, or turn aside. Shut doors are sometimes to be opened; and open doors are not always to be entered. The fact that we learn of dangers in our path, which it will cost us much to encounter, should not always be considered as forbidding us to proceed. It may be that the meeting of dangers and the enduring of sufferings and sacrifices, is part of God's will for us, and therefore part of our duty. We must be careful not to misread providences, lest we draw wrong inferences.

He who does people good, soon wins a place in their affections. Paul's week's stay at Tyre was full of kindness and helpfulness for the Christians there, and when the time came for them to leave, the parting was very tender. "When our days there were over, we left to continue our journey, while all of them, with their wives and children, escorted us out of the city. After kneeling down on the beach to pray, we said good-bye to one another."

Paul was a large-hearted man, sympathetic, ready always for helpfulness, with a rare genius for friendship. He had been only a week in Tyre--but when he came to leave, the people had learned to love him so much--that it almost broke their hearts to have him go away. He was not one of those stately men who impress others with their intellectual acuteness, but are cold as icebergs. He was a mighty man intellectually, but he was also gentle, affectionate, and kindly.

We all want to have friends. The reason Paul had friends--was because he was a friend to the people. The reason people loved him so tenderly--was because he loved them so truly. Nothing but affection--will win affection. We never can get these friendships by patronizing airs, by empty talk about how much we think of people, nor even by gifts bestowed upon them. We must love--if we would be loved. We must be a friend--if we would have friends. Paul really loved people. He desired to help them and was ready to make any sacrifice in doing so. Like his Master, he came not to be ministered unto--but to minister. His friendship for his people was not shown in mere professions, in soft words and in flattering phrases.

The beauty and influence of a Christian home, are well illustrated in the family of Philip the evangelist. We remember Philip--we saw him first as one of the seven deacons. But he became an evangelist, also. He seems to have settled as a missionary pastor at Caesarea. No only Philip himself--but his four daughters as well, were engaged in the work of the gospel. They had given themselves to Christ's service. It were well if the daughters in every home were prophetesses, speaking out their message in whatever way Christ desires them to speak. We do not know in what particular ministries for Christ, these young women were engaged. If they had lived in our day, they would probably have taught classes in the Sunday school and would have been active in some kind of Christian endeavor, or some other form of young people's work. Every young woman who has given herself to Christ should find some way of working for her Master and of winning souls. Always, women have been friends of Jesus. Their hearts are warm, their hands are gentle, and they are fitted for noble service.

One of the blessings of life--is that we do not know our future. Sometimes people rashly wish they could know what lies before them; but it is a great deal better they do not know. If we knew our joys--it might unfit us for the toils and tasks of our common days. If we knew our sorrows--it might make us afraid to go on and lead us to doubt and unbelief. It is better we should not know.

In our story, however, the veil was lifted a little way for Paul, and he had a glimpse of trouble awaiting him. We see how this knowledge affected the apostle's friends--they would have him turn away from the duty before him--because of the danger that lay in it. It would have been better if they had not been told of what was before him.

When in any way we are made aware of dangers before us, we must not allow the dangers to make us less heroic and faithful. He who turns back because he sees trouble before him--is failing Christ. Paul's heroism was noble. "I am ready not only to be bound--but also to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus!" It was not easy for Paul to make this determination. He was among friends who loved him and besought him to stay with them. Yonder were Jerusalem and the lifted veil showed him suffering, and trial there, possibly death. Should he stay--or should he go? The struggle was hard, and almost broke his heart. Such pleadings of love make duty hard. But Paul had no doubt about what he ought to do. The will of the Lord was plain to him. He was needed at Jerusalem. So his heroic purpose was formed. He did not ask what it might cost--chains or death--he was ready for either.

Duty to his God must come first. Luther, on his way to the Diet of Worms, affords another illustration of like heroism. We will have duties that are hard to meet, and friends with loving hearts will throw about us the silken cords of endearment, trying to hold us back. Then we must be brave to go on to do what Christ bids us do, in spite of love's persuasions and all the power of enemies.

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