

# Paul Arrives in Europe

by Steve Gallagher

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*Paul and Silas' journey to Macedonia was guided by the Holy Spirit, and they responded to their imprisonment with prayer and worship, which brought a great earthquake and opened the prison doors.*

**Duration:** 49:43

**Scripture:** 1 Thessalonians 1:2, 1 Thessalonians 2:8, 1 Thessalonians 2:17, 1 Thessalonians 2:19 - 3:1

**Topics:** "Agape Love", "Christian Compassion"

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## Description

This sermon delves into the transformation of Paul from a self-righteous Pharisee filled with disdain and hatred for others to a man filled with God's love and compassion. It emphasizes the importance of agape love, which is not based on fleeting feelings but on deliberate acts of extending oneself to meet the needs of others. The sermon highlights Paul's deep affection and care for the people he ministered to, showcasing how love is demonstrated through actions and behavior, ultimately making others feel loved.

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## Transcript

Okay, we're in our fourth talk through the life of Paul, third the way through already. We're going to pick up the story from last week. Paul and Silas had made their way up into Galatia, picked up Timothy, and now they were headed west.

When you get to Pisidian Antioch, you know, of course, I was there 20 years ago, whatever. When you get to Pisidian Antioch, the main Roman road, and it's still there, which is really amazing, but the main Roman road would go straight west to Ephesus. But the Lord leads them to go northwest and to bypass Asia, as we're going to read here in a minute.

So this is where the story picks up. And I want to just mention a couple of things before we get into the actual story. First of all, watch for how tuned in to the Holy Spirit Paul is.

It is amazing how the Lord is able to lead him and direct him just in his daily life to make the right decisions, to know that he's hearing from the Lord. I wish my channels were that open to God. They're not.

You know, it takes me some time, but I can get the Lord's will and his mind on things, but usually it takes a while to really know that I've got his mind on something. But Paul, it was daily. It seems that way.

That's just amazing. And I want to just mention one other thing in regards to being led by the Lord. How do I say this and keep it very concise? It really ties in with what's at the bottom of your motivation in life.

When love is the thing that constrains you and compels you forward in God's work, or I should say the degree that God's love is what is compelling you forward, is going to play a huge part in your ability to get God's mind on things, to get his leading, his sense of his direction through life. And I'm pretty sure that's right. And you certainly see it throughout Paul's life, just motivated by God's love and all that he's doing.

Another thing you can watch for is the designations that Luke gives to the Holy Spirit in these next few verses we're going to read. We'll be in Acts 16, by the way. Verse 6, he's called the Holy Spirit.

Verse 7, he's called the Spirit of Jesus. And then in verse 10, he's simply referred to as God. I want to read what Langenecker says because he kind of ties it in together in an interesting way.

He said, the heightening of terminology in verses 6 to 10, from the Holy Spirit to the Spirit of Jesus to God, is not just stylistic, but an unconscious expression of the early church's embryonic Trinitarian faith. Those are a lot of big words. Embryonic meaning new, you know.

They were still new in the development of the concept of the Trinity, but you see it coming forth in different places in the New Testament, and this is one of those places. So anyway, I just found that interesting, a good point. And the other thing I'll just mention is that in this passage that we're going to start with, we're going to see for the first time Luke's personal involvement in the story.

Up till now, he's been strictly a historian. Now he joins in the story himself. What an amazing thing.

Can you imagine being a historian, and all of a sudden you're in the story? I mean, it kind of seems that way. Of course, he didn't write it until many years later, but it'd make a great play or story or novel or something. Okay, let's get started with verse 6. They, meaning Paul, Silas, and Timothy, they pass through the Phrygian and Galatian region, having been forbidden by the Holy Spirit to speak the word in Asia.

So they're not even allowed to go into that province. And after they came to Mysia, which is a province north of Asia, they were trying to go into Bithynia. They were trying to go into Bithynia.

So apparently they wanted to go in this direction. I don't know what trying means, actually, but we see again, and the Spirit of Jesus did not permit them. So they got a sudden check in their spirit.

As soon as they stepped one step down that road or whatever, the Lord stopped them. And passing by Mysia, they came down to Troas. So, you know, they came down out of the highlands there down into the coastal region.

This is ancient Troy, of course, up on the northeastern corner of the Aegean Sea there. A vision appeared to Paul in the night. A man of Macedonia was standing and appealing to him and saying, come over to Macedonia and help us.

I just wanna stop real quick here and share a story I just heard Chuck Smith tell. There was a banker who lived in San Jose. He was a believer, you know, a good solid man.

And one night he had this strong dream. And in this dream, an old farmer from Panama was saying to him, will you come and help me finish my crop? And it's so impacted this man. It was a call from the Lord to go to the mission field.

He's a businessman, a banker of all things, and to go to the mission field. And so he took some training and whatever, and he ended up going down to Panama City, developed a work there. God blessed the work.

And over the years, you know, he ministered there in Panama City. And then one day he was visiting in the hospital and he walked into this hospital room and laying in the bed was that same old man. Amazing.

And so he got to talking to the man and apparently he was a missionary himself that had come there some years before and had gone out into the bush and began different works out there, just small works. In man's eyes would be meaningless practically. But there was that man.

What an awesome thing, you know, to experience after all those years. Talk about confirmation of God in your work. Anyway, Coney Barrett and Howson says this, in the visions of the night, a form appeared to come and stand by him.

And he recognized in the supernatural visitant, a man of Macedonia who came to plead the spiritual needs of his country. It was the voice of the sick inquiring for a physician, of the ignorant seeking for wisdom, the voice which has ever since been calling on the church to extend the gospel to heathendom. Come over and help us.

You know, I just love, I don't know if you can notice the difference between someone like Longenecker, God bless this man, he's, you know, he's a scholar, but the difference in the spirit, in what the kinds of things he shares and Wolvard and some of these other more modern scholars, all these facts and interesting, important facts. But when you read the writings of some of these men of God from 100 years ago, 150 years ago, there is such a depth. You can just, I mean, I can tell, I don't know if it's clear to you, but I can tell the difference in the depth of their life in God.

And that was just one of those comparisons that stood out to me. All right, verse 10. When he had seen the vision, immediately we sought to go into Macedonia, concluding that God had called us to preach the gospel to them.

So here's Longenecker commenting on this, because number one, this we section stops at Philippi. Number two, the second we section, which begins in chapter 20, begins when the missionaries revisit Philippi after the third missionary journey. And number three, the ministry at Philippi receives the greatest attention, 30 verses, in this fifth panel.

We may reasonably suppose that the use of we points to basically saying Luke was a resident of Philippi. And he may be right about that. Maybe Luke was a resident there.

And if that's true, then every time you think of the Philippian church and the letter to Philippi, you've got to think about the people who were there that we know about, and plus many others as well, of course. But Luke, Lydia, that we'll read about here in a minute, the jailer and his family and some of the others, that was the Philippians. And you have to keep that in mind.

When you're reading the book of Philippians, they were actual people. It's not just some random vague letter or something. There were actual people that Paul knew and loved on the other end of that letter.

And these are the people he was talking to there when he did write that letter. Okay, verse 11. So putting out to sea from Troas, we ran a straight course to Samothrace and on the day following to Neapolis.

Neapolis is basically the port city for Philippi, which is 10 miles inland. Okay, so that's its claim to fame. And from there to Philippi, in other words, they walked now to Philippi, which is a leading city of the district of Macedonia, a Roman colony, and we were staying there in the city for some days.

Now, Philippi's claim to fame was that the great battle between, was it Brutus? Was that who it was? And Mark Anthony occurred there a century before or whatever and had a huge impact on the way the Roman Empire developed from then on. But anyway, that battle occurred right near Philippi there. But Philippi is called a Roman colony.

Well, what does that mean? To have a colony meant, the reason the Romans would do this, they have their vast empire and scattered throughout that empire are these little cities that they would bring retired soldiers into these little cities and give them land and houses and so on, set them up for their retirement years, which was a blessing for them. And they would then establish this mini version of Rome, right there in the midst of these, what they would consider barbaric population of that area. So that was why Rome would do that.

And there was a number of these Roman colonies scattered throughout the empire because the Romans only saw two kinds of people. Kind of like in the same way that for the Jews, you're either a Jew or you're a Gentile. It doesn't matter what part of the world you're from.

If you're not one of us, you are a Gentile. And that's kind of how the Romans saw it. You're either a citizen of Rome or you're a stranger is how they looked at it.

So Philippi was primarily a military town. It wasn't a commercial city. And that explains why there's such a small Jewish population in this city.

It's because it was a military, kind of like San Antonio is for us. I think there's a dozen bases around San Antonio and that creates the primary economic base for that area. And that's how Philippi was.

It was a military town. So everything that happens, that plays into the story that we're about to read about. Okay, in verse 13.

And on the Sabbath day, we went outside the gate to a riverside where we were supposing that there would be a place of prayer and we sat down and began speaking to the women who had assembled. I wanna read something that McLaren said here. There did not seem in the whole of that great city that morning a more completely insignificant knot of people than the little weather-beaten Jew, travel-stained, of weak bodily presence and of contemptible speech with his handful of attendants.

Your city will be forgotten, although a battle that settled the fate of the civilized world was fought outside your gates, but that little Jew and the letter that he will write to that handful of believers that are to be gathered by his preaching will last forever. The mightiest thing done in Europe that morning was when the apostle sat down by the riverside and began speaking to the women who had assembled. You know, there is a good comparison of heaven's view and earth's view of things that go on.

And I think I'm gonna talk about that more next week, that difference in, you know, perspective. But we'll get that next week when we get to Athens and Corinth. Okay, verse 14.

A woman named Lydia from the city of Thyatira, a seller of purple fabrics, a worshiper of God, was listening and the Lord opened her heart to respond to the things spoken by Paul. I love the way Luke

expressed that. I don't think it's expressed that way anywhere else in scripture, but, you know, that's certainly one way of saying it, that the Lord opens a person's heart.

And when she and her household had been baptized, she urged us, saying, if you've judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come into my house and stay. And she prevailed upon us. All right, now Lydia, obviously, is an independent woman.

She's not married. Maybe she was widowed, I don't know. But anyway, she's a successful businesswoman.

She had come from Thyatira, which is over in Asia, you know, a little east of Ephesus. She had come over from there. Thyatira was known for this purple dye.

So she would, she basically had an import business. And she came and lived in Philippi and would get her cloth from over there and sell it in that area. And she was prosperous.

She had a house big enough for all these guys to come and stay. She had attendants and so on. So, you know, Lydia was, you know, someone to be reckoned with.

And you can tell by her, the way she is just said here, that she probably had a very strong personality, a way of kind of getting her way. So she prevailed upon Paul. And that's saying something, to prevail upon Paul.

I'm sure by the time he left, it was kind of like getting out of Jerusalem, you know. It's been a blessing, Paul, but you know, yeah. See you around.

Okay, verse 16. It happened that as we were going to the place of prayer, a slave girl having a spirit of divination met us. And now we've heard of unclean spirits and spirit of deaf and dumb.

Here's a spirit of divination. You know, what does that exactly mean in comparison to the others? I don't know exactly, but I think in the spirit world, they can't foresee the future like God does. But when you live in the spiritual realm, you can pretty much figure things out where things are headed, you know.

So I'm sure they used her as a fortune teller and she could probably nail some things pretty well close to right because these spirits know who these people are who come and talk to this girl. She doesn't know them, but the spirits know them. Maybe they're talking to other demons, who knows what goes on.

But anyway, so she had this ability and this girl's following them around saying, these are men, bond servants of the most high God and are proclaiming to you the way of salvation. That sounds good, but you know, reality is, first of all, these are polytheistic people and it wouldn't hit them the way that it would hit us necessarily. You know, it's just one more God, in other words, that she's proclaiming.

But beyond that, who wants, you know, Satan for your advertising agent, you know what I mean? I don't wanna be involved with Satan. I don't want someone who's possessed by the devil to be out there representing Pure Life Ministries. You know, so Paul finally gets to the place.

I love the way that, well, let me just read it. I love the way that Luke said it, though. She continued doing this for many days, but Paul was greatly annoyed.

That's funny, it just strikes me as funny that that was what motivated him. This man of love, and he was, and turned and said to the Spirit, I command you in the name of Jesus Christ, not in the name of Paul, the great apostle. No, he's a nobody and he knows it, but he's got spiritual authority.

And in the name of Jesus Christ, come out of her. And it came out at that very moment. But when her masters saw their hope of prophet was gone, they seized Paul and Silas and dragged them into the marketplace before the authorities.

And when they had brought them to the chief magistrates, they said, these men are throwing out our city into confusion, being Jews, and are proclaiming customs which it is not lawful for us to accept or to observe being Romans. So what they're saying is very manipulative. That's not their motivation at all.

They've lost their cash cow, basically, and that's what they're upset about. So anyway, the story continues. Verse 22, the crowd rose up.

There's that word again that we saw in the early church when the high priest rose up. The crowd rose up together against them and the chief magistrates tore their robes off them and proceeded to order them to be beaten with rods. When they had struck them with many blows, they threw them into prison, commanding the jailer to guard them securely.

And he, having received such a command, threw them into the inner prison and fastened their feet in the stocks. Okay, now, as I said to you before, I was in all these different areas. Philippi, the ruins there are really wonderful.

Again, it's like out in the countryside, so the ruins have been maintained. Philippi, the area there is a vast valley, and right in the middle of that valley is this mountain that rises up, and Philippi was built right up the side of that mountain. And the ruins there at the base of the mountain are still very intact, and the prison was right at the very base of the mountain, or maybe a little on the side of the mountain.

I don't remember there actually being a building there, but anyway, it's clear that the inner prison was just the deepest cave there that had gone into the hillside. So you can imagine what kind of a nasty atmosphere was in that place. You know, rats probably running around, it's probably wet and cold, chilly.

So they have been beaten like this, and after they have been beaten naked in front of this hostile crowd, can you imagine being stripped naked and beaten like this? And then drug off, and Luke says it twice, thrown into this inner prison. And it says that they were put in the stocks. Now the stocks, we tend to have this impression in our minds that they were kind of up against the wall and they had these, you know, heavy bracelet things around them, chained to the wall, but that's not what the stocks were.

The stocks were a wooden apparatus that you, that they would, they had holes in them, and depending on how miserable they wanted to make the people would be how far apart they would put their legs. And so they've been beaten, their backs are shredded, traumatized, and now they are made to lay down in that miserable, wet cell with their legs spread apart like that. I mean, just hard to imagine how bad this must have been for them.

Verse 25, let's see how they respond. But about midnight, you know, maybe it took them till midnight to get it together, I don't know. But about midnight, Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns of praise to God, and the prisoners were listening to them.

Can you imagine? This must have been a earthquake in heaven. There is one of the most powerful things that can happen in the spiritual realm when one of God's people has been abused, treated badly, and the thing that comes out of their mouth is not grumbling, not complaining, not accusing God, not getting mad at the person, not, you know, whatever, what do you say, being retributive towards the person, but the thing comes out of their mouth is worship to the Lord. And it's one of the reasons why we so emphasize worship here, is we need to be in the habit of praising the Lord, whether it's in song or just in daily life.

So I don't know, maybe they were singing some of the psalms, probably. You know, we would have songs that we know, you know, simple choruses that we would remember wherever we're at. So they're doing that, and then there's a response from heaven, isn't there? And this is, even though this is the only place in scripture I can think of quite like this, but this, I promise you, is what happens in heaven when we respond to those kinds of situations like they did.

And suddenly there came a great earthquake so that the foundations of the prison house were shaken, and immediately all the doors were open and everyone's chains were unfastened. When the jailer awoke and saw the prison doors open, he drew his sword and was about to kill himself, supposing that the prisoners had escaped. But Paul cried out with a loud voice.

You know, just see the love of Paul, the love of the Lord in Paul. He's so concerned. Here's a man who just put him in this torture instrument, and the first thing he can think of is that man's soul.

If he kills himself, he's going to hell for certain. That's the reaction that comes up within him. Do not harm yourself, for we're all here.

I'm telling you, you know, the Lord just, he was full of the Lord. And he called for lights and rushed in, and trembling with fear, he fell down before Paul and Silas. And after he brought them out, in other words, got them away from the other inmates, got them all chained up again or whatever, brought them out, and his living quarters apparently were right there connected.

And he says to them that tremendous age-old question, sirs, what must I do to be saved? And every one of us here in this room had that question at some point rise up inside of us. And, you know, this jailer, the reason he had such a reaction, there's probably a couple of different things. He knew, I'm sure word had gotten around in a little city like that, why they were thrown in there, because of what happened.

This demon-possessed girl, of course, people wouldn't have thought of her that way. They would have just thought of her as someone inhabited by the gods. That's what they would think about insane people or demon-possessed people.

That's how these superstitious people saw them. And so this young woman who was possessed by the gods was going around saying, these men represent the most high God. That had to get people's attention somewhat.

So they throw them into prison and an earthquake comes and hits the city. So this guy is feeling like, you know, I'm on dangerous ground here. I'm playing a part in torturing these representatives of this deity, whoever this deity is, you know, and that's probably where this fear mostly arose from, you know, or maybe partially a spiritual, probably in fact, some kind of a spiritual fear of the Lord that came in them.

I don't know about you, but when I first came to the Lord, that was the first thing that affected me was the fear of the Lord, was like opening my heart up, preparing me for when I would be faced with the gospel

when I was 16 years old. Anyway, so verse 31, they said, believe in the Lord, Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household. Now don't make a doctrine out of that like some people have done.

Paul was just, you know, speaking in the spirit. He understood spiritually that that applied to this man's home, okay? So that's not some doctrine that we create. If someone gets saved, all their family gets saved.

It's not like that. And they spoke the word of the Lord to him together with all who were in his house. The word of the Lord, a pure word from God to this man and his family.

Man, how powerful that must have been. And he took them that very hour of the night and washed their wounds, and immediately he was baptized, he and all his household, and he brought them into his house and set food before them and rejoiced greatly. This is a real conversion, the kind we hardly ever see in America anymore.

A man who was instantly transformed from sinner to saint, on fire for God. Probably the next day, he was going around to the army barracks and to all his old buddies and telling them about the Lord Jesus Christ, this Jewish Messiah, who came into my heart and saved me. Who knows how many people got saved just because this man's witness.

It's hard to say what happened after this and how his whole life completely changed. Instead of hanging out with his old army buddies, now he's hanging out with Lydia and Luke and some of, they're now his friends. His wife probably becomes close friends with Lydia.

You know, these are real people that actually lived. And we have to constantly remind ourselves of that and what really happened there in these stories. So anyway, I'll just summarize the rest of this chapter.

Basically, the magistrates send word to the jail, go ahead and let those guys go. And Paul said, no way, you come over here and you bring us out. We are Roman citizens and that would have terrified these guys.

So anyway, they come over and plead with them and send them on their way. So verse 40 says that they went to the house of Lydia because that's where the brethren were meeting at. And that must have been where the church began.

It was a house church there in Lydia's home, which makes sense because Lydia had a big house. So that would make sense. All right, so chapter 17.

Now, when they had traveled through Amphipolis and Apollonia, they came to Thessalonica where there was a synagogue of the Jews. Okay, basically these three cities are about, give or take 33 miles apart from each other. So it's a hundred mile trip.

So keep in mind, their bodies have just been brutalized and they walked for a hundred miles, you know, with their backs shredded and this was no easy walk they took. So they show up in Thessalonica and according to Paul's custom, he went to them and for three Sabbaths reasoned with them from the scriptures. You know, probably Isaiah 53, Psalm 22, talking to them about the Messiah, opening their eyes so they could see the Messiah in the Old Testament from a new light, you know, because the Jewish custom of the day, the traditions that had been handed down, the Messiah was coming on a white horse and gonna kick the Romans out and set up Israel, you know, the end times version of Jesus.

But first there's this other, you know, appearance of Jesus that they didn't understand at that time. So, you know, Paul's explaining all this. Verse three, explaining and giving evidence that the Christ had to suffer and rise again from the dead and saying, this Jesus whom I'm proclaiming to you is the Christ, the Messiah.

And some of them were persuaded. There's a word, you know, it just stood out to me when I read it, persuaded. Again, now Luke says it differently.

Earlier, Lydia's heart was open. These men are persuaded and that's what preachers are supposed to do to use, not manipulate, not flatter, but persuade in a godly way people of the truth. And that's what our call is, is to influence the thinking and the minds of people to, with the truth, to draw them to the Lord, right? Isn't that what we're supposed to do? So some of them were persuaded and some weren't.

And it says right here, who would make up part of this church? Some of the Jews were persuaded. A large number of the God-fearing Greeks, and that's Jewish proselytes, okay? They had already been part of the synagogue there and doing the whole Jewish ritualism thing. And there, when they see this, they took to it right away.

And a number of the leading women. So here's some influential women. And they were probably friends of Lydia because she probably, I mean, not Lydia, but they were women like Lydia, except this is Thessalonica, you know, but successful women or married to influential men, whatever.

Anyway, these are some of the people. And then when you read the book of Thessalonians, you get the idea that most of the people in that church were just typical pagans, not any of these three groups that are mentioned here, because this is talking about who comes out of the synagogue. But as Paul continues ministering, which probably went on for several months there in Thessalonica, a large number of just regular Gentiles, Greeks out there in the marketplace or wherever he was preaching and so on, got saved.

Now, the way Luke writes it here, it seems like they're in and out of the city within three weeks. But that's not the way it is because of a number of different reasons I don't have time to go into here, but I'll tell you this, that by the time they left there, there was a sizable congregation behind them in Thessalonica. And then what happens next in these next few verses, the Jews get upset and they stir the people up and they, you know, do what they always tend to do and cause all these problems.

And basically Paul and his guys get run out of town. And actually in 1 Thessalonians 2:14, Paul says to them, for you brethren became imitators of the churches of God and Christ Jesus that are in Judea. For you also endured the same sufferings at the hands of your own countrymen, even as they did from the Jews.

So we see here that, you know, Paul is acknowledging what they ended up going through. And then in the next few verses, Paul goes from there to Berea and he meets with Berean Christians and we've all heard of Bereans. It's just come to be a term representing people who really have an open and sincere heart for the truth.

They went into scriptures. They didn't just, you know, make a snap judgment. I don't like the sound of this.

No, they went to their Bibles in the Old Testament and looked to see what the Bible said. Is this true? And some of them got saved. We don't know how many.

You never hear about the Berean church. You do hear later about a man named Sopater who was one of the Berean believers who brought a donation and so on. So, you know, we know that some kind of a church was there but we don't ever hear about it from here on out.

All right, now I wanna leave you with some thoughts about Paul's heart for people. We'll pick up the rest of this story next week. Again, think about who this man was, naturally speaking.

Who was he? He was Saul the Pharisee, right? He was Saul the Pharisee. Self-righteous, despised other people, disdained people. In fact, his heart was full of hatred for people.

You wanna know who this man was? He wasn't some great man, you know, just a really great guy. No, he was the opposite of that. He was an ugly person.

No one probably liked this man. And yet, here we are, however many years later this is, probably 13 years later or whatever, and now he is a new creation in Christ. So you can see why when he writes that, those words to the Corinthians later, that he's talking out of his own experience.

He understands what it means for the Lord to get in your inner world and completely transform you into a different person. Now, I wanna go over some verses in 1 Thessalonians. If you wanna open up there, I'm just gonna skip through them very quickly.

I don't wanna take a lot of time, but I wanna just get this into our minds, what this man was like and what motivated him and pushed him forward to do the things he did. 1 Thessalonians chapter one, verse two. We give thanks to God always for all of you.

He's gonna write this in a few months' time from Corinth. We'll get into that next week. But so he's writing this a few months later.

We're constantly thanking the Lord for you, making mention of you in our prayers. Chapter two, verse eight. Having so fond and affection for you, we were well-pleased to impart to you not only the gospel of God, but also our own lives because you had become very dear to us.

Verse 17. We were all the more eager with great desire to see your face. Verse 18.

We wanted to come to you, I, Paul, more than once, and yet Satan thwarted us. Verse 19. For who is our hope or joy or crown of exaltation? Is it not even you? Verse 20.

For you are our glory and joy. Chapter three, verse one. When we could endure it no longer.

Verse five. When I could endure it no longer, I also sent to find out about your faith for fear that the tempter might have tempted you. Verse six.

We also long to see you. Verse eight. Now we really live if you stand firm in the Lord.

Verse nine. All the joy with which we rejoice before our God on your account. Verse 10.

We night and day keep praying most earnestly that we may see your face and may complete what is lacking in your faith. I'd say this man's been transformed. Would you? You couldn't say those kinds of things and be filled with the kind of disdain and hatred that he had for people before.

Only the Lord can do that. All right, now I wanna talk about this. I'm just gonna take a few minutes here to talk about this thing of love because there's a lot of misunderstanding about what love is.

I don't feel love for people. I had someone say to me not long ago, I was talking to and someone had criticized him or whatever and they were just saying how when that happened they felt this hatred inside them. Now I'll mention it again here in a minute but love is not a feeling.

Let me put it this way. It is, there are affections that you feel towards people but those feelings follow behavior. You start off, this is what agape love is.

You do the thing you should do. You extend yourself. This is what agape is.

You, as a deliberate act of your will, you try to meet the needs of others. You extend yourself. You get out of your own self to help someone else.

That's what love is. And as you do that, yeah, over time then the affections start to build up inside you towards those people and that does happen but it's not the feelings of love that we're after. And if you're after that, I'm telling you, you cannot trust your feelings because feelings are fleeting.

They come and go. Sometimes they're good. Sometimes they're not.

You know, all kinds of things go through our minds. The enemy plants thoughts in our minds or brings an atmosphere that is a feeling, you know, like this brother that felt this nasty feeling towards someone but that's not what's important. And the reason I'm saying this is when you go to gauge your life, don't gauge your life with God on these feelings.

You can't trust your feelings, positive or negative. Either way. I read this quote from someone and I'm gonna, this is probably the best definition of love I've ever heard, God's love.

The real test of my ability to love is not that I feel loving. The real test is that the other person feels loved by me. That is true.

That is as close to truth about love that I've ever heard. This guy got it. And you know, I was thinking about this in regards to you.

And two things came to my mind that are very fresh incidents of this. One was Thursday when we were having our half day of prayer here, about three quarters the way through it maybe, and all of a sudden this crisis arises where a certain boy got himself into trouble and you guys lifted your voices in prayer for him for an hour. You know, just poured your heart out on his behalf before God's throne.

That was love. You guys did it, including the person I just mentioned who had this passing feeling of hate towards someone. When it came down to what he did though, nevermind the passing feeling, what he did, it's one of the persons in here, what he did when the time came, he did the right thing.

He expressed love by joining his voice with the others on the behalf of this boy who was in trouble. And then Sunday, even a greater example of this happened Sunday. I am telling you what a mighty time it was in here after that service.

Now Pastor Jeff preached on missed opportunities was the title of his message. Preached to the men in this residential program about the danger of missing the opportunities when God comes in and offers

himself to you and you shut him off or you ignore him or whatever. And it's just a very powerful, strong, straightforward message for these men.

And I felt very led by the Lord afterwards to try to make it in a way that anyone who didn't wanna be part of it could leave because I just wanted the people in here who wanted to spend some time crying out to God. And so more than half of the men stayed and a number of the staff people stayed. And some of you guys for an hour, I, you know, I, cause I called on the staff.

I said, we are gonna pray for these men. We're gonna take turns. And we set up a mic down here and for an hour, different ones came to the mic and poured their hearts out for those men.

And I, you know, now Brad, Kathy, Jeff and Rose, I expect those kinds of prayers from them. I've been hearing them pray that way for years. You know, so that didn't come as any surprise that the way that they prayed and they prayed their hearts out.

But some of you younger guys really surprised me. Wow, it was powerful. Sends chills down my spine thinking about that you could be so young in the Lord and I've heard you guys express your feelings of what losers you feel like you are spiritually.

But if you could have gotten outside of yourself and heard what I heard, man, what a blessing it was. The way some of you guys prayed that morning, such a blessing, poured your hearts out, crying out to God on behalf of these men. And here's the point I'm getting at.

I don't see how it's possible that one single man who was in here, the men in the live-in program, could walk out of this chapel after that meeting Sunday and not have a firm, solid feeling inside them that the staff of this ministry loves them in the Lord. After hearing the genuine, earnest, sincere cries that went up at these mics Sunday morning, how could they feel anything else but loved? Right? That's love. That's God's love right there.

And that's what it looks like. It's not fleeting feelings, you know? We're not gonna be judging out a feeling. For instance, the guy who struggled with that feeling that day.

Yeah, if he sat there and nursed it and really thought about his grievances about the person who criticized him or whatever, yeah, now that would be sinful and that would be wrong. But that's not what it was. It was a fleeting feeling.

It's not those fleeting feelings that's important. It's what you do. It's the way you live your life.

And Kathy and I have talked about it many times and also with Jeff and Rose and so on, how often we have different feelings. But when you get into those situations with people, what comes out of your mouth? Graciousness, love, humility, kindness, gentleness. That is the love of God.

It's not primarily a feeling of affection, you know? Because people can be difficult and we are human beings and we have that side to us. But we have a free will and we have the choice to decide what we say and how we act. We can't necessarily affect the way the feelings come into our minds, but we can control what we say and what we do.

And that's what makes it God's love because we put ourselves in a position to get out of self and to extend ourselves so God can pour out his love to other people and make them feel loved after they've been

around us. Amen? That's the real deal there. So if you wanna know, do I love people? You gauge yourself by what you do and say and how it makes people feel, not on your feelings.

All right, God bless you all, I love you all, especially after what I've seen this past week. You guys are just my heroes. Bless you, we will see you next week and continue the story.

■ Oh, oh ■

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