

Resolved to Live – As a Witness for Jesus

“...about all that Jesus began to do and teach” (Acts 1:1).

R₂L – Resolved to Live: With A Faith that is Fearless (Acts 21:1-17 – Part 1)

Acts 21:1-4a

1 When we had parted from them and had set sail, we ran a straight course to Cos and the next day to Rhodes and from there to Patara; 2 and having found a ship crossing over to Phoenicia, we went aboard and set sail. 3 When we came in sight of Cyprus, leaving it on the left, we kept sailing to Syria and landed at Tyre; for there the ship was to unload its cargo. 4 After looking up the disciples, we stayed there seven days; and they kept telling Paul through the Spirit not to set foot in Jerusalem.

As some of you may know, there has been a pastors' conference this week held at Grace Community Church in Los Angeles where John MacArthur is pastor. Something took place on the opening night of the conference that might have made some feel as though they had stepped back in time to colonial New England. There in that church, with some 3000-plus pastors in attendance; there in the epicenter of technology, the power went out in the middle of John MacArthur's opening sermon. A few moments later, dim battery powered emergency lights came were on, trying their best to illuminate the huge, now very dark auditorium.

What did MacArthur do? Without hesitation; without apology; without drawing attention to the inconvenient circumstance, he grabbed a flashlight and just resumed his preaching. Unwavering; unstoppable; uninhibited, he continued the message. His voice grew with intensity as every corner of the room heard him unpack the truth of God's Word without the aid of a microphone.

Some of those there said the experience was simply incredible. They felt as though there were in Geneva, leaning in to hear each word John Calvin spoke; or out in some New England field listening to George Whitfield preach. Like them, MacArthur continued on preaching Christ. With the intensity of Spurgeon, MacArthur powerfully pleaded with pastors to do just one thing; to preach Christ or stop preaching. I was able to obtain one pastor's notes since there is no recording of this part of the message. MacArthur went on to say:

“I just wish that the church would lift up Christ. If anyone would tag your church let it be this, ‘They were ever and always exalting Christ!’ You and your church should be known for robust Christology. Do you want to know the secret to Grace Church? These people keep beholding the glory of Christ and they have been and are being transformed! That’s the answer. When I watch TV preachers, I yell at the TV. ‘Stop!! Give them Christ!’ A truncated Christology does not help anyone. Men, you need to care less about what people want to hear and more about what they need to hear. Give them Christ.”

All of these serves as an illustration that each one of us needs to take to heart. For while one of the lessons we might take away from MacArthur's experience is that we are not to allow anything or anyone to stop us from preaching Christ, I see something even greater than that behind all of this; the unstoppable, unwavering faith of a man determined to do everything and only that which God had called him to do. MacArthur did the will of God with a faith that was fearless. And in a similar fashion, we find in our text a man of unstoppable and unwavering faith; determined to do everything and only that which God had called him to do. In the text before us we have a man whose faith drove him; a true, genuine and fearless faith that did not allow

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anything or anyone to stop him from God’s appointed mission. Of course I am speaking of the faith of Pau and it will be this faith that we take some time to examine.

Beloved, I call you this morning to examine the condition of your faith. First of all, do you have faith? Have you truly trusted Christ for salvation and life? Assuming for a moment that most of you have such a faith, if you had to put an adjective in front of your “faith” – what would it be? Little faith? Mediocre faith? Fearful faith? Or would your faith be described as “great” faith? Of advancing faith? Of the most faith? Of fearless faith? Spurgeon once preached these words:

The man of little faith is the man of little love. The man of great faith is the man of great affection. He that has great faith in God could give himself to die for God, but he who has little faith in him would shrink at the stake because his love would be feeble.

He went on to say:

If you would find the men who serve God the best, you will find them the men of the most faith. Little faith will save a man, but little faith cannot do great things.

The matter of considering the condition and content of your faith is one of the most important exercises you must ever undertake. You see, there is a dangerous addition to faith being preached and promoted in churches today. No, I am not speaking of adding good works to faith as a condition of salvation. Nor am I speaking of trying to keep of the Law as necessary to salvation. The addition that I am speaking of this morning is really a hybrid faith; a misleading faith and it involves the placing of the adjective “personal” in front of it. Listen to sermons or to Christian radio and see how often you are told, implored, and called to a personal faith in Jesus. *It is one thing to know Christ personally; it is another thing entirely to regard one’s faith as personal.* Indeed each and every one of us must individually have and exercise faith in Jesus; but what is meant by “personal” faith? Have you ever thought about that phrase, “personal faith?”

I know what some of you are thinking, “What kick are you on now, Pastor? Personal faith is as American as apple pie!” And that just might be the problem. We have Americanize faith; we have overemphasized one aspect of faith at the expense and detriment of living out full biblical faith; a faith that, like Paul’s grows more and more fearless. Now, some might say that “personal faith” just means that you’ve got to have your own faith, not the faith of someone else. That may be true, but the danger behind the adjective “personal” in front of faith, is that it leads most people to see faith as their own private thing to do whatever they wants with it; to believe whatever they want regardless of whether it lines up with Scripture; and then, because it’s personal; they can choose to share this very private, intimate possession only when they might want to with people they feel worthy of being exposed to this “personal possession.” Even worse yet, by “personal faith” we often digress into a “politically correct” faith; a watered-down faith that impacts no one; a faith that is to be kept to oneself so as not to offend others; a faith that does not outwardly impact our daily routines; a faith that does not speak unless spoken to; that does not act unless the conditions are optimal; a faith that is minimal; marginal, mediocre and without merit.

But do you realize that the Bible does not directly speak of faith in terms of being “personal.” Yes, a person, every individual, if he or she is to have eternal life, must have faith; he must believe in who Christ is and what Christ accomplished to save him from his sins and transform him into the image of God. Yes, faith must come to impact a person’s individual life.

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For faith that does not affect one's personal behavior is not saving faith. But do you know that biblical faith is not merely a personal thing. In fact, it is not even mostly a personal thing. Faith affects the person, but it is not described in simply personal terms. In fact, faith itself is said to be something that belongs to God; it comes from Him and He grants or gives it to His people to both save them and for them to share. Did you know that? In Philippians 1:29 we read:

For to you it has been granted for Christ's sake, not only to believe [to have faith] in Him, but also to suffer for His sake...

And in Ephesians 2:8 we read:

For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God;

What is a gift of God? Salvation through faith. Your faith comes from God. It does not simply belong to you; the same faith that brought you to trust in Christ is the same faith that brought me to Christ. It is a shared faith. Consider some other Scriptures with me. We read in Paul's closing words in Ephesians 6:23:

Peace be to the brethren, and love with faith, from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. [peace, love and faith are from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ]

In 1 Timothy 1:14 we read this:

and the grace of our Lord was more than abundant, with the faith and love which are found in Christ Jesus. [faith and love are found in Christ]

And then in Titus 1:4 we have this insightful statement:

To Titus, my true child in a common faith: Grace and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Savior. [in other words, faith is not simply personal, but common, public]

And for those of you memorizing 1 Peter, what does Peter tell us in verse 7 about faith:

so that the proof of your faith, being more precious than gold which is perishable, even though tested by fire, may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ; [here we find that our “personal” faith has as its very goal the public praise, glory and honoring of Christ.]

But Peter has more to say as we read in 2 Peter 1:1 -

Simon Peter, a bond-servant and apostle of Jesus Christ, To those who have received a faith of the same kind as ours, by the righteousness of our God and Savior, Jesus Christ: [here again we note that our faith is that which comes to us from God and it is a publicly shared faith].

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Let me use this illustration. The sermon that I wrote today; is it rightly “my personal” sermon? If I understand my purpose as a preacher; then my goal is to study and to know and then to communicate the heart and will of God to the congregation. In this sense it is God’s sermon; given to me; to communicate to you. It becomes not “my” personal sermon to keep to myself, but rather it is “our” sermon. It belongs to “us”; and it has been given to “us” (I pray) from God.

Similarly, our faith, our trust, our belief in the words and works of Christ as revealed in the Scriptures, has been given to us from God not merely to be “personal” but public; not to be hidden, but visible; not to be veiled, but vocal. Beloved, our faith, our trust, our believing in Christ is not something to be bottled up inside, but is to be poured out. While it is not technically wrong to say “my personal faith” – we need to be careful not to conclude that such a faith is something with which I can do whatever I want, however I want, whenever I want. There is to be a corporate, outward expression of faith that goes well beyond the personal. If the faith we have is truly from God, then that faith will be increasingly relentless, resolved, radical, unstoppable, unwavering, unyielding, unremitting, and ultimately fearless.

Such faith, rather than being veiled behind our self-erected walls of convenience, work, family, hobbies, emotional baggage and the like; is to be forthright, forward, frank and fearless. Anything less than the pursuit and practice of such a fearless faith is not sincere biblical faith. What is being preached from far too many pulpits today is a faith in a comfortable Christianity; a faith that is safe; a faith that avoids risks; a faith that promises happiness rather than joy; of temporal blessings rather than eternal delights and of what you can see with your physical eyes rather than what know with spiritual eyes fixed upon Christ.

Ask the average church goer if they would consider themselves “people of faith” and they might say something like, “Yes, I believe in God, God is a real and important part of my personal life.” If you give them enough time they will go on to say something like, “I know I may not show “my faith” like I should, but whose perfect?” If we find faith lacking in our lives, we might do better to say, “I may not show “the faith of the Lord Jesus” as I should, but I am working on it. Our churches are filled with people this morning who profess to believe in a God who makes very little difference in their daily and even personal lives. This is not the fearless life-changing faith of the Bible.

We have come to believe that we can add Christ to our lives, but not subtract sin. We have believed the lie that faith in Christ, simply believing something about Him without a daily change in behavior is somehow biblical. Do you realize that a faith that does not daily affect your behavior, your words and your thoughts is a cowardly faith? What we need is a fearless faith; one that challenges us to do more; to strive harder; to plead more for Christ to be revealed in and through us in EVERYTHING we do.

And our text, and the series of message from Acts 21:1-17, will show us a vivid illustration of fearless faith in the life of Paul. This fearless faith of Paul is revealed in three areas of his life. And my contention is this; that the fearless faith of Paul is given as an example, calling you and me to develop, exercise, and long for nothing less than the same faith. How can I say this to you; that if you would grow in the grace and knowledge of Christ that you must be resolved today to live with the same fearless faith like that of Paul? Let me remind you of Hebrews 13:7 which says:

Remember those who led you, who spoke the word of God to you; and considering the result of their conduct, imitate their faith.

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We are to imitate the faith of Paul. A faith that does not get rattled if the lights go out; a faith that does not bend when the circumstances seem dismal; a faith that is fearless. Now, I said there are in our text three areas in which we see this faith of fearlessness revealed in the life of Paul here in Acts 21:1-17. This morning we will look at the first area, found in verses 1-6. How does a faith that is fearless reveal itself in Paul’s life and then what are we to imitate? This first area might surprise you. So let us begin noting in verses 1-6 that...

I. Fearless faith is to be seen in your relationships (1-4a)

Acts 21 ushers in the close of Paul’s third missionary journey. We last saw Paul in Acts 20 giving his farewell speech to the Ephesian elders in Miletus. Our text this morning shows us how Paul’s faith was fearless as it revealed itself in his relationships. How does a fearless faith show itself in our relationships? With people. When it came to relationships for Paul, three things were true.

A. Fearless faith has a deep affection for believers (1-4a).

When we had parted from them and had set sail, we ran a straight course to Cos

The word “**parted**” here in the NASB and ESV is a bit too nondescript. The Holman Christian Standard captures the intensity of what took place here better by saying, “**After we tore ourselves away from them...**” The idea of the verb used here is that of loved ones that are being separated; torn from one another’s arms. I envision Jewish families during the Holocaust, children being torn from their parents arms. That is the idea here; of having such an affection for someone that it feels like being torn apart just to leave.

When was the last time felt like you were being “torn” away from someone? When was the last time it was a believer in Christ? Sadly, our faith in Christ has not often fully developed to this kind of depth of interpersonal bond. We tend to be on the surface and shallow with one another. How does this show a lack of fearless faith? It is not a fearless faith because by keeping people out of our hearts; out of our deep affections; by not seeking to encourage one another in the things of the faith as often as we can find time to get together, we make it easy on ourselves and others to not think much about our gathering together or even our departing. Our example, Paul, felt his heart ache when he left believers. Here we see Paul’s deep affection for believers. By faith, Paul developed a heart for people; he wept over and with people. And such an affection was not limited to the Ephesian believers with whom he spent three years. Listen to how Paul described this deep affection for the believers in Thessalonica, a church that he spent just three weeks with. He wrote in 1 Thessalonians 2:8

Having so fond an 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.

The word here rendered “having so fond of an affection” speaks of being affectionately desirous for another. The Greek word (ὁμιπομενοι homeiromenoi) occurs nowhere else in the New Testament. It means to “long after, to have a strong affection for.” The sense here is that Paul was so strongly attached to them that he would have been willing to lay down his life for them. How is your imitation of Paul’s faith in this regard? John the apostle said the same thing only he put it on us saying 1 John 3:16,

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We know love by this, that He laid down His life for us; and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren.

Paul's leaving the Ephesian believers felt like being torn away because he, like John in 1 John 3:16, regarded these people like family; like brothers and sisters. Let me remind you that there is a good reason why we refer to other Christians as brothers and sisters. The kinship we experience with our fellow heirs in Christ is more deeply rooted than any physical blood line or familial tie. When God saves us, He literally exchanges our spiritually dead and unfeeling **“heart of stone”** for a spiritually living and caring **“heart of flesh”** (Ezekiel 11:19). With this exchange comes transformation! Our greatest desires begin to conform to God's desires, and ultimately, we want God's will more than anything else. This change occurs at the very core of who we are; it literally changes our identity. For we who were once not a people have become the people of God; part of the family of God; and God intends for us to live as such.

This new identity of ours is not grounded in anything we have done; but in what Jesus accomplished and secured on the cross. Our identity is bound up in His victory, not in any of our own. We are to delight in worshipping Jesus in all that we do, and we are to aspire to walk as He walked. While we will never be perfect on this earth we still share that foundational unity, this common faith with other believers that is only found in Christ. When we gather with our brothers and sisters in Christ, when we dwell upon the things of life with them, and when we reflect upon how God's truth and reality is to be witnessed every day, such ought make our times of fellowship sweet and encouraging, so much so, that it is very easy to understand how Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy had become so “affectionately desirous” of the Thessalonians. Beloved, our faith is to cause us to see ***our Christian brothers and sisters as “very dear to us”***. ***This week, make time for prayer and fellowship with other Christians, and pray that you will savor and grow from these times together.*** Paul's faith grew in fearlessness because he had grown in loving and being connected to other believers!

So, when Paul and the Ephesian elders parted company they believed that they would never see each other again in this life. The apostle was heading to Jerusalem to deliver a benevolent offering to the needy brethren there. The Ephesian elders were heading back home to resume their shepherding duties with the church. The pain of parting was real.

B. Fearless faith has a deep aspiration for the progress of the gospel (1b-3).

...the next day to Rhodes [~70 miles] and from there to Patara [~70 more miles]; 2 and having found a ship crossing over to Phoenicia [~400 miles] , we went aboard and set sail. 3 When we came in sight of Cyprus, leaving it on the left, we kept sailing to Syria and landed at Tyre; for there the ship was to unload its cargo.

If you'll look at a map you'll discover that Paul followed the coastline in a south by south-east course to reach Jerusalem. Mostly likely he was on a small ship from Miletus to Patara and then boarded a larger vessel to head into the open seas across the Mediterranean. It was always more dangerous to sail in the open sea, but the open sea allowed for faster travel, and remember, Paul wants to get to Jerusalem by Pentecost. Later on Paul's return trip across the Sea en route to Rome, he traveled on a ship that carried 276 people (Acts 27:37), and this one may have been similar in size.

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Notice all the places named in the text: Cos, Rhodes, Patara, Cyprus, Tyre, just to mention a few. Just in verses 1-6 there are at least eight locations given. Why does the Bible include such geographic details? Remember our mission; the one Jesus gave us in Acts 1:8? What does our mission include? Geographic details! Let me ask you something, can you name the last eight places you have been to recently? And while you were there, did you seek to fulfill your Acts 1:8 mission of sharing the faith of Christ? Jesus said to go and testify of Him, where? In Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and to the ends of the earth (1:8). To accomplish our mission we must go to real places, like Paul did. Did you ever think about how many different beds or mats Paul slept on in his life? He was constantly on the move and constantly showing a deep affection for the believers.

On a side note, one of the things we see in the book of Acts is *progress*. Jesus said, “Go” and the early church *went*. We see this progress in a variety of ways in Acts. We find people witnessing and people being converted in city after city. We find the church sending people out to preach the gospel in new areas. We find church members giving sacrificially to help one another. We find the disciples growing in their knowledge of Christ and His Word. In less than 30 years, the church took the gospel to city after city throughout the Roman Empire. This is a church making *progress*.

Now, let us answer this question. What do we see happening at Hope CBC? We have been granted this great location from which to worship Christ together. We find a growing and committed group of men serving on the Church Leadership Team working through how to be more effective in our mission. We find other men and women seeking to set the standards for our Awana ministry; for our men’s and women’s ministries. I find a youth staff and youth group not content with gathering for just fun and games, but who truly want to fellowship around the Word of God; wanting to understand God, Jesus, the Bible and our mission. I find a congregation that is seeking to help and give hope to others. These and other things like it are blessings from God. But notice something; they all center around people and the need to develop as part of our faith a deep affection for people.

This is great, but we have the potential for so much more, particularly in one area. When it comes to progress, where are we lacking? Let me give you one word that comes to mind. *Outreach*. There is a word that requires a fearless faith, does it not? Let us not ever forget that God has determined to grow His church. And God, whether you like His plan or not; whether you are gun-ho for it or not, is to use His chosen people to reach others for His Son Jesus Christ.

Are you thankful for your church? If so, is there evidence? Who have you invited to be your guest at Hope CBC in the past month? How about in the past six months? Progress doesn’t just happen. It involves intentional, sacrificial, Spirit-led, believer-shared faith, the kind the early church exhibited in Acts; the kind Paul exemplified in his life. Beloved, fearless faith is cultivated and distributed in our God-given relationships as we seek to spread the gospel of Jesus Christ.

C. Fearless faith has a deep affinity for believers (4a).

After looking up the disciples, we stayed there seven days...

Moving then to verse 4, let us take notice of another way this fearless faith of Paul revealed itself. We are told that once Paul had arrived in Tyre, there on the west coast of Palestine, he and his team did something. We read, “**After looking up the disciples, we stayed there seven days...**” What was the first thing on Paul’s mind upon arriving; to find other believers? But I need you to think this one through with me. We know that Paul did not start the

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church in Tyre and mostly likely, he may not have even known these believers personally. But some of these believers may well have known Paul. For it is likely that the people who started this church were the Christians who fled the persecution in Jerusalem following Stephen's death (Acts 11:19). And just who was it that instigated this persecution? It was Paul! Now, if there was a people or town that Paul might have liked to skip church in order to avoid embarrassment because of his past, it would be this one. Can you imagine the potential conversations? Paul walks and meets one of the believers there in Tyre who says, “Oh, so you are Saul, the one that had my father imprisoned and killed for following Jesus!” But Paul had an affinity, a like-mindedness, a common faith with these believers. Here we find Paul exercising a fearless faith, not skipping church because he might have to face up to some unpleasant memories. Our text tells us that he looked up, he sought out, he found the disciples there in Tyre. Why? Because his faith was fearless. He trusted that if God had forgiven him of his past; then God's people would also forgive him of his past. How is that for faith? Some of you who live in fear of the past need to remember that God's people, if they are being faithful, will forgive because they know just how much they have been forgiven.

And so, we find that to develop and to practice a fearless faith means learning and practicing a deep affection for believers; having a deep aspiration to see the gospel spread; and by recognizing the deep affinity with have with other believers. There is nothing simply casual, safe, convenient about such a faith; but such is a faith that accomplishes much for God. It is a fearless faith that reveals itself in a firm commitment to relationships in the church. Wherever Paul went, he sought out fellowship with the believers in that town. If there were no believers present, he did evangelism until there were believers and then helped them organize a local church.

Please ask yourself if this describes the condition of your faith this morning. For Paul, when he got to Tyre, he found the disciples in that city. That was his first thought and his first course of action. You see, church in the book of Acts was never a one-day-a-week thing; and God-forbid it should be for us. We must stop looking a church as a location we go to on Sunday, but rather something we are a part of seven days a week. To know Christ is to know His people. To know Christ is to know you need the local church and to know the local church needs you. Here is one of the most profound aspects of possessing a fearless faith; you know your faith is increasingly fearless the more involved you are with God's people throughout the week; when you feel like parting is being torn from other believers; when you are persistently speaking to others about Christ and His church; and when you are seeking out other believers so that you may “hang out” with them; that you might encourage and be encouraged by them. This is the first step in developing a fearless faith; working on your relationships with God's people. How are you doing with such things? Let us pray that our faith would increase in fearlessness to the glory of God.

Soli Deo Gloria

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