

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 1b)

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.

I recently met up with an old acquaintance to share a cup of coffee and “catch up” with one another. In the course of our conversation, I was asked about “the church” for this person has heard that we sold our building and were meeting elsewhere. I remember him asking me, “So, where is your church now?” Simply question, right? Without thought, and I really mean that, without thought, I simply stated what most any of us would, “Our church meets at Central Park Elementary School, off of Hwy 112.” As I have thought about my answer, I came to realize that while it may be geographically correct; for we are meeting here this morning, just as I said; such an answer is not biblically correct.

You see, last week I laid out for you the premise that the church, a congregation of believers, is not just a collection of individual people seeking to understand and live out a personal, private faith. Indeed, my prayer is that each one of you has come to have faith in the person and work of Jesus. You must believe yourself to be a sinner, one who has missed the mark and standard of God, and thus you deserve the punishment that sin deserves, eternal separation and wrath from your holy Creator. You must believe that God, in love, sent His one and only Son from heaven; to show you that He is the way, the truth and the life; and that you will never come to the Father and be made right with God until you, by faith; with trust and confidence in the person and work of Jesus alone; particularly His work on the cross, validated by His resurrection from the dead, is your only hope, the only viable means by which you may have peace with God and know that you have the hope of eternal life rather than the horrific expectation of eternal damnation. This is where faith begins, with this kind of individual confession of Jesus as your Savior and Lord. But this is not where faith ends.

We have been considering the subject of the church as being a body, a gathering of believers who are actively living out; not just their individual, but by extension their corporate faith in Jesus Christ in such a way as to demonstrate to the world (not just those within, but also outside the church) that they are followers of Christ. Let me remind you again of the simple and profound words of our Lord who said just before He went to the cross (John 13:34-35):

34 A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another. 35 By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.

What we learn from this verse is that the church, the gathering of the disciples of Jesus, is to be living out their faith in such a way; loving one another, serving one another, caring for one other; that the world (“all men”) will “know that you are My disciples.” Beloved, our faith in Jesus is to be lived corporately before the world so that they will know we belong to Jesus. The word

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“know” is “ginosko” in the Greek and it speaks of truly understanding something. It indicates a relation between the person “knowing” and the object known. What is “known” is of value or importance to the one who knows, and this becomes the basis of the relationship. Your unbelieving family, your friends, your coworkers, your neighbors are to come to value or see the importance of your interaction with the church and this is to become the basis of your relationship with unbelievers; showing them the love of Christ by showing them your love for the church.

So then, when my friend asked me, “So, where is your church now?” A more biblical answer would have been; we are scattered throughout Northwest Arkansas, coming together on Sundays at Central Park Elementary; and meeting together in various small groups and gatherings throughout the week seeking to live out our faith before others. I know, it’s more wordy and cumbersome. But do you realize that nowhere in the New Testament do you read that the followers of Jesus “went to church.” What we read is that the church (the people) gathered together. There is a big difference between the two. The church is the people, not a place or a meeting you attend. In our modern world, the “church” has become known as a place where people “go” rather than the “people who are on a mission for God.” We cannot underestimate the power of how words shape our understanding of what a “church” is and how it is supposed to function. Indeed we must meet someplace such as this for our large weekly worship gatherings, and will have various other classes and meetings that happen at a “place”- but foremost, we will be to be defined and function as a community of “people” who are living as the church all week long (1 Corinthians 12). What others outside the church need to see is our faith being lived out fearlessly everywhere we go.

Thus we need to see that faith in Christ is not something we simply choose to do when it personally suits us; rather, faith in Christ is who we are; it defines us individually and as a church. We are to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ to be saved; and then we are to be found faithful as a church. I remind you that a faith that does not daily affect your behavior, your words and your thoughts is a cowardly faith; and what 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.

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.

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...

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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.

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).

Following this parting, Luke gives the details of Paul's journey in verses 1-4:

...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.

And this is nothing short of a fulfillment of the great commission; our church mandate as found in Matthew 28:19-20. I know you have heard this before, but hear this command of our Lord Jesus once again. Here we read:

19 Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, 20 teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.

I would like to give you a brief outline by which you might remember our church mandate; our commission. This is how we are to exercise and exhibit our faith as a church in seeing the gospel progress:

1. There is our **intention** – we are to be going; wherever we go; wherever we are; we go with the mindset and intention of fulfilling this commission. It does not matter whether I go to my kids room to wake them up in the morning; to my neighbors house to share a cup of coffee; to my school to learn; to my job across town; or even a flight to the other side of the world; the Christian's mindset; the Christian worldview is one that says, “As I go, I will go to make Christ know.
2. There is our **imperative** – what am I to do; to accomplish as I go. My goal; my desire; my purpose is to “make disciples”; learners and followers of Jesus Christ. Are the people that you influence becoming followers or better followers of Jesus? It might be your children; it might be your family or friends or co-workers; but your imperative; the command of our Lord Jesus Christ is that you make disciples.
3. There is our **identity** – as we make disciples; we bring them to the place where they publically identify themselves with Christ; this is what baptism is; a public identification that one's life now consists and is committed to the will and purpose of Christ. Our identity is to be Christ.
4. There is our **instruction** – we are to be teaching disciples to observe and obey everything Christ has commanded. This means we are students of the Word of God. Are you growing in the grace and knowledge of Jesus Christ so that you may instruct others?
5. There is our **inspiration** – Jesus said that He is with us always, even to the end of the age. Our Creator; Savior and Lord has promised to be our inspiration, our motivation; ever-present; ever-calling us to fulfill the work that He started in building His church.

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Beloved, this is to be our deep aspiration for the progress of the gospel. What 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 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 skipped 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

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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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