

Paul's companions

Part 1

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Place	Canterbury, England
Date	31.03.2005
Duration	00:54:34
Online version	https://www.audioteaching.org/en/sermons/ns002/paul-s-companions

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[00:00:01] Chapter 20, reading from verse 1. But after the tumult had ceased, Paul, having called the disciples to him and embraced them, went away to go to Macedonia. And having passed through these parts, and having exhorted them with much discussion, he came to Greece, and having spent three months there, a treacherous plot against him, having been set on foot by the Jews.

As he was going to sail to Syria, the resolution was adopted of returning through Macedonia, and there accompanied him, as far as Asia, Sopyta, son of Pyrrhus, a Buryan, and of the Thessalonians Aristarchus, and Secundus, and Gaius, and Timotheus of Derbe, and of Asia [00:01:12] Tychicus, and Trophimus.

These going before us, waited for us at Troas, but we sailed away from Philippi after the days of unleavened bread, and we came to them to Troas in five days, where we spent seven days. And the last one in chapter 27.

Acts 27 and verse 21.

And when they had been a long while without taking food, Paul, then standing up in the midst of them, said, Ye ought, O men, to have hearkened to me, and not have made sail from [00:02:02] Crete, and have gained this disaster and loss.

And now I exhort you to be of good courage, for there shall be no loss of life of any of you, only of the ship.

For the angel of the God whose I am, and whom I serve, stood by me this night, saying, Fear not, Paul, for thou must stand before Caesar. And behold, God has granted to thee all those that sail with thee.

Wherefore, be of good courage, men, for I believe God that thus it shall be as he has said to me.

This evening, I would like to say a little about Paul's company, or Paul's companions.

[00:03:09] We have, in these series of meetings, been considering Paul, and I thought it might be

profitable if we considered the type of people, or types of people, who were privileged to be under the shadow of Paul, to journey with him, to accompany him, and to have fellowship with him in the work of the Lord, especially centering on the seven, I might say, young brothers of Acts 20, who were privileged to be in such a company.

[00:04:01] But before looking at that, I wonder to myself if we perhaps could look for a few moments at the seven disciples who were in the company of the Lord Jesus in John chapter 21.

It's always well, of course, whatever subject you take up, that is, to bring in the person of the Lord Jesus.

The chapter 21 of John, I'm sure, is well known to all, if not to everyone, in this meeting room.

The disciples, of course, had earthly aspirations.

No doubt they were greatly disappointed.

There were doubts as to the truth of resurrection, or misunderstanding, or partial knowledge [00:05:03] of things. There certainly was some confusion.

But when we read chapter 20, we know, of course, that the Lord Jesus never breathed into Peter in order to send him fishing.

He had an entirely different service in mind altogether. Of course, we know that Peter, no doubt, was a very skillful fisherman, a very experienced one, and I have no doubt he was very qualified in the job that he had done. But when he met the Lord with others in chapter 20, the Lord breathes into him in order that he might go somewhere else, and that is that he might go where he would remit and retain [00:06:03] and where he would have before him the service of the Lord Jesus. The breath of that heavenly man, he breathed into them, how intimate, how near they were in these circumstances of privilege, that the Lord could breathe into them. But when we go to chapter 21, we find there it says, after these things, Jesus manifested himself again to the disciples.

Wonderful grace and consideration on the Lord's path, that in spite of all our disappointments, in spite of all our failures and our breakdowns, that the Lord deigns to go on with us to bring us into an understanding of the truth. And so we find there are seven disciples mentioned in the beginning of chapter 21.

[00:07:09] And it seems of particular note that only three of them are named by name.

It says there were together Simon Peter, and Thomas called Didymus, and Nathanael. You wonder to yourself, why does the Spirit of God particularly call attention to these three?

And as we read the Gospel of John, of course, we read about these three men. And what they seem to have above everything else was an appreciation of the person of the Lord Jesus.

If you think of Nathanael in chapter 2, he says, Thou art the King.

[00:08:08] Nathanael says to him, Rabbi, Thou art the Son of God, Thou art the King of Israel.

When we go to chapter 6, Peter says, We know who Thou art, the Holy One of God. And when we go to chapter 20, we find that Thomas says, My Lord and my God.

What marked each one of them was that they had a wonderful personal appreciation of the Lord Jesus.

I wonder how long it is since some Christians have addressed the Lord Jesus and said, My Lord and my God.

[00:09:02] I've even known of so-called brethren who refuse to worship or to address the Lord Jesus in prayer.

And in some of these areas, I believe it has been tolerated for far too long. How can anyone call themselves a Christian who fails to pray to the Lord Jesus and to worship the Lord Jesus?

You would think to yourself that people would instinctively, intuitively know what their position was in relation to the person of the Lord Jesus. They're not speaking to Him about what He has done for them. They're not thanking Him for what He effected for them. They simply come to a certain judgment or conclusion in their own lives.

[00:10:06] It's like Psalm 45, what I have composed as touching the King.

It's very nice, of course, to quote the words of Isaiah. It's very nice to quote the words of Scripture, and we don't condemn that at all. It's very nice to borrow the words of Mr. Darby, I believe, that wonderful poet. We have other wonderful poets, of course, in our hymn book. And we have a very spiritual hymn book. And it's wonderful to use it, but not to overuse it.

That we, as persons who have come into contact with the Lord Jesus, that we can compose what we have composed concerning the King.

[00:11:01] It's not that I have to repeat what I hear others saying, and thank God that we can repeat many precious things that have been handed down to us. But surely the exercise and desire of our heart should be that we have this peculiar, particular impression as to the greatness of the Lord Jesus.

And if once we get this dominating effect in our lives, it changes everything in this scene as far as we are concerned.

Now when we go to a person like Paul, of course, we all feel that we are midgets, we are very insignificant in the presence of such a man.

You'll find in the verses we read, was it two nights ago, when we read about Acts 20, [00:12:08] we find that there's a delineation of the person of Paul. It reminds me something, somewhat, of the Song of Songs.

You remember in the Song of Songs, it's the delight of the heart of the loved one to describe the varied features, and to delineate the person, to call attention to certain parts of his body.

And she is so obsessed with him that she can describe so many matters. I think she begins with his mouth and she speaks of his arms and his feet and all the rest of it. But when we come to Acts chapter 20, the first thing that arrests us is the words of Paul.

[00:13:02] That is, that we are occupied with what proceeds from the mouth of Paul. And then it says, he himself being about to go on foot.

What a wonderful consideration. When we think of those feet of Paul that were devoted in an untiring way to the service of the Lord Jesus, it's very easy for us today to get on a plane and go thousands of kilometers or thousands of miles.

But we never seem to appreciate the labor and the endeavor it cost the apostle Paul to walk from one place to another, full of robbers, full of thieves, full of many dangers, [00:14:02] things we know very little about at the present time. And then he says, it says in chapter 20, that you shall see my face no more. No doubt he made a wonderful impression in Ephesus. And it would be a kind of face, no doubt, that they would remember, though in Corinth they didn't have much time for the physique or the features of the apostle Paul. He was rather despised. But when you come to Acts 20, how different it is. He said, you yourselves know that these hands have ministered to my wants.

What a wonderful example he sets us for the present day. Men, these hands, these hands that were marked by the sewing, by the trade, by the industry, [00:15:04] he was engaged in so that he might look after his own interests and support himself when forgotten and neglected by others.

And then it says, having said these things, he knelt down, calling attention to his knees and then falling upon the neck of Paul.

Wonderful chapter it is, chapter 20, begins, doesn't it, with the expression of affection that was shown in it and how the Holy Spirit, why would he devote such a chapter to calling attention to all the varied parts of the body of the apostle Paul, that body that was [00:16:03] a portrait of the service he was engaged in.

When we come to the Acts, of course, we find that Paul must have spent a considerable number of lonely years, the hidden years of Tarsus, the hidden years or so in the wilderness. But when we come to chapter 13, we find there, where we read this evening, that it speaks of Paul and his company.

I wonder if Paul came to Canterbury tonight, how many people would be in his company, how many people would consider it to be a privilege, to be an honor to be of Paul's company. [00:17:05] So we find in Acts chapter 13 that there are three great powers. First of all, there's a power that's portrayed in this man, Elimus, or Elimus, however you care to pronounce it.

He was a representative of a kingdom of darkness, of a kingdom of evil.

On the other hand, you have Sergius Paulus, who is the representative of the great Roman Empire, the great civilizing effect that the Roman Empire had in preparing the way for the incoming of the Lord Jesus.

But while we have the power of darkness, and while we have this power of sovereignty, this [00:18:05]

power of imperialism, if you want, there's a greater power found in chapter 13, and that is the power that was vested in the apostle Paul, the power to overthrow these kingdoms.

He overthrew the power of the kingdom of darkness and dealt with this evil.

He overthrew in the soul of that proconsul the power and greatness of Rome and filled his heart, no doubt, with the power and greatness of another kingdom altogether. He was liberated from the power of Rome and he found his part in place alongside Paul. [00:19:02] He was an intelligent man. He was a man who was in command, I understand, of about the area, the administration of things here that there was a greater administrator came along. What a wonderful time it must have been to live in. And as this young man, John Mark, you would think to yourself, if I were in his position, I would have thought to myself, surely, this is the greatest enterprise, the greatest thing that's happening on earth at the present moment. There was no greater operation going on and the Spirit of God had his eye upon this particular territory. It had gone from one part of the island right across to the extremity of it. [00:20:03] There was power, there was healing, there was greatness. It should surely have attracted the heart of any young man who was found in this service. And in spite of all the display of power and greatness, it says that, and having sailed from Paphos, Paul and his company came to Perga of Pamphylia and John separated from them and returned to Jerusalem.

Of course, there's been much speculation as to his motives, as to his reasons and all the rest of that, and we don't have to speculate about these things. The fact was that he turned his back on the company of the greatest preacher apart from [00:21:07] the Lord Jesus who had ever been here on earth, the greatest servant.

Instead of being grateful for the wonderful privilege of being under the shadow of such a man, he prefers to go back to the very place where Christ had been crucified, the religious center of the whole Jewish system.

I think that should speak to every one of our hearts. How much does the power and greatness of Christianity really affect us? Are there still in our hearts desire to be found perhaps in a more respectable public [00:22:01] position to be connected with such instead of being associated with this greatest servant of the Lord Jesus?

In Acts chapter 20, we find here that there are these seven men mentioned who formed the company of Paul, Paul's company.

We'll find if you look in chapter 19, it says, I'm looking for the seven sons of Sceva.

Yes, and we could read from verse 13 of chapter 19, it says, and certain of the Jewish exorcists [00:23:01] also who went about, took in hand to call upon those who had wicked spirits, the name of the Lord Jesus saying, I adjure you by Jesus whom Paul preaches. And there were certain men, seven sons of Sceva, Jewish high priest who were doing this. So in chapter 19, you have Sceva and his seven sons.

In chapter 20, you have Paul and his seven sons.

Great system of imitation that has been set up here when the truth of the assembly was being established and was being preached. It's not only happened in the days at the beginning, it's

repeated itself in history. [00:24:02] This system of imitation so that outwardly, there's supposed to be signs and wonders. There's this group of people, they have a certain status, they have a certain reputation, they have a certain heritage, and they seem to affect certain elements. But when you come to chapter 20, how different are these men?

It's interesting to see if you look into the different scriptures referring to them, that every one of these seven men in chapter 20 were familiar with Ephesus. They had all visited Ephesus, or they all had met Ephesians, and even one of them is called the Ephesian.

[00:25:01] Perhaps so that Ephesian ground was familiar to every one of them.

Some of us would be challenged in our hearts as to how familiar we are with Ephesian ground. It says in chapter 19 at the beginning, And it came to pass, while Apollos was at Corinth, Paul, having passed through the upper districts, came to Ephesus.

So in order to arrive at Ephesus, you have to go over the upper districts.

Seems to be elevated ground.

More of us, most of us no doubt, prefer to struggle in Rome, or to go through the exercises [00:26:04] of Corinth.

But how many of us spiritually have traveled through these upper regions in order to arrive at Ephesus?

As was mentioned earlier this week, you see chapters 1, 2, and 3, you have this wonderful atmosphere of prayer and of doxology, where the soul is engaged with the greatness of God and the greatness of God's thoughts.

And then the last three chapters, of course, it's like coming down. But before you can work out the truth at the downward level, you have to have the light and the knowledge of what is in the upper regions.

[00:27:05] Most of us prefer to struggle from Rome to Ephesians, when really we should be going from Ephesians to Rome.

Even chronologically, the Apostle Paul went to Ephesus long before he ever went to Rome.

Unless our souls are basked in the greatness and the dignity of the position, and unless we've seen that which is in the mind of God and in the heart of God, we cannot fill out our public position at all.

Occupied with our own needs, occupied with everything for me, for me, for me. [00:28:03] We even sing a hymn that repeats time and time again, for me, for me, for me. But when you come to the Ephesian letter, you have what is going to satisfy the need of the heart of God, what is going to provide refreshment for the heart of the Lord Jesus. Where can he find it on earth at the present moment? I remember in 2 Samuel 23, where David says, Oh, that one would give me to drink of the water that is in the well in Bethlehem. No doubt as a young man, he had gone about from all these different wells while looking after his sheep.

And there was a special, something special about this particular well. Where can the heart of Christ be refreshed at the present moment? [00:29:06] In the town where I live, in the place where I live, how much consideration is given to that side of the truth.

So we find that it says here that there accompanied him as far as Asia, and then it mentions the names of these seven young men. It says in verse 4 of chapter 20, Sopater, son of Pyrrhus, a Berean.

Wonderful to think that the Spirit of God, I should come upon this, I would say, young man, point out that he was a Berean and preserve that text for us for 2,000 years.

[00:30:01] What was so significant about it? What could God say about any one of us?

Remember in the time of Daniel, the message from heaven was, Art thou that Daniel?

Daniel was a man who was well known in heaven. And as Mr. Darby has said, there are no stranger God shall greet thee. Imagine arriving in heaven as a stranger. Or are we going to arrive in heaven?

Are those who know heaven well and who know something about it because they've tasted something of it during their pilgrim pathway here? Now someone says, well, when I die, I'll go to heaven. Well, the question is, why should you wait till you die? You don't go to heaven because you die. [00:31:02] You go to heaven because the Lord Jesus has died. And if you look at people like Peter and Paul and John, they didn't wait till they died before they went to heaven, did they?

The whole scene was opened up to them.

And you wonder to yourself, when I arrive in heaven, will I arrive there as one who is well known in heaven? Or will I arrive there as a place that I've already anticipated and that I know something of? Well, it says he was a Berean. And the Bereans, of course, were much more noble than those in Thessalonica because they searched the scriptures daily.

And that, I wonder, is that the custom of each one of us here? [00:32:04] You know, we're living in days when, well, you get up in the morning, what are you going to do about reading the scriptures? Well, there's the calendar. And you just tear off a page of the calendar and read it, and that's enough for the day. Or maybe you have a calendar for the evening. And I'm always very concerned about why or how the calendars are replacing the holy scriptures. But perhaps some of you won't agree, but it's just a great danger amongst us.

You didn't just read the scriptures daily, you searched the scriptures daily. Why do you go to read the scriptures? Some people go to read the scriptures in order to get material for a sermon. [00:33:01] You know, you hear about a brother, he's got his study, and he goes to his study so that he can prepare his outline or his sermon.

Why do we go to the scriptures? We go to the scriptures surely because we have a thirst, because we have a hunger. It says that David entered, he entered because of his hunger.

And there was only one place where that hunger was satisfied, as the priest took that bread that was available and fed David and those who were with him. So why do we come to a meeting? Come

because our parents expect us to come? Do we come because of custom or habit, in some kind of mechanical way? How often do we come to the meeting? [00:34:02] Because we have a hunger and because we recognize that that is a place or one of the places where that hunger can be satisfied.

How wonderful it would all be if we were more addicted to the scriptures. You know, in the coming day it's going to be rather embarrassing for some of us to meet some of those so-called minor prophets. You know, say you met Habakkuk, what would you say to him? You say, oh yes, didn't you have a, you had a book in the Old Testament, yes. But how long could you carry on a conversation with him as to the contents of his book? Oh, we might know the book of Jonah because it's a kind of interesting story and I'm sure it'd be very nice to go to Jonah and say to him, well, tell me something about [00:35:01] the days you spent in the belly of the great whale. But when you go to meet some of the other so-called minor prophets, I wonder how embarrassed it would be if we had to carry on a conversation with them.

I don't know why they're called minor. Probably because they didn't give great big long sermons. Because they were short and to the point.

So we find that, then it's after Sopita, it says he's a Berean.

And then of the Thessalonians, Ares Tarkas, Thessalonians, a man who should have known much of the truth, much of the truth of Thessalonians.

And as we all know, Thessalonians, especially chapter one, verse four, is something that [00:36:08] engages us with the coming of the Lord Jesus for all that belongs to him here on earth. What a wonderful thing it would be to fill our souls and occupy our time with the wonderful consideration when that blessed man will be coming.

Then it says that there's a man called Secundus.

It's rather a kind of funny name, isn't it?

He may have been a slave. And I understand in those days that a lot of slaves didn't have names and some of them just had numbers.

So you find this man, Secundus, is number two. [00:37:03] If you go to, is it Romans 16?

You find there it says, I Tertius, that is I number three, who have written this epistle to salute you in the Lord. And then it says, and the brother Quartus, that is the brother number four. So first of all, you have one who's number two and then you have one who's number three and you have one who's number four. But you never find anyone with the name Primus, number one.

But Secundus, it's the kind of position that dear Jonathan wanted, wasn't it?

[00:38:01] He would have been happy with position number two. A lot of trouble has been caused in many gatherings of God's people because so many brothers want to be number one.

They're not there, they wouldn't be satisfied with being number two. But you see, in Christianity, we have to learn that the number one position is not available. It's already been filled.

That's the position that's accorded to the Lord Jesus. And so we have to learn to take our place in a proper way and to move on in the testimony here. And then, of course, it speaks to us of Gaius or Gaius.

[00:39:05] You'll find there's a mention of Gaius, whether it's the same one or not. In chapter 19, it says, having seized and carried off with them Gaius and Aristarchus. That is, they were caught up in this uprising in Ephesus because of the overthrow of the goddess Diana, the goddess of hunting, the goddess of destruction.

And they find themselves in an atmosphere like this. And the citizens lay hands upon them.

And they are identified with those who are persecuted and those who have no place or position in the existing system in the place of Ephesus.

[00:40:08] Ephesus had been the number two city in that part of the world. Pergamos had been number one, but we find that Ephesus had taken over because of its advantages physically and advantages politically.

But in such a system, of course, Christians are never comfortable and never at home. Therefore, they find that they are being persecuted. And then, of course, we find a man like Timothy.

What kind of man was Timothy?

You'll find various mentions of him in the scriptures, especially in 1 Timothy and 2 Timothy. [00:41:05] He was a man who had a light as to the order of God, as to what was in the heart of God and how things should be worked out here. But he was also familiar, very familiar, with the conditions of 2 Timothy. So that first of all, he gets light as to the way things should be, and then he gets light as to the way things would be after the departure of Paul.

And it's necessary for us to have an appreciation, to have a valuation that we'll never find our way in a day of confusion in 2 Timothy unless we have a measure of light as to what we read in the first book of Timothy.

[00:42:01] And then, of course, we have Tychicus and we have Trophimus. Tychicus was a man that Paul said, wasn't it, that he would write to the Ephesians.

And he says, but in order that you may know what concerns me, how I am getting on, Tychicus, the beloved brother and faithful minister in the Lord. He was a man who was familiar with the circumstances of Paul. He was able to go about and tell the brethren as to even his physical condition. He was so familiar with him, he knew everything about him because he had spent so much time with him.

And then the other one, of course, is Trophimus. Trophimus, who had been left behind sick. [00:43:03] You know, people talk about, oh, why don't we go back to Pentecost? Why don't we go back to this great display of power and all the rest of that? But Trophimus was left surely as a light, as for our instruction, that we have to learn in spite of all our disabilities, in spite of all our weaknesses, that these are the conditions in which the testimony is going to be maintained and maintained by heaven.

He's the one who's called, I think it's in chapter 21 and verse 29, the Ephesian. How would you like to be known in your local gathering as the Ephesian? [00:44:02] I once met a brother who thought he was the great Roman. He was always going through Romans. He boasted great in the fact that he was a real Roman. No doubt there's not much wrong with a real Roman. Some people say a Roman can go anywhere, but then what kind of reputation would it be if you were known as an Ephesian, a man who had a real grasp of things, as Paul sets out in chapter 20, the whole counsel of God, the assembly of God, the gospel of God, the whole scope of the truth before him. We live in days, of course, you know, when there are so many specialists. Christianity is becoming like Harley Street. It's all full of specialists. You have special students of prophecy, men who go about all the time with charts and [00:45:03] show you things about what's going to happen in the future. Well, you're not going to throw stones or destroy a prophet like that, are you, if he's coming to tell you about the happy times that are coming in the future. I mean, even the natural heart of the Jew would be thrilled to think, oh, this is a wonderful thing that we're going to have in the future. The great problem, of course, with the prophets was that they also had a habit of speaking about the present, and that was why they were stoned from the time of Abel on. Which of the prophets have your father not stoned? So if you want, well, I'll leave it at that.

When we, I'm sorry, I see the time's gone.

Was it chapter 27 was read, yeah.

[00:46:04] Well, we certainly don't have time to look at the scope and the extent of those, of this wonderful interesting chapter, which in one way gives us a public history of the assembly.

Some people imagine that the only account we have of the history of the assembly is in Revelation chapter 2 and chapter 3, but then you get the history of it also in the book of the Acts, especially after chapter 20, when we're not occupied so much with Paul as a person, but when we're occupied with Paul more as a picture of the coming of the [00:47:01] conditions that exist publicly at the present time, then you start with the failures of breakdown and many other things.

But when we come to chapter 27, you see the practical salvation, I suppose I should say, that's connected with those who keep company with the apostle Paul. So the question today is, how many of us are keeping company with the apostle Paul? So many people find that Christianity doesn't extend much beyond my personal salvation.

And if that is the case, you might ask yourself the question, well, why didn't the Lord take me to heaven the day I was converted? He could have saved me from all these problems and all these exercises and all these troubles, [00:48:02] and it would have been so nice, more or less like the thief on the cross. I would be in paradise the same day, and I wouldn't have all these troublesome brethren and all the problems that are connected with them. Why did the Lord, in his wisdom, see fit to have here on earth such a thing as the assembly? You see, God found so much delight and so much pleasure in the person, in the manhood of the Lord Jesus, that God wanted a universe that would be filled with persons who would remind him of Christ.

For surely if the assembly is anything, it is but the moral continuation of Christ in [00:49:02] the very scene where he was rejected.

That that man was going to continue, I'm sure the devil must have rejoiced the day the Lord Jesus

died. He probably thought a lot of his problems were over. He had got rid of that man, and that would be the end of these things.

But then, if you go to Acts chapter 7, you'll find a young man there by the name of Stephen, one who acted like the Lord Jesus. He spoke like the Lord Jesus, even used the very words of the Lord Jesus. For God was going to continue that order of manhood, and he was going to produce it in the most adverse of circumstances.

That's a great triumph that God has, that in the very scene of Christ's rejection, that [00:50:06] he's producing that which will fill his heart with pleasure and delight because he has brought about a generation who are exactly like Christ, like him, O grace supreme, like him before thy face. That God, as it were, is going to decorate the heavens where every wit uttereth glory and where everything will give testimony to the greatness and to the blessedness of Christ.

What a wonderful occupying object God has provided in our hearts for the Lord in the person of the Lord Jesus, one who has come into the very circumstances in which we are. He's adopted, as it were, that condition that is understandable to our hearts and is [00:51:04] approachable to us, and that's what God wants to fill our hearts with at the present time. Forget about all the failures, forget about all the disorder and all the rest of it, but to fill our hearts as we see what God has in the person of Christ. It's the only standard that God has for Christians. You don't find standards in this chapter or that chapter. The standard for the Christian, there's only one standard, and that is the person of the Lord Jesus.

May the Lord encourage our hearts that we find ourselves in company with persons who have an appreciation of these truths, that we can be identified as a company because we're going out as a company, and John makes that very clear. [00:52:01] At the end of John's Gospel, he tells us the wonderful fact there will be individuals at the end of the period, and when he takes you to Revelation, he shows you there's going to be a company, a company who have the same feelings and the same desires as the Holy Spirit toward the Lord Jesus, so that at the very end, it's not a matter of going off in individuals while the truth, of course, is treasured and appreciated by individuals, that God's going to have that assembly, the response. Even so, come Lord Jesus, may it be the prayer of every one of our hearts, for his name's sake. Amen.