



26. 'Anticipating glory'

Acts 20.³²-21.¹⁹

Background

It's a consistent note struck throughout the Bible, but the New Testament in particular regularly spells out the integral connection between faith, hope and love. It's a 'cord of three strands' which is the hallmark of the believer – never the one without the other!

The passage in today's study illustrates this well – the upward gaze of faith, the forward perspective of hope, and not least the outward looking character of love. It's the bonds of that love which are particularly highlighted in the passage – and of course in the early church it was not least the love which believers had for one another which proved such a powerful testament to, and indeed such a striking display of, the truth of the gospel of grace.

In this life there are often partings – sometimes they arise because of bereavement, sometimes through a redeployment, sometimes through family commitments: and sometimes, too, on account of the call of the Lord.

Such partings are invariably painful and hard, keenly felt by all concerned, as they plainly were by Paul and his fellow believers. The strong bonds of love between them all were rooted in the fact of their having been born again by the Spirit of God and being in consequence the blood-bought children of God: their mutual love for one another stemmed from, and was a reflection of, the gracious love of God Himself, and the expressions of that love which are seen here are themselves pointers towards, and assurances of, the day of a great final gathering when there'll not be ever again any more partings at all. Faith, hope and love belong inseparably together.

It's instructive to observe the way this brotherly love found such varied and consistent expression – and to be challenged by the intensity of their faith, the certainty of their hope, and the reality of their love. In March 2020, after months of prayerful seeking the Lord's mind on the way forward the 'Next Step' which we recognised Him bidding us take involved, as part of a 3-fold commitment, our being, by the grace of God, *a family*. This passage, as vividly as any, provides a glimpse of what 'being a family' is like.

Read through the passage (including Acts 20.32-38) and if you don't have time for all the questions, start with '**days**' (1), (3) and (5).

1) Monday 4th September – the life of faith

Read [Acts 21.1-3](#)

“.. after we had torn ourselves away from them, we put out to sea ..” (Acts 21.1)

This single sentence captures well the essence of our present experience as followers of the Lord Jesus. The bonds of love with God’s people. The pain of parting from dear friends. The call of Christ to venture forth boldly with Him. A word in season for you?

What has been your experience of these three features of the life of the believer?

In what ways, either at present or in recent times, have you been conscious of the Lord calling you to ‘put out into deep water’ ([Lk.5.4](#))?

How ready are you to countenance following the Lord, in obedience to His call, into new spheres of service or into far parts of the world?

Is enough stress given to this call of the Lord to the ‘mission-field’ (whether at home or abroad) in the regular preaching of the Word of God?

Prayer: *In the pains of parting, Lord, help me rejoice in the prospect of that great and final gathering of Your people: grant me boldness meanwhile in stepping out in faith.*

2) Tuesday 5th September – life through the Spirit

Read [Acts 21.4](#)

“.. through the Spirit they urged Paul not to go on to Jerusalem ..” (Acts 21.4)

Another cameo of what it is to be a follower of Jesus. It’s a ‘plural’ life, lived in community with others; a life marked by a welcoming, hospitable love; and a life lived at the direction of the Holy Spirit – alert to, and sharing with others, His prompts.

Was Paul disobedient to the Spirit in insisting that he pressed on to Jerusalem (see [Acts 20.22-24](#))?

What’s meant by the statement that ‘through the Spirit they urged Paul not to go on to Jerusalem’?

Prayer: *Thank You, O my Father, for giving us Your Son, and leaving Your Spirit ‘til the work on earth is done. May I be alert to all His promptings and interpret them rightly.*

3) Wednesday 6th September – life on your knees

Read [Acts 21.5-6](#)

“.. there on the beach we knelt to pray ..” (Acts 21.5)

Yet another graphic picture of our new life in Christ. Again we see them down on their knees together (see [Acts 20.36](#)), praying for one another: a spontaneous prayer meeting involving them all, children included. Get yourself some knee pads!

How do we best 'accompany' those who are called into some fresh sphere of ministry, not just as they start that ministry but throughout the course of it?

What is the significance of their *kneeling* to pray (both here [v.5] and at 20.36)?

John Calvin seems to have been comfortable with kneeling to pray, John Knox less so (if his sermon before King Edward VII is anything to go by): what are the 'pros and cons' of kneeling to pray (beyond physical practicalities)?

In what ways does the Lord challenge or encourage you here in regard to both your own prayer life and your relationship with fellow believers?

How might we encourage and help children to share fully in the prayer life of the congregation?

Prayer: How grateful I am, Lord Jesus, that as my great High Priest You constantly kneel down with me and commend me to Your Father and impart to me His blessing.

4) Thursday 7th September – life lived in harmony

Read [Acts 21.7-8](#)

".. we greeted the brothers and sisters and stayed with them for a day .." (Acts 21.7)

Here's another window onto the life of Christ's church. A family, united by their common birth: and a fellowship in which a range of different Spirit-given gifts are gladly exercised, down the generations. Apostles, evangelists, deacons, prophets.

Read [1 Cor.12.7](#): what 'manifestation of the Spirit' has been given to you?

How might members of a fellowship be encouraged and helped to recognise, develop and use their Spirit-given gifts?

Prayer: You bestow gifts upon Your people with a lavish generosity, O Lord! May I savour afresh the privilege You give me of being one through whom You minister grace.

5) Friday 8th September – life on the battlefield

Read [Acts 21.8-11](#)

".. the Jewish leaders in Jerusalem will bind the owner of this belt .." (Acts 21.11)

Jesus is building His church. Through His Holy Spirit, He orchestrates the life and work of the church. He who is Himself 'the Word' continues always to speak, intimating to His people the trials they'll face and equipping them thereby the better to face them.

Read [Amos 3.7](#): in what ways does this have application to ourselves today?

Agabus was not an unknown quantity (see [Acts 11.27f](#)): when someone comes with a 'prophetic' word how do you know what to make of it?

Job seems to have had a 'foreboding' of the trials he had to face ([Job 3.25](#)): what experience have you had of such 'forebodings'? Should they be viewed as a normal part of Christian experience?

How do you know whether to see such an intimation as the Lord's re-assurance ('I have it in hand') or His warning not to go into that situation?

Prayer: Thank You, Lord, for making it clear that in this world we will have trouble, and for assuring us that You have overcome the world and have given Your victory to us.

6) Saturday 9th September – life in the Kingdom

Read [Acts 21.12-14](#)

".. I am ready not only to be bound, but also to die .. for the name of the Lord .." (Acts 21.13)

The three core values of the Kingdom of God are all seen here: submission, service, sacrifice. We are saved to serve and therein we find our truest freedom. We delight in Jesus as Lord, and in dying to self for His sake, we discover true fullness of life.

How do we resolve the tension when natural instincts and emotions, on the one hand, run counter to strong, inner convictions on the other?

Paul and his companions (including Luke) were clearly at odds as to the course to be followed: how is consensus reached when believers disagree?

Prayer: May Your will be done, my Father, on earth as it is in heaven. Sometimes it's hard to know what Your will is: help me to rest in the assurance that You are sovereign.

7) Sunday 10th September – life to the glory of God

Read [Acts 21.15-19](#)

".. Paul .. reported in detail what God had done among the Gentiles .." (Acts 21.19)

God's people delight to gather together, and to share with one another – and that in great detail – all that God has done, and continues to do, through their lives day by day. Today, thus, a day to join with fellow believers one way or another to praise Him!

There were no 'celebrities' – Paul the apostle stayed in the home of Mnason, a little-known disciple: can we avoid a 'celebrity culture' in the church today?

What has God been doing in and through your life which you will be glad to report to those you've maybe not seen for some time?

Prayer: Praise awaits You, our God, in Zion: to You our vows will be fulfilled. You answer us with awesome and righteous deeds, God our Saviour! ([Ps.65.1, 5](#)).