

A Record Of Faithful Service.

Text: Acts 20:17-38

Suggested Hymns:

357, 301, 416, 282, 377

1) In Your Labours

2) In Your Sufferings

3) In Your Loves

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all. Amen.

The text for our sermon today is Acts 20:17–38, *¹⁷ From Miletus [Paul] sent [men] to Ephesus and called for the elders of the church. ¹⁸ And when they had come to him, he said to them: “You know, from the first day that I came to Asia, in what manner I always lived among you, ¹⁹ serving the Lord with all humility, with many tears and trials which happened to me by the plotting of the Jews; ²⁰ how I kept back nothing that was helpful, but proclaimed it to you, and taught you publicly and from house to house, ²¹ testifying to Jews, and also to Greeks, repentance toward God and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ.*

²² And see, now I go bound in the spirit to Jerusalem, not knowing the things that will happen to me there, ²³ except that the Holy Spirit testifies in every city, saying that chains and tribulations await me.

²⁴ But none of these things move me; nor do I count my life dear to myself, so that I may finish my race with joy, and the ministry which I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the gospel of the grace of God.

²⁵ “And indeed, now I know that you all, among whom I have gone preaching the kingdom of God, will see my face no more. ²⁶ Therefore I testify to you this day that I am innocent of the blood of all men. ²⁷ For I have not shunned to declare to you the whole counsel of God. ²⁸ Therefore take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood.

²⁹ For I know this, that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock. ³⁰ Also from among yourselves men will rise up, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after themselves. ³¹ Therefore watch, and remember that for three years I did not cease to warn everyone night and day with tears.

³² *“So now, brethren, I commend you to God and to the word of His grace, which is able to build you up and give you an inheritance among all those who are sanctified.*

³³ *I have coveted no one’s silver or gold or apparel.* ³⁴ *Yes, you yourselves know that these hands have provided for my necessities, and for those who were with me.* ³⁵ *I have shown you in every way, by laboring like this, that you must support the weak. And remember the words of the Lord Jesus, that He said, ‘It is more blessed to give than to receive.’”*

³⁶ *And when he had said these things, he knelt down and prayed with them all.* ³⁷ *Then they all wept freely, and fell on Paul’s neck and kissed him,* ³⁸ *sorrowing most of all for the words which he spoke, that they would see his face no more. And they accompanied him to the ship.* (NKJV)

Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us through Your truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,

Jesus Christ is the Saviour of mankind.¹ Jesus is fundamental in all our preaching. But we dare not omit to tell the people that Jesus is also to be an Example to us. Jesus Himself tells us that we should do as He has done.² Peter declares that Jesus has left us an example.³ Christians should repeatedly be encouraged to follow the example of Jesus so that Christ dwells in their hearts and they be rooted and grounded in love.⁴

However, the Bible also teaches that we should be imitators of holy men of God. Paul tells Philippians that they have him as an example to follow.⁵ The Corinthian Christians are urged to follow Paul.⁶ Peter tells the elders to be examples to the congregation.⁷ The Letter to the Hebrews tells members to follow the faith of those who have rule over their souls.⁸ Today, we shall let one of these holy men of God be an example to us as we are encouraged to *Be as Faithful as Paul*. May the Lord bless our meditation.

1. Faithful Service In Your Labours

Paul was a labourer. He taught the people; he imparted knowledge to enlighten their understanding. The substance of his teaching was *“repentance toward God and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ.”* He preached God’s Law,

but especially faith toward our Lord Jesus.⁹ Paul declared to the hearers the whole counsel of God. He did that publicly and privately, from house to house, never wearying to warn every one individually. Surely, Paul faithfully performed the duty of teaching the people, a duty God had assigned to him as a called preacher of Jesus.

Not many are called by Holy Spirit to be overseers of God's flock, but each one of us has some duty assigned to him by God. Whatever it may be, let us be as faithful in doing our duty as Paul was, even if our field of service is not as great as was that of Paul.

Those having only one talent are expected to use faithfully the talent to given them.¹⁰ God does not judge by amount of work but by degree of faithfulness.¹¹

Are you a father or a mother? Parenthood brings with it certain duties towards children God has given you. You shall not love your children more than God.¹² You shall rule well your own household,¹³ you shall not provoke your children to anger,¹⁴ you shall bring them up in nurture and admonition of the Lord.¹⁵

In the performance of these duties God requires only faithfulness.¹⁶ God does not expect a one-talent parent to do what a ten-talent parent can do, but He does want the one-talent parent to use faithfully his one talent, and the ten-talent parent to use faithfully his ten talents.

Paul was undoubtedly a ten-talent man. Paul would have been unfaithful had he used only one or two of the ten talents God had given him. And we? Are we doing faithfully what we can as parents?

We are Christians. As Christians we have duties.¹⁷ Listed among these duties is to have compassion for one another.¹⁸ We should weep with those who weep.¹⁹ If one Christian suffers, all Christians suffer.²⁰ This is not something one may do or leave undone, as Matt. 18:23-33 easily shows in the parable of the unmerciful servant.

God commands us to have compassion towards others, but He does not expect the same amount of compassion from each one. All he asks is that we faithfully use our God-given abilities to be compassionate.²¹ Are we doing that? Are we striving to be as faithful in the work we have to do as Paul was in the work God gave Him to do?

2. Faithful Service In Your Sufferings

Paul was a sufferer. He had a thorn in the flesh.²² He was beaten with many stripes, and physical sufferings.²³ These physical sufferings were severe.²⁴ Worse were the sufferings he endured because he could not do what he wanted to do. God's Spirit compels him to cancel his plans and go to Jerusalem.²⁵ But he will do the Spirit's bidding even though he knows that afflictions await him.

And how his heart must have bled when he foresaw the future of the Ephesian congregation. When he is gone, "***wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock.*** These false teachers will speak perverse things, divide the church, cause factions to arise, and draw away the disciples from Jesus Christ.

What he has built up in three years, these false teachers from outside will cause strife and Paul will have to suffer. What will hurt still more is that in the Ephesian congregation there are those who, as soon as Paul is gone, will talk twisted, distorted, perverted stuff, corrupting purity of faith, disturbing the harmony of the congregation, forming scandalous sects and schisms.

To know that the Ephesian congregation would be torn asunder especially by wolves in sheep's clothing, by enemies within, and to be powerless to halt it is indeed a suffering whose severity is known only to those who have experienced it.

However, Paul was faithful in his suffering. Willingly he went where God sent him even though it meant severe suffering. Patiently he endured his sufferings. Not one word of complaint or murmuring against God do we find in his parting words to Ephesian elders.

Prayerfully he approached the suffering, asking God to lead him, to make him willing to do as God willed. Trustingly he went into his sufferings, positive that God knows what is best and orders all things well.²⁶

We also have sufferings. Some are sick physically. Chronic ailments. Painful sickness. This earth is a hospital in which every person because of his sin is a patient. Others are worrying about the future. They wonder what they will eat and drink tomorrow.²⁷ They fear they will lose their job.

Some imagine the worst about their children; they fear for the future of their country; they burden themselves with unnecessary cares. Or they are grieving

about the death of a loved one, a wayward child, an unhappy love affair; or they worry about impending bankruptcy and possible disgrace.

Combined with physical and mental sufferings are often spiritual sufferings. Some doubt that God loves them. Some think their sins are too great and too many ever to be forgiven.²⁸ Some say: *“I doubt very much that God answers prayers. He does not answer mine.”* Some people are certain they have committed the unforgivable sin and will not firmly believe they can be saved.

Some people cannot understand why God’s children must undergo sorrows; they believe God does not care whether they perish.²⁹ Do you need additional facts be presented to prove the truth of Christ’s statement *“In the world you will have tribulation”*?³⁰

Whatever our suffering be, let us be as faithful as Paul was in his suffering. May we be willing sufferers! Why be so foolish as to think we know better than God?³¹ God has chosen us to be His soldiers, and as such we should be ready to endure hardships.³²

And if the purpose of sufferings is not understandable to us, may God help us to say with Jesus in Gethsemane: *“O My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as You will.”*³³ Yes, willingly let us submit to God’s plan and ways for us.³⁴ May we be also patient sufferers.

Let us put away every inclination to murmur and complain!³⁵ Unto the bitter end let us endure every hardship.³⁶ If in our sufferings we become weary and faint in mind,³⁷ may there be on our lips continually the prayer *“Now may the Lord direct your hearts into the love of God and into the patience of Christ.”*³⁸

Especially let us plead that longsuffering³⁹ be given to us in rich measure when afflictions come, so that it may be said of us that we are as patient as Job.⁴⁰

Let us be praying sufferers. Especially in hours of great distress it should not be said that we have not, because we ask not.⁴¹ God says that in trouble we should call upon Him.⁴² Jesus did so in Gethsemane. It produces results.⁴³

Let us be trusting sufferers. Even though others think otherwise, may we always regard our sufferings as a furnace in which God tests our faith,⁴⁴ and strengthens it,⁴⁵ and makes it known.⁴⁶

May we always regard our sufferings as an instrument that God uses to have us cease from sin,⁴⁷ increase in holiness,⁴⁸ and fill us with a longing for heaven.⁴⁹

Let us finally be joyful sufferers. Let us rejoice that sufferings keep us close to God,⁵⁰ that sufferings are of short duration,⁵¹ and that our sufferings shall be changed into joy.⁵² And what a joy it will be!⁵³

3. Faithful Service In Your Loves

Paul loved his fellow-men. He showed his love by keeping back nothing profitable to them; by preaching to them the one thing needful for time and eternity, namely, repentance and faith; and by urging them to take heed unto themselves so that false prophets would not lead them astray.

He showed his love by admonishing them to remain loyal, and doing that continually for a space of three years; by commending them to the care of God and His Word, assuring them that all would be well if they did so; by giving them an excellent example to follow; and by praying with them and for them.

He especially shows his love for them when he says he is preaching to them the whole counsel of God, not to get their silver and gold, but for their own profit. Yes, he was ready to pay his own bills, so that no one could say he was preaching because he loved money.⁵⁴

Paul also loved God. He showed his love by his readiness to serve God, not for financial reasons and not for reasons of glory and honour, but rather with all lowliness of mind.

Paul a learned man, studied under Gamaliel,⁵⁵ but made no attempt to show his knowledge. Paul showed his love for God sacrificially, ready to go into death, if necessary, for Christ's cause. Truly, Paul was faithful in his love towards man and God.

Let us be as faithful as Paul was. Let us also love our neighbour as we love ourselves.⁵⁶ Love should not be mere sentiment. Those people do not love, who do not show love.⁵⁷ Remembering the many things Paul did to show his love, let us strive to imitate him.⁵⁸ Let us show our love for our fellow-men by removing their physical needs, feeding the hungry, and clothing the naked.⁵⁹

But let us show it especially by making it impossible for them to say that we do not care for their soul. Let us not fear to tell them that they are sinners. Peter

did that on Pentecost Day, and it brought thousands to their knees, anxiously crying: ***“Men and brethren, what shall we do?”***⁶⁰

The Law will do the same today. And when people ask us how to be saved, we can show them no greater love than telling them of Jesus through whom alone they can be saved,⁶¹ urging them to aspire to a greater degree of holiness, to lay apart filthiness,⁶² to lay aside malice and envies and hypocrisies,⁶³ to follow after righteousness, godliness, patience, meekness,⁶⁴ to put on more fully the new man,⁶⁵ to be blameless and harmless, and the sons of God.⁶⁶

Let us show our love of them by praying for them, not only for physical relief⁶⁷ but especially for their salvation.⁶⁸ In showing our love, let us never forget that every one who is in need of our help is our neighbour.⁶⁹

If we love only those who love us, what reward have we?⁷⁰ Love even your enemies.⁷¹ May our love never have a selfish motive.⁷² May we love our neighbour as we love ourselves, and do it because Christ first loved us.⁷³

Let us also love God. Let us love Him with all our heart, with all our soul, with all our mind.⁷⁴ Let us show our love to Him by obeying Him.⁷⁵ We should delight to do His commandments.⁷⁶

Furthermore, we should show our love to God by serving Him with the purest of motives. We should not serve for financial gain⁷⁷ or the applause of men.⁷⁸ Fully realising the imperfection of our love, we ask God to accept our weak service of love for Jesus' sake.

Paul has left us a fine example. Let us imitate him, imitate him who imitated Christ.⁷⁹ And let us be faithful unto death.⁸⁰ At the end of life's journey, Jesus always faithful to His promises, will say to us who are striving to be faithful in a few things: ***“Well done, good and faithful servant!”***⁸¹ Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep our hearts and minds, in Christ Jesus. Amen.

¹ Matt. 1:21; Acts 16:31

² John 13:15

³ 1 Pet. 2:2

⁴ Eph. 3:17

⁵ Phil. 3:17

⁶ 1 Cor. 4:16

⁷ 1 Pet. 5:3

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- ⁸ Heb. 13:7
⁹ vv. 21-24. Cp. John 1:29; John 3:16
¹⁰ Matt. 25:24-28
¹¹ 1 Cor. 4:2
¹² Matt. 10:37
¹³ 1 Tim. 3:4
¹⁴ Col. 3:21
¹⁵ Eph. 6:4
¹⁶ 1 Cor. 4:2
¹⁷ Matt. 5:16, 48
¹⁸ 1 Pet. 3:8
¹⁹ Rom. 12:15
²⁰ 1 Cor. 12:26, 27
²¹ 1 Cor. 4:2
²² 2 Cor. 12:7
²³ 2 Cor. 11:23
²⁴ 2 Cor. 1:8-10
²⁵ v. 22; cp. Acts 16:6, 7
²⁶ Rom. 8:18; 2 Cor. 4:17
²⁷ Matt. 6:25-34
²⁸ Gen. 4:13
²⁹ Mark 4:38
³⁰ John 16:33
³¹ Isa. 55:8
³² 2 Tim. 2:3; 4:5
³³ Matt. 26:39
³⁴ James. 4:17
³⁵ Phil. 2:14
³⁶ Matt. 10:22; 24:13
³⁷ Heb. 12:3
³⁸ 2 Thess. 3:5
³⁹ Gal. 5:22
⁴⁰ James. 5:10-11.
⁴¹ James. 4:3
⁴² Psa. 50:15
⁴³ James 5:16; Matt. 21:22
⁴⁴ 1 Pet. 1:6, 7
⁴⁵ 2 Cor. 8:2
⁴⁶ John 4:47-50; Matt. 15:28
⁴⁷ 1 Pet. 4:1-2
⁴⁸ Heb. 12:10
⁴⁹ Phil. 1:23
⁵⁰ Psa. 119:67, 71
⁵¹ 2 Cor. 4:17
⁵² John 16:30
⁵³ Rev. 7:14; Rom. 8:18
⁵⁴ 1 Tim. 3:3
⁵⁵ Acts 22:3
⁵⁶ Matt. 22:39; John 13:34
⁵⁷ 1 John 3:18; James 2:15-17
⁵⁸ Phil. 3:17
⁵⁹ Matt. 25:34-36; 2 Cor. 8:4-13; Heb. 6:10; Luke 3:11

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- ⁶⁰ Acts 2:37
⁶¹ Matt. 1:21; John 4:42; Acts 3:26
⁶² James 1:27
⁶³ 1 Pet. 1:1
⁶⁴ 1 Tim. 6:6
⁶⁵ Col. 3:10
⁶⁶ Phil. 2:14
⁶⁷ Luke 4:38,39
⁶⁸ 2 Thess. 1:11; 1 Thess. 3:10; John 17:9
⁶⁹ Luke 10
⁷⁰ Matt. 5:46, 47
⁷¹ Matt. 5:44
⁷² 1 Cor. 13:5
⁷³ 1 John 4:8-11
⁷⁴ Matt. 22:37
⁷⁵ John 9:4, 5
⁷⁶ Psa. 40:8
⁷⁷ Acts 8:18-20
⁷⁸ Matt. 6:1; 23:5
⁷⁹ 1 Cor. 11:1
⁸⁰ Rev. 2:10
⁸¹ Matt. 25:23