

Place: Lurgan Baptist 24:1:2012

THE CHURCH ABLAZE

Reading: Acts 20:1-16

30. A SHEPHERD'S HEART

The application form of a certain college contained the question, “*Are you a leader?*” One student pondered the question for a long time in view of her high school record. Her record contained no athletic or scholarly achievements and no student offices. She answered the question with an honest “*No.*” While she waited for her application to be accepted or rejected, she wondered if she should have answered the question differently. Much to her amazement, a letter arrived from the registration office with the following message, “*Welcome to our college. A study of our application forms for the next year shows that we have 1,452 leaders in the freshman class, and they will certainly need at least one follower.*” The apostle Paul was certainly not a follower he was a great leader. Everywhere he went people were drawn to the gospel through him. The way to tell if you are a leader is turn around and see if anyone is following you. Paul was a great leader because he had a shepherd's heart. Of course, the figure of the shepherd is very familiar to us.

Our Lord is called the Good Shepherd who died, (Jn 10:11) the Great Shepherd who lives, (Heb 13:20) and the Chief Shepherd who is coming again. (1 Pet 5:4)

Elders, pastors and leaders are also described as shepherds and their people as sheep. (Ezek 34:1-24) Here in (Ch 20) we see a beautiful picture of Paul as the spiritual shepherd of God's sheep. Now keep in mind in this final third section of the book of Acts Dr. Luke records Paul's journey to Jerusalem, his arrest there and his voyage to Rome. (19:21) Its interesting that the gospel of Luke follows a similar pattern. There Luke describes Christ's journey to Jerusalem to die. (Lk 9:53) In the same way that Christ set His face “*like a flint,*” to do the Father's will (Is 50:7 Lk 9:51) so Paul determined to finish his course with joy no matter what the cost might be. (20:24) My there have always been dedicated pastors who sacrificed in life and death for the church. It was love for the church that drove the busy Reformers Luther and Calvin to preach constantly to their flocks, not merely on Sundays but throughout the week.

Many Puritan pastors continued to preach the Word after being forbidden to do so by the authorities. They knew that they risked being imprisoned as was John Bunyan but love for the church compelled them to take that risk. Love for the church consumed the godly 19th century Scottish pastor Robert Murray McCheyne. Ill health could not deter him from his loving service, and consequently he died at a young age. It was his love for the church that motivated Charles Spurgeon to speak out against the modernism that was creeping into the evangelical church of his day. During the resulting “*Down Grade Controversy,*” Spurgeon was sharply criticized for his stand. Some of those close to him deserted him. Yet he refused to back down, although the stress the controversy

generated hastened the hour of his death. These were men who had a shepherd's heart, those who sacrificially loved the church. Yet no man has ever loved the church more than the apostle Paul. Do you recall what he wrote to the church at Philippi ? “ *I thank my God upon every remembrance of you always in every prayer of mine for you all making request with joy, for your fellowship in the gospel from the first day until now.* ” (Phil 1:3-4) “ *Ye are our epistle written in our hearts known and read of all men,* ” he told the Corinthians. (2 Cor 3:2) To the Thessalonians he said “ *But we were gentle among you even as a nurse cherisheth her children.* ” (1 Thes 2:7) My not only did Paul give his life for the church but he endured much suffering for it. Not only physical suffering ((2 Cor 11:23-28) but emotional suffering. Do you recall what he says ? “ *Beside those things that are without that which cometh upon me daily the care of all the churches.* ” (2 Cor 11:28) Paul was unrelenting in his commitment to the church. He was willing to pour out his life to see healthy churches established. Now at first glance our passage shows us a slice of Paul's life describing his travels.

Some things are skimmed over, and we can fill in many details from 1 and 2 Corinthians and Romans, which he wrote during this period of time. Other things such as his meeting with the church in Troas are described in more detail. We might at first read these verse and think, “ *That's interesting but it does not relate to my life.* ” But I think that just below the surface of Luke's description of Paul's travels lies Paul's unswerving commitment to the Lord's church. Here we see a man with “ **A Shepherds**

Heart.” Now having divided our study into three parts I want you to notice,

(1) A MAN WITH GOD'S PERSPECTIVE

“ *I do not expect to visit this country again,* ” those were the words of D. L. Moody spoken in 1867 when he made his first visit to England. He was so seasick during the voyage that he decided that he would never sail again, but he made five more visits to England despite the seasickness. Paul was ready for another journey. He wanted to make at least one more visit to the churches the Lord had helped him to found, because Paul was a man with a shepherds heart. (2 Cor 11:23) After the riot, Paul left Ephesus and headed toward Macedonia and Achaia. (19:21) He expected to meet Titus at Troas and get a report on the problems at Corinth, (2 Cor 2:12-13) but Titus did not come. The men finally met in Macedonia and Paul rejoiced over the good news Titus brought. Paul originally planned to make two visits to Corinth (2 Cor 1:15-16) but instead he made one visit that lasted three months.. (20:3 1 Cor 16:5-6) During that visit he wrote the epistle to the Romans. Now having given you that background lets look, at this man with God's perspective, God's viewpoint. You see, Paul had God's perspective,

(a) **AFFECTIONATELY:**

Look if you will at (20:1) You see, physically he embraced them. Some folk say that Paul was a “ *hugger,* ” He embraced the brethren in Ephesus and departed for

Macedonia. To Paul these people were not just acquaintances. They were not just numbers in the next town that he could chalk up for his missionary letter. These were real people that he loved and wanted to see them grow as disciples. My can you see Paul's passion? Do you see that (20:2) talks about " *exhortation,*" or " *encouragement,*" everywhere Paul went he encouraged, he built up the brethren in the faith. Why? Because he had a shepherds heart. Can I ask the elders of this fellowship as I ask myself, do you have a shepherds heart? Do you really care for the people of the Lord? Are you willing to put yourself out for them? Are you not just someone who wants to make the big decisions but are you someone who has a big heart?

(b) SPIRITUALLY:

Look if you will at (20:2) Geographically this took in Macedonia and Achaia (19:21) You see, Paul had a great burden to see that his converts grew spiritually. He did not win them and count them and then ignore them as many pastors, evangelists, and elders do. No, he wanted to see them grow in grace " *and in the knowledge of the Lord Jesus.*" So there was " *exhortation,*" with the Word. Is it not tragic that Paul's commitment to proclaim the truth of God's Word is not so much in vogue today? Preaching that exhorts from the Word no longer holds the central place that it held in the early church. (10:42 13:5, 32 14:7) Do you recall Paul's charge to the young preacher boy Timothy? " *Till I come give attendance to reading, to exhortation, to doctrine,*" (1 Tim 4:13) Timothy " *preach the Word.*" (2 Tim 4:2) My the results of

downplaying strong, biblical teaching are tragic. When pastors and elders neglect their responsibility " *for the perfecting of the saints,*" (Eph 4:12) then the saints cannot do " *the work of the ministry,*" as a result the building up of the body of Christ does not take place. The disastrous results include a lack of true unity (4:13) imperfect knowledge of the Lord Jesus, and lack of spiritual maturity resulting in immature children " *tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive.*" (Eph 4:14) My why is preaching the Word being minimized? Because of the rise of a market driven philosophy of ministry. Have you heard the term " *user friendly,*" churches? These are churches so called who have jettisoned preaching in favour of movies, drama, concerts, the testimonies of Christian superstars and other forms of entertainment. But my there is only way to grow spiritually. " *But we will give ourselves to prayer and the ministry of the Word.*" (6:4)

Can you see the great apostle? Though weary, busy and persecuted Paul devoted himself to teaching everywhere he went. His consuming passion even at the risk of his life was to see believers brought to spiritual maturity. Do you recall how he expresses it to the church at Colosse? " *Whom we preach, warning every man in all wisdom, that we present every man perfect in Christ Jesus.*" (1:28)

(c) MATERIALLY:

You see, the other goal that Paul had in mind for visiting the churches was to take up a collection for the needy saints at Jerusalem. He mentions his plans in three of the epistles written at this time, 1 Corinthians, 2 Corinthians and Romans. He wrote 1 Corinthians shortly before he left Ephesus. Do you recall what he says ? (1 Cor 16:5-8) He wrote 2 Corinthians from Macedonia. (2 Cor 2:12-13 7:5-6) Do you recall what he says ? (2 Cor 8:1-7) He wrote Romans from the city of Corinth ? (Rom 16:23 1 Cor 1:14) Do you recall what he says ? (Rom 15:25-28) Now why was this collection for the saints at Jerusalem so important to Paul ? Because he had a love for the saints at Jerusalem who were impoverished because of persecution.

But also Paul was concerned for the unity of the church. He knew that the tensions between Jews and Gentiles posed an ever present danger to that unity. *By meeting the needs of the poor Jewish believers at Jerusalem the Gentiles would show their love for them.* (1 Jn 3:17) Do you see now why Paul was surrounded by a considerable escort ? (20:4) It was because of the collection of money that he had been accumulating from the various Gentile churches ? My Paul was a man who was careful to be above suspicion in matters of money. There's another interesting fact here. *Did you notice this ?* The general flow in our missionary program is from the home church to the mission field. There was none of that in Acts. Money flowed in the opposite direction. It was the Jerusalem church that received the money. In fact, we have no record of the Jerusalem church ever supporting any missionary work. It was the Antioch

church, a foreign mission church that first sent out missionaries. My Paul planted indigenous churches, churches that could stand on their own feet, churches that did not need to propped out by massive infusions of money from elsewhere. Churches that soon became “*sending*,” churches investing as did the Philippians in Paul's missionary ventures elsewhere. Now are you beginning to see this man with God's perspective ? (a) (b) (c)

(d) *EVANGELISTICALLY:*

You see, we learn from the book of Romans which Paul penned at this time that he preached the gospel as far away as Illyricum. (Rom 15:19) Now he probably did this during his stay in Macedonia. (20:2) Illyricum is that region that corresponds to the former country of Yugoslavia. Now when Paul arrived in Macedonia he was in state of depression. How do we know ? Well he says, in (2 Cor 1:8) “*For we would not brethren, have you ignorant of our trouble which came to us in Asia, that we were pressed out of measure, above strength, insomuch that we despaired even of life.*” So often depression is Satan's tool to keep our mind on ourselves and off the need of a perishing world. But that device did not work with Paul for depression did not keep Paul from the great task of winning souls to Christ. You see, in all of Paul's letters its clear that he was not strengthening the church so that he it could be warm and cozy in its holy huddle isolated from a perishing world.

No, he was strengthening the churches so that they could

reach out with the gospel, and send out workers to take the gospel where Christ had not been preached.

(Rom 15:20) My is this our desire ? To reach out ? Are we going to fossilize or evangelize ? To focus on self or focus on sinners ? I tell you the church that turns in on itself and loses its outward focus is a dying church.

(e) TUTORIALLY:

For did he not act as a tutor and teacher to these men who surrounded him ? They were representatives of the various churches, entrusted with carrying their collection to Jerusalem to help the poor believers there. (Eph 6:21 Col 4:7) Many of these men were Gentiles whom Paul had seen come to Christ though preaching. He spent time with them, teaching and grounding them in the Scriptures. His strategy as he explains to Timothy was to entrust the things of God to faithful men who would be able to teach others also. (2 Tim 2:2) Now let me ask you as a leader in the work of God, is this what you are doing ? Are you discipling someone ? Maybe you have known the Lord for some time now. Have you ever asked Him to bring someone into your life, to whom you can entrust the things that the Lord has taught you ? Are you looking out for **FAT** men ? Those who are faithful, available, and teachable ? Now look at Paul. Has he not got a shepherds heart ? Is he not a man with God's perspective ? (1)

(2) A MEETING WITH GOD'S PEOPLE

The year was AD 57. The Jewish festival of unleavened bread lasted that year from the 7th April to the 14th April.

After it was over Paul sailed across the Aegean Sea to join the others at Troas. “ *And upon the first day of the week,*” (20:7) Now this passage is important because it records the earliest description of a Christian worship service and several features are important. Notice for e.g.;

(a) THE LORD'S DAY:

“ *And upon the first day of the week,*” (20:7) This is the earliest reference to the practice of the church gathering on the first day of the week rather than on the Jewish Sabbath which was Saturday. You might ask, “ *Well, what difference does it make what day of the week the church meets on ?*” Recently some churches in U.S.A, met on Saturday because Christmas Day fell on Sunday so they closed up shop on the Lords Day and worshipped the previous day. Does it make any difference what day of the week we worship on ? I think it does. I mean why did these early Christians, mostly Jewish change from the seventh day of the week to the first day of the week as their day of worship ? Why did they turn from a tradition about which they were more adamant than any other aspect of their religious faith ? ***The only explanation is that the Lord Jesus whom they worshipped rose from the day on the first day of the week.*** Thus Sunday worship is an evidence of and a testimony to the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

My this is why we worship on the first day of the week. This is why we worship on the Lord's Day because of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. (Rev 1:10) Paul says in his letter to the Corinthians where he was writing

to them about this collection for the poor saints at Jerusalem. “ *Upon the first day of the week let every one of you lay by him in store as God hath prospered him*,” (1 Cor 16:2) So the book of Acts and the subsequent writings of the early church fathers make clear that the church from earliest times met for worship on Sunday. For example, early in the second century Ignatius wrote,

Let every friend of Christ keep the Lord’s Day as a festival, the resurrection day, the queen and chief of all days.

Later in the second century, Justin Martyr, described how Christians of his day worshipped,

One the day called Sunday, all who live in cities or in the country gather together to one place, and the memoirs of the apostles or the writing of the prophets are read as long as time permits. Sunday is the day on which we hold our common assembly because Jesus Christ our Saviour on the same day rose from the dead.

Now did you notice where these believers met ? “ *The upper chamber,*” or “ *the upper room,*” Some Bible scholars think we can identify this home in which they met that night, because Paul in his final letter from jail in Rome (2 Tim 4:13) asked Timothy to stop at Troas and pick up the old robe he had forgotten in the home of Carpus. So here is an early church service taking place in the upper room possibly in the home of Carpus on the Lord’s Day. Now how seriously do you take worship on

the Lord’s Day ? I mean, are you present when the believers gather to worship on the Lord’s Day ? Do we make Sunday worship a priority in our lives ? Do we long to be here to bear witness of the fact that our Saviour is risen ? Or do we grieve the Lord by our absence from Sunday worship and by our presence on Monday walkabouts ? I mean is it not amazing how believers are absent on Sunday and present on Monday somewhere ? What most the Lord think of it all ? (a)

(b) THE LORD’S PEOPLE:

“ *And upon the first day of the week, when the disciples came together*,” (20:7) Do you know why they met in the evening ? Because Sunday was not a holiday during which people were free from daily employment. You see, some of these believers would no doubt be slaves, unable to come to the assembly until their work was done. So here they were a cosmopolitan group, but their social and national distinctions made no difference for they were all “ *one in Christ Jesus.*” (Gal 3:28) So there was (a) (b)

(c) THE LORD’S SUPPER:

For Dr. Luke indicates that the purpose of their gathering was “ *to break bread.*” (20:7) Its interesting that,

In the Gospels we have the Institution of the Lords Supper by the Lord Jesus: (Lk 22:14-20)

In the Acts we have the Celebration of the Lord’s Supper by the Early Church:

In the Epistles we have the Explanation of the Lord’s

Supper by the Holy Spirit:

How simple all this makes it. In the Gospels we see the Lord's Supper **Instituted**. In the Acts we see the Lord's Supper **Celebrated**. In the Epistles we see the Lord's Supper **Explained**. It would seem for the book of Acts (Ch 2) that they observed the Lord's Table every day. Subsequently, from (Ch 20) it would appear that it had become by that time a weekly practice on the first day of the week. " *And upon the first day of the week when the disciples came together to break bread.*" (20:7) Not once a year, not once a quarter, not once a month rather their habit was to break bread on the first day of the week. My is this your practice ? I mean, how can you walk out when the Lord's Table is set ? How can you turn your back on this dying request of your Saviour, " *this do in remembrance of me ?*" Now are you beginning to see the different elements in this worship service ? The Lord's Day, the Lord's People, the Lord's Supper. (2)

(3) A MIRACLE WITH GOD'S POWER

And it all began with

(a) A LONG SERMON:

Do you see (20:9) ? By the way, that's another essential element of a worship service. **The Lord's Word**. You see, this church met to be instructed from God's Word. In many of our churches today Paul would have been told what time to finish. However, the great apostle was not to be governed by the clock on this occasion. He had much

to say and they might never see him again. This was a golden opportunity Paul apparently preaching for four hours and then after the incident with Eutychus, he went back upstairs and talked with them about the things of God until daybreak. I mean can you see the availability of the man of God ? Here he was about to leave on a difficult journey, yet his love for the church made him available as long as the members needed him. Here's Paul using every available minute to teach the believers at Troas. You see, this early church devoted themselves to the apostle's doctrine, they were immersed in the Word. *Is it not sad to see how the Word is neglected in many church services today ?* Yet the Word of God is important to the people of God, and the preaching and teaching of God's Word needs to be emphasized. " *Preach the Word,*" is still God's admonition to leaders. According to Dr. D. Martyn Jones " *the decadent periods and eras in the history of the church have always been those periods when preaching has declined.*" My do we not need a return to the primacy of preaching ?

Of course our passage does not require that every sermon be four hours. This was obviously a special occasion, the only time that this church could hear the apostle Paul, but they were willing to stay up all night to do it. (a)

(b) A LIFELESS SOUL:

Whether it was the lateness of the hour or the stuffiness of the room (20:8) surely not the dullness of Paul's message, Eutychus whose name " *fortunate,*" fell asleep, fell out of the window and was killed by the fall.

However, Paul raised him from the dead and left him and the church comforted. You see, Paul's life was so closely linked with the purpose of God that he became a channel for the power of God to work in the lives of others. Now let's not be too hard on Eutychus. At least he was there for the service, and he did try to keep awake. He sat near ventilation, and he must have tried to fight off the sleep that finally conquered him. *The tense of the Greek verb indicates that he was gradually overcome, not suddenly.* I mean do you not have every sympathy for Eutychus? How many times have you fallen asleep in church? I have great sympathy for those who have trouble staying awake in church. Some work trying schedules that when they sit down, it's the first they have relaxed all week. Others are sometimes victims of medication. Sometimes, it's just so warm, the truth is some of the best saints have fallen asleep in church. I remember many years ago, preaching in one of our churches away up the country. I was very young, not long started the Baptist College. After the gospel service that evening I brought the pastor's wife and his family home to the manse.

We were just talking about the service, when the pastor's wife exclaimed, "*that was a powerful message you preached this evening, Denis.*" But aren't children so honest. For from the back seat of my car came a voice out of the darkness, which said, "*I don't know how you know Mummy sure you slept the whole way through it.*" Did you ever hear the story of the wife who had trouble getting her husband out to church because he would always sleep? My falling asleep in church does not really concern me. *What concerns me are the many who warm a pew*

every Lord's Day with their bodies awake and their souls asleep. Do you know what I mean? Those of you who use the church hour to complete the unfinished business of the previous six days. Those of you who are in a backslidden state because sin has desensitized you. Those of you who have become familiar with holy things. Perhaps each of us should ask ourselves the question, "***What really keeps me awake?***" Christians who slumber during a one hour service manage to stay away during early morning fishing trips, lengthy sporting events and concerts or late night TV specials. Let me ask you, do you prepare yourself physically for public worship to make that you are at your best? "*Remember,*" said Spurgeon "*if we go to sleep during the sermon and die there are no apostles to restore us.*" Dietrich Bonhoeffer ran a Bible seminary in Nazi Germany that was not approved by the state.

He was a critical and intelligent man, but in his homiletics class, he always laid down his paper and pencil, opened his Bible, and listened to the student's sermons no matter how poor or unskilled they were. *He felt that the preaching of God's Word ought to be received as if he were listening to God himself.* Is that how you listen? As if you were listening to the Lord Himself? Do you see how this incident finished? It commenced with a long sermon, it continued with a lifeless soul and it concluded with,

(c) A LOVELY SCENE:

Paul and the believers talking until the break of day. You

see, Paul preached until midnight. Then after the incident with Eutychus, he went back upstairs and talked with them. Now a different Greek word is used here which indicates conversation, about the things of God until daybreak. Now do you see what Dr. Luke is doing here ? Luke de-emphasizes the miracle by sandwiching it between Paul's sermon and his talking with the church on through the night afterwards. *He seems to be making the point that it is the teaching of God's Word, not amazing miracles that will sustain and strengthen the church.* For the main task of a shepherd is to feed the flock.

(Ezek 34:2) (1) (2) (3) **A Shepherds Heart.**

Let me ask the elders here, do you have a shepherds heart ? Do you feed the flock, protect the flock, nourish the flock, guide the flock, instruct the flock, care for the flock ? Are you there when the flock needs you ? Of course, if you are going to give out, you will need to time take in. That's why Paul walked the twenty miles from Troas to Assos. He wanted to be alone (20:13) He wanted to fellowship with God. He felt the need for spiritual renewal. Gifted though he was he needed to take time to be holy and speak oft with his Lord. *What about you ? I wonder who represents you in this passage ? Paul or Eutychus ? The man who was alive to the things of God, or the man who was asleep to the things of God ?*

A photograph in the newspaper some years ago showed a demonstration by the Royal Air Force, The photograph was of the VIP viewing stand. The Queen was staring toward the shy. Prince Philip had his attention focused

upward, but in the middle was Britain's secretary of state for defense, with his chin resting on his chest fast asleep. What a picture of many Christians today. All around us God is at work. Exciting things are happening. Opportunities for service abound. Yet many Christians sit in the midst of these happenings sound asleep. *Is that you ? Do you need to wake up to the wonder of worship, the wonder of work, the wonder of witness ? Like Paul do you need to impact your world for Christ in your day as He did in his ?*

