

Acts Highlights - Part 7

by George Verwer

George Verwer's sermon emphasizes the urgency of evangelism, the importance of enduring trials, and the need for genuine care in ministry as illustrated in Acts 20.

Duration: 27:56

Scripture: Matthew 6:33, John 3:16, Acts 18:25, Acts 19:4, Acts 20:21-22, Acts 20:24

Topics: "Book Of Acts"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker emphasizes the simplicity of the gospel message, which is the necessity of turning from sin and trusting in God through faith in Jesus Christ. The speaker discusses the debate surrounding whether repentance is a part of believing and becoming a believer, and concludes that it is indeed a crucial aspect. The sermon also highlights how God works in different ways in different people's lives, as seen in the example of those who only knew the baptism of John and needed help to understand and receive the Holy Spirit. The speaker then focuses on his favorite verse, which emphasizes the importance of using one's life to do the work assigned by Jesus, which is to share the good news of God's kindness and love. The sermon concludes with a hymn and a mention of a remarkable open-air preacher who traveled the world preaching the gospel.

Transcript

I've been listening to it on audio as well as studying the text. We have three challenging chapters, 18, 19, and 20. But in the light of our time, we're going to be especially focusing on Chapter 20, which is my favorite chapter in the Book of Acts.

I'll be sharing about that in a moment. We've started our sessions often with a quote from my old Bible. But today, we're going to start with a hymn.

This is a hymn that I remember because of a brother I met in California, maybe 50 plus years ago, and got linked with an unusual man, and he would often sing this. He was an open-air preacher. He eventually visited almost every single nation in the world.

He preached in most of them. We traveled across India together ministering. He, of course, saw many hundreds profess faith in the meetings.

But I especially remember this song, which I think is so relevant during this virus, which is taking the lives of so many people. The title of the hymn is, He giveth more grace. He giveth more grace when the burdens grow greater.

He sendeth more strength when the labors increase. To added affliction, He addeth His mercy. To multiplied trials, His multiplied peace.

His love has no limit. His grace has no measure. His power has no boundary known unto men.

For out of His infinite riches in Jesus, He giveth and giveth and giveth again. We pray that may be your experience in the midst of this very, very difficult time. I just heard also of tremendous flooding in some parts of India.

It's a challenging time for that nation and many other nations. We all need to be drawn closer to the Lord and the resources from the Lord. During this time, Acts 18 and 19 introduces to a number of new people.

And it's interesting how the book of Acts keeps telling us about people. And they're not all Christians. They don't all become Christians.

But two people, Aquila and Priscilla become part of the Apostle Paul's team. And they get introduced to us there in chapter 18. It said they had been expelled from Italy as a result of Claudius Caesar's order to deport all Jews from Rome.

And we think of how all through history, the Jewish people have been persecuted. And here it is way back recorded in Acts 15. Paul lived and worked with them, for they were tentmakers just as he was.

Tentmakers, that's an expression that's now been used in modern missions for maybe 70 years. It refers to a missionary who goes to a particular country, but he has a job. He has an employment.

And in our fellowship, we've had many tentmakers. There's a new emphasis on that now, a greater emphasis. And the leader of our work in the USA, Andrew Scott, has written a book called Scatter, crying out that even greater numbers would just go to the field with jobs.

It is interesting because later on, we read in 2 Corinthians 8 and 9, and we read more even in Philippians, how the Apostle Paul made it clear that the churches were also helping supply some of his needs. So it seems to me he had both sources of pressing on in the work of God. Each Sabbath found Paul at the synagogue trying to convince the Jews and Greeks alike.

And after Silas and Timothy came down from Macedonia, Paul spent his full time preaching and testifying to the Jews. Now, this is interesting because we've seen from previous chapters that he felt his main calling was to the Gentiles. And again, it just shows how sometimes people in ministry can be a little bit unpredictable.

And, of course, circumstances often change the situation. But notice what it says here, full time preaching and testifying to the Jews, telling them the Messiah you are looking for is Jesus. But when the Jews opposed him and insulted him, that's not always a good experience.

Have you ever been insulted for sharing the gospel? Paul shook the dust from his robe and said, your blood is upon your own heads. I'm innocent. From now on, I will go to the Gentiles.

So it seemed this further crisis drove him back to what he expressed before as his main calling to go to the Gentiles. After that, he stayed with Titus Justus, a Gentile who worshiped God and lived next door to the synagogue. Crispus, the leader of the synagogue in all his house, wow, believed on the Lord.

Many others in Corinth also became believers and were baptized. Of course, later on in the New Testament, we read two epistles to the Corinthians. But here is how it had its beginning.

And then we get introduced to a man, Galileo. He was not a Christian. He was a governor.

And it's interesting to compare what happened here in Acts 13 with Galileo and how he helped the believers to compare that with the mayor in a very similar thing. The believers were being opposed. And there were all kinds of problems.

In verse 35 of chapter 19. At last, the mayor was able to quiet them down enough to speak. Citizens of Ephesus, he said, everyone knows that Ephesus is the official guardian of the temple of the great Artemeus.

We don't have time to read that passage. But we see both here and with Galileo how non-Christians often come to the rescue of Christians. And it's a good reason why as much as possible, we should make friends with those that are in authority.

We should make friends with non-Christians who are decision makers, maybe the mayor in our community. Because often when there's difficulties, they can come and help. And again, I'd encourage you to study both of those passages and make that comparison.

It's interesting just how much traveling the apostle Paul did. And yet in some places, he remained for quite a while. Pick up in Acts 18 verse 23.

After spending some time in Antioch, Paul went back to Galatia and Phrygia, revisiting all the believers, encouraging them and helping them to grow in the Lord. This has always been one of my greatest passions. Even now, as I write many personal letters, emails, trying to mix it with prayer.

And people think I'm always trying to recruit them for global missions or always trying to get them to give their money. But the bottom line often in my heart from the scripture, I just want to encourage people. And I'm hoping that this ministry through the book of Acts and what I share is an encouragement to you.

And most of you, I think, have my email address. But I certainly don't hear from many of you. But it would be great to hear from anybody who has found this Acts series and encouraged me.

So Paul, with all of his gifting, he had the ministry of encouraging. It also emphasizes that evangelism, seeing someone come to Christ, is only the beginning. Then we have to see that person grow.

I think of that word in another part, I think it may be in Peter, grow in grace. And then I'll kick in. And I hope each one of you that are following this series, I hope you're growing stronger in your faith, in wisdom, in the many different aspects that we've been reading about through the book of Acts and, of course, so many other passages.

Chapter 19 is considered Paul's third missionary journey. And again, we really find him on the move. Just pick it up a little bit at verse 8. Then Paul went to the synagogue and preached boldly for the next three months.

So here again, though, Paul shook the dust off in that other place, said he was going to only go to the Gentiles. Guess where we find him? Of course, he was a Jew himself. We find him back in the synagogue preaching boldly for the next three months, arguing persuasively about the kingdom of God.

But some rejected his message and publicly spoke against the way. I think that's the first time we've seen in the book of Acts referring to believers as the way. I think there's some churches named after that.

So Paul left the synagogue. Wow. He took the believers with him.

Then he began preaching daily at the lecture hall in Tirenus. This went on for the next two years. So Paul had evangelistic lectures in this public hall for two years so that people throughout the province of Asia, both Jews and Greeks, heard the Lord's message.

And of course, this is the passion we should be picking up from the book of Acts, that people may hear. They may hear the Lord's message. And every time we have opportunity to make his message known, then we walk in the steps of these great apostles.

We've already referred to the riots that took place in Ephesus. The scriptures gives quite a few verses concerning that and how the mayor of the town came to the rescue. But we really have to move on to chapter 20, which is really the highlight chapter, not only of this morning, but in some ways of the whole series, especially picking it up when Paul arrived at Miletus.

There in verse 15. The next day we passed the island of Chios. The following day we crossed to the island of Samos, and a day later we arrived at Miletus.

Paul had decided against stopping at Ephesus this time because he didn't want to spend further time in the province of Asia. He was hurrying to get to Jerusalem. Paul seemed to be often in a hurry.

It's interesting. Some people, if you look like you're a person in a hurry, they criticize you and they say Jesus was never in a hurry. You know, it's amazing how quickly Christians criticize, even sometimes for the smallest things.

Anyway, Paul, of course, is greatly, greatly criticized by liberal theologians. Whole books against the Apostle Paul. Some writers say that he completely twisted the basic teaching of Jesus, which is, of course, not true at all.

Verse 17. When he landed at Miletus, he sent a message to the elders of the church at Ephesus, asking him to come down to meet him. It's obvious that Paul had some kind of apostolic authority and some kind of leadership authority because he could tell this whole group that they needed to get on the way and travel and meet him rather than him going there.

When they arrived, he declared, you know, from the day I set foot in the province of Asia until now, how I have done the Lord's work. Humbly, yes, and with tears. I have endured the trials that came to me from the plots of the Jews.

Wow. Either publicly or in your homes. So here the Apostle Paul is communicating to these leaders and he's speaking with considerable authority.

People who are anti-Paul, I met one and talked to one not long ago, say he was always boasting. Paul was not boasting, but trying to communicate truth, trying to communicate a way of life. And his example is

a challenge to live a godly life.

So he didn't go to them just with words, but he went with reality, with life, which, of course, must have included love that he wrote so prolifically about in 1 Corinthians 13. Let's pick up the challenge from this great passage, spoke about enduring difficulties and trials. And then verse 20.

Yet I never shrank from telling you the truth, either publicly or in your homes. I have had one message for Jews and Gentiles alike, the necessity of turning from sin and trusting God and faith in the Lord Jesus. Here again, we have a quick one sentence summary of the gospel.

Sometimes people want a long explanation. What is the gospel? But the Bible again and again gives often quite simple explanations like John 3.16. So here it is in one sentence, the gospel of God's grace. Wow.

Let's pick it up now again at verse 21. I have had one message for Jews and Gentiles alike, the necessity of turning from sin and turning to God and of faith in our Lord Jesus. There's a great debate going on.

Is repentance part of believing and becoming a believer? It seems to me it is. It seems to me emphasizing repentance does not lower the simple, basic message that we are saved by grace. There's a turning to God.

There's a repentance. And one of the things we've seen, even in the last two chapters, if you studied them carefully, is how God works in different people in different ways. And it talks about people who only, again, knew the baptism of John.

And now they had to be helped to understand and receive the reality of the Holy Spirit. We want to push on to get to my favorite verse. I have had one message.

Let's go down to verse 22. And now I'm going to Jerusalem, drawn there irresistibly by the Holy Spirit, not knowing what awaits me. Not knowing what awaits me.

I notice in recruiting for Operation Mobilization, and it's true of many other missions, that young people today, people in general, they really want to know what they're getting into. They want to know where they're going, endless questions about the climate, what they're going to wear. And now there's pressure to evaluate risk factors.

So people want to know what are the risks. And of course, Paul, obeying the Holy Spirit, did not know what he was getting into. And I believe, of course, God works in many, many different ways.

We're not judging different recruiting systems. But I believe the authority of the Holy Spirit in our lives is so crucial. It was the Holy Spirit that put it on my heart after my conversion, who evangelized my high school, to bring in a choir all the way from New York City.

We had hardly any black people in our area. And God put it on my heart to bring in this choir from the center of New York City to sing in my high school for one of the very first evangelistic meetings we had after my conversion. God put it on my heart to go through the subway system of New York City, giving out literature.

Later at college, God put it on my heart to get involved in jail ministry. Then God put it on my heart to go to Mexico. Later, God put it on my heart to go to Spain.

Later, God put it on my heart to go to Russia. And later, put it on my heart to go to India. Then put it on my heart to get ships.

And I really believe the Holy Spirit puts visions, puts ideas, strategies on our hearts. We, of course, often have to share that with our team, with our brothers and sisters, because we know as human beings we can get things wrong. And a number of times I surely got things wrong.

I had a plan to evangelize all the villages in the whole of UK after our big campaigns in Europe. In 62 and 63. And I got all the maps of all the villages of the whole of Britain.

I still have some of those maps. And that's like 55 years ago. But it never happened.

It was a fiasco. The two people I put in charge, they didn't work out. Soon they left.

And in God's work, there are always many disappointments. And we see this. We've seen this, of course, in our study of the Book of Acts.

It's interesting also just to compare the life of Paul with the kind of life people, especially some television people, are promising to Christians. A life of prosperity, life in which you have a nice home and plenty of money and a nice car, all these things are God's blessing, God's proof that you're really spiritual. This is false teaching.

There's a booklet we published in India about it, if you'd like to get a copy. That doesn't mean they're not believers. Some of the people who preach these things also do preach the gospel.

And God, in his mercy, saves people. Yes, as I point out in my book, *Messiology*, God saves people in very, very messy situations. If any of you are new to our series, maybe you've not yet seen this book that we're trying to get everybody to read.

Messiology, originally it was called *More Drops*. We're also trying to get people to read *Leading with Love*. Just such an outstanding book, especially for leaders.

And then also the book *Calvary Road*. And some of you are emailing me and sending your address so that we can send these books to you. If you mention the titles, of course, it's even more helpful.

So the apostle Paul's life, the apostle Paul, what he's teaching is very different from these false teachers who promise all these things and leave out the other side of the Christian life that involves trials and suffering and difficulties and the walk of faith. What a challenge. Let's pick it up now at verse 23.

Except the Holy Spirit has told me city after city that jail and suffering lie ahead. I wonder how many would join OM if that's all we promised, jail and suffering. We've had in the history of OM quite a few people in jail.

I was, of course, arrested by the Soviets, but they just locked us up in a room. But we need to remember that God has not promised an easy road to those who will follow him. Jesus said, if any man come after me, let him deny self, take up the cross and follow me.

I was still selling fire extinguishers as a young Christian. I owned my own business. I was soon going to get rid of all that and go into selling Bibles and Christian books door to door in my hometown before I went to Mexico.

But I was traveling across the whole of the United States. I was only one year old in Christ, still setting up agents for these fire extinguishers. And I met a woman of God in Pittsburgh, my aunt's mother, who became, my aunt became a wonderful, was a wonderful believer, helped my uncle come to Jesus when he came out of the Navy.

And that woman challenged me about baptism and it caused me to read the whole book of Acts in one night. And God especially gave me Acts 20, 24 as a young believer as my life verse. Let's read it.

Acts 20, 24. But my life is worth nothing unless I use it for doing the work assigned me by the Lord Jesus. The work of telling others the good news about God's wonderful kindness and love.

That was my life verse when I was 17 years of age. Maybe I had just turned 18. And it's still one of my life verses to this day.

Can you imagine the joy I have looking back at my life, serving Him pretty well every single day, putting in practice this message of Acts 20, 24 on a daily basis. And I don't believe that's just a message for George Borer. I believe it's a message for every believer.

This kind of total commitment, this kind of radical discipleship. Of course, that will be worked out in different cultures, different situations. Let's look at it again.

Are you able to say these words from your own heart and from your own mind? But my life is worth nothing unless I use it for doing the work assigned me by the Lord Jesus. The work of telling others the good news about God's wonderful kindness and love, of course, which is the gospel. Actually, other translations come out even stronger than the New Living Translation.

And the final verse in our limited time that I wanted to look at, it's been another verse that really has pushed me to be very careful in using my time. It's pushed me into saying no to a lot of good things that I could do what I felt was the best thing. And that's verse 31.

We see the intensity, we see the commitment. And we need some of that in our own spiritual DNA. Watch out.

Remember, for three years I was with you. My constant watch and care over you night and day with many tears for you. We need people who really care for God's people.

There have been pastors that when they interviewed them later and there were difficulties, the pastor admitted he wasn't that interested in people. He went into that ministry or in some cases a profession because he liked theology and he liked preaching, but he didn't really like people. So he didn't spend much time with people.

I pray that there are not too many such people in ministry. I've heard pastors that are too busy to ever visit anyone. So they hire someone who's a professional visitor and goes around and visit old people like me.

May we have spirit-filled people who really are walking in sincerity and reality as we see here in the book of Acts. For the space of years, space of three years, I cease not. I cease not.

And I pray we will take new steps to make better use of our time to serve people, to love people, and to obey the Lord Jesus in the Great Commission. Well, we've now been through 20 chapters. We only have eight more to go.

I wonder how many are going to stick with me to the end. Let's just pray. Father, we thank you for the book of Acts.

We thank you for the whole of your word. We thank you for the ministry of your Holy Spirit. And Lord, we humble ourselves just as Paul indicated in this passage.

We humble ourselves. We acknowledge our sin. And we embrace this radical calling of Acts 20, 24.

In Jesus' name. Amen.

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