

Book of Acts Series - Part 31 | a Snapshot of Greatness

by Jim Cymbala

Jim Cymbala's sermon explores the significance of the Book of Acts in understanding the early church, the importance of encouragement, and the role of community in Christian life.

Duration: 44:58

Scripture: Matthew 6:33, Acts 20:19-20, Acts 20:24, Acts 20:28, Acts 20:31, Acts 20:35

Topics: "Book Of Acts"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher emphasizes the importance of humility and compassion in the lives of believers. He highlights the tendency for people to easily judge others while ignoring their own flaws. The preacher shares a personal experience where he chose to walk away from a confrontational situation, demonstrating the need to respond with grace and love even in difficult circumstances. He references the apostle Paul's example of serving the Lord with humility and tears, challenging listeners to value these qualities in their own lives.

Transcript

Let's turn our attention now and pick up where we left off the last time I spoke here, which seems like two years ago, and our study in the Book of Acts. The Book of Acts is the fifth book of the New Testament, and all of them are historical. They're not letters of doctrine so much, but Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John are the four gospels which talk about the life of Christ and depict things he taught and did.

And the Book of Acts is what? It's what God continued to do after Jesus left the earth and the Christian church was founded. In Acts 1 and 2, we find out the last instructions of Christ, and then he leaves, he ascends to heaven in front of the disciples, and then the church is born in chapter 2 as the Holy Spirit comes. And now, for the first time, the gospel, the good news of Jesus, is being proclaimed.

Make note of this. The gospel is really not preached in its entirety in the gospels because Jesus had not accomplished what makes up the gospel. He had not died and resurrected.

The meaning of his blood was not understood. So although there's hints of the good news and he talks about it, the full good news and the message we're to preach is found in the Book of Acts as the apostles begin to share, first in Jerusalem and then in Samaria and everywhere, the gospel, the good news of

Jesus Christ. Why did God anoint Luke, the only Gentile writer in the New Testament? He wrote the Book of Luke and he wrote the Book of Acts.

Why did he inspire him to write this book of early church history? Well, only selected incidents are chosen. Obviously, we don't know what Matthew was doing during this time. He's never mentioned.

We have no idea what some of the other disciples were doing. They're not mentioned. The other Judas, not Judas who betrayed him, we have no idea.

So it's just selected pictures of the early church. Why? Because God wants us to know what the church should look like. What was preached? How did they live with one another? How did they share? What was it like to be a Christian? What did it mean to be a Christian? What did the early Christians go through? Why is that important? Because the Bible is our guide, but all of us are very susceptible to culture.

And culture many times can defeat what God wants us to know about him and the life that he wants us to live. What do I mean by that? We all, if we're Christians, got saved somewhere and were placed in a church. We didn't choose that church.

You were in Jamaica and you found yourself in a church in Jamaica. You were in Brooklyn like me, or you were in Puerto Rico, or you were in Africa, and you went and you got saved and someone witnessed to you, and now you found yourself in a church. What kind of church? Well, those churches all differ.

There's different denominations with different beliefs. And sometimes as centuries go by, churches veer off from the Bible. They don't practice what the Bible says the church should look like.

Ministers don't preach the message that the apostles preach, but they veer off into white American culture, red, white, and blue, amber waves of grain, and Americanism, and nationalism, or black culture, or West Indian culture, or Seventh-day Adventism, or whatever it is. So you don't know that. Hundreds of years have gone by.

You don't know. I don't know when we first get saved or we grow up in a church. We don't know what the Bible says first.

Takes time to study that. What we know is just the culture around us, and we say that's what church is. But maybe that's not what God intended church to be.

So if all you know is the Brooklyn Tabernacle, what you have to do is say, well, let me match the Brooklyn Tabernacle with what the Bible says. You never go by what a preacher says. You go by what the Bible says.

Can I get an amen? You don't go by what's happening around you and accept it in a gullible way. What you do is you say, is this in the Bible? Is this please God? Is this right? Does my denomination, not caring about other denominations, is that in the Bible? Are there any denominations in the Bible? Does God want black people to be over here and white people to be over here and Latinos and Asians and all the rest? Is this what God planned, or is this just what I accidentally ran into? And that's why God gave us the book of Acts, so we can know the way He began His church. Remember, Jesus never said, I will build your church, or you will build my church.

Jesus said, upon this rock, I will build my church. Jesus is building His church, but when we drift away from the way God wants it done, we end up, oh, so misrepresenting the Lord and getting in all kinds of trouble and doing things that are so unbecoming to Christ. I just finished a final edit of a book that is going to come out later in this year, and I was looking for an illustration about a certain point about understanding the difference between the New Covenant and following Jesus versus the Old Testament.

And as I was studying a little church history, I came across this sad fact that in around 1517, 500 years ago, Martin Luther began what we call the Protestant Reformation. The early Protestant reformers were persecuted by the Roman Catholic Church of that day because they were veering away from what the Catholic Church had developed into. Not going to go into all of that, but one of the sad, tragic moments of that whole time, which had so many beautiful moments, as brave, great men stood and say, no, I'm not going by what a pope or tradition says.

I'm only going by what the Word of God says. No, you can't earn your way into heaven. You can only be saved by faith in Jesus Christ.

These were concepts that were not known. Thousand years of history had gone by with no preachers of the gospel as we know it today. It had been lost, even though it's found in the New Testament.

Well, one of the reformers, John Calvin, was in Geneva, Switzerland after Luther already had died, and it was so sad as you read it how Christians treated each other, the new reformers, the new denominations, and they would disagree on the most minuscule little part of doctrine, and because they didn't agree with one another, they would cut off all fellowship and wouldn't talk to each other, wouldn't shake hands, wouldn't have fellowship, not on major things, just on little things. In the case of Calvin, and he was backed by other reformers, they ran into a heretic by the name of Servetus, and the heretic was defined by then someone who rejects Christian doctrine, who rejects what the Bible teaches about Christ, but they wouldn't let it go like that. They wanted to build a Christian community, and this man stood out like a sore thumb.

So what Calvin ordered was the man to be put to death by burning, and they burned a human being to death under heresy. Now, they couldn't find in the New Testament any verses to justify that. Can you imagine Jesus burning anyone? Can you imagine Paul or Peter or John burning someone who disagreed with us on doctrine? Never.

So they went to the Old Testament and the laws of blasphemy, where capital punishment is found in the Old Testament, and they hid behind those verses. But what a sad advertisement that was for the sweet spirit of Jesus Christ. How many understand what I'm saying? Say amen.

And that's the way we can be today. We can drift away from God's intention and misrepresent Christ, and instead of the world being drawn to the Lord, we're having church our way, and people are being repelled because we're not doing it the way God wants us to do it. In this passage I'm going to read, we have the only message to Christians that's found in the book of Acts.

We're going to find the only talk, sermon, sharing that's found in the book of Acts. It's going to be Paul speaking to some Christian leaders. All the other messages in the book of Acts are to unbelievers, or to a leader, or to a ruler, and we have those accounts of how they shared the gospel.

But this is the only talk we're going to find in the whole book to Christians. Paul has been traveling and he's ending his third missionary journey, and he's been in a place called Ephesus for three years, and now he's ending that journey. A riot has broken out, and now we see Paul wanting to leave and go another way, but he's delayed.

Let's pick it up in Acts 20. When the uproar in Ephesus had ended, Paul sent for the disciples, and after encouraging them, he said goodbye, and he set out for Macedonia, that's northern Greece. He traveled through that area, speaking many words of encouragement to the people, and he finally arrived in Greece, that's the southern part, where he stayed three months, probably in Corinth.

Because the Jews made a plot against him, just as he was about to sail for Syria, he decided to go back through Macedonia. So this ends his fourth, his third missionary journey. On his way back, he doesn't get directly back, but he stops outside of Ephesus in a place called Miletus.

And from Miletus, Paul sent to Ephesus for the elders of the church. When they arrived, he said to them, you know how I lived the whole time I was with you, from the first day I came into the province of Asia. I served the Lord with great humility and with tears, although I was severely tested by the plots of the Jews.

That's the beginning of his speech to these elders, and let's see what we can learn from that little historical narrative that we've picked out. One of the parts that wasn't in the PowerPoint, because of my oversight, was the fact that the Bible gives us the names of some of the people he was traveling with. Sopater, son of Firas from Berea, went with him.

So did Aristarchus and Secundus from Thessalonica. Gaius from Derbe, Tychicus and Trophimus from the province of Asia, and Timothy. They were traveling with him.

So what do we see here in this story? We see Paul spending great time in Ephesus, great three years, great fruit, church is founded, and then a riot breaks out because of Christianity. The idol merchants who were made small idols of Diana, who was the idol of that city, saw that their business was suffering because people were getting converted, and Paul was saying, those idols don't exist. That's not a god.

Don't bow down to that statue. So a riot broke out, and Paul then went headed west and went into Greece for a while, and then on his way back to go back to Jerusalem, he stopped in Miletus, and he called for the elders of the church, and now he's going to give them a long talk. This sermon is actually a lot about me and the men who are sitting up here, along with you, because as you read this, you're going to obviously make unconsciously judgments on what kind of pastors you've been around in your life, because Paul now gives us the model of what a minister should look like, and a Christian should look like too.

But he's talking now, defending his ministry, and it's very pointed that ministers of the gospel should be living like Paul. That's why God put that in the Bible. But let's go back to the beginning.

As the riot breaks out in Ephesus, the Bible says, before he left, he gathered the people to encourage them. And then he went up to northern Greece, and he found the disciples that he had won to the Lord up there, and he encouraged them. We've seen this theme over and over in the book of Acts.

Every place we find Paul and Peter, but especially Paul, stopping to encourage people. That word encourage could mean warning. It could mean some teaching, but it actually means, at the very essence of the word, to lift up the spirits and to encourage.

You find that over and over again, that Luke is writing, he stopped here to encourage Peter. He stopped there to encourage the people. He stopped over there to encourage the people.

He said, let's go back to the churches that we founded, even though we were persecuted and almost lost our lives. Let's go back. Why? Because the disciples, the Christians there need encouragement.

Brothers and sisters, if we learn anything from the book of Acts, it's that people need to be encouraged. How many times in your life has God sent somebody to you, whether in a church meeting like this, or maybe through a phone call, or an email, or having lunch with someone? How many times have you been with someone who you could actually, when you left, say, wow, she really encouraged me. He really encouraged me.

We found out in the early part of Acts that Barnabas, one of the great leaders of the early church who traveled with Paul, he was called son of encouragement. Why? Because he was so known to be a guy that would come alongside people and say, come on, don't quit. Don't give up.

Don't be sad. Be glad. Jesus loves you.

You're just going through this for a little while. You're going to get through it. Come on.

The world's not going to end. God's going to be with you. And we see Paul always encouraging people because he saw that in life there are so many discouragements.

Come on. Don't I get a witness here from anyone? You meet people who discourage you. The newspaper discourages you.

The stock market discourages you. The government can discourage you. So many things discouraging us.

The whole atmosphere and culture of America, if you want to live for Jesus Christ, it's not going to encourage you. It's going to discourage you. And that's why every time we're together, it's so important that we encourage each other.

And there are so few people, Christians who have been serving the Lord for decades, who make it their business and have this burden. I've got to encourage somebody today. It's always about us what I'm going through.

But what's needed is to stop thinking about ourselves and be like Paul who said, how can I encourage you? What verse can I give you? How can I teach you today so that you'll be encouraged in your faith? Everywhere he went, he encouraged people. How many today by the grace of God want to be a bigger encourager of other people? Just lift your hand. Because we love to be encouraged ourselves.

Let's ask God to make us more selfless so that we can encourage others. I know sometimes you're with some people, they're so negative. Have you ever been with a negative person that you just can't wait till the conversation ends? They are just so negative.

Negative. Never a compliment. Never a word about God's goodness.

Never a thanksgiving of what God has done. Just problem, problem, problem. I don't like this.

I don't like that. Problem, problem. That so annoys me.

Problem, problem. You just can't wait to get out of their presence. Come on, lift your hand if you know what I'm talking about, right? Let's not be that.

Let's be people. There are problems in the world. We don't go through life naive.

But we got a lot more to thank God about. And the promises of God are yea and amen in Christ Jesus. We're to encourage each other.

Amen. Let's say amen to that. I want you to notice also that Paul traveled with people.

I should have put that, we'll have it for the next service, that little list of all the people who he traveled with. Why would Luke write that? Well, Luke was among the group, by the way. And that tells us this, that the apostle Paul was not a loner.

Even though he was the greatest of all the apostles, he needed friends and companions and associates to do the work God called him to do and to keep encouraged himself. One of the most detrimental things that can happen in a Christian's life is to be a loner. And you can be a loner by yourself or you can be a loner with your wife or husband.

And you isolate yourself and the devil puts it in your head. No one really likes me. No one really cares.

There's all cliques in the church and I'm not in any of them. This is all the devil talking smack. Am I right? Because none of that is true.

But what he wants to do is to isolate you from the pack because that's what predators do. When predators hunt animals, they try to drive the one that they're interested in away from the pack because in the pack, there's safety. In the pack, there's strength.

I feel so sad sometimes when I pray for people before the Tuesday night prayer meeting, which I will do God willing this Tuesday. I feel so sad when I talk to someone, how long have you been coming to the church? Nine years. Have we ever met? No.

Who's your best friend in the church? I don't have one. No, I mean, who do you talk to? Who do you call? Who do you pray with? No one. There's something wrong with that.

Don't we need each other, brothers and sisters? Do we not need each other? Paul traveled with people. The whole idea of the minister being the pastor, the apostle being this aloof man of God who doesn't mingle with anyone because he's so holy and close to God, that is such nonsense. We all need each other.

We need friends. Do you have friends? You know why a lot of people don't have friends? Because they don't show themselves friendly. They're loners.

That's not good. I don't care what age you are. Listen to me now and receive this as a word from the Lord.

You need friends. No, I have my family. You need people beside your family.

You need brothers and sisters in Christ that you can call, laugh with, talk with, pray with, talk about the word of God. Can we give a rousing amen to all of that? We need that. I have watched over the years that one of Satan's main strategy is, oh, I don't want to bother anyone.

All these different approaches he uses to our minds. No, people, I don't want to bother anyone. Nobody really care.

I've heard that all my ministerial life, and it's all lies from Satan. Get a friend. Get a friend today.

If you don't have a friend, come up. I'll be your friend. I'll be your friend.

We'll be your friend. We'll talk to you. We'll call you this week.

But talk to people. Travel with people. Laugh with people.

Eat with people. Fellowship is so important. The Apostle Paul wasn't some lone ranger.

He traveled and had friends. So let's get to the main point of this. On his way back because of some more threats against his life, he's on his way now back to Jerusalem, and he stops in this place called Miletus.

And this is a famous part of the New Testament, of the book of Acts, especially to pastors, because it's called Paul's Farewell Address to the Ephesian Elders. That's what it's called. Paul's Farewell Address to the Ephesian Elders.

He tells them later on, and we're going to read it, I'm never going to see you again. God has shown me I'm never going to see you again. And he gives them certain warnings, but we just read the beginning of his talk.

So let's just see what we can learn on the way to the one sentence that I picked we should concentrate on. Number one, the Bible says when he stopped in Miletus, he called for the elders of the church at Ephesus. What elders? Well, these were the leaders of the church in Ephesus that he had founded from three years of ministry.

What is an elder? So everybody learn this now so you know it. In the New Testament, forget what you saw in church. In the New Testament, elder, pastor, bishop, and presbyter all mean the same thing.

It's the spiritual leader of a local church. Bishop, elder, pastor, presbyter. It's all the same title in the New Testament.

Well, why must there be leaders in the church? Because for anything to operate efficiently, there has to be authority and leadership. That's in anything. That's in a basketball team.

That's in a football team. That's in a company. What if you had a big company, AT&T, and everybody went to work and they said, what do we do today? Whatever you like, whatever you want, just hang out, do whatever you want.

Nobody's to tell you what to do. No, nothing can operate that way. So now let's just analyze that.

To exercise authority properly, you have to be able to submit to authority. When Paul called them to join him, why didn't they say, no, we're busy? No. Why should we go and listen to you? No.

They recognized the authority God had given him as an apostle and as someone who had led them into Christ. So to exercise, you want to be a leader and you want to exercise spiritual authority, not as a dictator, not spiritually abusing people, not getting involved in their life and ordering them around in every nook and cranny of their existence. That is nowhere found in the Bible.

Back in the seventies and eighties, some of you don't know about it. There was a discipleship movement that got very popular in certain parts of America where it was like a Ponzi scheme in a way. It was a pyramid scheme and the top people, you know, disciplined the ones under them and it went down and down and the tithing went all that way.

Had nothing to do with churches. It had to do with this pyramid of who's your disciple or who's over you. And the people, it got so intrusive that some of the people who were discipling, they told the couples that were under them, you don't buy a refrigerator.

You don't go on a vacation unless you run it by me. And they did it. Leave it to America to come up with something that crazy, right? And it spread like wildfire.

It was called the big discipleship movement. That was an abuse of it. There were some good things that happened in it, but it got to be something very, very weird and cult cultish.

I'm not talking about that. I'm talking about where the Bible says, obey them that are over you in the Lord. So I want to stop right here and you are watching because I like that you're watching on webcasts, but you know, what bothers me about that is we get emails now from around the world.

The thing about you watching makes me troubled that this becomes your church. But yo, you live in Kansas. You're in Nigeria.

You're in Argentina. You're in California. And I appreciate that you're watching and you put the webcast on and I trust it's a blessing to you, but you're not a member of the Brooklyn Tabernacle.

And if you want to help us financially, praise God, but you should be giving to the church you go to. Because how in the world can your church experience be something where you never meet us in the flesh? That's not right. That's not right.

I'm all for encouraging everyone I can, but we all need to be in a local assembly and we need to recognize the spiritual authority that's over us. Not in a dictatorial way again, but this is the way God does things. Obey them that are over you in the Lord.

Not that they're going to control you and rob you, but that they're going to guide you and teach you and help you. That's no advertisement for this church. It's a spiritual principle.

Sheep need a shepherd. When the shepherd guides the sheep, the sheep don't go say, why should I follow you? No, Jesus gave that example. He's the great shepherd of the flock.

And we shepherds, as you're going to see that word used later in the talk here in Meletus to the Ephesian elders, he says, now be careful how you shepherd the flock of God because the great shepherd is Jesus. He's the real shepherd. Now you're just under him guiding the people.

Be careful how you treat them because he's their shepherd. He shed his blood for them. So you better be careful how you treat any one of them.

Don't be a dictator and don't be like you're all that. You're not. But how about all the people who make nothing of their lives because they never settle in a church, submit to any authority? Oh, that's rampant today, especially among teens and 20-something year old.

I'm just in a mall. I like to go where I want to go, stay where I want to stay for as long as I want to stay. I never plant my roots anywhere.

No one's going to tell me what to do. Anti-authority. And it's the excuses.

Oh, nobody's going to control me. Spiritual abuse is rampant anywhere. I'm not talking about that.

I agree with that. But you that are here, where, what flock does God want you to be a part of? If it's here, praise the Lord. If it's not here, praise the Lord.

But please find out where you belong. Put your shoulder to the wheel. Pray with other people.

Study with other people. Worship with other people. Rejoice over people finding Christ with other people.

But be a part of something. Come on. Can we say aloud amen to that? This choir has been a blessing not just to here, but to people around the world.

How does this choir work? By authority. By authority. Carol picks the songs and they're going to learn it.

She didn't ask him, do you like this? Am I right, choir? You're going to like every song. Am I right, choir? I said not again, choir. You're going to like every song, right? Why? Because that's the way it works.

There's something more important than my personal tastes. It's being part of a team. We have an executive here from Macy's who's a vibrant member of the church.

That's how Macy's works. That's how everything works. In love, in kindness, submitting to authority and saying, what's the goal? And let's all work together.

And some of you here and some of you listening, you've never been a part of that in your life. You're not a team player. Using all these excuses never to be involved.

But if God set up local churches, how come he can't set up one that you find comfortable? That sounds very strange to me. God has local churches everywhere, but none of them is good enough for you. I don't think that's right.

So we see here that bishop, presbyter, elder, and pastor are all the same. Pastor Symbola is the same as Bishop Symbola. That's a certain ring to it, doesn't it? I'm just joking.

So there was authority. They submitted to Paul's authority and that showed that they could exert authority down. I've watched and learned that young men, young women, middle-aged people who really have a zeal for the Lord.

The way promotion comes is when God sees that you can submit and do the little things. And when you can do the little things and listen to others who are over you, then God says, now you're ready to exert authority because you've shown you can submit to authority. But some people want to be in charge of everything from the beginning.

My grandson Levi is going through that stage right now at four years old. He told his parents, Pastor Petri and my daughter Sue, I'm not listening to you anymore. And they said, why? He said, because I'm four years old now.

I know a lot of things. He said, I'm my own king. Signs of the last days, ladies and gentlemen.

And they said, what are you king over? And he pointed to his room and his toys. He said, this is my kingdom right here. That's the way a lot of Christians are.

Not going to listen to a soul because they think that's demeaning. They think that's like weak. I'm going to listen to somebody who tells, gives me orders.

No, nobody gives me orders. Well, how could life operate? How could anything operate that way? So they submit to him and he gathers them and he says to them, the first sentence. Oh, what a sentence to me.

I'm almost afraid to say it, but remember it applies to us too. The principle is not just for leaders. It's for all of us.

He says the first thing to them. Okay, brethren, you know how I've lived among you since the first day I put my foot into Asia, which is Turkey to us today. And speaking of Ephesus, he says, you know how I've lived.

First thing Paul points to is not a sermon or some revelation he had. He says, you know how I've lived day after day in front of all of you. The loudest thing about all of us is the way we live.

Not what we talk, not how Tanika can sing. That all has its place. I'm all for that.

But the loudest thing that affects other people is the way you live every day, how you act and react, how you talk to people, not here at the church, not when everyone's lifting their hands. Well, anybody's going to flow with that. I'm talking about how you live every day.

I just wanted to commit suicide here coming down on the elevator because the head of the security told me, you know, we're getting a complaint. Pastors, you need to know this. We're getting a complaint from the parking lot here on the corner because some of the people from your church, you know, you've been here a long time.

We love doing business with you, but some of the people, I hope it's just a few people, and they're the same ones who do it all the time. They give us, they're so rude, even this morning, so rude and so nasty to us. And on top of that, they cursed us out.

And how do you think I feel when I hear that? Look at me, everyone. How do you think I feel? What does it matter that I write a book? What does it matter that carols choirs won Grammy awards? If we got people who come here who act like that, then I'm a failure. I'm a failure.

I am a failure. Jesus said, by their fruit, you'll know them. So the loudest thing about you is not your suit and your tie and what verses you know.

Nobody really cares about that. It's how you act, how you talk. How many want to act and talk more like Jesus? I mean like, no matter what pressure comes, no matter what pressure comes, just walk away from things.

You know, yesterday I had to do some work here in the office, so I went to the corner diner. And when I walked in, I was wearing a jacket somebody just gave me as a present, a Pittsburgh Steeler coat that somebody gave me, a friend in Pennsylvania sent it to me. So I'm wearing it.

I walk in, and this guy's smoking a cigarette outside, and he just yells at me. He looked like he was, I don't know, high, not with it or whatever. And he goes, hey, what are you wearing that jacket for? Whatever.

So I went, yeah, whatever. So I went in. So I sat down, and when I sat down at the counter, I sat down, I saw money.

I thought it was a tip, and I saw some dirty dishes. So I thought, well, they'll clean that up. It was the only seat I could take.

I just sat down there, minding my own business, not 100% back health-wise. So I just want a little, you know, a little piece of cantaloupe, just a little decaf coffee, and then I'll go in here and try to write what I need to write. So the guy comes back into the thing, right to the counter, and he goes, what are you sitting in my seat for? And then the waitress says, no, we thought you were done.

You shut up. That's right. You shut up.

And I'm just saying, Lord, I don't need this. I do not need this this morning. I do not need this.

And he started to insult her. And he said, and then every four-letter word's coming out of his poor mouth. Poor man.

I said, Lord, what do I do? Should I get involved in this or what? And the Lord just, I felt speak to me and said, walk away. Just get up and walk away. Something could go down here.

And the owner had come, and they were talking about calling the cops. How you react when there's pressure. How you react when someone's ugly.

When someone's rude. How we act speaks louder than any song we sing, than any praise and worship chorus, than any, oh, I know a verse, and I was in a meeting in 1999. What does it matter if you're not acting like a Christian? Come on, brothers and sisters, can't we do better on this? Don't you want to be more like Jesus? First thing Paul says to them is, you know how I've lived among you the whole time I was there.

Not for a week, for three years. I want to be able to point and be able to say that when my time is up. You know how I've lived.

I want to be able to say that in some way, shape, or form. And then he says, you know how I've lived as I've served the Lord in great humility and tears. That's the end of the sermon.

This is something no evangelist or pastor that I know in America would be saying today, because we don't value those qualities. What minister, what famous preacher would say, you know how I've served the Lord among you with great humility and with tears. And nobody talks that way, because nobody values tears or humility much.

When Paul mentioned his humility, he was talking about something that to the Roman Empire was a scandal. It meant weakness. Humility and taking the low position was stupid.

The Roman Empire taught if you want to get something and you want to go somewhere, you go for it. You push yourself through. You vaunt yourself.

You exalt yourself. You let everybody know who you are and what you can do, much like America. But to be humble, to take the low position, to serve others and count them as more important, that was like, what are you, stupid? And yet Paul says, you know how I've lived among you.

I serve the Lord in great humility and in tears. Someone has said, a great spiritual writer, that the ultimate form of spiritual insanity is to be proud. If any of us are proud here today, just consider the facts.

The only reason you're breathing today is that God has let you breathe today. The only reason you have clothes on your back is that God gave you the strength and understanding to have a job so that you could earn money. Your life is in his hand.

You don't have one thing. Look at me. You don't have one solitary thing that God didn't give you because every good gift comes down from God.

If anyone knew, wait, if anyone knew all the mistakes we've made, if anyone knew all of my failures, you wouldn't even listen to me preach. If anyone knew what we were really like, it's not like we appear on Sunday all the time. Am I right or wrong? And yet God sees all of that and still loves us and still is kind to us.

Shouldn't that humble us? Should anybody be walking around strutting, bragging on where we're from or what color we are or what nation we came from? Is that not insane? Ah, the Bible says, if anyone boasts, let him boast in the Lord. If anyone's going to brag on anything, let's brag on the Lord. So Paul said, you remember how I was with you for three years? You know how I lived.

I served the Lord with deep humility. Whenever you listen to me now, in case you never hear my voice again, or you travel away someplace. If you ever see a minister drawing attention to himself, he's not a true minister of Jesus Christ.

Whenever you see someone acting in a way to draw attention and lifting himself up like he's special, that is not a true minister of Christ. A true minister of Jesus puts himself down so that God can be everything. Can we say amen to that? That's what Paul said.

And that's the same for us Christians. You see a Christian who lifts himself up and walks around like he's somebody, she's somebody, you're talking somebody there is just, they need help. The sign of a real Christian is to be meek and lowly like our Savior Jesus Christ.

And now the perplexing word as I close, and with tears. You know how I was with you for three years serving the Lord in deep humility and with tears. First of all, what person would make that their credential? Who would point to that and say, hey, come on, you know I'm real because I served the Lord in deep humility and with tears.

You know, he was like the Lord. When you're a real Christian and God is working in your heart, you get very tender toward the situations of life. You cry over people.

Are some of us so hard now that we can't cry over people? First of all, you cry sometimes when you just think of the goodness of God. How many have ever just wept when you think of his grace and his love, right? Then you cry over people that you see who are serving the Lord, but going the wrong way. You don't get angry with them.

You cry. In fact, I think it's a good rule. You really can't talk to anyone and help them unless you can cry over them.

If you're mad at somebody and you see them doing wrong, you're not going to help them as long as you're angry, even though you're right. No, you are right. Mom, if you're raising your children that way, you're going to raise a mess and dad too.

If you weep over your children, then you can say anything. If you show them compassion and love, you can do anything because they know that. But just because you see what's wrong in them and an angry rebuke and an angry correction is not going to help them.

You got to cry over people. I'm thinking of Jesus. He wept when Lazarus was in the tomb and he saw everybody mourning and human suffering.

He wept. Shortest verse in the New Testament. You want to memorize it? What is it? Jesus wept.

And then over Jerusalem, they were going to crucify him and he's weeping over them. Oh God, let there be a revival of the Holy Spirit in all of our lives so that we can walk in humility and feel for people and weep over people. Not judge people.

Paul didn't say I judged you. He said I wept over you. Judging is easy.

Judging is very easy. You just analyze things and you see what's wrong in people. But look in the mirror and you'll see a few things wrong in that person.

What the world needs is people walking in humility who weep over one another. Let's close our eyes. I'm going to dismiss everybody in a moment.

But I asked the Lord last night and again today, Lord, how should I end this service? And I said, Lord, even if it just comes to the moment where I end, you'll have to show me then. I just want to say this. Is there anyone here, you're just at the bottom right now and you need someone to just put their arm around your neck and pray with you.

You're lonely. You don't have any friends. You've messed up.

Satan is just barraging you, barraging you, barraging you with accusation after accusation. Come on, you got to do this quickly with me. If you're here today and you just say, Pastor, as you close and we sing a song, I want to be in the front and just end with someone praying for me.

Just get up out of your seat right now. Whether you're in the choir behind me, just going through such a long, dark tunnel. Can't see light at the other end.

You need someone to encourage you, to pray with you. Just get up out of your seat. Come quickly and stand here.

Come down from the balcony. That's it. We're going to wait for you.

Everybody, let's pray together. Father God, first of all, we thank you for your word and what we've learned today. How we need to be encouraged.

How we need friends and not to be loners. How we need to remember to submit to proper spiritual authority. And now we think about what the apostle said and how he lived.

Make our lives speak louder than our words. Save us from only talking the talk but never walking the walk. Work in us so deeply that we radiate Jesus everywhere we go.

Humble us before you. Take away pride. Take away empty boasting.

Take away look at me and help us to have a look at Jesus. Make our hearts tender, Lord. Make me a better minister, better pastor.

Make us better Christians. Help us not to judge people but to weep over people. Judging comes easy to us, Lord, but weeping and praying and encouraging people, that's something different.

But with you, all things are possible. And now, Lord, I finally bring my brothers and sisters who have come forward. You know what they're going through.

They're all different. It's all complex, complicated. Encourage them today.

Lift up their hearts. As they leave the building today, let there be a smile on their face. Let joy be in their heart.

Let peace be controlling them, the peace of God which passes all understanding. Help them to know today that you have never taken your eye off of them for a second. You know exactly what they're going through and you will never leave them nor forsake them.

And all things are going to work together for good. Even the thing that is hurting them now, puzzling them now, it's going to work together for good. We thank you for the body of Christ, for every visitor.

And now we pray that your blessing will remain on us all day long, we pray. Make us evangelists, every one of us, we pray. In Christ's name, and the whole church said, amen.

Let's give God one last hand clap of praise. Everybody turn around and hug five or six people, will you? No handshake.

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