

Gospel Companions

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[0 : 00] Read that passage again from the beginning down to verse 6, Acts chapter 20, page 929. So after the uproar, uproar in Ephesus ceased, Paul sent for the disciples and after encouraging them, he said farewell and departed for Macedonia.

When he had gone through these regions and had given them much encouragement, he came to Greece. There he spent three months and when a plot was made against him by the Jews as he was about to set sail for Syria, he decided to return through Macedonia.

And then this list of names that I want to focus on a little more in a few moments time. Sopater the Berean, son of Pyrrhus, accompanied him and of the Thessalonians, Aristarchus and Secundus, and Gaius of Derbe and Timothy and the Asians, Tithochus and Trophimus.

These went on ahead and were waiting for us at Troas. But we sailed away from Philippi after the days of unleavened bread. And in five days we came to them at Troas.

We stayed for seven days. I wonder if you're aware of the number of lists of names that we find in the Bible. And, you know, lists that we just so often just read the names off and then just almost forget about.

[1 : 22] But lists are important. We see biblical lists in the New Testament take the genealogies of Jesus, for example, in Matthew 1 and in Luke chapter 3.

These are there, of course, by God's inspired word. A list of names, individuals who are integral in the coming to earth of the Lord Jesus.

Now, of course, some of these names we know well, like Abraham and David. Others are just of a mere mention in the list of names and certainly in biblical terms never heard of again. Or we can go to Paul's letters.

Well, particularly the letter to the Romans. And at the end of that epistle, is it chapter 16? You see another list of names. Names that are there for a purpose.

Names that show us that the church was growing. Names of people who were instrumental in living out the gospel in relation to Paul's ministry.

[2 : 29] Of course, the ministry that proclaimed the Lord Jesus. And these are names recorded in the infallible word of God to encourage us. To show us how God works through individuals in the work of the kingdom.

We have a list of names with men and women. Men and women saved by the Lord Jesus. Men and women who served the Lord Jesus in the work and mission of the gospel.

And there in Acts 20 here is another list of names. A mini list we might call it. But names associated with Paul's ministry. And again, names given to us for a purpose.

In fact, as we'll see, a number of purposes. Because we're looking at the development of the early church. The early church under God's guidance. Under the ministry of certainly of the apostle Paul. And it's a list that I think we do need to look at more carefully. We've been looking at individuals who we've been calling trophies of grace. How God has worked in their lives for the good of their souls and the glory of his name.

[3 : 40] The furtherance of his kingdom. And these names are important for a good number of reasons that we'll look at in a moment. But, you know, this is the book of Acts.

This is the story of the early church. And we do need to look at how God has worked in individuals to further his kingdom in this book.

So don't just pass by what God has given to us in his word. Remain focused on what we find in this list of names.

So that we see the way that God works. Even through sinners. Even through individuals. Even through individuals like me. Like you. So that his kingdom is advanced.

But we do need to look a wee bit at the background to get, you know, to understand what we're seeing here. Because Paul's on another missionary journey. A third missionary journey. And he's reached Ephesus. And what's he doing in Ephesus?

[4 : 43] He's preaching. He's preaching the Lord Jesus. He's in the synagogue for three months. He preaches in the synagogue. But then there's trouble there. And he goes elsewhere.

He has to go to another part of the city. There's so much opposition to him in the synagogue where the Jewish people met. So for over two years, Paul continues preaching in Ephesus.

It's in Ephesus that he writes the first letter to the Corinthians. And one of the things that you write, that's why we looked at 1 Corinthians 16. One of the things you write to the church there is about a collection.

A collection for needy believers in Jerusalem. That's why we read 1 Corinthians 16. Because Paul is discussing with that church, directing them to set aside a sum of money on the first day of the week.

And then when Paul arrives in Corinth, he can take that money with him. He'll send you those. But then he says these words, verse 3 and 4, 1 Corinthians 16. When I arrive, I will send those whom you accredit by letter to carry your gift to Jerusalem.

[5 : 48] If it seems advisable that I should go also, they will accompany me. And as we notice, the they are these seven named individuals. Plus, of course, Luke, who wrote the book of Acts.

He's with them as well. So, that's why we read the two sections of the New Testament there. Acts 20, 1 Corinthians 16. You see the connection. That's why we've got this list of names there.

These men who accompanied Paul with that particular sum of money. And we'll think about the character of these individuals in a moment. So, Paul is an Ephesus.

He's very active in Ephesus. He's written to the church in Corinth. He's preaching the word in Ephesus. He's continuing his ministry in Ephesus. And then there's another large amount of opposition against Paul.

This time by Jewish exorcists. There's a riot in the city. Another riot. A pagan silversmith has a trade in shrines to the goddess Artemis.

[6 : 52] And he feels that Paul is endangering his business. And there's a disturbance. And then after the disturbance dies down, Paul goes to parts for Macedonia. And en route stays in Corinth.

About three months. He plans, you know, to wait there for the winter. Until the winter makes way for the spring to sail safely to Syria. And then on to Jerusalem.

And then Paul hears a plot. A Jewish plot against him. He's about to sail for Syria. He changes course. He's going to go back through Macedonia. Still in his intended journey to Jerusalem.

We see all that in Acts 19 and Acts 20. So, this is all narrative. This is all story. This is, you know, Luke telling us the story of what's happening in Paul's life in Ephesus.

And then there's this little break here. Rather than continue the story, Luke here, the author of Acts. Luke who's with Paul on that journey.

[7 : 50] Luke who's an eyewitness of all that's happening in Paul's life. He breaks off the story. And he gives us this list of traveling companions. Why? Because he wants us. He wants us readers.

He wants us. To know who were with Paul on this momentous journey to Jerusalem. He says, if Paul looks wanting us to share in this drama.

And see, not just through his eyes. But to see through the experience of these lesser known individuals. To see, you know, their contribution, as it were.

And the part that Paul was pulling in his mission. So this is an interruption in the story. And if it's an interruption, it means that there's something important to be told.

Something important to be learned. Not just for, you know, first century readers of the Book of Acts. But this is important for the readers of God's Word through the ages.

[8 : 46] Even for us here in Livingston today. So a few things I want to consider with you. Those of you who are eagle-eyed will know they're exactly the same headings as this evening.

That's actually deliberate. Don't worry, it's not spelling mistakes. It so happens this evening. Those are the same headings. Obviously a different context.

But let's look at the three things to consider in this list. Companionship. Companionship in ministry. Then unity and diversity in ministry. And thirdly, mission-mindedness in ministry.

Firstly, companionship. You know, when you look at Paul's missionary endeavours, then one of the great features of his work that we see is his constant need for companionship.

He appeals for companionship in his journeys. You know, he's hardly ever alone when he's spreading the Gospel. And you know, you know the names.

[9 : 51] Paul and Silas. Paul and Timothy. Paul and Mark. Paul and Barnabas. You go through the Book of Acts. And you actually even read Paul wanting the company of others in his mission work.

And even, when you read in the Book of Timothy, two books of Timothy, the epistles to Timothy, even these letters, the last letters that Paul wrote, even these last days before his trial and execution, he still desires human company, the company of believers.

I mean, he writes to Timothy, for example, asking him to do his best to come to him before winter. But here in Acts 20, in Paul's journey to Jerusalem, here's a list of his travelling companions. Seven named individuals, plus Luke, the author of Acts. Because Paul valued human company, and even more the value of the company of believers.

He valued the fellowship of true believers. I mean, elsewhere in his letters, he'd refer to these believers as fellow believers.

[10 : 59] Even fellow prisoners. Companionship. We might even say teamwork. Teamwork in the ministry was essential. Essential to Paul. I mean, yes, God had called Paul to be a missionary to the Gentiles.

And Paul was gifted with boldness and courage and zeal for the Lord. But Paul craved the company of fellow believers and the work that God had given him to do. And I think we can explore this.

Because, well, it wasn't just Paul who was alone in his desire for company in the work of ministry.

Think of Jesus. Later this evening we'll be thinking more closely in Jesus and his calling of 12 disciples to be with him in Jesus' three-year ministry.

But, you know, even thinking on that call of Jesus for others to be with him. The whole context of, concept of companionship is so important.

Jesus chose 12 men to be with him in his work. Paul chooses 12 men to be, or these men rather, to be with him in his work. I mean, the disciples who were with Jesus were later designated those who were with, who'd been with Jesus.

[12 : 15] It was after Jesus' death and resurrection in the continued ministry of the gospel after Jesus' death. The disciples, the remaining disciples, were designated as those who were with Jesus.

It's one of the criteria of being an apostle, that that person had been with Jesus. Here for the apostle Paul.

Of course, we have to say the apostle Paul had been with certainly the risen and ascended Jesus. Remember when he met the Lord on the Damascus Road and Paul was converted. Paul needed the company of like-minded individuals, fellow believers in the work of gospel ministry.

Men to share the burden of ministry. Men he could pray with. Men he could share with. Men he could trust. And obviously the nature of what Paul was doing in taking that gift to Jerusalem.

And of course, as we read in Acts 1 Corinthians 16, men whom the church could trust. The accreditation that the church gave to these seven men.

[13 : 23] These men who would give Paul that fellowship, yes, and that human friendship. Men to ensure that the loneliness of the work of ministry wouldn't be a constant factor in Paul's life.

Particularly as Paul's heading to Jerusalem. Think of the bigger picture. Because beyond the giving of the gift of money to the church, Paul actually didn't know what was going to face when he went to Jerusalem.

He knew he was going to face affliction. He knew he was going to face suffering. But he didn't know exactly how that would be in practice. But he wanted others to be with him in that journey.

Because you see, the work of Paul, that's with the work of all who labour for the Lord. It's very rarely a one-man exercise. Now, we've said maybe a lot from the immediate context here, but what about our application?

How do we apply this particular aspect of companionship? How do we apply that ourselves, as individuals, or as a church? Well, as we said, Paul had certainly eight men with him, the seven named plus Luke.

[14 : 36] Each of these men had different gifts, different personalities, of course, grace-filled personalities. They were there to support and encourage Paul, to learn of Paul.

Now, in any church, in any congregation, any congregation that proclaims the good news of the Lord Jesus, companionship, teamwork, is absolutely essential for the spread of the gospel.

Now, we see that, I suppose, in a formal context. We have court sessions, we have deacons' court, there's companionship, there's teamwork there. You see it, I pray too, amongst the members of the church, indeed amongst the church as a whole.

Teamwork, companionship, building up the church. That teamwork that is companionship, and well, how does that show in practice?

Well, mutual support and prayer. Fellowship, one with another. Encouraging one another.

Hospitality, offering hospitality.

[15:43] Visiting the sick. Agreeing in the Lord. Having that love for one another that shows itself in unity, in the companionship that brotherly love shows in the context of a church.

And you see, working together. Jesus emphasized that working together, even with Jesus and his disciples. And here we're seeing that emphasized in Paul and his companions.

Why? For the sake of the gospel. Surely it's for even us as a congregation here to strive in practice, to foster that companionship, to develop that teamwork, because the cause is Christ, the work is the Lord's.

You know, there should be no lonely disciples of Christ in the work of the kingdom. There should be no one, no one, for whom the wider fellowship doesn't care about in compassion and prayer, because fellowship believers isn't just a noun, it's a verb.

It's action. Fellowship. Practice fellowship. One with another. Because that's what we see here in Paul's case. It's the very mention of these names, these people who accompanied him.

[17:02] And it's this aspect of companionship, I suppose, that really leads us to the next main heading. Unity and diversity. Unity and diversity in ministry.

Luke's, Dr. Luke's a historian. And a historian very often gives detail, give detail in order to bring out a wider significance.

And that's the detail we see here to bring out a wider significance. The detail. The names. But they're not just names. Notice they're names associated with a particular place.

Look at verse 4 again. Sopater of Berea. Berea, a place. Son of Pyrrhus, and from Berea accompanied, from Berea accompanying him. And of the Thessalonians, Thessalonica, Thessalonica, these two individuals, Aristarchus and Secundus.

Gaius of Derbe and Timothy. Timothy was from the Derbe area. And the Asians. The Asians, that means from Asia Minor, the west of Turkey, the eastern part of Turkey, Titicus, Trophimus.

[18:07] So, here's these names. Seven names. But they're all mentioned in connection with a region. And in fact, we know that these were the regions that Paul actually visited and evangelised.

We'll come to that in a moment. The point surely is this. These are individuals from different regions. But they share in the work of gospel ministry. They obviously had different upbringings in these different regions.

So, you've got Thessalonica in the, you know, in the far, the west, as it were, the Macedonian part of Greece. And then through the middle to Asia Minor.

And then, you know, on to Derbe. You know, the whole stretch of territory, as it were. Men from different parts of that Mediterranean area.

But sharing in the work of the gospel. Again, we're seeing unity and diversity. Men from different backgrounds. Men with different temperaments.

[19:14] Men with different gifts. Men who are used of God in the service of the Lord. And, you know, it's really, we rejoice. It should rejoice in the unity and diversity of the church at large.

You know, because we know that the church is composed of Christians from different countries, different backgrounds, different giftings, different characters.

But believers united in the work of the gospel. And that means this. That means that the scandal of division, the scandal of a lack of brotherly love and unity in the gospel, that scandal is a blight in the church.

And it's an affront to the name of the Lord Jesus. It's an affront to the Savior who prayed to the Father when he prayed that his people be one. Even as he and his Father are one.

See, the Lord Jesus, remember, Lord Jesus, the head of the church. He's the true vine. And all who are in Christ are branches in that vine. I pray that we'll see that unity, yes, here in this congregation and beyond.

[20:25] Across denominations for the glory of God's name. There's a wonderful analogy of this in the Old Testament. It's an analogy of the unity of believers.

There's a lesson in wisdom. Ecclesiastes 4, verse 12. And though a man might prevail against one, okay, one against one, who's alone, two will withstand him and then this wonderful expression, this wonderful analogy, a threefold cord is not quickly broken.

In other words, the strength of the team that's united is greater than the individual. I believe in here in this congregation that we'll see that in practice, the threefold cord that can't be quickly broken. Why? For the sake of the gospel, for the sake of the cause of Christ. Because we're living in a dark and hostile world. We've seen even evidence of that in recent days. We need that unity, yes, and diversity in the work of gospel ministry. Because that work of gospel ministry is mission focused.

[21 : 37] That's our last point for this morning, the mission minded and even the missionary mindedness that we have to have in the gospel and ministry. You see, we mentioned just a moment ago these place names that were associated with these individuals and that's important.

They're not just there for the sake of it, they're there to give meaning. Remember, see in verse 4 the place names, Berea, Thessalonica, Derbe, Asia Minor.

As we said, these were the places that Paul had visited. These were places that Paul had evangelized. So, it would appear then that these individuals who are named here were the fruits of Paul's missionary labors in these particular places.

The work of God's Spirit, the Holy Spirit, accompanying the preaching of Paul in these very places, the places where the gospel had never been heard before. And here, the work of God through Paul leading to these individuals being converted.

So, again, this list here given for a purpose, there's this list revealing the missionary zeal that Paul had been blessed with and God blessing Paul in that missionary zeal. I think this is something we need to be reminded of again and again.

[22 : 53] The necessity to reach out with the gospel, the gospel message of salvation in the Lord Jesus and to do it in places where the gospel has never been heard of or proclaimed.

Whether it's in another continent, whether it's in our immediate neighborhood or friends or families or neighbors, relations. And what did Paul write to the Romans?

Romans 10, 14. How are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching? Paul preached. Paul preached the good news.

He preached the good news in these regions that are mentioned here. And we can deduce then that these men must have heard Paul preach. These men were convicted by the Holy Spirit.

These men gave their lives to the Lord Jesus. Wonder upon wonder found their names listed here in Scripture itself. You know, every congregation has a list of names.

[23 : 52] Every congregation has a list of names known as a communion role. Names of men and women who have professed faith in the Lord Jesus. But that list speaks not only of professed faith, but surely it speaks too of missionary zeal.

So it speaks of others who proclaim the gospel to them. And of course accompanied by the drawing power of the Holy Spirit. These men, these women gifted faith to believe.

Missionary zeal. Missionary zeal may have been from a preacher. It may have been to a friend. It may have been to a relative. A parent. But God blessing that mission-mindedness of those who sowed that gospel seed.

And God blessing and God giving the increase. Obviously here were these names mentioned. Paul had sown the seed of the gospel and the fruit evident in these names mentioned here in Acts 20. But something else we notice in this list. We notice that these men, yes, they were converts, but they themselves carried the torch of the gospel in their own missionary fervour.

[25 : 03] They were ready to serve the Lord where God sent them to make known the grace of God to sinners. I mean, some of these names that are mentioned here, he actually read off again in the New Testament.

The man there that we see there, Aristarchus. Aristarchus. Well, in the previous chapter, Acts 19, verse 29, he'd actually instead of been attacked for his faith. And you go to Paul's epistle to the Colossians, he's mentioned there again as Paul's fellow prisoner.

There's another name mentioned there, Tychicus, one of the Asians from Asia Minor in western Turkey. Paul describes him in the letter of the Ephesians as the beloved brother and faithful minister in the Lord.

And in fact, that mantificus was actually one of Paul's envoys to the church in Ephesus and Colossae. Gaius, another name that you see again. Gaius showed hospitality to Paul in Rome. Gaius hosted a church there. And then, of course, there's Timothy. We know much of Timothy in the Book of Acts and in Paul's two letters too. You see, here's the great wonder of conversion. [26 : 15] The grace that saves and keeps on saving. The grace that drives men and women to spread the good news, to spread the gospel, to tell what Jesus has done for them.

Men and women doing the will of God. Not for self-gain, not for what they can get out of it, but for the glory of God. I was preparing this sermon on Thursday. And on Thursday, it was announced that Reverend Donnie G. McDonald from Sky was accepted, or rather, he accepted the nomination of moderator designate.

And Donnie said these words, which I think really epitomizes some of the zeal that he has for the work of the kingdom. He said these words. He said, it is an honor to serve Jesus in any capacity and I'll do my best to fulfill this responsibility simply but diligently.

It's an honor to serve Jesus in any capacity and I'll do my best to fulfill this responsibility simply but diligently. And whether it's a minister from North Sky or a missionary from Berea, a missionary here, the same zeal surely has to be evident in your desire and my desire to serve Jesus for his sake and for his glory because that is a challenge.

[27 : 42] It's a challenge for you and for us here in Livingston. You see, it was evident even, you know, these names, these place names aren't just place names, they speak of churches and it was evident that the churches, the churches from which these men had come from, that the churches themselves had a mission-mindedness.

The churches had released these key men, obviously there were key men in these churches but they were released in order to accompany Paul in order that Paul go with these men with this mission context.

And the question of course has to be asked, what about ourselves here in Livingston? Do we have this mission-mindedness? Is it a feature of this congregation to spread the gospel not just in an immediate location but further a field?

And I think if we're honest with ourselves we'd have to say there's much room for improvement. Not just an individual zeal but a collective zeal for the Lord because why?

The fields are white unto harvest. Are we praying? Are you praying? Am I praying that the Lord of the harvest sends out laborers into the harvest field? Are you praying for the worldwide church?

[29 : 01] Are we focused on mission? Well, search your heart. That's to search my heart. And come before the God of mission. Yes, and seek His forgiveness for our, we might even say our near-sighted vision.

And pray that our vision be extended to the harvest fields where God sends you. God's calling someone here to serve Him whether it be in an immediate locale or further afield.

And that you hear that with the voice of God calling you. God called out to Isaiah the prophet. And Isaiah is replying whom or God saying to Isaiah whom shall I send and who will go for us?

And Isaiah saying here am I send me. I pray that that you will hear the voice of God calling you and you'll be saying and replying here am I send me.

That you'll have that willingness that heart's desire to be sent by God the God who promises to be with you always and is sending. And that you will be fellow labourers one with another as God's servants just as these seven named individuals here were fellow servants fellow labourers in the work of the kingdom.

[30 : 20] You know we've been speaking about lists. Well think of the list that's in heaven. Think of that heavenly list that Lamb's book of life in that book where every name of every one saved through the Lord Jesus the name was found in that book.

And I pray that you will be amongst your name will be in that list. Your name is written in heaven because in that list in that book no name can ever be erased from that book.

Why? Because of the love of God that's eternal to all who are his. So may God bless to us his word. Amen. Let us pray.

Lord have mercy upon us. We pray Lord that we will truly know your love for your people and that we will truly have that desire to serve you.

Yes in companionship one with another. Yes to have that mission zeal for you. That we will be united even in our diversity in our diverse gifts in our diverse personalities but that we will be as one

for you.

[31 : 33] Go before us Lord we pray bless all that has already happened this morning. Forgive we pray all sin even in the service.

Forgive our sinful thoughts even our sinful words. Bless our fellowship one with another. Go before us for the remainder of this day. Bring us back here in safety later this afternoon.

We pray all these things in Jesus name. Amen. Well let's close in Psalm 125.

Psalm 125 on page 419 the traditional version of Psalm 125 They in the Lord that firmly trust shall be like Zion Hill which at no time can be removed but stand ever so.

Psalm 125 to God's praise. an a to value who to