

Title: Encouragement  
Text: Acts 20:1-12  
Theme: the encouragement of the gospel  
Series: Acts  
Prop Stmtnt: The gospel enables us to encourage each other like nothing else.

Cornerstone, I love you. I told Andy before he preached last week, that he will love preaching here because you are a great church to preach to. You come. The Word matters to you. The Gospel matters to you. Jesus matters to you. The church matters to you. You come hungry. You come anticipating the Word. You not only come, you listen. You pay attention to the Word. You follow along and look at the text to see for yourself that this is what God's Word says. You come, listen and you respond. You respond to what is being said. You respond to who is saying it. And whether it is verbally, or facially, or body posture, or even through applause, the very fact that you respond is a huge encouragement. I am always glad to expose you to good preaching and good preachers because I know that while they will feed your soul, you will encourage theirs. Afterward, Andy said to me, "You're right. They are a great people to preach to."

Read Text: Acts 20.1-12 and 1 Thessalonians 5.9-11

Do you know who S. Truett Cathy is? He is the founder of Chick-Fil-A. Someone asked him once, "How do you identify someone who needs encouragement? He said, "That person is breathing." He is right. Think of it. You live in a sin-cursed world. Everyone around you lives in a sin-cursed world. We all live with grief. We all walk with a limp. We all live with insecurities and holes in our hearts. We all live with fears, secret struggles and wounds to our souls. And there are other factors that press in on us. Our bodies slow down and break down. Hardship comes upon family members and friends. We need encouragement. You need encouragement. In addition to that if you are a follower of Christ, you live out of step with your world. The wind of the culture is in your face. Life is like walking uphill and into the wind all the time. You get tired. You feel out of place, misunderstood and you wonder if you will ever be at home, at rest, and at peace. You need encouragement. Those around you this morning need encouragement.

Mark Chanski says that encouragement is adrenaline for the soul. Just as adrenaline enables you to do things that you otherwise could not do, so encouragement does that for our souls. I've tended to think that encouragement is nice and helpful, but I'm learning to see and I want you to join me on this in seeing how essential and wonderful encouragement is. In fact, encouragement is both stated and implied in our text. Encouragement is at the beginning and the end of our text. Encouragement is the bookends that holds this text together.

## **I. The Ministry of Encouragement** (1-3)

The first 6 verses are more than a travel log. Look at v.1. Do you remember the uproar? A riotous mob almost burnt down the city back in chapter 19. Had they found Paul, they would have killed him. "*after the uproar ceased, Paul sent for the disciples*" Why does Paul send for them? Well, it is possible that he may have been in hiding. He may have been keeping a low profile, but while that may or may not be the case, what is clear is that he is concerned about their well-being. Paul does not assume that they are fine. The very fact that he reaches out and

takes the initiative to care for them is itself an encouragement. Paul *encourages* the believers in Ephesus, then he says farewell to them and heads for Macedonia (map). He probably goes to Philippi and perhaps a couple of other places, but rather than give us the details about the itinerary, note that Luke describes Paul's ministry as giving them (the believers in Macedonia) *much encouragement*. Encouragement is what marks his ministry.

### **A. Encouragement is of God**

The word that is translated encouragement is from the Greek word *Paraclete*. Jesus used this word in John 16.7 to describe the Holy Spirit. Jesus told his disciples that it was necessary for him to go away so that the Holy Spirit would come. Jesus said, "if I do not go away, the Helper (parakleitos) will not come to you. The Holy Spirit is our helper. The Holy Spirit is our Encourager. His name is helper and encouragement. Jesus called him this because this is what he does. Encouragement is part of the very essence of who God is. Think about this. Why would Jesus tell his disciples that "*it is to your advantage that I go away*"? It is better for you that I not be here. Seriously? How so? Because the Helper, the Encourager is going to come in my place. Jesus viewed the coming of the Spirit as being so important, so necessary and needful that he determined that it was better for him to be gone so that the Helper, the Encourager would be here. Jesus knows that we need encouragement and God himself provides it. The very ministry of encouragement comes from God because that is part of who he is. Last week, Andy reminded us that God is kind. This week we are learning that God himself is encouraging. He helps.

Therefore, when Paul was encouraging (parakleting), he was being like God. But, how does encouragement actually work? There are a number of passages in the NT that speak about encouragement and most of them are in the writings of Paul. Isn't that interesting? This man's life and ministry was really characterized by encouragement. Look at 1 Thessalonians 5.11. "*Therefore encourage one another and build one another up, just as you are doing.*"

### **B. Encouragement is commanded by God.**

The ministry of encouragement is commanded by God. Why does God command us to encourage one another? Because we need it! Do not assume that others are fine without your encouragement, because they are not. Others need your encouragement. This is why God commands you to encourage others. Another reason that encouragement is commanded by God is because we need to care for other people. We need to take the time to be concerned about the things that are concerning others. But, what exactly are you doing when you encourage? Or, how do you obey this command? What does it look like to obey this command to encourage one another and build one another up?

### **C. Encouragement exhorts people to faithfulness (or Christlikeness)**

Building one another up means to help one another look more like Jesus. One aspect of encouragement is exhortation which is the emphasis of the word in Acts 14.22 where Paul and Barnabas are encouraging the believers to continue in the faith. Exhorting is pushing, pulling, lifting, carrying, supporting one another to be faithful in following Christ. It is like this. If you have sprained your ankle, then I am going to be your crutch, or your scooter. You can lean on me

in order to keep going, but you just can't quit. I am going to help you get to the finish line. I am going to help you get home safe. I am going to tell you about the promises of God. I am going to pray for you. I am going to call you, meet you at church, sit with you, sing with you, pray with you, meet with you, talk with you. That is exhortation. We are to help one another follow Jesus faithfully. *"Therefore, encourage one another build one another up, just as you are doing."* Did you hear that? "Just as you are doing."

#### **D. Encouragement reminds people of faithfulness (or Christlikeness)**

Encouragement is from God, it is commanded, it exhorts us to follow Jesus, but notice this; encouragement is also reminding one another of how they have been faithful. Paul tells the Thessalonians to encourage one another even as he encourages them because they have been encouraging one another. You've been doing this, keep it up! You've been doing this and it is right, good and beautiful. You've been doing this and you remind me of Jesus, don't quit! Encouragement involves reminding one another of how they have pointed you to Jesus.

So, when Paul encouraged the believers in Ephesus before he left and when he met with the believers in Macedonia (Philippi and other places) we know that he exhorted them to continue to be faithful and he reminded them of how their faithfulness was influencing others. Your faithfulness matters. The Mission Impossible movies begin with a mission. Your mission, should you accept is.... Beloved, you have a mission. As a follower of Christ, you are an agent for the gospel and the church. This text is like the recording that tells you what your mission is. Your mission is to gather with the other believers of your church and encourage them. That is what Hebrews 10 tells us. *"And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near."* Hebrews 10.24-25 You are here. You have gathered, now, have you encouraged anyone?

Do you see why it is so important that we meet together? So that we can encourage one another. Your mission is to exhort people to keep following Jesus and to remind them of how they have been following Jesus. Your mission is encouragement. Who have you encouraged this morning? Who needs to be exhorted? Who is limping who needs help, prayer and a shoulder? Who do you need to remind today of the blessing they have been to you? It is one of the reasons why you are here. This is your mission. I want to encourage you to fulfill your mission.

The 3 months that Paul spent in Greece, probably referred to another visit that he made to Corinth and it was most likely that during this visit that Paul wrote the book of Romans. Verse 3 says that Paul was about to set sail for Syria, which I take it that Paul intended to go back to his home base at Antioch and report to the church there before he went to Jerusalem where he was going to deliver the offering that he had been gathering. As it turned out, he did not go by boat on the first part of the trip, but instead went by foot since there was a plot against his life. But look at verses 4-6. Luke names seven guys who traveled with Paul. Do you see what I see? This is the fruit of encouragement.

## **II. The Fruit of Encouragement (4-6)**

Companionship is the fruit of encouragement. People who are encouragers will rarely lack for companions. Look at this. Sopater is from Berea. Aristarchus and Secundus are from Thessalonica. Gaius is from Derbe and Timothy was from Lystra. Then there is Tychicus and Trophimus who are from the province of Asia, which means that these guys were probably from Ephesus. Trophimus has an important part in chapter 21. But think about this. Here are 7 guys, not counting Luke who is also part of the band. (Notice the use of “us” and “we”). 7 guys who put their lives on hold in order to accompany Paul on a trip that promises to last for at least a couple of months. 7 guys who are primarily Gentiles and are willing to go with Paul to Jerusalem. And when you accompany Paul, you know one thing: life is not going to be dull. You may end up shipwrecked, arrested, beaten, chased, imprisoned, maligned, persecuted, hunted, even dead. Were any of these guys married? Did they have kids? We don't know. But Paul has no shortage of guys who are willing to invest a lot of time and take considerable risk in order to go on this long trip with Paul. Why would they do that? There are two reasons: 1) Paul is an encouragement. Paul has made the lives of these men significantly better and they want to be with him even if it costs them something. 2) Paul is on a mission of encouragement. Paul has been on a personal mission of raising a substantial offering from the predominantly Gentile churches in order to relieve the suffering of the Jewish believers in Jerusalem.

The early church experienced a great deal of tension between the Jews and the Gentiles. This was the issue that Paul addressed in the book of Romans and in the book of Galatians. This was the ongoing source of tension with Jews throughout the cities that he ministered in. Now, back in Jerusalem, where it all began, the believers were suffering from both persecution and from a famine. Even the Christian Jews had some cultural challenges in fully accepting Gentiles as brothers and sisters. But, it's pretty difficult to remain hostile to someone when that someone is feeding you and providing for your basic needs. When someone cares for and meets your basic needs, you tend to let your guard down. Paul knows that this needs to happen. He wants this offering to be a great encouragement to the believers in Jerusalem, a great encouragement to the Gentiles, and a testimony to the world of the grace of God. So, you can see why Paul was able to recruit some help. Paul is an encourager and he is on a mission of encouragement. The obvious benefit of having these men travel with him is that it provides accountability to the churches that gave toward this offering and it provided some protection for the offering itself. Paul would have been an easy target to rob, but not when he is traveling with 8 other guys.

Do you find that people want to be around you? What about your own family, friends, work associates, church members? It is worth considering how much fuller your life would be of people if your disposition was marked by encouraging. We, of all people have the reason to be encouraging and this is seen in this next scene.

### III. **The Basis of Encouragement** (7-12)

The band of brothers met up again in Troas. On Sunday evening, they gathered with the church, ate together and observed the Lord's Table. As part of the gathering, Paul preached. Since Paul had just recently written the book of Romans. I wouldn't be surprised if Paul was preaching through that book and if so, I can appreciate the fact that he preached until midnight.

Years ago I was in Russia teaching a group of pastors and pastors in training. Now, keep in mind that Russian Christians think that we are a bunch of wimps. Traditionally they have 3 sermons in their services and their services are long. I was asked to preach at a church for a night service and it was in the middle of winter in northern Russia. The people gathered in the basement of the church since the upstairs had not been completed yet. After a brief introduction, I was asked to preach. The pastor sat behind me and the translator was on my right. It had already been a long day. I had taught all day and the translator had translated the afternoon sessions. I did not know what to expect, that is how long to go, so I started preaching from Romans 1. After an hour I looked back at the pastor who told me to keep going. After preaching for a second hour I looked back at the pastor again who told me to keep going. After preaching for a third hour I looked back at the pastor who told me to keep going. Mind you, the people did not move. I think it was because that was the only way for them to stay warm was to sit close to each other. But, at this point, my Russian translator looked at me and said, "my brain is burning!" He was done. I felt a twisted sense of accomplishment. I had outlasted the Russian.

Well, on this night, Paul was preaching for a long time. There was probably the realization that this would be or could be the last time that they saw and heard Paul. No one wanted him to stop. He was leaving the next day anyway. Well, a young man by the name of Eutychus (whose name means fortunate) was unfortunately sitting in a window ledge and fell into a deep sleep and then he fell, out of the window and onto the street outside into an even deeper sleep. He was dead. This is disastrous! But the Lord uses Paul to bring the boy back to life. Well, instead of breaking up the party, this only encouraged them to keep going and Paul does until daybreak.

Luke gives this wonderful little summary and says, "*And they took the youth away alive, and were not a little comforted.*" And that word for comforted is from the root word Paraclete which means encouraged. Eutychus was raised back to life. Of course they were encouraged. But, this reminds me of why we are able to encourage others, like no one else. We have a basis for encouragement. Our basis for encouragement is the fact that we have been raised from the dead and we will live with Christ forever. We can encourage one another because of the gospel. In fact, we have to encourage one another. What is presented here in Acts 20 is an illustration of what is given to us in 1 Thessalonians 5 as a command.

*"Therefore encourage one another..."* what is the there for? Look at verse 9. *"For God has not destined us for wrath."* (What has he destined us for?) God has destined us *"to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, who died for us so that whether we are awake or asleep we might live with him."* Do you see it now? If you are a follower of Christ, you are with Christ. You are in Christ. You are with Christ and in Christ forever. Whether you are awake (that is alive) you live with Christ, or whether you die, then you live with Christ and see Christ. Heads you win, tails you win. If you are in Christ, you cannot lose. If you cannot lose, then do you have reason to be encouraged? YES!!!

The night is long - but you cannot lose. The way is hard - but you cannot lose.  
The suffering is deep - but you cannot lose. I have been hurt - but you cannot lose.  
I don't know what is going to happen - but you cannot lose.  
Be encouraged brothers and sisters - you cannot lose.