

"God's Love Story Sermon Outlines"

by Doug Hamilton

Section 35: God's Love Story Demands Good Leadership.

Acts 28:30-31 And he stayed two full years in his own rented quarters and was welcoming all who came to him, ³¹ preaching the kingdom of God and teaching concerning the Lord Jesus Christ with all openness, unhindered.

In this passage at the closing of the Book of Acts, Luke recorded that Paul spent two years under house arrest in Rome. He already spent another two years in custody in the motherland, attempting to defend himself from the false charges of the Sanhedrin. His only option was to make an appeal to Caesar (Acts 25:11) in the hope he could be freed. Paul already purposed in his heart to make the trip to Rome (Acts 19:21) and God assured him that he would appear before Caesar (Acts 27:24). Through great trial and trust in God, Paul did end up in Rome.

He did not idly pass time while being chained up to a soldier every day, but sought to be evangelistic and educational in his house arrest. When visitors came, Paul sought to make the most of it, preaching and teaching about the kingdom of God, leading souls to Christ. He influenced everyone, from the lowly slave Onesimus (Philemon) to those in Caesar's household (Philippians 4:22).

There was a law passed by the Roman senate in AD 61 which discouraged frivolous accusations against another party, a sort of tort reform to prevent the clogging the court system. We can assume it would have put a great deal of pressure on the Sanhedrin to send a delegation, but they did not. Whenever this occurred, the prisoner would be released, but carry the stigmatism of guilt without proven innocence. Why was there a delay for two years in Rome? It was likely because of the chaos which was taking place in Jerusalem at the time. There were many Jewish zealots rebelling against Rome in Jerusalem. This would eventually led to the destruction of the nation within just a few years. Rome had bigger problems to deal with concerning Jerusalem than a couple of authority figures wanting to "testify" against Paul.

Paul's release from Rome

What occurs after Paul's release is also intriguing. Paul had avoided uncertain death in that Roman jail (Phil 1:21-26). Paul left that prison with a mindset to further the works of the kingdom. He knew his days were numbered and sought to put in place a God-ordained structure to keep the churches strong once the apostolic age was over. It is called an eldership.

1) He went to Ephesus.

In 62 AD, when Paul was released from prison at the end of the Book of Acts, he went to Ephesus. He had already spent two years there teaching in the school of Tyrannus (Acts 19:10). There were many converts as *the word of the Lord was growing mightily and prevailing* (Acts 19:20). It was even reported here were so many converts to Christ in Ephesus that the Artemis idol makers in the temple staged a violent riot in protest.

"God's Love Story Sermon Outlines"

by Doug Hamilton

Prior to Paul being sent to Rome, he stopped at Miletus and met with the elders from the Ephesian church. It was an emotional meeting filled with advice to protect the young Christians from the false teachers. Acts 20:28-32 *"Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock...I know that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock...be on the alert"* Paul knew it would be a while before he could come back, if at all. Without a strong eldership, the false teachers could destroy the church family in Ephesus. A strong eldership takes care of the church family (1 Thes 5:12; Titus 1:9; 1 Peter 5:3). It is inclusive to issues of money (Acts 11:29-30), of prayer (Acts 6:2-4), of study (1 Tim 5:7), in visiting the sick (James 5:14) and resolving issues of doctrine (Acts 15:2).

It was time for him to follow-up and help develop a strong leadership. We know this to be true because of what it says in *1 Timothy 1:3-4 As I urged you upon my departure for Macedonia, remain on at Ephesus so that you may instruct certain men not to teach strange doctrines,⁴ nor to pay attention to myths and endless genealogies, which give rise to mere speculation rather than furthering the administration of God which is by faith.* Upon Paul's departure from Ephesus, he charged Timothy to help bring forth qualified men to be elders of the congregation.

These qualities are listed in 1 Timothy 3:2-7. The men who could lead in the church are those who manage their households well, possessing a good marriage and faithful children. They practice temperance, sobriety, fiscal responsibility and hospitality. They are above reproach, not only in the eyes of the Christians, but also those of the community. They not only model this behavior, but are equipped to teach others as well. With men like that, the church family will be strong and around for quite some time.

Why did Paul work so hard on this phase of the work? It is because he knows that God's Love Story will not continue in the life of a people whom have not good leadership. We are always one generation from apostasy. Paul was focusing on LEADERSHIP.

2) He went to Crete.

Some of those whom were converted on the day of Pentecost were Cretans (Acts 2:11). They took the gospel message back to their island and shared it with others. Following Paul's departure from Rome, he went to Crete to further the work of Christ. Upon his departure, Paul recognized the need to leave Titus to *"set in order what remains and appoint elders in every city as I directed* (Titus 1:5). He knew that without godly men leading the congregation, it was likely to destroy the work in Crete. This was the primary reason that Paul left Titus on the island when he departed to Nicapolis.

What were the qualities of these men which Titus was to look for?

On the way to Rome he sailed under the island of Crete. It was a large island, about 150 miles in length and up to 35 miles wide. It appears in Titus 1:5 that upon Paul's release from his first Roman imprisonment that he sailed back to that island to carry out some mission work.

"God's Love Story Sermon Outlines"

by Doug Hamilton

Titus 1:6-9 mentions these qualities. They were to be men whom have a track record of success in leading their families to faithful relationships in Christ. This was made possible because they did not display dishonesty, drunkenness, out of control anger and violence in their lives. Rather they sought to be blameless and trustworthy. Equally important was the fact that the candidates were well-studied, being able to encourage the faint-hearted and rebuking the rebels. It makes sense to have proven men like these in leadership among the local churches. Paul knew that without a strong eldership at the helm, the congregation would be left vulnerable. He wanted to make sure that God's Love Story would be viable for many generations after his departure from this world.

This was Paul's Pattern.

Asia

On the First Missionary Journey, Paul and Barnabas worked the area of Cyprus and Asia. Though running into many obstacles, they pressed on in the work. For three years they preached and taught. It says in *Acts 14:21-23* *After they had preached the gospel to that city and had made many disciples, they returned to Lystra and to Iconium and to Antioch, ²² strengthening the souls of the disciples, encouraging them to continue in the faith, and saying, "Through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God."* ²³ *When they had appointed elders for them in every church, having prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord in whom they had believed.*

They knew that it would be impossible to have a strong church without a strong leadership. They wanted God's Love Story to continue for them into the future. They appointed qualified men to be elders.

Greece

Not long after the planting of the church in Philippi (52 AD) there was a mature leadership already put in place (61 AD). *Phil 1:1* *"Paul and Timothy, bond-servants of Christ Jesus, To all the saints in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi, including the overseers and deacons..."* It was not by accident this occurred, but through planning. Wherever Paul planted churches, he attempted to plant elderships.

Conclusion:

Here we have two locations we know that Paul visited shortly after his departure from his Roman house arrest. Ephesus and Crete communicate two important thoughts concerning God's Love Story.

- A. We need to regularly appoint qualified men to be elders in the church.
- B. We need to regularly train the next generation of men to be elders.

God's Love Story depends on it!