

Monday, November 25, 2019—2 Corinthians 13; Acts 19:11-20:1

When an individual is on trial, the prosecution seeks to prove the defendant's guilt. Evidence is irrefutable. Paul wanted the church to show evidence of being "guilty" of following Jesus.

As he concluded the second letter to the Corinthians, he urged them to rejoice in Jesus, change their ways, and encourage each other through living in harmony and peace. Then, the evidence of faith would be evident—the God of peace and love would be with them. If, however, there was no evidence, they had failed the test (13:7).

This evidence was powerfully evident as Paul ministered in Ephesus for two years. Paul was able to do unusual miracles (19:11), and even the demons knew who Paul was (19:15). The seven sons of Sceva discovered faith and miraculous power were not something with which to toy or something that can work second-hand. Magicians burned their commodities, and a solemn fear descended on the city (19:17). The evidence was abundant of the power of Jesus to change lives.

The power of the gospel began to threaten the idol worship in Ephesus, so some of those who profited from the worship of Artemis (also known as Diana), presented the evidence of Paul's faith against him. He was turning people away from her, and they stirred up a riot as a result. God allowed cooler heads to prevail, and Paul was spared.

Pray for a life of faithfulness to Jesus that provides evidence to all of His greatness and glory. Encourage others to live with such evidence.

Sunday, November 24, 2019—2 Corinthians 9-12

Paul had taught the Corinthians a great deal about following Jesus. He was calling them to put into action the things they knew to be true. The grind of day-to-day living can drain the disciple of knowledge and strength and prevent him from making decisions that glorify God and exemplify Christ. God has given His Word, His Spirit, and His church to help disciples know and do the truth for the glory of Jesus.

The Corinthians had proposed the idea of gathering an offering from several churches and sending that money to help the saints in Jerusalem as they suffered through a famine. Paul had gathered some of those monies and was reminding the Corinthians it was time for them to give as planned. He did not want them to change their minds. Like a farmer who sows much, the Corinthians would reap great blessing from giving much. He wanted them to give with great joy (9:7) and great faith (9:8-9).

Some were doubting Paul's authority or giving more credence to others the people considered to be apostles. Paul reminded them of how he had conducted himself among the Corinthians and how God had worked through many hardships to preserve and protect Paul in the ministry. Paul had endured much, not for glory, but for the growth of the church. God reminded Paul His grace was sufficient, for His power is perfected in weakness (12:9). The Corinthians could be confident of the same thing.

Thank God for the empowering gift of His grace. Pray for opportunities to give cheerfully and to trust Him more.

Saturday, November 23, 2019—2 Corinthians 5-8

Paul knew the meaning of suffering for Christ. He was slandered. He was beaten. He was imprisoned. Paul knew what it was like to hurt physically for preaching

Christ. Paul knew what it was like to long for heaven, to be in the presence of the Master he loved so dearly. He told the Corinthians, whether he was at home with the Lord or here in his body, his goal each day was to please Jesus (5:9). He knew he could not make all people happy, but he certainly could please the Lord.

The most effective way Paul saw to please the Lord was bringing others into a relationship with Him. This ministry of reconciliation was the calling for every believer. Their newness of life compelled them to seek that newness for all those around them. This newness also empowered them to be united with other believers and to avoid the impurity of the world. This purity of soul should drive them toward personal and corporate purity.

Pursuing Jesus makes one a target for Satan's schemes. Paul and the Corinthians were experiencing some kind of tension as a result of their usefulness, and Paul was pleading with the Corinthians to renew their love for and trust in him. His ministry to them was exemplary. He had always been honest with them. He had disciplined them in love. They were more disciplined, selfless followers of Jesus as a result.

Praise God today for His presence and strength to endure suffering. Pray for purity of soul and unity with others to please Him.

Friday, November 22, 2019—2 Corinthians 1-4

The Corinthian believers were special to Paul. He had spent 18 months with them during his second missionary journey, so he knew a lot about them—their daily routines, their struggles, and more. He was able to write openly about delicate and difficult topics because of their connection. When he learned they were suffering, he wrote them this letter.

He assured them God would use this suffering for their good and for His glory. The way He comforted them would equip them to comfort others similarly in the future. All of God's promises were fulfilled in Jesus (1:20), so they could rely on Him to see them through this valley, giving them the strength to stand firm.

Paul was truly transparent with the Corinthians. He didn't want to cause them pain, but he also couldn't allow them to continue in sin and weakness. An earlier letter had addressed some issues they had corrected which was important because they were God's representatives to the world.

God had removed the veil of ignorance and given them true spiritual sight. They understood the good news and were now its shining lights, reflecting His glory (3:18). That is why they did not give up when hard times came. What they had was too valuable to hide and too important to run away in difficulty. Their bodies were suffering, but God was faithful to renew their spirits every day (4:16).

Thank God for a faith that renews the spirit each day. Pray for the opportunity to minister to someone in need and share the hope of Jesus.

Thursday, November 21, 2019—2 Thessalonians 1-3, Acts 18:12-19:10

Paul wrote the Galatians about walking the tightrope between legalism and licentiousness. He had to urge the Thessalonians to walk the thin line of the "now" and the "not yet." In his first letter, he encouraged them with the reality of Christ's return, but

he had to write again because they thought His return was imminent and, thus, withdrew from their present responsibilities. They needed to live with balance.

The Thessalonians were growing in their faith and enduring persecution. Some, however, were concerned that Jesus had already returned and that they missed it or that it could happen at any time. Paul assured them there would be specific events that would precede His arrival, including a man of lawlessness who would exalt himself in the temple of God in Jerusalem (2:1-12). None of this had yet occurred, so they could give full energy to standing firm in the faith and encouraging one another toward fulfilling their roles within the church and community (2:13-3:15).

Aquila and Priscilla were wonderful examples of this. They had been displaced by persecution but remained faithful. They left Corinth with Paul and settled in Ephesus, where they worked to support themselves as well as being intentional about discipling believers like Apollos. Paul, too, continued to minister to believers of varying degrees of maturity while preaching boldly in the synagogues seeking new converts.

Thank God for the assurance of Jesus' return and His promise to make all things new. Live with purpose each day to obey and glorify Him.

Wednesday, November 20, 2019—1 Thessalonians 1-5

During his second missionary journey, Paul had traveled through Philippi, Berea, Thessalonica, and Athens before settling into Corinth for 18 months. While he was in Corinth, he wrote to the believers in Thessalonica to address some important concerns they had. The end of each chapter makes clear they were wondering about Jesus' return.

The Thessalonians were exemplary believers. They had suffered for turning away from idols and to Jesus, and their hope in the return of Jesus was evident (1:10). They had confidence they would escape judgment because of their faith in Jesus. Paul and Silas had urged them to live for the pleasure of God alone because only He was worthy (2:1-12), and they had received this exhortation as the words of God, not foolish flattery.

Timothy had returned to see them and told Paul they were living faithfully (3:1-8). Paul told the Thessalonians they were his pride and joy (2:20). When Jesus returned, they would all stand before Him joyfully (2:19), strong, blameless, and holy because of Jesus (3:13).

Because of their certainty about the future, the Thessalonians could live differently than the culture in the present. Paul urged them to avoid sexual sin (4:1-8), to love one another, and to work diligently (4:9-12). The hope of the resurrection (4:13-18) would allow them to endure and encourage (5:11) one another in whatever they might face for being faithful.

As Paul urged the Thessalonians, pray continually. Give thanks in all circumstances. Hold on to the good. Avoid every kind of evil.

Tuesday, November 19, 2019—Acts 15:1-18:11

Television shows and movies at times promote an "ensemble cast." They gather some of the most famous actors to create interest and offer an outstanding, unique product. Viewers eagerly anticipate its release.

Acts 15 details the arrival of an “ensemble cast” in Jerusalem to discuss the conversion of the Gentiles to faith in Christ. Peter testifies to the genuine transformation he saw as Gentiles placed their faith in Jesus. He wonders why anyone would burden them with Jewish regulations when the Jews themselves could not keep those legal demands themselves (15:10). Paul and Barnabas told of the miracles they had seen, and James stood to say this is precisely what Scripture had predicted. This cast along with the apostles and elders sent a letter to all the Gentiles affirming their faith.

Soon afterward, Paul began his second missionary journey. Taking Silas with him, he met Timothy along the way and then went to Philippi, where they were beaten and jailed. Divine intervention allowed them to introduce the jailer and his family to Jesus. Later, they traveled to Thessalonica, where some local believers were jailed because of their connection to Paul and Silas. They moved on to Berea where the Jews were more open-minded and compared what Paul taught them to the Scriptures. As a result, many Jews came to faith in Jesus (17:11-12). He then preached in Athens and settled into Corinth for the next 18 months of ministry.

Thank God for the faithful witnesses that led you to faith and who continue to proclaim truth. Pray for courage to speak truth to others.