

Breaking Bread

By Paris Reidhead*

Will you turn, please, to Acts, Chapter 20. I shall begin reading in the 6th verse. Our meditation and message this morning shall be from this portion, verses 6 and 7;

“And we sailed away from Philippi after the days of unleavened bread, and came unto them to Troas in five days; where we abode seven days. And upon the first day of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread, Paul preached unto them, ready to depart on the morrow; and continued his speech until midnight. And there were many lights in the upper chamber, where they were gathered together. And there sat in a window a certain young man named Eutychus, being fallen into a deep sleep: and as Paul was long preaching, he sunk down with sleep, and fell down from the third loft, and was taken up dead. And Paul went down, and fell on him, and embracing him said, Trouble not yourselves; for his life is in him. When he therefore was come up again, and had broken bread, and eaten, and talked a long while, even till break of day, so he departed. And they brought the young man alive, and were not a little comforted” (Act. 20:6-12).

This is a very interesting portion of Scripture. Lest anyone should feel that long preaching had its advent with the 20th century, we have here apostolic example, which is of some comfort to preachers and probably very little comfort to others. I am reminded in this connection of what Charles Finney¹ said years ago. He said, “The reason we haven’t revival is that we have developed a generation of lazy preachers.” He said, “Any preacher that is too lazy to speak two hours has no reason to expect revival.” He said, “In my experience I have found that revival always comes in the last half hour of a two hour ministry.” He said, “The people of our generation have their minds filled with so much trivia and nonsense that it takes an hour and a half in order to get them free from the concerns that they brought with them into church, and concentrating on the Word of God.” Now he wrote that about 1840. I wonder what he would say, and how long he would prescribe for the sermon in 1963.

But this, of course, is not the main message of the text. It does testify concerning the Apostle Paul, that he was greatly concerned about the spiritual wellbeing of this church of Troas, and all the churches. God had shown him much, and taught him much, and his desire was that all that he had received might be in turn received by the church and be incorporated into the life of the church. I believe with all my heart in the essential integrity of the local church. It is of great concern to me and distress in fact that we are seeing so many movements which apparently can make much faster headway if they leave the confines of the local church, but I have yet to find that God has abandoned His method; and His method is always a company of believers drawn together by the Holy Ghost, submitting mutually to discipline one from the other, unto the Lord, and seeking to bring that which is in the Word to birth in the lives of the people. This is the Divine method. It is the method to which I am committed. I see in the Word of God little beyond the local church as far as Divine appointment is concerning, recognizing however that it is necessary for certain businesses and responsibilities to be mutually shared. But God’s method is the local church. It is that company of people, I say, that have been strangely and wonderfully drawn from various places and parts into a community of believers where they have been willing to submerge themselves in a discipline of love to the Holy Spirit, and to each other in fellowship in the Word.

We shortly shall present before you one who has been six months under the watch care of the church. We ask all who become members of The Gospel Tabernacle church to appear before the eldership. There is a very real reason for our doing this. It is not that we question the testimony of any at all who know and love the Lord Jesus Christ, but it is we are convinced that God is doing something in this church, as we are sure He is doing in every church that seeks to glorify Him. And if this is the case then it is necessary for us to recognize that He joins those whom He would have be part of what He is doing. And so it is in a sense a recognition of what the Lord is doing, and an identification with what He is doing, and a preparedness of heart to share as best one can by His grace in what He is doing.

¹ Charles Grandison Finney (1792-1875) An American Presbyterian minister and leader in the Second Great Awakening in the United States.

This was Paul's concern. As many as could, from this church at Troas, gathered together and they listened. They listened from whatever hour in the evening slaves and workers could finish their tasks, and free men could arrive, until the midnight hour. Then the accident of this young man falling from the window, and Paul restoring him to life, for it wasn't the young man's fault; it was the apostle's fault, if fault should be found, and they returned to the upper room, broke bread, and Paul continued to preach, because he was leaving them, and because there was so much he wanted them to have, so much he wanted them to be, there was so much he longed for them to experience. His heart yearned. He was just coming to birth for them, because he had seen that God had a plan and a purpose, in this company of people at Troas, and that there was so much more than they had.

And thus in the text, the first thing that rises up is the Heavenly concern. For I am confident that Paul was astute and wise enough to know that it wasn't the way to win friends and influence people to speak for four hours late at night, after they had done a day's work. Remember many of them were... Here we see in as eloquent and dramatic colors as it is possible to use on the palate of testimony that God had a great concern for the people of Troas. He wanted them know something. And consequently every church that is to please the Lord Jesus Christ must be consist of a company of people who have given themselves to the Word.

I am, as you know well that have attended the ministry, firmly convinced that there are two primary and main crises in the Christian life, and that there is a process. But I also am convinced that the Word of God must be central if the blessing of God is to be continuous. I am greatly distressed by the fact that among my brethren so frequently I find willingness to be content with such a small portion of the Word. If I had a blackboard and were capable of drawing and writing legibly enough so that you can read, neither of which I can do, I would try to depict before you a pie, just an ordinary pie of six, seven, eight pieces; and then to drawer a second circle in the center of the pie which would enclose part of all of the pieces. And then I would point out to you that so frequently there is a tendency on the part of Christians to pick a particular piece and major in it, and crowd themselves out to the very periphery of the rim of the pie. And so we find today, as in every day, a tendency on the part of churches to become associated with one emphasis of the Word, and Christians to make a hobby out of some particular part of the Word. This is distressing, I am sure, to the Lord, and certainly ought to be of distress to Christians who understand that we can only be nourished physically by a balanced diet, and we can only become strong spiritually by the whole counsel of God. And it is not to take one particular aspect and to major on it.

I have friends, of course, that are in the sovereign grace movement, and I love them dearly and stand with many of the truths that are precious to their hearts; but oh how distressed I become when I find a tendency to move clear out to the edge of that piece and balance on the rim. And then I find others that are so absolutely convinced of the fact that God keeps His Own, that they go clear out to the rim, almost to antinomianism, and still others that are concerned about some others aspect of truth. For instance, those who see identification and the victorious life, and it is true it is taught in the Word; but they come clear out to the very rim and the very edge,; or someone else seeing healing in the gifts of the Spirit going clear out to the rim and the very edge in antagonistic opposition and criticism by saying one or the other. They do not go far enough. The only place to go, and as far as anyone need go is to the limits of the Word. Every Christian ought to want the Word, the whole Word. Don't ever stop short of it. All the Word. Don't let anyone cheat you out of it. Nothing else than the Word. Do not accept a substitute for it. But these are limits described, and we stay within those limits, and refuse to be pressed by the pressure of logic to the position that takes one away from the center.

You can imagine my six piece pie, and feet no larger than yours, and as large as mine, standing in the center of the pie can touch all six pieces; but if you move out far enough, those feet however large will not be sufficient to stretch for more than two, because of the fact that there is the continuous widening away from the center.

And I am convinced that, whereas Paul had all that we would teach today, he taught it in a delightful balance, of wholeness, so that peace and truth was balanced against peace and truth, and that the people that he had were not anomalous. I am confident that it is good to have five fingers. You have heard me speak, perhaps, of the ministry of the Spirit filled believer. The ministry of the fruit filled life, and the ministry of intercession, and the ministry of ambassadorship, and the ministry of authority, and the ministry of the gifts and enabling of the Spirit. And I see them as a balanced ministry. And I think

it is a pity when some hand does not have the 3rd, or the 4th, or the 5th fingers, or just a nub, or just a club, without developed fingers, and without a concept of spiritual ministry. But I think it is equally bad when one finger, whichever one it is, gets out about six feet long, and instead of being a useful finger becomes a whip with which everyone is driven and scourged into the position represented by the finger.

I believe that Paul is dealing with these people these hours, because of his great concern that they be balanced, his great concern that there be a wholeness, a great concern that everything in the Word be given to them, and everything given to them be in balance with all the rest in the Word. And the 20th century probably is no easier time than the 1st Century was, because the Word of God has corrective instruction as well, showing that there was a tendency on the part of God's people to take a fragment and make it the whole. But as Paul was there at Troas, in this extended ministry, hours and hours and hours, I am sure that he is seeking to press upon the hearts of the people that necessity for the whole Word, and the balance in the Word, and the orientation of the Christian in the Word, and this I am certain is what is in the mind of the Spirit of God. It should be there, but it should be there in balance.

I have friends who believe in the authority of the believer. And I do, and have pressed upon you the little booklets by Mr. MacMillan², The Authority of the Believer, and The Authority of the Intercessor. But I also have friends who see nothing else that this in the Word. So absolutely convinced that this is true, an essential truth, the church languishes for the lack of this truth, that they almost restricted their ministry to this, and this is essential. It is a not without which. But it is but one aspect of truth. And I could enumerate other truths. And so through the years of ministry I have been seeking to share with you all that I understand the Word teaches, by laying it truth against truth, in a balance that when it doesn't acquire the popularity, and it doesn't acquire the allegiance of some, for it is so much easier to become loyal to a particular terminology, or a particular expression. But I am convinced beyond any question or peradventure of a doubt that in the long run, after the particular fads have past, that it is people that have been balanced in the truth, have seen this, and have not rejected anything in the Word, and have balanced it with the rest of the Word, that will become instruments for the working of the Lord.

Now Paul's concern is for this balance of truth: This orientation of truth around the Person of Christ. So it isn't in any emphasis, and I am sure this is from the whole tenor of his teaching and the whole testimony of his experience, and the epistles that he has written, that he is desperately concerned that the people know all that God would have them know, and they know each truth in relation to all others, and that they thus be strengthened by it.

Just as it is proper that one should have a balanced diet and there are times when there must be an emphasis placed upon something for a nutritional deficiency that has developed, but there comes a times when that deficiency is met. And if there is the same intake of that which was in great need a while before, there will set up an intolerance in the system. And it will become an abnormality. So, Paul is preaching, he is teaching. Let us not for so much as a moment forget the importance of the Word, the importance of the testimony, the importance of the Truth understood, and the Truth embraced, and the Truth obeyed. This we see throughout the Book of Acts and it is constantly to be pressed upon our hearts.

You know the contrast between Protestantism, and Catholicism was that in the medieval church and continuing to the present you have the altar, the Eucharist in the center, and you have the pulpits to the side; saying that the important thing in all church life are the ordinances. But we see the heritage of course of the Reformation, and particularly of the Methodist revival of putting the Word of God back in the center.

An Alliance Pastor out in Western Pennsylvania said, "You know my architect came up with a very wonderful new plan." I said, "What was that?" "Well," he said, "instead of having the pulpit in the center, he put it to the side and then he put the choir facing each other, and in back we are going to have a lovely stained glass window." He said, "Don't you think that is a nice new idea." "Well." I said to this man that had admitted that he had been a coal miner and was having a great ministry, and I am not reflecting on it at all. I said, "Well, it may appeal to you and your people, but I want you to know it is not really a new idea. It has been in vogue quite a while, and it represents the decentralization of the Word from the life of the people, and the

2 Rev. John A. MacMillan (1873-1956) Author of "The Authority of the Believer"; "The Authority of the Intercessor" (1942)

centralizing of the ordinances. And there is a very real reason for the pulpit being here.” Now I like the symbolism of the communion table being in front of the pulpit, and thus joining the two together. But there is a reason why Wesley³ inaugurated this. There was a purpose in it. There was an intent in it, to give back to the Word the place that it had lost in the centuries. And Paul gave the centrality to the Word, not that he made Bibliolaters out of his people, and not that he made the study of the Word, and the analysis of the Word, and the outlining of the Word, the end of the Christian life. But he recognized that there had in order for there to be life, there had to be sinew and the muscle. And there had to be a structure of truth. It is all right to have life, and it has got to be there. Let us recognize this. But life without a skeleton of doctrine, and without the sinew of truth, is not going to be anything more than just an undifferentiated animation. And God wants men and women that are able to walk, and act, and live, and work effectively to His glory. And so we find here that with the breaking of Bread is the opening of the Word.

But notice also that there is a gathering of the people regularly to this which the Lord ordained. You recall how that He had taken His disciples into the upper room, to celebrate the Passover Feast, and when He finished He testified to the completion of the Passover Feast with His Own death and inaugurated that which has come to us to be the Lord’s Supper. “For He took bread and broke it, blessed it and broke it, and He said, This is My body which is given for you. Then He took the cup of wine and blessed it,” and passed it about to all the members seated, and said, All of you drink it, and drink all of it, for this is the Blood of the New Covenant (Mar. 14:22-23).

Let us pause for a moment on what He actually said. We read it. Let us think first of the Blood of the New Covenant. You recall in Isaiah, the 43rd Chapter, that God said through the Prophet, to Israel, “Remember not the former things, neither consider the things of old. Behold the day cometh, saith the Lord, when I will do a new thing, springs shall come up in the desert, and streams in the wilderness, the owl and the dragon shall drink thereof, and this people that I have formed shall be for My praise” (Isa. 43:18-21).

God was saying that those whom Israel considered to be unclean, as unclean as the owl or as unclean as the dragon, would be changed by the drinking of the water, springing up in the wilderness, and would thus buy that water in its renewing power become to Him a people for His praise. This is the inauguration of a New Covenant. Then to Jeremiah, He said, “I am going to write My law upon your hearts. I will give you a New Covenant, not as your fathers, I gave your fathers which covenant they broke” (Jer. 31:31-32). But He said, “I will write My law upon your hearts” (Jer. 31:33). Oh, how marvelous it is to realize that in the new thing that God is doing it isn’t tables of stone in an Ark of a Covenant, that is too far away. He said, “I am going to write My law on your heart, and you are going to know inwardly by My Word,” and by the teaching I have given, and the ministry of the Spirit Himself what is right and what is wrong.

Then through Ezekiel He said, “I am going to take away the heart of stone, and I am going to give you a heart of flesh, and I am going to put My Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in My statutes” A New Covenant, a new thing (Eze. 36:26-27). What is the old thing? It is the law on tables of stone, it is a tabernacle, and a court, with a pillar of cloud by day, and a fire by night, and God beneath the wings of the cherubim. And it failed. Why? Because God was too far away. In the moment of crisis and test, and temptation, it is too much to have to even look around and say, Where is the cloud? It is too much to have to say, Which way is north, for over there is where Jerusalem is, and the Temple is, and the Tabernacle is. No. No. He said, It failed. Then of this new covenant He said further through John, “that there came One who came unto His Own, and His Own received Him not; but unto as many as received Him, to them gave He the authority to become the Sons of God, even to them who believe on His Name, who were born, not of the will of man, not of Blood, nor of the flesh, but are born of God” (Joh. 1:11-13).

In the Old Covenant, you became a member by physical birth. In the New Covenant, you became a member by supernatural birth, the impartation of Divine life. So, our Lord Jesus, the night He was betrayed, took the Cup, and He blessed it, and He said, This is the Blood of the New Covenant, this is the Blood whereby I am bringing all that I purposed into reality. This is the sacrifice which is going to make possible the fulfillment of all My good intent for you, everything I have planned, everything I have prophesied, everything I have promised, everything that was set forth as the hope of Israel, everything that has been set

³ John Wesley (1703-1791) Anglican cleric, Christian theologian, and founding the Methodist movement.

forth as the teaching of the Word, all, all is made possible by the Blood that I am about to shed, the Blood of the New Covenant.

But then remember He not only said this, but He said, "This is My body which is broken for you." We remember that in Galatians, He wrote, "Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us" (Gal. 3:13). If it is Blood that makes atonement for the soul, not without the shedding of Blood, it is the shedding of Blood by which we have remission of sin. If all we secure from the death of Christ is the remission of sin, then there is no reason, no legal reason why the spear in the hand of the soldier on the garden path could not have pierced the heart of Christ there in the Garden from where He had been praying and spared Him all the hours of agony that were to follow.

It is Blood that makes atonement, and it is the shedding of Blood that washes away sin. Why then agony from 6 o'clock in the morning when He was scourged by the order of Pilate? 9 o'clock when He was nailed to the Cross; 3 hours of indescribable human agony as He hung upon the Cross, lacerated back, bruised face, and then the nails that pierced His hands, and the crown of thorns upon His brow. Why? Why was this necessary? when it was 3 o'clock that He died and the lance pierced His heart and there gushed forth Blood and water. He said, This is My body which is given for you.

For you in what sense? You were not only under the sentence of death, but you were also under the curse of the law. The penalty of the law is death. The curse of the law is that which is set forth by God in Deuteronomy 28. A foretaste of the suffering, brought upon basket and store, body and family, until every area of the life was blighted, God thus testifying it was His intent to give to those under the sentence of death a foretaste of their doom, to move them to repentance. And our Lord Jesus said, I am not only going to redeem you from the penalty of the law of death, but I also want to redeem you from the curse of the law. And so He said, "This is My body which is broken for you, for you in your behalf:" the picture is the Blood of the lamb of the Passover sacrifice, sprinkled on the doorpost when the angel of death came through he saw the Blood. And when I see the Blood, said Jehovah, "I will pass over you." But what did they do with the lamb? Leave it? No. No. They carefully put it upon a stick, and spread open the breast with another stick, forming the cross, suspended over the fire, and began to turn it slowly over the fire, until the fire had penetrated every part of the body, and then it was eaten. It was eaten, and the testimony of the Word of God is that as they ate they were healed, for they were nearly three million we are told that left Egypt, and there was not a feeble man among all their numbers. For as they had eaten the body, which had been given for them, there had been this transforming work of God that prepared them for the pilgrimage that was to follow.

And so as we see the Bread, it is the testimony of Christ, "This is My Body which is given for you." My Body. He gave His Body to the Cross that in those nine hours, from 6 in the morning until 3 in the afternoon, He might endure the curse of the law in our behalf. Then He died of a broken heart, and there gushed forth Blood and water, and it wasn't the blood that dripped from His back when He was scourged, or His brow when He was crowned, or His hands when He was nailed, that atoned for our soul. It was that Blood gushing forth that carried with it His Life, His life. And so you see in the Bread which you take the testimony, "This is My Body which is broken for you," just as this is the Blood of the New Covenant by which all of redemption is secure. And so the breaking of the Bread, as it became was a testimony to these people that the Lord Jesus Christ died for them, by His shed Blood to wash away the stain and penalty of sin; by His given Body, His broken Body, to provide them with all that was needful for the journey. Do you see this?

But remember further. As they took the Bread, and would hold it in their hands before eating, and took the Cup and hold it in their hands before drinking, there certainly would have been meditation similar to that which you would be encouraged to have this morning. When the Spirit of God would speak to their hearts, and they would feel Him saying it was not only that He died for you, but He died as you, He was there on the Cross in your behalf, but He was there in your place. God dealt with Him as He must deal with you, and God saw His Son there as you. And you have heard us expound from Romans 5 that the answer to the guilt of the past is Christ for us, but the answer to the problem of sin in the life of a Christian in temptation is Christ as us. And as we hold that Bread, we are not only saying, Christ died for me. He died to wash away my sin. He died to deliver me from the curse of the law. But we are also saying; Christ died as me. And as I eat that Bread, and drink that Cup, I am testifying my own heart's confidence that when Christ died I died. Here it is. This becomes flesh of our flesh, bone of our bone, and the little morsel that we take, symbolizing to us His Body given, His Blood poured forth, is our affirmation that we were in Him, and

with Him when He died. Do you see that? Does this become real to your heart at the breaking of Bread? Oh, I might have spoken long on the day, the first day of the week. But you know Trench tells us that, this was the very beginning a common meal, similar to that in the home of Emmaus. This Lord Jesus said, "As oft as ye do it" (I Cor. 11:25).

We are going to have communion service now, but I trust that all of you will be present Saturday night next at the concluding service of the Christian Life Convention when believers from probably a hundred fellowships around the area gather together around the Table of the Lord, and we have in some little measure a foretaste of that day when believers from every kindred, tribe and tongue and nation. "As oft as ye do it." Yes, the first day of the week has become to us the hour of convenience, the hour when the nation pauses, the hour when we find our hearts waiting. But I do not believe that God would have us infer from this that it is either the only time we can have Communion or the only place that we can have Communion. They were meeting in a room, a garret room, because they were too poor to afford a place, and too weak in number to be given a place, and so they met where they could, and they met at the time they could. I heartily approve of the first day of the week. I believe that God has been pleased to honor and bless it, and it has become a testimony to Himself. But there are 168 hours in the week. And it is my conviction should your circumstances ever come to the place by persecution or privation, or some other means that you cannot keep that single hour, then I am certain that you will find that the Lord's great blessing will attend that moment when you can assemble yourselves together.

The significant thing about this is not thus the place that they met, or the time that they met. The significant thing to us is that the church found their deep, inner hunger, to know the Word of God and the deep, inner passionate longing to know the God of the Word. And so as they learned of Him in the Word, and they worshipped Him together He could reveal Himself to them. And it is thus the revelation of the risen Christ in the midst of His people that becomes the crown, and the joy, the honor and the blessing of all remembrance of His death. Might it be therefore that the Lord who is in our presence, finding us drawn to Him, our hearts open to His Word, accepting the teaching, the rebuke, the discipline, the instruction of the Word, and as we come to the Table, accompany the partaking of the Elements by the pouring out of our love, and our life, in abandonment to Him who alone is worthy, that He may be able to reveal Himself again in the midst of the candlesticks, and seeing Him as did John we shall fall upon our faces, lost in wonder, love, and awe. That's the meaning of the breaking of the Bread, the gathering to the Table of the Lord, that we might see the Lord, meet Him in the midst of His people.

If you see but one another, and hear but the Word spoken, profited you may be, but you shall miss the genius of the moment, for it is that the eyes of your heart should be opened to behold Him and to see Him. May it become thus, your joyous experience, to give yourself to the Word of God, and to the worship of God, that He might reveal Himself in your life, and in your midst that you become a profitable part of every assembly where the Lord may put you as we observe His death till He come. Shall we bow in prayer.

Let us examine our hearts before Him. We have established as a principle that it is the Word that prepares the way for worship, to know the Word of God and to fail to obey it is to put ourselves on grounds of partaking unworthily. O may God in these moments of searching enable us to see deeply into our hearts, that at any point of rebellion and every area of disobedience or of unbelief there shall come that breaking that He requires that He asks and He gives as we bow before Him. And might it be that in these moments there shall come to our hearts such a revelation of the cleansing power of the precious Blood that we shall plunge beneath that flow, plunge beneath that crimson Flood, and bring our hearts again to that only place of cleansing in God's universe, the Cross of Calvary, that there should be nothing to grieve Him whose Name is Holy. Let brokenness accompany a confession, let surrender accompany brokenness, let abandonment accompany all surrender so that it is not something taken again. Let there be that pouring forth for worship means worthship, worthship. He is worthy of you, and all you are, and all you have. Let us bow before Him then, hearts low, lost in wonder, love and awe, join our hearts in singing with the redeemed around the Throne, Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive riches and honour, and glory and dominion, and majesty, and power and praise, now and forever.

Father of Jesus, loves desiring, how our hearts do come to Thee today, that we might understand the place that Thou wouldst have the Word to have in our lives. O that we might give attendance to reading, that we might meditate much upon Thy truth, that we might study to show ourselves approved unto Thee, workmen that need not to be ashamed, that we might remember

that all Scripture is given by inspiration of Thee and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God might be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto every good work. Lord, let there come a new commitment of our hearts to Thy Word, a new covenant of Love with Thee and Thy Word. But oh, as we come to Thy Table now, grant that we shall see Him by these emblems represented, His Body given for us to redeem us from the curse of the law, His Blood poured out to seal this new covenant of redemption, make possible this way of life. O Father of our Lord, let the loveliness, the wonder, the glory of Thy Son dawn upon our hearts, Help us to see Him as John saw Him, "His head white as snow, His eyes as a flame of fire," His face as the sun, all glory, all honour, all majesty His (Rev. 1:14). The same Jesus Thou hast exalted. And might we as a people fall at His feet as dead to ourselves our sin, and our plans, and our intent, and from our lives thus brought to Him an incense of praise might ascend. Meet us now as we come to Thy Table and teach us new, afresh, and in deeper manner than ever before the meaning of the breaking of the Bread. In the Name and for the sake of our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

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