

Paul's Third Journey: Strengthening and Encouraging Believers

DARRELL DELANEY

Have you ever felt the tension of leaving a place you love, not knowing what is next, but trusting God is leading you forward? In today's episode of *Groundwork*, we go with Paul on his third missionary journey in Acts Chapters 18-21, where he faces both incredible opportunities and heartbreaking good-byes. From teaching in Ephesus to saying farewell to the elders he poured his life into, Paul's journey is full of faith, courage, and the kind of love that leaves a lasting legacy. Join us as we walk through his story and uncover three ways we can live with the same bold trust and purpose in our own lives next on *Groundwork*.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Welcome to *Groundwork*, where we dig into scripture to lay the foundation for our lives. I am Scott Hoezee.

DARRELL DELANEY

And I am Darrell Delaney; and Scott, we are in episode four of our five-part series in Paul's missionary journeys, and today we are diving into the third journey. So, the first episode was the first missionary journey; the second episode was Acts Chapter 15, where the Jerusalem Council was the debate where the Jews and Gentiles would both be able to come under the faith of Jesus Christ, and we found that, yes, they can; and Jews don't have to impose their beliefs on Gentiles in order for them to be saved; and then, we did the second missionary journey in the last episode, and today is the third.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right, exactly; and again, you know, we have seen different things. The first missionary journey was mostly in the area of what was then known as Galatia, now Asia Minor, or in Turkey. The second journey in episode three, the previous program, we ended up going to Greece, before then going back to Turkey...modern-day Turkey. And so now, right; onto the third missionary journey, where, again, as with the first two, there is great success, as you just said, Darrell, but lots of challenges and resistance; some people accepting the idea that Jesus was the long-awaited Messiah the Jews have been waiting for; others not only not accepting it, but rejecting it, sometimes with violence and hostility.

DARRELL DELANEY

Yes, so you have the Jewish leaders, who some of them accept what God is saying through Paul, and some of them reject what God is saying through Paul; and there are some Gentiles who believe and come to faith, but there are also some Gentiles who feel threatened by the transformational power of the gospel; and yet, we see Paul persevering, and he is setting out on his third missionary journey today, which gives us a glimpse of his heart. He doesn't just share the gospel and move on, but he often follows up and he strengthens and encourages believers wherever he goes. That reminds us, as well, Scott, that we are called to share our faith, and to disciple others as we help people grow in their walk with Jesus.

SCOTT HOEZEE

So, like the first two missionary journeys, this one begins in Antioch, Syria; and in Acts 18:23, we read: After spending some time in Antioch, Paul set out from there and traveled from place to place throughout the region of Galatia and Phrygia, strengthening all the disciples.

So, Paul already planted churches, and now he is visiting them again, right? He didn't just plant them and then walk away. He wants to encourage them in their walk; he wants to strengthen the believers, who have now populated the churches that he himself planted there in Galatia and Phrygia; again, which is in modern-day Turkey. So, he is visiting them again, seeing how they are doing, taking good care of them, interestingly. Now, coming up next, though, Luke is going to introduce us to an important figure named Apollos.

DARRELL DELANEY

Picking it up in verse 24, it says: Meanwhile, a Jew named Apollos, a native of Alexandria, came to Ephesus. He was a learned man, with a thorough knowledge of the Scriptures. ²⁵He had been instructed in the way of the Lord, and he spoke with great fervor and taught about Jesus accurately, though he knew only the baptism of John. ²⁶He began to speak boldly in the synagogue. When Priscilla and Aquila heard him, they invited him to their home and explained to him the way of God more adequately. ²⁷When Apollos wanted to go to Achaia, the brothers and sisters encouraged him and wrote to the disciples there to welcome him. When he arrived, he was a great help to those who by grace had believed. ²⁸For he vigorously refuted his Jewish opponents in public debate, proving from the Scriptures that Jesus was the Messiah.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Interesting; a powerful figure, so powerful that we know that in the opening of 1 Corinthians, that there were some people who thought that Apollos was the one they were supposed to follow instead of Jesus...

DARRELL DELANEY

Yes.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And Paul will deal with that in 1 Corinthians. Priscilla and Aquila see him, and they are grateful for him, but they also recognize he doesn't have the whole story. He only knows about John the Baptist's baptism of repentance; he doesn't know of the baptism into the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, which Jesus authorized in the Great Commission; and so, they have to kind of gently disciple Apollos, bringing him up to speed. He didn't resist; he was a good student. It is just kind of an interesting fact there that he was so learned and so effective, and yet was incomplete for a little while, until these regular people...they were not pastors...Priscilla and Aquila...they were regular folks, but they just knew how to disciple somebody.

DARRELL DELANEY

That is beautiful because they do not just dismiss Apollos because of what he didn't know. They brought him in, they invested in him, and that reminds me, too, Scott, that, you know, you don't have to be a super expert or a scholar of some sort to disciple someone. All you really need is a head start, is what my supervisors used to tell me in ministry; all you need is a head start. If you learned a lesson in the Bible yesterday, you can speak and teach someone the Bible lesson you just learned yesterday, especially if they have never heard it. So, you can use what you just learned, it is that simple; because they were regular, ordinary folks...Priscilla and Aquila...and they loved Jesus and Apollos enough to share what they learned, and that is all it takes sometimes.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And you know, there is a sense in which Priscilla and Aquila became mentors to Apollos; and, you know, Darrell, I think sometimes we don't value mentorship enough. I think we have discovered in seminary education over the years the incredible value of having an educational mentor—an experienced pastor—to come alongside seminarians as they are developing their skills...honing their skills...learning the craft of being a pastor and a preacher. So, it is a lovely, lovely vignette to bring Apollos up to speed on just a little tiny area of theology, which is actually not so tiny at all, so that it could make his preaching more effective. He wanted to move on from Ephesus to Achaia, and they want him to get a warm welcome, so they sent a letter along saying, you know, please do that; and yes, he was very, very effective. So, you know, here we are reminded that, as you said, Darrell, the journey of faith is relational and transformational. It is about building up others, being open to growth, trusting God to work in and through us

for his glory. But in just a minute, we are going to continue our journey on this third missionary journey with Paul. So, stay tuned for that.

Segment 2

DARRELL DELANEY

You are listening to *Groundwork*, where we dig into scripture to lay the foundation for our lives. I am Darrell Delaney.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And I am Scott Hoezee; and Darrell, we are going to jump right back into Acts now, Chapter 19. Paul again is in Ephesus in modern-day Turkey. He is spreading the gospel, and wherever he goes, he wants to get people to believe; and he sees them beginning to believe. He baptizes people, and as they receive the Holy Spirit, some of them we are told...we are not reading this part of Acts 19...but they spoke in tongues. We can point out, by the way, that some people think they are kind of like two baptisms, and the baptism of the Spirit is a separate thing, and that is when you start to speak in tongues, but we believe there is only one baptism. We all receive the Spirit. Some do speak in tongues; others don't, but we are all expected to bear the fruit of the Spirit. We are all expected, by the Holy Spirit's power, to be sanctified, become more Christlike, and Paul begins seeing that in his work here in Ephesus.

DARRELL DELANEY

I think the main point of that passage is to prove that the Holy Spirit is central to our faith; and he is the actor in the book of Acts, who is continuing the teachings of Jesus and displaying the power of it; and so, it does manifest in different ways, and Paul gets into that in his letter to the Corinthian church: There are different gifts and different types of things happening; but the point is that it is about knowing Jesus and experiencing the power of the Spirit in our lives; and so even though this stuff is going on, Scott, not all the things that are happening are good for Paul, are they?

SCOTT HOEZEE

No; opposition abounded at almost every stop along the way; and so, let's read these interesting verses again here in Acts 19 at verse 23: About...(and by the way, there is going to be a reference here to the Way, and that was what Christianity...the Church...was called early on. We read that earlier in Acts.) About that time there arose a great disturbance about the Way. ²⁴A silversmith named Demetrius, who made silver shrines of Artemis, brought in a lot of business for the craftsmen there. ²⁵He called them together, along with the workers in related trades, and said: "You know, my friends, that we receive a good income from this business. ²⁶And you see and hear how this fellow Paul has convinced and led astray large numbers of people here in Ephesus and in practically the whole province of Asia. He says that gods made by human hands are not gods at all. ²⁷There is danger not only that our trade will lose its good name, but also that the temple of the great goddess Artemis will be discredited; and the goddess herself, who is worshiped throughout the province of Asia and the world, will be robbed of her divine majesty." ²⁸When they heard this, they were furious and began shouting: "Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!" ²⁹Soon the whole city was in an uproar. The people seized Gaius and Aristarchus, Paul's traveling companions from Macedonia, and all of them rushed into the theater together. ³⁰Paul wanted to appear before the crowd, but the disciples would not let him. ³¹Even some of the officials of the province, friends of Paul, sent him a message begging him not to venture into the theater.

DARRELL DELANEY

So, we see a lot going on here. I mean, Paul's ministry in Ephesus eventually leads to a riot, Scott. I mean, Demetrius the silversmith was worried that Paul's message was going to turn people away from their idol making business. Now, in the last episode, we talked about how the people in the town where they were upset because the lady who used to, you know...what did she do? She prophesied?

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes, she foretold the future. She had some kind of a spirit, yes.

DARRELL DELANEY

She was supposed to foretell the future; and then Paul got upset and he calls that spirit to come out of her; now they cannot use her to make money; and so, this situation has social and political implications sometimes; and the idols that they have made their allegiance to are often threatened when Jesus Christ comes into the picture.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes; again, it is an economic challenge: Nobody is going to buy our idols of Artemis; or sometimes she is called Diana; but there was... I think that temple to Artemis in Ephesus was one the wonders of the ancient world. It was really, really huge and elaborate; but now, Paul is saying: Nah; she is not a god; and those little statues you make: they are nothing. They are just junk. So, they whip up this riot and push back against Paul; but interestingly, Paul is not going to back down. He is not going to compromise. He is going to stick his gospel no matter how much they threaten him; but then we get an interesting turn here a little bit later in Acts 19.

DARRELL DELANEY

And for some reason, Scott, Luke is inspired by the Spirit to include this speech of the town clerk, who calms the crowd and emphasizes there is no evidence of Paul blaspheming against Artemis or robbing temples. So, God can use a city official to bring peace in this situation; and look what it says in verse 32. It says: The assembly was in confusion: Some were shouting one thing, some another. Most of the people did not even know why they were there. ³³The Jews in the crowd pushed Alexander to the front, and they shouted instructions to him. He motioned for silence in order to make a defense before the people. ³⁴But when they realized he was a Jew, they all shouted in unison for about two hours: "Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!" ³⁵ The city clerk quieted the crowd and said: "Fellow Ephesians, doesn't all the world know that the city of Ephesus is the guardian of the temple of the great Artemis and of her image, which fell from heaven? ³⁶ Therefore, since these facts are undeniable, you ought to calm down and not do anything rash. ³⁷You have brought these men here, though they have neither robbed temples nor blasphemed our goddess. ³⁸If, then, Demetrius and his fellow craftsmen have a grievance against anybody, the courts are open and there are proconsuls. They can press charges. ³⁹If there is anything further you want to bring up, it must be settled in a legal assembly. ⁴⁰As it is, we are in danger of being charged with rioting because of what happened today. In that case we would not be able to account for this commotion, since there is no reason for it." After he had said this, he dismissed the assembly.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Such an interesting story. I mean, there is just so much intrigue going on here; and very, very interesting that this city clerk takes charge of the whole situation, calms them down, basically says: Well, it is true, the disciples...the apostles...they had not robbed temples, and near as we can tell, they didn't *directly* say anything against, you know, Artemis, the false goddess of Ephesus. They in fact de facto say she is not real; and Demetrius wasn't wrong. They could be an economic threat if they actually turned enough people to Jesus and not to Artemis; but nevertheless, the clerk says: Things are getting out of hand here; we could get charged by Roman officials with a riot, and that could cause us other problems. So, let's just go on believing in Artemis. We are a great city; and leave these people be. And that settled it. So, Paul didn't back down; he didn't have to. The city clerk got the people to back down.

DARRELL DELANEY

Yes, it is true; and you know, today we may not run into situations as extreme as this, Scott, but the truth is that the powers of darkness do have a great deal to lose when people begin responding to the gospel. So, it is our role as believers to keep spreading the word about God's love, grace and forgiveness around to everyone we know and don't know. Paul's time with the Ephesians was not just a one and done, because he spent a great deal of time there. So, don't get discouraged that people are not listening to you and it feels like what

you are saying to them has fallen on deaf ears the first time you encounter them, because they may be influenced by a consistent lifestyle if you keep at it; so please do keep at it; but we want to continue in this and do Chapters 20 and 21; and we have those left for the last segment, so stay tuned.

Segment 3

SCOTT HOEZEE

I am Scott Hoezee, along with Darrell Delaney, and you are listening to *Groundwork*; and we are, Darrell, in the final part of this fourth program in a five-part series on the missionary journeys of Paul. We are in the third missionary journey; and in this part, we are going to be turning to some very heartfelt and personal moments in Paul's ministry, including his farewell to the Ephesians and the Ephesian elders in Acts 20; and then he is going to be making a trip to Jerusalem after that.

DARRELL DELANEY

So, we get a glimpse of Paul's heart in this section in Acts Chapter 20; and this scene is set in Miletus, where Paul and the elders of the Ephesian church come to meet him, and it says: ¹⁸When they arrived, he said to them: "You know how I lived the whole time I was with you, from the first day I came into the province of Asia. ¹⁹I served the Lord with great humility and with tears and in the midst of severe testing by the plots of my Jewish opponents. ²⁰You know that I have not hesitated to preach anything that would be helpful to you but have taught you publicly and from house to house. ²¹I have declared to both Jews and Greeks that they must turn to God in repentance and have faith in our Lord Jesus."

SCOTT HOEZEE

Paul is giving a testimony to his life; to his ministry; to his way with the Ephesian people; to his consistency; his agony, you know, with tears. Paul would get so emotional telling them about the Lord Jesus Christ, declaring to them that he was the long-awaited Messiah that the Jews had been looking for, if only we turn in repentance and in faith, then we will be saved. So, it is really heart on the sleeve time for the Apostle Paul. He loves these people, and he has been reaching out to them; and it is a powerful example, Darrell, that witnessing—evangelism—that all of us can engage in and should engage in, it is not just about words, it is about living a life that matches the message.

DARRELL DELANEY

Yes; and Paul knows that he is willing to face hardships; and it reminds us that true ministry, Scott, comes with a cost; and Paul continues to share, in a sense of what is coming ahead. This is one of the most quoted sections of his farewell, and Paul says: ²²"And now, compelled by the Spirit, I am going to Jerusalem, not knowing what will happen to me there. ²³I only know that in every city the Holy Spirit warns me that prison and hardships are facing me. ²⁴However, I consider my life worth nothing to me; my only aim is to finish the race and complete the task the Lord Jesus has given me—the task of testifying to the good news of God's grace."

SCOTT HOEZEE

Again, a beautiful, heartfelt testimony; and interesting that the Holy Spirit gives Paul a heads-up that he might get arrested, beaten, jailed; but Paul says: I know that...you know, I know that, but nothing is going to stop me. The gospel is more important than I am; and you know, it is somewhat similar to what he writes to the Philippians, you know, that to live is for Christ, but to die would be gain. It is also going to remind you of Hebrews 12, where we are called to: (verses 1b-2a) *...run with perseverance, fixing our eyes on Jesus*; and that is what Paul was saying here. He wants to finish the race...he wants to run the race...and again, the task of proclaiming God's grace in Christ was worth more than his own life.

DARRELL DELANEY

Yes; so, we are reminded what Paul is doing. His words are still relevant for us today, Scott. Like, how often do we prioritize comfort and security over obedience to God? I mean, Paul is challenging us here to trust God with the outcome, and it reminds me of Philippians 3, where he says: (verse 10ff paraphrased) I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of his sufferings and somehow attain the crown.

That is exactly what he has been living and what he has been experiencing; and that is what he is actually saying, even though the path looks difficult, he stayed the course.

SCOTT HOEZEE

That is interesting, isn't it, that you and I have just been doing this as sort of on the fly here, we are reading these stories in Acts, and ding, ding, ding, we are reminded of all those different passages in Corinthians and Philippians you know. These are the experiences that led Paul later to write the things he did in his epistles. So, it is very, very interesting to me that that is what is in these narratives that Luke so well records for us here in the book of Acts. But as he is leaving Ephesus, he doesn't just leave them with warnings, he wants to entrust them to God, and so, in Acts 20:32, he says:

“Now I commit you to God and to the word of his grace, which can build you up and give you an inheritance among all those who are sanctified.”

It is a beautiful way for Paul to conclude that, Darrell.

DARRELL DELANEY

Yes, it is; and so, Paul is reminding them that it is God's grace and not their own strength that will sustain them, because God, of course we know, he builds the Church, and he secures our inheritance in Christ. Then he gives them this moving farewell that comes in Acts Chapter 20:36-38. It says: When Paul had finished speaking, he knelt down with all of them and prayed. ³⁷They all wept as they embraced him and kissed him. ³⁸What grieved them most was his statement that they would never see his face again. Then they accompanied him to the ship.

It is really hard to read that, Scott, without the true emotion of that moment...the weeping and the not knowing if they are going to see him again...these are not just colleagues and professionals to Paul; they were personal brothers and sisters in Christ, and he shared his life and ministry and struggles with these people. So, he is bonded with them.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes; he has poured himself into these people, a great example so selflessness and trust; and you know, Paul is just head-over-heels in love with the gospel. This comes out in his epistles as well.

So, it is really quite amazing; but the third missionary journey is drawing to a close. Paul is going to head to Jerusalem before he goes back to Antioch. So, now we are going to move into Acts Chapter 21, and that chapter gives us a good look at Paul's determination to follow God's will, even in the face of uncertainty and outright opposition. The first six verses of Acts 21, describe Paul and his companions traveling by ship. They stop along the way at places like Tyre, and there they meet with some believers. There is an important moment in Tyre where the disciples, through the Spirit, urge Paul not to go to Jerusalem, right? I mean, there are intimations of bad things waiting for Paul, so they don't want him to go. They try to deter him, but he won't be deterred.

DARRELL DELANEY

Yes; so, Paul is committed to being obedient, and that is more important to him than his own comfort and the security of his life, because he feels he is called to go to Jerusalem. It kind of reminds us of Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane, where he says: Not my will, but the Father...your will be done. I know that this is going to cost me. I know that I am going to suffer; but I would rather be obedient to you and honor your name than to save my own life in this situation. Paul does not know if he is going to come out of there alive or if he is not, but he is going to go in obedience anyway.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And then we get this interesting vignette in Acts 21:10-12. This guy named Agabus kind of comes out of nowhere, delivers a vivid prophecy: ¹¹Coming over to us, he (Agabus) took Paul's belt, tied his own hands and feet with it and said, “The Holy Spirit says, ‘In this way the Jewish leaders in Jerusalem will bind the owner of this belt and will hand him over to the Gentiles.’”

So dramatic; a dramatic moment. This guy is acting out what he thinks is going to happen to Paul, and so, again, they just don't want him to go there. They are weeping, but Paul says:

¹³Why are you weeping and breaking my heart? I am ready not only to be bound, but also to die in Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus.”

Again, Paul’s boldness is challenging and inspiring. He is not reckless, but everything is on the line for the sake of Christ.

DARRELL DELANEY

Yes; so, he does arrive in Jerusalem, and where the brothers and sisters are greeting him warmly, even though there is trouble on the horizon, he is met with the fellowship and the encouragement of the church. As we wrap up this episode, what does this all mean for us today? We have a few takeaways from this, and the first is to listen to God’s leading.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Exactly; Paul was attuned to the Holy Spirit. Does the Holy Spirit speak quite as clearly to us today as it did to Paul? Maybe not, but the Spirit does speak to us. We believe it speaks to us through other people; it speaks to us through internal calls; and we just need, like Paul, to stay tuned to the voice of the Holy Spirit; and then, when we hear it, to respond with faith; and then, a second takeaway: Prepare for sacrifice.

DARRELL DELANEY

So, of course, we know this. Following Christ involves sacrifice; whether it is giving up comfort, security, or even relationships, obedience to God comes with a cost. We count the cost of following Jesus Christ; and like Paul, we need to make sure we do count the cost and make sure that we understand that Christ is far greater than anything we would ever give up. If you save your life in this world, you lose it; but if you give up your life for his sake, you find it.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And our third and last takeaway in this episode: Lean on community. All of these journeys show the importance of community, that the believers prayed for Paul and the apostles. They supported Paul and the apostles; they tried to protect Paul and the apostles. Paul didn’t always take their advice, but he valued their love and their encouragement; and that is a reminder today, too: There are no Lone Ranger Christians, right? We all need the community of the church.

DARRELL DELANEY

So, Paul’s example challenges us to live with courage and faith, trusting God with the unknown; and as we reflect on his journey, we could ask ourselves these questions: What is God calling *us* to today? How can *we* step out in faith, even when the path ahead is uncertain? We may not know the future, but we do know who holds the future, and we know who that is, and that is our God.

SCOTT HOEZEE

That is the same Christ Jesus the Lord whom Paul proclaimed at every stop on these missionary journeys. For Paul’s example and for the Spirit’s working yet today, we give thanks to God.

Well, thank you for listening and digging deeply into scripture with *Groundwork*. We hope you will join us again next time as we wrap up our study of Paul’s missionary journeys with a look at the account of Paul’s arrest and journey to Rome in Acts 21-28.

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DARRELL DELANEY

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