

A FAITHFUL MINISTER OF THE LORD

Acts 19:8-10

Key verse: 9b-10a

“He took the disciples with him and had discussions daily in the lecture hall of Tyrannus. This went on for two years.”

Happy New Year! My name is Philip Wong. I became a disciple of Jesus in 1995 when I accepted Christ as my Lord and Savior and have been serving the Lord in UBF ever since.

At this leaders' conference, we have servants of God who have been serving the Lord 5, 10, 20, 50 years and more. However many years we have served, as we look at Apostle Paul and his ministry in Ephesus through our passage in Acts, we want to think about who is a faithful disciple of Jesus and minister of the Lord. Counting the amount of time is a quantitative measure of a faithful disciple, but there are also qualitative aspects, of a disciple of Jesus who is faithful to the end.

Paul planted the church in Ephesus during his second missionary journey (Acts 18:19). He was now on his third mission journey and had arrived to Ephesus. Upon arriving in Ephesus he met some disciples and baptised them (1-7). The next thing we see is Apostle Paul went to the synagogue where he met with people who were ready to argue his teachings about the kingdom of God. Verse 8 says he was arguing or disputing persuasively, reasoning and convincing them about the truth of the kingdom of God. Paul would come back to the synagogue over a period of three months. Again and again Paul would reason and explain and breakdown the truths about the kingdom of God.

Verse 9 says he did this because some of them became obstinate. Being obstinate means these men were stubborn in their unbelief and maligned the Way (name for Christianity), that is the gospel message and the way of Christ and how Jesus disciples must live. When you malign something, you are speaking evil of something. In this case, some Jews there were speaking evil against the gospel message and speaking evil against God. This is Satan's work: to distort the message of the kingdom of God.

For three months, Paul challenged the unbelief of the Jews. But after he said everything he had to say, he moved on. Of course, Paul would have loved to have won them over, but we are not going to win everybody over. Even our Lord Jesus did not win every single person he met.

What did Paul do next? He went to the Greeks. He went to the campus of the "University of Ephesus", to the hall of Tyrannus. This was a lecture hall most likely a place of education. But what is really unusual is how Paul went there every day, and it was not just to pop in and out of the hall, some writing sources says he spent some 5 hours each day, from 11am to 4pm teaching in the hall of Tyrannus. And on top of that he did this for two years. That is about 3650 hours of Bible study. If you have Bible study once a week for 1 hour, you need to come every week for more the 70 years! This is the longest amount of time Paul would spend in one place during all three of his mission trips.

Every day he would meet with pagan unbelievers to teach the gospel. Verse 10 tells us that after two years, all the Jews and Greeks living in the province of Asia heard the word of the Lord. According to historical accounts, this means about 2 million people. The hall of Tyrannus was one of Paul's last, biggest, boldest, and most successful ministry work. It's the essence of what Jesus told his disciples to do (Mt 28:18).

What does this teach us about Paul and his ministry while he was in Ephesus. One thing is clear: Paul was a faithful minister of the gospel to challenge unbelievers and teach the message of the kingdom of God to everyone until a whole nation would hear the word of the Lord. In Paul we find three traits of a faithful servant of God.

First, a faithful servant stands boldly on the message of the kingdom of God. A bold message is one that teaches the word of God such that it will anger, offend, or disconcert some hearers because the Word of God will reveal our sins. That means, God's servant must be courageous and strong in faith. Especially to do so in a hostile and unbelieving environment. Paul was faithful to preach with boldness of what he was absolutely convinced of. Ten years later, Paul would end up in prison in Rome, at which time he wrote the epistle to the Ephesian church and asking the believers to pray for him to still boldly declare the gospel, as he ought to speak it (Eph 6:18-20). Circumstances will never keep a servant of God from faithfully and boldly preach the gospel message. We can boldly preach the gospel because of the

how God has convinced us of the gospel truth. We are convinced of the power of the blood of Jesus that forgives us of all our sin. We are convinced of the resurrection of our Lord who conquered the power of death. We are convinced of the gospel that transformed each of us. In the end, it is by the help of God through the Holy Spirit that he enables his faithful servants to boldly preach the message of the kingdom of God.

Second, a faithful servant is patient. We see Paul teaching in two places, first in the synagogue and then in the hall of Tyrannus. We sense Paul's patience when he taught and explained the truths of the kingdom of God because of the time he spent there. He spent three months in the synagogue and two years in the hall of Tyrannus. Relatively speaking for Paul, this is a long time when we see how Paul stayed in a place no more than one year during his missionary journeys. To be there such a long time and to spend that much time to explain and teach and help people grow in the knowledge of the word God, this requires great patience. This is the patience of a shepherd, lovingly and prayerfully shepherding God's flock for the long haul.

These days, it seems like it takes so long to raise a disciple of Jesus. Sometimes we compare our personal experience and wonder "why are students today not growing as fast I did when I was growing as disciple?" The desire for growth and maturity in our church is a good and godly desire. Paul labored to the point of exhaustion to present every person mature in Christ. This zeal for the sanctification of others is one of the responsibilities of discipleship ministry. The problem arises when our expectations and desires are not surrendered to the Lord's. When people do not respond as quickly as we think they should. When ministries take longer to develop and mature than we had hoped. When leadership does not develop according to the perfect plan we had in our mind. Before we know it, impatience begins to grow in our hearts. Instead of love and joy in shepherding, frustration sets in because things are not happening as quickly as we desire. God's timing and ways are often very different than our personal ambition, even if the intentions are good. At the root of such impatience in ministry is that ugly five-letter word: pride. It's as if we are saying, "God, you are not doing what I think you should do—will you hurry up and get with it?" At this point the heart is exposed and God's glory has taken a backseat to personal agenda. But a faithful servant of God will be humble to patiently shepherd the sheep. And we can be patient because of how the Lord himself is patient. We are patient because the Lord has been so patient with us. We

are patient because God commands us to be patient. Therefore, can be the patient ministers of the Lord.

Third, a faithful servant perseveres. We are all bound to become discouraged when faced with life's trials. Paul was in the synagogue for three months, spending a lot of energy unsuccessfully trying to convince unbelievers. This must have been very discouraging. But Paul did not give up. He found a new audience and a new approach to his ministry by going to the hall of Tyrannus. This is not something typical of Paul – to teach in a lecture hall. But he got this inspiration and God abundantly blessed it. Everyday for two years, he could be found in the lecture hall. At the same, Paul, as a lay servant, would also have to support himself and continue his tentmaking job. Paul was committed and persevered to do this every day.

In the end, how can Paul or anyone be a faithful servant and ministry of the Lord? 2Timothy 3:16-17 says, "All Scripture is God-breathed and useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting, and training in righteousness so the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work." When God prepares someone for servanthship and ministry, he trains them through the Word of God. He gives that person an deep desire for the Word of God, and enables him to study it faithfully.

I have been told that I am a faithful servant of God. This is only because of the God's word working in my life. I first started Bible study in 1994. And over the course of 27 years, God has been molding me into his faithful servant beginning with his word. Many times, I became proud and tried to be faithful by doing things out of my own human effort. But my human effort is so limited. There have been situations which have been vey discouraged and days where I have complained felt like giving up whenever I rely on myself. Since the pandemic began, it has not been possible to go back to regular in-person worship as before, and serving online ministry has been challenging. When I relied on my own efforts, I complained and felt like giving up. This did not glorify the Lord. The Lord reveals this to me through his Word and reminds me that my faithfulness begins with God's word of promise to me and my decision to obey God's call for me to serve my Lord. From His Word God's word says to me, "Blessed is the one who perseveres under trial because, having stood the test, that person will receive the crown of life that the Lord has promised to those who love him" (James 1:12). From the Word of God, God calls us and works in us to be a faithful servant of the Lord. We obtain faith, and our faithfulness, by the grace of God. He is faithful to us, and as we humbly submit and

live as a faithful servant to the very end, the Lord will gladly say to us, "Well done, good and faithful servant!" (Matthew 25:23).

Like apostle Paul, there are many examples of faithful servants of God in the Bible, none greater than Christ himself, who faithfully served and gave his life for sinners. And we also have many examples of faithful servants of God in our lives today. God has chosen each of us to live as his faithful disciples when the Word of God works in us. Faithfulness is not a gift that only some people can have, but it is a fruit of the Spirit through the work of the Holy Spirit in each of our lives. With boldness, patience and perseverance in living as disciples and living as ministers and shepherds of God's flock committed daily Bible study and raising disciples, God will make us a blessing to expand his kingdom as we pray, "your kingdom your will be done."