

PATHOS  
Acts 20:13-38

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It was only a few weeks ago that, in my absence, church member and missionary Tim Martin spoke from this same passage. I have watched Tim's good and solid sermon on line and I am **not** going to try and rephrase his sermon. There are so many points that one might make from Paul's farewell to the Ephesian elders that next Sunday, like Tim, I too would like to address some of them. But as is often with the scriptures, while one thing may strike one person, an entirely different thing may strike another. And so while next Sunday there is certain to be **some overlap** with Tim's sermon, today's sermon is going to take us down an entirely different path.

For today I would like to speak to you on the topic of Pathos. Not a city, not a place, not a person's name. Rather, the "Pathos" of the text.

Now pathos is **not** a word that we often use in everyday speech.

- A Psychiatrist may speak of a patient's "**pathology**."
- A film critic may review a film as being "**pathetic**."
- You may offer deep **sympathy** to a woman whose husband has recently died.
- And you may think that brother-in-law of yours is a "**pathological liar**."

In each of these cases the word path, from **pathos** (taken from the same Greek word  $\pi\alpha\theta\omicron\varsigma$ ), is at the heart of these words. And that Greek word carries with it the idea of "**experience, misfortune, emotion or condition**."

A pathological liar is thus one whom, it is deemed, lies and tells lies, as part of his **regular experience** or condition. It is part of his nature, we would say.

When speaking of a film as being "pathetic" we mean we, the viewers, had the **misfortune** of suffering through it. The film may have been SO BAD that we thought we could hardly bear to watch another minute of it.

Or that sympathy that you felt towards that woman whose husband has died implies that you, as much as you are able, have attempted to try and **bear her misfortune**. Maybe you have experienced a similar situation. It is then that you can be truly SYMPATHETIC towards her and with her.

Stories that are **full of emotion** are described as being **full of PATHOS**.

And in this text before us this morning, that is what particularly strikes me. Indeed, I find it more than a little interesting that such PATHOS should have been exhibited towards the apostle Paul.

And here is why...

I have often thought, said, and taught, that we might not be all that positively impressed with some of the heroes of the Bible if were to actually have met them or known them. Issues of **personal hygiene** (including body odor and bad breath), the way in which women or those who were enslaved were treated, and just the cultural norms that we would have to surmount in being around some of our Biblical heroes could easily make them **not nearly as attractive** to us as we may think they would be.

For example – and this is just a very crass illustration of what I am speaking about – we know from the Bible that people wore sandals. Jesus wore sandals. And because of the many dirt roads that were, quite honestly, **covered** in horse, mule, donkey, camel, dog and oxen dung, those that walked these roads ended up with **FILTHY, STINKY FEET**. It is because of that that we read of various people in the New Testament scriptures (including the Lord Jesus) as having their feet washed.

It has been years since that time, as a kid, that I arrived at school only to find that I had stepped in some dog...dung. Oh, man, and did it stink! Was it our dog's poop, or some other dog's poop? I don't know. But those around me in class all knew, even as I came to know, that I needed to deal with my shoes.

And talk about an irony, it was just this past Friday that while meeting with the men at the Men's Discipleship Group at 5:30 in the morning, it was pointed out to me

that on the bottom of my one sneaker was some what appeared to be either mud or dog poop. I could hardly believe it, in light of the fact that I was going to be mentioning that very sort of thing in this morning's sermon. (It was dog poop by the way. Thanks a lot, to our dog, Rocky!)

But this kind of thing would have been a **regular part of life** for Jesus, his disciples, and everyone else around at that time. In our age of "social distancing, " "washing our hands often and thoroughly" and using "hand sterilizer" I don't know if we would be able to handle these people from long ago!

And then we have Paul...

Paul, it seems from the scriptures, was **not** the easiest guy to get along with.

- On the very first of his missionary journeys, John Mark, a cousin of Barnabas, **left Paul** and Barnabas in the middle of their trip. The text is not clear specifically WHY John Mark left them, but he did.
- In Acts chapter 15 we read of a major rift – a "**sharp disagreement**" (15:39) arising between Paul and Barnabas about taking John Mark along on a second journey. Barnabas had been Paul's discipler, his mentor, his friend, yet the tension became so great between Paul and Barnabas that they **split** and went two different ways: Paul taking Silas, and Barnabas taking John Mark.
- In Acts 20, beginning in verse 4, we read of some of Paul's traveling companions on this, his third missionary trip...

Sopater

Aristarchus

Secundus

Gaius

Timothy

Tychicus

Trophimus, and (implied)

Luke

That's 8 traveling companions. Yet by the time we read 2 Timothy, chapter 4, written some years later, Paul writes that "**Luke alone** is with me (v.11)...At my first

defense, **no one** came to stand by me, but **all deserted me**" (v. 16).

How could this have happened?

I think I know how it happened...

#### Galatians 2:11-14

Jesus taught us that if we have something against someone we are to go to them privately, and speak to them about the issue. But here is Paul and he has something against Peter (Cephas). And what does Paul do? He confronts him "before them all." It is impossible to know Peter's mind and attitude towards Paul, but I can imagine him, even if he knew Paul was right (which he was) being a bit ticked off at Paul for how he handled the situation.

Or look at 1 Corinthians 4:21. Here, after Paul tells the people in Corinth of his intention to visit them to set things right, he then **verbally threatens them**.

Can you imagine us trying that sort of thing today?

Elder Dave Graves OWNS a bullwhip. How about we take a picture of him, whip in hand, then put a caption with the picture – "At Burning Hearts, we have elders who will keep you in line" – and then send post that over Facebook or get it printed in the newspaper? That could help bring our church growth to a grinding halt, don't you think?

Paul was forceful and straightforward to the point of being offensive. He called an "ace an ace" and wasn't afraid of what enemies he might make along the way. In Galatians 5:12 he wrote that he hoped those who opposed him and his message would take a knife and mutilate themselves, that is, cut themselves up into pieces.

I have a wife who works in the public school system. If Paul used that kind of language in 8<sup>th</sup> or 10<sup>th</sup> grade he would likely have been evicted from the school.

So what is my point? It is simply this: I don't believe Paul was that easy of an individual to get along with. I believe there was **plenty to NOT LIKE** about Paul and that that is why so many, in fact, DID NOT LIKE PAUL.

Yet, with that as a background, we read of this DEEP PATHOS here in Acts chapter 20, as Paul met with the Ephesians elders to say goodbye to them. Let's read it again...

#### verses 36-38

One senses in these words **a real bond** with these Ephesian elders. That for all the challenges one might have had getting along with Paul, still there was a bond with him.

Years ago I heard Stan Gundry, one of my professors at the Moody Bible Institute, speak from the book of Philippians on how we should view one another. Let's turn to Philippians chapter 1...

#### Philippians 1:3-4

In his sermon, Stan Gundry asked "How could Paul, the author of these words, say he thanked God for **EVERY remembrance** that he had of these people? Every remembrance? Really? Most of us, if we're honest, would admit that even in regards to our closest relatives or friends there have been at least **SOME times** of tension...some heated arguments or debates...some memories that...well...we probably could have done without. So how could Paul say he thanked God for **EVERY** remembrance that he had of these people? Was he suffering from dementia?"

Professor Gundry then had us turn to Philippians chapter 4, verse 8...

#### Philippians 4:8

This is **the answer** for how one can thank God for EVERY remembrance. It is because we have, in our own hearts and minds, simply **decided to think only on those things that are pure, and lovely and commendable**. We have, in a sense, LET GO of the other memories...those points of tension...those sharp disagreements. And isn't that as it should be?

I have told you before of a time, now 25 years ago or more when Ruth and I had a sharp disagreement. It was so sharp that we decided to handle it in the **REALLY MATURE WAY** of not speaking to one another! And so at the dinner table, I would say, "Sarah, would you please ask Mommy to pass the butter." Things like that! So mature!

Finally after 3 days we both gave up the feud, forgave each other, and brought our relationship back to what it should be. But the real kicker was that after three days neither of us could recall what the fuss was all about to begin with!

So **whatever bad memories** those Ephesian elders may have had of Paul, they **let them go**. And **whatever bad memories** Paul had of the Ephesian elders, **he let them go**.

And so we read that together they **knelt in prayer**. When we get to Acts 21:5 we will find church leaders doing the same thing again: kneeling in prayer. That seems appropriate, doesn't it?

They **knelt in prayer**,  
they **wept**,  
they **embraced Paul**, and  
they **kissed him**.

We're not much into kissing one another: we men. Through the years I have had only one man – Lloyd Scalyer, the older Messianic Jewish leader of the Seed of Abraham Fellowship – consistently kiss me. He has always been such a big man, physically, that to kiss me has generally been more of leaning over me and kissing me on the top of my head.

But I've never rejected it. For I always considered it to be out of love.

But they kissed Paul.  
And they very sorrowful, for they were trying to deal with Paul's assertion that they would never see his face again.

Let me ask you a question: if you knew – somehow – if you truly knew you would never see someone again, would you kiss them? Would you weep over them and embrace them?

I have thought on this question a lot through the years. This past Thursday was the 38-year anniversary of my mother's death. She was very much alive on Wednesday of that year and by late that night – technically very, very early Thursday morning – she was dead. She died on the operating table at the hospital in Highland, Illinois. She had felt ill on Wednesday, been taken to the hospital by my dad, and after many hours had gotten up from the bed only to collapse on the floor. It was from there that she was taken into the operating room. On the way to the operating room she saw my dad running along beside the quickly moving gurney. It was at that time that she had just enough strength to say her final words which were, "I don't think I'm going to make it." And she didn't.

But what if she had **not died** that night but, instead, I had been given the opportunity to be with her, having somehow learned beforehand that this would be the final night of her life and that tomorrow she would be gone. I have thought about that. And do what I have concluded? I have concluded that after many hours of sitting and talking with her, I would probably say, "I think I need to go to sleep." Maybe I'm wrong. Maybe I would have the stamina to stay up the entire night. But like the disciples in the Garden of Gethsemane who were with our Lord on his final night, I think I would fall asleep.

We don't know how long Paul was with the Ephesian elders. They apparently weren't with one another long enough for anyone to fall asleep. But their parting was hard.

The church – maybe more than any other entity on earth (other than a family) – is to be a community of love, of real pathos.

But boy do we have a ways to go. For we are truly FAR, FAR TOO CASUAL in our relationships.

Many years ago now I sat on the board of Bethany Christian Services. At that time, the Park City Mall, each January or

February – during their most DEAD time at the mall – would offer to pretty much any and every non-profit organization one week in which they could set up a table or booth and promote their organization. And so it was decided that Bethany should set up a table and we, the board members, would man it (as they say). As things would be, right next to our table (upon which we had our brochures along with some homemade cookies, pies, quilts, Afghans and other items for sale) was a table for EST – one of those cult groups that Tim Martin could teach us all about. John Denver was still alive at the time and he had become associated with EST.

But here is what was interesting. I observed that when our people came on duty to man the table, we were all polite, and explained what we had sold, and where the money goes, and that sort of thing. But when the EST people showed up for their shift at their table, they warmly EMBRACED ONE ANOTHER, they hugged. They seemed so genuinely glad to see and be with one another.

We were the Christians, but it was them – the non-Christians – that expressed real love...real emotion...real PATHOS.

Jesus said, "By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have LOVE FOR ONE ANOTHER."

Paul probably smelled  
His breath, his body odor.  
Who knows how often they bathed back then?  
And Paul had been more than a little difficult at times.

But Paul was a champion of the gospel unlike any other.  
And they LOVED him for that.  
And so they embraced him, they wept over him and they kissed him.

We have a lot to learn.

