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Acts 20:17-35:

## **Be Those Who Remember**

- I. Right and Wrong Attitudes
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## **Be Those Who Remember**

**Acts 20:17-35**

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ,

A poor young boy in a poverty-stricken neighborhood found himself wandering into a church purely out of curiosity. In the church, he felt safe and protected from the dangers of the streets he came from. Arriving daily with just the old and worn clothes on his back, he learned about the Words and works of our Lord Jesus Christ and was led to faith in Him.

One day, long after his conversion, one of the members in the congregation, who for some reason, found wicked pleasure in hurting the faith of others, tried to shake the poor boy's faith by asking, "If God really loves you, why does He not tell someone to give you a pair of shoes or enough coal to keep your home warm in the winter?" The bright young boy stopped and thought for a moment. Squaring his shoulders and straightening up, he responded, "Jesus does tell somebody...and somebody forgets."

### **I. Right and Wrong Attitudes**

A dangerous attitude that frequently arises in Christian congregations is an attitude of self-righteousness that stems from a false understanding of what Jesus taught and did in His life on earth. It is an attitude that misunderstands the love of Jesus and the gifts He gives that enable us to serve one another. As sinful human beings, especially in church settings, we tend to get comfortable, form cliques, isolate from others, and ignore the needs of our brothers and sisters and our enemies. This is not just the case in church but in any social setting, and I'd be surprised to find a congregation that does not have this problem, at least in one way or another.

The story of this young boy is a strong reminder for us as Christians that we are not an exclusive, high-end social group. There is a right and wrong attitude about why we come to church and how we are called to live our lives in service to others. And in that boy's words, when someone is in need, "Jesus does tell somebody... and somebody forgets." Let's not be the ones who forget. Let us **Be Those Who Remember**.

The Apostle Paul, in his farewell to the Ephesian elders, didn't just preach generosity; he lived it. He reminds them and us, "In all things I have shown you that by working hard in this way we must help the weak and remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he said, 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.'" Jesus is the one who gave the most of all. He gave up Heaven for earth in His incarnation, comfort for suffering in His life, and life for death for us at the cross. He didn't isolate himself from the weak. He came to serve them. To serve us.

Because of Christ's immeasurable gift to us in the forgiveness of sins, we are now called to live as those who remember the poor, the sick, the helpless, the lost, and the dying. The right

attitude for us to have is to continually reflect on Christ's sacrificial love on the cross, recognizing that His sufferings and death were not in vain. Without His intervention, we were lost in our sins, spiritually dead, with no hope for eternal life and no capacity to do anything of lasting good. Without Christ, we were trapped in a self-centered existence, constantly seeking to gain more for ourselves, and blind to the needs of others. Whatever good we did was self-serving, seeking only the fleeting riches and promises of a fallen world that is ultimately doomed to perish.

In 1 John 5:19, we are reminded, "We know that we are from God, and the whole world lies in the power of the evil one." There is no ambiguity here. The corruption from the fall of Adam spans the entire world, deeply affecting every human heart. Sin has tainted our thoughts, our motives, and our actions, leaving us utterly helpless apart from Christ.

Therefore, the wrong attitude to have is the one we once had when we lived apart from Christ. Before we knew Him, we were indifferent to the needs of others, blind to the world's brokenness. But in Christ, we are called to live differently. It is wrong in the eyes of the Lord to see those suffering in real poverty or hardship and to walk away when we have the means to help. Yet, above all, it is even more grievous to withhold the message of reconciliation with God through Christ from those who need it. And we all need it.

In Matthew 5:14-16, Jesus says,

"You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.

We, who were once poor in spirit, must be diligent in following our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, in sharing the Gospel with others and loving as He loved us. By meeting our neighbors' physical and temporal needs, whether believers or unbelievers, Christ works through us to touch their hearts with the Gospel. In doing so, we offer them not just help for today but eternal hope, sealing them as children of love, not wrath; children of righteousness, not sin.

## **II. Wolves Among Us**

When we forget Christ and what He gave for us, we fail to love the poor, and we open ourselves to deception. Forgetting who Christ is leads us either into self-righteousness or into false "gospels" that deny the cross altogether. Paul, before this stark reminder of our treatment of the physically and spiritually poor, exhorted the elders by saying, "I know that after my departure fierce wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; and from among your own selves will arise men speaking twisted things, to draw away the disciples after them. Therefore, be alert..."

Dear friends, there are wolves among us in this life. Hypocrites, liars, and deceivers are in every church. And an even more alarming reality is that heresy infects modern-day Christianity like a plague. The truth is, churches in Decatur, Illinois, in the US, and in the world do not all worship the same Jesus Christ that the Bible bears witness to. That's why Paul says, "Be alert." Not passive. Not ignorant of our surroundings. Alert.

The danger isn't just "out there," but it's close, and it is not impossible for it to be even among our own number. False teaching doesn't always sound false. In fact, it is frequently the opposite. It tickles the ears and sounds loving and tolerant of all sin. It may preach about grace, but not repentance. It talks about Jesus, but not the Jesus who died because of our own wrongdoing. It talks about His love, but not the love that disciplines as a father disciplines his son. It talks about giving to people experiencing poverty, but supports organizations that take advantage of others and teach false doctrine to those who are spiritually poor.

This is why it is so vital that you know the truth. To be those who remember the spiritually and physically poor, you must know the Word of the Lord. You must know your Savior for who He truly is and what He has done. Because when the Gospel is twisted into a cheap grace, salvation itself is at stake for us and those around us.

### **III. Here is the Truth**

Jesus Christ—the true Jesus Christ—is the one who lived a sinless life on our behalf, who bled and died so that we may live. He is true God and true man who stepped into our predicament and saved us from utter self-destruction. He is our God who did not forget us but is the first of those who remember. In remembering His creation and His love for His children, He accomplished what only God could do by reconciling us to our Heavenly Father.

Moreover, He gives us His Holy Spirit to continue the work that He has started in us so that we will not continue living estranged from God but in complete and accomplished peace with Him. Christ is not only the one who "remembers" us but the one who reconciles us completely in body, soul, and relationship with God through His own divine sacrifice and continuing work.

Colossians 1:15-23 says,

"And you, who once were alienated and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds, he has now reconciled in his body of flesh by his death, in order to present you holy and blameless and above reproach before him, if indeed you continue in the faith, stable and steadfast, not shifting from the hope of the gospel that you heard, which has been proclaimed in all creation under heaven..."

Because of this great work of our Lord and Savior, the one who remembered us and did not abandon us to our evil deeds and their consequences, we now remember Him. And in remembering Him, we remember others and serve them in all their needs. We do this no matter

how irritating it may be or how inconvenient it is. We remember those who are poor, sick, suffering, lost, or simply outsiders. We are there for one another, always proclaiming the truths of our Lord Jesus in thought, word, and deed.

If we are not doing this, let this message to you today be a reminder to examine your life and what you do and to ask God to remind you always of the truth of His Gospel that centers around true and sacrificial love. Remember the truth of the Gospel so that no wolf in sheep's clothing can sweep it out from under your feet or twist it into something that it is not. It is more blessed to give than to receive, not because it earns us anything, but because in giving, we reflect the one who gave everything.

I once heard a pastor tell a story about a quiet man in a small congregation who rarely spoke and didn't contribute much to conversation but was always there. He would arrive early to unlock the church doors, stay late to clean up after potlucks, and slip envelopes of cash into mailboxes when someone had lost a job or gotten sick. One day, he finally caught the attention of another member who asked him, "Why do you do all this when nobody notices?" The man just smiled and said, "Because He noticed me."

That's it, isn't it? That's the life of those who remember. We remember the one who saw us in our filth, our pride, our poverty, our sin, and did not pass us by. We remember Jesus, who gave everything. And so now we remember others, not to be seen, not to be praised, not to earn a single thing, but because we were remembered when we didn't deserve it. **Be Those Who Remember**—because Christ remembered you.

Amen.

Pastor Lucas Abbott