

July 28, 2013

“A Model From A Pastor’s Parting Words to His Congregation”

Acts 20:16-38

16 Paul had decided to sail on past Ephesus, for he didn't want to spend any more time in the province of Asia. He was hurrying to get to Jerusalem, if possible, in time for the Festival of Pentecost. **17** But when we landed at Miletus, he sent a message to the elders of the church at Ephesus, asking them to come and meet him.

18 When they arrived he declared, "You know that from the day I set foot in the province of Asia until now **19** I have done the Lord's work humbly and with many tears. I have endured the trials that came to me from the plots of the Jews. **20** I never shrank back from telling you what you needed to hear, either publicly or in your homes. **21** I have had one message for Jews and Greeks alike—the necessity of repenting from sin and turning to God, and of having faith in our Lord Jesus.

22 "And now I am bound by the Spirit to go to Jerusalem. I don't know what awaits me, **23** except that the Holy Spirit tells me in city after city that jail and suffering lie ahead. **24** But my life is worth nothing to me unless I use it for finishing the work assigned me by the Lord Jesus—the work of telling others the Good News about the wonderful grace of God.

25 "And now I know that none of you to whom I have preached the Kingdom will ever see me again. **26** I declare today that I have been faithful. If anyone suffers eternal death, it's not my fault, **27** for I didn't shrink from declaring all that God wants you to know.

28 "So guard yourselves and God's people. Feed and shepherd God's flock—his church, purchased with his own blood—over which the Holy Spirit has appointed you as elders. **29** I know that false teachers, like vicious wolves, will come in among you after I leave, not sparing the flock. **30** Even some men from your own group will rise up and distort the truth in order to draw a following. **31** Watch out! Remember the three years I was with you—my constant watch and care over you night and day, and my many tears for you.

32 "And now I entrust you to God and the message of his grace that is able to build you up and give you an inheritance with all those he has set apart for himself.

33 "I have never coveted anyone's silver or gold or fine clothes. **34** You know that these hands of mine have worked to supply my own needs and even the needs of those who were with me. **35** And I have been a constant example of how you can help those in need by working hard. You should remember the words of the Lord Jesus: **'It is more blessed to give than to receive.'**"

36 When he had finished speaking, he knelt and prayed with them. **37** They all cried as they embraced and kissed him good-bye. **38** They were sad most of all because he had said that they would never see him again. Then they escorted him down to the ship.

Paul wants to get to Jerusalem in time for the festival of Pentecost – which had become an important feast for the Christians, for it was during a festival of Pentecost that God pour out the Holy Spirit on the believers. So to save time he took a faster ship that bypassed Ephesus and harbored at Miletus about 30 miles away. When he got to Miletus on the shore of the Mediterranean Sea, he sent a message to the elders of the church at Ephesus to meet him. There he spoke to them and Luke was present. Luke recorded what he remembers of Paul’s talk to the elders. It would be Paul’s farewell speech to them for he felt that he would never see them again. In his talk to them he reminds them of his care for them, his work, his goal, and his example implying that they should follow what he has done. He also warns them, exhorts them, and entrusts them to God. Then He prays with them before they share their tearful good-byes.



In a sense what we have here is a pastor’s heart and his parting words to his congregation.

A pastor was leaving his area and was saying farewell to his congregation at the Church doors for the last time. He shook the hand of an elderly lady as she walked out. She said "Your successor won't be as good as you." "Nonsense", said the pastor, in a flattered tone. "No, really", said the old lady, "I've been here under five different ministers, and each new one has been worse than the last."

In other messages from Acts we looked at the First Church in Jerusalem and the model it is for us. We also looked at the Church at Antioch and the model that church showed us. We also looked at Paul and his conversion to Christ. This morning we are going to look at Paul's message to the elders of Ephesus and the model that Paul's life shows us to follow:

1. Paul's attitudes and Aims

a. Humility and endurance in doing the Lord's Work

(v19-20) I have done the Lord's work humbly and with many tears. I have endured the trials that came to me from the plots of the Jews. I never shrank back from telling you what you needed to hear, either publicly or in your homes.

The model Paul shows us here is to do the Lord's work with humility and compassion; endure trials & persecution that come along with that; and never hesitate to tell others anything that will be helpful to them.

b. Faithfulness in declaring God's Word

(V26 & 27) I declare today that I have been faithful. If anyone suffers eternal death, it's not my fault, for I didn't shrink from declaring all that God wants you to know.

We should faithfully share the gospel & all that God wants others to know. Notice also that it was God who was working in and through Paul for Paul declared all that God wants known.

c. An example of helping those in need

(V33-35) "I have never coveted anyone's silver or gold or fine clothes. You know that these hands of mine have worked to supply my own needs and even the needs of those who were with me. And I have been a constant example of how you can help those in need by working hard. You should remember the words of the Lord Jesus: 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.'"

Do not covet worldly things they are only temporary things. Yet, be responsible and work hard to supply your own needs, the needs of those you are responsible for, and so that you may help people in need.

Jesus said, "it is more blessed to give than to receive." You will find that to be true. I'm sure in a few weeks we will hear from those who went on the mission trip to W. Virginia. What we usually hear from them and this year will not be different, is that while they went to bless others, they were blessed – more blessed. For indeed, it is more blessed to give than to receive.

Paul: Humble, endurance, as he faithfully declared God's Word, and an example of helping those in need.

2. Paul's message

(V21, 24, 25, 27) I have had one message for Jews and Greeks alike—the necessity of repenting from sin and turning to God, and of having faith in our Lord Jesus... my life is worth nothing to me unless I use it for finishing the work assigned me by the Lord Jesus—the work of telling others the Good News about the wonderful grace of God...I have preached the Kingdom... I didn't shrink from declaring all that God wants you to know.

We have one message and it is the same for all alike: the necessity of repenting from sin, turning to God, and having faith in Jesus.

Acts 20:22-24

"And now I am bound by the Spirit to go to Jerusalem. I don't know what awaits me, except that the Holy Spirit tells me in city after city that jail and suffering lie ahead. But my life is worth nothing to me unless I use it for finishing the work assigned me by the Lord Jesus—the work of telling others the Good News about the wonderful grace of God.

V23b-24 THE MESSAGE:

The Holy Spirit has let me know repeatedly and clearly that there are hard times and imprisonment ahead. But that matters little. What matters most to me is to finish what God started: the job the Master Jesus gave me of letting everyone I meet know all about this incredibly extravagant generosity of God.

What matters little to Paul? His own life. He was facing suffering, jail or worse, but he says, that mattered little to him. What matter most to Paul? Telling others the Good News about the wonderful grace of God for salvation.

What matters most in your life? Compare it with Paul's statement in v24. Paul lived to make the incredible extravagant generosity of God's grace known to as many as he could.

3. Paul's method

(v21, 25, 31, 34-35) I never shrank back from **telling** you what you needed to hear, either **publicly** or in your **homes**...I ...**preached** the Kingdom ... **Watch out!** Remember the three years I was with you—my constant **watch and care** over you night and day, and my many tears for you... You know ...I have been a **constant example** of how you can help those in need by working hard.

- He spoke to people publicly & privately in homes: Telling, testifying / witnessing
- Preaching

- Warning, not being judgmental, but warning with constant concern - watch and care
- Constant example especially by ministering to those in need. That's when we witness with actions instead of words or in addition to words.

4. The difficulties and dangers the church will face

(v29-30) I know that **false teachers**, like vicious wolves, will come in among you after I leave, **not sparing the flock**. Even some **men from your own group will rise up and distort the truth** in order to draw a following.

Paul has already mentioned the difficulties he will face; here he mentions the difficulties that the church will face. False teachers, persecution, and apostasy. There are false teachers today who want to use the sheep instead of love and care for the sheep. There are teachers and preachers today who claim to be of our group and may have been at one time, yet now they distort the truth. The enemy uses them to confuse, cause dissension, and destroy. What do we do?

5. Paul's advice of how to deal with these dangers:

(V28, 31-32) "**So guard yourselves and God's people**. Feed and shepherd God's flock—his church, purchased with his own blood—over which the Holy Spirit has appointed you as elders. ... **Watch out!** Remember the three years I was with you—my constant watch and care over you night and day, and my many tears for you.

"And now I **entrust you to God and the message of his grace** that is able to build you up and give you an inheritance with all those he has set apart for himself.

Guard yourself and God's people: Church leaders have to guard themselves as well as the congregation of God's people. This is why it is so important for you to pray for your leaders. They must keep watch over their lives so they can keep watch over the congregation. They will be the first line of attack by the vicious wolves that I previously mentioned. Before the flock can be protected, the Shepherds must protect themselves.

They keep watch over the congregation by following the instruction of Paul to feed and shepherd the church – guide, direct, feed, protect, help them grow in the faith. Why? Because they were purchased with Christ own blood; and a second reason is that the leaders were appointed, not by Paul, not by the church, but by the Holy Spirit.

Paul's final warning is, "**Watch out!**" - Be alert (literally, "keep awake"). We can never keep our guard down because the vicious enemy is always around, always looking for victims.

(According to the Life Application Bible Commentary) This is why it is important to be a part of a church. The church leaders' major role is to guard the flock that is to: watch, make decisions, and protect the church from everything that comes against it: sin, laziness, deception, distraction, disaster. One of the major benefits of believers

putting themselves under the leadership of a church elder is that they receive not just instruction or correction but protection as well.

The final thing Paul says sounds more like a blessing: I entrust you to God and the message of His grace.

Entrust yourselves to God and His grace. That grace, Paul says is “Able to build you up and give you an inheritance with all those God has set apart (sanctified) for Himself.” Trust God and live in grace and give away grace.

What mattered most to Paul is a model showing us what must matter most to us: Telling others the Good News about the wonderful grace of God for salvation.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nPIOkdNL-QQ>