

Bibles???

The Word of God is the Absolute Truth and the Final Authority

Turn your bibles with me to Acts 20 –

Here we are going to see Paul's message to the elders of Ephesus

The significance of this is that for much of the book of Acts, we always find Paul's speeches as he evangelized to Jews and Greeks or we find his speeches whenever he is defending himself – we will see this later on in the book of Acts.

However, what makes this speech notable is that his audience – will be believers.

He is going to show them his attitude toward ministry

We are going to see his heart toward God, toward the church, toward the lost and toward himself.

Let's pray...

[Act 20:17-38 NKJV] 17 From Miletus he sent to Ephesus and called for the elders of the church.

In our study last week, we learned was on a mission to go to Jerusalem.

And as he made his way down the coast of present day Turkey – as he was island hopping and going from peninsula to peninsula – the scriptures point out that Paul decided to bypass Ephesus.

Now, Ephesus was the place where Paul spent the longest amount of time –

He established a church there –

I am pretty sure Paul wanted to go there – however, he couldn't –

Time did not allow him to.

You see church,

As Paul visited the churches in Greece and Macedonia – he had collected a much needed offering for the church in Jerusalem.

So there was a sense of urgency on his part to make his way to Jerusalem – so that he could deliver the aid.

There is another reason that he bypassed going to Ephesus, at the end of our study last week, we saw that in verse 16 – Paul wanted to get to Jerusalem by the Day of Pentecost.

Now, Luke tells us that Paul celebrated the Passover in Philippi (verse 6 tells us that)

That means that he has 50 days to travel 1000 miles.

Remember, “Pent” in Pentecost means 50

50 days after Passover.

And if we look closely from verse 6 to verse 17 where we are now, Luke is very thorough in describing how many days he stayed in each place.

Luke tells us that Paul left after the Feast of Unleavened Bread (7 days)

Then he tells us that Paul joined the other guys in Troas after 5 days – and they stayed there 7 more days

And then Luke provides a day by day account as they went from one place to the next – and if you add all the days together – we are around day 24

Sp Paul only has 26 more days to get to Jerusalem – and he is not even half way there.

That is why he decided to bypass Ephesus.

He was never going to make it to Jerusalem on time – so he sends one of his men to gather the elders of Ephesus.

Now, when we think of elders today, we think of the guys that make the decisions in the day to day operations of the church.

However, the word elder that is used here, is the same word for overseer, for shepherd – it is where we get our word for pastor.

So what we have here – is the first pastor's conference

This is Paul's last instructions to them, his last chance to give them one last word of encouragement, one last chance to help them finish their course as Christians well.

Paul knows he is not going to see them again – so this is his farewell to them.

He has called them together – one last time to encourage them and say goodbye to them.

18 And when they had come to him, he said to them: "You know, from the first day that I came to Asia, in what manner I always lived among you, 19 "serving the Lord with all humility, with many tears and trials which happened to me by the plotting of the Jews;

So, Paul starts by reminding them who he is.

He wants them to remember exactly how he's lived while he was with them.

How he lived ALL THE TIME – not only on Sunday morning or during church services.

I stopped counting how many times someone has told me that the reason they don't follow Jesus is because a Christian they knew offended them in some manner – so they have determined that they don't want to do anything with Christianity.

And usually our response is to tell them that they should put their eyes on Jesus and not on people

But the truth is, we shouldn't back off from the power that comes by the example we set.

Paul was constantly telling people to follow his example:

[1Co 11:1 NKJV] 1 Imitate me, just as I also [imitate] Christ.

[2Th 3:7-9 NKJV] 7 For you yourselves know how you ought to follow us, for we were not disorderly among you; 8 nor did we eat anyone's bread free of charge, but worked with labor and toil night and day, that we might not be a burden to any of you, 9 not because we do not have authority, but to make ourselves an example of how you should follow us.

Paul is not saying – look at me as an example instead of looking at Jesus.

He is saying, look at me as an example of someone who follows Jesus.

I had you make a note of - **And Paul served with all humility**

Remember, during His ministry – Jesus called out the religious hypocrites – why because they saw themselves as religious rock stars, they wanted people to serve them, to honor them.

“Look at how I pray, look at how religious I am”

Paul was the complete opposite of the religious rulers –

He served not to draw attention to himself – but to draw others to Christ.

He served not because he wanted his will to be done – he served because he desired to do God's will.

And verse 19 tells us that he served with many tears –

Does this mean that Paul was a crybaby?

Do we find in the scriptures instances where was Paul crying when he was shipwrecked, or the times when he is imprisoned or when he is beaten or when he gets kicked out of the synagogues?

No –

Because the tears were not for himself, but for others.

We have examples of him grieving for others as he disciplines them

When he wrote to the church in Corinth -

[2Co 2:4 NKJV] 4 For out of much affliction and anguish of heart I wrote to you, with many tears, not that you should be grieved, but that you might know the love which I have so abundantly for you.

Turn to Phil 3

Here we have him grieving for the enemies.

[Phi 3:17-19 NKJV] 17 Brethren, join in following my example, and note those who so walk, as you have us for a pattern. 18 For many walk, of whom I have told you often, and now tell you even weeping, [that they are] the enemies of the cross of Christ: 19 whose end [is] destruction, whose god [is their] belly, and [whose] glory [is] in their shame--who set their mind on earthly things.

Jesus taught us to love our enemies –

Unfortunately, many times we find ourselves cheering when our enemies fall instead of grieving and weeping of for them.

20 "how I kept back nothing that was helpful, but proclaimed it to you, and taught you publicly and from house to house, 21 "testifying to Jews, and also to Greeks, repentance toward God and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ.

Paul was not afraid to tell the people what they needed to hear.

He wasn't afraid of their responses or losing them as his friends.

That is how he was able to say – he kept back nothing that was helpful.

And the message he proclaimed – was the gospel.

He proclaimed it in the synagogues to the Jews and to the Gentiles

The house to house that is mentioned here could be a reference that the church in Ephesus was made up of smaller home churches – they didn't have a centralized

location where they met – and Paul took his ministry from one home church to the next.

22 "And see, now I go bound in the spirit to Jerusalem, not knowing the things that will happen to me there, 23 "except that the Holy Spirit testifies in every city, saying that chains and tribulations await me.

Here we see Paul's determination to get to Jerusalem –

Almost as if the Holy Spirit has a chain around him and is pulling him to Jerusalem

And as Paul would go from city to city, a word of prophesy would come to him – where he would be told of some hardships that were awaiting him in Jerusalem.

Next Wednesday, when we get to chapter 21 – we are going to see an example of this as we see a prophet by the name of Agabus that come to warn Paul of the dangers he will face in Jerusalem.

Here is a question to think about –

Would we have continued on to Jerusalem, knowing that danger awaited us there?

Would we have succumbed to fear?

Paul had a greater fear of the Lord and was able to stay on course.

24 "But none of these things move me; nor do I count my life dear to myself, so that I may finish my race with joy, and the ministry which I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the gospel of the grace of God.

As we read this –

It is important to understand that Paul didn't have a death wish.

What he is declaring here in verse 24 is that he didn't allow anything in his life that he viewed as too precious/too dear to give up.

Therefore he continued to press on – no matter what.

You see, Paul had in mind the idea that your life is not your own.

Your life belongs to Jesus.

You are dear to the Lord and He has designed a course for you.

He is waiting at the end.

He has promised to complete the work He has begun in you and that is why you will finish with joy.

25 "And indeed, now I know that you all, among whom I have gone preaching the kingdom of God, will see my face no more. 26 "Therefore I testify to you this day that I [am] innocent of the blood of all [men].

Turn with me to Ezekiel 3

I am going to show you what Paul is referring to here when he says that he is innocent of the blood of all [men]

[Eze 3:17-19 NKJV] 17 "Son of man, I have made you a watchman for the house of Israel; therefore hear a word from My mouth, and give them warning from Me: 18 "When I say to the wicked, 'You shall surely die,' and you give him no warning, nor speak to warn the wicked from his wicked way, to save his life, that same wicked [man] shall die in his iniquity; but his blood I will require at your hand. 19 "Yet, if you warn the wicked, and he does not turn from his wickedness, nor from his wicked way, he shall die in his iniquity; but you have delivered your soul.

These are sobering words we find here in Ezekiel 3

To think that the blood of others might be required of us if we do not warn them.

Paul is declaring that he's done his part.

He's given them plenty of warnings.

He's free from their blood.

If someone died without knowing Jesus it was not because Paul had slacked-off in his mission or ministry.

It was on account of their own rejection of the Lord's free offer of salvation.

27 "For I have not shunned to declare to you the whole counsel of God.

Paul could leave them with a clear conscience because he knew that he taught them the whole counsel of God.

Remember, we read in Acts 19 – that Paul taught at the school of Tyrannus for two years.

That means he taught them from Genesis to Malachi – that is what they had back then.

The whole council of God means – all of it.

Not just a sermon with a bible verse sprinkled here and there.

It is not a sermon that starts off with a bible verse and then the preacher goes off on a tangent and preaches to the audience what they want to hear.

The real calling of a preacher is to simply allow the Word of God to speak for itself and let it declare its own power.

28 "Therefore take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood.

I want you to notice Paul's instruction to the elders –

Now, before you say – he is talking to pastors – so I am going to tune out

I want to remind you that as long as we are living and breathing, God is using us to lead someone to a deeper relationship with Christ.

So this includes all of us

Take heed – it means pay close to attention to –

- To yourself
- Flock

An elder / overseer must have his eyes open first to himself and then to others

He can't be in the business of picking specks out of people's eyes without taking the logs out of his own eyes first.

He can't spend all of his time watching out for others while completely ignoring his own spiritual condition.

He needs to make sure he's growing in grace & faith.

He can't take those he's leading any farther than he himself has gone.

Paul then tells the elders that they must shepherd the Church of God.

The flock doesn't belong to them – it belongs to God.

He's the Chief Shepherd & the sheep are His.

The elders role is as under-shepherds who tend the flock FOR Him.

Notice - Who made them shepherds? – the Holy Spirit. God did

They did not appoint themselves

They didn't earn the position by attending seminary

They were called by God & set in their office by divine appointment.

To feed, to lead and to protect the flock

29 "For I know this, that after my departure **savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock. 30 "Also from among yourselves men will rise up, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after themselves.**

Paul is speaking both by experience and prophecy here.

In many of the churches that he had planted, as soon as he left, false teachers appeared among the flock and then they started attacking the flock – they started to bring division, they started to lead the flock astray by preaching false teachings.

Paul knew it was going to happen in Ephesus.

So he warns the elders to be on guard and watch out for false teachers – as they would come from the outside as well as within.

And he likens these false teachers as savage wolves.

One of the greatest concerns of a shepherd is predators.

Wolves and wild dogs would hover around the edges of the flock – waiting for the chance to take off with a lamb.

31 "Therefore watch, and remember that for three years I did not cease to warn everyone night and day with tears.

Paul is asking the elders to have the same concern for the people of God – that he himself had.

Again, he wants them to imitate him – to shepherd the flock the way he shepherded the flock

32 "So now, brethren, I commend you to God and to the word of His grace, which is able to build you up and give you an inheritance among all those who are sanctified.

Paul knows that there are no better hands to place people in than God's hands.

The same goes for our children and even those that we serve.

We feed them, we warn them, we love them, but ultimately, we must say, "God, their Yours"

That is what Paul is doing here – he spent 3 years of his life pouring into them – he knows that they are going to face obstacles – so he commends them to God.

I had you make a note of the word of His grace...

Sometimes we tend to focus so much on the parts of the Bible that talk about what we're supposed to do for God, that we forget that our lives should be focused on what God wants to do for us. That's grace.

And when we truly understand grace – when we grasp what He has already done for us – when we realize that we are loved unconditionally - that is when we begin to grow and mature in Christ.

33 "I have coveted no one's silver or gold or apparel. 34 "Yes, you yourselves know that these hands have provided for my necessities, and for those who were with me. 35 "I have shown you in every way, by laboring like this, that you must support the weak. And remember the words of the Lord Jesus, that He said, 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.' "

Apparently there had been some people who had claimed that Paul was out to make money (2Cor.12:17).

After all, he's on his way to Jerusalem with a collection he's taken from all the churches. He's going to give the money to the poor in Jerusalem.

And Paul reminds them of his motive for ministry -

He wasn't in it for himself, but for God's glory and for the building up of God's people.

36 And when he had said these things, he knelt down and prayed with them all.

37 Then they all wept freely, and fell on Paul's neck and kissed him, 38

sorrowing most of all for the words which he spoke, that they would see his face no more. And they accompanied him to the ship.

Here we see that Paul's heart and how the elders of Ephesus responded to him.

He prayed with them all and notice that it says that all wept bitterly.

That is how much love the people of Ephesus had toward Paul because that is the same love that he had shown them.

And I pray that this will be the love that we have for one another.

Let's pray...

To Receive Christ do the following:

Admit, "I am a sinner."

Confess and be willing to turn from your sin.

Believe, by faith that Jesus Christ died for you on the cross.

Receive, through prayer, Jesus Christ into your heart and receive eternal life.

Dear Lord Jesus,

I know that I am a sinner and need Your forgiveness. I believe that You died on the cross for my sins. Please forgive me for my sins and cleanse me by Your blood. I accept You by faith as my personal Lord and Savior. Give me a thirst for Your Word and Help me to follow You all of my days. In Jesus' name I pray, Amen.

[Num 6:24-26 NLT] 24 '

May the LORD bless you and protect you.

May the LORD smile on you and be gracious to you.

May the LORD show you his favor and give you his peace.'



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