

Paul and the Ephesian Elders Part 2

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 25 February 2024

Preacher: Randy Hunter

[0 : 00] 20. Acts chapter 20. We started last week with Paul addressing the Ephesian elders.

He's kind of giving them a final farewell, his parting words, and he has told them, this is the last time you'll see me. And so he is preparing to go to Jerusalem, and he knows when he gets there that he's going to suffer persecution.

He knows that imprisonment and other things waits for him, and so he is saying goodbye to the Ephesian elders for the last time. And so we'll start, we'll pick up in verse 17 and read the whole context, and then we'll review a little bit about what we talked about last week, and then move on with the remaining part of his address to the Ephesian elders.

So verse 17, and from Miletus he sent to Ephesus and called the elders of the church. And when they were come to him, he said unto them, you know, from the first day that I came into Asia, after what manner I have been with you at all seasons, serving the Lord with all humility of mind and with many tears and temptations, which befell me by the lying in wait of the Jews, and how I kept back nothing that was profitable unto you, but have showed you and have taught you publicly and from house to house, testifying both to the Jews and also to the Greeks, repentance toward God and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ.

And now, behold, I go bound in the Spirit unto Jerusalem, not knowing the things that shall befall me there, save that the Holy Ghost witnesses in every city, saying that bonds and afflictions abide me.

[1 : 48] But none of these things move me, neither count I my life dear unto myself, so that I might finish my course with joy, and the ministry which I have received of the Lord Jesus to testify the gospel of the grace of God.

And now, behold, I know that ye all among whom I have gone preaching the kingdom of God shall see my face no more. Wherefore, I take you to record this day that I am pure from the blood of all men, for I have not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of God.

Take heed, therefore, unto yourselves and to all the flock over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood. For I know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter among you, not sparing the flock.

Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things to draw away disciples after them. Therefore, watch and remember that by the space of three years I cease not to warn everyone night and day with tears.

And now, brethren, I commend you to God and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up and to give you an inheritance among all them which are sanctified. I have coveted no man's silver or gold or apparel.

[3 : 07] Yea, ye yourselves know that these hands have ministered unto my necessities and to them that were with me. I have showed you all things how that so laboring you ought to support the weak and to remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he said it is more blessed to give than to receive.

And when he had thus spoken, he kneeled down and prayed with them all. And they all wept sore and fell on Paul's neck and kissed him, sorrowing most of all for the words which he spake that they should see his face no more.

And they accompanied him under the ship. And so Paul is giving his final address to the Ephesian elders in person. Now, he'll write a letter to them later from prison.

One of the last letters he will write as he goes through different imprisonments, he'll write to the Ephesians a letter. And you can read that.

It's preserved for us in scripture. But he will write to them a letter. But this is the last time he will see them. And so he is giving them his parting words. Remember, Ephesus was the place he spent the longest of any time in his ministry.

[4 : 10] A lot of places he would go in for a few weeks or so, and then he would usually get run out. But some places like Corinth, he stayed for a while. And then Ephesus, he stayed for about three years. So this was the place he kind of stayed the longest in his ministry.

And he had an effective ministry there. And a church was established. And this church went on for a long period of time. Later on, John will write to them in Revelation.

One of the seven churches that's mentioned in Revelation is the church at Ephesus. It's the first one that John will write to. And you'll see when you read that, think about what Paul told the elders here.

And some of those things were happening that Paul promised would happen. And that was probably 35 years or so later when John wrote to the church that Paul is writing here now.

And so within a span of about 35 or 40 years, those things that Paul said were going to happen to beware of came to pass. But this was a good church.

[5 : 13] This was a church that Paul spent a lot of time with. Spent a lot of time there. And he is meeting with the elders. And notice in verse, if you look in verses 18 through 21, Chuck Swindoll and his commentary on Acts gave five things that Paul talks about.

He overcame certain pitfalls along the way. And he's encouraging the Ephesian elders to do the same. And those five things he points out was Paul overcame the test of laziness.

In verse 18, he's talking about being with them in all seasons. It was an everyday thing all the time. Day after day, Paul was consistent. He didn't give in to the pitfall of laziness. Also, he mentioned he overcame the test of pride.

Verse 19, serving the Lord with all humility. And then he overcame the test of discouragement. Verse 19, the lying in wait of the Jews. That's actually the also could mean plotting against him.

The Jews were plotting against him. Also in number four, he overcame the test of fear. Verse 20, I kept back nothing. I didn't shrink away or I didn't draw back from anything.

[6 : 26] I gave you everything you needed. I didn't shrink away from the responsibilities he had. I didn't draw back. But I gave you everything that was profitable to you. And then the fifth thing he mentioned was he overcame the test of efficiency.

Anything that was profitable. Anything that helps them or confers a benefit. And so those were five things that Chuck Swindoll picked up on in his commentary that summarized what Paul was saying to the Ephesian elders that I thought went pretty well.

The pitfalls that Paul avoided. The pitfall of laziness. The pitfall of humility or pride. The pitfall of discouragement, fear, and inefficiency.

And those are five things we all struggle with. Right? Those are not just a thing that Paul had to deal with and fight against. Those are things that we all have to fight against. We all have to guard against laziness.

Right? It's very easy to do the easy thing and be lazy. Right? It takes work to get about our daily lives. It takes work to study the scriptures efficiently. It takes work to do anything.

[7 : 31] And so there's always that pitfall of laziness that we have to battle against. There's that pitfall of pride. Paul said he was serving the Lord with all humility. Lowliness of mind. And so that's something that we'll see something happen that's good in our lives.

And it's very easy to get prideful about it. And forget that we are what we are by the grace of God. And so that's something we all have to face. And discouragement. Think about how hard Paul was working day after day after day only to have people lying in wait, plotting against him.

And so that's something that we have to battle. You know, you see things you want to see done. You pray for things and you don't get the results right away. Or you don't get the results like you'd like to see them.

Or you want to see people saved and they reject the gospel time after time. It's very easy to get discouraged. So that's something we all battle. Fear. It's very easy to battle fear and to be overcome with it.

Fear of people. Fear of consequences. Fear of those things. And also, it's also the test of inefficiency. It's also a battle that we have not to do things to the best of our ability through the power of the Holy Spirit.

[8 : 39] To kind of do things halfway. But Paul overcame that pitfall. And so these were things that he pointed out to the Ephesian elders. And then he's going to go from his ministry to them.

That's what he's doing there in the first few verses. He's summarizing his ministry to them. And now he's going to turn it to them and say, now, because of that, and as a result, he's kind of going from being their mentor, their spiritual leader, to now he's going to put the responsibility to them.

Now it's your turn. I've lived it before you. I've lived it consistently. I've done all I can to be an example for you. Now I'm leaving.

It's time for you to take over. So that's basically what's happening in verses 25. And now, behold, I know that ye all among whom I have gone preaching the kingdom of God shall see my face no more.

Wherefore, I take you to record this day that I am pure from the blood of all men. For I have not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of God. So he's summarizing what he's done for them. He's been faithful.

[9 : 49] He's told them the whole counsel of God. He's lived it before them daily, consistently for three years. Take heed, therefore. There's that word, therefore. Remember, anytime you see the word, therefore, find out what it's there for.

So Paul is saying, as a result of all of this, take heed. Watch yourselves. Be on guard is what he's telling them. Take heed, therefore, unto yourself.

And so think because he's going to tell them all the responsibilities that are on them. But the first thing they have to guard is themselves. They have to take heed. They have to be on guard for themselves.

That they don't encounter some of those same pitfalls. Right? The pitfall of pride. The pitfall of laziness. The pitfall of inefficiency. Those things. Be on guard.

Beware. Be alert. This is take heed. This idea of taking heed. He'll tell them, watch. In verse 31. It's a command that they would give a soldier to not fall asleep.

[10 : 52] It would be someone who's a century. Someone who is a guard. Who is watching over a certain outpost. It's a command to not fall asleep. Be alert. Be on guard. Be watchful for things that are happening.

He says, so take heed, therefore, unto yourselves. Remember, Paul told the Corinthians the same thing. He's talking about, I keep under my body and bring it under subjection.

Lest while I've preached on others, I myself become a castaway. That word castaway there carries the idea of being disqualified or being unusable. No longer usable in the service of the Lord.

And so Paul realized if he was going to preach to these people, if he was going to teach these people, he had to live it out. He had to set the example. And he had to keep watch over himself or he could do something that would render him not useful.

Be disqualified. Because how can someone teach someone to do something or not to do something? And they're going right opposite of what they're teaching other people to do. And so Paul was aware of that.

[11 : 50] So he's saying, take heed, therefore, unto yourselves and to all the flock over which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers. And we talked about that word last week. Overseers is the word episkopos, where we get the word bishop from.

And Paul lays out the qualifications of a bishop in 1 Timothy chapter 3 and in Titus chapter 1. But that Greek word episkopos, if you break it up, epi means above or over.

And skopos is the idea of seeing or viewing. So you're seeing over. You're viewing over something. And so you're watching. You're taking guard. You're being someone who watches out for their care.

Watches out for their safety. And so that's what he's telling them. Take heed unto yourselves and to all the flock over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers to feed the church of God.

To feed there the idea of be their shepherd. Shepherd them. Be their pastor. Shepherd them. The word pastor is the word shepherd. And this is the verb form of that word. Feed them.

[12 : 51] Shepherd them. Be their pastor. And so think about what a shepherd does. The shepherd looks for the best places for them to eat. He looks for the best food sources. He looks for the most secure places.

He looks for the best watering holes. He looks for the places that's less likely to be a place where wolves can come in. He's always on guard. He's always protecting.

He's always watching. He's always leading. It's a full-time responsibility. And it's a lot of responsibility. And Paul is trying to get the heaviness of their responsibility to weigh in on them to the point where he says, The Holy Ghost hath made you overseers to feed the church of God which he hath purchased with his own blood.

So think about the price that God paid to get the church. Now here's something in passing, but there's a reference to the deity of Christ. If you read too fast, you'll miss it.

But notice that again. It said, The church of God which he, God, hath purchased with his, God's, own blood. So there's a reference to the deity of Christ right there.

[13 : 58] Jesus is God manifested in the flesh. And so there's a reference to his deity. But it cost him his own blood to purchase the church.

And so with high cost comes high responsibility, high accountability. And so think about the accountability that's weighing on these Ephesian elders to be told, You're guarding a group of people.

You're overseeing a group of people. You're protecting a group of people that cost God himself the blood of his own son to purchase. And so with high price comes high responsibility.

With high responsibility comes high accountability. And they'll answer to God for how they fulfilled their role. That's why Paul encourages people.

He says he didn't encourage many people to be teachers because that increases their accountability. That increases their responsibility. And every time you're in a position where you're watching over and caring for the souls of people, You're giving an account to God for that.

[15 : 02] And so the price, the accountability is very, very high. And Paul is trying to get that to these people. That so high that God purchased the church with his own blood.

So that gives you an idea of the level of accountability and responsibility that goes with it. And so now Paul is going to encourage them and also warn them. For I know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock.

And so here again is a reference to the shepherding aspect of protecting. Because one of the number one enemies of a sheep is a wolf. A sheep has no system of defense.

They are some of the most defenseless creatures that you'll ever see. In fact, if one of them gets turned over, laid down on their back, they can't even get themselves up. They're one of the most helpless, defenseless creatures.

And when we're called sheep in the Bible, it's not really a compliment. Because they're not real smart. They're not defense. They don't have much defense. They're basically just an animal that needs a leader, that needs a protector.

[16 : 09] And so one of their main enemies is a wolf. And a wolf is very sneaky. A wolf is very powerful. A wolf is very fast. A wolf can come in and do damage in a matter of no time.

And so Paul is warning them, using that metaphor of a wolf, to warn them of dangers that they need to protect the sheep from. And so he's also not only warning them of dangers from the outside, which is always you got to watch out for, because there's things that there's things that's going to want to come into the church to attack and to to destroy it from the outside.

But then he's going to warn them about stuff from within. Notice what he says. A lot of times the enemies don't come from without the church.

They come from inside the church. Someone raises up inside the church and starts spreading a bunch of things. It could be rumors. It could be lies.

It could be false teaching. It could be all kinds of things that a person raises up inside the church. And notice he's saying from your own selves. So we're not just talking about ordinary church members.

[17 : 28] We're talking about from in amongst this group of elders, in amongst this group of leaders, this group of pastors, this group of bishops that God has set aside to be the leaders, the protectors of the church.

Within that group could come someone spreading perverse things. So not just not just ordinary church member from the church of Ephesus, but one of the leaders that Paul is talking to.

He's warning them that within this group that he's talking to, somebody could rise up teaching perverse or things that are contrary to sound doctrine. So he's warning them.

That's why there's power in numbers. That's why it's good that there were multiple of them, not just one, because you have accountability. Each one could keep each other accountable. Each one could keep each other on track.

If one hears of another one starting to go down a road of of incorrect teaching, they can say, you know, this is not right. You need to correct this. And so that's why there's there's power in numbers.

[18 : 26] Numbers are a good thing a lot of times. And so Paul is warning them that things could come from within. And and you see that happening in churches today.

All of a sudden, somebody will come up with some some new thing that no one has heard of or some new teaching and start to permeate churches and churches split or churches leave the tradition of the gospel that they've been built upon.

And that happens a lot of places. You'd be amazed at some of the stuff that's being taught in churches nowadays. And some some things are kind of not surprising, but some things are.

But you'd be amazed at what is being taught in some churches and is causing division. It's causing churches to split because people are grabbing hold of some new thing or grabbing hold of some false teaching that's permeating the church from from the outside.

That's coming in and then working its way through the church. A lot of that's happening today. You'd be you'd be amazed. So notice what he says in verse 31. Therefore, watch and remember that by the space of three years, I cease not to warn every one of you night and day with tears.

[19 : 36] And now, brethren, I commend you to God and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up and to give you an inheritance among all them which are sanctified.

I have coveted no man, silver or gold or apparel. And so he's telling you he's telling them three years. I've led by example. Now I'm commending you to the grace of God.

Now you take over. You carry the mantle. You do it. So he's he's passing the leadership roles on to them. He's showing he's telling them I've led by example. I've given you the pattern to go by.

Now you do that. And he's commending them to God's grace. He said, I have coveted no man's silver or gold or apparel. Yea, you know yourselves that these hands have ministered unto my necessities and to them that were with me.

Remember, Paul's a tent maker. And a lot of times he would go into a city and he would work. Even while he was in ministry, he would work as a tent maker. Remember, a few chapters ago, he worked with Aquila and Priscilla as a tent maker.

[20 : 41] And so he labored with his hands. He just didn't do ministry. He labored outside of that as someone who was a tent maker. And he used that to meet his needs.

He didn't always depend on money coming in from from other places because at this time, the missionary support wasn't like it is now. It wasn't it wasn't like today where missionaries can be funded from a whole different number of churches.

And so they can give their full selves to the gospel and full time and energy to ministering to the people they're serving in those particular mission fields. Things were different back then.

So he had to work along with that. And so he would he would minister and he would also work as a tent maker to provide for his his needs.

He said, I have showed you all things how that so laboring you ought to support the weak and to remember the words of the Lord Jesus. Now, he said it is more blessed to give than to receive.

[21 : 41] And he's telling them, he's like, you may have to do the same thing to support the weak. It may require you working with your hands just like he has in addition to the ministry that they're doing to help serve the weak or to serve those who are who are helpless.

And he quotes Jesus there was that is more blessed to give than to receive. And when he had spoken, thus spoken, he kneeled down and prayed with them all. And they all wept sore and fell on Paul's neck and kissed him, sorrowing most of all for the words which he spake that he that they should see his face no more.

And they accompanied him onto the ship. And so the reality was hitting them. He's leaving us for the last time. They've been with Paul for three years. So imagine someone that had had the life transformation that Paul had had through the power of Christ and through the power of the gospel.

He had had his life transformed. And now he became the leading apostle in the church. He had been commissioned face to face by the Lord Jesus himself on the Damascus road.

And he had met with the other apostles, with Peter and others. And he had been with this church for three years. And now they're realizing he's leaving and we're not going to see him anymore. And they realized what that meant.

[22 : 54] They meant that he's expecting to go probably be killed for the gospel when he gets to Jerusalem, at least imprisonment. But maybe even more than that, because back in verse 24, he said, but none of these things move me.

Neither count I my life dear unto myself so that I might finish my course with joy and the ministry which I have received to the Lord Jesus to testify. I, the gospel of the grace of God.

So he said, these things don't move me. He knew he was going to be threatened. He knew he would be imprisoned. He knew he may be killed when he gets to Jerusalem. But he said, none of these things move me.

He said, neither count I my life dear unto myself so that I might finish my course with joy. And remember when he wrote 2 Timothy, that was probably the last letter Paul wrote before he died.

He said, I have fought a good fight. I've finished my course. So Paul accomplished what he set out to do. He finished his course. But he could face death with confidence.

[23 : 54] Death didn't scare him. He's like, I don't count my life dear unto myself. Remember when we studied Philippians, Paul said to depart and be with Christ is far better.

He just didn't say it would be better for me to go be with Christ. He said it would be far better to depart and to go be with Christ. And so he had no fear of death, no fear of going to see the Lord because he knew the Lord.

He knew what waited on him. And if you want something, if you want to read something encouraging, find some testimonies of people that knew the Lord and served the Lord for lots of years.

When they come down time to die, read some of their last words and be very encouraging to you. How that people, when it came time to, when they knew they were facing the end and they knew they had maybe hours or maybe even minutes left to live, how they could face death with confidence.

And that's what Paul was doing. He knew that going to Jerusalem may be a death sentence for him. But he said, I don't count my life dear to myself. And remember Philippians that we studied, he wrote from a Roman prison.

[25 : 01] And he said to depart and be with Christ will be far better. Not just better, but far better. So he didn't, he didn't fear, he didn't fear death. He didn't fear what might befall him.

He was ready to go be with the Lord. I was just looking this past week at the biography of D.L. Moody written by his son. And his son was there when D.L. Moody went to be with the Lord.

And after D.L. Moody had, his health had declined and he was getting ready to die. He said, this is the day I've been looking for. He said, this is my triumph. This is my coronation day.

There's no valley here. God's calling me. I must go. If this is death, it is sweet. He was ready to meet the Lord. And so he didn't have to fear death. And that's what, that's what Paul was, was doing here.

He, he didn't count his life dear to himself. He just wanted to finish his course with joy. And so that's, that was what motivated Paul more than his own safety, more than his own well-being.

[26 : 03] Next chapter, we're going to meet the prophet Agabus again. And he's going to tell Paul, you're going to be bound if you go to Jerusalem. You're going to be imprisoned if you go to Jerusalem. And Paul is knowing these things are going to happen.

He just wants to finish his course with joy. He values that. He values giving his life for the Lord more than his own personal safety, more than his own personal well-being.

And so that was, that was Paul's drive and determination to finish his course with joy. And so if you read 2 Timothy, you'll find out he did that. He said, I fought a good fight. I finished my course.

I've kept the faith. And so that was his parting words to Timothy, who coincidentally was actually a bishop in Ephesus for a while. And so this, it all comes, it'll all come full circle as Paul is leaving the Ephesian elders.

Now, Timothy will pastor in Ephesus for a while. And so Paul is, maybe Timothy could be here hearing this, and he's going to tell Timothy later on, I finished, finished my course.

[27 : 05] And so next time we'll see Paul going to Jerusalem. He's going to get there. We'll see what happens when he does. And things will begin to pick up, and we'll see what happens when Paul gets to Jerusalem starting next week.

Let's pray. Father, we thank you for your word. We thank you for the testimony of men like Paul who knew you, knew the dangers of what lay ahead if he were to be faithful to you.

But at the same time, he knew that his determination, his heart was to finish the course that you had given him. And when he writes to Timothy, the last letter he writes in 2 Timothy, he said, I finished my course.

May that be an example to us that Paul was not just one person. Paul was a Christian. He was a saved person.

And you're no respecter of persons. And the same grace that you gave to Paul, that he could face the end with confidence, that he could face the end with full assurance and a hunger and a desire to finish his course, you'll give that same grace to any and all of your people that hunger for it and that truly want to finish their course with joy and be obedient to the plan that you have for them.

[28 : 20] So I pray that you'd help us as your people to be faithful to what you have for us to do. May the desire of our heart, may the controlling desires of our heart be that of finishing our course with joy and being able to say, I have fought a good fight.

I finished my course. May we be faithful to the work that you have us to do. May we be faithful in whatever it is. It doesn't matter who people are or where they're at. If they're saved, they have something to do.

It could be just faithfully witnessing to the people around them. It could be working on a job somewhere and being a light and giving the gospel to people around them. It could be someone that's a shut in that doesn't really get to see many people, but they can pray.

They can be faithful in the word. They can be faithful to pray for others and to pray for those who are out in full-time service. We pray for each and every one here that we would know what you'd have for us to do and that we'd be faithful to it so that when it comes our time and we're facing our final days, we can know with confidence that we've finished the course that you've set for us.

Pray that you'd be in the service, be with those who sing and participate in the music, be with our pastor as he opens the word. May we be doers of the word, not just yours only. In Jesus' name, amen.