

Desperately Devoted to Gods Gospel - Word of Grace

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[0:00] If you would take your Bibles and turn to the book of Acts, chapter 20. If you're visiting with us, you can also pull out the black Bible in the chair in front of you.

Go towards the back, find page 110, 110. 110 you'll find Acts 20. We're going to start reading verse 17 through the end of the chapter, verse 38.

Again, Acts 20, 17 through 38. 20, 17 through 38.

I'll read the passage, then we'll begin our study. And from Miletus, Paul sent to Ephesus and called to him the elders of the church.

And when they had come to him, he said to them, You yourselves know from the first day that I set foot in Asia, how I was with you the whole time, serving the Lord with all humility, and with tears and with trials which came upon me through the plots of the Jews.

[1:17] How he did not shrink from declaring to you anything that was profitable, and teaching you publicly and from house to house, solemnly testifying to both Jews and Greeks of repentance toward God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ.

Now, behold, bound in spirit, I'm on my way to Jerusalem, not knowing what will happen to me there, except that the Holy Spirit solemnly testifies to me in every city, saying that bonds and afflictions await me.

But I do not consider my life of any account as dear to myself in order that I may finish my course in the ministry which I have received from the Lord Jesus to testify solemnly of the grace, excuse me, of the gospel, of the grace of God.

And now, behold, I know that all of you among whom I went about preaching the kingdom will see my face no more. Therefore, I testify to you this day that I am innocent, of the blood of all men. For I did not shrink from declaring to you the whole purpose of God. Verse 28. Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which he purchased with the blood of his own Son.

[2:39] I know that after my departure, savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock. And from among your own selves men will rise, speak imperverse things, draw away the disciples after them.

Therefore, be on the alerts, remembering that night and day for a period of three years, I did not cease to admonish each one with tears. For now I commend you to God and to the word of his grace, which is able to build up and to give the inheritance among all those who are sanctified. I have coveted no one's silver or gold or clothes. You yourselves know that these hands minister to my needs and to the men who are with me. And everything I showed you that by working hard in this manner, you must help the weak and remember the words of the Lord Jesus that he himself said, is more blessed to give and to receive.

And when he had said these things, he knelt down and prayed with them all. He began to weep aloud, embracing Paul. They repeatedly kissed him, grieving especially of the word which he had spoken that they should see his face no more.

And they were accompanying him to the ship. OregonLive.com has an article that reads, quote, Read the desperate letter, Nazi war criminal Adolf Eichmann wrote to save his own skin.

[4:16] Adolf Eichmann, to the very end, maintain he was merely following orders. In 1962, just before his execution, the Nazi war criminal wrote a letter in German to Israeli presidents in which he pled for his life.

The handwritten letter in which Eichmann tried to shift blame from his own murderous actions to those of his superiors, it was released this month for the International Holocaust Remembrance Day, which I think was celebrated on Thursday.

The New York Times provided an English translation. You can go online, Google Adolf Eichmann, you can read about his, what he did within the Nazis, as a commander in the Nazi army.

But listen to what he says here in this letter. I'm not going to read the whole thing, but just a small portion of it, like the end of it. Listen to what he says, quote, There is a need to draw a line between the leaders responsible and the people like me forced to serve as mere instruments in the hands of the leaders.

I was not a responsible leader, and as such do not feel myself guilty. I'm not able to recognize the court's ruling as just, and I ask your honor, Mr. President, to exercise your rights to grant pardons in order that the death penalty not be carried out.

[5:43] End quote. Well, he was hanged in 1962. Desperate. He was desperate to save his own skin.

Desperate means feeling, or showing, or involving a hopeless sense that a situation is so bad as it would be impossible to deal with. Eichmann desperately wanted to live, and not face the gallows. What are you feeling, or showing? What do you evolve with a hopeless sense that a situation is so bad as it would be impossible to deal with?

Are you desperate? Is there something or someone we should be desperate about? As a church, what should we be desperate over?

What should we just... The situation would be impossible without this. Our passage actually answers that question.

[7:03] As we come to this part in Acts, just do it. Just be who you are. May God use us to fulfill His mission. Here we will see, we must be desperately devoted to God's gospel word of grace.

This is where we will stand, and where we will fall as a church. Desperately devoted, passionately committed, intentionally driven to God's gospel word of grace.

The gospel word. A statement, short statement, God wants us to be desperately devoted to His gospel word. And you want to know why we're desperately devoted to God's gospel word?

We're desperately devoted to it because we see our own need of grace. We see our horrible sin.

We see our horrible thoughts and deeds and actions, the words coming out of our mouths. And we see how God should judge us and condemn us, and yet, He's gracious and kind.

[8:26] He loves. It's amazing. We see our need for grace, so we're desperately devoted to grace.

For us to mature, for us to have the assurance of God's love, for us to be protected from error and division, we must be a church that proclaims, teaches, and lives out God's gospel word of grace.

We proclaim it, we teach it, and we live it. We proclaim it, we teach it, we live it. It just comes out of us. It's just who we are.

There's another way to put it. In other words, there must be a church that embraces Jesus' words, that there's much more satisfaction to giving and receiving.

A church that follows Paul's example, and heeds Paul's exhortation. It's better, it's much more of a blessing, to give than receive.

[9:45] Is that not the essence of the gospel? I mean, God could have just wiped us all out, and said, I'm starting over.

Gee, Adam and Eve, forget it, I'm done. Jesus, Holy Spirit, okay, two thumbs up, we're in. Done. He doesn't.

God loves to give of himself. And you might say, well, how is it more of a blessing to God for him to give than receive?

He gives of himself because he ends up receiving the blessing, receiving the fact that he is glorified in all his goodness and his compassion, his gentleness, that he's a God who's so good and so kind to sinners when he doesn't need to be.

That's how he gets the blessing. That's how he gets satisfaction. Paul, he proclaimed, he taught, he lived the gospel of grace, and as he did that himself, now what he does, he exhorts the elders of the Ephesian church, and really the whole church, okay, they're the leaders of the church who's doing the leaders, but don't just think it's just for the leaders, it's the leaders, and then for them to pass it along to the people.

[11:06] So he exhorts the elders in the church to do the thing that he did, proclaim it, teach it, and live it, the gospel of grace.

Paul wanted to see a healthy Ephesian church, so he addressed her leaders with this final, loving, caring, exhorting speech. Friends, God wants to see a healthy Cottonwood Bible church.

So he's going to exhort us today, here in Acts 20, 17 to 38, exhort us through this loving, caring, exhorting speech, calling us to rely upon him, on his plan, upon his spirit, and the real, living presence of Jesus is with us, and he will help us to fully rely upon him and to be a church devoted desperately to this gospel word of grace.

I mean, what we see even behind this, the speech that Luke records for us, that Paul speaks to the elders of the Ephesian church, such strong emotions.

They had such a love for Paul. He had such a love for them. Paul, the pastor, he passed on the torch to the leaders and to the church. They meant so much to him.

[12:44] Serving them with humility, with tears, diligently, with the right priorities, serving them without greed, working hard. That's what you see here.

It's coming out of the text. So let's start with the how. Follow Paul's example. Number one, we're going to have two points.

Follow Paul's example. He, Paul's exhortation. So what's Paul's example? How does he do this? How do we follow his example, I should say? What does he do?

He lived out the gospel word of grace. He proclaimed and taught the gospel word. He lived it out. He proclaimed it and taught it. This is what he did. We follow his example.

So we'll hit verses 17 through 27. We'll skip over to verse 31 and then over to verse 33 to verse 38. Okay?

[13:46] He summoned the elders of the Ephesian church for 17 from Miletus and they came to him. They're the ones that are responsible for shepherding and guiding God's church.

He begins and even ends his speech speaking about his faithfulness in his ministry. Notice, he says, you yourselves know from the first day I set foot in Asia I was with you the whole time serving the Lord with all humility tears with trials which came upon me through the plots of the Jews.

I did not shrink from declaring to you anything that was profitable teaching you publicly and from house to house. He's speaking about his faithfulness to them.

The leaders and the people can see Paul's life as an example. Faithfulness. Love. Compassion. Not to mention he didn't withhold the truth.

When he was with them the whole time he was serving the Lord with all humility tears and the trials that rose up because of the Jews coming against him. He was devoted to the Lord.

[14:56] He was devoted to the Word. The Gospel Word. He wasn't silent from declaring to them things that would be profitable for them. They were challenging. They might not want to hear this.

But he knew it would be profitable. He knew it would be good for them. He knew it would help them. Whether it was in public or it was in private he did it both.

Do you notice what it says here? With humility tears with trials. You see that? We need leaders like this.

We need leaders who are humble who are caring and sacrificial. We need church members like this. Church members who are humble caring and sacrificial.

This is the type of people we need to be. Why? Because it's God's Gospel Word of Grace. He saved us and it's working in and through us. So we are a people who are humble.

[15:57] We are a people who are gracious. We are a people that have such care for each other. We are a people that are so devoted to this Gospel Word we'll sacrifice anything for it. Paul faithfully spoke about encouraging and challenging things to prepare them for the opposition that comes upon the one who does faithfully proclaim the Gospel Word.

He didn't dilute it and skip around. He proclaimed and taught it completely. Notice what he says in verse 21. Solomon may testify to both Jews and Greeks of repentance toward God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ.

Two aspects of the Gospel of the response of the Gospel repent and believe.

Repentance and faith are two sides of the same coin. What's the coin? Conversion. Repentance faith repent means a change of direction and how one relates to God.

That's how one writer puts it. You go in this direction and you change directions. Faith is placing trust in what God has done through the Lord Jesus Christ embracing both Jesus' person and work.

[17:24] So there's a change of direction and then there's embracing. Change of direction and you trust Jesus. Repent and believe. That's how you respond to the Gospel.

So Paul's ministry he was faithful proclaiming necessary truth testifying to Jesus to all calling them to repent and trust in Jesus Christ.

Christ. That's the Gospel. That's how you respond to the Gospel of Grace. God is so gracious he should condemn hell bound sinners and he doesn't.

He shows compassion to them. In the Lord Jesus Christ sending Jesus who lived perfectly was crucified on the cross as a substitute for sinners.

God unleashed his wrath upon him and God was so satisfied with his sacrifice of his life he resurrected him physically from the dead. And he did that for all those who turn away from their sin repent and place their trust in Jesus Christ.

[18:27] In Jesus Christ alone. By the way notice the two elements of the response of the Gospel.

The response of the Gospel again is repent and believe. Some think just repent. Some think you just believe. Some think repent is a same thing as believing. No they're not.

Repentance and believing there's two aspects of the response to the Gospel. Repent and believe.

Another way to put it one must embrace Jesus as Savior and Lord.

The essence of repenting and believing. A person does not simply embrace Jesus as Savior.

Maybe some of you might know somebody who says oh you should accept him as Savior. No sure he must embrace him as Lord of their life.

as part of the Gospel. One writer says it like this quote genuine faith demands repentance and sincere repentance will continue to flow from saving faith.

[19:32] End quote. Are you here today? Are you here today and have not responded to the Gospel? You have not turned from sin the direction of your life and put your trust in Jesus Christ alone.

Do that today. Turn from sin and put your trust in Jesus. He's the only one who can save you.

Nobody else can. Only Jesus Christ who he is and what he's done for us as sinners.

That's the essence of his grace. going back to our text in verse 22 through 24 Paul says behold I'm bound in spirit I'm on my way to Jerusalem I don't know what's going to happen to me there except the Holy Spirit solemnly testifies to me in every city that bonds and afflictions await me.

The Holy Spirit was telling him you're going to go to Jerusalem and there's going to be a lot of stuff for you. You're going to face a lot of trials. It didn't matter to Paul.

Look at verse 24 I don't consider my life of any account as dear to myself in order that I may finish my course in the ministry which I received in the Lord Jesus to testify solemnly of the Gospel of the Grace of God.

[20:49] The Gospel Word of Grace. The worth of his soul was found in doing what God wanted him to do which is proclaim the Gospel.

His desire was to accomplish or finish his course in ministry. Jesus had called him to a particular ministry to testify to the content of God's grace in the Gospel.

He thought of it as a race. running a race. You know like you're running a 5K running a 10K and you're going.

That's what he thought of it. Here's the course I have to complete. Here's the way I have to go the route I have to take to finish this race. That's what he thought of it. And he'd be faithful to run it.

His passion was to carry out this ministry he received from Jesus. So Paul was willing to lose his life for the sake of the ministry Jesus Christ had called him.

[22:01] He was willing to follow his master in suffering for testifying to the Gospel of God's grace to sinners. That's the example we follow. We must also be like this.

Well I'm not called a full time ministry. Yes you are. You don't think you are? Something's wrong with you Christian.

You are called a full time ministry. You should be proclaiming. You should be teaching. You should be living out the Gospel. That's not ministry. Well that's what we pay you to do pastor.

Yeah that's what I speak to you to do member. How do you like that? I'll pull the pastor card out. It's your ministry.

No. Our ministry. That's your ministry. That's our ministry. This is the way we should think of it. Just be who you are.

[23:07] We are the church. We are a holy nation. We are the people of God's own possession as Peter has said. We proclaim His excellencies. It should be like breathing.

It should be as you are exerting yourself and you start breaking up a little bit of a sweat. That's what should come out. It's proclaiming grace.

Teaching grace. It's living out God's grace. How in the world can we say we're Christians if we don't do that? Well I just keep it to myself. What?

That's ridiculous. Notice what Paul says in verse 25. Now behold I know that all of you among whom I went about preaching the kingdom you're not going to see me again.

Those who may preach the kingdom or the gospel of God's grace there's other ways to say that.

But then he says therefore I testify to you this day I am pure of the blood of all men.

[24:20] Why? For I did not shrink from declaring to you the whole purpose of God. I'm innocent of any responsibility. Should you as leaders or should you as the church fail?

I proclaim the whole counsel of God to you. I didn't hold anything back. God's plan for humanity as revealed in the scriptures fulfilled in the Lord Jesus Christ I gave it to you.

He told them all they needed to know to stand firm in God's grace he was pure of blood guilt is another way to put that. Interesting when he says this the language when he says pure it denotes worship.

So Paul he saw his mission as an act of worship to be faithfully accomplished. now that's an example of we should think of this ministry that God has called you that God has called us as an act of worship and it is.

Flip over to verse 31 now drop down verse 31 therefore beyond the alert the second command the first one is in verse 28 beyond the alert why we should do whatever it takes to prevent false teaching why remembering my example night and day for a period of three years I did not cease to admonish each one of you I admonish you toward gospel faithfulness with tears with love for you with such compassion and loving care for you he says remember the pattern of my ministry night and day I'm doing this you go and do likewise you have the same passion follow my example I admonish you something leaders should do to the people and really all of God's people should admonish it's another word we get the other word counsel we should be counseling each other in the word oh that's that's that's for the professionals

[26:36] Jim no it's not you're the professional because you know the gospel word we know God's grace I understand there's really difficult cases to deal with I get that the majority of cases we take the gospel word and we minister we admonish we counsel each other in the gospel word of grace go to verse 33 now 33 he says I have coveted no one's silver gold clothes you use those know that these hands minister to my needs and the needs of those who are with me once again he underscores his faithfulness showing them by way of example how he ministered to them I lived out this gospel word I didn't covet your money I didn't covet your clothes I wasn't seeking some personal status I actually worked for my own support I wasn't greedy but he's saying I served you he was living the gospel before them now it's not to say a church should not support their elder or elders but the key is using one's position for personal gain or coveting a leader should not be tempted to consider ministry opportunities in economic terms instead of teaching love grace truth he took care of his own needs and the needs of those with him he worked hard notice it says you yourselves know these hands ministered my no needs verse 35 and everything

I showed you by working hard in this manner you must help the weak notice the word help this word luke uses the word day d-e-i delta epsilon iota it must happen we must serve we must help the weak remembering the words of the lord jesus he himself said is more blessed to give than to receive interesting question help the weak does he mean those who are weak in terms of poor or does he mean those weak in reference to those who are spiritually weak i believe he's talking about spiritually weak spiritually weak in that it would have been a stumbling block for them to support paul financially that's why he said i worked hard night and day in the previous verse so in other words paul lived the principle given by the lord jesus of giving rather than receiving he gave his time he gave his effort he gave his work without some type of financial contribution he just did it in this way and with this attitude that's what the elders and the church should be the focus of giving and serving each other as paul has so faithfully served them night and day with tears we must be careful with the love of money we must be a giving church not a stingy church and not just giving in reference to our financial like giving to eric not just giving that but giving to each other giving each other our time giving each other resources giving each other our ministry able being able to ministry

to each other and admonish and counsel each other for giving rather than receiving and taking it's so opposite of our american culture it's so opposite when people come to churches too i mean people that will come to church they say what are you going to give to me that's not how it works around here how are you going to give how can you give that's the gospel right notice in 36 through 38 he said these things he knelt down he prayed with them he wept aloud embraced him repeatedly kissing him he you feel the emotion of this the emotion of this departure they love paul so much tears hugs kisses and you see verse 38 grieving the word literally means experiencing pain pain experiencing pain why what was the thing that was just oh they're feeling so much pain over they're feeling so much pain over the fact that he said i'm not going to see you again he was so sad and they accompanied him to the ship it was heart wrenching but paul throughout the speech he's giving to them he's saying follow my example i proclaim this gospel word i taught it and i lived it out before you follow my example and then it leads us to number two heed paul's exhortation what do we heed proclaim teach live out the gospel word of grace pretty simple he proclaimed it he taught it he lived it now we heed the exhortation what's his exhortation you proclaim it you teach it you live it starting in verse 28 be on guard for yourselves and for the whole flock on which the holy spirit made you overseer as a shepherd the church of god which you purchased with the blood of his own son the most important part of his speech you could say practically he was calling them to fill their god given task theologically the ground for the ministry of the elders and really of the church is the significant death of jesus christ take heed to yourselves and all the flock a shepherd cannot adequately care for others if he neglects his own spiritual growth christian you cannot care for others and minister to them if you neglect your own spiritual growth for the elders he says you must fulfill your roles as overseers or guardians or protectors notice just touching verse 17 again the elders of the church in ephesus elders plural of the church one in ephesus it's one church plural plurality of men so there's not some single bishop or single overseer as the wrong erroneous teaching that infiltrated the church in the second century no these group of men were called to oversee god's church and overseeing god's church was part of their role as shepherds the purpose of watching was pastoral care each true local assembly is precious to god and it must be treated with care and love an elder he says must oversee god's church shepherding or pastoring them he must protect rule and foster care and notice he says among which the holy spirit made you the holy spirit had you be this he made you this he gave it to them and by the way he knows he's speaking to the elders who are called to oversee so they could shepherd which is where you get the word pastor the church elders overseers pastors elders are pastors pastors are elders elders are overseers overseers pastors pastors are overseers this is all the same thing for some reason oh and it's plurality for some reason some southern baptists have a vendetta against a plurality of elders

I don't understand that because the text is very clear pastors are elders I literally got my hands sawed off for teaching this when I first came here to this church but elders are pastors pastors are elders look at the text at what it says and it's this church whom God had purchased with the blood of his own son it's this church whom God had purchased with the blood of his own son this underscores the cost that God incurred to establish his church his flock his sheep his people God acquired the church through the substitution of his son's blood I don't have it up there but the next part of my note says so the elders task is sacred this is sacred because this is his church we have a senior pastor his name is Jesus

Christ God took the initiative to have his son suffer and die to restore broken humanity creating a whole new humanity and it's seen in his church we're all people groups they're one in Jesus Christ this responsibility is huge so Jesus atoning work is the basis for the proclamation of forgiveness but it's also for the forming and maintaining God's new community God's new humanity so he says be on guard why verse 29 threats would come to threaten life and growth I know that after my departure savage wolves would come in among you not sparing the flock the flock would be in danger of false teaching from false teachers who devoured and destroyed these would be a serious menace to the flock wanting to draw them away from

[37 : 53] God's church for whom Jesus died wolves notice he says verse 30 and from among your own selves men will arise so what does that mean well it could mean from among their own selves like the elders or it could mean from the church either way it's bad wolves even from among yourselves will rise notice he says speaking perverse things distorted things it's a teaching that takes the disciples off the straight path of God's leading direction how does God lead how does God give his direction in the gospel word of grace that's how so holding to the gospel protects us holding

to the gospel word of grace is the very thing that protects us as a church the gospel is essential that's why the gospel must shape us as a church influence us as a church it's very easy for leaders to attract people to themselves instead of to the gospel word it's very easy for leaders to get approval of people instead of

Jesus Christ that's why I need you to pray for me to be a good shepherd for you that's why I need you to pray for us that we would be this kind of church not the savage wolf not holding to the gospel type church you take somebody like Isla why is she here you take someone like Ann why is she here because we need them to pray for us to pray for me you might say how does God use me in this church Christian wake up you need to pray for this church you need to pray that we will hold desperately to the gospel word you need to pray for us in this you need to pray for me in this and then you go to verse 32 now I commend you to God and to the word of his grace so what does Paul do he entrusted them to God and the word of his grace he commended them into

God's care and protection what does that mean in other words you cannot rely upon yourselves you know he just said hold to the gospel of grace well you're not going to be able to do that you must rely on God's grace to help you to rely on God's grace not funny so he says I know you can't do this so I'm entrusting you to his grace in and of ourselves we will fall away that's why Peter says one no no second don't look it up just say it we're kept by the power of God it's God's power who keeps us it is in 1 Peter chapter 1 God's power keeps us you can't rely upon yourselves and then notice what he says now

I entrust you to God the word of his grace this word of grace which is able to build up and to give the inheritance among all those who are sanctified interesting it's because it's this message of God's grace that will build them up and the message of God's grace that will give them the inheritance shared by all the saints listen through teaching the gospel word God builds his church and through teaching the gospel word God promises an internal inheritance to his people why does he say inheritance it's just another way to explain the gospel of grace the center of the gospel is God's grace and inheritance friends we will inherit the world whereby us as people we inherit the world this great and glorious kingdom worshiping and serving our great and glorious king is that not grace oh yeah it is it's so much of

God's grace we're a bunch of loser sinners and yet God has inheritance for us or we will rule the world the universe with Jesus Christ as our pastor what grace so it's this gospel word of grace by which God's church grows in size and maturity and is protected from error and wrong division through the gospel word God converts sinners and sustains them until they reach the inheritance promised to them in the gospel so it's vitally important this gospel word of grace is faithfully followed in this church so that you us we as Jesus followers are assured of

[44:20] God's love for us in Jesus Christ and we're encouraged to press on toward love press on towards unity press on towards grace press on in obedience in our relationships with each other and those of the world it's vital to us because we see how much we need God's grace it's vital because we see how much we needed God's grace so the responsibility of elders God's leaders is to shepherd God's dearly loved people Paul was obviously most concerned about them protecting God's work in and through the Lord Jesus Christ so he entrusted them with God's grace and his gospel word so in other words this grace gospel word is the only thing that will serve as the protection of God's church must hold fast to the gospel word of grace in his son so shepherds must be equipped theologically and spiritually to protect

God's people how do they do that they're proclaiming they're teaching they're living the gospel word of grace the shepherds feed and protect the people in the gospel word it's grounded in the gospel word if they have been changed by the gospel word of grace then they'll serve as good shepherds understanding the cost paid for them and his people i'll put it another way if all of god's people have been changed by his word of grace then they will serve each other understanding the cost that's been paid for them and for his people you get that so i put this up here earlier and i'll put it up one more time for us to grow mature for us to have the assurance of god's love for us to be protected from error and division we must be a church that proclaims teaches and lives out god's gospel word of grace i've been reading a book since january of this year by paul david tripp called dangerous calling he says this quote now he's talking about pastors book for pastors actually he says this no one gives grace better than a person who knows he desperately needs it himself no one gives grace better than a person who knows he desperately needs it himself and that's not just true for pastors it's true for all of us isn't it so in other words we must be a church that embraces

Jesus' words that there's more satisfaction to giving and receiving church it follows paul's example we heed his exhortation we give because we see how much god's given to us father help us to know how much you love us in jesus christ how much we desperately need you to show us grace so that we will see that you have as you've given yourself so much to us may we give so much to each other showing the same gracious love have you shown it to us in jesus sending him having him die for sinners like us saving us rescuing us loving us do that in us take a few moments if you would have a few moments of silence maybe pray for us as a church pray for you as an individual take a few moments of silence to think and ponder what we've seen here in the book of acts and after a few moments we'll have our time of giving singing our last two songs and then closing prayer sit think ponder

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