

Caring for the Church Bought by Christ - Acts 20:17-38

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[0 : 00] Let me begin with a question. Have you ever had things in life turn out not the way you want? So let me ask a follow-up question.

How did you respond when things go the way you want? Because our responses to unwanted situations actually reveal what we truly care about?

We saw at the end of last week's sermon passage the travelogue that Pastor Scott Priso eloquently brought great insight in the first 16 verses of chapter 20. We saw at the end that Paul was returning from this multi-year missionary journey with some stops in some small coastal towns, but he passed by the major city of Ephesus where he administered for three years.

He passed by there, but now the passage last week ended in verse 16 with Paul stopping in this little town of Miletus. And what we see today is that because of his goal to reach Jerusalem by Pentecost that we saw last week, he was under time pressure.

Because of the time pressure, he passed by Ephesus. But I don't know about you. I have this problem of sometimes reading God's word too quickly.

[1 : 28] When you read God's word too quickly, you miss some subtle but significant things. And here's something that we can miss. We know this about Apostle Paul.

He was a man of great determination. He is about as goal-oriented a person as he can find. But the beautiful thing is Paul's focus was never on his own plans, but on God's purposes.

So even though Paul is set with this time crunch of making to Jerusalem by Pentecost and he skips by Ephesus, we see that even in the midst of that hurry, his heart is still on God's purposes and not his own.

So today's passage will reveal this immense passion that God has put on Paul's heart to encourage other believers regardless of his circumstances.

So as we look at today's passage in verses 17 through 38, let's invite God to change our heart so that our cares become God's cares.

[2 : 39] So let me pray for that and we'll look into the passage. God, we thank you for your Holy Word that you have given to us. I pray that your Holy Spirit would be at work in our midst this morning so that your Spirit would change your heart so that our cares would be the cares of Christ that he has for his church. Amen.

So we left at verse 16 last week and if you have your Bible to either the Bible in the front of you or your personal one, the one on your phone, however you prefer, please turn to Acts chapter 20.

We are going to look at verses 17 through 38. So let me pick it up from there. So Acts chapter 20 verse 17 begins with this. From Miletus, he sent to Ephesus and called to him the elders of the church.

Let's pause right there for a moment. So what this tells us is that even though Paul was no longer physically in Ephesus, Ephesus was still in his heart.

And what we know a little bit about Paul's history with Ephesus from what we have seen in Acts is that he was in Acts, he was in Ephesus the first time that is recorded in chapter 18 of Acts and when he bid goodbye to them, there was a brief visit that's discussed in Acts chapter 18.

[4 : 0 6] He said, I will return to you if God wills. I don't know about you, but we tend to use the word if God wills in a rather glib fashion.

So we say that to avoid commitment to hedge our bets or in some cases people use if God's will as a euphemism for, oh, it's going to take an act of God for me to do that.

But Paul was not invoking God's name cavalierly. In fact, what we see later in Acts chapter 19 was that he did return and he was there for three years teaching sincerely.

And this chapter, chapter 20 began in verse one with him giving a second goodbye or the end of a second visit to Ephesus. And then Pastor Scott preached last week from verse two all the way to verse 16.

He's making this long circuitous journey around the various parts of the region. And now on his return trip, we are told that he wants to meet with the elders of Ephesus again.

[5 : 1 1] We don't know exactly why he stopped at Miletus and we don't know why he's using that stop to talk to the elders at Ephesus. At this point in the text, we don't know the circumstances of the stop or for the reason for the meeting.

But as we saw last week, this stop itself is an interruption in Paul's plans. What more, if you think about it, the elders at Ephesus were not expecting this visit.

It's approximately a day's journey, perhaps from Miletus to Ephesus. It's only 30 miles, but travel was hard those days. And lo and behold, here are some messengers from Paul.

And here, think about, imagine your elder at Ephesus. You've got your day life going on, you've got whatever cares of the day going on. And suddenly there are messengers from Paul saying that Paul wants to meet you.

You have a choice. You've got to drop everything that you're doing and take the day-long trip to go meet Paul, or else you're going to miss out. So for this meeting that's recorded in God's Word to happen, both Paul and the elders at Ephesus had to interrupt their plans.

[6 : 2 3] This is convicting for me because God often speaks to us through interruptions of our plans. So the first question we ought to ask ourselves as we look at those opening verses, how do we respond when God interrupts our plans?

Are we willing to listen to God by letting go of our plans, or at the very least putting our plans on pause? That is an important thing because if it weren't for that interruption, we wouldn't have this passage in God's Word.

So with that interruption of plans, let's see what the meeting was about, picking up in verse 18. And when they had come to him, he said to them, you yourself know that from the first day 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.

How I 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 towards God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ.

I don't know if you have noticed, anytime someone begins a conversation with a history lesson, you know that it's serious, right? So in this case, Paul begins his message to their elders at Ephesus by reviewing their, his personal history with them.

[7 : 59] As we said, Paul first visited Ephesus, that's recorded in Acts chapter 18, and during that trip he evangelized Jews at the synagogue. And then later in a second visit for much longer visit, he taught both Jews and Greeks Gentiles.

But notice that he taught them in every setting, whether publicly or privately. In every setting to every group, he preached the gospel. And he did so under significant opposition from both groups.

You see, in the end of chapter 19, Pastor Jay preached about this riot at Ephesus, where the Greeks, especially those who are in the practice of the idolatry and serving the idols, they had their own reasons to object to the gospel.

And here Paul is talking about this constant background opposition from the Jews that was a constant throughout Paul's ministry wherever he went. We see this in his letters to the Thessalonians, to the Corinthians.

We see this constant backdrop of oppositions that Paul has. And in this case, he's specifically talking about the opposition from the Jews, although just a chapter ago, we saw the opposition from the Greeks as well.

[9 : 18] And in all these things, we see that Paul says that he served the Lord with all humility, with tears, and with trials.

I don't know about you. I think none of us seeks humility, tears, or trials. Now, there is actually a causal link there. What we see here is that he faced trials of all kinds from all groups.

And the trials that he faced produced two things in Paul, tears and humility. Let's examine both of those things. Let's talk about the tears.

We don't do justice to our heroes like Paul. We think that they are impervious to criticism, that whatever is lobbed against them, they're somehow, you know, they've got this Teflon shielding.

That's not true. That's not what Paul says here in God's Word. Paul was profoundly hurt by the opposition he was facing and the drove him to tears. But the beautiful thing is what he did in response to the pain.

[10 : 23] He was in a lot of pain, but what he did in response to the pain was it brought out humility in Paul. Humility is a root word of humus, the top layer of the soil.

So in his response to the trials and in response to the pain that he was facing, Paul didn't stand up on his feet and say, come on, I'm going to take you on. That's not what he did. He went low.

He went low. In this, Paul was demonstrating Christ to the Ephesians. We know from the letter to the Philippians, Philippians 2, Paul famously explained humility to the Philippians by invoking the example of Christ and his incarnation and his sacrificial obedience to the Father.

What Paul wrote to the Philippians, Paul demonstrated to the Ephesians that in response to the opposition, he humbled himself and served the Lord with all humility.

So what's beautiful about this is that it's not just the content of Paul's teaching. The manner of Paul's teaching to the Ephesians was also enormously significant.

[11 : 39] So that brings up the question for each of us. How do we respond to trials? We know that godly life will come with trials.

But how do we respond to those trials? Do we respond to those trials by serving the Lord in humility in a way that actually demonstrates Christ to others?

I must confess that I don't always do that. So how do we take this approach of Paul that when confronted with trials, a response ought to be humility in a way that by both with word and deed, we point people to Christ?

And that was a beautiful teaching of Paul to the Ephesians. Now let's talk a little bit about the opposition itself. Jews and Greeks had enormous cultural, social, political and theological differences between them.

In fact, their differences were far greater than any social differences we have in our day. And therefore, they had their own reasons to object to the gospel. We know this when Paul writes to the Corinthians, he talks about the gospel being a stumbling block to the Jews and a foolishness to the Greeks.

[12 : 52] So they each had their own reasons to object to the gospel. And so therefore, their opposition comes in different ways. And yet, because the gospel applies to every person, regardless of race, gender, socioeconomic status, Paul was convicted to minister in humility to every group in every setting.

And that ought to be convicting to us. Do we humble ourselves to minister to vastly different groups, regardless of all of these worldly differences, so that we can minister the gospel to them?

If not, I think what it's doing is that it's revealing a deficiency in our value of the gospel, in our desire for God's glory.

If we value the gospel, if we value God being glorified through the proclamation of the gospel, we ought to take the same attitude of Paul that no matter what the cultural, social, ethnic, theological differences between different groups are, we ought to humble ourselves to preach the whole counsel of God to everyone.

And that is another inspiring and a convicting lesson that we get from Paul and how he ministered to the Ephesians from this. In all of these things, as I said, in the appeal to the Philippines too, Paul was trying to mimic Christ, that in response to the opposition, Christ humbled himself, and Paul was trying to identify with Christ in how he ministered to them.

[14 : 32] So identification with Christ was Paul's motivation and humility like Christ was Paul's method, and every arena, whether in public or private, was Paul's setting, and every ethnic group was Paul's audience, and now we see the message of Paul, the message of Paul that is testifying, repentance towards God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ.

What we see here is that the central message of Paul, regardless of who he was ministering to, is the forgiveness of sin by birth, life, death, and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the need for everyone to repent of their sin and receive this free gift of salvation is the message of Paul, no matter who he was ministering to.

Every aspect of our ministry must focus on this central point. It's because of the necessity of this good news that we must strive for consistency in our method, in our audience, in our message.

All of those things have to fit together to point people to Christ, regardless of their background, and that's what Paul did with the Ephesians. So let's continue with the passage picking up in verse 22.

And now behold, bound, different translations use, constrained, compelled, bound by the 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, so that I may finish my course and the ministry which I received from the Lord Jesus to testify solemnly of the gospel of the grace of God.

[16 : 31] I'm sure you know this. Most frustrations in life, especially in human relationships, come out of unmet expectations. We expect something, but we get something different, and that causes us to be upset.

In every marriage, in every family situation, in every workplace, that's often the source of most tensions. And if you're honest, I suspect that for some of you, you may have a strained relationship with God because of unmet expectations.

You may be expecting a certain reward for your obedience to God, and it doesn't turn out that way in this life, and that may cause some strain in your relationship with God, in your trust with God.

Now Paul, if anybody had reasons for those expectations, Paul had even more. His five-year missionary journey that we are concluding changed countless lives for eternity and changed the course of the world.

If anybody had reason to expect good reward in this life, it was Paul. And what was his reward for that? What we are told is that not knowing anything but.

[17 : 47] Notice that not knowing anything, God doesn't always satisfy our desire for details in this life. God calls us to trust, trust Him. Trust Him, not that everything will be okay, that platitude.

We've all heard that platitude. That's nonsense. It doesn't. Everything doesn't turn out all right in this life. But we are called to trust God, God's character and God's purposes, and Paul does not know the details of what's going to happen to him, but he trusts God and God's purposes.

And that is something beautiful for us to not miss. And so not knowing what will happen to him, but that all of these things are going to be more persecutions.

So his reward for faithful ministry was more persecution. And yet how does Paul respond to this news that more persecution awaits him?

What we see here is that Paul was bound, constrained, compelled by the Spirit to go to Jerusalem. And when he goes to Jerusalem, it turns out that nothing but trouble awaits him.

[19 : 03] How do we respond when we know that trouble awaits us? If we are honest, most of us want to run the other way. I do. And how does Paul respond knowing that trouble awaits him?

He's pressing on towards Jerusalem. What's the difference? Both with the Ephesian elders here and in the next chapter we'll see that when Paul is in tire, the believers in tire also receive the word from the Holy Spirit that persecution awaits Paul.

The Ephesian elders are in tears. They don't want Paul to die. And later we'll see just in a few verses at the beginning of the next chapter, believers in tire, they don't want Paul to die.

So out of their love for him, they want him to not go through with what's awaiting him. But Paul is pressing on. Why?

So verse 22 that we read that reads, depending upon your translation, bound by, compelled by, constrained by, by the Spirit, that by the Spirit, all can also be read as in the Spirit.

[20 : 16] Paul was in the Spirit when he received this revelation that trouble awaits him. So it turns out that the believers in tire and Paul, they both get the same news, namely trouble awaits Paul.

But the response is different. Have you ever noticed this? You know, we are coming into an intersection. Do we see a road sign? You can have two people see the same road sign and go different ways.

Why? Because you go into different places. You have different callings. You have different objectives. So the believers in tire and Paul, they both read the same sign correctly. They both got the same revelation from the Holy Spirit that trouble awaits Paul.

The difference was that different goals for Paul, because he was in the Spirit. To be in the Spirit means that our thoughts, our motives, everything about us is God's.

Paul wasn't primarily interested in self-preservation. He was completely sold out to whatever the Holy Spirit had for him, and if the Holy Spirit had persecution, that's what he wanted.

- [21 : 24] So it's not that Paul was a glutton for punishment. We already established that Paul was in significant pain and tears with the troubles that awaited him. It's not that Paul was a glutton for punishment, but he was completely in the Spirit that his desires, his goals, everything was the Holy Spirit, and if the Holy Spirit has trouble ordained for him, that's what he wants.

It's not that the believers in tire of the Ephesian elders who cried and didn't want this to happen to Paul were wrong. That's an appropriate expression of their love for him.

Which one of us wants our loved ones to be put through persecution, prison, or death? None of us want that for our loved ones, so they were appropriately expressing their love for him and that they didn't want this for him.

But Paul was in the Spirit and the only cares he had were the cares of God, not his own. And that's why Paul is pressing ahead.

It's an important thing to remember how we respond to these things. It's not that Paul was rejoicing in the pain, but Paul had joy in the midst of the pain.

- [22 : 39] Many of us know these verses from the beginning of James that calls us to rejoice when we face trials. What James is telling us is not to rejoice in the trials, but in the midst of the trials because of what comes after the trials.

We are told in Hebrews 12-2 that our Lord and Savior Jesus, for the joy that was set before him endured the cross. The joy in obedience to the Father and the joy in the fruit of the obedience to the Father is what kept Jesus going, is what Hebrews 12-2 tells us.

And that is what is driving Paul over here. He knows that there is joy in obedience to God, there is joy in the fruit of his obedience to God, and that is what is driving him.

And that is why in the Spirit Paul is pressing on to Jerusalem even though he knows that nothing but trouble awaits him. How does that look for us?

How does it look for us to be in the Spirit that our cares are not about self-preservation but only God's purposes? That's what Paul is demonstrating to us.

- [23 : 53] Here's the interesting thing. Even the world's secular wisdom recognizes the value of a purpose-driven life to endure troubles in life.

You can have all kinds of secular wisdom about you just have to have a meaning and a purpose to get through the hard things in life. That's true. Even secular wisdom recognizes that.

During World War II, psychologist Victor Frankel was a Jew who was sent to four different concentration camps, including the notorious Arthwits.

He lost all his family members in the concentration camp. He went through terrible hardship and after that had a renowned career as a psychologist.

And he came up with his life lessons that he learned from these four concentration camps in an international bestseller called Man's Search for Meaning.

- [24 : 51] Here's the disappointing thing about it. The lesson that he got out of all of that was that we all need to have some meaning in life and we just have to envision the some purpose in life.

And as long as we are fixated on the some vision and meaning in life, we can endure the any challenges of life. Folks, that's not going to satisfy us because we know that we often go through life by trying to find our own meaning and purpose in life and devoting all our energy and attention to whatever meaning and purpose that we come up with.

Paul wasn't merely trying to find his own meaning and purpose in life. Paul had God-given meaning and purpose in life. There's an important distinction between finding our own meaning in life and a God-given meaning and purpose in life.

Paul wasn't trying to figure, gee, what should my life be about? No, that will only lead to trouble. Solomon squandered much of his life trying to find meaning and purpose in all kinds of things.

Wealth, wisdom, pleasures of all kind. And he found all of those things to be both fleeting and futile. Do you know what ultimately stumped Solomon every single time?

[26 : 12] Death. He couldn't wrap his mind around death and we'll talk about death in just a few minutes. But the point here is this. Paul wasn't trying to find his own purpose in life because he knows the purpose that God had given him.

That is, we see the end of verse 24, to testify solemnly of the gospel of the grace of God. It is only in that purpose we have true meaning to our lives.

So my question for you is this. Are you someone who is trying to find your own meaning and purpose in life, whether it's in personal fulfillment, accomplishments, family, legacy, social causes?

We can devote our lives to any of these objectives, but I can assure you those are not going to give you the satisfaction you think they're going to give you. Only the God gave an objective here to testify to the gospel of the grace of God.

That's the only thing that will give you true meaning and true satisfaction in life. So what will it take for us to align our purposes to God's purposes?

[27 : 24] Let's pick up where we left off in verse 25. And now, behold, I know that all of you among whom I went about preaching the kingdom will no longer see my face.

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, whole counsel of God.

So the previous two farewells that Paul had for the Ephesians in the end of chapter 18 with the first visit, in the beginning of chapter 20 with the second visit, those two goodbyes were temporary goodbyes.

But this goodbye was going to be a permanent goodbye, at least in this lifetime. And what we see here is that because this goodbye was going to be permanent in this life, that's why Paul took the trouble of reviewing his history with them.

And as he looks back at his history with them, he is trying to give them some important lessons. And as we said earlier, there is nothing like death to give meaning to life.

[28 : 40] Because for Solomon, it was this inevitability of death that kept on challenging whatever alternative meanings and purposes that he tried to find in life. Nothing like death, there's nothing like death to give purpose to life.

And what we see here is that that inevitability of death, that death wipes out everything, that all those struggles that Solomon went through, it could either drive you to despair, or it could allow you to write your ship.

In the case of Paul, knowing that his life is about to come to an end, gave him clarity on the purpose of his life. He knew that his life was about one thing, and it gave him great peace, that he is living his life exactly how God wants him to live.

Unlike Solomon, Paul did not waste the new life that Christ had given him, and he declares that he was innocent of the blood of all men.

Let's examine that phrase for a moment. Innocent from the blood of all men, for I do not shrink from declaring to you the whole purpose of God.

[29 : 55] Let's examine that part for a moment, the whole counsel of God. The Gospel message is clear, but it's also profoundly deep.

So while it is necessary to keep the simple message of salvation, the elders of a church must teach the fullness of God's revelation in his inspired word to the flock God has given them.

And Paul demonstrated that not only did he teach the whole counsel of God, he demonstrated that this is what it looks like to teach the whole counsel of God, and this is important for the leadership of any church to teach the whole counsel of God and not deprive the congregation of any of them.

And so that's an important commitment of the leadership, should be the important commitment of the leadership of any church. And now let's look at the previous part of the sentence. I'm innocent of the blood of all men.

To understand that phrase, we have to go back to the Old Testament. In Ezekiel 34, Ezekiel, famous prophet of the Old Testament, God charges Ezekiel with declaring a message to Israel.

[31 : 09] God also tells Ezekiel that if Ezekiel failed to deliver this message and that someone dies because Ezekiel failed to deliver the message, that Ezekiel was guilty of their blood.

The messenger was guilty of the blood if he did not deliver the message. And Paul is using that same language here that he had the responsibility to deliver the gospel, the whole counsel of God to the Ephesians, and if he did not, and if someone died, he was responsible for their blood.

Do you recognize the importance of this? While you and I may not have received specific callings like Ezekiel was called to Israel, Paul in this case was called to deliver the gospel to the Ephesians, you and I may not have had the specific calling to a specific place like Ezekiel and Paul had, but every single follower of Christ is given the general calling of the Great Commission to teach everyone to observe, follow, obey, keep, all that Christ has commanded us.

That is a call on all of us. Every follower of Christ has that command on us, which means the implication is clear. If God is commanding us to teach all that He has taught us to others, and if we don't, the implication is clear that God is going to hold us responsible.

I gave you this message and you didn't deliver the message. What does it like to have? Would you like to have this clean conscience before God that you were not guilty of someone's blood because you didn't fail to deliver the message that God had given you to deliver?

[33 : 01] Paul did. Paul speaks here with a clean conscience that I did what God has asked me to do. If you want to have that clean conscience before God, then we must reset and realign our life's purposes to be God's purposes.

Like Paul did. So all of that was Paul describing his life with the Ephesians. And that description of Paul's life now turns into a prescription for the elders of the Ephesians' church.

And that's where we pick up in verse 28. So the text moves from description to prescription. And then he says, 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 arise, speaking perverse things to draw away the disciples after them. Therefore, be on alert remembering that night and day for a period of three years, I did not cease to admonish each one with tears.

And now I commend to you God, you to God, and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up and to give you the inheritance among all those who are sanctified.

[34 : 32] Now, here's the thing. The, Pat, the phrase of wolves for false teachers was something that we know the Lord Jesus Christ himself used in Matthew 7.

He talks about false teachers as wolves coming in to destroy and kill. And Paul is using that in that message here. But the first command for the elders is not about the wolves, is about taking care of their own walk with the Lord, because the first command here is about taking care of their own life.

Be on guard yourselves. Before an elder can take care of the flock, the elder has to take care of one's own walk with the Lord. So while every Christian is commanded to steward this new life that God has given us, elders are not exempt from that.

Elders also, like every believer, must steward the new life that God had given them. But they have this additional responsibility in addition to taking care of their own walk with the Lord.

They also had to care for the flock. And that is where the bulk of this passage lies. But it begins with the elders taking care of their own walk with the Lord, and then extends to taking care of the flock.

[35 : 53] Let's talk about taking care of the flock. God has ordained elders to take care of the church. Jesus Christ himself is the good shepherd. In John 10, Jesus talks about himself as the good shepherd. He is the good shepherd.

But God, in His grace and wisdom, He has instituted elders to be His undershippers. Jesus is the good shepherd, and elders are undershippers of the good shepherd to take care of the local flocks.

Jesus is the good shepherd of his entire flock, and over the subsets of the flock, like this, Jesus puts elders as his undershippers. The New Testament uses different terms to describe this office, this role, if you will.

There are three terms that are often used interchangeably. Elders, overseers, shepherds. Those terms are often used interchangeably to refer to the same role.

There are some distinctions in the terms. For instance, shepherds often refers to feeding the sheep by taking them to the pasture. That's where we get that translation, pastor, by feeding them by taking them to the pasture.

[37 : 05] So the shepherd has to do with that feeding of the flock term, and elders has to do with wisdom in discerning, right from wrong, truth from error part. And then there is the overseer part that has to do with guarding the flock. All of those things are in play over here.

And we see that all three terms are used in reference to the elders, with elders, shepherds, overseers are all used here. And a lot of this focus right here is on the overseer, the guarding the flock part.

And guarding the flock comes from two things. You have to guard the flock from threats from the outside, as well as threats from the inside. And that is an important charge that Paul had received, and Paul is passing on this charge to the Ephesian elders that you must guard the flock from threats from the outside, as well as threats from the inside.

Paul not only had taught this, he exemplified this with his own life. We see that with tears, with day and night, he was doing this.

Because going back to the Good Shepherd, what we see here when we see in John 10, as Jesus talks about himself as a Good Shepherd, Jesus makes the distinction between a hireling.

[38 : 22] Hireling, just somebody hired to do the job, and he says, once a threat comes, I'm out of here, not my problem. But the Good Shepherd lays down his life for his flock.

What Paul is demonstrating, that how hard he worked, with how much of heart he served the church, with tears, day and night, he's demonstrating that he's closer to the model of the Good Shepherd than that of a hireling.

That first sign of threat, not my problem, but Paul not only is it teaching them, he's showing them what it means to show Christ like love, be a Christ like shepherd for the flock.

And that is what he wants the elders of the church to do. Now, that is hard for me to read as an elder of the church. As an elder of the church, I and my fellow elders, we must ask ourselves, do we demonstrate a Paul-like example to this church?

That's something that has to keep us accountable. Only God who works through the means of the Word of His grace can ultimately empower the elders to imitate Him.

[39 : 33] And the reward for that is eternal, a treasure in heaven that does not perish. Even though in this life we will have trouble, Paul is clear on what his life is about, where his reward is, and he's teaching them and showing that to the elders of the Ephesian church.

Continuing in verse 33, Paul goes on to tell the elders, I have coveted no one's silver or gold or clothes.

You yourselves know that these hands minister to my own needs and to the men who are with me. In 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, it is more blessed to give than to receive.

Let's set one thing straight. God cares immensely for both the flock and the shepherd. God cares about the well-being of both the flock and the shepherd.

But God also condemns the shepherds for feeding themselves, or worse yet, feeding on the flock instead of feeding the flock.

[40 : 54] God condemns shepherds for feeding themselves instead of feeding the flock. We see this in Ezekiel 34, where we talked about earlier. God condemns the shepherds of Israel for taking care of themselves and not the flock.

And what we saw earlier last year, we went through the Sherman series on 1 Corinthians. In 1 Corinthians 9, Paul persuasively pounds the message to the Corinthians that he and his coworkers were right to receive their support because they were ministering to them.

A worker is worthy of his wages, and Paul and his companions who were ministering to the Corinthians had the right to receive support from the Corinthians.

He makes a point very clear, but then he quickly proceeds to say that, but he's choosing to forsake that right. Why? Because he didn't want to hinder the ministry of the gospel.

So, similarly with the Ephesians, he had the right to receive support from them, but he forsakes that right and work outside of the church.

[42 : 06] We saw earlier that he and his companions, they worked as leather workers, tent makers to take care of their needs, not only his needs, but that of his coworkers, so that they can render their ministry to the church in Ephesus without any financial burden to them.

We are told that Paul has two motivations for working outside of the church to take care of his and his companions' needs and not receive that from the Ephesians.

His first motivation was simply this, to be above reproach against the charge of coveting their money. He did not want to be accused. He didn't want any of his companions to be accused that they were after the love of money.

The love of money, as God's word tells us, is the root of all kinds of evil, and to this day, love of money remains one of the top reasons of failed Christian ministries and Christian leaders.

Paul did not want to even have room for the charge against him, and so he took care of his own financial needs. Here's the thing. Here's how sin works.

[43 : 18] Those who are ministering to the church have the right to receive support from the church, but sin corrupts that right into an expectation, an entitlement, and an abuse of power.

The right to receive support is biblical. When that right becomes an expectation, an expectation becomes an entitlement, and the entitlement becomes abusing your power to nefariously fuck money, that's the path of sin.

Take something good and turns into something evil, and Paul didn't want to give any room for that, and that's why he draws the line that, no, I am going to take care of my needs and that of my companions so that nobody in the Ephesian church can say, I took your money.

That's his first reason. But the antidote for that is always to look for Jesus, and that's the second reason, because Paul was to teach Jesus' message with word and beat.

Jesus said that the Son of Man came not to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many. And Paul wanted to demonstrate that to the Ephesians, that he is giving himself sacrificially to the church, and that he's repeating the Lord's statement as more blessed to give than to receive as a way of the Ephesian church to look to Jesus.

[44 : 40] This is what the Lord did. And you have to ask ourselves, do we have Christ-like leaders in this church who desire to give rather than to receive?

Because that is the model of Christ that Paul demonstrated to the Ephesians. Having said everything that he had to say, it's time for the final goodbye.

Let's look at the final goodbye in verses 36 through 38. When he had said these things, he knelt down and prayed with them all. And they began to weep aloud and embrace Paul and repeatedly kiss them, grieving especially over the word which he had spoken that they would not see his face again.

And they were accompanying him to the ship. When Paul wrote to the Philippians, he wrote of this tension between remaining on earth for their good versus going to be with the Lord for his good.

That same tension that Paul had with the Philippians, it looks like he had some of that in the Ephesians as well. The difference is, in the case of the Philippians, that tension was to have an outcome that he would go to see the Philippians again.

[46 : 02] But in the Ephesians, the tension was to have a different outcome that he's never going to see them again in this life. Why does God have these different outcomes for different people?

By the way, a minor digression. There's some scholarly debate on whether Paul actually made it to Ephesus, or Philippi. I'm not going to get into that. I'm just going to take Paul out of his word.

He says that he's going to see the Philippians. He's not going to see the Ephesians. That's what I'm going to go with. So, let's take Paul out of his word that the Holy Spirit has told him that he's not going to see the Ephesians again.

How do we reconcile the fact that, in the case of the Philippians, the outcome of this tension was that Paul would go to see the Philippians again. But with the Ephesians, that he's never going to see them again.

Does that bother you a little bit? We talked earlier about Paul's reward for faithful ministry was more persecution.

[47 : 05] Are you someone who struggles with the why me question in life? When you go through hard times in life, when you have been faithful and you're rewarded for faithfulness with trouble, are you someone who goes before God with the why me question?

Maybe you're not someone who struggles with the why me question. Maybe you're struggling with a different question. What about him? Peter had the same trouble right before the ascension after the resurrection.

When Jesus had told Peter what was to come of him that he would endure persecution and be martyred, Peter pointed to John and said, what about him?

We, from the time we were children, we had this sense of fairness question that we challenged our parents. So that's not fair. Maybe Peter had some of that in his response to Jesus.

It's not fair that I'm going to be martyred, but what about him? Maybe the Ephesians are asking, hey, how come Paul gets to go to see the Philippians and not us?

[48 : 15] We don't know that. But we could go there in our own minds. We could go there to places where we may doubt the goodness of God in his fairness.

But Paul wasn't. He's demonstrating to the Philippians, to the Philippians and now here to the Ephesians, that God had provided everything that they need.

Every good teacher prepares his students for their departure. Every good teacher prepares his students for the end of the year exams. Every good teacher prepares things for after they graduate.

Every parent should prepare the children for what happens after they leave home. Jesus was the ultimate teacher. Jesus prepared his disciples for his departure.

In the night before the cross in John 16, we're told that Jesus speaks to the disciples and he tells them that he's given them everything that they need. Jesus specifically says that he had given them three things.

[49 : 19] They had each other. They had his word and they would receive the Holy Spirit. So Jesus says, I've given you everything you need. Paul is doing the same thing.

Paul knows that this was his final goodbye to the Ephesians on earth. There is sadness in the departure, but not regret. Do not confuse sadness with regret.

There is sadness here. There are tears on every side. Paul is also sad that he's going to leave the Ephesians. There is sadness, but sadness is not regret because Paul knows that he has done his job.

He has prepared the Ephesians. He has given them everything that they need to walk with the Lord. That's why he's able to say this final goodbye without any regret.

Even in that, Paul had something of enormous value to teach the Ephesians. It's not just what he said in how he said it without any regret. He's able to look back at his life and say, I have done everything that God has asked me to do for you.

[50 : 32] In that peace and clarity and confidence that he had in God's purposes, Paul was giving yet another lesson to the Ephesians, not in just what he said, but in how he said it to them.

What does this mean for us? The reality is that each one of us at some point in our life has to say a final goodbye to those we love.

Here's the thing. We have to say that final goodbye, like Paul, is not knowing what's going to come next. Paul doesn't know the details of what's going to happen next, and neither will we.

In fact, there is reason to believe that if you read Revelation chapter 2, verses 1-7, that perhaps these elders or the elders that came after them didn't quite live up to the teaching that they received from Paul or didn't pass it on to the next generation.

The reality is that we too will come to the place where we won't know exactly what's going to come after us. The difference is, like Paul, when we commit our whole lives to have our cares be God's cares, and the only concern be that we lived out exactly what God has called us to do, we can say that goodbye with the same peace and confidence that Paul had.

[52 : 00] Paul and the Ephesian elders both had an unexpected encounter. Neither of them were expecting this encounter, and yet, as we said before, our response to unforeseen circumstances will actually reveal our hearts.

I want us to be a people that when our hearts are revealed, our hearts are shown to be God's heart because we have completely aligned ourselves to the Holy Spirit.

Let's learn that lesson from not just what Paul said in his teaching about how he lived his life. Let me pray for us.

Father, thank you for the preciousness of your word. Thank you that it's only in your purposes, it's only in a life dedicated to making you known, to knowing you and to making you known that it's peace with the unforeseen circumstances of life.

I pray that we will be a people whose heart will be transformed by your Holy Spirit so that our cares become your cares so that when trials hit this life, our response will reveal that our heart is your heart. Amen.