

The Man with Acts 20:20 Vision

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[0 : 00] Well, good morning again. Let's begin this morning by turning together to Acts chapter 20. And we're going to be looking in chapter 20, verses 17 through 21.

This is part of a larger discourse that Paul had with the elders from Ephesus, but we're going to stick with those few verses this morning.

So as we go to verse 17, we'll begin there. Verse 17 says, From Miletus he, or Paul, sent to Ephesus and called for the elders of the church.

And when they had come to him, he said to them, You know from the first day that I came to Asia, in what manner I always lived among you, serving the Lord with all humility, with many tears, and trials which happened to me by the plotting of the Jews, how I kept back nothing that was helpful, but proclaimed it to you and taught you publicly, and from house to house, testifying to Jews and also to Greeks, repentance toward God and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ.

Let's pray. Lord, this morning, please use your word this morning to encourage us, to motivate us. And this morning, dear Father, that you may help us to understand that the time is short and that we have a responsibility to share our faith with others.

[1 : 30] We pray in Jesus' name. Amen. So here is the Apostle Paul. He was preaching in another city, and he was intent on going to Jerusalem and stayed a little bit longer where he was and sent the disciples on.

And then he goes by boat. He ends up probably having a day there in Miletus, which was 30 miles south by land from Ephesus.

And because he wanted to get to Jerusalem before Pentecost, he ends up calling for the elders in Ephesus to come and meet him there in Miletus.

And so here's the context of where we are. And so these elders come and meet with the Apostle Paul in this city.

And these elders were most likely the pastors of these house churches or these churches there in Ephesus where Paul had ministered for about three years sometime before.

[2 : 45] Now, these elders, when the Bible talks about the New Testament elders, it's basically synonymous with presbyters, with sometimes called overseers.

Sometimes they were called bishops, pastors. These were all the same office. And so what we have is when probably when Paul told Timothy to go and to appoint elders, these were men who had grown in the faith, knew enough to preach God's word, knew enough to shepherd or pastor and oversee the local churches.

So these are the ones that Paul had called. So if you look at it, it was kind of an ideal elders meeting. Paul called the leaders of the Ephesian church together. It was not a meeting where they took minutes or wasted hours.

Paul went right to the point and was talking about soul winning. He was talking about reaching others with the gospel. So it was very it was a very focused meeting.

It had a goal, had a point. And that's what he dealt with. And it was a meeting that Paul used for them to look back at his previous three years ministry there in Ephesus.

[4 : 00] He talks a little bit about his experience, how he came and ministered to them. He's talked to them in verses 22 to 27 about the present situation, wanted the elders to remember that and to return to their mission.

And then in verses 28 to 35, Paul wants them to remember their vision and gives them a brand new or reminds them of their motivation for ministry, why they were there, why they were leading the church.

And he talks about their future responsibilities. And so here we have the Apostle Paul with this elders meeting and he is reminding them of their responsibilities.

Now, because of what the Apostle Paul wrote in Galatians chapter 6 verse 11, some would say the Apostle Paul had poor eyesight because in Galatians chapter 6 and verse 11, where we're going to be tonight in our Bible study, starting with Ephesians chapter 6, ending our study in the book of Galatians, Paul said, see what with with what large letters I am writing to you.

So Paul takes over from his the the fancy word is amanousis. But it was his the person that was his scribe, the person that was dictated to.

[5 : 28] So Paul takes the takes the writing instrument, whatever it was, and then he starts writing. Some would say because scripture was written in much of it was written in lowercase that he wrote in all uppercase.

The last few portion of verses in Galatians 6 to make the point. Some would say he wrote with large letters because he couldn't see. Well, whatever the case, we know that Paul had what we see here, 20, 20 vision, Acts 20, 20 vision.

And so what we're going to do is a little play on words this morning. So as we go on, we'll look at the first kind of vision the apostle Paul had just in these few short verses, verses 17 through 21.

And we see, first of all, that Paul had tender vision. We see that in verse 19. In verse 19, Paul says, serving the Lord with all humility.

Remember, he's reminding them of his past three years ministry there in Ephesus. He says, with many tears and trials which happened to me by the plotting of the Jews.

[6 : 39] So Paul had shed tears over the ministry, over others. Paul was moved by the needs of the people. We've said this before. Some think of the apostle Paul as this hardened former Pharisee.

But Paul showed a lot of compassion toward people without Christ. And so the apostle Paul said he shed tears. And he remembers or he has compassion for those in bondage.

And there were many of those without Christ who were in bondage, the bondage of idolatry, the bondage of unbridled passion. They were doing whatever felt right in their own eyes.

And they were getting themselves in trouble. And there were those who were in the bondage of anger and enslaving substances. And there were a lot of people without Christ who had no hope and needed some help.

So the apostle Paul reminds these elders of his passion for souls. And he's hoping that his passion for lost souls gets translated and gets caught by these elders.

[7 : 46] So what we see is Paul with his tender vision. And we think about our own ministry. We think about our own life as we go through our routine, our day.

Whether it's at work, whether it's at home, whether it's in the neighborhood, whether it's volunteering here or there. And we ask ourselves, do I have that same kind of compassion that the apostle Paul had?

Do I see people the way Jesus saw people? Do I see others through the eyes of Christ? Do I see others the way the apostle Paul saw them?

He sees people who were in sin or people who were involved in all manner of wickedness.

And rather than look down upon them and say, I would never do that. The apostle Paul rather had compassion for them and shed tears over their lost condition.

[8 : 46] And then with all that he had within him, did something to share the news of Christ with him. And no matter who they were, we're going to see that as we get further along this morning, that the apostle Paul, whether it's Jews, whether it's Greek, whoever they were, the apostle Paul had a tender vision for people.

Now that may not be your personality, but no matter what, God can produce in us that desire to see others come to know Christ as their Savior.

And so what we can do is we can be praying, God, give me compassion for others. God, rather than being cynical or rather than just seeing others and labeling them, God, help me to have compassion and see that, yes, they might be wicked.

Yes, they might be engaged in all manner of evil doing. But there's a soul there and there's a soul there that needs to know Christ. And with Christ, with the Holy Spirit coming in and indwelling someone, he can, as the apostle Paul said, all things can become new when the Holy Spirit indwells someone.

So Paul had this tender vision. He reminds these elders of his passion for souls. And then next, what we see is the apostle Paul had a targeted vision, and that's verse number 20, publicly and from house to house.

[10:31] We see the apostle Paul's ministry had been one of continual outreach. In verse 20, he says, Very possibly, these meant the house churches.

Churches didn't meet the same way in the first century as they do today, with large buildings, with large budgets. And so maybe in a city the size of Ephesus, there were a number of house churches with however many would fit into a particular dwelling.

And there was someone who was an overseer or an elder or someone who was responsible for that particular cell group. And Paul met from house to house when he was in Ephesus.

So he says, Remember back when I first came? We were meeting from house to house. He says, I kept nothing back that was helpful.

If there was something that I could do that would help others to grow in Christ, he says, I held nothing back. He says, But proclaimed it to you and taught you publicly. So Paul had a kind of a dual-pronged ministry.

[11:42] Paul, publicly in the marketplace, was talking about Jesus, and also from house to house. And very possibly, not only house churches, but if someone was amenable, Paul said, Hey, can I come over and we can sit down and we can talk more about this?

And maybe they invited him to dinner. Maybe they invited him for lunch. And the apostle Paul sat with his family. And he taught them about who Jesus was.

And how Jesus was the Messiah. And for the Gentiles, very possibly, the apostle Paul may have started back in the Old Testament. And brought them up to speed.

And to say, This is who Jesus was. I remember in the ministry that I.J. Fontenot, when he began there in South Louisiana, in Opelousas, his mode of, or his method of ministry was, literally, he didn't start with the Romans road.

He started them in Genesis. And he would go over, have coffee with the family, and he would share Christ with them, starting in the book of Genesis. He says, Because, because of the way they've been taught, he said, they're not ready to trust Christ.

[12:56] Because they need to know who Jesus really is. And they need to know about the gospel. And it's not about the church. And it's not about religion. And so he would begin. And sometimes it would take weeks or months before someone was really ready.

And they understood. And they were able to disconnect from, we need religion, to, we need Christ. And so from house to house, he went and he taught. And he probably expounded to the Gentiles, who were clueless.

They didn't know who Jesus was. They didn't know that God created the world. They didn't know that God had, that Jesus was the Son of God, that was, had always existed, that he was virgin born. So the Apostle Paul was teaching them these things. And to the Jews, the Apostle Paul had to teach them, this Jesus, remember, you heard from a child that the Messiah was going to come. This is why this Jesus is the Messiah of which Israel had long awaited. And so the Apostle Paul was teaching.

[14:02] He had a targeted vision. He went publicly, marketplace, very possibly if there was a synagogue somewhere, the Apostle Paul would go there.

But also from house to house. His ministry was one of continual outreach. He was always looking for someone to share the gospel with. And the Apostle Paul wasn't just satisfied with holding services.

He was sharing the gospel. And his strategy was actually based on Jesus' proclamation or Jesus' commission. We see that in Matthew chapter 28.

So if we turn there with me, Matthew chapter 28, we look at the very words of Jesus. And Jesus came and spoke to them saying, All authority has been given to me in heaven and on earth.

He says, verse 19, Go therefore and make disciples. Go there, he says, go and teach. Mathetes, the Greek word for disciple.

[15:08] This in the verb form. Make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit and teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you.

That was what Paul was doing. He was going and he was teaching and he was making disciples as he went from house to house as well as publicly. And Jesus says, And lo, listen to me.

I'm with you. Don't be afraid. I'm there with you as you are making disciples even to the end of the age. His public preaching centered on salvation, centered on the gospel, centered on Jesus Christ. Remember Paul said, I'm not ashamed of the gospel of Christ for it is the power of God for them who believe. We talked about that a little bit last week as well. So Paul's messages were centered on Christ and his personal outreach took him into homes.

It has worked since the first century. It's still working today. And there are many who will, and I've offered this and I offer it again.

[16:22] If you would like to open up your home to have a home Bible study and invite your friends and it may just simply be, look, let's study the Bible together.

And we start with the gospel of John. We start with the gospel of Rome, with the book of Romans somewhere, and we say, this is who Jesus is and this is what the Bible teaches about how to be right with God.

And so it can be an evangelistic Bible study where you open your home and invite friends to come, have refreshments, have just a reason to sit down together.

We open up God's Word, nothing pushy, but just studying God's Word from verse to verse to verse. I'm willing to do that. And that is how people come to know Christ because it's a very, very low key, low pressure, and they find out what the Bible says and the Holy Spirit begins to work on their life. And it's a way to open up your house and be a lighthouse to your community or to your friends. And so his outrage took him into homes and he lovingly presented Christ to every person that he came across that was willing to listen.

[17:42] Now, I don't know that the Apostle Paul gave a three-point message or gave the gospel to every actual human being that he encountered, but I think Paul saw everyone as a potential follower of Christ.

And so he allowed the Holy Spirit to lead him. So first of all, what we see is the Apostle Paul had a tender vision. We see in verse number 20 that he had a targeted vision.

He did it publicly and he did it from house to house. And then what we learn in verse 21 is that he had a total vision. He had a total vision that didn't leave anyone out.

Verse 20 in Acts chapter 20, he says, I kept back nothing that was helpful but proclaimed it to you, taught you from house to house. And then verse 21, he said, testifying to the Jews, did he stop at the Jews?

No, he says, and also to the Greeks. Repentance toward God and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ.

[18:54] So Paul had a total vision. He was testifying to Jews. He was sharing the gospel with Gentiles. And here's the thing. Paul saw everyone as a candidate for heaven.

Do we think in terms of that? When we go to the grocery store and the person who's checking us out, do we see them as a candidate for heaven? Hey, this is a potential person who will follow Christ.

And maybe it's just simply sharing a gospel tract. Maybe it's letting them know during the holidays. Just giving a short message about why we have this season and what it's all about.

We're coming up to Easter in just a few short weeks. It'll be here before we realize it. And talk about the resurrection because people are thinking about Easter eggs and Easter bunnies.

For Easter, they're not thinking about the resurrection. The reason why we celebrate the time when Jesus Christ rose again and now there is an empty tomb.

[20:06] So that's just a real simple way for us to share the gospel. There's all types of gospel tracts that make it simple for us to start a conversation.

There are really literally all kinds that my personal favorite gospel tract is put out by Dr. Larry Moyer from Dallas.

And it's May I Ask You a Question. And it's very simple. It gives illustrations and it goes through Jesus Christ, goes through good news, bad news.

It's called the good news, bad news approach. The Bible has bad news. The bad news is about us. The bad news is we're all sinners. And the Bible also says that the result of sin is death.

So that's even worse news. But the Bible has... The bad news is about us. The Bible has good news. And the good news is about Jesus Christ. But God demonstrated His love toward us and that

while we were sinners, Christ died for us.

[21 : 11] And so He uses illustrations in the gospel tract about being sick, someone having cancer, and if He could replace cancer cells, take them on, then you would die.

You would die in their place. Talks about missing the mark. Talks about throwing something and reaching some faraway place. Well, you know what?

We could all try. And some of us might be able to get it further than someone else, but none of us could actually physically do it. So it's impossible. He talks about missing the mark.

All have sinned and come short of the glory of God. And then talks about what Jesus did for us. And the good news is Christ died for us and explains how to trust Christ as our Savior.

And if you have different interests, they come with different covers. There was one for, I think, hunting. There was one for golf, if you play golf. There's one with a golf cover that you can share with your golfing buddies.

[22 : 12] There's one with horse on the front for those who are cowboy types. There's one with a motorcycle on the front that you can share with your motorcycle buddies.

There's all different. You may have a different personal favorite. As a matter of fact, I ordered a few gospel tracts that came in yesterday. That's a simple way we can do that.

And at a restaurant, hand it with your tip. Some people just hand the gospel tract and leave the waitress or leave the server hanging there with nothing to appreciate their service.

Don't do that. If you're not going to leave a tip, don't leave a gospel tract because I think that's a poor testimony. But as believers, we ought to be more generous. So just one tiny way that we can think about sharing the gospel with others.

So the Apostle Paul saw every contact as an opportunity to potentially share the gospel with someone. And also what we see is he says, I held back nothing, but in verse 21, he says, I gave the message to Jews and the Gentiles.

[23 : 27] Remember, Paul was a Jew. And what was the typical Jew's attitude toward non-Jews? Well, they didn't like them. And they thought they were less than people.

They called them dogs. They had all kinds of kind of bad names for Gentiles. And a Jew wouldn't even eat with a Gentile because they thought just eating at the same table with a Gentile would defile them and would make them somehow dirty.

And so Paul says, I testified both to Gentiles and to Jews. So what he's saying is his passion for souls allowed him no prejudice.

He was willing to share the gospel with anyone. He saw all people as those who were without Christ in need of repentance.

And he also gave the good news of salvation to everyone. He says, they came, and he says, when they had, verse 18, let's go back from verse 17.

[24 : 33] I don't have it on the screen. He sent to Ephesus, from Miletus, sent to the Ephesians, called for the elders of the church, verse 18. When they had come to him, he said to them, you know from the first day that I came to Asia in what manner I always lived among you, serving the Lord with all humility, with many tears and trials, which happened to me by the plotting of the Jews.

Those of you who've been going with us through the book of Galatians, those legalizers, those legalists who had come in, they were there for personal gain. They were there to put another notch on their belt.

Say, look, I got another convert. But Paul said, I came with humility. It was not about me. It was about you. Verse 20, how I kept back nothing that was helpful but proclaimed it to you and taught you publicly.

Remember, that's his targeted vision publicly and from house to house. And then we see his total vision, verse 21, testifying to Jews, also to Greeks, repentance toward God and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ.

And what we see as we close this out, we're going to jump to verse 26. Paul wanted to be free from the blood of all people.

[25 : 48] So we see that in verse 26. Paul said, therefore, he says, for this reason, I've said all of that, he says, therefore, I testify to you, I'm telling you the truth, that this day I am innocent of the blood of all men.

How could the apostle Paul say that? He could say that because he had made it his mission. He had a targeted vision. He had a tender vision and he had a total vision that as much as lied within

the apostle Paul, he had made the effort to share the gospel with everyone he came into contact with or with everyone that would listen, with everyone that was available.

So Paul said, I testify to you that I'm innocent of the blood of all men. Now, going back a little bit of what we talked about last week, you know what? The book of Romans says, how will they hear? Meaning, how will people hear about Jesus unless we tell them? And there are some who would say, if you don't tell someone and they go to hell, it's on you.

Well, I don't know if I would go that far, but all I will say is this, it's our responsibility to tell. God says that. But secondly, I do know that if God is wooing someone and the Holy Spirit is drawing them to salvation, God is going to make the way for them to hear the gospel.

[27 : 23] I would just want it to be me. Or I'm sure you would want it to be you. Because you can share in the joy of them coming to know Christ as their Savior. And so, the Apostle Paul says, I'm free from the blood of all men.

So as we conclude this morning's message, this was Paul's vision for training leaders. This was Paul's vision to these Ephesian pastors, these Ephesian elders.

He says, look at how I behaved among you. Remember the past. Remember my vision, how I did it. This is the current situation, he says, in verses 22, verse 27.

This is why you need to be busy. And then in verses 28 and following, he says, this is what you need to be doing in the future.

So these elders were charged with carrying out Paul's vision. So I leave us with this. May God give us Acts 20-20 vision.

[28 : 23] So we can be showing compassion for the lost and be looking for opportunities. opportunities. The opportunities may be in our own family. The opportunities may be in the workplace.

The opportunities may be in the neighborhood, maybe on the golf course, maybe at the gym. It may be somewhere. Somebody comes to you and says, I'm having a really bad day or this is what's happened to me and I don't know how I can get through this.

We can have an opportunity to introduce them to someone who can help them get through it. Jesus Christ. Let's pray. Our dear, precious Father, we thank you for your goodness.

Lord, I thank you for loving us beyond measure. Father, I pray that you would help us to develop this Acts 20-20 vision that we may have a tender vision towards others and that we may have a targeted vision that we may look for opportunities to share our faith and that we would have a total vision that we would leave no one out.

If you give us the opportunity, we will take that opportunity and share our faith with others. Father, we pray that you would help us to make a difference in the lives of those around us.

[29 : 46] We pray in Jesus' name. Amen. Let's all stand this morning. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. And as we look at our next steps this morning, maybe your first next step is to pray that God would give you compassion for lost souls.

Maybe you had it at one time and the passion and excitement to win others to Christ has maybe waned. It's not what it used to be.

And we can pray, God, please give me that passion again for those who don't know Christ. It could be that we pray for opportunities to see those who need to trust Christ as their Savior.

And maybe it's just praying God for that total vision. Lord, help me to be willing to share the gospel with anyone and be able to see everyone as a potential candidate for heaven.

And because we are ambassadors, we can boldly share the gospel with others.

[31 : 15] and that's what the apostle Paul was talking with these elders about. Father, this morning as we have gathered here together in your name, Lord, thank you for giving us the example of Paul and others.

help us, Lord, today to remember that you are our Savior, that we are part of your family. Help us to live a life that is worthy of our calling.

Lord, we pray that you would be with us as we go out today. Help us to be an encouragement to others. Fill us with your spirit.

And we pray that you would bless this offering that we are about to receive this morning. Use it to further your word. Help us to be able to accomplish your will here and abroad.

And for this, Father, we pray in Jesus' name. Amen.