

# Paul's Sermon About The Ministry Of The Church

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Preacher: Harry Robinson

[ 0 : 00 ] Now I want you to turn to Acts chapter 20, and this is in that series of talks which is coming to a conclusion about Paul's, or the sermons from the Acts of the Apostles.

And we've heard Paul preach to a mixed Jewish congregation, to a pagan congregation, and now we see him speaking to a Christian congregation, and it's in Acts 20, verse 17 following, and it's on page 133 of the New Testament section of your blue pew Bible.

So I hope you're all at the ready. See, there's one lovely thing about this which I'm very anxious to share with you this morning, and that is sermon preparation.

There is a model of sermon preparation in this story which I think if ever you aspire to be a minister, it would be a... No, I shouldn't say that because you all are.

Well, I forgot. Anyway, this is Sir Paul's sermon preparation. If you look in the verses immediately preceding, the paragraph immediately preceding verse 17, you'll see that he spent a day walking on the west coast trail, that is, all by himself, in the land which was made famous by Helen of Troy and the wooden horse, from Troas to Asos.

[ 1 : 40 ] So he spent a day there. And then he spent several days cruising in the western Mediterranean among the Aegean Islands.

The best I can do is Stanley Park and the British Columbia Ferry System. But that's where he prepared this sermon, which he delivered then to the elders of the church in Ephesus, telling them the things they needed to know.

So this has the special drama of being the last sermon that he was to preach to them, the last time they would see him. And so they listened to it.

It has another special characteristic, and that is probably in the whole of the Acts of the Apostles written by St. Luke, this is probably the only sermon that St. Luke actually was in the congregation and heard Paul preach it.

So it's a very important sermon in Acts chapter 20, verse 17. Now I want to tell you briefly a little bit about my life this week, because this is, I'm really in this sermon asking you a question.

[ 2 : 58 ] How do I cope? How do we cope as a congregation in the light of Paul's sermon? During the course of this past week, the Bible Society has made an appeal for support for the Bible Society work, and that's in your bulletin, which you'll find in your hands.

The food bank has made a very eloquent appeal for next Sunday that you will come and participate in that. There was an historic meeting in the Trendle Lounge this week when the staff of Youth for Christ, InterVarsity, and Young Life met together and shared their oneness in Christ.

That was a very important meeting for Vancouver and full of very important people. I heard this week about the mission at UBC in January, which is being led by Michael Green.

I am very much aware and constantly reminded of the international students' work, in which international students coming to seek knowledge at the universities and colleges of this city, it is our purpose, or the purpose of this mission, that they should also find the knowledge of God in the person of Jesus Christ.

I got a very eloquent letter from a man whom I know to have been converted at the Billy Graham Crusades here only a few years ago, a very eminent man as a Christian, I think, pleading with me as a leader of this congregation to do something about welcoming the gay games to Vancouver in 1990, and suggesting that what Rick Hansen did for paraplegics these games might do for homosexuals.

[ 4 : 49 ] One a very positive thing and the other, I think, a totally negative and destructive thing. And pleading with me to use my influence to do something about that.

I was also approached by people who are very concerned about making Vancouver a war-toy-free zone, that we won't give war toys to our children.

I was asked, what is the peace and justice movement of this church doing? I was reminded that there are Canadian physicians for the prevention of nuclear war, engineers for nuclear disarmament, lawyers for nuclear disarmament, veterans against nuclear arms.

All these important issues. I am asked to endorse, support, encourage, lead this congregation in all these matters.

And I simply don't know how to do it. I have no idea how to cope with that. I have no idea how to do it. And I must tell you that the number of these appeals creates in me what I consider to be a kind of sore and throbbing jealousy.

[ 6 : 14 ] Because I tend to think that all these issues could tear us apart. I admit that they are the legitimate ministry of people in this congregation.

I admit that some of them are tremendously important. And some of them are eternally significant. But my jealousy comes from the fact that if there isn't some kind of positive ministry in this congregation, then all those other ministries will fall and fail.

Because I don't think anybody will be concerned. And that what I am jealous about is that that ministry should be maintained.

Well, what is that ministry that I think is primary to the life of a congregation? Primary to the Christian community?

I suggest to you that Paul outlines it when he tells about his ministry in Ephesus. And he talks first about the primary nature of that ministry.

[ 7 : 33 ] And this is how Paul's apostolic ministry to that congregation of mixed Jews and Greeks and pagans and idolaters and fornicators and lascivious and immoral people.

He went among them and he fulfilled the ministry in this way. How did he do it? Look at verse 18. He lived among them.

Look at verse 19. He served the Lord with humility, tears, and trials. That was his daily diet as he fulfilled this fundamental ministry.

He did not shrink from telling them anything that was profitable. He taught them. In verse 20, you can look and see it. He taught them.

He taught them in public. And he taught them from house to house. Family by family. Household by household. He taught them.

[ 8 : 40 ] He taught them. We look in verse 24. And what was it he taught them? He taught them and ministered to them with that ministry which had been he had received from the Lord Jesus.

The Lord Jesus had met him and ministered to him. And he was carrying out that ministry that he had received from Jesus. And the secret, I'm sure, of the fundamental ministry of the Christian church is that the ministry you receive, you give to somebody else.

That that's a primary reality. You must do it. If you are the dead end of the ministry you receive and it's not passed on by you, then the primary ministry of the church is not going on.

Jesus ministered to Paul. Paul ministered to the Ephesians. And what did he do? He testified. And this is again in verse 24.

He testified to the gospel of the grace of God. The good news of the grace of God. And that was so important, he tells us in that verse, that testifying to the grace of God was so important that he didn't count his life as worth anything by comparison.

[ 10 : 04 ] My life is not precious. If I was to lose it, that wouldn't bother me. But to fulfill that ministry, that's the concern of my existence, around which my existence throbs.

If you look in verse 25, you will see further what this primary ministry was. That among those people, in verse 25, he went among them preaching the kingdom, the reality of the rule of Christ in the hearts of men, in the hearts of men of other nations, in the hearts of men of other faiths, in the hearts of men of other cultures, in the hearts of people of all sorts of mixed sexual identity.

He preached the kingdom of God, in the hearts of men of other nations, in the hearts of men of other nations, in the hearts of men of other nations.

Three years he did it. Declaring the whole counsel of God. So that was the fundamental ministry which Paul carried out by which the church became a church.

By which this whole mixed bag of people from all sorts of moral and spiritual and ideological and philosophical backgrounds came together and became the church of God.

[ 11 : 52 ] By that primary ministry, by that primary ministry, by that apostolic ministry of St. Paul. Which ministry must be basic to us as a congregation as well.

The second level of ministry that went on in that church was pastoral ministry. And it's the ministry of the elders.

If you look in verse 17, it was the elders that were gathered together. And elders is always a plural term.

There isn't an elder in the congregation. There are always elders. And that word is translated into English by, well, another translation of the Greek is presbyters, priests, ministers, pastors, shepherds, bishops.

All that is the function of the elders. To do all those things. Now we think of most of those terms as titles.

[ 13 : 03 ] Pastor, minister, father, bishop, your lordship. We look at all those things as titles belonging to particular people in the church hierarchy.

No, that's not what they are primarily. Primarily they are functions of ministry. Primarily they are functions of pastoral ministry. Shepherding the flock of God.

And so that pastoral ministry, Paul tells the elders, you must carry on. I have come among you and I've done the primary ministry. Now you have to work at the pastoral ministry.

Now, how does he do this? Well, the elders have been, by the Holy Spirit, look in verse 28, they have been made guardians.

That is, they have oversight of the congregation. They're Holy Spirit made guardians. They're not vestry elected leaders.

[ 14 : 12 ] They are Holy Spirit made guardians. Now, it's that tension in the church which I think so often corrupts the pastoral ministry.

That we have all sorts of official people with official jobs. But what we need are people who are, by the Holy Spirit, made the elders and the pastors and the shepherds and the guardians of the flock. And it's not by putting dog collars on people that that happens. That's a work of the Holy Spirit. And the dog collar may or may not be subsequent to that.

But I regard this congregation to be full of, unacknowledged, undefined, Holy Spirit-made guardians of the faith who have a ministry among us.

And sometimes that's exercised in small groups. And sometimes it's exercised in counseling. And sometimes it's exercised in prayer. But these are the Holy Spirit-made guardians who are the elders in this congregation.

[ 15 : 30 ] And who have this pastoral ministry to fulfill. And what is the pastoral ministry? Well, it is to feed the church of God. Do you know that there's a word here which I think is very important for us to see?

And it's the word, take care of yourselves. And it's verse 28.

Take heed to yourselves. Part of the ministry is to you yourself and to the flock, the church of God. To feed that church. And what kind of a church is it? It is a church that God has purchased with his own blood. Well, scholars have trouble with this verse because it talks about God's blood.

And they don't quite know how to interpret or quite know how to get around it. I think almost anybody could. But if you're a pure scholar, it represents a problem.

[ 16 : 37 ] It's a church purchased with his own blood. And you see, fundamental to your membership in the congregation or the flock of Christ is that you are there because you have been bought.

That you are not your own. You belong to Jesus Christ. It's not a volunteer organization. You have been bought and paid for.

Now do what you're told. I mean, that's the implication, isn't it? That's the basis of understanding. This church.

And knowing that, he says, the problems that you're going to have in the pastoral ministry are that fierce wolves are going to come among you in sheep's clothing.

Well, it clearly indicates that the problem we're going to have as a church are problems that are going to originate among us in our relationships to one another.

[ 17 : 44 ] And the pride and covetousness and arrogance, perhaps, of people among us. People like me.

And perhaps like some of you. Who could be as wolves among the flock of God, destroying people's faith.

And not only that, there's going to be false teachers among you. Who will draw people away from the simple discipleship of Jesus Christ. And I think, and this is where my jealousy throbs.

I think I often see people by good causes and good ideas and deep concerns being drawn away from the fundamental reality of their life, which is to be the disciples of Jesus Christ.

That's the primary thing for which you've been bought. Well, that's what he says. That's where the problems are going to come from. So that's pastoral ministry that has to go on.

[ 18 : 48 ] And then there's personal ministry. And I say this because it's God's ministry to your person. God ministering to you as a person.

And if you look towards the end of the passage, and you'll see where Paul says, having talked about his own apostolic ministry, having talked about the pastoral ministry of the elders, he now talks about God's personal ministry to people.

And he says, and I haven't written down. Oh, there it is.

Verse 32. I commend you to God and to the word of his grace. And that is how God ministers to each one of us. That's why Paul says, take heed to yourself.

That's why Paul says, I pummel my body, lest having preached to others, minister to other people, I myself should be a castaway.

[ 19 : 55 ] The problem that most of us have with the Christian faith is not the wolves, not the teachers, but ourselves. And he says, take heed to yourself and allow God's personal ministry to you to be carried on.

And it's done by the word of his grace. If you look in verse 32 following, this word of grace is able to build you up. That word of grace from God.

It's able to build you up in your faith. It's able to give you an inheritance which belongs to you among those who are sanctified. Some people come home to their wives and their wife takes one look at them and says, you've been drinking.

They might come home and saying, you've been out with the boys. They might come home and say, you know, it could be worse than that.

I won't suggest to your imagination other things that might be said. But you can tell where they've been. And Paul says, when you come home, I want you to be recognized as having been among the people of God.

[ 21 : 23 ] And sharing the inheritance which belongs to them. That's the kind of picture. To give you an inheritance among those who are sanctified.

But then he goes on from there and he talks about that personal ministry of God. And I just want quickly to get through this. Look what it says there.

How that ministry works. I think it works by dealing with your covetousness. And Paul says, God, by his word of grace, dealt with me.

So that I didn't covet anyone's silver or gold or apparel. So much Christian ministry is marred by covetousness. As I was told this week, lots of people come to church because they're told, all the grace of God belongs to you in Jesus Christ.

And they're not there for many weeks before they find out. As I was told this week, they get the hidden message. We got a lot of overhead costs and we'd like you to share them.

[ 22 : 33 ] That's the real message. And people hear that. But Paul says, I didn't covet your silver or your gold or your apparel.

He said, you know that I worked with my hands. And God, I think, enables us to work without covetousness, to work with our own hands. He enables us to toil, to help the weak.

And that's toil. That's hard, long work. He sustains you in that by giving you the words of the Lord Jesus to remember that it's more blessed to give than receive.

You get the balance straight. Most of us think blessing is receiving something. But in the kingdom, in the church, the blessing comes from giving something.

Giving something of yourself, of the toil of your hands. Giving something in terms of other people. That's where the blessing comes.

[ 23 : 48 ] You don't have to sit there accounting for what you've received. If you want to know the blessing of God's ministry, then you are to remember the words of the Lord Jesus.

It's more blessed to give than to receive. Most of us live our world caught in a network of covetousness in which we want.

And Paul smashes that with a statement from Jesus, which incidentally is not recorded anywhere else. A statement from Jesus saying, it's more blessed to give than receive.

Turning our kind of world and our kind of covetousness upside down. And Paul's sermon was over. And the wonder of this sermon was it ended with Paul praying, with people embracing each other, with people weeping, with people kissing each other.

Where that apostolic ministry has taken place, where the pastoral ministry is happening, where the personal ministry of God to individuals, and allowing them not to be covetous, to work with their hands, to remember the words of the Lord Jesus, to minister to the weak, where that's happening, then there is great love and great concern one for another.

[ 25 : 06 ] That we pray for one another, we embrace one another, we weep with one another, and we kiss one another. That's the community I want you to belong to. And from that community, to go out into the world, to all the issues that we must face, in the name of Jesus Christ, and in the acknowledgement, that Jesus Christ is Lord.

Amen. Let us pray. Amen. Let us pray. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen.

Andefening God, Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.y fans.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. That is what they say, Amen.

[ 26 : 32 ] Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. stone. Oborn, fly to us. Amen. Amen. Wake up for us, props for us, and their name, let us sing, to the software, it is per Rubing home.

Amen. Amen. Amen. offerings of all of ourselves to you. And to receive these, our prayers, which we offer unto your divine majesty, imploring you to inspire continually in the universal church the spirit of truth and unity and concord.

And grant that all of us who confess your holy name may agree in the truth of your holy word and live in unity and godly love.

We beseech you also to lead all nations into the way of righteousness.

And so to guide their governors and rulers that your people may enjoy the blessings of freedom and peace.

[ 28 : 08 ] And this morning we think of the church in Russia and all those who are in prison for their faith since this is St. Nicholas Day and he has been the patron saint of Russia.

And grant unto your servant Elizabeth, our queen, and to all who are put into authority under her, both here in British Columbia and around the world, that they may truly and impartially administer justice to the maintenance of your true religion and virtue.

give grace, O Heavenly Father, to all bishops, including Douglas, our bishop, and priests, for Harry and Archie and Ernie, for Bill and Jim, for Brian and Judy Telfer and Paul Barnett in Australia, and for those who are going to be ordained this afternoon at the cathedral, that they, by their life and their doctrine, may set forth your true and living word and rightly and duly administer your holy sacraments.

Prosper all who proclaim the gospel of your kingdom among the nations. Lionel Gurney and Don will be traveling tomorrow to Pakistan.

Jack and Jean McLeod in New Caledonia. Brian and Sue Salter in Zimbabwe have written that there has been some divisiveness among staff at school and ask our prayers for unity.

[ 30 : 56 ] And they have come up against spirit worship. And so we pray that the people may be freed from this and that a new congregation started by one of the former students of the school would thrive.

And to all your people, Lord, give your heavenly grace and especially to our congregation that with meek heart and due reverence we may all hear and receive your holy word, truly serving you in holiness and righteousness all our days.

and we most humbly implore you of your goodness, O Lord, to comfort and succor all who in this transitory life are in trouble or in sorrow or need who are sick or in any other adversity who we now we name.

for Beth and for Joan and Jack and Jack.

Amen. We remember before you, O Lord, all of your servants who have departed this life in faith and fear of you.

[ 33 : 22 ] We remember the family of Hazel Pipes this week. And we bless your holy name for all who in life and death have glorified you, crying to you to give us grace that rejoicing in their fellowship, we may follow their good example and with them be partakers of your heavenly kingdom.

Amen. So, Father, grant these prayers for Jesus Christ's sake, our only mediator and advocate to whom with you and the Holy Spirit be all honor and glory world without end.

Amen. Amen. Now, as our offering is received, we sing together hymn number 203.

and a letter of glory to Christ's sake. Let it be with you for the grace? Let us pray together for the grace, for the nas■ el student and benefits to everybody who shall embrace theness, our of the world of Daniel■ who shall overthrow his faith and a definition of inclusivity inπει gravy and sac manifesting each that and hid the so of birth in the e ja

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CHOIR SINGS CHOIR SINGS Chitinh ph ■■■■■■ of a day soon and all there is, our to the Son of promises now it is one day if you'd end, things dreams shall stand forever, thy days will not change forever.

The service now continues on page 76 in the prayer book with this invitation to all of us. You that do truly and earnestly repent you of your sins and are in love and charity with your neighbors and intend to lead the new life, following the commandments of God and walking from henceforth in his holy ways, draw near with faith and take this holy sacrament to your comfort and make your humble confession to Almighty God, meekly kneeling upon your knees.

Almighty God, Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, maker of all things, judge of all, we acknowledge and confess our manifold sins and wickedness, which we from time to time most grievously have committed, by thought, word, and deed, against thy divine majesty.

We do earnestly repent, and are heartless sorry, for these are misdemeanors. have mercy upon us, most merciful Father. Thy Son, our Lord Jesus Christ's sake, forgive us all that is past, and grant that we may ever hereafter serve and please thee in newness of life, the honor and glory of thy name.

[ 40 : 39 ] through Jesus Christ's sake, amen. Almighty God, our Heavenly Father, who of his great mercy hath promised forgiveness of sins to all them that with hearty repentance and true faith turn unto him, have mercy upon you, pardon and deliver you from all your sins, confirm and strengthen you in all goodness, and bring you to everlasting life through Jesus Christ, our Lord.

Hear what comfortable words our Savior Christ saith unto all that truly turn to him. Come unto me, all that labor and are heavy laden, and I will refresh you.

God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son to the end that all that believe in him should not perish, but have eternal life.

Hear also what St. Paul saith together, This is a true saying, and worthy of all that we receive, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners.

Hear also what St. John saith, If anyone sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous, and he is the creation of our sins.

[ 42 : 11 ] The Lord be with you. And with our spirit.

Lift up your hearts. We give them all to the Lord. Let us give thanks unto our Lord God.

He is the Christ of the Lord. It is very meet, right, and our bounden duty, that we should at all times and in all places give thanks unto thee.

O Lord, holy Father, almighty, everlasting God, creator and preserver of all things.

Therefore, with angels and archangels, and with all the company of heaven, we laud and magnify thy glorious name, evermore praising thee and singing.

[ 43 : 22 ] glory, glory, glory, glory, glory, Lord, God of hosts, heaven and earth are full of glory, glory to thee, O Lord, is kind.

blessed is he that come in the day of the Lord, O Son, the King of heaven, glory to thee, O Lord, is kind.

Blessing and glory and thanksgiving be unto thee, Almighty God, our heavenly Father, who of thy tender mercy didst give thine only Son, Jesus Christ, to take our nature upon him and to suffer death upon the cross for our redemption, who made there by his one oblation of himself once offered a full, perfect, and sufficient sacrifice, oblation and satisfaction for the sins of the whole world.

And did institute and did his holy gospel command us to continue a perpetual memorial of that his precious death until his coming again.

Hear us, O merciful Father, we most humbly beseech thee, and grant that we, receiving these thy creatures of bread and wine, according to thy Son, our Savior, Jesus Christ's holy institution, in remembrance of his death and passion, may be partakers of his most blessed body and blood, who in the same night that he was betrayed took bread, and when he had given thanks, he break it, and gave it to his disciples, saying, Take, eat, this is my body which is given for you.

[ 45 : 33 ] Do this in remembrance of me. Likewise, after supper he took the cup, and when he had given thanks, he gave it to them, saying, Drink ye all of this, for this is my blood of the new covenant, which is shed for you and for many for the remission of sins.

Do this as oft as ye shall drink it in remembrance of me. Together. Wherefore, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, we thy honest service with all thy holy church, remembering the precious death of thy beloved Son, his mighty resurrection and glorious ascension, and looking for his coming again, Lord, to make before thee in this sacrament of the holy bread of eternal life and the cup of everlasting salvation, the memorial which he hath commanded.

And we entirely desire thy fatherly goodness, mercifully to accept this our sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving, most humbly beseeching thee to pray, that by the merits and death of thy Son, Jesus Christ, and through faith in his blood, we in all thy whole church may obtain remission of our sins. Gilm Refere microchip editing. That night, God bless you. Amen. Jahang, that so quit. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

[ 47 : 17 ] Amen. Amen. Amen. Men. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.