



Testify to the Gospel of the Grace of God

Series: Acts -- Worldwide Witness to the Worth of Jesus Christ

Acts 20:13-38

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-Pray

-Intro: Please don't look at this passage and tell yourself that this is for Elders/Pastors and then check out because you don't think that it applies to you. Yes, it does address elders as Paul is engaging in a discussion with the Ephesian elders but we, as the people of God and the bride of Christ, can learn so much from what Paul says about himself and his ministry and from the instruction that he gives these guys. So please engage with me concerning this text this morning.

-Paul is coming from one of what had to be the best church services ever! The church had gathered together to hear the Word of God expounded, which Paul did, and to break bread together and remember Christ and His saving work among them. And remember, that in the midst of that service a young man named Eutychus fell to his death out of the window from the third story. Paul goes down, bends over and takes the young man in his arms and the child is resurrected and brought back to life. Paul goes back up and resumes the service, breaks bread with them and then has some conversation for the rest of the night until daybreak and then departs. And they took the young man away alive and the church was left with great comfort--- yea! Seriously, imagine being a part of that service! Amazing! What a gift from God. But Paul, as amazing as that service had to be, still had ministry that he was called to do and so he leaves to continue that ministry.

1 – Mapquest once again (13-16)

-"But going ahead to the ship, we set sail for Assos, intending to take Paul aboard there, for so he had arranged, intending himself to go by land. And when he met us at Assos, we took him on board and went to Mitylene. And sailing from there we came the following day opposite Chios; the next day we touched at Samos; and the day after that we went to

Miletus. For Paul had decided to sail past Ephesus, so that he might not have to spend time in Asia, for he was hastening to be at Jerusalem, if possible, on the day of Pentecost.” (Acts 20:13–16, ESV)

-Here we have a record for how everyone got to Miletus, which is where the dialogue between Paul and the Ephesian elders takes place. Paul doesn't get on the ship in Troas but arranges for them to pick him up in Assos and he is going to get there by land. Now we don't know why Paul did this---we can only speculate. It would have been a quicker trip to get to Assos by land than by sailing. So Paul could have wanted to get to Assos and have a chance to share the gospel before boarding the ship. It may be that Paul wanted some believers from Troas to accompany him to Assos so that he could have more time to disciple and teach them. It could have been that Paul wanted some time alone to commune with the Lord after this amazing service and knowing that he was going to Jerusalem where he knew that affliction and persecution would be waiting for him there. We don't know. But for whatever reason, Paul boards the ship in Assos and they sail to Miletus.

-Now we also see that Paul intentionally sails past Ephesus so that he might not have to spend time in Asia because he wanted to hurry to be in Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost. But he also knew that the ship would be ported in Miletus for a while and knew that it was a doable trip (30 miles or so) for the Ephesian elders to meet him there for a final farewell and some final instruction. Paul had spent close to 3 years in Ephesus so he knew that if he went there that there would be many farewells and he would be delayed. You know how it is when you get the church together for a farewell---just like our picnic yesterday---you gotta have some chicken and some conversation and some activities for the farewell and that can take lots of time and Paul knew it. And since it was a farewell it would have taken much longer because of the emotions that would be involved. So Paul calls the elders to meet him and they come.

2 – Paul's look back at life and ministry (17-21)

-“Now from Miletus he sent to Ephesus and called the elders of the church to come to him. And when they came to him, he said to them: “You yourselves know how I lived among you the whole time from the first day that I set foot in Asia, serving the Lord with all humility and with tears and with trials that happened to me through the plots of the Jews; how I did not shrink from declaring to you anything that was profitable, and teaching you in public and

from house to house, testifying both to Jews and to Greeks of repentance toward God and of faith in our Lord Jesus Christ.” (Acts 20:17–21, ESV)

-Paul appeals to his life with them. He tells them, “You yourselves know how I lived among you.” You have seen my life lived with you. You have seen the gospel lived out knowing that the gospel applied to a man’s heart changes the man. It could have been that some people were trying to discredit Paul and his ministry. That definitely happened. There were people trying to hinder his ministry---we have seen that already in Acts several times. Paul is saying look at my life and not to rumors or opinions. Paul is telling them to recall the way he lived among them. Well, how did he live?

-He served the Lord---Paul considered the mercies of God to him and poured himself out and presented himself as a living sacrifice because he knew that was his spiritual worship and reasonable service. Paul never forgot the mercy of God in Christ shown to him who used to be a persecutor of the church that Christ purchased with His blood. Paul knew what kind of sinner he was and he knew the magnificent grace and mercy that had been shown to him. Paul knew what Christ had done for him and he never moved past it. And everything that Paul did was rooted in a love for Christ for he would proclaim that the love of Christ controlled him (2 Cor 5:14). And everything that Paul said and did was to please the Lord and not man.

-This should be the same for us beloved. We must never move past the grace of God in Christ to us but as we, by the power of the Spirit, grasp God’s grace more and more, we should be moved to pour ourselves out in service to the Lord and present ourselves as a living sacrifice that is rooted in a deep love for Christ and what He has done for us personally. And we speak and act to always please the Lord and not to please man. And how did Paul serve and how are we to serve?

A – He served with all humility---Paul’s ministry and service was not about himself. Paul did not seek to draw attention to himself but to always point to Christ. He had been brought low before God and he knew that he was no different than anyone else. He was only a sinner saved by grace. Paul knew that if he had any gifts that had been used in ministry that they were gifts that had been given to him by God.

-Paul's serving the Lord was not about himself. Isn't that what humility is about anyway-not being about self. Timothy Keller said, "the essence of gospel humility is not thinking more of myself OR thinking less of myself, it is thinking of myself less." That's it beloved and we can learn greatly from this. God's redemptive plan, our giftedness and the ministries that we are involved in, the church, all of it beloved is not about us. It's about serving for the glory of God. We truly need to die to self and be humbled before the cross. Paul was!

B – He served with tears---ministry is emotional because it's real. Paul was not mastered by his emotions but he had a love for the lost and he had a love for the church. His ministry was full of great empathy and compassion. Paul's involvement in ministry was personal not just some professionalism. He had a ministering presence in the midst of the good and the bad. He had friendships and loyalties and serving others was more than just a routine to him. It was more than just something to do. He loved these people and he rejoiced with those who rejoice and he wept with those who wept.

-We need to minister this way beloved. Our lives together should be real. Our love for one another has to be personal and more than just some surfacy talk. Our life together is going to consist of good and bad times. There will be easy times and then there will be times of great difficulty. Is it going to be personal and real enough for us to fight through it and rejoice with those who rejoice and weep with those who weep? I trust that it will be. Because Paul stuck it out even in the trials. He says that next...

C – He served with trials---ministry is very hard. The Christian life is hard. Paul was facing trials by the plots of the Jews---his own people. These are the people that he wished that he himself could be accursed so that they would know Christ. Imagine how hard it would be to be persecuted and attacked by those that you love. Ministry was hard but that did not stop Paul.

-The passage says that in all of this Paul never shrank from declaring what was profitable.

Well, what is it that is profitable? Paul told Timothy:

-"All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work." (2 Timothy 3:16–17, ESV)

-Paul knew that his task was to equip the saints for ministry and he knew that the most important thing the church needed was the Word of God to be proclaimed so he didn't hold anything back. We saw last week how the power of the gospel turned Ephesus upside down and Paul trusted in the power of the gospel of Christ. He taught it publicly and he taught it privately from house to house. Woe to Paul if he didn't preach the gospel and that's what he did---he didn't hold back. He preached repentance toward God and faith alone in our Lord Jesus Christ alone. And Paul didn't discriminate. The passage says that Paul testified to both Jews and Greeks of the gospel. It didn't matter to Paul who it was he was going to share the gospel with them. Paul knew that to be saved from the wrath of God for our sin was man's greatest need. It was the greatest need of the lost and it was the greatest need of believers even after salvation---repentance and faith in Christ.

-It still is our greatest need. If you are here today and you don't know Christ personally, your greatest need even if you don't realize it is to be saved from the wrath of God and the death that your sins deserve. And you can't save yourselves. You can't earn it. You have no hope in this world apart from crying out to God for His grace to give you faith to believe in Christ and to repent and turn from your sins. You can't muster that up on your own. And if you are here today and you do know Christ, He is still our greatest need. We still sin and are called to live a life of continual repentance and turning to Christ. We are sinners saved by grace---praise the Lord for that!

-Paul trusted totally in the power of the gospel. He always had and that trust evidenced itself in his life and his ministry---past, present and future. And Paul gives us a glimpse into the future.

3 – Paul's look at future ministry (22-24)

-“And now, behold, I am going to Jerusalem, constrained by the Spirit, not knowing what will happen to me there, except that the Holy Spirit testifies to me in every city that imprisonment and afflictions await me. But I do not account my life of any value nor as precious to myself, if only I may finish my course and the ministry that I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the gospel of the grace of God.” (Acts 20:22–24, ESV)

-Paul says that he is constrained by the Holy Spirit. What that means is that Paul is bound by the Holy Spirit to go even when knowing that persecution awaits him in Jerusalem. Paul must go and preach the gospel knowing that he will be imprisoned and suffer much affliction. Jesus had said that He would show Paul how much he would suffer for the kingdom. He expected it. We should too beloved. No one is greater than his master and Christ is our master and the world hated Him and it's going to hate us. The world persecuted our Savior and if we live for Him then it's going to persecute us too. Paul told Timothy that anyone who sought to live a godly life will be persecuted. But you know what? Jesus promised us that we would be blessed for it. He promised that we would have blessings in heaven if persecuted for His name sake. Praise the Lord beloved. The sufferings of the present do not even compare to the blessings that will be revealed in the day of Jesus Christ---praise the Lord AMEN!

-Well, how can we live like that? What perspective must we have to truly praise the Lord in the midst of promised persecution? What perspective did Paul have? He tells us.

-"But I do not account my life of any value nor as precious to myself, if only I may finish my course and the ministry that I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the gospel of the grace of God." (Acts 20:24, ESV)

-Paul's self had died. His ministry was not about himself or how he was treated or what trials he had to face or what sufferings he had to endure. Paul's only goal in ministry was to finish his course well and finish well his ministry that he had received from the Lord. He wanted to die testifying to the gospel of the grace of God and do it well! Paul knew his ministry was a gift of God's grace. Paul knew that being used of God in ministry was not a right or an entitlement and he knew that he couldn't produce a ministry apart from the grace of God. And the mark of a God-given ministry is one that is saturated with testifying to the gospel of the grace of God in Christ. This marked Paul's ministry and it marked his life!

-Beloved, this is to be true of all of us as Christians. We are to die to self and not make things about us. We are to serve the Lord fervently and have as our goal the same as Paul---to finish well the calling that God has placed upon our lives whatever it may be. Finish well beloved---finish well so that you will be embraced by our Savior, and He will look you in the eye and He

will call you by name and He will say to you---Well done good and faithful servant, enter into the joy of your Master!

-Paul finished well and he wanted the same for the church in Ephesus. Paul was leaving and was not to see them again so he gave instruction to the elders so that they could continue the ministry there.

4 – Paul Addresses the Elders to continue the ministry.

A – He tells them that he is not going to see them again (25)

-“And now, behold, I know that none of you among whom I have gone about proclaiming the kingdom will see my face again.” (Acts 20:25, ESV)

-Paul knew that this was his final farewell with these guys. And he knew this was no game but ministry was real. This was not just a social event for Paul or the elders. This was no light thing and Paul never took his ministry to them lightly.

B – Paul didn’t take his ministry to them lightly (26-27)

-“Therefore I testify to you this day that I am innocent of the blood of all, for I did not shrink from declaring to you the whole counsel of God.” (Acts 20:26–27, ESV)

-Paul tells these guys that I have not held anything back from you. I preached to you the things of God’s Word that brings much comfort and joy but I have also preached the hard things that you probably didn’t always want to hear but my conscious is clear. Paul knew that he would give an account to God of his ministry and oversight of God’s people in Ephesus so he held nothing back. He consoled them, encouraged them, exhorted them but he also corrected them, rebuked and reprovved them and warned them so that he was innocent of their blood. I imagine that Paul had in mind the Scriptures from Ezekiel that can help us understand this more thoroughly.

-“So you, son of man, I have made a watchman for the house of Israel. Whenever you hear a word from my mouth, you shall give them warning from me. If I say to the wicked, O wicked one, you shall surely die, and you do not speak to warn the wicked to turn from his way, that wicked person shall die in his iniquity, but his blood I will require at your hand. But if you warn the wicked to turn from his way, and he does not turn from his way, that person shall die in his iniquity, but you will have delivered your soul.” (Ezekiel 33:7–9, ESV)

-Paul felt the weight of speaking the Word of God and he would not hold back any of the hard truths. If God said it then Paul preached it and he trusted God for the results. Paul wasn't worried about self-preservation or the perception of man but he felt the weight of being faithful to speak the truth in love and thus please God.

-What about us beloved? Do we speak the full counsel of God's word? That word for counsel means the plan or purpose of God---is that what we are about? It's not always warm and fuzzy--it's just not. This is a sobering reminder to us of the responsibility that we, as God's people, to speak God's truth. Are we willing to speak it in love? Are we willing to receive it too? Because just as we saw in the Ezekiel passage, if the preacher speaks the truth of God from His word, it's not the preacher's fault if we don't receive it. He is free from guilt. Beloved, if we refuse to receive the full counsel of God that's on us---it's on us. Do we desire the full counsel of God and are we willing to submit to it?

C – Paul gives the elders instruction from which we all can learn (28-31)

-“Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to care for the church of God, which he obtained with his own blood. I know that after my departure fierce wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; and from among your own selves will arise men speaking twisted things, to draw away the disciples after them. Therefore be alert, remembering that for three years I did not cease night or day to admonish every one with tears.” (Acts 20:28–31, ESV)

1 – Paul tells them to pay careful attention to themselves---Paul is telling them to know the truth and be immersed and grounded in it. Jesus told his disciples to watch and pray so that you may not enter into temptation (Mt 26:41). Paul knew this was crucial for ministry. That's why he told Timothy to “keep a close watch on yourself and on the teaching...Persist in this for

by so doing you will save both yourself and your hearers' (1 Tim 4:16). He knew that a man is only as useful as he is devoted to Christ. Paul knew that ministry is not just some outward actions but an overflow of intimate communion with Christ personally. Paul knew that these men could not care adequately for the church and others if they neglected the care of their own souls.

-Beloved, the application here for us is simple---we need to pay careful attention to ourselves. I'm not talking about some kind of morbid introspection here but we need to watch and pray and guard against temptation and we need to hate sin and fight it. We need to be immersed in the Word and in prayer. We need to be applying the Word to our lives and have every intention to submit to it and live it. It's not about just knowing the right catch phrases---we need to preach the gospel to ourselves and live it. Beloved, we are called to be holy and not just outward in the eyes of men but inward toward God. We must pay careful attention to ourselves by pursuing Christ hard and in a real way.

2 – Paul tells them to pay careful attention to the flock---Paul is telling the elders that they need to pay careful attention to themselves because that is crucial to being able to pay careful attention to the flock. Paul knows the weight of watching over the people of God. Paul knows that these guys will stand before God and give an account just like he will.

-"Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls, as those who will have to give an account." (Hebrews 13:17, ESV)

-Why are they to do this and why is it weighty? Because the church was purchased with the blood of Christ. Christ loved the church and gave Himself up for her. And if Christ loved the church so much then so should we. The church belongs to Christ and is to be centered wholly on Him. Paul wanted these guys to have a right view of the church and to treat it as the precious fellowship that it was. Why---because it costs the blood of the Son of God!

-Beloved, we need to have a right view of the church too. When we look around and see our brothers and sisters, we need to see the work of Christ to purchase the church. And this is a personal thing beloved. When we look around and see one another, we should see the miracle

of the work of Christ applied to each other's hearts and lives and see the grace and love of Christ at work in each other and love one another and it be real and amazing to us. We can all pay careful attention to one another if we really love one another. If we really care and love each other then we will watch over one another. We will stir one another up to love and good works. We will strive side by side for the gospel for the glory of God and not for ourselves. If one of us strays then the others will pursue and confront out of love if need be and love will bring a wandering brother or sister back and save their soul from death and that love will cover a multitude of sins. If we really love one another, then we will be willing to do this for each other and we will be willing and thankful to have it done to us. What a blessing of God to be in a family, and that's how Scripture describes the church, that loves one another like this. Beloved, pay careful attention to yourselves and to each other!

3 – Paul tells the elders to watch out for wolves---Paul knows the wolves are going to come in the church from the outside and from the inside. They are going to speak twisted things to draw away the disciples from the real truth about Christ. He tells them to be alert so they will see them. Paul had warned them concerning this. Paul is telling them to be alert and identify them and then deal with them. He is right---we need to deal with anyone who speaks false things. Call them out and rebuke them. That's what Paul told Titus to do.

-“He must hold firm to the trustworthy word as taught, so that he may be able to give instruction in sound doctrine and also to rebuke those who contradict it.” (Titus 1:9, ESV)

-It's the same for us beloved, elders especially. Elders, be alert and on guard for the speaking of false things and protect the body of Christ from it at all costs. And beloved, watch for yourself and for others and receive the warnings that you may receive. Why do we do this? Again, the church is not ours but it was obtained with the blood of Christ our Savior---it is His bride and so we watch and pray and then we identify and we fight!

D – Paul commends them to prayer and the Word (32)

-“And now I commend 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.” (Acts 20:32, ESV)

-Paul knew that the only true wisdom and the only hope were to be found in the Word of God and he knew that only God and His grace could sustain and keep them. Paul knew that the word was the most important thing for the church and he knew that life in it would keep these men and the church.

1 - He knew that the word of grace would **build up** these guys and the body. Paul knew that God uses His word to strengthen the church as a powerful source of spiritual growth. Paul knew the Word of God would be a source of assurance. As elders, these guys could not--- absolutely could not neglect prayer and the ministry of the word. This would be their main task as it was the most important thing the church needed and so it had to be central. Paul wrote to the Ephesians:

-"And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes. Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love." (Ephesians 4:11–16, ESV)

-We are called to do the same beloved. Elders, we are to shepherd and teach the word to equip this body for ministry work. And beloved, we are to pursue Christ in such a way that we unify in our faith and we are to continually grow in Christ toward maturity so that we aren't tossed around in uncertainty and every wind of doctrine and so be deceived. Doing this we will speak the truth in love and we will grow in unity and we will work properly and the result will be that we build this body up in love. But it requires self to die and to pour ourselves out in service to Christ. My prayer is that this is what we move to right now today and rejoice in what Paul says the result will be---an inheritance.

2 – And the word of God faithfully preached and taught **would give the inheritance to those who are sanctified.** If the word of God is faithfully preached and remains central then it will lead to the sanctification and perseverance of the saints which we know from Scripture results in glorification and being in the presence of our Savior face to face for all of eternity. He is our inheritance. What a gift of God! And the promise we can cling to live with this perspective:

-“And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ.” (Philippians 1:6, ESV)

-God promises this beloved---walk in faith and assurance of it. Keep your eyes on the inheritance and lay up treasures in heaven. And know that this day is not here yet and we must be faithful. And Paul gives us another example of how we live until that day comes.

E – Don’t be drawn away by the world (33-35)

-“I coveted no one’s silver or gold or apparel. You yourselves know that these hands ministered to my necessities and to those who were with me. In all things I have shown you that by working hard in this way we must help the weak and remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he himself said, ‘It is more blessed to give than to receive.’ ” (Acts 20:33–35, ESV)

-The lessons here are pretty simple: Don’t be a friend of the world and be drawn away by its treasures. Don’t covet materially. Work hard and don’t be idle. Idleness leads to many problems. Help the weak and so fulfill the words of the Lord Jesus---“it is more blessed to give than to receive.” The lessons are simple but living them is not. Fight the fight of faith and don’t give yourself over to the offers and promises of the world---they are temporal. Work hard and do it as unto the Lord and so glorify Him.

5 – Bonds of ministry are real and personal (36-38)

-“And when he had said these things, he knelt down and prayed with them all. And there was much weeping on the part of all; they embraced Paul and kissed him, being sorrowful most of all because of the word he had spoken, that they would not see his face again. And they accompanied him to the ship.” (Acts 20:36–38, ESV)

-This is a real moment beloved. Paul gets done with his instruction and they pray fervently. And the emotion comes because the love that they have for each other is real---it's real and deep. It's not just a word that they use when they end a phone call but one that proves itself in action. They embrace Paul and kiss him knowing that won't see him again. And that embrace is not enough so they accompany him to the ship so that they get to spend the last possible minute they have with him. But they send him off knowing that gospel ministry trumps feelings and emotion. They have seen it. Doing gospel ministry side by side for 3 years is the reason their love is so real and deep. That's what happens when self is out of the way and the church is about the work of the Father with the gospel of Christ as the centrality.

-Isn't that what we want here? Don't we want this kind of love that is not surfacy but real and raw? You know how we get it? We die to self and we consider the mercies of God to us in Christ and we present our bodies as a living sacrifice and then we strive side by side in ministry for the gospel. That's how we get here. Are you ready for that? I hope so because we are! Let's do it beloved---let's do it!

Applications: Briefly

1 – Die to yourself and pour yourselves out in service---if we do this the petty things go away.

2 – Declare the truths of God in the gospel without prejudice and without shrinking back. Paul was not ashamed of the gospel and we can't be either.

3 – Set your face like a flint, even in the midst of trials and persecution, to finish your course well using the gifts that God has blessed you with to build up the church and to testify to the gospel of the grace of God in Christ.

4 – Pay careful attention to yourselves---train yourselves for godliness.

Pay careful attention to your brothers and sisters in love.

5 – Keep yourselves unstained from the world.

6 – Love and unify as the body of Christ so that it goes deep. Don't let your love be some surfacy, mushy, worldly, redefined word but let it be rooted in the blood of Christ that will last for all eternity.

7 – Immerse yourself in the word of God's grace and live with its eternal perspective right now with your eyes on the inheritance of Christ. Nothing else can bring you a joy that is inexpressible as communion with Christ. Walk out of here today with that joy and every intention to live out this instruction that we have heard today.

-Pray

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