

## Sermon Notes

# WORSHIP SERVICE -

11.23.2025

## PART 42 - THE MARKS OF FAITHFUL MINISTRY

### I. INTRODUCTION

- What will be said about you when someone says goodbye to you for the last time?
  - Final goodbyes are hard, raw, and emotional. There is a weightiness to those moments.
  - But there is a difference between a goodbye that leaves a void of sadness and a goodbye that leaves a legacy of faithfulness.
  - We come to a passage today that is just such a moment.
  - Paul has left Ephesus, he is near the end of his final missionary journey, and all he sees is Jerusalem before him.
  - His heart is burdened for the church and he wants to pass the weight of faithful ministry to the next generation.
  - He wants to deliver a final charge to pastors who must shepherd and lead the church in the midst of trouble.
  - Paul's final words to them are profoundly personal and deeply pastoral.
  - In them we see a blueprint of what faithful gospel ministry must look like.
  - The question this text asks of us as we consider the marks of faithful ministry is this: If you left today, is the church stronger because you were here?"
- 
- Before coming to our central passage, I want to briefly highlight the events at the beginning of chapter 20.
  - We must appreciate the road Paul traveled to get to Miletus to deliver his farewell address to the Ephesian elders.
  - Luke records a rigorous and demanding final leg of this journey.
  - Paul is moving with unwavering commitment through Macedonia and Greece after his departure from Ephesus.
  - His eyes are set on Jerusalem, but before that, he circles back to strengthen the disciples.
- 
- One of the last stories Luke tells before arriving in Miletus is of their stop in Troas.
  - You likely know the story, Paul is with the church on the Lord's day, he is leaving the next day, that he preaches late into the night, and a young man named, Eutychus, falls asleep, tumbled out a third story window, and died.
  - Paul stops preaching, goes down, and through the power of Christ, raises him to life.

- Why does Luke include this?
- To warn about the dangers of falling asleep in church?
- No, he includes it to validate the messenger! Paul is a true apostle of Jesus Christ. He carries the power of the resurrected King.
- The miracle underscores the divine authority behind the man who is about to deliver the following charge.
- You get a sense in the narrative that Paul's movements are marked by urgency and intentionality.
- Acts 20:16 shows us that he deliberately sailed past Ephesus to save time, because he wanted to be in Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost.
- He is laser-focused on what he believes the Spirit has mandated.
- And with that, Paul lands in Miletus.

### **Acts 20:17-38**

Now from Miletus he sent to Ephesus and called the elders of the church to come to him. 18 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, 19 serving the Lord with all humility and with tears and with trials that happened to me through the plots of the Jews; 20 how I did not shrink from declaring to you anything that was profitable, and teaching you in public and from house to house, 21 testifying both to Jews and to Greeks of repentance toward God and of faith in our Lord Jesus Christ. 22 And now, behold, I am going to Jerusalem, constrained by the Spirit, not knowing what will happen to me there, 23 except that the Holy Spirit testifies to me in every city that imprisonment and afflictions await me. 24 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. 25 And now, behold, I know that none of you among whom I have gone about proclaiming the kingdom will see my face again. 26 Therefore I testify to you this day that I am innocent of the blood of all, 27 for I did not shrink from declaring to you the whole counsel of God. 28 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. 29 I know that after my departure fierce wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; 30 and from among your own selves will arise men speaking twisted things, to draw away the disciples after them. 31 Therefore be alert, remembering that for three years I did not cease night or day to admonish every one with tears. 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. 33 I coveted no one's silver or gold or apparel. 34 You yourselves know that these hands ministered to my necessities and to those who were with me. 35 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.’”

36 And when he had said these things, he knelt down and prayed with them all. 37 And there was much weeping on the part of all; they embraced Paul and kissed him, 38 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.

## **II. PAUL'S EXAMPLE OF FAITHFUL MINISTRY**

- Wanting to make haste to reach Jerusalem by Pentecost, Paul bypassed Ephesus and stopped in the harbor city of Miletus.
- From there he sent a messenger to Ephesus to have the elders of the Ephesian church come to meet him.

- The leaders of the church are called elders and overseers. They denote the same people.
- It is evident the church at Ephesus had several elders and we know that Paul planted churches and left them with qualified elders.
- In Acts, we read that Paul appointed elders in every church in Galatia. (14:23)

## PAST EXAMPLE

- Paul begins by appealing to their memory of his character and past example.
- “You yourselves know how I lived among you...” (18) and again in (34).
- They knew Paul, he had lived among them, he was with them from beginning to end, for three years. He practiced faithful presence.

## a. SERVICE

- He called them to remember his service to the Lord, he didn’t demand to be served, no, his ministry was modeled after his Messiah who came to serve not to be served (Mark 10:45).
- His service was to the Lord primarily, and in doing that, he was serving the Ephesians.
- Paul’s service to the Lord among them was characterized by:
  - humility - he wasn’t there for his own personal glory, he served for the good of others.
  - Phil 2:3 Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves.
  - tears - Paul’s ministry was hard. There were lots of painful moments.
  - trials - that is, all the persecution Paul endured, mainly from the Jews.
- Paul’s service to the Lord was messy, sacrificial, and authentic ministry.
- Patrick Schreiner, *“Ministry is not a sign-up sheet for experiencing your best life now.”*

## b. PROCLAMATION

- He called them to remember how he did not shrink from declaring to them anything that was profitable.
- Many were the temptations to water down the message to avoid trouble, but Paul did not hold back from declaring the truth.
- Many pastors face this same temptation.
- V27 He says it another way, he did not shrink "from declaring to them the whole counsel of God."
- The faithful minister must preach not just the comforting promises, but also the hard truths.
- What does that mean for us? We must be a church that not only desires comforting words of promise but also the sanctifying, challenging, and convicting words.
- You should desire preachers and teachers that are faithful to God’s word and you must be faithful to hear and do what God’s word says.
- Furthermore, Paul’s faithfulness to the proclamation of the truth wasn’t just relegated to the church, it was in public and from house to house.
- He did not avoid proclaiming to both “Jews and Gentiles.” He preached to anyone and everyone.
- And the content of his message everywhere and to any and everyone was “repentance toward God and of faith in our Lord Jesus Christ.”
- Repentance and faith. That was what Jesus preached. This is the apostolic message. This is our message.
- Repent and believe, turn to Christ for salvation and life, and your sins will be forgiven.

- Your ministry is not faithful if that is not what you're proclaiming.
- We need to adopt Paul's example: anytime, anywhere, anybody proclamation.

### c. HARD WORK AND GENEROSITY

- Paul demonstrated his authenticity and righteous character by his hard work, laboring with his own hands to provide for his own needs and for those who worked with him.
- Paul was always conscientious of the fact that he could be accused of using his position for his own gain.
- Paul's list of qualifications for elders is that they must not be greedy for dishonest gain. The love of money cannot mark leaders of Christ's church. (1 Tim 3:3,8; 6:3-10; Titus 1:7,11)
- Additionally, he did not want to put any burden on the church. (2 Thess. 3:7-9)
- He states in his farewell address that he does this following the example of our Lord who said, "*It is more blessed to give than to receive.*"
- It is not good to be idle, slothful or lazy. Ministry is hard work. Serving the Lord and others should never be approached with an attitude of "*what is the most convenient and easiest for me*" and "*what requires me to give the least.*"
- Faithful ministry requires selflessness, hard work, and generosity.

### FUTURE FOCUS

- There is a transition in v22, "And now behold...", from his past example of faithful ministry to a future focus of faithful ministry.
- His future ministry involves a parting and a call to faithful endurance in persecution.
- Paul's future is Jerusalem.
- There is a switch from "*You know...*" to "*I know...*"
- Here's what Paul knows.
- All paths lead to Jerusalem.
- He doesn't know what's going to happen to him when he gets there, except this, the Spirit is compelling him.
- The Spirit has testified to him that his future involves imprisonment and affliction.
- He also knows that he can face whatever suffering is in store for him because he doesn't consider his life of any value or something precious to hold on to.
- His overriding concern is to finish his race and finish the task that Christ gave him which is "to testify to the gospel of the grace of God."
- From his prison cell he wrote to his son in the faith, Timothy, "For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure has come. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith." (2 Timothy 4:7)
- How about you? Are you holding on to your life? Jesus said "whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it." (Matt 16:25; Mark 8:35; Luke 9:24)
- If your highest goal is self-preservation, Jesus said you will experience a great loss.
- He also knows that none of them will see him again.
- In Jerusalem, chains await him, and he doesn't know what the outcome will be.
- Because of Paul's faithful presence, example, service, ministry, and proclamation, he testifies that he is "innocent of the blood of all" because he did not avoid declaring to them the whole counsel of God.
- Paul, like a faithful watchman, has given them all the Lord has given him to say.

- He cannot be held responsible if any of them might perish, they heard the truth from him, he didn't hold anything back.
- Can we say that others God has placed around us? "I didn't hold anything back. I am innocent of the blood of all."

### III. PAUL'S CHARGE TO FAITHFUL MINISTERS

- Paul now gives a final charge to the elders. The first imperative is found in v28.
- Here is the main responsibility of the elder—they must be vigilant.
- V28 Pay careful attention to yourselves and to the flock of God.
- First, be vigilant over their own lives. The pastor's first charge is to himself.
- 1 Timothy 4:16 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.
- A pastor who neglects the care of their own souls is unable to keep the second charge.
- Second, be vigilant over the flock. The pastor's second charge is to the church.
- A pastor cannot neglect the care and feeding and leading of the flock.
- Here is the reason for this vigilance and call to diligent watchfulness.
- First, they have a heavenly calling. The Holy Spirit has made them overseers. They didn't appoint themselves.
- Now, there is the human element in the appointment of the leaders of the church, they must meet the qualifications of character and gifting, but that is not opposed to what Paul is saying here. The Spirit is directing the church.
- Second, the flock they are to shepherd and care for belongs to God.
- An elder will be more diligent and faithful in ministry if they remember that their flock is not really their flock, it is God's flock. We are merely under-shepherds.
- God obtained this flock at an incalculable cost—with his own blood.
- Every redeemed soul that is part of Christ's church was bought with the blood of the sinless, spotless Lamb of God.
- Elders are overseers of a blood-bought flock. Their responsibility is to protect, lead, and care for the congregation.
- Pray for your pastors!
- Pray for our personal piety, our marriages, our families, our devotion to Christ.
- Pray for our protection.
- Pray for our faithfulness to God and his Word.
- There is another thing the elders must be vigilant of—wolves.
- There are two specific threats Paul warned them of that would come after his departure: external threats and internal threats.
- External threats: "fierce wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock..."
- These wolves are savage, they want to destroy and devour the sheep.
- False teachers will arise. Every pastor in the history of the church has lived in the era of wolves.
- Internal threats: "...and from among your own selves will arise men speaking twisted things, to draw away the disciples after them.
- We have to be on guard against heresy and individuals who are power-seeking who can spring up in the midst of our assembly. We have to be careful who is appointed to leadership.

- Pastors need to be vigilant because the dangers will come from both outside and inside.
- We have the guard rail of God's Word, being faithful to preach and teach God's word.
- We have confessional standards like the 1689 London Baptist Confession of Faith and the historic creeds of the Church, these are a hedge around the great truths of Scripture to help guard the flock.
- Every disciple also needs to be in God's Word: reading it, studying it, meditating upon it, hiding it in your heart, so that you're not an easy target for wolves.

## COMMENDATION TO GOD AND HIS WORD

- Paul commends them to divine care and protection. He entrusts them to God and the word of his grace.
- He won't be there to protect them and watch over them, so he gives them over to God and to his word.
- Paul can leave because he is confident that God will preserve his Church and His word will build them up and give them the inheritance that is promised to the saints.
- The word of grace will continue to do its work among them even if he is not present.

## CONCLUSION

- Paul's example and Paul's charge to the elders in Miletus gives us a picture of what marks faithful ministry.
- One day, you will have run your course. One day, another generation will stand where you stand.
- Paul could look these men in the eye and declare, "I am innocent of your blood. I gave you everything I was supposed to."
- Can we say that?
- Parents, can you say that to your children, "I held nothing back of the gospel"?
- Leaders, can you say, "I did not shrink from declaring the truth?"
- Will we have lived a life that exemplifies the marks of faithful ministry or will we have lived it selfishly?
- Let's all look to Jesus, the perfect example of faithful ministry!
- He is the faithful Shepherd and Great Overseer of our souls, who loves and leads and cares for and feeds and protects his flock.
- Let us all commit ourselves anew to the Gospel of the grace of God that brought us to Christ, sustains us today, and is able to build us up and give us the inheritance among all those who are sanctified.
- Let us finish our course with joy, looking forward to the day when we will see the face of our Lord Jesus Christ, from whom we will never ever have to say goodbye.

## APPLICATION AND REFLECTION

In light of today's message....

- What did I learn about the gospel?
- How can I apply what I learned about the gospel to my life?
- With whom can I share the gospel this week?