

THE LIFE OF THE APOSTLE PAUL

MINISTRY NOTES

- A. He took a ship from Assos to Miletus where there was a layover.
- B. Paul would use that time to call the elders of the Ephesian Church to join him there for a final message to them.
- C. This is the first recorded message in Acts by Paul to Christians and is the closest text in Acts to a Pauline epistle.

FINAL FAREWELL AT EPHEBUS, ACTS 20:17-38

- A. Paul called the Ephesian elders to meet him in Miletus (17), *Now from Miletus he sent to Ephesus and called the elders of the church to come to him.*
 - 1. It was 30 miles from Miletus to Troas and would have taken at least one day for Paul's request to reach the elders in Ephesus and another day or two for them to meet him in Miletus.
 - 2. Paul's purpose was to give them pastoral instruction for their lives and ministry.
 - 3. The *elders* are called *overseers* in verse 28.
 - a. The terms are interchangeable as seen in Titus 1:5, 7, *This is why I left you in Crete, so that you might put what remained into order, and appoint elders in every town as I directed you...For an overseer, as God's steward, must be above reproach. He must not be arrogant or quick-tempered or a drunkard or violent or greedy for gain.*
 - b. He was obviously planning to meet with the church leaders.
- B. Paul's address to the Ephesian elders (18-35)
 - 1. His ministry in Ephesus (18-21)
 - a. Paul reminded them of his commitment to them personally and to the ministry (18-21),
 - 1) Paul was faithful despite great difficulties (18-19), *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;*
 - a) Paul used his life as an example of faithfulness in ministry.
 - 1] 1 Thessalonians 2:1-5, *For you yourselves know, brothers, that our coming to you was not in vain. But though we had already suffered and been shamefully treated at Philippi, as you know, we had boldness in our God to declare to you the gospel of God in the midst of much conflict. For our appeal does not spring from error or impurity or any attempt to deceive, but just as we have been approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel, so we speak, not to please man, but to please God who tests our hearts. For we never came with words of flattery, as you know, nor with a pretext for greed—God is witness.*
 - 2] Kenneth Gangel, *We may assume that the Jews in Ephesus continued to poison the atmosphere there with attacks on Paul; so this farewell address to the elders begins by establishing his credibility first of all in behavior.*
 - b) His humility was evident in how he endured trials that so often came from Jews who rejected the Messiah.
 - 1] He reminded the elders how he had to endure suffering caused by others.
 - 2] Specifically, Paul mentioned plots from the Jews not only in Ephesus but in Antioch, Iconium, Lystra, Thessalonica, Berea and Corinth.
 - 3] Humility is a theme throughout Paul's epistles.
 - a] 2 Corinthians 11:7, *Or did I commit a sin in humbling myself so that you might be exalted, because I preached God's gospel to you free of charge?*
 - b] Philippians 2:3, *Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves.*
 - c] Colossians 3:12, *Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience,*

2) Paul's testimony was clear and consistent (20-21), ***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.***

- a) He taught the Gospel without concern for His well-being.
- b) He taught to large assemblies as well as small, possibly house churches or discipling ministry.
- c) He taught the same message to all peoples which is repentance toward God and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

1] Justification has two parts.

- a] It is the call of God, turning man's heart in repentance toward Him.
- b] It is the response by man to the heart change, placing trust in the work of Christ alone.

2] The plan of salvation is not designed differently for one nationality or another, it is *one size fits all*.

- a] Those who listen must be discerning, 2 Corinthians 11:4, *For if someone comes and proclaims another Jesus than the one we proclaimed, or if you receive a different spirit from the one you received, or if you accept a different gospel from the one you accepted, you put up with it readily enough.*
- b] Those who preach must proclaim the truth with distortion, Galatians 1:8, *But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach to you a gospel contrary to the one we preached to you, let him be accursed.*

d) Kenneth Gangel, *Many wonder why Paul seems defensive in this opening paragraph. If we think back on the difficulties he had faced from city to city, and especially at Ephesus, we can certainly understand why he wanted to review the solidarity of the message which brought the Ephesians to faith.*

2. Paul spoke of his future suffering (22-27)

a. He was called to go to Jerusalem and to suffer for his faith in Christ (22-23), ***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.***

1) *I am going to Jerusalem, constrained by the Spirit, literally, the Spirit compels me to go to Jerusalem.*

- a) Paul is not being restrained by the Spirit but being directed by the Spirit to go to Jerusalem.
- b) The Holy Spirit who informed Paul of what was coming was the One who had informed him where he was to go.
- c) Homer Kent, *It should be noted that the Spirit did not prohibit his going, but told him what would happen when he arrived.*

2) Paul chose to be obedient despite the peril.

- a) He asked for prayer, Romans 15:30-31, *I appeal to you, brothers, by our Lord Jesus Christ and by the love of the Spirit, to strive together with me in your prayers to God on my behalf, that I may be delivered from the unbelievers in Judea, and that my service for Jerusalem may be acceptable to the saints,*
- b) His obedience was maintained to the end, 2 Timothy 4:6-8, *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. Henceforth there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will award to me on that day, and not only to me but also to all who have loved his appearing.*

b. He shared that faithfulness in ministry is to be pursued above personal comfort (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.***

- 1) He wanted to be faithful more than to be safe, Philippians 1:20, *as it is my eager expectation and hope that I will not be at all ashamed, but that with full courage now as always Christ will be honored in my body, whether by life or by death.*
- 2) His calling was to proclaim the Gospel in word and deed.

- 3) He considered the Gospel as preaching the kingdom
 - a) Thomas Constable, *Paul's "gospel of the grace of God" was a continuation of the good news Jesus preached but in a universal context. Thus he equated it with "preaching the kingdom" (v. 25).*
 - b) J. Dwight Pentecost, *No reference is made to support the notion that the earthly Davidic kingdom had been established. Rather, the message concerns entrance into a present form of the kingdom of God by faith in Jesus Christ.*

- c. He declared that he had been faithful in declaring to them the whole truth of God (25-27), ***And now, behold, I know that none of you among whom I have gone about proclaiming the kingdom will see my face again. 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.***
 - 1) Paul sensed that he would never see this group again because of the Spirit's leading him to Jerusalem.
 - 2) Paul had faithfully completed his work in Asia and Greece.
 - a) He had evangelized the region.
 - b) He was innocent of the blood of others because he had made known the way of salvation.
 - c) Note Ezekiel 33:1-6, *The word of the LORD came to me: "Son of man, speak to your people and say to them, If I bring the sword upon a land, and the people of the land take a man from among them, and make him their watchman, and if he sees the sword coming upon the land and blows the trumpet and warns the people, then if anyone who hears the sound of the trumpet does not take warning, and the sword comes and takes him away, his blood shall be upon his own head. He heard the sound of the trumpet and did not take warning; his blood shall be upon himself. But if he had taken warning, he would have saved his life. But if the watchman sees the sword coming and does not blow the trumpet, so that the people are not warned, and the sword comes and takes any one of them, that person is taken away in his iniquity, but his blood I will require at the watchman's hand.*
 - d) He declared the whole counsel of God, J. McGee, *As I write this, I am a retired preacher. I have made many blunders and have failed in many ways. But as I look back on my ministry, I can say truthfully that when I stood in the pulpit, I declared the Word of God as I saw it. I have the deep satisfaction of knowing that if I went back to any pulpit which I have held, I haven't a thing to add to what I have already said. I don't mean I couldn't say it in a better way, but the important thing is that I declared the whole counsel of God. I have always believed that the important issue is to get out the entire Word of God.*

3. Paul's exhortation to the elders (28-35)
 - a. He called them to purity (28-30), ***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.***
 - 1) A Christian's ministry starts with oneself and move out to others.
 - a) Stanley Toussaint, *...before they could provide for the flock they had to care for their own spiritual well-being.*
 - b) Church leaders are to *pay careful attention*, literally, *to guard* themselves and those who have been entrusted to their care from those who would try to destroy their faith.
 - c) Church leaders are ultimately selected by the Holy Spirit not the congregation.
 - 2) *Overseers* or *church leaders* have responsibility to care for the church of God.
 - a) Care must be taken not just for individuals but God's institution, the church.
 - b) *which he obtained with his own blood*, the better translation is *He (God the Father) purchased with the blood of His own (Son).*
 - c) The church does not belong to the leadership but to God.
 - 3) Paul was not overreacting by warning these leaders of future danger.
 - a) There would be those who would come to destroy what had been established by the grace of God.
 - b) Some would even come from the group to which he was speaking.

- c) Most of Paul's epistles are sent to churches that were under spiritual attack.
 - 1] 1 Timothy 1:6-7, *Certain persons, by swerving from these, have wandered away into vain discussion, desiring to be teachers of the law, without understanding either what they are saying or the things about which they make confident assertions.*
 - 2] 2 Timothy 2:17-18, *and their talk will spread like gangrene. Among them are Hymenaeus and Philetus, who have swerved from the truth, saying that the resurrection has already happened. They are upsetting the faith of some.*

- b. He admonished them to be vigilant in guarding the faith (31), ***Therefore be alert, remembering that for three years I did not cease night or day to admonish every one with tears.***
 - 1) Paul ordered them to be *alert*, literally, *stay awake, be watchful, be vigilant.*
 - 2) Hebrews 13:17, *Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls, as those who will have to give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with groaning, for that would be of no advantage to you.*
 - 3) Thomas Constable, *Reference to his tears shows that Paul's ministry was not just intellectual but also emotional;*

- c. He commended them to the God they served (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.***
 - 1) Paul gave a bleak picture of coming problems but commended them to the God of all grace and to His written word for which Paul was mightily used by God.
 - 2) Thomas Constable, *God's grace is the source of all spiritual growth and of the ultimate inheritance these elders would one day enjoy because they were believers.*
 - 3) Philippians 1:6, *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.*
 - 4) Kenneth Gangel, *We should not miss the strong statement that church leaders stand under the Word of God and not over it. God's Word, not the personalities of human leaders builds, up God's people.*

- d. He exhorted them to faithful service by using himself as an example (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.'***
 - 1) Paul encouraged them to follow his example as a *tent-maker*.
 - a) He worked to meet his physical needs and the needs of those who served with him.
 - b) He did not want anyone to think he was ministering for personal gain.
 - c) Kenneth Gangel, *He particularly turns to this theme in dealing with the elders, perhaps because false teachers in Asia so frequently acted in greed and love of material things.*
 - 2) Paul worked hard so that he could also help those who needed help.
 - a) He lived out Jesus' instruction that there is more blessing in giving than getting.
 - b) He may have heard this instruction or it may have been a distillation of Jesus' teaching since it is not a quote from Scripture.

- C. Paul's farewell (36-38)
 - 1. He concluded his exhortation with prayer (36), ***And when he had said these things, he knelt down and prayed with them all.***
 - a. Paul brought his time with the elders to an appropriate place, prayer.
 - b. William Neil, *The kneeling posture here, as elsewhere in Scripture, reflects an attitude of submission to the sovereign God. The normal position for praying seems to have been standing, so kneeling implies a particularly solemn occasion.*
 - c. I. Howard Marshall, *We may well see a certain parallel between Jesus, setting his face to go to Jerusalem to certain death, and Paul, conscious that he was going to imprisonment and not expecting to see his friends again.*

2. The Ephesian elders expressed their love for Paul with great emotion (37-38), *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.*
 - a. The Gentile Christians' open affection for Paul is a sharp contrast to the many Jews who hated him.
 - b. William Barclay, *...through all this scene there runs one dominant feeling and that is the feeling of an affection and a love as deep as the heart itself. That is the feeling that should be in any Church. When love dies in any Church the work of Christ cannot do other than wither or fade.*
 - c. The finality of Paul's ministry to them became harshly evident as they followed him to the ship.

CONCLUSION

- A. One's life should be a proclamation of the truth of the Gospel.
- B. Problems will come for Christians, even from some who were supposedly best friends.
- C. A healthy church is a loving church.