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Acts 20:17-21      "Ephesian Elders Meeting" (Part 1 of 3)      November 7, 2018

Let's open our Bibles tonight to Acts 20:17 as we continue our journey through this book.

We have mentioned to you a lot - I'll try to keep reminding you often enough to where you probably will never forget - that this book is a narrative report written by Dr. Luke of the first thirty years or so of the early church after its birth on Pentecost. And it is specific to communicating to us how God's Word and the gospel of His Son was sent into the world by people filled with the Holy Spirit whom the Lord had promised to send. It is a blueprint, I think, for what the church should be like. It is certainly a revelation of what God longed for the church to be in that first generation. It is a clear insight, I think, into how the Lord uses us.

We've mentioned to you quite often that the book is fairly chronological - it is about thirty years. The first fifteen years were primarily the focus of the gospel going to the Jews (to the Jews first and then to the Gentiles). God's desire was always to reach all men, certainly. And so, as you read through the Scriptures you'll find, especially through the book of Acts, that when Peter was led by the Lord to miraculously hook up with a Roman centurion (Cornelius) to come to his house and speak to a room filled with Gentiles and, forty seconds into his sermon, everyone gets saved, and the Holy Spirit falls upon them, it was clear, I think, to everyone that God intended everyone to be saved. There was some discussion, early on, amongst Jewish believers about whether Gentiles could just go right to Jesus without passing "Go" or collecting \$200. No. Without becoming Jews. And there was a meeting (in Acts 15) where Peter and Paul and Barnabas shared their experiences of how God had brought them to places where they were sharing, and God's Spirit fell upon the hearts of those who were listening and were saved. And so they determined, as rightly so, you just needed Jesus. You just needed to go to Him, and He could give you life. Now the Judaizers are folks that you'll find a lot in the New Testament, kind of chasing Paul down and arguing with him - legalists, if you will. They dogged the steps of the church and evangelism for years.

But the last fifteen years of the book of Acts, and roughly maybe two-thirds of it as far as chapters are concerned, were really the gospel being taken to the known

world. And it was done primarily through three very long missionary journeys that Paul took with his teams. Their method of reaching the world was planting churches in big cities and then giving them the responsibility of reaching out around them. Paul went out in 46 A.D. for the first time; went to primarily Galatia. We have maps. If you don't have them, if you're new, just stop by the back or ask an usher. All three trips, as well as his trips to Rome, are on those pages. But Paul basically went to Galatia first. In the second trip out, 50 A.D. to about 55 A.D. (six years), he spent most of his time in Europe - planting churches. The third time out, 55-56-57 A.D., Paul went to Ephesus for the most part, and then he kind of went around the horn back to Greece. That's the map that is up there now - his third missionary journey.

We've mentioned to you that the best way to learn from the book of Acts (because it is narrative like much of the Old Testament is, at least the Old Testament history) is you have to say to yourself, "This is what God wants me to know about what happened." And so there may be unanswered questions and, "Gosh, I wish I knew more about that," but we don't have more. We have this. And so here the Lord says, "Here's what I want you to know about how the church functioned, and how outreaches went and what the cost was and what kind of sacrifice was required for those who gave their lives for the sake of the gospel." When you get to the epistles - and we will get to those down the road - then there are more doctrinal directives or sentences or paragraphs of specific things that we should believe and why we should believe them. But this is a narrative of someone walking along, making a report, if you will, of all that was going on. And so here you learn by example and illustration, by the reports of actual experiences of individuals.

We are currently in Acts 20. It is Paul's third missionary journey. We spent three weeks in Acts 19, which is a report of his three years of ministry in Ephesus and a remarkable work of God's Spirit - people delivered from the occult and from witchcraft and all, from idolatry. And Paul stayed there until some of the idol makers were so angry over losing so much business to the Christians now coming to walk with Jesus that they really started a riot about - it got Paul killed, almost. He wanted to take a crowd on in a meeting place; not a good idea. But they kind of sent him, if you will, down the road, and Paul left this place that he had spent three years with. The chapter (chapter 19) ends with that riot. Paul had sent Timothy and Erastus - two guys that were working with him - ahead of him, over to Macedonia, over to Greece, across the Aegean, and they were going to collect money from these young churches to help the poor saints in Jerusalem who were

struggling. It was Paul's way/idea to bridge the gap between the Gentile churches and the Jewish believing saints there in Jerusalem. We are told (in chapter 19) that Paul intended to spend the winter in Ephesus and then catch up with them, which apparently he did. When you get to chapter 20:1 (and really to the end of chapter 21 or so, at least the middle portion of it), we are only given by Luke bits and pieces of Paul's long journeys. It was a difficult travel. You read more about the suffering that Paul went through on this trip in the epistles than you do in the report from this book of Acts that Luke wrote. It was especially difficult because every place that he stopped, either a prophet or a friend said, "Man, we've been praying for you, and the Lord says you shouldn't go back to Jerusalem," which was Paul's kind of desire all along - to get there by Pentecost and then reach out to the Jewish saints and say, "Look what all the Gentile churches brought you." And he was bringing a bunch of guys with him from these various fellowships. So every time he stopped, he got bad news, but he really felt like even the death threats and all were nothing compared to what he believed God was calling him to do.

So if you begin reading in verse 1, and we're going to start in verse 17 tonight, you find that Paul traveled - and it's really a description of what you have on your map. Paul ended up going, if you will, up the coast of Asia to Troas; it's about 150 miles from Ephesus. He sailed over to Macedonia, which is Europe. He then traveled down to Athens and Corinth (on the other side), about 600 miles in all; stayed there for three months, according to verses 2 and 3. He had planned to get on a boat there in Corinth, and sail to Syria and then to Jerusalem. It was a typical kind of boat that took Jewish worshippers to Jerusalem for the Feast Days. And that was Paul's intention except they uncovered a plot that somebody was going to throw him overboard; and he was smart, he went, "Yeah, I'm not getting on that boat." And so he went back the 600 miles from which he came, spent another 250 miles going to the port city of Miletus (if you look on that Asia side of your map), which is on the Ephesian coast. And from there, he would have to travel another 700-some miles to get to Jerusalem by the time he got there. So, this was a long, kind of arduous, journey. Paul, according to what the Bible tells us, covered about 1500 square miles in just under sixteen years. That's a lot of places to go.

Well, last week we began in verse 1 down through verse 17. Remember, Paul was in Troas. He had been there for a week. He met with the church, he thought he was leaving for good. He went up to an upper room, where he taught the Bible. They went past midnight. He really spoke a long time. There was a guy named Eutychus, who was sitting in the window. We told you last week his name meant "Lucky." And

"Lucky" fell out the window about midnight and ended up dead on the ground. Paul went down, prayed for him. The Lord raised him up. "Lucky" went home. Paul went upstairs to talk to them till the break of dawn. But there was this hunger in their hearts for the things of God. In the morning, Paul went to check on "Lucky." He was okay. And he sent his crew by boat to Assos which is the next little town, there on your map, while Paul made this 20-mile hilly walk by himself. They then get on a boat, and we are told (from verse 13 to verse 16 or so) of these one-day trips where Paul went to Mitylene and Chios and Samos, and then he stopped at this place, Miletus. (You can find it on your map.) It was the port city of Ephesus. It was 12 miles from there, inland, along the (what is called) Neander River, even to this day and where Paul comes, really, back to the place he'd spent those three years and where he left, beginning in verse 1. So it's been six months; he's been around - 600 miles plus another couple hundred now, and he's going back by the church of Ephesus, and he believes it's probably the last time he'll ever meet with the leadership. So, as he comes to Miletus, the port city, Paul sends a message to the leadership of the Ephesian church, and he said, "Would you come down here, 12 miles, and could we meet together? I'm on my way. I'm on a boat. I can't stay long, but I want to just kind of pass along my last words of comfort or encouragement to you."

And it is one of the more important, I think, passages that we will find in the book of Acts as far as teaching. In fact, we will, Lord be willing, spend the next three Wednesdays going over eighteen verses. It is the only place in the book of Acts that you will find Paul teaching believers that we have a record of. He speaks a lot to unbelievers, but this is purely talking to pastors, to overseers, to elders, to servants in the Ephesian church. These are men that he loved. He had trained them from the day that he had begun there, if you will. He uses new titles for them that you find here in the book of Acts. There's a Greek word, "*presbuteros*," which is a Jewish term for elder; it is applied to pastors in terms of wisdom. He uses the word "*episkopos*," another Greek word for overseer, usually from a governmental standpoint. He's talking to these pastors, these shepherds of the flock. He wants to make sure they're going to do a good job. He handed the church to them. He asked them to take care of something that he'd worked three years with. He spent longer here than anywhere else, and he wanted to be sure that these men could follow what he had set for them as an example. In fact, we're going to look at five verses tonight - 17, 18, 19, 20 and 21. They are unique in the sense that they're the beginning of what he wants to say, but they're all about his example.

So, let's begin in verse 17. It says, "From Miletus he 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.' " Notice verse 18. Paul writes this, " 'You know, from the first day that I came to Asia.....' " When Paul arrived in Miletus, we read, "He called the elders and when they came to him." And I was moved by the thought that Paul gets ahold of guys that have to do a half a marathon just to go see him and then go back again; it's a 25-mile little round trip that he's asking them to make. And here's one of the criteria, I think, that you'll discover in the book of Acts - is that God has a tendency to use those who are available. I think availability becomes kind of a key characteristic of those in the church that God uses. These guys had jobs, they had family obligations, and yet when Paul called to meet with them here (on very short notice), they took their responsibility and his training very seriously. They were available. And I think that that's important to see.

When Moses spoke to the children of Israel, there on the borders of the Promised Land (that book of Deuteronomy), he used this great illustration to explain to them how God was going to use them mightily. And he said to them, in chapter 20:1 of Deuteronomy, " 'When you go out to battle against your enemies, and see horses and chariots and people more numerous than you, do not be afraid of them; for the LORD your God is with you.' " He'll protect you, He'll watch over you. " 'So it shall be, when you are on the verge of battle, that the priest shall approach and speak to the people. And he shall say to them, "Hear, O Israel: Today you are on the verge of battle with your enemies. Do not let your heart faint, do not be afraid, and do not tremble or be terrified because of them; for the LORD your God is He who goes with you, to fight for you against your enemies, to save you." ' " And then he said (after the priest speaks), " 'Then the officers shall speak to the people, saying, "What man is there who has built a new house and has not dedicated it?" ' " And those that raised their hands, he would say to them, " ' "Let him go and return to his house. Also what man is there who has planted a vineyard and has not eaten of it? Let him go and return to his house, lest he die in the battle and another man eat of it. And what man is there who is betrothed to a woman and has not married her? Let him go and return to his house, lest he die in the battle and another man marry her." ' " And then, " 'The officers shall speak further' " (I'm just reading to

you out of Deuteronomy 20) " 'and say, "What man is there who is fearful and fainthearted? Let him go and return to his house, lest the heart of his brethren faint like his heart." And so it shall be, when the officers have finished speaking to the people,' " (whoever is left and available, God will use them to battle) " 'that they shall make captains of the armies to lead the people.' " In other words, if there's a reason for you not to be available, then God can't use you. It doesn't mean that He won't, but at this time He can't use you. You're kind of in that position where it isn't your time. And Moses' command to the priests was, "You tell them of God's power," and to the officers, "You tell them about how busy their life can be," and then the frontline ministry people are for those who have frontline availability. If your material possessions, if your family demands, if your job overwhelms you, if you're afraid to step out, it's just not your time. Don't go. You're not that person that the Lord is going to use. There's really no other place from which you can lead than from the front. A badge doesn't make you a leader, a title doesn't make you a leader, a position that someone gives you doesn't make you a leader. Serving is an action verb. It requires doers.

And so Paul sends the note to whoever; somebody had to go up the river. "Hey, Paul's in the port, man. We're gonna be here for one day. He really would like to meet with you guys." And everyone packs up, and they go. They want to hear from what Paul had to say. He begins in verse 18 by saying, " 'You know, from the first day that I came to Asia,' " (to Ephesus, in particular) " 'in what manner I always lived among you.' " Paul begins his word of encouragement to these would-be pastors, and he appeals to their personal knowledge of him over the three years that he's been with them as the basis for what he's going to talk to them about. He starts by saying this, "My life is an open book. You know me well. You've seen my life and my example. You've seen from day one what I'm all about." And I like the words, "You know." I like that very much. When Paul wrote the 1 Thessalonian letter, he began in chapter 2 to appeal to people who he hadn't spent much time with but really wanted to encourage. And so he appeals to the same thing - his example to them for the three weeks or four weeks he was with them. And he says, in verse 1, "You know about me." And, in verse 2 of 1 Thessalonians 2, "You know about me." And then, in verse 5, "You know about me." And then, in verse 9, "I want to remind you of what you know about me." And verse 10, "You were witnesses of what kind of life I lived." And verse 11, "You know about me." He does it time and time again. It's kind of like the proof is in the pudding. Paul calls the leadership together in Ephesus. Three years he's been there. He's handed them everything that he worked to establish. And he said, "You know me. You

know what kind of person I am." And leadership, to Paul, was first and foremost a matter of example. And I can't stress that enough. If you really want God to use you, be a good example. My father used to say, "Look, you don't have to do like I do, you just do what I tell you." Well that's great. You can pull that off as a dad. Because what are you gonna do, argue with your dad? But it didn't sell me very much. It is far better to hear, "Do what I'm doin'," or, "Go with me," or, "Do like I do." Right? For anyone in leadership, it's all about example. And if you go through the gospels and through the New Testament, for that matter, you will constantly find Jesus and His leaders talking the same way. Jesus gets down and washes the feet of His disciples at the last supper, and He stops, and He goes (John 13:15), "Now, I've done this as an example to you. As I've done, now you go and do." Peter writes to the churches, pastors that are scattered abroad in his generation, "Shepherd the flock of God which is among you, serving as overseers, not by compulsion but willingly, nor for dishonest gain but eagerly; nor as being lords over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock" (1 Peter 5:2-3). Paul sends Timothy to pastor this church - this church, the Ephesian church. He writes him a letter there - 1 Timothy is written to Timothy in Ephesus; and he says to him, in chapter 4:12, "Let no one despise your youth." It's a great verse, especially since Timothy was probably in his forties. "Let no one despise your youth." So if you're in your forties, you're just a bunch of kids. That's right in the Bible. Then he says this, "Be an example to the believers in word, in conduct, in love, in spirit, in faith, in purity." "Timothy, the way that you win these people over - that think you're a young guy - is to be an example." Paul writes to the Corinthians, and he says this to them (and I don't know if you could say this or if I could say this), but he said to them, "Imitate me, just as I also imitate Christ" (1 Corinthians 11:1). In other words, "My example to you, if you'll follow that, you'll be in a lot better shape than you are now. Come and follow my example." And Paul calls on that example - first things first in the eyes of all of the people. He says, "You know, from the first day that I came to Asia, in what manner I always lived among you." "

Something about Paul's arrival - Paul understood that the minute he showed up, he was leaving an impression. Right? That old saying that says, "You've only got one chance to leave a good impression." Paul, from the very outset, in town, was aware of that. People were watching. "You've known me since day one. You know how I always lived." Paul was there three years, under all different kinds of circumstances, emotions, times of life. He left the city because there was a whole mob outside chanting to take him out. Paul was able to be flushed out if he was a phony, if he wasn't the real deal. But Paul was the example to these men of being

an elder or a pastor, of being a saint of God. And he stood the test of time through all of the seasons. He was a good man. He was proven. He would later write to Timothy, "Do not lay hands on anyone hastily," (1 Timothy 5:22) because they might just fall. So be slow about who you promote, who you lay hands on, "not a novice" (1 Timothy 3:6). But Paul had weathered three years there. He was there during the spring when hope springs eternal. It's kind of like that, isn't it? We get spring, and the blossoms come out, and we're excited. And summer is the fruitful time, isn't it? The thrilling time. But then fall comes. And fall's not always that cool, you know? You start gettin' pruned, and dead branches fall off the trees and dead leaves. And then there's winter. You got nothin'. Everything's buried. There's this long time where you hear nothing, and you feel even less in your spiritual life. And Paul has made it through all of the seasons. He was up. He was never down. He was faithful. He pressed on. So Paul says to these men, "You know in every season of life, from the first day I showed up there, the kind of life I lived." Paul was a pretty volatile guy. I think you know that. He was a very passionate man, but he was consistent in his devotion. He didn't go, "I think I love Jesus today, and I don't love him tomorrow." He was consistent, and he calls these men to remember that. "You know, from the first day I was with you, I've always lived this kind of life." And what kind of life?

And he said, "I was serving the Lord with all humility." The word "serving" is the word for "*doulos*." The word "*doulos*" actually comes out of the Old Testament Hebrew experience. But slavery in the Old Testament was more than the hateful thing that we see as slavery today and we would never promote or applaud; we would hate it as a mistreatment of others. But, at least in the Old Testament, people became slaves to others just to survive financially. Whole families would sometimes join with a rich family and spend their whole life there, and it was a benefit to everyone. The thing is, if you became a slave because you owed money to someone - you had to pay off a debt - when your debt was finished, you were free to go. Unless you wanted to become a "*doulos*," a servant or a slave that chooses to be a slave. And in the Old Testament, they would run an ice pick through your ear and put a big gold hoop through it, and you would become a slave by choice; not forced, not compelled, but just because you've chosen to become a slave. And that's the word that Paul uses oftentimes when he talks about we, as Christians, are God's servants. Right? How do you keep going when people throw stones and when the reward is distant and the work doesn't seem to grow at the desired rate? For Paul, the answer was always the same: "I'm serving the Lord, I'm His servant, and He's worthy to be served." And the Bible says (Matthew 10:42)

even giving a glass of cold water to another in His name gets God's notice. So, for Paul, he had chosen his life to serve the Lord. For him, his whole life was an audience of One. He wanted to please the Lord. So often, we get caught up into wanting to keep everyone happy. It's impossible. You just might as well learn that early. But if you'll please the Lord, you'll probably please most folks around you as well. He kept his eyes on the Lord. "I'm His servant, nobody else's. I belong to Him. From the day I showed up, I began to serve the Lord." He was sold out to Jesus. And because of that, he never felt weary in the sense of being burned out, or taken advantage of; even his enemies, he figured out a way to turn that around, "Well, the Lord's doin' something." It just didn't slow him down. Paul was convinced of where he stood with the Lord. In fact, when he writes to the Ephesian church (this church in the letter, the Ephesians - you have that one, too), he said in chapter 6:5, "Bondservants," (he uses the word "*doulos*") "be obedient to those who are your masters according to the flesh, with fear and trembling, in sincerity of heart, as to Christ." Serve your master like you serve the Lord. Have that kind of heart towards them. And he uses this same kind of example and same kind of wording. Be a "*doulos*." Be a servant of the Lord.

When Jesus spoke of the last days judgment, there in chapter 25 of Matthew, He said, "When I was hungry and thirsty and naked and sick and as a stranger in prison, you came and visited Me," (verse 35), and He was talking about a "*doulos*," someone who has, in their heart, been called upon to serve the Lord. When Paul wrote to the Thessalonian church, he wrote to them in chapter 2, and he said, "But as we have been approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel, even so we speak, not as pleasing men, but God who tests our hearts" (1 Thessalonians 2:4). We just want to make God happy as we step out to serve. So, Paul's outlook every day, and he says it to these leadership men, was, "Look, you know my life, and my life is one of being a.....I've chosen to be God's slave," if you will, "I've chosen to be His servant." It's not gonna be so easy to fall to the whims of men or to the desires of men when your eyes are on the prize. "I want to please the Lord." You can say to me, "Hey, you want to come do that?" And I go, "Well, I don't think that'll please the Lord." If I have that in mind, I'm in good shape. Right? I'm His slave, I'm His servant, I belong to Him. "I serve the Lord," he said. "I serve with all humility." It's one thing to act like a servant; it's quite another to have the heart of one. Paul says, "I serve with a humble mind." Paul had great gifts. I mean, if you read the Bible, you come away saying, "There're very few people that seem to have more insight and influence in the 1<sup>st</sup> century than Paul. He had a lot to go with and a lot to look to and a lot of fruit, but he lived a life of grace. He

didn't, and wasn't, overcome with pride. He realized where his strength lie. And so he said to these men, "You know that I serve with a humble heart." Paul wrote that he "esteemed others better than himself" (Philippians 2:3). He wrote that he looked for fruit so that the Lord could be glorified (1 Peter 2:12). He talked about the grace of God that kept him (1 Corinthians 15:10). He served every day like that. In fact, the Lord gave to Paul a thorn in the flesh because of the amount of revelation that God gave to Paul, and he said (2 Corinthians 12:7), "I got this thorn in the flesh so that I wouldn't be too high-minded about the things that God has given to me." Suffering was often the lot of the slave, and Paul suffered. But he was a humble man, and he served the Lord. He writes (in 1 Corinthians 15:9), "I am the least of the apostles, who am not worthy to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. But by the grace of God, I am what I am." He said, in 2 Corinthians 3:5, "Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think of anything as being from ourselves, but our sufficiency is from God, who also made us sufficient as ministers." Wherever you turn in the Bible, Paul was a humble guy, sold out to the Lord, a slave by choice, and he was an example to all men.

He goes on in verse 19, and he says, " 'I served the Lord with all humility, with many tears and trials which happened to me by the plotting of the Jews.' " Paul suffered a lot. Paul would write to Timothy, years later, "If you're going to live a godly life, you're going to suffer persecution" (2 Timothy 3:12), and he mentions to him two things. And he mentions it here as well. Within, there was a sorrow that led him to tears; from without were trials and persecutions. And both of them brought, really, a difficulty, I think, in Paul's life day-to-day. "I served you with tears and with trials." I think it is hard to serve the Lord and watch people turn away from the Lord. I think the hardest thing as a pastor, and I've been at this forty years now, is seeing people shake their head in church, "Aha, amen," and then not doin' any of it. Or comin' back six years later and go, "Man, I haven't seen you." "Yeah, I haven't been doin' very good." "What do you want to do?" "I want to get back with the Lord." "All right. Let's do this." "Okay." And they don't do it. (Pastor Jack shakes his head.) And you feel like you're just spinnin' your wheels. You know? You go home, and you go, "What am I wastin' my time for?" That's how you feel. But what you really want to do is (Laughing) choke people because that's always the best way to communicate. There is something to be said for watching people refuse God's counsel when you just know it's the very thing that they need; and it's hard to watch people live with their bad choices. And it can discourage you. You can preach your eyeballs out and walk home sayin', "Man, that was a great message the Lord gave me. It's gonna change lives!" Yeah, maybe one day but not so much

now. And you can get very discouraged. Paul found himself just constantly having to face up to that. He pressed on, clutching the promises of God. There's that Scripture in Psalm 126:5 that says, "Those who sow in tears shall reap in joy." I mean, there's a cost involved to ministry, isn't there? And he says to these men, "It's not gonna be an easy gig." I had a guy tell me one time, "You pastors, you work on Sunday. What else do you do?" And I said, "Nothin'. We go on vacation and play golf. What else do you.....?" (Laughing) I have no idea. There's a heartbreaking, I think, realization that it's a difficult fight. Paul wrote to the Corinthians - not doing great as a church, "Out of much affliction and anguish of heart I wrote to you, with many tears, not that you should be grieved" (with what I'm about to say), "but that you might know the love which I have so abundantly for you" (2 Corinthians 2:4). What a horrible thing to have to write to somebody, and he's got to really read them the riot act, but he wants them to know he's not mad; he just wants them to do better. And he says, "This is killin' me to write this to you. I don't know how to get this across to you, but I'm gonna write it." He writes to the Romans (in chapter 9:1), "I tell the truth in Christ, I am not lying, my conscience also bearing me witness in the Holy Spirit," (in my heart) "that I have great sorrow and continual grief in my heart. For I could wish that I myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren." "I would take judgment if they could be saved." I'm not gonna say that for anybody. I'm not givin' up my salvation for you or anyone else. But Paul was willing to do that. He said, "I would do it in a minute. I'll take the curse for their sake. I can't stop weeping over the Jews," the ones that he loved and wanted so much to reach. So, there's a tough place in ministry, and I think if you're in ministry, and your people let you down or you're disappointed, it's part of the ministry. Paul experienced it constantly. He'll say, down in verse 31, "Watch, and remember that for three years I did not cease to warn everyone night and day with tears." Emotional guy for bein' such a tough guy. But he certainly paid the price, I think, in heart for being God's man on the scene. To be an overseer, I think your heart'll break because people don't do very well. Remember the old "Seinfeld"? I don't know if any of you guys watched "Seinfeld." But he'd always say this: "People. They're the worst." Like the world'd be great without people. Well, the church'd be great without people. Or maybe they wouldn't exist. So, you want to love people, you're gonna hurt. You know? And in ministry, that's certainly the case.

Yet the hope of God's Word and the promises of His work should sustain us. There are very few things that are eternal. God's Word is eternal. The souls of men are eternal. The fruit of our labors is stored in heaven. And God knows. There's a

great verse. It's in Psalm 56. It says that the LORD stores your tears in a bottle (verse 8). In other words, nothing gets wasted. He watches and sees. He knows the price that you're paying for the ministry that He has given to you. And it can tear your heart out. "Are they not in Your book?" That's what it says (his sufferings and his tears). So Paul says, "Now you remember my example, my humility, and the heart that is breaking for the people that are hurting, as well as the trials that have come my way." Those are external. Right? Trials come from without. He says, in particular, "by the plotting of the Jews." I mean, the Jewish religious leaders had made Paul's life a nightmare. Like I said, Luke doesn't tell the half of it in the book of Acts. You'll find much more of it in the epistles. But here in Ephesus, you could see it firsthand. Why was Paul so hated by the Jews? Well, he used to be one of them. He was their main persecutor, and then he turned to Jesus, and he began to associate with the Gentiles. Then he began to say that they could be saved like everyone else needed to be saved. You'll read down in verse 22, "And see, now I go bound in the spirit to Jerusalem, not knowing the things that will happen to me there, except that the Holy Spirit testifies in every city, saying that chains and tribulations await me." And then he says, "It really doesn't matter; I've gotta go." He was living in constant danger as he sought to take the gospel to men. He said in 1 Corinthians 15:30 (right towards the end of the chapter), "Why do we stand in jeopardy every hour? I affirm, by the boasting in you which I have in Jesus Christ our Lord" every day. "We're in trouble because of who we're talking about and who we're standing with." So, he endured, he pressed on, he was faithful in every season. He calls on that example to say to these men, "Now it's your turn to run with the ball."

Verse 20, he says, " 'how I kept back nothing that was helpful, but proclaimed it to you, and taught you publicly and from house to house.' " He was serving the Lord in verse 19. He is serving the church in verse 20. Paul gave to God's people everything he knew. I'll tell you what. The chief function of the body gathering together, in the Bible, is that God's Word might be taught, and people might learn to walk in it. Because this is our advantage - God's Word to us. Right? These are the ways of life. This is what He stands behind. This is what He exalts even above His name. And notice that Paul says, "I have kept back nothing." There's a Greek word. The word is "*hypostello*." The word "*hypostello*" means to withdraw food from a patient that can't eat it, keeping it back. Like, "You can't eat this. This is bad for you." Dr. Luke uses his medical dictionary here, and he says that Paul always set a table that was filled with every profitable thing. It wasn't just ice cream; it was vegetables as well. In fact, he will say (down in verse 27), "I have

not shunned to declare to you the whole counsel of God.' " Revelation with Leviticus. How often we know of churches that seem to avoid teaching all of the Bible. They don't want to offend anybody. They figure if they teach on things that are the most important to the people, the seats will be full. But that's hardly a goal. The goal should be - can you and I come to know God in the way that He intended, and can we walk in the blessings of knowing the Lord? Is that our interest? Some people preach a social gospel. Other people do selective Bible reading. Not Paul. He didn't hold back anything. Let the chips fall where they may. Before they could be his friends, he was going to be their teacher. And that's a big issue. Paul gave them everything. Even what we're doing now on Wednesdays, as soon as we get done with the book of Acts, we're going to go back to Ruth and 1 and 2 Samuel; because we stopped at Judges. Right? Our favorite book of the Bible, Judges, is now going to be our favorite book - Ruth. But when we went through Leviticus, it is usually a death blow to Bible studies. You go, "Oh, you teach Leviticus. No one's showin' up." No. We were never as full as we were in Leviticus. It was the coolest book ever. Learned a lot. Because God's Word brings life. You don't have to tailor it. It's God's Word to life. Paul gave it all to them, everything he knew. And this young protégé, Timothy, later on when he came here to pastor, Paul said (in 1 Timothy 4:13) to him, "Till I come, give attention to reading, to exhortation, to doctrine" of God's Word. "This is your job, Pastor Timothy. Teach the Bible. Make sure that the people know it well." In 2 Timothy, the last letter Paul wrote to Timothy in this city, before Paul was put to death for his faith, he said in chapter 4:2, "Preach the Word! Be ready in season and out of season. Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching." "Timothy, don't lose track of why you're there. Don't give up." People sometimes will say of us here, "Why do you guys have Bible studies all the time?" And the answer is because that's why the church exists - so that we might come to know God. And this isn't a place for topicals or pet peeves or personal concerns. We want you to know the Bible. We want you to know all of the Bible. Paul said that the Lord had given us His Word, that it was profitable for everything that we do (2 Timothy 3:16). It's the benefit of it. I'm glad that you're here on Wednesday. I know I'm singing to the choir. And I know many of you are tired, and you haven't gone home yet, and you didn't eat, or you hope I'm done in a minute because you're gonna go eat. But you come. You make the commitment. And God will honor that, always. And Paul found himself just convinced that that was the case. He was going to teach God's Word. David wrote, in Psalm 40:9-10, "I have proclaimed the good news of righteousness in the great assembly; indeed, I do not restrain my lips; I have not hidden Your righteousness within my heart; I have declared Your

faithfulness and Your salvation; I have not concealed Your lovingkindness." He just laid it out there for people to know. "The Word of God shall not return to Me void" (Isaiah 55:11). You might read Psalm 119. It's a big chapter - biggest one in the Bible - all about God's Word; every verse about the Scriptures.

So he says, "I've held nothing back. I've proclaimed it to you." And notice, "I've done that in public meetings, and I've done that in small, little groups - from house to house." Paul had life service and lip service. How 'bout that? For three months, he sat in the synagogue. He was welcome. Then they chased him out. For two years, he sat in Tyrannus' schoolroom that he rented, and he taught every day. Privately, he would teach in the homes; he would teach in the pulpit. He was there. And I should just say this to you - he did all of this while working a full-time job. Because Paul was a tentmaker all the years that he spent in Ephesus. He mentions that in several places. So he went to work every day making tents; still had time to do these daily Bible studies and minister to the people. He was an example of a hard-working, constant ministry, whole-counsel-of-God guy, and he says, in verse 18, "You know this is the way that I lived."

So he ends, in verse 21, by saying this, "I was testifying to Jews, and also to Greeks, repentance toward God and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ." There's his message. Right? Repent toward God and have faith in Jesus as being the Lord. Paul had this evangelistic heart and this constant desire to reach everyone. I mean, if you read through the Scriptures the things that they say about Paul, Paul didn't care what color you were, what ethnic background you came from, what your job restriction was, or what the city limits were, how far they were away. If he could get in, he's comin'; he's comin' to share. His mission field was broad. Didn't matter Jew or Greek to him. They all got the same message. Everyone got to hear the same thing. Everyone got to hear the same thing. So his message was simple, and notice it only has two points: repent toward God, have faith in Jesus. The word "repent" is the Greek word "*metanoia*." It just means to turn around. Like if this is me, this is "*metanoia*." (Pastor Jack turns 180 degrees, his back to the congregation.) Hey, nice map (he's looking at the map on the big screen).

So, when it comes to a relationship with God, the call of the gospel is that you have to change your understanding and your commitment in regards to God. You have to change your direction. You have to walk where He walked, go where He says to go. Change your opinion, change your understanding, change your mind about God. And I think most of the time people carry around an opinion about God that's not

biblical. But once you meet the Lord of the Bible, then you have to change. He's not going to. The devil's real good at lying about God from the beginning - God's not fair, God's not loving, God's not kind, God doesn't love me. How come He blesses them and doesn't bless me? What about this, what about that? No, no, no. You can lay all your opinions down and just go, "All right. The Bible tells me what God is like, and I'm gonna repent. I'm gonna turn around. I'm gonna agree with God that I'm a sinner. I need judgment. He's provided for me. Oh, that's good to know!" The first part's not good to know - you're a sinner. That's not good news. But if He saves you, it is good news. You've got to turn to the Lord with your intellect and with your emotion and with your will just like Peter and the boys did in the boat, there in Luke 5. And second of all, you then have to turn to Jesus with your faith. Right? You have to look to Jesus with your faith. He's the One who came to save. He's the Lord Jesus Christ. He's the One who came to give His life for us. We read, in 2 Corinthians 5, Paul writing to them, that we are redeemed by His blood, and then God reconciles us to Him through His Son (verse 18). So the door to God is open through His Son, and that's the way that we come.

So Paul says this to these men, and I don't know how many there were (elders); church was huge, though, and it would be around fifty years from now when Jesus would write a letter to them in Revelation 2. (You can go read it there, the first seven verses.) This church lasted a long time. Timothy would be the pastor. John the apostle would be the pastor. Polycarp, the early church father, would be the pastor after that. You have a whole series of pastors, historically, that managed and pastored this church. But Paul says to these men, the original, the OG's (the original guys), "I want to meet with you one last time." He knew where he was headed. He knew trouble was waiting. He didn't know if he was going to survive it or not, whether he was going to come out alive. But these were his last words, his parting words, the things that mattered the most to him, figuring, "This'll be the last time I ever see these guys." And he starts off by appealing to their relationship with him over these three years. "You know how I've been since day one. You know how I behave when things get rough. You know how I behave when things aren't. You know that my whole interest is being God's slave by choice, that I serve Him. I'm not proud of myself. I don't have a high view of myself. I realize it's the Lord's work. I'm not haughty, I'm not prideful. I'm just serving God. I'm trusting Him. And the work breaks my heart because people don't do so well, and I'm faced with trials all the time. People are trying to kill me and wipe me out. I realize there's a price to be paid. But in the midst of all of that, I've given you everything I know. I've proclaimed to you every place that I go - whether it's in a

big assembly meeting or it's sitting in your house for dinner - I'm just always talking to you about Jesus; having faith in Him, turning away from your old ways and turning to the Lord. You remember that." And that's Paul's beginning of his message. "This is exactly what I want you to think about. Remember me for these things."

Next week, we will have Part 2 of Paul's sermon to the Ephesian elders. I don't think there's a better sermon for us in the book of Acts than this one that Paul begins to speak to them. And I think by the time you get to the end, we're just going to say, "Ah, the Lord's so good, all that You've given to us." So let's pray tonight.

Submitted by Maureen Dickson  
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