

# THE PREACHER'S LAST SERMON

---

ACTS 20:17-35 • TV152B

A television broadcast sermon delivered  
SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 13<sup>TH</sup>, 1981

By  
**HENRY T. MAHAN**

---

Transcribed, edited and published  
JANUARY 6<sup>TH</sup>, 2014

**HENRY T. MAHAN TAPE LIBRARY**  
Zebulon Baptist Church  
6088 Zebulon Highway  
Pikeville, KY 41501

## **Acts 20:17-35**

*“And from Miletus he sent to Ephesus, and called the elders of the church. And when they were come to him, he said unto them, Ye know, from the first day that I came into Asia, after what manner I have been with you at all seasons, Serving the Lord with all humility of mind, and with many tears, and temptations, which befell me by the lying in wait of the Jews: And how I kept back nothing that was profitable unto you, but have shewed you, and have taught you publickly, and from house to house, Testifying both to the Jews, and also to the Greeks, repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ. And now, behold, I go bound in the spirit unto Jerusalem, not knowing the things that shall befall me there: Save that the Holy Ghost witnesseth in every city, saying that bonds and afflictions abide me.*

*“But none of these things move me, neither count I my life dear unto myself, so that I might finish my course with joy, and the ministry, which I have received of the Lord Jesus, to testify the gospel of the grace of God. And now, behold, I know that ye all, among whom I have gone preaching the kingdom of God, shall see my face no more. Wherefore I take you to record this day, that I am pure from the blood of all men. For I have not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of God. Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood. For I know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock. Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them.”*

*“Therefore watch, and remember, that by the space of three years I ceased not to warn every one night and day with tears. And now, brethren, I commend you to God, and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up, and to give you an inheritance among all them which are sanctified. I have coveted no man's silver, or gold, or apparel. Yea, ye yourselves know, that*

## THE PREACHER'S LAST SERMON

ACTS 20:17-35 • HENRY T. MAHAN

---

*these hands have ministered unto my necessities, and to them that were with me. I have shewed you all things, how that so labouring ye ought to support the weak, and to remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he said, It is more blessed to give than to receive."*

Here is the title of our message today: **"THE PREACHER'S LAST SERMON."**

I am taking my text from the **20<sup>th</sup> chapter of the book of Acts**. I will be using; (now watch this; listen), if you are following along in your Bible, I will be using **verses 17 through 35** on this subject: **"THE PREACHER'S LAST SERMON."**

I want you to listen to this message; I think I have something for us here. I believe that God has given me a message that we all need to listen to very carefully.

Now, what is the occasion? The apostle Paul was leaving his friends at Ephesus, the people at Ephesus. He had preached to them, he had written to them, he had instructed them and taught them.

Now, he was leaving them. He was going to suffer and die. He knew it and they knew it. The Spirit of God had given many prophecies and many warnings that Paul would be bound and would suffer martyrdom and they would never see him again.

These people to whom he was preaching at this particular time would never hear his voice again, would never hear him preach again, and would never see his face again. This was his final and his last message to them.

Now, what did he do in this message, what did he say in **Acts 20**? Well, I will tell you something that he did not do and this will kind of hit home right now, it will hit this generation. He didn't spend his time boasting of how many people he had won to the Lord. There's no mention of that in this sermon.

He didn't stand before these people to whom he was preaching for the last time, people to whom he had preached and witnessed and taught and been a pastor. He didn't spend his time bragging about how many people he had won to Jesus; he did not.

Secondly: He didn't boast of the books he had written; he could have but he didn't mention the books he had written.

He didn't mention the many sermons that he had preached. He didn't mention his hardships and his difficulties. He didn't mention to them what they owed him.

He didn't mention the churches that he had organized. He had organized churches all over that area and he had ordained elders and preachers all over that area. He doesn't even mention it.

## THE PREACHER'S LAST SERMON

ACTS 20:17-35 • HENRY T. MAHAN

---

He didn't seek their praise; he didn't seek their claim. They didn't have a testimonial dinner. I will tell you this; Paul wasn't going to a larger church. He wasn't leaving this church to go to a larger church and a bigger salary.

He was going to die and he knew it. He preached to these dear people for the last time. He said, "*You won't see my face anymore but I have got some things to say to you before I leave.*"

Now, here is what he said; there are about five things that he pointed out, five specific things, five important points. All the way through you will have much of what he said but watch these five things:

It is interesting to listen to this man Paul. Our Lord called him "*the pattern of believers.*" He was the chosen, appointed, God-sent messenger, no question about that, Paul the apostle. This is what he said in his last message to the people at Ephesus before he departed:

First of all: In **verse 19**; Paul said, "*I have served the Lord with humility of mind.*"

Now; here Paul, listen to him, throughout all of his entire epistles, listen to the way he talks; "*I am what I am by the grace of God.*"

Paul never boasted and bragged. I get so weary of hearing preachers brag about numbers, and accomplishments, and all of these things. Paul never bragged; he never boasted. He always said, "*I am what I am by the grace of God.*"

He said, "*I'm not worthy; I'm not fit to be called an apostle.*" How long has it been since you heard a preacher say that he wasn't fit to be a preacher, that he wasn't fit to be a pastor, that he wasn't fit to be a bishop?

Did you ever hear one say that? No! Everybody today is worthy. Everybody today has their credentials. Everybody today has whatever it takes to be whatever they want them to be. Paul said, "*I'm not worthy to be called an apostle.*" He said, "*I'm less than the least of all the saints.*"

What do we do? We seek the important seats, the highest seats, the seats with names on them. We think that we are higher than all of the saints. Paul thought that he was "*less than any of the saints, less than the least.*"

He said, "*Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners of whom I am chief.*" He didn't say, "I was chief; he said; *I am chief.*"

How many chief of sinners do we have? How many people are willing to say, "I am the chief of sinners; I am the greatest sinner; I am the neediest sinner?"

No, we are all good folks you know, pretty good folks. We have good reputations, good character, good standing, good this and good that. God said, "*There is none good, no not one.*"

## THE PREACHER'S LAST SERMON

ACTS 20:17-35 • HENRY T. MAHAN

---

Paul said, *"I serve the Lord with humility."* All of us need to be conscience of our sins. We need to be conscience before God of our imperfections. Brethren; we need to learn to walk humbly before God and humbly before men.

I don't wear a religious uniform; I am not going to put one on. I'm not going to take to myself a title of reverence or a title of respect for I am only a man and you are only a man and everybody else is only a man. We are men among men.

Richard Baxter once said this: "I preach as one who may never preach again. I preach as a dying man to dying men." That's what I am.

The apostle Paul said this: *"I'm not one wit behind the chief apostle but I am nothing."*

I saw a sign one time advertising a church and it said; "A church where everybody is somebody." I wonder what it would be like to advertise, "A church where everybody is nobody."

That is what Paul said; *"I am nothing."* He said, *"I haven't arrived."* **Philippians 3:12** says: *"I haven't arrived; I'm not perfect. I have not apprehended (not laid hold upon that for which I have been laid hold of by Christ)."*

All of us need to remember this; will you listen to me? We need to remember that our gifts, whatever they are, our blessings, whatever they are, are all ours by the grace of God; they are borrowed; they are borrowed gifts.

He said in **1 Corinthians 4:7**: *"Who made you to differ?"* You are talented and gifted; who gave you the talents and the gifts? If you are beautiful, who gave you the beauty? If you are strong, who gave you the strength? If you are rich, who gave you the riches?

*"Who made you to differ? What do you have that you didn't receive? If you received it, why do you boast as if you didn't receive it? Do you have anything that you didn't receive from God?"*

You preachers and believers; your minds, our minds are enlightened by the grace of God. What I know God taught me. Our hearts are made to love by the grace of God and our lips are open and made to speak by the grace of God.

The prophet cried: *"Not unto us, O LORD, not unto us, but unto thy name give glory."* Paul said: *"I am crucified with Christ, nevertheless, I live, yet not I; it is Christ that liveth in me."*

I wish that God would stamp this on my heart in indelible ink, write it on my heart with a point of a diamond in the stone, *"I am what I am by the grace of God. I have what I have by the grace of God. I know what I know by the grace of God, whatever I will be, only by the grace of God. He said: "I have served the Lord with humility of mind."*

## THE PREACHER'S LAST SERMON

ACTS 20:17-35 • HENRY T. MAHAN

---

The great John Newton who wrote Amazing Grace, one of the greatest preachers, I guess, that ever lived; the great John Newton said: “When I get to heaven there are three things that will amaze me, three things that will amaze me more than anything else, he said:

First of all: “I am going to see some people in glory that I didn’t expect to see”

Secondly: “I am going to miss some people that I sure thought would to be there”

Thirdly: “The most amazing thing of all will be to find John Newton in the presence of the Lord; that will amaze me more than anything else”

Can you say that? Paul said, *“I have served the Lord with humility.”* It ought not to be hard for us to serve the Lord with humility. Every one of us ought to be amazed that God would even have us. David said, the great king of Israel said: *“Lord, who am I and what is my house that you should show such mercy to me?”*

Are you amazed?

**“Amazing grace  
How sweet the sound  
That saved a wretch like me.**

**I once was lost  
But now I’m found  
I was blind  
But now I see.”**

Amazing grace! We say these things but how we need to learn them in here, in the heart!

Secondly: **Verse 20:** Paul said to those people (believers), he says: *“I’ve kept back nothing that was profitable unto you”*

Here he is preaching his last sermon to these people; he is leaving them. He said, *‘I will tell you about my ministry; I have served the Lord with humility and I’ve kept back nothing that was profitable unto you.’*

*“I’ve testified both to the Jews and to the Gentiles repentance toward God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ. I’ve testified from house to house with tears to every one of you, (two things): repentance toward God and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ.”*

My friends; these two things are not only profitable; Paul says: *“I kept back nothing profitable to you”* but these two things are not only profitable, they are essential; repentance and faith are essential.

Our Lord said, *“Except you repent you will perish.”* Now, that is how essential repentance toward God is: *“except your repent you shall perish.”*

## THE PREACHER'S LAST SERMON

ACTS 20:17-35 • HENRY T. MAHAN

---

Then, faith: He says in **Hebrews 11:6**: *“Without faith it is impossible to please God. He that believeth on the Son hath life. He that believeth not the Son shall not see life but the wrath of God abideth on him.”*

There's an old pastor named Dodd who preached over in England many years ago, old pastor Dodd. Every time he preached he would preach on this subject: **“Repentance toward God and Faith in Jesus Christ.”**

In fact, he preached it so much that he got the nickname: “Old Mr. Repentance and Faith.” That's what they called him everywhere. They would advertise: “He's going to preach.” Somebody would say: “Well, oh Mr. Repentance and Faith is going to preach.”

This is what he had to say about that when he heard what they were saying: They were calling pastor Dodd “Old Mr. Repentance and Faith.” When he heard it he said: “Well, I will tell you this; if I died in the pulpit I want to die preaching repentance toward God and faith in Jesus Christ.”

He said, “If I die out of the pulpit, I want to die practicing repentance toward God and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.”

Why are these two things so important? Paul said, *“I kept back nothing profitable unto you, (profitable, essential) to you. I have testified to the Jew and Gentile repentance toward God and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.”*

What is repentance toward God? Notice that it says, *“Repentance toward God.”* That's where repentance is born, Godly sorrow. Paul, writing to the Corinthians says: *“You have repented with an earthly sorrow that bringeth death.”*

In other words, there are a lot of people who are sorry for their sins because they have failed financially or because they have been caught or because they have had to pay the price.

They are sorry for their sins and they are sorry in an earthly fashion; it has cost them their earthly friends and earthly gain, earthly treasures, earthly comforts, earthly praise and all of these things.

Godly sorrow is that sorrow toward God which David uttered when he said, *“O Lord against thee have I sinned, against thee and thee only have I sinned and done this evil in thy sight.”*

So, true repentance is an attitude, it is a spirit. It's not just an act. You can shed tears and not repent because Esau sought repentance with tears but he didn't find it. Repentance is a spirit and an attitude toward God; it has to do with God, my relationship with God.

This thing about repentance is that it is an attitude, which continues. We continue to repent because we continue to sin. That's true! There's none without sin. *“If any man says he has no sin he is a liar and the truth is not in him.”*

## THE PREACHER'S LAST SERMON

ACTS 20:17-35 • HENRY T. MAHAN

---

*"If we say that we have not sinned we make God a liar."* If we say that we have no sin, *"we deceive ourselves."* So, we continue to repent. We daily repent toward God.

And, we repent; listen to me, not only for what we have done but we repent for what we are, (attitude, spirit, our thoughts, and our imaginations). We repent because of our pride, anger, hatred, covetousness, jealousy, envy, and all of these things that possess us and live within us.

We wrestle with them and we seek to defeat them and crucify them and put them aside; it is our attitude toward God. Paul said, *"I have preached unto you repentance toward God"* and repentance has to do with attitude toward God, toward myself, and toward others and a broken heart.

That's what it is all about, *"a contrite spirit."* The Scripture says, *"God is nigh unto them of a broken heart. He saveth such of be of a broken and a contrite spirit."* Has your heart ever been broken, broken over your sins against God, broken daily, constantly?

What is faith toward Christ? Paul said, *"I preach repentance toward God and faith toward Christ."* Listen to me: true saving faith has one object Jesus Christ; He is the object of faith, He is the object of faith.

Faith looks to Christ. Faith leans upon Christ. Faith receives Christ. Faith trusts Christ for He is the only object of faith.

The Scripture says, *"God hath given us eternal life and that life is in his Son: And he that hath the Son of God hath life. He that hath not the Son of God shall not see life."* Christ is the one object of faith.

True saving faith has one foundation, only one, not feeling, not logic, not human wisdom. The one foundation of faith, that basis, that foundation, that footer upon which the whole house of faith stands is the Word of God.

The Word of God is the foundation of faith; *"faith cometh by hearing and hearing by the word of God."* We believe because God has spoken. *"I believe, therefore, I have spoken."*

I found it in God's Word. If you can't find it in God's Word you have no reason to believe it. You have no foundation for believing.

You might say, "Well; I think this." God said, *"Your thoughts are not my thoughts."* Well, this is the way I think it is: *"Your ways are not my ways. If they speak not according to the law and the prophets it is because there is no light in them."* The one foundation of faith is the Word of God.

Thirdly: True faith has one goal, only one; it is to be like Christ!

## THE PREACHER'S LAST SERMON

ACTS 20:17-35 • HENRY T. MAHAN

---

David said, *"I shall be satisfied when I awake with thy likeness."* He that has this hope in him; what hope? To be like Christ. That's true! True saving faith has one object, Christ. It has one foundation, the Word of God. It has one goal to be like Christ.

**"My faith hath found a resting place  
Not in device or creed  
I trust the ever living one  
His wounds for me shall plead.**

**Enough for me that Jesus saves  
This ends my fear and doubt  
A sinful soul I came to him  
He'll never cast me out.**

**I need no other argument  
I need no other plea  
It's enough for me that Jesus died  
And that he died for me."**

Paul said; *"I'm leaving you but I have served the Lord among you with humility."* He says, *"I've kept back nothing profitable to you. I preached to you, Jew and Gentile, repentance toward God and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ."*

Paul says in **verse 27**: *"I have not shunned to declare unto you all the council of God."*

Now, I may not preach with the power I desire (and I don't); I'd like to have more power, the power of God upon my ministry. I may not preach with the earnestness that I covet and I do covet to preach with godly earnestness and sincerity.

We are not playing games. We are in a battle to which there is no discharge. I may not preach with the wisdom with which I ought to preach and I'm sure I don't. I may not preach with the effectiveness and I sure know that; but that I covet.

One thing is sure and one thing cannot be said: "I have not withheld from you the truth of God, in order to please you or to get gain from you." Preachers need to be able to say that. That's what Paul is saying here.

He says, *"I have kept back."* To keep something back is to withhold it, not tell it, not put it out there, not give it to the people, to keep it back, to keep it hid, you know, to keep it away somewhere because you don't want to hurt them, offend them, or lose their friendship or displease them.

Therefore, we hide it. Paul said: *"I haven't hid anything from you. If I know it I have told you about it,"* he said. He didn't say he "preached the whole council of God;" he didn't know the whole council of God and nobody else does.



## THE PREACHER'S LAST SERMON

ACTS 20:17-35 • HENRY T. MAHAN

---

He said, *"I've not shunned to declare unto you all the council of God."* If I know it I will tell it to you. If God's taught it to me I will tell it.

I've heard preachers say, "Well; I believe that but you can't preach that or that's a family doctrine or keep it in the study or keep it in the basement or keep it in the classroom. Don't get it out in the public."

Let me tell you something: The apostle Paul says: *"If I please men I am not the servant of Jesus Christ, if I seek to please men."*

Now; shall we try to make God known, the living God, the God of the Bible, and at the same time withhold the true character of God? Can we do that?

Can we really make God known and not preach God's attributes and character, His righteousness as well as His mercy, His wrath as well as His love, His truth as well as His grace? We have to tell everything we know about God.

Shall we try to please men by denying the true nature of sin? I've got to tell men what they are and who they are and where it happened and the consequences and the results of the fall. I have to be honest with men.

Jeremiah was, he said; *"The Ethiopian can't change his skin; the leper can't change his spots, and men can't do good that are accustomed to doing evil."*

John said: *"You love darkness and hate light."* Our Lord said: *"All men are liars."* David wrote in the **Psalms**; *"There is none good, no not one."* Paul repeated in the **Book of Romans**: *"There's none righteous, no not one."*

Shall we deny God's grace and preach a doctrine of works and tell men that they can be saved by works when we know it's not so?

Shall we give a man a hope for heaven that is not a new creature in Christ, who does not know Christ, who does not love him?

Shall we compromise the Word of God to gain converts? Shall we compromise the Word of God, the truth of this Book, in order to get some rich fellow to join our church so he will give a big offering, so that he will build a building or that he will do something like that?

Shall we compromise God's Word to court men, to please men? God have mercy on our soul but He won't do it, not if we compromise his Word.

Shall we tell men the whole truth, the whole council of God? Shall we try to make the cross acceptable by taking away the offense of the cross to please men?

## THE PREACHER'S LAST SERMON

ACTS 20:17-35 • HENRY T. MAHAN

---

Oh, Paul said: "I didn't do it, I won't do it and I will die first" and he did. Bunyan said, "I will go to prison," and he did. Bishop Latimer said, "I will go to the stake" and he did.

My friends; we are on the trail of God's sheep. Every preacher needs to realize this. We are not trying to see how many people we can get to quit their meanness. We are on the trail of God's sheep.

*"His sheep will hear his voice."* That's what He said. *"His sheep will follow him."* We don't need to soft-soap them or sweet-talk them or entertain them. *"His sheep will hear his word and they will follow him."*

One day some fellows came to Lord and they said; *"If you be the Christ, tell us plainly?"* Well, he said: *"I told you but you didn't believe me."*

*"You didn't believe me because you are not of my sheep. My sheep hear my voice and I know them and they follow me and I give them eternal life and they shall never perish. Nobody is going to pluck them out of my hand."*

I am on the trail of God's sheep. Out there somewhere are some people whom God is pleased to save and I am trying to find them and I'm going to tell them the truth because they can't be saved without the truth. No sir, they can't be!

Paul says, *"I have served the Lord with humility of mind and I've kept back nothing profitable to you. I have preached repentance toward God and faith in Jesus Christ."*

He said, *"I haven't shunned to declare unto you the all council of God."* Paul is saying, "What God has taught me I have taught you. What I have received of the Lord I delivered unto you. What God has revealed to me I have tried to preach to you. What you do with it is your business but I will not please men; I will not seek their favor or seek their fame. I am going to preach his Word."

Fourthly: In **verse 32**, now watch this; he says, *"brethren, I commend you to God, and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up, and to give you an inheritance among all them which are sanctified."*

Here is and I want you to listen to me for a few moments. I want to deal with something that is very important here. He is about to leave them and he doesn't say; "How many of you believe what I am preaching raise your hand."

"I want you to come down and make one more decision. I want you to come and shake my hand one more time. I want you to come rededicating one more time. I want you to come and all get around in a circle and let's burn a candle and hold hands and sing 'Blessed Be the Tie that Binds' one more time."

## THE PREACHER'S LAST SERMON

ACTS 20:17-35 • HENRY T. MAHAN

---

No sir! He says; *“I’m leaving and I have served God with humility and I have kept back nothing profitable to you. I haven’t shunned to declare unto you the all council of God. Now I commit you to God and to the word of his grace.”*

That’s what Paul says: *“I commend you to God.”* This is what he is saying: “I commit you to God to save you and I commit you to God’s Word to teach you.”

I know what the present day method is. I know what the present day plan is. You preach and then you invite people to the front. You invite people to the altar. You invite people to the water. You invite people to the church. You invite people to the pastor. You invite them anywhere.

My friends; salvation is not in the altar; it’s not in the water; it’s not in the bread and in the wine; it’s not in the preacher’s hand. It’s not in reaching your hands up in the sky or buying a book; salvation is in Christ. It is to come to Christ, not to me; I can’t save you.

I hear preachers say: “Have you made your decision; write to me?” Paul didn’t say, “Now, if you know God write to me; he said: *“I commend you to God; I commend you to God’s Word.”*

We have all of these books on how to be saved, how to live saved, and how to be happy, those that are saved, how to get the baptism of the Spirit, how to do this and how to do that. God wrote a Book (the Bible) and that Book is sufficient for His people. It’s the only rule of faith and practice.

My friend; I commend you to God and I commend you to His Word of grace. I commend you to God the Saviour and to His Word to teach you and that’s sufficient; because He is sufficient.

Salvation is to come to Christ. Our Lord said: *“Come unto me all ye that labor and are heavy laden; I will give you rest. Come unto me. Ho, everyone that thirsteth; come to me.”* Eternal life is to receive Jesus Christ. I sincerely commit you to God and to His Word.

John wrote over in **1 John 5:11**: *“This is the record; God hath given us eternal life and that life is in his Son.”* That’s where it is, it is in Christ, life, hope, salvation, forgiveness, pardon, redemption, and sanctification is in Christ.

You won’t find those things in an altar or in water, a pool, or drops of water. You won’t find them in a catechism or a creed. You will find those blessings in Christ. Seek the Lord; turn to Christ; call upon Him; fall upon your face; pray to God.

Cry like the Publican in the temple: *“God be merciful to me the sinner.”* Don’t do business with a preacher or a soul-winner or anybody else. Do business with God!

If men can talk you into religion another man can talk you out of it. If a man can talk you into a profession of faith you can talk yourself out of it.

## THE PREACHER'S LAST SERMON

---

ACTS 20:17-35 • HENRY T. MAHAN

I will tell you that if God saves you and if God deals with you and God gives you a new heart and God gives you a new life, if God gives you faith it will be eternal.

I commend you to God. I commend you to God to save you and I commend you to his Word to teach you. Christ alone can save!

Now; watch this last thing in **verse 33**: This is something that I am going to shoot straight with you on; Paul said: *"I have coveted no man's silver, gold, or apparel."*

You will never hear anyone on this television broadcast, on this broadcast from 13<sup>th</sup> St. Baptist Church ask you for one dime or one dollar. We don't sell trinkets; we don't sell souvenirs; we don't sell holy water; we don't sell Bibles made in Jerusalem.

We don't give away lapel pins. We don't try to get people to send in money; God will support this program. If God's in it God will pay for it.

That is what Paul is saying to these people: *"I haven't coveted your silver or your gold or your apparel; I have preached Christ to you."*

We are not beggars; we are not salesmen; we are God's preachers, preaching the Gospel of God's Son. Shame on the churches and preachers of this day that have made the Holy God, the King of King's and Lord of Lord's a beggar, depending on people to support Him by begging them to send in money or selling silly, religious gimmicks, and souvenirs.

God help us; we are in bad shape!