

Acts 20:17-27

“Paul’s Pastoral Heart”

Paul has (by this time) been out on the mission field for the last several years. It’s the 3rd trip he’s made & he’s covered a large portion of the central & western parts of the Roman Empire. Churches have been planted, disciples have been established, miraculous things have occurred, & now he finds it in his heart to begin wrapping up & winding down the trip. He wants to head south & be in Jerusalem for the Day of Pentecost, he wants to head back to his home church in Antioch. (& We know he wants to see Rome after that).

However, he also has it in his heart to bring a collection from the Gentile churches to the poverty stricken, mostly Jewish church in Jerusalem in order to build greater unity between the Jewish & Gentile believers, to bear one another’s burdens & fulfill the law of Christ. After all (Paul said to the Romans), if they’ve partaken of their spiritual things (i.e. the good news of J.C. & Him crucified for the sin of the world, the wonderful reality of the Person/power of the Holy Spirit coming to dwell in & rest upon the believers, empowering them for service, the explanation & application of scripture in their daily growth & life set apart to God) then it’s their duty, their *obligation* to minister to them in material things.

So he’s on route to Jerusalem w/an offering & an entourage. He has a couple of men from each region in which he’s ministered, no doubt the representatives to give the elders in Jerusalem the gift/offering they’d brought.

However, on his way back, though he was stopping @ various places to encourage the believers, he opted to sail past Ephesus, (the city he’d spent more time in than any other). He knows that a “quick stop” there probably isn’t possible & he really wants to make it to Jerusalem for Pentecost. He’s got about 3 weeks to make it some 650 miles or so, so he needs to stay focused on his agenda. So he sails past Ephesus, but the ship stops at the port in Miletus (about 30 miles south) & what we discover is that rather than him going to them, he calls for them (that is the elders) to come to him.

Vs 17-27

I pointed out to you in a previous study that Paul wasn’t necessarily called to be a “pastor”, in that his primary calling was that of an apostle. Not one to stay indefinitely in one place, ministering to one group of people, but rather he would plant a work, establish the work, & then commend the work into the care of the believers there & move on. However; that doesn’t mean that Paul didn’t have a “pastoral”, or “shepherd’s heart” w/in him. He certainly did! & There’s nothing in the book of Acts that displays that quite like this passage...

He didn't want to go into the area of Ephesus because he had so many friendships, so many relationships that had he missed someone he'd have left hurt feelings. Had he stayed until he greeted everyone he'd have missed Pentecost. So rather than go to them, he calls for the elders, the leaders to come to him. This way he can minister to *all of them*, offer insight to them, through their leaders.

Now; when we read of the "elders" of the church. Don't be misled into thinking that they were the 5-6 or 10 guys who kind of oversaw the collective gathering like in a modern church assembly. The church (in the ancient world) didn't gather in large venues as we do today. But rather, they gathered in individual's homes throughout the city. So each of these "elders" would be considered "pastors" today, meaning that they each oversaw a separate gathering throughout the city.

Paul is (in essence) calling for a small "pastor's conference" of sorts. Under shepherd to under shepherd kind of candid conversation. He wants to open his heart to them & impart some things to them that will help them minister more efficiently & effectively to the people of God.

But don't tune me out here thinking, "Well, I'm not a pastor, I don't serve in ministry, I guess this section isn't for me." Couldn't be further from the truth... There's application here for every believer, regardless of where you may be in your walk/relationship w/God.

Ok; there's a # of things that Paul draws their attention to that we're going to want to take note of today & the next time we're together. For instance, he calls attention to his *past*, to his *present* & admonishes them to beware *of* & take heed *regarding* the future. He points out the *motive* of his ministry, the *manner* of his ministry & the *message* of his ministry. Most of which, Luke sums up for us in only 4 Vs (18-21). –

The 1st thing he reminds them *of*; draws their attention *to* is his irrefutable integrity & the motive of his ministry. He says, "You know, from the 1st day that I came to Asia (again the Roman Province of Asia Minor, not China, India, Indonesia, Korea etc. This would be around modern-day Turkey.) in what manner I *always* lived among you."

I don't know if you find this challenging, but I do (& I pray you do too)! When Paul gathers these men around, grabs hold of their attention & begins to pour out his heart for what (as far as he's concerned) will be the very last time, the 1st thing he does is set himself out there as an example of how to lead a Christian life.

He says, "Guys, before I even say anything, I want to remind you of the life that I lived among you." & He's not calling their attention to himself as *opposed* to Jesus.

He's not even entertaining the thought of them looking to him *instead* of Jesus. But rather, "I want you to look at me as an example of what it means to *follow* Jesus." What's the Christian life supposed to look like in the everyday, day to day world in which we live? Paul would say, "Just look to me, I'll show you." & It wasn't said arrogantly, it was an honest evaluation of integrity. He says, "Men... brothers, you *know* me. You know what manner of life I lived *daily*."

& We remind ourselves of this from time to time; but take a moment to honestly evaluate what the Christian community of CCJ would look like if everyone here modeled their life in Christ after yours... How would this church function if we all endeavored to know Jesus, understand & spend time in scripture in the same way you do? What if we all sought to serve the body or be a light in the community to the degree that you do? What if we all gave the exact proportion of our finances to this ministry that you do? Or came to church w/the same consistency & regularity as you? Would this place be slammin', or would ministry even happen?

Listen, none of us have it *all* together, but that doesn't diminish the fact that we should be able to point to our lives as an example of what it looks like to follow Jesus. To serve Jesus, to know Him, to make Him known & to give of ourselves to Him... Even if you've only known the Lord for a short time, you should be a model of what a new believer in J.C. looks like.

& Allow me to ratchet this up one more level. If you *couldn't* do that (point to your life) or *wouldn't* do that; why not? ... & Here's the next question, what are you going to do about it? Listen, let's no coast on the faithfulness of others; we need to press forward in our *own* walk *with*, witness *for*, & faithfulness *to* J.C.

That's the point Paul is driving at here, as God has done through him, so He can do *in* you. We're to deny ourselves, crucify the flesh & follow Christ. If you want to minister to others effectively, you & me we've got to exemplify integrity...

The motive & manner of ministry is found following his call to integrity & they are, "serving the Lord (Vs 19) w/all humility". The motive of his ministry? "Serving the Lord." Which is to say he wasn't serving man, not really, not ultimately. Yes; we serve the Lord in our service to others, but make no mistake, we serve the Lord Christ. Remember Jesus said, pertaining to our service to other believers, "Assuredly, I say to you, *inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these My brethren, you did it to Me.*"¹

¹ [The New King James Version](#). (1982). (Mt 25:40). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

You see; if you're serving man, then when they don't thank you, or show whatever measure of appreciation you think is owed *to* you or whatever, you'll feel burned, taken advantage of or disillusioned. Paul discovered that it's not altogether uncommon for those whom you're trying to bless & be there for to turn on you, beat you or stone you... you wind up getting hurt by those you're trying to help!

What keeps a guy going then? Why not sign off, forget about it or be done w/it? Because we're not serving man, our reward, our recognition doesn't come from man, we're serving the Lord. It makes all the difference.

The *motive*? "Serving the Lord." The *manner*? "In all humility". Paul didn't act like a religious celebrity, need pandered to or to be treated like royalty. He wasn't out signing scrolls or the back of people's robes; he was just busy about the business of his Master. He wasn't a mercenary. (In it for how he could profit personally). He just wanted to be found faithful, pleasing to J.C.

He realized who he was... It's interesting how people can perceive a person. I'm sure there were those who perceived him as an incredibly spiritual, dynamic individual (& understandably so, God used him in ways that most people could only dream of). But as far as Paul was concerned, he was the guy who'd murdered Christians, who sought to erase the work of J.C. from the face of the earth, who flew in the face of God's grace & in the end knew that he was saved *only by* God's grace. & I'm not suggesting that we wallow in the past (forgetting those things which are behind, we press forward to that which lies ahead, if any man be in Christ he's a *new* creation, *old things* have passed away). Yet, there's a real key in being able to distinguish who *you* are from who *Christ is in you*... Are you following me? Paul would write to the Romans, "For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) nothing good dwells;"² He told the Corinthians, "But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellence of the power may be of God and not of us."³ The treasure of the gospel, the Person of J.C. through the power of the Holy Spirit dwelling in us, these earthen vessels... You see? The excellence of the power isn't of us, it's of God who dwells *in* us.

Paul knew that, & it only served to humble him more, that the God of all creation would use *him*, would dwell in *him* & minister *through* him... how humbling is that; for any of us? & The longer you walk w/God, the more familiar you become w/how holy He is, the more humbled you are...

² *The New King James Version*. (1982). (Ro 7:18). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

³ *The New King James Version*. (1982). (2 Co 4:7). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

It was when Isaiah saw the Lord, high & lifted up, the train of His robe filling the temple, the seraphim above His throne crying, “Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts, the whole earth is full of His glory!” That he recognized his own sinfulness, he was humbled in the sight of the Lord saying, **“Woe is me, for I am undone! Because I am a man of unclean lips, And I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; For my eyes have seen the King, The Lord of hosts.”**⁴ Pride disintegrates in the presence of God’s holiness, the heart *heaves* w/sorrow & we are undone...

Paul served the Lord faithfully, w/all humility. There was no sense of entitlement, no self-promotion, no “If I were in charge things would be different” mentality, he served gratefully, in humility, knowing that he was the product (as are we all) of grace.

If something would help them, he wouldn’t hold it back. He says, “I held back nothing that was helpful, but proclaimed it to you & taught you, publicly, privately, didn’t matter to me, if there was opportunity to help you, I poured into you.” He didn’t need a big audience. & There was continuity, consistency to his message, whether it was in the public eye, or privately the message remained the same, he didn’t hold out the insights for the big crowd, he gave everything he could to anyone he could.

He taught them doctrines, duties, privileges, responsibilities, he shared the balance of faith & works, anything that was profitable, he poured it into them. He didn’t just preach topics that tickled his ears, that he preferred, he shared it all. He wasn’t worried about the truth of sin offending anyone, he wasn’t going to refrain from talking about the blood of Jesus, he shared it all! & It was the message for all mankind, both Jews & Greeks, men & women... The motive? Serving the Lord. The manner? In all humility. The message? “Repentance toward God & faith toward our Lord J.C.”

That all men everywhere (outside of Christ) need to repent of their sin, turn to God, change your mind about the direction you’re going & place your faith in the Lord J.C. It’s the gospel of grace. What is grace? It’s getting what you don’t deserve. Justice is getting what we deserve. Mercy is not getting what we deserve, & grace is getting what *we don’t* deserve. & Grace is available through turning *from* sin *to* God (repentance) & placing your faith in the Lord J.C. Who has loved you & given Himself for you upon the cross. He stepped in, took the penalty of our sin upon *Himself* & in return will give the reward of His righteousness to *you* if you will believe upon Him (that my friends, is grace).

⁴ [The New King James Version](#). (1982). (Is 6:5). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

This was the sum of Paul's *past* w/them; his integrity, his ministry, the motive, the manner, the message. As for the *present*?

Vs 22-24

The words, "And see, now" shift us from the past to the present as Paul opens his heart & tells these men of the uncertainty that awaits him in Jerusalem. He says, "I'm compelled to press forward, I feel bound in my spirit to go to Jerusalem." He'd received the collection, he'd purposed to finish his course & he wasn't going to be diverted or distracted from it.

He knew that he was headed for dangerous waters, that tough times (chains & tribulations) were waiting for him there, the Holy Spirit testifying to him (through the means of various prophets) in various cities. But he was purposed to follow through? Why? He said, "So that I might finish my race w/joy & the ministry which I received from the Lord J.C." It's what compelled him, he wanted to be obedient to the call that God had placed on his life, regardless of the cost.

He said, "I don't know exactly what's going to happen, I only know that it's going to be bad. I might even die, but none of it will move me off course..." "None of these things move me..." Think about that. What is it that compels you, that keeps you pressing forward in life? Ambition for success? You want that promotion? Pushing for fame/fortune? Paul said, "I just want to be faithful to God's call upon my life. I want to finish my course w/joy (obediently), to testify to the gospel of the grace of God."

2 Things w/that. #1 That means being content to not know what's coming down the pike. Some people feel like they can't move forward unless they know what's coming. If that's you, you will not finish your course w/joy. You might finish, but there'll be a lot of anxiety involved, stress, tension & trauma. Paul didn't have to know what the future held, because he trusted the One who holds the future...

#2 It means not counting your life dear to yourself. Now listen, Paul didn't have a martyr's mentality. That's not what's in view here. We want to live for the glory of God! But if the preservation of my life is the single most important aspect of my existence, that will weigh in heavily on the decisions I make, what I'm willing to do, what I'm not willing to do... Of course we're not to act foolishly, or tempt the Lord by placing ourselves intentionally in harm's way. But if I refuse to take a risk at all cost, then again, I may finish my course, but not joyfully, not faithfully because I'm not willing to lay down my life for the sake of the gospel.

Paul is saying, “My life pales in comparison to God’s calling & if my life is lost in the course of His calling, then so be it.”

In other words, as far as Paul was concerned, the gospel of the grace of God was a message worth dying for. Listen, the gospel of moral reform, or save yourself through good works or religious tradition, mystical mumbo jumbo or political correctness & self-esteem isn’t worth dying for! But the gospel of the grace of God... Absolutely.

There was nothing that would move Paul, cause him to quit. Question; what makes you quit? Is there something in life that could keep you, or stop you from serving Jesus? (Write down, read later, Lk 9:57-62). For some it’s all about convenience & comfort. They’ll serve under those conditions. **For others it may be the pursuit of other things; for Paul there was nothing that would hinder him from finishing the course that God had called him to. We want to hear from our Lord, “Well done, good & faithful servant.” Can you imagine that? Jesus putting His hand on your shoulder, looking you in the eye & saying, “Great job.” Nothing like it.** (Again, look it up l8r, Heb 12:1-3)

Vs 25

These words dropped like a bomb. The whole atmosphere just changed. & They’re all glad that they opted to walk 30 miles to see him. He’s letting them know, they’ll never see him again. & I want you to see this, what did he emphasize? **Think about his time in Ephesus, amazing miracles were done, diseases & demons leaving people who came into contact w/his sweatbands. Demons were verbally acknowledging his ministry... yet w/all that he didn’t say, “You all, among whom I manifested some amazing miracles.” Or, “You all, who heard even the demons acknowledge the legitimacy of my ministry...”**

He drew their attention to the life-transforming power of the Word of God... “You all, among whom I have gone *preaching the kingdom of God.*” It’s as if he’s saying, “I could draw your attention to a lot of things, but at the end of the day it’s about *kingdom of God*, proclaimed through the *word of God.*”

Vs 26-27

Paul says, “Because you won’t see my face again, because I’ve spent so much time, invested so much into your lives...” “Therefore... You need to know & be confident in the fact that I am innocent of the blood of all men.” He’s saying that his heart & conscience are clean before God. How so? “For I have not shunned to declare to you the whole counsel of God.”

“I haven’t touched only on my favorite topics or avoided certain subjects.”

“I’ve given you the whole counsel of God.” To the best of his ability, he’s given them everything they need to understand the ways, the word & the heart of God.

To me this is one of the benefits of teaching book by book, Ch by Ch, Vs by Vs. It keeps me from skipping certain things I’m not comfortable with & pounding on things I feel good about. We cover everything, if it’s in God’s word, we need it. It’s the best way I know to ensure the spiritual health & maturity of the body. Man shall not live by bread alone, but by *every word* that proceeds from the mouth of God.

Unfortunately; today, not a lot of guys do this. They’ll maybe use the Bible as a launching pad. They take off from the Bible, never to return. Others will use the bible to illustrate their points. But the true calling of the Pastor isn’t to use the Bible to confirm what *they* say, but to simply share what the *Bible* says! Ours isn’t to *defend* the word, it’s to *declare* the word & let the chips fall where they may...

W/that, may your life be one of integrity, may you serve the Lord in all humility, may you finish your race w/joy, holding back nothing helpful but testifying to the gospel of the grace of God...

Prayer Points:

Father that’s our prayer. That You would strengthen our relationship w/You that we might be examples one to another of what it looks like to follow You. That we not coast in the wake of the faithfulness of others, but we’d be true to You, & to Your calling upon our lives individually, & as a body. Fill us w/Your Spirit, use us for Your glory.

You’re hearing all this talk about finishing well, maybe you’ve not even joined the race. You’ve not given your life to Christ. Here’s the message, repent of your sin, turn from your sin, turn toward God & place your faith in J.C. Receive His grace through faith & you will be saved.