

Faithful to the End

Acts 20:17-38

5 minute memoir

2 minute Personal Intro

2 minute RVTA Update

2 minute Thank you to Carp

Acts 20:17-38 (NASB)

17 From Miletus he sent to Ephesus and called to him the elders of the church. **18** And when they had come to him, he said to them, "You yourselves know, from the first day that I set foot in Asia, how I was with you the whole time, **19** serving the Lord with all humility and with tears and with trials which came upon me through the plots of the Jews; **20** how I did not shrink from declaring to you anything that was profitable, and teaching you publicly and from house to house, **21** solemnly testifying to both Jews and Greeks of repentance toward God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ. **22** And now, behold, bound by the Spirit, I am on my way to Jerusalem, not knowing what will happen to me there, **23** except that the Holy Spirit solemnly testifies to me in every city, saying that bonds and afflictions await me.

24 But I do not consider my life of any account as dear to myself, so that I may finish my course and the ministry which I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify solemnly of the gospel of the grace of God.

25 "And now, behold, I know that all of you, among whom I went about preaching the kingdom, will no longer see my face. **26** Therefore, I testify to you this day that I am innocent of the blood of all men. **27** For I did not shrink from declaring to you the whole purpose of God. **28** Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood. **29** I know that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; **30** and from among your own selves men will arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after them. **31** Therefore be on the alert, remembering that night and day for a period of three years I did not cease to admonish each one with tears. **32** And now I commend you to God and to the word of His grace, which is able to build you up and to give you the inheritance among all those who are sanctified. **33** I have coveted no one's silver or gold or clothes. **34** You yourselves know that these hands ministered to my own needs and to the men who were with me. **35** In everything I showed you that by working hard in this manner you must help the weak and remember the words of the Lord Jesus, that He Himself said, 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.'"

36 When he had said these things, he knelt down and prayed with them all. **37** And they began to weep aloud and embraced Paul, and repeatedly kissed him, **38** grieving especially over the word which he had spoken, that they would not see his face again. And they were accompanying him to the ship.

Prayer

- Paul first went to Ephesus in Acts 18 (beginning of AD 53). He returns in Acts 19 (end of AD 53) where He ministers to the Ephesians for about two years until He departs at the beginning of Acts 20 which is the end of AD 55.
- Obviously a depth of relationship here.
- Paul feels deeply connected to what God began in Ephesus, and is desiring to both say goodbye to them as he believes this is the last time He will ever see them.
- He is also wanting to **think back** on all that God had done. And he is wanting to **encourage** them and warn them, and he is wanting to himself **commit** to also not giving in the work God has set before Him.
- 3 parts:
- **A Reflection, an Exhortation, and an Intention.**
- I believe the Lord is wanting to do to speak to us in this way today, look back for reflection; provide us with an exhortation that will also include a warning, and create in us an intention in moving forward.

The old novelist and poet James Baldwin said,
“Know from whence you came. If you know whence you came, there are absolutely no limitations to where you can go.” - **James Baldwin**

“You can’t really know where you’re going, until you know where you have been.”

A REFLECTION (vv. 18-21)

- In v. 18 — Intimate relationship
- In v. 19 — ministry, emotion, trials, suffering
- In vv. 20 - 21 — preaching, teaching, evangelizing, discipling, training (v. 20, 21)
- But Paul now is closing up a chapter of his life here.
- He has poured into this church, and this city, and so he pauses to reflect and take stock of some of what God has done.

- He is remembering God's faithfulness. But He is also remembering all that he gave them.
-
- Reality Carpinteria you have labored well, and your labor has not been in vain.
 - "THANK YOU" God for you faithfulness. Thank you for what you have done. Thank you for what you have done through your church. And thank you for what you have done in our lives.
- Psalm 103 instructs praise and remember.
- "Praise the Lord oh my soul, and do not forget all of His benefits." (Psalm 103:2)
- *Story about Reality and the presence of God (3 min)*
- In all of the church gatherings, and camps, and conferences Emily and I had ever attended, we had never experienced the presence of God in this way. Or maybe we had, but we had certainly never experienced in an environment where there was also such a high emphasis on scripture and orthodoxy.
 - *Spirit and Truth Sail Boat vision*
- The presence of God is the best thing we've got going for us."
- It is in the presence of God that there is healing
- Joy in the face of sorrow.
- Peace
- Wholeness.
- Truth.
- Grace.
- Power.
- Rest.
- Resolve.
- "One moment in the presence of God can answers a lifetime of questions."
- And Paul is reminding these guys all that God did, and what He started and what matters.
- Reality Carp, don't forget who you are.
- You make room for God to manifest his presence.
- You make room for the Senior Pastor of this church, Jesus Christ to be present with His people, because, it is HIS NEARNESS that is our good, Psalm 73 says.
- "restorative anointing"
- **That** is where it all started and where everything good comes from
- *Vision story (2 min)*
- Today we look back and say, THANK YOU LORD, for all you have done.

- Like Isaiah 42 said, you have indeed **gone forth like a Warrior and prevailed against Your enemies.**
-
- **19 Serving the Lord with all humility and with tears and with trials** (Reality Carp you have experienced seasons of great life and seasons of great death. And yet, like Paul says) **20 I did not shrink from declaring to you anything that was profitable, and teaching you publicly** and from house to house, **21 solemnly testifying to both Jews and Greeks of repentance toward God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ.**
- Paul would write to the Corinthians, "and I did not come to you with eloquence of speech or wise and persuasive words, but with a demonstration of the Spirit's power."
- Reality Carp, you share this same heritage. This is the marriage of Spirit and Truth.

Secondly,

AN EXHORTATION (vv. 28-32)

- Paul cares about these people. God has begun a good work there. And anytime God has begun a good work, the enemy will try to destroy it. And he will often use people as his tools, even Christians who are walking in the flesh, which is why Paul told CHRISTIANS (Eph. 4)
- **So Paul warns these men in v. 28, "Be on guard." It could be translated "Keep watch".** Keep watch over who? First of all, over yourselves.
- **Watch yourself. (v. 28)**
- Guard yourself from the flesh. Guard yourself from the world. Guard yourself from false doctrine. Guard yourself from lies.
- Guard your HEART
- Guard your mind
- Watch out for the little comprises which will surely lead to bigger ones.
- **Keep watch over yourselves.**
-
- And keep watch over each other.
- Watch yourself. And:
- **Watch out for each other. (v. 29)**
- This the BODY of Christ. You are my brothers and sisters.
- This is family.
- We live in this dangerously individualist society where nobody is welcome in anyone else's business because "it's not my place". Yes it is. Pauls says, "**watch out for each other**"
- You may be a hand in the body of Christ, but that person next to you may be an arm. What good is a hand with a broken arm?
- Their business is your business.
-

- **Next He's says:**
- **Watch out for wolves. (v. 29)**
- Watch out for wolves because **salvage wolves will come in (from the outside) among you not sparing the flock (v. 29)**. And also (v. 30) from **AMONG YOURSELVES**.
- So wolves will come from within and from without.
- **We know the enemy is OUT there, but he wants to come in HERE.**
- **He will come from without and from within.**

- **Matthew 7 - False prophets come as wolves. BUT THEY come as wolves in sheep's clothing.** That means they look like sheep. They LOOK like Christians do. They know the right words to say. They know the right things to pray. They act in a moral way, and participate in Christian service.
- They have an **appearance of godliness**, but what you don't know is that they actually deny the power of God. And they actually deny the truth and love and grace of God.
- And you won't know until you start examine their fruit. We're not called to judge each other. But we are called to judge each other's fruit.
- And you will know when someone doesn't belong when they bear FRUIT that does not belong.
- What kind of fruit? LOVE.
- Not condemnation, and shame, and fear, and divisiveness, and pride and arrogance, and gossip, and of division, and of criticism and complaining. Not a yoke of bondage to the law.
- Do they take advantage of Christian liberty and encourage others to do the same.
- Watch out for such people.
- They will come from the outside some looking obviously like wolves (those are the easy ones), but some looking like wolves in sheep's clothing
-
- **The attack will ALSO come from within.**
- There may be wolves coming from the outside. Paul says here that they'll also come from within.
- The Devil attacks from the outside in, but if he has the opportunity, He would rather attack from the inside out.
-
- And in His disguise He will begin to influence a culture or a mind or a family, and deceive people with lies that APPEAR to be light — that APPEAR to be of God.
- They appear to be righteous and good.
- Beware of words full of religion, but lacking love. Beware of legalism DISGUISED as holiness.
- Beware of the lie that God wants us to be comfortable. And safe. And secure. **No he doesn't.** God wants us to follow after Him. And sometimes following Him is uncomfortable.
- Beware of "being responsible".

- Beware of licentiousness disguised as LIBERTY. For freedom you have been set free, BUT DO NOT (Gal. 5) use your FREEDOM as an opportunity to indulge the flesh.
- Some people here today medicating with alcohol. With food. With prescription drugs. God is inviting you to a better way.
- You're not a slave. You are free.
- **Repent today that times of refreshing may come. It doesn't matter how far away from intimacy you are. It's just one step back to Jesus.**
- The enemy wants to rob what God has begun in and through you.
- Watch out for yourselves. Watch out for each other. Watch out for the devil.

Lastly we see in Paul's words. A reflection. A exhortation. and:

AN INTENTION (v. 24)

- This is "my AIM" in vs. 24. In other words, this is my GOAL. This is what I am shooting for. This is what I intend to do.
- This was Paul's Goal. This was Paul's aim.
- To finish the course. To Complete the task that God gave him.
- **"See to it that you complete the ministry that you received from the Lord." (Col 4:17)**
- Every single one of us have been given a calling from God. We all have a **general** calling.
- And personal, specific callings **THROUGH WHICH** that **general** calling is fulfilled.
-
- There are HEART THINGS in all of you. There are passions in you that are uniquely placed there by God.
 - There may be a love in you for a certain demographic.
 - A certain ethnic group.
 - A certain language.
 - A certain career field.
 - And you may just think, "Oh that's just the way I'm wired." **Dang right it's the way you're wired!** And WHO WIRED YOU LIKE THAT? God put that there.
- God gave you this general calling of helping people know the love, grace, and truth of Jesus, and He wants to fulfill it **THROUGH THE WAY HE WIRED YOU.**
- And some of you God did speak you. Remember that.
- You have fought the good fight. Run the race with endurance....
- But the **race** is not over, the **fight** is not finished, the **work** is not done.
- I know it may feel for some of you personally, and maybe as a body, like maybe your prime has come and gone.

- You may feel too old like your time has come and gone. And as a church, I know it FEELS like “15 years — We’ve done a lot in 15 years”. And you have.
- **But This is the end of the book. This is just the end of the chapter.**
- In the Kingdom of God and in His economy, He doesn’t need people, or even churches who FEEL strong, young enough, old enough, brave enough, in order to manifest his power through them. In fact He PREFERS to use the weak people.
 - Moses
 - Peter
 - murderer Paul
 - prostitute Rahab,
 - Old man Abraham
 - Doubter like Sarah
 - Dead man like Lazarus
- God is not done with you friends. Not as a church and not as individuals. **If you’ve still got breath in your lungs, then God still has a plan for your life.**
- I’m NOT here to tell you to RUN the race. You’ve already run the race. **I’m here to tell you to FINISH the race. I’m here to encourage you to be faithful to the end.**
- If you’ve been lazy in your pursuit of God and the things of God, it’s time to strip off everything that is holding you back so that you can start running again.

- The enemy of the goal is counting this life **worth something.**
- **v. 24** “I do not consider my life as dear to myself (as something to treasure. As most valuable. As something to hold on to). Why was He committing to make NOT hold on to His life and the things of this life? **SO THAT I may finish...**
- **In other words,** the reason for not counting his life as dear to himself is for the PURPOSE of being able to finish call and ministry God gave him.
- **Opposite is true also:** If He counts his life as dear to himself then HE WILL NOT BE ABLE TO FINISH the course and the ministry that God gave to him.
- **You cannot finish the calling of God while also treasuring this things of this world.**
- Jesus said it like this: Can’t serve God and money. Can’t embrace the comforts of this world AND the fulfill the calling of God. So then **“Let us also lay aside every encumbrance and the sin which so easily entangles us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us” (Hebrews 12:1)**