

## 50—Acts 20.25-38—Shepherding the Church of God

### I. Introduction

- a. I don't like this text for reasons you might not expect. Upon hearing that, you might think...well it's because it's written to pastors like you and these are some pretty weighty things. Indeed, they are and we are going to wad through them together in a moment.
- b. But what often makes me not like this is knowing the pain of no longer being with your mentor...the one who shared the gospel with you...the one who opened up the bible and taught you these amazing things about God and his grace. Not seeing the face of the one who patiently helped you through so many messed up things...who watched you weep over the pain of thinking wrongly about the wonderful truths of the Bible.
- c. I have had some great brothers like Paul in my life. Each time it was painful to move away. The words of the farewell get soaked in tears as the reality sets in. New fears arise as you contemplate Paul or your mentor not being there to rely on and ask all the hard questions. Now they must answer those questions without Paul.
- d. It is such a joy to have people like this in your life. It is sad that there's very few who want such a relationship in the church today. May we be different here.
- e. Well, let's see how Paul instructs these pastors before he leaves.

### II. Main Point

- a. Farewell: Shepherd God's flock which he purchased with his own blood

### III. Outline

- a. Pay Careful Attention to yourselves and the flock
- b. Be on the Alert for wolves
- c. Follow my example of working hard and giving
- d. Paul's Farewell ends with sorrow and weeping

### IV. Exposition

- a. We continue Paul's farewell to the Ephesian elders this morning. I recall our journey through Jesus' farewell as we walked through the Gospel of John. It too was filled with promises and warnings and prayers and tears. Someone's last words are often weighty and very important. If you had an opportunity to leave some final words with your family, I imagine they would not be about unimportant things. You would express your deep love for them. Being at the end of life, you might want to say something like the poem I sent you last week in the email which repeats this line: "Only one life, 'twill soon be past, Only what's done for Christ will last" (C. T. Studd). In Paul's final words, he first commands the pastors to pay careful attention to themselves and all the flock.
  - i. There in v. 25 Paul says that he "has known that none of those whom he had gone about proclaiming the Kingdom to from Ephesus will see his face again."
    1. In other words, I'm not going to be there proclaiming the Kingdom ever again. That's your task now. That's the task of the church in Ephesus.
      - a. Paul holds out the testimony that he is innocent of the blood of all.
        - i. What does it mean to be innocent of the blood of all?
          1. A homicide detective might use this of his suspect concerning a physical death.
          2. But Paul means this in terms of eternal life. In other words, if any in Ephesus reject the gospel it's not because he didn't tell them. Their eternal death is not on him.
          3. The words have the flavor of the watchmen in Ezekiel. The picture there is that of a man keeping watch in the tower of the city and saw the enemy coming but failed to warn the city as

they slept. There's blood on the hand of the watchman if that happens.

4. Paul is saying he sounded the warning in Ephesus. He has no blood on his hands.
- b. Now these pastors are the watchmen.
    - i. This may seem like an easy task but there are plenty who refuse to hear it. They do not trust the watchman nor the message.
    - ii. Part of what Paul is trying to communicate there in verse 27 is that he did not shrink back from declaring the whole counsel of God.
      1. It's easy to skip all the hard things in God's word says. It's tempting to just focus on the parts we all like but that's not my task.
      2. (2 Tim. 4:1-4) I charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by his appearing and his kingdom: <sup>2</sup> preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching. <sup>3</sup> For the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions, <sup>4</sup> and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander off into myths.
  - ii. In light of this, Paul commands these pastors there in v. 28, "Pay attention to yourselves and all the flock."
    1. Life is not a swimming pool but rather a river. You are either drifting with the steady flow or you're paddling against the stream of the world.
    2. So, not paying attention is not an optional command.
      - a. There's a warning here for me. Paul doesn't just say, pay attention to all the flock but also myself.
        - i. Imagine a mom trying to care for a newborn without sleeping and without help. That child is at risk because that mom will crash eventually.
      - b. That is the daily grind to be filled up on the Spirit of God through living on the Word of God and prayer. If I don't do that, I will have nothing to offer. Man does not live by bread alone.
    3. But the command to me is also to pay attention to all the flock.
      - a. One person doing this task is next to impossible. That's why the structure of every church ought to have more than one pastor as is so clearly implied in this text.
        - i. Every pastor has limits. When you have more than one like the Bible teaches you decrease those limits.
        - ii. These elders from Ephesus are the pastors of the church there.
      - iii. It says there in v. 28 that the Holy Spirit has made or placed them there as overseers.
        1. That means God the Holy Spirit is uniquely involved in gifting and placing pastors.
          - a. (Eph. 4:11-12) <sup>11</sup> And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers,

<sup>12</sup> to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ

2. In other words, the Holy Spirit has made me and placed me here to watch over the flock.
  - a. (Heb. 13:17) <sup>17</sup> Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls, as those who will have to give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with groaning, for that would be of no advantage to you.
  - b. This overseeing of souls is a main task of the pastors.
  - c. In fact, the very next word used in our text in v. 28 is the word for pastoring.
    - i. Notice what he tells the elders from Ephesus again in (Acts 20:28) <sup>28</sup> Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to care for (to shepherd) the church of God
    - ii. All three terms are used in this scene. We've talked about how they are interchangeable terms that describe the one office.
    - iii. Elder, bishop (overseer), pastor (shepherd).
    - iv. Whatever you've been taught, that is the pattern of the NT office of pastor and the intended structure of the church to have more than one pastor.
  - b. To obey the command to pay careful attention to yourselves and ALL the flock cannot be accomplished by a single pastor. The value is too high for one person.
    - i. So, if the purchase price shows the value of what is purchased then what value does God place on the church?
    - ii. Notice there at the end of verse 28, the flock that is to be cared for is the flock that God purchased with his own blood.
    - iii. God sent his only Son into the world to be the perfect sacrifice we all needed.
    - iv. That seems to be the most valuable of all possible payments for His flock.
    - v. That's a strong argument for following God's way of structuring His church.
- b. Well, if that's not enough to hear the demand that the pastors are to pay careful attention to themselves and all the flock, there's an ever-present issue of wolves in sheep's clothing who want to destroy God's blood-bought flock.
  - i. Again, since Paul is leaving and will never return, the elders of the church in Ephesus must hear what Paul knows will happen after he leaves.
    1. He says there in v. 29 that fierce wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock.
      - a. Wolves are the hunters and sheep are the hunted.
      - b. The wolves do not come in looking like wolves. They are deceptive and seek to hide under the guise of their religion.
        - i. They are fake but have the appearance of sheep.

- ii. They talk like sheep. They know the lingo. They know how to pray or ask someone to pray.
  - iii. They are smart but they may play dumb.
  - iv. What they want is to be followed. They don't want you following Jesus' ways. The plain reading of scripture is not the final word.
- 2. One of the ways to combat this is a consistent admonishing of all the flock. Notice what Paul follows up with after the warning.
  - a. V. 31—Therefore be alert. How? Remembering that for three years Paul did not cease to admonish every one with tears.
    - i. To admonish someone is to see a fellow church member clearly on the wrong path—a dangerous path and you point that out with tears begging them not to walk away from Jesus.
      - 1. It also means to speak clearly about avoiding those wrong paths.
      - 2. Both are done in the spirit of brotherly love.
    - ii. Paul did not cease to instruct them in the whole counsel of God's word.
  - b. In other words, they must continue what Paul was doing in Ephesus.
    - i. They can't just say God's loves you. To love is to say more. They can't just soft-pedal everything.
    - ii. This is important because wolves do not like to be instructed and it shows.
      - 1. (Prov. 9:7-10) <sup>7</sup> Whoever corrects a scoffer gets himself abuse, and he who reproves a wicked man incurs injury. <sup>8</sup> Do not reprove a scoffer, or he will hate you; reprove a wise man, and he will love you. <sup>9</sup> Give instruction to a wise man, and he will be still wiser; teach a righteous man, and he will increase in learning. <sup>10</sup> The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the Holy One is insight.
      - 2. Wolves are foolish and wicked. They do not fear the Lord and therefore cannot be instructed.
- 3. At the end of this, the only thing Paul can do now as he leaves is entrust them to the Lord.
  - a. Notice there in v. 32, that he entrusts them to God and to the word of his grace.
    - i. Both are necessary. Both are sufficient to accomplish the task.
    - ii. But notice what God's word of grace can do:
      - 1. To build you up and to give you the inheritance among all those who are sanctified.
  - ii. What do you think happened after Paul left? You have probably guessed that wolves did come.
    - 1. Timothy was sent to pastor at Ephesus later on. The pastoral letters of first and second Timothy address many of the issues that came about.
      - a. Notice this in (1 Tim. 1:3-4) <sup>3</sup> As I urged you when I was going to Macedonia, remain at Ephesus so that you may charge certain persons not to teach any different doctrine, <sup>4</sup> nor to devote themselves to myths and endless genealogies, which promote speculations rather than the stewardship from God that is by faith.
    - 2. But it was also addressed by Jesus himself through another letter addressed to them.
      - a. In Revelation 2, we hear that they had abandoned the love they had at first.
      - b. Jesus admonishes the church through this letter to repent with a warning that if they do not he will remove them.

- i. It's interesting to hear that Jesus would remove the church in Ephesus. He had rather the church be removed than to have a bad witness there.
- c. As we move on to the final point, Paul wants to remind the elders of Ephesus of the example he set before them.
  - i. Now we need to be aware that Paul was single. He wishes many would be as he was and able to devote so much time and energy to the ministry.
    - 1. I mean, in the verses we just covered, he talks about admonishing the church night and day. He had more time than most.
      - a. He unfolds this in his first letter to the Corinthians. (1 Cor. 7:32-34)
  - ii. Even here beginning in v. 33, he sets the example of not coveting one's silver or gold.
    - 1. Indeed, one of the qualifications of a pastor is not to be a lover of money.
    - 2. He goes on to say he ministered to his own needs and to those who were with him.
      - a. (2 Thess. 3:7-10) <sup>7</sup> For you yourselves know how you ought to imitate us, because we were not idle when we were with you, <sup>8</sup> nor did we eat anyone's bread without paying for it, but with toil and labor we worked night and day, that we might not be a burden to any of you. <sup>9</sup> It was not because we do not have that right, but to give you in ourselves an example to imitate. <sup>10</sup> For even when we were with you, we would give you this command: If anyone is not willing to work, let him not eat.
  - iii. Working hard has a purpose:
    - 1. It's to help the weak and to remember the words of Jesus, "It is more blessed to give than to receive."
      - a. This is basic Christianity 101. I was taught this a new believer very early on. I heard a new Christian ask, "Do I give according to the gross or the net?" The man replied, "How much do you want to be blessed?"
      - b. The first thing you do when you get paid is give to the church and other ministries.
        - i. When he is first in your life, the first thing you do with your money is give it back. Yes, give it back. It's all his anyway. We are just a steward of it.
    - 2. This more than how we give our offerings. It also ourselves too.
- d. Well, we've come to the final farewell of beloved brothers in Christ.
  - i. After his final words, Paul kneels down and prayed with them all. I'm certain he speaks to the Lord of entrusting these brothers to him and the word of his grace.
  - ii. All of them are weeping. Grown men are crying. The brotherly affection they have for each other is expressed in tears.
    - 1. They hug this dear brother and as it was their custom, the literally fell upon his neck they kissed him.
    - 2. Most of their sorrow was due to the fact that they would not see his face again.
      - a. What a joy to have such a relationship with fellow Christians. Indeed, they are family...closer than family.
    - 3. They accompany him to the ship just like many of us do with dear friends and family.
      - a. It's takes forever to leave good brothers.
  - iii. I recall the day me and my family left the seminary in Fort Worth. One of my dearest brothers was there. We cried together, hugged and said goodbye.
    - 1. I can still see him in my mirror on the moving truck standing in the parking lot weeping.
    - 2. I miss him and many others who poured so much into my life. But I would not be the person I am today without those dear brothers who gave instead of received.

3. They gave of themselves and now I'm here to give to you.

V. Response

a. How might we respond?

i. There's no doubt, anytime we open God's word there are things we hear God say to us to should move us to repentance.

1. We don't pay attention to each other as we ought.

2. We are not as alert as we ought.

3. We may think wrongly about God's design for the church and need to seek to humble ourselves before the Lord and submit to his word.

ii. There's much to rejoice about too.

1. God's love for his church was the sending of His only Son.

2. The price he paid was the blood of his Son.

a. And if you have never repented and believed in Jesus, just hear the enormous price God paid.

b. No one has ever loved you like that.

c. Will you have him?