

## Text— Acts 20:17-38

Fellow redeemed sinners, redeemed by the blood of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ,

The apostle Paul was nearing the end of his 3<sup>rd</sup> missionary journey when the events recorded in our Scripture selection took place. Paul would then soon face a trial because the hate-filled Jews despised him and his preaching, for he preached that all people needed to repent of their sins, and needed to turn to Jesus Christ and believe on Him as the promised Messiah foretold of old, the one true Savior of the world.

Nevertheless, before Paul's visit to Jerusalem where he repeatedly and truthfully testified to various parties, and then his hearing at Caesarea and his subsequently being sent to Rome, we behold him in our Scripture selection where we learn about:

### "PAUL'S PARTING MESSAGE TO THE EPHESIAN ELDERS"

With that as our theme, may we, in view of our text and with the help of the Holy Ghost, see—

- 1) How Paul's parting message included a reminder to hold to sound Scriptural doctrine
- 2) How Paul's parting message included a reminder to the Ephesian elders to be faithful pastors
- 3) How Paul's parting message included encouragement
- 4) How Paul's parting message resulted in some sadness

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Verse 17, ----- (Acts 20:17)

The apostle Paul during his 3<sup>rd</sup> missionary journey had arrived at Miletus, a city which was about 40 miles south of Ephesus, *And from Miletus he sent to Ephesus, and called the elders of the church.*

The elders were – as we see later in verse 28 of our

text – the overseers who fed the Christian congregation at Ephesus. In other words, the elders whom Paul sent for were pastors who served the Ephesian church, which apparently had grown to a sizeable number of Christians.

Verses 18-21, ----- (Acts 20:18-21)

The elders from Ephesus arrived at Miletus, at which time Paul briefly rehearsed what his ministry had been among the people throughout the region of Asia, which included the city of Ephesus.

The apostle Paul had suffered at the hands of Jews who failed to repent and believe on the Lord Jesus Christ. Nevertheless, Paul had humbly and faithfully served the Lord by persistently preaching God's truth both in public places and in individual homes, since every soul is precious. Yes, Paul knew what it behooves all of us to know and remember, that being: "there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth." (Luke 15:10)

Observe also that Paul was not prejudice, for he testified to both Jews and Gentiles, *repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ.* Indeed, note well that the apostle Paul never varied in his message, for he consistently preached Law and Gospel— *repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ.* Hence, Paul's parting message included a reminder to hold to sound Scriptural doctrine.

My friends, Paul's preaching is exactly what every called Christian pastor is to preach: the Law of God in its full severity, and the Gospel of Christ in its full sweetness, for we read in Romans 3:20, "by the law is the knowledge of sin." And, we learn in Romans 1:16-17, "the gospel of Christ... is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek. For therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith: as it is written, The just shall live by faith." Take it to heart that the Law shows us our sin and the wrath of God, while the Gospel shows us our Savior and the grace of God.

It's as Holy Writ plainly states: "In this was manifested the love of God toward us, because that God sent his only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him. Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins. For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God; Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus: Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God; To declare, I say, at this time his righteousness: that he might be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus. For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast. For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord. ...who hath abolished death, and hath brought life and immortality to light through the gospel." (1 John 4:9-10; Romans 3:23-26; Ephesians 2:8-9; Romans 6:23; 2 Timothy 1:10)

Fellow Christians, let us thank and praise God for touching our hearts with His Holy Word – Law and Gospel – by which we have come to know our sinfulness and have come to know our only Savior from sin, the Lord Jesus Christ.

Verses 22 & 23, -----. (Acts 20:22-23)

Observe that Paul, being *bound in the spirit*, went forward toward Jerusalem, without *knowing the things* which would occur there concerning himself. Paul had no details as to what he would have to endure, except *that the Holy Ghost* witnessed *in every city* he traveled through, *saying that bonds and afflictions* awaited him.

Most folks in Paul's shoes might have consequently avoided the journey to Jerusalem, but Paul was bound to remain faithful to his calling as a servant of the Savior, despite knowing that unpleasant things awaited him in his body. Think about the example Paul is to all Christians: an example to continue steadfast in the faith of Jesus Christ no

matter what sufferings may come our way. We would all do well to remember that our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ says in Matthew 10:28, "fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell." Let us never forget Paul's parting message included a reminder to hold to sound Scriptural doctrine no matter what we Christians may have to endure because of doing so.

Verse 24, -----. (Acts 20:24)

Think of Paul's mind-set in being firm in the faith of Jesus Christ in the face of the further persecutions that would come upon him, for even while knowing bonds and afflictions awaited him, Paul declared: *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.*

Oh, Paul the apostle was all-in for his Lord and Savior Jesus Christ! Accordingly, Paul's bravely going forward in the face of persecution is a portion of his parting message, serving as a reminder to hold to sound Scriptural doctrine. Indeed, realize that the Gospel of the grace of God, the good news of God's undeserved love shown to us in sending us Jesus the Savior, is more precious than temporal life, for John 3:16-18 states in no uncertain terms: "God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life. For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved. He that believeth on him is not condemned: but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God."

Thus, Paul was ready and willing to finish running his course of life in this world with joy as he looked forward to being in heavenly bliss with Jesus. Yes, the apostle Paul was ready to depart this transitory world, for he wrote in 2 Timothy 4:7-8, "I have

fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing." So, we see that Paul's parting message included a reminder to hold to sound Scriptural doctrine even if it cost's one his or her life in this world.

Verses 25-27, -----. (Acts 20:25-27)

Paul knew that he would not see the Ephesian elders again in this world once he departed from them in concluding their present meeting. Paul had preached the kingdom of God among those brethren in the faith, and he was not bashful about telling them straight out that he was *pure from the blood of all men*. Indeed, no one who heard Paul preach would be able to rightly say that they failed to obtain the forgiveness of sins and salvation because Paul's preaching lacked necessary information, for Paul in total honesty could and did say: *I have not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of God.*

My friends, the apostle Paul preached and taught what every called Christian minister is to preach and teach: ALL THE COUNSEL OF GOD— ALL the DOCTRINES OF THE HOLY BIBLE! Now, since the apostle Paul was careful to preach and teach all the counsel of God, such action was itself a reminder to the Ephesian elders – and is a reminder to us Christians today – to hold to sound Scriptural doctrine. Furthermore, 2 Timothy 3:16-17 also says to every one of us: "All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, throughly furnished unto all good works."

God grant that we take to heart how Paul's parting message included a reminder to hold to sound Scriptural doctrine, and that we endeavor to cling to all the doctrines of the Holy Bible without compromise.

As we ponder the next few verses of our text, let us see how Paul's parting message included a reminder to the Ephesian elders to be faithful pastors.

Verse 28, -----. (Acts 20:28)

Note well that it is God the Holy Ghost who made those Ephesian elders overseers – pastors – of the church of God which was in Ephesus. Additionally, Paul's parting message included a reminder to the Ephesian elders to be faithful pastors in that they were to take heed to themselves as well as the congregation under their care to properly feed them all the counsel of God, ALL THE DOCTRINES OF THE HOLY BIBLE, for the church was NOT their possession but was GOD'S possession since He had purchased those people with His own blood.

God the Father does NOT have blood; God the Holy Ghost does NOT have blood; but, God the Son, Jesus Christ, has blood, the very blood which has purchased and won us all from all sin! It's as we read in 1 Peter 1:18-21, "Forasmuch as ye know that ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold, from your vain conversation received by tradition from your fathers; But with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot: Who verily was foreordained before the foundation of the world, but was manifest in these last times for you, Who by him do believe in God, that raised him up from the dead, and gave him glory; that your faith and hope might be in God." Jesus is God and man but one Christ, our only Savior! Let us be faithful to the Lord Jesus Christ and His pure preserved Holy Word, for He has purchased us with His own holy and infinitely precious blood.

Verses 29-31, -----. (Acts 20:29-31)

Here we further see how Paul's parting message included a reminder to the Ephesian elders to be faithful pastors. Trouble from without and within would come upon the Christians at Ephesus, as

happens at some point in most Christian congregations to this very day.

Paul likens the situation to wolves coming in and devouring the sheep, for false teachers would enter into the congregation with false doctrines which would destroy the spiritual lives of folks in that church. It still happens today when Christians in a congregation listen to false prophets on the T.V. or the internet or the radio or in books; pretty soon duped-Christians stop heeding what their own faithful pastor is teaching from the Holy Bible and instead they believe what the false prophets are pedaling. However, Jesus clearly states in Matthew 7:15, "Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves."

Another problem of which the apostle Paul warned the Christians at Ephesus was that of their *own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them*. Is it not a problem seen to this very day? A person rises up in a congregation and thinks he knows much more than his pastor; pretty soon, that person on his ego-trip convinces other folks to follow him, and they split from the congregation as they go and do their own thing.

Nevertheless, the elders at Ephesus were to continue to be faithful pastors, faithful to Jesus Christ and His pure preserved Holy Word; and, all called pastors today are to do likewise despite shrinking numbers in their congregations.

Additionally, the Ephesian elders were to remain alert and expecting such troubles since Paul urged them, saying: *Therefore watch, and remember, that by the space of three years I ceased not to warn every one night and day with tears*. Likewise, faithful pastors today are to be alert and expecting heart-wrenching troubles because 1 Peter 5:8 warns, "the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour."

Let all Christians today – laypersons and pastors – remember how Paul's parting message included a

reminder to the Ephesian elders to be faithful pastors.

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As we ponder the next few verses of our text, let us see how Paul's parting message included encouragement.

Verse 32, ----- (Acts 20:32)

Despite problems that would come from without and arise from within, the apostle Paul encouraged the Ephesian elders when he said: *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*.

Yes, the faithful are in God's capable hands, and the Word of God's grace – the Gospel of Christ – is able to build Christians up in the faith. Oh, just as it's true that "faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God," as Romans 10:17 informs us; so also 1 Thessalonians 2:13 reports that "the word of God... effectually worketh also in you that believe." And, when God through His Word grants folks faith in Jesus Christ and then keeps them in the faith, they have the inheritance of eternal life in heaven awaiting them when they depart this vale of tears. Fellow Christians, let us be encouraged by Paul's parting message to the Ephesian elders.

Verses 33-35, ----- (Acts 20:33-35)

The apostle Paul was not bragging but was rather encouraging the Ephesian elders by his own example to be givers rather than takers. Paul did not desire the pastors at Ephesus to misuse their calling to achieve temporal gain, nor should any pastor today misuse his calling for temporal gain. Oh, it's a sad fact that many do use the ministry simply as a way to make money as they jump from church to church just to up their worldly-wealth.

Pray that the misuse of the holy ministry would cease, and that more pastors would – as did Paul –

*remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he said, It is more blessed to give than to receive.* Yes, let us pray that more ministers would stand firm in the full truth of God's Word and the Christ of the Holy Bible, heeding the words of encouragement found in Paul's parting message.

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As we ponder our text to its conclusion let us see how Paul's parting message resulted in some sadness.

Verses 36-38, ----- (Acts 20:36-38)

The Ephesian elders were saddened by the fact they would see Paul no more in this world; they knelt and prayed together for the last time, and shed many tears. Oh, the pastors of Ephesus would miss their beloved teacher who had taught them so much of God's Word. They accompanied the apostle Paul to the ship which would carry him on toward Jerusalem.

Fellow Christians, we can all certainly relate to what those Ephesian elders were feeling. For example, we've all seen more than one faithful servant of Christ laid to rest after his departing this life. We've said good-bye to a number of faithful pastors who taught us God's Word. We remember them and how we worshiped the Lord with them. But, we must also never forget that if we remain faithful to our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, we will see those departed believers again one day when we join them in paradise.

Let us remember what we've considered this day concerning Paul's parting message to the Ephesian elders. Let us daily and sincerely repent of our sins; let us cling to Christ Jesus in heart-deep faith as our personal Savior and Lord; and, let us go forward uncompromisingly continuing in God's pure preserved Holy Word, which can build us up in the faith and sustain us therein. Amen.

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