

Woodland Baptist Church

April 3, 2013 - Wednesday Night in the Word

Acts 20:17-36 - Leadership Transition and Admonition

1) OPENING REMARKS

- a) A major portion of the “Ephesian section” of Acts is dominated by a journey motif.
 - i) Paul concluded his ministry in the churches of Asia, Macedonia, and Achaia (20:1–6). He set out on his final trip to Jerusalem.
 - ii) Awaiting ship at Troas, he restored a youth to life after a fall from an upper-level window (20:7–12).
 - iii) He traveled by sea to Miletus (20:13–16) and sent for the elders of the Ephesian church, to whom he delivered a major farewell address (20:17–38).
 - iv) Resuming his voyage, the last leg of his trip was marked by strong forebodings from Christians along the way of the dangers that awaited him in Jerusalem (21:1–16) [Polhill]

2) SUMMARY OF MOVEMENTS

- a) **1-5** Paul leaves for Macedonia, encourages the disciples there and then arrives in Greece, most likely Corinth and stays for three months. He finds out about a plot by the Jews to kill him, so he returns to Macedonia. He has a missionary team, most likely church representatives that travel with him. His team went on ahead, then later, after celebrating the festival of unleavened bread, Paul sailed from Philippi (Macedonia) to meet up with them at Troas.
- b) **7-12** While at Troas, Paul worships with a group at a house church (breaking bread), speaking until late into the night. A young man falls asleep during the assembly time and falls to his death from the third floor of the home. Paul raises him from the dead, went back and ate with the church, spoke until daybreak and left.
- c) **13-16** Paul’s companions went ahead of him and sailed for Assos, as Paul came behind them on foot. At Assos, Paul joined them on the boat and sailed to Mitylene, Chios, Samos and finally Miletus. Paul avoided Ephesus, as he was in a hurry to get to Jerusalem by the day of Pentecost.
- d) **17-38** - Paul says good bye to the Ephesian elders.

3) READ ACTS 20:17-38

- a) **Qualification of Elders - 1 Timothy 3:1-13; Titus 1:5-9**

4) INTERESTING FACTS

- a) Paul's address to the Ephesian elders is the third and final example in Acts of his speeches during the course of his missionary work. The first, delivered in the synagogue of Pisidian Antioch (13:16–41), was given during the course of his first mission and was to a Jewish audience. The second, delivered before the Athenian Areopagus (17:22–31), was given during his second mission and was to a Gentile audience. The Miletus address was delivered in the course of his third mission and was given before a Christian gathering.¹
- i) The most striking parallels to the Miletus speech are Paul's words to Timothy in 1 Tim 4:1–16 and 2 Tim 3:1–4:8.²
- ii) The Miletus address is not easy to outline. Basically the speech falls into two main portions: Paul's relationship with the Ephesians—his ministry among them, his present plans, and his future prospects (vv. 18–27)—and his exhortation to them for their role as church leaders (vv. 28–35).
- b) The speech which follows is not only his farewell speech to them but his last will and testament to the churches which he had planted both east and west of the Aegean.³

5) **Verses 17-21** Three CHARACTERISTICS of Paul's EXAMPLE in ministry

- i) Luke calls those men "elders," but Paul speaks of them as "guardians" and "shepherds." There is little or nothing of institutionalism in the part which they are seen to play here.⁴
- b) **17 Now from Miletus he sent to Ephesus and called the elders of the church to come to him. 18 And when they came to him, he said to them: "You yourselves know how I lived among you the whole time from the first day that I set foot in Asia, 19 serving the Lord with all humility and with tears and with trials that happened to me through the plots of the Jews; 20 how I did not shrink from declaring to you anything that was profitable, and teaching you in public and from house to house, 21 testifying both to Jews and to Greeks of repentance toward God and of faith in our Lord Jesus Christ.**

¹ Polhill

² Ibid

³ Bruce, pg 387

⁴ Bruce, pg 389

i) **First** was the humility and perseverance that had marked his service for the Lord (v. 19). Paul's language here is reminiscent of his epistles. He often spoke of "serving" (douleuō) the Lord (cf. 1 Thess 1:9; Col 3:24) and described himself as a servant or "bond-slave" (doulos) of Christ.⁵

(1) Paul was probably speaking collectively when he said, "through the plots of the Jews," as most of the Jewish persecution is not recorded in Ephesus.

ii) A **second** characteristic of Paul's ministry was the openness of his proclamation (v. 20). He kept no secrets, held nothing back. Whatever was true to the gospel and helpful to the faithful, he preached both publicly and from house to house. Mention of public proclamation recalls Paul's days in the synagogue of Ephesus and the lecture hall of Tyrannus (19:8f.). The reference to houses most likely is to the house-church meetings of the Ephesian Christians.⁶

iii) The **third** and final characteristic of Paul's ministry was the inclusiveness of his witness. He had preached to everyone, both Jews and Greeks (v. 21). No one had been left out...There is no room for exclusivism in the gospel in the sense that the gospel is for Gentiles and Jews, slaves and free, and men and women. The gospel itself is, however, exclusive in its claims, "for there is no other name under heaven ... by which we must be saved" (Acts 4:12). Salvation is available only in the name of Jesus.

6) **Verses 22-23** Paul's future PERSECUTIONS as he goes to JERUSALEM

i) **Romans 15:30-33** - I appeal to you, brothers, by our Lord Jesus Christ and by the love of the Spirit, to strive together with me in your prayers to God on my behalf, 31 that I may be delivered from the unbelievers in Judea, and that my service for Jerusalem may be acceptable to the saints, 32 so that by God's will I may come to you with joy and be refreshed in your company. 33 May the God of peace be with you all. Amen.

⁵ Ibid

⁶ Polhill

b) **22 And now, behold, I am going to Jerusalem, constrained by the Spirit, not knowing what will happen to me there, 23 except that the Holy Spirit testifies to me in every city that imprisonment and afflictions await me. 24 But I do not account my life of any value nor as precious to myself, if only I may finish my course and the ministry that I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the gospel of the grace of God.**

c) **22 And now, behold, I am going to Jerusalem, constrained by the Spirit, not knowing what will happen to me there, 23 except that the Holy Spirit testifies to me in every city that imprisonment and afflictions await me.**

i) **Constrained by the Spirit...The Holy Spirit testifies in every city that imprisonment and afflictions await me...**

(1) Acknowledging some uncertainty about the outcome ('not knowing what will happen to me there'), he nevertheless reveals for the first time a conviction about imprisonment and hardship awaiting him in Jerusalem ('I only know that in every city the Holy Spirit warns me that prison and hardships are facing me'). Such warnings by the Holy Spirit are mentioned again in 21:4 (Tyre) and 21:10–14 (Caesarea), where the last reference shows that the Spirit addressed him through a Christian prophet. The Holy Spirit was both the driving force to undertake this journey and the source of revelation about its dangerous outcome (cf. Rom. 15:31).⁷

(a) constrained - [deo] - to tie; to compel someone to act in a particular manner.

ii) Life or death was not the issue that mattered; what mattered most was, as he told another church, that Christ should be magnified in his body, "whether by life or death" (Phil. 1:20).⁸

d) It is very important to remember that the imprisonment and afflictions that Paul experienced were from being a **committed gospel minister**, not from doing things that were illegal and wrong. Many times we like to blame God for our afflictions when in fact, we have done things that are outside the will of God and we are suffering discipline because of sinful choices, not faithfulness to Christ.

⁷ Pillar NT Commentary

⁸ Bruce 390

i) **1 Peter 4:12-19** - 2 Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you. 13 But rejoice insofar as you share Christ's sufferings, that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed. 14 If you are insulted for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you. **15 But let none of you suffer as a murderer or a thief or an evildoer or as a meddler.** 16 Yet if anyone suffers as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God in that name. 17 For it is time for judgment to begin at the household of God; and if it begins with us, what will be the outcome for those who do not obey the gospel of God? 18 And "If the righteous is scarcely saved, what will become of the ungodly and the sinner?" 19 Therefore let those who suffer according to God's will entrust their souls to a faithful Creator while doing good.

7) **Verses 25-27** The church's future PERSECUTIONS from OUTSIDE and INSIDE

a) **25 And now, behold, I know that none of you among whom I have gone about proclaiming the kingdom will see my face again. 26 Therefore I testify to you this day that I am innocent of the blood of all, 27 for I did not shrink from declaring to you the whole counsel of God. 28 Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to care for the church of God, which he obtained with his own blood. 29 I know that after my departure fierce wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; 30 and from among your own selves will arise men speaking twisted things, to draw away the disciples after them.**

i) **Will see my face again** - It is very possible that this is the last time you will see me alive; do you remember a time when you saw someone for their last time, but you didn't realize it at the time you saw them?

ii) **Their blood was not on Paul's hands** - "Like Ezekiel's trustworthy watchman, he had sounded the trumpet so that all the province of Asia had heard.⁹ [Ezekiel 33, but here Ezekiel 3 is quoted, same principle]

(1) **Ezekiel 3:16-21** - And at the end of seven days, the word of the Lord came to me: 17 "Son of man, I have made you a watchman for the house of Israel. Whenever you hear a word from my mouth, you shall give them warning from me. 18 If I say to the wicked, 'You shall surely die,' and you give him no warning, nor speak to warn the wicked from his wicked way,

⁹ Bruce, 392

in order to save his life, that wicked person shall die for his iniquity, but his blood I will require at your hand. 19 But if you warn the wicked, and he does not turn from his wickedness, or from his wicked way, he shall die for his iniquity, but you will have delivered your soul. 20 Again, if a righteous person turns from his righteousness and commits injustice, and I lay a stumbling block before him, he shall die. Because you have not warned him, he shall die for his sin, and his righteous deeds that he has done shall not be remembered, but his blood I will require at your hand. 21 But if you warn the righteous person not to sin, and he does not sin, he shall surely live, because he took warning, and you will have delivered your soul.”

(2) **He preached the whole counsel of God** - did not shrink.

(a) **shrink** [hyposteilamen] - to hold back out of fear

iii) **Pay careful attention to yourself and all the flock** - to be in a continuous state of readiness to learn of any future danger, need, or error, and to respond appropriately

(1) Holy Spirit has made you overseers - [episkopos] - guardian, church leader or supervisor

(2) Christ obtained by his own blood - [haimatos] - blood, life blood, death killing

iv) **Future of leadership**

(a) The shepherd imagery is continued in vv. 29–30 with Paul warning the Ephesian elders of a time to come when religious predators would ravage the flock of God. They would arise both from outside and inside the church.¹⁰

(2) **Fierce wolves will come in among you - not spare the flock**

(a) Fierce wolves - [lykos bareis] - severe people will come in from the outside.

(b) Galatians is a good example of this where the Judaizers came in behind Paul and perverted the gospel of free grace to one of circumcision and the law.

¹⁰ Polhill - NAC

(c) **Matthew 7:17-19** - 15 "Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves. 16 You will recognize them by their fruits. Are grapes gathered from thornbushes, or figs from thistles? 17 So, every healthy tree bears good fruit, but the diseased tree bears bad fruit. 18 A healthy tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a diseased tree bear good fruit. 19 Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. 20 Thus you will recognize them by their fruits.

(3) **Men will arise from among you that will speak twisted things and draw away disciples after them.**

(a) **Twisted things** - [diastrepho] - deform, make crooked, pervert, mislead

(b) **Luke 23:1-2** - Then the whole company of them arose and brought him before Pilate. 2 And they began to accuse him, saying, "We found this man **misleading our nation** and forbidding us to give tribute to Caesar, and saying that he himself is Christ, a king." [1, 2, 3 John]

(4) Other Scriptures:

(a) **1 Timothy 4:1-3** - Now the Spirit expressly says that in later times some will depart from the faith by devoting themselves to deceitful spirits and teachings of demons, 2 through the insincerity of liars whose consciences are seared, 3 who forbid marriage and require abstinence from foods that God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and know the truth.

(b) **1 Timothy 6:3-5** - Teach and urge these things. 3 If anyone teaches a different doctrine and does not agree with the sound words of our Lord Jesus Christ and the teaching that accords with godliness, 4 he is puffed up with conceit and understands nothing. He has an unhealthy craving for controversy and for quarrels about words, which produce envy, dissension, slander, evil suspicions, 5 and constant friction among people who are depraved in mind and deprived of the truth, imagining that godliness is a means of gain.

(c) **2 Timothy 3:1-9** - But understand this, that in the last days there will come times of difficulty. 2 For people will be lovers of self, lovers of money, proud, arrogant, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, 3 heartless, unappeasable, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not loving good, 4 treacherous, reckless, swollen with conceit, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, 5 having the

appearance of godliness, but denying its power. Avoid such people.
 6 For among them are those who creep into households and capture
 weak women, burdened with sins and led astray by various passions,
 7 always learning and never able to arrive at a knowledge of the truth.
 8 Just as Jannes and Jambres opposed Moses, so these men also oppose
 the truth, men corrupted in mind and disqualified regarding the faith.
 9 But they will not get very far, for their folly will be plain to all, as was
 that of those two men.

(5) "Scripture Twisting: 20 Ways the Cults Misread the Bible," by James Sire

- (a) **Inaccurate quotation** - "judge not, that you be not judged;" you must finish the rest of the passage to understand what he means.
- (b) **Twisted translation** - Jonah was an allegorical - Jonah was clearly not an allegory as Christ quoted him and real historical people were involved.
- (c) **The Bible hook** - always prefacing what they say by saying, "The Bible says" to give their words authority.
- (d) **Ignoring the immediate context** - in John 6 Christ was speaking literally of his blood and flesh, he was not speaking symbolically. Christ was indeed speaking metaphorically as he had just taught on the manna from heaven and is now placing himself as the bread from heaven.
- (e) **Collapsing contexts** - trying to make Scriptures related when they are not truly related to the same teaching.
- (f) **Overspecification** - seeing something in the text that is not there

b) Christ is the true shepherd - READ John 10:1-21

8) Verses 31-35 Paul's CLARITY of CONSCIENCE toward the Ephesian ministry

- a) **31 Therefore be alert, remembering that for three years I did not cease night or day to admonish every 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 coveted no one's silver or gold or apparel. 34 You yourselves know that these hands ministered to my necessities and to those who were with me. 35 In all things I have shown you that by working hard in this way we must help the weak and remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he himself said, 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.'**"

i) 31 Therefore be alert, remembering that for three years I did not cease night or day to admonish every one with tears.

- (1) Be alert - now that Paul was leaving they could no longer count on his personal presence for pastoral guidance and wise instruction.¹¹
- (2) Paul poured the gospel into them 24/7 for three years and gave them all of himself - tears, humility and trials.

(a) Romans 12:9-21

ii) 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.

- (1) *I commend you to God and to the word of his grace* - Paul is leaving but he leaves with them God's word that is graceful - as the teachings of Scripture are powerful. Paul says the word can do two things:

- (a) Build you up [oikodomeo] - to increase the potential of someone or something through ongoing process.
- (b) give you inheritance [kleronomia] to gain an valuable possession that has been received.
- (c) Who are sanctified [hagiazō] - to cause someone to have the quality of holiness.

iii) 33 I coveted no one's silver or gold or apparel. 34 You yourselves know that these hands ministered to my necessities and to those who were with me. 35 In all things I have shown you that by working hard in this way we must help the weak and remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he himself said, 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.'" - Paul reminds them finally that those who take care of the people of God must do so without thought of material reward. As Samuel called all Israel to witness when he was about to lay down his judicial office (1 Samuel 12:3), so Paul calls the elders of Ephesus to witness that all the time he spent among them he coveted nothing that was not his.¹²

¹¹ Ibid, 394

¹² Bruce 395

iv) 33 I coveted no one's silver or gold or apparel.

- (1) Paul did not solicit payment for the ministry that he provided, although he could have. He could have asked for or insinuated that he wanted their precious metals [silver, Gold] or apparel [clothing].
- (2) With this disclosure we see how 'his humble disinterest in "silver"-based wealth sets him apart from the Ephesian magicians (19:19) and shrinemakers (19:24–27)'. It also set him apart from itinerant philosophers and religious charlatans who made money out of their teaching in the Greco-Roman world (cf. 1 Thes. 2:3–9).¹³

v) 34 You yourselves know that these hands ministered to my necessities and to those who were with me.

- (1) He provided for himself and those with him through his own work - "these hands" most likely make reference to tent-making.

vi) 35 In all things I have shown you that by working hard in this way we must help the weak and remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he himself said, 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.'"

- (1) His witness of hard work bear testimony to Christ's teaching, "It is more blessed to give than receive."
- (2) The principle is rather, 'It is better for a person who can do so to give to help others rather than to amass further wealth for himself'. Paul's own behavior is then presented as a practical example of how to put this into practice. Paul did not follow Jesus' teaching by selling his possessions and distributing the proceeds (cf. Lk. 12:33), but he gave to others by working with his own hands (cf. 1 Cor. 4:12) to supply his own needs and the needs of his companions (cf. 18:1–3).¹⁴

- b) 1 Peter 5:1-11** - So I exhort the elders among you, as a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, as well as a partaker in the glory that is going to be revealed: 2 shepherd the flock of God that is among you, exercising oversight, not under compulsion, but willingly, as God would have you; not for shameful gain, but eagerly; 3 not domineering over those in your charge, but being examples to the flock. 4 And when the chief Shepherd appears, you will receive

¹³ Pillar NT commentary

¹⁴ Pillar NT

the unfading crown of glory. 5 Likewise, you who are younger, be subject to the elders. Clothe yourselves, all of you, with humility toward one another, for “God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.” 6 Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God so that at the proper time he may exalt you, 7 casting all your anxieties on him, because he cares for you. 8 Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. 9 Resist him, firm in your faith, knowing that the same kinds of suffering are being experienced by your brotherhood throughout the world. 10 And after you have suffered a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, confirm, strengthen, and establish you. 11 To him be the dominion forever and ever. Amen.

9) **Verses 36-38** A Final FAREWELL to a well-loved LEADER

- a) **36 And when he had said these things, he knelt down and prayed with them all. 37 And there was much weeping on the part of all; they embraced Paul and kissed him, 38 being sorrowful most of all because of the word he had spoken, that they would not see his face again. And they accompanied him to the ship.**

10) **CLOSE**

- a) Three CHARACTERISTICS of Paul’s EXAMPLE in ministry
- i) Do we follow the example of Christ and Paul - in humility, perseverance in proclamation and inclusiveness?
- b) Paul’s future PERSECUTIONS as he goes to JERUSALEM
- i) Are we aware of the possibility of our future persecutions of the church and are we willing to die for the gospel?
- c) The church’s future PERSECUTIONS from OUTSIDE and INSIDE
- i) Are we aware and watchful for savage wolves coming into our flock and men that twist the truth from within our flock?
- d) Paul’s CLARITY of CONSCIENCE toward the Ephesian ministry
- e) A Final FAREWELL to a well-loved LEADER