

Acts 20 • If only I may finish my course

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As I've done several times in our study of the Book of Acts thus far, I'm going to start off with a map just to remind you of where we are. Circled Ephesus there, which is where the apostle Paul is currently, although in our text, he's about to leave.



You'll recall from the last chapter that there was an uproar in Ephesus and it all was because, well, it was because the Word of God had so taken hold in that area of the world that the people were turning away from their pagan deities and no longer worshiping them.

And that meant that there was a decline in business for the guys who would make these little figurines that they crafted of the false goddess Artemis., your Bible may say, Diana.

Anyway, the craftsmen were concerned that they were going to lose money so they got the whole city in an uproar. And it was shortly after that, that I think Paul decided to move on and we're going to see where he's going to go, and how he's going to move toward eventually getting back to Jerusalem.

It's in his heart by the Holy Spirit to go back to Jerusalem and we're going to see how he goes about doing that. But he's also going to stop and speak to the church leaders in Ephesus before he does. And that's what we're going to create quite a bit of a focus of our time this morning, but we're going to start all this with prayer so let's pray.

Father, thank You so much for giving us this time today to be together. Lord, what a lovely worship time. We just thank You God, that we can take that time to worship and adore You, and declare Your goodness and our need of You.

And now, as we get into the Word, we pray that you would nourish our hearts, nourish our souls, fill us with understanding, and help us, Father God to see those areas where we need to take the Word of God and walk it out.

Be with us we pray Father in the name of Jesus, our Savior. And all God's people said, amen. Amen.

Verse 1 of chapter 20. Look with me in your Bible. It says, *“After the uproar ceased, Paul sent for the disciples, and after encouraging them, he said farewell and departed for Macedonia.” (ESV)*

Let me put another map up on the screen that will show you the route here. He was in Ephesus and he's going to make his way up to Macedonia again.



And that means he's going to start visiting the churches that were there. And it's not going to mention them by name. It's just simply going to say he visited the believers that were there. But the believers would be in places like Philippi, and Berea, and Thessalonica, and that sort of thing. So that's where Paul is traveling.

Verse 2 says, *“When he had gone through those regions and had given them much encouragement, he came to Greece.”* And we know that he's also going to go on down to Corinth, which is very close to Greece.

And it says, *“³ There he spent three months, and when a plot was made against him by the Jews as he was about to set sail for Syria, (yeah, and that basically means back to Antioch where he started from but) he decided to return through Macedonia.”*

He had just come through Macedonia and he was thinking to himself, I want to just hop a boat. He really wanted to get back to Syria and then go down to Jerusalem but he discovered a plot. Wouldn't it be lovely to be the apostle Paul and you're just minding your own business, doing what the Lord told you to do, and there are plots to have you killed.

And he learned that this plot was going to be somehow carried out on the ship that he was going to be taking back to Syria so he decided the safer way to go was on land. And those are some of the decisions that he had to make along the lines.

Look at verse 4, it begins to talk about some of the people that were accompanying him. *“Sopater the Berean, son of Pyrrhus, accompanied him; and of the Thessalonians, Aristarchus and Secundus; and Gaius of Derbe, and Timothy; (and then they were a couple of guys from Asia Minor and they were) and the Asians, Tychicus and Trophimus.”*

And we know that Luke was also there because it goes on in verse 5 to say, *“These went on ahead and were waiting for us (notice that) at Troas, ⁶ but we sailed away from Philippi after the days of Unleavened Bread, (or Passover if you will) and in five days we came to them at Troas, where we stayed for seven days.”*

Another map for you to take a look at as it says that they moved then from Philippi and then that's where he would essentially get on a boat and go on over to Troas. It says it took about five days for that journey.



By the way, as we were reading through those lists of the men that were accompanying Paul, you might've noticed that one of the men from

Thessalonica was a man named Secundus. Did you catch that? Do you know what Secundus means? Second.

In fact, it wasn't a name, it was a number. And the reason it was a number is because he had been a slave and that's what they did. They didn't give names to their slaves, they gave them numbers. And so this man was two. It could have easily just been seven or nine or ten, but he was two.

But what's cool about this is that now this man is a born again believer, a former slave, and he's traveling with the apostle Paul. And I love the fact that Christianity knows no rank.

When we are in Christ, it doesn't matter what your background is or may have been. It doesn't matter whether you were low or high on the social scale. You're just a child of God.

And it's interesting when Paul went on to write letters to the churches, he would actually have to address these issues of slaves and masters, because some of them are going to the same church.

Can you imagine having some slaves, and some of them get saved, and then you get saved, and you guys are all going to the same church. And while you're at church, there is no slave master relationship. It's just children of God. It's just believers. And so that just turned the whole thing on its ear. I don't know I that actually.

Luke tells us in verse 7 that, *“On the first day of the week, when we were gathered together to break bread, Paul talked with them, intending to depart on the next day, and he prolonged his speech until midnight.”* You thought I was long winded.

And then he goes on to say, *“There were many lamps in the upper room where we were gathered.”* Why would Luke say that? There were a lot of lamps, candles, and that sort of thing burning. Well, when you have a lot of flames, open flames, in a room like that's filled full of people, it's going to chew up the oxygen, and that's going to potentially cause people to become drowsy.

Look what we go on to read. *“⁹ And a young man named Eutychus, sitting at the window, sank into a deep sleep as Paul talked still longer. And being overcome by sleep, he fell down from the third story and was taken up dead. ¹⁰ But Paul went down and bent over him, and taking him in his arms, said, “Do not be alarmed, for his life is in him.” ¹¹ And when Paul had gone up and had broken*

bread and eaten, he conversed with them a long while, (look at this, they got a little second wind. He talked) until daybreak, ... ”

I love it. They had an all-night church service and it helps when you bring somebody back from the dead, gets people a little bit. Excited about sticking around and seeing what else God's going to do.

It says and then he “...and so departed. ¹² And they took the youth away alive, and were not a little comforted.” I can well imagine.

Verse 13, “But going ahead to the ship, we set sail for Assos, intending to take Paul aboard there, for so he had arranged, intending himself to go by land. ¹⁴ And when he met us at Assos, we took him on board and went to Mitylene.”

Let me again, put a map up on the screen for you. I put a little box there so you can see these various areas. They were at Troas, they went down to Asos, and then he got on board at Mitylene. Actually, Mitylene is a little tiny island that is just hugging the coast of Asia minor there.



And it says in verse 15, *“And sailing from there we came the following day opposite Chios; the next day we touched at Samos; and the day after that we went to Miletus.”*

Again, another map to show you again, the route that they took. And here is, we're zooming in a little bit to Miletus.



Now I want you to take note of where Miletus is in relationship to Ephesus. You can see on the map there that it's just south. And Miletus was right on the coast, and Ephesus was just off the coast. But I want you to see here that they're very close to Ephesus.

And verse 16 tells us, *“For Paul had decided to sail past Ephesus, so that he might not have to spend time in Asia, for he was hastening to be at Jerusalem, if possible, on the day of Pentecost.”*

In other words, he wanted to get back for the Feast of Pentecost and Paul knew that if he went into Ephesus, he'd never get out of there again because he had

just been there for three years, or the better part of three years. And so he basically is going to bypass Ephesus so he doesn't have to stay.

And then he says in verse 17, *“Now from Miletus he sent to Ephesus and called the elders of the church to come to him.”*

Here's what's happening. Paul is in Miletus. He doesn't want to go to Ephesus because he knows he's going to have to stay there longer than he wants to, because he wants to very much get back to Jerusalem for the Feast of Pentecost. So he calls for the elders.

Now, when it says in your Bible, he called for the elders, I don't want you to think about a group of guys who might be leading a particular church, like one church. For example, we have elders here at Calvary Chapel and they're wonderful men, and they serve the fellowship, but that's not the way it's really happening here.

The elders mean, the leaders of the various house churches in Ephesus, because by this time the church had grown and there were several. They didn't have church buildings, they met house to house. We know that when Paul was in Ephesus, he taught in a lecture hall during the week and then on the weekends they would meet in homes.

Paul would go from house to house and that sort of thing, but each of the house churches had an elder or, if you will, a pastor who would be over that particular fellowship. The reason I say, or a pastor, is because elder, overseer, and pastor, are used as interchangeable terms in the new Testament. They're basically just, it's the same thing.

So these are the pastors of the various house churches in Ephesus. So he's calling the leaders to himself there in Meletus and he's going to speak to them.

And in verse 18 it says, *“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.”

I want you to pause here with me for a moment because I want you to see what Paul is doing in this first address to these local pastors from Ephesus. The first thing he does is he's going to call attention to the way he lived. And this is important because that takes a lot of guts for somebody to say, I want you to remember how I lived when I was with you, because there were a lot of things going on.

And again, it was the better part of three years. You can live a pretty holy life in front of somebody for a week or two, maybe three, if you're really good. But try almost three years.

And you'll notice that Paul is saying, there was a lot of trials that happened to me while I was there with you guys. A lot of difficulties. Why is he saying that?

You want to find out what somebody is really all about. Watch them go through a trial. Watch them go through a situation where somebody is hunting for their life. Watch them go through a situation where somebody wants to hurt them and see how they react. See how they respond. That's where you find out what somebody is really made of.

And you'll notice that Paul is saying, you saw all of the things I went through while I was there with you during that time. And you know how I responded. You know how I lived. You know that I *“did not shrink (he says) from declaring to you anything that was profitable.”*

And he said, I taught you guys for almost three years house to house. And that means he went from fellowship to fellowship in Ephesus, teaching the Word of God.

And then he says at the end of verse 21, I want you guys also to remember that I taught and I shared the gospel with people, regardless of whether they were Jews or Greeks. In other words, I don't care. I don't care what their racial background is or their cultural background or the color of their skin. I don't care, because you know why? Because God doesn't care.

For God, there's only one race and that's the human race. We come up with all these other things, and we talk about racism, and it's so stupid.

Let me tell you something. When you stand before God, He's not going to say, so what color was your skin, or what was your cultural background? He's going to want to know whether you've put your faith in Jesus Christ and that's all that matters. And that's all that mattered to Paul. And so as he taught the gospel, he

taught it without any sense of prejudice, partiality, toward any people group or whatever. And I like that. I really do.

And then he goes on in verse 22. Look with me there. He says, *“And now, behold, I am going to Jerusalem, constrained by the Spirit, ...”* That literally means in the Greek, bound by the Spirit. And what Paul is doing is he wants them to know that the reason he's going to Jerusalem is because the Spirit is moving him to do it and he admits here. He says, *“...not knowing what will happen to me there, ...”*

I don't know. I don't know what's going to happen except that the Holy Spirit testifies to me in every city that imprisonment and afflictions await me. And that surprises me. If the Holy spirit was telling me that if I headed somewhere that imprisonment and afflictions were waiting for me, I think I'd hop a boat to some other location. And yet it's in his heart. Paul wants to go and he explains why he was willing to go even though he knew that suffering was waiting for him.

Look at verse 24 and guys, verse 24, I'm just going to tell you right now, this is just one of those verses you really need to pay attention to. He says, *“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.”* People don't quickly move past that verse.

This is one of those verses you that we could stand to memorize and then think about for a decade or two, and just let it sink in to our hearts. Because Paul is explaining here first of all, he says, I know the Holy Spirit's making me aware of the fact that there is suffering awaiting me in Jerusalem, but you know what? There is no sacrifice on my part that could possibly be too much for Him to ask because you see He has given me everything.

And what can I do, but do the same? What can I do, but give Him everything, even if it is my life? And he says here, I don't *“account my life of any value.”* I don't consider it a precious thing. What is precious to me and what is the overriding goal of my life is simply to finish the course that God has put me on. And the ministry that Jesus gave me to share the gospel and to see people come to faith in Him. That's my goal. That's my heart. That's my desire. And I love that because I think that should be the heart for all of us.

Paul didn't focus on how he started the race. He was just concerned about how he would finish it. The way he started the race wasn't that tremendous. He didn't come to Jesus because someone, because he was convinced of the Gospel when

someone shared it. He had to get knocked on his keister by a blinding light on the road to Damascus when the Lord Jesus appeared to him, knocked him onto the ground, blinded him, and revealed to him who He was. I am Jesus, the one you are persecuting. And it was then that Paul... Starting the whole race, didn't start all that notably for Paul, but he didn't care. That wasn't what was important, it's how I finish.

And I want you to think about that too. Maybe some of you have a fairly unruly story to tell about how you came to know Christ. And some of you were born breach. You came in, you said the kingdom kicking and screaming. And I've seen people come to the Lord that way.

I had a guy one time except Jesus in my living room and he desperately did not want to come to the Lord. Desperately, but he couldn't deny it any longer. And he was, poor guy. He was on his hands and knees on the living room floor, hyperventilating. He was like, it was like, just like, oh! He finally gave up and he came to Jesus. In fact, his wife came walking in the room, she saw him on his hands and knees there. She goes, is he okay? I said, he will be.

But anyway, it was just, that's the way some people, it's like the first part of your journey wasn't that great. That's okay. Don't worry about it. Let's be concerned about how we finish. Let's finish faithfully. Let's finish walking with the Lord with an upright and whole heart, amen. Let's finish the race well. And that's what Paul says here. If only I may finish my course and the ministry that I've received.

He goes on to say in verse 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.”*

Now, first of all, you can probably imagine how this statement was received by the men who were there and who had walked with Paul for the better part of three years. And to hear him say, you'll never see me again. I'm sure that hit them like a ton of bricks, and it did.

But you'll notice that he followed up by saying, *“I'm innocent of the blood of all”* men. Why? Because *“I did not shrink from declaring to you the whole counsel of God.”* In other words, Paul is saying, I gave you everything that God gave me to give you. Whatever He gave me, I gave to you. I didn't hold anything back. I taught you everything I knew.

And, for us, the whole counsel of God is 66 books of the Bible, from Genesis to Revelation with nothing left out. That's the whole counsel of God. And I thank God that I can say like the apostle Paul one day, I didn't shrink from giving you the whole counsel of God.

And I've taught through the entire Bible with you guys. Takes about 10 years to do it. But we're on our fourth time through the Bible right now. This is our fourth journey from Genesis to Revelation. And it's unfortunate that it doesn't happen in more churches. I'll just say that. I wish more pastors today would take seriously the idea of giving people the whole counsel of God, all of it, every bit of it.

Unfortunately, I think probably most pastors today just, they just use a few verses. They'll read a few verses out of the Bible and then they'll talk about, they'll use it as a launching pad to talk about whatever they feel the need is to talk about. Or whatever the people need to hear, or whatever they feel like needs to happen in their church or something like that.

And they're preaching from the Bible, but they're not teaching through the Bible. They're not going chapter by chapter, verse by verse. And it's gotten to the point today where when people come to a church that, and they're not used to that teaching, a systematic, they think it's weird. Seriously, they think it's weird.

We had a lady come here a number of years ago and she was describing to someone what it was like coming to our fellowship. And she was like, well, it's like a Bible study. And she, but she'd never experienced that before where there was a teaching ministry through the entire Bible. It was preaching.

And you guys know there's a difference between preaching and teaching. Those are completely different Greek words. To preach is to exhort. To teach is to instruct. Jesus did both. He preached and He taught among the people. And it's important that we do both of those things because God gave us the 66 books in our Bible for a reason. Because they're all the inspired Word of God. And we need to study through them.

Unfortunately, a lot of churches where they teach topically. They'll have a Bible study somewhere where they're maybe teaching through the Bible, but it's not done for the whole church.

And when Sue and I first started getting serious about walking with the Lord, we were attending a church that was, that taught, well, taught, preached. The

guy that was the leader of the church, he was a preacher and he taught topically. And so that was my experience at first. I had never experienced systematic, verse by verse teaching for the first few years of really starting to walk with the Lord.

And so when I started a church years later, I did that same thing. I started teaching topically and you know what? I hated it. I hated it because it was a struggle to find out, or to figure out what to teach the next Sunday. Because it would, when you teach topically you bounce all over the place.

One week It's out of Isaiah the next week, we're going to teach, take a few verses out of Matthew and next week, we're going to be in Genesis. And the week after that, we might look at a verse from 1 Peter or something like that. And you're bouncing around and you never really know what you're going to do next. And I hated Saturday nights because I was like, oh, what am I going to do? What am I going to speak on? So I'd have to read through some chapters and see if something resonated in my heart.

And then I started listening to Bible teachers who are going through the Bible chapter by chapter, verse by verse, and it was like a bomb went off in my head. And I thought, this is so smart, to just teach through the Bible, and to go through every book of the Bible, every chapter, every verse. And I started enjoying doing what I was doing. And now this is the highlight of my week. So anyway, there you go.

Verse 28. Now, Paul is going to begin to speak to them directly and exhort these men as leaders in the church. He says in verse 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, (this is so important) which he obtained with his own blood.”*

And this first exhortation that Paul gives to these men is so critical. He says, pastors, elders, overseers, again, they're all used interchangeably. *“Pay careful attention,”* not just to the flock, but as it starts off to yourselves, to your own life. He says, you need to pay careful attention to yourselves.

The New American Standard Bible says, *“be on guard for yourselves.”* Because every leader needs to understand that if his ministry is going to be effective, it's going to, it has to start with him being on guard and watching for his own personal safety. And that means he needs to be aware of his own weaknesses because not every pastor has the same weaknesses, but we have weaknesses. Believe me, the same, vulnerable to the same temptations you are.

And you have to take care, you have to take steps to ensure your own personal safety if you're going to lead others. Elsewhere, the apostle Paul wrote about some of the things he had to go through to stay safe. Let me show you this on the screen from 1 Corinthians is a great passage. Paul says,

1 Corinthians 9:27 (ESV)

...I discipline my body and keep it under control, lest after preaching to others I myself should be disqualified.

...I discipline my body and (I) keep it under control, lest after preaching to others I myself should be disqualified.

And what Paul is saying there is that, it's one thing to exhort the body of Christ, but am I exhorting myself, and am I listening to what I'm saying to the body of Christ or am I ignoring my own words? Because Paul basically, he says in this verse that he finds it necessary to maintain a strict discipline in his own life concerning his body.

Because our bodies are interesting. They'll dictate to us if we don't dictate to them. That's just the way it is with your flesh. If you let your flesh tell you what to do, and when to do it, and how to do it, and so on, and so on, and so on, your flesh will be the leader. Will dominate you.

And so Paul says here I find it necessary to bring such discipline into my life that after preaching to others, I'm not found in violation of my own preaching. Because he makes it very clear that to ignore one's own counsel as a church leader is to be disqualified from that position as a leader. Why? because that is hypocrisy. If I say walk with the Lord, and then I'm not walking with the Lord, know, that's hypocritical.

But Paul understood the depth of the potential that was in his own life to mess up. He was not a man who was disconnected from his own vulnerabilities. Look what he said to the Romans in Romans chapter 7. He said,

Romans 7:15 (ESV)

I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate.

I do not understand my own actions. (sometimes) For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate.

And Paul is commiserating with the rest of us and saying, this is what happens in our lives, isn't it? Sometimes we absolutely do what we hate to do and the reason we do that is because we have weaknesses in our lives. So we have to be very careful. And then there's this sobering reminder that James gives us. This one's kept me up a few nights. He says,

James 3:1 (ESV)

Not many of you should become teachers, my brothers, for you know that we who teach will be judged with greater strictness.

Not many of you should become teachers, my brothers, for you know that we who teach will be judged with greater strictness.

In other words, if a teacher gets up and says, this is what the Word of God says, but ignores it himself, there's going to be a greater judgment there. So pastors, elders, and overseers have to watch their own lives carefully.

Next, you'll notice in verse 28, he says, pay careful attention also to the flock. So after he deals with himself, he's then to pay careful attention to the flock. Notice what he says. *“In which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers,”* right?

Now, remember, Paul called for the elders and he said, the Holy Spirit has made you overseers. So you can see that elder and overseer are synonymous terms here. And he's reminding them that the One who called them to this ministry also charges them to care for the flock.

What does he mean by caring for the flock? Well, he means teaching them the Word of God. He means encouraging them to trust the Lord in all things, especially when life gets hard. He means helping them when their faith is weak. He means praying for them. And he even means at times having to warn them. And I'll just tell you right now, that's not a fun thing to do.

When somebody is headed in a wrong direction and you are the one to speak into their lives and say, I just need to warn you. The road you're on is a dangerous one, and if you keep going, it's not going to go well for you. I mean, those aren't fun things to say to people, but it's part of caring for the flock.

And then the last thing Paul reminds them of in verse 28, if you'll notice at the end of that verse, he talks about the fact that the church has been *“obtained with his own blood.”* Speaking of the Lord Jesus.

In other words, what Paul is saying to these leaders is the church doesn't belong to you. It belongs to Him. He bought it. He purchased it with His blood. And so don't..., get your hands off the church.

This is something pastors need to hear. Get your hands off the church. It's not yours. It's His it belongs to Him. And it's a sobering reminder, but it's also a freeing reminder It's freeing in the sense that it's His church and so I don't have to worry about it And if it's His church, He's going to provide for it.

I had an opportunity to remind a young brother about this just this past week on Thursday. Sue and I went over to Caldwell for a, we have monthly luncheons with Calvary Chapel pastors in the Treasure Valley. We were over at Caldwell, Calvary Chapel, Caldwell, and I was sitting next to a young man named Kenji. Some of you may know him.

He pastors the Spanish speaking church here in town. It's actually a Calvary chapel. We planted that church originally. And so Kenji and I were talking and he was telling me that there's a good chance that they may lose their building, the one they're meeting in on Sunday morning.

And so we talked about it for a while, but I was able to remind him that it's not his problem. I said, Kenji, it's not your church. It's His church and He'll take care of it. He'll find a place for you guys to meet. Don't worry about it. Don't stress. You just pray. You give it to the Lord and you trust the Lord. It's His church. He bought it with His blood. He's not going to abandon it. It was a fun reminder.

And then Paul goes on to give a warning in verse 29, he says, *“I know that after my departure fierce wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; (and he says) ³⁰ and from among your own selves will arise men speaking twisted things, to draw away the disciples after them.”*

In other words, Paul says the threats are going to come from without and from within. First of all, he says, fierce wolves are going to come from the outside and they're going to attack the sheep. And so he warns them of the danger and he's telling them that part of your job as an overseer is to protect the flock. And you have to be willing to do that when somebody comes in with a malevolent attitude toward the believers, a pastor has to be willing to get out his shepherd staff and swing it, you know what I mean?

Because wolves come in for one reason and that's to destroy the sheep. That's it. That's the only reason. And so he's telling them this is going to happen. But see

there's a more insidious danger here that Paul tells him about. He says, you know what? It's one thing when a wolf comes in and you can usually recognize a wolf. But there is a danger that's greater than that, and that is when there's a wolf among you in sheep's clothing. And some of these men are going to arise from your own number. And he says, they're going to speak twisted things. And that literally means they're going to take the doctrines of the church and they're just going to twist them in such a way as to draw the simple minded away so that they might draw disciples after themselves.

And by the way, that's the main goal. It's all about ego. People want to have followers and so people are going to come into the church, they're going to spend time in the church, and then they're going to draw people away so that they can say, we have the real truth. In fact, Paul even warned Timothy about a couple of guys that were just like that. Let me show you this screen on the screen from 2 Timothy chapter 2. It says,

2 Timothy 2:16-18 (ESV)

...avoid irreverent babble, for it will lead people into more and more ungodliness, and their talk will spread like gangrene. Among them are Hymenaeus and Philetus, who have swerved from the truth, saying that the resurrection has already happened. They are upsetting the faith of some.

...avoid irreverent babble, for it will lead people into more and more ungodliness, and their talk will spread like gangrene. Among them are Hymenaeus and Philetus, (look at this) who have swerved from the truth, saying that the resurrection has already happened. They are upsetting the faith of some.

So these two guys were twisting the Word of God and they were drawing people away saying, well, we know the real truth, and the resurrection has already taken place. And if you need to know more about what's really going on, you come to our Bible study, and you'll be in the know. And it appeals to people's egos, frankly. And Paul calls it, "*irreverent babble.*" And people are still irreverently babbling today and we need to avoid it.

He says here in verse 31, "*Therefore be alert, (that means be on your guard, be watchful) 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.*"

I love what Paul says here. He says, did you notice? He says, “*And now I commend you to God,*” and he says that to them because he's not going to be with them anymore. He's not going to see them anymore so he says, “*I commend you to God.*” What that means is, I give you to the Lord for His keeping.

And the reason this is such an important statement, it was a very important statement for me to learn because when I was a young pastor, I had no concept of this idea of commending people to the Lord. And what I did instead is I carried people.

And the very first church that I started up in Washington, the Lord kept people from coming, literally, because I hadn't learned how to commend people to the Lord. And I learned very quickly that my shoulders weren't built for carrying people and what I was doing was I was trying to be the Holy Spirit in their lives. And talk about an exercise in futility. I mean, it was just, it was... So I had to learn a lesson the hard way.

I had to go through a situation where I started a church and it just, and people stayed away in droves. I've told you that before, nobody came. And it was a terrible time in our lives and it hurt my family because I hadn't learned to commend people. And I was micromanaging and working with them in their lives in such a way that my family was suffering.

And so I got out of the ministry for a very short period of time and I told the Lord, I don't ever want to do that again. And it was like the Holy Spirit said, okay, now you're ready because you see, I had nothing more to prove. And He taught me that you, Paul, you've got to learn to commend people to the Lord.

And what that means is I teach the Bible. I go through, I teach the Word of God and it's my job to do it as clearly and accurately as I know how. And after I teach, I commend you guys to the Lord. And what that means is, I give you to the Holy Spirit to take that Word, and either embrace it, or reject it, or whatever you're going to do with it. It's not my job to play Holy Spirit in your life.

I mean, I can exhort you and all that sort of stuff, but I have to trust that the Lord is going to use His Word to speak to you personally, and enable you then to embrace it and walk it out. I can't help you walk out the Word of God. I can't do that. I tried when I was a younger man and about killed me.

So it's up to, but the Lord is able to help you walk out the Word of God. And that's the cool part, is I learned that He was able, and He can do it, and He will

do it. He does do it. And I don't have to be the Holy Spirit. It's very important that we learn to commend people to the Lord, because He's the one who's able to, as Paul says here, build you up and give you the inheritance among the saints that's yours. He's the one who's able to do that through His Word.

Paul says in verse 33, you'll notice, *“I coveted no one's silver or gold or apparel.”* What's he saying here? He said you guys know from the time I spent here with you that I was not about money. It was not about money for me. I didn't look at any man's belongings and want them for myself. I didn't cheat you out of anything. I didn't covet

And the reason this is an important statement is because it's inappropriate for church leaders to be concerned, overly concerned with money. I don't think church leaders should really think about money at all because for some people it's a stumbling block. They care too much about money and they talk about it all the time. And people get really burned out about hearing about money issues.

One of the biggest brags that the Lord has given me in 33 years of pastoring this church is that we've never once taken an offering, and we don't talk about money unless it comes up in the Word of God.

And you know what? I love that because it puts God in the place of being the Lord of His church, who takes care of His church. And I'm not the person who has to worry about it or even talk about it because money is a big fat drag, to be honest with you, it really is. But Paul reminds them that was not a focus of my life. And you remember that, you know that. I was not fixated on money.

He says in verse 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.’”*

That's a lovely sentiment, but if you go to the Gospels to try to find that statement, you won't find it. It's not in the Gospels. Apparently it was something Jesus said that just didn't get recorded. And Paul probably heard it from one of the men who walked with Jesus during that time. But he's reminding them here, my hard work among you was an example to you.

Verse 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.” You can see how much they loved Paul. And that's pretty cool.

Paul poured his life into that area, that fellowship, those fellowships in Ephesus. But we forget sometimes that many years after Paul was there and ministered, that the church in Ephesus carried on.

In fact, many years later, Jesus Himself wrote a letter to the church at Ephesus. He dictated it to the apostle John and it's recorded for us in the Book of Revelation. Here's what the Lord said.

Revelation 2:2-5 (ESV)

“I know your works, your toil and your patient endurance, and how you cannot bear with those who are evil, but have tested those who call themselves apostles and are not, and found them to be false. I know you are enduring patiently and bearing up for my name's sake, and you have not grown weary. But I have this against you, that you have abandoned the love you had at first. Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent, and do the works you did at first. If not, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place, unless you repent.”

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That simple reminder, the churches in Ephesus, they continued to, walk with the Lord. They continued to be faithful to the Lord in their doctrine. They continued to be discerning as it relates to itinerant people that came through their area. And they were able to figure out the real ones from the fake ones. And they had no time for people who were playing games. But they cooled on their love for Him. They lost their first love.

You know that excitement, that zeal, when we first come to Christ? The Lord says, what happened to that? What happened to the way you used to feel, and the excitement you used to have, and the way your love was seen in the way you lived?

Jesus told us that in the last days, the love of many will grow cold. (Matthew 24:13) Let's not be among those whose love grows cold, but let's stay fervent, amen. That's what I want to do. I want to stay fervent for the Lord.

Let's stand together and we'll pray. If you need prayer, we'll invite you to come on down front here after we're finished and we'll have some folks up here ready and willing to pray for you, whatever the need may be. Let's go to the Lord.

Father, we thank You so much for Your Word. Thank You for all of the reminders that we've heard today in the Scriptures.

Thank You, Lord, for the reminders to stay vigilant and to be careful about temptations and Lord, to take the Word seriously and to embrace it and walk it out.

And thank You, Lord, for the reminder to keep our love active, to walk with you in integrity, to live with you every day.

Thank you, Father, for each day's reminders as we go through the Scriptures, what a blessing it is to be fed from the Word of God. And You are so faithful to teach us, and instruct us, and give us what we need.

And so we ask Father God that we would lay hold of these words, and hold on to them during the week, and meditate on them, and think about them, and pray about how to apply these things to our lives.

Thank you, Father, for your goodness.

We worship you as King of kings and Lord of lords. And pray all of these things in the powerful name of Jesus Christ, our Savior. And all God's people said, amen.

God bless you.

Have a good rest of your day.