

BE SHEPHERDS OF THE CHURCH OF GOD

Acts 20:1-38

Key Verse: 20:28

“Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers. Be shepherds of the church of God, which he bought with his own blood.”

In the last passage we learned how the Apostle Paul pioneered the church in Ephesus. He began with about twelve men. He helped them to accept Jesus as Christ the Lord. When Paul prayed for them in the name of Jesus, the Holy Spirit came upon them and transformed them into children of God. Then Paul spent two years in daily Bible study to help these men grow in faith and in the knowledge of God. God worked so mightily that the entire province of Asia heard the word of the Lord and saw the light of Christ. Paul gained the vision and faith to say, **“I must visit Rome also.”** May God help us to depend on the work of the Holy Spirit, engage in disciple raising, and finally come to have God’s great vision for world mission in this year.

This passage covers the rest of Paul’s third missionary journey. It focuses on his farewell address to the Ephesian elders. Through this address we learn the beautiful shepherd’s life of Apostle Paul. In turn, the Apostle Paul says to us, **“Be shepherds of the church of God, which he bought with his own blood.”** May God help us to do so.

First, Paul shares God’s vision for world salvation (1-7).

When the riot in Ephesus ended, Paul sent for the disciples. Paul was not daunted by opposition. Rather, he encouraged the disciples to keep on preaching the gospel of Jesus. Then he said good-bye to them and set out for Macedonia. Along the way, he continued to encourage the people in each church he visited. Paul was a source of encouragement to everyone. It was because he had experienced the great victory of God in Ephesus. He was burning with a vision to go to Rome and evangelize the whole world through Roman roads. He believed the kingdom of God would come in power and glory. He shared the great work of God and God’s vision with all the churches. One who is burning with God’s vision for world salvation can encourage others. We can be a blessing to

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our beloved missionaries from many nations this year when we have world mission vision burning in our hearts.

Paul finally arrived in Corinth, where he stayed for three months and probably wrote the book of Romans. It was the fruit of his lifetime study of the Old Testament and his experience with the gospel. It was the expression of his faith and vision for world salvation. He knew the gospel is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes (Ro 1:16). The gospel was a like spiritual nuclear weapon that was about to explode across the world and bring true righteousness and peace.

However, before going to Rome, he was on his way to Jerusalem (Ac 19:21) with some companions. Look at verse 4. **“He was accompanied by - Sopater son of Pyrrhus from Berea, Aristarchus and Secundus from Thessalonica, Gaius from Derbe, Timothy also, and Tychicus and Trophimus from the province of Asia.”** Along with these seven men, there was at least one more, for in verse 5 the personal pronoun “we” is used. The author, Luke, has rejoined the team at Philippi. Paul’s journey team was representative of the places he had pioneered. By bringing to Jerusalem Gentile Christian leaders and an offering from their churches (Ro 15:25-27), Paul wanted to share God’s vision of world salvation with Jewish Christians. Paul’s spiritual growth is amazing. Once he was a narrow-minded Jewish legalist. He saw Gentiles as slightly elevated animals. But after meeting the Risen Christ he realized that all people are sinners and that God loves all people and wants to save all people. Paul shared God’s heart for people of all nations. So he led an international team to Jerusalem to share God’s vision for world salvation.

Second, Sunday worship service in Troas (8-12).

Paul and his team came to Troas. This is where Paul had first seen God’s vision of the man of Macedonia (Ac 16:9). Something happened there that reveals the character of the early church as well as the spirit and faith of Apostle Paul. The church met on the first day of the week, that is Sunday, to break bread (7). Jews observe the Sabbath on Saturday. But Christians have held worship service on Sunday since the resurrection of Christ (Jn 20:19, 26). Jesus rose from the dead on a Sunday (Lk 24:1). Jesus’ resurrection was the dawn of a new

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era in which God revealed his victory over death and opened the way for all people who believe to receive the kingdom of God.

The worship service focused on God's word. Paul delivered a message that lasted until midnight. Most attendants must have worked hard during the daytime. Then they gathered in the early evening to have worship service. If they started after dinner, it means Paul's gospel message lasted around five hours. Of course, this was a special worship service, because Paul was leaving the next day. Still, we must admit that the early Christians loved the word of God and they studied the Bible intensely. There was not much ceremony involved.

The place where they were meeting was an upstairs room. They needed many lamps to light the evening service. It was warm and the lamps depleted oxygen steadily. A young man named Eutychus was trying to digest Paul's message. But as Paul talked on and on, without reaching a conclusion, Eutychus began to fade. His eyes became heavy and his head kept dropping to his chest. Finally he fell into a deep sleep. Then he fell to the ground and died. Paul went down, threw himself on the young man and put his arms around him. **“Don't be alarmed,” he said. “He's alive!”** (10) By Paul's resurrection faith, Eutychus was raised from the dead. How could Paul have such faith and power to raise the dead? It was because Paul lived by the power of the resurrection every day. He practiced the resurrection principle. He died every day in his natural self and rose with Christ every day (1 Cor 15:31).

Look at verse 11. **“Then he went upstairs again and broke bread and ate. After talking until daylight, he left.”** The meeting continued until daylight. Probably no one dared to doze after what happened to Eutychus. They could not sleep at all. Yet they were greatly strengthened by the word of God (12). When we listen to God's word with reverence and worship God with all our hearts, he gives us true rest and joy.

Third, Paul's farewell address to the Ephesian elders (13-38).

Paul and his company worked their way to Miletus. Paul intentionally avoided Ephesus. He was eager to reach Jerusalem and then go on to Rome

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according to God's vision. If he stopped by Ephesus, he might not be able to pull himself away from his dear sheep and coworkers. So he landed at Miletus, about thirty miles to the south, and sent for the Ephesian elders. In verses 18-35 he says farewell to them. His farewell is both a personal testimony and a charge to the elders. We can see the fruit of his lifetime effort to imitate Christ, the Chief Shepherd. Let's learn even one thing and be better shepherds of God's church.

1. Paul's great humility. Look at verse 19. **"I served the Lord with great humility and with tears, although I was severely tested by the plots of the Jews."** While serving the Ephesians, Paul always fixed his eyes on Jesus. In fact, he was serving Jesus. In serving Jesus, the most important quality was humility. Paul said in Philippians 2:5-7: **"Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: Who being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death—even death on a cross!"** Paul's humbleness was tested by the plots of the Jews. They invented false charges against him. They harassed him legally. But Paul never retaliated. He fixed his eyes on Jesus and did what Jesus wanted him to do every day. This was possible because he had the great humbleness of Christ in his soul. This was possible because Jesus lived in him. - May God help us learn the great humility of Jesus and of Paul.

2. Paul's message. Look at verse 21. **"I have declared to both Jews and Greeks that they must turn to God in repentance and have faith in our Lord Jesus."** Paul was a great intellectual. But his message was simple. Paul taught that God is the Creator and Father of all people. People have been separated from God by sin. All people must turn to God in repentance and have faith in the Lord Jesus. When we do so, God forgives our sins and gives us eternal life in his glorious kingdom. This gospel message saves all who believe. Paul proclaimed this message with courage and boldness to all kinds of people.

3. Paul's spirit to finish the mission. Look at verses 22-23. **"And now, compelled by the Spirit, I am going to Jerusalem, not knowing what will happen to me there. I only know that in every city the Holy Spirit warns**

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me that prison and hardships are facing me.” Paul’s journey to Jerusalem reminds us of Jesus’ journey to die on the cross for the sin of the world. Paul’s life was in real danger because he was obedient to his mission. What was his attitude? Look at verse 24. **“However, I consider my life worth nothing to me, if only I may finish the race and complete the task the Lord Jesus has given me—the task of testifying to the gospel of God’s grace.”** Without God’s mission, Paul’s life had no meaning. Paul’s single passion was to finish the race God had marked out for him. If he could complete his mission, he would be happy. Someone said this is the age of “aimless distraction.” Most people have no goal of life. Even if they have a goal, they do nothing to achieve it, but waste time in trivial pursuits and become scatterbrains. Paul was different. Paul had a clear goal based on God’s mission for him. He gave not only his time and his heart to this mission, but he was willing to give his life if only he could finish the race. May God teach us the spirit of Paul step by step, even in doing our homework this semester.

4. Paul’s charge to “Be shepherds.” Look at verse 28. **“Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers. Be shepherds of the church of God, which he bought with his own blood.”** First of all, a shepherd must keep watch over himself. Only Jesus was sinless and perfect. All other shepherds are sinners and vulnerable to the devil’s temptations. Jesus warned his disciples against the temptation to abuse their position as shepherds and to indulge in a pleasure-seeking life (Lk 12:45). In a practical sense, money and sexual sin are the means by which the devil has led many servants of God astray. A shepherd must keep watch over himself through daily repentance before the word of God and prayer. Dr. Samuel Lee often said, “If I am right with God, then everything is okay.”

In addition, a shepherd must keep watch over the flock of sheep. A shepherd must watch over the sheep to make sure they do not stray from the green pastures and to protect them from predators. No one can make others grow spiritually; only God can do that. But those entrusted with the task of shepherding must watch over the sheep. They must be vigilant in prayer and make a good spiritual environment. They must fight against the clever schemes of the devil with prayer and God’s wisdom. In 1675, there was a general Indian uprising against the colonists of New England. Some saw this as God’s

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judgment on their unfaithfulness. The entire New England territory was in grave danger; many colonists were killed. But there was one place the Indians refused to attack—the city of Concord. They were afraid of a God-fearing pastor named Edward Bulkely. The Indians said, “We will not prosper if we burn Concord. The Great Spirit loves that people. He tells us not to go there. There is a great man who prays.” Where there was one shepherd who kept watch with prayer, the entire city was spared.

Verse 28b says, **“Be shepherds of the church of God, which he bought with his own blood.”** There is one Chief Shepherd of God’s church. He is Jesus Christ. Jesus said, **“I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep”** (Jn 10:11). Jesus died on the cross to save us from sin and Satan. Jesus purchased each member of the church of God with his blood. The church belongs to Christ. He charges his servants to be shepherds of his church. A good shepherd is one who follows the example of Jesus and Paul. We cannot say everything about being a good shepherd here. But one characteristic is most important to remember. A shepherd must sacrifice for the sheep. Ultimately, a shepherd must give his life for the sheep. A selfish person cannot be a shepherd. Only a sacrificial person who loves Jesus more than himself can really be a shepherd of God’s sheep.

Paul was a good example. Look at verse 31. **“So be on your guard! Remember that for three years I never stopped warning each of you night and day with tears.”** Paul was diligent and watchful for the sake of God’s sheep in Ephesus. He thought nothing of himself but gave his time and heart to serve God’s people in Ephesus night and day for three years. In this new semester, we must study hard and work hard at our jobs, but at the same time, we must sacrifice for God’s sheep. Only those willing to sacrifice can be shepherds of God’s people.

5. Paul’s faith in God. Look at verse 32. **“Now I commit you to God and to the word of his grace, which can build you up and give you an inheritance among all those who are sanctified.”** Just before, Paul had strongly encouraged the Ephesian elders to be good shepherds for the church of God. Paul charged them with the trust. But ultimately, Paul trusted in God and committed the church into God’s hand. He knew that God had been working in

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Ephesus by the word of his grace. The word of God planted in their hearts would grow and produce fruit by the sovereign hand of God. Though hardships and trials would beset them, Paul believed God would work mightily in all things to build up his people through his word of grace. God would use times of suffering to sanctify them until they all became holy saints. God would work in them by the word of his grace until they bore the image of Christ and received the kingdom of God as their inheritance.

6. Paul's hard work and giving spirit. Paul was a self-supporting lay shepherd. Paul worked hard to supply his own needs and the needs of his companions. A shepherd must work hard. A shepherd must practice a giving life. This may sound burdensome, but it is the way of true blessing. Jesus said, **"It is more blessed to give than to receive."**

7. Paul's prayer. After his farewell address, Paul knelt down with the Ephesian elders and prayed. He depended on God in prayer. After saying everything, we must pray. Look at verses 37-38. **"They all wept as they embraced him and kissed him. What grieved them most was his statement that they would never see his face again. Then they accompanied him to the ship."**

May God help us to be shepherds of the church of God like Paul.