Acts 20- Paul's Farewell and Final Instruction

Background: MAP

We are joining Paul's missionary journey at the end of his 3 year stop over in Ephesus. Paul is planning his return trip to Jerusalem. Much of the text we will cover today is simply a narrative and could be a not so exciting trip report. We know that every word in this book is the inspired Word of God and profitable for teaching, reproof, correction and training in righteousness. I prayed over the Word that the Spirit would give me more than a trip summary that we can apply to our lives today.

- Paul had a brief visit to Ephesus on his second missionary journey AD 52 with Pricilla and Aquila. He had left Corinth and was on his way back home.

Acts 18:18-21 **18** After this, Paul stayed many days longer and then took leave of the brothers[a] and set sail for Syria, and with him Priscilla and Aquila. At Cenchreae he had cut his hair, for he was under a vow. **19** And they came to Ephesus, and he left them there, but he himself went into the synagogue and reasoned with the Jews. **20** When they asked him to stay for a longer period, he declined. **21** But on taking leave of them he said, "I will return to you if God wills," and he set sail from Ephesus.

- He left Pricilla and Aquila in Ephesus and sailed on to Caesarea and then to Antioch.
- About a year later in AD 53 he returned and stayed for about 3 years.
- What did he do?
    - I am sure Pricilla and Aquila were productive in planting seeds for Paul's return. Remember Acts 19:1-7 where, Paul, teaching in Ephesus, taught the disciples of John the Baptist about Jesus and the Holy Spirit.
    - Ephesus was the capital city of the Roman province of Asia. Population 200-250,000. Connected Asia by roads and sea trade routes. Melting pot of cultures, languages and religions. It had the

Temple of Artemis (Diana) a god of fertility. It had a large theatre holding 25-35,000 that Gabriel may have seen the remains. A great location to <u>impact the world</u> for the Gospel

- Is Houston not a similar modern city. Large population, melting pot of cultures languages and religions. Every religion and cult can be found in our city. Magic, sorcery and prostitution is in our city. **Is not Houston a place that VCC can share the gospel it can be spread throughout the world?**
    - Paul taught daily in the school of Tyrannus for 2 years and it says in Acts 19:10 so <u>that "all who lived in Asia heard the word of the Lord, both Jews and Greeks."</u>
    - From Ephesus, Paul wrote letters to the church. We know he wrote I Corinthians and an earlier "harsh" letter referenced in 1 Corinthians that we do not have. He may also have written the letter to the Galatians from Ephesus.
    - Acts 19 tells us, **11** And God was doing extraordinary miracles by the hands of Paul, **12** so that even handkerchiefs or aprons that had touched his skin were carried away to the sick
    - He caused many to turn from magic and idolatry. Remember them burning their books. (Acts 19:18-19)
    - When it began to impact the idol-making business, Demetrius the silversmith stirred up a riot. (Acts 19:23-41)

This is where we pick up today.

Last weekend Julie and I visited our son Drew and his wife Sydney in Brooklyn. We saw the Cubs beat the Yankees, visited my niece, Emma, who just moved to complete her residency at Columbia, cooked out on their rooftop, and went sailing on the Hudson river to see the Statue of Liberty and the city at night from the water. I like the proverb,

> **"A wise man once said the skill in attending a party is knowing when to leave."**

We spent three nights in their small apartment and as much fun as it was to see them, there comes a sense that it is time to leave. As we pick up the story of Paul's third missionary journey, we find Paul sensed it was time to leave.

Acts 20:1 After the uproar ceased, Paul sent for the disciples, and after encouraging them, he said farewell and departed for Macedonia.

- He had been there nearly 3 years and 19:10 "All who lived in Asia heard the word of the Lord, both Jews and Greeks."
- We all come to times in our life when it is time to leave. You may be at a point in your life where it is time to leave. At one of those times in my life I read a book by Dr. Henry Cloud, *Necessary Endings*. A couple truths I am sure Paul recognized.
    - Read P 8. Endings are necessary for growth. Just as pruning dead branches helps a plant grow, certain relationships, projects and patterns must end for individuals and organizations to thrive.
    - Read P11. Avoiding endings leads to stagnation. Fear of confrontation or fear of change causes many to avoid endings that are necessary. This results in personal or professional decay.
        - Pruning is necessary when something is good, but not best.
        - Pruning is necessary when something is no longer useful and taking up space.
        - Sometimes pruning is necessary when seasons have run their course.
        - Pruning is necessary when we drift and find ourself investing in things that no longer align with our goals or values.
- Paul had many endings during his missionary journeys. In every city he went to, some received his message and some rejected his message. In every city Paul decided when it was time to leave. Even when stoned and left for dead, Paul walked back into Lystra because it was not time to leave. He had unfinished business.
- Solomon also recognized this truth of recognizing time for change in his writing.

Ecclesiastes 3:1-8 For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven:

[2] a time to be born, and a time to die;
a time to plant, and a time to pluck up what is planted;
[3] a time to kill, and a time to heal;
a time to break down, and a time to build up;
[4] a time to weep, and a time to laugh;
a time to mourn, and a time to dance;
[5] a time to cast away stones, and a time to gather stones together;
a time to embrace, and a time to refrain from embracing;
[6] a time to seek, and a time to lose;
a time to keep, and a time to cast away;
[7] a time to tear, and a time to sew;
a time to keep silence, and a time to speak;
[8] a time to love, and a time to hate;
a time for war, and a time for peace.

- Is it time for a change in your life or my life?
- The Scripture tells us Paul gathered his disciples. These are the people he had invested his time, knowledge, and energy to build the church.
- He encouraged them, said farewell and departed for Macedonia. He left the church on good terms.

Acts 20:2-3 [2] When he had gone through *those regions* and had given them much encouragement, he came to Greece. [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, he decided to return through Macedonia.

- **MAP** "he had gone through *those regions*" - Macedonia would have likely included stops in Troas, arriving at the port of Neapolis, Phillipi, Thessalonica, Berea and he came to Greece. This is the region of Achaia, where Corinth is located.
- There had been a famine in Jerusalem. Paul had taken up an offering for the church in Jerusalem and wanted to get there for Passover. He

planned to sail <u>with other Jews</u> on a boat to Caesarea and then to Jerusalem. He learned of a plot to throw him overboard on the trip. How convenient. Paul would have just disappeared into the sea. So, he decided to walk BACK through Macedonia and catch a boat to get to Jerusalem.

Acts 20:4-6 [4] Sopater the Berean, son of Pyrrhus, accompanied him; and of the Thessalonians, Aristarchus and Secundus; and Gaius of Derbe, and Timothy; and the Asians, Tychicus and Trophimus. [5] These went on ahead and were waiting for **<u>us</u>** at Troas, [6] but **<u>we</u>** sailed away from Philippi after the days of Unleavened Bread, and in five days we came to them at Troas, where we stayed for seven days.

Note: The pronoun shifts from "he" to "We" and "us." Luke was in Phillipi and joins the journey to Jerusalem here.

Who are all these guys?

- These were representatives from the Gentile churches Paul helped to establish in Macedonia. They were bringing their offerings from each of the churches.
- These gifts met a physical need, but also was an act of unity between the Jewish and Gentile believers.

You have heard the term, "Churchman?" A "churchman" is one who loves the church. Paul was a "churchman." We lost a great churchman this week. **John MaCarthur** passed away this week. He was a reformed evangelical and superb expository bible teacher. He pastored Grace Community Church for over 50 years. He founded a University and Seminary, authored more than 150 books, and has reach millions across the globe with his radio, tv and online ministry.

We see Paul's heart for the church in his letters to them. He was the first and foremost "Churchman." I know MacArthur had a similar love and commitment to the church.

- **Philippians 1** Paul writes to the church of Phillipi saying, “I hold you in my heart and **8** For God is my witness, how I yearn for you all with the affection of Christ Jesus.” You can read in his letters to the church in Corinth or the church in Thessalonica his love for the church. These guys were the leaders of the churches.
    - Sopater of Berea
    - Aristarchus and Secundus of Thessalonica
    - Gaius of Derbe
    - Timothy of Lystra
    - Tychicus and Trophimus – Christians from Asia.
- Paul references these churches in his letter to Romans and 1 Corinthians.

1 Corinthians 16:1-4 Now concerning[a] the collection for the saints: as I directed the churches of Galatia, so you also are to do. 2 On the first day of every week, each of you is to put something aside and store it up, as he may prosper, so that there will be no collecting when I come. 3 And when I arrive, I will send those whom you accredit by letter to carry your gift to Jerusalem. 4 If it seems advisable that I should go also, they will accompany me.

Paul writes to the church in Rome during his 3 month stay in Greece on this third missionary Journey.

Romans 15:25-26 **25** At present, however, I am going to Jerusalem bringing aid to the saints. **26** For Macedonia and Achaia have been pleased to make some contribution for the poor among the saints at Jerusalem.

- Paul and his friends represented the Gentile churches. They were travelling together in Greece, the city of Corinth to take their offering to Jerusalem for Passover.
- Paul and Luke stayed in Phillipi to celebrate Passover and the feast of unleavened bread which is part of Passover week. The others continued on to Troas. It took about 5 days to sail to Troas. Note:

They were sailing in unfavorable wind. Paul and Luke met up with them and they stayed the week in Troas. **MAP**

Acts 20:7-12 [7] 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. [8] There were many lamps in the upper room where we were gathered. [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, until daybreak, and so departed. [12] And they took the youth away alive, and were not a little comforted.

- They were in **Troas**. The **first day** of the week. "Resurrection Day or The Lord's Day." This would not be the Sabbath. The Jewish Sabbath starts at sundown on the last day of the week. Friday night to Saturday night.

John 20:1 Now on the **first day of the week** Mary Magdalene came to the tomb early, while it was still dark, and saw that the stone had been taken away from the tomb.

John 20:19 [19] On the evening of that day, the first day of the week, the doors being locked where the disciples were for fear of the Jews,[a] Jesus came and stood among them and said to them, "Peace be with you."

- Christians have been meeting on the first day of the week since the Resurrection. The church was born on the first day of the week when the Spirit was given to the believers at Pentecost. We see here they are meeting on the first day of the week and we see their **order of service**.

    - They would gather together to have a fellowship meal where believers both rich and the poor would come together share a meal and fellowship. They called it the **"Love Feast."**
    - As part of the breaking of bread would take the bread and wine in remembrance of Jesus broken body and spilled blood for us.
    - They would teach from the Scriptures.
    - We see this record of the early church gathering in this way here in 56 AD.
- Paul was leaving and had so much he wanted to communicate and leave them full. So he kept on teaching until midnight and we get the story of the first person who fell asleep during the preacher's sermon.
- It was warm, the torches were lit and the air was heavy with smoke and it was approaching midnight. You can see how young Eutychus found the perfect spot to perch in the window opening to catch some fresh cool air and it says "He was overcome by sleep."
- Overcome by sleep – You know the feeling. I particularly remember being overcome by sleep like Eutychus. Every Christmas eve growing up my parents took me to midnight service. Sleep would come on me, my head bobbed and my consciousness was overcome by sleep.
- Eutychus head bobs, he is overcome by sleep and falls out the third story window to his death.
- Paul, knowing the Scriptures, did as Elisha did in **2 Kings 4:32-35** where he laid his body on the Shunammite's son when he died, his flesh became warm and he opened his eyes. Elijah also did the same for a widow's son who died in **1 Kings 17:17-24.**
- Remember **Philippians 3:10** where Paul says his goal is, "To know Him, and the power of His resurrection." Paul knew resurrection power and it says in verse 10, The NASB says, "he fell upon him and after embracing him, he said, 'Do not be troubled, for his life is in him.'"

- Miracle performed, crisis averted, Paul eats a meal and continues to talk with the Ephesians until daybreak before leaving.

Spiritual Slumber

- The real danger for me and for you is when we fall into a **spiritual slumber**. We become so comfortable in this Christian circle, we become dull to the spiritual significance of our salvation. We become dull to the awesome power of the Word and the Spirit. One of my favorite verses is:

  Job 5:8-9 that says, "But as for me, I would seek God, and I would place my cause before God; who does great and unsearchable things, **Wonders without number**."

- **When we are in a spiritual slumber is when we fall out of the window**. Like Sampson we lose our strength, like David we fall into temptation.
  - So when we sing – Sing from our souls
  - When we hear the Word – know that it is a love letter to you.
  - Wake up to the Wonders of worship and His Word.

  Acts 20:13-16 [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. [15] And sailing from there we came the following day opposite Chios; the next day we touched at Samos; and[b] the day after that we went to Miletus. [16] 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.

  MAP

- Luke and his companions get on board the ship, but Paul decided he needed more fellowship. He had just preached all night and now, so he

can get more fellowship time, he chooses to walk the 20 miles from Troas to Assos as his companions sailed around the cape.

- They catch the boat to Miletus because it was the fastest route to Jerusalem to get there by Pentecost. They stop in Mitylene, Chios, Samos and then to Miletus which is past Ephesus.
- Ephesus was about 35 miles inland from Miletus and Paul takes the opportunity to call the Elders to come and see him.

Paul's Farewell

Paul, in giving his farewell message to the Elders of the Ephesian church, he begins by talking about his ministry and highlighting four aspects of his approach to ministry. We will read the text and then go back and highlight these four approaches to ministry. Notice all the references to himself as he makes these declarations.

> **Acts 20:18-27** **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.[a] **22** And now, behold, **I** am going to Jerusalem, constrained by[b] 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. **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.

In these verses, Paul is setting up his message to the elders. He is giving them personal testimony of what it takes to be a leader in the church.

1. **Verse 18 & 19** Paul testifies to his unshakeable commitment to God and His people. He was a "churchman."
    a. He lived with them. He was part of the fabric of the community.
    b. He served them wholeheartedly and sacrificed himself for them in the midst of attack from Jews that rejected his message.
    c. He had the resolve to stay the course. How is my resolve to stand out in a crowd as a Christian when the crowd is mocking Christianity or even violent to Christians? Chip and Joanna Gaines
2. **Verses 20 & 27** Paul declares he was committed to teaching God's Word.
    a. No matter what came against him, Paul did not shrink from declaring repentance and salvation through faith in Jesus. – When I am faced with resistance will I react in this manner?
3. **Verses 22 - 25** Paul asserts he always put others before himself.
    a. He knew suffering would come his way, but it would not deter him from putting others interest and the message of the gospel he personally received from Jesus above his own life.
    b. His life was so committed to preaching the gospel that he did not even give consideration for his own life. THAT IS RADICAL COMMITMENT. That is the example he is giving to the elders.
4. **Verses 26 & 27** Paul was committed to produce a sense of well-being and clear conscience.
    a. As much trouble that came, Paul declares himself innocent of any bloodshed because he did the work given to him by Christ and he accepted full credit for declaring the whole council of God.

Paul now issues his instruction to the elders

Acts 20:28-38 **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,[e] which he obtained with his own blood.[f] **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. [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.'"

[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.

V 28. To the elders and overseers of the church. This was Paul's farewell and last time he would see the elders. He had one message to give them. Of all the messages that Paul could give, he chose to emphasize the importance of maintaining <u>the purity of the teaching for the church</u>.

1. V 28. **First, be on guard for perils with your own hearts.**
    a. The great responsibility of the leader of the church is **to guard against false teaching.** To steward the spiritual hearts of the people that Christ gave His own life to save. It is a great privilege and great responsibility to teach at VCC. We, as leaders, must be on guard and diligent to protect our own hearts from false teaching.
2. V 29 **Be on guard (Be a watchman) for perils from the outside**.
    a. "**I know** Fierce wolves" will come from outside the flock. <u>Paul knows.</u> He has seen it time and time again that False teachers will come. We also know false messages and teaching come to

every church today. And we must be vigilant to stay true to the correct teaching of Scriptures and protect truth from outside messengers.

3. V 30. **Be on guard for perils that will come from within the flock.**
    a. I like the saying, *"Don't believe everything you think."* Even within our own minds and our own body, we will have "twisted ideas" and possibly draw others into false beliefs. We take great care in at VCC to teach the Scriptures for what they are saying and not misinterpreting or taking them from context to fit our own message. We do not skip over or leave out important teachings just because they are difficult or controversial.

V 33-35. Paul concludes his farewell by commending the elders to God and to His Word.

- Leaders are commended not to do ministry for the money or material needs as Paul demonstrated by not only providing for himself, but also for those who travelled with him.
- He commends them to Live by the grace of God and he offers a quote from Jesus that is not in any of the gospels saying, "it is more blessed to give than to receive."
- And at this he prayed, embraced the elders and said his farewell for he knew he would not see them again.

How did the Spirit speak to me?

- **Just like Paul in Ephesus, VCC can change the world for Christ in Houston Texas.**
- **Are there necessary endings that need to happen in my life or your life?**
    - Areas to be pruned and cut away so that you can grow.
- **We need more "Churchmen?"**
    - Are we people who love the church and are committed to the body.
    - Are we people who recognize the value of every soul
    - Are we people who see the beauty in the diversity of gifts and cherish the privilege to share our lives in service to each other.
    - Are we people who love the church despite all our individual faults.
    - Are we people who, like Paul, do the hard work of correcting areas where we go astray and to disciple and train others to build the church up.
- **Be on guard for falling into a spiritual slumber.**
    - Don't let Christian familiarity dull the wonders of the Word, the power of the spirit, and the unimaginable grace in our salvation.
- **Leaders, guard your own hearts against false teaching.**
    - As stewards of the spiritual hearts of the people of VCC, the leaders must diligently protect our own hearts.
- **Leaders must be watchmen for dangers from the outside the church**.
    - Fierce wolves will and have come to our church. Mostly with good intentions, but teaching false doctrine. We must be vigilant to stay true to the correct teaching of Scriptures and protect truth.
- **Leaders be on guard for perils that will come from within the flock.**
    - *"Don't believe everything you think."* We must be disciplined to hold every idea or teaching to the whole of Scripture.