

Acts 20:18-38 A look at Ministry Past, Present and Future – Part 1

We began our study in the book of Acts on January 9th – of this year.

A) We have made it to Acts ch.20 – Written by Luke

B) The book of Acts is a fast moving account of the spread of the gospel through the Roman Empire in the first 30 years after Christ's resurrection.

C) In it we see the spread of the gospel from Jerusalem to Judea to Samaria to the far reaches of the Roman empire!

D) But now and then Luke stops his fast moving story and let's us hear a sermon to teach us what kind of doctrine and preaching and leadership was behind this wonderful advance of the kingdom of God.

Acts Ch.20 is one of those moments

A) The Apostle Paul is on his way to Jerusalem and he is in a hurry to get there.

B) His goal is to make it there for the feast of Pentecost – for that reason he passes by the City of Ephesus on his Journey.

1) He just didn't have the time to be with the believers in this Church that he had Pastored for 3 yrs.

C) But being so close he could not pass up the opportunity to meet with the Elders of that Church.

1) So Paul stopped at Miletus and called for them to come to him.

D) It was about a 20 mile journey – but they came eagerly to meet with their beloved Pastor.

1)His meeting with them is laid out for us here in Acts 20:18-38! It was sort of a mini – Leadership Conference.

E)In this meeting Paul reviews his time of ministry in Ephesus.

1)His sermon can be broken up into three sections

In verses 18-21 Paul reviewed the **PAST**

In this section, Paul reminds these leaders about his **faithfulness to the Lord and to the church** as he ministered **for three years** in Ephesus.

In verses 22-27 Paul discussed the **PRESENT**

In that second section Paul tells these leaders his **present personal feelings** *in light of the past and future.*

In verses 28-35 Paul spoke about the **FUTURE**

Paul warns these leaders of the dangers that they and the church would face.

Paul begins w/ a review of the past : Paul Points out 3 things about his ministry in Ephesus in (vv. 18-21).

A)He is going to discuss what was the Manner of his ministry. {Most of our time here}

Then he is going to talk about what was the Motive of his ministry.

Finally he will talk about what was the Message of his ministry.

B)What is put before us here is of great help to anyone who desires to be used by God.

1)But it is also a great pattern to follow in simply desiring to honor God in any and every aspect of our walk with God.

C) **First the Manner of his ministry.**

Acts 20:17-19

17 From Miletus he sent to Ephesus and called for the elders of the church. 18 And when they had come to him, he said to them: "You know, from the first day that I came to Asia, in what manner I always lived among you, 19 serving the Lord with all humility, with many tears and trials which happened to me by the plotting of the Jews;

D) There are four things that I want us to see concerning the Manner of Paul's ministry.

#1 He ministered in Humility. *Serving the Lord with all Humility.*

A) Humility starts with a sense of being completely undeserving of anything that God had done for you or given to you.

B) In 1976 Dr. Thomas A. Harris wrote the book *I am ok – you are ok!* – The book that appeared on the *New York Times* bestseller list for two decades.

C) Amazing. After twenty years, the book that is the **prototype for the self-esteem movement was still selling like hotcakes.**

1) Yet what does the Bible say? Scripture declares we are all sinners and that all we like sheep have gone astray (Isaiah 53:6),

C) that there is none righteous no not one (Romans 3:10), that there is poison under our lips, blood on our hands, and our feet are swift to walk where they ought not to walk (Proverbs 6:17, 18).

In other words, the diagnosis of the One who created us is that we are *anything but okay!*

A) No one understood this better than Paul. At the outset of his ministry, he declared himself to be the **least of the apostles (1 Corinthians 15:9).**

B) Later on, he saw himself as less than the **least of all saints (Ephesians**

3:8).

C)And toward the end of his life, Paul referred to himself as the “Chief of sinners” (1 Timothy 1:15)

1) Not, “I once was the chief of sinners,” not, “I used to be the chief of sinners,” but, “I *am* the chief of sinners.”

D)Paul went from being the least of the apostles, to the least of all the saints, to the chief of sinners. How can this be?

1)Did Paul become a worse and worse person the longer he walked with God? Did he sin more and more hideously, more and more frequently? No.

E)Paul simply discovered that the closer he drew *to* the Lord, the more intimate he became *with* the Lord, the more he realized how far he was from the holiness *of* the Lord.

In fact the context of 1 Timothy 1:15 is not a depressing – dudge of look how bad I am – but a celebration of the grace of God.

A)That God had given to Paul more blessing than He ever deserved – which is what Grace is.

B)It is A celebration of all that God had done in and through Paul despite the fact that he was a sinner. –

C)That is what Grace is all about.

1)Getting what you don’t deserve.

God’s Riches At Christ Expense.

C)The person living under Grace will be one who is very humble.

2 Corinthians 1:12

“For our boasting is this: the testimony of our conscience that we conducted ourselves in the world in simplicity and godly sincerity, not with fleshly

wisdom but by the grace of God, and more abundantly toward you.”

There is an Absence of the understanding of Grace today in the Church and in Ministry – replaced by an attitude of Pride.

A)Sense of entitlement – people thinking – I deserve this from God because I am such a good Christian.

B)Or I deserve this position of ministry because I am so gifted

1)The Church today is permeated by self promoters – pp who are quick to speak of their accomplishments – their giftings.

C) You can always spot someone who is filled with Pride – **how Critical they are of everything and everyone around them.**

1)They would do it better / they would do it differently.

D)Anything that starts to produce in me a **Spirit of Pride and Criticalness I know is not of the Lord – it is the flesh – UGLY**

James 4:10 “Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and He will lift you up.”

Richard and the tooth paste skit – study Christian liberty. His humility won me.

E)That is why Peter exhorted - 1 Peter 5:5-6

“Likewise you younger people, submit yourselves to your elders. Yes, all of you be submissive to one another, and be clothed with humility, for “God resists the proud, But gives grace to the humble.” Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you in due time.”

Paul started from a heart of Humility being amazed that God had chosen to use him at all. – Humility comes from an understanding of Grace.

A) Humility results in a feeling toward God that he has absolute rights over your life.

B) that he can do with you as he pleases and that he has absolute authority to tell you what is best for you—and that's just fine with you.

C) It is a spirit of utter yieldedness and submissiveness to the Lord as master. You are Clay in the Potter's hands.

The second thing that marked the manner of Paul's ministry was Tears!

A) Serving the Lord and walking with Jesus- means getting so intensely involved in people's struggles that you cry over them.

B) Friends who are struggle in their marriage – a friend struggle in sin.

1) Richard – Woke up this morning at 3am to Rob Salvato puking his guts out. – Spent the next 3hrs praying for me.

C) Jesus wept at the tomb of Lazarus – Affect of Sin – Death

1) Jesus wept over Jerusalem - Luke 13:34

"O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the one who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, but you were not willing!"

D) Flies in the face – of the Calvinist – Limited atonement – Irresistable Grace – Joke / Act

E) Jesus was a man of sorrow acquainted with Grief - Wept over Sin – Burden for the Lost!

1) Walking with Jesus – same heart produced in us – Paul had that!

The third thing that marked the manner of Paul's ministry was Trials.

A) The trials which happened to me – by the plotting of the Jews.

B) Walking with Jesus and serving Jesus will include hardship.

C) A pastor once jokingly defined “*the great tribulation*” as “the one you're in!”

Because ministry is the place of God's training for you / and trials are a big part of our growing process

A) You are going to encounter situations that are all a part of God's testing & trying of you.

B) How you handle it is will determine your growth

1) Training Ground for Eternity! – Determine your Future!

C) And there will be trials is because there is an enemy Who wants to see you do anything but be used by the Lord.

D) So He is going to come against you / more involved you get the greater the warfare.

1) TRIALS – PLOTTINGS –

The Fourth thing that marked the manner of Paul's ministry was consistency.

A) To make this last point I want to read to you from the KJV of v.18 –

Acts 20:18

“And when they were come to him, he said unto them, Ye know, from the first day that I came into Asia, after what manner I have been with you at all seasons.”

Bb) I hope you realize that in your Christian life personally & in the ministry definitely there will be seasons.

B) Just like there are seasons in nature - there will be seasons in your walks

1) Times when the word is fresh & alive - times when you just pick it up & the H.S. is speaking - spring & summer - fresh & alive fruitful

C) Followed by times like fall & winter when things seems cold - and - and you feel dead - or very dry - prayers are weak .

1) First time I thought I had back slid - but it is all part of the seasons in our walk - God takes us thru

All part of our growth - like the good shepherd taking His sheep beside the still waters - where there is rest & refreshment .

A) To the valley of the shadow of death where it is dark & scary - but He is there.

What is the key to handling those seasons in your personal walk w/ the Lord

A) You stay consistent in the word - consistent in prayer - in church –

B) KNOWING this is just a dry tome that is going to pass .

C) Winter will be followed by spring.

**D) But here is the thing that you need to remember about winter times –
1) where is the work going on? **Below the surface.****

E) **Beneath the ground - where you can't see it - roots are getting deeper
& stronger**

1) Things are drinking in the nourishment Strengthen roots

**Just like there are those seasons in our personal lives - there are seasons
in the ministry.**

A) Important to recognize them & stay consistent

B) Don't Panic – stay consistent.

C) Batting Slump – temptation to Change everything – stance – grip etc.

Stay true to your convictions – stay consistent in your work –

A) Winter will be followed by Springtime and harvest

Followed by summer

B) Death will be followed by life.

C) **Consistency allows you to be faithful in season and out of season.**

So these four things marked the *MANNER of Paul's ministry.* –

Humility, Tears, Trials and Consistency

Now Lets Briefly Consider the **Motive** & the **Message** of Paul's Ministry.

Motive – V. 19 Serving the Lord.

The Motive of ministry is not about serving people or even meeting needs.

A) Never be able to please all the people.

B) People are fickle – Always a new flavor –

C) If your motive is to please people – You will be striving to attain their favor – striving to maintain it

1) FAST ROAD TO BURN OUT!

D) Paul knew that the key to ministry was not in serving people, primarily but in 1st serving the Lord !

1)) Remembering that the sheep are God's sheep & the only things we have to give to them is what Jesus has 1st given to us !

The only way to keep your sanity in ministry is to make sure you are doing what you do for Jesus.

A) He is the one at the end of the day – you will answer to.

B) Ministry starts with ministering to the Lord –

1) Acts 13 – Prayer devos – worship

C) Then and only then are you ready to minister for the Lord.

D) But if I am ministering for Him / before or instead of ministering to

Him my life will be out of balance & I will lack Joy / very frustrated

E)Sad some of the most frustrated people I know are pastors / frustrated at way things are going / who's not there / what is not happening / w/ People

1)Lost sight of the fact it's Gods Church its Jesus ministry /

2)And the most important thing for them is to have their hearts before Him!

F)It is an easy thing to have happen where ministering *for* the Lord becomes my passion / my life /

1)Instead of the Lord Himself !

Paul's Motive was Serving the Lord.

Finally the Message of his ministry: V.20-21

20 how I kept back nothing that was helpful, but proclaimed it to you, and taught you publicly and from house to house, 21 testifying to Jews, and also to Greeks, repentance toward God and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ. 22

Style

Preaching – Proclaimed

Teaching – taught

Content:

Held back nothing that was profitable.

A)Today Churches – lets not offend – so we are not going to talk about sin. Or Blood.

B)They strip the message of the gospel of all of it's Power.

C)Paul was faithful to give the whole counsel of Scripture. – top to bottom.

He Preached repentance toward God and faith toward Jesus Christ.

A)Salvation happens – Repent = Change your mind and Change your direction.

B)Change your mind about God – I am not oK –

1)Sinner separated – turn from Sin –turn to God.

C)Faith = to trust rest your weight fully in the Saving work of Jesus Christ!

Salvation is the Result.