

Paul's Third Missionary Journey: Farewells--Acts 20:22-38

by J.R. Miller

Paul's sermon emphasizes the importance of living a life devoted to duty, setting a good example, and caring for the weak and poor.

Scripture: Acts 20:22

Topics: "Faithfulness in Ministry", "Caring for the Flock"

Description

J.R. Miller reflects on Paul's farewell to the Ephesian elders during his third missionary journey, emphasizing Paul's commitment to his mission despite the suffering he anticipated in Jerusalem. He urges the elders to prioritize their own spiritual health while also caring for the church, highlighting the sacred responsibility of shepherding God's flock. Miller underscores the value of the Church, purchased by Christ's blood, and the importance of living a life that exemplifies Christ's teachings. He encourages believers to support the weak and to embrace the principle that it is more blessed to give than to receive, echoing Christ's selfless example. Ultimately, the sermon calls for vigilance in both personal and communal faith, urging Christians to live out their faith authentically.

Transcript

Paul was on his way to Jerusalem. The ship which bore him stopped at Miletus. There he sent for the elders of the church at Ephesus and spoke to them some earnest farewell words. He spoke first of his journey to Jerusalem as leading him into suffering. "And now, compelled by the Spirit, I am going to Jerusalem, not knowing what will happen to me there." We never know what lies just before us.

Paul did know, however, that he would suffer bonds and afflictions at Jerusalem. Yet this did not deter him from going forward. The incident shows noble heroism. "None of these things move me, neither count I my life dear unto myself," he says, "so that I may finish my course with joy, and the ministry which I have received from the Lord Jesus." His life was valuable only for one purpose, that with it he might do the Master's will and fulfill his mission. Life is worth living--only when it is devoted to duty!

The counsels which Paul gave to the elders at Ephesus, are valuable for us today. He first counseled them to take heed unto themselves. We should never neglect our own garden--in caring for the gardens of others. The life which concerns us personally and most intimately, the one for which we are immediately responsible, is our own! Other people may need watching, and we may have some responsibility for

them--but our first business is to watch ourselves. This is a responsibility no one can lift off us. We should take heed to our own hearts--and be sure that they are kept with all diligence. We should take heed to our personal habits. We should take heed to our companionships. Watchfulness has abundant rewards!

But the duty of watching does not terminate with ourselves. These elders had a responsibility beyond their own lives. "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." The official position made them responsible for all the care they could possibly give to others. The office of pastors is a very sacred one. They represent Christ on the earth in caring for his flock. When they give us advice or warn us of temptation or danger--we should not be vexed--but should remember that they do this because they love us.

Paul puts a high honor on the Church. A great price was paid for it. He also gives us a glimpse of the infinite value of Christ's death. He says the Church of God was purchased with his own blood. If our souls are so dear to God, should we not care for them ourselves? If we were purchased at such great cost, should we ever do anything to degrade or dishonor ourselves? Then if Christ purchased us--we belong to him and are to live for him and for him alone.

It is a sore loss to many, when a good minister is taken away. There are plenty of wolves, yet, which watch for every opportunity of breaking into the fold, and they never spare the flock! There is no holy home into which they do not try to creep. There are bad papers and books circulated by the millions, which are indeed "grievous wolves," and make terrible havoc among tender lives. There are evil companions that creep in, wearing sheep's clothing--but are really wolves that come to devour. Every parent should keep sacred watch to protect his home and the children from the devouring wild beasts, and every teacher should use all diligence to shelter his class from such dangers. Keep the fences good, and let the under-shepherds never relax their vigilance for a moment!

Paul could say for himself that he was pure from the blood of all men. He meant that he had been so faithful in the presentation of Christ, toiling early and late, never sparing himself in his efforts to save others--that no one could ever say he was lost because Paul had not done his part. All who are responsible for souls--should so discharge their duty as to be able to say the same.

It is a great thing for a pastor or a teacher to be conscious of setting a worthy and good example before those he instructs and seeks to lead. Paul says here, "I have showed you all things." He refers to his own diligence. Although a minister of Christ and an apostle, he had labored with his own hands during the week at his trade--that he might preach to the people on the Sabbath and minister to them in holy things. In every way Christians, not only ministers and teachers--but all Christians, should so live that their lives shall be examples to those who know them! One really never can preach higher truth--than he lives. There is no use in telling the people about the love of God, the compassion, the gentleness, the forgiveness of God--if they do not see these divine qualities, at least in some dim measure, in our own lives!

Once Christ came to this world to show us in human life, what God is. But he is not here any more, and he wants us, his followers, now to show the people what God is like--not in our words, merely--but in our conduct, our disposition, our character. We are always giving examples, even unconsciously. There is not even a little child, that has not some imitators. Somebody will do--as we do. It will be a fearful thing if we show anyone the wrong way, if we set an example, the following of which would lead anyone to destruction!

One of the great teachings of Christianity has always been the duty of caring for the weak and the poor. Paul enunciates this teaching here. "You ought to support the weak." Jesus was especially kind to the weak. He never broke a bruised reed. He reached out his strong hand to lift up those who had fainted and fallen along the way. He looked after the sick, saying that the healthy did not need the physician. There are many weak ones about us. Some are weak in body, feeble and sickly. We ought to be gentle to these and to help and encourage them. Some are weak in courage and resolution, in moral power. They cannot resist temptation. We ought to help these, by giving them sympathy and inspiring courage in them. "Bear one another's burdens" is another of Paul's words. Elsewhere he says, "We who are strong--ought to bear the infirmities of the weak."

Another great lesson which Paul gave these Ephesian elders, is contained in the words, "It is more blessed to give--than to receive." This is one of the lost words of Christ, which Paul picked up and saved for the world. It is not found in any of the Gospels. We may be very thankful, however, for its rescue, for it contains a great truth. It does not seem to us to be true--that giving is better than getting. We all like to receive, and many of us do not like to give. But Jesus did not say it is more pleasant to give than to receive--but more blessed. Receiving and not giving--feeds and inculcates selfishness; giving trains toward unselfishness. "Not to be ministered unto--but to minister," was the motto of Christ's own life; not to receive--but to give. "He is the first among you," Jesus said to his disciples, "who serves with the most complete self-forgetfulness." Blessed is Christ-likeness, and he who gives, not he who receives, is most like the Master!

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/jr-miller/pauls-third-missionary-journey-farewells-acts-2022-38/>

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