

~ Lesson 72 ACTS ~

An Eternal Address in Miletus (part 1)

Acts 20:17-27

We are continuing our study in the book of Acts, looking at the final leg of Paul's 3rd journey as he travels back to Jerusalem. Last week we saw brother Luke join Paul again in Philippi after being apart for 6 years, Acts 20:5, and then Paul and Luke met the rest of the company in Troas, Acts 20:6. And it was here at this main port in Troas that the company is reunited together after collecting the contribution for the poor saints in Jerusalem. Now having booked passage on a merchant ship, they leave Troas and travel south toward Syria. Last week we ended as Luke recorded the company traveling from port to port through the Aegean Sea and coming to Miletus, Acts 20:15. And today we find ourselves docked in Miletus as Paul sends for the elders in Ephesus to come meet them there for one final farewell address to his beloved church.

20:17) From Miletus he sent to Ephesus and called for the elders of the church.

It had been Paul's desire to have one final meeting with the Ephesian church on his way back to Jerusalem. He had originally planned to leave Corinth and sail to Syria, and then from Syria they would travel down to Jerusalem. But because of a plot against his life from the Jews in Corinth, Paul had to change plans and travel north back through Macedonia, to Troas, and now finally to Asia, Acts 20:3. But because of his haste to get to Jerusalem by the Day of Pentecost, Acts 20:16, Paul sailed past Ephesus and followed the itinerary of the merchant ship docking at Miletus, about 30 miles south of Ephesus. So now, knowing the ship will be docked in Miletus for a couple of days, Paul sends for the elders of the church in Ephesus to come join them to give a final farewell address.

The distance from Trogyllium to Miletus was only about 25 miles by ship, so they would have easily come to Miletus sometime that morning with enough time for Paul's runners to travel to Ephesus that day, Thursday, and invite the elders to come meet them in Miletus. These runners were probably Trophimus and Tychicus who were with them from Asia, Acts 20:4. They would have known the terrain well, plus many times Paul sent Tychicus as his messenger, Eph 6:21; Col 4:7; 2 Tim 4:12; Titus 3:12. Trophimus and Tychicus probably arrived at Ephesus sometime that evening and then the next day, Friday, traveled back to Miletus arriving sometime in the afternoon.

It is here in Miletus that Paul delivers his farewell address. This is so special because Luke records his message to these elders. One of only a few sermons by Paul recorded in the Bible. But what is so special about this address is it reads just like a Pauline epistle. This is the only record we have of Paul specifically speaking to Christians which is who all of his letters were addressed to... Christians. This was a meeting of only a handful of people, but these become eternal words having been written in the Divine record. I love how RCH Lenski describes this event: So small a group: a few elders, Paul, his eight companions—yet an immortal meeting! The great theater in Miletus where the crowds gathered, which is now in ruins, is forgotten like the nameless crowds that gathered there; but the words this one man Paul spoke to a handful of men somewhere in this harbor city still throb with life and power as when they were uttered that day. Here are immortal truths; here throbs a heart moved with those truths to a tenderness and a love which they alone could beget. Paul's address to the Ephesian elders is a shining page even in the New Testament.*

The elders arrive in Ephesus excited for the opportunity to see their brother Paul again. It had been about one year since they had seen him last, May 57ad-April 58ad, now Paul gathers them together to admonish them one final time before going to Jerusalem. Let's read the first part of his speech, **Acts 20:18-27**.

Paul continually proclaimed and taught the Gospel and Paul reminds them of his conduct while he was with them for three years. He does this because he knows he may never see them again, Acts 20:25.

* Lenski, R. C. H. (1934). *The Interpretation of the Acts of the Apostles* (p. 836)

Paul uses three Greek words describing the elders and their duties in the church: Elders- πρεσβύτερος; Overseers- ἐπίσκοπος; and Shepherds- ποιμην. These men came to Miletus as elders, πρεσβύτερος, and they left as overseers, ἐπίσκοπος, and shepherds, ποιμην, Acts 20:28. But he would never ask them to do something he hasn't done first. Starting in verse 18, Paul begins describing his conduct among them as something to be followed. Remember in 1 Corinthians 11:1 he says, "*Imitate me just as I also imitate Christ.*"

20:18) ...“You know, from the first day that I came to Asia, in what manner I always lived among you,”

This is an emphatic start, addressing these elders specifically saying, “You (elders), you know... (you are very acquainted with how I was at all times). Then Paul continues giving examples of how he behaved during these three years he was with them.

20:19) serving the Lord with all humility...

Paul was a servant, a δούλος, a slave of the Lord Jesus. I have a verse pinned to my computer monitor that tells me daily whom I serve. Colossians 3:23-24- ²³ *And whatever you do, do it heartily, as to the Lord and not to men,* ²⁴ *knowing that from the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance; for you serve the Lord Christ.* We as Christians serve Jesus and not men. And we do this will all humility, ταπεινοφροσύνη, a humility of the mind. This is a mindset, a daily choice that we serve Jesus Christ and not our flesh or this world or other men. We're not men pleasers, we're Jesus pleasers. Paul had this mindset, Gal 1:10; 5:11; 6:12. Paul preached the offense of the cross and stood for Truth and because of this, many times led to suffering persecution. Notice the rest of verse 19...

20:19) serving the Lord with all humility... with many tears and trials which happened to me by the plotting of the Jews;

The Jews were always plotting to kill him, even since Damascus when he had to let down out of a window in a basket, Acts 9:23-25. And for 20 years people have tried to kill Paul. In fact he had just escaped a plot from the Jews to kill him in Corinth, Acts 20:3. Paul reminds the Ephesian elders of this because he is telling them, *imitate me as I also imitate Christ.* They persecuted Jesus, they persecuted me, they will also persecute you. This is why Paul tells Timothy who will become the Bishop of Ephesus in just a few years, *share with me in the sufferings for the Gospel,* 2 Timothy 1:8. But even among this intense persecution, Paul never shrunk back from preaching the Gospel and he continues describing his conduct in Ephesus...

20:20) how I kept back (ὕποστέλλω- to shrink back or avoid) nothing that was helpful, but proclaimed it to you, and taught you publicly and from house to house,

“Publicly” would have been in the synagogues and the school of Tyrannus and “from house to house” is Paul personally visiting all the house churches not only in Ephesus, but in all of Asia. Everywhere Paul went, he did not avoid the offensive message of the cross. He did not shrink back from proclaiming the offensive message of the Gospel. It is only offensive to those who reject Jesus. This is the message of the Gospel... that we are all sinners who need a Savior. And without Jesus we are going to hell. But if you trust in Jesus and His atoning work on the cross, you can have eternal life with Him. This is repentance and faith toward Jesus Christ. This is what he preached everywhere...

20:21) testifying (διαμαρτύρομαι- to thoroughly testify. A testimony from the heart) to Jews, and also to Greeks, repentance toward God and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ.

Repentance and Faith... in the Greek Paul ties this together as one unit. It is a fascinating phrase...

τὴν εἰς τὸν Θεὸν μετάνοιαν, καὶ πίστιν τὴν εἰς τὸν Κύριον ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦν Χριστόν.

The repentance unto God, and the faith, that which is unto our Lord Jesus Christ.

The repentance, τὴν μετάνοιαν, is a definitive change of mind to turn away from sin and turn upon God, and at the same time we trust in Jesus and become immersed into the faith that which is in Jesus Christ. Turning our entire lives to be solely dependent on Jesus. You can't have repentance without faith. You can't turn away from sin without having faith in Jesus as your Savior. Repentance does not mean we clean ourselves up and then turn to Jesus. No, it means we turn away from our sin and fully trust in Jesus at the same time. And we trust Him to forgive us, to cleanse us, and to sanctify us. It is turning away from sin and falling into the Savior's arms by faith. We immerse ourselves into the faith that is only found in Jesus by His Grace. That's the Gospel, Acts 14:15; 2:38, and Paul preached this everywhere he went... even unto persecution and death...

20:22-23) ²² And see, now I go bound in the spirit to Jerusalem, not knowing the things that will happen to me there, ²³ except that the Holy Spirit testifies in every city, saying that chains and tribulations await me.

He was bound in the Spirit as a servant of Jesus Christ to go to Jerusalem. The Lord had laid on his heart to go to Jerusalem for two reasons: 1) to deliver the contribution to the poor saints at Jerusalem; 2) to minister the Gospel to the Jews. Knowing even that chains and tribulations await him there. During this last leg to Jerusalem, the Holy Spirit continues to tell him of the things he must suffer for the Name, but this is not being revealed to Paul to scare or deter him, but rather I think to prepare him for what is to come. Paul was led of the Spirit. We saw this when he wanted to go into Asia, but the Spirit forbade him. Then he wanted to go to Bithynia and the Spirit did not permit him, Acts 16:6-7. But here he is not forbidden to go to Jerusalem, only warned of the things that might happen to him there knowing **that chains and tribulations await me**. In this life sometimes our faithfulness is rewarded with chains and tribulations, but in eternal life our faithfulness is rewarded with the crown of Righteousness. Notice this is Paul's mindset...

20:24) But none of these things move me; nor do I count my life dear to myself, so that I may finish my race with joy, and the ministry which I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify the gospel of the grace of God.

Paul was determined to finish his race with joy. He received this ministry from the Lord Jesus Himself and he is running this race to the end... and indeed he did. At the very end of his life as he was awaiting death in a dungeon he wrote these words to Timothy... 2 Timothy 4:7-8-⁷ *I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith.* ⁸ *Finally, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give to me on that Day, and not to me only but also to all who have loved His appearing.* These are powerful words. There is nothing that can stop a man with this mindset on finishing his race with joy so that he might hear those words, *“Well done good and faithful servant. Enter into the joy of the Lord.”* Matt 25:21.

Paul's ministry and his race that Jesus called him to was to thoroughly testify the Gospel of the Grace of God. To proclaim the good news of God's grace toward us. Lenski describes God's grace like this... *“The Divine favor extended through the atoning merits of Christ to the guilty, damned sinner to free him forever from this guilt and to receive him as God's child.”*[†]

Paul is bound in the Spirit to continue his race, to proclaim the gospel of grace, knowing that this may cost him his life and be the last time he ever sees his friends in Ephesus.

20:25) And indeed, now I know that you all, among whom I have gone preaching the kingdom of God, will see my face no more.

This word preaching is κηρύσσω, to herald. Much like Jesus, Paul went about everywhere heralding the kingdom of God. But now, Paul is heralding the full plan of the Kingdom. He is preaching about those

[†] Lenski, R. C. H. (1934). The Interpretation of the Acts of the Apostles (p. 843)

things that Jesus couldn't speak about. He is preaching Jesus as King and Savior and no one enters His Kingdom except through Him. But now Paul knows that this message of the Kingdom will cost him his life and says **And indeed, now I know that you all...will see my face no more**. Out of his entire address to the Ephesian elders, this was the most grievous to them. Notice what Luke says in **verse 38**.

Paul continues testifying of his conduct while he was with them...

20:26-27) ²⁶ Therefore I testify to you this day that I am innocent of the blood of all men. ²⁷ For I have not shunned (same as v.20, ὑποστέλλω- to shrink back or avoid) **to declare to you the whole counsel of God.**

Verse 27 is the reason why he is innocent of the blood of all men. He did his duty as a servant of the Lord and declared the whole counsel of God. We as Christians, especially those who preach and teach the Word must always declare the whole counsel of God. This is why I am always flipping to other places in the Bible to show and explain things. The word counsel in verse 27 is βουλή, referring to the King's desire; a divine purpose or plan. The Bible is one story of Redemption, one plan to bring us into Fellowship with the Father through Jesus Christ.

When Paul says he is **innocent of the blood of all men**. This blood of all men is referring to the guilt of sin leading to death, but not physical death, but eternal death. The redemptive plan of God gave the Way for all men to be redeemed from this guilt and to enter into Eternal Life with God, but each person has to receive this gift of grace by placing their faith in Jesus Christ.

Paul says he is innocent of this blood because he has proclaimed this Way for all men to be redeemed. Therefore, he says, "I am innocent of this blood." Whether they accept or reject is their issue. I am innocent. I think Paul has Ezekiel in mind when he says this, **Ezekiel 3:10-11, 17-19**. Paul also referred to this in **Acts 18:16** while he was in Corinth. Paul is saying, "I have been faithful to my calling and have proclaimed the Word of the Lord. For I have not shrunk back or avoided that which I was called to preach. Therefore, now I am innocent of the blood of all men knowing that I have faithfully proclaimed the Gospel. Whether they accept or reject, that's their choice. I have done what I was called to do. That is preach the Word.

Notice five times Paul mentions this proclamation of the Gospel...

- Verse 20... How I didn't shrink back from that which was profitable, but proclaimed it to you.
- Verse 21... thoroughly testifying repentance toward God and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ
- Verse 24... thoroughly testifying the Gospel of the Grace of God
- Verse 25... preaching (heralding) the Kingdom of God
- Verse 27... I have not shunned to declare to you the whole counsel (Divine plan) of God

This was his ministry... to preach the Word. This is what he told Timothy who later became the Bishop of Ephesus, **2 Timothy 4:2**. And this is what Paul is admonishing the Ephesian elders to do as well. After making an example of his own conduct, Paul turns this responsibility to the elders of Ephesus and begins warning them and admonishing them to oversee and shepherd the flock.

20:28) Therefore take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood.

Paul begins to warn of wolves within the church to draw people away from the Truth. The best and only way to battle deception and heresy is to proclaim the Truth. So next week we are going to finish Paul's admonition as he hands this responsibility to shepherd the flock of God to the Ephesian elders.