

9/1/16

Acts 20:17-27

Faithfulness

¹⁷ Now from Miletus he sent to Ephesus and called the elders of the church to come to him. 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. ²² And now, behold, I am going to Jerusalem, constrained by 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.

(Pastor prays)

Fifteen years ago today, I had just climbed out of the Grand Canyon and was in a hotel room in Los Vegas. I watched in abject disbelief as the events of 9/11 unfolded and in the days and weeks after as the dust settled and families gathered around in gothic churches and well-manicured cemeteries to say their good-byes. And if you have ever had to say goodbye to someone you love, you have a sense of what they felt.

If you've ever had to say goodbye, you have a sense of what's in this passage. The apostle Paul is leaving his friends and fellow elders in Ephesus. It's so moving that down in v. 37 there is a picture of them huddled up and weeping.

What is it in this farewell address, besides Paul saying they would never see each other again? What is it that makes it so moving and deep and worth our time to study? What is it about this one man's life in Christ that inspires and challenges us and gives us hope? Why is it written here and what can we learn? And what can I do and what can you do with the next half of your life that's going to be honoring to God and good for His church and something worth giving your life to even if it means sacrifice or hardship or poverty?

In Christ, I want to learn the kind of bravery that Paul displays in his life and more specifically in this passage. Don't you want to learn Christ that way, something that takes me farther and deeper and more profoundly into living my life to the Glory of God and for the joy of His people? To do so there are things I have to learn. I think Paul gives us several things right here and now:

In Christ We Learn the Grace of God

Let's see if we can work through this text together and point out some of the distinctions.

I Want to Learn to Keep My Promises

Like Paul kept his promises. Look at his self-described commitment. Let's read it in v. 17-19, *¹⁷ Now from Miletus he sent to Ephesus and called the elders of the church to come to him. 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; Because of his love for Christ, Paul was an all-weather promise keeper to the degree that he invites scrutiny in v. 18. "You yourselves know..." And then in v. 19 *¹⁹ serving the Lord with all humility and with tears and with trials that happened to me through the plots of the Jews; Paul was convinced that in serving people, he was serving God. And serving God means keeping your promises when it's costly.**

See the language in v. 19 – humility and tears. There is a selfless intensity to that kind of love-driven commitment, an intensity that comes from a life that can say, "I have been

crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live but Christ who lives in me.” Or this: “For me to live is Christ and to die is gain.” The more Christ there is in you, the more promises you end up keeping. A cross-centered life is a promise-keeping life.

There is something else I think we can learn:

I Want to Learn to Tell the Truth

I don't mean that I'm a liar or that you are a liar and don't tell the truth. I just want to tell *more* of it. I want to be trusted more so that I can genuinely and lovingly speak Gospel truth.

Listen to what he says as we join him mid-sentence in v. 20-21. *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.*

Notice that the centerpiece of truth is found in v. 21 and that truth is the epicenter. The Gospel is the fountainhead from which all other truths come. Paul declares the Gospel in v. 21: repentance toward God and faith in the Lord Jesus; and in v. 20, notice he declares that truth is profitable.

I want to live in such a way that my life is dominated by the belief that the most profitable truth I can tell someone is that God has created you for the specific purpose that your life can bring honor and glory to Him. You are created to reflect God's glory as the moon reflects the sun, but that's not possible if you are lightless and dead in sin. It only comes in the truth of v. 21: faith in the Lord Jesus and repentance toward God.

For us to grasp the truth of the Gospel, we must tell the truth about ourselves. It's very similar to what the Lord said to the church at Laodicea in Revelation 3:15-17, *“I know your works: you are neither cold nor hot. Would that you were either cold or hot! ¹⁶ So, because you are lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of my mouth. ¹⁷ For you say, I am rich, I have prospered, and I need nothing, not realizing that you are wretched, pitiable, poor, blind, and naked.*

That's the truth of our condition, and until we grasp that about ourselves and about people we love, we can't fully see the beauty of God's grace and love and forgiveness in

Christ. Real love for people starts when you can tell the truth. God is a holy and loving God. Man is a sinner, separated from God. Christ died on the cross in the place of sinners. And faith in his perfect life, atoning death and resurrection - faith in that coupled with a repentance from sin, has the power to save every person who trusts and believes the truth. I want to learn to keep my promises. I want to learn to tell the truth. Tell the truth.

I Want to Learn to Face Difficulty

I guess we all face it at some point but I want to face trouble like Paul faced it. Listen to his firsthand account and hear his view of life. This is what I want. This view takes away wrong and selfishness and blame and hate and anxiety. His view of life sets you up for a joyful approach to the hardest obedience. Let's read it in v. 22-24.

²² And now, behold, I am going to Jerusalem, constrained by 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.

Here you have this almost heroic reception of hardship, saying the mission of grace and the glory of God are so much more important than my salary or my vocation or my career or my frustrations. What matters ultimately in every event of my life is God's glory. Is God receiving glory and is His grace being displayed? Let's read v. 24 again. *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.* To testify to the Gospel of the grace of God. It's the whole message of Paul's entire ministry. The whole message of the Gospel. The whole message of the whole Bible is dominated by God's grace, not hatred or condemnation or bigotry.

If we shout things at people, don't let it be hate speech. *Let it be grace speech.* Isn't that the lesson Paul gave Timothy in 1 Timothy 1:13-15? *...though formerly I was a blasphemer, persecutor, and insolent opponent. But I received mercy because I had*

acted ignorantly in unbelief, ¹⁴ and the grace of our Lord overflowed for me with the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus. ¹⁵ The saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the foremost.

That not just Paul's testimony, It's mine. It's every Christian's in here. And by faith in Christ today, that testimony can be yours. Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners. Even if you think you are the worst, His grace will save you. Perhaps you think you are the worst. You feel condemned. Sin condemns. Grace saves.

(Pastor prays)