

"The Third Missionary Journey"

Part 12

Acts 18:23-21:26

Introduction: As we come back to our study of Acts tonight, we are again stepping into Paul's meeting with the elders from Ephesus. Last week we looked at Paul's words as he revisited his time with the believers at Ephesus. We then looked at Paul's in sight as to what was awaiting him at Jerusalem.

Notice Acts 20:18-23

There was one thing that Paul did not know and that was what awaited him at Jerusalem. But he did know by the Holy Spirit that he would encounter bonds and afflictions. The Jews despised Paul because he preached the Gospel of Jesus Christ and that a person is saved by grace and not keeping the Law. They also despised him because he carried his message of salvation to the Gentiles. In the beginning of this chapter we read of the Jews who were going to attack him and he had to change his plans and go back through Macedonia.

- **Returning to Jerusalem**
- **"Time with the Ephesian Elders"**

Notice Acts 20:23-24

Paul knew he would encounter bonds and afflictions but he tells these elders that none of those things moved him. Paul's main goal was to finish his course with purpose. In the words of the Apostle here we see that which is foreign to most believers. Serving the Lord to the end and faithfulness to him is more important than life itself. These verses certainly would not be popular in many churches today. Many in the church believe that a comfortable life is of the highest importance. Paul defeats that teaching here and makes it noticeably clear that for the believer the number one priority should be finishing the course which the Lord has set before us.

Application:

This is something that all of us need to look at in our lives and the reason is because many start out strong and then something pulls them away from the course that God has given them to run.

Galatians 5:7-8

⁷ *Ye did run well; who did hinder you that ye should not obey the truth?*

⁸ *This persuasion cometh not of him that calleth you.*

The believers in the region of Galatia started out strong until the Pharisees came through the door with a false Gospel. There have been many believers who started out strong and determined and then they were lured away by something. It may have been the world, the desire for money, a hobby, a spouse, or just that they became spiritually complacent. If ever there was a day in which we need to stay the course it is the day in which we live in.

Hebrews 12:1-3

Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us,

² *Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God.*

³ *For consider him that endured such contradiction of sinners against himself, lest ye be wearied and faint in your minds.*

Notice the words of Arnold.

"The Apostle Paul mastered the question of values. Not even life itself was more valuable than being faithful to Christ, according to Paul. For Paul, the ultimate value was carrying out the will of God in his life. Every Christian must settle this issue of values whether he is a doctor, lawyer, engineer, teacher, plumber, carpenter or housewife. The ultimate value is to do the will of God. Any other value must be subservient to being faithful to the Lord Jesus Christ. What are your values? To get a husband or wife? To be a success

in business? To be a millionaire? To make some significant scientific discovery to benefit mankind? To write some scholarly work which will shake the world? The Bible says the only value worth having is to glorify God and to manifest Christ in one's life by doing the will of God."

Paul knew that he was on this earth for one purpose and that was to glorify God as he walked in the will of God. How much different would the world be today if God's children had the same mindset? We need to also know that there are believers who start out on the course and then get involved in something that disqualifies them.

1 Corinthians 9:24-27

²⁴ Know ye not that they which run in a race run all, but one receiveth the prize? So run, that ye may obtain.

²⁵ And every man that striveth for the mastery is temperate in all things. Now they do it to obtain a corruptible crown; but we an incorruptible.

²⁶ I therefore so run, not as uncertainly; so fight I, not as one that beateth the air:

²⁷ But I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection: lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway.

To be a castaway is to be disqualified from receiving the reward. Paul was very careful that he ran the race by following the rules. He made sure he practiced self-control.

Paul was the living example of Romans 12:1-2.

Romans 12:1-2

I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service.

² And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God.

Notice Acts 20:25

Paul knew that he would not return to Ephesus again and that on earth he would never see these believers again. These were his farewell words to the elders.

Notice Acts 20:26-27

Paul had not failed to warn everyone he had the opportunity to speak to in Ephesus. He had declared all the counsel of God to the church and therefore everyone that Paul encountered was now accountable for the Truth that he had shared.

Notice the words of John Phillips.

"As far as Ephesus was concerned, he had fully evangelized and warned the city. If people remained in their sins it was no fault of his. His hands were clean, no blood guiltiness rested on his conscience. He called upon his friends, the Ephesian elders, to corroborate this remarkable claim."

Possibly Paul was thinking of the Words that God had given to Ezekiel.

Ezekiel 3:17-21

¹⁷ *Son of man, I have made thee a watchman unto the house of Israel: therefore hear the word at my mouth, and give them warning from me.*

¹⁸ *When I say unto the wicked, Thou shalt surely die; and thou givest him not warning, nor speakest to warn the wicked from his wicked way, to save his life; the same wicked man shall die in his iniquity; but his blood will I require at thine hand.*

¹⁹ *Yet if thou warn the wicked, and he turn not from his wickedness, nor from his wicked way, he shall die in his iniquity; but thou hast delivered thy soul.*

²⁰ *Again, When a righteous man doth turn from his righteousness, and commit iniquity, and I lay a stumbling-block before him, he shall die: because thou hast not given him warning, he shall die in his sin, and his righteousness which he hath done shall not be remembered; but his blood will I require at thine hand.*

²¹ *Nevertheless if thou warn the righteous man, that the righteous sin not, and he doth not sin, he shall surely live, because he is warned; also thou hast delivered thy soul.*

Notice what Clarke wrote concerning the Words given to Ezekiel.

"Hear it, ye priests, ye preachers, ye ministers of the Gospel; ye, especially, who have entered into the ministry for a living, ye who gather a congregation to yourselves that ye may feed upon their fat, and clothe yourselves with their wool; in whose parishes and in whose congregations souls are dying unconverted from day to day, who have never been solemnly warned by you, and to whom you have never shown the way of salvation, probably because ye know nothing of it yourselves! O what a perdition awaits you! To have the blood of every soul that has died in your parishes or in your congregations unconverted laid at your door! To suffer a common damnation for every soul that perishes through your neglect! How many loads of endless woe must such have to bear! Ye take your tithes, your stipends, or your rents, to the last grain, and the last penny; while the souls over whom you made yourselves watchmen have perished, and are perishing, through your neglect. O worthless and hapless men! better for you had ye never been born! Vain is your boast of apostolical authority, while ye do not the work of apostles! Vain your boast of orthodoxy, while ye neither show nor know the way of salvation! Vain your pretensions to a Divine call, when ye do not the work of evangelists! The state of the most wretched of the human race is enviable to that of such ministers, pastors, teachers, and preachers."

➤ **Warning to the Elders**

Notice Acts 20:28

Here in this verse Paul exhorts the elders and he starts by telling them to take heed for the flock and for themselves. He goes on to tell them to be sure to feed the flock which they are responsible for. Paul's words are a reminder that the number one priority of the pastor and spiritual leaders of the church is to teach them the Word of God.

Notice Acts 20:29-30

Paul knew there would be wolves who would come in to lead the church into apostasy. But he also warned them that there would be some from among them who would fall into false doctrine and lead others into apostasy. Also let us understand that false teaching is often an inside job.

2 Corinthians 11:13-15

¹³ *For such are false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into the apostles of Christ.*

¹⁴ *And no marvel; for Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light.*

¹⁵ *Therefore it is no great thing if his ministers also be transformed as the ministers of righteousness; whose end shall be according to their works.*

Paul knew the wolves were coming because after the first missionary journey they infiltrated the churches of Galatia which is what we are studying in Galatians. This church would be no different. The church is the light of the world today and therefore Satan will do everything he can to lead the church into apostasy so that it will not be effective. The warning that we must heed is that Paul said even some of these elders had the potential to fall away. If they had the potential then so do we.

1 Corinthians 10:10-12

¹⁰ *Neither murmur ye, as some of them also murmured, and were destroyed of the destroyer.*

¹¹ *Now all these things happened unto them for examples: and they are written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world are come.*

¹² *Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall.*

Conclusion:

Notice Acts 20:31

The key word here is "WATCH." We must be on alert at all times. In our own personal lives and in the church. Satan will come in if given an opportunity.