

A Ministry Worth Having (Part 2)
Acts 20:17-38
Notes

I. INTRODUCTION

ILL: The summer after I received my driver's license, I got a job working for a construction company building levees and doing other dirt work. One evening when I was leaving the shop, I slowly pulled out of the gravel road to cross over to the gas station right across the highway. As I was putting along, a car topped the hill. I saw the car and tried to speed up, but I was unable to get out of the way. The car t-boned me. I spun around in the road and hit the ditch and was knocked out. When I came to, I opened the door and stumbled out of the truck and fell in the ditch. I began to cry. When the state trooper arrived, he asked me if I was ok. I told him I was ok, and he asked why I was crying. I said, "you don't know how much my dad loves this truck. He is going to kill me!"

The entire wreck could have been avoided if I would have actually driven across the highway like I was supposed to instead of just taking my sweet time.

Because I chose to only give minimum effort and creep across the road, I caused damage to myself and someone else.

Instead of enjoying a delicious pint of cookies and cream ice cream from the store I wound up knocked out in a ditch.

When we fail to allow the Spirit of God to empower us for ministry and when we fail to step up and serve in ministry, we end up stunting our own spiritual growth and we simultaneously fail to pour into others, harming their growth in Christ as well.

When we see ourselves in light of what Christ has done for us; when we view our role as one of many working in tandem for the glory of Christ and the building of the church, we will joyfully give ourselves to the ministry of the church and to Christ.

If we seek to serve and honor Christ, then our lives, our ministries must be worthwhile. We must seek to honor Christ in all we do; share him with all we meet; and to build his church for his glory.

We cannot begin to have a worthwhile ministry if we do not understand that each of us have been given a ministry.

As believers, we need to understand that God has not called us to live a halfway kind of life. He has called us to be all in.

Last week we looked at the speech Paul gave to the Ephesian church leaders. In his speech, he provides us with several principles to follow so that we can have a worthwhile ministry.

Last week we looked at 5 of those principles:

- Be present
- Work hard
- Practice humility
- Serve in your giftedness
- Share the gospel

This week we will look at the next 5 principles.

To help us remember where we were we will go over our passage again.

²² And now, behold, bound by the Spirit, I am on my way to Jerusalem, not knowing what will happen to me there, ²³ except that the Holy Spirit solemnly testifies to me in every city, saying that bonds and afflictions await me. ²⁴ But I do not consider my life of any account as dear to myself, so that I may finish my course and the ministry which I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify solemnly of the gospel of the grace of God.

²⁵ “And now, behold, I know that all of you, among whom I went about preaching the kingdom, will no longer see my face. ²⁶ Therefore, I testify to you this day that I am innocent of the blood of all men. ²⁷ For I did not shrink from declaring to you the whole purpose of God. ²⁸ Be on guard for yourselves and for 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. ²⁹ I know that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; ³⁰ and from among your own selves men will arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after them. ³¹ Therefore be on the alert, remembering that night and day for a period of three years I did not cease to admonish each one with tears. ³² And now I commend you to God and to the word of His grace, which is able to build you up and to give you the inheritance among all those who are sanctified. ³³ I have coveted no one’s silver or gold or clothes. ³⁴ You yourselves know that these hands ministered to my own needs and to the men who were with me. ³⁵ In everything I showed you that by working hard in this manner you must help the weak and remember the words of the Lord Jesus, that He Himself said, ‘It is more blessed to give than to receive.’”

³⁶ When he had said these things, he knelt down and prayed with them all. ³⁷ And they began to weep aloud and embraced Paul, and repeatedly kissed him, ³⁸ grieving especially over the word which he had spoken, that they would not see his face again. And they were accompanying him to the ship.

Prayer.

In Order to Have a Worthwhile Ministry We Need to:

1. Be Present
2. Work Hard
3. Practice
4. Serve in Your Giftedness
5. Share the Gospel

5. Be Obedient to the Spirit (22-23;26-27)

“And now, behold, bound by the Spirit, I am on my way to Jerusalem,”

“Therefore, I testify to you this day that I am innocent of the blood of all men. ²⁷ For I did not shrink from declaring to you the whole purpose of God.”

If we are to have a worthwhile ministry, we will be obedient to the Spirit of God in our lives.

Paul is going to Jerusalem. There is some disagreement as to his need to go to Jerusalem, but we know Paul wanted to go and be there in time for Pentecost and he wanted to take to the struggling Jerusalem church the offering he collected from the Gentile churches.

Paul knows that going to Jerusalem is going to cause him great hardships but notice what he does-he obeys the Spirit of God.

Greek scholars note a particularly interesting thing taking place in the words “bound by the Spirit.”

Paul, in his spirit, that is, his own determination, desires to go to Jerusalem. Also, the Holy Spirit desires Paul to go and what takes place is that when Paul’s desires match up with what the Holy Spirit desires, Paul’s following his own desires glorify God in his obedience.

What would happen if Paul wanted to go Jerusalem, but the Holy Spirit did not want him to go? He would have been disobedient had he gone.

What do we do when the Holy Spirit places a holy burden on our heart?

Here are the usual three options:

- We quickly obey and glorify God
- We delay obedience and prolong our blessings
- We delay obedience that leads to disobedience

When the Spirit of God, through the foundation of the Word of God prompts our hearts we are called to obedience.

In verse 22 Paul tells us of his future obedience, but in verses 26-27 he tells us of his past obedience.

“Therefore, I testify to you this day that I am innocent of the blood of all men. ²⁷ For I did not shrink from declaring to you the whole purpose of God.”

Paul followed the conviction and calling of the Spirit in testifying to the gospel.

This is where it gets tricky for us. We often know what God wants, but troubles keep us from doing it.

Paul was able to proclaim his innocence of not being found guilty of disobedience in sharing the gospel because he said, I used every opportunity God has given me to share the gospel.

Whenever the Spirit of God provided a person, a place, and a potential opportunity Paul was obedient to do what God called him to do-share the gospel.

What about you? Is the Spirit of God impressing on your heart? Is there something you are to be doing for the glory of God?

Is there a ministry you are to be involved with at the church? Is there a person who needs your forgiveness? Is there an area in your life you need to surrender?

A worthwhile ministry is a ministry which is obedient to the Holy Spirit.

6. Be more concerned about finishing well than about your current status (24)

“But I do not consider my life of any account as dear to myself, so that I may finish my course and the ministry which I received from the Lord Jesus,”

Paul understands and recognizes the hardships that await him in Jerusalem. He does not shy away from an honest appraisal of his situation, and he does not try to sugarcoat his circumstances.

He fully states his case, but then he comes out and says, “I am more concerned about finishing well than I am doing well.”

Think about how opposite that is for most of us.

Paul was more concerned about doing what God called him to do than he was about making a legacy of himself or his ministry.

Sometimes what hinders us is the fact that we are often more concerned about immediate benefits than we are about living for Christ.

What is more important, leaving a Christ honoring legacy or living for the moment?

Three or more generations of my grandkids will not remember my name, but they can be impacted by the legacy of faith I leave in my kids, who leave one for their kids, to leave for their kids.

My kids, Jackson and Michaela scantily remember my Pawpaw and Jase and Jacob don't know him at all, but I tell you this. The lessons I learned from him about character, love, grace, forgiveness, and integrity will be impressed upon them throughout their life.

And you know what? Maybe they will be like me. Maybe they will be taught the lessons, shown the love and forget about it for a time. Maybe a big chunk of their lives won't be what Kristin and I envision for them, but you know what?

They will always have those lessons in their hearts and the lessons will be right there and may be what leads them back to the truths of Christ one day.

But that won't happen if we are more concerned about living for the moment more than are living for a legacy.

If we are more concerned about their sports; more concerned about having things; more concerned about status updates; more concerned about being what the world says we are supposed to be; if we are more concerned about living for the moment, then we will not be able to build a legacy.

Paul did not consider his life his own but viewed his life as an offering to be poured out to others for the glory of God.

How many of us view our lives through this lens?

A life focused on the pleasures of the moment will forfeit the blessings of a lasting legacy of faith.

Because of Paul's perspective of living for a legacy, his life was able to have a far greater impact than if we would have simply lived for the moment.

Notice his words. He fully understood that his entire life was a ministry.

You see, we often misunderstand the work of the ministry. We think that our ministry life is relegated to the church.

When we have this perspective, we limit what we can do for the Lord because we fail to see our entire life as a ministry.

Yes, each one of us are called to serve in the ministry of the church. Every one of us! But each one of us are called to give our lives as a ministry to the glory of God.

What about you today? Is your ministry hindered because you are living for the rewards of this world?

The manner in which we view our life will directly impact whether we live for a legacy or live for ourselves.

7. Love People (37-38)

³⁷ And they began to weep aloud and embraced Paul, and repeatedly kissed him, ³⁸ grieving especially over the word which he had spoken, that they would not see his face again. And they were accompanying him to the ship."

As Paul is leaving, we see this highly emotional scene.

Why were they so emotional? Why did it matter to them so much, that he was leaving?

Because they loved him.

We cannot have ministry without love.

What we see between Paul and the Ephesian church is a direct result of the church following the command of Jesus.

In John 13 Jesus gives this instruction to the disciples,

³⁴ A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another. ³⁵ By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another."

Notice Jesus' words here. He is giving the disciples, you and me a new command. But don't we already have a command to love? Didn't Jesus tell us the greatest commandment was to love God above all else and love others as ourselves. How is this command different?

This command in John 13:34-35 is different in this way. Before Christ, a person could only love God with a fallen fragile love. Since Christ has come, died, and risen all those who believe in him have the Holy Spirit living inside them.

This means that we now have the ability to love God and love others with the same sacrificial, self-giving love that Christ has loved us with.

The significance of this is huge. The implications of this type of love in contrast to the self-serving love of the world is worlds apart.

Jesus says that this type of love, loving people like I love them will be so impactful that you won't have to tell people you belong to me, they will automatically know you belong to me.

The love that we, in this church, have for one another should be so strong that it literally acts as a beacon to a world searching for true love.

Our love should act as a magnet to the world. People are looking, searching, and yearning for this type of love and we have it, or should have it.

So, when we talk about a worthwhile ministry, it should be identified with love.

“Do I love the church enough to serve the church?” “Do I love the church enough to engage in ministry with the church and missions alongside the church?”

Members who love the church will find ways to minister in and through the church.

8. Have Integrity and Character (33-35)

“³³ I have coveted no one’s silver or gold or clothes. ³⁴ You yourselves know that these hands ministered to my own needs and to the men who were with me. ³⁵ In everything I showed you that by working hard in this manner you must help the weak and remember the words of the Lord Jesus, that He Himself said, ‘It is more blessed to give than to receive.’”

In order to have an effective worthwhile ministry we need to have integrity and character.

Paul says I did not desire anyone else’s blessings; I didn’t covet anyone’s possessions.

I worked when I was supposed to work; I handled my responsibilities as they came to me.

I helped those in need, and I did not take from people

I gave away more than I received.

Paul had a reputation where he could say, “If you want to follow Jesus, follow me and I’ll show you how.”

We need to be men and women who have integrity and the character of Jesus.

How will we have a reputation of Christ followers if we do not?

When the world comes against us they may say all sorts of things about us, but let them not have evidence to say that we lack integrity or that we are not following and growing in the character of Jesus.

Paul’s trade was tent making and when he would go places, if needed, he would fund his own ministry and way by making and selling tents.

From his job he not only supported and funded his own ministry, but he also provided for those around him who were weak and in need.

Paul regularly and generously gave to those around him, even at personal loss to him.

Why would he do that? Notice his words as he quotes Jesus. It is more blessed to give than to receive.

There are a few things to note about Paul’s character. Part of his character was formed through his understanding of his own gifts.

Paul did not have to covet anyone’s gold, silver, or clothes; he did not have to try to be like other people because he knew his lane. Paul served Christ in his way, the way God gifted him, and he did it with joy.

Paul did not have to try to be like someone else or have someone else’s gifts or blessings because he was secure in his own gifts and the blessings that God provided him.

When we understand our identity in Christ, we can serve Christ faithfully with godly character and integrity.

What does this look like practically?

Character means being who we say we are

Integrity means doing what we said we would do

What this means for ministry is that if we say we are Christ followers, that means we are in the business of making disciples and part of making disciples means that we are actively involved in the ministry of the church.

What about you? How are you involved in the ministry of the church? Are you helping us equip your generation and the next generation?

Let us be men and women, children and young people who are passionate about following Christ like Christ desires us to follow him.

9. Protect Christ's Church (28-32)

*"²⁸ Be on guard for yourselves and for 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. ²⁹ I know that after my departure **savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock;** ³⁰ and from among your own selves men will arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after them. ³¹ Therefore be on the alert, remembering that night and day for a period of three years I did not cease to admonish each one with tears. ³² And now I commend you to God and to the word of His grace, which is able to build you up and to give you the inheritance among all those who are sanctified."*

In verses 28-32 Paul turns his attention directly to the elders and gives them a charge.

He calls them to protect the church.

- be on guard
- reminded them the church belongs to Jesus
- false teachers and people who seek to harm the church will come in-know the word, protect the flock from these wolves
- and not only will people from the outside come in, but people within the body will rise up and try to make a name for themselves, to try to get a click going, and hurt the church. –guard against them

This passage right here is one of the strongest biblical cases for a plurality of elders/a multitude of pastors in the church.

The church is the bride of Christ, and the leaders of the church are called to do all they can; to literally pour out their lives to protect the church from all enemies from without and within.

You may say, but this does not apply to me because I am not a pastor or elder.

The principle is this: we are all to do all we can to protect Jesus' church.

Be alert

- Always ready to defend the gospel

- Listen for false doctrine
- Look out for dissention and disunity

This means we do not take false doctrine lightly. This means we do not take conflict lightly. This means we do all we can to promote humility and kill pride within the church.

Now, this is a very pointed question, but I believe the text calls for it: “Am I ensuring the purity of Christ’s church.” “Am I doing all I can to protect Jesus’ church?”

From here Paul and the elders embrace and depart.

If we are going to have a worthwhile ministry, a ministry worth having then we will:

1. Be present
2. Work hard
3. Practice Humility
4. Serve in your giftedness
5. Share the gospel
6. Be obedient to the Spirit
7. Be more concerned about finishing well than about status
8. Love people
9. Have integrity and character
10. Protect Christ’s church