

Beginning in chapter 20, we read that after leaving Ephesus, Paul traveled through Macedonia and Greece, and made his way back to Jerusalem. At Troas, where he received God's call to go to Macedonia on his second missionary journey, a young man fell to his death while Paul preached to the church. God used Paul to resurrect Eutycus from the dead, and thus encouraged the church.

In tonight's passage we will read about events that occurred after Paul left Troas. In this passage we see another example of Paul's preaching, and we see the first indication that there was a spiritual tension as to whether or not Paul should go to Jerusalem. Let's see what insights we might learn by reading together Acts 20:13-32.

The bible does not tell us why the rest of the team traveled by boat to Assos and Paul wanted to go by land, only that they met up at that seaport. Perhaps Paul wanted to visit someone or a church somewhere along the way. Maybe he wanted to spend some time alone with the Lord to determine his course of action. For whatever reason, the team split up for a brief period of time. After they met up in Assos, they sailed, day by day through island seaports in the Aegean Sea, as Paul set his focus on Jerusalem, and the Feast of Pentecost.

His desire to reach Jerusalem in time for the feast kept him from returning to Ephesus, or speaking to the other churches on the Asian continent. However, when they reached Miletus, Paul apparently had a couple of days of layover while they waited to catch a ship for the next leg of their journey. He sent for the Elders from the church in Ephesus, who traveled thirty miles to the south to meet up with their Apostle.

This layover gave Paul the opportunity to speak to, instruct, and encourage, the elders of the church. Luke gives us the heart of this message in our passage this evening. We have already studied other samples of Paul's sermons in chapters 13, 14, and 17. In last week's passage I said that Paul was obviously a Baptist preacher, because he went on and on, ate twice, and preached all night. In this passage we see the characteristics of a Baptist preacher in that his sermon outline contained three points: a recount of Paul's example over the last three years of missionary activity, his present situation, and the future responsibilities of the Ephesian elders. This message was important to Paul, and the elders, because this was the last time that they will ever see each other.

Beginning in verse 18, Paul uses himself as an example to follow. The Elders could testify that Paul spoke the truth when he said that the whole time he ministered, he served the Lord in humility, with tears, and faced opposition and hardship at the hands of the Jews who resisted the gospel message.

Some people think of humility as a weakness, and that leadership must be strong, and forceful. The biblical model on the other hand is that humility is a necessary virtue for effective ministry. Numbers 12:3 tells us that Moses was the most humble man on earth, and God used him in his weakness, to demonstrate God's power to the Jews and to the Egyptians.

Paul characterizes his own ministry by speaking of his humility among the people. Yet we read about his boldness in speaking the truth of the gospel. He stood up to every opposition. He made personal sacrifices in order to reach the lost, and to encourage the saints. In his actions we see strength, and courage, so how do we balance the actions of Paul with his claim of humility?

First and foremost, effective ministry requires that we humble ourselves before God. James 4:10 says, "Humble yourself before the Lord, and He will lift you up." Humility is

learning to not trust in our own strength, but to operate in God's strength. Humble ministry is not about promoting ourselves, but doing what is good and godly towards others. Humble service is never about beating someone up with the bible, but sharing the truth, and encouraging others with the word of God.

Humility speaks to the condition of the heart. In humility we submit ourselves to the will of God. In humility we share the gospel as one sinner to another. On the other hand, we never compromise upon the truth of God's word, or the gospel of Jesus Christ. It is the spiritual gift of humility that allows Christian martyrs to face death when they refuse to denounce their faith in Christ.

A humble spirit affirms to the people we try to reach that we empathize with their loss. It keeps us from developing a better than thou attitude that cripples the power of the gospel message. When we try to reach the lost, or to encourage the saints, humility says, you are not a notch on my belt, or a number to be reported, but that I care about you, and love you. More than that, it says Jesus loves you, and wants what is best for you.

Ministry also comes with tears. I mourn for people I have known that died lost in their sins. My heart breaks for people who hear, but reject the gospel. A heavy sadness hangs over me when people profess Christ, but live as though He has no authority over their lives. Effective ministry requires humility, and it also sometime breaks your heart.

Paul further characterizes his ministry by the opposition that he faced. I find it interesting that he did not say anything about the opposition from the Gentiles that came in Ephesus, or Philippi, but instead focused upon the opposition that came from the Jews. I suppose that he was more understanding of opposition from those who did not have the privileged background that came from Jewish faith, or access to the word of God, which should have made it easier for them to understand and receive the gospel. Obviously he tried to reach Jews and Gentiles alike, but the opposition that came from his own people was the hardest for him to bear.

If I share my faith with someone whom I have never met before, and they oppose the gospel message, or they are cruel to me, it saddens me, but when I share my faith with someone I know and love, and they reject the gospel, it breaks my heart. The opposition that comes from our friends and family is deeply personal. We have more opportunities to share the gospel with the people that we spend more time with, and their repeated rejection of God's grace, and their resentment towards us for trying to share the love of Christ becomes a spiritual burden, and a cross that we must bear.

In spite of opposition, Paul did not shrink from declaring the word of God and reaching out to all people with the gospel of Christ. He preached and taught in the public squares, and went from house to house, which is probably a reference to the churches that met in people's homes.

In verse 22, Paul switches from the example of his ministry among the people, to his current situation. He tells them that the spirit compels him to go to Jerusalem. Another equally valid translation might be that he is constrained by the Spirit, from going to Jerusalem. He goes on to say that in every city he visits, the Spirit warns him of the dangers and sufferings he will face if he goes to Jerusalem. In chapter 21 we will read that people in the church at Tyre, "through the Spirit," warned Paul not to go.

There are two legitimate ways to interpret this passage. Either Paul was led by the Spirit to go to Jerusalem, even though he would face great hardship, or the Spirit continually warned Paul not to go, but he went anyway. While the traditional interpretation seems best if we have an exalted view of the Apostle Paul, the second interpretation makes Paul a little more human, and

we can identify with him better in our weakness. Just as there is ambiguity in the way we can translate this verse, I suspect that Paul struggled with some ambiguity in his heart. He felt an obligation to complete what he started by taking the offering himself to the church in Jerusalem, but he had uneasiness in his spirit, even as we sometimes struggle with what is the best thing to do in these circumstances.

Back in chapter 15 we read about the start of the second missionary journey. Paul and Barnabas got into a big fight, and went their separate ways. Barnabas and John Mark returned to Cyprus and retraced the steps of the first missionary journey, while Paul and Silas went by land and another route. Chapter 16 tells us that he struggled for some time. His ministry was ineffective. The Holy Spirit kept him from preaching the word in Asia, until God called him to go to Macedonia. Originally, it was Paul's idea that the Holy Spirit wanted them to go back and encourage the churches started on the first missionary journey, but he got off track in his clash with Barnabas, and he had to get his head and heart right before he could resume effective ministry.

Paul already understood that he had to go to Rome. If he had gone to Rome, and let someone else take the offering, he would have gotten there a lot quicker, and avoided a lot of hardship. Regardless of how you interpret these events, this passage reminds us that in God's sovereignty, he still allows us free choice. Our choices result in consequences, but in the end, God's sovereign will is done. The lesson for us is to not be rash in the decisions we make, but to discipline ourselves to be sensitive to and obedient to the Holy Spirit and the revealed will of God. Paul's heart was right, and he was determined to finish the race, but everybody makes the wrong decision from time to time.

In verse 25 Paul tells the Ephesian elders that they will not see him again, and he begins the third point of his sermon, his instruction for their future. Paul leaves them with a clear conscience, because he is confident that he has done all that God has called him to do. The elders will be in charge of the flock from here on out.

He tells them to pay careful attention to their own lives, so that they will be able to attend to the people in the church. Personal sin cripples ministry leaders, and makes them spiritually ineffective. First take the beam out of your own eye, and then you will be able to see clearly to take the speck out of your brother's eye. The church belongs to Jesus Christ. He purchased it by His blood. By His Holy Spirit, God called the Elders to lead the church. The Elders have a responsibility to live their lives unto the Lord, in all righteousness, and to be led by the Holy Spirit, in order to fulfill their calling.

Being in a right relationship with the Lord, and keeping their lives pure is important, because savage wolves will come into the church, and people in the church will rise up with impure motives to lead others astray. In other words, within the church, there will be spiritual battles, and the leaders within the church must be spiritually prepared.

If I presented Paul as an imperfect man, please know that you have imperfect pastors as well. If Paul can mess up, so can we. Even when we do mess up, I can speak for Brother Carl, Brother Jimmy, and myself, our hearts are right before the Lord, and we are trying to be the men God called us to be. I can say the same thing about our deacons. They are not perfect men, but they are men of God with pure hearts. They are a tremendous blessing to the pastors, and we all encourage and pray for one another, as we pray for and encourage the church.

The church becomes the body of Christ when every member catches the vision that Jesus has for His church. We stand together upon the truth of God's word, without compromise. We love one another in the Lord. We do not tear one another down, but build up one another in the

faith. We hold to the highest moral standards as we encourage those who still struggle with their sin nature. We warn one another of the dangers we perceive. We equip one another with the word of God, so that we can take our stand. We look forward to the return of Christ and His kingdom set up here on earth. We look for places where we can join God in His work, to minister to those in need, and to share the good news with the lost world.

The good news is that while we are sinners, by nature and by choice, God reaches out to us, in His love and grace, through Jesus Christ, His Son, who died for our sins. The creator God of all that exists, humbled Himself, ministered in tears, led by example, sacrificed Himself on a Roman cross, was buried, but arose after three days and nights in a tomb. He secured victory over sin and death for those who believe and entrust their lives to Him. He ascended into heaven where He makes intercession for us. He has prepared a place for all those who belong to Him, and He is coming again to take us to be with Him forever. If you can confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord, and believe in you heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you shall be saved. If there are any here who need to be saved, come to Jesus right now. For all who trust in Him, enrich your relationship with the Lord, so that together we may serve Him with all our hearts.