

The Great Stories of the Early Church
72-Paul at Ephesus 07
The Great Farewell 01
Acts 20:17-38

- 17 And from Miletus he sent to Ephesus, and called the elders of the church.
- 18 And when they were come to him, he said unto them, Ye know, from the first day that I came into Asia, after what manner I have been with you at all seasons,
- 19 Serving the Lord with all humility of mind, and with many tears, and temptations, which befell me by the lying in wait of the Jews:
- 20 And how I kept back nothing that was profitable unto you, but have shewed you, and have taught you publickly, and from house to house,
- 21 Testifying both to the Jews, and also to the Greeks, repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ.
- 22 And now, behold, I go bound in the spirit unto Jerusalem, not knowing the things that shall befall me there:
- 23 Save that the Holy Ghost witnesseth in every city, saying that bonds and afflictions abide me.
- 24 But none of these things move me, neither count I my life dear unto myself, so that I might finish my course with joy, and the ministry, which I have received of the Lord Jesus, to testify the gospel of the grace of God.
- 25 And now, behold, I know that ye all, among whom I have gone preaching the kingdom of God, shall see my face no more.
- 26 Wherefore I take you to record this day, that I am pure from the blood of all men.
- 27 For I have not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of God.
- 28 Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood.
- 29 For I know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock.
- 30 Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them.
- 31 Therefore watch, and remember, that by the space of three years I ceased not to warn every one night and day with tears.
- 32 And now, brethren, I commend you to God, and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up, and to give you an inheritance among all them which are sanctified.
- 33 I have coveted no man's silver, or gold, or apparel.
- 34 Yea, ye yourselves know, that these hands have ministered unto my necessities, and to them that were with me.
- 35 I have shewed you all things, how that so labouring ye ought to support the weak, and to remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he said, It is more blessed to give than to receive.
- 36 And when he had thus spoken, he kneeled down, and prayed with them all.
- 37 And they all wept sore, and fell on Paul's neck, and kissed him,

38 Sorrowing most of all for the words which he spake, that they should see his face no more. And they accompanied him unto the ship. KJV

Introduction:

For the last nearly two months we have been looking at Paul's ministry at Ephesus, the three years that he spent there. Admittedly, we are skipping ahead in time a little for the message today but the purpose is to keep the story intact of Paul's ministry to the Ephesian people and especially the Ephesian church.

We left the story last week at the point where Alexander the silversmith had led an uprising against Paul over the fact that the Gospel was costing him customers and money. We discussed in some detail the relationship between money and religion showing that the problem with Paul was much more the issue of money than it was theology and we attempted to show you some of the things that happen when money plays too large a role in religion.

The story has moved along now since then. The first part of chapter 20 tells us that after the uproar Paul had departed from Ephesus to go again to Macedonia where he had introduced the gospel in his Second Missionary Journey (you will recall that we are now in the Third Missionary Journey). He traveled through Macedonia encouraging and strengthening the churches and then had proceeded on to Corinth and spent about three months there.

Paul's original intention had been to sail from Corinth back to Syria but he learned of a murderous plot of the Jews and determined to retrace his steps back to Macedonia and sail from there. The first stop had been Troas from which he had launched his first trip to Macedonia and it was there that he had preached all night to the brethren. A young man by the name of Eutychus had fallen asleep during the long message and had fallen from a high window and been killed. Paul raised him from the dead, restored him to the church and the meeting continued until dawn.

Sailing from Troas they had stopped at the port of Miletus which was only a short distance from Ephesus so Paul had sent to Ephesus and called the elders of the church to him to say a final farewell. It was quite an emotional time for it had been revealed to Paul that he would never see these people again. But Paul reviewed his ministry there and the words he shared give us some help in understanding the man himself and how he viewed his responsibility as a spokesman for God. It is quite instructive.

Acts 20:18-21

- 18 And when they were come to him, he said unto them, Ye know, from the first day that I came into Asia, after what manner I have been with you at all seasons,
19 Serving the Lord with all humility of mind, and with many tears, and temptations, which befell me by the lying in wait of the Jews:
20 And how I kept back nothing that was profitable unto you, but have shewed you, and have taught you publickly, and from house to house,
21 Testifying both to the Jews, and also to the Greeks, repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ. KJV

“You know my manner of life”

These people knew how Paul lived. He did not live a cloistered and separate life from him where they only saw him at public speaking engagements or on Sunday. He lived among them on a day to day basis, visiting in their homes, allowing them to see what kind of man he was both in the pulpit and out of it. There was no filter in place, no one to run interference between Paul and the people, no special rules as to how one might interact with him. It was clear that he was who he represented himself to be and nothing else.

“Serving the Lord with all humility of mind, and with many tears, and temptations, which befell me by the lying in wait of the Jews”

We can surmise that people saw Paul weeping more often than they saw him laughing. He fully believed what he preached and he knew that unless those in his audience repented they would forever perish. That bothered him and tore at his emotions. He did not have a “professional decorum” about him. This means that he really cared about people and what was to become of them.

Part of his sadness also must have been the fact that many of his fellow Jews hated him so much that they were willing to violate the very Law of God and murder him to see him stopped. He had a genuine concern for their souls as well as those of the Gentiles.

Rom 10:1

1 Brethren, my heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel is, that they might be saved. KJV

Rom 9:3

3 For I could wish that myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh: KJV

It is almost unimaginable what this man must have suffered emotionally as he saw the very people over whom he longed and prayed for their salvation plotting and conniving to kill him.

In many ways Paul was similar to Jesus.

Isa 53:3

3 He is despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief: and we hid as it were our faces from him; he was despised, and we esteemed him not. KJV

But I am sure that his sadness was not only for the Jews and their desperate clinging to their false hope of salvation in the rites of Judaism but also extended to the people of Asia who were in bondage to their false religion and their idols.

Paul can be characterized as an humble and sad man.

“I kept back nothing that was profitable unto you”

One might ask, “why would anyone keep anything of the gospel a secret?” The answer is that there are elements of the gospel that people do not like, issues that make them angry and stir them to hatred.

“What would that be?” you might ask. Well, notice what it was that Paul preached.

“Testifying both to the Jews, and also to the Greeks, repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ”

He led with the issue of Repentance, just as John the Baptist did, just like Jesus did, just like the other apostles did.

Matt 3:1-2

- 1 In those days came John the Baptist, preaching in the wilderness of Judaea,
- 2 And saying, Repent ye: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand. KJV

Matt 4:17

- 17 From that time Jesus began to preach, and to say, Repent: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand. KJV

Mark 6:7-12

- 7 And he called unto him the twelve, and began to send them forth by two and two; and gave them power over unclean spirits;
- 8 And commanded them that they should take nothing for their journey, save a staff only; no scrip, no bread, no money in their purse:
- 9 But be shod with sandals; and not put on two coats.
- 10 And he said unto them, In what place soever ye enter into an house, there abide till ye depart from that place.
- 11 And whosoever shall not receive you, nor hear you, when ye depart thence, shake off the dust under your feet for a testimony against them. Verily I say unto you, It shall be more tolerable for Sodom and Gomorrhah in the day of judgment, than for that city.
- 12 And they went out, and preached that men should repent. KJV

Acts 2:38

- 38 Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost. KJV

Preaching repentance means that one talks to people about their sins. Remember, Paul even spoke to the Athenians about their worship of things they did not know and called on them to turn from idols to the living God in repentance.

Notice something else he said to the Ephesians on this same topic.

26 Wherefore I take you to record this day, that I am pure from the blood of all men.

27 For I have not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of God.

Paul was not one of those men who decided that some things should be kept from the people. And he was not a man who was afraid to say what was true.

And, he tells us why.

First of all, he who withholds truth, the whole truth, places the eternal spiritual welfare of others at risk. This is true for the preacher but it is also true for the parent, the neighbor, and the friend. Paul believed that he would be held responsible for the life of the man who perished for lack of truth that Paul held and refused to share, or edited so that important pieces of it were missing.

If I were to interview each of you believers here today and ask what it was that brought you to faith, each of you would tell a slightly different story. There were different elements of the truth that were used in each life in slightly different ways to bring each of you to repentance and faith. Suppose that element of truth had been withheld from you, for whatever reason. Are you confident that you would have come to Christ without it? On the one hand, we are certain that the Sovereign God can bring His people to Himself even with defective instruments, but Paul saw his own responsibility in declaring the Whole Counsel of God so that it would never be an issue that something was left out.

Secondly, we see that Paul carried Truth very high and considered it unfairly and unjustly presented unless the whole of it was told.

If we read the letter to the Ephesians we will see that there was far more that Paul considered as 'profitable' than merely the way of salvation. He had a deep and profound longing that these people come to experience the totality of all that God had for them and that included far more than missing hell and making heaven.

Eph 1:15-17

- 15 Wherefore I also, after I heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus, and love unto all the saints,
- 16 Cease not to give thanks for you, making mention of you in my prayers;
- 17 That the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give unto you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him: KJV

Eph 3:14-16

- 14 For this cause I bow my knees unto the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ,
- 15 Of whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named,
- 16 That he would grant you, according to the riches of his glory, to be strengthened with might by his Spirit in the inner man; KJV

Eph 4:1-3

- 1 I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called,
- 2 With all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in

- love;
3 Endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. KJV

There are deep, profound, and wonderful things to be known in the Christian experience but they can only be known as God reveals Himself to us, strengthens us, and grants us the desire to follow and obey Him. These things are all dependent upon knowing all that might be known of God and of His Work in the world through Jesus Christ.

We only find out those things by someone who know them telling someone who does not know. God normally does not send angels into the world to tell us anything and even when they come they do not involve themselves in retelling information that has already been given. That work is the work of believers and in order for us to be involved in it we must first know the truths of God and then be willing to share those with others. We must be faithful to tell is without alteration and we must be brave enough to tell it fully.

Why? For the same reasons that motivated Paul. We do not want to be held responsible for the perishing of others because we withheld something and, because we love the Truth, all of it, The Whole Counsel of God.

There are many ways that people, even people who claim to speak for God, withhold the Truth, some overt and some very subtle.

Some simply teach the basics of Christianity over and over again. We cannot say that what they teach is not the truth but there are certainly important realities that are never shared, never discussed, never taught. Sunday Morning at many churches is simply the way of salvation repeated endlessly in varying forms like a kaleidoscope. Certainly that is important but it was not all that Paul taught and it should not be all that we teach.

Some withhold the truth by hiding it within elaborate ceremonies. It is there but not easily decipherable and sometimes not decipherable at all. The RCC held on to the practice of holding services in Latin for centuries when no one in the assembly, even sometimes the priests themselves understood the words that were being said. If there was truth, no one had access to it. Paul made the point of that in 1 Cor. 14.

1 Cor 14:1-9

- 1 Follow after charity, and desire spiritual gifts, but rather that ye may prophesy.
- 2 For he that speaketh in an unknown tongue speaketh not unto men, but unto God: for no man understandeth him; howbeit in the spirit he speaketh mysteries.
- 3 But he that prophesieth speaketh unto men to edification, and exhortation, and comfort.
- 4 He that speaketh in an unknown tongue edifieth himself; but he that prophesieth edifieth the church.
- 5 I would that ye all spake with tongues, but rather that ye prophesied: for greater is he that prophesieth than he that speaketh with tongues, except he interpret, that the church may receive edifying.
- 6 Now, brethren, if I come unto you speaking with tongues, what shall I profit you, except I shall speak to you either by revelation, or by knowledge, or by

- prophesying, or by doctrine?
- 7 And even things without life giving sound, whether pipe or harp, except they give a distinction in the sounds, how shall it be known what is piped or harped?
 - 8 For if the trumpet give an uncertain sound, who shall prepare himself to the battle?
 - 9 So likewise ye, except ye utter by the tongue words easy to be understood, how shall it be known what is spoken? for ye shall speak into the air. KJV

The same effect can be created by a person speaking the same language as the audience if he uses words and terms that people do not understand and does not labor to make every truth clear and plain. This is partially what is meant, I think, by the “gift of teaching,” or one being “able to teach.” Teaching is far more than reciting important ideas in technical language, it is working really hard to make those ideas understood.

The Truth can be withheld if the teacher is lazy, not diligent, and does not work hard to learn and know the Word of God himself. How can he teach what he does not know? He withholds the Truth by his carelessness. Even if he knows and has learned the truth, he can withhold it by being unable to work hard to cover all of the elements of Truth in the Word of God.

And, then, there is the suppression or holding back of Truth by mingling it with error to the degree that it becomes unrecognizable or unusable. When important words such as ‘believe’ and ‘faith’ and ‘repent’ are modified, even every so slightly, the Truth can become hidden to the hearer and withheld from them. When the meanings of the ordinances of the church are either not well explained or confounded with human philosophy, the Truth can be withheld from those who participate.

Then, there is this. Some pieces of God’s Truth are difficult to hear and even more difficult to embrace. Some of them makes us uncomfortable, some of them make us sad, and some of them make us angry.

When we hear, “whatsoever is not of faith is sin” (Rom 14:23), or “... whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things.” (Phil 4:8), and we contemplate all of the things in our lives that are inconsistent with that, we are (or should be) made uncomfortable. The Truth of God often calls us out for behavior that is inconsistent with it and rebukes us for our lack of obedience. Who should remind us of these things? Should anyone? Or should we be left to simply go on in our lack of conformity to God’s Word.

When we hear “The soul that sinneth, it shall die,” (Ezek 18:4,20) we are called upon to contemplate the Awful Judgment of God upon the wicked. We are forced to think of family, friends, and neighbors who stand in the greatest possible danger from their disobedience to God. Sometimes, such truth forces us to helplessly weep over those we love, with whom we have shared the gospel, and yet they have refused it. Should anyone remind us of those things or should we be allowed to put them in a mental closet somewhere and live as if all is well with everyone?

And, what about, "... it is written, Be ye holy; for I am holy." (1 Peter 1:16) It is uncomfortable to us to be reminded that we are called to be holy people in a very real sense, in all that we say and all that we do and all that we think. Should someone point that out to us and risk making us angry or should we be allowed to simply go on doing as we see fit and thinking that it is no one else's business?

Truth is often uncomfortable but we need people, desperately need people, who love us and love truth enough to say it out loud anyway.

Paul's method was simple.

V.20 - "I kept back nothing"

V.27 - "I declared the whole counsel of God"

The goal and design of the man of God and of the True Church is spiritual growth that never stops but continually moves us closer and closer to the image of Christ.

Eph 4:11-16

- 11 And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers;
- 12 For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ:
- 13 Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ:
- 14 That we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive;
- 15 But speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ:
- 16 From whom the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love. KJV

One can never achieve this goal without the Truth, the Whole Truth, the Entire Counsel of God, presented by one who is enabled by the Spirit of God to do so.

There are a few rare souls who might get there with just themselves and a Bible but those are rare, and those are people who more than likely have the gift to teach others anyway.

Then, there is this.

- 22 And now, behold, I go bound in the spirit unto Jerusalem, not knowing the things that shall befall me there:
- 23 Save that the **Holy Ghost witnesseth in every city, saying that bonds and afflictions abide me.**
- 24 **But none of these things move me**, neither count I my life dear unto myself, so that I

might finish my course with joy, and the ministry, which I have received of the Lord Jesus, to testify the gospel of the grace of God.

The life of the man of God is a life of trouble among the blessings. Each of those troubling times can become the instrument that moves him off his course.

At every hand there is a door by which one might escape further difficulties. At this point in his life Paul had accomplished so very much one might make a case for him simply to go home to Antioch of Syria and finish out his days ministering to the saints there.

But, if Paul did that, in fact, if he took advantage of any of the opportunities to ease the burden on himself there would be one glaring reality. **He would not finish his course with joy and that was more valuable to him than even his life.**

Young men are not often taught this in Bible College or Seminary, but they should be.

For those who are the recipients of such a ministry there is great responsibility.

28 Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood.

As overseers, feed the flock, with exactly the same goals as Paul had. It is the church that belongs to God, that He has purchased with the blood of His Own Son.

Here we see the way that Paul saw the individual churches, the high regard in which he held them. Each of them was a special treasure to him, so valuable that whatever he had to suffer for it was counted as nothing by him.

Note: When you hear people belittling a true church or see them treating it as a thing of little value, know this, the Holy Spirit Who was motivating Paul is not motivating these.

It is clear that Paul wanted the leaders he was leaving behind to have the same goals, burdens and attitudes he held. The design was and is that men like Paul pass the baton to others who will serve in the same spirit and with the same goals he did. The, when their course is done, they were to pass the leadership to others who would continue the process.

But, of course, God knew that there would be those who would fail at reproducing Paul's ministry and would not pass his vision on to a new generation of leaders. Thus it became, and continue to be, the responsibility of every man who God raises us to read such passages as those before us today and start the process over again.

How many times this has happened across the two thousand years since this meeting with the Ephesian elders only the Great Judgment will reveal.

But, understand this, the vision of Paul is just as valid today as it ever was.

God sent His Own Son into the World to bear the sins of all who would repent and believe on Him. Those whom He saves, those who trust in Christ's Work, He would have to grow continually in holiness to His Honor and Glory. This is the Truth.