

If I had but One Sermon to Preach

A Study of Acts 20:17-38

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Introduction: There are occasions in our lives in which we should reflect upon those things that will really last.

- A. Paul had such an occasion when he called for the elders at Ephesus in Acts 20.
 - 1. While this was not Paul's last sermon, it was to be his last sermon to them.
 - 2. At this occasion as Paul did in all occasions, he sought to point them to Jesus Christ. **(2 Cor 4:5-6)**
 - 3. The emotion of this separation was a good time for Paul to bring their attention to the things that will really last.
- B. This week has reminded us once again of the brevity of life.
 - 1. This is always for our good when we have a living faith. **(Ps 90:12)**
 - 2. The truth is that a preacher should preach every sermon as if it were his last!
 - 3. What things would you tell your loved ones if it were your last words?

I. We must consistently live each day for the Lord (20:17-21)

- A. Paul set such an example that he could say "you know." **(20:18; 1 Cor 11:1)**
 - 1. Not only that, his example was from "the first day" and "always."
 - 2. When one has the right kind of heart they will set such an example. What they say and do in public will be what they do in private. **(2 Cor 4:1-2)**
 - 3. A clear conscience provides great strength in the face of the false accuser! **(Prov 28:1; Psa 23:4-5)**
- B. Paul set this example in adversity. **(20:19)**
 - 1. It is in adversity that we come to see who we really are!
 - 2. How can a man endure these things? He does by humility. The humble can take losses because he knows one who is greater! **(Phil 4:10-13)**
 - 3. How many have given in permanently to bitterness because of adversity?
- C. Paul worked with these Christians in their homes as well as in public. **(20:20)**
 - 1. Paul would have never had much influence if the only time he spent with these Christians were in the assemblies! Paul was not "promoting the pastor system!"
 - 2. We will never reach the lost nor influence one another until we open our homes and open our lives. **(Acts 9:26-28)**
- D. We must not neglect the foundation of faith and repentance. **(20:20-21)**
 - 1. When we neglect the heart we have accepted the religion of the Pharisees! **(Mt 15:8-9)**
 - 2. In these personal illustrations Paul was not "testifying" but rather giving emphasis to God's truth by example. We must not fear speaking of the Lord's blessings in our lives!
 - 3. Paul was determined to make personal application to their lives so they could receive what they needed! From what motivation do you teach?

II. We must continue with confidence and purpose in life. (20:22-24)

- A. Paul knew by inspiration that trouble lay ahead but he did not know the specifics. **(20:22-23)**

1. This did not phase him because he was already prepared for this when he became a Christian. Jesus prepared his disciples too. **(Jn 16:1-3)**
 2. Paul was more concerned about how his disciples handled his persecution! **(2 Cor 1:8-11)**
 3. When we give into bitterness we also affect those who we have taught! Paul showed them in these unfair times what genuine faith in God means.
- B. Paul knew there would be a finish line! **(20:24)**
1. If we would focus on the right things we would finish the race too. **(Heb 12:1-4)**
 2. Do you have the hope of heaven? **(1 Cor 9:24-27)**
- III. We must seek and demand the whole council of God (20:25-31)**
- A. When you are seeing a loved one for the last time there is concern for their safety!
1. Paul wanted them to see why he taught them as he did. The time is coming where they must seek and demand this kind of teaching. **(20:28)**
 2. If he had not taught in this way the “blood” of those he taught would be on his account at judgement day! Do you view teaching this way?
 3. Watch out when men are attacked for their personality and style. Are they teaching the truth? **(2 Cor 10:8-10; 1 Cor 4:14-17)**
 4. When a preacher caves in to the carnal pressures of brethren, he needs to repent! **(2 Tim 4:1-4)**
- B. There is a real danger of false teachers destroying a local church. **(20:29-31)**
1. There are many who have seen their loved ones forsake the love for the truth and go into various forms of liberalism.
 2. Preachers are often the major reason. Today there are many sources of error.
 3. Consider the common warnings about false teachers and teaching. **(Mt 7:15; 2 Pt 2:1-3, 18-19; 1 Jn 4:1; 2 Jn 9-11)**
 4. Would North Charlottesville want a man who would “for three years ... not cease to warn everyone night and day with tears?” **(20:31)**
 5. It may be a compliment to be accused of “negative preaching!”
- IV. We must keep our eyes on the goal. (20:32-38)**
- A. When we keep our eyes on who we are, how we got here and where we are going then we will humbly follow God. **(20:32)**
1. How many of you have tasted that the Lord is gracious? **(1 Pt 2:1-3)**
 2. When we focus on bitter attitudes and personal agendas of revenge, then God’s grace is not with us.
- B. We must not give in to covetousness. **(20:33-35)**
1. A real test of covetousness is in how we give to others!
 2. What kind of faith do we have? Are we self-centered or God-centered?
- C. Paul taught them the power of prayer. **(20:36-38)**
1. While they would be separated, they were not separated from God.
 2. Are you missing a loved one? Pray! **(1 Thess 5:25; 2 Thess 3:1)**
- Conclusion:** Let us each build our lives on God’s word which will never fail us!
- A. Which do you give more thought to: retirement or heaven?
 - B. What are you leaving your loved ones?