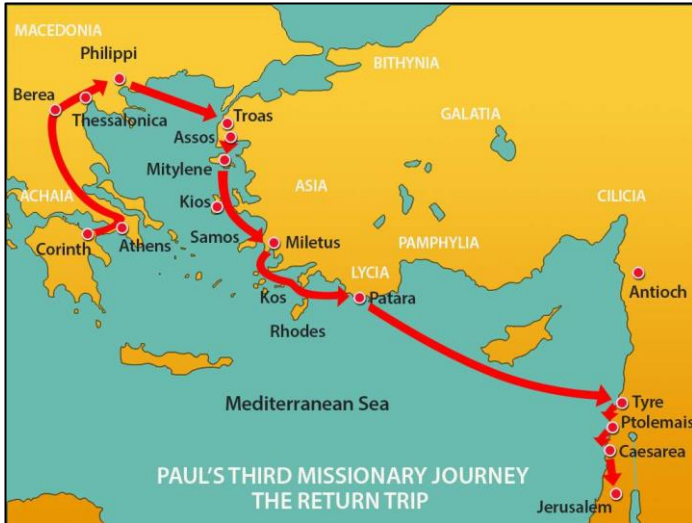
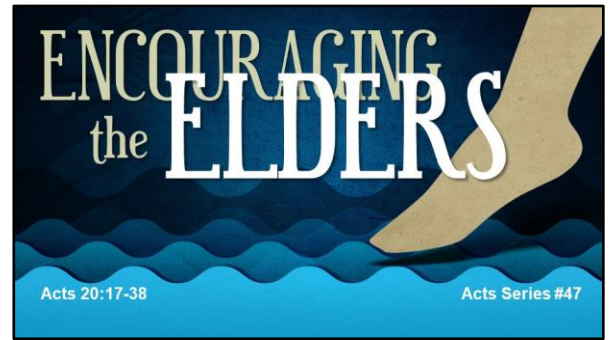




Message #47
“ENCOURAGING THE ELDERS”
(Acts 20:17-38)



Paul and his companions are now on the return trip of his Third Missionary Journey. Having gone back down to Corinth, and picked up the offering collected from the churches along the way (for the Jerusalem church), he is now keen to return to Jerusalem before Pentecost.

After spending seven days in Troas, where he met with some key leaders as well as seeing God miraculously raise Eutychus from the dead, Paul sails south towards Ephesus, but he bypasses the great city, instead, travelling on to Miletus (some 50kms from Ephesus). From Miletus, Paul summons the Ephesian church elders to meet with him one final time.

This was a very special time, very emotional. Paul was very close to these men. Probably, they had come to the Lord through Paul’s ministry, and he had nurtured them in their faith and overseen their progress to spiritual maturity and church leadership. Now, Paul wanted to share his heart with them one last time. (Interestingly, this is the only time in Acts that Paul speaks to a purely Christian audience.)

In this poignant meeting with the elders, Paul reviews the past, describes the present and prepares them for the future....

THE PAST

Paul looks back over his years of ministry and uses these reflections as a foundation for the advice that he will give the elders for their own continuing ministry leadership in Ephesus.

Read Acts 20:18-27.

How does Paul describe the character of his work in Ephesus?

In essence, Paul is asking these men to “look at my life as a model”.

Can you say to others, “Look at my life” as a good example of a Christian witness? Why/Why not?

In verse 19, Paul says that he served the Lord with “great humility and tears”. Paul “wept” for several reasons:

1. He grieved over the state of the lost (Romans 9:2-3).
2. He cried over weak, struggling, sinning, immature Christians (2 Corinthians 2:4)
3. He wept over the sinister threat posed by false teachers (Acts 20:31)

Obviously, Paul was moved very deeply over the spiritual condition of others.

How deeply is the salvation of others (or their rejection of it) felt by you?

Who are you most burdened for (for their spiritual healing/redemption/conversion)?

Take a moment now to pray for them.

In verse 21, Paul highlights two necessities of a true response to the gospel:

1. Repentance toward God (this involves the whole person...intellect, emotion and will).
2. Faith in the Lord Jesus Christ (not just turning FROM sin, but turning TO Christ).

(See 1 Thessalonians 1:9 and Ephesians 2:8-9).

Paul spoke to the elders of the MANNER of his ministry, the MOTIVE of his ministry, and the MESSAGE of his ministry. Read 1 Thessalonians 2:1-12 for more about Paul's relationship with his "spiritual children" in Christ.

THE PRESENT

True Christian witness will ultimately result in some form of persecution. Paul is a great example of this.

In **verses 22-24** Paul shifts the focus from the past to share what is happening in the present.

He says that he is heading off to Jerusalem where he expects imprisonment and, perhaps, even worse.

But Paul is not one to turn away, or hold back from what he believes God is calling him to do.

What are Paul's priorities as stated in 20:22-24?

How do your priorities compare and contrast with Paul's?

How was Paul able to stay motivated and focused in the face of such unrelenting oppression and certain persecution?

Do you agree with the following statement? Discuss.

Our souls are held by what they hold; slaves still are slaves in chains of gold.

Are there things that are holding you back from being fully obedient and free to serve the Lord?

In 20:26 Paul was able to declare that he had done everything that he could to proclaim the gospel and, therefore, he was not guilty of anyone's "blood" if they refused to respond to the gospel.

Could you state with similar assurance that you have always done all you could to proclaim Jesus?

THE FUTURE

Paul then instructs/exhorts these church leaders to take good care of their own spiritual lives and those of the people God has given them to care for. Just as Jesus is the Good Shepherd (John 10:11) they are to be His "under-shepherds for the sheep Jesus gave His life for.

Paul tells the leaders to:

- Shepherd the flock
- Guard the flock
- Study and pray
- Be free from self-interest



Sadly, the Ephesian church did see such attacks from false teachers in the years ahead. In his later letters to Timothy (who was then pastoring the Ephesian church) Paul condemned the false teachers that had arisen. (see: 1 Timothy 1:3-7; 2 Tim.3:1-9; 1 Tim.1:20; 2 Tim.1:15; 2 Tim.2:17)

What do Paul's instructions about the sheep he is leaving in the elder's care communicate about their value (20:28)?

As a Christian, what would you like your legacy to be, in your family, church and community? How are you working toward that end?

How can we use our lives to display the fact that God alone is worthy of worship: in what we say; in how we plan; and in how we treat others?
