

EXTRAORDINARY EVANGELISM

Acts 20:13-38

Paul needed some exercise after his strenuous night. He also needed and was longing for solitude and communion with God, such as were impossible in the crowded quarters on board the ship. So he sent the ship with his companions around the promontory, a distance of forty miles to Assos, while he refreshed himself with a walk of twenty miles across the Isthmus in order to join them there. It has been suggested that in this way he was able to circumvent his assassins, who had been foiled in their effort to kill him on the vessel on which he had intended to sail from Cenchrea, and who, he may have had reason to suspect, were still on his track. He got into the ship and they sailed uneventfully until they came to the seaport city of Miletus.

Paul could not take time to go to Ephesus, much as he desired to do so. After his arrival in Miletus, anxious to know the situation at Ephesus, Paul summoned the elders at the church at Ephesus to meet him at Miletus, a distance of twenty-eight or thirty miles. They came to him without delay.

His parting address to them is one of simplicity, pathos, and dignity. In it we find love without weakness, personal reference without egotism, tenderness and solemnity wonderfully blended. His address was characterized by remarkable frankness, tenderness, and fidelity. Paul's life was one of dedication, fidelity, endurance, diligence, and beneficence.

I. Paul's Manner.

Paul reminded the Ephesian elders of the spirit and character of his ministry among them. In his address he made frequent references to his own life. He challenged them to put their finger on one thing in his past record that was subject to suspicion. It gives one a wonderful sense of security if his past is without shadow. A good, clean record inspires a person. It makes a hero out of a coward.

Four judges examine our record. Our friends lay the mantle of charity about our mistakes and see us through kind eyes. Our enemies review our words and deeds in the light of their prejudice and disfavor. They even clothe our kind deeds with a garb of suspicion. We, ourselves, know more than our friends or our enemies know about our lives. We know we are not as good as our friends think we are, but we are not as bad as our enemies think we are. Our Lord is the court of last appeal. He knows more about us than our friends know, more than our enemies know, and more than we know about ourselves.

Paul's manner was characterized by:

1. Humility.

"Serving the Lord with all humility of mind." verse 19. Two things kept Paul humble, namely, his blessed Lord against whom he had committed such grievous sins and the bitterness of his enemies who plotted to take his life. Therefore, it was through his love for Christ and his fear of men that he remained humble.

Of the proud we read in the Bible that God "resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble." God turns a deaf ear to the proud. There is nothing that He appreciates in His children more than a spirit of genuine humility, and there is nothing He detests as much as an arrogant and haughty air. There are two classes of proud people--those who have something to be proud about, and those who only imagine they have, and ninety nine and nine-tenths of all the proud belong to the latter group.

2. Sincerity.

"Serving the Lord with all humility of mind, and with many tears." verse 19. Paul possessed an insatiable desire to see people saved. That was the one thing for which he lived. With him that was what really mattered. He knew what he had been saved from and to what he had been saved.

"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." He was tempted in all points like as we. In his times of weakness he cried to God for strength to resist and to be the victor instead of the victim. Wherever he went, and whatever he did, on this he could always rely--the Jews either would be on the dock for his boat to land or they would attend his services and try to break up the meetings.

3. Charity.

How did Paul repay the Jews for all their slanderous reports and threats to kill? He, like his Lord, and Stephen, the faithful deacon, returned love for hatred; good for evil. When they seemed about to take his life, he labored incessantly to bring divine life to them.

Paul not only gave them the standard of Christian life, but also the standard of the Christian ministry. He reminded them how he had served the Lord, how he had served the people, how he had upheld the truth, and how he had remained steadfast. He had lived in humility before them, had been compassionate toward them, had been faithful to them, had been a true shepherd, and called them to repentance and exhorted them to faith in Christ. Without prejudice he had offered the Christian hope to all men on the same terms.

Paul also gave them a standard of Christian courage. It was the courage to follow the leadership of the Holy Spirit, even though bonds and affliction awaited him. It was a courage to face opposition at any cost, even though his life was at stake. It was the courage to finish his course with joy in spite of uncertainty and of the persecutions that awaited him. His one consuming desire was that he might not fail in life's high resolve and that he might finish his course with joy.

II. Paul's Message.

Paul's address reveals his tender sympathy and pastoral heart. He recounted his ministry at Ephesus; his many temptations, trials, and tears; his fearless and faithful preaching in public and in private. He did not have any theories of men to defend, but he did have a revelation of God to declare.

1. Repentance toward God.

"Testifying both to the Jews, and also to the Greeks, repentance toward God." verse 21a. Have you repented of your sins?

2. Reliance upon Christ.

"And faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ." verse 21b. One can receive eternal life through faith in the finished work of Christ on the cross. He died for you. Have you received Him as your Saviour and Lord? "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved."

3. Resignation to the Holy Spirit.

Paul was utterly abandoned to the Holy Spirit. "Save that the Holy Ghost witnesseth in every city, saying that bonds and afflictions abide me." verse 23. The Holy Spirit had indicated that Paul was to suffer bonds and afflictions wherever he went. Instead of being crushed as a result of his knowing this fact, Paul could still say, "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." verse 24.

III. Paul's Mission.

1. To finish his course.

"So that I might finish my course with joy." Paul had that course before him throughout his ministry. When he first met Christ, he said, "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?" He had a fixed resolve to fulfill his mission, and to finish his work with credit and honor. He had a definite purpose in his life. He encountered many adversaries. He felt secure in his journey, even though there were many hindrances in the way. He was imprisoned many times for his faith. He was never moved by dangers or hardships.

2. To feed the flock of God. verse 28.

A pastor is the undershepherd over the flock. He is charged with many grave responsibilities. He is to feed them. He is to watch over them. He is to protect them. He is to lead them.

If the churches of our Lord are to live and to thrive, men must still give their lives for them. Churches live and grow on self-denial, self-surrender, and self-sacrifice. Our Lord established His churches, outlined their programs, ordained their doctrines and prescribed their mission. They will be attacked both from without and from within.

3. To fortify Christians.

He warned the saints at Ephesus that after his departure, "grievous wolves" would enter their ranks, "not sparing the flock." He told them that even some among their number would rise up and promote false doctrines, "to draw away disciples after them." "Therefore watch, and remember, that by the space of three years I ceased not to warn every one night and day with tears." verse 31.

IV. Paul's Method.

1. He commends to God. verse 32.

The word, "commend," means to "recommend as worthy of notice; praise." He turned them over to the Lord and to His Word which told them of the grace of their Lord.

2. He communes with God.

At the conclusion of his word of exhortation to them, they accompanied him to his ship. Before getting on board, "He kneeled down, and prayed with them all." verse 36. He prayed with them and for them because he lived on praying ground. He praised them to God, and then prayed to God for them.

What a scene at that farewell party. It was not a merry-making occasion, but one filled with sadness. They embraced him and kissed him. Paul dearly loved his converts and friends, and they in turn loved him devotedly. From this incident we learn three simple truths:

(1) Separations are inevitable.

All earthly ties must be broken. The happiest marriage must end in sorrowful separation. The warmest friendships must end at the grave if not sooner. When the hour of parting comes, it is a blessing to face it with a clear conscience and with no remorse or regret over unhappy relationships and unfinished duties.

(2) Separation may be profitable.

When Jesus was about to leave His disciples the last time, He said, "It is expedient for you that I go away." When the eaglet grows too large to be mothered, it is expedient for the mother to force it out of its nest to find food for itself. The time comes in every life when the individual needs to be thrown out upon his own responsibilities.

(3) Separation may be hopeful.

When Paul left his brethren on the sands of the sea at Miletus, they were very sorrowful, for he told them "that they should see his face no more." But in the dim distance there loomed a brighter day--one that gave promise that they would meet again never more to part.

It is unspeakably sad when we give up our loved ones to realize that the parting is final, that there never can be a reunion, and that the goodbye is for both time and eternity. At such times not one ray of light penetrates the dense darkness for those who are without the hope of the Gospel.