

PAUL'S FAREWELL MESSAGE

ACTS 20:17-35 • TV-040A

A television broadcast sermon delivered

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By

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Acts 20:17-35

"And from Miletus he sent to Ephesus, and called the elders of the church. 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, 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: [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, Testifying both to the Jews, and also to the Greeks, repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ. And now, behold, I go bound in the spirit unto Jerusalem, not knowing the things that shall befall me there: Save that the Holy Ghost witnesseth in every city, saying that bonds and afflictions abide me. 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. And now, behold, I know that ye all, among whom I have gone preaching the kingdom of God, shall see my face no more. Wherefore I take you to record this day, that I [am] pure from the blood of all [men]. For I have not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of God. 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. For I know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock. Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, 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. 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. I have coveted no man's silver, or gold, or apparel. Yea, ye yourselves know, that

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these hands have ministered unto my necessities, and to them that were with me. 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."

I'm speaking to you today on the subject: "PAUL'S FAREWELL MESSAGE."

Now, some of you have written saying that you like to follow in your Bibles while I'm bringing the message. I wish you'd do that for the program today especially.

I want you to turn to **chapter 20** of the book of **Acts**. We're going to take our message from **verses 17-35**. Now, that's **Acts 20:17-35**. And the subject will be: "PAUL'S FAREWELL MESSAGE."

Now, the apostle Paul was leaving his friends at Ephesus. They would see him no more. This was his farewell message. These were the last words that they heard him speak on this earth.

And Paul did not spend this time with these men bragging about the converts he'd won to the Lord while he was in their city. And Paul did not spend this time with these men boasting of the books he had written or the sermons he'd preached or the churches he organized.

And he did not spend this time seeking their praise and their gratitude or a testimonial to his service for God in the city of Ephesus.

I want us to look at the apostle's farewell. I want us to listen to this chosen, anointed, God-sent man. Listen to what he says to these people as he's preaching his farewell message, his last sermon, four things that he brings out.

First of all: In **verse 19 of Acts chapter 20**; look at it in your Bible. Paul says, "*I have served the Lord with all humility of mind.*" "I'm leaving you now. I've been with you for three years, but you will remember one thing. During those three years that I preached to you I have served the Lord with humility."

Listen to him throughout all of his epistles. Listen to Paul speak, "*I am what I am by the grace of God.*" Again he said, "*I'm not worthy to be called an apostle.*" Again, he said, "*I am less than the least of all the saints.*" And again, "*This is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance that Jesus Christ came into this world to save sinners of whom I am the chief.*"

We need to learn from this. Here's one of the greatest preachers who ever lived. Here's a man who wrote the majority of the books of the New Testament, led of course, by the Holy Spirit.

Here's a man who suffered for Christ. Here's a man who preached all over the country who was a missionary, one of the first missionaries. Here's a man sent out by God himself, a chosen vessel to the Gentiles.

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And yet, as he speaks, he says, "*I am nothing. I am less than the least of all the saints.*" He said, "*I have served the Lord with humility.*" Let all who name the name of Christ be conscience of our imperfections.

We don't take titles of holiness. We don't wear religious uniforms, for we are nothing. We preach as dying men to dying men. The Scripture says in **2 Corinthians 12:11**; Paul's speaking here, he says; "*I am not one whit behind the chiefest apostle.* I am not behind the chief; pick out the chief apostle; I'm not behind him." And yet, he says, "*I am nothing.*"

In **Philippians chapter 3:12** he says; "*I count not myself to have apprehended,*" (that is, I haven't arrived. I don't have the answers for every subject. I have not arrived. And I am not perfect). Let all who name the name of Christ recognize with the apostle Paul our own imperfections and learn to preach, and witness, and teach, as dying men to dying men.

And then let all who name the name of Christ remember that our gifts, whatever gifts we have, are borrowed gifts. Paul wrote in **1 Corinthians 4:7**, "*Who maketh thee to differ? What do you have that you have not received? Now, if you've received it why do you boast as if you'd not received it,* (as if it came from you)." Our minds are enlightened by the grace of God. Our hearts are made to love by the grace of God. Our lips are touched by the grace of God.

And He who gave these gifts can just as easily take them away. Our gifts are borrowed gifts. And our total dependence, whether preaching, teaching, witnessing, or living; our total dependence is on the Holy Spirit.

It is the Holy Spirit who convinces me of sin; it is not me, nor my words, nor my message. It is the Holy Spirit who reveals Christ. Christ must be revealed to the heart. The sinner must be given eyes to behold the beauty of Christ and ears to hear the voice of Christ and a heart to understand the work of Christ. The substitutionary work of Christ to the unbeliever, to the natural man, is foolishness. But to the believer, to the man whose eyes have been open, whose ears have been unstopped and his heart has been illuminated; the Gospel of Jesus Christ, the substitutionary work of Christ, is the; "*Wisdom of God and it is the power of God.*"

He sees in that death of Christ God's wisdom and God's justice satisfied and God's law honored. So; "*It's not unto us O Lord, not unto us but unto thy name, give glory.*"

It shouldn't be difficult for us to serve the Lord with humility. It shouldn't be difficult at all for us to do whatever we're doing, whether we're giving, praying, preaching, or singing. It shouldn't be difficult for us to conduct ourselves in a humble fashion.

Actually; we ought to be amazed that God almighty would even condescend to fellowship with us. We ought to be amazed in our hearts and in our souls that a holy God would condescend to walk with us.

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And the only way He can commune with us and fellowship with us and walk with us is because of Jesus Christ, not because of ourselves. So that's the first thing that Paul says as he's bringing this farewell message.

He stands before his elders at Ephesus after three years of preaching and teaching and he says; "I want you to remember this: I have served the Lord with humility. I know what I am and I know whose I am. I know my need. I know my sins. I know my insufficiency. I know that I'm a man just like you and what I preach to you I preach to myself."

Secondly: Look at **verse 20**. Here I believe is the second point in Paul's farewell message; he says; "*I have kept back nothing profitable unto you.*"

And then in **verse 21** he declares the two essential things that are profitable unto you. He said; "*I have declared unto you repentance toward God and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ.*" That's been my two-fold message, repentance toward God and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ."

Now there was an old pastor by the name of Dodd, old Phillip Dodd. And he used to preach so much from **Acts 20:21** on repentance toward God and faith in Jesus Christ that they called him, "Old repentance and faith." That's what folks called him. They nicknamed him old pastor Dodd; "Well here comes old repentance and faith; who's going to preach Sunday, old repentance and faith?"

But he explained it this way; he declared; "If I die in the pulpit, I desire to die preaching repentance toward God and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ. And if I die out of the pulpit I desire to die practicing repentance toward God and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ."

What is repentance toward God? David said, "*O Lord, against thee and thee only have I sinned and done this evil in thy sight.*" Repentance my friend is a saving repentance. If it's true repentance; now get this, it is toward God.

It's not being sorry you got caught. It's not being sorry that you lost something in the process. It's not being sorry that you've made a mess of your life. It's not being sorry that you've committed sin against an individual.

Repentance, if it's true repentance, if it's saving repentance, is always toward God. Paul said; "*There's an earthly sorrow that bringeth death. There's a godly sorrow that worketh repentance.*"

And that's the kind of sorrow that bringeth true repentance is when I realize that my sins are against God; against God I've sinned. "*Against thee and thee only have I sinned*" and my sin is against God.

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I have violated His law. I have transgressed His commandment. I have come short of His glory and the problem is not between me and men; the problem is between me and God. That's where I am in trouble.

It's what happened in the Garden of Eden. It's what happened on the cross of Calvary. It's what happened when God is supposed to be enthroned in my heart and His scepter reigning over me and I'm supposed to be in my heart, mind, and soul, subject to my King, and I have committed treason against my King.

That's my problem right there! These little troubles that we have every day in life; that's not the problem, the problem between me and God is not that I stole a watermelon or played hooky from school or went to a picture show; that's not the problem.

The problem between me and God is hatred in my heart for His Holy reign and His Holy rule and His Holy law. It's because I've tried to throw God off His throne. It's because I've crucified His Son. It's because it's a natural rebellion inborn and inbred in me against God almighty and His law.

And repentance is not only over one particular sin or two particular sins; repentance is over the nature of sin.

You haven't got a hold of repentance yet until you repent, not only for what you've done, but for what you are. That's where repentance is. That's the foundation of repentance. It's not what I've done it's what I am. It's what causes me to do what I do. That's where I repent.

And repentance is a continual state. Repentance is not an isolated act that takes place in time past. Somebody said; "Well, I repented 20 years ago." No you didn't either, not unless you're still repenting. I have repented; I am repenting, and I shall repent.

Paul said; "*I have kept back nothing profitable unto you*" and this is the most profitable thing of all, first, repentance toward God. You've got to find out what sin is and who sin is against, what sin is; it's an inward principle. It's a nature. It's against God.

And the only solution, the only remedy, is faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ. Now watch these words, "*toward*." Paul said; "I have kept back nothing profitable unto you. I have preached repentance toward God and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ."

Faith is not toward the church, not toward the Bible, but toward our Lord Jesus Christ. He is the object of faith. Saving faith has one object; it is a person. It is that person's deity, that person's suretyship, that person's substitution, that person's mediatorial work, and that person's crowning glory.

That's what faith is. It's in a person. I believe Jesus Christ came into this world as my Redeemer, as my Surety, as my Saviour, and as my Substitute. And He took upon himself human flesh and lived as a human being on this earth, God in the flesh, the God-man.

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And He met the law and obeyed it and He went to the cross and took my sins and paid for them. Faith has one object, Christ. And I'll tell you this; faith has one source and that's Christ. "*He's the author and finisher of our faith.*"

And faith has one reason for hope and that's Christ, not because of anything I do or shall do, but because of what He did. And faith has one foundation and that's the Lord Jesus Christ.

And faith is a continual principle. It's a state of being. A man didn't once believe on Christ and now he doesn't. That's an impossibility. Christ is our life. When Christ comes into dwell we die. "*And the life we now live in the flesh we live by the faith of the Son of God who loved us and gave himself for us.*" I have believed, I am believing, I shall continue to believe.

**"My faith has found a resting place
Not in device or creed
I'll trust the ever living one
His wounds for me shall plead**

**Enough for me that Jesus saves
This ends my fear and doubt
A sinful soul I came to Him
He'll never cast me out.**

**I need no other argument
I need no other plea
It's enough that Jesus died
That He died for me."**

Paul says; "I've served the Lord among you with humility and I have not shunned, I've kept back nothing profitable unto you. I've preached unto you clearly repentance toward God, not toward men, toward God."

Not even toward self, toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ, the one Saviour, the one Redeemer, the one Mediator, the one Substitute; "*We are complete in Him who is made unto us wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption.*"

Now the third point of his message; now stay with me right here. And Paul said as he continued this farewell message, look at **verse 27**; "*I have not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of God.*"

"I have served the Lord with humility. I've kept back nothing profitable unto you. I have not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of God."

Now my friend; we need to be able to learn to say this. I may not preach with the power that I desire and I don't. I may not preach with the enthusiasm and earnestness that I should and I'm

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sure that I don't. I may not preach with the effectiveness that I covet and that's certainly so. And I may not preach with the wisdom that I'd like to have and that's certainly so. And I ask God to give me that wisdom.

But I'm telling you this; one charge that must not be leveled against a minister or a Sunday school teacher or an elder, deacon, or any of God's children, is that I have through covetousness and fear and seeking the praise of men, left out part of the Word of God.

What a horrible, horrible charge to be leveled at any of God's servants, that we have omitted parts of this book because we covet men's possessions or we covet their praise or we fill their purses. What a horrible charge!

Paul said; (look down at **verse 33**) he said; "*While I've been with you I have coveted no man's silver, gold, or apparel.* I want nothing that you have." And I believe he could add this; I have coveted no man's praise. I have coveted no man's friendship. I have not sought to make disciples to follow after me at the expense of God's Holy Word.

Now you listen to me; I don't care who it is; we're not servants of Christ if we lean on the arm of flesh for our support. We're not servants of Christ if we seek to win disciples for our cause, or our program, or our denomination, or if we seek to gain support by preaching what men want to hear." Paul said; "*I have not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of God.*"

Let me ask you seven questions. Will you think for me a moment? Shall we try to make God known by withholding His true attributes? God is love but God is just. God is merciful but God is truth. And God is gracious but God is sovereign.

And we must not keep back the glory, justice, power, and the awesomeness of God almighty. We must preach God in all His attributes. Shall we try to win men to Christ by preaching another Jesus, a Jesus of our own imagination?

That's what Paul said in **2 Corinthians 11:4**; "*They'll come preaching another Jesus and another spirit and another Gospel.*" Why? To make disciples, to get numbers, to get crowds, to get people down the aisle, to make reports, to have baptisms, to make an impression and to glory in men's flesh.

Shall we do that? Shall we preach half a Jesus? Are we going to preach Christ the sovereign, Priest, and King?

Thirdly: Shall we try to convert men by preaching another Gospel or shall we declare the Gospel of God's glory and leave this work of conversion in the hands of the Holy Spirit?

Shall we try to make the cross acceptable by taking away the offense? Shall we try to make the cross of Christ acceptable and glamorous by taking the offense out of it? Paul said; "The Gospel of the cross is offensive." It's called foolishness by this world. The world despises the Gospel of substitution. It hasn't changed.

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In the next place; shall we try to mix God's grace and man's works? Paul plainly declares throughout the whole book of Romans; "Salvation is all of grace or all of works;" it's not mixed. It cannot be mixed.

We can't mix man's dignity and God's deity. We can't mix man's works and God's grace; it's got to be all of God. Shall we give a man a hope for heaven that is not a new creature in Christ? Shall we keep padding our rolls with unconverted professors of faith and pat them on the back when we see them, Christmas and Easter, and tell them they're all right and they're in the Lord, when we know they're not?

Shall we compromise the Gospel of redeeming grace to win the support of natural men? What shall I do on this TV program in order to get your letters and get your support and get your help, shall I compromise the Gospel of Jesus Christ?

The answer is an emphatic no! Paul said; "*I have not shunned to declare unto you the whole counsel of God.*" And though all men forsake us, and though all men turn from us, and Paul said, "They did. All men have forsaken me. Only Luke is with me." He said, "*I will not shun to declare unto you the whole counsel of God.*"

I know this; we're on the trail of God's sheep. Out yonder somewhere are God's sheep and they're going to hear His voice. They're not going to hear the voice of a stranger. A stranger's voice they will not follow.

They're going to hear His voice. And we must, we must give them the Word of God, not what we think they ought to have and what they ought to hear, but the Word of God, unmixed with our ideas, and unmixed with our creeds.

It is not a denomination or a program or a church that we're promoting; it's the glory of God almighty. It's to bring sinners, not to ourselves, or to our buildings, or to our creeds, but it's to bring sinners to Christ.

Listen to Paul; "*O that I may win Christ and be found in Him. O that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection.*" And that's what I want for you, that you may win Christ, not that I may win your approval or win your fellowship or win your support; I want you to win Christ, that you might know Him, whom to know is life eternal, that you might rest in Him.

And that brings us to the fifth point and this is one of my most important points. I want you to listen carefully to it. Paul in bidding farewell to this group of people; he preached to them I think about three years and he was leaving.

No more would they hear him and no more would they see his face, ever again. This was his last message. And he says now; "Since I've been with you I've served the Lord with humility and I've kept back nothing profitable unto you."

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"I've whittled down the flesh. I've stripped the flesh. I've knocked the foundations out from under the flesh. I've preached repentance toward God and faith toward Jesus Christ. And I've not courted your support; I've coveted no man's apparel or gold, silver, friendship, or fellowship. I've not shunned to declare unto you the whole counsel of God."

Fifth: He said, "*I commend (commit) you to God; and His Word*"

Look at it in **verse 32**; it says; "*I commend you to God and the Word of His grace.*" But the word there; get you an Amplified Bible or a Greek New Testament and you'll find the word is "I commit you to God."

"I commit you to God to save you. I commit you to God to teach you. I commit you to God to protect you. I commit you to God to care for you."

Now, I know the present day method is not this at all. The present day method is for me to design my message until I get down to a certain point and have an organ start playing and a choir start softly singing.

And I'm supposed to draw some kind of imaginary net and I'm supposed to get people to come to the front, to come to me, to come to an altar, to come to a church, to come to an ordinance, or to come to something physical.

But this my friend cannot save. We preach that you're a sinner. We preach that your sins are against God. Your guilt; we preach your guilt and your need. We preach Christ as the only Saviour and when we close this message we commit you to Him.

I say unto you; don't come unto me; seek the Lord. Go off yonder in your own bedroom or in your closet and cry out to God for mercy. Be like the Publican in the temple. Don't come down and shake a preacher's hand and have him tell you what to say and then shake your hand and tell you you're saved, you're all fixed up and you'll go to heaven when you die, your names in the Lamb's Book of Life.

He can't save you, but God can. He can't speak peace to your heart but God can. He can't put a song in your heart but God can. And that's what I'm telling you to do. I'm telling you that when I finish this message today; get alone with the Lord like the Publican in the temple and cry; "God be merciful to me a sinner. I've received Christ as my Lord and Saviour. I commit myself to the Son of God."

Paul says; "I commit you to God. I preached to you. I've not shunned to declare unto you the whole counsel of God. I've kept back nothing profitable unto you. Now I commit you to God to save you, to keep you, care for you, protect you, and to provide for you."

And watch this now; "*And I commit you to His Word of His grace which is able to build you up.*" His Word is able to build you up in the faith. His Word is able to cleanse you. His Word is able to give you assurance.

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I don't have a pamphlet to send you on how to be saved. You get you a Bible. I don't have a pamphlet to send you on how to live for God or how to anything else. I commend you to the Word of God.

I commit you to God to save you and I commit you to His Word to teach you. Don't come to me; go to Christ. Don't turn to a human vessel or to human writing; turn to His Word. He said, "*My Word, shall not return void. It shall accomplish that whereunto I have sent it, as newborn babes desire the sincere milk of God's Word that you may grow.*"

"Wherewithal shall a young man cleanse his way, by taking heed of the Word of God?" You lay these tracks and pamphlets and books and "How To Books" and "How Not To Books" aside and buy you a Bible and bury yourself in God's Word.

That's what Paul said to these people: "I commit you to God to save you." And I commit you to His Word, His Word of grace to teach you and to build you up in the faith, to strengthen you, and give you assurance and make you what you ought to be. "*Faith cometh by hearing and hearing by the Word of God.*"