

Farewell Speech

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Acts 20:17-38

In our ministry, Sevan and I had to give several farewell speeches. We served in several churches around the world. It is not easy to say goodbye for people you loved, served, and taught. You wonder what the final words should be. Who will continue the ministry that was planted many years ago?

Today we have arrived to Paul's final words to the leaders of the church in Ephesus church.

This is the only record we have of a speech that Paul gave to believers, and its contents are remarkably similar to his letters (also addressed to believers). The Pastoral Letters were written to elders, and they have a remarkable number of points in common with this speech.¹

Also, there are similarities of teaching of Jesus to the disciples in the upper room. "When Jesus announced that in just a short while they would see him no more; although his departure would ultimately be to their benefit. In that regard, Paul echoed those words of Christ to his disciples."²

Paul's talk has three main themes. (1) He defends his behavior, presenting it as an example to Ephesian elders (vv. 18–27, 33–35). (2) He presents a charge along with a warning (vv. 28–30). (3) Finally, he commits them to God (v. 32).

1. Advice to the Elders

From Miletus, Paul sent to Ephesus for the elders of the church. ¹⁸ When they arrived, he said to them: "You know how I lived the whole time I was with you, from the first day I came into the province of Asia. ¹⁹ I served the Lord with great humility and with tears and in the midst of severe testing by the plots of my Jewish opponents. ²⁰ You know that I have not hesitated to preach anything that would be helpful to you but have taught you publicly and from house to house. ²¹ I have declared to both Jews and Greeks that they must turn to God in repentance and have faith in our Lord Jesus. (Acts 20:17-21 NIV)

-We find elders gathered with Paul in **Miletus**. His words of encouragement are very helpful.

“You know how I lived the whole time I was with you... (Acts 20:18 NIV)

There is nothing replaces being with someone. Sometimes we write to each other, “I am sorry I was not with you in person, but I was with you in my thoughts.” Well, thanks, but nothing replaces being with someone.

-He was with them doing what? Serving the Lord.

-How? With humility, and tears on their behalf, tears of prayer.

For I wrote you out of great distress and anguish of heart and with many tears, not to grieve you but to let you know the depth of my love for you.

(2 Cor. 2:4)

Please notice, the early church endured **hardship and trials**. Paul was with them in those days and served them with love.

- Also, we see here an important action in serving. Paul preached from door to door, house to house, teaching **the truth of the Gospel of Jesus Christ**.

- Paul was an expert in building bridges. He preached to the Jews and the Greeks, inviting both to turn to God, which meant repentance (turn around), and have faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

- Paul did not compromise the Gospel’s message. While serving them, he also taught them.

“You know that I have not hesitated to preach anything...”

I do ask myself, “Nerses, what did you keep back, or hesitated to preach?” Oh, I will face my God one day, and I will be accountable for my service to you...

- Paul’s love is an active love. **Repentance and faith in Jesus**. This is my daily topic to you. We need to turn to Jesus, and we need Him to strengthen our faith.

- PACC leaders, all leaders, please notice the biblical command to us: when God calls you to serve at any church, you should first love those people, so you can care for them. Please don’t serve as an obligation, or because badveli told you...

2. Compelled, Bound, Warned and Guided by the Spirit Հոգիով Կապուած

²² “And now, compelled by the Spirit, I am going to Jerusalem, not knowing what will happen to me there. ²³ I only know that in every city the Holy Spirit warns me that prison and hardships are facing me. ²⁴ However, I consider my life worth nothing to me; my only aim is to finish the race and complete the task the Lord Jesus has given me—the task of testifying to the good news of God’s grace.

²⁵ “Now I know that none of you among whom I have gone about preaching the kingdom will ever see me again. ²⁶ Therefore, I declare to

you today that I am innocent of the blood of any of you. ²⁷ For I have not hesitated to proclaim to you the whole will of God. (Acts 20:22-27 NIV11)

The Spirit of the Lord guides Paul and his friends. If you remember, Paul wanted to go to Asia Minor and the Spirit of God did not allow him. Then we saw how the Holy Spirit guided him to go.

We see here the Spirit of God will guide Paul: on the one hand, the Spirit will restrain and warn him, and on the other hand the Spirit will guide him to “continue the race” to teach, to preach, to testify.

Paul was telling his friends that he was not afraid. What lay ahead of him was his call. He knew he would face hardship in Jerusalem. That did not stop him from his call and mission.

Do I do the same? Am I afraid what will happen to me if I go to a hostile place? It is what the Lord Jesus Christ had set him aside to do. What mattered to him was to finish the race...

For I am already being poured out like a drink offering, and the time for my departure is near. ⁷ I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. (2 Tim 4:6,7 NIV)

When Sevan and I prayed and decided to come to SF to serve in 2005, many people did not understand why we were going there.

Why are you leaving a secure place and go to an unknown place?

We were worried about being uprooted from the place we were born and raised.

We were worried about raising our kids here in the US.

We were not certain whether the congregation would accept us or not.

But when you have calling, you just accept and move forward.

3. Take Care of the Flock, Watch out!

²⁸ Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers. Be shepherds of the church of God, which he bought with his own blood. ²⁹ I know that after I leave, savage wolves will come in among you and will not spare the flock. ³⁰ Even from your own number men will arise and distort the truth in order to draw away disciples after them. ³¹ So be on your guard! Remember that for three years I never stopped warning each of you night and day with tears. (Acts 20:28-31 NIV)

- First, Paul warns to leaders of the church to remember to **take care of themselves.**

Illustration: When you board the plane, they give you instructions in case there is an emergency. Let us say in case of emergency those oxygen masks come down from the top. If you have a child with you, first you need to put the mask on yourself, then you can assist the person next to you.

Love your neighbor as yourself.

- I think many of us do not take care of ourselves. Do you have a Sabbath in your life, on a weekly basis?

- I believe one of the main issues with the church leadership in general is to neglect our personal spiritual food.

I am reading a book **Lead with Prayer** by Ryan Scoog, Peter Greer and Cameron Doolittle. In it the emphasis is to all leaders of the church to lead with prayer. Prayer should not be a spare tire.

Prayer, silence, reading, continue education, relaxing, breathing, contemplating, exercising... Take time to yourself, otherwise you will burn out. **Keep watch over yourselves...**

- Next, **watch over the flock.**

Savage wolves will come from the outside, also from the inside and you will have false teachers which will distort the truth.

Illustration:

“Harvard, Princeton, Yale-- the most prestigious secular universities in America were started as evangelical Christian seminaries, totally committed to the inerrancy of sacred Scripture. Those who hold that view today need safe-conduct passage to walk on those campuses.”³

Be on your guard.

“Watch and pray” was my theme during the Lent season. That theme does not end. “Watch and pray...so that you don’t enter to temptation. We need to be alert to know the Truth, and teach it to our kids, youth, adults...

Although Paul uses here the term “savage wolves,” but also Jesus warned us describing them in a different way: wolves that look like sheep:

“Watch out for false prophets. They come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves. ¹⁶By their fruit you will recognize them. Do people pick grapes from thornbushes, or figs from thistles? (Matthew 7:15-16 NIV)

In summary, we should be watchful for our personal life, our spiritual personal growth, and equip ourselves and our flock, our church, our bible study groups, our Sunday school kids, youth the with the Word of God.

Later when Apostle John writes the book of Revelation, he writes the Christ’s message to seven churches one of which is the church of Ephesus. Even with all

the warnings Paul gave to them leadership, it seems they drifted. The Lord Jesus rebukes them saying:

You have forsaken the love you had at first. ⁵ Consider how far you have fallen! Repent and do the things you did at first. (Rev 2:4,5 NIV)

4. Commending (or entrusting) them to God and God's Provision

³² "Now I commit you to God and to the word of his grace, which can build you up and give you an inheritance among all those who are sanctified. ³³ I have not coveted anyone's silver or gold or clothing. ³⁴ You yourselves know that these hands of mine have supplied my own needs and the needs of my companions. ³⁵ In everything I did, I showed you that by this kind of hard work we must help the weak, remembering the words the Lord Jesus himself said: 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.' " (Acts 20:32-35 NIV)

The final words of Paul. He must leave now, but how can he leave? To whom he should he commit the church he loved?

Every time we left a church. We wondered what would happen to them. But God raised amazing young people to do His work. It is His work, not ours.

I commit you to God and to the word of his grace.

He entrusts them to God and to the Word of his grace, **the Gospel.**

The power of the Gospel is amazing. God will do His Work in us. Paul is confident that after he leaves, the Gospel will be spread.

And also, he reminds them that he worked hard not to be attached to gold and silver. Paul was a tentmaker, and he took care of his own financial needs, but he highly recommended not to forget the needy and the weak.

5. Farewell in Prayer

³⁶ When Paul had finished speaking, he knelt down with all of them and prayed. ³⁷ They all wept as they embraced him and kissed him. ³⁸ What grieved them most was his statement that they would never see his face again. Then they accompanied him to the ship. (Acts 20:36-38 NIV)

Paul says goodbye to his beloved people on the shores of Miletus, and they watch him go as the ship that gradually disappears. Paul leaves behind the Message, the Good News of Jesus Christ.

Application:

1. Follow God's calling to you. **"I only know that in every city the Holy Spirit warns me that prison and hardships are facing me." (23)** Paul knew he would face all this hardship, but he still went.

2. Take care of yourself. Both spiritually and physically. **“Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers.” (28)** As you serve, don’t forget your own spiritual nourishment.
3. Watch out from the wolves from the outside and the inside which are more dangerous because they look like sheep.
4. If God leads to leave, don’t worry. Remember it’s His work, not yours.

Also

Open your eyes to see “others”. Where are the needs. Who is hurting?

How can you listen to people who are hurting and pray with them.

1. Darrell L. Bock, *NIV Study Bible Commentary Luke*, P 534

Both have autobiographical sections (vv. 18–27, 33–35; 1 Tim. 1:12–16; 2 Tim. 2:8–10; 4:6–18) and both emphasize the importance of example (Acts 20:18–27, 31, 33–35; 1 Tim. 4:12; Titus 2:7), of finishing the race (Acts 20:24; 2 Tim. 4:7), of hard work (Acts 20:18–21, 35; 2 Tim. 2:6), of suffering (Acts 20:22–25; 2 Tim. 1:8, 12; 2:3, 9–10; 4:6), of impending trouble (Acts 20:22–25; 2 Tim. 4:6–7), of communicating a body of truth carefully (Acts 20:20, 26–27, 32; 1 Tim. 6:20; 2 Tim. 2:2, 15), of false teachers coming from within the church (Acts 20:29–31; 2 Tim. 4:3–4), of being on guard against certain people (Acts 20:30–31; 2 Tim. 4:14–15), of the importance of leaders looking after their own lives (Acts 20:26; 1 Tim. 4:7, 15–16; 2 Tim. 2), of tears of concern (Acts 20:19, 31; 2 Tim. 1:4), of the primacy of the ministry of the Word (Acts 20:20, 26–27, 32; 1 Tim. 4:13–14; 2 Tim. 4:2), of the ability of the Word to help keep people in the faith (Acts 20:32; 2 Tim. 3:16–17), etc.

2. R.C. Sproul, *You Will Be My Witness to the End of the Earth Acts* P309

3. R.C. Sproul, *You Will Be My Witnesses to the End of the Earth- Acts* P 311