

READ Acts 19:8-10

As Paul went about sharing the Gospel across many borders and in many lands as is recorded here in Acts, he wasn't exactly known for growing roots and spending large spans of time in any particular place. It is not uncommon to read of Paul stopping in for quick visits in town after town while on his preaching journeys. His goal was to share the good news of Jesus with as many as he could. It is for this reason that what we read here in **Acts 19:8-10** is often considered odd.

As far as we can tell from Scripture, Paul's stay in Ephesus (around 3 years by 1st century counting) was his longest stay in any one place. Yet, we should not be surprised by what is said in **v.10** as Luke records, *"This went on for two years, so that all the residents of Asia, both Jews and Greeks, heard the word of the Lord."* If Paul could accomplish as much as he did during short stays, we should expect nothing less than what is said when he stayed in one place for a longer length of time. If we're being honest, a three years stay for Paul is probably equivalent to a 10-15 year stay for many preachers today.

Speaking of going against the norm, it is often said that most preachers stay at their first work for 2-4 years, and yet we have been blessed by God to have worked with this church family for the last nearly seven years. For this we are thankful to God, but we also saddened that our time here has drawn to a close. As I considered what I would say during my final lesson here at Pleasant Plains, I recognized that there are a number of really solid farewell speeches found in Scripture. Jacob's is found in **Genesis 49**. Joshua delivers a powerful parting message in **Joshua 23,24**. The same should be said for Samuel's last speech given in **I Samuel 12**.

Yet, it is Paul's farewell address to the Ephesian elders that has resonated with me more than any other, and I would like for us to consider this farewell address of Paul that is found in **Acts 20:17-38**. Following his time in Ephesus that could certainly be defined as eventful, Paul continues on his journey back to Jerusalem. It is good for us to remind ourselves that Paul had to make a quick exit from Ephesus because of a near-riot caused by his preaching of the Gospel. He quickly calls together the disciples, encourages them, and then departs for Macedonia (**Acts 20:1**).

He bounces around from Macedonia to Greece and then back to Macedonia. He eventually ends up in Troas, travels to Assos, sails to Mitylene, Chios, Samos, and then eventually arrives in Miletus which is about 30 miles south of Ephesus. It is from Miletus that he calls for the elders of the church in Ephesus to come meet him, and he delivers what we are about to read together as what seems to me to be an effort at closure with these brothers he had been with for so long. This speech is quite different from the other Pauline speeches within Acts (only one recorded that is addressed to fellow believers), but there is so much that is found within it that can encourage us as we move through this time of transition. Let's read this text together, consider what Paul does within it, and then I'll ask you to grant me some grace this morning as I put myself in the shoes of Paul by leaving you with some personal thoughts that will bring our work here at Pleasant Plains to a close.

GOD Considering Paul's Farewell To The Ephesian Elders (Acts 20:17-38)**A. Paul reflects on his time in Ephesus. (vv.17-21)**

1. As mentioned just a moment ago, Paul's time in Ephesus was quite eventful. No doubt there were some who spoke ill of Paul, but he emphatically states to these brothers that they knew him for who he truly was. They knew he was dedicated to serving the Lord since he had done that since the first day he stepped foot in Asia. He also felt good about the manner in which he did so, as he highlights the humility and even tears he shed as he did such. This was done even in the face of numerous trials he faced from both Jews and Greeks.

2. In the process of doing such work, he mentions specifically how he did this without avoiding to proclaim anything to them that would be profitable. In fact, he was busy proclaiming his consistent message not only publicly but also from house to house. What was this message? Paul states it could be summarized in a message demanding repentance towards God and faith in Jesus as Lord. As the Apostle reflects on his time in Ephesus, I have no doubt that he saw his time as being spent doing exactly what he loved to do...serving God and others.

B. He acknowledges what is waiting for him in Jerusalem. (vv.22-24)

1. Not only does Paul take the time to look back and reflect upon time passed, but he also looks forward and recognizes that the future will also bring difficult times. He acknowledges that he is on his way to Jerusalem, and he feels certain that things will not go well there for him. There is some dispute over the proper interpretation of his words in **v.22**. Some translations speak of Paul being compelled by his spirit while other take the phrase as meaning that the Holy Spirit was compelling Paul to go to Jerusalem. I tend to lean toward the latter since he also mentions the Holy Spirit warning him of what is to come, probably through the means of prophets as we will see specifically in **21:10-12** with Agabus's prophecy.
2. Nonetheless, we can rest assured that even Paul's own spirit was very much in step with the desires of the Spirit in whatever he did, and the end result in his mind would be the exact same. Whether he suffered chains and afflictions or not, he still was dead-set on finishing his course of ministry and testifying to the Gospel of God's grace. Common sense and logic alone would probably lead us to the conclusion that Paul probably wouldn't have a kind welcome party of Jews waiting for him in Jerusalem, but none of that mattered to him. He would still speak the truth, fulfill his ministry, and testify concerning Jesus regardless. He acknowledges his future difficulties, but he is determined to boldly face them.

C. He warns the Ephesian elders of future trials. (vv.25-31)

1. Paul's future isn't the only future that he wants to discuss during this meeting with the Ephesian elders. He also wants to talk about what lies ahead for them, and what he has to say probably isn't exactly what they would like to hear. Nonetheless, Paul, as he has done during his nearly four year relationship with these brothers, is not going to shrink away from speaking what is necessary and needed. He anticipates that they will not see him again. Perhaps he believes his ministry will take him far away, or maybe he believes this truly is about to be the end. Whatever his thinking might have been, he wants these men to make sure they know that his work with them should have prepared them for this point where they would part ways.
2. **"Therefore..."** seems to be the beginning of Paul's main point for this meeting. He wants to bring closure yes, but he also wants to warn these men that they are now responsible for those they have been entrusted to care for. Paul had done his duty in declaring to them the whole plan of God. He believes his hands to be innocent of their blood, and now it was their responsibility to be on guard and alert for any dangers that might present themselves against the church in Ephesus.
3. Where might those dangers come from? Paul says to be on guard against dangers from even among their own number who would seek to distort the truth and lure disciples away into following after their error. How serious was Paul when it came to these warnings? Apparently this was something he had addressed with them previously during his time with them.

D. He encourages these brothers to emulate his faithful example. (vv.32-35)

1. What would be the remedy to such troubles that might face them? Paul desires for them to be committed wholly to God and the word of His grace. He also states that they could do this through following the example he set forth while he was with them in Ephesus.

2. We are not given a ton of details as to exactly what Paul did during his time in Ephesus apart from his teaching efforts, but it seems that he made sure to conduct himself in such a way that no one thought he was simply trying to gain material goods or wealth. He strongly states that he did not covet anyone's goods and his evidence was the fact that he worked with his own hands in order to support himself and even others! He truly felt as if he had set the example for others in this way, and he believed in doing so that he had followed the unrecorded words of Jesus that *"It is more blessed to give than to receive."*

E. Paul tearfully departs. (vv.36-38)

1. Surely, we would all have to admit that Paul was one who gave, gave, and gave some more. It surely must be this reality that leads to the great showing of emotion that is found within this text. I don't know about you, but I know I have been guilty in the past of imaging Paul as someone who was very cold and almost robotic in the way he carried himself. However, this text maybe more than any other text should erase any thoughts of such away. Time and time again we see Paul expressing the emotional attachment he felt towards these brothers and the church they served, and it led to them giving that back in return.
2. What a beautiful scene to imagine within our minds. Here we have Paul, this spiritual giant, reflecting, acknowledging, warning, and encouraging these brothers in various ways and at the end as he is getting ready to depart...there are many tears shed by everyone...Paul included. There are embraces and kisses shared. Hearts are broken over the thought of never seeing this beloved brother ever again. And yet...would any of us expect for Paul to have it any other way? Would we expect for Paul to rather not have such a strong bond with these brothers? Of course we wouldn't think such! We wouldn't want such for ourselves, and it is this strong relationship that exists between brothers and sisters of the faith that makes a day like today so difficult. Yet, I think the best way to handle such as day is to do just as Paul did.

YOU Standing In Paul's Shoes

A. I am filled with much joy as I reflect upon the time we have spent with this church.

1. As I stand here in some sense in the shoes (or sandals) of Paul, I am left reflecting upon the time we have spent here in Jackson working with and serving this church. When I take the time to do such, I am left filled with such joy because of everything that has been accomplished. This isn't to say that everything has gone perfectly. It hasn't and it never will. And this also isn't to say that what has been accomplished because of my work along. It hasn't and never will be.
2. No, I stand here reflecting and being joyous because of the work we have all accomplished together. Every act of service and sacrifice has led this church to the place where it is today. Every act of love from the very first day we arrived has been a blessing to us, and they have aided us by encouraging us and making us feel like we are truly a part of this church family and not simply the preacher and his family. You have served us so well, and we will never be able to do enough to show you just how much you have impacted us. For this we are filled with such joy and gratitude as we reflect upon the past nearly seven years.

B. I acknowledge the opportunities that lie ahead.

1. But we also recognize that there is a future ahead for all of us, if the Lord allows it. Thankfully, I do not have any expectations for chains and persecutions for myself in Loudon, so we don't share that with Paul, but we do recognize that life must go on even after we part. From my perspective, there are so many opportunities for good work that lie ahead for this church.

2. There are so many opportunities for men in this church to step up and serve in ways they haven't served in the past as I depart and some time lapses before the next man arrives. There are opportunities for brothers and sisters here to fill the voids that are left by our family and the various ways we contributed to the daily life of this church! What awesome opportunities that will only help for the next man and his family's time here to be even better than our time spent here.
3. As for us, I am really excited for the prospects of growth that lie ahead in Loudon. I'm really excited to have a hands on impact on the faiths of my family. I am excited to help that church expand its work and abilities. The Lord has been faithful to us all in the work we have done for Him in the past, and I see no reason as to why He won't continue to bless us moving forward.

C. I must warn that our enemy will not let up.

1. However, this isn't to say that there is no potential for difficulties in the future. I'm not sure if Paul had anything specifically in mind when he gave the warnings he did in **vv.29,30**, but I know that I certainly don't have the ability to predict such. What I do know, though, is that our enemy, the devil, the evil one would love nothing more than for this time of fresh start and transition to be soiled through whatever means he can make happen.
2. This is why I want to strongly warn each and every person here to not allow such to happen! Do not allow our adversary to gain a foothold within this church. Do not allow for outside influences of this corrupted world to damage the spiritual integrity of this church. Do not allow for influences from within this church to damage the good things this church has going for it! Pride, personal ambition, and selfishness must be put far away from each of you. There is no room for such within this church as she marches forward for God's glory. Shepherds, care and listen to your sheep. Sheep, respect and follow the wise lead of your shepherds. Don't let the wolves in. Don't let them hurt what has been building in this place. Don't let our work together be tarnished by the evil one.

D. I want to encourage us all to follow the example of Paul as we work for the Lord.

1. Such can be helped from happening by seeking to follow the example of Paul that is detailed within this text. He spoke of his humble service to the Ephesian brothers and sisters. He endured trials so as to keep working. He didn't shy away or avoid teaching was was necessary and beneficial. He was consistent in who he was and what he taught whether in public or private. He served with pure intentions and put others before himself. Really in doing all of this...our brother Paul was simply imitating Jesus.
2. May each of us operate in this sort of way as we move forward seeking to serve and do good work for the Lord. May we humbly serve others. May we endure difficulties. May we stand boldly for needed truths. May we be consistent. May we put others first with pure intentions. I am incredibly confident that every person operating in this way would lead to a wonderful environment in which God's name is glorified and every person is encouraged and built up by what is done in this place. I've seen this done during my time here, and I have full confidence that it can continue to be done moving forward.

E. As we depart, we want you to know how much we love you.

1. It is because of what we have seen and experienced that such a day as today is so difficult. As we prepare for our own departure, I fully recognize that, at least from my perspective, many tears will be shed, and such will be the case because of the incredible love that has been shown to us from the first day until now. Thankfully, I anticipate that this is truly only goodbye for now, but that doesn't really help the pain in the moment all that much.

2. Just as these men ached at the thought of Paul no longer being with them, so too do we ache knowing we will no longer be with you all. Yet, we find comfort in our takeaway point for today which reminds us that we are all pulling together in the same direction and for the same goal no matter where we are, and we can look forward to being together again some day either on this side of eternity or the next. I do hope it is sooner rather than later, but I imagine my tune will change once we are all in the presence of God enjoying the wonderful fruits of our labor from this life.

Main Point/Conclusion: *No matter where we are, may our work bring glory to God until we are able to be together again.*

WE

In following Paul's example, I would like to end this last lesson with a prayer for all of us as we reflect on where we have been and look forward to what lies ahead:

Our Father in heaven...as we bring this lesson to a close in which we have thought upon Your servant Paul's farewell address to his Ephesian brothers, we too have reflected upon where we have been and thought upon where we are going. However Lord, we would be foolish to do such without recognizing that our past, our present, and our future is only made possible by what You have provided for us, what You are providing for us, and what You will provide for us. We want to give You thanks for the blessings we have experienced and enjoyed over these last nearly seven years. Thank you for bringing growth to this church. Thank you for sustaining us through difficult times. Thank you for the immense love and bond that we share because of our common faith in Your Son and the hope we have in Him of resurrection and life eternal in the end. We ask that you will bless us moving forward as we part ways to continue Your work here and elsewhere. May we all humble ourselves to serve selflessly in the ways we are able. May the leaders of this church be blessed with great wisdom, patience, and strength as they shepherd and serve this church. May every person here keep their eyes focused on You, pleasing You, and doing what is best for Your kingdom here at Pleasant Plains. Thank you God for every blessing and especially the blessing of salvation and hope through Your Son. It is in His name that we pray...amen.

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