

## Acts 20: Bloody Message, Bloody Ministry

**Get on the Bus** – What a text! One of my favorites that encompasses *the seriousness of Biblical Leadership* and the closeness among those that pour their lives out to raise up others, *and one that so clearly highlights the central themes of our faith and practice*

- **Unbeliever** – This is a great passage for you because it indeed highlights the central themes of Christianity – *themes of atonement and the preciousness of the church* and it is possible you have had *bad experiences* with the church and particularly with Christian leaders but here you get a picture of a faithful Christian leader

**Opening Illustration** – Farewell addresses or final words are as my father says meant to be lasting words – In prepping for this sermon I looked up farewell addresses, those of Washington and Regan stood out as they addressed the nation about the past and the future

- **But for me as a sports guy one of the most endearing farewell addresses I've heard was from Lou Gehrig – The famous baseball player who was deteriorating due to ALS now called Lou Gehrig's disease steps to the mic at Yankee stadium – The man who had broke the record for most consecutive games played and now his body failing him a hero in the eyes of the Yankee fans steps to the mic and your hear his voice echoing throughout the stadium and here is part of what he said:**

*"Fans, for the past two weeks you have been reading about the bad break I got. Yet today I consider myself the luckiest man on the face of the earth... When you have a wonderful mother-in-law who takes sides with you in squabbles with her own daughter — that's something. When you have a father and a mother who work all their lives so you can have an education and build your body — it's a blessing. When you have a wife who has been a tower of strength and shown more courage than you dreamed existed — that's the finest I know. So I close in saying that I might have been given a bad break, but I've got an awful lot to live for."*

- **Author Ray Robinson wrote of that day:** *"I would say the feeling was kind of mournful. I think they knew he probably wasn't going to play anymore...He delivered those words without any paper in front of him. I was deeply touched. I could imagine that people had tears in their eyes. They were there to say goodbye to a man they considered a decent, honest, resolute fellow."*

As I read that I got a picture of what is happening in this text as we come to one of the many farewell speeches in the scriptures – **And here we have Paul who has planted this church, given these men the gospel, and raised them up as Elders** – *And now he is headed toward Jerusalem knowing this will be the final time he addresses him and so he calls for them to give them a final word in what was a solemn moment with a group of man saying goodbye with tears in their eyes*

- **Now in this passage Paul is addressing Pastors but it would be a mistake to think this is only for pastors for at least 2 reasons:**
  - o **First, as a believer it is good for you to know what God expects of the church and her leadership for many reasons** – such as you are called to affirm official church leadership and hold us accountable
  - o **Second, all Christians have been given this apostolic ministry that was given to Paul and passed on to the Ephesians elders – All of us in our King's Commission have been commanded to testify to the gospel of God's Grace and to teach what Christ has commanded** – *And so this is a word for you whether you are a pastor, or aspiring pastor, or whether God has put you as a faithful Christian in a school, a family, a neighborhood, with the responsibility to declare the counsel of God just like Paul or these elders!*

**Main Thought:** *So what I want to look at today is 10 marks of a Gospel leader and teacher manifested in the example of Paul and the exhortation of Paul to the Ephesians Elders*

**(Read v. 13-16) Transition to the Text – Before we get to his charge Luke gives us Paul’s travel log – Luke doesn’t give us much detail other than to highlight the cities and ports that they hit along the way with the main focus being his haste towards Jerusalem**

- **We see later in the text he feels constrained by the Spirit to go there with the hope to get there in time to celebrate Pentecost – *Possibly to deliver a gift from the Gentiles the church at Jerusalem for the Feast of Weeks and so he couldn’t delay if he was going to make it on time***
- **He doesn’t go to Ephesus because he believes it will slow him down – *Either cause it could cause unrest (like the previous riot) or because of his many relationships there he would have had to say too many goodbyes***
- **And despite his hurry he stops at Miletus and calls for the Ephesian Elders to meet him there for his final charge to them – In which he will tell them this is what biblical leadership looks like in what is the only recorded speech in Acts that is delivered to just Christians – so here we go:**

**(READ V. 17-21 – GO FAST!) MARK 1: GOSPEL LEADERS IDENTIFY WITH THE SHEEP (V. 18) – *So here Paul is in front of the Ephesian version of Tony, and Matt, and Shane, and Foshee***

**Paul gives us a mark of a good shepherd, a good leader – he smells like the sheep – *A good leader is with his people***

- **In order for you to see our example and in order for us to know what our sheep need... and in order for you to know those that you are seeking to teach and grow – *We have to be around them so we can know what counsel from the Word they need... and the truth is if we love them we will be with them like Paul!***

**Mark 2: Gospel Leaders pursue humility (V. 19) – **Paul pursued humility in relation to God stating I was merely a servant of God – he expressed this clearly in 1 Corinthians 4:5-7:** *What then is Apollos? What is Paul? Servants through whom you believed, as the Lord assigned to each. I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth. So neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God who gives the growth.***

- **Can we say this of ourselves? We are merely servants serving the King!**

**Mark 3: Gospel leaders teach with compassion (V. 19) – **He loves them – He hurts when they hurt, he rejoices when they rejoice and he knows them in their struggles** whether it be family, or pain, or sickness and most of all he desires for them to know and treasure God**

- **There is an emotional fervency in Paul’s ministry – *may have heard the song “Big Girls They don’t cryyyyy” but I definitely heard the adage big boys don’t cry well to quote Dwight from the office, False!***

**Mark 4: Gospel leaders persevere in trials (V. 19) – **Gospel leaders if they don’t shrink back should be ready to suffer – But so should all Christians who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will face suffering!****

- **Some of this is unique to Paul but suffering is not unique to him – *He has faced great opposition mainly by the Jews through beatings and if we will be bold we should expect to have to persevere through trials!***

**MARK 5: GOSPEL LEADERS TEACH THE PROFITABLE THINGS (NAMELY THE GOSPEL) IN MANY PLACES TO ALL KINDS OF PEOPLE (V. 20-21) – **He preaches all kinds of profitable things in all kinds of places (in public – Hall of Tyrannus) and (house to house) to all kinds of people (both Jews and Greeks) towards the end that all would repent and believe** – This our calling Christian and unbeliever this is what we hold out to you – repent and Believe!**

- **In the GC you have been called to teach what is profitable and call for repentance and faith – And you will not be held accountable for whether one believes or not but whether you spoke words of warning and liberation**

- If we really believe in hell and really believe in judgment and we really believe Christ can save – *We will speak in all kinds of places (pulpits, parks, homes, Mexican restaurants) to all kinds of people with tears with pleading*
- If we had child in the road who was about to get hit by a car and perish we would plead with them to get out of the road – *And if we believe those who work around us, and those we go to school with, and those in our neighborhood, and those in India have the wrath of God set against them if they will not repent and believe in Christ we will plead with tears, please get out of the road!* (2 Cor. 5 – one of favorite preachers tells us a story of pleading...)

*In all of his trials and hard work Paul rather than complain says I am model to follow and so follow me as a follow Christ who is the EPITOME (or in the words of Tony Merida) of these gospel marked traits*

**(READ V. 22-24) MARK 6: GOSPEL LEADERS TREASURE CHRIST ABOVE ALL – Paul has an exceptionally strong sense of compulsion that he is to go quickly to Jerusalem even though the Spirit is clear that much pain awaits this trip – *I think this is a fascinating verse for our place and times!***

- We often interpret God’s plan for us as the easy path – **It is fascinating to me how so often God’s will involves the higher paycheck or easier life – *And yet Paul knows that he is headed to afflictions and chains and yet the Lord is constraining him to go (we probably need a whole new theology of God’s Will)***
- You know sometimes people have said to me I have a word for you (I was even “prophesied” over in Bangladesh) and it’s always something good coming for me – *no one yet has had a word from the Lord that says no matter where you go beatings await you – not sure I’d frame that and put it on the wall*
- ***But Paul now like our Lord sets His face like flint toward Jerusalem and like our Lord knows that danger awaits him***

Paul’s evaluation is that none of the threats ultimately concerned him as much as the completion of his mission – **He says in light of Christ and the course He has given me I don’t count my life as precious – *What a statement, Can we say that? I don’t care about my life as long I finish my course***

- If anything we count our lives of value in our own agendas – ***but Paul was so driven by love of God and love of neighbor that he could say as I heard in a Piper Jam: “God keep me faithful on the job and the let me drop and go to my reward!”***
- When it comes to counting our life as more precious to us than Christ we must repent and smash the idols – *how do we know Paul valued Christ above all... he would just say to us look at my back!*
- Christian hardship may not at all mean you are out of God’s Will – ***It may be His means of making Christ your highest treasure and His means of advancing the gospel through you and it’s not meaningless it is producing in you an eternal weight of Glory!***

And what a ministry he has – love this line to testify to the gospel of the Grace of God – **And who did this ministry come from: It came from the Lord – *What we have and what we do we have received – And this is our same commission to testify that there is a message of grace that will rock you because God in His kindness has made a way for rebels to be forgiven and loved and cherished and restored***

**(Read v. 25 – 27) Mark 7: Gospel Leaders teach boldly – This was a heartbreaking moment for the Ephesian Elders – Paul had started this church and discipled these men personally and so try to imagine this scene and try to put yourself in their shoes**

- ***Paul says this likely because he knows something bad awaits him in Jerusalem and also because his future mission plans are to go west (Rome and beyond to Spain) and this will prevent him from ever being back!***

**And Paul has a clear conscience (innocent) Why? He's boldly declared the whole counsel of God – *He is saying he will not be found culpable for future moral or doctrinal failures before God because he taught them the whole counsel even when it was unpopular and difficult and cost him***

- **In age of tolerance (even in the church where we want to build crowds tempted to do so through itching ears) we must not give the people what they want but what they need – We cannot skip passages when they speak against our sins or the sins of one of our rich church members**
- ***John the Baptist put his head on a platter to not shrink back and often in our pulpits we wont even risk our paycheck to tell someone it is not lawful for you to have another man's wife!***

**Luther Said:** *It is the truth which is assailed in any age which tests our fidelity...If I profess with the loudest voice and clearest exposition every portion of the truth of God except precisely that point which the world and the devil are at that moment attacking – I am not confessing Christ, however boldly I may be professing Christianity*

- **If we are to be innocent of the blood of all we (all of us) will boldly and gently declare the whole council – and that means even Leviticus not just the verses we like to crochet or frame**
- **Because God knows best what is needed to build up the next generation and Paul commends the whole counsel because we do not know what kind of attack the next generation of IDC will face – *We do not know at what point of the Word of God the serpent will come about and say has God really said?* How can we combat the accuser by teaching them to know and treasure and obey and not be embarrassed of all of it!**

**(READ V. 28 – 32) MARK 8: GOSPEL LEADERS PURSUE HOLINESS (V. 28) – Now Paul gives specific directions for the Elders – and so lets just briefly look at the office of Pastor or Elder**

- **This is a key passage because it some traditions there is a tendency to view the offices of Elders, Pastors, and Overseers or Bishops as separate offices but in this text the word for each of those 3 offices are used – He calls in V. 17 The Elders to him (The Presbeuteroi) and here in this verse he calls this same group of men Overseers/Bishops (Episkipoi) and he uses the verb form of the Word for Pastor (Poimen) indicating these 3 terms are used interchangeably about same men (same in Titus and 1 Peter 5)**
- **We see then the Biblical pattern is for there to be a team or plurality of pastors/elders/Bishops (you can call me bishop if you want) who lead and oversee the body not a one man band or a board over the pastors – *a plurality being the healthiest expression because it brings a diversity of gifts in caring for the body and rightly ordered churches best advance the mission***
- **And notice who appoints and makes overseers – the Holy Spirit – *He works in the life of a man to give him a desire for a noble task in being an overseer and that being then recognized by the congregation as it affirms him as set apart for this task (Acts 13)***

**Here Paul's charge to these elders sound similar to his charge to a future Ephesian Elder named Timothy – He tells him to watch his life and doctrine for the purpose of building up and protecting the people – read 1 Tim. 4:16: *Pay close attention to your life and your teaching; persevere in these things, for by doing this you will save both yourself and your hearers***

- **This is one of the best verses on pastoral ministry in the whole of Scripture – the call for a pastor is to watch his own life and doctrine so that he can care for the people God has entrusted to him**

**Gospel Leaders pursue holiness – The first need is for us to guard our own spiritual and moral purity before caring for others – We are not called to be perfect but to be consistent in our godliness before turning our attention to our sheep**

- **It is sad that too often in the church we prize performance over holiness in the church – *Churches having unbelievers in their bands because they are better musicians, preachers getting passes for grievous sins because they can really speak***



- As Elders we are sheep too, but as one of my friends says we are called to be the beefiest sheep as we seek to lead the sheep!
- **Richard Baxter says:** “Take heed to yourselves, lest you perish, while you call upon others to take heed of perishing; and lest you famish yourselves while you prepare food for them... Take heed therefore to yourselves, if ever you mean to do good to others”

**MARK 9: GOSPEL LEADERS AGGRESSIVELY SHEPHERD THE SHEEP** – *We do this task in a 4-fold way by knowing you, feeding you, leading you, and protection you and this is done in all kinds of ways preaching, teaching, counseling, protecting the doctrine of the church, confront in sin, and so on...*

- This is a high calling – Why? Because you are precious! Christ won you with His own blood – *How important is the church? Christ set His face like flint towards Jerusalem where He would drown in His own blood to redeem His bride!*
- And here we have this amazing sentence “God obtained with His own blood” – But there is a problem isn’t there, God cant bleed – This is true, and yet God in His love took on flesh and became everything that it meant to be human (he hungered, and hurt, and bled and died) – *the Cappadocian Fathers said that which he did not assume He could not redeem but praise be to God He did took on flesh dwelt among us and became that substitute sacrifice for us...*
- **And so this is one of the clearest places in the scripture that Jesus is called God!**

**And Christian this is why you should treasure the church** (*not the ideal church, the messy one that you belong to – don’t just hear that lightly in this age of consumerism*) because Christ treasured the church so much so that He would have the judgment of God due us poured out on Him – **When we denigrate the church we make a mockery of Christ’s bleeding!**

- We cannot say I love Jesus it’s the church I can’t stand – *And it is easy to love the church in the ideal but is it in the nitty gritty of being around people and in community with people that have hurt you and offended you? Christ died for that community!*

**And fellow elders we should put our hands to the plow diligently** because Christ loves these people we oversee deeply (costly) and so should we as we let this gospel truth spur us on – it is blood serious work!

- **And members please pray for us in this very tough thing we undertake and it is privilege but also a weighty responsibility** – *there are many burdens we carry ourselves that you will never know about as we seek to give an account for you and your families, marriages, children, brokenness! We covet your prayers!*

**Paul challenges them then to be alert and aggressive in our protecting the sheep** – *Not only will outside things threaten the church but false teaching and teachers from inside the church will threaten*

- How sad some from among you will come as savage wolves to cause division and lead some astray by teaching twisted or deviant – *In our day that could be prosperity teaching, compromise on certain sins, works based salvation, and on...*
- Paul was right as even by the time Timothy is serving in Ephesus there are already those ravaging the churches – **As he writes of Hymaneus and Alexander in 1 Timothy, Phygelus, Hermogenes, and Philetus in 2 Timothy – what’s the lesson? Give your kids a funny name and they will become heretics** – No its that Paul was right some had already swerved from the faith and upset the faith of some

**I think sometimes we miss the Shepherd imagery** because we see cuddly pictures of Jesus really pretty nuzzling the sheep – but in Middle East in those times the shepherd’s main responsibility was to knock the teeth out of wolves!

- This means then that theological error is no small matter – why? Because it muddies eternal things and leads people astray – *We all need to be Alert and strong in the Word (Berean-like) so that we can recognize Wolves and cut their heads off... don’t be seduced by friendships or new and exciting teachings as we recognize aberrant theology that leads astray and combat it*

(31 – 32) Paul for a 2<sup>nd</sup> time mentions a tearful ministry so see the importance of a compassionate ministry as he moves to some words of assurance and commendation – I love reading over those we send out to pastor and be missionaries

- These words highlight the centrality of the Word of God in our ministries – *It will protect and build up the church and give one the perseverance to receive the blessed inheritance!* The Word does the work not even ultimately gifted teachers like Tony!
- We also see the ultimate protector of the church is God – *We don't shepherd alone, God is with us and he will protect and build the church of the Lord Jesus Christ*
- *And so he commends them over to God (as he had done the first elders he ever commissioned in Acts 14: "To the Lord in whom they had believed"), His Grace and His Word, what a great place to be and what future hope that gives us!*

(READ V. 33 – 35) MARK 10: GOSPEL LEADERS ARE GENEROUS – **Paul reminds them that he worked hard so as not to be a burden looking at his own hands when he says this to them** – and he did this to provide for his companions and the weak/the poor – in doing this we can learn to be like our Lord in caring for others with the bread we earn!

- Paul unlike to many Christian leaders was not motivated by money but was generous – why is it easy to shrink back? *Cause there is a lot of money in tickling ears – We live in a world where so-called pastors who stand behind pulpits are buying 65million dollar private jets – it doesn't seem they've read Paul or Luke*
- This saying by Jesus was not recorded in any of the gospel but as we know from our brother John there: Were many other things Jesus did. Were every one of them to be written, I suppose that the world itself could not contain the books that would be written – **And isn't it amazing in a passage that in a final address that so highlights doctrine and pastoral ministry and church order that Paul highlights giving**

AND THAT'S WHERE HIS FINAL ADDRESS ENDS

**Conclusion – How can we pursue these marks – well through the example and power of another:**

- There was another **who so identified** with the people that became *everything that it meant to be human* so he could redeem and care for them
- There was another who deserved as His inheritance all powers and *yet humbled himself to the point of death...* and now we are to have this mind as we humble ourselves and see the interests of others over our own even to the point of suffering so others get life
- Another who would weep over erring sheep without a shepherd
- There was another *who persevered in trials as He was accused at a show trial*, beaten, and then killed though he was innocent **as the only Holy One, not just Above Reproach, sinless!**
- *There was another so cared for the sheep as the Great Shepherd He would lay down His life for them...*
- *And there was another who though he was rich became poor so that we by His poverty could be come rich!*
- *When we see these through the lens of the gospel we begin to be made like Him!*

*See this One hanging on a cross outside the gates of Jerusalem and see that the judgment of God against sin touched down at Golgotha on the only perfect who was standing in the place of the imperfect, of the sinners pouring out His blood so that those of us that would repent and believe in Him would be Redeemed and forgiven!*

- **And how do we know He accomplished all He said He would** – *cause on a Sunday morning eyes that had previously been closed and matted down with blood opened! And He walked out into the sunlight!*

**Unbeliever – I will not shrink back cause I think it is for your good –** *repent and believe in Him, ask for His judgment to be your judgment and his resurrection to be yours... repent and turn from sin to Him and Embrace Him!*

**Believer – Final addresses are meant to be lasting – It is striking how close what Paul says is similar to what Jesus said in his farewell address in Matthew – Preach the gospel and teach all that I have commanded:**

- **In response lets be marked leaders, and lets love and treasure the church (soon we shall soon and indeed as we look around right now we are seeing what His blood achieved!)**
- *Pray for us as we lead this body as imperfect men who need much wisdom and grace*

**And Lets not shrink back from declaring this –** *It could be that 10 years from now it is illegal to stand right here and say the way to God is only through Christ or that it is outlawed to for us to determine who we can call pastor or what we can say about the bible's teachings on sexuality*

**Will there be a congregation here that is willing to say:** You can drag us into the center of the city and beat us in front of cheering masses but we will say – **“HERE WE STAND, WE CAN DO NO OTHER!”**