

Acts 18:23-20:38 A Model Ministry

What instructions would a husband and father give to his family when he is leaving for war? He wouldn't give instructions on the trivial things of life like when the bin needs to go out. In Acts 20 Paul is giving instructions to the leaders of the church he is leaving behind not expecting to see them again.

Here's a summary of what this chapter says:

Once the Apostles preach the Unstoppable Gospel, leaders are appointed to follow Paul's example by teaching the Word of God and sharing their lives to strengthen and protect the churches.

1. PAUL'S EXAMPLE

Read: v.26

The background to Paul's comments is in **Ezekiel 34** where God indicts the leaders of God's people in the Old Testament who have not cared for His people. Paul says I have cared for God's people. How has he done this?

By PREACHING THE WORD See v.20, 24, 26-27

Paul's ministry is primarily a ministry or service of the Word.

He doesn't see himself as a counsellor, not a miracle worker, not a healer, not a problem solver. But a teacher. A preacher.

He didn't hesitate to preach the Word. See vv.20, 27 Didn't bork at it. Didn't shrink back from it. Even when he had to preach a hard truth to people who would oppose him.

As Paul sums up his ministry notice what is not there. No miracles. He doesn't see his miracles as necessary or normal for the ongoing work of the church.

I am constantly getting mail and emails inviting me to our church to Acts like revival through miracles. Through someone who has the gift of healing. This is missing the point that says it is the Word that is conquering the world.

Paul is like one of those toys you punch and it would spring up again. Or like the song with the words:- I get knocked down but I get up again.

Teaching is essential to Gospel ministry and church life. Jesus commanded it in Matthew 28:20. Go and make disciples and TEACHING them.

It is Jesus and his WORD that is conquering the WORLD.

By SHARING HIS LIFE

Read: 18-19

v.24

This verse reminds of an old hymn:-

I'd rather have Jesus than silver or gold; I'd rather be His than have riches untold;
I'd rather have Jesus than houses or lands; I'd rather be led by His nail-pierced hand
Than to be the king of a vast domain, Or be held in sin's dread sway;
I'd rather have Jesus than anything This world affords today.
I'd rather have Jesus than men's applause; I'd rather be faithful to His dear cause;
I'd rather have Jesus than worldwide fame; I'd rather be true to His holy name

When John G Paton who was the missionary who took the Gospel to Vanuatu this is how one man responded:-

Mr. Dickson exploded, "The cannibals! You will be eaten by cannibals!" But to this Paton responded:

Mr. Dickson, you are advanced in years now, and your own prospect is soon to be laid in

the grave, there to be eaten by worms; I confess to you, that if I can but live and die serving and honoring the Lord Jesus, it will make no difference to me whether I am eaten by Cannibals or by worms; and in the Great Day my Resurrection body will rise as fair as yours in the likeness of our risen Redeemer.

This is Paul's attitude to his life.

Paul's example is also seen in his:-

DEEP RELATIONSHIPS

See 36-38,21:1

His deep relationships with these believers is seen in the words:- Weeping, kissing, embracing. All the marks of affection for people you love.

This teaches us there is a **Cost to Gospel ministry**. The cost of Gospel growth.

Gospel growth necessarily means change. Change in relationships mainly. Emotional cost. Relational cost.

What will it mean if we are to grow? COST.

He may feel like I am lose my friends.

2. THE ELDERS ARE TO FOLLOW

Read: 28

WATCH YOURSELF – SELF WATCH

The Elders are to look out for their own Christian life. Taking responsibility for their own relationship with God. Working on knowing what they believe through studying the Bible. Praying that this would bear fruit in their life – in their attitudes, actions and words.

A church cannot progress beyond the Spiritual progress of their leaders. They are to be spiritual men. This is why qualifications for Elders are about character. Pray for the pastors and Elders at Lakeshore.

That we watch ourselves and each other.

Each week the Lakeshore Elders and Pastors meet together and Garry keeps us accountable to our spiritual disciplines.

George Mueller who started many orphanages and depended on God for providing everything and so never asked for money discovered that his first and primary business of every day should be to be attentive to his own soul. His inner life. His private life.

If the Elders aren't being lead by Jesus is like the blind leading the blind. You cant' take someone somewhere you haven't been before. You can't help others know someone you don't know well yourself.

The Elder's are also to:-

WATCH THE FLOCK

Read v.28 – The flock is the church of God. They belong to God. They are his bought by Jesus death.

Jesus is the Shepherd. The Elders are the undershepherds. They are representatives of God to the people. Not representatives of people to God or the pastor.

What are sheep like?

Not like we think. Well at least not what I think as a city boy. Not fluffy and cute.

You may have heard of Dippings. Farmers take sheep and drop them into chemicals. Why? Because sheep are full of lice, ticks, worms. They are infested by pests. Sheep are stinky, stubborn, dumb and wayward. I speak as one sheep to other sheep.

No wonder there are troubles in churches. Some people are a great trial to their pastors. And some pastors are a great trial to their people. Remember what Jesus did for his sheep. Gave his life for them. Will we live for them? Will we love and serve them? Feeding them. A sheep not feed is a sheep that is dead. A Christian that is not well feed is a Christian that is dead.

Believers who are not taught are vulnerable to the latest wave or fad of teaching that comes through the Christian church. The latest fads that are seen in books in the latest Christian bookshop catalogue. Or on the display stand as you walk in the door. Is that how you determine what is teaching you?

The Elders oversee the people work of the church as well as the organisation of the church life. A good metaphor to think about this is a trellis and the Vine. The trellis being the organisation of the church and the vine being the organism of the church ie the people. The Elders are to Shepherd and Oversee/manage. A growing organism that if it is to keep growing needs organisation. The Elders as overseers must do this organisation. It can't be ignored. Church life must be organised so people can be fed and grow. As part of our Vision and Plan for 2015 We'd like to see a group formed to take up this part of church life. A church management group.

Elders are also to:-

WATCH THE WOLVES

Read: 29-31

Sheep can do nothing to defend themselves. They must be guarded from dangers. So we must be guarded from dangers that come in. The dangers of false teaching. People who oppose the truth.

We don't like this side of the life with Jesus. This part of church life but it is a reality. We must find it difficult.

Not everything is good. Not everything is right.

Jesus in Matthew 7 talks about wolves in sheeps clothing. Satan likes to sow unbelief , wrong thinking in places where there's commitment to belief and right thinking.

So it is important to know the Gospel. Know what the main things are. Know the Biblically central truths.

These include the authority of the Bible; the Triune nature of God; the person and work of Christ, including His absolute deity, His sinless humanity, His substitutionary death on the cross, His bodily resurrection, ascension, and second coming; and, the gospel, that we are saved by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone.

We cannot give an inch on these truths, or we compromise the Christian faith.

All corruptions of doctrine come from ambitious men who will always go off from the purity of Truth and distort the Word of God.

Charles Simeon said, *"To warn men of their danger is the kindest office of love"*

So Elders have a **DOUBLE DUTY – FEED and PROTECT.**

We have to be awake to everything we read and hear.

A person can say 100 right things to draw you in so that he can say the 1 fundamentally wrong thing.

Wolves don't send a text message to let you know they are coming. Or to let you know they have arrived.

Like little red riding hood. Oh what lovely teeth you have. All the better to eat you with.

Be like the **Bereans** and examine the Scriptures. Test everything against the Bible. Test what I say.

People think that doctrine is not important or, even worse, that it is harmful. Experience is what we seek. But experience that is not based on sound doctrine is not godly experience. Charles Spurgeon wrote, *"Those who do away with Christian doctrine are, whether they are aware of it or not, the worst enemies of Christian living."*

Pray that I and others who are responsible for shepherding will know the Bible and teach it. Know sound doctrine so that you will not have a vulnerable faith that can be wrecked on the reefs of ignorance.

I want you to have a deep understanding of what you believe and that you'll know how to feed yourself on Christ centered truth. And know what isn't truth.

How do experts spot counterfeit money? Study the real thing.

How on earth will they do this?

3. with GOD'S RESOURCES

Read: 32

Firstly himself. By prayerful dependence on him. God is the ultimate source of confidence. The ultimate resource God has given.

ALSO His Word. Paul going but the Word is staying.

What will the word do? Build you up.

Build you up in your knowledge of Jesus. As you are built in Jesus you will be convinced that he is everything. That his worth living for more than anything and anyone.

That you'll be like Paul who says:- v.24

These are Paul's parting words to those he would not see again.

v.28

v.32