

Manner & Message of Paul
Acts 20:17-27

Richard Tow 8-16-15

We take as our text today, Acts 20:17-27.

“From Miletus he sent to Ephesus and called for the elders of the church. 18 And when they had come to him, he said to them: “You know, from the first day that I came to Asia, in what manner I always lived among you, 19 serving the Lord with all humility, with many tears and trials which happened to me by the plotting of the Jews; 20 how I kept back nothing that was helpful, but proclaimed it to you, and taught you publicly and from house to house, 21 testifying to Jews, and also to Greeks, repentance toward God and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ. 22 And see, now I go bound in the spirit to Jerusalem, not knowing the things that will happen to me there, 23 except that the Holy Spirit testifies in every city, saying that chains and tribulations await me. 24 But none of these things move me; nor do I count my life dear to myself, so that I may finish my race with joy, and the ministry which I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the gospel of the grace of God. 25 “And indeed, now I know that you all, among whom I have gone preaching the kingdom of God, will see my face no more. 26 Therefore I testify to you this day that I am innocent of the blood of all men. 27 For I have not shunned to declare to you the whole counsel of God.”¹

In this passage, Paul is facing some heavy trials. He is headed for trouble. He is headed for Jerusalem where there is plenty of opposition waiting for him. Everywhere Paul has gone on this journey the Holy Spirit has sent a prophetic words warning him of “*chains and tribulation*” in Jerusalem. God has not told him exactly how all that will transpire; but He has told him enough to prepare him for the ordeal. We see all that in verses 22 and 23.

That raises two questions in my mind. (1) Why doesn't this man of faith just speak to that mountain of trouble and make it go away? (2) If that doesn't work why doesn't he just avoid Jerusalem and spare himself all that trouble. I raise those two possibilities because those solutions would definitely cross my mind if I were in that situation.” Let's join hands and ask God to remove the opposition.” Maybe use the suggestion James and John had for Jesus concerning some of the Samaritans who were opposing Him: Luke 9:54 “*Lord, do You want us to command fire to come down from heaven and consume them, just as Elijah did?*” Jesus said, “No, I didn't come to destroy people but to save them.” OK, praying the opposition away does not seem to be working. So what about just avoiding all the trouble? There were times when Jesus did that. When the religious leaders were trying to stone Him, he just slipped out through the crowd (John 8:59) and got away from them. Once in Damascus the governor stationed guards at the city to arrest Paul; Paul's his friends let him down over the wall in a basket and he got away that way (2Cor. 11:33). There are times when the answer is to simply avoid the trouble.

But in this situation God has told Paul to go to Jerusalem, trouble or no trouble. The Holy Spirit was (from within) compelling Paul to go. Verse 22, “*And see, now I go bound in the spirit to Jerusalem....*” In the next chapter (Acts 21) Paul is still on his way to Jerusalem and makes a stop in Caesarea where Philip the evangelist lived. Turn with me to Acts 21:8 “*On the next day we who were Paul's companions departed and came to Caesarea, and entered the house of Philip the evangelist, who was one of the seven, and stayed with him. 9 Now this man had four virgin daughters who prophesied. 10 And as we stayed many days, a certain prophet named Agabus came down from*

¹ All Scripture quotations are from New King James Version unless indicated otherwise.

Judea. 11 When he had come to us, he took Paul's belt, bound his own hands and feet, and said, 'Thus says the Holy Spirit, 'So shall the Jews at Jerusalem bind the man who owns this belt, and deliver him into the hands of the Gentiles.' 12 Now when we (Luke is author) heard these things, both we and those from that place pleaded with him not to go up to Jerusalem.'"

Now let's pause for a moment and get the picture of what's going on here. Paul is staying with his friend, Phillip. Phillip's daughters all have prophetic ministries. A seasoned, recognized prophet, named Agabus, comes and gives a dramatic prophecy to Paul warning him of the trouble that is waiting in Jerusalem. Two things about this prophecy: First, it is demonstrative. Agabus takes Paul's belt and binds himself with it. He doesn't just speak the words; he acts out the prophecy. Just want you to see that can be biblical. Second, the prophecy is true and accurate. Later in this chapter what Agabus prophesied comes to pass. But notice something else, everybody's interpretation of what to do about the prophecy was wrong. They heard a true and accurate prophecy; then added their interpretation to it: Paul, don't go to Jerusalem! Paul's response is in verse 13 *"Then Paul answered, 'What do you mean by weeping and breaking my heart? For I am ready not only to be bound, but also to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus.'* 14 *So when he would not be persuaded, we ceased, saying, 'The will of the Lord be done.'"*

What is the lesson here about prophecy? It is a biblical gift; but we have to be careful about adding to what God has said. Additionally, if we receive a prophecy we remain responsible before God to hear Him and obey what He is telling us to do. We don't just turn our lives over to the prophet. A godly prophet would never want you to do that anyway. But internally (in Paul's spirit) God had already told Paul to go to Jerusalem. "Walk into the trouble and I will be with you!" In Acts 20:22 (NIV) Paul says, *"And now, compelled by the Spirit, I am going to Jerusalem...."* Some things can't be prayed away. Some things can't be avoided. Some things have to be endured. Paul wrote to Timothy, *"...endure hardness as a good soldier of Jesus Christ...."*

We need the Holy Spirit to show us what needs to be endured; what needs to be avoided; and what needs to be rebuked. Sometimes we're tolerating things (enduring things) that God has not assigned for us to endure; the enemy is simply putting it on us. Those mountains need to be removed. If we're not sure which it is, then we need to ask the Holy Spirit to show us whether it is something God wants us to walk through and trust Him with or whether it is a harassment from the enemy that needs to be ended now!

So the setting in Acts 20:17-27 is during Paul's journey to Jerusalem where big trouble is waiting for him. In Acts 20:17 Paul is at Miletus and has the elders from the church at Ephesus (about 30 miles away) come meet with him. There he reminds them of two things: his manner of life and his message. He is reminding them of these things so that they will follow his example. The Holy Spirit has put this in the word of God so that you and I will follow the same example.

I. Paul's MANNER of life.

Verse 18 *"And when they had come to him, he said to them: 'You know, from the first day that I came to Asia, in what manner I always lived among you.'"* Two things about that: (1) the word *"always"*: There was a consistency in Paul's life. He wasn't one thing one day and something else the next. Paul is not just pointing out one event or one act of service that he did. This was the way Paul always lived. (2) the words *"among you"*: Spiritual leaders should live "among" the people. Bible Colleges used to teach ministers to not get too familiar with the people; otherwise, they won't respect you. If people knowing me causes them to not respect me, maybe I shouldn't be leading. A leader does not

have to be perfect to be respected by the congregation. He or she does have to be genuine, sincere and following Jesus. Paul told the church at Corinth to follow him as he followed Christ.²

Now observe the manner of life that Paul describes in Acts 20:19.

“...serving the Lord with all humility, with many tears and trials which happened to me by the plotting of the Jews.”

Notice the three words in that verse: humility, tears, and trials.

If those are absent in a leader, you probably should not follow. A leader may be very gifted and talented, great speaker, good administrator: but if pride reigns, be careful. *“Pride goes before a fall.”* If it’s one success after another, not tears, no trials then its not the same kind of thing that Paul was. There may be seasons where everything comes easy; but over the long run ministry includes some trials and tears.

(1) Humility means I will do the menial job if need be. Paul was *“serving the Lord with all humility...”* Jesus demonstrated this mindset when He washed the disciples’ feet. Mark 10:45 *“For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many.”* You want ministry? Ministry is laying down your life for others? You *do* want ministry because this is what the Lord has called all of us to do.

Mother Teresa is admired for the ministry she has been willing to do among the lepers in Calcutta. She even received the 1979 Nobel Peace Prize.³ But there are thousands of Mother Teresa’s who labor behind the scenes and have never been recognized for their service. But one day they will. One day the King of Kings will say to them, *“Well done good and faithful servant... Enter into the joy of your Lord.”*⁴ Some of you are doing service behind the scenes that nobody knows about; but Jesus sees it all. Be not *“...weary in well doing: for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not.”*⁵ The due season does not always come as soon as we think it should; but that verse is a promise from God. We will reap if we faint not.

(2) Paul had some *“tears”* along his journey.

There were disappointments. There was compassion in his heart for the disappointments other felt. As I have watched hardships that some of you go through, I have wished that I were a millionaire so I could just take care of things that you need. It hurts me to see you go through tribulations; and I know you feel the same toward me.

Ministry is motivated by compassion. Our Great High Priest is touched with the feelings of our infirmities.⁶ And to some degree we also are touched by the pain we see one another go through. Listen to Paul’s description of ministry in 1 Thess 2:1-12.

“For you yourselves know, brethren, that our coming to you was not in vain. 2 But even after we had suffered before and were spitefully treated at Philippi, as you know, we were bold in our God to speak to you the gospel of God in much conflict. 3 For our exhortation did not come from error or uncleanness, nor was it in deceit. 4 But as we have been approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel, even so we speak, not as pleasing men, but God who tests our hearts. 5 For neither at any time did we use flattering words, as you know, nor a cloak for covetousness -- God is witness. 6 Nor did we seek glory from men, either from you or from others, when we might have made demands as

² *“Be ye followers of me, even as I also am of Christ”* (1Cor 11:1 KJV).

³ Short biography of Mother Teresa, <http://www.motherteresa.org/layout.html> accessed 8/15/15.

⁴ Matthew 25:21

⁵ Galatians 6:9

⁶ Hebrews 4:5

apostles of Christ. 7 But we were gentle among you, just as a nursing mother cherishes her own children. 8 So, affectionately longing for you, we were well pleased to impart to you not only the gospel of God, but also our own lives, because you had become dear to us. 9 For you remember, brethren, our labor and toil; for laboring night and day, that we might not be a burden to any of you, we preached to you the gospel of God. 10 You are witnesses, and God also, how devoutly and justly and blamelessly we behaved ourselves among you who believe; 11 as you know how we exhorted, and comforted, and charged every one of you, as a father does his own children, 12 that you would walk worthy of God who calls you into His own kingdom and glory.”

So why are we studying these things? (1) So we know what kind of people to follow and (2) so we know how we are to behave as we minister.

Serving others can be a very frustrating experience. People are often up and then down. They don't always make progress as fast as we think they should; just as we don't always make progress as fast as others may think we should. But “*just as a nursing mother cherishes her own children*” and “*as a father does his own children*” we invest our very lives in you. Think of that nursing mother. The nurture she gives to that child is not a distant thing; it is giving of herself to the child.

(3) Paul also mentions the “*trials*” he went through in the course of ministry.

The American concept of success is very different than what we see in Paul's ministry. A big, fancy house; somebody to carry his suitcases; plenty of money in the bank would not describe Paul. His crowds were sometimes small. He didn't always have a roof over his head; and sometimes the crowd that did gather were there to put his lights out.

People want to follow something successful. The problem is many don't have a biblical definition of success in mind. They have “the mind of the world”. They define success with the same criteria the world uses. And for that reason, they follow the wrong example. And for that reason, they pursue the wrong goals.

Paul is on his way to Jerusalem. He is walking into a hot bed of trouble: “*chains and tribulation await me.*” Yet this is what he says in Acts 20:24 “*But none of these things move me....*” Nothing could shake is faith and confidence in God. Can you look at your trials and face them square on and say with Paul, “*But none of these things move me....*”? How could Paul do that? The secret is found in the words that follow: “*nor do I count my life dear to myself, so that I may finish my race with joy, and the ministry which I received from the Lord Jesus....*” He was so focused on his calling, he was so intent on doing what God had appointed him to do, that no devil, no trial, no opposition would move him off his destination. “*...none of these things move me....*” We used to sing an old song that said something similar, “I shall not be, I shall not be moved. I shall not be, I shall not be moved. Just like a tree that's planted by the water. I shall not be moved.”

Paul was steadfast in his resolve. His ministry was characterized by humility, tears, and trials. Most of the world could not see the greatness in that.

That was Paul's manner of life.

II. His MESSAGE is described in Acts 20:20.

“how I kept back nothing that was helpful, but proclaimed it to you, and taught you publicly and from house to house, 21 testifying to Jews, and also to Greeks, repentance toward God and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ.”

First notice how he used every opportunity to share Christ. He spoke at public meetings; but he also went house to house sharing his message. Paul did not measure his assignment based on the number of heads in the audience. He simply seized every opportunity to proclaim Christ whether it was to

thousands or one on one. He testified to Jews and Greeks alike. If it was a breathing human being, high or low in society, Paul would tell them about Jesus.

His message was about “*repentance toward God and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ.*”

Repentance means a change of mind that results in a change of behavior. It is not politically correct to tell anybody to repent. But the message of the gospel includes repentance. John the Baptist preached “*Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand!*”(Matt 3:2). Jesus’ message was “*Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand!*”(Matt 4:17). Your message to the world is “*Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand!*” We give that message with compassion and grace; but if it is left out, then we have left out a crucial part of what has to be said.

The devil has worked hard to eliminate the word sin and eliminate the word repentance. Without sin there is no need for the cross. Without repentance there is no change of direction. Whatever way you were going is the same way you’re still going. Peter concluded his sermon in Acts 3 with these words, “*Repent therefore and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, so that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord.*” Notice the order here: (1) repent (change your mind) (2) be converted (turn about) (3) *that your sins may be blotted out*. I wonder how many people in church today have never repented, never been converted, but have assumed their sins are blotted out. There is a fundamental transformation that occurs when a person repents and is converted. Thinking, world view, and behavior are changed.

Did you know that 65% of abortions (about 650,000 every year) are performed on professing Christians?⁷ Without business from professing Christians Planned Parenthood would go out of business. Titus 1:16 talks about people who profess to know God, but in their works deny Him. Many church-going people live exactly like the world. They love the same things the world loves. They pursue the same goals as the world pursues. Only 20% of born again Christians say their faith is their highest priority. Here are the top 5 goals. All of them come before being a better Christian. (1) Maintaining good health (2) Getting a better job (3) Being a good parent (4) Taking care of family (5) Surviving life’s challenges/hardships.⁸ Are those bad things; certainly not. They are good things to do. But none of them are about seeking first the kingdom of God and His righteousness.⁹ None of them address the first and greatest commandment to love God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength.¹⁰ People who profess no allegiance to God have those same goals. Mafia leaders care about family. All I’m saying is a whole lot of people sitting in church this morning are fooling themselves.

America is in big trouble: not because pagans act like pagans. The fundamental problem is the church. Yes, there are many dedicated Christians in various denominations. But it is a smaller minority than you might think. On the whole, the church of America is a lukewarm gathering of people doing their own thing in life and throwing God a bone on Sunday morning. But all of that is about to change. The world around us is forcing people off the fence. More and more the ungodly won’t let the Christians talk out of both sides of their mouth. You are either for same sex marriage or you’re against it. You are either for abortion or you’re against it. You will either stand up for Jesus as the only name under heaven whereby we must be saved or you’ll surrender to pluralism. Already pastors and other leaders are having to put up or shut up. Churches are having to decide whether they will go along with what the state says is true or hold to what the Bible says is true.

⁷ George Barna and David Barton, *U-Turn* (Lake Mary, FL: Frontline, 2014) p. 109.

⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 145-146.

⁹ Matthew 6:33

¹⁰ Matthew 22:37-38

Judgement is coming to America. But judgement begins in the house of God (1 Pet. 4:17). Don't think a half-hearted, lukewarm Christianity is going to be sufficient in the days ahead. Get in or get out. The fence will get more and more uncomfortable.

Repentance needs to be preached to professing Christians who sit in pews on Sunday morning. And if they really repent, they will be preaching it to pagans in the market place. And the promise in Acts 3:19 is that when there is true repentance, conversion, and forgiveness of sin—then the *times of refreshing* come—then the Holy Spirit comes down with power. Then you have New Testament Christianity.

Paul says in Acts 20:20 you know *“how I kept back nothing that was helpful, but proclaimed it to you, and taught you publicly and from house to house, 21 testifying to Jews, and also to Greeks, repentance toward God and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ.”* Repentance that leads to salvation is not only turning from sin but turning to God. It must be accompanied by *“faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ.”* He is the only way of salvation. Forgiveness of sin is only possible through the blood He shed on the cross. *“... if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved”* (Rom 10:9). Faith toward Jesus as Lord of your life, as the promised Messiah, was essential to Paul's message.

In our text Paul says you know *“how I kept back nothing that was helpful.”* If it would help them to know it, Paul would say it. He did not use flattering words to gain their favor. He did not avoid subjects that they might not want to hear about. He was willing to confront them with truth, if in the long run they would benefit from it. A person standing in the pulpit can be a prophet or a politician; but he can't be both. The politician measures his words by what will gain him popularity and a following. The prophet measuring his words by his accountability to God and what will benefit the hearers. Paul said, *“...I kept back nothing that was helpful.”*

Look with me at Acts 20:25 *“And indeed, now I know that you all, among whom I have gone preaching the kingdom of God, will see my face no more. 26 Therefore I testify to you this day that I am innocent of the blood of all men. 27 For I have not shunned to declare to you the whole counsel of God.”*

The whole counsel of God includes encouraging words that people want to hear and confrontive words that people don't always want to hear. Sometimes Paul stepped on people's toes, not because he was obnoxious by nature or because he wanted to get something off his chest—but because he wanted to help them as much as he possibly could—even if it cost him their favor.

Paul told Timothy, *“Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine. 3 For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; 4 And they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables. 5 But watch thou in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, make full proof of thy ministry”* (2 Tim 4:2 KJV).

That is my word to you this morning; for each of you have a ministry to fulfill. Be faithful to the word in all that you say and do. The Living Bible translates verse 5 *“Stand steady, and don't be afraid of suffering for the Lord. Bring others to Christ. Leave nothing undone that you ought to do.”*

Pray

OUTLINE
Manner & Message of Paul
 Life Church 8.16.15

Intro

- A. Read text: Acts 20:17-27
 - > Vs 22-23 Prophetic Warnings
 - > Acts 21:8-14 Agabus' warning & Paul's Response
- B. Reminds Elders of (1) Manner of life (2) Message

I. MANNER of life

- A. Vs 18 *"And when they had come to him, he said to them: 'You know, from the first day that I came to Asia, in what manner I always lived among you.'"*
 - (1) "always"
 - (2) "among you"

- B. Vs 19 *"...serving the Lord with all humility, with many tears and trials which happened to me by the plotting of the Jews."*
 - (1) "with all humility"
 - (2) "tears"
 - > I Thes. 2:1-12
 - (3) "trials"
 - > American concept of success v Paul
 - > Vs 24 *"But none of these things move me...."*

II. MESSAGE

- A. Vs 20-21 *"how I kept back nothing that was helpful, but proclaimed it to you, and taught you publicly and from house to house, 21 testifying to Jews, and also to Greeks, repentance toward God and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ."*
 - (1) Used every opportunity: *"taught you publicly and from house to house"*
 - (2) Message was about *"repentance toward God and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ"*
 - Acts 3:19 (1) repent (2) be converted (3) sins forgiven (4) times of refreshing
 - Repentance needed for American Church
 - > 65% of abortions performed on professing Christians
 - > only 20% born again Christians say their faith is their highest priority

- B. Vs 25-27

"And indeed, now I know that you all, among whom I have gone preaching the kingdom of God, will see my face no more. 26 Therefore I testify to you this day that I am innocent of the blood of all men. 27 For I have not shunned to declare to you the whole counsel of God."

QUESTIONS

1. Were you surprised to hear 65% of abortions are performed on professing Christians? Do you think the American Church needs to repent? Do you believe that judgement begins in the house of God (1 Pet. 4:17)?
2. Why did Paul remind these church leaders of his manner of life and message? Do you think that over time we can lose sight of these standards?
3. Paul's manner of life was characterized by humility, tears, and trials. Are you surprised that he didn't use such standards as education, size of audience, and other criteria commonly used to measure leadership today?
4. Paul specifically included repentance toward God and faith toward the Lord Jesus Christ in describing his message. Do you think a message that leaves out a call to repentance will produce genuine converts?
5. Paul said that he had not shunned to declare "the whole counsel of God." What part of the whole counsel of God do you think preachers avoid most today? What part is considered politically correct and what part is not?