

**Text:** Ac 20.33-38

**Proposition:** Persevering ministry depends on the dedicated lives of disciples.

Today we will amazingly cover six verses! We will conclude Paul's farewell sermon to the Ephesian elders and "watch" the leave taking that follows.

The last few recorded verses of this message go back, in a way, to the pattern of the earlier part of the message. Paul again gives his own ministry as an example to these elders.

(Remember, what we have is a summary, you can read through the whole thing in a couple of minutes. I can't imagine Paul giving a farewell address that lasted two minutes!)

The last bit of the message contains much practical wisdom. Just the sort of thing you might think Paul would say. Yet there is more, something felt, not said.

I want to look through these last words and this last seen so we can observe that "felt thing" and consider the topic:

### *Maintaining Relationships in Ministry*

My own ministry is now about thirty-six and a half years old. We began holding church services in August, 1986, after about a year of preliminaries. And here we are.

I've known many people through this ministry, both locally and in a wider circle including pastors and churches all over BC, Washington, Oregon, and some in Alberta.

The deepest relationships in my life are right here in this ministry.

There are some broken relationships also. I'd like to say "It was the other guy's fault," but I know myself only too well.

Christian ministry is built on relationships. I think the things Paul says shows the importance and strength of the relationships he had in Ephesus. They give us some keys to its longevity and fruitfulness.

As a church, we need to commit ourselves to the things that make for a persevering ministry.

Read Ac 20.33-38

**Proposition:** Persevering ministry depends on the dedicated lives of disciples.

## I. The depth of the relationships (36-38)

A. The motions of this scene are vivid and real

1. The closing prayer with these, his closest friends in Ephesus (36)
2. The strong emotion and gestures of affection (37-38a)
3. The accompanying Paul and his party to the ship (38b)

B. The *emotions* of this scene testify to the depth of the relationships

1. They are among the men converted in Paul's Ephesian ministry (19.8-10)
2. These men, no doubt, restrained Paul during the earlier riot in Ephesus (19.30-31)
3. Through these men, other churches established
  - a. For example, Paul never ministered directly in Colossae that we know of
    - 1) 196 km away
    - 2) Paul says he "heard" of them, and tells Philemon he wanted to visit them (Col 1.3-4, Phile 22)

Col 1.3-4 ¶ We give thanks to God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, praying always for you,<sup>4</sup> since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and the love which you have for all the saints;

Phm 1.22 At the same time also prepare me a lodging, for I hope that through your prayers I will be given to you.

- b. The individual who established the church there was Epaphras (Col 1.7-8)

Col 1.7-8 just as you learned *it* from Epaphras, our beloved fellow bond-servant, who is a faithful servant of Christ on our behalf,<sup>8</sup> and he also informed us of your love in the Spirit.

c. Epaphras also mentioned sending greetings (Col 4.12, Phile 23)

Col 4.12 Epaphras, who is one of your number, a bondservant of Jesus Christ, sends you his greetings, always laboring earnestly for you in his prayers, that you may stand perfect and fully assured in all the will of God.

Phm 1.23 Epaphras, my fellow prisoner in Christ Jesus, greets you,

- 1) It seems that Epaphras met Paul in Ephesus, returned to Colossae, established the church there
- 2) Likely contributed to establishing churches in Laodicea and Hierapolis, which were nearby
4. The seven churches of Revelation, not including Ephesus, may all likely be the fruit of Paul's Ephesian ministry and these elders
  - a. Moved by Paul's ministry to conversion
  - b. Moved by Paul's training to evangelism

## II. The keys to the relationships (33-35)

### A. Personal integrity (33)

1. Paul's testimony may seem boastful (I don't think it was), but was nevertheless a fact
2. Paul took extra measures to maintain his integrity

The group accompanying him and the offering to Jerus. for example.

3. Ministry relationships and ministries disintegrate quickly when integrity betrayed

Consider the rapid destruction of Ravi Zacharias' ministry when his immorality revealed.

Trust is hard won, easily destroyed: you can forgive, but it takes much time to trust again (if ever).

4. The relationship Paul had with these men depended strongly on integrity

## B. Public ministry (34-35a)

1. Paul's role as a "tentmaker" long noted
  - a. From 1 Cor 9.6 indicates Barnabas followed a similar policy
  - b. "Bi-vocational" ministers not a new thing in the church
2. Paul's outside work supported himself *and* others
  - a. Members of his team (34)
  - b. "The weak" (35)
3. Paul intended this as a public example for the Ephesian elders
  - a. An example of self-sacrifice
  - b. An example of hard work
  - c. To underscore "the ministry of hard work"
  - d. To emphasize the burden of living for others

Nothing builds a church like giving of one's labour to one another, and the work of God.

Modern writers talk about "taking ownership" — the local church doesn't belong to anyone, but it needs to become "our church."

We do this by working together for one another

## C. Paradigmatic commitment (35)

1. Fancy word alert! (to satisfy the vain egotism of alliteration)
  - a. Paradigm = a pattern, a template to follow
  - b. A paradigmatic commitment: this principle taught by the Lord is a pattern for all to follow
2. "It is more blessed to give than to receive"
  - a. You will search the Gospels in vain for this phrase
  - b. Yet we consider it a genuine thing Jesus said, something Paul treasured, lived by, and passed on to others
  - c. The Lord Jesus himself taught self-sacrifice by word and deed

d. The church requires this kind of commitment for growth

#### D. Summary

1. If you have a group of men committed to the same work who possess
  - a. Personal integrity
  - b. Are active in Public ministry
  - c. Are committed to the Paradigmatic pattern given by the Lord
2. Then you will maintain long term and deep Christian relationships

This makes your life in the local church deep and rich.

This also gives an enduring strength to the ministry... let's go to Rev 2 to see what I mean

### III. The power of the relationships: persevering ministry (Rev 2.1-7)

#### Read Rev 2.1-7

A. The word "angel" often taken to mean "the pastor"

B. These words spoken about AD 95

1. Paul spoke in Miletus (Ac 20) in about AD 56 or 57
2. We are reading words that come almost 40 yrs later
3. Paul long gone, Timothy probably gone, ministry in Ephesus in other hands

C. Notice the commendation of the church (2-3)

1. I know your deeds and toil and **perseverance**
2. I know you cannot tolerate evil
3. I know you test those who claim apostleship, but are not
4. I know you have **perseverance**
5. I know you have endured for My name's sake [Jesus]
6. I know you have not grown weary

The work of those elders, the men left behind in that church, built a great and enduring ministry

D. Yes, there is a criticism (4)

1. They left their first love
2. Their hearts lost their fire
3. Maybe they were going through the motions (but orthodox)

E. The solution: (5)

1. Remember your former place
2. Repent
3. Do the deeds you did from the first

Now, the church in Ephesus lasted for many years, it became a leading church in church history.

But let me remind you, Turkey today is a Muslim country. The venerable old church is a memory, and its candlestick is taken down.

**Conclusion:**

**Proposition:** Persevering ministry depends on the dedicated lives of disciples.

May God help us to be those disciples.