

The Weight of Being an Elder - Acts 20:17-39
Notes, Family Worship, Bible Reading

Notes from the Sermon

We live in a culture that has become skeptical of leadership. Especially among the younger generations, the idea of leaders having authority over the church and in the lives of people is being, well, for the most part rejected. This coincides with a general rejection of the institutionalized church. Now, before I start down that “kids these days” path, there is actually good reasons for this skepticism of leadership and organized religion. The church has been rocked in the past couple decades with a myriad of scandals as a result of evil and unrepentant leaders and pastors. Almost every faith tribe has had some version of a sexual abuse scandal that included monsters who used power to manipulate women and children and the structures that were used to protect the evil leader while marginalizing the victim. Add to this the stories of pastors in the church who failed morally, committing adultery, or who lost their position of leadership over scandals created by their dominating authoritarianism leading to their being spiritual bullies. We should be sympathetic with the cries made by people who have been wounded by awful leadership in the church. Yet, the text of Scripture does not allow us to throw the baby out with the bath water and get rid of any form of spiritual leadership and authority. What we ought to be doing in our churches is returning to the Biblical model of leadership and call those leaders to be the example of godly faith and character.

Our text this week is one of the tenderest and most beautiful relational moments in all of Scripture. We often picture Paul as this tough leader, ready to march in to Hell with a water gun and take over, standing strong against any opponent. What we see here is the heart of a loving pastor who has discipled others and then served alongside them. Yet, at this moment the Apostle Paul has been led by the Holy Spirit to visit Jerusalem to deliver the offering that had been collected in the churches of Greece and Asia for those suffering in that church. He spent three years leading the church in Ephesus, leading along with the band of brothers to whom he is now speaking. He then took a short trip through Macedonia and Achaia to collect the offerings and enlist a team of people from each church to accompany him as he goes to Jerusalem. But on the way back Paul wants one last opportunity to invest in the lives of these pastors as he leaves. The story is filled with much tears as he says farewell to these men for the last time. We see the deep love Paul has for the church and specifically these men whom he invested his life and ministry. I imagine there was lots of snot crying and hugging as Paul gives this speech. This speech is the only sermon or speech given in Acts where the audience is entirely made up of believers. In the speech Paul does two key things. First, he conveys his deep love for these men and the church they serve. This is not an arms length, “I love everybody,” type love. Paul’s love is deeply emotional leading to all parties experiencing deep pain as he leaves. But he also calls these men to love the church in the same way after he leaves. Paul’s call is primarily as a missionary and Apostle, but the Elders call is to stay in their town, to pastor and lead their church, and to deeply love the people God has given them. Second, he reminds these men how he fulfilled the call alongside them in Ephesus, faithfully preaching the Gospel in the city and making the Gospel visible in his life lived before them. But he is not sharing this as a “look how awesome I am” sort of speech. Paul is investing in them a charge to do the same thing, to be a ministry marked by the faithful preaching of the Gospel from the Word, and then to be a band of brothers who are defined by faithful doctrine and holy character that is visible to the church and in the city.

The answer to failed leadership is not to abandon the church and discard any call for authority. I say this as a person who has been hurt by an ungodly pastor, and with deep sympathy for those who have been wounded by evil leaders, wolves in sheep’s clothing. Of course the text tells us that this will happen. And it gives us the remedy. A plurality of elders

who band together to proclaim Christ, pastor and lead Christ's church, protect the church from these wolves, and model holy and generous lives. The church should be careful that those who serve as elders have this kind of character and doctrine, and then when they do, follow those leaders. We must remember that only Christ is the True Good Shepherd, and the church is His possession, "which He obtained with His own blood." yet He has called pastors to tend his flock, to care for His people and lead them faithfully. Often our failure is the result of choosing the most gifted and passionate people to lead the church rather than testing their character and doctrine, and then looking for the love of Jesus for the church.

Bible Reading for the Week

Daily Bible Readings

Sun	Mon	Tues	Weds	Thurs	Fri	Sat
Psalm 42	Psalm 43	Psalm 44	Psalm 45	Psalm 46	Psalm 47	Psalm 48

Reading from this past week: Acts 20:17-39

Reading in preparation for this coming Sunday: Acts 20:17-39, 2 Timothy 4:6-8

Family Worship

Song - *Blessed Be your Name*

<https://youtu.be/Rw4H5t3TWHM>

Gospel Project

Unit: Into Captivity

Story: Nahum Warned of God's Judgment

Big Picture Question: What makes people special?

Answer: People are special because we are made in God's image, as male and female, to know Him.

Scripture: Nahum

New City Catechism

Question #46: What is the Lord's Supper?

Answer: Christ commanded all Christians to eat bread and to drink from the cup in thankful remembrance of him.

Verse: 1 Corinthians 11:23-26

Scripture

Acts 20:17-39

- Have you had an experience where a spiritual leaders was actually a wolf who hurt you or others in the church? How has this shaped your view of authority in the church?
- How does Paul exhibit characteristics of a faithful spiritual leader in this text? What values and traits does he exhibit which should be followed by other pastors and leaders?
- What are the challenges and charges Paul gives these elders and why are these things important for those who lead Christ's church?
- What is the proper response in the church when it has godly leaders? Why are faithful pastors so important for the work of making disciples?

Prayer

*Spend time this week giving thanks for the provision of God in your life and the relationships He has given you.

*Pray for the Elders of Genesis, Eric Burnley, Mike Hubbard, Bob Lancaster, John Parke, and Kirk Mathews.