

MAIN POINT

Following Jesus impacts the choices we make about our master, our message, our mission, and our money.

INTRODUCTION

When is the first time you remember saving up money to buy something? In retrospect, do you regret spending your money this way?

What is an investment you have made that you are glad you did? What made it worthwhile?

Why do we sometimes regret the way we spend our money and our time? What does this tell us about ourselves?

As Paul neared the end of his life, he was passionate to leave a strong legacy behind. In his farewell speech to the elders of the Ephesian church, he reminded them of the key choices we must make about our master, our message, our mission, and our money. With so many things competing for our time and attention, Paul's wise hindsight will sharpen our vision of what matters most.

UNDERSTANDING

> READ ACTS 20:17-24.

Paul was on his way from the province of Macedonia and headed to Jerusalem in hopes of being there for Pentecost. First, however, Paul wanted to speak with the leaders and friends from Ephesus, so he sent a messenger and they met him at Miletus. Paul wanted to give them some instruction because he was uncertain if he would ever make it back to Ephesus.

From verses 19-21, what becomes clear about Paul's master, mission, and message?

What sacrifices had Paul made up to this point in his life in order to preach God's Word and testify to the gospel of Jesus Christ?

How was Paul able to continue teaching God's Word and preaching the gospel knowing what awaited him at Jerusalem (vv. 22-23)? What does this help us understand about how he viewed his mission and the choices he made to live it out?

Paul begins his address to the Ephesian elders by reminding them that he had served them with humility, had suffered, and had been persecuted all so that he could help people know Jesus and turn to Him in repentance. Given all the trials that Paul had recently gone through, we might think that he would be reticent to go to Jerusalem given that “imprisonment and afflictions” awaited him in every city (v. 23). Paul, however, does not question his purpose as he shares that he was “constrained by the Spirit,” indicating that he felt a strong, divine calling to go to Jerusalem—no matter the cost.

What has your faith in Christ cost you? What has it brought you?

How was Paul able to give his life away without regret? What is the takeaway for us from his example? (See also Philippians 3:7-11.)

> READ ACTS 20:25-35.

What were the warnings Paul gave to the leaders at Ephesus? Which do you think is most important for our church? Why?

What references did Paul make to Jesus? What does the example of Jesus mean for leaders?

Paul called the leaders to Miletus to tell them he would not see them again face to face and to give final instructions in person. Paul told them he was not worried about the dangers that may come or the accusations that people would put against him. He was so focused on spreading the kingdom and declaring the purpose of God that he did not care about what may happen to him. Paul warned the elders that in his absence false teachers would arise and they must shepherd the church at Ephesus well. He told them to prepare by being in the word of God’s grace and to be built up in it for their sanctification. Paul reminded them of Jesus by talking about His blood. He told them they were to lead in accordance with Christ, who gave himself up to save the church. Paul wanted the leaders to understand the weight they had taken on and the dangers that could come to them.

How could Paul, in good conscience, say of the Ephesians, “I am innocent of the blood of any of you” (vv. 26-27)? What does this tell us about Paul’s motivation? About what he treasured?

What pressures in your life threaten to keep you from joyfully proclaiming Christ to the people around you? How can you follow the example of Paul instead?

Paul served with humility and with his heart; he was even drawn to tears in the midst of trials. Paul did not back down from these trials, but pushed forward into them. When Paul couldn’t teach publicly, he went house to house. Paul did not let the trials at the hands of the Jews keep him from ministering to them. He never turned away an opportunity to share the gospel—even with his adversaries. Because Paul never shrank “from declaring the whole counsel of God,” he could declare himself innocent of the Ephesian’s blood. He had done everything within his power to point them to Christ (vv. 26-27). This tells us that Paul’s treasure was not in this world. Jesus was Paul’s treasure, and because of this, Paul viewed every moment and every circumstance of his life as another opportunity to proclaim the grace of God that can only be found in Jesus Christ.

Paul ended his farewell by instructing the church to be generous (vv. 32-35). Why is this an important teaching for any church to know?

What impact does generosity have on the greater community that a church is located in?

Paul concluded his speech with an emphasis on the proper relationship to material goods. He quoted Jesus as having said, "It is more blessed to give than to receive." If we have truly experienced God's grace, we will be examples of generous giving, seeking to bless others even as we ourselves have been blessed.

APPLICATION

Do your priorities indicate that Christ is your master? What are two changes you could make to better reflect that Christ is your master?

How might growing to treasure Christ more change your perspective on trials? How might treasuring Christ more change your perspective on your purpose at home? At work? Here at Jacksonville Chapel?

How can we, as brothers and sisters in Christ, encourage one another to serve Christ more?

PRAY

Thank God for sending His Son to be our sacrifice so that we might have a relationship with Him. Pray that we would see Christ as our master and count everything we have as loss compared to the value of knowing Him as Lord. Pray that, as we value Christ more, we would grow to more actively and passionately engage in His mission.

FOLLOW UP

Midway through this week, send a follow-up email to your group with some or all of the following:

1. Questions to consider as they continue to reflect on what they learned this week:

What sacrifices is God calling you to make for the sake of His kingdom?

Have you counted the cost? What might be keeping you from moving forward in obedient faith?

2. The challenge to memorize Acts 20:24.

COMMENTARY

ACTS 20:17-27

20:17. Paul's ship landed at the port of Miletus, 30 miles south of Ephesus. He sent for the leaders of the Ephesian church to come to him. Paul had decided to sail past Ephesus because he was in a hurry to reach Jerusalem by the Feast of Pentecost. However, for a messenger to go to Miletus and return with the leaders would have taken at least three days. Perhaps Paul thought that, if he visited Ephesus, he would not be able to pull himself away from the many friends he had made during his three-year ministry there. The leaders who hastened to Paul at Miletus are called elders. Later in his address, Paul called them "overseers" (20:28). The terms refer to the same group. Paul called the leaders to Miletus in order to instruct them. Of all Paul's speeches in Acts, the Miletus address is most like his letters.

20:18. This verse sets the theme of the entire speech. Ephesus was the main city of Asia, and Paul had ministered there for three years. The Ephesian elders had ample opportunity to observe Paul's style of ministry. Paul often urged his converts to imitate him (see Phil. 3:17). We are wrong to view this as arrogance on Paul's part. He was ministering primarily to Gentiles who came from various religious and cultural backgrounds. The Christian lifestyle was a radically different way of life.

20:19. Paul reminded the Ephesians how he had not always found his ministry among them to be easy. He particularly focused on the opposition of the Jews. The account of Paul's ministry in Ephesus does not include any particular Jewish plots against Paul, but it does point out that Paul had to abandon his witness in the synagogue when opposition arose (Acts 19:9). Such experiences reminded the elders that Christian servants often encounter opposition and hardship.

20:20. Paul had witnessed about the gospel both publicly and from house to house. One of the main settings for his public witness had been his daily discussions in the lecture hall of Tyrannus (19:9). The word translated "preach" means "to tell or announce," which implies preaching the gospel. Such preaching is aimed at leading people to Christ. The word for "taught" is used to describe instruction, which implies teaching those who already are believers, instructing them in the faith and in the Christian lifestyle. Paul stressed that his ministry in Ephesus had been completely open; his work was done publicly. He had hidden nothing from anyone. Later in his address, Paul warned the elders that false teachers were coming in the future who would be "savage wolves" ravaging "the flock" (20:29-30).

20:21. Paul's witness had been inclusive. He had preached to both Jews and Greeks. Paul described his open witness as centering on two essential aspects of Christian commitment. First, people must turn to God in repentance. For Gentiles, this meant they must abandon their gods and acknowledge God as the One True God. For Jew and Gentile alike, it meant that they must repent of their sins, for all are sinners and under the judgment of God (Rom. 3:23). Second, people must have faith in our Lord Jesus. There is no forgiveness of sins apart from faith in the One who died for those sins.

20:22-23. Paul was willing to risk dangers because he felt compelled by the Spirit to make the journey. The Spirit had a task for him to complete that eventually would take him to Rome, where he would bear witness before Caesar (Acts 27:24). The task involved much hardship, but Paul was committed to Christ and willing to follow wherever His Spirit led.

20:24. Physical survival was not high on Paul's list of priorities. Instead, he placed supreme value on fulfilling the Lord's purposes for his life. Paul's goal was to complete the task the Lord Jesus had given him—the task of testifying to the gospel of God's grace. No one had experienced God's grace more profoundly than Paul himself. He once had been a persecutor of Christ's church, but Christ had turned him completely around. Paul's calling was to lead as many as possible to the good news of God's saving grace in Christ.

DISCUSSION GUIDE

20:25-27. Paul's claim that he was "innocent of blood" referenced future errors that the church may have had. Paul is only accountable for what he had done. He puts the accountability onto the elders of the Ephesian church. His confidence in his work was because he did not shrink from declaring the whole purpose of God.