

"HARD TO SAY GOODBYE"**MONDAY****READ ACTS 20: 17-38**

There is a helpful way to study scripture called "**Inductive Bible Study**". One of the key disciplines you develop in this method is learning to interrogate the text with appropriate questions. Acts 20:17-38 is an excellent passage to practice this technique, asking **Where?, Why?, Who?, When?, What?** and **How?** Take a few minutes and prayerfully read (*take your time - don't speed read*) Acts 20 (*read the entire chapter to help establish the context*) asking as many of the 5 What & How questions as you can. As you read the passage try to get an overview or setting of this wonderful scene. As you read, imagine what it was like to be present. As you prayerfully interrogate **Acts 20:17-38**, try to imagine the scene and yourself as one Paul is addressing: an Elder in the Ephesian church. Asking and answering the questions will help you do this and then the Bible text becomes far more than just another passage, but one that you will remember for the rest of your life! Try this today for your Bible Devotions time. What jumps out at you? Think about those things today.

TUESDAY**READ ACTS 20:17-38, 1 PETER 1:13-25**

H C Trumbull writes in the Biblical Illustrator about conferring responsibility...

"There are two sides to the question of quitting ourselves of responsibility for those whom we have set to a special work. On the one hand, we may err by meddling with their work and worrying over it; on the other hand, we may err by failing to show our continued interest in that work, and in those who have it in charge. Paul committed neither error. He laid responsibility on the Ephesian elders, and had no thought of attempting to take it from them; but he wanted them to consider that responsibility in all its bearings, and to be assured of his loving and prayerful sympathy with them in its discharge.

Here is a pattern for all those who have set others at work, in the church, in the Sunday school, in the place of business, in the home. Do not worry yourself, nor worry those who have the thing in immediate charge, by your close attention to the details of their business—which is not yours. But do not fail to show them that you consider them lovingly and prayerfully, and that you commend them "to God and to the word of His grace" in their life and work—before their Master and yours."

Paul is so very careful as he addresses the leaders of the Ephesian church. His love for them is evident in how and what he speaks to them.

Paul's life is an open book of humility and integrity. He is not afraid to speak truth with great love and compassion, always with a great understanding of what a "*chief sinner*" he considers himself to be! And the response of the Elders in Ephesus is touching. *THEY loved Paul*. They agreed that he "*walked what he talked*". Tears were shed by Paul and those special believers when Paul departed from them.

John Wesley, observed that "*neither the Romans nor the Greeks had a word for humility.*" The very concept was so foreign and abhorrent to their way of thinking that they had no term to describe it. When, during the first several centuries of Christianity, pagan writers borrowed the term "*tapeinophrosune*", they always used it derogatorily - frequently of Christians - because to them humility was a pitiable weakness! For Paul to have behaved with humility would have been seen as weakness by those in the cultures he lived in. But not in the church with those who loved the Lord. In our culture we speak about the virtue of humility as being desirable, but we rarely value true humility. The old adage "*once you think you're humble...they you cease to be so!*" is true of us. We are proud of our humility? How does THAT work?

With all humility, honesty, and integrity, can you say to those you have lived with, worked with, gone to school with, been neighbors with, or ministered to, as Paul did -- "*You know what my lifestyle was when I ministered among you.*" Or do you have some "rooms" of your heart that you've kept shut so that no one

could see how you really think or live. Paul was authentic, transparent, the "real deal," an "open book," a man whose life radiated Godly humility. Does this not speak of Paul's integrity and his character? Reputation is what other men think about us. Character is what God knows to be true about us! *(Gulp!)* Give yourself a good "look in the mirror" today. Can the same good things be said about you as a Jesus' follower? If not, why not? Ask God to help you be true to your commitment to Him and live that out daily for all to see in humility and gentleness.

WEDNESDAY

READ ACTS 20:29-31, 2 CORINTHIANS 2:4, PHILIPPIANS 3:18, 2 TIMOTHY 1:4, ROMANS 9:2-3, JOHN 11:1-17, LUKE 19:42-44

What makes you tear up? Are you one who cries easily, or not?

People are moved with emotion for many reasons. Often times it's purely connected with OUR feelings, our woes, our troubles or frustrations. Many of our tears are selfish in nature, though we don't like to admit it! But there are those moments that touch us in deep ways....people for whom we have great care and love. Sometimes even a story can cause tears to well up in us when it moves us at the heart-level.

Many think of Paul as stern and cold, but clearly he was an emotional and passionate man. The elders had seen Paul's example of godly sorrow. Several times in Scripture we see Paul expressing his deep emotion. Indeed, Paul had been in their midst, going *"to and fro weeping, carrying his bag of seed"*, filled with the truth of the Gospel of grace. John MacArthur says: *"Paul wept because of:*

- 1) those who did not know Christ.*
- 2) struggling immature believers*
- 3) the threat of false teachers "*

Even Jesus Himself shed tears. *"Jesus wept."* These are just two little words, but they have an extraordinary meaning for us. When we read the gospels, we tend to forget the human side of Jesus — that He had human relationships throughout His life. It can be easy to slip into thinking of Jesus as a higher being (*which of course, He was, He's God!*), who was so set apart from those around Him — that His relationships were strictly of a leader-follower dynamic. That He did not feel like we feel.

Jesus' human spirit reveals that heartfelt mourning in the face of death is not an indication of a lack of faith — of doubt — but it is honest grief at the reality of death and suffering. His friend, Lazarus, had died and his family was grieving. Jesus felt and shared their grief in a deep way.

Jesus cried for Jerusalem at least three times. Luke 13 tells us about a day when He wept over the city before arriving there. He was weeping over the tragedy of a lost opportunity. The Israelites that assembled in Jerusalem for the Passover missed the opportunity to be saved from both earthly and eternal destruction. They were visited by their Savior, but they did not know it. Instead of receiving Him, they killed Him.

The Apostle Paul reminds us in this chapter of the book of Acts that we should be deeply moved by important things. It should affect us that those we know and love who reject Christ. It should grieve us when we know other Jesus' followers who struggle to accept the grace of God, or are stunted in their spiritual growth. It should upset us when we see them lured into false teachings and confused by things and people who contradict the ways of God.

What has moved you to the point of tears lately? Has it been because of others, or mostly at your own pain and sorrowful situations? Don't forget to look beyond yourself and really care about what God is doing in other's lives and the mission He has given you to affect others in their walk with God.

THURSDAY

READ ACTS 20:19, JAMES 1:2-8, 1 PETER 1:7

Paul utters these words about his life: *"I served the Lord with great humility and with tears and in the midst of **severe testing** by the plots of my Jewish opponents."* None of us like to be "tested" or to endure these "trials" (as many translations of this passage proclaim). The pain and stress of these kinds of times and situations in our lives leave us weary and afraid of the next to come. But we also know that it is in these times of trial, that our faith grows stronger and more sure.

The greek word "*peirasmos*" connotes trouble or something that breaks the pattern of peace, comfort, joy, and happiness in someone's life. Trials rightly faced are harmless and in fact beneficial to the saint as Peter and James 1 explain, but wrongly met become temptations to evil. This passage in Acts has "temptations" instead of "trials" in many translations and this leads to some confusion in the understanding of the Greek word *peirasmos*. The English word temptation originally referred to trials, whether good or bad, but the evil sense has monopolized the word in modern English. Vincent adds that it "*is a mistake to define this word (peirasmos) as only solicitation to evil. It means trial of any kind, without reference to its moral quality.*" The context determines whether the intended purpose of the "*temptation*" is for good or for evil.

Be encouraged by Spurgeon's wise words regarding times of affliction...

"I am afraid that all the grace that I have got out of my comfortable and easy times and happy hours might almost lie on a penny. But the good that I have received from my sorrows, and pains, and griefs, is altogether incalculable. What do I not owe to the crucible and the furnace, the bellows that have blown up the coals, and the hand which has thrust me into the heat?... I bear my witness that the worst days I have ever had have turned out to be my best days... I can bear my personal testimony that the best piece of furniture that I ever had in the house was a cross. I do not mean a material cross; I mean the cross of affliction and trouble.... In shunning a trial we are seeking to avoid a blessing."

Do you only see temptations and trials in a negative light? Why is it tough to see them as a blessing? What recent, or perhaps even happening now, TRIAL have you endured or are enduring? Can you see good coming from it? How is it helping you to depend on God? What have you learned about yourself and others from this situation? Have you asked God to help you see the value of a trial?

FRIDAY

READ ACTS 20:35, LUKE 6:38, MATTHEW 10:8

We are called to help the weak. "You must help the weak" Paul admonishes the Elders in Ephesus. Take up the cause of the weak, presumably the "economically" weak and the physically weak who are unable to work. Notice how this passage supports his earlier statement that he had not coveted riches. (vs.33)

Paul's ministry was exemplary in every respect and set the bar high not only for the shepherds (elders) but the sheep. You may be a sheep, but you are still leaving an example for someone, influencing them by your words and deeds. Are you being careful how you conduct yourself? What is the "Gospel" according to your life? Barnes Commentary comments... "*To provide for the wants of the sick and feeble members of the flock, who are unable to labor for themselves. The weak here denote the poor, the needy, the infirm.*"

"It is more blessed to give than to receive" - This specific saying is not recorded in the Gospels, but attributed to Jesus. Note that Jesus is not saying that the recipients of another's generosity are less blessed! Indeed they are! Note also that Paul is not advocating that we be great givers in order to curry favor with our Father or even worse to try to barter our way into heaven. The Father is satisfied only with the greatest gift of His Son's sacrificial death.

We give, because He gave. Givers are invariably people of faith, because you have to trust in God to give away money that you easily could spend on yourself. People of faith are people of prayer, because it is through prayer that we receive from God's bountiful supply. So it was fitting that Paul knelt down with these men and prayed with them before he got on board the ship. He probably prayed that God would keep them from false teachers, that each man would be a godly example to the flock, and that through them the church would be built up and expand all over Asia. And he probably prayed that God would meet their needs according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus (Phil. 4:19). These men grieved at the thought of never seeing Paul again, because they knew that this generous man loved them, and they loved him.

How is generosity seen in your life? Is it hard for you to give of your time, finances, concern and care to others? What have you done lately that has expressed your love for others in need? Determine today to "do something" to help. Give it a go. Give beyond yourself.