

Missio Dei Fellowship exists to glorify God by delighting in Him and making Him known through the proclamation of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Marks of A Wise Shepherd **Acts 20:25-38**

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PowerPoint Presentation included: none

SermonAudio Blurb: Paul has called the elders from Ephesus to meet with him privately. This story Luke chronicles lays out the final words of Paul to these dear men. He speaks honestly to them and gives them a very strong admonishment to be found faithful for what awaits them. And in doing so Paul lays out an outline of what any aspiring elder or current elder ought to take to heart as they consider their relationship to the local church.

I. Introduction.

- A. Read 20:25-38.
- B. Paul is coming to the end of his 3rd Journey, which Luke chronicles for us.
 - 1. He is heading to Jerusalem (22) knowing, in general terms, what awaits him.
 - 2. He stops in Miletus so that he can send for elders in Ephesus.oad, instructions on their key duties as elders now that he is gone.
 - 3. It is worth noting that here is a key passage that rebuts those who downplay the unique role and position that elders play in a local church. It is popular to try to make the office of elder mean essentially nothing.
- C. This passage is a key one to understand the nature of church oversight.
 - 1. There are various approaches on how this should function.
 - a. Group of elders (presbyterian).
 - b. Bishops who oversee elders (Episcopalian).
 - c. Congregational with a pastor.
 - d. Generally this all deals with the terms used in the bible, elder, bishop and pastor.
 - 2. Missio Dei Fellowship is overseen by elders, I am an elder but I am called “pastor.”
 - 3. Elder is the normal term used in a Jewish culture. Throughout Old Testament refers to the wise men of the city.

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4. Bishop or overseers is used in a Gentile setting.
 5. Pastor simply means “shepherd.” In Old Testament refers to priests and teachers at times. YHWH is the Shepherd of Israel (psa 123) and Jesus calls Himself the “chief” and “good” Shepherd.
 6. In our culture we tend to use "elder" as the non-paid leader and the "pastor" as the paid. Some people freak out over "associate" or "assistant" or "senior" because they are not used in the bible. We use these, primarily to help differentiate the roles played by paid staff pastors.
 7. How the Spirit uses all three terms in this passage: elders (17), overseers (28a), and shepherd (28b).
- D. Paul knows he is leaving them and will not see them again in this life.
1. Vs 25 he tells them this straightforwardly and in vs 37-38 they are full of sorrow because they accept the reality that he was leaving.
 2. Worth noting that he will write to them one more time, the book we call "Ephesians."
 3. This was written while he was imprisoned in Rome.
 - a. According to Acts 28 he was able to live in a rented house under guard with a Roman soldier.
 - b. During that time, he was able to write Ephesians, Colossians, and Philemon.
 - c. Then later, he wrote 1 Timothy to tell Timothy to try to fix the problems that had arisen in the church at Ephesus.
- E. Last week we saw 13 marks of a life submitted to God. Building off of that, we will see 14 marks of a wise shepherd today.

II. 14 Marks of A Wise Shepherd.

- A. Teach for a clear conscience (26).
1. There are all sorts of motivations to teach at a church. But all too often, the driving motivation is not to have a clear conscience before God. And that is the only thing that really matters.
 2. 1 Corinthians 4:1-5 is a key passage..
 3. Galatians 1:10, *“For am I now seeking the favor of men, or of God? Or am I striving to please men? If I were still trying to please men, I would not be a slave of Christ.”*

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4. Paul talks about men who tickle the ears of those who listen.
 5. But a wise shepherd has to turn a deaf ear to his people at times and continue doing one thing well, “preach the Word.”
- B. Teach the whole Word (27)
1. Note the “for” because it is there to show that this is why Paul had a clear conscience before the Ephesians.
 2. One of the simplest ways to maintain a clear conscience as a pastor/elder is to commit yourself to be limited to the Word of God.
 3. Paul states confidently that the “whole will of God” had been taught and proclaimed.
 4. So, he is confident that he has done all he can do to equip them for his departure.
- C. Keep watch on their own soul (28a).
1. The term “guard” speaks of keeping a close watch on something.
 2. What stands out here is that Paul commands the elders to first watch themselves. He knows them and he knows the nature of self-deception. We, as humans, tend to think far too highly of ourselves and that sets us up for a huge fall.
 3. Hypocrisy among the elders will kill a church. The standards set by the elders will trickle down to the person in the pew over time. But almost never will this go the opposite way.
- D. Keep watch on the flock of God (28b).
1. Notice the phrasing though as it paints a beautiful picture. The church is viewed as a flock.
 2. Notice also how Paul says that the elders came from “among” the flock. In other words, though they function as shepherds over the church, they belong to that flock themselves. They are distinct from the church but not separate from it.
- E. Remember your holy calling (28c).
1. The fact is that if one qualifies to be an elder and is accepted as one, it is the Holy Spirit Who is behind it. It makes the role and work of being an elder a holy calling and task.

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2. Too often men desire to be an elder for reasons that are more personal than holy.
- F. Remember whose church it is (28d).
 1. We are to shepherd God's church. This cannot be forgotten and sadly is too often.
 2. It is the constant awareness that the church you shepherd is not yours, even a little.
 3. It does not belong to a denomination. It does not belong to a congregation. It belongs to God.
 4. But how? In what way does the church belong to God.
- G. Remember who bought you and the church (28e).
 1. This is one of the clearest passages showing the deity of Jesus Christ. It is God's church and He [God] purchased it with His [God's] own blood.
 2. The church is made up corporately and individually of sinners. Slave to sin. Slave to Satan. Unable to be free from sin, Satan and death. But God the Son took on flesh and laid His life down to purchase His Church out of slavery.
 3. This should make all who wish to be elders/pastors think long and hard on that desire.
 4. It means we better be ready to have a clear conscience because we fought long and hard to be found faithful in handling the church.
 5. And this means we should always be on the look out for anything and anyone who might be looking to bring harm to the church.
- H. Watch out for false shepherds rising up from **within** (29-30).
 1. This is key to note. It is a given that false shepherds will arise outside the church. They are frankly rather common.
 2. But it is within the church, and even more importantly, among the elders themselves, that Paul is warning these men.
 3. They look nice but are savage and deadly (29).
 4. No body of elders is immune (30a).
 5. It starts by twisted teaching (30b).
 6. The goal is to gather disciples to themselves (30c).

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- a. This is helpful to see. If good, wise shepherds are God-centered then it makes sense that dangerous, false shepherds, are man-centered.
 - b. These guys are all about gathering folks to themselves. They try to carve out a group of people without the elders knowing about it with the goal to get a name for themselves.
 - c. I have watched this play out in so many different ways over my life. Men do their dirty work in the church, get confronted and challenged over it, leave the church and then a campaign of drawing others over to them begins.
- I. Remember you are never not on duty (31a).
- 1. He again reminds them to be watchful. And the basis for what he means by this statement is his conduct with them for three years.
 - 2. Too many people try to give counsel from their failures rather than their faithfulness. Paul is not doing that.
 - 3. Being an elder/pastor means you really don't have days off.
 - 4. Every function, every gathering, every chance meeting is an opportunity to observe and instruct and encourage and correct. They are all perfect ways to keep watch as you see people interact.
 - 5. *This one also has good application for parents.* It is easy to get tired and let your eyes wander or rest. You think you did a great job early on that you can coast and you stop watching over the health and hearts of those in your household. Let this be an exhortation for you to become awake again.
- J. Remember to give the people your heart (31b).
- 1. It is rather easy to correct or admonish without giving your heart to the people. But the term, admonish, means to impart understanding, to set the mind right. This involves warning, encouraging, and correcting people.
 - 2. But when you do this, at times the people will not believe you.
 - 3. This is hard to do when you first start out as a pastor/elder. People don't know you and vice versa.
 - 4. But often, this labor is done with tears. And most of those tears are done privately or with just a few present.
- K. Constantly reminded of the gospel and God who gives it (32).

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1. We all slip into legalism or licentiousness at times and only the gospel of Jesus Christ will pull us out of those dangerous ditches.
 2. But when we go back to remember and to dwell on God, who took on flesh and bore our sin, things begin to change in us.
 3. We need to be reminded by faithful shepherds of what builds us up in the most holy faith. What awaits us in the end when all things are made right and proper; when we receive the fullness of our inheritances with our Savior.
 4. That we are not laboring in vain. Our soul is kept safe by the Holy Spirit, purchased out of enslavement to sin by our Savior and eternally loved by our Father in heaven.
- L. Remember that money is not your motivation (33a).
1. If you want to do well as a pastor then you must not love money. You must love God and then, God's people.
 2. Pastors who are paid must constantly remind themselves that their fellow elders get no pay for their labors. Covetous and complaining hearts kill shepherds and turn them into wolves.
- M. Be generous (33b-35).
1. This is the opposite aspect to money. We are not to be motivated by it and we are to be generous toward others with it.
 2. A life that is full of the truth, "It is more blessed to give than receive" must be that of a shepherd.
 3. Open your home. Open your heart. Open your goods. Open your skills. Open your time. Be generous.

III. Conclusion.

- A. Be a shepherd that grieves when leaving the sheep (36-38).
1. There are those who leave a church that is bruised and battered.
 2. There are those who leave a church and they are skeletal and starved.
 3. There are those who leave a church that is full of itself and arrogant toward others.
 4. And there are those who leave a church and the church weeps.
- B. To be a shepherd of the church is hard all by itself. But to be a wise shepherd requires a solemn mind set, a sound faith, and a commitment to serve well.

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Benediction

May the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and the God of all comfort, comfort you in all your afflictions, so that you may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction, with the comfort with which you yourself have been comforted by God. Amen.