

Unstoppable Kingdom

Globally: Last Words of a Kingdom Leader

Acts 20:17-38

Last words are given extremely high priority. The image that comes to mind is that of an old, wise grandparent gathering family and friends around a bedside to impart the most important words of wisdom they can share before passing away peacefully. But very few situations fit that description.

The Bible records many leaders imparting last words (Jacob to his sons, Moses to Joshua, and Jonathan to David). In today's passage we will look at the last words from the Apostle Paul, not because he is about to die, but because he knows he will likely never see this group of people again. He had spent 2 years and 4 months discipling these people just two years prior, but now had a few last words of wisdom to offer them before saying goodbye. This passage provides a clear picture of a Kingdom Leader in Paul's address.

Main Idea: Leaders in the Unstoppable Kingdom Aim to Look & Lead Like Jesus

*“Now from Miletus he sent to Ephesus and called the elders of the church to come to him. 18 And when they came to him, he said to them: ‘You yourselves know how I lived among you the whole time from the first day that I set foot in Asia, 19 serving the Lord with all humility and with tears and with trials that happened to me through the plots of the Jews; 20 how I did not shrink from declaring to you anything that was profitable, and teaching you in public and from house to house, 21 testifying both to Jews and to Greeks of repentance toward God and of faith in our Lord Jesus Christ. 22 And now, behold, I am going to Jerusalem, constrained by the Spirit, not knowing what will happen to me there, 23 except that the Holy Spirit testifies to me in every city that imprisonment and afflictions await me. 24 But I do not account my life of any value nor as precious to myself, if only I may finish my course and the ministry that I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the gospel of the grace of God. 25 And now, behold, I know that none of you among whom I have gone about proclaiming the kingdom will see my face again. 26 Therefore I testify to you this day that I am innocent of the blood of all, 27 for I did not shrink from declaring to you the whole counsel of God. 28 Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to care for the church of God, which he obtained with his own blood. 29 I know that after my departure fierce wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; 30 and from among your own selves will arise men speaking twisted things, to draw away the disciples after them. 31 Therefore be alert, remembering that for three years I did not cease night or day to admonish every one with tears. 32 And now I commend you to God and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up and to give you the inheritance among all those who are sanctified. 33 I coveted no one's silver or gold or apparel. 34 You yourselves know that these hands ministered to my necessities and to those who were with me. 35 In all things I have shown you that by working hard in this way we must help the weak and remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he himself said, ‘It is more blessed to give than to receive.’ 36 And when he had said these things, he knelt down & prayed with them all. 37 And there was much weeping on the part of all; they embraced Paul & kissed him, 38 being sorrowful most of all because of the word he had spoken, that they would not see his face again. And they accompanied him to the ship.” **Acts 20:17-38***

Two Elements of a Kingdom Leader from Acts 20:17-38

I. The Marks of a Kingdom Leader - Acts 20:17-27, 33-35

This is the only speech of Paul recorded in Acts that is specifically crafted to fellow followers of Jesus. The first part of his speech is autobiographical, explaining the Marks of a Kingdom Leader. A kingdom leader:

- **Leads thru Leaders (Acts 20:17-18a)**
A Kingdom Leader knows that they can't do it all themselves, and more importantly they don't want to. Paul set up elders (*presbuteros*) in Ephesus and specifically called them to this important gathering to impart his last words of wisdom. **Jesus practiced this by spending most of his time on earth with the 12, equipping them to leadership**
- **Leads by Service (Acts 20:18b-19)**
Paul uses the term *doulos* (servant, slave) to describe his posture. A person not submissive to authority, cannot be trusted with authority. Paul was a servant! **Jesus submitted to the will of the Father in everything.**
- **Leads with Truth (Acts 20:20-27)**
Paul went to great pains to emphasize that he withheld nothing from them and declared the *whole counsel* of God. He gave them everything he had! **You want a leader to tell you the truth, the alternative is awful. Jesus often shared hard truths with his disciples and others.**
- **Leads in Sacrifice (Acts 20:33-35)**
Paul refused his right to take a salary from the Ephesian church, and instead chose to support himself through tent-making and to support from Philippi. He led the way in generosity, which is a mark of a Kingdom Leader! **Jesus gave everything, including his own life.**

*“Christian discipleship is not being able to quote the teacher, it's becoming like the teacher.” **James Roberson***

*“Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ.” **1 Corinthians 11:1***

Typically, the citizens sacrifice their lives for the King. However, in the Unstoppable Kingdom the King sacrificed himself for the citizens.

*“For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.” **Mark 10:45***

If you are or aspire to be a leader, these qualities make you a kingdom leader. If you are not, these are the marks you're looking for in a leader!

II. The Message of a Kingdom Leader - Acts 20:28-32, 36-38

The exhortation section of Paul's last words to the Ephesian elders.

A Kingdom Leader must:

- **Be Aligned to God (Acts 20:28a, 32)**
Paul instructs them to pay attention to themselves before they are to care for the flock. How? Verse 32 says that it is through the word of God's grace which will build them up. **A kingdom leader must firstly stay close to God!**
- **Be Attentive to Others (Acts 20:28b)**
They are also to care for God's flock, obtained by the blood of Jesus. They are to be overseers (*episkopos*) to the ministry of their church and to shepherd (*poimen*) the people on their journey with Jesus. **Leaders are attentive!**
- **Be Alert to Threats (Acts 20:29-31)**
Threats come from the outside and from the inside, seeking to lead people astray. Paul fought this with passionate and consistent encouragement with the truth! **Some of the greatest ministry pains are due to missed threats.**
- **Be Affectionate to One Another (Acts 20:36-38)** You just feel the love, connection, and support between Paul and the Ephesian elders in this passage. They prayed, they cried, they embraced, they kissed, they grieved, and they sent Paul away. **You can't lead people you don't love, and you can't follow someone who doesn't love you.**

A little guy wanted to be a lumberjack, but the foreman was skeptical. So he decided to give the guy a week to prove himself. Mon-Tues he was the most productive man in the forest, Wed-Thurs he was about average, but by Friday he had fallen way behind. Why? He hadn't taken time to sharpen his axe. **Roughly 25 times in the NT we read about Jesus getting alone!**

"But he would withdraw to desolate places and pray." **Luke 5:16**

You can't get water from an empty well. A consistent message from a Kingdom Leader must involve alignment to God, attention to others, alertness to threats, and affection toward one another.

Last words are a powerful thing! In conclusion, Look at Jesus's last words on earth before he ascended back to the Father...

"But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth." **Acts 1:8**

Become a citizen of the Unstoppable Kingdom and Follow Jesus today!

Sources and Further Reading Opportunities:

- *CSB Study Bible* – Trevin Wax, General Editor (2021)
- *The Bible Exposition Commentary* – Warren Wiersbe (1996)
- *The New American Commentary: Acts* – John B. Polhill (1992)
- *Acts: Bible Study Commentary* – F.F. Bruce (2017)
- *Acts for Everyone* – N.T. Wright (2008)
- *Acts: The Church Afire* – Kent Hughes (1996)
- *Acts* - John MacArthur (1994)
- *Acts* – K.O. Gangle (1998)
- *The Kingdom of God* – Martyn Lloyd-Jones (1992)
- *The Message of Acts* – John Stott (1994)
- *Kingdom First* – Jeff Christopherson (2015)