**The Power of Words**

**Introduction:**

After observing the Lord’s Supper with the disciples at Troas and then raising the young man Eutychus from the dead, Paul decides to walk to their next stop, Assos. This was about a twenty-mile trip while Luke and other traveling companions took a forty-mile journey to Assos by ship. Paul boards the ship there and sails on to Mitylene, Chios, Samos, Trogyllium and then to Miletus. Since Paul was in a hurry to get to Jerusalem by Pentecost [probably only a little over a month away] he decided to bypass Ephesus. It is from here he calls for the elders at Ephesus.

**Text:** Acts 20:17-38

**Body:**

1. **Declare the Whole Counsel of God – An Admonition to Preachers**  Acts 20:17-27 “From Miletus he sent to Ephesus and called for the elders of the church. And when they had come to him, he said to them: ‘You know, from the first day that I came to Asia, in what manner I always lived among you, 19 serving the Lord with all humility, with many tears and trials which happened to me by the plotting of the Jews; 20 how I kept back nothing that was helpful, but proclaimed it to you, and taught you publicly and from house to house, 21 testifying to Jews, and also to Greeks, repentance toward God and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ. 22 And see, now I go bound in the spirit to Jerusalem, not knowing the things that will happen to me there, 23 except that the Holy Spirit testifies in every city, saying that chains and tribulations await me. 24 But none of these things move me; nor do I count my life dear to myself, so that I may finish my race with joy, and the ministry which I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the gospel of the grace of God. 25 And indeed, now I know that you all, among whom I have gone preaching the kingdom of God, will see my face no more. 26 Therefore I testify to you this day that I am innocent of the blood of all men. 27 For I have not shunned to declare to you the whole counsel of God.’ ” NKJV These eleven verses constitute a divine definition of what a preacher is to be and do. Many concepts of preaching prevalent in the Lord’s church today come from denominational practices, not from the Word of God.
2. **A Humble Servant** Acts 20:19 A preacher must “not think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think soberly, as God has dealt to each one a measure of faith.” (Romans 12:3) “For I say, through the grace given to me, to everyone who is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think soberly, as God has dealt to each one a measure of faith.” NKJV Paul had written these words a short time before our account occurs.
3. **Compassionate** Acts 20:19-21 “with tears” Read II Corinthians 2:4. “For out of much affliction and anguish of heart I wrote to you, with many tears, not that you should be grieved, but that you might know the love which I have so abundantly for you.” NKJV Preachers should feel for those to whom they preach. They must truly love their souls. “A lover of souls”
4. **Not a Life of Ease** Acts 20:19 “trials” He had suffered much at the hands of Jews. (Acts 20:3) “and stayed three months. And when the Jews plotted against him as he was about to sail to Syria, he decided to return through Macedonia.” NKJV Verses 22, 23, and 24 inform us that Paul had heard from brethren [probably those with gifts of prophecy] that chains and tribulations awaited him. Preaching is not a job where you go to an office from eight to five, M-F. Notice Acts 20:31. “Therefore watch, and remember that for three years I did not cease to warn everyone night and day with tears.” NKJV “night and day” Conscientious preaching is a very physically and mentally demanding work. It is one which should not be entered into for the purpose of making money or having a job with security. Those things are very important, especially in our day and age, but not the reason a gospel preacher works. I do believe though that Scripture teaches that the congregation has responsibility to help the preacher bear this burden.
5. **Preach the Whole Counsel of God** Acts 20:25-27 (Ezekiel 33:1-9) “Again the word of the Lord came to me, saying, ‘Son of man, speak to the children of your people, and say to them: When I bring the sword upon a land, and the people of the land take a man from their territory and make him their watchman, when he sees the sword coming upon the land, if he blows the trumpet and warns the people, then whoever hears the sound of the trumpet and does not take warning, if the sword comes and takes him away, his blood shall be on his own head. He heard the sound of the trumpet, but did not take warning; his blood shall be upon himself. But he who takes warning will save his life. But if the watchman sees the sword coming and does not blow the trumpet, and the people are not warned, and the sword comes and takes any person from among them, he is taken away in his iniquity; but his blood I will require at the watchman’s hand.’ So you, son of man: I have made you a watchman for the house of Israel; therefore you shall hear a word from My mouth and warn them for Me. When I say to the wicked, ‘O wicked man, you shall surely die!’ and you do not speak to warn the wicked from his way, that wicked man shall die in his iniquity; but his blood I will require at your hand. Nevertheless if you warn the wicked to turn from his way, and he does not turn from his way, he shall die in his iniquity; but you have delivered your soul.” NKJV The preacher’s main responsibility is to preach! This is where the denominational world has wrongfully influenced the role of preaching in the Lord’s church. Paul says a preacher should spend his time preaching. But preaching what? All of God’s Word! He must preach the negative as well as the positive. Read Verse 20. For the faithful gospel preacher, his duty is not to make people happy and feel good or to increase our attendance number or our contribution. None of these things are his responsibility. The primary question he needs to ask about his preaching is: “Is it the truth?” Is it all of the truth? A preacher can preach truth and be lost.
6. **Do Not Cease to Warn Everyone – An Admonition to Elders** Acts 20:28-31 “Therefore take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood. For I know this, that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock. Also from among yourselves men will rise up, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after themselves. 31 Therefore watch, and remember that for three years I did not cease to warn everyone night and day with tears.” NKJV This is the heart of Paul’s message to elders he had worked with for three years was. This concerns their responsibilities as shepherds – what is involved in being a scriptural overseer. “Take heed” What Paul is about to say is extremely important. They need to give it careful attention. They must diligently examine their own selves to see if they are fulfilling duties of an elder.
7. **Made Overseers by the Holy Spirit** When men meet qualifications precisely as laid out by the Holy Spirit in the Scripture and then are installed by the congregation, it can be said that the Holy Spirit made them overseers. One day they will give account to God for their oversight. The overseers must assume the ultimate responsibility, much like a plant superintendent does. The buck stops with the elders. There is no one to pass it on to! Being an elder is not about glory and honor, but work and responsibility.
8. **Must Possess an Appreciable Measure of Spiritual Maturity** The word “elder” implies one who has grown, not just chronologically older, but spiritually more mature. They must have the capacity to make wise, sound decisions. (I Timothy 3:6) “not a novice, lest being puffed up with pride he fall into the same condemnation as the devil.” NKJV
9. **“Above All, Being an Elder is about Shepherding”** Shepherd or pastor: the elders are to shepherd the flock, not the preacher. Shepherding is where an elder should concentrate most of his time and efforts. Paul paints a picture here of a dedicated shepherd caring for the flock. Being a shepherd was a duty, a smelly job because one was constantly with his sheep; he lived with them. As shepherds, elders are to know their flock very well. This comes by spending much time with all the flock. “Until a man is ready to shepherd all the flock, he is not qualified to shepherd any of the flock.” Many elders fail in this area.

Shepherds feed the flock by teaching the Word, insuring worship is in spirit and in truth. . . Elders guide the flock by example, not by acting as lords or masters. (I Peter 5:1-3) “The elders who are among you I exhort, I who am a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that will be revealed: Shepherd the flock of God which is among you, serving as overseers, not by compulsion but willingly, not for dishonest gain but eagerly; nor as being lords over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock;” NKJV A shepherd helps the sick and hurting sheep to heal. He does whatever he can for the sheep. He tries to keep them from straying and if they do, does all in his power to bring them back to the fold. The elder must watch for savage wolves and protect the flock. As Jesus put it, “Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ravenous wolves.” (Matthew 7:15) Elders must be aware of false teachers so they can protect the flock. (Titus 1:9-14) “holding fast the faithful word as he has been taught, that he may be able, by sound doctrine, both to exhort and convict those who contradict. For there are many insubordinate, both idle talkers and deceivers, especially those of the circumcision, whose mouths must be stopped, who subvert whole households, teaching things which they ought not, for the sake of dishonest gain. One of them, a prophet of their own, said, ‘Cretans are always liars, evil beasts, lazy gluttons.’ This testimony is true. Therefore rebuke them sharply, that they may be sound in the faith, not giving heed to Jewish fables and commandments of men who turn from the truth. NKJV Elders are entrusted with a great responsibility to care for the flock – one from which they can take no time off.

1. **Remember the Words** Acts 20:32-38 “So now, brethren, I commend you to God and to the word of His grace, which is able to build you up and give you an inheritance among all those who are sanctified. I have coveted no one’s silver or gold or apparel. Yes, you yourselves know that these hands have provided for my necessities, and for those who were with me. I have shown you in every way, by laboring like this, that you must support the weak. And remember the words of the Lord Jesus, that He said, ‘It is more blessed to give than to receive.’ And when he had said these things, he knelt down and prayed with them all. Then they all wept freely, and fell on Paul’s neck and kissed him, sorrowing most of all for the words which he spoke, that they would see his face no more. And they accompanied him to the ship.” NKJV The gospel reveals God’s amazing grace. By availing ourselves of this grace which is offered through the gospel, we receive an inheritance with all those who are sanctified, eternal life in heaven. Christians are built up. (Colossians 2:7) “rooted and built up in Him and established in the faith, as you have been taught, abounding in it with thanksgiving.” NKJV Christians are sanctified – set apart. This occurs when the penitent believer confesses His Savior and is immersed in water for the forgiveness of sins.

**Conclusion:**

Words do indeed possess great power. Listen to I Corinthians 2:12-13. “Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might know the things that have been freely given to us by God. These things we also speak, not in words which man’s wisdom teaches but which the Holy Spirit teaches, comparing spiritual things with spiritual.” NKJV

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