

- **Great recurring movie scene is emotional farewell-**
- **Favorite is between a child and his grandfather... closing lines of one of greatest movies EVER... "Grandpa, maybe you could come over and read it to me again tomorrow".... Anyone?? Grandpa, played by the iconic Peter Falk, reply's... As you wish! (Princess Bride)**
- **LAST WEEK we talked about....**

† **Paul's great legacy... of his time in Ephesus/ entire life..**

Paul's great passion/ - his wish- was for this first generation of believers- as a community of faith (the church)- to be prepared both theologically (understanding of God's Truth), and spiritually (increasing experience of God's presence), to persevere after he was gone, and in the face of looming adversity.

- **TODAY Paul's final departure from his beloved friends in Ephesus will happen, and here we see one of the two great farewell's in the NT. The first is Jesus- Acts 1... "You will receive power..."**
- **PAUL's farewell speech to Ephesian church leaders is filled with emotion, and we see the great love that existed between Paul and these early church leaders, whom he realizes he likely will never see again.**
- **But Paul's farewell is also PROPHETIC...**

† **A prophetic farewell**

...As he looks toward not only what awaits him in Jerusalem, but also what future holds for church.

- **SO, for first generation of church - AND for church today- Address holds important principles for how we ALL must be prepared- BOTH theologically and spiritually- to persevere as a community of faith...**
- **AS DISCIPLES who are growing together- and expressing together- goodness, nature and character of God in WHO WE ARE and HOW WE LIVE.**
- **FIRST THING! LOT HERE! Multiple topics that could each be their own message- we are going to briefly touch on these, looking for the BIG theme**
- **One other thing- this story speaks powerfully to spiritual leaders- so if you are in any role of spiritual leadership (and almost all of us are), then this is a passage we need to really consider.**
- **OKAY! Pick up story in port city of Miletus, day's journey from Ephesus. Elders/leaders of church in Ephesus have made trip, gathered with Paul right there at the shore. As scene opens, we see Paul...**

† **Paul's reflection on his ministry, and ALSO what it teaches us**

- **The first thing Paul considers is how his ministry was defined by HUMILITY.... Specifically,**
 - **Humility in the face of opposition**

Acts 20:17-19 *From Miletus, Paul sent to Ephesus for the elders of the church. ¹⁸ When they arrived, he said to them: "You know how I lived the whole time I was with you, from the first day I came into the province of Asia.*

¹⁹ I served the Lord with great humility and with tears and in the midst of severe testing by the plots of my Jewish opponents.

- **This is striking and in contrast to attitudes we see prevalent in parts of the church today. Throughout his life of ministry, Paul's greatest opposition came from his own people, the Jews. We've talked about how every time Paul went into a new city, he sought out the local**

synagogue, even though every time he would be rejected, sometimes with threats on his life.

- *AND YET, what is his attitude in the midst of this opposition? He is heartbroken- even at this point- after all the abuse he endured, he still desires for his people to hear and receive the Grace of God.*
- *But even more importantly, Paul consistently responds to opposition with humility.*
- *Not anger, not protest- never seeks to denigrate or come against those who come against him- rather- with consistent humility, patience, and incredible courage, Paul responds with fruit of the spirit...*
- *...as he NEVER HESITATES to share the good news of God's Grace.*

- **No hesitation!**

Acts 20:20-21 *You know that I have not hesitated to preach anything that would be helpful to you but have taught you publicly and from house to house. ²¹ I have declared to both Jews and Greeks that they must turn to God in repentance and have faith in our Lord Jesus.*

- *In this farewell Paul states the three parts of his message- our need for repentance- to TURN TO GOD- for faith in Christ... not just acknowledgement, but a heart of trust and dependence upon Christ- and he will go on to speak of the FULL WILL of God- the Good News of God's GRACE. EVEN in the midst of opposition, Paul never hesitated to share the wonderful gift of the Grace of God.*

- **We continue.. verse 22...**

Acts 20:22-24 *“And now, compelled by the Spirit, I am going to Jerusalem, not knowing what will happen to me there. ²³ I only know that in every city the Holy Spirit warns me that prison and hardships are facing me. ²⁴ However, I consider my life worth nothing to me; my only aim is to finish the race and complete the task the Lord Jesus has given me—the task of testifying to the good news of God's grace.*

- *Paul considers the road before him- it is a road of uncertainty and danger... but also a road of peace and courage.*

- **Peace and courage in the presence of uncertainty and danger**

- *When he says “I consider my life worth nothing to me”, Paul IS NOT saying his life is WORTHLESS. Far from it.*
- *Many people today conclude lives have no worth, no meaning- it's a great tragedy of the human condition.*
- *In contrast, Paul is at peace, and possesses great courage, because he knows his life is of ULTIMATE WORTH to GOD.*
- *This is subtle but incredibly important. Again, when Paul says ‘my life is worth nothing to me’, he means his WORTH, HIS IDENTITY, HIS PURPOSE, doesn't come from HIMSELF. It comes from God.*
- *THEREFORE, he can be at PEACE in the face of great uncertainty because he knows his HOPE, PEACE, CONTENTMENT.. the WELLNESS OF HIS SOUL is NOT a function of HIS performance, his wisdom, and the approval he receives from others.*
- *NO- Paul has a different source- GOD, his identity in Christ, and the calling- privilege God has given him to LIVE OUT and share good news of God's Grace.*

- **PAUL GOES ON** to day he will never again see his friends- you can feel emotion in text- but for Paul, isn't just a statement of grief, but **FREEDOM....** The freedom of heart that flows from a faithful life...
- **The great freedom of faithfulness** Acts 20:25-27 “Now I know that none of you among whom I have gone about preaching the kingdom will ever see me again. ²⁶ Therefore, I declare to you today that I am innocent of the blood of any of you. ²⁷ For I have not hesitated to proclaim to you the whole will of God.
- This is a bit of a strange statement. Some people/traditions have interpreted this to mean if we fail to adequately share the gospel with someone, and that person fails to turn to Christ in faith, that WE then carry the guilt- the blood- of that person on our hands. There is not only bad theology, it is a formula for guilt and bondage.
- Rather, Paul is saying “Hear me! I have faithfully taught you the full message of God's Grace... and so what you do with it is not my burden to bear. I am free of the burden of your response, because I've faithfully done what God called me to do.
- For Paul, his calling was to proclaim the Gospel and Grace of God. FOR US, calling may look different. Although in some way, we all are called to allow God's work of transformation in our hearts- and represent God's reality and goodness in our lives.
- AND CHURCH- when we faithfully live in a simple, trusting obedience to God NOW, in the PRESENT... this yields the gift of being able to trust God with TOMORROW, whatever tomorrow may bring. In other words, THE PRESSURES OFF.
- PAUL TRUSTED GOD with the future of this precious community of faith, and a big reason he was able to do so was his faithfulness to how God was leading HIM. That's principle can apply to many areas...
- NOW, Paul changes focus, moving from his own life to what lay ahead for the church. **FIRST BIG thought:**

✠ The high calling of spiritual leadership

- Within the church God will raise up leaders and overseers- this is a basic NT concept. These roles vary, and are critically important. BUT this doesn't diminish the fact that almost every believer- in some way- will be called to be a spiritual leader.
- So this passage speaks to the church in general- although it must be said these words are particularly important- and humbling- to those who would step into larger role of Spiritual leadership within church.
- **FIRST point Paul makes is....**

• Importance of your own spiritual and emotional health

Acts 20:28a Keep watch over yourselves....

- If you've ever been on an airplane, this is the oxygen mask principle. If you can't breath, you're no good to those around you. **LEADERSHIP STARTS** with your own spiritual and emotional health.
- This is trap many pastors and church leaders fall into- and I've struggled with myself. For all time we may spend focused on spiritual health of others, we neglect it in ourselves, and results can be disastrous.
- On the positive side, the greatest thing a spiritual leader can do for their church is to be surrendered to and dependent upon Christ in their own lives.
- **THIS IS CRITICAL**, because- speaking in all honesty and humility- the task of spiritual leadership- being a shepherd- is a great privilege, but its' **IMPOSSIBLE**.

- The impossible privilege of being a shepherd

Acts 20:28 *Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers. Be shepherds of the church of God, which he bought with his own blood.*

- **Think of this! First of all, being in a role of Spiritual leadership is a role given to you the Holy Spirit- GOD.**
- **Paul goes on to say that not only is the community of believers – with which we have been entrusted- the possession of God, it is the possession God bought with HIS OWN BLOOD. God has taken his most precious possession and entrusted it to US.**
- **KEY THING!!! Paul's language here isn't describing individual believers. OF COURSE, through the cross God purchased and redeemed every believer- as an individual. BUT HERE PAUL SAYS IT IS THE CHURCH- believers TOGETHER as a COMMUNITY- that God bought with the blood of Christ.**
- **FRIENDS- Let me be vulnerable here- as a Pastor, it has been gut wrenching to see the church fragment as it has over the past two years. EVERY pastor I know shares with me the same story- our congregations are half the size they were before 2019. But the truth is, Covid only accelerated trends that have been in place over a generation.**
- **THE CHURCH, as a vibrant, loving, invested, GATHERED COMMUNITY of faith that is a change agent in the lives of its own people and the community around it- the church is in decline.**
- **And it is tragic, it should break our hearts, because it is for the CHURCH that Christ came, lived, died, and rose again- not just us as individuals who claim a personal faith in Jesus Christ.**
- **POINT! Being a spiritual leader- a shepherd seeking to oversee and bring God's goodness to people- this is not just a difficult task- it is impossible... APART FROM GOD. And THEREIN lies our great hope.**
- **When God calls you to be a shepherd- in some way- what God is really doing is calling you to open your life so that HE can do this work THROUGH YOU.**

Colossians 1:28-29 *He is the one we proclaim, admonishing and teaching everyone with all wisdom, so that we may present everyone fully mature in Christ. ²⁹ To this end I strenuously contend with all the energy Christ so powerfully works in me.*

- **The church today is blessed (I think it's a blessing) with incredible resources. But our hope, our power, is IN CHRIST. As we read in Philippians 4- I can do all of this through CHRIST who gives me strength.**
- **SO- we are called to KEEP WATCH, over ourselves and the church, as a shepherd watches their flock.**
- **Paul continues with metaphor of sheep as he turns now to the enemy of sheep- the wolf. HERE we see**

- † The greatest threat (*hint- it's not the big bad secular world*)

Acts 20:29-31 *I know that after I leave, savage wolves will come in among you and will not spare the flock.*

³⁰ *Even from your own number men will arise and distort the truth in order to draw away disciples after them.*

³¹ *So be on your guard! Remember that for three years I never stopped warning each of you night and day with tears.*

- **LOTS could be discussed here- just one thought now. The great threat about which Paul warns these leaders ISN'T external persecution. It's not even the immorality of the surrounding culture.**
- **IT IS THE FRACTURING OF THE CHURCH FROM WITHIN.... THE DISTORTION OF GOD'S TRUTH WITHIN THE CHURCH.**
- **NOW! Honest people can debate what these distortions within the church ARE. But I'll just point out one thing. If we look at Paul's letters, how he reprimands the church against heresy and distortion of truth- the BIGGEST issue he confronts is RELIGIOUS LEGALISM...**
- **The idea- ROOTED IN PRIDE- that our righteousness- and our value to God- is achieved through our own moral performance, where inevitably the criteria of our self-righteousness is established by US.**
- **IN CONTRAST is the miraculous blessing of a life humbly and obediently dependent on the amazing Grace and indwelling life of Jesus Christ.**
- **Think about this more... Go read Galatians 5....**
- **In the theme of Grace, this is how Paul ends his farewell.**
- **In my outline, I have phrase, "Committed to Grace", but if you look closely, the truth is that God and His grace has been committed to us. Given to us- entrusted to us.**

✠ Committed to Grace

Acts 20:32 *"Now I commit you to God and to the word of his grace, which can build you up and give you an inheritance among all those who are sanctified."*

• Our inheritance

- **When we think of our inheritance as believers, what do we typically think this means? HEAVEN, right? NO QUESTION, scripture does speak of heaven- eternity with God- as our inheritance. But we make a great mistake if this is the limit of our understanding.**
- **You see, the emphasis in Paul's words here is on the PRESENT. He says God and His Grace will BUILD US UP. That is something happening right now- in Heaven we will no longer need to be built up. This is something God is doing now. This is also the meaning of 'SANCTIFIED'- which refers to our ONGOING, INCREASING EXPERIENCE of who we already FULLY ARE in Christ.**
- **My point – and I humbly suggest was Paul's as well- is that our inheritance IN CHRIST isn't just heaven when we die, but the goodness, the fullness, of CHRIST'S PRESENCE IN OUR LIVES RIGHT NOW.**
- **NOT in the relative goodness or success of our circumstances, which always can change, but the CONSTANT and COMPLETE reality of CHRIST WITH US, which we experience by faith.**

– Paul continues...

Acts 20:33-34 *I have not coveted anyone's silver or gold or clothing. ³⁴ You yourselves know that these hands of mine have supplied my own needs and the needs of my companions.*

– Here Paul is describing the great...

• The power of identity

- **You see, Paul didn't need silver, gold, or nice clothing to know who he was. Really, this is a picture of NOT COMPARING yourself to other people in order to determine your own value.**

- **Paul basically says... I didn't need any of that- in contrast, I had the joy of working for my own living, and even more, being able to support those around me.**
- **This leads to his last statement to his dear friends. It's of note that Paul's parting words to this first generation of church leaders focused on...**

- **The great gifts of compassion and generosity**

Acts 20:35 *In everything I did, I showed you that by this kind of hard work we must help the weak, remembering the words the Lord Jesus himself said: 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.'* ”

- **The church is not just about doctrine- either in how we protect it or spread it. The church is about people. Paul here describes the blessing of generosity to be HARD WORK- in other words, the Spirit of Christ in us will seek to love other people sacrificially- not just out of an overflow or abundance.**
- **Last thought- When Jesus said “It is more blessed to give than receive”, this statement can also be read to mean “there is greater blessing in giving than receiving.. or even “There is greater JOY in generosity than there is just in receiving”. Something to remember.**
- **The scene ends as Paul finishes speaking and heads to the ship. Here we see a very emotional picture of..**

- ✠ **The gift of community**

Acts 20:36-38 *When Paul had finished speaking, he knelt down with all of them and prayed. ³⁷ They all wept as they embraced him and kissed him. ³⁸ What grieved them most was his statement that they would never see his face again. Then they accompanied him to the ship.*

- **I'll say it one more time... the movement of Christ Disciples that changed the Mediterranean world in one generation did so as a COMMUNITY. People who did life together and LOVED ONE ANOTHER.**
- **They body of interconnected people- who with all their frailties and brokenness- came to know this NEW LIFE through faith in Jesus Christ, and experience the transforming reality of this new life TOGETHER.**
- **This remains God's invitation, and CALL, for the church today**