

Farewell Address to Ephesians Elders

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[0:00] Acts chapter 20. We're going to begin reading at verse 13 and read through the end of the chapter. We went on ahead to the ship and sailed for Esos where we were going to take Paul aboard.

! He had made this arrangement because he was going there on foot. When he met us at Esos, we took him aboard and went on to Medellin. The next day, we set sail from there and arrived at Chios. The day after that, we crossed over to Samos and on the following day arrived at Miletus. Paul had decided to sail past Ephesus to avoid spending time in the province of Asia, for he was in a hurry to reach Jerusalem, if possible, by the day of Pentecost.

From Miletus, Paul sent to Ephesus for the elders of the church. 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, I served the Lord with great humility and with tears, although I was severely tested by the plots of the Jews. You know that I have not hesitated to preach anything that would be helpful to you, but I've taught you publicly and from house to house.

[1:18] I've declared to both Jews and Greeks that they must turn to God in repentance and have faith in our Lord Jesus. And now, compelled by the Spirit, I am going to Jerusalem, not knowing what will happen to me there.

I only know that in every city the Holy Spirit warns me that prison and hardships are facing me. However, I consider my life worth nothing to me, if only I may finish the race and complete the task the Lord Jesus has given me, the task of testifying to the gospel of God's grace.

Now I know that none of you among whom I have gone about preaching the kingdom will ever see me again.

Therefore, I declare to you today that I am innocent of the blood of all men, for I have not hesitated to proclaim to you the whole will of God. 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. I know that after I leave, savage wolves will come in among you and will not spare the flock.

[2:33] Even from your own number, men will arise and distort the truth in order to draw away disciples after them. So be on your guard. Remember that for three years I never stopped warning each of you night and day with tears.

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. I have not coveted anyone's silver or gold or clothing.

You yourselves know that these hands of mine have supplied my own needs and the needs of my companions. And 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. When he had said this, he knelt down with all of them and prayed.

They all wept as they embraced him and kissed him. What grieved them most was the statement that they would never see his face again. Then they accompanied him to the ship.

[3:41] Let's hear the preaching of God's word. The Lord Jesus Christ so loves to save sinners that he sends his ambassadors all over the world with his saving gospel.

Now, in the book of Acts, we're just about to the end of Paul's third missionary journey. Having set out from his sending church in Antioch of Syria, he made his way through Galatia and revisited the churches that he had planted earlier and made his way to Ephesus, where he would spend three years, the greater chunk of this whole third missionary journey, because there the Lord opened up a

wonderful opportunity and did many miraculous things to uphold his name, and the word of the Lord spread widely and was greatly honored.

So, Paul spends three years there in Ephesus, and then before sailing home, Paul wants to revisit some of the other churches over here in Macedonia and Achaia that he had planted earlier.

So, that's where he went, and having spent three months in Corinth and in that region, he was ready to then sail back home to Antioch.

But it was there in Corinth, just before he set sail, that he discovered that his appointment was to be frustrated by God's appointment, or his will was disappointed by God's appointment.

[5:20] He learned of a plot on his life, and evidently the plot on his life had to do with planting hitmen on his ship to kill him at sea and to lose his body somewhere in the Mediterranean.

And so, Paul's plans changed, and instead of sailing home from Corinth, he now turns around and retraces his steps back by way of land through Macedonia.

Now, we might think that, yes, he revisits these places wherever he goes. He's encouraging the saints. We might think that surely he'll revisit Ephesus. It's been almost a year now since he's been to Ephesus.

Surely on his way home he will stop at Ephesus. But he doesn't. He purposefully bypasses Ephesus, and we're told why in verse 16 of our text.

Paul had decided to sail past Ephesus to avoid spending time in the province of Asia, for he was in a hurry to reach Jerusalem, if possible, by the day of Pentecost.

[6:28] Remember, he's collected financial gifts from the Gentile churches to give to the needy saints back in Judea, and he wants to get there before the feast of Pentecost. He's in a hurry.

You ever been in a hurry? You don't want to be late for some appointment, and maybe you're running late, and that's Paul. He's in a hurry.

Now, when you're in a hurry, you don't stop along the way to visit with people and have coffee and get out and kick your feet through the leaves and smell the roses. You make a beeline for your destination, don't you?

When you're in a hurry, you don't make any extraneous stops. Now, if you're out of gas, yeah, you'll stop and shoot five gallons in just enough to get you there, or if the kid's absolutely necessary to go to the bathroom, yes, we'll take a two-minute pit stop, but hurry, we don't want to be late.

We're in a hurry. Well, when you're in a hurry, you only stop if it's very important, and it's that fact alone that ought to color verses 17 to 38 in our Bibles with a yellow highlighter.

[7:45] This farewell address to the elders of the church at Ephesus was so important that a hurrying apostle interrupted his journey home for this meeting.

Was that also one of the reasons why God sends him back this route so that he might have this meeting with the Ephesian elders? Well, he's at Miletus.

He sails past Ephesus because he doesn't want to get hung up there and spend so much time in the province of Asia. He's here in Miletus. And from Miletus, about 30 miles away from Ephesus, he sends a messenger to Ephesus to have the elders of the church come down and meet him there.

So that's 30 miles the messenger must go to fetch them, and then another 30 miles back. And all the while, Paul's in a hurry, and yet he waits because this is critical.

This meeting is so important for the future life and health of the church in Ephesus. More than that, this meeting is critical for the future life and health of Grace Fellowship Church in Bremen.

[8:58] This meeting is critical to every other church of Christ on earth, to every elder and every Christian, to your spiritual health, and to mine as well.

Because the Holy Spirit records this meeting for us, at least some detailed minutes of it. He does not just record for us that such a meeting took place.

He doesn't say the elders came, a good time was had by all, and they all went on their way encouraged. The Holy Spirit says, this meeting is too important. I want details of what Paul has said, enshrined in the Holy Scriptures, so that every church of every age, both shepherds and sheep alike, will be able to read it because they need it.

The fact that we have this meeting and what happened, the very words of Paul, 22 verses, more than half the chapter, tells us of its importance.

And it's not just here for Pastor Jason and myself, the elders of this church. This is here for you.

God wants us to know what we are to be doing as elders in this church, but he also wants you to know what we are to be doing as elders in the church.

[10:22] So thanks for the map. Let's give our attention then to Paul's address to the leadership of the church. And I just want you to notice in passing that the leaders of the church are called elders in verse 27.

They're called overseers in verse 28. In verse 17, they're called elders. Verse 28, they're called overseers, and they're also called shepherds or pastors in verse 28.

Now these are not three different offices in the church at Ephesus. They're rather three different names, words to describe the one and the same office in the local church.

And we'll see that these names help us to understand the role of spiritual leaders. So the first lesson, Paul gives them an example to follow, his own life and ministry among them for three years. His opening words of the address to the elders is, you know, you know, he says, you know how I lived the whole time I was with you from the first day I came into the province of Asia.

[11:29] Notice several things about Paul's example. First, it was visible. You could see it. You know how I lived. Now he couldn't say that if he lived a private life isolated from the flock.

No, his life was shared with the people just as a shepherd is found with the sheep. So Paul lived with them so that they could observe him so that he can say to them in truth, you know how I lived. His example was visible. He rubbed shoulders with them. Second, it was authentic. It was consistent from the first day he arrived to three years later when he departed.

It was not one thing in public, another thing in private. It was an authentic, consistent example that he left behind. He had nothing to hide, no double life. You know how I lived and how I ministered. Third, it was helpful. And that's why Paul shares it. He's not here tooting his horn and saying, hey, look at me. See what I do.

[12:39] As if to direct attention to himself or itself, for his own glory. Rather, he's using one of God's own tools for teaching those under him a living example.

What a powerful tool. You know, God not only gave us his written word that we might read of who he is and how to be right with him and how to live before him, he also sent us his living word that we might see the word in action.

The Lord Jesus Christ fleshing out what this life looks like. Paul will tell Timothy to set an example for believers in all areas of life, speech, love, faith, purity.

And that's what Paul had done for these Ephesian elders while he was with them for three years. He not only told them what to do, but he showed them how to live and take care of the church.

All of us who teach, whether in the church, at home, in school, in other venues, business, ought to remember this power of a living example.

[13:56] Paul's example was helpful to those who learned from him. And lastly, it was Christ-like. Paul wanted all the under-shepherds of Christ's flock to be just like the chief shepherd, Jesus Christ, of whom David could write, the Lord is my shepherd.

And so Paul wants these shepherds at Ephesus to be just like the Lord Jesus. He only wants them to notice his own example because he's following Christ's example.

As he could say to the Corinthians, follow my example as I am following Christ's example. Paul. So Jesus, the ultimate good shepherd, I'm following him so you elders follow me.

What you've seen in me, do as you care for the flock. So Paul gave them his own example of life and ministry. It was visible. It was credible, authentic.

It was helpful. It was Christ-like. The second point, let's hone in on some specific examples of Paul's character. What does he hold out before them in terms of his character and life?

[15:14] Well, first he says in verse 19, you know how I serve the Lord with great humility. You've seen me serve with humility.

In other words, Paul didn't come into Ephesus with a holier-than-thou attitude. He was approachable because he was humble. He was among them as a humble servant.

Just like the ultimate good shepherd who said, come to me and learn from me for I am gentle and humble in heart.

And even so, elders are to be humble men. we're dangerous when we're proud. The sheep are not safe when the shepherds are proud.

Pride is one of the vocational dangers of this ministry. It can cause us to so work in the congregation and in our ministry to make ourselves the focus of the ministry.

[16:21] And that's why in setting forth the qualifications for overseers, Paul tells Timothy he must not be a recent convert or he may become conceited, lifted up with pride and fall under the same

judgment as the devil.

And that pride usually means that the Lord needs to put us through some humbling circumstances of life to pound the pride and arrogance and conceit out of us to make us humble servants of the flock.

It's humble men who are able to deal gently with those who are ignorant and going astray. It's humble men who are willing to serve and be useful to the flock. So he sets before them his humility. Secondly, his love for people. He's saying, you've seen my love for people. You say, John, I don't see those words in there. Where do you see that? Well, I see it in his tears. Verse 19, you know how I serve the Lord with great humility and with tears.

With tears. Paul was emotionally invested in these people. They were more to him than just numbers, warm bodies in the pew to count.

[17:34] No, they were people he loved. They were people he wept with and wept for due to his concern for them. He says it again in verse 31. Remember that for three years I never stopped warning you day and night with tears.

With tears. And then we can see Paul's love for the people and their reciprocated love and tears for him in verse 38 as Paul is leaving them at the end of his address.

It says they all wept, verse 38, they all wept. Paul wept and the Ephesian elders wept as they embraced and kissed. Such love between them that he says in the first verse of chapter 21 that we had to tear ourselves away from them.

Paul loved the people he served and they loved him back. And that's Christ-like isn't it? It's Christ in Gethsemane our great shepherd offering up prayers and petitions with loud cries and tears in that struggle to see us saved.

Even so elders are to have a tender love for the people they serve. And that love is to flavor everything that they do. It's to move them to pray for their people. It's to be seen in the way they speak the truth to them in love.

[18:57] The way they sympathize with them. The animating power of love is needful in elders. Humility, love for the people, and lastly a willingness to suffer for them in many trials.

For he tells them in verse 19, you know how I was severely tested by the plots of the Jews. Now we read of one plot. Remember the plot to wipe him out on the sea journey home?

Well, I guess, excuse me, that was Corinth. I don't want to confuse Corinth and Ephesus. But we read of that plot when they came into the auditorium there and shouted, great, it's the goddess of Artemis of the Ephesians and Paul wanted to venture in.

They said, no, for your life you can't dare go in and speak to them. There was plot, but there were more than one. It's plural, isn't it? The plots. There were multiple plots on his life in Ephesus and yet they would not stop him from ministering to them.

They would not move him. He suffered many trials in bringing God's word to the Ephesians, but he counted it as well worth the cost. Just to finish the task of testifying of the gospel of God's grace.

[20:18] And the minister's response to suffering and trials involved in pastoring the flock reveals much about them. It's the hireling who cares not for the sheep who runs at the first sign of danger and suffering and cost.

But it's the good shepherd who lays down the life for the sheep, who pays the ultimate cost. And every under-shepherd like him is found willing to suffer on behalf of the flock that he serves.

Paul can say of the Corinthian flock, I will most gladly spend and be spent for you. And he can say to these Ephesians, you saw that. You saw how I suffered under all these trials as I ministered to you.

And part of that suffering and pain of the price, the cost, was found toward the end of his address when he says, I've not coveted anyone's silver or gold or clothing.

He was probably falsely accused of being in it for the money. There were many charlatans roaming the countryside who thought that religion was a means for financial gain. And Paul knows that if they think I'm one of them, then they'll just dismiss my message.

[21:34] And for the gospel's sake, he says, it's too important. And so I'll preach all day and then I'll work by night so intense with Aquila and Priscilla just so no one will discount the messenger and the message with him.

And he did it for one other reason too, that he might set an example for them. I showed you that by this kind of hard work, we must help the weak, remembering the words of our Lord Jesus himself

who said, it is more blessed to give than to receive.

And everything about Paul's life, you see, showed that. He was a giver. He wasn't there to get. He was there to give. To give the glorious gospel of the grace of God. To give his very life if necessary. And he says to these Ephesian elders, there's got to be something of that in you, man. As you serve those precious sheep in Ephesus.

I wonder if there's anything in your life that gives evidence to this reality that you find it more blessed to give than to receive. That's something that all the people of God learn from their Savior who became poor to make us rich.

[22:48] Well, you know all about it, Paul says, about his character, his humility, his love of people, his willingness to suffer through many trials for them. Examples of Paul's character.

Now, thirdly, he gives them some examples of his preaching. And, namely, one overarching example.

He preached the whole counsel of God. You've seen how I preach. You know that I have not hesitated to preach anything, verse 20, anything that would be helpful to you.

You see, I came among you as one seeking to help you. I wanted to profit you. I wanted to benefit you. So I didn't hold back from any preaching that would serve that end of helping you.

And how does Paul define what teaching is helpful to the Ephesians? Look down at verse 27. Uses the same phrase. I have not hesitated to proclaim to you.

[23:54] Earlier he says what would be helpful to you. Now he says the whole counsel of God. Now, can you put those two together? What is helpful to the people in Ephesus?

The whole counsel of God. All of his will. The whole message. The full message that God has given us in Scripture. Or as Paul will write to Timothy, all Scripture is God-breathed and is profitable. It's helpful. So I'm not going to hold back from you any of it, but give you 16 ounces to the pound Bible. He didn't hesitate.

He didn't shrink back. He didn't hold back from giving them what was necessary for their help and benefit. Now, why do you think he put it in those terms?

Why didn't he just say, you know, when I was with you, I gave you the whole counsel of God. I gave you what was... Why does he say, I did not shrink back? I did not hesitate.

[25:00] Because Paul knows that there's a temptation for every preacher of the gospel to shrink back from saying some things. To hesitate before he says something for fear of how it will be received by the people.

Yes, yes, it's in the Bible, I know. Yes, God said it, but people don't like to hear it. We're trying to grow the church here at Ephesus. And if we preach those words of Scripture, why, people might not come back.

Or even worse, they might persecute us. Paul was not above feeling the temptation to shrink back, to hesitate, to trim the message, to suit people's desires, but he absolutely refused to do so.

And why? Why did he not hold back anything that God had said? Well, one reason was because it's only by proclaiming the whole counsel of God that he would clear himself and make himself innocent of the blood of all men.

He knows he's got to give an account one day, and the only thing that will keep the blood of man from being on his hands is if he preaches the whole gospel, verses 26 and 27. But another reason why he preached the whole gospel, the whole counsel of God, was because he loved them so much.

[26:24] And he was there to help them. And he would not hold back anything that would help them, that was profitable to them. And that is all of Scripture.

No. No. This is critical to any church. Do you know that much of the false doctrine being preached today is not so much that wrong things are being said?

Some places that's true. Wrong things are being said. But I would say there's more false doctrine that is not due to wrong things being said, but that other truths are not being said.

They're being held back. They're being not spoken. And when part of the truth is preached as if it were the whole truth, it is an untruth.

Part of the truth spoken as if that's the whole truth is in fact a lie, an untruth. Notice the example Paul gives us on this point.

[27:32] In verse 22, he preached repentance and faith. There are pulpits in the land that urge people to have faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

But you may wait in vain to hear an equally clear call to turn to God in repentance from their sins. Paul says in verse 22, I've declared to both Jews and Gentiles, I just have one message for all people that they must turn to God in repentance and have faith in our Lord Jesus. Not one or the other, but both. And false doctrine is being spread when the call to faith in Christ is given. But the call to repent is consistently withheld.

That's a serious error. And it can be a damning error. You know, there are lots of people today who've made some kind of decision about faith in Jesus.

Who never intended to change their lives, to order them in his ways. Never intended to repent of their sins. They want to be saved from hell, but they don't want to be saved from sinning.

[28:58] Lots of them. In lots of churches. Well, that option is simply not on the table. God has never said that he would save someone if they do not repent.

No, the only salvation Jesus offers is salvation from sin. That's why his name is Jesus. For he will save his people from their sin. And unless you repent, he says, you will all likewise perish.

So, Paul is saying, I didn't withhold anything that was needful for you. So I preached repentance. And I preached faith. Both.

Both must be preached. One popular preacher today, when asked why he doesn't preach against sin, said, well, with what with all the negativity in the world today.

People need love and affirmation. So I just don't feel called to preach against sin. Well, if he doesn't preach against sin, he's not called to preach.

[30:04] Period. Period. Because that's part of the whole counsel of God. Because a gospel without sin is a gospel without salvation.

Why do we need to be saved if there's no sin to be saved from? And no matter how many times they may use the name of Jesus. It's a false gospel.

His name is Jesus because he saves people from sin. So you see why Paul is urging them to do as he has done and preach the whole message of God.

Now, it can be just as damning to give a call to repent without directing people to faith in Jesus Christ. What does that turn into? Man saving himself with his own works.

No, Paul says, I preach both. Repentance toward God. Faith in our Lord Jesus. Whatever was helpful, whatever was needful, I preached it. Let me give you other examples of preaching today.

[31:07] And by the way, it's always been this way. There's nothing new. There's always been people who turn to teachers who will give them what their itching ears want to hear.

Many today preach about God's love. And we say, good for them. For God is love. But they often refuse to preach about God's wrath.

Shame on them. That's part of the whole counsel of God. Do you know what's helpful for you? Do you know what's profitable for all men? To hear both.

God's love and God's wrath. God's love and God's love and God's love and God's love. And that's why Paul says in Romans 11, 22, Behold the goodness and the severity of God.

Behold his kindness and his sternness. Because that's the only God that exists. Anything less is a God of your own imagination. Be sure you're worshiping the right God.

[32:07] How do we be sure that we've got the right God? We preach the whole counsel of God. All of his attributes. All that he is. The same thing is true that some would preach man's responsibility.

Others preach God's sovereignty. No, no. It's not either or. It's both. We must preach both law and gospel. One without the other is serious trouble.

We must preach duties and privileges of the Christian life. The imperatives and the indicatives. We must say things from the pulpit that are both positive and negative.

You know that the summary of God's law is the 10th of the moral law is the 10 commandments. And eight of the 10 are in the negative. We must say things that are negative.

You shall not. You shall not. As well as you shall. We must preach the imparted righteousness as well as imputed righteousness.

[33:10] Justification as well as sanctification. We could go on and on in these matters. One without the other is misleading, erroneous and false and produces unhealthy Christians at best and deceive professors at worst.

So what's the antidote to such an anemic message? It's simple. It's clear. Preach the whole. Counsel of God.

Preach all that God has said. Don't hold back anything. And that's what Paul did. We all need all that God has said to us. In biblical balance.

In biblical proportion. That's simply to believe that God has spoken no wasted words. That he knew we needed to hear everything that he said.

Well, having set these before the elders his own life and ministry among them. That they might learn from his example. Paul now turns to some direct commands for them.

[34:09] Verse 28. Keep watch over yourselves. Now this is not an example. Yes, Paul did this. But now he's turned from example to direct commands.

Keep watch over yourselves. Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers. Be shepherds of the church of Christ which he bought with his own blood. Now you get the picture of verse 28. The whole picture here is given in terms. These commands are given in terms of a shepherd watching over a flock.

We have those words in the text. Flock and shepherd. And so that's our fourth point. He sets before them the example of a shepherd watching over his flock.

The church of God is referred to as a flock of sheep. The elders are referred to as overseers and shepherds. Kids, you know what an overseer does? He oversees.

[35:07] He looks over. He watches over. And that's what a shepherd does for the flock. He's watching over the flock.

And that's the example given of a shepherd's treatment of his flock. So we learn here then that elders have a double watch to keep.

They must watch over themselves and all the flock. Notice first themselves. Because you know your shepherds are also sheep.

And need to be watched over as much as you. And so we're commanded to keep watch over ourselves. We have no less temptations, vulnerabilities, and need for watching than you do.

I want to tell you it's easier to preach to you than it is to preach to myself. Because if I preach to you, you're the one that's got to do the repenting if there's something wrong.

[36:07] But if I preach to myself, I've got to do the repenting. And I can be so busy in ministry and in preparing to what I'm going to say to you that I fail to take time to first preach to myself.

That's a recipe for disaster. That's a formula that has led to many a fall of a man in the ministry.

So we must watch for ourselves. And then we must watch over all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made us overseers. We're not responsible to watch over all Christians.

Pastor Jason and I will not give an account one day for watching over all Christians. That's not.

Notice the language. We're responsible to watch over all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made us overseers.

This flock. And I trust you can see in that why membership in a flock is important. It's important because it defines the flock that I and Pastor Jason are to watch over.

[37:20] And that one day we must give an account to. Not everyone who comes in and out of these doors is a part of the flock.

But every member here has agreed to place themselves under the oversight of the shepherds here. Well, keep watch over yourselves and over all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers.

Now, what are we to do then? How does that work out? What does it look like? Well, what does it look like? What does a shepherd do for his woolly sheep? Because as you see that example, you will get a good picture of what your elders are to be doing for you.

So first of all, the shepherd feeds them, doesn't he? Some plants are noxious to sheep. So the shepherd leads them out into green pastures and besides still waters.

And so we pastors must be careful to give you solid food, milk, meat, stuff that will nourish your souls.

[38:28] And what is that but the living and abiding word of God that nourishes your faith and hope and love and every other Christlike virtue?

That sanctifies you? That sanctifies you? That builds you up? It's through the preached word that you behold the glory of Christ and are being transformed into his same likeness.

And that's why Jesus would say to Peter, feed my sheep. And why Paul would write to Timothy and say, preach the word.

That's what they need to hear. The word of God. And that's the primary task of the shepherd, to feed the flock on the word of God. And Paul says, I not only taught you publicly this word of God, but also from house to house.

So the public ministry of the word is more like a shotgun approach. And scatter goes the word. And the Holy Spirit can take that scattered buckshot and bring it right home to individual applications.

[39 : 35] We're not denying that. But there are times when there are specific situations in the lives of the sheep that require a specific ministry to that sheep alone.

To be able to take what God's word has to say about their particular need and problem and to bring it to them. And that's why Paul says my ministry was not only publicly, but from house to house, from individual to individual.

Feeding the flock. Knowing the word that sustains the weary. Giving a word in season in the particular need. And that's why shepherds need to know the condition of their flock.

That's why we want to know how is it going with you. And where can we pray and minister to you? A shepherd feeds the flock. What else does he do?

Well, he leads them. There's those woolly sheep again. They don't know what's best for them. They need to be led. And so the shepherd goes before them. And what do they do?

[40 : 40] They follow him. And spiritual shepherds are to be like the chief shepherd. And what does he do? He leads them in paths of righteousness for his namesake.

Paths of righteousness. And so the under shepherds of Christ, both by example and by teaching, are to be leading you in paths of righteousness.

That means there'll be heavy doses of God's commands and of his laws. His righteous and holy and good laws. So that you can see what are the boundary markers on this narrow road that leads to life.

I'm to lead you. We're to lead you in paths of righteousness. Here's the way. Walk in it. The shepherd leads the flock.

Well, thirdly, now what's the shepherd doing? Here he is at the end of the day. And he's at the gate of the sheepfold. And he's holding out his staff. And each one of the sheep are passing through as they come into the sheepfold.

[41 : 43] And what's he doing? He's counting. And if when he gets done, he's one short, what does he do? Well, he leaves the ninety and nine and he goes out looking for the one that's lost.

And he finds him and he brings him back. And so that's what an elder does. He restores them when they stray.

He restores them. Oh, how David appreciated this about his good shepherd. He restoreth my soul. How many times when David had strayed, the good shepherd came after him.

And not always just God and him. You remember, it was through Nathan. You're the man. And that's the way it is. Yes, the good shepherd is over you, dear sheep. But he uses his under shepherds to come after you when you're straying.

To restore your soul. Elders called to seek out the wandering sheep. Who strayed outside of God's commands.

[42 : 47] To warn them. To gently seek their restoration. To point them to Jesus. To call them to repentance. The shepherd feeds and leads and restores.

And lastly, he defends. I've said it many times from this pulpit that sheep have no defense mechanisms. The gazelle's got speed to run away from danger.

The turtle has a shell to tuck into. Porcupine has his quills. A skunk has his scent. But a sheep depends entirely upon the shepherd for his defense.

And so David watched over the sheep, didn't he? Against the wild beasts that were always looking for leg of lamb. And when they came, he was up to fight them for his sheep.

To defend them. Elders no less are to defend against the dangers to the flock. And that's no small part of keeping watch over the flock.

[43 : 49] Why do they need to be? Yes, they might stray away. That's part of it. But there's also those that would do them harm. And so the shepherds are to watch over, to defend the flock.

To stand guard. And it's not physical claws and teeth that they defend against. It is spiritual enemies. The world, the flesh, the devil. And let me just point out one special way that all three of those work.

We defend the flock against certain ideas that are floating around today. Ideas. Oh, they sound so innocent.

Can an idea hurt anyone? Some ideas, if you believe them, will take you to hell. They're not all harmless. No, the Bible says there are things being said that war against your soul.

There are doctrines of demons. 1 Timothy 4.1 There are those who are teaching things that spread their destructive influence like gangrene.

[44 : 58] And who have overthrown the faith of some. There are those who are ruining whole households by teaching things they ought not to teach. And it's not enough that they use lots of Bible verses.

For the scriptures can be twisted to their own destruction and to the destruction of all who believe them. There's hardly an epistle in the New Testament that does not warn of false teachers and false doctrines.

Ideas can be very dangerous to believe. And this is why Paul insists that the overseer must be able to teach. He must hold firmly to the trustworthy message as it has been taught.

So that he can encourage others by sound doctrine and refute those who oppose it. There is an encouraging and a refuting of error that must be done by the shepherds to defend the flock.

He tells the Ephesian elders, verse 29. Must have been some of the saddest words he had to speak to them. I know that after I leave, savage wolves will come in among you and will not spare the flock.

[46 : 12] Even from your own number. He's looking in the eyeballs of these men. Even from your own number, men will arise. To distort the truth in order to draw away disciples after them.

Some of them eager to gain a following would distort the truth and wreak destruction from within the very church that had the Apostle Paul for three years. Lies being taught in the very place called to be the pillar and ground of the truth.

Dangers where they are the least expected. Within the church. Within the church. The hospitals are places devoted to healing and health, aren't they?

That's why they exist. For healing and health. And yet some of the most dangerous infections are the ones that are caught in hospitals. And in other health care facilities.

The church is no safe zone. Some of the most dangerous errors are being taught within professing churches of Christ. And if it happened in Ephesus, it can happen anywhere.

[47 : 29] Hence, the shepherd must be on guard. Watch over. Defend the flock. Feed them. Lead them. Restore them. Defend them. And then there are motivations for the elders found in this address.

First motivation comes from whose flock it is. As you're watching over this flock, elders never forget whose flock it is. Be shepherds of the church of God, which he bought with his own blood.

I know of no sharper prods in my heart than this. That you are his sheep. You are precious in his sight.

He bought you with his own blood. From heaven he came and sought her to be his holy bride. With his own blood he bought her. And for her life he died.

And that one who died for your souls and shed his blood for you now says to me, John, while I'm gone, look after them. Look after them. And if I will just remember whose you are, it will keep me from lording it over you.

[48 : 37] It will keep me from abusing the flock. It will send me to serve the Lord Jesus who bought you. And you, because he bought you.

Second motivation. Who has appointed us to this task? He says, keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers. It's God himself who wants his churches to be ordered and organized with officers, shepherds, and sheep.

Clearly defined membership. This is God's plan for the good of his sheep. And it's God the Holy Spirit who gives gifts and graces needed for the office of overseer and then places these officers in each flock.

Even when the sheep vote, it's the Holy Spirit who makes them overseers by his overruling providence. By setting forth his qualifications and telling the members, the sheep, look for men who fill these offices.

It's the Holy Spirit who guides that whole process. And that's both a comforting and a motivating force for your elders to know that the Holy Spirit has made us overseers in the flock.

[49:56] And third motivation. Who it is that will hold us accountable. Hebrews 13, 17 says that we must give an account for shepherding your souls.

That means that I must stand before him who spilled his blood for you. And look him eye to eye and give an account for what I did.

And Paul says in this passage, I know that the only thing that will enable me to stand eyeball to eyeball with Jesus Christ without the blood of people on my hands is to preach the whole counsel of God.

What a motivation, you see. A motivation. So he gives these motives to the elders to spur them on. Let me just close with three applications. First of all, there's much here for your pastors. This is a tall order indeed. I've heard things this morning that I've had to repent of this week.

[51:01] And my repentance is not over. I must change. I must become more. What this example set before us in scripture is.

Who is sufficient for these things. It's only Christ who can make us capable ministers of the new covenant. There's much here for your pastors. But secondly, there's much here for you, the sheep. I want you to really get a hold of this fact. That these instructions for your shepherds have been put out there for you to read.

In other words, it's not something private that's kept in a pastor's conference. No. This is public information. There's a reason for that. There's a reason God wants you to know these things. First of all, because it's sheep. You've got to choose the shepherds that you will submit yourselves to. You've got to look for shepherds that you will place yourself under their oversight for your journey through this life.

[52:03] You've got to know what kind of men should we as a church be choosing to serve. What are the signs of those the Holy Spirit is calling?

And then you need to know how to pray for your pastors. Knowing that you stand to gain or lose. Depending on what kind of shepherds we are.

There's a verse in scripture that Paul writes to Timothy that hammers this point home. Watch your life and doctrine closely. Elder Timothy. Spiritual leader Timothy. Watch your life and your doctrine closely.

Persevere in them because if you do, you will save both yourself and your hearers. Yes. Pray for your shepherds.

Because you stand to gain or lose depending on what kind of shepherds we are. Would you pray for us? You could do nothing better for Pastor Jason and myself than to open your Bible to chapter 20 of Acts and to pray over these things that we've seen this morning for us.

[53:20] To do as Paul did at the end. To commit us to God and the word of his grace that is able to build us up. And having built us up to build you up.

And to give us together an inheritance among those who are sanctified. We elders need God as much as you do. We elders need this word of God as much as you do.

Commit us to God and his word. And we will be most grateful. Thirdly, lost person. Lastly, these instructions to elders are also important because it reveals to us that God is very jealous of his gospel.

If people are to be saved in 2016, the true gospel must remain intact. Amen. And so he gives the shepherds of his flock such instructions about preaching the whole counsel of God.

Why? Because he wants you sitting there this morning to hear the true gospel that really saves people. That really has a righteousness to give to sinners.

[54:37] That will make them right with God. You see, the reality is we've all sinned against God and God is so holy that anyone that sins against him accrues a huge debt that must be paid.

All sin must be paid for. That's because of God's holiness. And God is determined that sin will be paid for in one of two ways.

First option, by the sinner himself in hell forever. That's what we all deserve for sinning against him. But now let me tell you about the grace of God that he has devised a second plan, a second payment plan that he has approved of whereby he will accept payment from a substitute that he himself will equip and send his own son to pay the price in full for all who repent of their sins and trust in him.

Paul says, that's why I live, to testify to the gospel of God's grace. You see, the gospel is the good news.

It's all about God's grace. That when he could have and should have and might have dealt with us according to our sins by damning us forever, he said, I will accept a second way of payment from the substitute Lamb of God if you turn from your way and trust in him to save you.

[56:11] What a gracious plan. Would you come to him today? Would you trust in him to pay for all of your sins and come to know this life with the Lord Jesus?

Let's pray. We bow, chief shepherd, before your eyes. We're thankful that you are the good shepherd of the sheep who laid down your life for the sheep.

That's why there is a church, why any of us are forgiven, why we delight in you and the gospel of your grace. Make us faithful ambassadors of that gospel.

Make Pastor Jason and I to bear more and more the stamp of what we've seen this morning to the end that these people, every one of them, might profit and be helped onward to God.

We ask it for Jesus' praise. Amen.