



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

6420 Churchill Way | Dallas, Texas | 75230 | t 972.239.5371 | believerschapeldallas.org

The sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

Acts 20

“Paul’s Third Missionary Journey-IV: Paul and the Ephesian Elders” TRANSCRIPT

[Prayer] Father we thank Thee for the word of God, and we thank Thee again for the life and ministry of the Apostle Paul, for the experiences that he had, the lessons that he taught others and that he teaches us. We thank Thee for his epistles; we thank Thee also for his experiences recorded by Luke his friend and the historian of the Christian church. As we study tonight Lord, enable us to profit from the things that the apostle experienced, and the things also that he said, and especially the things that he said to the elders in Ephesus. We ask Thy blessing upon this meeting and upon the ones that follow. For Jesus’ sake. Amen.

[Message] Tonight we are turning to Acts chapter 20 in which is recorded the apostle’s ministry in Troas, and his ministry also, in the latter part of the chapter to the Ephesian elders at Miletus on the way back to Jerusalem, probably with a gift of money for the church in Jerusalem from the churches of the Gentiles. We want to begin reading at chapter 20 at verse 1. What I would like to do is to read the first 6 verse, make just a comment or two, because they only bear indirectly upon what we are talking about, and then say a few words about verses 7 through 12 and Paul’s experience in Troas, and finally conclude with a brief analysis of Paul’s message that he gave to the elders at the

church at Ephesus which he called to meet him in Miletus. In verse 1 we read, Acts chapter 20,

“And after the uproar was ceased, Paul called unto him the disciples, and embraced them, and departed for to go into Macedonia. And when he had gone over those parts, and had given them much exhortation, he came into Greece.”

One of the things that the apostle was exhorting them about concerning which Luke makes no mention is the collection that he was taking for the church in Jerusalem. And so he exhorted them, he wanted the churches of the Gentiles to give their offerings to the church in Jerusalem as an indication of the oneness that they had in the body of Christ and of the love that they had for them. Paul attached a great deal of significance to this. And one finds reference to it in his epistles, not only in 2 Corinthians, but also in the Epistle to the Romans. And in verse 3 we read, “And there abode three months. And when the Jews laid wait for him, as he was about to sail into Syria, he purposed to return through Macedonia.” So the apostle had gone to Macedonia, he had given much exhortation, he came to Greece, and there was no doubt in Corinth, and he “abode there three months.”

We know from the Epistle to the Romans which he wrote from this visit to Corinth that he was staying in Gaius’ house. And furthermore, since he gave the Epistle to the Romans into the hands of Phoebe, and told her to take it to the church at Rome, we know that she was also with him in this particular ministry in Greece before he returned to Macedonia. But now we read in verse 3 that he wanted to return through Macedonia,

“And there accompanied him into Asia Sopater of Berea; and of the Thessalonians, Aristarchus and Secundus; and Gaius of Derbe, (He especially marked out as Gaius of

Derbe not Gaius of Corinth) and Timotheus; and of Asia, Tychicus and Trophimus. These going before tarried for us at Troas.”

So evidently they had an agreement that they would make this trip back together, but they went ahead and then had arrangements for meeting at a certain place. Now if you’re reading these words carefully, you will notice that the author of the Book of Acts returns to the first person in verse 5, “These going before tarried for us at Troas. And we sailed away from Philippi after the days of unleavened bread.” And so if you remember at the end of chapter 16, Luke had been writing in the first person, and so evidently he had traveled with Paul to Philippi, but after the ministry in Philippi, he begins to speak in the third person again. It’s a reasonable assumption that Luke had remained in Philippi and carried on ministry there. So when the apostle came back through Philippi now, he evidently decided he would go with Paul, and so he spent the intervening time in Philippi. And this is just an indication of the fact that Luke now has rejoined the Apostle Paul.

“These going before tarried for us at Troas. And we sailed away from Philippi after the days of unleavened bread, and came unto them to Troas in five days; where we abode seven days.” That’s an interesting little statement, because if you remember when we talked about the ministry to Lydia who was the first of the converts in Europe, and we spoke about how at the time when Paul left Troas to go west, it took him only three days to travel across the Aegean Sea. Now as he is going east, it takes him five days. One of the commentators made the comment that “he was enabled by strong winds to make the journey in only three days going to the west.” And then added, “It is almost as if the purposes of grace helped in the physical journeying from Troas to Philippi” because that was a very important trip for Paul to take, since the gospel was preached by him for the first time on that trip. Well now he’s going the other way and five days and he arrives in Troas and he waits for seven days.

Now this visit to Troas is notable for several things of course one of the things that we all smile about is the fact that here at Troas we have one of the best known men of the Bible. And the thing that makes him famous is that he fell asleep during a sermon. That may seem to us to be just an ordinary feat, but Eutychus was creative, he was the first to do so according to Luke’s history in the Christian era. In fact he’s the patron sinner of sermon sleepers. [Laughter] And so if you see someone sleeping in the services on Sunday morning as some do in Believers Chapel, they are simply following in the steps of this patron sinner of sermon sleepers. There is an old story about an individual who said to another one, “how late do you usually sleep on Sunday mornings?” The person said, “It all depends.” Depends on what? And the answer came, “The length of the sermon.” [Laughter] So he was a very very interesting man evidently, but I must say that if you read this account, you’ll notice that really he had reason to go to sleep, because the Apostle Paul preached and preached and preached and continued to preach until after or until midnight. So there are very few of us probably that could stay in a small room and sitting on a window sill where no doubt there was every opportunity to fall asleep, fail to do so.

Well now we read in verse 7, “And upon the first day of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread.” That’s a rather interesting statement, because you might not expect it to be written this way. You might have expected Luke to say and on the first day of the week when the disciples came together to hear a sermon, or to observe or to listen to the choir, or to have fellowship with other Christians or to well you can of course think of all the reasons why some people might attend church. But Luke says, “When the disciples came together to break bread.” This is incidentally the earliest unambiguous evidence for Sunday worship.

Now many people think that the early church met on Saturday night, but one can see from this incident in Troas that they really met on Sunday night. Now you can tell that if you will compare the 7th verse with the 11th verse, “Upon the first day of the week

when the disciples came together to break bread, Paul preached unto them ready to depart on the morrow and continued his speech until midnight.” Now notice verse 11, “When he therefore was come up again, and had broken bread, and eaten, and talked a long while, even till break of day, so he departed.” So the morrow is the break of day.

Now if Luke were writing according to Jewish time then of course the night would have begun that night, and then it would have still been the same day the next day until the next night. So the fact that he says he was going to depart on the morrow, or tomorrow, and he leaves the next morning is an indication that the kind of time that Luke is following is Roman time and not Jewish time. And if that is so, then the church was meeting on Sunday night on the first day of the week, on Sunday night and not on Saturday night. I mention that because here in Dallas we did have a few years back a little group meeting on Saturday night and they liked to think of themselves as following the New Testament, and in fact they called themselves the Saturday Night Church, and made a great deal over the fact that they were meeting according to the Scriptures because the first day of the week according to Jewish time begins at sundown on Saturday night. But as you can see from this, the apostles did not follow that. This is the earliest unambiguous evidence for Sunday worship. Evidently they interpreted the first day of the week then as inclusive of the worship of the Lord on our Sunday.

And it is significant that they came together to break bread, not to observe the mass, listen to the choir, fellowship, even a sermon, though a sermon did take place here, but rather they came together to break bread. I’m not trying to de-emphasize the fact that the ministry of the word of God is prominent, because it’s clear that most of the time was taken up in the sermon that Paul preached to them, but the purpose for which they came together Luke says was to break bread. It’s possible that they came together to have a kind of Agape, that is a love feast, and then at the conclusion of their eating together and the fellowship that they had in that, then the apostle preached to them. That’s not absolutely clear from this, but it certainly is possible. At any rate, we read in verse 7 that,

“Paul continued his speech until midnight, and there were many lights in the upper chamber where they were gathered together. (And if we remember of course, they didn’t have electricity, but they had a lot of candles or things similar to candles around, and there was a lot of smoke and a lot of heat, we can understand better how Eutychus fell asleep) And there sat in a window a certain young man named Eutychus, being fallen into a deep sleep: and as Paul was long preaching, (That seems to be one of the things that the Christian church must suffer from the beginning, long preaching. Dr Packer did very well, but of course everyone enjoyed him and we’re glad that he did preach for a long time but he was following in apostolic succession too in preaching for a long time. Well Eutychus was not only bored, and bored to tears, but he was bored, and not only bored to sleep, but bored to death, [Laughter] which is I say an unusual experience.) As Paul was long preaching he sank down (the Authorized Version says he sunk down, we don’t say that any longer, but that was good English when the A.V. was translated, like he sung a hymn used to be alright, we don’t say that we say he sang a hymn, but he sung is and they sung is in the Bible. My text here has) he sunk down with sleep, and fell down from the third loft, and was taken up dead. (There’ been a little question about whether Eutychus really did die or not, but since Luke is the one writing this and since he was a doctor, the evidence is rather on the side of the fact that he really did die, so) He was taken up dead and Paul went down, and fell on him, and embracing him said, Trouble not yourselves; for his life is in him. When he therefore was come up again, and had broken bread, and eaten, and talked a long while, even till break of day, so he departed. And they brought the young man alive, and were not a little comforted.”

Well Paul and his ministry in Troas reminds me particularly of the early practice of the Christian church. They met on the first day of the week, evidently because that was the day of the resurrection. And they met in order to break bread. That is the

communion service was a very important part of the meeting of the church. But the ministry of the word was a very important part of it too. Now I don’t mean to start any argument with the elders, or to start any argument with any one else, but it my own personal feeling that the meeting of the church in the first place let me say this, I think the elders have a right to say that any meeting of the church is a “meeting of the church” and since I’m expounding the text and this may be my last night since some of the elders are here, [Laughter] I personally feel that it’s not quite correct to call the Sunday meeting in Believers Chapel “the” meeting of the church. It seems to me, any meeting that the elders say is a meeting of the church and which they call is a proper meeting of the church. It is a meeting of the church, and in it we observe the Lord’s Supper and it’s very important.

From the earliest records that we have of the Christian church, they observed the Lord’s Supper every Sunday. That was there characteristic. They would have felt right at home in Believers Chapel and they would not feel at home in churches that observe the Lord’s Supper once a month or once a quarter or even once a year. They would have said immediately, “Why do you not observe the Lord’s Supper more frequently?” They would not lay down legalistic requirements, it must be every week, but hat was their practice. They observed the Lord’s Supper every week. One can find that in the earliest writings of the church fathers, in the didache and in others. And then it has persisted in the history and tradition of the Christian church through the Roman Catholic practice of the mass. Now of course that has doctrinal aberration to it, but the very fact that they observe it is evidence of that. And it’s striking, at least striking to me that John Wesley, the greatest of the Methodist, traditionally, John Calvin, the greatest of the Calvinists, traditionally, Charles Haddon Spurgeon one of the greatest of the Baptist, all agree that the observance of the Lord’s Supper ought to be every Sunday. Calvin states it in his institutes. So, it’s nothing unusual for the Chapel to observe the Lord’s Supper every Sunday, it’s only usual, because the church has so widely abandoned the practice.

So the on the first day of the week, they came together to break bread.

We don’t think of course that person sins if he’s not at the Lord’s Supper every week. But we do think that the elders are right in saying that we ought to provide an opportunity for all to observe the Lord’s Supper every week if they like. And I don’t mind the silences either; I think the silences are good. I couldn’t help but think Sunday night when Bob was exhorting us and chastising us a little bit and speaking about the silences and that that was bad that suddenly he lost his place and we had some silence [Laughter] in the midst of his message. I thought I would stand up and say something about that, but thought perhaps it might be misunderstood. So anyway, it’s a humorous thing to be among Christians you know, we are a humorous and funny people, so we ought not to loose our sense of humor. Well, Eutychus then is an illustration of the patron sinner of sermon sleepers.

Now I want to go on and say a few words about what Paul said to the elders at Miletus and so let’s read on,

“And we went before to ship, and sailed unto Assos, there intending to take in Paul: for so had he appointed, minding himself to go afoot. And when he met with us at Assos, we took him in, and came to Mitylene. And we sailed thence, and came the next day over against Chios; and the next day we arrived at Samos, and tarried at Trogyllium; and the next day we came to Miletus. (Now if you have a map before you, you can see that the apostle with the people is just moving down the western coast of Asia Minor, and so he comes to Miletus.) For Paul had determined to sail by Ephesus, because he would not spend the time in Asia: for he hasted, if it were possible for him, to be at Jerusalem the day of Pentecost. And from Miletus he sent to Ephesus, and called for the elders of the church.”

Now he called for the elders of the church because he wanted to say some things to them, but at the same time he did not want to go into Ephesus, because he undoubtedly thought that that would delay him so far as getting to Jerusalem in time for him to be there at Pentecost and after all he had that money with him that he wanted to give to the church in Jerusalem. And here we have this wonderful message that he gave to the Ephesian elders. It’s a remarkable thing of course, because it’s the only message that we have in the New Testament of Paul’s that was delivered to Christians, and it stresses two important things.

It stresses first of all the fact that the ministry of the apostle was not an impotent kind of ministry. Just look at some of the verses, verse 19, the apostle says, “Serving the LORD with all humility of mind, and with many tears, and temptations, which befell me by the lying in wait of the Jews:” Verse 31, “Therefore watch, and remember, that by the space of three years I ceased not to warn every one night and day with tears.” Verse 26, “Wherefore I take you to record this day that I am pure from the blood of all men.” That’s a remarkable statement, he feels that he has fully preaches the gospel there. And verse 37 when the apostle was ready to leave, “And they all wept sore, and fell on Paul’s neck, and kissed him.” J.H. Jowett was one of the great preachers of a generation or so ago and he was speaking on Paul’s toilsome missionary journeys and all the persecutions that he endured, and he said, “I once saw a track of a bleeding hare across the snow that was Paul’s track across Europe.” So whenever you think of Paul’s missionary journeys you think of the experiences that this great man had. And he had many experiences that were not very happy so far as his physical experiences were concerned, but were great so far as the ministry was concerned. His ministry was not an impotent ministry.

And the second thing about Paul’s ministry that is significant if we use this particular message as an example is the fact that it was not an empty ministry. It was not a ministry that was the kind of ministry that is so popular today, not the kind that Dr Packer gave us, because he gave us something substantial. But the ministry that is so

popular today is the shallow kind of ministry. Listen to what Paul says in his words to the Ephesian elders. In verse 27, “For I have not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of God.” And in verse 21, “Testifying both to the Jews, and also to the Greeks, repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ.” Verse 24, he says, “But none of these things move me, neither count I my life dear unto myself, so that I might finish my course with joy, and the ministry, which I have received of the Lord Jesus, to testify the gospel of the grace of God.” And verse 25, “And now, behold, I know that ye all, among whom I have gone preaching the kingdom of God, shall see my face no more.” The kingdom of God. And verse 32, “And now, brethren, I commend you to God, and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up, and to give you an inheritance among all them which are sanctified.” And of course I’ve left out a number of the texts, let me just remind you of one more, look at verse 28, in his exhortation to the elders he said, “Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood.”

Now one can see from this that he preached atoning sacrifice of the Lord Jesus Christ, he preached the kingdom of God, his message had a note of eschatology in it. He preached the gospel of the grace of God. He would have understood fully and thoroughly our phrases that we often use, the sovereign grace of God and things like that. And in fact he did not so far as his words go; he did not omit any part of the full orbed teaching of the word of God. Because he says he gave them all the counsel of God.

Now you can see also from this that the apostle was not engrossed in his preaching with the problems of his day. He touched on many of the problems of course, but the touching on the problems was secondary. The apostle was primarily preaching the doctrine of the grace of God, he was preaching the sacrifice of the Lord Jesus Christ, he was preaching the kingdom of God he was preaching the grace of God, and that is the central thrust of his ministry.

Now let me read, and just make a comment or two in one or two places in this message, “And from Miletus he sent to Ephesus, and called the elders of the church.” And I’d like to make just one comment here, notice the 28th verse, “Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers,” Overseers is the English translation of the word the Greek word, *episcopos* which means a bishop. Now bishop is a word that refers to the work of an elder. We tend to think because we have today, historically, the episcopalian form of government, or rule by bishops, that a bishop is different from an elder. Well a bishop is different from an elder in some of our churches, but a bishop was identical with an elder in the days of the New Testament. One can see that from verse 17, “And from Miletus he sent to Ephesus, and called the elders of the church.” And then he said, “Take heed unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you (or appointed you) bishops.” So the elders are bishops, and the bishops are elders. Now that is confirmed by Titus chapter 1 verse 5 and verse 7 where the apostle says with reference to Titus that he wants him to go and appoint elders, and then he gives the qualifications, and he says a bishop must be so and so. So when these men came from Ephesus, they were elders and bishops in the church at Ephesus.

Now the term elder is a word that has to do with the dignity of the office. And the term bishop is a term that emphasizes the duties of the particular office. So elder and bishop are the same, elder looks at a spiritual dignity and maturity of the person. Bishop, which means to oversee, looks at the duties that he is to perform. He is to oversee the local church in his ministry as an elder.

Notice also that we have the elders of the church. In other words, plural, there are several elders in the one church at Ephesus. Now occasionally when people like to think of one elder ought to be in one church and one elder in another church and another elder in another church, when they see something like this, this doesn’t seem to go with that theory. So they suggest that there must have been a number of different

house churches or smaller churches in Ephesus which are gathered together here and simply called the church, in the sense of the body of believers in a locality. Well one must, if he had only this text, one must say, that is possible in other words logically it is possible, but it’s highly unlikely. We don’t ever read of any other churches in Ephesus then the one church. The burden of proof, the *onus probandi*, to use the Latin expression, the *onus probandi*, rest upon those who hold that there are more churches than the one when the text always uses the singular. So we conclude, and this is confirmed in many other places in the New Testament, that there was a plurality of elders in the one church at Ephesus, several elders. How many? We’re not told, simply plural. Elders and Bishops then are one office and there are several in one church.

And further, the elders shepherd the flock. We are told in verse 28, “Take heed to the church of God, over which the Holy Ghost hath appointed you overseers, to feed (that word is the Greek word to shepherd) to shepherd the flock of God.” So the elders are the shepherds. Now of course a man may have the gift of shepherd/teacher, and not necessarily be a member of the body of elders. He has the spiritual gift of shepherd/teacher. So far as Paul is concerned, all the elders shepherd. Now later on, Paul in one of his epistles will make a distinction between those who labor in the word, and those who do not. So we gather from this that while all the elders shepherd, some may have further gifts of ministry, ministering the word of God. 1 Timothy chapter 5 verse 17 makes that very plain. So that’s an interesting little statement that Luke the historian makes.

But let’s read on, verse 19 he says, “Serving the LORD” wait, I guess I should begin with verse 18,
“And when they were come to him, he said unto them, Ye know, from the first day that I came into Asia, after what manner I have been with you at all seasons, Serving the LORD with all humility of mind, and with many tears, and temptations, which befell me by the lying in wait of the Jews: (Of course he also had troubles from the Gentiles. We just read

in the preceding chapter about Demetrius the silversmith, so he had troubles on all sides, both Jews and Gentiles.) And how I kept back nothing that was profitable unto you, but have shewed you, and have taught you publicly, and from house to house,”

The apostle did not in his work in Ephesus think that it was improper to teach the word in his daily experiences with those believers. He taught from house to house. You can just see the apostle as he ministered he was constantly speaking on spiritual topics. Even in his casual conversations, I have a hunch, that his speech was speech that led right into the significance of our relationship to the Lord Jesus Christ. I want you to notice one other thing here in verse 20 it says, “And how I kept back nothing that was profitable unto you.” Now if I just had that text, I might like to ask Paul a question, “Well Paul, what is profitable?” And we might get all kinds of answers to the question, I can think of all the answers that might be given today in 1983 by people who are ministers of the Lord Jesus Christ. If you’ve ever been around a bunch a preachers and you’ve heard them talking about what is profitable, you can imagine what might be said, because almost every conceivable kind of thing some preacher will think is profitable. And fortunately for us, Paul defines profitable in this context, because in verse 27, he’s just said in verse 20 now, “I kept back nothing that was profitable unto you.” In verse 27 he says, “For I have not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of God.” That is what is profitable, the counsel of God. Not the counsel of men, the counsel of God, or the gospel of the grace of God, or the kingdom of God, or repentance toward God and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ, all of these things are the things that are profitable. Now you may get a crowd together to hear other things, you can get a crowd together to hear a comedian. But for profitable things, you must have the word of God, all the counsel of God.

Now we continue, “Testifying to the Jews and also to the Greeks, repentance toward God and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ.” I would think from this context here that this is the most definite thing he has in his mind at this point. What is profitable?

Repentance toward God and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ. What does Paul mean by repentance toward God and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ? Well, repentance and faith are evidently very important if one is to preach in the steps of the apostle.

Repentance toward God and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ, repentance toward God what does that mean? What does that mean? We’ve all heard surly, or most of us have, preachers who have pointed out that the term repentance comes from a Greek word, metanoeo which means essentially to change the mind. Meta the preposition is a preposition that is often used of change combined with other verbs, noeo means to think so that metanoeo means to have an after thought. That’s really what it means, Meta means after, so an after thought.

Well usually, an afterthought is a change of mind. For example, Everson Walls has just had an after thought. He’s been trying to deal with Gil Brandt which is like trying to deal with Stone Mountain. And he has been unable to budge him and so today or yesterday he made a trip out to California because he had an afterthought that is a change of mind. So the term repentance toward God is to have an afterthought, to have a change of mind. It evidently refers to a change of trust in this context. Evidently when a person has repented, he formerly trusted in a certain thing or person, whatever the case may be; usually in spiritual things, it’s a false trust, trusted in his good works, trusted in his religion, trusted in his baptism, trusted in the observance of the ordinances, trusted in his education, trusted in his culture et cetera. And so to repent is to have an afterthought that is a change of mind. To transfer the object of one’s trust. And faith in the Lord Jesus Christ expresses the positive trust of reliance upon Christ and his finished work, reliance upon the sacrifice that he has accomplished. So to repent is to change one’s trust to modify his former trust, change it into trust in the Lord Jesus Christ. It’s a change of mind, and has to do primarily with the objects of our trust.

I used to trust in good works, didn’t have many, but I thought it was a good idea, and I trusted in good works. Trusted also in the fact that I was a Presbyterian, and

Presbyterians, well wasn’t God partial toward Presbyterians? So I had been, it seemed to me taught to believe (I don’t think I was taught that but that’s the impression I got) that we generally had the truth. At least those that taught me talked as though they generally had the truth. And so you change your trust to trust in the Lord Jesus Christ that’s to repent.

I remember the story of an elderly man who was listening to a preacher give a lengthy discourse on repentance and it was rather complicated, so the congregation was largely at sea. And after the preacher was long in preaching following the illustration of the apostle Paul, an old man got up in the back and started toward the front and he was saying, “Hup two three four, Hup two three four, Hup two three four, Halt! About face! Hup two three four, Hup two three four.” And he marched out. And he got to the back and he said, “Folks, that’s repentance. Let’s go home.” [Laughter] Well it’s something like that.

But there is one thing that we that we should stress, and the Bible stresses this, there is no repentance no true repentance without corresponding conduct flowing from it. In other words we have John the Baptist saying, “Bring forth fruits need for repentance.” In other words, genuine repentance will produce fruit. I hasten to say of course, we don’t have to see the fruit. We can not say to an individual, you haven’t repented if I don’t see some fruit in your life. It’s God who is the judge of fruit. But the fruit must be there. And you can not say well how much fruit should be there, because there is need for only one piece of fruit. Oh I know you are happy to know that I just took my grapes off my grapevines, my three grapevines. I gathered all my grapes; I had a little dish about that big. [Laughter] So you see, you don’t have to have much fruit but that’s the fruit of my viticulture, you don’t have to have a lot of fruit, and you certainly don’t have to yield to someone telling you, “Now you’ve got to have this and you’ve got to have this!” In order to be saved. One piece of fruit is sufficient to show that a new birth has taken place, because we can not produce any fruit of ourselves. So when people come and say, “If

you say you have to have some fruit, how much?” You don’t have to have but just one piece of fruit so far as the Bible is concerned, because without him, we can do nothing. So Jesus said, in the context of bearing fruit.

Well I have a couple of minutes, let me just say a few words about verse 28 and 29. Paul goes on; I’ll read down rapidly,

“And now behold, I go bound in the spirit to Jerusalem, not knowing the things that shall befall me there, save that the Holy Ghost witnesseth in every city, saying that bonds and afflictions abide me. But none of these things move me, neither count I my life dear to myself, so that I might finish my course with joy, and the ministry, which I have received of the Lord Jesus, to testify the gospel of the grace of God. And now, behold, I know that ye all, among whom I have gone preaching the kingdom of God, shall see my face no more. Wherefore I take you to record this day that I am pure from the blood of all men. (Or from the blood of all.) For I have not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of God.”

I would love for that to be true of me as a preacher of the word. That I’ve not shunned to declare unto you all the word of God. That I’ve not tried to hide things that I think might be offensive, hide things that might cause you to be critical of me. That I would be an ambassador, truly ambassador, an ambassador delivering simply the message of the Lord no matter what the consequences.

Now he says to the elders, “Take heed therefore to yourselves,” That’s proper. All who serve as elders are to remember that they are to be models and examples for the flock. The writer of the epistle of to the Hebrews makes that point several times in the last chapter of his epistle; the elders are to be models. Because were to follow their faith. So, “Take heed to yourselves and to all the flock over which the Holy Ghost has made you overseers, to feed the church of God.” To shepherd the church of God. And why

should we take heed to ourselves and why should we take heed to all the flock? Well he goes on to say because this is the church of God “which he hath purchased with his own blood.” Now it would be nice to have about fifteen minutes to talk about the text at this point, but let me just say that it’s likely that this text reads this way, “To shepherd the church of God which he has purchased with the blood of his own one.” And the reference to his own one would be a reference to the Lord Jesus Christ. In other words, the church has been purchased with the blood of his own one.

John Calvin has some very interesting things to say about why the elders ought to be diligent, and I’d like to conclude on just one note. He says that they ought to be diligent because they know God has pledged faithfulness to the work of the work that the elders are doing. And furthermore, he says that the elders ought to be diligent because they are in authority not by man, but by the Spirit, it’s the Holy Spirit who has appointed them as overseers. That means a man is not made an elder by hands being laid upon him, he’s made an elder by the Holy Spirit, and he begins in the church to be an elder before he’s ever recognized as an elder. He comes to be recognized by his service. It’d be nice if God should appoint elders in Believers Chapel and we should see the elders by what they do. That is they shepherd. Calvin also says elders should be diligent because it’s no ordinary honor to rule the church of God. And finally he says the fourth reason with which Paul urges the shepherds to be diligent in the practice in their office is that the Lord has given no ordinary proof of his love toward the church by pouring out his own blood for its sake. So if the Lord Jesus Christ has given himself for the church, the church is important for God. We don’t have to talk about the dignity of the church, we don’t have to talk about the goodness of the church, or the righteousness of the church, but the importance of the church and important not because of what we are before we’re saved, but important for what we’re going to be as a result of the saving work of God in Christ. What a tremendously solemn privilege it is to be an elder, a shepherd of the flock of God.

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And also incidentally if the flock is so much, so important to God, the flock is important for every one of us, whether were elders or not, is it not? Let’s bow in prayer.

[Prayer] Father we are grateful for this marvelous hortatory message that the apostle gave to the elders of the church at Ephesus...

[RECORDING ENDS ABRUPTLY]