

Having considered Paul's ministry at Troas (vv1-12), we come in vv12-38 to Paul's final counsel to the Ephesian Elders while at Miletus. We will divide this into two parts, considering vv13-27 this morning and vv28-38 next week. Paul basically does three things in vv17-27 (I'm starting with v17 because I'll say a few words about vv13-16 in a moment): he reviews his past ministry (vv17-21), anticipates his future suffering (vv18-25), and underscores his present innocence (vv26-27). Thus, he looks back, looks into the future, and settles with the present.

- I. His Past Ministry (vv17-21)
- II. His Future Suffering (vv18-25)
- III. His Present Innocence (vv26-27)

I. His Past Ministry (vv17-21)

1. Verses 13-16 describe how Paul arrived at Miletus—Luke says in v13, that he and the other men went ahead and sailed to Assos, whereas went to Assos by land.
2. V14—"And when he met us at Assos, we took him on board and came to Mitylene"—v15 describes three additional days of sailing eventually arriving at Miletus.
3. V16—"For Paul had decided to sail past Ephesus, so that he would not have to spend time in Asia; for he was hurrying to be at Jerusalem. If possible, on the Day of Pentecost."
4. Paul desired to be at Jerusalem on the Day of Pentecost because Jerusalem itself would be filled with people.
5. He no doubt considered this a major opportunity for evangelism as hundreds of thousands of people would be present for weeks and even months.
6. Miletus was a coastal city about one-days walk south of Ephesus—thus, instead of entering Ephesus himself, he went south to Miletus and called for the elders of Ephesus to come down to him.
7. Notice, Luke speaks of the "elders of the church" which means the church (singular) had a plurality of elders.
8. Furthermore, we learn that these elders (v17) are called pastors (v28a) and overseers (v28b) which means they are interchangeable terms.
9. These are three terms that together describe the officer of elder—an elder rules, teaches, and governs.
10. Thus, when Paul arrived at Miletus, he sent and called for the elders, pastors, or bishops (overseers) of the church in Ephesus.
11. Again, the reason he did this instead of stopping at Ephesus himself was because he was in a hurry, wanting to arrive at Jerusalem, if possible, on the Day of Pentecost.
12. And thus, in coming to the first half of Paul's counsel to the Ephesian elders, we come first to his past ministry.
13. Paul summarizes his past ministry among the Ephesians into two categories: his life (vv18-19) and doctrine (vv20-21).
14. (1) His life (vv18-19)—"You know, from the first day that I came to Asia, in what manner I always lived among you, serving the Lord with all humility, with many tears and trails which happened to me by the plotting of the Jews."
15. Paul began with a description of the way he carried himself among them—the manner in which he served the Lord.

16. (a) With all humility—the word rendered "humility" refers to a "lowliness of mind concerning oneself."
17. It refers to a lowly mindset about oneself—literally it entails a deep sense of one's littleness or insignificance.
18. The opposite of humility is an inflated or exaggerated view of one's own importance and significance.
19. Thus, I think Paul is specifically referring to his mindset with reference to his many missionary endeavors.
20. While it was true God chose Paul to play an important role in advancing the kingdom, Paul did so with a low view of himself.
21. It's rather easy for a man to have inflated views of himself with regards to the advancement of God's kingdom.
22. Thus, as we read through his letters, it becomes apparent that Paul never forgot what he was by nature (the chief of sinners).
23. And thus, all that he was and had, were nothing more than undeserved graces and gifts of the Lord Jesus.
24. John Dick—"Humility was a virtue, by which the Apostle was eminently distinguished. Elevated to the highest rank in the Christian Church, more learned than any of his brethren, and possessed of great natural talents, and of miraculous powers, he was not elated with an idea of his superiority, nor haughty and overbearing in his interaction with others. The pious reflection which he introduces in one of his Epistles, was always present in his mind. 'By the grace of God I am what I am.' He did not dare to be proud of qualifications and privileges which he had not merited, but divine goodness had freely bestowed upon him."
25. (b) With many tears—by this is meant the many sorrows that Paul experienced throughout his ministry.
26. This was caused by the unbelief of the Jews, the afflictions of others, and the remaining ignorance and indifference of professing believers.
27. Few people truly appreciate the sorrow that pastors experience because of the poor choices of those they minister to.
28. You preach and pray for weeks, months, and years, only to see so little change in many you minister to.
29. Paul knew the heartache of ministry—of seeing people you love walk away from the simplicity of the gospel.
30. People embracing dangerous doctrines that you've earnestly warned them about with tears and sorrow.
31. Paul was a man who dwelt among the people, and thus was not above the discouragements of ministry.
32. John Dick—"He was not a man of a stern unfeeling temper; but in him a tender heart was conjoined with a vigorous understanding."
33. (c) With many trials—these specifically refer to the hardships and afflictions caused by the unbelieving Jews.
34. In almost every city Paul visited, he faced the hatred and opposition of the envious and jealous Jews.
35. He knew what it was to flee from city to city because of the murderous opposition of those who hated the truth.

36. Phil.3:18—"For many walk, of whom I have told you often, and now tell you even weeping, that they are the enemies of the cross of Christ."
37. (2) His doctrine (vv20-21)—"how I kept back nothing that was helpful, but proclaimed it to you, and taught you publicly and from house to house."
38. (a) Where he taught, v21—"and taught you publicly and from house to house"—that is formally and informally.
39. Paul not only taught them in formal worship (as he did in Troas), but also within their individual homes.
40. Today this is called counseling which simply refers to the private instruction of individuals by pastors.
41. There are people today who want to take this aspect of ministry away from pastors and give it to professionals.
42. But we don't read anything about "professional counselors" anywhere in the book of Acts or the NT.
43. Paul taught them gospel publicly and he also taught them the same gospel privately (from house to house).
44. John Dick—"In his private interaction with the disciples, he inculcated the doctrines and duties which he had delivered in their religious assemblies. In their own houses, he could descend to a more detailed exposition, and a more personal application of the truth, than the nature of his public discourses would admit. He could inquire into their spiritual state, their temptations, their perplexities, and their sorrows, and tender such counsels, and reproofs, and encouragements, as the case of individuals demanded. Like a good shepherd, Paul looked well to the state of his flock."
45. (b) What he taught, v21—"testifying to Jews, and also to Greeks, repentance toward God and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ."
46. He testified or bore witness to both Jews and Greeks, of the nature and necessity of repentance and faith.
47. (i) Repentance toward God—the Greek word rendered repentance literally means "to change the mind."
48. It fundamentally refers to a change of mind about God, His law, and our behavior—it's for this reason it's described as being "toward God."
49. Repentance has a peculiar reference to God as all sin is a violation of His law and thus against His Being.
50. Thus, it's "repentance toward God"—that is, repentance with respect to God (His Being and His law).
51. This distinguishes it from what Paul called "the sorrow of the world" which leads to death (2Cor.7:10).
52. True repentance isn't merely sorrowful for the consequences of sin but sorrowful for the nature of sin.
53. It now sees God as holy, just, and good, and thus sees itself as unholy, unrighteous, guilty, and filthy.
54. (ii) Faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ—fundamentally faith refers to a trust or reliance upon someone.
55. Shorter Catechism—"Faith in Jesus Christ is a saving grace, whereby we receive and rest upon Him alone for salvation, as He is offered to us in the gospel."

56. Faith can best be described as the hands of the heart whereby we receive and rest upon Him alone for salvation.
57. But notice the Shorter Catechism says "as He is offered to us in the gospel"—that is the Godman, prophet, priest, and king.
58. This is why Paul describes faith as being "toward the Lord Jesus Christ"—Lord (divinity) Jesus (humanity), Christ (Anointed One – prophet, priest, and king).
59. Thus, it's not merely "faith" but it's "faith towards the Lord Jesus Christ"—it's trust in Him as Savior.
60. First, they must never be conflated—by this I mean, they are not the same things—they are not synonymous.
61. Sam Waldron—"Repentance and faith are directed toward different objects. Repentance focuses on God and His law. Faith focuses on Christ and His grace."
62. Second, they must never be severed—that is, while they are distinguishable, they always come together.
63. One man has likened them to the two sides of a single hinge—both are necessary for the door to open and close.
64. And so too, repentance and faith are the two sides of conversion—there can never be the one without the other.
65. This is what every person must do if they are to be saved—they must repent and believe the gospel (Mk.1:15 – 'The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand. Repent, and believe in the gospel').
66. Notice Paul describes these as universal necessities, v21—"testifying to Jews and also to Greeks"—it's a universal truth—in order for a person to become a Christian; to be right with God; they must repent and believe the gospel.
67. But these are not only universal truths they are continues truths—the entire Christian live is one of repentance and faith.
68. This is how the Christian life begins and it's how it continues—repenting of our sin and laying hold of Christ.

II. His Future Suffering (vv22-25)

1. Within vv22-25, Paul turns from his past ministry among the Ephesians to his future ministry in Jerusalem (I can best explain these four verses by four points).
2. (1) Inner restraint, v22—"And see, now I go bound in the spirit to Jerusalem, not knowing the things that will happen to me there."
3. The phrase "bound in the spirit" refers to the inward restraint that was put upon him by God Himself.
4. His spirit was bound by the desire that he must get to Jerusalem, even though he had no idea of the details of what would happen.
5. Paul knew that there would be hundreds of thousands of people, who needed to hear the gospel of God.
6. (2) Certain suffering, v23—"except that the Holy Spirit testifies in every city, saying that chains and tribulations await me."
7. It had been previously revealed to him by the Holy Spirit, that in every city he ministered, there would be persecution.

8. Thus, he's basically saying—"I expect to encounter in Jerusalem the same thing I experienced in other cities."
9. Albert Barnes—"In almost every city where Paul had been, he had been subjected to these trials. He had been persecuted, stoned, and scourged. So uniform was this, so constant had been his experience in this way, that he regarded it as his certain portion to be thus afflicted, and he approached Jerusalem, and every other city, with a confident expectation that such trials awaited him there."
10. (3) Holy determination, v24—"But none of these things move me; nor do I count my life dear to myself, so that I may finish my race with joy, and the ministry which I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the gospel of the grace of God."
11. This is what drove him to preach the gospel regardless of opposition and persecution—he was commissioned by Christ Himself.
12. He knew that he belonged to Christ and not himself and thus he wanted nothing more than to serve Christ.
13. But notice, Paul wasn't content with simply enduring hardships, he wanted to finish his race "with joy."
14. That is, while his entire ministry was one of suffering, it was also filled with joy and gladness at the privilege of serving Christ.
15. (4) Loving farewell, v25—"And indeed, now I know that you all, among whom I have gone preaching the kingdom of God, will see my face no more."
16. Paul knew the end of his ministry was coming close and he had no intention of returning to this part of the world again.

III. His Present Innocence (vv26-27)

1. V26—"Therefore I testify to you this day that I am innocent of the blood of all men. For I have not shunned to declare to you the whole counsel of God."
2. The reasons Paul was innocent of the blood of all men was because he faithfully proclaimed the whole counsel of God.
3. This explains his earlier statement in v21—repentance toward God and faith toward Christ are a summary of Scripture.
4. He faithfully told all men that they are born in sin and the kingdom of darkness are under the sway of the evil one.
5. He faithfully told all men that they needed to repent of their sins or else face the righteous judgment of God.
6. He faithfully told all men that their only way of salvation was found in the person and work of Christ.
7. He faithfully told all men that in Christ there was not only forgiveness of sin but acceptance and adoption.
8. He faithfully told all men about the need to love a holy life that conforms to the law of God as summarized in the TC.
9. He faithfully told all men about the need to align themselves with a local assembly that believes the truth.
10. Paul wasn't responsible for how people responded to his message; he was only responsible for telling the message.

11. John Dick—"Individuals had, perhaps, perished in sin under his ministry, but there ruin was entirely owing to themselves. No man could charge him with negligence and unfaithfulness."
12. And so, in closing, I want to summarize this passage under the theme—The blessing of a good conscience.
13. But before I do so, let me state at the outset that I intend to apply this principle to all the people of God I especially have in mind pastors and parents.
14. They too like Paul have been given a specific ministry "to testify to the gospel of the grace of God" (v24).
15. (1) It comes as the result of faithfulness—notice Paul never mentions anything about success in terms of numbers.
16. Instead, he defined success in terms of faithfulness—of doing that which he was commissioned to do.
17. Now, this doesn't mean Paul was only concerned about what he taught and not how he lived (remember he was considered about both).
18. No Paul was concerned about what he taught and he was also concerned about how he taught it (in a humble and loving way).
19. He wasn't satisfied with merely communicating information to people as if that was the whole of his responsibility.
20. He used his own life as a testimony of the gospel—he not only preached repentance and faith but he lived it.
21. It's inevitable as pastors live among their people and parents among their children that sin will occur.
22. And when it does we simply have to own it—we have to publicly repent and find fresh pardon in Christ.
23. (2) It often comes with tears and trials—I don't want to be misunderstood—we all want to see people saved and sanctified.
24. We mustn't get the wrong picture—Paul didn't have the mindset—"I don't care if people believe the message as long as I am free from their blood."
25. No, his heart was heavy with sadness and sorrow as people refused to believe and others were slow to grow.
26. How many sleepless nights did Paul have? Wrestling with God in prayer for the salvation of his beloved people (no dear brother, it's inevitable – no one has a good conscience without many tears and trials).
27. (3) It brings with it true and lasting joy—faithfulness results in a good conscience which brings with it true joy.
28. Is our calling difficult? Yes. Pastoring, parenting, and simply being a Christian in this God-hating world isn't easy.
29. But dear brethren, what a privilege we have regardless of our particular callings—we get to serve Christ and testify (in word and deed) of the gospel of the grace of God.
30. No, like Paul we are not sure of what lies ahead, but we can be assured a measure of tears and trials await us.
31. But mingled with all the tears and trials will be joy and gladness—Christ has rescued us from our sins and has made us ministers of the gospel.
32. And if we have a congregation of 2, 5, 10, or 150, what a privilege it is to testify of God's grace in Christ.

33. And then, eventually we will hear those blessed words—"Well done, good and faithful servant. Enter into the joy of your lord."