

# ***Gospel Baptist Church: Past, Present, and Future***

Acts 20

Introduction: I reread the 20 year history of Gospel Baptist Church and was challenged by the blessings of God on our church from its beginning. I visited Cleo Steed in the hospital and he told me the story of Gospel's beginning. Buddy Fox at the visitation of Cleo Steed shared with me how God directed some important decisions about our beginning. The good hand of God has been upon this ministry to the present. Our prayer today is that we will be worthy of God's continued approval and blessing.

Paul labored at Ephesians for almost three years and had his most fruitful ministry according to Acts 19:10. Paul's ministry at Ephesus was not only local but regional contributing to the starting of other churches at Colosse as well as the seven churches in Revelation 2 and 3.

In Acts 20:13-35, Paul meets with the leaders of the church at Ephesus for what he thinks will be his last meeting with them and preaches to them. He reviews his past ministry with them in Acts 20:17-21. Then Paul covers his present ministry in 20:22-27. Lastly, Paul exhorts them concerning their future ministry in 20:28-35. There are some parallels with past, present and future ministries as Gospel.

## **1. Our Past 45 Years at Gospel (20:13-21)**

Paul's statement in 20:19 summarizes Paul's ministry: Serving the Lord. How Paul served the Lord reflects the past 45 years at Gospel Baptist Church.

### ***A. Paul served the Lord when it was inconvenient in verses 12-17.***

Paul ministered all day at Troas in 20:7-10. He fellowshiped all night in 20:11. Then he walked all day towards Miletus in 20:13.

### ***B. Paul served the Lord by living a godly life in verse 18.*** Paul could say, "Imitate my life."

***C. Paul served the Lord with humility, tears, and trials in verse 19.*** In chapter 19, the Gentile business community almost killed Paul because he was cutting into their idol sales through the many conversions. In verse 19, Paul refers to the times the religious Jews wanted to kill him.

### ***D. Paul served the Lord by proclaiming the Gospel in verses 20-21.***

When I read how Paul reflected on how he served the Lord at Ephesus it reminded me of how our charter members served the Lord in the early days of Gospel.

1. They served the Lord although it was inconvenient. We met in a dairy farm house not in an elaborate auditorium. Then we met in a leaky tent on 311. When it rained church members held umbrellas. We had no regulated heat and air conditioning. We had no asphalt parking lot and concrete walkways. We walked on the soggy, wet ground. We

worshiped on shavings not carpet. When you when home from church you had to clean your shoes. These pioneers not only came to church on Sunday morning and evening and on Wednesday evenings but during the week to help build the first building three months after we started meeting in the tent. Fall and winter would soon be upon us. We sat on second hand pews that were more like see saws. You had to be careful if you sat on one and make sure no one else was not on the other end of the bowed up pew or you might shoot them into the air. Of course some of us did that on purpose to our friends. It was like having play ground equipment inside the church.

2. We served the Lord with many godly examples back in those days.
3. We served the Lord through the hard times with humility and tears.
4. We served the Lord with great preaching by A. F. Blackburn. I just listened to a taped sermon by preacher Blackburn preach in 1960 at the Blue Ridge Camp meeting.

## **2. Our Present Ministry at Gospel (Acts 20:22-27) With “and now” Paul moves to his present ministry.**

### ***A. We must continue to serve even though the inconveniences increase (verses 22-23).***

Paul knew his ministry would get harder because the Holy Spirit had recently showed him this truth when he wrote the Epistle of Romans at Corinth in Acts 20:1-2. Romans 15:25-31 is the specific reference where the Spirit informed Paul that when he delivered the relief offering for the poor saints at Jerusalem he would face extreme opposition. Some believe that Paul wrote the comprehensive doctrine of salvation in Romans just in case he was killed at Jerusalem and never made it to Rome. When Paul did arrive at Jerusalem he was nearly killed. He was imprisoned for two years at Caesarea in Acts 24 and then sent to Rome to be imprisoned for two more years.

### ***B. We must continue to serve and “finish” our ministry even though the inconveniences increase (verse 24).***

Ten years later, Paul, just before he is martyred at Rome for the gospel can say, “I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith” (2 Timothy 4:7).

### ***C. We must continue to preach of the gospel (verses 24-25).***

1. In verse 24, Paul preached “the gospel of the grace of God.”
2. In verse 25, Paul preached “the kingdom of God.”

These two descriptions of Paul’s preaching were not contradictory to Paul but complimentary. When we are saved by grace through faith, we submit to Christ our King. True salvation is no mere profession of faith that does not change our lives. Paul informed the new converts on his first missionary journey in Acts 14:22: “we must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God.”

3. In verses 26-27, Paul preached the gospel to all. Like Ezekiel (3:17-19), Paul warned the wicked like a sentinel on the city wall and therefore he had no unsaved person's blood on his hands.

Have we told all for whom we are responsible about Christ? When is the last time you shared the gospel?

### **3. The Future of Gospel Baptist Church (Acts 20:28-35)**

If Jesus tarries His coming, what will the next 45 years hold for Gospel Baptist Church?

#### ***A. First, we must prepare ourselves spiritually for the future (verse 28a).***

Paul addresses the leaders at the church at Ephesus and exhorts to first "take heed unto themselves." About five years later Paul will repeat this admonition to Timothy who is now the leader at Ephesus in 1 Timothy 4:16: "Take heed unto yourself."

Charles H. Spurgeon wrote to his preacher boys a book entitled "Lectures to my Students." He called the first chapter "The Minister's Self-watch" based on this verse in 1 Timothy 4:16a. Before Spurgeon gives instruction on preaching he deals with the more important issue of the character of the preacher. Spurgeon quotes Ecclesiastes 10:10: "If the iron (axe blade) be blunt, and he does not whet the edge, then he must put to more strength." Spurgeon reminds us that we are the tool in God's hand but we must keep ourselves sharp to be effectively used by Him.

#### ***B. Next, we must prepare our church spiritually for the future (verse 28b).***

1. We prepare the church by feeding the church God's Word. The church is God's flock which must be made to lie down in green pastures beside the still waters. After Paul told Timothy to take heed to himself in 1 Timothy 4:16, Paul then added "and unto the doctrine."

Paul was big on preaching and teaching doctrine. Just in verse 28 alone, Paul refers to three major doctrines: The Trinity, the Church, and the Redemption by the blood of Christ.

Paul was accused by Peter of preaching so deeply he was sometimes hard to understand in 2 Peter 3:16. The remedy for that problem is for the listeners to get more serious about studying God's Word.

I remember going to hear preacher Blackburn preach and he taught on the two comings of Christ at the Rapture and the Revelation. I had never heard that truth before. That truth drove me deeper into God's Word.

2. The reason we feed doctrine to the sheep is because wolves are waiting on the outside to

attack and destroy our faith (verses 29-30).

Steward Custer shows the fierce nature of wolves as an important theme in Scripture:

- a) A night wolf shall spoil those who know not the Lord (Jer. 5:6).
- b) False prophets are like wolves ravaging the prey (Ezek. 22:27).
- c) Believers are like sheep in the midst of wolves (unbelievers) (Matt. 10:16).
- d) Wolves hunt sheep that are without a shepherd (John 10:12).
- e) Fierce wolves [false teachers] seek to destroy God's church (Acts 20:29) (Witness to Christ, Bob Jones University Press, 2000, 295).

3. The remedy is what we have seen throughout this sermon. In verses 31-32, Paul admonishes his leaders to "watch and remember." Look to the future. Remember your past. What was in their past? Paul preaching, teaching, testifying and witnessing the Word of God. The Word of God will build you up and make you strong so that no wolves will destroy your faith nor the faith of your flock.

4. Lastly, Paul says sacrificially live for others in verses 33-35.

What a fitting conclusion to a sermon to church leaders to quote Jesus who said, "It is more blessed to give than to receive." Paul gave himself for the Ephesians night and day preaching, serving, and warning with tears.

But Jesus gave His life on the cross for our sins that we might be converted and give our lives as Paul did for others.