**Round Top Church Christian Fellowship**

**Sermon Series**

**Paul’s Letter to The Saints in Ephesus**

*Chapter 1 – Life’s Words Count*

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(Unless otherwise noted, NAS is quoted.)

 Setting the context of Paul’s letter to Ephesus, written while he is under house arrest in Rome (60 – 62 A.D.), is nowhere better detailed than in his final address given to their Elders, in-person, before he sailed for Jerusalem (58 A.D.) while he was at Miletus (Acts 20). This letter shows the depth of Paul’s personal commitment and relationships with the congregation in Ephesus. The Biblical text and chronology inform us that Paul spent three years in Ephesus, (52-55 A.D.) mostly during his third missionary journey.

ESV Global Study Bible Provides This Chronology - Paul arrives in Ephesus (Acts 19:1; 1 Cor. 16:8); ministers for three years (Acts 20:31) and writes 1 Corinthians; makes brief, “painful visit” to Corinth (2 Corinthians 2:1), then returns to Ephesus and writes “severe letter” (now lost) to Corinth (2 Corinthians 2:3–4; 7:8–16)

Therefore, it is worthy to reflect back on Paul’s farewell address recorded by Luke in Acts 20. In this address, we see the intimate details of Paul’s heart as he lays bare his inner feelings and thoughts. I do not know about you, but I have never given a last address to someone with whom I had spent a considerable amount of time investing my heart and soul. It was just not a good-bye for now; it is “The next time we meet will be in Heaven”. What do you say? Do you go over the most impactful events that had taken place over the years? Do you speak in general terms? It has to be personal, encouraging and enduring.

**Paul calls the Elders of Ephesus to Miletus for a Farewell Address**

(Acts 20:16-38)

16 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 in Jerusalem, if possible, on the day of Pentecost. 17 From Miletus he sent to Ephesus and called to him the elders of the church. 18 And when they had come to him, he said to them,

**Paul’s Farewell address To Ephesus Elders**

"You yourselves know, from the first day that I set foot in Asia,

how I was with you the whole time,

 19 serving the Lord with all humility

and with tears and with trials

 which came upon me through the plots of the Jews;

 We see that Paul makes it clear that he wants them to remember that he was with them through all of life’s toils. Paul did not duck-out on the difficult things. Paul stood with them through tears and trials brought by those Jews who persisted in Paul’s destruction. Paul was not the type to give advice until the tough times came then abandon his flock. They all knew and lived with Paul through these most difficult of times when the prevailing political and pagan culture pressed on them from all sides.



**https://www.google.com/search?q=Paul+preaching+at+Miletus+painting&rlz=1C1GGRV\_enUS751US751&tbm=isch&source=iu&ictx=1&fir=Vm88s\_kvgJwSbM%252Cv\_ZJ3q05VNsOyM%252C\_&vet=1&usg=AI4\_-kQDs1XobewQmrb5eegUpyzEsGtnLg&sa=X&ved=2ahUKEwjy8ty6yK7xAhWTZ80KHZt4B-YQ9QF6BAgQEAE#imgrc=KRTAOIeIqnfF0M**

 20 **how I did not shrink**

from declaring to you anything that was profitable,

and teaching you publicly and from house to house,

Verse 20 highlights Paul’s comprehensive teaching that was delivered in the most personal way. It is evident that Paul had spent a considerable amount of time in each of their homes. The word “publicly” is used to indicate that there were not any secret meetings. Everyone knew that Paul had spent time in the community homes. The Gospel Message was not hidden from the general population.

So, what was Paul *declaring* and *teaching*? The next verse makes it clear the spiritual things that are the most important points in Paul’s presentation of the Gospel Message - *repentance* and *faith*. If you were to tell someone today to *repent toward God* and *have faith in our Lord Jesus Christ,* what would you be telling them? What is repentance? What is faith, and why Jesus? Why Lord? Why Christ?

**How does all this work? What is behind these words directed at the Elders who have advance knowledge of Paul’s context?**

21 solemnly testifying to both Jews and Greeks

of repentance toward God

and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ.

 Remember, Paul is talking to Jews and Greeks. Their religious history and heritage are different but they both agree there is God. With these words, Paul sums-up the foundational teaching of the Gospel Message. Paul wants them to start (turn to) with God and point to Jesus as the long-awaited Messiah (Greek – Christ) who is also God (Lord) in the flesh. Paul directs them to turn to God first and then to have faith that Jesus’s sacrifice on the Cross paid their debt for sin. This is the most important role of the Messiah. I mean, why does the world need a Messiah? To defeat all of our enemies in this temporal world? No. The Jews were looking for a Messiah to defeat all their enemies, but Jesus, the Messiah, rejected their belief and carried out the role of “Messiah” prophesied in Isaiah 53.

 This presence of “Messiah” begs the question – does a person owe a debt to God for sin? Human experience and the acceptance of an afterlife dictate that this life is measured. Every person is accountable to their Creator for their life. The psyche of all humanity thirsts for forgiveness of wrong acts and thoughts. All people seek to be made spiritually whole. We observe that people who live a life with the feeling of unforgiveness demonstrate their unforgiven state with outbursts of anger and bitterness.

Romans 7 is the hallmark text defining the struggle fallen humanity has with losing to the power of the *law of sin and death.* Paul compares the Law of Moses to which the Jews thought adherence would make them right with God. But Paul declares the Law of Moses only highlights sin. The Law does not give people the spiritual power to overcome sin’s practice or its outcome which is separation from God.

**Romans 7:15-25**

15 For I do not understand what I am doing, because I do not practice what I want to do, but I do what I hate.

 16 Now if I do what I do not want to do, I agree with the law that it is good.

 17 So now I am no longer the one doing it, but it is sin living in me.

 18 For I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my flesh. For the desire to do what is good is with me, but there is no ability to do it.

 19 For I do not do the good that I want to do, but I practice the evil that I do not want to do.

 20 Now if I do what I do not want, I am no longer the one that does it, but it is the sin that lives in me.

 21 So I discover this law: When I want to do what is good, evil is present with me.

 22 For in my inner self I delight in God's law,

 23 but I see a different law in the parts of my body, waging war against the law of my mind and taking me prisoner to the law of sin in the parts of my body.

 24 What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death?

 25 Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, with my mind I myself am serving the law of God, but with my flesh, the law of sin. (Christian Standard Bible CSB 2017)

 God does not have Paul stop writing after this declaration of losing to the law of sin and death. No. God declares through Paul the victory in Spirit of Life in Jesus Christ.

**Romans 8:1** Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those in Christ Jesus, **2** because the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and death. (CSB17)

We are measured by our Creator and therefore judged for how we live our temporal lives. Revelation 20 provides the details of everyone’s “Great White Thone” judgement. Revelation 20 is the fulfillment of John 14:6. Everyone is judged! This is why Jesus is the only way. The Messiah, Jesus, is the only One who paid the price for our sin. The Messiah, Jesus, is the only Judge described in Revelation 20. Thus, all must go through the judgement of the Messiah, Jesus, to access the presence of the Father in His Heaven.

I understand people do not like to hear that their lives will be judged. So, they refute the existence of God. (Out-of-sight, out-of-mind.) We must witness to people that God’s love does not leave us powerless to navigate in this fallen world. God did not create us and say “figure-out victory in this life on your own”. NO! God provided the roadmap. Once Adam and Eve rebelled in the Garden, (Genesis 3 representing all of humanity), through God’s omniscience, He offered a path back to Him which is each person’s decision to accept (free-will-choice) or not. God is an equal opportunity Savior. He offers all fallen souls an opportunity to surrender to Him, which is everyone who has ever lived (Romans 1:18ff). Once we surrender to God, we have access to the eternal life-saving power of the Cross of the Messiah.

**Today’s Witness**

We have a similar witnessing task today. Most people believe there is a God and an afterlife. However, they are unaware, not sure, and doubt the *role* of Jesus. Why is Jesus, “Lord” and “Christ”?

In today’s secular world, as always, people have questions and are limited in what they know and believe. Their sources of information are narrow and uninformed about the bigger picture of God. We will not have enough time here to have an exhaustive discussion about God. I see that we need to make some key points about God. Paul had spent almost three years in Ephesus when he sums-up his teaching in a few words. We should note that Paul was addressing the Elders of the church who possessed a more mature understanding of the Gospel Message.

Below are ten points about God. These ten points are not presented to be the first or last in a study about God. These are presented here to be talking points. It is important that we tell people that God knows who they are, and they can count on Him. God did not create us in His image to get lost in the melee of human carnage. However, due to fallen humanity’s wars and missteps, people often live and die as just a biological mass. People need to know that God is love and loves people, and He does not want us to live in fear but in victory (1 John 4, Romans 7). God did not allow a meaningless random biological and chemical process to create us. God created us to live victorious lives now and for an eternity.

**1 Corinthians 15:54-57 CSB17**

54 When this corruptible body is clothed with incorruptibility, and this mortal body is clothed with immortality, then the saying that is written will take place: Death has been swallowed up in victory.

 55 Where, death, is your victory? Where, death, is your sting?

 56 The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law.

 57 But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ!

**1.** God is the Creator of all things and interacts with our world.

 Genesis 1 to the Incarnation tells us of God’s interaction with His creation.

**2.** God created people in His image (Genesis 1:26,27). This is not a physical image, for that would depict God with great limitation. We are created in His spiritual image to have a spiritual relationship with Him.

**3.** God is not limited in the way He presents Himself. We see God presenting Himself in the form of a burning bush that is not consumed in front of Moses (Exodus 3). God’s presence is a fire by night and a cloud by day during the Exodus. God gets physically personal with Jacob in wrestling. Jacob endures the event with a hip injury and a name change to Israel (Genesis 32).

**4.** God is Love (1 John 4:8) and God loves people (John 3:16).

**5.** God calls people to come to Him in a covenant relationship (Genesis 12, Romans 10:13, Joel 2:32) providing them with an opportunity to choose Him and be blessed with an eternal relationship.

**6.** God created and determined what is good (Genesis 1,2) and, at the same time, due to God’s unconditional love, allowed free-will choice for people to choose against His will. God’s creation made love a choice to be chosen through adversity. Love is not experienced in a vacuum with no opposition. For love to exist, there has to be alternatives.

**7.** God is all-knowing, powerful, and ever-present.

**8.** God’s love is greater and more powerful than sin and death (Romans 8:1-4).

**9.** God created us to have His Holy Spirit indwell our hearts, so He can direct our lives (Deuteronomy 30:6; Ezekiel 36; Romans 8:9; Galatians 2:20). He waits for us to invite Him into our hearts.

**10.** God created us in His spiritual image to have an eternal relationship with Him. He created us with the compacity to see the Way to the Truth to Eternal life (John 14:6). Unfortunately, due to human sin, the biological genetic code has been altered leading to people being born who are defective and do not have their full mental compacity to interact with God. God’s grace covers these people.

We see all of these ten attributes/characteristics (and more) about God spoken by Paul. Verse 22 directs our attention to God’s Holy Spirit being “bound” in Paul and testifying through him (v. 23). From the beginning of Paul’s calling (Acts 9), he knew that afflictions awaited him in the service of God.

22 "And now, behold, bound in spirit,

I am on my way to **Jerusalem**,

not knowing what will happen to me there,

 23 except that

 the Holy Spirit solemnly testifies to me in every city,

saying that bonds and afflictions await me.

But look to what Paul has to look forward. He seeks to finish/fulfill (v. 24) God’s calling in his life. Paul knows and wants others to know that he received his calling directly from God. Paul sees and accepts that his temporal life is to be spent and exhausted in delivering God’s Good News to Jews, gentiles, Kings and rulers.

24 "But I do not consider my life of any account as dear to myself,

so that I may finish my course

and the ministry

which I received from the Lord Jesus,

to testify solemnly of the gospel of the grace of God.

How does Paul present the Gospel? As the “grace” of God. Grace means that His Gospel cannot be earned; we must surrender to Him. This means that all the Law of Moses, all the pagan cultic rites, all the manmade stuff anyone is placing in front of a relationship with God is not of God. This truth is evident from Genesis to Revelation, from the beginning of man’s creation through the time of God’s incarnation as Jesus Christ, to today and eternity. Ephesians 2:8 sums-up God’s intent for establishing a saving relationship with Him.

4 But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, 5 even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), 6 and raised us up with Him, and seated us with Him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, 7 so that in the ages to come He might show the surpassing riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.

8 For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; 9 not as a result of works, so that no one may boast.

 Standing before the Ephesus Elders, whom Paul poured out his soul in the face of life-threatening opposition, he presents final words.

 25 "And now, behold, I know that all of you,

among whom I went about preaching the kingdom,

will no longer see my face.

 26 "Therefore,

I testify to you this day

that I am innocent of the blood of all men.

 27 "**For I did not shrink**

from declaring to you the whole purpose of God.

 We all have been given gifts from God to function. The parable of the talents in Matthew 25 brings to mind the Believer’s anguish if they did not use the attributes, gifts and talents God bestowed upon them. What more can we say than what Jesus taught in this parable? Who wants to be in a state of “weeping and gnashing of teeth”? The Apostle Paul was given every gift and talent to fulfill God’s calling. Paul was intelligent, able to preach, write and teach, enduring, persistent, physically strong coupled with an independent stubbornness that only yielded to God.

 What is the whole purpose of God from which Paul did not shrink? The delivering of the Gospel Message.

 One of the most important duties in fulfilling the office of Elder or Overseer of a local congregation is to protect them. An Elder must keep diligent guard for his own spiritual, physical and mental wellbeing. It is the responsibility assigned by God’s Holy Spirit to an Elder to protect the members of the church. This means both physically and spiritually.

 28 "Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock,

among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers,

to shepherd the church of God

which He purchased with His own blood.

 Paul knows that he is just one person. He knows human nature. Paul knows that his presence as God’s Apostle carries weight in the community. Paul knows that savage wolves are to some degree kept at bay by his presence. He was one of the few people to possess the knowledge of the Law of Moses and the teachings of Jesus.

 29 "I know that after my departure

savage wolves will come in among you,

not sparing the flock;

30 and from among your own selves men will arise,

speaking perverse things,

to draw away the disciples after them.

 Paul also knows, like with Jesus in John 6, there are those who attend who are “*fence-riders*”. These will raise their heads, being either self-consumed with pride, deceived or ignorant, and create doubt or dissention. Elders should be of the ever-present mind that they serve in a fallen perverse world that seeks to devour God’s people. The Pastor’s role includes protecting the congregation from wrong teaching and evil acts.

 31 "**Therefore** be on the alert,

remembering that night and day for a period of three years

I did not cease to admonish each one with tears.

 The Word of God is inseparable from God which represents and speaks His grace in order for us to be built-up. Remember, the “Word” became “flesh” and lived with us (John 1). So, the Word is more than black ink on white paper. The Word is God, whose Spirit is maturing Believers all the time (sanctifying) who have received an inheritance to eternal life with God.

 32 "And now I commend you to

 God and to the **word** of His grace,

which is able to build *you* up

and to give *you* the inheritance

among all those who are sanctified.

 Paul, the Apostle, Missionary and Evangelist called by God and martyred for His calling, was not a charlatan T.V. preacher conning *seed money* from his flock. The T.V. personality con-artists have hands too soft and their fingernails too manicured to work to support their lives. These con-artist are equivalent to the money-changers in the Temple that Jesus drove out. They have turned their local church into slot machines. They teach - if people throw enough money at God, one day they might get rich.

We have a proper biblical teaching from Paul about supporting Elders or Overseers in the Church.

**1 Timothy 5:17-18 CSB** 17 The elders who are good leaders are to be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who work hard at preaching and teaching. 18 For the Scripture says: Do not muzzle an ox while it is treading out the grain, and the worker is worthy of his wages.

 33 "I have coveted no one's silver or gold or clothes.

 34 "You yourselves know

that these hands ministered to my *own* needs

and to the men who were with me.

 Paul ties his lack of coveting to giving. It appears that Paul viewed his service to the Church as an offering. Thus, to Paul, he received a greater blessing to give his service to God.

 35 "In everything I showed you

that by working hard in this manner

you must help the weak

 and remember the words of the Lord Jesus,

that He Himself said,

'It is more blessed to give than to receive.'"

**End Of Paul’s Address**

 36 When he had said these things,

he knelt down and prayed with them all.

 37 And they *began* to weep aloud and embraced Paul,

and repeatedly kissed him,

 38 grieving especially over the word which he had spoken,

that they would not see his face again.

And they were accompanying him to the ship.

Have you contemplated about writing an “*end of life letter*” to your children, grandchildren, great grandchildren and to your future generations? What are the most important things you want them to know about you, about what you believe about God? I pray God gives you the words. I truly believe we all should have a farewell address to our families.

**AMEN**