

IMMANUEL’S BAND:
A Portrait of True Shepherds and Their Flock
(Acts 20:17-38)

I. WELCOME / INTRO

A. Welcome / Pastoral Prayer

B. Background of Today’s Text (3rd MJ, going, coming; 2 years in Eph.)

C. Today’s Scripture Reading:

¹⁷From Miletus Paul sent *word* to Ephesus, calling for the elders of the church. ¹⁸And when they had come to him, he said to them: “You yourselves know how I lived the entire time I was with you, from the *very* first day I set foot in the province of Asia; ¹⁹how I served the Lord in all humility and with tears, even in the midst of *the* trials I faced due of the plots of the Jews; ²⁰how I did not shrink from declaring to you anything that was profitable, or from teaching you publicly and from house to house, ²¹solemnly testifying both to Jews and Greeks *about* repentance towards God and faith towards our Lord Jesus. ²²And now, behold: Bound by the Spirit, I am on my way to Jerusalem, not knowing what will happen to me there, ²³except that in every city the Holy Spirit continues to warn me, saying that chains and afflictions await me. ²⁴But I consider my life nothing at all, nor do I hold it dear to myself, as long as I can complete my race and the ministry I received from the Lord Jesus: to testify to the gospel of the grace of God.

²⁵“And now, behold, I know that none of you among whom I have gone about proclaiming the kingdom will see my face again. ²⁶Therefore I testify to you this day that I *am* innocent of the blood of all, ²⁷for I did not hesitate to declare to you the whole purpose and plan of God. ²⁸Watch out for yourselves and for the entire flock, among whom the Holy Spirit has made you overseers *with a calling* to shepherd the church of God that he purchased with his own blood. ²⁹For I know that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; ³⁰indeed, from among your own number men will rise up, speaking perverse things, *trying* to draw the disciples after them. ³¹Therefore keep constant watch, remembering that night and day for three years I did not cease to warn and admonish each one *of you* with tears. ³²And now I commend you to God and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up and give you the *promised* inheritance, together with all who have been sanctified. ³³I have coveted no one’s silver, gold, or clothing. ³⁴You yourselves know that these hands provided for my *own* needs, and for the needs of those who were with me. ³⁵In all *these* things I showed you that by laboring in this way you are to uphold the weak, and *also* to remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he himself said, ‘It is more blessed to give than to receive.’”

³⁶Now when he had said these things, he knelt down and prayed with them all. ³⁷Then they all began to weep freely; and falling on Paul’s neck, they *all* were kissing him *goodbye*, ³⁸sorrowing most of all over the word he had spoken, that they would not see his face again. And they began walking with him to the ship.

D. Today’s Big Idea: Our text gives us much biblical instruction about the calling, character, work, struggles, and blessings of elders/overseers. And it gives us something more: A picture of the love that binds elders together, not only with one another, but also with the people they serve. In short, it gives us a picture of Immanuel’s Band (e.g., Robin Hood)

- Note: Unlike Peter, Paul never described himself as an elder. But he served for many years as a leader in the church at Ephesus, and certainly functioned as one. *We see this in today's text!*

II. (17-24) WHAT DOES A TRUE ELDER LOOK LIKE? THE *EXAMPLE* OF PAUL

A. He is part of a team of mature Christians (17)

¹⁷ From Miletus Paul sent *word* to Ephesus, calling for the elders of the church.

- Elders: Same as overseers and pastors; spiritually old, rather than chronologically; i.e., mature
- Plurality: Both in a city, and in a church

²³ And when they had appointed elders in every church, with prayer and fasting they commended them to the Lord in whom they had believed. – Acts 14:23

B. He lives an exemplary life (18-21)

¹⁸ And when they had come to him, he said to them: “You yourselves know how I lived the entire time I was with you from the *very* first day I set foot in the province of Asia: ¹⁹ how I served the Lord in all humility and with tears, even in the midst of *the* trials I faced due of the plots of the Jews; ²⁰ how I did not shrink from declaring to you anything that was profitable, or from teaching you publicly and from house to house, ²¹ solemnly testifying both to Jews and Greeks *about* repentance towards God and faith towards our Lord Jesus.

- Paul's faith was in a fishbowl! He intentionally set an example for the elders and the people
- Served the Lord
- Humility
- Tears
- Perseverance in the midst of trials
- *A focus on bold preaching and teaching, with a view to the salvation and edification of God's elect*

C. He is conscious of God's call to the ministry, and intent on fulfilling it completely, even at the cost of his life!

²² And now, behold: Bound by the Spirit, I am on my way to Jerusalem, not knowing what will happen to me there, ²³ except that in every city the Holy Spirit continues to warn me, saying that chains and afflictions await me. ²⁴ But I consider my life nothing at all, nor do I hold it dear to myself, as long as I can complete my race and the ministry I received from the Lord Jesus: to testify to the gospel of the grace of God.

- A man of the Spirit (who hears from the Lord)
- Who knows he's in a race . . . and who fired the starting gun!

¹²“Now as I was on my way to Damascus with authority and commission from the chief priests, engaged in these *very* activities, ¹³ at midday, O king, *as I was* on the road, I beheld a light from heaven, brighter than the sun, shining all around me, and around those who were travelling with me. ¹⁴ And when we all had fallen to the ground, I heard a voice saying to me in the Hebrew dialect, ‘Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me? *It is hard* for you to kick against the goads.’ ¹⁵ So I said, ‘Who are you, Lord?’ And the Lord said, ‘I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. ¹⁶ But arise and stand on your feet; for I have appeared to you for this reason: to appoint you as a servant and a witness, not only of the things you have seen, but also of the things I will *yet* reveal to you. ¹⁷ And I will deliver you from the *Jewish* people, and also *from* the Gentiles, to whom I am sending you, ¹⁸ to open their eyes so that they may turn from darkness to light, and *from* the power¹ of Satan to God, so that they may receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among those who are sanctified by faith in me.’ – Acts 26

- Who sees the finish line, and is intent on crossing it, even at the cost of his life
- **Who is separated to the proclamation of the Gospel of grace of God!**

III. (25-35) WHAT DOES A TRUE ELDER LOOK LIKE? THE *TEACHING* OF PAUL

A. (25) He has a feel for the future of their church, and is concerned to provide for it

²⁵“And now, take note: I know that none of you among whom I have gone about proclaiming the kingdom will see my face again.

B. (26-27) He is deeply aware of the eternal stakes of his ministry, and his accountability to God to fulfill it

²⁶ Therefore I testify to you this day that I *am* innocent of the blood of all. ²⁷ For I did not hesitate to declare to you the whole purpose and plan of God.

- Stakes
- Accountability

¹⁷ Obey your leaders and submit *to them*, for they keep watch over your souls as men who will give an account. Let them do this with joy and not groaning, for that would be injurious to you. – Hebrews 13

- Declaration: The truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth!

C. (28) He is a watchful man, understanding that God has made him a custodian of his most precious possession

²⁸ Watch out for yourselves and for the entire flock, among whom the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, *with a calling* to shepherd the church of God that he purchased with his own blood.

- A sound biblical cosmology is running in the background of this text!
- He watches over himself as an individual

- He watches over his fellow elders
- He watches over the flock
- Why? In part, because he is a custodian of God's most precious possession (their wives, their children, and their brothers and sisters in Christ)
- And in part because . . .

D. (29-31) He is a watchful man, understanding that he, his fellow-elders, and the flock are in constant danger of Satanic attack

»*For* I know that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; »indeed, from among your own number men will rise up, speaking perverse things, *trying* to draw the disciples away after them. »Therefore keep constant watch, remembering that night and day for three years I did not cease to warn and admonish each one *of you* with tears.

- Savage wolves
- Invading the flock
- Invading the eldership
- Creating schisms
- Requiring on the part of elders watchfulness, warning, admonition, ***and church discipline***

²“I know your works, your toil, and your patient endurance, and that you cannot tolerate evil men, but have put to the test those who call themselves apostles (though they are not), and have found them *to be* false.” – Rev. 2 (Christ's words to the *Ephesian* elders!)

E. (32) He steers the sheep, not to himself, but to God, Christ, and the Word of his Grace

³²And now I commend you to God and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up and give you the *promised* inheritance, together with all who have been sanctified.

- Elders are “commendars”
- To God
- To the Word of his GRACE!
- And therefore to Christ, the Fountain of Grace!
- These alone have power to accomplish the up-building and preservation of God's elect

F. (33-35) He does not fleece the sheep, but sacrificially loves and provides for them

³³I have coveted no one's silver or gold or clothing. ³⁴You yourselves know that these hands provided for my *own* needs, and for the needs of those who were with me. ³⁵In all *these* things I showed you that by laboring in this way you are to uphold the weak, and *also* to remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he himself said, ‘It is more blessed to give than to receive.’”

- Not a money grubber
- Hard worker

- Aware of the weaker brothers
- Giver rather than taker

¹⁹But I hope in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy to you shortly, so that I also may be encouraged when I learn of your condition. ²⁰For I have no one *else* of kindred spirit who will genuinely be concerned for your welfare. ²¹For they all seek after their own interests, not those of Christ Jesus.
– Phil. 2

IV. (36-38) WHAT DOES A TRUE ELDER LOOK LIKE (IF ALL GOES WELL)? HE IS DEEPLY LOVED!

³⁶Now when he had said these things, he knelt down and prayed with them all. ³⁷Then they all began to weep freely; and falling on Paul's neck, they *all* were kissing him *goodbye*, ³⁸sorrowing most of all over the word he had spoken, that they would not see his face again. And they began walking with him to the ship.

V. CONCLUSION: WHAT ALL THIS MEANS FOR YOU

A. Why would anyone want to be a urologist? Answer: Calling

B. Why would anyone want to an elder? Answer: Calling!

C. What we've learned today: An elder is a gift of Christ to his Church, a man called to a profoundly important and extremely difficult task. THEREFORE . . .

- When you choose your elders, choose with extreme care—lest you get a savage wolf! (Quote: Alex Strauch)
- When you have chosen an elder, then love, respect, honor, support, and pray for him, making his job as easy as you possibly can! These men don't grow on trees!
- A helpful hint: Think about Immanuel's Band (Slide)