

[Book Thesis: The Power of God Spreads the Gospel]

My Testimony
[Paul's Goodbye]

Find Acts 20. Final conversations matter. Just an hour before my family and I moved to Illinois in 1988, I visited my grandpa. Although he couldn't speak from the stroke he'd recently had, he could hear. I chose my words carefully because I suspected it would be my last conversation. For the first time in my life I told him I loved him. I thanked him for fond memories like me staying at the farm in the summer when I was a boy; or enjoying many Sunday suppers with him and Grandma. With tears I begged him to keep fighting to live. I wasn't ready to let him go. He was my last living grandparent.

Then we left for the Midwest. He died 4 weeks later. "Last words, are lasting words." As time runs out, you say only the most urgent and vital things. For Jesus, it was the Great Commission; for the apostle Paul, it was the Miletus speech. For 4 Sundays we're going to scrutinize his goodbye to the elders of the Ephesian church

- My Testimony
- My Gospel
- My Faith
- My Charge to Church Leaders

Today, Paul's testimony about his ministry. What's yours like? I mean all the work you do with your spiritual abilities to increase and help Christ's kingdom: serving, teaching, evangelism, encouraging, leadership, discerning between good and evil spirits, administration, prayer, miraculous gifts, financial giving, and so on.

What's your testimony about your ministry? The purpose of prodding you on this is; not primarily to make sure every Keystone position is fully staffed. It is to make sure every Christian is using his/her abilities for the kingdom. Maybe some will use more of their abilities outside of Keystone at places like HOHC or Water Street or Brephos. But *doing* ministry matters to the Church, and it matters to you. Because while *Jesus'* work on the cross gets you *into* heaven, the faithfulness of your *ministry* determines the extent of rewards *in* heaven: READ 2 Cor. 5:10; 1 Cor.3:11-15; Rom. 14:12.

Let's hear Paul testify about his work, then consider ours. READ Acts 20:13-26, 32-36. PRAY.

Paul is again on the move, bound for Jerusalem—hopefully in time for Passover. He passed by Ephesus but when the ship they were on had a layover at Miletus, he sent word for the Ephesian elders to come see him. When they did Paul soberly said his good byes, declaring he had no regrets about his ministry.

1. Adversity doesn't stop me (19)

REREAD v.19. Paul testified that "Adversity doesn't stop me. I never stopped doing my work for Jesus, and I did it to the bests of my ability. Whether I was telling people about Jesus, planting churches, answering questions raised by the churches, debating people of other religions, or collecting money for needy Christians, I did it, and did it

well *despite* adversity: unreliable co-laborers, lack of money, Jewish opposition, Gentile opposition, danger, abuse, poor health, betrayal, loneliness; *none* of it stopped me.”

He endured more misfortune than any 100 of us, yet there were few complaints. Like the Acts 5 apostles, Paul counted it an honor, a privilege to suffer, be inconvenienced, work hard, for Jesus. “Adversity doesn’t stop me.”

2. People Matter to me (20)

REREAD 20-21. Paul testified that “People matter to me.” It’s true that as needed, Paul could be very blunt—even severe with people: Peter, Barnabas, John Mark. But he thoroughly loved people. READ 2 Cor.11:11.

I’m fascinated by this because I don’t believe love and compassion came naturally to Paul.

When Dr. C.I. Schofield was a pastor years ago, a woman came to tell him she was going to serve the Lord in China.

“Well, you must love the Chinese people very much.”

“Oh, no,” she replied. “In fact, I rather dislike them.”

Rev. Scofield was mystified, “Then why are you going to China?”

“Because my Lord loves them,” she explained. “And I love Him.”

Same with Paul. People *did* frustrate him at times. But his love was genuine because it was crafted by the Holy Spirit in Paul from Paul’s love for Christ. READ 1 Thess.2:8. You can’t and won’t expend the energy to minister to people without getting God’s love for them. That’s why Paul could claim “People matter to me.”

3. Finishing Well Matters to me (22-24)

REREAD v.22-24. Paul testified that “Finishing well matters to me.” Not just crossing the line at top speed, but running well *throughout* the race. “My work is winding down. I have no regrets. Everything I *should* have taught you, I did. Everyone I should have confronted about his/her soul, I did.” Here was man headed for his grave who would not be bombarded by a lot of ‘if onlies.’” Finishing well mattered to him.

4. Money or Goods have no Hold on Me (33-35)

REREAD v.32-35. Paul testified that “Money and goods have no hold on me.” Financial independence? Didn’t interest Paul. How’s the stock market? Didn’t matter to Paul. Nor a big house, a sleek, red, 0-5 in 20 donkey, didn’t worry about adequate retirement, or money for dinners out.

Paul was so disinterested in money that he didn’t even ask the church for support, didn’t even accept free meals. He paid his own way to be an example to them. READ 2 Thess.3:7-9. Money and goods had no hold over him.

Now, let’s go back to the question I asked you earlier: What’s your testimony about your ministry? Are you...

1. Undeterred by adversity? Are you committed to your ministries even if you can’t get along well with one of the members of the team? Or your CONNECTION group? Do you bail if the rest of your life is becoming too busy or ministry’s inconvenient? What about when the wheels are coming off your life personally? “Pastor, I think I better step back for a while because I’m having

some problems in my life.” Really? Never had problems before? I don’t know anybody like you. Everyone’s got problems. Paul said in 2 Cor.1:9 that such things happen—not to make us flee ministry—but to transfer faith from the wrong thing—person—to God. Is ministry the one thing you’ll sacrifice in your life, or the one thing you’ll sacrifice for? It’s likely we’ll never have to face most of what Paul did, but will the little things make you withdraw?

2. **Do People matter to you?** I don’t mean do you have warm squishy feelings about people you may not even know. I mean, are you devoted to the people of God? 1 Cor.12:7 explains that God gave us these abilities, these spiritual gifts to benefit the kingdom, benefit the church. Do these folks matter to you because you realize they matter to God? Do those people matter to you? Or, what about the ones still *outside* the kingdom? Do you have a Luke 15 understanding of God’s heart for them? Persistent search for those lost?
3. **Do you want to finish well?** Many pastors grow frustrated at the troubling up and down nature of the ministry. Someone volunteers are like fireworks: bright, energetic burst at the beginning, but quickly flame out. Reasons come by the dozens but a troubling and recurring one is that people didn’t realize it was going to be so much work. For some, ministry seems to be the one expendable item in their palm pilots. If there’s room for it, I’ll include it, but don’t expect me to adjust any *other* area of life, so I can minister. I am so grateful for the spirits of the men you chose Thursday night—all of whom could have declined because their lives are already too busy. Instead, the committed to move *other* things to make room for this work. Are you looking to work just when you feel it’s beneficial to you, or not a sacrifice, or not too demanding, or are you willing to run, run, run, the race with endurance, and finish well? Phil.3:14: *...I press on toward the goal to win the prize...*
4. **Do Money & Goods have an unhealthy hold on me?** As a single man, Paul urged people to not get married but instead devote their lives to Christ’s service. I’m sure one of his concerns was that husbands and fathers must pay more attention to money than a single man; he has a responsibility to provide for more than himself, not only now but in the future. That *is* his responsibility. But the *hold* this stuff acquires, can cripple and even kill our ministry. Are you too busy chasing the buck—working all that overtime—to have time to minister? You’re not available, and too tired. How about some of you middle-aged women? Are you working because your household won’t survive without your check, or should you be unemployed so you can invest in the lives of some of the young women in the congregation like Titus says?

Concl:

Let’s say, you’re thinking, “Wow, I’m not serving the Lord with my abilities; if I stood before God today, I’d be embarrassed by the testimony I’d have to give. Now what?”

Conviction is a great first step. Then what: serve out of duty? Maybe, if you must. But wouldn't the motive of love work better? Love for whom? God.

In Lk. 7, Jesus was having dinner at Simon's house—not the disciple—a Pharisee. Hearing he was there, a woman with a bad reputation crashed the party and began to wash Jesus' feet with her tears and very expensive perfume. Jesus let her. Which appalled Simon. Jesus read his thoughts and told him a story.

"A man owed a moneylender \$500, and another man owed him \$50. When the moneylender learned that neither man had the money to pay, he forgave both loans. Simon, which man do you think was most grateful; which loved him more?"

"Probably the one with the bigger debt."

"Correct. That's how it is with those who love much. But those who love little, who do you think came to a may have been a prostitute, came Listen to what Jesus told Simon the Pharisee in Lk.7:47. "Those who have been forgiven little, love little."

If you serve little, you probably love God little. If so, you don't realize how big your debt really is. Your sin, whether big or small, cost Jesus His life. Repreach the gospel to yourself again: Jesus died and rose again for sinners, of whom *I'm* the worst. For I am.