

Longing for Ephesus

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Date: 12 November 2023

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[0 : 00] Our Father in heaven, thanks for your word and we pray this morning as we hear it, that you'd help us to hear it well and that we'd be prepared to live by every word in your scriptures.

We pray it in Jesus' name. Amen. Now a church is a family, it is the household of God, that's what the nature of a church is. We told in 1 Timothy that it's the household of God.

And we all have some kind of understanding of what a family is, don't we? There's younger people, there's older people, there's mums, there's dads, there's kids, there's grandparents, there's cousins, there's aunties, there's widows, there's widowers, there's healthy, there's sick.

And when you get the family together there can be some kinds of stress at times. Yet in a family, blood is thicker than water, right? That's what happens in a family. You love your family, or at least you should in the family.

Now the church is not a social club, it's not a political party, it's not a lion's society, and God forbid it's not a networking society. And today we see the heart of Paul clearly on display for the church in Ephesus.

[1 : 08] Now I'm sure that his heart would have been the same for every church that he started. But we see it specifically here in Acts chapter 20 as Paul calls the Ephesian elders to him.

And so let's dive into this chapter together. Remember, Paul was on his way to Jerusalem. We just saw that, we've got a slide up here, he's on his way to Jerusalem. We don't have Jerusalem on the page, but he's on his way to Jerusalem.

And if it's possible to get there by Pentecost. Now at one level, Pentecost is the place where the Christian church on earth began.

It's the time and the place, really, when the Christian church in the world started. The Holy Spirit of God came upon believers there and set them as his people.

And he's aiming to arrive, he's got there in Miletus, you see on the map there, it's a port close to Ephesus, right? And as you know, Ephesus is a place in Asia Minor, that's where it is.

[2 : 11] And from there, so many people had become Christians. The gospel had radiated out from Ephesus into all that Asia Minor, Turkey area there now. And they'd become followers of Jesus.

And so many become Christians that the great temple of Artemis was despised, has come to nothing, one of the great wonders of the world. And she was seen as nothing as well.

And the trade in idols had become defunct, turned down. And in his haste to go to Jerusalem, instead of him going up to Ephesus, he calls the Ephesian elders to himself down at the port at Miletus.

Now, the people we're looking to, we speak to, as such is their love for him, that they drop what they're doing, their spiritual father at one level, and they come to him at Miletus.

And he's addressing, notice, who's he addressing? He's addressing the Ephesian elders. That's who he's addressing. Older men. And yet these older men are those who have been appointed as overseers of the church.

[3 : 17] Have a look at verse 27. It was read to us in verse 27. He says, For I did not shrink back from declaring to you the whole counsel of God. Pay careful attention, verse 28, to yourselves and to all the flock to which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers.

So these older men, the select group, have come down to him who are overseers of the church in Ephesus. They are responsible for the welfare of the church. And at one level, all older men are elders.

Any man who's older than you, any man who's older than me, is an elder to me. That's the idea. Very important to understand who he's talking about here. But there are those Christian men who are given a responsibility as overseers of the church.

And we'll listen to these words carefully. And he's addressing Christians now. We'll talk about overseas a bit later on. And the importance of them. So this is the only address in the book of Acts where Paul addresses Christians specifically.

And what does he tell them? Well, you see what he tells them there in verses 17 to 27. They know how he lived.

[4 : 31] See that there? You yourselves know, verse 18, how I lived among you the whole time from the first day I set foot in Asia. They have seen him in action.

They know him. And verse 19, he is their servant. More than that though, he literally served as a slave of the Lord Jesus.

That's what it means. He was humble. See? Serving the Lord with all humility. And with tears and with trials that happened to me through the plots of the Jews.

Let me tell you a bit about humility. We've got to get this right about humility. Humility is not thinking less of yourself. Right?

Thinking that you're worthless, useless, low self-esteem. We're extremely valuable people.

Extremely valuable people.

[5 : 36] Precious. Greatly loved by the Lord Jesus. To think otherwise is to doubt God's word about us. He loved us.

He loved me so much that he would die for me. That's how valuable we are in his sight. And that's how valuable we are to God.

We need to recognise that. So don't think less of yourself. But humility is thinking of yourself less.

Got it? Humility is thinking of yourself less. Not wanting my way. Not thinking I'm the most important person in the room or in the car or in the queue or in the family.

Humility is thinking about others and their needs, their ideas more. Being willing to hear what the other person has to say. And not putting words into their mouths.

[6 : 40] That's what humility is. They knew Paul. They knew Paul. And they knew his courage for Christ. It was costly for him. Minisher was tough for Paul as he proclaimed the gospel in Asia.

His own countrymen, Jews, right? Particularly Jewish leaders, reject Jesus and they made life difficult for him.

See, they plotted against him, verse 19. It's a wicked thing to plot against people. To want to bring them down. To overthrow them.

And we hear of one instance there in chapter 20, verse 3. Where the Jews plotted to bring him down. Plotted for his blood. He was persecuted in Antioch.

Driven from town in Acts chapter 13. He was stoned and dragged out of Lystra in Acts chapter 14, verse 19. They think they'd kill him and then he gets up and then goes back in there again.

[7 : 40] To tell them of the Lord Jesus Christ. And we will hear about another detailed event for us in chapter 23. When he gets to Jerusalem. Now why does Paul experience such opposition?

And he doesn't stop, right? He didn't shrink back from what he taught. Right?

And he taught what was only useful. Teaching publicly and privately. See verse 20 and 21. How I did not shrink from declaring to you anything that was profitable.

And teaching you in public and from house to house. Testifying both to Jews and to Greeks. Of repentance towards God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ.

That's what got him into trouble. Teaching publicly and privately. Repentance and faith. Repentance and faith.

[8 : 51] Repentance is changing your mind. Literally. That's what repentance is. You used to think one way. You now think another. You used to think Jesus was nothing.

You now think he's everything. You used to think Jesus was a liar. You now know he is Lord.

Repentance is changing your mind.

Repentance is for everyone. Jews and Greeks. Me and you. And I take it that repentance and faith are profitable.

Repentance is recognizing that the ways I'm living. The things I'm believing. The attitudes I have. Which are wrong. Which are sinful.

And then turn from them. And that's got to be good hasn't it? That's got to be good. Rejecting a way of life that is damaging to me and everybody else.

[9 : 53] It's got to be good. And Paul solemnly declared these things in humility with tears. That God has sent his son the Lord Jesus Christ.

Lord and Christ. Anointed King. King of the Kingdom of God. King and so Lord of Jews. And King of the Universe.

And so Lord of Gentiles. That's the Kingdom of God. And it's by faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. That both Jews and Greeks. Are made right with God.

Made one new family in Christ Jesus. Forgiven their sins. Made whole. Very difficult message. For Jews to accept this message. Very difficult for the Greeks.

To accept this message. And those who didn't accept it. Persecuted. Prosecuted. Paul.

[10:56] The one who announced it. It wasn't easy for him. See there in verse 22 and 24. It wasn't easy for him. And now behold.

I'm going to Jerusalem. Constrained by the Spirit. Not knowing what will happen to me there.

Except. That the Holy Spirit testifies to me. In every city.

That imprisonment and affliction. Awaits me. But I do not account my life of any value. Nor as precious to myself. If only. I may finish my course.

And the ministry that I received from the Lord Jesus. And to testify to the gospel. Of the grace. Of God. He didn't shrink it back.

The easiest thing to do for him. Would have been to say. Oh no. I've had enough. Right. Would have made it a lot easier. I'm tired of being beaten up. And put in prison.

[11:56] Persecuted. And driven out of town. And he's about to go to Jerusalem. And face more. To the eye of the storm. It's kind of like the Lord Jesus.

Isn't it? Knowing that when he gets to Jerusalem. He's going to cop it as well. And yet. Paul. Was willing to do it. I want to point this out to you.

Being known as a follower of Jesus. Will not necessarily make you popular. In fact. If you want to live a godly life. A gospel life. You will face persecution.

That's the promise of the scriptures. It takes courage. To be known. As a believer. As a follower of Jesus. Now I'm not saying that we're apostles. I'm not saying that at all.

But just saying that as believers. We mustn't be ashamed of Jesus. We mustn't shrink back. From what's in the word of God. And so we need to hold the word of God.

[12:54] And live like we believe it. Opening our mouths. And ready to declare it. It won't make us popular. We may even have been. Not accepted in the past.

As Christians. That's one thing. But now the tide has turned. Christians are now. Not seen as. Okay. Or neutral. But Christians are now seen as. Bad people. Because we challenge. Just by our very lifestyle. Almost every value of our modern world.

Or we should. The age we live in is one of relativism. It's to have a so-called open mind. Tolerance. But only if you're in agreement with the majority.

You'll be accepted if you agree. That all kinds of. Godless practices are okay. That they're wonderful expressions of sexuality. And liberation. And progress.

[13:54] But if you have an opinion. That goes against the crowd. If you have an articulated position. Which goes against the crowd. If you say that.

Promiscuity and sexual immorality. Is actually damaging to self. Society. And everything you would like to hold dear. And if you say that God's not pleased with it.

And that it's actually sinful. And offends God. Like all other sins. Of greed. Selfishness. Selfishness. Which we're all guilty of.

Then you'll be persecuted in some way. Or at least ignored. Or marginalized. Or scorned. If you go on to mention that Jesus was crucified.

So that we'd be forgiven for our offending of him. And our rebellion against God's lordship. That we need to repent. And towards God. And have faith.

[14:57] In the Lord Jesus Christ. Then. You'll get one of two reactions. People will say. Yeah. You're right. And come to faith and forgiveness.

Or. You may well face. Persecution. Adverse reactions. Unfortunately. It can be costly.

In all kinds of ways. To stick up for Jesus. In the Christian church as well. But we'll get on to that later. Paul is fully aware. That being a herald of the gospel. Is costly. Because he's going to Jerusalem.

And there he will again. Speak about repentance towards God. And faith in the Lord Jesus. And. He's not certain of his fate. Except it's going to be tough. There's only one thing on his mind though.

That is to announce the gospel of grace.

[15:56] This good news. That Jesus is the Christ. That forgiveness of sins is found through his name. Not found by works. Not by going to the temple. Not by law keeping. Not by being a good Jew.

But only by grace. God's incredible kindness. In sending his son. And Paul knows that. He won't see the elders again. But he wants them to know.

Do you see there. That he's innocent of their blood. Verse 25. And now behold. I know that none of you among whom I've gone about. Proclaiming the kingdom.

Will see my face again. Therefore I testify to you this day. That I'm innocent of the blood of all. For I did not shrink. From declaring to you. The whole counsel of God.

Comes up twice. Isn't it? Shrinking. Shrinking. He doesn't shrink back. Well. He picks up the things of Ezekiel 23.

[16:57] As long as he's. A faithful. Pastor. Speaking the whole word of God. He'll be innocent.

Of their blood. If they face the judgment of God. He's proclaimed the whole counsel of God. He hasn't left anything out. If they find themselves in trouble with God.

It's not on Paul's account. But. Because he's told them. Everything they need to know. Can I just point something out here.

Notice the importance. Of the whole counsel of God. That is. All of God's word. It isn't that we can say. Believers can say. That we like one bit.

But not another bit. We like what Jesus says. But not what Paul says. We like what. James says. But not what Peter says. We can't just choose.

[17:54] The bits we like. If we say. We don't accept. Or like a part of God's word. And go out of our way. To prove that it. Doesn't mean what it says.

If we twist and distort. It means. To make it mean. What you want to say. Then we're in great danger. Paul taught. The whole counsel of God.

Not just his favourite bits. Leaving out the bits he didn't like. There's lots in the Bible. That I know people find hard to accept. However we need to listen. To the whole counsel of God.

Not just what we want to hear. That means. As we do so. We are submitting to Jesus. As Lord. That's what that means.

Which is why we preach. Like we do here at church. Just a bit of a reminder. We preach from the Old Testament. We preach from the New Testament. We preach. Passage. From the big. As we work our way through.

[18:52] The book of Acts. Or any book of the Bible. We start from the beginning of the book. And we work our way through. The whole lot. So that we. Hear the whole lot. Not walking around. Thinking. What will I preach tomorrow? God's told me.

What I'm going to preach. Here it is. The whole counsel of God. Now again. It took courage. To teach the whole counsel of God. It's easy to shrink back.

From the tough stuff. But that is ultimately foolish. And irresponsible. And God will have it on my neck. And the elders neck. If we don't.

And so we see Paul's plea. In verses 28 to 31. Pay careful attention.

To the flock. In which the Holy Spirit. Has made you overseers. To care for the church of God.

Which is obtained. By his own blood. Those entrusted.

[19:49] With the care of God's church. Have a huge. Huge responsibility. The oversight. Of God's church. Which God.

Has brought to be. By his son's. Precious blood. It's not Roy's church. It's not pastor. So and so's church.

It's God's church. And so the idea. Of paying careful attention. Is stressed. Both here. In verse 31. Be alert.

It is God's church. God's church. God's church is something. That cost him. A great deal. You know. What it's like. To entrust someone. To someone's care. Don't you. You may have.

That kind of experience. With a child. And putting your child. Into the care. Of somebody else. The babysitter. The daycare centre. The kindergarten.

[20:48] The boarding school. There's concern. How she'll go. Will she be looked after. Will she be safe. Will she cry. Will she have friends. When she gets there.

God has entrusted. Something incredibly precious. To the overseers. Those responsible. For shepherding. Shepherding. His precious.

People. And Paul then warns. The elders. Listen to this. I know.
 That after my departure. Fierce. Wolves. Will come in among you. Not sparing the flock. And from
 among your own selves.
 Will arise men. Speaking twisted things. To draw away. The disciples. After them. Notice where
 they'll come from.
 [21 : 54] They're not. Cavoodles. Scruffy the hound. They are wolves. Who tear into the flock.
 And destroy the sheep. And notice where they come from. They come from outside. And they come
 from inside. That's where they come from. External wolves.
 Will arise. And internal wolves. Will arise. Elders.
 Overseers. Are to have two postures. Towards church. You ready for this? Two postures. Towards
 church. Everybody's welcome. Come on in.
 We want the whole world to come and hear the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. Please come.
 Every day. Every week. Public. Private. We'd love to have you gathered with us. Way open arms.
 [22 : 51] Welcome. We're glad you're here. Right? But also this one. Get out. Go away. Don't
 come back.
 Yeah? Two postures. That is the posture of the preacher. Welcome. Come. Go away. Don't come
 back.
 To the wolves. That's the posture we need to have. Might sound harsh. But it's what we're entrusted
 to do. For the welfare. Of the sheep.
 Of those entrusted to his people. And so the wolves. Twisted things. Crooked things.
 Perverse things. Deformed things. That's what they do. And they take away the disciples of Jesus.
 After them. To become disciples. Of their crooked teaching.
 [23 : 51] Their false teachers. Crooked teachers. Are wolves. Which have continuously wreaked
 havoc. On the church. Down the centuries. And how will the elders.
 Guard the flock. Not with shotguns. Not with fox baits. Not with dingo traps. The elders are to guard
 the flock.
 By following the example of Jesus. And of their apostle Paul. The elders are to guard the flock. Not
 by shrinking back. From teaching the whole counsel of God.
 Despite personal risk. And conflict. And cost. The elders are to guard the flock. By preaching the
 whole counsel of God. Repentance towards God.
 And faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. Elders are to guard the flock. By proclaiming the gospel of God's
 grace. Elders are to guard the flock. By not counting their own lives.
 [24 : 44] As anything precious. But that they might finish the race. Holding on to the faith. And in
 the end. Receive their words from the good and faithful God. Well done.
 Good and faithful servant. That's a timeless word. For all to hear. And that's a timeless word. For
 every would-be elder to hear. Who might be appointed to be.
 Overseer of God's flock. Unfortunately. Unfortunately. What Paul has preached. Has become all too
 true. God's precious church. Has been torn apart.
 By the walls. All through history. And continues to happen. In various places. Around the world.
 Today. It all starts. In the same place. By the twisting.
 The distorting. The defamation. The departure. From the truth. Perverting. The things of God's
 word. Denying the authority of scripture.
 [25 : 41] That's where it comes from. And then coming up with this idea. Of interpretation. Can I
 tell you. Interpretation is a. Dodgy way.
 To speak about the scriptures. Can I tell us. We need to understand. To comprehend. The
 scriptures. It's pretty clear. Most of the time.
 And so. There are place. After place. Where you will see this. In that place. There are wolves.
 Who. Are active. And say. That it's fine. To have. All kinds. Of. Immoral people.
 Leading. And in charge of. Whole denominations. Contrary. To 1 Timothy. Chapter 3.
 [26 : 40] There are some wolves. Denying the place. Of the death. And resurrection. Of Jesus. So
 they are. Taking. Away. From the gospel.
 The gospel. Negative people. Gospel. Minus people. Saying Jesus. Didn't die. And rise again. And
 there are wolves. In churches. Preaching a gospel. Which is not simply.
 Repentance. Towards God. And faith. In Lord Jesus Christ. There are gospel. Adders. They're the
 snakes. Not just wolves. They add. To the gospel. Saying. You've got to do this. Plus.

This. And plus. That. Expect. To see this. To be a true. Follower. Of Lord Jesus Christ. They're wolves. And snakes.

Because they're adders. They're all. They're all. They're all. They're all. They're all. They're all. They're all. They're all. But that's what makes people. Love them. Because people love. To have their itching ears.

[27 : 36] Twitched. By the things they love to hear. Teachings that make people long to believe that they might be popular.

They could be attractive people to be around these teachers. But that makes them all the more and more dangerous. Brothers and sisters.

We need to know the scriptures. So that we can see the wolves. And stand against them. Because the elders. Are to care for the sheep.

Ezekiel chapter 34. 1 Peter chapter 5. They're to bind up the ones. That have been mauled. And feed and nourish the sheep. So that they won't be led astray. By fierce wolves.

That can come from. Without. And within. Elders are to lead the sheep. To the green pasture. To the fresh water. Looking after the weak sheep. So that the strong sheep don't hurt them.

[28 : 33] Fend off the wild wolves. Who'd want to come in. And tear apart. And can even grow up from within. And it's going to be done in God's strength. This work. In verse 32 to 35.

Paul commissions the elders. By committing them to God. And the word of grace. 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 were sanctified. Paul has.

Made them alert. He's spoken to them for three days. And for three years. And ceaselessly speaking them. The things of the scriptures. Truthfully. And honestly. Tearfully at times.

And now. He's committing. The elders. To the word of God's grace. It's only God's grace.

[29 : 31] God's strength. That will make them able to. Actually. Stand against the walls of the world. See these elders. Are the fruit.

Of Paul's labor. Of his preaching. Of his teaching. Of his exhorting. Of his. And now. As God commits the church. To the oversee.

And oversight. Of elders. So Paul. Commits. The elders. Into God's care. The word. Of his grace. Notice.

The first place. To find care. From. God. Is his gracious. Word. The scriptures. Old. And new. And the gospel.

Of Jesus. Which is timeless. That is. His gracious. Word. In this. World. Which will continue.

[30 : 26] To strengthen. And bring them. Safely. Through to glory. The gospel of Jesus. Is not something. We should tire. From hearing. It's what gets us saved. And keeps us saved. Now.

I know you're asking. The question. What happened. To God's church. In Ephesus. Jesus. We find out. In the book of Revelation. That. Tells us.

That the church. Was still going strong. 40 or 50 years later. After Paul. Paul spoke to the elders. It's still going. And they'd stayed true. To the gospel. Of God's word. They'd endured.

Hardship. They'd exposed. To false apostles. Who would twist. The truth. However. They do have a problem. And the problem. And the problem. Was this. That they've abandoned.

The love. They had at first. I mean. They'd cried. Tears of joy. And love. For each other. And for Paul. But. Somehow. They'd lost it. Somehow. They'd lost it. They've abandoned it.

[31 : 31] They're. Maybe orthodox. They might be true. They might be right. But it's. Cold.

It's a loveless truth. That they're holding on to. And Jesus is not happy about it. And so. They'd have them repent of that as well. And as we look back.

It seems that the warning was heeded. St. Ignatius. St. Ignatius. Who wrote a few decades. After John wrote the book of Revelation.

Saw them doing well. Seems like they heard the warning. But something's happened. Hasn't it? Today. You won't find a large.

Vibrant church in Turkey. In Ephesus. Islam. Is the dominant religion there now. And it's.

[32 : 30] Leading people to worship the false gods. Of Allah. And deny Jesus. As Lord and Saviour. Islam. With its mosques. And minarets. Calling people to pray.

Bringing. Darkness. And fear. Where the name of Jesus. Once proclaimed. Bringing light. And freedom. Where the name of Jesus.

Needs once more to be proclaimed. Knowing that. Doing so will come. At great personal cost. We have a young man.

Who's gone out from uni church. Who is now studying. Doing the MTS program in Sydney. To work primarily amongst Muslims. If you go to see him at summer school.

You'll get to talk to him. If you're at uni church. You know who he is. And we see Paul's departure. See the love.

[33 : 34] The pastor and his team. And the team.

And the pastor. I'm sorry. Praying for one another.

Hugging one another. Kissing one another. All in tears. Okay.

Knowing that he's likely to lose his life. For what he believes. Now I'm not a prophet. Nor a son of a prophet. Right. However I can tell you confidently.

That God's precious church. Will always face one major threat. And there's fierce wolves. Who will teach and preach twisted things. And draw away disciples after themselves.

[34 : 46] And that these wolves. Will come from outside the church. And these wolves. Will come from within the church. Which is why we need leaders. Overseers. Pastors. Teachers. Who are fearless.

And faithful to the word of God. And we have them here. Able to recognise.

Those who teach twisted things. And lead people away from Jesus. And you might not like hearing. When we say that there are wolves. But we are saying it for your good.

Elders. Elders. Not concerned for their own comfort. But rather who pay careful attention to themselves.

And to the flock. Which God has made them an overseer. We have them here. Don't drive them away. We have people here.

[35 : 48] Who care for the church of God. Obtained by his own precious blood. Which is why we need pastors. And elders. And teachers. Who will be committed to contending. For the truth of God's word. Which is the way to guard God's flock.

And we'll need to continue. Contending. Continually. Until the Lord Jesus returns. And by doing this. We will be teaching.

The next generation of elders. How to guard the flock. Well as well. The threat to the flock. Never goes away. Never goes away.

Never ceases. We need to have people. With a deep love. For God's word. And his grace. Overseeing us.

A deep love. For the apostle Paul. And his teaching. Overseeing us. With a deep love. For the Lord Jesus. And his word. And his honour. Overseeing us. With a deep love. For the lost.

[36 : 48] Overseeing us. With a deep love. For one another. Overseeing us. And may it be. That our church. Is still here.

In another 50. 80. 100. Years. Or at least. Until the Lord Jesus returns. Let's pray.

Let's pray. Our Father in heaven. We thank you for your life giving word. Please help us to hear it well. Please help us to endure.

And to love. And to care for the flock. That you have purchased. With your own precious blood. For we ask it in Jesus name. Amen.