

# The Elders' Proclamation

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Acts 20:13-34

We were in this passage last week with the Elders' Pulpit, and we talked about the solemn living or the manner of the work of the elders.

Paul took them and us by the hand and showed the past, the present, and the future of the church.

The past focused on his example, his sacrifice, the full running of his race and fulfilling his ministry. No wonder his departure was filled with tears! Some ministers can't wait to move on to greener pastures; but not this one.

The present dealt with the call to shepherd the flock of God – in the central verse of the passage, 20:28. This verse is chock full with descriptions of the church leader – elders, overseers, and shepherds. There are two words in the Greek for shepherding, one speaking of feeding and providing for the flock, and one for ruling, directing them, having authority (not as kings or lords), but gently yet firmly guiding the flock of God. It is the second word here. See then how this stands against so much today of loose church structure and leadership, not least of which the church which has no formal membership. Shepherds don't just go out and find some sheep and start herding them. Sheep and shepherd are to have a precious and clear bond with each other.

Then the future involves the warning of wolves coming and these undershepherd elders are to protect, to guard, as well as oversee.

These are God's people, yet they have enemies! They are God's flock, yet disciples will be attacked and even devoured. 20:28 is not the only passage which mentions blood.

There are three others.

First, there is this passage – the blood of the sheep in the savage ravaging by the wolves. Have you seen a wolf gorging itself upon a lamb or sheep? It is awful!

Secondly, there is blood in the commitment Christians are to have against sin, against evil, and for Jesus. Paul says in 24 “I do not consider my life of any account as dear to myself.” Oh, what Christians must suffer and have suffered! You cannot love both God and yourself, as the late Rev. Schuller taught.

But third there is a most important blood in 26 – being innocent, pure from the stain of all men’s blood! That is the ringing note for our message today.

Our text rings with the glory of God in the gospel of His Son, of His divine ownership of a precious church – one church, with the great and important needs of the flock, but as well the full provision found in the Word of Grace, carried in the heart and hand of Paul – the faithful servant of his Savior and Lord. All this is sharply punctuated by this chilling warning if ministers, if elders, if Christians are not faithful. **Blood on my hands!**

*<sup>6</sup> 'But if the watchman sees the sword coming and does not blow the trumpet and the people are not warned, and a sword comes and takes a person from them, he is taken away in his iniquity; but his blood I will require from the watchman's hand.' (Eze 33:6)*

May this serve to come to the need and remedy of God’s people – which is our title: the elders’ proclamation.

We have two points to make:

The main point is **what** is proclaimed – Paul brings before us again and again what he taught, what he preached, the center, the content of his message and ministry. Here is repentance and faith (21); here is the

gospel of the grace of God (24); here is preaching the kingdom (25); 27 declares the whole purpose or counsel of God; lastly, God and the Word of His grace (32).

But first let us take in the full scope of this message, the **how** of proclaiming these riches. How did Paul proclaim and teach and preach and testify?

Well, we might say simply, in **every** way!

He did so in **every setting** – verse 20 – both publically, in the church and in the school of one Tyrannus, every day, for some 5 hours, says some manuscripts. And privately – from house to house – personally, in small groups of believers.

A minister is not faithful unless both of these outlets of his service are finding feet. He must be balanced – not sacrificing the public work by the private, or the private for the public.

He did so at **every time** – verse 18 – from the first day + the whole time; verse 31 – night and day! He is not faithful who only ministers in short stretches, when convenient to him.

He did so with **every one** – 21 – solemnly testifying to Jews and Greeks, serving believers and unbelievers, becoming all things to all men. How easy it is to spurn one over the other; to only evangelize or to only disciple; to deal only with the weak or only with the strong, with the lambs or the sheep. Paul said he was pure from the blood of ALL MEN. That is, all **kinds** of men.

Then he did so with **every tool** – we are barraged with a great variety of verbs, describing his interaction at all times in all places with all men by every means – *teaching, declaring, solemnly testifying, preaching, shepherding, warning and protecting, admonishing*, and all so tearfully – which shows tenderness, passion, earnestness. He is

whole-hearted, warmly engaged, serving the Lord with joy as he serves the church and those lost in their sins.

Each setting demands a different tool. Were a minister to stand in the pulpit and merely share, that would be inappropriate; if he were to stand up in a Bible study and begin to herald and preach, that too would be the wrong tool at the wrong time.

Not all elders preach, but all teach; not all Christians teach, but all witness to the Word of God and the testimony of Jesus Christ.

Take just this last word in verse 31, admonish – *noutheton*, root is *nous*, the mind – sometimes admonishing, sometimes warning, often instruction; all addressing the *mind*, helping believers to think as believers. As Paul wrote to the Colossians: “We proclaim Him, admonishing every man and teaching every man with all wisdom, so that we may present every man complete in Christ.” (Col 1:28)

Elders should especially like **1 Thessalonians 5:12-13** “But we request of you, brethren, that you appreciate those who diligently labor among you, and have charge over you in the Lord and give you instruction, and that you esteem them very highly in love because of their work. Live in peace with one another.”

But here is a ministry for the believer, the led, as well as the leader in this word:

***Romans 15:14*** *And concerning you, my brethren, I myself also am convinced that you yourselves are full of goodness, filled with all knowledge and able also to admonish one another. (Rom 15:14)*

So Paul is found serving, in every way, in every time, in every setting, to every one – and what is he serving? Everything! Verse 20 – I did not shrink or shy away from declaring to you anything! Anything profitable to you! The whole counsel of God!

This brings us to the second and main point – the **what** of the proclamation.

There is something especially open, sincere and honest in all of this. There is no “jiggery pokery” as they say in Scotland, in Apostolic Christianity. Jiggery pokery means to be doing something sneaky behind the scenes.

Gospel ministers and gospel churches do not follow cunningly devised fables so as to pull the wool over our eyes. The aim in all is for the true benefit, the spiritual, godly, edifying, blood-bought blessings of a saving God.

This Spirit-bound ministry testifies most solemnly, first of all, to the gospel of the grace of God, and the reception of that gospel by repentance and faith. This is the truth found in 21 and 24.

Let us begin with that gospel, the glad tidings of great joy, which angels desire to look into. Without the gospel, there is no repentance, no faith, no salvation, no life – nothing but death. The gospel is the rich and sovereign kindness of the Lord to sinners as sinners. “Grace is God’s unmerited favor – not earned or deserved, not of works or merit, unbought and unexpected,” writes John Eadie.

It is gracious on God’s part – He was under no obligation to provide any salvation to lost, hell-deserving enemies. It is gracious in its terms to men – revealed in the Scriptures alone – the free offer of redemption, of reconciliation, of peace with God, of life in Christ, of heaven and eternal life offered as a gift to be freely embraced and received. And it is gracious in its results when received.

Listen again to Eadie:

“This is not a break or a lessening of the charge, but a complete deliverance through grace. It is not some benefit fitted for the present,

to fill up a momentary wait before a final judgment... but free, perfect and joyous salvation. ...Pardon, peace, purity, healthy progress to perfection, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting – is this all not worthy of the name good news?” p. 322.

The gospel is that Jesus is your very life, and He is so by what He did on earth, especially what He did on the cross. This is the God-given remedy, for God-owned people. Without the gospel, you have nothing; without the cross, you have nothing.

Yet this gospel must be received. Here is where repentance and faith come in. Why do you suppose it is repentance to God and not to Christ, and faith in Christ and not in God? Is it not because God is the offended party – He is the one who is incensed, angry, righteously hostile to the wicked; He is God offended, God the righteous, God the holy, toward rebels from him. That rebellion is deep, great, and irreversible from our side (if we even wanted to change it!).

Yet God offers the greatest olive branch ever to His enemies! And this is where faith enters in – faith in Jesus. Jesus does all the saving. It really is not repentance or faith which saves – these are only instruments which lay hold upon the wealth, the rich treasure, of salvation that is all in, of and through the Son of God come in the flesh.

What is it to repent and believe? It is to know yourself to be a genuine, bona fide, real sinner – that your sin offends God; it is to feel this weight – to be convinced, convicted and moved to contrition and humility; where your mouth is stopped as guilty before God; and you turn from your sins, your sinfulness, yourself, to trust in Jesus the very Rock of salvation, who stood in your stead, dying for sinners exactly like you – and worse!

Faith sees Jesus as the offered Redeemer, calling all to come to Him. Faith believes Jesus can save as He who cannot lie has promised and sworn. Faith then – most importantly – comes to Jesus; trusts no longer in your ways but trusts to Him, as your very life, your heaven, your Savior. Faith alone pleases God here, and nothing else besides.

And such a faith laying hold upon Jesus means Jesus lays hold upon you – He changes, saves, pardons, adopts, makes new, welcomes, sanctifies, and assures you – all the glory of God the Father! Without this Gospel, we have nothing. Thomas Brooks said, “Till men have faith in Christ, their best services are but glorious sins.” J. Gresham Machen said, “Nothing before the cross can properly be called the gospel, or good news.” No good news, truly, for you – until you come to Christ; and no bad news, truly, lastingly for you, after! For all things must work together for your good!

Now Paul goes further in 25 and 27, when he speaks of preaching the kingdom and of declaring the whole will or purpose of God. Christ is the center, and the gospel is central.

He is, as Eadie again has it:

“Christ Himself is the nutriment of the flock, as they know him, trust him, love him, and obey him; Christ everywhere; Christ as source of salvation and peace; Christ as motive to duty and holiness; Christ as basis of hope and the center of fervent affection; Christ in teaching as prominently as he is in Scripture; Christ in all the ordinances as pervading as he is in the plan of redemption.” p. 333

But the concepts of the Kingdom and the whole counsel of God carries us beyond the entrance into the kingdom and the beginning of grasping the basics of God’s teaching on salvation.

The Kingdom is our citizenry, our life beneath our all-gracious **King**. This is Kingdom living as well as Kingdom entrance. This is Matthew

5 – the blessedness of those who are heirs of God, joint heirs with Jesus – those who manifest by grace this life of humility, sorrow, meekness, hunger for godliness, showing mercy and compassion, pure in heart, peaceable in life, and persecuted by the world. The Kingdom is pivotal in Acts – it begins with Jesus’ 40 day ministry of teaching on the kingdom, and ends with Paul’s ministry of teaching about the kingdom. This touches on the rule of Christ as King in your life; of your following and submitting, worshipping and serving Him, loving your God and your neighbor.

Then perhaps the whole will or counsel of God gets more into Jesus as your **Prophet** – who instructs you for all of life. I don’t believe this phrase should be that of God’s purpose exclusively; it is broader than that – His ways, His principles, His knowledge and ethics. Why? Because this same word is used in Luke 7:30 *But the Pharisees and the lawyers rejected God's purpose for themselves, not having been baptized by John.*

One last one from John Eadie, who I obviously have found most excellent on this. After insisting that Paul did not back down from teaching all things – especially those things which were opposite the pride of men, he writes:

“He told them how guilty and undeserving they were, and how utterly unable to save themselves; had presented salvation to them in a plain story of One who had been hanged on a tree outside Jerusalem; had dwelt on the necessity of an entire change of life and the immediate and complete abandonment of such sins as were common...; and had shown them what a marked and visible line should exist between them and the world round about them. All the counsel of God – every atom and element of it... all had been expounded by him who had rightly divided the word of truth.” p. 325-326.



Thus you see both the gospel salvation, and the life that flows rich and full from and by the cross of Christ. Both are necessary – neither is complete without the other. All the full life lived by grace, simple saving grace; that simple entrance opening up the great vistas of an eternal covenantal life in God through Christ.

OH, who is sufficient for these things? How can any servant say, I am pure from all men’s blood? When I think of the great task upon the Christian life as **a full calling**, to hold to all the truth – a call in verse 19 to humility, to tears, to trials, to opposition in the world; a call to be **willing to suffer for Christ**, being led BY HIM into afflictions, into bonds even, even into death – a call to follow **the Lord** as your most loving Shepherd; a call **to discern the wolves**. What can we say?

We conclude with where Paul drives us in the relief of verse 32 – (read). I would entrust you to two closely-connected infallibles: God and the Word of His grace (which really are inseparable) – God and His Word which are able (dunameno – He has in Himself and in His gracious Word everything necessary and more) – to do two related things – to build you up and give you an inheritance (as in 1 Pet. 1); those that are sanctified – a subtle way of insisting upon holiness as the prerequisite of heaven, without which no man shall see the Lord.

“The Holy Scriptures are justly called the Word of God’s grace,” says Charles Simeon, “because they contain a wonderful revelation of grace, suited to and sufficient for our every want... By that [Word] the whole work of grace may be carried on and perfected within us. It is by that Word that we are at first begotten by God; and by that we shall be nourished unto life eternal.”

Peter had the same emphasis: “After you have suffered for a little while, **the God of all grace**, who called you to His eternal glory in Christ, will Himself perfect, confirm, strengthen *and* establish you. To Him *be* dominion forever and ever. Amen. (1Pe 5:10-11)

What a three-fold cord is yours! The God of the Word of Grace, the Word of the God of Grace, the Grace of Word of God. Amen!