

Paul: An Example to Emulate Acts 20:13-38

Introduction

What is a disciple?

We have been talking for some time about how our mission as the Body of Christ according to **Acts 1:1** is to **continue the mission that Jesus began during his ministry on the earth**

And how according to **Acts 1:8** that means that we should be going forth in the power of the Holy Spirit and be **acting as witnesses of Jesus Christ** – That much is clear

We know also that Jesus gave his followers the mission of **making disciples** in **Matthew 28** and we have talked a great deal during this series from the book of Acts about how we should be making disciples

This past week I was caused to wonder whether we have a good idea about what a disciple is and what we should be looking for in order to know whether a person is a true disciple of Jesus Christ

After all, if we are going to be obedient in being disciple-makers we should have some sort of idea what we are making – Shouldn't we?

No one would start a construction project without some idea of what they were setting out to build and most successful building projects begin with a set of blueprints to be followed

And once again I have been amazed at God's goodness and his timing as we came to this very passage at the time when those ideas were circling around in my brain and I was bugging some of you to come up with a definition of a disciple so that I could gauge understanding within the congregation

This morning we are going to be looking at **Acts 20:13-38** and my aim is to show you from these verses what a disciple of Jesus Christ looks like so that we can both measure ourselves to see where we stand on the continuum of discipleship and to know what we should be witnessing in those believers we hope to see become disciples

This passage contains Paul's farewell address to the Ephesian elders and is commonly used when speaking to men in church leadership but these verses contain a good deal that is valuable to the entire church as give us a very good understanding of Paul's character and his practices as a true disciple of Jesus Christ

A disciple is simply a follower and they come with varying degrees of commitment as we saw when Jesus began teaching hard things and many of those who were called his disciples fell away

However, a true disciple is one that perseveres and strives to become like his or her master in all things

But when we look at Jesus and his perfect life we can sometimes find it daunting and virtually impossible to emulate and that's where Paul's example comes in as it seems somehow more attainable

If you are a parent you know that one of the best moments of parenthood is when you see your little one mimicking your facial expressions, the way you move, the way you talk, and the things you say...it can also be one of the most horrifying moments you will ever experience when they show you things about yourself you'd rather not face

How many of you have experienced that whole "love/hate" thing with being copied?

Why is it that our kids never seem to hear our wise words while never failing to copy our foolish behaviors?

Paul must have been an extremely confident man because he told the believers in Corinth to imitate him as he imitated Christ in **1 Corinthians 11:1** – **I won't ask for a show of hands but how many of us would want that?**

Actually Paul invites believers to copy him more than once because he also does so in **1 Corinthians 4:15-17** where he writes:

For though you have countless guides in Christ, you do not have many fathers. For I became your father in Christ Jesus through the gospel. I urge you then, be imitators of me. That is why I sent you Timothy, my beloved and faithful child in the Lord, to remind you of my ways in Christ, as I teach them everywhere and in every church.

If you would, join me in your Bible as I read through **Acts 20:13-38** as we begin to see what it has for us today

We will be looking very quickly at **Paul's journey from Troas to Miletus** and then more in depth at the rest of the passage as **Paul reviews his example** while he was in Ephesus, as **he reveals his expectations** as they concern his present plans, and then as **he readies the elders** for their future ministry with all of its challenges and struggles

***13**But going ahead to the ship, we set sail for Assos, intending to take Paul aboard there, for so he had arranged, intending himself to go by land. **14**And when he met us at Assos, we took him on board and went to Mitylene. **15**And sailing from there we came the following day opposite Chios; the next day we touched at Samos; and the day after that we went to Miletus. **16**For Paul had decided to sail past Ephesus, so that he might not have to spend time in Asia, for he was hastening to be at Jerusalem, if possible, on the day of Pentecost.*

***17**Now from Miletus he sent to Ephesus and called the elders of the church to come to him. **18**And when they came to him, he said to them:*

*“You yourselves know how I lived among you the whole time from the first day that I set foot in Asia, **19**servicing the Lord with all humility and with tears and with trials that happened to me through the plots of the Jews; **20**how I did not shrink from declaring to you anything that was profitable, and teaching you in public and from house to house, **21**testifying both to Jews and to Greeks of repentance toward God and of faith in our Lord Jesus Christ.*

***22**And now, behold, I am going to Jerusalem, constrained by the Spirit, not knowing what will happen to me there, **23**except that the Holy Spirit testifies to me in every city that imprisonment and afflictions await me. **24**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, 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. **26**Therefore I testify to you this day that I am innocent of the blood of all, **27**for I did not shrink from declaring to you the whole counsel of God.*

***28**Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to care for the church of God, which he obtained with his own blood. **29**I know that after my departure fierce wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; **30**and from among your own selves will arise men speaking twisted things, to draw away the disciples after them. **31**Therefore be alert, remembering that for three years I did not cease night or day to admonish every one with tears. **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.*

***33**I coveted no one's silver or gold or apparel. **34**You yourselves know that these hands ministered to my necessities and to those who were with me. **35**In all things I have shown you that by working hard in this way we must help the weak and remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he himself said, 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.'”*

***36**And when he had said these things, he knelt down and prayed with them all. **37**And there was much weeping on the part of all; they embraced Paul and kissed him, **38**being sorrowful most of all because of the word he had spoken, that they would not see his face again. And they accompanied him to the ship.*

Let's look quickly at **Paul's journey from Troas to Miletus** - I just realized I didn't leave room for this on the note sheets so you may need to jot notes on the back...

Luke comments in verse 16 that Paul was in a hurry and that seems to translate into Luke's reporting on the trip as he moves through it very quickly

Paul's journey from Troas to Miletus (13-16)

It was approximately 45 miles by sea from Troas to Assos but only 20 miles by land and Paul arranged for his companions to make the trip via the longer nautical route while he chose to go overland alone

We can only speculate why Paul wanted to be alone on this first leg of his journey before joining his friends on the ship

Some propose that Paul wanted to remain in Troas a bit longer for one reason or another while others hazard that he just wanted to be alone with his thoughts – perhaps he simply wanted time alone with God since he knew what awaited him – but the truth is we really don't know *why* Paul arranged things the way he did because Luke doesn't tell us

In any event, Paul met up with the group at Assos and they travelled together for the remainder of the trip to Miletus

Luke records that after taking Paul aboard the ship then skipped down the coast first to Mitylene then to a harbor on the mainland opposite the island of Chios then to the island of Samos before finally sailing to Miletus

Due to the nature of the winds which tended to go calm at night and the numerous small islands in the area which made sailing at night very treacherous, the journey of approximately 230 nautical miles took at least 3 days

I. Paul Reviews His Example (17-21)

His past ministry

It appears that Paul, having ruled out a stop at Ephesus, chose a ship that was going directly from Chios to Samos but which would result in a stay of a few days in Miletus allowing for his visit with the elders from Ephesus

Who would have guessed that a first-century traveler would have had to factor in layovers and connections just like we do today?

When they arrived in Miletus Paul sent a messenger to summon the elders to come to Miletus to meet with him

The word for “elders” here is *presbuteros* and it is first mentioned as a position of leadership in the church in **Acts 11:30** – a position that is mentioned another 36 times in Acts and further refined in the Pastoral Epistles

These men were the likely leaders of the various house churches that would have existed in Ephesus

And even though Paul didn't want to get caught up in what he knew could easily become a protracted visit with many social obligations in Ephesus, he still wanted to have a time of face-to-face communication with the church leaders so as to benefit the church there

Ephesus lay roughly 30 miles north of Miletus and it would have required a day to travel between the two cities

So it would have taken a messenger a full day to get to Ephesus then a second full day for the elders to make the trip back south to Miletus which means that Paul likely met with them on the third day

When they met, Paul began by reminding the elders of how he had lived among them during the time of his ministry there – he **reviewed his example** with them

Paul's life was an open book because he lived a life of integrity that was open to examination

We need to remember that Paul was in Ephesus for a rather long period – he had taught for 3 months in the synagogue and then after he was expelled from there he taught for another two years in the hall of Tyrannus – and later in verse 31 Paul says that he had labored among them for three years

The Ephesians had ample opportunity to see Paul and how he lived and when they reflected on his time with them they saw that **his walk matched his talk and was therefore worthy of imitation**

It's very important to recognize that Paul wasn't trying to make “disciples of Paul” and **he only called for people to imitate him as he followed and imitated Jesus**

And in **verses 19-21** Paul's example shows us six characteristics that should be evident in the life of a Christ-follower

First, Paul was **humble** – Paul didn't have a high opinion of himself – he saw himself as a slave or in the Greek a *doulos* to Christ

And the word he uses here for serving is *douleuo* (dool-yoo'-o) which means to serve as a slave

As Christ's bondservant, Paul was a living example of **Luke 17:10** where Jesus taught:

“So you also, when you have done all that you were commanded, say, ‘We are unworthy servants; we have only done what was our duty.’”

Paul wasn't impressed with himself, he was humble and he saw his life of commitment as only doing his duty

He was also **tender-hearted** as we see in **verse 19** that he ministered with tears

No doubt he wept over those who rejected his message and over those who accepted it, with joy over those who did well and over those who struggled to walk worthily as well as over the organized resistance and trials he faced

Paul cared about people and his heart ached for them

He was also **thorough** as we see in **verse 20** that he taught them everything they needed to know

Paul's goal was to see the believers in Ephesus do well and so he wasn't remiss in teaching them every last thing that he could to help them on their spiritual journey

We also see in **verse 20** that he was **expedient** which means that he took every opportunity to preach and to teach the Word of God

Paul taught publicly in the synagogue and in the hall of Tyrannus and he also went from house church to house church and taught the believers there

He took all opportunities to spread the gospel

Paul was also **inclusive** as we see in **verse 21** - Paul testified or witnessed to everyone God put in front of him

And he was **evangelistic** as he told everyone about how to be reconciled to God

He taught **repentance** which involves knowledge of personal sin and sorrow for it that results in the desire of salvation from it – it's a turning away from sin

And he taught **faith in our Lord Jesus Christ** which means to recognize him as Messiah and to accept the sacrificed made on our behalf and then to personally, wholly trust in his shed blood as payment for one's own sin

Humble, tender-hearted, thorough, expedient, inclusive, and evangelistic – can you think of a better list of the necessary qualities of a witness for Christ?

While not everyone will have all of those qualities in equal measure to the apostle Paul or expressing them exactly like Paul, we should expect to find those qualities present in anyone who is a disciple of Jesus Christ – that is to say, anyone who is seeking to be like Christ

II. Paul Reveals His Expectations (22-27)

His present plans

Next, in verses 22-27 Paul turns his attention to his present plans as he reveals his expectations for his future

Paul was bound to go to Jerusalem and he didn't know what awaited him there although he suspected it was going to be bad

In his determination we see that Paul was **obedient** even when he had to go into a situation that was fraught with uncertainty and possible peril

In fact, Paul reveals in **verse 23** that the Holy Spirit had told him that he was facing imprisonment and affliction

But still he was determined to go and in **verse 24** he tells them and us why

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

Paul put his own welfare and even his life on one side of the scale and the faithful completion of his service to God on the other and saw that in the analysis that his decision was clear – doing what God wanted was more important than his temporal, physical well-being

Paul often spoke in terms of sporting events and here he says that he knew that he had a race to run and he wanted to finish it well regardless of whatever course God might have laid out for him

Remember back in Acts 9 the Lord appeared to Ananias and told him that he was going to show Paul how much he was going to suffer for the name of the Lord

Paul knew what he was up against and he counted his life of no value compared to finishing his race of testifying to the gospel of the grace of God – he was **pragmatic** in his view of spiritual and eternal reality

And Paul knew that he could face his possible death as **blameless** because he had been **faithful** in his ministry to be **thorough** in sharing everything necessary for salvation and Christian living

Paul knew that his role was not to inform anyone of his opinions – his role was to be a messenger who delivered God's message faithfully regardless of how it might be received

2Timothy 4:3 warns of the day when people will seek out teachers who will scratch their itching ears by telling them only what that which suits them

Far too often that is proving to be the case from pulpits all across the country as church after church succumbs to the temptation to provide church that never ruffles any feathers and only makes people feel good

And that's largely because people demand church "the way I want it" not church that tells me who God is, who I am, and what he demands of me because that makes me feel bad

And people are quick to vote with their feet if and when they feel uncomfortable

So pastors and church leaders weaken and adapt their message to the detriment of the Body and Name of Christ

But regular Christians today also tend to shy away from telling people what they need to hear because it might not be well received and they might not like us any more – and remaining friends is paramount because Jesus is love or something

So we find that it's easier to let people go their own way than to tell them what God's Word says

And in doing so we're like a man standing by the side of the road who knows there is a bridge out just around the next bend watching while car after car speeds by and drops into the abyss – all because he didn't want to speak up and risk having someone think that they were criticizing their driving ability

But Paul knew that he could head toward the possibility of death and stand before God with a clear conscience because he had been obedient and had not shied away from telling people what they needed to hear

Then, having reminded the elders of his example and revealed his plans and the anticipated outcome of his actions, Paul turned his attention to making sure the elders were ready for what lay in store for them and their ministries

And even though Paul's words had direct application to those elders and still serve to specifically inform church leaders today, we see that every believer would be wise to pay attention to the truths behind them

III. Paul Readies the Elders (28-38)

Their future struggles

First, in **verse 28** Paul told the elders, "Pay attention to yourselves" which means – don't think that you can't fall

Every believer has to be **constantly vigilant** and aware of their own spiritual condition

And elders have the added burden of watching out for the flock which God has put under their oversight

The church of God and each believer that makes it up is precious to God not only in the sense that all people have intrinsic worth as God's crowning creation and the bearers of his image but worth that is determined by the fact that each believer has been purchased with the most valuable commodity that has ever existed, the blood of Jesus

Elders carry a heavy burden in guarding the flock of God because there are forces afoot that are seeking to harm the flock and the elders will be held responsible at the Bema Seat of Christ for each and every person that God has given them the privilege and responsibility of caring for as we see in **Hebrews 13:17**

Paul mentions two specific threats that were later seen in the church of Ephesus and in churches ever since

Paul warns the elders that "fierce wolves will come in among you" meaning that evil will attack **from outside the church** and spiritual enemies will try to infiltrate the church – especially healthy churches because Satan knows there is little need to attack a weak, ineffective church

But peril will also rise **up from within the ranks of the church** and even from among those in leadership as they begin to mislead others with falsehood and to encourage opposition and even open rebellion within the church and Paul warns that these twisted men will seek to form cliques of the like-minded and will divide the church into factions

And while we are often sensitive to attacks from without the ones from within are more subtle and insidious just because they come from people who are known in the church – people who are trusted and not under suspicion

Still, both varieties are very dangerous so Paul once again reminds the elders of his diligence as he ministered among them and he exhorts the church leaders to be ever vigilant

The individual members of the flock may not have the responsibility of oversight of the flock but they should also be knowledgeable enough to recognize an attack and vigilant to keep themselves from being a victim of attack

It seems obvious that Paul was still bearing a burden for the church of Ephesus and he cared for the elders who were leading it

And after warning them of what was coming he turned them over to God's care and protection and the sufficiency of God's Word to instruct them in **verse 32**

God's Word is sufficient and it contains all that a believer needs and lives that are marked by knowledge, wisdom, and spiritual growth - the life of a disciple - will be **lived in obedience to God's Word**

Then in **verses 33-34** Paul quickly reminds the elders of his pure motives in ministry by mentioning how he lived among them by working to support himself and his companions in ministry

No one could say that Paul was only in it for the money

Then, in his final words, Paul declares that his hard work also enabled him to help the less fortunate an act which is commanded by the Lord

And he quotes words uttered by Jesus that aren't found in any of the gospels "It is more blessed to give than to receive"

Given what John wrote in the final verse of his gospel, **John 21:25**, we should be more surprised that we don't find more sayings like this than by the fact that Paul included this one

Last week we considered why we come to church and we looked at the benefits of encouragement, edification, and energizing that we gain through being here

But we also saw that we should be here to provide those same benefits to others

Jesus says "it is more blessed to give than to receive" so a disciple will be motivated to be here if only to be a benefit to others and to be further blessed through that activity

So the final mark of a disciple from this passage is that **they tend to give more than they take**

We see in **verse 36** that Paul has now completed his message to the elders so "he knelt down and prayed with them"

And closing out this passage we see the mutual love that Paul and the elders had for each other as there was much weeping, embracing, and kissing as they said what they all believed would be their final good-byes

It's a poignant scene as we imagine the elders standing on the dock watching Paul's ship disappear over the horizon and then beginning the long walk back to Ephesus

Conclusion

It's been said that the church is always just one generation away from extinction and while we know that Jesus promised that the gates of hell would not prevail against his church we also know that the church can become so compromised as to lose its effectiveness in any particular place

And as the world seems to be winning believers over to their way of thinking at a faster rate than believers are winning the world that statement has never seemed more true than it does today

Folks, we need to get busy with making disciples of Jesus Christ

Through evangelism certainly – we must be out to win the lost to Christ

But we must also be about teaching God's Word and training believers how to live Christ-like lives

Because the most significant contribution we make in life, is the passing of our faith to the next generation

And now we know what a disciple should look like

They should be Christ-followers who exhibit humility, tenderness, thoroughness in expressing biblical truth and a readiness to do so at every opportunity as they are open to telling everyone how to be reconciled to God - thereby ensuring their blamelessness before God who judges impartially

A disciple should be obedient in all things and have a proper view of themselves and live life with generosity toward others

We need to weigh ourselves in the balance as Paul did not just to understand our own relative importance but to also know that we are living as true disciples of Jesus Christ in such a way that we too could encourage people to "imitate me as I imitate Christ"

To be able to do that we need to be ever vigilant of our own spiritual condition and to consider the warnings and admonitions of others - weighing them and searching ourselves carefully to see if we need to make a correction

What would need to change in order for you to be able to say, "I am an example of how to live the Christian life and my life is worthy of imitation"?

Even though you know you haven't fully arrived can you say that you are a worthy example of a new believer or a worthy example of a believer at your stage of sanctification and you would be happy to have another believer look to your life to see how to be like Christ as much as you are?

In doing so I believe that you will see areas of your spiritual walk that are worthy of imitation and I wholeheartedly encourage you to make the effort to get with another believer and show them what you do well and how they can be more like Christ by following your example

But if you believe your example comes up short in any area, what are you going to do about it?

Will you seek out someone who is living the Christian life more fully in the area that you lack and spend time with them to learn what they are doing and how they are doing it?

In other words, are you willing to learn; are you willing to be a disciple?

It's not really as complicated as we make it out to be - simply seek out someone has shown you some aspect of being a believer that you admire, someone who you see as more spiritually mature in some area and ask to spend time with them

Then just talk with them and watch what they do and how they do it, ask questions, seek their advice on specific issues...whatever, just be together with the intention of becoming more like them as they are like Christ

Trust me, they will likely be flattered and a bit embarrassed at the suggestion that they have anything to teach you but they will get together with you nonetheless and you will both be better for it

Let's pray