

THE HEART OF A SHEPHERD

Acts 20: 17-38

Please review this weeks catechism question.

Did you get a chance to meet anyone new after last Sundays' worship service?

INTRODUCTION

Who has had the greatest influence on your life (vocation, family, hobby, intellect, spiritual)? Who has motivated you to change the most? Why did this person have such a profound influence on you?

It is the stated purpose of Jesus to produce change in the lives of individuals and communities. His is a call to leave the "world" behind and to come be his follower (Luke 9:23-26). It is to flee the evil desires of this world and to pursue righteousness, faith, peace and love along with all those who call on the Lord from a pure heart (2 Tim. 2: 22). One of the ways God has appointed for this transformation to take place is through the work of Christian leaders. Elders, pastors, parents, even all Christians are called to be instruments of change in the lives of others. In Acts 20, the apostle Paul speaks with the elders of the church in Ephesus for the last time in his life. In this passage he is exhorting them to be leaders God will use to produce change in the lives and communities that they live in. As we examine his "last testament" to these men we will discover how we can be men and women of influence in the lives of those God "assigns" to us.

STUDY

1. Read through 20:17-38 and make a list of all the evidences of passion or intensity that you see in Paul.

- v. 19, *with tears*
- v. 20, *I did not shrink from declaring*
- v. 22, *going to Jerusalem, compelled or bound by the Spirit*

- v. 24, *he does not consider his life of any account but is intent on finishing the course, the task assigned to him by Jesus. He is fixed on this one goal.*
- v. 26, *I am innocent of the blood of all men.*
- V. 27, *I did not shrink from declaring to you...*
- V. 28, *pay careful attention to yourselves and all the flock*
- V. 31, *be alert. I never stopped warning each of you night and day with tears.*
- Vv. 33-34, *I did not covet and I worked night and day to provide*
- V. 35, *work hard to help the weak*
- Vv. 37-38, *the men were filled with sorrow and wept openly as they kissed him goodbye because Paul said this was the last time he would ever see them.*

2. Describe what Paul says he is going to do and what will happen to him in vv. 22-23.

God the Holy Spirit is compelling him to go to Jerusalem. It is God's will that he go to Jerusalem. He is going there to deliver financial help to the church in Jerusalem that he has received from the churches in Macedonia and Greece. While he doesn't know the particular details, the Holy Spirit, while commanding him to go has also told him that he is going to be imprisoned and afflicted when he gets to Jerusalem. Just as it is God's will that he go to Jerusalem, so it is God's will that he be imprisoned and afflicted when he gets there. He is on a suicide mission, in other words. He knows that the journey he is on is going to end, not in a warm welcome and needed rest at some vacation resort but in being physically harmed and put in a dungeon. Yet he goes.

3. According to v. 24, why is Paul going to go to Jerusalem even though he knows he is going to lose his freedom and be harmed in other ways as well?

What matters to him is that he finish the race that Jesus has set him upon. What matters to him is that he faithfully discharges the task that Jesus assigned to him, the task of bearing witness to the good news of God's grace. When do people knowingly put themselves in harm's way in order to obey a command or fulfill a duty? I would argue that ultimately, the only way anyone ever does this sort of thing is when he or she loves the one who has given the command. The apostle Paul

eagerly declares that it doesn't matter what happens to me. My life on planet earth is devoted to one person, Jesus Christ and therefore it is given to doing what he has told me to do. Paul is not primarily motivated by the task but by the person who has given the task. He does not go to certain pain because he likes pain but because the one whom he loves, God the Holy Spirit, has told him to go. His heart is full of affection for God and so he embraces all that God asks of him. He wants to please the one he loves.

But also, doesn't his willingness to go into certain suffering reveal his zealous faith in Christ? He really believes that to have Christ and to lose his freedom, his health, his very life is not loss, but gain. He knows that if God is for him then no one can successfully be against him. He cannot be harmed and so while he may encounter pain and suffering, it cannot separate him from what he prizes above all else, the love of God for him. His life is securely hidden with Christ in God and regardless of what happens to him in the present, he is going to live with Christ forever.

4. Have you ever willingly placed yourself in harm's way (physically, emotionally, socially, financially) because you are so intent on completing an assignment? Why did you do it?

5. Have you ever placed yourself in harm's way because of something that Jesus asked you to do?

6. According to vv. 27-28, what motivated Paul to declare the "whole counsel of the will of God"? See Ezekiel 33: 1-9, what does God say will happen to the watchman or the prophet who does not warn people of the coming danger? What does he say will happen to the watchman/prophet who does warn of impending danger?

The warning in Ezekiel is based upon a metaphor. The metaphor is that of a walled city with a watchman upon the wall. God says that when he decides to send an army against that city because of the sin in the city and the watchman blows the trumpet and warns the people of the city of the army that is coming and the people in the city do nothing to prepare and so are destroyed, then they will perish for their sin because they ignored the warning. However, if the watchman does not warn the city, while the people will be destroyed for their sin, the watchman will be

held accountable for their blood. In other words, a watchman who does not blow the trumpet will be killed for his dereliction of duty. The watchman/prophet who warns people and they do not prepare/repent, the people will perish but the watchman/prophet will save himself.

God tells Ezekiel, Paul, every elder and pastor in Christ's church, every parent, every small group leader, every Christian who speaks for Christ that God is watching and he is listening. All who fail to tell "the whole truth and nothing but the truth" about God's gospel of grace will bring God's anger down upon themselves. Paul views himself as a witness on the witness stand who will be called to account if he commits perjury. He knows that he will be held accountable by God for every misleading, incomplete or inadequate explanation of God's gospel. He will be held accountable by God for not proclaiming the gospel to all whom God assigned to him.

Paul fears God and knows that God is paying attention. Paul is "working out his salvation with fear and trembling because it is God who works in him, both to will and to act according to his good pleasure." (Phil. 2: 12-13)

7. Does this mean that everyone who makes an incomplete or misleading presentation of the gospel will go to hell? Does this mean that everyone who fails to share the gospel with someone God wanted them to share the gospel with, will go to hell? See 1 John 1:8-2:6.

This does not mean that if you have failed to share the gospel with one person that God wanted you to share the gospel with, that you are going to go to hell. It does not mean that if you have misled someone at one time you are now condemned. What this means is that failing to preach the gospel to someone God wants you to preach the gospel to is a sin. Failing to accurately share the truth of God is a sin. What Christians don't want to do is sin. What Christians do when they sin is confess their sins to God while taking refuge in the death of Christ for their sins. Then they seek to obey Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit. However, when those who profess to be Christians persist in their sins and refuse to repent, then the Scriptures say that there is a strong likelihood they are not Christians.

8. Have you ever done anything because you knew that God was going to evaluate you based upon your doing or not doing it? Have you ever done anything or not done something, because you feared God?

9. In vv. 33-35 what does Paul say that he didn't do and that he did do?

He says that he didn't covet any of the possessions of the Ephesians or any of their money. He worked night and day with his own hands in order to supply he and his companions to earn money for food and shelter. He worked hard so that he could help the weak, which probably means that he used some of the money he earned to give to the poor. He not only preached the gospel but he worked as a tentmaker enough to earn the cash he needed to supply provisions for he and several companions and to give money to the poor.

10. Why did Paul work like this? (Notice especially the last line of v. 35)

He did it to set any example for them so they would work hard to provide for their own needs and the needs of the poor. He also did it because he knows that Jesus will reward him for his service. There is no hardship that he has experienced, no deprivation that will not be more than adequately repaid in heaven. "It is more blessed to give than to receive", is not simply referring to the pleasure we feel when we help someone else. Paul is talking about the fact that Jesus has promised to reward his faithful servants in heaven. The loss of earthly pleasures for the sake of serving others in the name of Jesus will be repaid.

11. According to v. 31 what did Paul do for the three years he lived among them, "proclaiming the kingdom"?

He warned each one of them, night and day, with tears.

12. What does this tell us about Paul's heart in relation to the Ephesian people themselves?

Paul was personally concerned with each one of the Ephesians. He spent time with each one personally. The apostle Paul's heart broke over the lost condition of individuals. Paul often wept both privately and while engaged in the work of persuading men and women, boys and

girls to flee from the coming wrath. Paul had a personal concern for each person that God placed under his care. As he contemplated the danger that each person was in, the wrath that was hanging over their heads, the necessity of them turning from sin and fleeing to Christ, he was moved to talk with them personally and to do so, not in an arrogant, commanding way but with tears, with a heart filled with compassion and passion for their eternal well-being.

13. Have you ever warned anyone about anything, with tears?

14. If you are a parent, how do you usually respond when your children commit sins or don't respect you or don't show the kind of concern for the things of God that you want them to show? Do you get angry or do you weep? Do you warn them or do you condemn them?

15. How do you usually respond when you see or hear about other professing Christians who are not pursuing Christ with whole-hearted devotion? Do you judge them? Are you indifferent? Do you weep and then go talk with them personally, weeping as you do?

16. Who has the Lord assigned to you to influence for the sake of Christ?

17. What do you need to do in order to "declare the whole truth and nothing but the truth to this (these) individual(s)?"