



# DELIVERED

Sharing the gospel is worth the sacrifice and effort.

## ACTS 20:22-35

Goodbyes are hard. They are hard when you know you may never see that person again. When leaving for college, work, or other reasons, you will eventually move on and so will the people left behind. That doesn't negate the relationships, but it does change them. They are no longer your neighbors, your coworkers, or your classmates.

***What is the best way to say goodbye to friends? What would you want a friend to remember about you?***

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# UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

## ACTS 20:1–21:26

It was time for Paul to move on. Ephesus had become a second home for Paul. With Ephesus being his home base, Paul traveled to Macedonia, possibly visiting Philippi and Thessalonica. The apostle wrote First Corinthians while in Ephesus, and from Macedonia he wrote Second Corinthians. From there, Paul traveled to Greece, where he stayed for three months (Acts 20:1-3).

A plot devised by the Jews to kill Paul caused him to change his travel plans, and he headed back through Macedonia to his hometown of Troas (20:3). It was in Troas that Eutychus fell from a third story window and had to be revived by Paul (20:7-12).

From Troas, Paul sailed to Miletus. In a hurry to make it to Jerusalem in time for Pentecost, he sailed past Ephesus. Nevertheless, when he stopped at Miletus, he sent for the church elders from Ephesus to deliver his farewell address and to caution them about challenges they would face (20:17-38).

Paul continued on to Tyre, where believers warned him not to travel to Jerusalem (21:4). In Caesarea, Paul stayed in the house of Philip the evangelist. While there, Paul met Agabus, who prophesied that Paul would be bound in Jerusalem (21:8-12). In spite of the danger ahead, he continued to make his way to Jerusalem.

Once in Jerusalem, Paul reported to the church about God’s work among the Gentiles. The church leaders, grateful for the Gentile believers, raised the issue of the Jewish believers who reported that Paul was teaching Jews to abandon the law. A plan was proposed to solve the problem. Instead, the situation became worse with the warnings given becoming a reality (21:15-36).

***Read Acts 20:22-35 in your Bible. Look for words and phrases that express Paul’s resolve to share the gospel. How did Paul’s goal of sharing the gospel impact his decision to go to Jerusalem?***

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# EXPLORE THE TEXT

## HIS COMMITMENT (ACTS 20:22-24)

With the Ephesian church leaders now in Miletus, Paul began to address them by recounting past experiences with them. He emphasized ministering in the church with humility, passion, and boldness in the midst of conflict (vv. 19-20). He had faithfully witnessed to unbelievers about their need for repentance and faith (v. 21). After reflecting on the past, Paul turned his attention to what lay ahead.

### VERSES 22-23

**<sup>22</sup> “And now I am on my way to Jerusalem, compelled by the Spirit, not knowing what I will encounter there, <sup>23</sup> except that in every town the Holy Spirit warns me that chains and afflictions are waiting for me.**

Paul had decided to return to Jerusalem in spite of the potential dangers. He had made the decision before he left Ephesus, and no one was going to change his mind (see Acts 19:21). Paul reminded his hearers that the Holy Spirit was pushing him to go to Jerusalem.

The apostle was unsure about what lay ahead for him. The only thing he knew about his future was that he would go to Jerusalem, that he would faithfully share the gospel, and that he would face opposition once in Jerusalem. The *Holy Spirit* had already told Paul that *chains and afflictions* were awaiting him once he arrived in Jerusalem. On multiple occasions while on this specific trip, Paul had received warnings about going to Jerusalem. Luke recorded two specific warnings—one in Tyre and the other in Caesarea (see Acts 21:4,11). The Holy Spirit was preparing Paul for what he was about to endure for the sake of the gospel.

### VERSE 24

**<sup>24</sup> But I consider my life of no value to myself; my purpose is to finish my course and the ministry I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the gospel of God’s grace.**

Paul was all in. The warning did not scare him or keep him from doing what he knew was required for the sake of the gospel. As Paul considered the cost of obedience, he realized that the greater cost would be found in failing to share the gospel. He had already been crucified



with Christ (see Gal. 2:20). He was ready to sacrifice his life for the sake of the gospel, calling his life of **no value** when compared to the gospel.

**As Paul considered the cost of obedience, he realized that the greater cost would be found in failing to share the gospel.**

When writing to Timothy, Paul compared the Christian life to running a race (see 2 Tim. 4:7). In this passage as well, he compared his ministry to running a race. To win the race, the runner must stay the **course** and keep running. Paul was intent on winning his assigned race. Runners endure the pain of the race not just to run, but to finish and to do so well. Paul knew that only through finishing well would he find true satisfaction in this life.

Paul's race and ministry was summed up as testifying to **the gospel of God's grace**. He spent his life telling others about God's grace found through faith in Jesus. It was the gospel of grace that made the potential adversity worth it.

***How does a warning serve as a way to prepare for what is ahead? How does understanding the value of the gospel give a person the strength to endure difficulties that result from the gospel?***

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## **KEY DOCTRINE: *Evangelism and Missions***

The new birth of man's spirit by God's Holy Spirit means the birth of love for others.

### **HIS CONCERN (ACTS 20:25-31)**

#### **VERSES 25-27**

<sup>25</sup> **And now I know that none of you, among whom I went about preaching the kingdom, will ever see me again.** <sup>26</sup> **Therefore I declare to you this day that I am innocent of the blood of all of you,** <sup>27</sup> **because I did not avoid declaring to you the whole plan of God.**

Paul changed the focus of his speech. He now focused on the church in Ephesus. His plan was to do all he could to take the gospel to the western part of the Roman Empire. Rome potentially would be his base, which is why he wrote his letter to the church in Rome. This plan assumed he survived Jerusalem. Either way, Paul was committed to God's call on his life to take the gospel to the nations.

## **It was the gospel of grace that made the potential adversity worth it.**

The apostle planned on sharing the gospel wherever he could, just as he had done in Ephesus. He clearly explained that if a person in Ephesus was not a believer, it was not because of him. He had done everything possible to share the gospel in the city. He had offered people the opportunity to accept the gospel. He had preached without holding back any part of the gospel of grace. He set the standard for the church leaders hearing his words. They would now be called upon to follow his example, not backing down from proclaiming the truth of the gospel.

***What might keep a person from being able to make the same claim Paul made in verses 26-27? What makes it hard to share the gospel with everyone a person meets?***

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### **VERSE 28**

**28 Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has appointed you as overseers, to shepherd the church of God, which he purchased with his own blood.**

Paul expressed his deeper reason for wanting to visit with the Ephesian church leaders. His absence would open the door for problems. He called on these leaders to **be on guard** like shepherds watching a flock. A shepherd had to remain alert and ready. No doubt some of these church leaders would face difficulties and temptations. They had to make sure they kept guard over themselves first, then they could guard the sheep. He emphasized guarding **all the flock**,



not just the Jewish or just the Gentile sheep. The shepherd was responsible for the entire flock.

Paul reminded them that the responsibility of guarding the flock was a task assigned by **the Holy Spirit**. Paul's first missionary journey began by the church in Antioch recognizing that the Holy Spirit had set him and Barnabas aside for this work. God used the church to confirm and support what He was already doing in the lives of the two missionaries.

To emphasize the magnitude of the responsibility, Paul reminded the leaders that this flock was **purchased** at a high price. Jesus' death on the cross paid for the salvation of these believers. God was entrusting that which was purchased with the death of His Son into the watchful care of these leaders.

#### VERSES 29-31

**<sup>29</sup> I know that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock. <sup>30</sup> Men will rise up even from your own number and distort the truth to lure the disciples into following them. <sup>31</sup> Therefore be on the alert, remembering that night and day for three years I never stopped warning each one of you with tears.**

Paul explained in greater detail why it would be important for these leaders to be on guard. False teachers would rise up. Paul compared them to **savage wolves**. Jesus had used a similar term for false teachers (see Matt. 7:15). A wolf has no concern or interest in the well-being of sheep. In fact, it is only worried about its own well-being and will do whatever is necessary to feed its own appetite. The same would be true of these false teachers.

The apostle reminded these leaders that the false teachers would come from within the church as well. This group would be more dangerous because of the trust placed in them as one of their own. These false teachers twisted the truth just enough **to lure** followers of Christ, especially those who may have doubts when facing persecution. Paul's **warning** pointed to the need for church leaders to focus on teaching everyone in the church the basics of the gospel and the Christian faith.

Paul concluded just as he had started—directing the leaders to **be on the alert**. He pointed to himself as an example. These men would have been aware of the work Paul did and how he did it the three years he was in Ephesus. He had set the standard when it came to



guarding the sheep and expected the next generation of leaders to follow his lead.

***In what ways are false teachers like savage wolves? How does the analogy of shepherd versus savage wolf point to the motives of a church leader versus the motives of a false teacher?***

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## **HIS COMMENDATION (ACTS 20:32-35)**

### **VERSE 32**

**<sup>32</sup> And now I commit you to God and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up and to give you an inheritance among all who are sanctified.**

Paul had given these leaders a big task. If they tried to do it on their own, they would fail. Paul reminded them that they would need to depend on God and the power of the gospel to fulfill their task as shepherds. The power of the gospel would both **build** them up for the task and provide them with the assurance of their future **inheritance**.

### **VERSES 33-34**

**<sup>33</sup> I have not coveted anyone's silver or gold or clothing. <sup>34</sup> You yourselves know that I worked with my own hands to support myself and those who are with me.**

Paul reminded the Ephesian leaders of the danger of looking for rewards in the present. These leaders had needs just like other people. He called on them to trust God to provide for those needs. Again, he pointed to his own life as an example. Paul's ministry was not motivated by financial gain. If that were the case, he would not be on his way to Jerusalem. Paul received support from other churches to do the work he had done in Ephesus. He taught that ministers should be worthy of their wages and that churches should provide for the physical needs of those who served them. However, Paul's custom was to not ask for believers in the city where he was evangelizing to support his work. Rather than burden the Ephesian believers, Paul worked to provide not only for his own needs but also those of his missionary team.



The false teachers were motivated by financial gain, which impacted how and what they taught. Paul was challenging the leaders of the church at Ephesus to be motivated by the gospel, trusting God to provide through various means, including the support of their local body of believers.

VERSE 35

**<sup>35</sup> In every way I’ve shown you that it is necessary to help the weak by laboring like this and to remember the words of the Lord Jesus, because he said, ‘It is more blessed to give than to receive.’”**

Paul wanted to avoid anything that would get in the way of sharing the gospel. He worked hard while in Ephesus to make sure even the needs of *the weak* and poor were covered. Paul pointed to his own life and a quote of Jesus to make this final point. The Gospel accounts do not include this quote, but there is no reason to doubt that Jesus said it. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus called for His followers to give to the needy without fanfare (Matt. 6:2). He obviously expected His followers to take care of those in need.

***How does generosity and caring for the needy move a person away from greed? Why would it have been important for these church leaders to be aware of their motives for ministry?***

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**BIBLE SKILL: *Compare similar experiences.***

Compare Paul’s address to the elders from Ephesus found in Acts 20:28-38 with one of the following farewell addresses: 1 Samuel 20:41-42; 2 Kings 2:9-14; or Ruth 1:8-14. What did your comparison reveal about the person leaving and his or her concern for those left behind? How was hope for a future expressed? What principles do you see about providing a good farewell?

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# IN MY CONTEXT

- Believers experience contentment when they faithfully fulfill God’s purposes in their lives.
- Believers must remain diligent to recognize and confront divisive and false teachings.
- Believers must guard themselves from greed, focusing on the needs of others.

*List ways God has used you to make a difference in the lives of other believers and His church. Thank Him for the opportunities and ask Him to show you how you can impact those outside the church. What actions do you need to take based on what God showed you?*

*Discuss with the group ways you can help each other be on guard against false teachings and teachers. Prioritize the ideas listed and talk about how to put the most effective ones into action.*

*Reflect on Acts 20:35, considering ways you can follow Jesus’ words. What is one anonymous giving action you can do this week that would point someone to Christ? Record the impact that act had on you and the recipient.*

## Prayer Needs

