

If you would, please open with me to Acts chapter 20. I would like to begin tonight by reading this passage, Acts chapter 20, beginning in verse 17 and ending in verse 38:

*Now from Miletus he sent to Ephesus and called the elders of the church to come to him. 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, serving the Lord with all humility and with tears and with trials that happened to me through the plots of the Jews; 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 toward God and of faith in our Lord Jesus Christ. And now, behold, I am 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 afflictions await 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, to testify to the gospel of the grace of God. And now, behold, I know that none of you among whom I have gone about proclaiming the kingdom will see my face again. Therefore I testify to you this day that I am innocent of the blood of all of you, for I did not shrink from declaring to you the whole counsel of God. 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. 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. Therefore be alert, remembering that for three years I did not cease night or day to admonish everyone with tears. 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. I coveted no one's silver or gold or apparel. You yourselves know that these hands ministered to my necessities and to those who were with me. 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.'"*

*And when he had said these things, he knelt down and prayed with them all. And there was much weeping on the part of all; they embraced Paul and kissed him, 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.*

For those of you who are new here, my name is Paul Matthies and I serve as the membership pastor as well as an elder here at the Village Church. And this is a unique weekend for me. And it is not unique merely because of the advent of the video services. I am actually very excited about the video services because on screen I will actually be as tall as Matt. Now, if you are watching this by video right now and I appear to be overweight, I assure you it is only the camera. It adds let's say 50 pounds. Of course, I have asked them to air brush in muscles and hair and to make my voice sound like James Earl Jones, and we'll see how it turns out. But this week is unique for me because it is my farewell sermon. For those of you who attended in November, you may remember that upon God's call I have decided to move to Asia at the end of March to pastor the team serving there for the next five years. And since I leave five weeks prior to that, Matt was gracious enough to give me one final chance to say farewell and to share my heart. And though I still have one month of serving here as a pastor, for those of you who know me in a preaching capacity, this is, in a very real sense, goodbye for now. And in preparing for this message, I wanted to choose a passage about leaving behind a legacy. I think

all of us desire to leave behind a legacy. Even the Scriptures talk about leaving behind a good name or leaving behind an inheritance or passing on or imparting to the next generation. We all want to make an impact, and we all want to be remembered for the difference that we have made. And I am no different. I want to look back at my time serving here at the Village and wonder if I have made a difference in this place. I want to be remembered. Now, some of this is healthy and some of this is unhealthy. In my flesh, I start thinking, "Well, maybe I should have taught more. Maybe I should have worked harder. Maybe I should have done more to get my name out there. Maybe I should have worked harder to build a family here." And you know, all of this is talk about self preservation, and that is sinful.

But when I look at this passage, on the other hand, I look at Paul's farewell address in Acts chapter 20 and my spirit testifies that I have left some things here undone. Some very important things I feel I have left undone. And I cannot honestly stand before you today and deliver the same speech that Paul was able to deliver in his leaving in Acts chapter 20. My life does not match up with the apostle Paul in Ephesus, but I want it to. Why? Because like you, I want to leave a godly legacy. I want to be able to stand up in front of a crowd and with all integrity deliver a speech like Paul delivered in Acts chapter 20. And I am not there yet I can see clearly from my past three years at the Village, but I want to be. So today my aim is not to stand up in front of you and reminisce about my past three years here at the Village and how I've enjoyed my time here.

Instead, I want us to look together at this passage, and I want us to figure out how we can leave a godly legacy like that of the apostle Paul. And tonight we're going to be seeking to answer the question "How did the apostle Paul reminisce about his time in Ephesus, and how can we seek to be like him?" In Philippians 4:9, the apostle Paul writes, "What you have learned and received and heard and seen in me--practice these things, and the God of peace will be with you." You see, we have this promise in the Scripture that if we seek to serve our Lord in the same way the apostle Paul did, God will be with us and we will achieve peace. And this is the peace, I believe, of knowing the lives that we have lived have made an eternal impact. In the "Sermon Notes" section of your bulletin, you will find six numbered blanks. And I would like for us to spend our time together observing six principles from the life of Paul in his ministry of how to leave a godly legacy. And indeed, these six principles reflect my prayer for each of us today.

And if you would, I would like to start that journey together to say a world of prayer. "Father, I am very grateful to have this chance to share today. And Father, we come today to be commended to the word of Your grace, which we know is able to build us up and give us an inheritance and to sanctify us. And so Lord, would you teach us through the study of Your word today? Would you show us how we can leave behind a godly legacy like that of the great apostle. And we ask this now in Jesus' name. Amen."

Now in Acts chapter 20, in the very first line of Paul's speech, we find the first principle, which I believe is the most difficult to maintain. And we see here that number one, we are to live purposefully. Number one is live purposefully. In verse 18, Paul says that in the very first day he set foot there in Asia and every day after for the next three years, he lived with purpose. He came with a plan, he spent every day fulfilling that plan and he was able to leave knowing that he had accomplished that plan. I'm not sure if you're like me, but I'm a great starter. Some of you may be like me and be a wonderful starter, you know, a big dreamer that always has a new project under way? But how many of us are great finishers? Do any of you have wedding scrapbooks that you have yet to complete even though you were married seven years ago? Or maybe there's some household projects that you've begun around the house and never got around to finishing, and you can still see the stars through your roof at night? Or on a more important level, how many of you have thought about spending more time with your family or sharing your faith more consistently or attending a group more regularly? And yes, some of us have big dreams and great intentions, but our laziness and our lack of focus and our inability to make decisions are keeping us from a godly legacy, and at the end of the day, we have nothing to show for ourselves except for a vision statement. And in 2 Corinthians 8:10-12, Paul exhorted the church there and said, "And in

this matter I give my judgment: this benefits you, who a year ago started not only to do this work but also to desire to do it. So now finish doing it as well, so that your readiness in desiring it may be matched by your completing it out of what you have. For if the readiness is there, it is acceptable according to what a person has, not according to what he does not have." Did you hear that? Finish well. Paul is exhorting us to finish well, to let our desires be matched by our actions. And we should seek to complete our plans out of what we have been given. And it's important to note that according to Corinthians, Paul says that we are held only accountable to the resources we've been given. In other words, God is not going to judge you based on what you wanted to give but did not have but what you did have but failed to give. Did you hear that? Some of you tonight are carrying some unnecessary guilt because you're thinking, "Paul, I want to give more to the kingdom, I want to be able to give more time and resources and energy, but I have nothing left to give." And Paul's not addressing you here. Paul's admonishing those of us who have plenty of time, plenty of resources, plenty of energy to give. But for some reason we're those people who have the great intentions serve the kingdom but we just can't seem to find the time and the resources, even though they're right there in front of us and right there with us. And Paul is going to admonish the church and say, "Get up and finish what you started. You are with out excuse. How can you plan on making an impact, how do you plan on leaving a godly legacy if the only impression you ever leave is the impression of your body on your mattress? Get up, do something, have a plan and finish well. Live purposefully."

The next principle we observe in verse 19 is to serve humbly. Number two is to serve humbly. Paul tells us that he began his ministry at Ephesus by serving the people humbly, and he continued serving them despite trials and tough days and tribulations. How many of us have served God until it hurt? And how many of us have kept on serving even after it hurt? We played hurt. You know, it always amazes me how much passion I start with in serving God in ministry, but then the first time I have a tough day, the first time I have to have a hard conversation with somebody, all of a sudden I start reasoning with myself, "Oops, I think God's calling me to a different ministry. My spiritual gifts just don't quite fit in with that ministry." And so, I drop the ball and I quit persevering in serving humbly. You know, before coming to the Village, I experienced what many people like to call "church hurt." Some of you have experienced what you would describe as "church hurt." You know, I had an experience as a young believer that left a very bad taste in my mouth. And to spare you the details, essentially there was a very influential man in the church in which I served as a volunteer youth worker that decided to end that youth program just because his daughter didn't like it. She was unhappy, but it had grown by twenty fold. And so, I left that church being weary of serving, not understanding how people in God's church could behave that way. Now, please don't hear me saying that it isn't important to heal and take some time to get over the hurts and work through forgiveness in regards to church hurt. But you know what I did for the next two years? I just kind of sat on the sidelines, and I just decided "I'm just going to attend church, and I'm not going to get in the game because I'm worried about experiencing church hurt." You know, some of you are still on the sidelines talking about church hurt. But you know, another question we need to ask ourselves is "When did we start believing the lie that serving God and His people would be easy?" In Philippians 2:5-8, Paul writes, "Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross." Serve humbly. Sometimes being like cross means dying to self and serving humbly even when it hurts. It means persevering in our serving. It means pressing on towards the joy set before us even if we walk away feeling unappreciated or feeling like we've endured suffering. Serve humbly.

Which leads us to our next principle in Acts 20:20-21, in which Paul says to teach boldly. Number three is to teach boldly. Paul says that at all times, day and night, in all places, publicly and privately, and to all people, both to Jews and Greeks, he was consistently and boldly teaching a message of repentance and faith. He said that he did not shrink back from sharing anything that was profitable for them. He was not concerned about someone ripping off his ideas as if they were their own. He says he did not shrink back from declaring anything. And you know, in that phrase, that implies that it was not always easy to share the things that he knew he was called to share. Indeed, it is awesome at times to be able

to proclaim a message of grace. When it becomes difficult is when God asks you to preach a message of repentance, of telling people that they must turn away from sin and turn towards God. Some of us today know people in our lives who we love that need help. And they need to hear about not only the gospel of grace, but they need to hear about the danger of sin in their lives. One of the most difficult responsibilities I have at this church is confronting the sin in the lives of our sheep here. You know, I can testify that sometimes the fear of man consumes you and you start thinking to yourself, "I can't confront this individual, because what happens if I hurt their feelings?" But the call of Scripture is clear that we can either speak the truth in love and run the risk of hurting feelings or we can watch people we love walk a path of destruction, whistling the entire way. And in 2 Timothy 4:1-5, Paul commands, "I charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by his appearing and his kingdom: preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching. For the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions, and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander off into myths. As for you, always be sober-minded, endure suffering, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry." And you know, when thinking about a godly legacy, we must ask ourselves, "Who makes the greater impression on us, the man who talks to us and is nice to us on the cruise ship or the woman who saves us from drowning when we fall overboard?" At times, it's our job to teach boldly and rescue people from the path of destruction.

And it's on this line of thinking that Paul shows us the next principle in verses 22-27, which is to think selflessly. The fourth principle is to think selflessly. You know, Paul tells them, he says, "You're not going to see my face anymore." But he was okay with that. Why? Because he wasn't in this for himself. He was in it for the gospel and he was in it for them. Look at verse 24 when he says he does not account his life of any value nor as precious to himself as long as he accomplishes his calling to testify to the gospel. You know, we live in a culture that tells us that we're supposed to look after old number one, that we are first to protect our own interest or protect our own image. And so often we teach our children that they are to value things such as self esteem, self realization, self awareness over such things as self sacrifice and self discipline and self control. But you know, the apostle Paul had a different perspective when in Philippians 2:3-4, he writes, "Do nothing from rivalry or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others." In Acts 20:26-27, Paul makes a very striking statement. He says that because of his selfless thinking, he's going to be able to walk away with clean hands because he had delivered the message of the full gospel to them. You know, he did not deal in half truths. He did not leave anything unsaid. Instead, he had a life saving message to proclaim, and he told all of them. Whatever it took, however long it took, wherever he needed to go, whenever he had opportunity, he had something to say, and he declared to them everything he knew so that he had nothing left to say except goodbye. Don't you want to live your life in such a way that when you go, all that you have left to say is goodbye? Maybe tonight some of you are thinking about people in your life that you've left things unsaid and tonight is the night where you need to go and speak with them about the things that you need to say. And Paul did not love himself so much that it kept him from his mission and it kept him from loving his brothers and sisters. Instead, he thought selflessly, which leads us into the next set of verses where Paul is actually going to switch gears from how they must view others to how they must conduct themselves.

And in verses 28-32, Paul's going to tell us the fifth principle which is to walk wisely. Number five is to walk wisely. Paul tells the church there, he says, "Be alert." And elsewhere in Ephesians 5:15-16, Paul writes, "Look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise but as wise, making the best use of the time, because the days are evil." You know, walking wisely plays itself out for Paul in two different ways according to this text. First of all, he tells the elders to be on guard for themselves and for the entire flock. You see here that Paul assumes that all believers are part of a flock under the care of pastor/shepherds. Paul is advising us that we as believers are to be a part of spiritual community. Why would Paul be commanding this? Because we are more in danger of spiritual attack and deception when we are not under the care and protection of spiritual authority. I don't know if you know anything about wolves and sheep, but wolves never eat a sheep

that is with the flock. Instead, wolves only attack those sheep that are by themselves. And when a wolf seeks to attack a flock of sheep, it circles it until it causes one sheep to run away scared by itself, and then they devour it. I'm here to tell you tonight that some of you are sheep that are in isolation, and you are in real danger because you have yet to identify yourself with a church body or more importantly, a small group and you are not being shepherded and cared for by an alert, loving shepherd. And as such, you are in great danger of spiritual attack and deception. You know, sometimes we advertise the practical benefits of being part of a church or part of a group: having friends, hanging out, learning more about the Bible. But you know, there is a very real spiritual dynamic about church and group membership. It keeps us from isolation.

It protects us from being susceptible to the enemy who comes to steal, kill and destroy our spiritual growth. And so, we need others in our lives to circle around us, and we need to be under the spiritual authority of a loving shepherd who remains alert and cares for us, his flock. You know, secondly Paul commends them to God and he commends them to the word of His grace. He's saying to them, "Do not trust in your own wisdom." You're going to need spiritual wisdom if you're going to live life well, and as God's children, this is your inheritance. The word of God is your inheritance. It's able to build you up and give you everything you need to live a life worthy of repentance. And he's telling us that we can be, through this word, sanctified and set apart for God's purposes. And when we're in tune with God's purposes, our lives, our purposes cannot fail. And so, he says that this labor of love, known as God's word, can equip us for every good work and he commends us to the word of His grace to walk in spiritual wisdom.

And you know, one of the good works that the word equips us for is the work of giving, which leads us to the final principle that we see in verses 33-35 which is give generously. Number six is to give generously. You know, in America it's almost ingrained in us that it's our responsibility to provide nice things for our family, to have a large nest egg for our retirement and to view our bonuses as an opportunity to increase our standard of living. Now, I'm not questioning the wisdom of savings accounts here, but I do believe that we need to take a sober look at what Paul is writing about at the end of Acts 20. Why? Because essentially he is saying that you will find more satisfaction in life through giving than in terminating all your income on you and your family. And he's saying that hard work should be performed with the poor in mind. We don't work hard and make money for ourselves, we remember the weak, the poor, the needy, our neighbor. And he's going to go on to say that any amount of money that we receive that exceeds the needs of our family should not increase our standard of living but increase our joy through giving. When you have more than enough, when God gives you an abundance, this is not an opportunity to increase your standard of living but an opportunity to increase your joy in the Lord through giving. In 2 Corinthians 9:6-8 says this, "The point is this: whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. Each one must give as he has made up his mind, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that having all sufficiency in all things at all times, you may abound in every good work." Now, I have served at this church for over three and a half years now. I have been in many of your homes, and I have eaten meals with many of you, I have seen the clothes we wear, I have seen the cars we drive and I have seen the things we buy. And can I just say that we as a church have a great opportunity to leave a mighty legacy of kingdom-minded generosity because we are rich, rich Christians. And Paul is exhorting us that in our riches, we are to remember the weak and to learn that it is more blessed to give than to receive. You know, at the end of the day, how we handle our money is really a statement of trust. Do we trust God enough that we would sow and give bountifully, trusting that the same God who gave to us in the first place will have more than enough to give to us again and to our children and to our grand children? Some of us are waiting to leave all of our income to projects that are going to bear our name. You know, and it would do good for some of us to remember that the true church is made up of people and that people matter to God, and that we have an opportunity through giving to the poor and to other people to impact their lives for the sake of the gospel, to the glory of God and for our own joy. And indeed, it is more blessed to give than to receive, and Paul exhorts us to give generously.

You know, I have several concerns in preaching this message. The first one being that you are going to walk away thinking that by merely doing these six things you're going to leave behind a godly legacy as if this were some magical six-step formula. But Paul makes it very clear in 1 Corinthians 13 that you can have all faith, you can have all knowledge, you can even give your body to burn but if you have not love, you are nothing. And so, in the bottom of your sermon notes, you are actually going to see and equal sign with a blank beside it. The reason why is because I want you to write in there the phrase "love wholly." Love wholly, love fully, love completely. And indeed, we cannot leave a godly legacy unless we ask God to give us a heart that loves fully, completely, wholly. And indeed, we will love wholly when from a surrendered heart, we live purposefully and serve humbly and teach boldly and think selflessly and walk wisely and give generously.

You know, the next concern that I have is that you're going to go out and do all these things for the promotion of self as opposed to surrendering to self or dying to self for the sake of the kingdom and giving up self for the sake of the gospel. The fact is you have to be caught up in something greater than yourself, or could I put it this way, someone greater than yourself with whose name is above your name. And leaving a godly legacy may mean that your name isn't remembered at all. It may mean that you walk by the spirit and died to self. Instead, you made an eternal impact, your works will be remembered by God and you make a difference in the lives of those to come, but they might not remember your name at all. But that's okay. You know, I entitled this message "Leaving It All Behind." And the reason why I did that is two-fold. First of all, Paul was leaving behind a successful ministry in Ephesus in order to finish his calling elsewhere. But the second reason is that, in a very real sense, Paul had left it all behind at Ephesus, he had given everything he could possibly give, he had nothing left to say, he left it all behind with them. And while he was leaving them physically, he was able to entrust to them everything he had, everything he knew, and in writing to the Thessalonians, the first letter, chapter 2, verse 8, Paul put it this way, "So, being affectionately desirous of you, we were ready to share with you not only the gospel of God but also our own selves, because you had become very dear to us." And in the end, Paul knew that they might not remember his name but they would remember the deeds that he had done, all that he had given them and the one whom he came to proclaim. And he was leaving behind a godly legacy for God's name, for the name of Christ over his own.

You know, the final concern that I have in preaching this message is that you're going to be convicted and you're going to go home and think about all that you need to do in order to get your life right. The problem is that leaving a godly legacy is nothing that we can do apart from God. God must be involved in the work of accomplishing a godly legacy in our lives. You see, we are in need of his forgiveness, we are in need of his grace, we are in need of his help. And the appropriate response tonight is to actually go to God and plead mercy, because when we put our lives up against the life of the apostle Paul, we realize that we don't measure up in terms of leaving a godly legacy. But I'm here to say there is hope, there is grace and there is power to change when we enter the presence of God through the blood of the Son Jesus and through the intercession of the Spirit. And tonight we have the opportunity to go before God and say, "I want to leave a godly legacy. I want to, but God I need Your help, I need Your grace, I need Your Spirit to empower me to be the type of person You're calling me to be."

In closing, I want to thank this church for your love, for your prayers, for your support. It has been a wonderful three and a half years doing life with this community of believers. I'm still going to continue to be a part of this church, though in a very different role overseas serving our members, but my hope is that through your love, through your prayers, that one day I'm going to be able to stand in front of a body of believers in Asia and be one step closer to delivering the type of farewell speech that we find in Acts 20. And I want to close us tonight by praying for you that God would empower you to be one step closer tonight in leaving behind a legacy that I believe all of us desire to the glory of God.

Let's pray. "Father, I want to thank You for the time You have given me here at the Village. And as I look back on these past three years in the same way that the apostle looked back at his three years, Lord, I can with integrity say that I've accomplished or been the man who he was, but I want to be. In three years from now in Asia, I want to be able to look back and with integrity say some of the things he was able to say in terms of leaving a godly legacy. But Lord, I don't dwell on the past, but I press on towards what lies ahead. And Lord, I pray for those in here tonight that You would empower them in the same way to evaluate their life against the truth of Your word and then by Your grace, empower them to live a life that leaves a legacy that is likened to that of the apostle Paul. And so Father, we thank You for Your word tonight. We thank You and ask You to help us as we seek to love wholly, love fully, love completely as we live purposefully and serve humbly and teach boldly and think selflessly and walk wisely and give generously. And we ask all of this in Jesus' name. Amen."

© 2007 *The Village Church*