

Acts 20:25-35 (NIV)

25 "Now I know that none of you among whom I have gone about preaching the kingdom will ever see me again.

26 Therefore, I declare to you today that I am innocent of the blood of all men.

27 For I have not hesitated to proclaim to you the whole will of God.

28 Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers. Be shepherds of the church of God, which he bought with his own blood.

29 I know that after I leave, savage wolves will come in among you and will not spare the flock.

30 Even from your own number men will arise and distort the truth in order to draw away disciples after them.

31 So be on your guard! Remember that for three years I never stopped warning each of you night and day with tears.

32 "Now I commit you to God and to the word of his grace, which can build you up and give you an inheritance among all those who are sanctified.

33 I have not coveted anyone's silver or gold or clothing.

34 You yourselves know that these hands of mine have supplied my own needs and the needs of my companions.

35 In everything I did, I showed you that by this kind of hard work we must help the weak, remembering the words the Lord Jesus himself said: 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.'"

44-20-02-Exemplifying Gospel Faith

ministry, service, faithfulness, example, work, oversight, giving Acts 20:25-35

The Gospel calls us back home to our true identity as servants.

INTRODUCTION: (Text as the Scripture reading)

–*Minister* means *servant*. **Eph 4:11-12 (ESV)** says that God “gave... apostles, ... prophets,... evangelists,... shepherds and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ.” That means pastors, like me, are “to prepare God’s people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up.” (NIV) In other words, *all believers* are the real *ministers*. **God created us to serve Him and others**. When *sin* took us *out of service*, **Jesus saved us... but He saved us for servant leadership. HOM.idea.**

–**Our servant-nature** comes from the *ultimate Servant: creation’s Maker and Provider*. Our **destiny** is *servant leadership* [**Gen1:26**, “Let us make man in our **image**, in our **likeness**, and let them **rule...**”]. We were **to train for it at the grass-root level**– **Gen 2:15**, The LORD God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden **to work it and take care of it**. Someday, when we “reign with Christ” in “the new heavens and the new earth,” **we will still be servants**.

–**In our text**, Paul told the “elders” (*servant leaders*) **to follow him in exemplifying Gospel faith**– **v.19-21**, I served the Lord with great humility and with tears.... You know that I have not hesitated to preach anything that would be helpful to you but have taught you publicly and from house to house. I have declared to both Jews and Greeks that they must turn to God in repentance and have faith in our Lord Jesus. To follow Paul’s example, **servant leaders need to have...**

I. A Servant’s Attitude about Time

- A. **Time spent with others** is moving toward a *last meeting, a final time*– **v.25**, “Now I **know** that none of you among whom I have gone about preaching the kingdom will **ever** see me again.” (Paul **knew** this was it!)
1. **If we treated each time together** with loved ones as if it was our last, **how might that change our behavior... conversation... focus?**
 2. **Paul had the same “kingdom” focus** Jesus had. (With Jesus alive in our hearts, **surely** we’d want our **last communication** with others to be **sharing about what He means** to us, how **He’s blessed** us, what **He’s been doing** in our daily walk with Him.)
- B. Our **biggest hindrance** to sharing about “the kingdom” is “**What** will others think?” (What we **should ask** is “**When** will others **start**”

thinking about God, and how can I help them do it?"

1. Paul knew that time is limited and is misused by hesitation— v.27
“For I have **not hesitated** to proclaim to you **the whole will of God.**”
2. People’s opinions change with the times, but time won’t stop for our hesitations about telling them the “will of God.”

TRANS: Because time for sharing our Gospel faith eventually runs out, we need the right timing. God will guide us in the best time to share, if we take the time to listen in prayer. We need a servant’s attitude about time, but also about the times. This planet’s history of dangerous times began when Cain murdered his brother Abel. If we are to serve God and others faithfully and effectively in modern times, we need to have....

II. A Servant’s Attitude about Danger— v.28. Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers. Be shepherds of the church of God, which he bought with his own blood.

A. These words are spoken to “elders,” but remember that God calls us all to servant leadership “for building up the body of Christ.” (We are to “watch over” both ourselves and other believers in “the flock.”)

1. Scripture says “Yes, you are!” to Cain’s “Am I my brother’s keeper?” attitude. (A blood-tie calls us to mutual watch-care in “the church of God,” because Jesus purchased us all with his own blood.)
2. [**Bill Withers’ hit song** expresses this idea of mutual caring: “Lean on me, when you’re not strong / I’ll be your friend, I’ll help you carry on / For it won’t be long ‘til I’m gonna need / Somebody to lean on... / Just call on me brother, when you need a hand / We all need somebody to lean on / I just might have a problem that you’d understand / We all need somebody to lean on.]

B. Paul warns “be on your guard!” against external attacks by “savage wolves” who “will not spare the flock,” but also against internal dangers from false teachings that “distort the truth” and “draw away disciples....”

1. To heed his warning, we must be alert to the spiritual climate of our culture. (If others don’t share our concern, we should pray!)
2. Paul’s “tears” of “warning” seem to indicate intercession: prayer can change things, even complacent, un-servant-like attitudes.

TRANS: A servant’s attitude about danger means putting on God’s armor for spiritual warfare. But using it skillfully to stand firm in faith has this crucial requirement in Eph 6:18 (CSB), Pray at all times in the Spirit with every prayer and request, and stay alert with all perseverance and intercession for

all the saints. We’re to pray for each other. **The Gospel calls us back home to our true identity as** our “brother’s keeper.” Kingdom living is not serving self but serving God and others! It means having...

III. A Servant’s Attitude about Serving

- A. “What’s in it for me?” is the greedy attitude of leaders who misuse their power for gain. (Paul exemplified authentic servant leadership – v.33, “I have not coveted anyone’s silver or gold or clothing.”)
- B. God the Servant cared for His creation, even to the point of being crucified for it. (Similarly, Paul served both the churches he had established and even the ministry teams he formed— v.34, “...these hands of mine have supplied my own needs and the needs of my companions.”)
- C. Paul following Christ’s example of servant leadership, and he tried to get others to do the same thing— v.35, “In everything I did, I showed you that by this kind of hard work we must help the weak, remembering the words the Lord Jesus himself said: ‘It is more blessed to give than to receive.’”

CONCLUSION:

–We exemplify Gospel faith only as **the Gospel reestablishes us in our true identity as servants.** Worldly noise distracts us from Christ’s call: “Follow Me.” Where does His call bring us? Into self-giving service!

–Ingrown, self-serving lifestyles are boring. Their endless array of new toys never end the boredom. Enduring joy and satisfaction come only by rediscovering our true purpose, our real raison d’être. Humans were created to be **servants in the image of a serving God**. When Jesus starts indwelling us by Gospel new birth, His “grace and truth” call us back home to who we really are.

–What will we be doing in Heaven? Listen to this simple description given in the Bible’s last chapter— Rev 22:3, No longer will there be any curse. The throne of God and of the Lamb will be in the city, **and his servants will serve him**. Since that’s the heavenly goal of our salvation and sanctification, Paul includes in this passage this familiar benediction in v.32, “Now I commit you to God and to the word of his grace, which can build you up and give you an inheritance among all those who are sanctified.”

–I’m concluding this message with [a prayerful song by Kelly Willard wrote a beautiful one as the prayer of a servant-heart: “Make me a servant / Humble and meek / Lord let me lift up / Those who are weak / And may the prayer / Of my heart always be / Make me a servant / Make me a servant / Make me a servant today.”]