

Acts 20:17-38

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“Learning from the Best:

Paul and a Lifelong Ministry of Testifying to the Gospel of God’s Grace”

How we got here:

It has often pointed out by teachers and preachers that no individual has ever had more impact on the world than the Apostle Paul. He set the standard for personal discipleship, ministry mentorship, church planting, the local pastorate, local ministry, domain engagement, global missions, the importance of theologically grounded ministry, biblical preaching, and a high view of the sovereignty of God while demanding by the authority of the Gospel that all men commit themselves through faith and repentance and obedience to Jesus.

- Paul’s had grown up in a home that placed an emphasis on Hebrew Law education and old covenant theology. He was expert in the ways of Judaism. He grew up going to church and Hebrew school and attended the highest levels of seminary and law school. He lived in the city of Tarsus which was one of only three or four megacities in the Roman empire and which was known for university life.

- Post early adult life was committed to the advance of Judaism under Roman rule. This included the persecution of Christians.
- In the midst of this persecution, God saved Paul in one of the most spectacular conversion stories we read about.
- Paul was trained most likely in Jerusalem in the ways of Jewish law.
- Paul had served in the highest ranks Jewish religious life. He had status.
- His unique background gave him audience with both Jews and Romans. Much of Paul's early ministry was strategically going into Jewish synagogue, because he had the credentials to do so, and preaching.
- Likewise, he could debate on the largest Greek and Roman stages. He often used these platforms to proclaim the gospel. He spoke in defense of the gospel before the Jewish Sanhedrin, the Roman King, governors, legal counsel, universities, and even preached the gospel at the Areopagus on Mars Hill in Athens. If we were going to compare this to modern preaching we might examine the ministries of Billy Graham for Robbie Zacharias. In modern context Paul preached at halftime of the Super Bowl, on the stage of the Grammy's, and at the graduation ceremonies at

Harvard, Yale, and the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

- Paul planted churches throughout the Roman world.

17 Lessons Paul has Taught Us in Acts:

1. Paul's Spirit was unconquerable. Courage is not the absence of fear. Courage is the execution of the mission and the calling and responsibility given by God even in the presence of fear. Paul had been stoned at Lystra and left, presumed dead, but he went right back into Lystra when God revived him. To withstand the Elymas the sorcerer face to face required much courage. At Philippi Paul was beaten, and at Athens he stood toe to toe with the intellectuals of the day, and in Corinth faced depression, Ministry burn out, loneliness and realization of the weightiness and fallenness of that city. In Ephesus he survived a huge riot and when he came to Jerusalem and Caesarea later in his ministry to face Roman governors and Jewish kings and not once did he ever shrink back. What we learned from Paul is not to be without fear, but to have a confidence in the calling of God on your life that overrides that fear. He showed us that when you are confident in your calling and purpose you will press on in the most difficult situations.

2. Paul's vision for ministry was clear and strategic. Paul worked hard and had a high view of the sovereignty of God, but he understood that as men and women we

have great responsibility to carry out the calling and plans and purposes of the Lord. Sometimes there seems to be the misconception that because/when and if I hold to a higher view of the sovereignty of God, then I don't have to do much work. Paul shows us that God is sovereign but demands everything from us in our pursuit of personal holiness, the execution of the Great Commission and the building of the church. God had given Paul a clear calling to plant churches throughout the Roman world. God had repeatedly re-affirmed that calling Paul had confidence in that.

3. Paul's faith was deeply rooted in what God had done and revealed to him through the risen Lord. We learn from Paul the importance of a constant and daily reflection on the gospel. In First Corinthian's 15:1-2 Paul reminded the Christians in Corinth of this gospel. We too, should be reminded of this gospel, daily.

4. Paul did not work alone. He understood the need for a team. As sure, we must work together to carry out the vision and mission God has called us too. For the global and historical church triumphant, we must know what Jesus has laid out in Scripture as our mission of making disciples of all people. And locally, we need to know who we are and what our responsibility is to our communities and our families.

5. Paul believed in and practiced personal mentorship.

Paul invested deeply in the development of young pastors like Timothy, Titus and John Mark. *“Imitate me...”*

6. Paul loved the church, and the body of Christ. There is sometimes a negative outlook toward the church. It is easy to find what is wrong with the church and to identify things we do not like about the church, but the church is the bride of Christ. It would be unhealthy for one man to talk about the things he doesn't like about another man's wife. If he criticized her openly, complained about her to his friends and talked ugly about her in general, the husband of the Woman would be compelled to defend her name and honor. Jesus Christ has told us that he has a bride, and she is the Church. Paul loved the church and it is evident in the greetings and salutations he would send in his letters to the various cities and churches. He knew the church was not without her issues, and he had a strong conviction and genuine desire to see her grow and become stronger.

7. Paul preached with Authority that was not his own, but came from God. We can learn from Paul what it looks like to speak with authority, speak unapologetically, and speak with conviction, The power that drove Paul's preaching was from the Lord. Paul knew that the Spirit of God dwelled in him, richly. Whether he was preaching or debating on the largest and greatest stages of the day, or in a one on one gospel conversation, he was unapologetic and unwavering in his commitment to preach Jesus Christ

and his gospel. Here are some things we have learned about preaching and its place in the local church and in missions.

-Primacy, persistence, pervasiveness and power of preaching, and the proper way to preach.

Primacy — Primary to the function of the church.

Persistence — There is never a need to come up with a better way.

Pervasiveness — The need to spread the Gospel throughout the world by preaching.

Power — Gospel-centered and Christ exalting.

Proper — Expository

8. Paul lived by faith. He wrote to the Galatians, “The life I live, I live by faith in the Son of God who loved me and gave himself for me.” Paul would write in one of his letters, “*we walk by faith, not by sight.*” And he would remind us that “*the righteous live by faith*”.

9. Paul believed in the power of prayer. This was true personally, as well as for the ministry and growth and mission of the Church.

10. Paul knew his own limitations, and the need to depend fully on The Lord.

11. Paul was serious about his walk with Jesus and

personal holiness. Paul was as passionate about ministry as a person can be, but he did not put that before his own devotion life and personal worship. This is a mistake that a lot of us make in ministry. We can easily become so consumed with doing the tasks God has given us that we fail to maintain intimacy with Jesus and we lose focus on the most important thing.

12. Paul believed that to be absent from the body was to be present with the Lord. This gave him an urgency to do the work but a fearlessness of what man might do to him. He didn't fear death.

13. Paul believed that this world is temporal, and that one day Jesus is returning to make all things new, judge every deed, word and thought of my own, and establish an eternal kingdom in which he will reign forever.

14. Paul showed us how to engage hostility. There is a lot of hostility in our society dividing people politically and ideologically. As Christians there is a way to engage the enemies of the gospel.

15. Paul taught us how to deal with ministry induced depression and anxiety. We saw this in Acts 18 during Paul's time in Corinth.

16. Incarnational ministry. Acts 20:18.

17. Paul had a Living Hope.