



26. 'Ministering grace'

Acts 20.¹³⁻³⁸

Background

The church at Ephesus is in many ways the 'headline act' when it comes to the New Testament's teaching about the church: there's more about that single fellowship than there is about any other church. It's not just the fact that Paul spent longer there than with any other church: it's the range and volume of material that we're given about this fellowship which means that it's become the 'flagship' for our understanding of church life.

The account of how that church began, for one thing – a whole, lengthy chapter, full of drama, daring and discipleship. There's a substantial, well-structured letter addressed to that church which provides the most compact and concentrated teaching that you'll find about Christ's church. There are letters addressed to the pastor of the church at Ephesus, spelling out the sort of pastoral ministry which this (like every) fellowship requires. And there's a message from the risen Lord Himself, which is addressed to this self-same congregation, a generation on.

And then there's *this* passage as well, the larger part of Acts 20, in which the account already given in Acts (18 and) 19 of the way the church at Ephesus was planted and started to grow, is supplemented now by the testimony of Paul as to what that work of God involved for the man through whom the Lord effected it. This passage, in which Paul reminds the Ephesian elders of the nature of his ministry throughout that 3-year period, gives us the inside story of how costly and demanding the work of the gospel will be.

If Acts 19 were all we had, we'd be thrilled and stirred by the sovereign and mighty activity of God as He worked by His Spirit in commending His Son and building His church in the face of all adversity. How wonderful! How exciting! How amazing is the sovereign grace of God! 'Count me in!' we'd be quick to affirm: who wouldn't wish to be part of a venture like that?

But hang on. You need to count the cost if you want to be counted in! What does it cost to see a church established in this way? What does it cost to preach and teach God's Scriptures and to pastor the people of God? The church was bought with His blood: and there'll be blood, sweat and tears on the part of the pastors as well, if Christ's church is to grow and to thrive in the face of the battles there are. Read the whole passage and if you're short of time, start with '**days**' (2), (5) and (6) and the additional questions there.

1) Monday 28th August – urgency in your living

Read [Acts 20.13-16](#)

“.. he was in a hurry to reach Jerusalem ..” (Acts 20.16)

Paul’s itinerary (where he was going, and how he’d get there) tells the story of a man in a hurry! There was an urgency about his living; he combined a clarity in his plans with a flexibility of approach. Life’s too short to live it in a merely ‘random’ manner.

If (as we learned through Covid) our plans are at best only ever provisional, why does it really matter that we apply our minds to careful planning?

How careful are you to plan ahead and what plans for the week do you need to be making today?

Prayer: Give me the wisdom, Lord, to discern clearly the path You mean me to walk, the boldness to step out on it, and the grace to respond to Your every prompting.

2) Tuesday 29th August – passing on the message

Read [Acts 20.17-21](#)

“.. I have not hesitated to preach anything that would be helpful to you ..” (Acts 20.20)

The gospel is the most pressing and vital message anyone can hear. The need for repentance, and the call to trust in the Lord. Paul passed it on with great passion, at great cost, and with great consistency – his living as eloquently as his preaching.

Twice in this passage (vv.20 and 27) Paul says “I have not hesitated ..”: what makes you hesitate to declare all that the Bible has to say?

How do you overcome those natural hesitations?

What do you find most striking and challenging in what Paul says here about the way he ministered in Ephesus?

What might that teaching ‘from house to house’ look like in our own situation?

Would you value more of that?

How careful and urgent are you in impressing on others the need for both repentance and ‘faith in our Lord Jesus’?

Prayer: Thank You, Lord, for those who were at pains to declare the gospel to me: help me to be as ready to share this gospel with others as the opportunities arise today.

3) Wednesday 30th August – life in the Spirit

Read [Acts 20.22-24](#)

".. the task of testifying to the good news of God's grace .." (Acts 20.24)

Here's a man demonstrating what life in the Spirit looks like. Compelled by the Spirit. Warned by the Spirit. Emboldened by the Spirit. And always so focussed by the Spirit on the Lord Jesus Christ – serving Him, honouring Him, proclaiming Him.

How much of this sense of the 'compulsion' of the Spirit have you experienced in your life as a believer?

What will 'finishing the race' well and completing your God-given task mean for you?

Prayer: *Give me persevering grace that I may be run the race marked out for me: keep my eyes fixed on You, Lord Jesus, that for the joy set before me I may endure all things.*

4) Thursday 31st August – a holy ministry

Read [Acts 20.25-28](#)

".. the church of God, which He bought with His own blood .." (Acts 20.28)

The message of the Bible is crucial: the church of the Lord is precious. There's a gravity and sanctity about all ministry, which is born of the extremity of our plight and the costliness of God's grace. Judgment is certain: salvation is costly. No place for levity.

Read [Ezekiel 33.1-11](#): how 'responsible' are we as a church for ensuring that the community around us hear the message of the gospel?

How does the knowledge that the church is *God's* because bought with His blood inform your attitude towards and your relationships within the church?

Prayer: *Make me mindful always, Lord, of both the great price You have paid and the great privilege You have given in bringing me into Your family, the church.*

5) Friday 1st September – on your guard

Read [Acts 20.29-31](#)

".. So be on your guard! .." (Acts 20.31)

If believers are like sheep, then there's always a need for shepherds: not only to feed and nourish them, but to guard and protect them too. Believers will face the challenge of both aggression from a hostile world, and deception from those distorting the truth.

What examples of 'savage wolves' coming in and 'not sparing the flock' might you quote if a friend asked what Paul meant by this?

How do you guard yourself from error?

Might there be more teaching given in the church to warn you about, and guard you against, particular teachings which today are distorting the truth?

How can you best help a fellow disciple if you're aware that person is being taken in and drawn away by the deceitful attractiveness of false teachings?

Prayer: Guide me, O my great Redeemer, pilgrim through this barren land. I am weak, but You are mighty; hold me with Your powerful hand, and land me safe in glory.

6) Saturday 2nd September – living graciously

Read [Acts 20.32-35](#)

".. I have not coveted anyone's silver or gold or clothing .." (Acts 20.33)

God has given His word that He's generous – the word of His grace. But He is generous *beyond* words! And the words with which that word of grace is proclaimed must ever be supplemented by lives which display, in every regard, just such generosity.

How is 'the word of His grace' building you up and 'sanctifying' you?

In what ways does Paul here say he *demonstrated* the gospel of grace, and how might you also demonstrate God's grace in your daily living?

'I know of nothing in the world that would have a more efficacious tendency to propagate Christianity throughout the nations of the earth than the good behaviour of the professors' [Samuel Davies]: how do you as an individual, and how do we as a fellowship, 'help the weak' by the sort of hard work to which Paul alludes here?

Is 'coveting' a temptation for you, and if so how have you learned to combat it?

Prayer: Keep me cultivating seeds of envy in my heart, O Lord: captivate my heart with the wonders of Your grace towards me, and thus may I be generous always to others.

7) Sunday 3rd September – loving one another

Read [Acts 20.36-38](#)

".. he knelt down with all of them and prayed .." (Acts 20.36)

Those who love the Lord will love His people too. Watch how that finds expression in this little cameo. Physically (embracing and kissing): emotionally (weeping and grieving): and practically (on their knees in prayer). Let us love one another well!

While recognising that such love for your brothers and sisters in Christ is the fruit of the Spirit's work, what steps can you take to nourish such love?

To what extent does your love for the saints find expression in your joining with fellow believers to pray with them and for them?

Prayer: May my worship of Yourself today, O Lord, find expression in my love for Your people: make me alert to the need which others may have for me to pray with them.