

Acts Series #18 “The Shepherd” Acts 20:28-32

I. INTRODUCTION

A. *Parting Words*

1. I attended a high school graduation this week for one of our seniors
2. Interesting listening to the words of the Valedictorian and Salutatorians
3. They all spoke of how they were ending one phase of their lives but where now embarking on a new one
4. One of them mentioned that though they had spent 4 years together, that graduation ceremony would be the last time most of them would see each other
5. Because he knew that that would be his last opportunity to speak to his fellow students, he chose his final words carefully and issued them a sobering challenge

B. *Paul’s Final Words To The Ephesians*

1. Acts 20 records the Apostle Paul’s final words to the elders of the church at Ephesus
2. Paul had spent 2½ years in Ephesus, and had developed some deep friendships
3. But he knew this would be the last time he would see them; he would never again return to their city
4. So he picked his words carefully
5. And he issued a sobering challenge

II. TEXT

A. *Vs. 28-31*

{28} **“Therefore take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood.**

1. How fitting that we should study this portion of the Word of God on Father’s Day
2. For just as Paul spoke these words to the Ephesian elders, God ordains that fathers should be the elders and leaders in their homes and families
3. Just as Paul said to them, “Take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among whom the Holy Spirit has made you overseers,” so we can just as easily say to every father here today, “Take heed to yourself, and to that little flock of your children, among whom God has appointed you to be their shepherd.”
4. What we find in these verses is a job description for pastors
 - a. these Ephesian elders were just that; pastors, shepherds
 - b. I want you to know what the duties and responsibilities of your pastors are

- c. as well, there are men in this fellowship, some of them are sitting here right now, whom God will call into the pastoral ministry
 - d. if you are one of them, I want you to understand what God is calling you to
5. You see, it's easy to get confused on what the duties of a pastor are
 - a. some years ago, a research group conducted a poll of church members to find out what they thought a pastor should do and how much time he should spend doing it
 - b. the results were very interesting
 - c. summarizing their findings they wrote,
 - d. "The perfect pastor preaches for 15 minutes. He condemns sin but never embarrasses anyone. he works from 8:00 A.M. until midnight and is also the church janitor. he makes \$60 a week, wears good clothes, drives a new car, and gives \$50 a week to the poor. he is 28 years old and has been preaching for 25 years. He is wonderfully gentle and handsome, loves to work with teenagers, and spends countless hours with senior citizens. He makes fifteen calls daily on church members, shut-ins, and hospital patients, and he is always in his office when needed."
 - e. the report ends with this tongue in cheek conclusion: "If your pastor does not measure up to this profile of the perfect pastor, simply send this description to six other churches that are tired of their pastor. Then bundle up your pastor and send him to the church at the top of the list. In one week you will receive 1,643 pastors. One of them should be perfect."
 6. It's easy for a pastor to get caught in the trap of ministering to meet the expectations of the people, to allow himself to become a hireling to those who pay his salary
 7. The pastor needs to remember that he wasn't *hired*, he was ordained and appointed by God to shepherd the flock
 - a. and they are God's people, not his
 - b. God is the one who defines His duties, not the church board
 8. Paul defines those duties here
 - a. and as I mentioned, because fathers are shepherds of their families, these words are a fitting job descriptions for them as well
 - b. so let's take a close look at these things

B. Take Heed To Yourself

1. The first thing Paul tells them to do is to take heed to themselves
2. The care of one's own soul comes first
3. He will be of little help to the church whose own personal relationship with God is not kept fervent and deep
4. As a minister himself, Paul was well acquainted with the trap many fall in to
 - a. it's the trap of *professionalism*
 - b. because a pastor spends so much time in study and prayer for the

- purpose of teaching and leading, it's easy to neglect his own need to just spend time with the Lord for himself!
- c. he becomes like an ambassador for his home country who lives in a foreign land
 - 1) he constantly tells others of how wonderful his country is
 - 2) he defends her interests
 - 3) and persuades many to visit her
 - 4) but his life becomes so consumed with his duties as ambassador he never takes the time to return home and enjoy the blessing of his country himself
 5. Would you hire a gardener whose lawn and yard were a shamble of weeds and dead grass?
 6. Would you visit a dentist whose teeth were rotten and yellow?
 7. Not likely
 8. So how can a minister expect any positive response to his ministry if his life isn't holy?
 9. Fathers,
 - a. if you want your children to grow up strong in the Lord
 - b. if you want them to be different and to make a difference rather than just going along with the crowd
 - c. then take heed to yourself
 - d. your kids are smart
 - 1) if you aren't going to be courageous and be different from the crowd, why should they?
 - 2) if they don't see you being diligent to spend time with the Lord, why should they?
 10. Take heed to yourself!

C. *Take Heed To All The Flock, Among Whom The Holy Spirit Has Made you Overseers, To Shepherd the Church Of God Which He Purchased With His Own Blood*

1. The picture of God's people as a flock of sheep is a repeated one scripture
2. The OT prophets often spoke of Israel as God's flock with the leaders and priest being the shepherds
3. Psalm 95:7 says, "He is our God, and we are the people of His pasture, the sheep of His hand."
4. In John 10 Jesus called Himself the Good Shepherd and spoke of His followers as His flock
5. The picture Paul paints here is a flock of sheep that Jesus has purchased with His blood shed on the cross of Calvary
6. Over this flock, the Holy Spirit has appointed men to act as guardians;
 - a. overseers who serve under the Good Shepherd
 - b. these under-shepherds must take heed of their task
7. "To take heed" means to be diligent toward something
 - a. if you're taking heed toward something it means it occupies your full attention

- b. it becomes your focus
 - c. it isn't merely one of many things you do;
 - d. it's the one thing you do
8. A pastor cannot be sloppy or half-hearted in the pursuit of his calling
 9. Nor can a man appoint himself to the position of pastor
 10. It is God who ordains—it is the Holy Spirit who makes pastors and appoints them to oversee the flock
 11. And once appointed, they need to apply themselves wholeheartedly to their vocation
 12. We might well ask, “What are the duties of a shepherd?”
 13. There are three main duties of a shepherd: Feed, Lead, Protect

First Duty

- 1) The first duty of a pastor is to *feed the flock*
- 2) Shepherds know that the health of their sheep is directly tied to their diet, so they seek out the best pasture
- 3) In the same way, pastors must be diligent to provide a steady diet of God's word
- 4) Look at v. 27
 - a) as a master shepherd, Paul well knew the importance of a well rounded spiritual diet
 - b) so he didn't focus just on pet topics or scriptural hobby horses
 - c) in the 2 years he spent in Ephesus, he gave them the whole counsel of God
- 5) If a guy spends all his time teaching in just one area or one just one doctrine, then he feeds the sheep an unbalanced diet and they won't be healthy
- 6) Our youngest son, Tyrell, is a very picky eater, and if he had his way, would eat only one thing: french fries
 - a) but Lynn and I know that a steady diet of just fries will make him weak and sick
 - b) he might want only fries, but in our love and concern will make sure he gets and eats other things as well
- 7) The flock of God is often a lot like my son
 - a) there are certain things they love to hear about
 - b) and if they had their way, they have just a steady stream of that
 - c) prophecy, grace, the wonderful blessings and promises of God
 - d) but if that's all they ever got, they'd end up weak and sick
- 8) So pastors need to be diligent to make sure they give a well-balanced diet of the whole counsel of God
- 9) The same can be said of fathers: It is your duty to make sure your family is receiving a steady diet of the whole counsel of God
 - a) the tape of this service will be aired on the radio next Sunday so let me say a word to those who are listening
 - b) fathers, you are accountable for the spiritual growth and development of your children
 - c) are you reading through the bible together with them?

- d) are you taking the lead in bringing your family to a church where the whole counsel of God is boldly taught without apology?

Second Duty

- 1) The second duty of a pastor is to *lead the flock*
- 2) Beside a healthy diet, sheep need exercise; they need to move around
- 3) In his marvelous little book, *A Shepherd Looks At Psalm 23*, Phillip Keller, who is an experienced shepherd, writes that left to themselves, sheep are such creatures of habit that they will stay in one area and so over graze it that they will totally ruin the land
 - a) they will keep going over the same trails until they are deep muddy ruts
 - b) they will graze until the blades of grass are gone, and then they will paw the ground to dig up the roots, forever ruining the pasture
 - c) then parasites begin to grow and the sheep become sick with various diseases
- 4) Keller says that the diligent shepherd spends a good portion of his care for the flock in moving them from one pasture to another so that they avoid the dangers of their natural inclination to just over graze
- 5) It's no wonder God likens people to sheep, for we too are creatures of habit
 - a) most people don't like change
 - b) change means confronting something new, and the fear of the unknown often keeps people from moving forward
 - c) but we cannot move forward without change
- 6) So pastors must be diligent to keep the flock of God from becoming complacent and settling down to a religious routine that fails to stay current with the move of the Holy Spirit
- 7) A pastor must be a man of vision, not a *visionary*
 - a) the difference is this
 - b) a visionary is a person who's always conceiving of some new direction, some new project to pursue or opportunity to exploit
 - c) a visionary often promotes his plans at the expense of others
 - d) but a pastor with vision is a man appointed by God to lead His flock to a preferred future
 - e) a pastor's vision doesn't conceive of some abstract project;
 - f) it sees God's people becoming all that God desires and ordains that they should be
 - g) and the man who has been given such a vision by God must apply himself to lead the flock over which he has been appointed to that end
- 8) Fathers, as the shepherds and pastors of your homes, what is the vision God has given you for your children?
 - a) you don't need to be a visionary
 - b) but if you're a father, then you need a vision because you are a leader
 - c) nothing is more sad than a leader who has no vision
 - d) go to God and ask Him to give you a vision for your role as father

Stop

- 1) Let me stop at this point and say that we do have a vision here at Calvary Chapel
- 2) In a nutshell - our vision is to be conformed to the image of Jesus Christ
- 3) A fuller expression of it is usually found on the back of the bulletin each week
- 4) I want you to know that we have a specific direction for this fellowship
- 5) Our goal, as individuals and as a group, is to attain to the fullness of the stature of Christ
 - a) we want to see the character of Christ, characterize our lives
 - b) we want to do His works
 - c) we want to speak His words
 - d) we want His life to flow through us in such a way that when people see us, they see Jesus and are drawn into a love relationship with Him
- 6) If you're a visitor this morning, we want to invite you to come and be a part of that vision

Third Duty

- 1) The third duty of the pastor is to protect the flock
- 2) Notice what Paul says in vs. 29-31

{29} "For I know this, that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock.

{30} "Also from among yourselves men will rise up, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after themselves.

{31} "Therefore watch, and remember that for three years I did not cease to warn everyone night and day with tears.

- 3) Paul is speaking both by experience and by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit here
- 4) In many of the other churches he had planted, he had seen how after he left, people who had appeared to be a part of the disciples had fallen away and tried to take others with them in their error and heresy
- 5) He knew that it would happen again here in Ephesus
- 6) So he warns those men who had been given the oversight of the church to be on guard and watch for false teachers who would come from their own ranks and try to harm God's people
- 7) One of the greatest concerns of a shepherd is predators
 - a) wolves and wild dogs that come and try to make off with a sheep or a lamb
 - b) lions or some other carnivore that sees sheep as an easy target
- 8) A good shepherd will keep a sharp eye out to protect his flock
- 9) In fact, he will even intervene between the flock and predators who circle, looking for a tasty meal of mutton
- 10) I'm reminded of young David, who wrestled with a lion and a bear because they dared to menace his father's flock
- 11) I think of Jesus who said that He laid down His life for the sheep
- 12) Here Paul makes no bones about telling these pastors that they must keep watch over and protect the people

- a) for they face perils from without - savage wolves who will come in and not spare the flock
 - b) they face perils from within - even from their own ranks men would arise who would depart from the faith and try to take others with them
- 13) The same is true today
- a) great is the danger from without—cults, false religions, religious shysters and hucksters that want to do nothing more than get in and rip people off
 - 1) JW's, Mormons, Moonies
 - 2) Buddhists, Hindus, Muslims
 - b) even from within there is danger—wolves in sheeps' clothing who appear to be a part of the flock but who have a personal agenda
 - c) they insinuate themselves into the confidences of people
 - d) and then they begin to draw people away from the truth by saying things that appeal to the flesh
 - e) the modern evangelical church landscape is covered with aberrant groups who are following false teachers that came out of good, solid churches
 - f) because of Paul's emphasis on this point, I find myself compelled to name some names and groups that fit this category
 - 1) International Church of Christ movement
 - 2) Iglesia Ni Cristo
 - 3) Rodney Howard Brown and the Holy Laughter movement
 - 4) The Word-Faith Movement, including Kenneth Hagin, Kenneth Copeland, Charles Capps, Fred Price, John Avanzini, Paul Crouch
 - 5) The "Jesus Seminar's" Robert Funk and John Dominic Crossan
 - g) I realize that mentioning names like this may offend some people, but I make no apology
 - h) as a shepherd, this is what I am called to do - protect the flock
 - i) and without mentioning names of false teachers, many people, especially new believers, can be unwarily led astray by them
- 14) Look at the sense of passion and intensity with which Paul labored to teach and lead and protect the flock in Ephesus . . .

{31} "Therefore watch, and remember that for three years I did not cease to warn everyone night and day with tears.

- 15) Father, as shepherds of your little flock, you're called to the task of protection
- a) watch over your children
 - b) the devil goes about as a roaring lion seeking whom he may devour
 - c) protect your kids

D. V. 32

{32} "So now, brethren, I commend you to God and to the word of His grace, which is able to build you up and give you an inheritance among all those who are sanctified.

1. Paul has given his charge to the pastors of Ephesus

2. And now he concludes by commending them to God and to Word of His grace
3. Paul had spent three years pouring himself into them
4. And now it was time for them to step in and carry on the work he had begun
5. He had left them a good example and had fully trained them
6. But now it was time to go and to entrust them to God
7. This is something *every* pastor has to come to grips with - that in the end, it is the grace and mercy of God that gives us what we need to be faithful
8. Study, prayer, training, preparation, learning; it isn't these things that accomplish the task of the shepherd
9. It is God living in and through us that provides what we need to be faithful
10. There is never an end to books and tapes
 - a. there is never an end to seminars on how to be an effective pastor
 - b. there is a steady stream of letters and advertisements describing the latest technology in how to minister in the 21st Century
11. But books and tapes do not make a man, not do seminars and the latest tools
12. Only God can make a man
13. Only God can make a man effective to lead His people as he wants them led
14. God makes pastors
15. God makes fathers
16. May God make us the *men*, the *pastors*, and the *fathers* that he desires!