

Explore the Bible: Delivered

January 17, 2018

- The Explore the Bible lesson for Feb. 4 focuses on Acts 20:22-35.

The pace of the Apostle Paul's journey seems to pick up speed as he nears his return to Jerusalem. Luke, the author, seems to share briefly about some of his stops to show us Paul's haste to arrive in Jerusalem by Pentecost (Acts 20:16).

Yet, the believers from Ephesus seem to continue to pop up following the riot in Acts 19. In Miletus, they meet for a final "huddle" to share their convictions about Paul's ministry and future.

Consider Paul's opening comments in Acts 20:18-21. His lack of hesitation to preach what is helpful was critical to his ministry. When we consider that *sharing the gospel is worth the sacrifice and effort*, we can see Paul's story intermingled to prove he faithfully endured all responses to his ministry and still continued presenting the gospel.

His Commitment (Acts 20:22-24)

If this were a scene from a movie, what would this scene look like? We are merely beginning Paul's speech to these people whom he was close to, and the emotional resolve drenches us by his words. Paul was compelled to face the future.

Paul—by the power of the Spirit—was ready to face the uncertain future. He truly did not know what would take place, except that "prison and hardships" would face him. Surely, he still hoped to reach Spain, but even his hopes had to be humbled before the Spirit's leading.

How do we react to God when he calls us to an unknown future? Somehow, Paul seems content to go forward in spite of the promise of hardship. This has to be because of his certainty that God's plan is always best for the gospel.

Focus on Paul's greatest desire: "If only I may finish the race and complete the task the Lord Jesus has given me." This echoes his strong statement in Philippians 3:12-14. This also reminds us of the hymn lyrics, "I am resolved no longer to linger." Paul was committed to going forward as a faithful servant for God's purpose.

His Concern (Acts 20:25-31)

When we look at the life of Paul, we typically call him an "evangelist" or "missionary," but rarely if ever a "pastor." It is true that his life reminds us today of the itinerant evangelist who travels city-to-city sharing the gospel in local churches along his journey. But in these verses, we see a pastor's heart, a shepherd's concern.

As we remember previous lessons, we are sure to recall the consistent dealings with false teachers and less-than-true teachings with which the believers had to grapple. *How would you describe Paul's tone in this warning?* He is as defensive as he always was, and in this case more so, since his absence was imminent.

What does being "on your guard" look like today? How do churches typically respond to false teaching, and how should they respond? There is a necessary awareness so believers will not emulate any other teaching but God's.

His Commendation (Acts 20:32-35)

J. Bradley Chance reminds us “the word ‘commend’ is used similarly in 1 Timothy 1:18 and 2 Timothy 2:2, both of which exhort Timothy to stand faithfully...it can carry the meaning of ‘commit’ or ‘entrust.’” (J. Bradley Chance, *Acts*, 374). It is interesting Paul uses this word consistently in his farewell speeches.

It is natural for us to view this as a “passing the baton” of the work that Paul began. This makes even more sense because Paul’s strong admonition comes from a man whose heart desires for his work to continue on. He was entrusting his life’s work to others, who would continue on in his stead.

The word “responsibility” also comes to mind in light of these verses. *How do you see responsibility as a key theme for Paul and these elders?* Living for God and sharing his good news brings a responsibility that we continue forward, faithfully. We may not all be elders, evangelists, or pastors, but we all share the responsibility of being faithful.

Conclusion

Ask your group to compare this speech to another farewell speech they are familiar with—real-life or fictional). *How does Paul’s speech compare to other farewell speeches?*

There is no doubt from Paul’s words and actions that he was committed to the message of the gospel in spite of all he encountered. We also need that same resolve and commitment. This is fed by the fact that lives are changed for the better when they receive God’s good news; thus, the messenger’s grief is worth it.

Paul was facing what he only knew—that his physical life would be in jeopardy. Rather than running away, he was convinced and compelled

forward. We know his life continued to make a difference, but we do not know how much less it would have made a difference if he focused on protecting himself.

Is my life worth giving for the lives of others? Paul believed this, and so have followers and disciples over the generations between he and us. Now we are asked to fall in line, believing God's good news is greater than our breath.

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