

A Good Preacher's Work

Acts 20:17-35

Introduction:

1. Most everyone in a church has expectations about what a good preacher is supposed to do.
2. These expectations come from a variety of places.
 - a. Societal expectations may center on him being a community leader. Does he promote compassionate organizations?
 - b. Our past religious affiliations may shape our expectations of him. Is he supposed to wear a collar, a robe, a suit? Our past experience with someone else that we appreciated: "Well, Kelly Ellis always used to . . ."
 - c. Then there are our personal expectations? Does he visit me? Is he extroverted? Does he speak well? Can he keep me interested in what he is saying? Is he good-looking?
 - d. We could go on, but you get the idea. Some of our expectations we would never put in a job description. They just would not fit and they might reveal too much about us.
3. In Acts 20:17ff Paul gives a description of his work with the church at Ephesus. He had worked with them for two years.
 - a. Acts 19 describes how he had gone there on his third preaching journey.
 - b. When he arrived he found about twelve men acquainted only with John's baptism.
 - c. He taught them more fully the way of the Lord and they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.
 - d. He taught in the synagogue there for three months. The opposition intensified to the point that he took the disciples away and reasoned daily in the school of Tyrannus.
 - e. He left Ephesus when the silversmiths created a riot as a result of his teaching. He went into Macedonia and Greece. Now on his way to Jerusalem he spoke to the elders from the church in Ephesus about his work with them.
4. His summary of that work gives us, in my judgment, some good information about the work of a preacher. It will do us well to shape our expectations of the work of a preacher around the work that he modeled in the church at Ephesus.

Discussion: Reading of 20:17-24

- I. A good preacher serves the Lord (19).
 - A. It is appropriate that this consideration come first.
 1. There is a sense in which a good preacher serves the people, but first he serves the Lord.
 2. If he serves the people first he may compromise his service to the Lord. To be honest, sometimes the people take too much ownership of a preacher. They would allow their personal interests to get in front of the Lord's interests. Some might be so bold as to think, "We hired him and we pay him and he will do what we say." Careful!
 3. He serves the Lord first!! And if not, are you sure you want him?
 - B. He serves the Lord with humility.

1. Humility is a state of unqualified vulnerability to God.
 2. It is not about self-depreciation. It is not about being milque-toast. It is not about him submitting himself to whatever the people may want. Nor is it about him seeking his own will and insisting on his "rights."
 3. It is about "unqualified vulnerability to God." He submits himself to the Lord's will.
- C. This often results in tears as trials come (cf. 19:9, 23ff).
1. These are not brought on by the preacher's hostile and angry actions, but as a result of what he is teaching.
 2. His teaching does not always result in pleasant circumstances.
 3. His teachings call for change. There is no embracing of false religions (19:18, 23ff). The world of the first century was heavily polytheistic. Christianity does not embrace this concept, but stands opposed to it.

II. A good preacher does not shrink from declaring anything that is profitable (20-21).

- A. Sometimes this requires great courage.
1. Growth is not always comfortable. As a matter of fact, it really never is. Growth takes us away from what is comfortable. Cf. Heb. 12:11.
 2. This is part of the challenge of "serving the Lord with humility."
- B. He teaches publically and from house to house (19).
1. Teaching is the work.
 2. It must be done everywhere and so the good preacher uses both public and private avenues to do his teaching.
 3. Often we think of preachers standing in a pulpit, but his work should not be limited to what he does there.
- C. He solemnly testifies to all of repentance toward God and faith in Jesus Christ (21).
1. He teaches the necessity of turning toward rather than continuing in our turning away. John Gottman speaks of marital partner's turning toward each other. He speaks of how we make "bids" for relationship. God has made "bid" for relationship with us. A good preacher calls attention to the "bid" and identifies repentance as the appropriate response.
 2. He teaches dependence on Jesus Christ as the means for having that relationship.

III. A good preacher is "bound by the Holy Spirit" (22-24). He gives his life to the work.

- A. This is part of his humility—his unqualified vulnerability to God.
- B. The good preacher does his work not knowing what is going to happen to him.
1. Paul did not know all the details of what was going to happen in Jerusalem.
 2. He did know that bonds and afflictions awaited him.
 3. Not a pleasant expectation.
- C. He placed his life in God's hands.
1. This is what humility is about.
 2. This is what discipleship is about. Jesus said, "Whoever wishes to save his life will lose it; but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it" (Matt. 16:28).
 3. This is not just for preachers. It is for disciples.
 4. Following Jesus means "taking up your cross" (Matt. 16:24).

IV. A good preacher preaches the kingdom of God (25).

- A. Chapter 19:8ff says that Paul spoke in the synagogue at Ephesus reasoning and persuading about the kingdom of God.
 - 1. There is some sense in which this text defines for us what preaching is. It involves reasoning and persuading.
 - 2. The topic of the reasoning and persuading is the kingdom of God.
 - 3. In 19:9 it is described as “the Way.” This is a term used in Acts to refer to Christianity, the way of Christ the king.
 - a. Acts 9:2: It is the Way that Paul had previously persecuted.
 - b. Acts 19:23: It was the Way that the silversmiths in Ephesus opposed.
- B. Preaching the kingdom involves . . .
 - 1. Teaching about baptism in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ (Acts 19:5).
 - 2. Repentance (19:19). Even turning from idols (19:26).
 - 3. Submission to the King, Jesus Christ for salvation.
- C. Failure to do so makes one guilty of murder (19:26).

V. A good preacher declares the whole purpose of God (27).

- A. A good preacher is familiar with the purpose of God.
 - 1. He knows what God’s purpose is.
 - 2. And works to declare it and make it clear so that the people see their place in the purpose of God.
 - 3. He works to get them to submit themselves to the purpose of God in light of the benefit that it is to them (cf. Deut. 4:40; 12:28; Eph. 6:3).
- B. He declares the whole purpose of God.
 - 1. The purpose of God has a global element to it.
 - 2. It involves a “big picture” view when even the smallest details are part of the overall purpose.

VI. A good preacher gives warning (28-31).

- A. There is a need to be on guard because the flock is valuable. It has been purchased with the blood of Christ.
 - 1. It does not take a lot of giving for you to come to the realization that some people do not understand the sacrifice you have made to make their gift possible.
 - 2. As a result they do not value nor appreciate the gift.
 - 3. Christ purchased the church with his own blood therefore it needs to be guarded, cared for, protected. Particularly is this the job of overseers/shepherds.
- B. Wolves feed on the flock.
 - 1. Sometimes these wolves are from within the flock.
 - 2. They destroy by “speaking perverse things.”
- C. The good preacher admonishes each one (individual attention). He does it night and day (unceasingly). And he does it with tears (emotionally connected).

VII. A good preacher commends people to God and the word of His grace (32).

- A. In light of the fact that Paul expects to never see these elders again (38) he turns them over to God and the word of His grace.
 - 1. There is a sense in which a preacher forms a bridge between the people and their God.
 - 2. When he is no longer available to serve in this capacity their relationship to God and His word must go direct. Indeed people need to grow to the point that they do not depend on the bridge, but their own direct relationship with God and His word.
- B. It is the word of God that is able to build up.
 - 1. Sometimes we may depend too much on a preacher.
 - 2. Our real dependence needs to be on the word of His grace, not just as it is communicated through someone else.
 - 3. Preachers fail. Circumstances change so that he may not be available. Our faith must be in God and the word of His grace, first and primarily. If our faith is primarily in a preacher it is misplaced. These elders must carry on with or without Paul.

VIII. A good preacher works hard and gives (33-35).

- A. Paul says he coveted no one's silver or gold or clothes.
 - 1. There are preachers that are preaching for their own benefit.
 - 2. These might be described as "hirelings" ("hired hands). Cf. Jn. 10:12. There is a difference between being paid for preaching and preaching in order to get paid.
 - 3. "The one who is taught the word is to share all good things with the one who teaches him" (Gal. 6:10). We are not to muzzle the ox while he is thrashing and the laborer is worthy of his wages and we are to respect those who work hard at preaching and teaching (1 Tim. 5:17-18).
 - 4. But then there are those preachers who are in it for their own personal benefit—money, position, power (Cf. Acts 20:30; 1 Tim. 1:3ff).
 - 5. A good preacher is not covetous, but then Christians are not to be covetous either. Some want a preacher who is willing to make sacrifices and then in their own covetousness take advantage of him. "How much can we get for as little as possible?" A preacher can expect the church to sacrifice for him and then take advantage of them. Neither is appropriate.
- B. Acts 18 refers to Paul's work of tent making at Corinth. 20:34 says, "These hands ministered to my own needs and to the men who were with me."
 - 1. Such action exemplified "working and helping the weak" in recognition of Jesus' teaching "It is more blessed to give than to receive."
 - 2. Ephesus Christians were to learn from what Paul had done to work hard and to give.
 - 3. Many churches have benefited from preachers working with their own hands! Many preachers have benefited from Christians working and helping preachers! Indeed, both preachers and Christians need to be committed to the work of the Lord and not just themselves. There should be no adversarial spirit between those working in the Lord's kingdom.

4. Is it any wonder then that when these dynamics are present that there would be emotional attachment and grief when there is separation (cf. 36-38)?

Summary and Conclusion:

A good preacher . . .

1. Serves the Lord.
2. Declares everything that is profitable.
3. Is bound by the Spirit thus giving his life to the work.
4. Preaches the kingdom.
5. Declares the whole purpose of God.
6. Gives warnings.
7. Commend people to God and the word of His grace.
8. Works hard and gives.