

**May 3, 2009**

**Sermon Title: Spend Yourself Generously**

**Sermon Series: Generosity in Times of Hardship (Social Responsibility Emphasis)**

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**Sermon Text: Acts 20:17-38**

Sermon-Based Discussion

## INTRODUCTION

In a few weeks, many people in Boston will be closing a chapter of their lives. Students will graduate and move on. Jobs and contracts will finish and people will say good-bye. Leases will run out, prompting many to evaluate the next season of their lives. In an transient city like Boston, many will be saying good-bye.

For anyone, saying good-bye can be a moment of truth, a time of reflection on how one has lived his/her life. For Christians, it's a valuable moment to ask God "How have I spent myself generously while I've lived, worked and studied here?"

In this session, we'll look at Paul's farewell to a group of elders from a church he pastured. We'll see what this parting reveals about his ministry, his life, and the gospel.

## OPENING QUESTIONS

1. Describe a time in your life when you had to say "good-bye" to a place. Maybe it was a school, a job, a church, or a small group.
2. Most people get more reflective during times of good-bye and transition. Why might this be so?

The apostle Paul was in Miletus, about 30 miles away from the city of Ephesus. He summoned the elders of that church. The summons probably took several days, and the elders would have been on the road for several days as well. This scene is Paul gathering with the elders, perhaps on the shore near his awaiting ship. We will read the first part of his parting words.

3. Read Acts 20:17-24. Consider the way Paul described his ministry in Ephesus: with great humility, with tears, severely tested by plots...
  - a. How do you think Paul thought and felt about this church based upon his ministry there?
  - b. Do you think this was a particularly "bad" church, or does every church face these kinds of challenges?
4. What characterized Paul's preaching at this church?
5. Consider Paul describing his future plans (22-24). How would you feel if God told you this was your future?

6. Paul gives specific instructions for church elders in verses 25-35. What are they?

Why is it important for all Christians to understand the role of church elders?

7. Read about the farewell of Paul and the Ephesian elders in Acts 20:36-38. What does this farewell indicate about how they felt about each other?

## GOING DEEPER

8. Over time, what difference might you see in a church that shied away from proclaiming the whole counsel of God in the Bible?
9. In our planning, we tend to shy away from hardships. But for Paul, hardships was all he knew was in store for him! Considering the future plans of Paul, what are reasonable expectations about how good and/or how difficult the future might be?

## WHAT WILL YOU DO?

Paul's life and spending himself generously comes from his understanding of the gospel. If the statement is true that "It is more blessed to give than to receive," then God is the most blessed of all. Think about it: the Father gave His only Son. The Son gave His life on the cross. The Spirit gives His illumination and power to those who are converted to Christ.

If a Christian's life is in God and the gospel, then he/she will grow in this attitude and action of spending oneself generously in service, in speech, and in future planning. If a Church and eldership follow this, then they will preach the full counsel of God. And if you're in a season of saying "good-bye", consider how this may indicate to you how generously you've spent yourself.

Let us pray and ask God to examine our lives and motives. Consider specific ways to align ourselves to this gospel of generosity and hope.

## CHANGING YOUR MIND

However, I consider my life worth nothing to me, if only I may finish the race and complete the task the Lord Jesus has given me—the task of testifying to the gospel of God's grace. (Acts 20:24)

## Acts 20:17-38

<sup>17</sup>From Miletus, Paul sent to Ephesus for the elders of the church. <sup>18</sup>When they arrived, he said to them: "You know how I lived the whole time I was with you, from the first day I came into the province of Asia. <sup>19</sup>I served the Lord with great humility and with tears, although I was severely tested by the plots of the Jews. <sup>20</sup>You know that I have not hesitated to preach anything that would be helpful to you but have taught you publicly and from house to house. <sup>21</sup>I have declared to both Jews and Greeks that they must turn to God in repentance and have faith in our Lord Jesus.

<sup>22</sup>"And now, compelled by the Spirit, I am going to Jerusalem, not knowing what will happen to me there. <sup>23</sup>I only know that in every city the Holy Spirit warns me that prison and hardships are facing me. <sup>24</sup>However, I consider my life worth nothing to me, if only I may finish the race and complete the task the Lord Jesus has given me—the task of testifying to the gospel of God's grace.

<sup>25</sup>"Now I know that none of you among whom I have gone about preaching the kingdom will ever see me again. <sup>26</sup>Therefore, I declare to you today that I am innocent of the blood of all men. <sup>27</sup>For I have not hesitated to proclaim to you the whole will of God. <sup>28</sup>Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers. Be shepherds of the church of God, which he bought with his own blood. <sup>29</sup>I know that after I leave, savage wolves will come in among you and will not spare the flock. <sup>30</sup>Even from your own number men will arise and distort the truth in order to draw away disciples after them. <sup>31</sup>So be on your guard! Remember that for three years I never stopped warning each of you night and day with tears.

<sup>32</sup>"Now I commit you to God and to the word of his grace, which can build you up and give you an inheritance among all those who are sanctified. <sup>33</sup>I have not coveted anyone's silver or gold or clothing. <sup>34</sup>You yourselves know that these hands of mine have supplied my own needs and the needs of my companions. <sup>35</sup>In everything I did, I showed you that by this kind of hard work we must help the weak, remembering the words the Lord Jesus himself said: 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.' "

<sup>36</sup>When he had said this, he knelt down with all of them and prayed. <sup>37</sup>They all wept as they embraced him and kissed him. <sup>38</sup>What grieved them most was his statement that they would never see his face again. Then they accompanied him to the ship.