

Hillside Fellowship Church
October 18, 2020

Heavenly Father, we thank you for the victory that we have in Christ. We thank you that the end of the story isn't death, but life and it isn't sin and shame, it's righteousness and cleansing. We thank you, Father, for all that you offer us in Christ. And as we gather now and open up your word, Father, would you open up our hearts? Would you give us faith to hear so we can benefit from your word, that it would come alive in us this morning; that *you* would give life to us this morning?

Father, we are just overwhelmed in a world of uncertainty. Would you help us today to lay hold of the one thing that is unmoving, unshakable, the only thing that is certain? And that is the rock who is Jesus Christ. Help us, Father, to see Him today. Give us hearts that would perceive and praise Him. Help us, Father, to take hold of Christ. This we pray, in Jesus' name. Amen.

It's great to see you this morning and to be with you this morning, Hillside. I'm going to have you go right to Acts chapter 20. If you're a guest or new here with us, I'm going to welcome you here in a minute. I'm going to set a few things for all of us and then I'll come back just to make sure you know a little bit about us, okay?

So go to Acts chapter 20 and what I want to do, since we've been in this study for a while, is I want to just look at the first verse of the chapter and then I'm going to jump to the end of the chapter. I'm just going to read a few verses right out of the gate here, because I want to set a context for us, right? Maybe some lenses with which we can look at the passage

today in Acts chapter 20.

Here we go. I'm just going to jump in. It says this. Acts chapter 20, verse 1. If you don't have a Bible, it's up here on the screen, so don't sweat it. 1 "After the uproar ceased, Paul sent for the disciples, and after encouraging them, he said farewell and departed for Macedonia." So now jump way to the end of the chapter. I want you to read verse 36 with me.

36 "And when he had said these things, he (Paul) knelt down and prayed with them all. 37 And there was much weeping on the part of all; they embraced Paul and kissed him, 38 being sorrowful most of all because of the word he had spoken, that they would not see his face again. And they accompanied him to the ship."

What we're going to be looking at this morning in Acts chapter 20 is, basically Luke, in one sense -- he's the author of the book of Acts -- completing the story of Ephesus for us. Last week we looked at that with Pastor Dave. This massive riot broke out and that's really what pushes Paul out of this city and away from these people. The same people that he calls to and encourages before he goes.

And then he heads to Jerusalem. We'll look at that. And as he's heading to Jerusalem, he'll get one more opportunity to be around the leaders of this church in Ephesus. And that's what you see at the end. And so, everything in between -- this entire chapter, I don't know that we can fully grasp it if we don't grasp that what we're looking at is a very highly relational context.

You see it there in the words that Luke chooses to use, don't

you? The encouragement that they receive in one another. The weeping, the sorrow at parting from one another, knowing that they won't see one another again. The kisses, the embrace, the affection with which they treat one another. There's just no way for us to dive into this in the immediate context and not have some lenses on that look very relational at the text. Okay?

That's where I want to make sure we start right off the bat. We're looking at something really relational. And here's why I think it's important, not only we think that way, look that way as we see this text here immediately, but I would purpose to you that if you zoomed way out and looked at the big picture of scripture from Genesis to Revelation. Again, if you're not familiar with the Bible, if you don't have one, come find me. I'll make sure you leave here with one.

But if you look at the big picture of the scripture, I would propose to you that the most effective lenses with which we could look at scripture is a relational one. In fact, this is how I would teach my own children when we talk about the scriptures together. When we talk about the big picture. You go to the very beginning and you have God and he's going to create this world, right?

And what the scriptures introduce us to is a good God who creates a good world, and he gives good gifts so that we could enjoy those in relationship with Him. That's the big picture. And we're kind of used to that, right? Pastor Dave gets up here week in and week out and he says, hey, let me give me give you a big theological picture. Well, there probably isn't a bigger theological picture than that. That God is good. The world he created is good. God gives good gifts and his purpose in all of this is that we would enjoy all of

this in relationship with him.

It's a very relational story. Now, we can come to the scriptures with all kinds of lenses, can't we? Oftentimes, we come to the scripture, maybe we have an historical lens on. And there's plenty of history here. Don't get me wrong. I'm telling you guys, if you love geography, you're going to get your fill of geography in Acts chapter 20. We're going to look at city after city that Paul is going to go around to. Names I can't even pronounce. And you'll find that out here in a minute when I try to get there. Okay?

You're going to get history. I mean, these are places that you can go and visit and some of you probably have. You've taken the trip. You've walked in the footsteps of the apostle Paul. You've seen the seven churches in Asia and you've visited these places. There's plenty of history here. And the point of the historical context of the scripture is to help us understand, when we read the scripture, we're reading about a very specific person who lived in a very specific place, in a very specific time. That God, himself, entered into human history and is actually now inviting us into a relationship with God through him.

So again, it's a relational story. And so it's not primarily historical context. It's a relational context when we come to the scriptures. Now, some of us have a very intellectual lens that we look at the scriptures with. And again, it's okay. I'm not saying that's a bad thing. Just like there's history here, there's also plenty of things to study. You can study the scripture, you can spend the rest of your life studying the scripture, whether that's decades or days and you're never going to exhaust the amount of wisdom, because the wisdom of God is unsearchable, right?

His ways are inscrutable. Like, he's so much more transcended than us. How can we wrap our finite minds around the infinite? And so, there are certainly plenty of things that we can study. We can dissect the text. And I would propose that's where sometimes we lose sight of the relational story. Because if we come to the scriptures merely intellectual, then what we're going to end up doing is kind of beginning to pick apart all the pieces of scripture like we did in science class back in high school.

And there's on life there. Because we're missing the fact that as we search the scriptures, they're all pointing to a person who is inviting us into a relationship with God through him. That's Jesus Christ.

Now we may have a moral lens. If you know the Bible, you're well aware that there is a lot of laws in here. A lot of rules. 600 and some odd rules in the law. There's some do's and don'ts. There's plenty of things we can look at in the scripture and say, you know what? I really think what God wants of me is that he just wants me to do good.

Many within the culture today, in fact, many of you here may very well believe that. You've sat in church for years and you've never quite got that what the law is doing is it's actually pointing to your need of a relationship with this person who's going to reconcile you to God through him. Jesus Christ.

So even if we look at the scripture with a moral lens, we're still going to fall short of the relational context. Like, there is no bigger story when it comes to scripture. There is no bigger theological picture for us to grasp than that we put on

a relational lens as we look at the scriptures. So whether it's historical, whether it's intellectual, whether it's moral.

Another one we use a lot is an eternal lens. A lot of us come to the book with an eternal lens. This book is just telling us about eternal things and how we might have eternal life and giving us some sense of assurance or insurance that when we die, we actually know where we're going to go. I mean, maybe you've heard that evangelical pick up line before. Right? If you were to die tonight, do you know for certain where you would spend it?

Again, I am not in any way being critical of any lens that we come to the scripture with. But I am wanting anyone in the room to see that if we don't have a relational lens when we come to scripture, the way we're viewing it is insufficient. Because even the eternal aspects of the scripture is not something where we merely go through the motions of whatever church or religion or denomination that you've grown up with, in the hopes that we now have some assurance that we go to heaven when we die.

Jesus said that he came so that we might have life, and life to the full. And we don't have to sit around waiting on that. But he gives us his Spirit now so that we can actually walk in relationship with him today. So again, there is no bigger theological picture that I could give you when it comes to, not just the context of Acts 20, but when it comes to the context of all of scripture, that we put on a relational lens.

Here you go. Since pastor Dave does this and we're used to it, here's the smaller theological picture. What does sin do to that relationship? Severs it, doesn't it. It severs that relationship with God. It separates us from God. It puts us

in this position where rather than wanting to enjoy the goodness of God's creation and the good gifts that God gives us in relationship with him, we would rather say, no, thanks. I'll take all that you have to offer me, God, but I'm really not interested in a relationship with you.

And so, we use God and we use others and we use the good gifts of this world that he gives us to serve me. Because like a really insightful pastor theologian has once said, D.N. Tooker, "I love me some me." Right? I mean, we do. We love us some us. And so that's what we do. We look at God, we look at others, we look at the world and we say, in our sin, you know what? I could use those things.

I could use those things to get what it is I want. And that's the smaller theological picture. And so here's what's amazing. Again, if you're a guest, if you're new with us, I guarantee you, at some point, you're going to hear us say something like this around Hillside. Jesus Changes Everything.

And if that's a new statement to you, if that's something you haven't heard before, what we want you to know is that if you're going to be here around Hillside, then we want to help you enter into and walk in a relationship with Jesus Christ. Because there is no other place where God has given us life than in Christ.

It is in Christ that we're reconciled to God. It is in Christ that we can then be reconciled to others and to the world around us. It is only in Christ that we find that life. We want to help you know Christ, relate with Christ, walk with Christ, grow as a disciple of Christ. So we say it all the time, Jesus Changes Everything. And so again, if you're new, if you're a guest,

we're so glad that you're here. And we have no greater aim or desire than that you would know and walk with Jesus.

But I've got to be honest. There's a lot of us that hear that statement week in and week out and we're still waiting for Jesus to change everything around us, not realizing that when we make the statement that we're talking about how Jesus changes everything about us. And that's what I think is beautiful about this passage this morning. We're going to get to see, through the life of Paul, how Jesus changes us. Because Jesus changes Paul.

So I want you to go to Acts 20 and we're going to work through this in a few different settings this morning. It's really difficult to teach a passage and really aim at us capturing the glory of Christ. Because again, if we have an aim -- I've kind of already laid out my cards in front of you -- we want you to relate with Jesus. And yet, there is no more central character in Acts chapter 20 than Paul.

And so, I'm just going to put it out there in front of you before we even dive into this text in detail. If you leave today and you somehow see Paul as the hero, I have failed miserably. All right? I've failed miserably. But if you can leave today and you can find hope that Jesus can change you because he changed Paul, then I think we're at least tracking together. All right? So I just put that out there as we get going.

Let's jump in here. I'm going to get back to verse 1 and I want you to see the unbelievable transformation that Jesus brings about in the life of Paul through just even the twists and turns of life. Look at this. Acts chapter 20, verse 1.

20:1 "After the uproar ceased, Paul sent for the disciples and after encouraging them, he said farewell and departed for Macedonia." Now, again, I've already told you, big riot in Ephesus. That's the uproar that dies down. Probably not good for Paul to stick around. And so he calls the disciples that are in Ephesus. That's who he's encouraging and then he's taking off for Macedonia.

2 "When he had gone through those regions and had given them much encouragement, he came to Greece." Like I said, lots of geography. Maybe you've been there. I'm not going to put a map on the screen. Maybe you've got one in the back of your Bible and you can follow there.

3 "There he spent three months, . . ." So he's three months in Greece. And now he's going to sail from Greece to Syria. ". . . and when a plot was made against him by the Jews as he was about to set sail for Syria, he decided to return through Macedonia."

So the plan changes, doesn't it. So he's not going to get onto a boat. He's not going to sail to Syria. He's actually going to get back on land. He's going to walk back through the direction he had just come.

Verse 4. "Sopater the Berean, . . ." I'm just making this up as I go. ". . . son of Pyrrhus, accompanied him; and of the Thessalonians, Aristarchus and Secundus; and Gaius of Derbe, and Timothy; and the Asians of Tychicus and Trophimus."

How did I do?

Congregation: Whoohoo. [Laughter.]

5 "These went on ahead and were waiting for us at Troas, 6 but we sailed away from Philippi after the days of Unleavened Bread, and in five days we came to them at Troas, where we stayed for seven days."

So again, if you're taking notes, you're welcome to draw arrows and lines and find the map and give me the timeline. What I would want you to see is that Paul's trip begins unplanned. A riot has pushed him out of Ephesus, right? And then Paul's trip continues to go in ways that don't seemingly look planned. Right? I'm going to get on a boat. I'm going to sail -- actually no, I'm not. There's people trying to kill me. I'm going to walk back the other way. You guys go here. I'll go there. We'll try to meet up there.

In fact, jump down to verse 13. You kind of see the same thing going on. So after we left Troas, . . . 13 "But going ahead to the ship, we set sail for Assos, intending to take Paul aboard there, for so he had arranged, intending himself to go by land. 14 And when we met at Assos, we took him on board and we went to Mitylene. 15 And sailing from there we came the following day opposite Chios; the next day we touched at Samos; and the day after that we went to Miletus."

I'm just really botching these names. 16 "For Paul had decided to sail past Ephesus, so that he might not have to spend time in Asia, . . . "

We're kind of getting now why, right? Big riot. Probably not good to go back there. " . . . for he was hastening to be at Jerusalem, if possible, on the day of Pentecost."

So this is the first time Luke let's us in on what Paul's even trying to do. He's trying to get to Jerusalem. He definitely has a destination in mind. But as he goes, it's really clear that no matter what plan Paul makes, it never really comes together as planned. Does it? In fact, in this passage alone, I think the only time he intended to do something and it actually happened was when he walked to Assos and met up with the guys there.

And you could go back through the book of Acts and there's a really good chance that may be the only time Paul ever intended to do anything and it worked out the way that he wanted it to. [Chuckling.]

But Paul's life and ministry is filled with all kinds of curve balls and twists and turns and the unexpected. I would wrap it up in one word. I would say, Paul experiences an absurd amount of uncertainty in his life. Anyone here familiar with uncertainty? How do you handle uncertainty? I mean, if you weren't sure how to answer that question before this year, we have plenty of practice, right. Welcome 2020.

I mean, if we've known anything this year, it's uncertainty, right? Our plans have changed so many times this year alone. Like, our changes have children and grandchildren at this point. Like this year has just provided so much uncertainty. We're probably at the point now where nothing is going to surprise us when it comes to 2020. Right? Chances are, I'm going to HEB this afternoon as I leave here. I'm not going to be shocked at all if I run into some aliens. I'm just not.

[Laughter.]

I'm just not. I'm going to just give them a high five and just be like, welcome to 2020. Right? I mean, that's what it looked like for us. I'm going to drive right by Tractor Supply, the big marquee is going to probably say, Flying Pigs. Right? There's just not going to be any surprises for us. I know everybody is kind of getting a little anxious about the election. Chances are, Kanye's going to win and none of us are going to be surprised.

[Laughter]

We're going to be like, that's 2020. Everything about this year is uncertain. And I don't know about you, but there's probably a chance that in the midst of all this uncertainty, you've found yourself saying what I find myself saying. Man, I really wish things would just go back to normal. We've lost perspective though, haven't we? Because when was normal ever certain?

When was normal ever certain? My wife and I, in our refrigerator, have a reminder of how uncertain life is. It is a small little bottle of ice wine. Anybody here heard of ice wine? Ever heard about ice wine? The Niagara peninsula is the largest producer in the world of ice wine. I don't know why they started that other than the fact that I assume it gets really cold there. And if you've never heard of ice wine before, they have to wait and leave the grapes on the vine until the first freeze, and they have to hope that after they harvest the first round that the ones they leave on the vine don't go bad. Because of they rot, they can't use them.

And then when the first freeze comes, they literally have to watch the thermometer drop and when it gets to 18 degrees, they call in all of the work force, because they have hours

now. Literally just hours to harvest all of the grapes that are frozen at this perfect temperature and not just harvest them all. But now they have to produce them all. Press them all, get everything out. I guess the water's frozen and so what comes out is just the sweetness of the grape.

And so apparently ice wine is supposed to be some of the sweetest wine you could have. And then based on this whole production process, it's some of the most expensive wine that you can purchase. So about four years ago, my wife and my oldest son went with some of her family to see Niagra Falls and they toured some ice winery thing there. And her aunt bought her this small little bottle of ice wine and when my wife brought it back she said, you know what? It was a time of just transition for our life.

A lot of things were uncertain. And we were praying through, what do we do with that uncertainty? God, what is it you're doing in our lives? Where is it you're directing us? How do we discern your leading? And it was actually during that time that we ended up moving our family here. And coming here, my wife was expecting. And that summer was just brutal as you guys know. Summers here are brutal. But when you're pregnant, ladies, it's that much more brutal. Can I get an amen?

And she had contracted a cough because apparently every summer, this African dust crosses the Atlantic and falls on San Antonio. Right? Like what did the people do here in the past that incurred the wrath of God to send dust every summer to descend on us? As if we didn't have enough allergies to deal with because of the cedar and the oak and things, right? And so she had this cough and it was just so brutal. And yet, this beautiful baby comes from that.

And then just as we started to think life was getting a little certain, beginning to make sense, we found out we had another baby coming. Again, another beautiful baby comes from that. And then just when we think are starting to kind of settle in and make sense, there's a worldwide pandemic. And then that leads us into this fall where because of the all the crazy that's going on, we're homeschooling five kids with two babies. And I don't know about you guys, but that just sounds insane. And that's what it feels like.

And when she brought back that bottle and said, I'm going to put it here, you know what? When life makes sense, I'm going to get this out.

[Laughter]

Right? It's still in our fridge. Because when does it make sense? When is it certain? When is there that time? And I think in the midst of all of the crazy, we can fool ourselves into thinking, man, if we could just get back to normal. As if normal was certain. So what do you do with uncertainty? What do you do with that? What does uncertainty typically produce in us? I'll ask it that way.

Fear, right? Fear, anxiety. Do you realize the two answers just gave are on the cutting edge of scientific breakthrough right now? As if we needed a bunch of research and science to tell us that when life is uncertain that we're anxious. Right? But it's true. You can follow neuroscience, brain science, all of that stuff right now is beginning to just unpack and map for us how all of this stuff is wired. And that there are specific parts of our brain they always thought were fear and specific parts they thought were tied to anxiety. And

now they're realizing there's way more overlap than this. And this is going to change everything when it comes to helping psychologically.

But here's the reality. Life is going to continue to be uncertain and we're going to continue to respond with anxiety and fear, unless Jesus changes us. And that's what's amazing to me when I look at this passage and I look at Paul's ministry as a whole. What do we find Paul doing as he's pushed out of a city on the back end of a riot, as he's ushered off a boat, because there are people planning to kill you, let's change the plans? What do we find Paul doing as he goes from place to place in the midst of all of these twists and turns?

Did you guys catch what he's doing? He's encouraging the believers there. You ever been encouraged by an anxious person?

[Chuckling]

It doesn't happen, does it? It doesn't happen. Right? When life is throwing you some really crazy stuff, I guarantee you that you don't have, in your phone anxious friend, and you call them at that time. None of us are encouraged by somebody who's anxious. And this is where it really is amazing to see the impact of Christ on Paul's life.

Does anybody remember when we first met Paul in the narrative of Acts? This is a little bit of a review. I'm sorry. I should've told you up front that I was going to ask questions like this. And again, if you're new, you haven't been around. I'll help you out. There's no expectation on you. But does anybody remember?

You remember when we were introduced to Paul? His name was Saul at the time. And you can go back. It's in Acts chapter 7 where Stephen is literally being stoned. Stephen was a follower of Jesus and Stephen kind of shared about Jesus in front of this counsel and they got really angry and they picked up stones and started stoning him. And as Stephen is being murdered, everybody that's picking up stones to throw at Stephen are actually taking off their coats so they can get some range of motion and they're laying their coat down at the feet of a young man named Saul.

And it tells us, as you get into chapter 8, that Paul heartily approved of this murder and that he began ravaging the church. So connect the dots. You have somebody ravaging the church in Acts chapter 8, and you have the same somebody encouraging the church in Acts chapter 20. And the only difference is Jesus Christ. See Paul isn't the hero of the story.

Jesus is the hero of the story. And it's a relational story. And Jesus invited Paul to follow him and to walk with him just as he invites you and I to follow him and to walk with him. And Paul goes from a young man filled with all kinds of passion and desire and anxiety about the world around him, ravaging the church, to somebody who can step into these environments, complete chaos all around him, uncertainty left and right amidst the twists and turns of life, and yet he brings encouragement and comfort and peace to the church. That's remarkable isn't it?

The work of Jesus Christ in Paul's life is remarkable, isn't it? Let's keep going. I want you to see some more about this transformation. Look at this next [Chuckling] . . . this next

one really gets me. Verse 7. "On the first day of the week, when they were gathered together to break bread, Paul talked with them, intending to depart on the next day, . . . (now he's in Troas now, OK? So new city). . . . and he prolonged his speech until midnight.

8 There were many lamps in the upper room where they were gathered. 9 And a young man named Eutychius, sitting at a window, sank into a deep sleep as Paul talked still longer. And being overcome by sleep, he fell down from the third story and was taken up dead."

I'm not making this up, right? You're following along.

10 "But Paul went down and bent over him, and taking him in his arms, said, 'Do not be alarmed, for his life is in him.' 12 And they took the youth away alive, and were not a little comforted."

What do you do with this story? I mean, I really don't know why Luke included this. I really don't. And it's gets almost commercial when you read through commentaries on Acts chapter 20 to try to figure this out. I mean, there's a part of me that wonders if Luke just thought this was such an outrageous story. Nobody's going to believe it. And so he writes down all these names just so we know. Like seriously. I'm not making this up, guys. All right?

Like Sopater was there and Tychicus and Trophimus and -- you can ask all the guys. They were all there. You gotta believe me. It almost feels like that kind of story. There's certainly some practical wisdom here, right? Like, don't fall asleep in church. Right?

[Laughter]

You know? [Chuckling.] Come on. Wake up, right? Stay with me. Don't stay up after midnight, kids. Nothing good happens after midnight, right? We've all said that as parents. Like what do you do with this story? No joke. One guy that I read literally went through a list of probably 10 things he got out of this text to help us understand what it must have looked like for the church to gather in a normal setting back then.

Like, what's normal? What is normal about this story? There's absolutely nothing normal. We have a significantly tragic event that takes place as Paul's talking to the believers in Troas. And then the flip side of it is this unbelievable experience, which again, some doubt that Eutychus was even dead. It really is just one of those stories. I don't know what you do with it.

But, I can tell you a couple things I do know as I look at this. I think again, it helps us really grasp the significant transformation in Paul's life. Here's one thing I do know. Life is filled with highs and lows, isn't it? Life is filled with highs and lows. There are tragedies and there are triumphs and sometimes those things can happen in just a moment between one another.

Like, life is filled with highs and lows. And what a lot of us do when it comes to the highs and lows of life, the tragedies and the triumphs, is we try to avoid the worst. I mean, you guys would know what it would've looked like today for something like this to happen. The meeting. We all get together. Okay, guys. What are we going to do? How do we keep people from falling out of windows? We know that

there's a lot of risk here, right?

There's a chance that we might get sued. We've got to be really careful. You know, can we get some of those railing things on the windows? Can we do that, right? Hey, can we talk to Paul? Because we could put a timer or something on the screen. Like why does he keep going as long as he goes? Like, he can't talk until midnight. Maybe we sit down and talk with Paul.

I mean, that's what we do? We try to avoid the worst. We look at life and all the potential tragedies and traumas and we try to hedge ourselves against all of these things. And I'm not saying that we shouldn't be practical or careful. But again, has it ever worked for anybody? Has anybody ever been able to insulate themselves from every potential catastrophe and tragedy?

But that's kind of what we do with the triumphs and the tragedies of life. We try to avoid the worst and we try to mimic the best. And again, it's wild to think about what we would do in this context. I've been a pastor for over 20 years. I've prayed for those who are sick. I have never laid myself on top of anybody in the hopes that it gets them well. But did you guys know, biblically, Elijah and Elishah did that? And apparently Paul. So is that what I do?

And again, that's kind of how we approach these things, right? Like, can you walk me through? Like what were the steps again? Like, what did he do? So like he embraced him and he kind of, like, help me out here. I need to make sure I know exactly how Paul did this because we want to follow those who do this well. That's what we do with the tragedies and triumphs of life.

Well. listen. Again, if there's something for us to learn, if there's something for us to see in this context, we know that it's a relational story. And we know that Jesus has invited Paul to follow him and to walk with him. And I don't know in the context of Acts of all of the amazing things that the Holy Spirit does through the church and the apostles if there's anything more amazing than this contrast here.

Because again, do you guys remember when we first met Paul? Paul was the young man surrounded by coats approving of death. And here we get this picture of Paul toward the end of ministry, because this is really it. He's done with the journeys. The rest of Acts is just him talking before counsels and kings as a prisoner of Rome. Spoiler alert. Okay?

Still come. There's still some good stuff in there. But that's just the rest of Acts. This is the end of the line for him as far as somebody going around interacting with the churches. And one of the last pictures we get is Paul embracing a young man surrounded by the church hoping for life. It just doesn't get anymore dynamically different than that, does it? And the only difference from point A to point B is Jesus Christ. Because Paul's not the hero of the story.

It's a relational story and Jesus has invited him to follow and Paul has gone from one approving of death to one bringing hope and life when he interacts with the people around him. I mean, that is dynamically different. That is life changing transformation, and the change in Paul's life was Jesus Christ.

Let's look at this last section, because it is the longest one.

In verse 18 -- so now Paul's jumped around city to city with these guys. He's now in Miletus, which is south of Ephesus and he calls the elders to come down to him. It's this final farewell. At the end of this is when they're weeping, they're embracing, they're kissing, they're sorrowful as he leaves. And so, this is the interchange. So just listen to it. Again, you gotta have this relational lens on.

He says to them, verse 18 "When they came to him, he said to them: 'You yourselves know how I lived among you the whole time from the first day that I set foot in Asia, 19 serving the Lord with all humility and with tears and with trials that happened to me through the plots of the Jews; 20 how I did not shrink from declaring to you anything that was profitable, and teaching you in public from house to house,

21 testifying both to Jews and to Greeks of repentance toward God and of faith in the our Lord Jesus Christ. 22 And now, behold, I am going to Jerusalem, constrained by the Spirit, not knowing what will happen to me there, 23 except that the Holy Spirit testifies to me in every city that imprisonment and afflictions await me.

24 But I do not account my life of any value nor as precious to myself, if only I may finish my course and the ministry that I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the gospel of the grace of God. 25 And now, behold, I know that none of you among whom I have gone about reclaiming the kingdom will see my face again.

26 Therefore I testify to you this day that I am innocent of the blood of all, 27 for I did not shrink from declaring to you the whole counsel of God. 28 Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has

made you overseers, to care for the church of God, which he obtained with his own blood. 29 I know that after my departure fierce wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock;

30 and from among your own selves will arise men speaking twisted things, to draw away the disciples after them. 31 Therefore be alert, remembering that for three years I did not cease night or day to admonish every one with tears. 32 And now I commend you to God and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up and to give you the inheritance among all those who are sanctified.

33 I coveted no one's silver or gold or April. 34 You yourselves know that these hands ministered to my necessities and to those who were with me. 35 In all things I have shown you that by working hard in this way we must help the weak and remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he himself said, 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.'"

It's such a beautiful moment, isn't it, as Paul sits with these leaders and Paul encourages these leaders. And if you work back through, the words that he speaks to them is a warning. Hey, pay careful attention. Verse 28. I mean, that is the crux of his message to them. Watch your life and watch for the flock that God has entrusted to you. He's purchased his people with his own blood. The Holy Spirit has given you this charge, so watch your life and watch the flock, because there are going to be those that come in.

They're not here to protect the flock or here to care for the flock and aren't here to look after the flock. But rather would speak things that draw the people toward them, rather than

toward Christ. I mean, that's the crux. It's a warning. And the reason he gives the warning is because he knows, I'm not going to see you again. Like, this is it for me. This is my last chance, right? These are the most important words I could share with you, because I know there isn't going to be another opportunity.

You and I will never be in the same place at the same time again. You won't see my face. So pay careful attention, right? The warnings there because he knows he's not going to see them. And he knows he's not going to see them because he knows he's headed to Jerusalem. And while again, there's uncertainty in his life, I don't know what awaits me, I know that the Holy Spirit says it's imprisonment and it's affliction.

Whatever that's going to look like, however that's going to come. But around that part, Paul sandwiches his comments at the beginning and at the end. That's the part that should stick out to us. Sure, he has taught them for three years night and day. He has given them the whole counsel of God. He has called them to repent and to place their faith in Jesus. The content of Paul's ministry is summed up in every single one of those little snapshots.

The kingdom of God, faith in Christ. But in the beginning and the end of his comments, he says, you, yourselves know how I lived among you. You yourselves know how I labored and worked among you. These hands. You yourselves know. They had watched his life, and he knows that. He had set an example for them and he knows that. But again, if Paul's not the hero of the story, what do we take away from that?

Well, look at what he points to. You yourselves know how I served the Lord, with all humility, in tears and trials. You yourselves know how I worked so that we might have the ability to give to the weak and to follow in the footsteps of Christ who said it's more blessed to give than to receive.

Everything that Paul taught about Christ Jesus being the source of life is also everything that Paul lived. And again, it may not strike us as deeply as it should unless we take the long view of Paul's life. Do you remember when we were introduced to Paul? Paul used people to serve his position. Paul used the people around him, cared little if anything for their life. Because he desired to climb the ranks of his chosen path.

And yet, here, at the end of his life, Paul uses his position to serve people. It just doesn't get anymore dynamic, does it? Paul took hold of a cause. And like any of us who take hold of a cause, we're going to then have to define the people that are with us and the people that are against us and we're going to take up arms against those that are on the outside. Because they're a threat and a danger, and we're going to look for whatever power and authority we can find in order to take down those that are not part of our cause.

That's Paul's life apart from Christ. But then here, we see him taking hold of Christ. Literally surrounded as he travels to Jerusalem by men from all different walks of life, from all different parts of the world he travels. I don't know if you caught that when we were reading all the names how diverse his group is.

But see, when he let go of his cause and he took hold of Christ, now all of a sudden all he cares about is the people

he interacts with would experience the life of Christ that he has experienced. And so he pours out his life for them rather than taking life from them. Again, it just doesn't get anymore dynamically different. This is life-changing transformation. And Paul is not the hero of the story.

What's different from when we meet him to what we see here, as his traveling ministry comes to a close, the only difference is Jesus Christ. The only difference. And so I'll close where I began. If you leave here today and you think that Paul's the hero, I have monumentally failed you this morning. But if you can see in the work of Jesus Christ in the life of Paul, how he changes him, and that could give you and I hope of how Jesus is changing us, then I think you're tracking with me.

So let's pray together and let's ask the Lord Jesus to either begin or continue this work of transformation in our hearts and lives.

Father, you really are good and so good to us. And what you do by taking us as your enemies with hearts that are hard, with desires that are selfish, even the good things that we do, looking to use you for a better marriage or better job or better family or a better us instead of seeing that you call us to repent and to place our faith in Jesus. And through Jesus, you reconcile us to yourself.

Father, we're in relationship with you. We're in a family. We're sons and daughters and you give us your Spirit and that Spirit begins to transform us and change us. From those who live anxious to those that hold fast to you as the unshakable one. From those who really would hate and want to take life to those who love and serve and want to

give life. Father, I just would ask that we, as a people at Hillside, could be known in a similar way as Paul.

As those that humbly serve. Those that walk even with tears through the uncertainties and tragedies of life with those around us. That we could be known as people who hold fast to Jesus and invite others to jump in and just take that next step with him. We pray this, father, in Jesus' name, amen.

[Ending song]