



Acts and The Early Church (Week 8/8) Proclaimed Good News

Small Group Discussion Questions

Connect *Is there any area of your life in which you think you need to grow as a living sacrifice?*

Warm-Up

1. What are some of your favourite topics (not Gospel-related!) that you love to tell people about? Why do you love to tell people and what makes it easy to share?
2. Who have you known who has been a great example of proclaiming the Gospel with their life: in Word and/or example?

Read Acts 20:17-21

3. Where is Paul and where is he going next?
4. What does Paul remind the Ephesians about his life and ministry among them? Why do you think he emphasises the way that he lived with *humility, tears, and trials*?
5. What does it mean to be humble? Is it possible to be humble and profess that you are humble?
6. How could our lives be marked more by *humility and sacrifice* rather than *pride and comfort*?
7. What has Paul not hesitated to do? What has been at the heart of his message?
8. Why does Paul stress repentance and faith in Jesus? What does he mean by both of these terms?
9. Do we share this same message? Who on your frontlines would you love to receive this good news?

Read Acts 20:22-24

10. Why now is Paul leaving? Who is he compelled by? Does he know what is going to happen?
11. How do you feel when God leads you but you don't know all of the details? What helps you to obey?
12. What did Paul *know* would happen? What was his *only* aim? Do you share this aim, too?

Read Acts 20:25-38

13. What does Paul mean by his declaration of innocence? Why do you think he said this?
14. What does Paul instruct the people to do in his absence? *How do we help one another to tend the flock?*
15. In Paul's absence, how will the people be under threat? How should we also be on guard against distortions of the Gospel message?
16. What words of Jesus does Paul quote? *How have you known this to be true? How could you grow in this?*
17. In what way have you experienced the rich fellowship that Paul expresses here? How do you think we can all be part of nurturing the community of believers with love?

Apply *Pray for one opportunity to share the Good News—or invite someone to Alpha—this week.*

Pray *Gracious Father, we thank you for the faithful proclamation of the Gospel—through Word and example—throughout the centuries. Please help us to testify to the beauty and reality of God's grace through every aspect of our lives. In Jesus' Name, Amen.*

GOING DEEPER

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Small Group Discussion Questions

On Your Frontline this Week

Who needs to hear the good news in your everyday context? How will you witness to them this week?

For Families

- *Download:* some of the family resources to use at home: stbartskids.org

Listen, Watch, and Read

- *Listen (sermon):* “The Gospel Ministry” by Tim Keller:
<https://gospelinlife.com/sermon/the-gospel-ministry/>
- *Listen (sermon):* “Heartbeat of a Pastor” by John Stott:
https://www.allsouls.org/Media/AllMedia.aspx?show_media=50322
- *Listen (sermon):* “Paul to the Ephesian Elders” by Al Gibbs:
<https://stebbes.org/sermons/paul-to-the-ephesian-elders/#sermons>
- *Listen (sermon):* “Ministry that Lasts” by William Taylor:
<https://www.st-helens.org.uk/resources/talk/51809/>

Series Resources

- *Read (book):* “Strange Religion” by Nijay Gupta. 📖
- *Read (commentary):* “The Challenge of Acts” by Tom Wright. 📖
- *Read (book):* “Why the Gospel” by Matthew Bates.
- *Read (advanced commentary):* “Acts: Witnesses to Him” by Bruce Milne.

📖 [Available to borrow in the Church library](#)

FAMOUS LAST WORDS

John Sedgwick was an American Civil War Officer,

The last words he was reported to have spoken were:

"Nonsense, they couldn't hit an elephant at this distance."

On his deathbed, Oscar Wilde, the great English playwright, said:

"Either that wallpaper has to go, or I do"

And you wonder who wrote this epitaph to a British soldier of the 19th Century:

*Sacred To The Memory Of
Captain Maurice James Butler;
Royal Irish Rifles.
Accidentally Shot Dead By His
Batman On The Fourth Day Of
April, 1882
'Well Done, Thou Good And
Faithful Servant'*

Famous Last Words – there's some great collections of them on the internet!

And in some ways, **the passage we come to in Acts today is Paul's 'famous last words'.**

Not in his life – he had a number of years travel and imprisonment before him yet – but certainly, ***his last words to the leaders of the church in Ephesus*** in person,

Although he would write his letter to them later.

And, because they are Paul's last words – **they're important for us,**

Because in them, **he's passing on his task to others** – to these Ephesian elders, and through them to the Ephesian church, ***and to us!***

So we need to listen to them – because ***Paul is summarising*** what matters for us as a Church,

What we should be doing,

And what we should care about.

So let's take a moment, and ask the Lord to help us take them in:

PRAY

So what do we learn from Paul's words here?

I want to pick up on three things:

Firstly, our lives are to be characterised by sacrificial, humble service,

Secondly, our purpose is the proclamation of salvation in Jesus – and all that God's word says about him, and

Finally, we are to be committed to God's people, and seeing them brought faithful to Christ in heaven.

SACRIFICIAL, HUMBLE SERVICE

Firstly then, our lives are to be characterised by sacrificial, humble service.

Throughout this early part of his address Paul keeps on saying, "*You know*".

"You know how I lived..." v.18

"You know that I haven't hesitated..." v. 20

He wants them to remember what his life was characterised by during the 2-3 years he spent with them.

And he says, **it was characterised by humble, sacrificial service.**

Paul's words can sound a little self-serving to our Australian ears – like he's blowing his own trumpet!

But that's not Paul's aim – he wants them to remember what he was like, so they can imitate him.

He wants their lives to be as focussed on serving the Lord, as his was.

Look at v.18:

"“You know how I lived the whole time I was with you, from the first day I came into the province of Asia. ¹⁹ I served the Lord with great humility and with tears and in the midst of severe testing by the plots of my Jewish opponents.”"

Paul's life was characterised by humble service – not just of the Ephesian Christians – but of the Lord.

So deep was that service, ***it was often characterised by tears:***

Tears, because of his longing for people to know Jesus,

Tears, because of the opposition from his own people – the Jews.

On my desk at work I always make sure I have a box of tissues,

Because, whenever missionaries come back on home assignment, and speak about their experiences – I know there will often be tears.

Joy yes, over what the Lord has done in those years of ministry, but also tears – because the ministry is often hard, and their service costly.

True humility – biblical humility – isn't just about not being proud – but *laying down our own rights in order to serve the Lord* and serve others.

You see that again, a little later, in v. 22 he says:

*“²² And now, compelled by the Spirit, I am going to Jerusalem, not knowing what will happen to me there. ²³ I only know that in every city the Holy Spirit warns me that prison and hardships are facing me. ²⁴ However, **I consider my life worth nothing to me; my only aim is to finish the race and complete the task the Lord Jesus has given me—the task of testifying to the good news of God's grace.**”*

That's humility – that's Christian service.

And yes, Paul is talking to the leaders here, but ***it is to be an attitude that should characterise us all.***

Take a moment and ask yourself,

“When I come to the end of my life, what do I want to look back on?”

- A happy family, gathered around you
- A successful career
- Some wonderful memories of homes we've lived in, or of holidays or hobbies we've enjoyed...

Or could we say with Paul, *“I want to finish the race, and complete the task and the life the Lord has given me...”*

You know – I think as Christians we are much better at singing about that sort of commitment than living it.

Paul wants us to learn from his example.

Not to become an apostle or a travelling missionary – though if you think that might be you, please come and talk to me later!

But as you look at what this week has in store for you – with all its mundaneness,

How are you going to live it to serve and give glory to Jesus?

That would be a good question for us to talk about over coffee at the end of our service – I suspect it would really pep up our normal after church conversations!

When Jesus wrote to this same church 40 years later through the Apostle John in Revelation, he said to them:

“I know your deeds, your hard work and perseverance... Yet I hold this against you: you have forsaken the love you had at first. Consider how far you have fallen. Repent and do the things you did at first...”

I suspect the Ephesians, like us, had become better at singing about living for Jesus, than doing it.

Let's remember our first love!

And seek to have lives that are characterised by humble, sacrificial service.

THE PROCLAMATION OF SALVATION IN JESUS

But what is that service to be focussed on?

Well, Paul says, ***it's to be focussed on the proclamation of salvation in Jesus.***

Did you hear that all the way through Paul's address?

v. 20 *“You know that I have not hesitated to preach anything that would be helpful to you...”*

v. 21 *“I have declared to both Jews and Greeks that they must turn to God in repentance and have faith in our Lord Jesus.”*

v. 24 *“I consider my life worth nothing to me; my only aim is to finish the race and complete the task the Lord Jesus has given me—the task of testifying to the good news of God's grace.”*

v. 27 *“For I have not hesitated to proclaim to you the whole will of God.”*

Paul was very clear about his task:

It was to testify to the grace of God in the Lord Jesus, and to call people stop living for themselves, and to cling by faith to him.

Testifying to both the Jews and Greeks of Ephesus,

And teaching ‘the whole will of God’ to the believers – in public, and from house to house.

And, again, Yes, Paul was an apostle and missionary,

And he was speaking to the Ephesian leaders and teachers.

But the message doesn’t change – and if Jesus is to be glorified in Toowoomba

– his good news must be spoken,

– and people must be challenged to respond.

That task has been passed on to us.

We won’t all be evangelists and teachers – *but every single one of us should long that our neighbours and friends would know and find life in Jesus.*

Jesus gave his life for us, and for them – Paul is only imitating his Lord in giving his life for this message.

And who are we to live for anything less?

Friends, **there are many things that can possess our focus as Christians:**

The quality of our worship,

Thinking through how we respond to the ethical questions of our time,

Ensuring our leaders are well trained and resourced,

Caring for those who are in need among us.

And they are all important things – indeed Paul speaks of our ‘care for the weak’ at the end of his address.

But if we lose sight of the gospel – if we forget that the very heart of our purpose is the proclamation of Jesus,

then all those other things become meaningless.

The CMS tagline is “A world that knows Jesus”

It sums up what we are about – and why we send our missionaries.

And as a staff team, we have nice blue t-shirts with that tag-line emblazoned across the back!

I have not problems wearing that T-shirt in church, or at our Summer School conference,
But when I'm out in public it always makes me feel uncomfortable!
What if people think I'm some crazy fanatic – weird, dangerous, compelling -
perhaps!!

But that's what we long for – isn't it?

That like us, people would find that Jesus gives us life and hope and salvation,
And that Jesus be glorified – by people turning to him in repentance and faith.

Our service of Jesus is to be focussed on the proclamation of salvation in Him.

Are you convinced of that?

And if you are, how is it affecting how you pray, how you live your life among your
friends and neighbours and workmates...

COMMITTED TO GOD'S PEOPLE

Finally, we are to be committed to God's people, and seeing them brought faithful to Christ in heaven.

This is the focus of Paul's urging to the Ephesian leaders from verse 28:

*"²⁸ **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.²⁹ I know that after I leave, savage wolves will come in among you and will not spare the flock. ³⁰ Even from your own number men will arise and distort the truth in order to draw away disciples after them. ³¹ **So be on your guard!** Remember that for three years I never stopped warning each of you night and day with tears."*

There's the tears again – his concern for the church.

Paul is very aware of the spiritual battle that rages against God's people day by day.

And he wants us to share that awareness – so he says, **"Keep Watch"** – Be aware!

And the place to start watching – is ourselves.

To be aware of how we are going in our walk with the Lord.

When Jesus spoke his 'final words' to his disciples in the upper room on the night before his arrest – he says in John 15:

“⁴ Remain in me, as I also remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me.”

One of the most important things you can pray for Adam and team here,

- And for each of your missionary partners –

Is that they remain strong in their relationship with the Lord.

It is so easy to let all the pressures of ministry pull them away from that – your prayers are a vital part of their perseverance.

And that’s true for every single one of us.

So the watching starts with ourselves – ***but it goes on to the whole flock of God’s people.***

As he turns his attention to them, Paul says, ***“Be shepherds of God’s flock.”***

Paul calls them to imitate the Lord – the Great Shepherd.

Why are they to be so diligent and watchful?

Why should each one of us have a deep concern for each of our brothers and sisters?

Well, firstly, because we, and they, are so valuable to him – did you hear it?

“Be shepherds of the church of God, which he bought with his own blood.”

So valuable are we, each of us here – and his whole church worldwide – that Jesus gave his life for us.

And the question is of course, *“Should they not be just as valuable to us?”*

You know, the next time you get frustrated, or angry with a brother or sister here at church – and want to just walk away – stop for a moment and remember who they are – ***one for whom Christ died*** – and let that reorientate how we respond to them.

That’s the positive reason to care for God’s flock.

But there’s another as well – ***the enormous danger of false teachers*** – from both outside and within the church.

²⁹ I know that after I leave, savage wolves will come in among you and will not spare the flock.

That dangers is something many of our missionaries are all too aware of,

They work in areas of the world where the church is growing rapidly – but that growth is accompanied by an influx of false teaching

– most especially prosperity teachers – feeding on people’s need, to – all too often – line their own pockets.

And our missionaries serving in Europe – serve in a place where Jesus was once well known – Europe is filled with churches,

But sadly, all too many of them are now empty – because Jesus has been forgotten – because their leaders failed to shepherd them.

So how do you shepherd God’s church – so precious to him, but so beset by danger?

Well, by teaching the whole counsel of God,

And, as Paul says in v.31, *not stopping warning us, night and day with tears.*

That’s why God’s word – read and explained – is so central to our meeting together – whether here on Sunday, or in your small groups throughout the week,

Because that’s where we hear and know Jesus – and how we are to live for him.

Friends, why should you make it a priority to be here Sunday by Sunday,

And to meet in your small groups week by week?

Well, surely – because you here, together and each one – are so precious to the Lord – bought with his own blood,

And because here – as you hear God’s word together – he feeds and protects you as his precious flock.

CONCLUSION

It’s been a whirlwind tour through the book of Acts hasn’t it?

Seeing God’s weird, dangerous, compelling – and immensely precious people in the early church,

And I hope, seeing yourselves reflected in them.

And although this tour has only touched the surface of Acts, what a great place to finish:

And to remember – and never forget –

How our lives are to be characterised by sacrificial, humble service,

our purpose is the proclamation of salvation in Jesus – and all that God’s word says
about him,

and, Finally, how we are to be committed to God’s people, and seeing them brought
faithful to Christ in heaven.