

Acts 20:17–19

An Exemplarily Consistent Ministry

Saturday, April 8, 2023 • Read Acts 20:17–19

Questions from the Scripture text: For whom did Paul call in v17? About what time period does he remind them (v18)? To what, during that time period, does he especially call their attention? In what manner had he served the Lord (v19)? With many of what two things? How had these things happened?

What is the first part of a faithful ministry? Acts 20:17–19 looks forward to the morning sermon on the coming Lord's Day. In these three verses of Holy Scripture, the Holy Spirit teaches us that **a faithful ministry is not an impressive man, but a servant of an impressive God.**

This final audience of Paul with the Ephesian elders is so rich that we will have to consider it in several chunks. He makes it plain at the outset that he is presenting himself as an example to them (v18). What are some of the exemplary features that he highlights?

Consistency across time. "from the first day that I came to Asia." We mustn't think that we can be worldly with others until they warm up to us, and that we will then be able to switch to concern for their souls. This doesn't work in churches. It doesn't work in relationships. Especially in family relationships and close friendships. The lack of consistency will gut us of the courage to speak plainly and earnestly. And even if we were finally to speak forthrightly, our having begun in another manner will hollow out its effectiveness upon others.

Consistency of doctrine and character. "I always lived among you." He spoke about eternal, spiritual, weighty things. Those who do so must live as if those are the things that carry the most weight in their lives, not just upon their lips.

"Serving the Lord." Even the Lord Himself was among us as One Who serves. Should those by Whom He now leads the church on earth lord it over them? God forbid. cf. Luk 22:25–27.

"All humility." Not just that we are brought low. The word here emphasizes attitude. Humble-mindedness. How can one speak highly of God while quite obviously thinking highly of himself? The two are incompatible, and yet many who are full of themselves actually think they are promoting God because of their lip-service to doctrine.

Willingness to suffer. "many tears and trials." What did you expect? Every faithful elder who has shepherded for any significant amount of time has had many occasions to ask himself this question. Suffering is part of the ministry. It was part of Christ's ministry. It is part of being a Christian. And it is definitely a big part of the Christian ministry. Shall the flocks elders hide this reality from the flock? Will they, for the sake of pride and appearances of personal strength, conceal from Christ's sheep the picture of Christ's shepherding that He paints in the sufferings of the under-shepherds? God forbid. Let us be willing to suffer for the joy set before us. And thus let us set Christ before others.

Who are to be examples in the church? What sort of consistency should they display? What sort of attitudes? Who have a similar role in the home? What should a faithful Christian expect to experience in this life?

Sample prayer: Lord, thank You for coming not to be served but to serve and to give Your life a ransom for many. Grant that we would humble ourselves in Your sight and be willing to be servants of all, for we ask it through Christ, AMEN!

Suggested songs: ARP131 "My Heart Is Not Exalted, Lord" or TPH341 "Alas! and Did My Savior Bleed"

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(The following is a machine-generated transcription. PLEASE BE AWARE of—and patient with—transcribing errors. If there is something confusing or obviously erroneous, you are invited to listen to the audio recording via hopewellarp.org)

Acts chapter 20 verses 17 through 19. These are god's words. From my latest, he sent to Ephesus. And called for the elders of the church. And when they had come to him, he said to them. You know, from the first day that i came to asia. In what manner?

I always lived among you. Serving the lord. With all humility, and many tears trials. Which happened to me by the plotting. Of the juice.

So far, the reading of god's. Inspired and inherent word. As we are introduced to. The final interview with the Ephesian, elders from verses 17 to 38 of the passage. We're reminded How important this was to pull. Paul was hurrying to jerusalem, he had determined not to stop at Ephesus.

Over 16. That he would not have to go into asia and spend time there. And the implication being that if he had gone in there, he would have started visiting all of the churches to encourage them. As we have seen him do whenever he passes. Through a region where there are churches.

That had been planted. And even though he's not going into Ephesus, he calls For the elders of emphasis. Because it is they who as we will read

Later in the account. It is they to whom There's then it is day to whom Uh, The lord has entrusted the shepherding of flock there. In which the holy spirit has made them overseers. In the church that has been bought. With the blood of god, and Many such great and amazing things.

We will be hearing and thinking about Concerning christ's ministry in the church by his spirit. Through elders. And so he calls for these elders and he is giving them kind of his Um, Final charge is last. Will and testament for their ministry in the church. And, What he begins us with here?

And these three verses and we're going to have to go very slowly. I thought it was going to be. Four or five sermons. But when i started to work on versus 20 to 21, Uh, for the next lord's day, i discovered that that needed to be two sermons. So we'll have three sermons just to get to the end of verse 21.

But what he starts with is, Presenting himself as an example unto them. This is. Both because the transition from the apostolic ministry to the elders, Ministry is one in which they are to do as he does, but also Because part of the ministry. Is to be an example to those to whom you minister.

So he is not just an example to them, he is an example of being an example. You see this in hebrews chapter 13, Um, Where he instructs the people to. Follow to submit to their elders, following Uh them because they know. The outcome of their faith. And they have seen the outcome of their faith.

So similarly these ephesian elders have seen the outcome the display and the life. Of paul's faith. This is a hard thing for, Husbands and fathers. Because, one of the things that We are to do as we teach our children. Our wife. Or for an elder. Our congregation. As we should be an example of what it looks like.

When i sinner is not only brought to faith, but Matured. In the faith. In this case, Paul was an example, not only of what a matured sinner looks like, but what a

faithful. Shepherd. Looks like, This is one of the reasons why Um, there must be some sort of mentorship.

In the training for, The ministry.

So he says, you know, From the first day that i came to asia in what matter. I always lived among you. And so there are two things that we're going to see here in verse 18 and verse 19. In verse 18, we're going to see Consistency. Consistency of example across time.

And in the second half of verse 18, We're going to see. Consistency between. Character and doctrine. Then i guess it's a little, it's a third thing. A little bit different. And verse 19. Consistency between the specific doctrine. And the result in the character, so you have the fact of consistency.

Between character and doctrine. The second half of verse 18. Um, and then you have applications of that consistency. In verse 19. First consistency. Across time. Says, you know, From the first day. That i came to asia. And what matter i always. Lived among you. And so we have here, a reminder that The christian life is real because god is real.

And christ is real. And so we must resist the temptation to think. Well, i will kind of slow play my christianity at first. I'll hold it back. I'll keep it under wraps. I'll be a little less fanatical about the lord jesus and a little more worldly. Like they are so that they can get comfortable with me.

And once they are comfortable with me, then i can really turn it on and show them. Um, Tell them and show them. How wonderful jesus is and how completely? Life should be given to him and lived. Before him. And, but we'll we'll go slow at first. This is something that is the mistake that believers make in their relationships.

This is a mistake that churches make Uh, with those who come in among them, You know, wanting to Kind of be attractional and worldly. Whether in the sorts of activities that are considered outreach, And i was recently. Uh, disappointed at a Presbyterian meeting to hear the The church revitalization coach of the entire synod.

Uh, recommending worldly. Uh, sorts of Outreach. Um, This is a mistake that churches can make in their outreach and it gets even worse. Because churches can make this mistake in their worship. And so they will blaspheme god with the lightness of lightness of their worship. And they will hate god with their eye.

The idolatry of even man-made components. To worship. Um, in order to Attract, or To see more friendly or more amicable. Um, To others. To be more like they are. Paul was not like that. Paul said day number one, In asia. I crossed the border. And i was 100%. 24 7.

With all my heart repentance toward god and faith in jesus christ. This was my life. Every bit as much as it was my message, and it was Intense, it was palpable. It was obvious. It was just what i was. And this is really the way christianity must be. That cannot be.

Something that you turn on and turn off. Cannot be something that. Uh, we are a little bit. Um, At a time or Um, Uh, sometimes. Sometimes very intense, the whole of our life. And sometimes, Um, Not really something that is. Uh, palpable or on our minds. Well, we've seen cannot, but Really must not must not be this way.

It can be this way because of our remaining sin. But when we recognize it, we should repent of it and turn from it. Because there is a Consistency that they apostle is teaching us at the spirit is teaching us by the apostle here. Consistency across time. From the first.

Right out of the gate. This was what you saw. This was the example that you saw in my life not necessarily even because he was trying to be an example. So much as this is what he is he was? Not just the first day, but This is how he always lived among them.

He didn't. Come to a place where there are some who are close to him that he could let his hair down and Live from his flesh. Live from his pride. Live for himself. Live, as if. He found the world. Um, To be. Pleasurable, apart from god. No. There's a consistency across time.

This, of course. Cannot have been. 100 percent, true. He's still a sinner. And yet, by A quick. Identification of sin. This life of repenting and believing. And every repentance coming with a restoration of joy and hope in the gospel of the one who forgives him, which stirs up. Love the stirs up more obedience.

This is how the christian life is lived and becomes consistent. And this is how he began. And this is how. He aimed at the beginning and and always living among them. And it was. And it was consistent enough. That it was observable. This, of course. That means that they could also see and hear his repentance.

Not that he was mature enough to be so consistent. That they'd be like Um, One day, we can be as great as paul. What part of his consistency? Of course would be repentance. And faith that produced more obedience. But there was seven, so there was more repentance. Which was met with more faith, which produced More obedience, you get.

The idea. So, there's a consistency across time and then There is. Um, The necessity of a consistency between life and doctrine. It's very interesting. He's going to get to preaching and teaching which we'll consider when we get to verse 20. But he doesn't first say, you know, from the first day that i came to asia.

What i always talk preached and taught what i always proclaim to you and talk to you. Yes, he he preached and talked. The first thing that he highlights is. How he lived? His life was consistent. With his preaching and this must be the way that it is. It is.

It guts us of the conviction and the power. Of the word of god in our lives. Whether we're talking about the word of the gospel, and its comfort, over the word of the law, and its instruction, or sometimes the word of the law, and it's correction and rebuke. And so forth, all those things that we're going to be thinking about, we think about the, sufficiency of scripture, which is going to happen a couple of times in the course of this passage.

Um, No, big deal, whatever. The dog is doing is fine. I have just lost my train of thought, though. Thank you.

It, it gets the Conviction and effectiveness, and power of the word of god. As we hear it preach, as we hear it, taught. Whether we're talking about the word of god in the comfort and good news of the gospel, and the praise of the glory of god, and how pleasant he is, and how enjoyable he is.

Or whether we're talking about the word in its instruction, a correction, or reproof or training. All of those things that we are going to see when we When we

talk about the sufficiency of scripture, which we will hear a couple of times by the time we get to the end of this chapter, it got it robs.

The the preaching and teaching of its effectiveness in our lives. If we can immediately go and live, like none of those things are true. We hear the the glory and pleasantness of god. In all his good gifts. And then we run right over to the fellowship hall and Um, We remember the goodness of the food.

But we're not tasting him and having fellowship with him. And how good that gift is. And we can see that because we're not still savoring himself from his word, which is how he gives us his word more directly. He's giving us a day in which he cuts out other distractions, so that we can do that.

When we, when we hear. Waitily. And then live lightly. And that's not just. Uh, in sobering things. Like, rebuke and training, but even in blessedness, We can hear the weighty joy of knowing god. And, Immediately. Fill ourselves up on. Lightness and light. Pleasures. If we can even call them that fun.

There's Uh, good word for a horrible thing. Fun. You have god. And true pleasure. That's that. You have fun. And lightness. Um, but there must be a, there must be a consistency. Between that which is breached and that, which is taught because it sorry preached and taught and that which has lived because if there isn't Then whatever we say.

Or here and the preaching and teaching. The way we live is sort of saying it's not actually true. It's like listening to. A love song ballad. It's pretty to think about pretty to hear about. But it's not actually informing and shaping our life. It's like a novel. Or a film.

There's a mental exercise. That we do for. An hour or 40 minutes or 20 minutes. Depending on. How? Word less, the worship has become. But it's not life. Now we we need to have that consistency. Between. The preaching and teaching on the one hand, and the living, and the other hand, And the first people who need to have that consistency are the elders.

The next steps. This was what paul was an example. Uh, to them of For the first day i came to asia and what manner i always Lived among you. And then there is a specific consistency. Between the specific doctrine. And the application in his life. So, What did he?

What did he preach? And teach to them. He preached and taught them god, the lord Jesus christ couple weeks time, lord willing will be in verse 21 will consider. That in verse 21. But here, he just says serving the lord With all humility. So, one of the things that he's preaching and teaching is the lordship of Jesus, That Jesus is your way that Jesus is Jehovah.

Jesus is the creator. And he is the creator who has made us to know him especially by coming and redeeming us. That he who is lord of all. Did not lord it over those to whom he came like the kings of the gentiles do, but he came as a servant.

He came to seek and to save what was lost and to give himself a ransom for many. And so here is the lord whom he is. Proclaiming the the glory of Jesus. And here is the lord, even who has not only glorious in himself, but himself has been among us as one, who serves and so, in two great ways.

Paul proclaims, the lordship. Uh, the the necessity of being a servant. First and foremost, a servant of Jesus christ. A servant of the lord, Paul did not come. Telling. How great he is, he came telling how great Jesus is. But there is the possibility of having this inconsistency in our christian lives.

When we speak to others. Directly about spiritual things. We talk about how great and glorious god is But then we speak another circumstances or the way we act in other circumstances. And we're communicating with the life. How great? And glorious? I think i am.

He says, no. This general consistency between doctrine and life had a specific consistency. Between the glory of the lord. And the humility of his servant. Whoever was to be great in the church. Must be servant of all. The most lowly. Humble. Quick to serve everyone else. People in the church also be the elders.

Or to be the minister. They do not say well, everybody needs to learn about authority so i am everyone's boss and i'm not going to go help people. Because they need to learn their servant position. Now, that's in the military. People have their ranks, the ranks, have their duties.

Well, here is the duty that applies to the rank of elder in the church. Servant. Serving to the lord. And servatable. Not only a servant of the lord, but With all humility. The lord is glorious. And knowing his glory is my glory. So i humble myself. Under his mighty hand.

A cast myself upon him, i fulfill My office. But i fulfill it as a servant. Whatever. That office is. There is a sense in which We're all deacons. Not the office of deacon. But in the diaconal, the lowliness of mind and quickness to serve others ahead of ourselves. That should mark every christian.

Well. Not only counting the lord worthy of service, but also counting the lord worthy of suffering. Here not just the lord's greatness and glory, but the lord's pleasantness. The lord's joyousness, the the worthiness of the lord. Uh, for any amount of suffering, just as Jesus for the joy set before him.

Endured the cross. Jesus for the joy set before him. For the joy of showing the glory of his father, the joy of fulfilling. The love that the father, and the son, and the spirit of had for the elect from From all eternity. The love that, the father. Set upon the elect in the sun.

Jesus for the joy of being the display of his father's glory in the resurrection, like we heard about In roman's six in the midweek meeting Jesus for the joy. Of leading his redeemed brethren. Whom he redeemed and purchased by his blood in the worship. As he quotes from in hebrews chapter 2 from psalm 22.

And the first two thirds of psalm 22 all about. The literally, this is where we get the word excruciating. As of the cross suffering. All of the excruciating suffering of the cross, and the first two thirds of Psalm 22, but culminating in what The one who has. Who has been brought up out of that?

The resurrected lord, Jesus declaring, his father's name to his brethren and singing, god's praise and the midst of their assembly. And so, The glory of god, the fact that Jesus is lord that father, son and holy spirit. Uh, is Is the lord got Uh, this was This was worth.

All of christ's suffering and this was worth. Paul's suffering. You see, it's not just christ who has suffered. He says serving the lord with all humility. With many tiers. And trials. Which happened to me. By the plotting of the juice. Now, there are many tears for many reasons, not just because of the trials.

And the glory of god and the good of his church, which he God has committed himself for which god has given himself. Sometimes, that produces tears. Over a church that does not recognize god to be what he is. Does not respond to him that way. But there are also tears and trials that come From those who are

opposed to the gospel.

And yet. The lord himself is such a joy already, and what the lord himself is accomplishing, is such a joy in the future, and we may be certain about it now. That it's worth suffering. No, you didn't laugh his way through the suffering, did he? It was painful at the time.

He says here. Not just trials, but tears and trials. Which happened to me. By the plotting of the juice.

Suffering is part of. Christianity and suffering is especially part. Of ministry. And so, The elders of the flock should be examples to the people. Of suffering. Up to yours. Of trials. Of not just giving up. Uh, preferences themselves and the worldly pleasures. But giving up the idle of Being comfortable.

And having. Um, everyone like them. Being well willing to be thought, illove and treated ill. By others. Because the lord jesus is worth it. So, Now, not I always miserable. But still that consistency. Between the lordship of christ. And, Willingness of the shepherd, both the serve. And to suffer.

So, i wonder

Do you believe that jesus is lord? And is he worthy of you are being a servant, not just to him. But of all humility. And you'll find out how you're doing on that the next time. You are asked to do a chore or Help another with a chore that Um, that you don't want to or you feel like you shouldn't have to All humility means.

Not speaking down to one another. But giving place and preference. The honor respects to one another. And what's coming out there at those times? Is. Whether the lord is growing us in, maturing us in. Not just knowing that he is lord. But knowing with the life and reflecting in the life, That he is lord.

And are you willing to suffer or Are you idolizing comfort?

Many things that we are kept from doing. Because they are either difficult or painful. Or there is some kind of relational cost. That if the lord jesus is our joy. We would do them. So these are good things for us. To think about and you can pray. For those in the lord has given you, you don't get to choose.

Your father and he isn't the example, he should be And you can pray for your elders. That we would be examples. Of these things to the flock. Let's pray.

My father, we thank you that the chief shepherd has been for us the Chief example. That. He was. Perfectly righteous in every phase of his life, even as he was growing in wisdom and stature and favor And we thank you for jesus's perfection in our behalf. And it's perfect example.

We thank you lord for The wisdom of using. Sinners. Whom you redeem and whomatore. As shepherds in the congregation, the elders. A shepherds in the home husbands and fathers. And we pray. Lord that The ones that you have given us would be examples. Of what mature faith looks like.

And that. Um, Consistency. Across time would be improved. In their example, in their life. And consistency between doctrine and practice. And especially this consistency between the lordship of jesus. And a willingness to Be a lowly servant. And the willingness to suffer. Lord, help me.

Particularly is the weight of my Uh, callings all. Come now upon me. And this and the fourth coming passages. You know, god how Despite my knowledge of you, I'm so tempted to Slouch in and find relief and comfort and refreshment in other things. The bless your name for the lord's day.

In which you actively. Uh, Or restrain that But i pray oh lord, that the effect of it would be Not only much on that day but much in the rest of the week. That you would be the one to whom. I resort the way that i wind down. Where my soul finds refreshment and enjoyment.

And that even, Granting me repentance and growth that this late stage in life. That you would make it. An example. For my family. And grant also that i and the other elders, Would be such examples to the church. Truly, you are glorious and Part of that glory is not just that you are worthy of these things.

But that you by your grace, by your spirit or the one who works these things, And so we look to you to do so. With the hope that you have given us in jesus christ. And therefore, in his name, we ask him. Amen.