

Tusculum Hills Baptist Church
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THE CHURCH'S MISSION

Acts 20:20-38

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I have four points to my message today:

- The church mission should be clear to all.
- We should be faithful to the church's mission.
- The church's mission should carry on without us.
- The church should leave an indelible mark on the world.

INTRODUCTION: Paul left Ephesus where there was a riot, because teaching about Jesus and salvation threatened the local businesses of making idols out of precious metals. He traveled to several places, and a young man fell asleep as Paul preached. He fell from a third-story window and died, but a miracle happened through Paul, and the man was brought back to life.

I've read this passage numerous times, and I am not sure of the significance of its placement in scripture:

- Perhaps it's a reminder not to fall asleep in church.
- Perhaps it's there to tell people not to sit in high windows.
- Perhaps it's there to let us preachers know, if Paul's preaching can put someone to sleep, mine will too.

Anyway, the people ate together and visited all night until the sun came up, and Paul sailed to Miletus. When he arrived, he asked the elders from the church at Ephesus to come visit him. Paul reminded them how hard he had served them and how he declared salvation to all of them. It was a farewell speech that he wanted the elders to pass along to the people at Ephesus.

THE CHURCH MISSION SHOULD BE CLEAR TO ALL

SCRIPTURE: Acts 20:20-24

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

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.

EXPLANATION: When Paul was converted many years earlier, he had one mission, one goal: to tell others the good news of God’s grace.

Paul had a clear vision of what God wanted him to do. He never wavered one way or the other. Because he was so close to the Lord, he even knew what the future held for him.

APPLICATION: We must seek clarity for what God has called us to do, individually and collectively. As individuals, we must seek to keep a clear vision of our salvation and the result it should have in our lives.

As a collective group of people, we must seek clear vision. As a church, it’s easy to get sidetracked. A few years ago, there was a model called Refocusing which was designed to help churches get back on track. I sat through several presentations of Refocusing and was not convinced it was a good model. Three churches went through Refocusing training and the results were disastrous in all three churches. A friend of mine in another state said the Refocusing model was a disaster in his state. In fact, I never heard of one success story coming out of Refocusing. You know, it’s ironic that a training called Refocusing threw churches further off track.

It is so easy for a church to be distracted. There are five functions of the church, as far as I understand it: evangelism, discipleship, fellowship, missions, and ministry. It’s easy to be derailed, and we must keep our focus.

Are you able to articulate the church's mission?

WE SHOULD BE FAITHFUL TO THE CHURCH'S MISSION

SCRIPTURE: Acts 20:25-31

“Now I know that none of you among whom I have gone about preaching the kingdom will ever see me again. ²⁶ Therefore, I declare to you today that I am innocent of the blood of any of you. ²⁷ For I have not hesitated to proclaim to you the whole will of God. 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.

EXPLANATION: Paul never wavered in any way. His life mission brought about so much passion it fueled him from the time he was converted until the very end. He said his life was worth nothing to him. In other words, he loved his mission more than his own life. He was completely consumed with sharing the good news of God's grace.

Paul knew human nature. He knew the nature of sin, and he knew Satan was alive and well. He knew the message of salvation would be perverted and people would mix it with false religions. He knew people would be discouraged.

So, he was faithful to his life mission, and he made sure people knew the basics.

Paul said he proclaimed the “whole will” of God, but he had a pattern to the way he did it. He did not go into a new group of believers, or non-believers as the case may have been, and expound on the deep truths that he knew. He started with the basics and stayed there before moving on into deeper truths.

APPLICATION: I want to use the job of a mechanic as an illustration. Some of you may know that I do a majority of my own mechanic work. I did not grow up doing that – I started in my twenties. Over time, I've learned how to do complicated

repairs. But I didn't start with the complicated repairs. When my kids came along, I taught them the basics and moved on to more complicated things. I didn't overwhelm them from the beginning. What if my kids had come up to a car that I was working on and said, "Dad what are you doing?" And what if my answer were, "All the repairs I do on the car are too complicated for you to ever understand." I could have easily influenced my kids at an early age that they would never understand any of it. This is a very simple illustration – the same could be said about any task.

APPLICATION: Faithfulness to the church's mission requires us to be patient with new believers, to teach them the basics, and to help them grow as believers. Faithfulness to the church's mission means that you'll warn people to be on guard, just like Paul did.

Yesterday, when I was getting a haircut, my barber said, "We are living in a day when even the elect are being deceived." That's rattled around in my head. Faithfulness to the church's mission requires us to speak up.

THE CHURCH'S MISSION SHOULD CARRY ON WITHOUT US

SCRIPTURE: Acts 20:32-35

"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. ³³ I have not coveted anyone's silver or gold or clothing. ³⁴ You yourselves know that these hands of mine have supplied my own needs and the needs of my companions. ³⁵ 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.'"

EXPLANATION: The inheritance that we pass along to the future generation of this church is not just a building – it's the collective efforts of all of us embodied in a new group of people.

Numerous times we learn that Paul was confident his work would carry on without him. He gave us the model right here. By example, he didn't ask for people's silver,

gold, or clothing; he worked hard to take of himself and others; and his leadership by example included benevolence.

Paul knew his life mission would carry on because:

- He put his all into training them.
- He invested his time into so many people and so many places.
- His life mission was lived out with a predictable pattern.

THE CHURCH SHOULD LEAVE AN INDELIBLE MARK ON THE WORLD

SCRIPTURE: Acts 20:36-38

When Paul had finished speaking, he knelt down with all of them and prayed.

³⁷ They all wept as they embraced him and kissed him. ³⁸ What grieved them most was his statement that they would never see his face again. Then they accompanied him to the ship.

EXPLANATION: Paul headed to Jerusalem, never to return to Ephesus. He left a mark on them that they'd never forget. But the legacy he left—the strong, the solid, the well-worked legacy he left behind—was a strong group of believers who could carry on the message of the grace and salvation of our Lord Jesus Christ.

When I was a boy, I noticed how much my childhood pastor preached from Paul's writings. When my dad became a pastor, I noticed how much he preached from Paul's writings. And now, as a pastor, I've noticed how much I preach from Paul's writings. Why? Because he left such an indelible mark on the world.

But if we were to hear Paul respond to that, he would correct me and he would say, "Not I, but Christ..." For Paul, it was not all about him. It was about Christ Jesus, the risen Lord. When Paul said, "Follow me, as I follow Christ," he didn't stop with "Follow me." He had his focus!

Churches close for different reasons. Some of you have come here from churches that closed. Any church closure is a sad occasion. When I pass by an abandoned church, I wonder what happened.

If we concentrate on these four points, we can leave a legacy like Paul did.

- The church mission should be clear to all.
- We should be faithful to the church's mission.
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Sincerely, Paul Gunn
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