

- Today on this Palm Sunday, as we are reminded of Christ's mission, we come to the end of our series in Acts remembering our mission. To receive and reflect him in our lives.
- Through our study in Acts, we have been asking the question What would Ventura county look like if Jesus were king? And what should the church look like since Jesus is King?
- And in many ways our text gives us a summary of what the kingdom coming in our lives looks like and gives us a charge to live it out.

Acts 20:18-32 From Miletus, Paul sent to Ephesus for the elders of the church.¹⁸ When they arrived, he said to them: "You know how I lived the whole time I was with you, from the first day I came into the province of Asia. 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. ²⁰ 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.

²⁵ "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, ^[a] which he bought with his own blood. ^[b] 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.

³² "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.

- Nominated for 10 Oscars, the movie 1917 appears to be filmed in only two continuous shots, capturing the urgency of WWI in just 90 minutes.
- This urgency is displayed in two British soldiers who must cross over into enemy territory and race against time to deliver news that could potentially save 1,600 lives. They had a message to guard. But it wasn't like guarding a secret. They did not guard this news by keeping it **from** people, they guarded it by getting **to** ppl.
- In the Apostle Paul's farewell speech to the leaders of the church in Ephesus, we see him eager to guard the message of the gospel and he does this not by keeping it to himself but bringing it to others. And like the soldiers in WWI, he does so with great urgency for he knows it is a message which saves lives.
- Reality Ventura, we too have been given a message which saves lives and a mission to bring it into the world. And how we do that is of the utmost importance. Our text today reminds us of this.
- On his church planting mission, Paul spent several years in Ephesus, investing in people and raising up leaders. And in many ways, his final words are a commissioning speech. He is not only reminding them of what is important in this kingdom life, he's commissioning them to carry it out!
- And it serves as a beautiful summary of what all Christians have been called to in this kingdom mission. Jesus has given us work to do and the power to do it. And this passage serves as a reminder and a charge to us. So, I would like to give 7 brief but important charges that both summarize what we have learned and send us out into the world with urgency. And I would love for us to hear them as personal charges to each one of us!
- So, just as Paul commissions the Ephesians elders, Christ has commissioned us. In what ways? What are we commissioned to be? There are 7 charges I want us to hear and the first is this: Rvta

1. Be Relational (v 18-19)

- a. What does the kingdom of God coming look like? It looks like a community committed to building real relationships... It

looks like us plunging ourselves into the challenging yet glorious task of loving each other in community (This scene)

- b. When Paul gives his address to the leaders of this church, he does so with a history. He was known by the community.

Acts 20:18-19 When they arrived, he said to them: "You know how I lived the whole time I was with you, from the first day I came into the province of Asia. 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.

- c. As they worked together Paul placed himself in the view of other believers as worked together with them on mission.
- d. And notice how vulnerable he was! "you saw my tears!" You know the work I had done while I was among you!"
- e. Let's be honest, we are very good at controlling what others see. Which makes it easier for hypocrisy to grow in our lives
- f. But committing to the community life of the church provides a great protection against this and fosters authenticity!
- g. And In doing so, we reflect the love of God for us! (john 13!)
- h. I know relationships are messy and complicated. Maybe you have been wounded. But let me simplify things for you: Jesus loves these people, and so I should love these people.
- i. **Now, where does this come from?** How can we grow in this? **The truth.** Truth is the soil from which transparency grows. Church, we are commissioned by Christ to:

2. Be Biblical (v 20)

- a. We have learned in our series that the church wasn't a random community center, they were a learning community, devoted to studying God's word. And Paul's job, and the church's job is to guard the truth and proclaim the truth

Acts 20:20 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.

- a. To be Biblically faithful means both to know and follow what Scripture says... and not cherry-pick what we like or don't!
- b. Verse 27, all you need to know! The doctrines of creation, fall, redemption, restoration. The truth about God's Holiness, man's sinfulness, and what God has graciously done about it for us! We must not hold back!

- c. Paul guarded the truth by giving the truth! (treasure v news)
- d. Do we want to know who God is? We can't just believe anything. You must look at the truth, His Word
- e. Do you want to know who you are? You need truth!
- f. Our aim is to model this on Sundays... actually study the Bible, open up Scripture, look at it, unpack it, apply it!
- g. We do not want to be a community where someone could come for months, then be shocked when we open a Bible!
- h. Everyone needs it! Everyone can receive it! That is the second charge. **Be Biblical.**
- i. But where does this lead? Lots of people might know the Bible, but some might be unchanged by their knowledge!
- j. Notice, Paul is able to refer to the Bible as the word of God's grace... why? Because the Bible is ultimately about Jesus and how he has done for us what we could not do for ourselves. And so, Church the 3rd charge, is this:

3. Be Christ-Centered (v 21)

- a. Jesus is the Word of God in flesh, come to our world to fulfill all the promises of God we see in the Bible, for us, to **live** on our behalf, **die** on our behalf and **rise** on our behalf!
- b. Jesus is the true prophet, the true priest, the true king, the true sacrifice, the true lamb, the true light, the true bread, the true and only way to God! To preach the Word, ultimately is to preach Christ! What was Paul's call to action?

Acts 20:21 I have declared to both Jews and Greeks that they must turn to God in repentance and **have faith in our Lord Jesus.**

- c. To be a Kingdom community, we must always make it clear that it is only *through* Christ that we can follow the Word!
- d. The kingdom will not advance through good advice, but good news! And so, we must point to Jesus as the fulfillment of Scripture, the one true savior and redeemer!
- e. After all, we are not the hero, Christ is the hero of the story!
- f. And as we do this, we get to watch lives change!

- g. May Christ always be both the grounds and the goal of our church! The motive we appeal to for change! Doing this will bring change in ourselves, in the church and for the lost!
- h. And the power to do this is provided by God Himself. Paul knew this, we need to know this. This leads to the 4th charge

4. Be Spirit-filled (v 22-23)

- a. Paul understood the whole of his life as needing to depend on the Holy Spirit! And he demonstrates that here.

Acts 20:22-23 “And now, compelled by the Spirit, I am going to Jerusalem, not knowing what will happen to me there. ²³I only know that in every city the Holy Spirit warns me that prison and hardships are facing me.

- b. We are also told that the Holy Spirit made the leadership to be overseers! The work of the Spirit is seen through Acts...
 - i. Billy reminded us that we’re a body, gifted by the Spirit
 - ii. And Dom reminded us in our first week that for kingdom ***purpose***, we need kingdom ***power***! The Book of Acts began with our absolute need for the Spirit!
- c. RVTA, we must endeavor to walk in the presence and power of the Spirit! ***The alternative is frightening! It’s all on us!***
- d. But it doesn't have to be on us. The Spirit has been poured out! And now dwells in you who believe! We can know close fellowship with him! He dwells in you! He speaks to you!
 - i. Therefore, it is possible to *grieve* Him or *receive* Him!
 - ii. Indeed, there will be stronger or weaker evidence of the Spirit in this church according to our response!

e. But here is what happens when you say YES

- i. You feel what God feels. You Desire what God desires.
You are enabled to Do what God calls you to do*
- f. Church, we must be filled with the Spirit, led by the Spirit!
- g. Like Paul, we must be willing to go where the Spirit leads... even when it is hard... when it costs. 5th, church we are:

5. Be Generous (v 24)

- a. If you know that your true reward is found in relationship to Christ, then you find power to take risks and make sacrifices. And this is what makes you then radically generous.

- b. Notice, for Paul, generosity flows from an awareness that all he has and all he is belongs to his Lord!

Acts 20:24 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... **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.' "

- a. We were made to give generously, and we are moved by to give and generously by God! Not out of guilt, but grace!
- b. All the challenges, the drama, the difficulty the opposition... facing it is all worth it, because Christ is worth it!
- c. This means were **not** investing in Kingdom primarily because of how it benefits **us**, but for how it can benefit **others**.

Luke 14:13-14 But when you give a feast, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, and you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you. For you will be repaid at the resurrection of the just."

- d. See, its precisely because of what WILL happen in the future that you can take generous risks in the present! With Joy!
- e. And we must be careful to cling to these truths because hard times will come, and opposition will arise. Which leads to the 6th charge. Reality Ventura, we are commissioned to be

6. Be Watchful (v 25-31)

- a. A Kingdom community is in danger when it ceases to be watchful. We have learned through this series that we can and will face spiritual opposition against us. And we must be alert. We also learned that we can and will face temptations amongst us, and we must be vigilant. Paul says to leaders:

Acts 20:28-29 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.

- b. Paul knew these dangers and we do well to take these warnings to heart. Wolves - *Be on guard! false teaching!*
- c. We must be watchful over ourselves and each other.
- d. **Yourself:** It is possible to grow dull and not even know it!
- e. **Others:** We also watch out for each other!

Hebrews 10:24-25 And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching.

- f. This might require a shift in how we think about people in church. We are not called to be *spectators* or *critics* of the people around us; they are the blood-bought people of God! And so, we encourage each other! Mindful that we have an enemy who would love to destroy the kingdom work!
- g. In fact, when we are given warnings about the work of the devil, it's not just a warning to individuals but a community.

1 Peter 5:8 "Be alert and of sober mind. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour."

- h. Now, what is the key to being watchful? Peter tells us in the very sentences that come before his charge to be watchful.

1 Peter 5:6 "Humble yourselves, therefore, under God's mighty hand, that he may lift you up in due time"

- i. Indeed church, leaning into his power is the key to fulfilling all of these charges. And that is why, lastly: We must

7. Be Prayerful (v 32)

- a. Paul concludes in verse 32 by committing them to God, and down in v 36, they all kneel down and pray together.
- b. God's purposes will not be accomplished by man's power. We need His. We access this through prayer.
- c. The more prayer, the more release of the power of the gospel And through prayer, God gets all the glory and credit.
- d. What does the kingdom coming look like? God's people crying out in prayer! Asking for him to do the impossible!
- e. I don't know about you, but I want to be a part of something that can only be explained by the power of God
- f. I charge us to never underestimate the power of prayer.
- g. Church, this is God. He is both rich and generous. He is willing to give way more than we ask for. *What will you ask for?*
- h. Now, how can we be assured that he will hear us in our cry for help? How can we be assured that we can fulfill all this?
 - i. Maybe you feel inadequate or overwhelmed?

- ii. Maybe you are not a Christian, and you are wondering how you can even start?
 - i. Well, the good news is that answer is the same for us all and it is summarized in one little word that Paul uses over and over in this passage and includes in his final prayer: **grace**.
 - i. How can you be saved? Grace. How can you be renewed? Grace. How can you be strengthened? Grace. How can you find the power to commit? Grace.
 - j. God does not provide on the basis of what we deserve. It's based on Christ. **And do you see that Paul has actually reflected Christ in this whole passage!** Though Paul was leaving the familiar in tears, heading into Jerusalem and the opposition that awaited him, his life on mission was but a small reflection of Christ's ultimate mission.
 - k. Jesus went in tears to Jerusalem... not just to risk but loose his life, not merely to be bound but burdened with our sin on the cross... and when he did, he was not surrounded by friends and leaders but darkness. He was cast out that you might be brought in... forever, bound that you might be free!
 - l. What does the kingdom coming in our lives look like? It looks like a people who are relational, biblical, Christ-centered, Spirit-filled, generous, watchful and prayerful.
 - m. And how does this happen in our lives? Paul is crystal clear.
 - n. It is all through the love and grace of God.
- Acts 20:32** "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."
- o. It is grace that will propel you into mission. It is grace that gives you the urgency. It is grace that gives you the power.
 - p. Jesus asks you, "will *you* love Ventura County like *I* love Ventura county?" You will find the power to do so when you see how I have loved you!"
 - q. Oh, to think that Jesus has pursued us to this great length! And continues to pursue us! This is grace. Church, we commit you to this grace, the very grace of God.