

# The Christian Arsenal

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## ACTS 20:1-38

We continue in our study of the **Book of Acts** today. I hope you've enjoyed our study so far. We're getting close to being finished. We only have six more weeks after this week's lesson. I hope we all feel like we know the Apostle Paul better from having studied this book!

Starting today in our study of this book, we see a shift in Paul's ministry. Up to this point, Paul has been engaged primarily in pioneer work. He has been going into **new** areas and he has been planting **new** churches, but in this chapter, Paul is visiting churches he has **already** planted. He is giving them teaching and encouragement and what makes this significant is that Paul is doing this for the last time.

The first part of **chapter 20** gives details of Paul's final tour of the mission field. These verses tell us how he went back to the churches of Macedonia and Greece.

When Paul arrived in Macedonia, he arrived there in what seemed to be a state of spiritual depression. Luke doesn't tell us this, but it is believed that it was while Paul was in Macedonia (actually in Phillipi) that he wrote the book of **2 Corinthians**.

For those of you who were here on New Year's Eve, Bro. Bob preached a sermon on **2 Corinthians 1:8** and Paul said there and also in the **second and seventh chapters of 2 Corinthians** that he was **burdened excessively, even beyond his strength, to the point that he despaired even of his life**.

**By the way, if any of you are going through a difficult time right now, call Debbie, Bro. Bob's secretary, and get the tape of his New Year's Eve message.**

In the **second chapter of 2 Corinthians**, Paul said he had **no rest for his spirit** and in the **seventh chapter** Paul said **he was afflicted on every side...conflicts without and fears within**.

I believe the reason for Paul's despair was the opposition he faced everywhere he went. Paul was a strong man...spiritually strong...but even strong people can have their hard times!

**HAVE YOU EVER BEEN THERE? HAVE YOU EVER BEEN SPIRITUALLY DOWN OR SPIRITUALLY DRY AND/OR SPIRITUALLY DEPRESSED?**

Well, I have. And I believe you and I can look at the example Paul set and be encouraged because Paul didn't allow these hard times to keep him from what God had called him to do.

So often, depression is Satan's tool to keep our minds on ourselves and off the world around us that is perishing. But, that didn't work with Paul, because from Macedonia, Paul went on to Greece...to Corinth and while he was in Corinth, he wrote his theological masterpiece...the **Epistle to the Romans**.

Paul wanted to sail from Greece to Syria, but he found out that the Jews had plotted to kill him, so he went from Greece to Troas by way of Macedonia. If you'll take the time to look at your Bible map this afternoon, you'll find that Paul went way out of his way to do this.

Somewhere along the journey, by the way, Luke rejoined Paul and his team...and I'm sure Paul was overjoyed that he had, because all in all Paul traveled over 5500 miles by land and over

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6700 miles by sea to evangelize an area of 1500 square miles in less than sixteen years. Can you imagine? I'm sure Paul could use the attention of a physician, don't you?

Well, **verses 7-12 of chapter 20** tell us of Eutycus. We're not going to cover poor old Eutycus in detail...but let me just say that when Paul came to Troas, he met to fellowship with the believers there and he began to speak to them. **Verse 8** tells us there were many lamps in the upper room where they were gathered.

The room probably was **crowded** and very **warm** and the **smoke** from the lamps was filling the room, and as Paul continued to speak, there was a young man who was sitting on a window sill and he went to sleep and fell three stories to the ground and died as the result of that fall.

Well, Paul and the others went to him, and Paul embraced him and Eutycus came back to life. What does this remind you of? It's very similar to the story of the time Elijah stretched himself on the widow's son and raised him from the dead.

**Some folks say that Eutycus wasn't really dead, and that Paul probably gave him artificial respiration...but the Bible tells us he "was picked up dead" (NAS) (NIV); "was taken up dead" (KJV). I believe Eutycus was dead and I also believe this was yet another way that God authenticated Paul's ministry. Remember we said last week that almost everything that is recorded about the Apostle Peter is also recorded about the Apostle Paul...and this was done so that folks would know that Paul's ministry was just as real and had just as much authority as Peter's ministry.**

**Verses 13-16** tell us of the next leg of Paul's journey. He and his team traveled by ship to Miletus on their way to Jerusalem.

You see, Paul had been gone from Jerusalem for a long time. The longing of Paul's heart was to go back to Jerusalem and spend Pentecost with the believers in Jerusalem. Paul was thought to have been a passenger on a merchant ship that made its way down the Aegean toward the Mediterranean. This merchant ship was really a freighter that stopped at various trade centers to unload and take on cargo.

Well, as the Lord would have it, the ship stopped off in Miletus. Miletus was close to Ephesus and since the layover was going to last several days, Paul sent for the Ephesian elders to come meet him for a final time of fellowship and instruction.

Paul had spent three years with the believers at Ephesus. Actually, this was Paul's goodbye to these folks, because Paul knew he would never see them again...

There are some very important "farewells" in Scripture. For instance, the passage in **Genesis 49**, where Jacob, at the end of his life, gathers his twelve sons around him and blesses them is one. Another is in at the end of the **Book of Deuteronomy** when Moses bids farewell to the Israelites at the end of his life. There is a farewell recorded in the **Book of 1 Samuel** between David and Jonathan.

We've all said "goodbye" to loved ones...some we knew we wouldn't see for a long, long time; some we knew we wouldn't see until we meet them again in heaven. And I said all that to simply say this...

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If we really look at the remainder of **chapter 20** in the light of it being a final goodbye, I believe we'll see a little of what pushed Paul...a little of what inspired Paul to do what he did. I believe we'll see a little of what made Paul committed to the work God had called him to...

Commitment means different things to different people...

You've heard the story of the young man who was so in love with this young lady that he wrote her a letter, pouring out his heart's devotion and he said... "I love you so much that I'd swim the deepest ocean for you, I'd cross the burning desert for you, I'd climb the highest mountain for you...**and I'll see on Saturday if it doesn't rain.**"

Well, Paul's commitment wasn't like that! And I believe we'll see as we go along the level of Paul's commitment to the ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ.

## **Verses 18-21...**

I want us to think about four aspects of Paul's approach to ministry...

### **1) Paul's commitment to God and His people...**

**Paul's life had been an open book the three years he had been in Ephesus. He had served the Lord with humility. He had never been haughty or proud. He had never looked down his nose at anybody. He had never been "holier than thou." He had never lorded it over the Ephesians...and this was in spite of the fact that Paul must have been a great preacher. He said he wasn't...but we have his writings and if he preached anything like he wrote, we know he was a great preacher.**

The story is told of George Whitefield, the famous eighteenth century evangelist. George Whitefield was a brilliant, spell-binding speaker, and when he came to a town, huge crowds went to see and hear him. I mean, folks dropped what they were doing and gathered to hear George Whitefield.

You can imagine that when a man like that finished preaching, folks would flock around and say, "Mr. Whitefield, your sermon was wonderful!"

Well, George Whitefield had an answer for them.

*He said, "Yes, I know it...the devil told me that just as I was stepping down from the pulpit."*

The story is also told of a young Scottish preacher who was so self-confident that he literally bounded up the steps of the pulpit one Sunday. He was just filled with self-esteem and self-importance. Unfortunately, he lost his way in the middle of his sermon and became confused and completely forgot his message.

As the young man came down from the pulpit, totally humiliated, an old Scottish elder said to him,

*"Young man, if you had gone up the way you came down, you would have come down the way you went up."*

Paul served the Lord with humility. Paul also served the Lord with tears. He had wept over their sins and he had wept over their sadness. Paul also served the Lord with trials. Luke hasn't told us all that Paul had endured...how the Jews had persecuted him incessantly...but these Ephesian elders knew the whole story.

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Another aspect of Paul's ministry is:

## 2) Paul's commitment to sharing God's Word...

**Verse 20** tells us that Paul said he didn't shrink from declaring to them anything that was profitable. The KJV uses the phrase, "I kept back nothing". This phrase comes from the Greek that means "**withholding food from a patient.**"

Paul had never done that. He had always spread before them a full table. He had even set before them food they might not like...as long as that food was good for them.

And he did this **publicly**, and he also did this **privately**... "house to house."

And he did this for **all people**...Jews and Greeks. Every person was someone for whom Christ died...every person was someone who needed a word from God.

Paul didn't preach an "easy believism." Paul preached repentance toward God and faith in the Lord Jesus. Paul preached a faith that resulted in a changed life.

Well, not only do we see that Paul was totally committed to God and to God's people and not only do we see that Paul was totally committed to sharing God's Word, but, we also see

## 3) Paul's commitment was totally selfless...

### **Verses 22-25...**

Paul knew he was in for a rough time in Jerusalem. The Holy Spirit had already told him this...yet Paul felt constrained to go there. He would be arrested and afflicted if he went to Jerusalem (and we'll see this in the weeks ahead), and Paul knew this, but he was determined to go anyway.

Paul had another ten years of ministry before he finally would finish his course, but because of his determination to go to Jerusalem, much of his remaining time would be spent in prison.

Paul looked at life from a different perspective than most of us. Self-preservation wasn't high on Paul's list of priorities. He was prepared to lose both his liberty and his life for the cause of the Lord Jesus Christ.

The fourth thing I want us to see about Paul's ministry is:

## 4) Paul's commitment produced a sense of well-being and a clear conscience...

### **Verses 26-27...**

**What a statement! God told Ezekiel He would require the blood of men at Elijah's hand if he failed to warn men that they would die in their sins if they didn't turn from them.**

**Let me ask you...Has God changed? Does He still hold His children accountable for sharing the way of salvation? I shudder to think of the blood that I'm not innocent of. How many of us could make the statement that Paul just made?? I believe the tears God will wipe away from our eyes in heaven will be tears we shed over souls we failed to witness to about Jesus.**

What a sobering thought! What a serious challenge!! How many opportunities do we let slip by us day after day after day?

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Not Paul!! Paul was innocent of the blood of all men! Paul preached to them **the whole counsel of God.**

Paul preached **publicly.**

Paul preached **privately.**

Paul preached to **Jews and Gentiles.**

Paul preached **specifically**... “repentance toward God and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.”

Paul preached **comprehensively**... “the whole counsel of God.”

**This was how Paul conducted his ministry. And this was how Paul wanted the Ephesian elders to conduct theirs...and may I say, this is how Paul wants you and me to conduct ours, as well.**

The main purpose of Paul's message to the Ephesian elders was not to get them to applaud him and his ministry, but rather to get them to look at him and say, **“If Paul can do it, we can, too!!”**

And Paul had some words of warning, some words of admonition and some words of instruction for these men.

**Verses 28-31...**

Paul told them they must watch over themselves and they were to watch over the flock that Jesus purchased with His own blood.

Paul told them the church would be attacked from without and he also told them the church would be attacked from within.

Our church leaders, especially our pastor, need to know what's out there. He needs to know what movements, what cults, what heresies and false teachings are on the horizon. He needs to keep a watchful eye on the flock. He needs to keep the flock so grounded in the Word that we won't be blown to and fro with every wind of doctrine. And, the flock...you and I...need to have teachable spirits.

I'm grateful for a pastor who loves us enough to declare to us the whole counsel of God...even when it steps on our toes. I'm grateful for a pastor who keeps a watchful eye on who preaches and teaches here at our church.

**By the way, aren't you grateful that our church is a church  
that evangelizes the sinner  
and edifies the saints  
and exalts the Savior??**

Well, let's see how Paul winds up this message to the Ephesian elders...

Remember, Paul was going away. He couldn't stay there and chase away the wolves. However, the church at Ephesus was not defenseless. They had God...and they had God's Word.

If they would cultivate a knowledge of God and His precious Word, they would be strong.

God's Word had the power **to protect them.**

God's Word had the power **to build them up.**

God's Word had the power **to guarantee their inheritance.**

God's Word had the power **to sanctify them by God's grace.**

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## Verses 34-35...

Paul told them he had not coveted anyone's riches. Paul tells us over in **Romans 7** that he once had a problem with covetousness, but not anymore. He had moved beyond that. He knew that giving brought forth a bigger blessing than receiving.

## Verses 36-38...

The world tells us... "You only go around once...Now is the time to make it...If you don't lay up for yourself now, you'll never have it..."

By contrast, Paul knew he could lay it up now, but if he did, when he died, it would all be gone forever. Paul knew on the other hand, that if he lived for God now, he would have treasures forever.

C. S. Lewis said, "If you live for the next world, you get this one in the deal; but if you live only for this world, you lose them both."

We literally cannot take it with us when we leave. But, if we're obedient to God and try to serve Him with all our hearts now, spiritual treasures will be waiting for us in heaven when we get there. **And compared with those spiritual treasures, the things for which men sell their souls here are less than worthless, aren't they?**

Well, let me ask you...How do you say "goodbye" to someone? The best way to say "goodbye" to someone is by praying with and for that someone.

Some of the sweetest prayer times my husband and I have ever been a part of is when someone has been visiting with us and before they leave, we gather in the kitchen and join our hands and hearts in prayer...

And although the Ephesian elders were grieved to see Paul go I believe they no doubt would remember the words he had spoken to them...the things he had reminded them...the words of admonition and exhortation and example he had spoken to them.

What do think Paul prayed for these men?

I believe he told God he was committing these folks to His care.  
I believe he asked God to keep them from danger by the power of the dear Holy Spirit.  
I believe Paul asked God to ground them in the Scriptures.

I believe Paul asked God to preserve their church from evil within and without.  
I believe Paul asked God to fill the church at Ephesus with people who believed and loved God's Word and would walk in its precepts.

I believe Paul asked God to enable these folks to grow in His grace and to walk in obedience to Him.

Do you think God heard Paul's prayer?

I do...I think God heard it and answered it, because the church in Ephesus was strong and survived to be an effective witness for the Lord Jesus Christ in Asia for many, many years.