

Radiant Church, August 30, 2020
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The Church We Can Be Part 1

Acts 20:18-35 will be our text for the next several weeks

And when they came to him, he said to them, "You yourselves know how I lived among you the whole time from the first day that I set foot in Asia, serving the Lord with all humility and with tears and with trials that happened to me through the plots of the Jews; how I did not shrink from declaring to you anything that was profitable, and teaching you in public and from house to house, testifying both to Jews and to Greeks of repentance toward God and of faith in our Lord Jesus Christ. And now, behold, I am going to Jerusalem, constrained by the Spirit, not knowing what will happen to me there, except that the Holy Spirit testifies to me in every city that imprisonment and afflictions await me. But I do not account my life of any value nor as precious to myself, if only I may finish my course and the ministry that I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the gospel of the grace of God.

And now, behold, I know that none of you among whom I have gone about proclaiming the kingdom will see my face again. Therefore I testify to you this day that I am innocent of the blood of all, for I did not shrink from declaring to you the whole counsel of God.

Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to care for the church of God, which he obtained with his own blood. I know that after my departure fierce wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; and from among your own selves will arise men speaking twisted things, to draw away the disciples after them.

Therefore, be alert, remembering that for three years I did not cease night or day to admonish every one with tears. And now I commend you to God and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up and to give you the inheritance among all those who are sanctified.

I coveted no one's silver or gold or apparel. You yourselves know that these hands ministered to my necessities and to those who were with me. In all things I have shown you that by working hard in this way we must help the weak and remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he himself said, "It is more blessed to give than to receive."

Church will be Death

Recognizing the cost...and paying it anyway

Acts 20:24 *But I do not account my life of any value nor as precious to myself, if only I may finish my course and the ministry that I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the gospel of the grace of God.*

Living a gospel-centered life means we give up, reject the person we would otherwise have been, and become the person Jesus died for to create - a follower of Him - a child in the image of his/her Father in heaven

Church can be Life

Keeping the grace of the gospel central to everything

Acts 20:32 *And now I commend you to God and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up and to give you the inheritance among all those who are sanctified.*

What is a church, really?

A bunch of broken people who were nearly drowned in their sin, now lying on their backs, smiling, inhaling the grace of God in the gospel

What is a pastor, really?

A fallen and fragile man who was nearly drowned in his sin, now lying on his back, smiling, inhaling the grace of God in the gospel - and now commissioned to lead others to that same spot on the ground.

“Commend” = to commit to something, and to call unto something

Believing the grace of the gospel is how we breathe in church life. Constant, essential

1. Flood your mind and soul with the gospel
2. Help our church to thread the gospel through everything we are and do together
3. Know where you and the rest of us are tempted to depart from gospel centrality

The Church Can Be Holy

Acts 20:18 *And when they came to him, he said to them: You yourselves know how I lived among you...*

This list of fears I carry as a pastor and church-planter is long:

That we will have nowhere to meet on Sunday mornings

That the church will fail

That the church will plateau, and stay static

That too many of us will move away

That we'll run out of money

That we will run out of worship leaders

That people will get sick of listening to me

That what I preach could end up with me being accused of hate speech

My greatest fear? That there will be a disconnect between my public self (what I say or write, how I come across) and my private life (who I am)

Why would I fear this?

I am predisposed and really good at sinning

I can be afraid to correct sin in other people

I can exaggerate my own capabilities

I can be a malcontent, always dissatisfied with how things are going

I can be a raging skeptic, anticipating nothing more than what we see today

I can easily replace holiness with sick versions of moralism

And I've served under some really sinful pastors

Some with a lack of purity, unfaithful to their own marriages

Some who wanted only to build their own "brand"

Some who couldn't be trusted to tell the truth

We sin easily, because we are innately fearful. We fear losing something we never had nor ever needed, something that will never really save us or satisfy us

We fear any perceived threat to our own idols

Paul allowed his public life and his personal life to be seen, observed by the church people in Ephesus

In both aspects, he was one and the same person. Integrity on display

And he wasn't being boastful, just honest about his integrity

Unrepented of hypocrisy has no room in a graced-saturated life, or a grace-saturated church

The gospel of Jesus and living a fake Christian life cannot coexist without consequences

We should fear the lack of holiness

Acts 19:17-18 *And this became known to all the residents of Ephesus, both Jews and Greeks. And fear fell upon them all, and the name of the Lord Jesus was extolled.*

Choosing to be personally holy, to be a holy church requires hard changes

Acts 19:18 *Also many of those who were now believers came, confessing and divulging their practices. And a number of those who had practiced magic arts brought their books together and burned them in the sight of all.*

These were already Christians, part of the church, confessing how they'd continued to live duplicitous lives

The openly confessed their sin. In public

They burned up anything that stood in opposition to their holiness

This is why in **Acts 20:28** Paul says to *Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock...*

Paul did not say, pay careful attention to your programs, your website, your budgets, your sermon series. Instead, he says, “Pay attention to yourselves”

As a church together, let’s decide this: Whatever it takes, our church will be a family where our private lives and our public lives will align with our personal holiness before God

1. Give everybody in your GC a hunting license, giving them permission to expose the sin in your life
2. Almost all of our gospel stories (our testimonies) include how we have been sinned against. We need to be good with sharing our own sin, everything that God’s gospel grace has overcome and erased
3. Make it your lifelong pursuit to know and obey God’s Law. Start with the Ten Commandments. Become very familiar with the Sermon on the Mount and the Book of James
4. Pray for your church. Pray for our purity, our integrity, and that we would all be obedient to the whole counsel of God

We all want our church to be important enough to be committed to it
We all want to feel like we’re a part of something bigger than ourselves

At times we will fail; primarily, we will fail each other
It may happen where our own expectations are not met

But, to be the church Jesus has called us to be, we will each have to die to ourselves

And be confident that the life of Jesus is found in the life of the church

And that we see holiness in ourselves and in our church as being essential and vital to our becoming THE CHURCH WE CAN BE