

Acts 20:1

1 After the uproar had ceased, Paul sent for the disciples, and when he had exhorted them and taken his leave of them, he left to go to Macedonia.

<PRAY>

How many times have you heard someone say, “The most important thing is (fill in the blank?)

Since all of you are mature, sage, smart people, (well many of you are...) let me ask you a few questions.

If you were counseling a young couple about to be married and you were asked to say, “The most important thing for you to know is...<WAIT>

If you were speaking to your son or daughter about to go to college for the first time and you were to say, “The most important thing for you to know is...<WAIT>

If you had to comfort a grieving friend and you were to say, “The most important thing for you to know is...<WAIT>

If you were going to give advice to a new college graduate and you were to say, “The most important thing for you to know is...<WAIT>

Some people would say:

- The most important thing is to focus on being successful
- The most important thing is to focus on the future
- The most important thing is to think positive thoughts
- The most important thing is to get along with everyone

After 50 years of hearing about “the most important thing,” I asked myself this week, “Just what is the important thing anyway?”

This morning, Luke tells us about 6 things that are important. As we work our way through Acts 20, we will see through the life of Paul, things that are important to God.

Let's begin in verse 1.

1 After the uproar had ceased, Paul sent for the disciples, and when he had exhorted them and taken his leave of them, he left to go to Macedonia. 2 When he had gone through those districts and had given them much exhortation, he came to Greece.

Verse 3 says he spent three months there and then he went to Syria and from there he traveled through Macedonia. Verse 5 says that he went from there to Philippi and then on to Troas where he and Luke met up with many of their friends.

Paul was primarily a teacher but he was also an exhorter. In verses 1 and 2 we find Paul exhorting the disciples. What is an exhorter?
<WAIT>

Do you know someone who when you see them you just love being around them because they give you much encouragement? People who are exhorters make outstanding greeters and ushers and table leaders. They remember people's names and they are warm and friendly to even strangers. What is the opposite of an exhorter?
<WAIT>

It is very important that we all encourage one another during trying times or difficult situations. The Holy Spirit gives some people the spiritual gift of exhortation. Supernaturally, people with this gift encourage others even at their lowest point and help them to draw closer to the Lord. But, it's just as important for each of us, even if we don't have that spiritual gift, to encourage our brothers and sisters.

Let me ask you a question, "How can you tell if someone is encouraging you from their heart or just because they think it is the right thing to do when they see you on Sunday?" <WAIT>

One way you can tell if a person means what they say is to see if they come back around and see how you're doing a few weeks after your

time of trouble passes. That's what Paul did. He went back around to the cities and villages where he had ministered and checked on the people he had disciplined. He was looking to see if they were all right in the Lord. He was seeing if they were growing in their faith.

Are you an encourager? Do you come back around after a situation passes and check on the people you encouraged when they were going through the hard times? Do you look into their lives and see where their needs are?

The first important thing we see in this passage is that it is important to encourage our brothers and sisters.

The second important thing is found in verse 7. Would someone read this passage? <WAIT>

7 On the first day of the week, when we were gathered together to break bread, Paul began talking to them, intending to leave the next day, and he prolonged his message until midnight. 8 There were many lamps in the upper room where we were gathered together. 9 And there was a young man named Eutychus sitting on the window sill, sinking into a deep sleep; and as Paul kept on talking, he was overcome by sleep and fell down from the third floor and was picked up dead. 10 But Paul went down and fell upon him, and after embracing him, he said, "Do not be troubled, for his life is in him." 11 When he had gone back up and had broken the bread and eaten, he talked with them a long while until daybreak, and then left. 12 They took away the boy alive, and were greatly comforted.

A lot has been made of this passage about people who fall asleep in church. Let me pause to say thank-you to...most...of you who stay awake during my lessons. <PAUSE>

So what is going on here? Paul is preaching up a storm and that was an important thing to these people. That is, up to the point where young Eutychus falls out of the window. But notice that Paul didn't hesitate. He went immediately to the young man's aid.

There's a leadership lesson embedded in this narrative. When something goes wrong, all eyes turn to the leader to see how he or

she reacts during the crisis. It doesn't matter that the crisis has nothing to do with you; everyone will look to you to resolve the situation.

Anyway, this young man fell from a window at least 25 feet from the ground. Why do you think the boy might have fallen asleep? <WAIT>

Perhaps it was because the carbon dioxide levels in that room were so high because of the candles and the stale air. Perhaps it was late, and that the young man probably had worked a full day already. Or perhaps Paul was just boring. <PAUSE> All we really know is that he fell asleep and fell out of the window.

Trust me when I say this. A teacher knows when someone is about to doze off. Good teachers are constantly reading the audience as they are teaching. When one of you is about to fall asleep, believe me, I know it.

So I can imagine Paul in front of the group, teaching his heart out and watching this guy sitting in the window sill about to fall asleep. And when he falls to his death, it was probably not a great surprise to Paul.

But notice that he doesn't hesitate as he runs to his aid. There is no delay, no vacillation, because Paul knows that the important thing is to tend to those in need. Especially if the need occurs when you're the leader of the group.

The third important thing is found beginning in verse 13. In verses 13-17, we read that Paul and his companions leave Troas and continue through the region until they reached Miletus which was a city outside of Ephesus. Would someone read this passage beginning in verse 17? <WAIT>

17 From Miletus he sent to Ephesus and called to him the elders of the church. 18 And when they had come to him, he said to them, "You yourselves know, from the first day that I set foot in Asia, how I was with you the whole time, 19 serving the Lord with all humility and with tears and with trials which came upon me through the plots of the Jews; 20 how I did not shrink from declaring to you anything that

was profitable, and teaching you publicly and from house to house, 21 solemnly testifying to both Jews and Greeks of repentance toward God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ. 22 "And now, behold, bound by the Spirit, I am on my way to Jerusalem, not knowing what will happen to me there, 23 except that the Holy Spirit solemnly testifies to me in every city, saying that bonds and afflictions await me. 24 "But I do not consider my life of any account as dear to myself, so that I may finish my course and the ministry which I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify solemnly of the gospel of the grace of God.

25 "And now, behold, I know that all of you, among whom I went about preaching the kingdom, will no longer see my face. 26 "Therefore, I testify to you this day that I am innocent of the blood of all men. 27 For I did not shrink from declaring to you the whole purpose of God.

So much of our time is spent talking about irrelevant issues. We can talk about the weather for hours. But how often do we really peel back the onion and talk about the REALLY important things in our lives? How often do we share our deepest feelings and concerns with others?

Paul didn't go to Ephesus because as we learn from 2 Corinthians, apparently he was carrying a large quantity of money that he was anxious to get to the church in Jerusalem. Had he gone into the city of Ephesus he knew that he would be delayed. But he wanted to speak with the leaders of the church so we read here about the first Pastor's conference in history.

Paul wasn't talking to them about the weather. Rather he was sharing his heart. He talked about how:

- He fought laziness with perseverance,
- He overcame pride with humility,
- He overcame discouragement in times of trial, He withstood fear in the face of intimidation, and most importantly,
- He preached the gospel despite the risks to his own life.

Paul preached the whole counsel of God!

Notice also that he declares his testimony to the elders. Paul is not

boasting here. He is letting the elders of the Ephesus church know what has led him to so what he has done. And, he is letting them know to what lengths he and the other evangelists have gone to, to bring the Word of God to the lost. Yet, he also wants them to know that he is not responsible for someone else deciding not to follow Jesus Christ. He wants them to know that it is not the preacher that is held responsible for the listener not obeying the Word of God.

The important thing is to testify to the grace of God. Paul's eyes weren't on himself, but on God and he recognized his role as God's servant.

The fourth important thing is found beginning in verse 28.

28 Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood. 29 "I know that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; 30 and from among your own selves men will arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after them. 31 "Therefore be on the alert, remembering that night and day for a period of three years I did not cease to admonish each one with tears.

Paul tells the Ephesian elders that the important thing for the church is to "Be on Guard!" Paul rightly evaluates that once a leader has been brought down, or moved out of the way, the flock will be attacked by those that desire to follow their own selfish ways. He says that not only will wolves come in from outside, but opportunistic wolves from the inside will attempt to interpret the word as they think they know it. He says that opportunistic wolves from the inside will attempt to bend and distort the truth of Jesus to get the people to follow after them.

Christians shouldn't follow people. Christians shouldn't follow Pastors. Christians only follow JESUS!

Paul says that he warned the Ephesians every day for three years that they needed to be on their guard or unbelievers would come in and try to disrupt the body.

We need to remind ourselves that there may be those that come in from the outside, or, rise up from the inside that will try to distort the truth in order to draw attention to themselves. We must always be on guard.

The fifth important thing is found beginning in verse 32.

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. 33 "I have coveted no one's silver or gold or clothes. 34 "You yourselves know that these hands ministered to my own needs and to the men who were with me. 35 "In everything I showed you that by working hard in this manner you must help the weak and remember the words of the Lord Jesus, that He Himself said, 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.'"

The fifth important thing is to show God's grace. Paul tells these elders that he was committing them to God and to the Word of His grace. All of this based on the hard work that Paul did in Christ while he was in Ephesus. He tells us that while he was there he, himself, provided for his own needs, and this displaying God's grace which was intended to build up the Ephesians.

Paul led by example. He is letting these men know that what he did was to try and set an example that they could follow in helping the weak and poor, and, that the example he was following was the example of Jesus Christ, Himself.

Hard work has a way of discerning the ALIVE in Christ from the selfish imitators of this world that want everything for themselves. Paul calls on these believers to remember what Jesus had said, it is more blessed to give than to receive. The important thing is to show God's grace, especially to those that are clueless in Christ.

The final important thing is found beginning in verse 36.

36 When he had said these things, he knelt down and prayed with them all. 37 And they began to weep aloud and embraced Paul, and repeatedly kissed him, 38 grieving especially over the word which he

had spoken, that they would not see his face again. And they were accompanying him to the ship.

Paul has had an emotional time as he has talked with the Ephesian elders. They must have held a special place in his heart. He opened up that heart to these men and asked them to carry on the good work in Jesus Christ to the end. And, he didn't forget that the important thing is to pray.

There are many important things competing for our attention. But perhaps this morning we should reflect on Paul's words in Acts 20. These are the 6 important things to God. That we:

- Encourage Our Brothers and Sisters
- Care for those in Need
- Testify of God's Grace
- Be On Guard
- Show God's Grace
- Pray With Our Brothers and Sisters

Think about some of these the next time this week someone says something about the weather and try to turn the discussion to one of these important things.

<PRAY>