

Joel Breidenbaugh (Acts 20:17-38)

**Intro.** In most churches the pastor stands at a door to shake hands as his congregants leave, but some of them never know quite what to say. Here are a few which have been said over the years: “You always manage to find something to fill up the time.” “I don’t care what they say, I like your sermons.” “Pretty nice speech today, pastor” “If I’d known you were going to be good today, I’d have brought a neighbor.” “Did you know there are 243 panes of glass in the windows?” “We shouldn’t make you preach so often” (Arthur Myers, *Berkshire Sampler*). As we continue our series in Acts 15-28 on “Missions 401: To the End of the Earth,” today we look at the last half of Acts 20 on “What to Expect from Your Pastors.”

Theme: Missions, pastoral ministry & stewardship

Background: Luke traces Paul’s 2<sup>nd</sup> & 3<sup>rd</sup> missionary journeys through the end of Acts 15 through Acts 21, when Paul arrives back in Jerusalem. These trips occur from the early AD 50s to around AD 57, some 20-25 years after Jesus was crucified, risen & ascended—in just a few decades, the gospel was spreading throughout the Roman Empire.

- Shepherds have difficult jobs, for they continually watch over their sheep & they especially focus on making sure they are fed & protected—pastors primary duties are to teach God’s Word in feeding the people (& encouraging them to feed themselves by reading), leading his people (like shepherds lead their sheep to new pastures) & protect them from wolves in sheep’s clothing (false teachers) through prayer & sound doctrine. Most church members in America expect their pastors to spend a little time preaching, but lots of time making visits, counseling, leading the church’s finances, administration & the like. Those things are necessary at a certain level, but they must never be the pastors’ main focus or he will fail in discharging his duties.

➤ As the gospel message spreads at home & abroad in fulfilling Jesus’ mission “To the End of the Earth,” what should you “Expect from Your Pastors”:

**1. Expect a plurality of pastoral leaders to serve & shepherd your church (20:17, 28; cf. 14:23 15:2, 4, 6; 1 Timothy 5:17; Titus 1:5; Hebrews 13:7, 17; James 5:14)**

- There were multiple elders (spiritually mature, pastoral leaders) in the church of Ephesus—but it wasn’t just the large churches who had them, for the NT pattern of leadership in the local church was for each church to have a plurality of elders/pastors (14:23; 15:2, 4, 6; Titus 1:5; etc.)

Illus: No single pastor can care for everyone beyond roughly 50-75 members (most US churches have less than 80 regular attenders for a reason)—some Christians have unhealthy expectations of their senior pastor who cannot possibly minister effectively to everyone in the church, but when none of the pastoral leaders are ministering to someone, that’s a problem

**2. Expect your pastors to serve with humble dependence on the Lord (20:18-19, 24, 33-35)**

**a. By following the Lord’s leading (20:18-19, 24)**

- Paul served the Lord in humble dependence & didn’t count his life as his own, but only to do that of what the Lord had led him to do, especially in testifying of God’s gospel of grace
- Pastors who are the real deal serve the Lord in a similar manner, not concerned as much as with whether people like them as much as whether they faithfully discharged the Word of God

Illus: Every person who has ever walked the face of the earth has an authority—employees follow their boss’s leading; managers & coaches follow the authority of the team president & owner; CEOs follow the input of their boards; the children of Israel followed Moses’ authority in the wilderness; congregations must follow their pastors’ leading; pastors must follow the leading of the Lord; even Jesus followed the leading of His heavenly Father

**b. By being an example in working & giving (20:33-35)**

- Paul had the right to expect pay from the churches he served, because he commanded Timothy to remind Ephesus to provide for their pastors (1 Timothy 5:17-18), but Paul often began ministry in a new location with a bi-vocational mindset to provide for his needs while he shared the gospel—he did this in part to honor the Lord Jesus who taught, “It is more blessed to give than to receive” (20:35)

Illus: Most preachers often preach without getting paid, because we are called of God & aren't in it for the money. Our Leadership Team is comprised of more lay pastors than professional pastors & they don't get paid for their service. Most of them teach & preach weekly but don't get paid by the church. I've preached in numerous churches and in chapel services and at conferences and never got paid a dime, but the Lord has always been faithful in providing for me & my family. The first time I ever preached here, I never got paid for it, but the Lord has been faithful & provided & I'm thankful for this church's support. If I was in it for the money, I could have left this church a few years ago for a church 4x our size & got paid a lot more, but I was confident the Lord planted me here. But even if this church came to a place where they couldn't afford to pay me, I'd get another job as a source of income & keep preaching. If I ever get fired from a church, I'd still keep preaching, even if I don't get paid for it.

**3. Expect your pastors to serve the majority of their time in studying & teaching the Word (20:20-21, 24-27, 29-32)**

- Both the apostles' practice (6:2, 4) & instructions to pastors (20:27; 1 Timothy 4:13) were centered around the ministry of the Word & prayer—pastors who don't major on the Word are not doing what God has called them to do

Illus: I once served under a pastor who was great with people & visited several each week, but he spent no time in his study to prepare a message. I spent many weekends with him & he prepared his Sunday morning message in his recliner on Saturday afternoon while watching football or basketball. He rarely fed the people & while they loved him because of his care for them, they never grew in the ministry of the Word & they nearly starved to death (the reason they stayed was because it was a small town & it was the only decent-size Baptist church)

**a. Preaching evangelistically (20:20-21, 31)**

- Paul used terminology which was at the heart of the gospel, which is foundational to everything else in the Christian life—the holiness of God, the sinfulness of man, the remedy of Jesus Christ, God's Son as the only hope for the world & the necessity of repentance from sins & faith in the Lord Jesus to be declared right with God

**b. Preaching doctrinally (20:20, 24-27, 29-30)**

- Paul didn't merely preach the basics of the gospel, but he also preached Christian doctrine which was grounded in the gospel—teaching, declaring the whole counsel of God—making sure they were grounded in the faith so they were prepared for fierce wolves who would try to come & steal them away from the faith

**c. Preaching expositively (20:27)—cf. 1 Timothy 4:13**

- When Paul said he declared the whole counsel of God, he was talking about teaching through God's Word (cf. 1 Timothy 4:13)—reading the Scriptures, like any book, is most profitable when beginning in a book & reading through it—that's why I preach exposition (book by book, paragraph by paragraph, verse by verse), because it best represents biblical preaching & what the apostles modeled

Illus: A stranger entered the church in the middle of the sermon and seated himself in the back pew. After a while he began to fidget. Leaning over to a white-haired man at his side, evidently an old member of the congregation, he whispered: "How long has he been preaching?" "Thirty or forty years, I think," the old man answered. "I'll stay then," decided the stranger, "He must be nearly done." (*Christian Clippings*, 26).

**Conc.** I ran across this story about a lady representing a committee to find a new preacher & she went to a store to buy one—Good morning, madam. May I help you? *Yes, please, I'd like to buy a minister.* For yourself or your church? *Oh, for my church, of course. I'm already married.* Uh, yes. Did you have a particular model in mind? *I've got a description from the Candidate Committee right here. We want a man about 30, well-educated, with some experience. Good preacher and teacher. Balanced personality. Serious, but with a sense of humor. Efficient, but not rigid. Good health. Able to identify with all age groups. And, if possible, sings tenor.* Sings tenor? *We're short of tenors in the choir.* I see. Well, that's quite a list. How much money did you want to spend? *The committee says \$9,000. \$9,500 tops.* Hmmm. Well, perhaps we'd better start in the bargain basement. *Tell me, how much is that model in the window?* You mean the

one in the Pendleton plaid suit and the gray suede dune boots? *Yes, that one. He's a real dream.* That's our Princeton #467. Has a Ph.D. and AKC papers. *AKC?* American Koinonia Council. He sells for \$16,000 plus house. *Wow! That's too rich for our blood. What about that model over there?* Ah, yes. An exceptional buy. Faith #502. He's a little older than 30, but has excellent experience. Aggressive. Good heart. Has a backing of sermons, two of which have been printed in Christian Leaders. *He's not too bad. Can you do something about his bald head?* *Mrs. Penner especially insists that our minister have some hair.* Madam, all our ministers come in a variety of hair styles. Keep him in mind. Now let me show you Olympia #222. Four years of varsity sports at Brass Ring College. Plays football, basketball, volleyball, and Ping-Pong. Comes complete with sports equipment. *What a physique! He must weigh 200 pounds!* Yes, indeed. You get a lot for your money with this one. And think what he can do for your young people. *Great. But how is he at preaching?* I must admit he's not St. Peter. But you can't expect good sermons and a church-wide athletic program too! *I suppose not. Still...* Let me show you our Fresno #801. Now here's a preacher. All his sermons are superb—well-researched, copious anecdotes, and they always have three points. And—he comes with a full set of the Religious Encyclopedia at no extra charge! You get the whole package for \$8,300. *He's wearing awfully thick glasses.* For \$220 more we put in contact lenses. *I don't know. He might study too much. We don't want a man who's in his office all the time.* Of course. How about this minister over here? Comes from a management background. Trained in business operations at Beatitude College. Adept with committees. Gets his work done by 11:30 every morning. *His tag says he's an IBM 400.* Madam, you have a discerning eye. Innovative Biblical Methods. This man will positively revitalize your church. *I'm not sure our church wants to be revitalized. Haven't you got something less revolutionary?* Well, would you like someone of the social worker type? We have this Ghetto #130. *The man with the beard?* *Good gracious, no. Mrs. Penner would never go for that.* How about our Empathy #41C? His forte is counseling. Very sympathetic. Patient. Good with people who have problems. *Everyone in our church has problems. But he might not get out and visit new people. We really need a man who does a lot of visitation. You see, all our people are very busy and...* Yes, yes, I understand. You want a minister who can do everything well. *That's it! Haven't you got somebody like that?* I'm thinking. In our back room we have a minister who was traded in last week. Excellent man, but he broke down after three years. If you don't mind a used model, we can sell him at a reduced price. *Well, we had hoped for someone brand-new. We just redecorated the sanctuary, and we wanted a new minister to go with it.* Of course. But with a little exterior work, and a fresh suit, this man will look like he just came out of the box. No one will ever know. Let me bring him out and you can look him over. *All right. Honestly, this minister shopping is exhausting. It's so hard to get your money's worth. Tell me, do you also give Green Stamps with the contract?* Uh, no. But if there's any dissatisfaction after six months we send a new congregation for the balance of the years. That usually takes care of most problems (Jean Shaw, "How Much Is That Preacher?" *Don't Stand Up in the Canoe: A Fantasy from Life*). Some Christians don't expect enough of pastors, but most Christians expect too much. You should expect what God expects & when you don't get that, you should let your pastors know. Each of us want nothing but God's best for you & this church & that begins with a personal relationship with Jesus. Won't you turn from your sins & trust Him today?