

Sunday evening August 2nd 2015 at CBC
Sermon outline: Question all assumptions
[2] A settled ministry guarantees the future?
Acts 20

Today we are looking at a church founded some years after the one in Jerusalem. This is the church planted by the apostle Paul in the city of Ephesus. We are going to look for our 'surprise' in a final speech made by Paul to the leaders of the church – a church in which Paul had been personally involved for about three years.

[1] THE FOUNDATION ON WHICH THE CHURCH WAS BUILT

Every church has foundations.

[a] the historical foundation

The historical narrative tells how the church came into being. We are given that information in chapter 19. Ephesus was a city well known its pagan worship of the goddess Diana (to the Romans, Artemis to the Greeks) and also for its occult practices. It was a major centre, with its temple to Diana being one of the seven wonders of the ancient world. Some 200,000 thousand people lived there. Acts 18 records a first brief visit to the city by Paul and Acts 19 records his longer stay of around three years.

[b] the theological foundation

We have Paul's own words:

In particular:

Acts 20:21

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

[c] Ministry foundation

There is a third kind of foundation on which a church rests at any given moment. This is the ministry foundation. How have the church's resources been used to share its message. What sort of pattern of ministry has developed (or been developed) in the church?

Once again we have Paul's own words:

See Acts 20:20-21; Acts 20:27; Acts 20:31

Every church would love to have a ministry foundation like this. We are looking for a new full-time pastor. What if we could find someone like this? If we could have such a ministry for three years, would it not give us a wonderful platform going forward?

You would certainly think so...

[2] THE FUTURE THE CHURCH WAS GOING TO FACE

You can analyze Paul's speech in terms of what he knew and what the Ephesian elders knew.

[a] The elders knew (Paul reminded them) ...

How he had conducted himself amongst them – 18

That he had not hesitated to preach anything that would be helpful – 20

That he had supported himself financially – 33-34

[b] Paul knew ...

That prison and hardships were ahead of him – 23

That these elders would never see him again – 25

That after he left, SAVAGE WOLVES would attack the church – 29

That these wolves would arise from the present elders - 30

And here is our surprise, here is the assumption we must question.

A settled ministry in a church – apostolic or otherwise – even one that has seen much encouragement and growth within the church is no guarantee of safety in future days.

[3] THE PRECAUTIONS THE CHURCH WOULD NEED TO TAKE

But is that all we can say?

[a] Recognize that there is always a spiritual battle

The issue of false leaders crops up in quite a few of the NT letters, just as false prophets can be found in the OT. It is a manifestation of an on-going spiritual battle. The battle never goes away and so we are wise to be ready for it. There may be

a lull in the action, but sooner or later the enemy will make another attempt to destabilize the church.

[b] Be on your guard, for yourself and for others

It is not entirely the job of others to keep watch over you. And you cannot keep watch over others unless you first keep watch over yourself.

How do you keep watch over yourself?

[c] Rely on the word of grace

See Acts 20:32

A good test is whether we are appreciating more of what the Lord Jesus has done for us on the cross, or less. Does the cross become more meaningful, or more embarrassing, for us? Are we placing more of our thinking under the authority of the Bible, or less?

And finally ...

... there is another surprise.

See Acts 20:38

[d] Use the mind not just the heart

There is a need for clear thinking. The big problem for the future was not that Paul would never return to Ephesus. It was that the wolves were coming. May we, too, always be on our guard.