

After My Departing

For I know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock. -Acts 20:29

If you'll turn with me to Amos. First of all, if you want to mark Acts 20, for that chapter will be the place where I have the most to speak to you about today. I will not give you the title. I don't want you thinking about the title just yet. And after you mark Acts 20, you'll find Amos - chapter seven. You got the major prophets, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Daniel. And you've got Hosea, Joel, and Amos. You run into it right after the major prophets. I hope you've got your Bibles. I hope you'll stay with us in all places. You can't get along without your Bibles. You must know them. Keep them with you.

A few years back, not long, Ridge and Ryder, Ridge 9 or 10, 11, somewhere in there. Ryder, he just happy to be along. They were sitting out there, I think it was one Saturday night, watching sports with Toby. And I sat there amazed. Ridge could tell you anything about anybody. He knew all the sports figures that Toby would bring up and how they were doing and all about it. And I said, "Ridge, how do you know all that?" And he said, "I keep my nose stuck in ESPN". So I want you to keep your nose stuck in your Bibles and use it. As I said, I'll give you the title later. We'll draw it from Acts 20.

But would you bow with me as we seek our Father that He might continue that that He has started with us today?

Our Father, we might carry our Bibles, we might read our Bibles, but we cannot understand apart from the Spirit. But these little ones, never should we lay it down because it's talking about things that they do not understand. Just let them keep searching and stir an interest in their heart for things above, for our blessed Redeemer. For if you spare them, then they will understand and recall what they heard this morning in the devotion. Dark times are ahead. It is dark now, but it's going to get darker. But thank you, Father, for the light in Goshen, for the divine protection of your people. I pray that you might continue to draw that they live nigh thee and find in thee all their sustenance. Christ being our meat and our drink. Father, we ask you for thy Spirit this morning for these folks do not need to hear from me, but from thee. And I pray you'll, give us that from that distant land. I pray you'll work in us a thirsty soul. So we sit here longing, seeking after, and praying for that water from above. Now Father give wisdom, divine unction, and direction, and give them a good understanding, all for the glory of our blessed Redeemer. In his name we pray, amen.

In Acts chapter seven, beginning with verse 10. **Acts 7:10 - Then Amaziah the priest of Bethel sent to Jeroboam king of Israel, saying, Amos hath conspired against thee in the midst of the house of Israel: the land is not able to bear all his words.** All Amos was doing was telling them what he had received from the Lord. But this priest, he said, we can't bear all his words. Do something with him. It sounds like America, wanting to regulate speech. And I assure you that one day that you just speaking truth from scripture, be it Romans 1, be it Christ the way, the door, the only way, then you will be accused of hateful speech. You're just telling the truth, but to those that will not accept truth, it is to them, hateful, belittling.

Verse 11- **For thus Amos saith, Jeroboam shall die by the sword, and Israel shall surely be led away captive out of their own land. Also Amaziah said unto Amos, O thou seer, go, flee thee away into the land of Judah, and there eat bread, and prophesy there: But prophesy not again any more at Bethel: for it is the king's chapel, and it is the king's court. Then answered Amos, and said to Amaziah, I was no prophet, neither was I a prophet's son; but I was an herdman, and a gatherer of sycomore fruit: - Amos 7:11-14.** I can relate more to his language there. Know exactly what he was talking about. I was no prophet. I am not that. So whatever you hear today, it is not by way of prophecy. No one has that ability today. We have the ability to say as things are, to point out how things are and coming things as we find it in scripture. But when John completed that last verse in Revelation 22, verse 21, that book, this book, your Bible had all that you'll ever have of God down here as far as a written work or prophecy. And if any man add unto this - John's words or unto this the word of God - the Lord said*, I'll add the plagues of this book unto him. Be careful, children. ***And if any man shall take away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part out of the book of life, and out of the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book. – Revelation 22:19**

Now in Acts chapter 20, Paul is not saying something new. Though he had been to the third heaven and heard things that it was not lawful for him to speak. When he writes the verses that we will read later here in Acts 20, it was not because God told him, it was because of a spiritual discernment. He knew human nature in its depravity, and he knew this is going to happen. I can tell you nothing that an honest, open-minded person will not already know or come to know in your book. Unless you are an eternal optimist, which you can't be believing in scripture, then you've got to accept some of the things that are coming. A good friend for many years, and we knew what we could say to the other. He always would say, "You're a pessimist", concerning my views of the world and of mankind. And he'd always throw a little hint in - "I'm an optimist". Of course, I knew him, I knew what he was, I knew what he was saying when he said that I was a pessimist. Later on, he changed and he said, "You're not a pessimist, I see. You're just a realist, seeing things as they are". And that's what Paul, said here that I will read to you a little later on. But I want to begin in verse number seven, seven down through nine.

And upon the first day of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread, Paul preached unto them, ready to depart on the morrow; and continued his speech until midnight. - Acts 20:7

Now there's some hindrances to those sitting here in the audience. Long speech and verse eight, many lights in the upper chamber. And you know that with people gathered around that lights giving off heat, the old bulbs giving off a lot of heat. Those folks have difficulty focusing after a while. But they did not lose, they did not lose anything Paul was saying. They received it all, which meant that they got beyond the external hindrances that were there. Some of us grew up in going to the church building. They would raise the windows when the annual meeting was, and it was in July or August, and it was hot. And everybody that had those old fans that the funeral home used to pass out in all the churches. But they that went to hear, the preacher kept their attention. You can find anything, you can make anything a reason to lose your attention. And you might lose the one thing that God had for you today.

Now in verse 13, this is after one young fellow goes to sleep and falls out and meets death. But Paul goes down, brings him back to life, and comes back and they continued again, breaking bread and eating for a long while. Now verse 13, and we, that's Luke and all that were traveling with Paul and the party here, **And we went before to ship, and sailed unto Assos, there intending to take in Paul: for so had he appointed, minding himself to go afoot. Acts 20:13.** They'll travel on and they will get to the place that Paul is walking to, and there they'll pick him up. But there's only one place where anybody that carries the Word of God to others can get their pail filled. Jesse called David and he said, "you take these breads, And you take these parched corns and you take the cheeses and you go down there and see about your brothers there at war" – paraphrasing **1 Samuel 17:17-19**. And Jesse meant that David was to leave everything that he gave him. You just save enough for you to get back home in your traveling back. You give everything away that I gave you. Jesse didn't want him to come home with a sack half full. He wanted him to come home with an empty sack. The Wesley's and Whitfield and many of those other itinerant evangelists and preachers that were noted for preaching upwards of 20 sermons a week, Mr. Wesley said, "If I was at one place, I was tied down, remained at one place for over a year, I would run out of things to preach."** They would preach in this town, this village, and go up to the next one and preach there, possibly the same thing all the way up the Eastern Coast. But he said, "If I remained, if I had to go time and again with new material, I couldn't do it. Not preaching that many times a week."** *Quotation from either John or Charles Wesley*

Now today's sermons can be found from a multitude of sources. Somebody always, some groups, some organizations, some church function always ends up getting your email address and they send you out these sermons, sermon titles, sermon notes. "This would be good for Sunday." And I'm sure a lazy man would be glad to take that and use it. But nobody has a message for you until they've been in the closet and they are alone with God. Nobody. Paul's got an empty sack. Preaching till midnight, then bringing the young man back up and sitting there until daybreak, talking, and he's given away everything that he came with. And now it's time to get away from human companionship and get along with my master, my savior, my redeemer. Shut up with God is a must, not only for a pastor, but everything you need as a Christian, it will come from the closet. You say, "Well, I take some things back that you tell us." Well, if you get anything that I say to you, you got it because you asked the Lord before you got here, and God just gave you a few little things that I might have said. But everything you get, you get in a secret place, even from a public place of worship. And one thing you've got to have, when you go or shortly after you go, you've got to have a right heart. And that heart has got to be maintained all the time that you are conversing with the Lord or trying to hear from Him. I've had times when I was seemingly within the holy place. And within just a few minutes, my mind would be a million miles away. And I would close and get up. For if you get anything from God, it's just you and the Lord. And you got an empty sack. You cannot be the Christian that you ought to be except you have that place where you get along with the Lord. Never is a oneness obtained and cautiously maintained without silence. Are you always asking something from your friend? But you never give them time to talk. It's you. Is it you always talking when you shut your closet doors? And you can have silence, but it does not mean that there is silence in you. You've got to fight off things that will crowd out your mind. God will have no rivals. Now, acquaintances get very uncomfortable with periods of silence, if it's just two of them together. Good friends are satisfied just being with their good friend. You don't have to have a conversation with them. Just being there. And if you feel like talking and if you give them opportunity, that's fine. But you don't have to come up with something to talk about like acquaintances do.

Paul broke bread. They had eaten that, talked a long while after, and no doubt that the conversation was about the Lord Jesus. And now, Paul's got to have replenished that that he gave away. As valuable as friends are. Paul needed time alone. Renew the fellowship with his Savior and with his friend. I hope that this is not including anybody in this congregation today, but a large number of people today, the vast majority I would say, they accept Jesus as Savior And that's the last time they'll ever need him until a crisis or an emergency occurs. How is it with you as far as friendship with the eternal God? There is a richness in Christ. I mean, the richness of him as Savior is vast, eternal. But there is a richness in him beyond that of a Savior. **John 15:13, Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends.** I wish I could have found the old, I can't remember if he was a Puritan or a Reformer, but the only thing I could find was a lady in my own generation out in the Midwest, I believe. She said, "If you've got two friends in your life, you're lucky. If you've got one good friend, you're more than lucky." Well, folk, I can point you to one that will be the best friend that you ever had. And if you can ever get to that relationship, beyond Christ saving, beyond Christ as your Savior - if you can get to that relationship where Christ is your friend, then I cannot use the word lucky, but God has greatly enriched your soul and placed something in there more valuable than all the gold and silver in the world. If I know I got that friend in heaven, and I know that he will not forsake me or leave me. Now folk, billionaires, have got a lot of so-called friends. You let them lose their riches and their friends will be gone in just a few days. But that's something that with carefulness, a child of God will never lose. I know careless living, I know indifference to this friend, you can lose that friendship and the witness of that relationship. For Jesus said in the same, or next verse that I quoted previously, **Ye are my friends, if you do whatsoever I command you. – John 15:14**

Now I want you to go with me to Proverbs 18. **There is a friend that sticketh closer than a brother. - Proverbs 18:24b** But I assure you that it can be, the witness of that relationship can quickly be lost. You grow a little careless or just a little indifferent, and you'll lose what was your best friend. **Verse 14 of John 15.** Jesus said, **Ye are my friends, if you do whatsoever I command you. Verse 24 of Proverbs 18, A man that hath friends must shew himself friendly: and there is a friend that sticketh closer than a brother.** Let your attitude or actions towards such a friend find him in the distant background in your life. Life becoming so busy for you, crowding out time alone, secret time, just the two of you. Taking time that ought to be spent with Him, infringing upon that time because you've got more important things to do. Neglect or throw away by an offense is to prove yourself unworthy of such a friend as this one that will stick closer to you than the brother. The selfish, unloving, rebellious son of David that was intent on killing his father where he could take his throne, he recognized what friendship was in others, though he never had a friend. David sent Hushai back. He wanted to go with David, but David sent him back. And he said, "You could be a better help to me if you were there in the castle, keeping an eye on Absalom." - *paraphrased from 2 Samuel 15:34.* And when Absalom went in to that meeting, joined himself there, Absalom looked at him and he said, **Is this thy kindness to thy friend? – 2 Samuel 16:17b** "You were my father's good friend. Have you betrayed him?" - *paraphrased from 2 Samuel 16:17.* And don't you think it's strange that a man that knows nothing about close friendship recognizes that in another? The Lord appeared to another son of David and said, **Ask what I shall give thee. - 1 Kings 3:5.** And he said, "Thou hast shewed unto thy servant David my father great mercy..." - part of **1 Kings 3:6a.** And listen to this, **and thou hast kept for him this great kindness – part of 1 Kings 3:6b.** David was a friend of the Lord Jesus. David had plenty of time growing up, being the younger, out keeping the sheep. He knew, he knew his Lord and what a great friendship! And Solomon knew that. And he said, "when you appointed me

king, it was because of the great kindness that you had for my father.” – paraphrased from **1 Kings 3:6-7**. David's gone. God's kindness remains as long as the world even in unbelievers and rebels at heart that have never known what true friendship can be, could see it through others. And of all the friends, friends with the Eternal, Almighty, Sovereign, Creator, Ruler, Sustainer of the world, worlds. And a little old sinner can be brought to salvation and friendship with the highest and strongest of bonds between he and the Lord, between you and the Lord. That that Paul knew. He said, “I've got to go alone. You folk take a ship.”**** Folk, if you have valuables, you keep them locked up.

And now, go back with me to **Acts 20:28**. And what I am about to say from here to the close, do not make more out of what I say than I intended. I am no prophet. I have no extraordinary gifts. I would not even consider myself worthy to carry Paul's books to him. Now you realizing that, that being said, one of my griefs in departing from you is - I know what lies ahead. Now **Acts 20:28 - Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood**. That's what I'm talking about. God purchased you, but God bringing you into an intimate friendship. Abraham **was called the Friend of God** – **James 2:23b**.

Now **Verse 29**. Now, what I'm saying, I am not saying this is my last time here. I'm not saying that. I'm not saying a month from now or a year from now or two years from now, I'm not saying that, I don't know. But I do know this, **Verse 29**, and the title of the message is, “After My Departing” **For I know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock. Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them.** – **Acts 20:29**. Some of you I know, I call you strong in the Lord. I think you are very dedicated as best you can be. And when I'm gone and you're here, these things are coming. Grievous wolves. Not sparing the flock. And everything within me, and the only motive of even being here - every day this week, I closed my thinking here. And I have searched throughout this book, even one day had Larry checking on another sermon title, to see if I'd ever preached that. I didn't want to be here. But I know that there is coming upon you that which you must be careful for and watch for, and would, if possible, destroy the very fabric of this church. There is no weightier epistle in all scripture than what Paul wrote to the Ephesians, the ones that he's called here, “the elders”. Yet within about 30 years after Paul's dead, Jesus took up this with the church at Ephesus. **Revelation 2:2-4 - I know thy works, and thy labour, and thy patience, and how thou canst not bear them which are evil: and thou hast tried them which say they are apostles, and are not, and hast found them liars: And hast borne, and hast patience, and for my name's sake hast laboured, and hast not fainted. Nevertheless I have somewhat against thee, because thou hast left thy first love**. The condition in this land is that which I mentioned some 30 years ago of exactly what would be. I received a lot of ridicule, mocked by a best friend, “You are no prophet, we can pray, we can get the country back on the right track. We got to get the right men in office. We got to get folks voting.” I said, “All right, go ahead.” And I've not mentioned it again. And there's that in this old fallen nature of me that when they bring up to me how bad it is, I just like to say, “Could you go back 30 years ago and remember our conversation when you got very heated and said, I didn't know what I was talking about”, but that would be all me. That wouldn't be the Spirit of the Lord. So I just let them talk. Paul didn't have to be a prophet to tell the elders what would be. He knew human nature. And he knew that human nature will always take the path of least resistance, or human nature will take the path of the greatest advantage. Hold your place here. I got one last that I want you to turn with me, and that's in **2 Kings 8**.

Hazael was sent by the king to the prophet to find out if he would recover. **2 Kings 8:10-13a** - **And Elisha said unto him, Go, say unto him, Thou mayest certainly recover: howbeit the Lord hath shewed me that he shall surely die. And he settled his countenance stedfastly, until he was ashamed: and the man of God wept. And Hazael said, Why weepeth my lord? And he answered, Because I know the evil that thou wilt do unto the children of Israel: their strong holds wilt thou set on fire, and their young men wilt thou slay with the sword, and wilt dash their children, and rip up their women with child. And Hazael said, But what, is thy servant a dog, that he should do this great thing?** He didn't know what was within his own heart. He had a higher opinion of himself. He could never stoop that low. **2 Kings 8:13b**- **And Elisha answered, The Lord hath shewed me that thou shalt be king over Syria.** Watch out for wolves. Not sparing the flock. Watch out for evil men coming in. We don't have this kind of men left - and there were prophetesses in the Old Testament also.

2 Kings 8:14 - **So he departed from Elisha, and came to his master; who said to him, What said Elisha to thee? And he answered, He told me that thou shouldest surely recover.** But Hazel got to laying there that night on his bed thinking, "If I'm king, I will have great wealth and great power. And I will have servants like I am to the king. And I will be ruler." You know what he did the next day when he got up? **2 Kings 8:15a** - **And it came to pass on the morrow, that he took a thick cloth, and dipped it in water, and spread it on his face, so that he died:.** He smothered the king to death. "You think I'm a dog that would do something like that?" And yet he was overcome by pride, ambition, lust, never believing that he could be guilty of such a crime. But his lust for power and riches overcame him.

Now children, and you fellows in particular, if men came in dressed as evil wolves, you would have no problem standing against them when you found out what they were. But your problem is going to come, let it be a friend, or a relative, or a good acquaintance and of your own selves shall some arise. Over 45 years ago, well, it was over 50 years ago now, JoJo wasn't even born. Two uncles that had professed salvation under my ministry - and I was a young preacher and they were at least 20 years older than me. And of course, their age made them know more after they'd sat there a little bit. And both of them wanted a meeting with me one Sunday afternoon after lunch - wanted me to come to their house. I said, "No, you come to mine", because I knew something wasn't right about this. And they got there and sputtered around, danced around the subject, and I said, "What do you want?" "Well, what you preached this morning, we just think it was very wrong. And you should not have been so personal up there in that pulpit." It's a lot harder to deal with family and friends than with strangers. I let them speak and dismissed them. And I suppose not knowing that they got their point across to me, one of them sat there that Sunday night in the service and clipped his fingernails. And every time there was a pause in my speaking, there was a clip. Everybody could hear it. But I got through.

So now, whenever, God be gracious and spare me 10 years, I don't know. But I will in one way leave with sadness, not knowing just exactly what you will face or what will become of you, young ones here. Will some of you depart? Well, some of you get to looking around and thinking there's not enough activity there. There's more down at the other churches around. And ladies, whether the Lord has gifted you to speak in public, we say "No", but that does not leave you out of this. You can pray, you can pray earnestly for those following. You can pray that God might help keep them focused and that they could keep this assembly focused on the Lord Jesus Christ.

Now you know I'm not one to take up every issue going around. But I would like to think my overall theme, especially these last few years has been Christ and your relationship to Him and Him

becoming what He would if you get your heart right. You think it won't happen? As certain as I am that the sun will rise tomorrow, if the Lord gives us another day, that's how certain I am of what you will face. You speak of Christ, but you warn the little ones that might come along. They're just sinners. And that you can never, as one of the old writers said, "You can never take the thread and needle and begin stitching the gospel in a young person's heart until first the needle has stuck them and they find out who they are without him." You can preach against sin. You must preach against it. You must enable these to know that they are sinners and that they must come to Christ. And when done so, then you can set Christ before them. There are some, actually many, in America and in Great Britain I wouldn't come close, I mean not even close, to comparing myself as far as equal with them in ability to speak. But you know what they've done in the last 15 years, maybe 20? They've lessened their standards. They've adopted a more means of interpreting the scripture to make it less offensive, and gathered the means - are wanting to build the church up in number. I'm all for that. I'd like to see the walls bulging here with a crowd, but not because we forsake the gospel. Not because we slack preaching about Christ. And what a Savior and Brother and Friend that he will be to all those that do His will. We lessen not our standards that we might gain. We lessen not the means of getting to Him because of sin. You must not leave those old trodden out paths to make new ones because the old ones are too strenuous on hearers, they're too demanding. Forsake not. Leave not the old proven paths laid down in scripture. Not only is your soul at risk, but the souls of everybody that hear you are at risk.

And there will come a time that you must rule over your own old nature to be faithful to Him. You might hurt feelings, but it's all right if you do it in love and following the leadership of the Spirit of God. Warn of sin, of death, and hell. And again, always I say, "Keep this place Christ centered." And if grievous wolves enter in, you be as David, not letting them have even the very least. "I killed a lion and I killed a bear because I got a lamb." – paraphrased from **1 Samuel 17**. You don't let them get to these little ones. When you find out they're wolves, they come dressed up in sheep clothing, but then after a little while, their true nature will show, and you find them to be wolves. And we've all been deceived by people. We thought better of them than what they turned out to be. So it will happen again.

And fellows, if God has not gifted you with the ability to speak, don't press your way into this, but pray for those that God is raising up. **And now, brethren, I commend you to God, and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up, and to give you an inheritance among all them which are sanctified. – Acts 20:32.** I hope you didn't misunderstand me. I'm not prophesying anything. I'm just telling you, knowing human nature and having been in this 53 years. Lord bless, Lord keep you. And as Paul said, the Lord build you up in his grace.

- Bro. Barrett Holloway