

Good Morning Christ Community Church. I am so thankful for the opportunity to come and bring the message this morning. Before we dive into our text this morning I want to take a moment and thank you all. I became the Pastor at Ririe Chapel 5 years ago, and when I took the pastorate we began talks of a building project. We had to replace the front stairs of our building, because they were falling apart. There were many hurdles to this plan, chiefly the financial burden as a smaller church. After much prayer among the board of directors we decided to move forward. We sent out letters to local churches asking for assistance, and many partnered with us. Christ Community Church partnered with us in a large way with a financial gift and prayer for our church. I desire to thank you all. We truly would not have been able to even begin our project without your help. On behalf of everyone at Ririe Chapel thank you. I have the privilege to understand what Paul says to the Thessalonian church, "We give thanks to God always for all of you!"

## **Introduction**

Now I would love to turn our attention to our text for this morning. Would you open your bibles to Acts chapter 20 verses 17-35. While you are turning there, have you ever had to say goodbye to someone? Likely you all have whether it was a friend moving away or a child going to college. Goodbyes are a part of life. However, have you ever had to say goodbye to someone knowing you would not see them again?

I have had the opportunity to speak up at Old Faithful Christian Ranch several times and I always love it. Spending time in God's Word with the young guys and gals is just amazing. Usually Thursday night is a special night, because we do chapel around the campfire. Often, it is a sobering time in which the students contemplate Jesus and salvation. Many of them dedicate their lives to the Lord or rededicate their lives to the Lord. Then comes Friday morning chapel. I find Friday morning the most difficult chapel message to prepare, because the students are leaving and I may not see them again. I desire to teach them more about the Lord and discipleship. I desire to prepare them for life not at camp. Some of them are going back to hard home situations, serious sins, and deep depression.

It is difficult to say goodbye to someone you will not see again, because we want to impart wisdom to carry them through our absence. In our text today

Paul is saying farewell to the elders of Ephesus. Paul has spent three years serving with these men. He has labored for them and with them, and now he is leaving. To add to that, Paul knows he will not see these men again. Paul is returning to Jerusalem and knows he will be imprisoned and afflicted. This is the setting of our text today. Paul's final words face to face with the church of Ephesus. He desires to prepare the Church for what is coming in his absence. So let us read our text today [Acts 20:17-35](#).

Acts 20:17–35 ESV

“Now from Miletus he sent to Ephesus and called the elders of the church to come to him. 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.' ”

I know this is a large reading so I want to boil it down for us. You could preach four sermons from this text; however I only have today. Bottom line, Paul is warning the Church that wolves are going to come in and not spare the flock, and deceivers are going to rise up from among the Church and lead away disciples. It is from this warning that Paul calls the Church, especially the overseers, to be ready. So we need to unpack Paul's warning

to the Church before we can appreciate Paul's call to the Church.

1. So to begin with, Paul tells the Church wolves are going to come in not sparing the flock and deceivers will rise up to lead away the disciples.

Pauls warns in verses 29-30, "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."

a. These wolves are unbelievers coming and persecuting the church.

We know persecution of the early church was gruesome. Emperor Nero who is currently reigning began to burn Christians alive. Rome for a few hundred years pursued killing Christians. The methods of this persecution should shock us; however the reality of persecution should not.

i. Jesus promised persecution in Matthew 10:16-18 "Behold, I am sending you out as sheep in the midst of wolves, so be wise as serpents and innocent as doves. Beware of men, for they will deliver you over to courts and flog you in their synagogues, and you will be dragged before governors and kings for my sake, to bear witness before them and the Gentiles." Paul promises persecution for all who pursue godliness 2 Timothy 3:12 "Indeed, all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted, while evil people and impostors will go on from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived."

ii. We see wolves coming into the flock of God and devouring throughout history. All the way back to the times of Paul until now in our present age. We here in America live a very privileged life, and praise God. However currently our brothers and sisters in Christ around the world have wolves chasing them, eating them. At the forefront of our minds right now is the church in Afghanistan. The body of Christ is being hunted by the wolves. May we never forget we are sheep in the midst of wolves. There may come a day when we no longer have our religious freedom as Americans, and the wolves have free reign. Paul's warning is for us, and for our Churches. Though we may not experience the ravaging of intense persecution, we must remember what we are up against. We do experience persecution, albeit mild persecution. We all experience affliction caused by a fallen world under the power of the enemy. This may be situations at work or in the home where we are belittled for our faith. We may be passed over for a job promotion.

Whatever the case may be we must acknowledge the threat of the wolves presently in our lives.

b. Not only does Paul warn the Church against wolves, but he also warns the Church about deceivers rising up from within the church and their goal is to lead away and deceive the disciples. We know the early church experienced many heresies that rose out of their ranks. From Paul confronting the Judaizers to John combating the gnostics. There will be those who seek to twist the bible and even the good news of Jesus for their own pleasure and material gain.

i. We can see this in history and in our present culture. Out of the epidemic of comfortable Christianity deceivers have produced blatant heresies, and vomited them around the world. One example, dear church, is the word of faith movement, also known as 'name it and claim it,' or, as my Dad calls it, 'blab it and grab it' is a heresy. Deceivers twist scripture for their gain. They have turned the all powerful God into nothing more than man's cosmic vending machine. Paul's warning of deceivers rising up is for us today as well.

I grew up here in Idaho on a farm and ranch. Growing up we had a flock of sheep. I have to tell you all sheep are dumb. I argue they are the dumbest farm animal. Hopefully you have seen a sheep. Picture it in your mind. They have an oddly shaped body, dorky head, and these pathetic stick legs. If a predator gets into a herd the sheep's only hope is that they are faster than the other sheep. We had coyotes get into the flock and kill our sheep. After the first sheep was killed my dad, the shepherd, went to work. We put bells on the lead sheep's neck, so that we could hear if something was happening. We got llamas to help protect the sheep. There was a threat and we responded.

› **Transition: Paul is warning the Church of Ephesus and the Church today that there is a threat, and from this Paul tells the Church, especially the Overseers how to be ready. There are four necessities for the Church from our text.**

2. First, the Church needs Overseers who are paying attention. Verse 28 says, "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."

We must remember Paul is speaking to the elders of the church who are also called overseers. The office of Overseer is crucial to the safety of the Church. Paul, in light of the threat of wolves and deceivers, first calls the Overseers or Elders to pay attention to the flock. Now from our text we see the origin of Overseers, the duty of Overseers, and the attitude of Overseers.

- a. The Origin of the Overseers is the Holy Spirit. Paul states the Holy Spirit has made them Overseers. I know many of the current Elders of Christ Community Church and many of the former Elders. Your Elders, Pastors included, are commissioned by God. The office of Overseer has authority in the Church. We need men of God called to this office. Elders of CCC, you are called by God to this office. This is a sobering reality.
- b. The Duty of Overseer is to care for the flock. The Greek here means to act like a shepherd. The duty of the Overseer is to tend to the needs of the flock. Remember those dorky helpless sheep who are prey to the predators. Our duty as elders or overseers is to run to the flock's aid.

During that time of coyotes I can remember hearing the bell of the on the sheep's neck sound. There was an immediate response to the threat. One of us from the family, usually my father, would run to the flock. In order to scare away the predator. Paul is calling Overseers to PAY ATTENTION to the flock!

- c. The attitude of Overseers must be that they are called to shepherd the blood-bought flock of God. Overseers are never shepherding their own flock; rather God's flock. This attitude creates a seriousness to the calling of the Overseer. Overseers of CCC and myself, we are called by the Holy Spirit to care for God's blood-bought bride. Nothing should distract us from this calling. Paul is calling the Elders then and now to step to the front and protect the flock!

John Calvin said, "The Pastor must have two voices. One to speak tenderly to the flock, and the other to drive away the wolves."

- › The Church needs Overseers who pay attention, and praise God Christ Community for the Elder board you have and the pastor staff

you enjoy. I pray God will continue to raise up men to oversee this church. The Church not only needs diligent overseers, but the church as a whole needs to be alert to the threats!

3. The second necessity for the Church in light of the threat is to be alert. Paul states, “Therefore be alert, remembering that for three years I did not cease night or day to admonish every one with tears.” It is true Paul is still speaking to the Elders; however when the elders got back home I am certain they told their church the same thing. Since wolves are around and deceivers are rising up the Church needs to be alert. The Church needs to be alert personally and corporately.
  - a. Paul speaks to the personal alertness of the Church in [Ephesians 5:15-16](#) “Look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise but as wise, making the best use of the time, because the days are evil.” In other words because the days are evil we need to watch our step! We need to be alert.

If you have ever hiked a switch back or on any uneven ground you understand this. You have to watch where you step and where you are going. You have to watch the weather to be sure you don't get trapped in a storm.

    - i. Each and every one of us need to be alert. We need to be on guard against the wolves and deceivers. This means we need to be aware of our surroundings. The people we hang out with, the music we listen to, the TV we watch, and all of the other dynamics of our lives should have to pass through a filter. We cannot afford to be flippant with our christian life, because there are wolves seeking you out! There are deceivers desiring to fool you. Therefore, dear friend be alert.
    - b. Each one of us should not only be personally alert, but corporately alert. Paul makes this point in verse 35, “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.’” Each one of us should seek to help the weak.

This may be one good thing about sheep. They are a herd animal. If

a predator gets into the flock they run together. They create this mass of wool. Now they can't do anything once they are together. They can only stand there and hope the predator loses interest. The Church should be a community that comes together like a flock of sheep.

- i. We come together in the Name of Jesus. We rally around the weak and drive away the wolves and deceivers by prayer and encouraging the weak. I must take a moment here and speak to both sides of the situation here.
  1. On the one side we have the individuals who have not heard a deceiver in years, if ever, and they don't even know what a wolf looks like. When we find ourselves in a place of peace we can fall prey to not seeing the suffering of our brothers and sisters. Just because you are not experiencing the wolves and the deceivers does not mean that no one is. Paul is still calling us to be alert! We should be communities who are concerned about each other. We should be churches who are radically involved in each other's lives. We should be watching out for each other. How sad it is when people are suffering within the church and the church does nothing. The Church needs to be alert and on guard for each other.
  2. On the other side of this there are those who have been attacked by the wolves and deceived by the deceivers. There are those who are suffering and struggling. You may be sitting here today with hunks of your soul ripped out, with pain, with regret, and with sorrow burdening your spirit. Come to the flock! Come to the Church. I am not speaking of the building, but the people. Talk to someone. Tell someone you are struggling. Reach out to your pastors and elders! It is sad that Christians are more willing to go to the Quick n Loans than to the Church. This is because Quick n Loans gives anonymity, and we can hide behind it. The problem is anonymity only isolates us, and an isolated sheep off by itself is easy picking for a wolf. So I implore you, reach out to someone. The Church is here for you. You have elders and pastors here to care for you. Please, if you are feeling weak, beaten up, and worn down come to the flock.

My Dad finally wised up and sold the sheep, but we also had cows. When we work cows to brand them or give them shots it's all hands on deck. Everyone had a job. My dad would give the shots and brand the cows. My grandma would load the shots. My Grandpa would run the squeeze chute. My mother, brother, and sister would push the cows up to the squeeze chute. My job was to sit on the back fence and watch the cows to make sure they did not jump the back fence. It was incredibly boring! Keep in mind branding cows could take an hour or two, and here I am sitting in the back. My sole task was to be watchful and alert. This one time the cows started getting really ornery. They started pushing the back fence and one started to raise its front legs to jump. Now this was the first action to take place on the back fence since the dawn of time, and unfortunately I had wandered off in my own thoughts. I was not being alert. I was daydreaming. The cow uncontested jumped the fence and part of the herd followed. By the time I realized what was happening it was too late. I had to explain to everyone, who was doing their job, why the cows got out. I had become distracted. I was not paying attention or being alert. Dear Church we need overseers who are paying attention and a whole church who are alert. We cannot afford to get distracted! Wolves are coming! Deceivers will rise up! This brings us to our third necessity for the Church in light of the wolves and deceivers.

4. The third necessity for the Church is an ability to endure. Paul is warning the Church then and now so that they and we can be ready!

Have you ever been driving and a deer comes on the road? Hopefully you didn't hit the deer, but isn't it just silly how the deer walks on the road and then looks at the light and stops! The deer is alert! It is aware of the bright shining orb speeding toward it, but it doesn't move. It is kinda ridiculous. We are not called to be like the deer when we face wolves and deceivers. We need to continue to push forward even in the midst of opposition.

- a. We are called to run the race before, no matter the cost. We are called to withstand suffering. We are to be an unmovable community. Even when the wolves come we should endure, and when the deceivers rise up we ought to withstand. Paul is the example of this in verses 22-24. He is heading to Jerusalem and he does not know



what exactly will happen to him, but he does know he will be imprisoned and afflicted. In other words Paul does know he will be arrested and possibly beaten, but he does not know he is going to be beaten so badly he will not be able to walk. He does not know this imprisonment will take him all the way to Rome. However, no matter the cost, Paul is committed. Verse 24 reads “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.” Paul's example gives us a picture of enduring and being ready and the Church. It is like he says to the Elders, “Wolves are coming for you and your Church be ready. As for me I am headed into the wolf's den.”

- b. The ability to endure only comes through valuing Jesus above our own lives. Paul makes this point even more clear in [Philippians 3:7-11](#) “But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ. Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith— that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, that by any means possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead.”
  - i. Friends, is Jesus your supreme delight? The Church needs to be able to endure trials, wolves, and deceivers. This happens when we treasure Christ above our own lives. Paul does not account his life as any value apart from Christ. Paul does not hold his life as precious to himself. Paul is stating his supreme delight is Jesus! Nothing else matters compared to knowing Jesus! Only as we attempt to value Christ above all else will we be able to endure the evil days.
    - 1. When we value Christ above our own lives the wolves can physically attack us, but they cannot truly harm us. When I realize the magnitude of the majesty of Jesus I realize I have all I need. The wolves will come in, but they will not be able to take

what we have in Christ!

2. When we value Christ above our own lives the deceivers cannot lead us astray. The deceptions of man twist scripture for material gain or physical success. If we are valuing Christ above all else then we will be able to see through the lies of a man centered heresy.

It is a simple truth that in order to endure we must value Christ above our own life, but it is difficult in practice. You may remember the portion of the Book "Where the Red Fern Grows" in which Billy needs to catch a raccoon hide to train his dogs. In order to do this Billy makes a trap with a narrow opening at the top and nails around the opening. At the bottom of the trap Billy places a bright shiny object. The raccoons would come and see the shiny object and want it. So they would reach in and grab the object, and as they pull their paw they would be stuck by the nails. This was a very effective trap for Billy and does work in reality. The irony is all the raccoon needs to do is let go of the shiny object and he could be free. Freedom is that simple for the raccoon, but it won't. The raccoon wants the bright shiny object and won't let go even if it means death.

1. Our fallen hearts are so like that raccoon. My sinful heart desires the momentary pleasures of this earth. Our hand is caught in the trap of money, fame, career, or family. Now these things are not bad; in fact they are good, but the trap is when a good thing becomes the best thing in our lives. Dear friends, the wolves are coming, let go and value Christ! Do not let your heart or the deceiver lead you away in the pursuit of fleeting fascination. We must value Christ above our own lives. When we enjoy Jesus as our supreme delight we can endure the evil days.
- › Transition: It is always difficult preaching subjects like this, because as I proclaim that we all need to value Christ above all even above our own lives I know how short I come. Sin is not valuing Christ enough. It is saying Jesus you are not enough and I need ABC or D. It then begs the question, am I ready for the wolves? Am I prepared for the deceivers? Paul is saying it is going to be hard work. Following Jesus

always is. Dying to ourselves in order to value Christ above all is a life long difficult task. We are going to fail. We are going to fall short. Overseers are going to struggle. We as the Church may forget to be alert. Paul's exhortation to the Church and especially to the elders is daunting. In light of the evil days the Church needs overseers who pay attention, the Church needs to be alert, and the Church needs to be ready to endure. In the midst of the difficulty of these three necessities the Church must remember who their Good Shepherd is.

5. This is the fourth necessity in light of the wolves and deceivers coming; the Church needs to remember who is their Good Shepherd. Paul states in verse 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."

i. Overseers you are called to pay attention to the flock. Church we are called to be alert and endure by valuing Christ above our own lives. It is going to be scary. We may experience days of deep darkness. However, we must remember whose hands we are in. Paul entrusts the Ephesians into the hands of God. This is Paul saying, "I am leaving, but you are in the hands of God and The Word of His grace!" The Word of God's Grace is Jesus and the Gospel. Take heart dear friends, no matter how deep the darkness, no matter how deceitful the deceivers, no matter how fierce the wolves we are in the hands of the Good Shepherd. Jesus states in [John 10:27-30](#) "My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all, and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand. I and the Father are one." This is our hope! God is for us and Christ is with us! There is no power that can snatch you from Christ. Not only is God with us and for, but He is working in our lives and guarantees us eternal life.

1. God is able to build us up. We all come with brokenness and problems, but God by the Word of His grace is building you up. We may go through intense persecution and fiery trails, but we can know God is working. [Romans 8:28](#) "And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those

who are called according to his purpose.” God is working through the afflictions for our good and His Glory.

2. God is able to give us the inheritance of eternal life with Jesus. [Ephesians 1:13-14](#) “In him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of his glory.” No matter how difficult things may get we need to remember God is able to bring us to our inheritance. Our inheritance is certain because of the finished complete work of Christ. The inheritance of eternal life is for all those who have been sanctified.
  - a. The Greek form of sanctified is a perfect passive participle. This means the action of being sanctified is being done to us and is perfect and complete. To be sanctified means to be set apart as holy. It is true we are not perfect in this life, but the righteousness that comes through faith in Jesus Christ means our future complete holiness is absolute.

## **Conclusion**

With his final words Paul warns the Church of what is coming and calls the Church to be ready. Christ Community Church we need to remember who our Good Shepherd is. When we behold the glory of our Good Shepherd it will produce within us a valuing of Christ above life itself. When we value Christ above life itself we will be able to endure the evil days. We need to be able to endure because wolves are coming and deceivers are going to rise up, therefore dear church be alert and fellow overseers pay attention! We must prepare for the wolves!