

SUMMER 5 - Acts 16-18 - Encouragement, Eutychus, and Tears in Ephesus

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[0 : 00] Well, friends, I'm very glad we're in here rather than in the church because it's quite muggy in there.

And we couldn't be in the Hudson Taylor room, which was our next option, because the Mandarin youth are in there tonight. They've got a whole two days of studying the Bible together and they're sleeping there overnight.

And so they're there. They had first priority on it. But I thought this would work. So anyway, it's a lot cooler than it was at 7 o'clock, let me tell you.

Anyway, let's pray. Almighty and loving Father, may the words that I speak now be yours and may you graft them into our hearts and work in us so as to bring forth in us the fruit of good works.

And we pray this for the honour and praise of your name through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen. Our friends, I'm going to start with a story which some of you will remember.

[1 : 05] His name was Jim Jones and he was the pastor of a church. And in 1977, he and many of his followers relocated to a place called Jonestown in Guyana.

There were rumours that there'd been brainwashing and mistreatment. Investigations were launched and a senator visited. And the senator was killed. Jones realised that the days of the cult were therefore numbered unless something drastic happened.

So he called all of his people together and they drank a cocktail of cyanide, sedatives and tranquilisers. At the end of it, 912 people lay dead, scattered around the grounds of the farm.

Jones shot himself in the head. Friends, those events happened just after I became a Christian. It was a Christian cult. And around about the time I began to consider Christian ministry.

And they have, for a number of reasons, stuck in my brain. They are, you see, a prime example, amongst many other examples, of how at risk God's people are to wolves in sheep's clothing.

[2 : 18] And so this talk is going to have a look at some advice given to the leaders of Ephesus about these very such things. So let's turn and let's have a look at Acts 20. And we're going to finish up in Acts 20 and the speech of Paul.

But it might be helpful for us to remember the context of these verses. First, let's have a look at Paul's itinerary. And I've given you a little map there. We're in the early stages of Paul's third missionary journey.

Look at the map and look at your Bibles as well at the same time. So you can have one in one hand and one in the other, as it were. Let's see where Paul is and let's see where he has been.

Chapter 18, verse 23 is the first verse to look at. We're told that Paul spends some time in Antioch. We're then told that he takes an inland route through Galatia and Phrygia.

And as he goes, he strengthens the disciples in those regions. Now flip through to chapter 19, verse 1. We're told that Paul takes the road through the interior and he arrives at Ephesus from, as it were, his back entrance.

[3 : 24] We looked at this chapter on Sunday night. However, in the middle of this chapter, we're told about his ongoing travel plans. Look at verse 21 in Acts 19. And we read this.

After this happened, Paul decided to go to Jerusalem, passing through Macedonia and Archaea. After I've been there, he said, I must visit Rome also. It's a strange trip, isn't it?

Because if you look at it on the map, here he is, as it were, in Ephesus. He says, I'm going to Jerusalem. But he just doesn't turn around and go back to Jerusalem. No, he says, I'm going via Macedonia and Archaea.

Then I'm going back to Jerusalem. Then I'm coming back this way again and on my way through to Rome. So notice the headings. Jerusalem via Macedonia, via Archaea, finally to visit Rome.

Notice again, his long-term goal is Rome itself. And with that we begin, by the way, Archaea is where Greece is.

[4 : 23] You'll see that on the map. You can see it labeled. Let's turn to the first few verses of chapter 20. In chapter 20, verse 1, he bids farewell to the Ephesians and he heads off to Macedonia.

And we know from his letters and from chapter 20 that Ephesus had been a really tough gig for him. You see, the word uproar in verse 1 reminds us of some of that.

Anyway, after encouraging the Ephesians, he says goodbye to them. He sets out for Macedonia and he travels through the area. And as he goes, he speaks many words of encouragement to the people that he meets.

Finally, he arrives in Greece. That is, he comes to Archaea. And you can see that in chapter 20, verse 2. In verse 3, we're told he stays in Greece for three months.

So if we think about Acts 19, 21, Paul has fulfilled two essential stages of his long-term goal. He has now, he set his heart on Jerusalem.

[5 : 23] He's been through Macedonia and Archaea. We fully expect that he's now going to head off to Jerusalem. But now look at the second half of verse 3. It appears as though he is about to do exactly that, perhaps to take off via a boat.

And we're told that because some Jews had plotted against him, just as he was about to sail for Syria, he decided to go back through Macedonia. So he turns back on his tracks, as it were. And you can see this in our map.

Across from Ephesus to Macedonia, down to Greece. Now back through Macedonia again. And in verse 4, there are various men that accompany him.

In verse 5, they go on ahead of him and they wait in Troas. And in verse 5, we get the language of us again. Can you see that? Us and then later on, we.

And it appears to indicate that Luke has now joined him again. Perhaps he's joined him in Philippi. And they journey on from there to Troas. And they join the others in Troas.

[6 : 24] So now we've got this whole little band together in Troas. And in verse 6, we're told that they're there for seven days. Now before we move on and look at what happens there, I want to show you some things that are not quite evident on the surface of the text.

Turn with me in your Bibles to chapter 24, verse 17. So Acts 24, 17. I need to tell you that these verses we're about to read come after Paul has finally made it to Jerusalem.

We already saw that some Jews were beginning to cause trouble for him, even in Archaea. Well, back in Jerusalem, some Jews from Asia then stir up some trouble for him. The end result is when he gets back to Jerusalem, he's arrested.

As we'll see later, he's taken before various Jewish and Roman authorities. There are plots to kill him. And in chapter 4, he stands before Governor Felix in Caesarea.

And look what he says in verse 17. He explains his actions in this way. He says, After an absence of several years, I came to Jerusalem to bring my people gifts for the poor and to present offerings.

[7 : 30] Now we get some hint as to why he's going to Jerusalem, you see. He's going to Jerusalem to bring gifts and offerings. Now, he's bearing gifts.

He's bearing a collection that he's been taking up amongst all the churches. And the epistles, you remember every now and then in the epistles, he refers to a collection he's taking up. Well, that is probably this one.

And in fact, it appears as though it's a 20-year project in Paul's ministry. 20 years of collecting collections and taking them to Jerusalem. It may very well be that the men mentioned in verse 4 are therefore representatives of Gentile churches who are going with him, representing the churches of the Gentiles in order to present this gift to the Jerusalem churches.

The Jerusalem church. Now, look at the names of the people and look at the places they're associated with. They're from all over the place. Sopater from Berea. Aristarchus and Secundus from Thessalonica.

Gaius from Derbe. Timothy, who we heard of in Ephesus. Tisicus and Trophimus from the province of Asia. And by implication, Luke from Philippi.

[8 : 43] Can you see what's being said? From all over that place where he's been traveling, we've got representatives with him. And perhaps they are going with him to actually present corporately this collection from all of these groupings of people.

But it appears as though this gift for the poor saints in Jerusalem was a gift of love. But also more than that, it was a symbol of unity. Perhaps Paul thought it might accomplish a couple of things.

First, it would help Gentile Christians realize the debt that they owed to the mother church in Jerusalem from which the gospel had come. And second, it would give the Jewish Christians there in Jerusalem an appreciation of the vitality of Gentile faith.

Anyway, that's a bit of background for you. That's what I think is going on underneath the surface here in these verses. You can read more about the collection in some place. If you're taking notes, in Romans 15, in 1 Corinthians 16, and in 2 Corinthians 8 to 9.

And now let's return to see what happens in Troas. Chapter 20, verse 7. We're told that on the first day of the week, we, that is Luke and the others, came together to break bread.

[9 : 58] Now let me tell you, this is the first unambiguous reference in the New Testament to Christians meeting on Sunday rather than Saturday. The first hint that we've got that they're doing it.

Perhaps because of work commitments Christians met during the evening, they break bread in the evenings which probably means they celebrated the Lord's Supper in the context of a meal. They listen to Paul speak and speak he does.

Apparently he keeps on talking until midnight. I like the on and on in the verse. And just as happens whenever Christians meet and listen to preachers who speak on and on, there are people who fall asleep.

It may very well be that it's added to by, not the heat of the day, but you notice the reference to the many lamps. I wonder if the place has sort of, you know, got all sorts of smoke going around in it.

It's late at night. They're keeping themselves awake by the light of candles and so on and lamps and there's oil and it's getting pretty stuffy in there. And Eutychus is sitting, you know, perhaps near the window on the windowsill or whatever.

[11 : 05] And sure enough, he falls out right out of the window. Last thing you want happening as a preacher, let me tell you. Everyone rushes down.

Eutychus is dead and Paul knows, though, it's not too late. He does what Elijah and Elisha do in the Old Testament and throws himself on the young man, wraps his arms around him and Eutychus is restored to life.

And believers return to their third story room. I have a midnight snack and continue on until dawn. I'd be pretty worried there'd be more people falling out of windows myself.

Anyway, it was a great night of encouragement. There's recently been a book published by a group of people on preaching that is called Awake...

Sorry? Yes, it's called Saving Eutychus. In other words, preaching not long, tedious sermons. Anyway, they had received preaching from Paul.

[12 : 05] They shared in the Lord's Supper. They'd seen a great sign of God's presence and power. It's a great evening together and symbolises a little bit of what Christians did. Let's turn to verse 13.

Paul journeys on towards Jerusalem. Luke and others hop on a boat that stops at various places along the way. Now, the introvert in me wonders if all of these people are a bit too much for Paul and maybe he's an introvert as well because he gets out and while the others are going in a boat, he walks by himself.

Or perhaps he wanted some time for prayer. I often reflect on this, wonder whether Paul at times does seem to walk and whether he uses it either to evangelise people or perhaps to have some time on his own when he can pray.

I don't know. I've got no idea. But I have pondered it every now and then. Paul travels on foot to Asos. He rejoins them there. They then arrive off Shios and then they cross over to Samos.

They arrive at Miletus and verse 19 tells us that Paul is now in a hurry to get to Jerusalem by Pentecost. He also wants to encourage the Ephesian Christians and so from Miletus he sends for the elders of the church at Ephesus and verses 17 to 38 give us a wonderful record of what he says to them.

[13 : 17] It's his parting message. The reason I read the one Samuel passage is that that's Samuel's parting message to his people and here is another parting message from Paul to the Ephesians.

Now this speech is unique in a whole lot of ways. It is the only record in Acts of an address by Paul to a Christian audience for example. And it has a very strong look and feel of the sorts of things you find in his letters.

Anyway, before looking at the speech I want to look at the end of the chapter. Can you see what happens? Paul speaks to the elders or has spoken to the elders. He kneels down and he prays. And perhaps he prays the sorts of things we might hear him praying in the book to the Ephesians in the epistle to the Colossians Philippians 1 Thessalonians.

Anyway, after a very deeply affectionate and sorrowful farewell with tears on both sides Paul and his companions board the ship. And that is the context for the address.

He spent a number of years with these people. It appears as though they are amongst the most difficult years of his ministry. They have shared tough times together. They have a deep love for each other.

[14 : 27] And that is Paul's parting message to his friends and his converts. It's a deep and moving moment in the book of Acts. And so that's the context. Now what I want to do is I could go through all the detail but what I want to do is show you why I think Luke has put this particular account in at such length.

I want to give you an outline outline of the speech. And what I've done if you flip to the back page you'll see a more literal translation from the English Standard Version.

I need to tell you this speech is probably an abbreviated speech it probably went on a lot longer than the short few verses that we have. Just as many of the speeches I think in Acts are significantly abbreviated.

Luke probably gives us a snapshot or summary of the speech which preserves its content perhaps even its structure. But I want you to look at the structure. I want you to look at the highlights that I've put in in your diagram.

Can you see them there? Just look at all the repetitions. Do you notice them? So you yourselves know and notice that that's repeated toward the end. So you yourselves know occurs right at the beginning and then right at the end.

[15 : 38] And then notice how I did not shrink from declaring to you occurs another step in. Can you see that there? I did not shrink from declaring to you. And then did you notice there's lots of references to testifying right in the middle.

So why do you think those repetitions are there? It's not a way we generally think. But it appears as though people in the ancient world often think in what's called chiasms that you know when I preach the highlights meant to come at the end.

But maybe the highlights actually in the middle here. for these for Paul. And that the thing he really wants to say is just encapsulated right in the middle of his speech. I think that's where the high point is.

I think the repetitions force you to the middle of the speech. So see if you can work out what's being said at that high point. My thought is that these verses in these verses we are looking at in between the two and behold now statements.

we are looking at what the key point of his message is. Look at verses 22 to 23 and look at what Paul says. He says 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.

[17 : 01] But I don't account my life of any value nor as precious to myself if only I may finish my course and the ministry I received from the Lord Jesus to testify to the gospel of grace and now behold now let's focus on that content for a moment.

Paul is clear isn't he? He's going to Jerusalem. Second he's going there under the direction and constraint of the Holy Spirit. Third he doesn't know the details of what's going to happen there except it will involve imprisonment and affliction.

Fourth he and God work hand in hand together in this. The Spirit you see keeps testifying to Paul that imprisonment and affliction await him and Paul keeps testifying to the gospel of the grace of God.

Can you see Holy Spirit is telling Paul things and Paul is telling people things. In other words Paul is sticking close to the ministry that Jesus gave him and fifth point Paul considers that in all of this his life is of no account given that he's on a mission from God and that mission is to tell people of the gospel of the grace of God.

So what do you think Luke's saying here? I want to step back from it a bit and think about what is going on and to do that I want to go to Luke's parallel work of Luke's gospel.

[18 : 24] You see remember well this is actually his first volume of a two volume work. I want us to go now back into Luke so can you travel back into Luke's gospel with me? And I want you to look particularly at Luke 9 51 and look at what it says.

So flip in your Bibles Luke 9 51 It says this As the time approached for him to be taken up into heaven Jesus resolutely set out for Jerusalem.

Now that verse scholars note is a turning point in the ministry of Jesus. You see up until this point Luke has recorded his ministry in the ministry of Jesus in Galilee. From now on he steadfastly works toward Jerusalem and looks toward it.

And the word used is sort of what you'd use if any of you have done the sport of orienteering then you know the best way to do orienteering is you're given a compass reference and some footsteps or yards or whatever or meters that you're meant to take toward the point.

The best way to do orienteering rightly is to set, take the compass bearing and look at some item that is on that compass bearing and start taking steps toward it.

[19 : 36] That is what Jesus is doing here. He sets his mind, his eye on Jerusalem and he says that's where I'm going and he begins to journey toward it. From now on he'll steadfastly work toward Jerusalem.

Now why? What's going to happen to him in Jerusalem? Well Luke has already told us by telling us what Jesus came to do. He tells us later on, look at chapter 19 verse 10.

And look at what he says to Zacchaeus. Remember chapter 19 verse 10. And he says this. The son of man came to seek and to save the lost.

So you see Jesus is shaped by God's desire and God's desire is to do what? To seek and to save the lost. And what will happen therefore in order to seek and to save the lost? What will Jesus need to do in order to save the lost?

Well Luke 9. So go back to Luke 9 verses 18 to 22. Tells us that. Just remember that the disciples have confessed Jesus is the Messiah.

[20 : 35] He says, he responds by urging them to keep to themselves and then he says in verse 22. The son of man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests and the teachers of the law and he must be killed and on the third day raised again to life.

Friends, in Luke's gospel and on the mouth of Jesus, Jerusalem is a place of suffering and death. Now look at the verses immediately after this.

Look at verses 23 to 25. Luke 9, 23 to 25. After announcing where he's going, he urges his disciples to follow him and says, Can you see what's being said?

The demand of Jesus is very clear. It is to follow him on the road to Jerusalem. For the sake of Jesus, the disciples of Jesus are to be willing to deny themselves in their own rights and to follow Jesus where he goes.

The theme is picked up in Luke 14, 25 to 27. So have a look, sorry, 26 to 27. So keep going. Luke 14, 26.

[22 : 07] And Jesus says, If anyone comes to me and does not hate father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, even their own life, such a person cannot be my disciple.

And whoever does not carry their cross and follow me cannot be my disciple. Now, did you notice the pattern? Think about it for a moment. Compare Luke and Acts together and think about what's going on.

Jesus is on a mission from God, isn't he? It's a mission to rescue people from sin and to bring them into relationship with God. It's to seek and to save the lost. Because he's on that mission, it will be necessary for him to suffer in order to bring it to fruition.

Knowing this, what does he do? He sets his mind to go wherever it is necessary for that to happen. In Jesus' case, where does that mean he's got to go?

He's got to go to Jerusalem. And Jesus expects his disciples to have the very same mindset as he himself has. They too are to be on a mission from God, to rescue people from sin, bring people into relationship with God.

[23 : 12] God. And because they're on this mission, there will be opposition and difficulty and suffering and deprivation and pain. Nevertheless, the disciple will set their minds on doing this, fixing their eyes not so much on the suffering, but on what lies beyond it.

for what lies beyond is what lay beyond for Jesus, the glory of being in the presence of God. In our case, the glory of knowing Jesus, belonging to him, being in his company and being in his will on the way.

Now, think about Acts, Jesus and Paul. Did you notice there's a similarity between Luke and Acts as it talks about the ministry of Paul?

You see, Paul has been around since Acts 9. and most of his ministry has occurred outside of Jerusalem. But here, in chapter 19, 21, he resolves that just like his Lord, he will go to Jerusalem for a specific purpose.

And our passage tells us why he's going. He's doing it because he's on a mission from God that is more important than life itself. He is to testify to the gospel of the grace of God. And the rest of Acts tells us the story of how he goes to Jerusalem.

[24 : 27] And lo and behold, the same thing happens in Jerusalem as happened to Jesus. He suffers. And in his suffering, his determination to testify to Jesus pushes him on from Jerusalem and even on to Rome.

Can you see what I'm saying? I'm saying that this speech in Acts 20 is, in my view, setting the program for the rest of the book of Acts. And it functions like Luke 9 does in Luke.

Luke 9 is a turning point where Jerusalem is on the horizon. Luke, Acts 21 is a turning point. Acts 20 is a turning point where Jerusalem is on the horizon. And Jerusalem will mean what it meant for the Lord, suffering.

I think this also sets up Paul as a model of what it means to take up your cross and follow Jesus. I think Luke is deliberately saying, you've heard about taking up your cross and following Jesus in Luke's gospel at the mouth of Jesus.

Let me show you what it looks like in an apostle to the Gentiles. He will do the same. He will, in order to testify of Jesus, be ready to suffer.

[25 : 36] that is, he will take up his cross and follow Jesus. Now, let me say that I think what I'm saying is all of this is very deliberate in my view in Luke's part. I think he's setting up his book with a deliberate pattern, using Paul as a model of what it means to be a disciple of Jesus Christ.

You see, he is like his Lord. He or a disciple is like their Lord. He or she has the gospel uppermost in their mind. He or she will do what is necessary in order that the gospel be proclaimed.

He or she will be willing to go to Jerusalem, that is, to suffering and pain and turmoil, if that is what is required. We are, you see, friends, to be like Paul, who was like Jesus, which is why later on Paul will say those sorts of words, won't he?

He'll say, follow my example as I follow the example of Jesus. You see, he is a model to follow. That's how he is a model. That's what we're to imitate, his disposition.

And that reference, by the way, is 1 Corinthians 10, 31 to 11, 1, where we're told to imitate Paul even as he imitates Jesus. That is what it means to be a disciple, someone who brings the gospel to others, a learner, one who's seen from his or her master and learnt from them, a follower.

[26 : 51] So I guess my, you know, the cutting edge of this tonight is, are you such a follower? Are you a disciple of Jesus? Have you counted the cost of being a disciple? Are you willing to take up your cross?

Because that reference in Jesus, take up your cross, occurs five times in the gospels. That's an extraordinary number of times. Jesus, the early church is clearly wanting us to hear these words of Jesus.

We are to be willing to take up the cross and follow our Lord. So I want to ask you, are you willing to participate in that? And let me tell you, if you do, it will create disturbance in your life.

Jesus in some places says it will sometimes cost homelessness and poverty and pain and suffering for our Lord Jesus Christ. Remember what Luke, what Jesus made clear in Luke 14?

If anyone comes to me, that means me and it means you, and does not hate his father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, even his own life, such a person cannot be my disciple and whoever does not carry their cross and follow me cannot be my disciple.

[27 : 56] Jesus is talking about every potential disciple, including us. He's talking about everyone who claims to be a disciple. He's talking to every Christian and he's saying that the cross and following him is to be our priority.

We are on a mission from God, every one of us. Our love for God and Christ and his mission is to be radical, so much so that our love for Christ and his mission is to be as hatred for everything else.

It is to be so strong that our love for all the closest of human cares and relationships is to be like hatred in comparison. Our love for God and Christ and his mission is to be extreme.

And that sort of devotion is not just for Jesus and for Paul. No, it's for all people who aspire to be disciples. No one, says Jesus, can be a disciple without following in his footsteps.

And that means no comfort, no glory, no final gain without the cool, hard nails of a cross. Let me say it again. There's no comfort, I think, no glory, no final gain without those cool, hard nails of a cross.

[29 : 02] That is, without saying, I will follow wherever you want me to go. There are no Christian disciples without crosses loaded on their shoulders, if you like. That's what Jesus is saying, isn't he?

Jesus says this time and time again in the Gospels, and the Gospels record it so that it can sink in, be heard above the din of this world. So that's the core of this speech, I think, to the Ephesian elders.

That is what they are to hear, and that's what they're to communicate to the Ephesian churches. That's what we are to hear here at Holy Trinity.

We're a church full of people who live up to that great calling. So, I've given you what I think is the centre of the speech. Having said that, I want to give you some other things to think about.

Take a look at the passage again, because it tells us the story of a pastor with his congregation. Did you notice that? It tells us something about the nature of ministry among the people of God. And the first thing I want you to notice is verse 28.

[30 : 04] So, Acts 20, verse 28. A Christian congregation is pictured as sheep. They are the congregation or church of God. The church is God's church, not the church belonging to certain human overseers and shepherds.

The people of the church are God's people, God's sheep. They are precious and of great value to him. He has bought them with his own blood, that is, with the blood of his own son, Jesus Christ.

They are of great value to him. They have cost him. But notice verse 29 as well. Paul says, I know that after I leave, savage wolves will come in among you and will not spare the flock.

Can you hear this? Can you see its consequences? Paul is saying that the people of God, not only are the people of God, but they're people in great danger. They are in danger from wolves who will come in to kill or maim the sheep.

And so because of the great value of the sheep and the great danger of wolves, overseers and shepherds are to do everything they can to protect the sheep. Now, of course, this begs the question.

[31 : 15] And the question is, how, how are shepherds to protect sheep? How does an overseer of God, God's flock, protect the sheep?

How does an overseer of God's flock protect those that flock? Well, this met this passage, I think, in the rest of the New Testament tells us shepherds do their role by doing two things.

They feed the sheep by teaching them the truth. That is by giving them the word of God. And they protect the sheep by warning them of error.

They read 1 and 2 Timothy, and you'll see that Paul's constantly telling Timothy to do this, to feed the sheep and to protect them from and to teach them about error and warn them off. Can you notice the thrust of both of them?

The job of a shepherd of God's sheep is tied around teaching. It is about instruction and about doctrine. That's how to protect the sheep and feed them.

[32 : 17] So if I might just read from Titus chapter 1 verse 9. He says, An overseer of God's flock must, here it comes, hold firmly to the trustworthy message as it has been taught, so that he can encourage others by sound doctrine and refute those who oppose it.

Can you hear all three things? He must hold firmly to the trustworthy message so that he can encourage others by sound doctrine and refute those who oppose it.

That's the main role of a pastor or shepherd. Now if I can put it so that we grasp the coarseness of it in one sense, the radicalness of it, it is not primarily counselling, nor administration, nor management.

the primary role of the pastor is to teach the flock and to refute error and to warn people about error. It's teaching the people of God and the word of God, the word of God.

It's warning the people of God about false teaching and false teachers. It's about encouraging them in the faith through teaching them the word of God. God. And let's just push it home for a moment.

[33 : 28] You see, in today's church, it is fashionable to be contemporary, isn't it? And it's fashionable to hold different views about Jesus and about the gospel. But we must not allow this.

You see, there is nothing more destructive for the church or bewildering to the sheep than when heretics are allowed to run free without contradiction.

When people who profess to be shepherds teach that the chief shepherd was not God in the flesh, for example. When they say, well, he wasn't born of a virgin either, or that he was mistaken or imperfect in his teaching, or that he didn't die for our sins, or that his death wasn't a substitutionary death for us, or that he did not rise bodily from the dead, or that scripture is not true and able to be trusted, or that we don't need to obey all that it says.

You see, people who teach these sorts of things are not true shepherds, are they? They're not doing what shepherds are meant to be doing. And I think it's clear from the New Testament that they're not even true sheep.

They're wolves. They're outsiders. They're the people Paul warns us about time and time again in his letters. They're the sort of people Jesus himself warned us about when he said, watch out for false shepherds.

[34 : 51] They come to you in what? Sheep's clothing. Which means they look like sheep. But are not. Inwardly, he says, they are ferocious wolves.

Friends, run away from them. Don't listen to them. Instead, turn away from modernity and newfangled ideas and turn back to the faith which, as Jude says, was once for all delivered to the saints.

Find true shepherds who teach it and preach it and live it. And urge your friends to lead places where wolves lead congregations of God's people. By the way, since we're talking about the task of a shepherd, I want you to notice the example of Paul here.

Notice how thorough he was. He was thorough in his teaching. Look at verse 27. It tells us that he taught the whole will, or if you like, the whole counsel of God.

You see, he didn't just sort of hone in on the bits that he liked. He was thorough in his content. He taught the whole revealed will of God. By the way, that is why, that's one way, one reason why I work through passages of the Bible systematically.

[36 : 00] In all the churches over which God has given me authority and oversight. See, that helps me avoid teaching my own hobby horses. I want to adequately cover what the Bible says.

You see, preaching systematically through the Bible helps me to do this. It's not the only way to teach the flock, but it helps me to do it this way. Second, I want you to notice that Paul was thorough in his coverage.

Verse 20 tells us he not only taught anything that would be helpful, but he taught it in public and he taught it in private. You see, his teaching of the Word of God wasn't simply restricted to a 30 to 40 minute monologue every Sunday.

His ministry of the Word of God was thorough. It took the form of reasoned presentation of God's purposes in a public setting. But he also, you see, sat over the dinner table and laid into the night explaining to people what all of this meant for them in particular.

He was thorough in his coverage. And if you want an example of this in the latter church, Calvin is a supreme example. Calvin would preach a number of times every week.

[37 : 10] Then he would go and visit people in their homes. Then he would meet one to one. And then he'd write to missionaries all through France. And they'd dug up, they'd found his letters.

And he had an extraordinary ministry to people. So he ministered in public, in groups, one to one, and in correspondence. It was a thorough ministry.

Thorough not only in its content, but in its coverage. Now I want to close today by talking about keeping each other on track. You see, I believe that God has appointed me and other staff as shepherds over the congregations here at Holy Trinity.

That causes me and my staff to have certain responsibilities. responsibilities. Under God, we are to do what we can to make sure that you keep on track in the way you think and in the way that you act.

Sometimes this means saying harsh things to our congregations or to individuals. And Andrew and I have had to do a few of these things this last year and they've been extraordinarily difficult.

[38 : 15] Sometimes it means saying some encouraging and warm things to you and I hope that's where the weight lies. We wouldn't be fulfilling our role if we didn't do this, would we? We are the shepherds of this bunch of congregations.

Our job is to teach you and warn you. But let me tell you something. At the same time, I too am a sheep. I'm one of you. The other staff here, they are also sheep as well.

And that means that you, our congregations, need to do what you can to keep us in line. To encourage us, to rebuke us and so on.

Friends, you need to make sure that I and the other staff and the staff of whatever churches you come from are teaching what is right. You're responsible for making sure they get the tasks straight and do their job properly.

You're responsible to check on your pastor's Christian life and progress. I will never be embarrassed if you do so. I think it's the right thing to be doing. I love it when people say, you know, are you resting well, Andrew?

[39 : 23] Are you studying your Bible well? Are you growing in godliness? That's what you should be asking me. You're responsible to check on us in some ways.

And if we or the pastors of your church teach wrongly or lead people astray by example, then it's your task to tell them and to rebuke them in love. You see, we must keep each other in line, mustn't we?

For we're in this together. We are on this great mission from God together to proclaim his son and to live lives of godliness in a world set against him. But we are surrounded by wolves.

So in the power of the spirit and independence upon Jesus, let's keep each other on the straight and narrow, that road that leads to life. And let's help each other get there.

Let's pray. Father, help us not to neglect meeting together, as is the habit of some, but to meet together regularly and to spur one another on to love and good deeds and faithfulness to you and faithfulness to your son and faithfulness to the proclamation of him in life, in deed, in word.

[40 : 39] We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen. this