

The Perfect Pastor

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[0 : 0 0] Just finding at 20, again I prepared in the NIV, so I'm just going to keep that to hand and it would be helpful if you could, if you've got a Bible just to have that to hand as well.

It's great to be part of this occasion, some formality, but also a special time where there's such warmth towards Robin and Annabelle and Heidi and Angus and Naomi.

And it's great to see what's happening, this great hope for Winchborough, for reaching out and establishing a church there under God. And for Robin, where is Robin?

There you are. This is for you Robin. I can tell you what you have to do now, because I came across this job description for the perfect pastor. Perhaps you can relate to some of this.

The perfect pastor preaches for exactly 20 minutes. He condemns sin roundly, but never hurts anyone's feelings.

[0 : 5 9] He works from eight in the morning until midnight and is also the church caretaker. The perfect pastor is 35 years old and has 40 years experience.

He never forgets a name and spends most of his time in prayer. He also knows when somebody is sick and needs visiting, even without anyone telling him about it, and he spends most of his time in sermon preparation.

He loves to spend time with his family, but has no problem with you dropping in unexpectedly. He remembers everyone's birthdays and their anniversaries.

He eats nutritiously, sleeps well and easily, exercises daily and is always there to listen to you night or day. He has a burning desire to work with teenagers and spends most of his time with the elderly.

He doesn't overburden the church's finances, so he has a full-time secular job as well. He never misses the meeting of any church committee and spends most of his time out there in the real world doing evangelism.

[2 : 0 3] And of course, most of us find, such are our expectations, that the perfect pastor is the one we see in a different church and not your own. So what should we expect from Robin?

And what should we pray for Robin, for Winchborough? Well, what does God say? Here in Acts 20, we find the apostle Paul, central to the outward movement in Acts of God's unstoppable word as the risen Lord Jesus was at work through his apostles.

And Paul is speaking to the elders of this church that he planted in Ephesus. He's since then moved on from Ephesus, but when he was on his way to Jerusalem in haste, he can't resist but to want to meet them one last time.

Clearly this is a vital meeting. In verse 17, we read that he sent to Ephesus and he called the elders of the church to come to him. So this is the speech on the beach and it's a vital speech.

It's the only speech recorded by Luke in Acts for already believers. It's an extraordinary thing. What does Paul have to say to the elders that was so significant?

[3 : 06] Well, what he says about his own ministry and what he calls them to in their ministry as elders in Ephesus has much to say for how we pray for Robin and what we look for from him.

So three points this morning for us. The first is the perfect pastor teaches the truth. The perfect pastor teaches the truth. And we see that again and again in what Paul says.

Let's have a look at verse 20. The apostle Paul, how I did not shrink from declaring to you anything that was profitable. He declared what was profitable and he did that publicly and from house to house.

So he taught comprehensively. He taught everything to everyone everywhere that he could. He taught everything. Verse 20, anything that was profitable.

And when you're planting a church, I guess because without fruitful evangelism and growth, the church is not viable. The temptation then is to cherry pick the bits of the scriptures that would be culturally popular and to overlook those bits of God's word that would be culturally difficult and potentially offensive.

[4 : 23] And yet Paul was a church planter. And when we look at verse 27, he says, I testify to you this day that I'm innocent of the blood of all, for I did not shrink from declaring to you the whole counsel of God, the whole counsel.

He taught the truth bravely. So we have that language in verse 20 from Paul of how he did not shrink from declaring to you anything that was profitable. Why do you think he has to say that he didn't shrink?

He didn't hesitate? I guess because sometimes people don't want to hear the truth from God. And so when proclaiming it, there's the temptation to shrink back from that.

It's true when speaking to those who were not yet believers. And Paul says in verse 21 of his message about Jesus, that it's the message both to Jews and to Greeks of repentance towards God and a faith in our Lord Jesus Christ.

That is that Paul's gospel is a message of repentance for the forgiveness of sins, of a change of direction, away from our life, away from God, and back towards God, repentance for the forgiveness of sins.

[5 : 41] Jesus is risen, he's ascended, he's the King, and we're to lay down our arms and submit to his lordship in our lives. It's a confronting gospel, and Paul was brave, not strong, weak in himself, praying that he would find strength in Christ Jesus in his weakness, in fear and trembling, but confident in the Spirit's power to be at work, to move people, to respond in repentance.

And of course, it's not just with not yet Christians that we need courage to teach the truth and not to shrink back. He says in verse 20, when he's speaking about them, I did not shrink from declaring to you anything that was profitable.

For none of us likes to be told by God that we need to change. And so if you teach the truth, Robin, people might want to dismiss you.

They might say to themselves, well, what would Robin know? He's just a bloke from Bradford, and where's Bradford? Yorkshire? What would he know about my life and about the real world?

When Robin first arrived in Glasgow, he walked in to, it was straight from the airport, I think, to my home group meeting, a room full of Scots in my living room, and I introduced Robin.

[6 : 59] I said he's coming to Glasgow to start training at seminary in Edinburgh to be a pastor. And they looked at him as if to say, why is he doing that? And then one of them said, where are you from?

And he said, Bradford. And they looked at him as if they were thinking, where's Bradford? And then he said, but my wife's from Lewis, and suddenly the room warmed up.

So good to meet you, Robin. So Robin, Annabelle is a great gift to you. And yet even with the great gift of being married to Annabelle, we should expect that for you to be a faithful pastor, teaching what's helpful from the Scriptures, that people will be encouraged, their hearts will be warmed as they see Jesus, but also they'll be confronted at times and you're not to shrink back from what would be profitable.

And look where you had to go to hear the truth from Paul in verse 20. He says, teaching you in public and from house to house. I take it there was a hunger from God's people to grow when they met together to meet with God in His Word.

And Paul taught everywhere. And I was struck, Robin, by the way, you did that in Glasgow on our time with us as we had you preaching on Sundays, but you were also leading a small group.

[8 : 19] And then you were meeting guys for breakfast and you were meeting guys on Zoom in the lockdowns, reading books with them. And we pray that you'll be able to teach people everywhere in Winchborough.

In the bowling club that's been provided to meet, but also let's pray that it's in the schools and in the coffee shops, wherever people will meet you. And notice Paul's extraordinary commitment to that work in verse 24.

It's an extraordinary thing to say. I do not account my life of any value, nor is precious to myself, if only I may finish my course and the ministry that I receive from the Lord Jesus to testify to the gospel of the grace of God.

So Paul is comprehensive, he's courageous, he's committed to the cause. The perfect pastor teaches the truth. Secondly and more briefly, the perfect pastor keeps watch.

So have a look with me at verse 29. The apostle Paul says, I know that after my departure, fierce wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock.

[9 : 27] I don't know whether you've ever seen wolves on the hunt in a wildlife program. The sheep will just be grazing and just living and it's peaceful.

And then the wolves attack and within minutes it's just utterly horrific. There's blood everywhere. There are limbs everywhere. Maimed animals. It's devastating.

And that's the picture that Paul uses here, just as Jesus used it, for a church when false teachers are at work.

And it's striking to me, reading Acts 20, that there was such Paul's concern about this. Because I wonder, looking at my church family at St. Silas, how many of my church family wake up in the night worried that a false teacher might take over the church?

How many of us would really worry that would happen at St. Columbus or in Winchborough when God willing, the Lord establishes a people and a church there? I suspect very few of us wake up in the night worried about that.

[10 : 29] Why not? Because essentially we think to ourselves, if a false teacher got up into my pulpit, I'd spot them. And yet a key mark of Paul's ministry was a passionate plea to keep watch.

Look at verse 31, verse 31, therefore be alert. Be on your guard. Be alert.

Remembering that for three years I did not cease, night or day, to admonish everyone with tears. I take it it's because false teachers don't arrive in your church with a t-shirt on saying, I'm a false teacher.

In verse 30 he says, even from your own selves will arise men speaking twisted things to draw away the disciples after them. They even come from within, people who start out as Christians we know and trust and we rejoice in them and we put them forward for ministry.

But then something goes wrong. And it would be easy if it was obvious because they went way off track and were denying the truth. But what he says is rather than denying it, they twist it.

[11 : 47] Verse 30, they speak twisted things. So there's just a distortion. It's just a little bit off beam from the scriptures. So what's the solution?

Well it's to have faithful shepherds who guard the flock. Have a look at verse 28. Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers to care for the church of God which he obtained with his own blood.

So Robin you have to keep watch over yourself. You see that? Pay careful attention to yourselves. An older minister visited St Silas a couple of years into my ministry there about five years ago and he looked around at the end of the morning service and he said, Martin this is a great opportunity for ministry.

Don't do anything daft. Don't do anything daft doctrinally. Don't do anything daft morally. In other words, keep watch over yourself.

And Paul drives home the point in verse 31. Therefore be alert, be alert. There's lots that we'll want Robin to be focused on in Winchborough. We hope that there'll be lots of opportunity to reach new people.

[13 : 04] Already it's been thrilling to hear of his breakfast meetings with guys that he's just meeting around the place. There'll be services to plan in time. There'll probably be rotors to do.

We hope there'll be many ways that the team can be equipped to reach the community. At the same time, don't neglect the call to keep watch over the flock, to nurture them by showing them Christ so that they're well fed and protect them.

And if we're frightened by the sobering warning that Paul gives on the beach, let's also be reassured by verse 32. And now I commend you to God.

And to the word of his grace, what a great description of the Scriptures, the word of God's grace, which is able to build you up and to give you the inheritance among all those who are sanctified.

So by God's word, you can equip people that the Lord would preserve them. It's all that we need. The word of God's grace. And it's the word of God's grace because in God's word, we encounter Him and in His holiness we're convicted.

[14 : 11] War is me for our sin, our uncleanness. And then the word of God's grace says to us, see the Lord Jesus and His righteous life, His perfect life lived for you and trust that salvation has been one for you in Him.

Stick with Him. So Robin, you can trust that when you commit people to the word of God's grace, you have everything you need for them. And how should you come across as you teach the truth and as you keep watch over the flock?

Well, that's our third point. So the perfect pastor teaches the truth, the perfect pastor keeps watch, and thirdly, the perfect pastor sheds tears.

Did you notice how packed with emotion Paul's words are? Let me bring that out again. Verse 19, he says, he served the Lord among them with all humility and with tears and with trials.

In verse 31, he's crying again. Verse 31, therefore be alert, remembering that for three years I did not cease night or day to admonish everyone with tears. As he leaves them, verse 36, when he said these things, he knelt down and prayed with them all and there was much weeping on the part of all.

[15 : 28] They embraced Paul and kissed him, being sorrowful most of all because of the word he'd spoken that they would not see his face again. Luke says next they had to tear themselves away.

Why all are crying? Well, such is the commitment that a pastor has for his people. So he starts to remind them what he was like.

He says, verse 18, you know how I lived among you the whole time I was with you. That is that a pastor is not to be in an ivory tower, unknown, but is to be known and robbing you to be known by the people.

Not that you'll be sinless and perfect, but they'd see your dependence on Christ day by day. They'd see Christ in you as looking through a window and seeing your dependence on him because they know you.

And Paul was known by them. He was a man of contentment, of hard work. At the end of his speech he says how he didn't cover anyone's riches.

[16 : 29] He worked hard to supply his own needs. He was generous and sacrificial. And let me say, Robin and Annabelle, I think you've been a great model of that since you moved to Scotland.

These guys lived in a small flat in Glasgow joyfully and contentedly. And then I'm struck by the way you've been content with the house that was provided in Winchborough, the joy over that provision.

And even as you wait perhaps for it to be extended, to be a home for ministry in the future, you've shown contentment and joy in God's provision.

And you've kept your lives free from the love of money. And Paul would have us do that. So he has these tears of commitment for his ministry and his people. And there are also tears of friendship that Paul's three years with the people in Ephesus created these close ties so that they wept thinking that they wouldn't see him again.

They're heartbroken. And I hope and pray that as you and the launch team in Winchborough serve Christ together and the wider church here in Edinburgh support you, those kind of close friendships will form.

[17 : 39] So as we finish, why would you do this Robin? Christian ministry, I mean, you're called to teach the truth even when it's confronting and people don't want to hear it. You're called to keep watch.

And that means that at times you'll be opposed by false teachers. It's a job where you work hard and you set an example and you give generously and you end up spending a lot of your time in tears if you're going to be anything like Paul.

But you can do it Robin because of who Paul is following here. You see Luke told us in Luke's Gospel that Jesus set his face toward Jerusalem knowing what would face him there.

And here we hear that Paul is following that example himself. In verse 22 he says, I'm going to Jerusalem not knowing what will happen to me there.

Paul is following his savior and in Christian ministry, that's what we're called to do. Robin, you can strive to teach the truth because Jesus Christ is the truth and he gave his life that we might know him.

[18 : 45] We find the truth demonstrated, the truth about God at the cross as he demonstrates his love for us. You can strive to keep watch to be a good shepherd because you're an under shepherd of Christ, a chief shepherd who will appear one day bearing the marks that he died for his sheep and laid down his life for you.

You can shed tears of commitment to the task because you know Jesus first committed himself to you and it cost him everything. And you can shed tears of friendship with those you serve and do ministry with because you know Jesus died alone, abandoned by his friends so that he could call us his friends and welcome us into his family.

Keep your eyes on him, the man of sorrows, what a name, for the Son of God who came, ruined sinners to reclaim. Let's pray together.

Father in heaven, we thank you that the Lord Jesus Christ is building the church to be his bride, that you have chosen a people to be your special gift to your son and that nothing, not even the gates of hell, will prevail against your will and your plan.

Lord, we thank you for Robin, for Annabelle, for Heidi, Angus and Naomi. We thank you for Robin's character, for saving him, for his dependence on your grace, for his gifts, his prayerfulness, his convictions and we pray for him, heavenly Father, that by your spirit his heart will abound with a deeper grasp of all that Christ has done for him, our chief shepherd.

[20 : 32] That Robin can be strong in the grace that's in Christ Jesus, to teach the truth, to guard the flock and to love your people even with tears, for Jesus' name's sake.

Amen.