

DUDLEY'S MONTHLY MESSAGE

OCT 2025 | ACTS 20:17-32

*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.*

ACTS 20:32

THE STORY (PLUS ONE)

The book of Acts chapter 20, verses 17 through 32 records one of the most important texts regarding the nature and role of the New Testament church. The apostle Paul had spent three years establishing the church in Ephesus. He had gone from there to Macedonia and Greece but wanted to return to Jerusalem for the feast of Pentecost. It required that he retrace his steps, but he didn't want to get detained in Asia, so he arranged to meet the elders from Ephesus in Miletus. He summarized his three years there and reminded them of what was essential in establishing a church of the Living Lord. He also told them about the wolves that would come in after he left to devour

the sheep. They are predators who are not interested in protecting the flock. They distort the gospel and draw people after themselves. They are establishing their own following and building their own ministries. By the way, wolves are still around and still distort the truth for vulnerable sheep, drawing people into groups where the focus is not the gospel of grace. Those in their thrall eventually crash on the rocks of self-improvement and starve while eating the husks of transactional teaching. Paul made it clear that elders were responsible for protecting the flock. They are accountable. Paul was also clear that the flock had been purchased by the blood of God Himself. The way

he declared for leaders to protect the sheep was by proclaiming and teaching the gospel of grace.

In a day when elders are largely in charge of fiscal matters of the church and untrained in knowing the gospel or detecting deception, sheep are at the mercy of wolves. The church is weak because the food is poisonous and too many leaders prey on the sheep while building their own kingdoms. The sheep are counted and courted to make ministries look good, but they cannot discern when a wolf in sheep's clothing appears. Today we need to hear and heed what Paul said in this important text. Essentially he says that the story of the gospel is the only food that will sustain the sheep, and it is the only power that will protect against the wolves. He uses four phrases to describe the message that he featured for three years. First, he preached repentance toward God and faith in the Lord Jesus. Second, he proclaimed the good news of God's grace. Third, he proclaimed the kingdom of God. Fourth, he proclaimed the whole purpose of God. Finally, when he concluded with the solution to feeding and protecting the sheep, he declared, "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" (Acts 20:32, ESV). If we combine all these phrases and their implications, what is the message that Paul declared essential?

Primarily, the message is a story. Actually it is **the** story. Even though many people will readily admit that the Bible contains many stories, not many know the one story that the Bible tells. Good stories have 5 dynamics. First, there is the setting - the "once upon a time" beginning that is familiar. The Bible starts in a garden with the main characters - God, Adam, Eve, and the Serpent. God creates with a purpose to have human partners to manage and rule the creation. Everything is present to make success possible. Second, there is the conflict or problem. The Serpent provides that. He distorts, deceives, and draws Adam and Eve to himself. (The same thing wolves do.) Third, there is the rising action as the story covers the attempts to solve the problem. Noah's experience shows God's intention to preserve creation and move toward full restoration. Abram's family is chosen to be the physical family that will produce the hero. Moses delivers Abraham's descendants from slavery and receives a covenant that not only makes them a nation, but sets the stage for humans to realize they are so

flawed by sin that they cannot simply keep the commands of God. They need a hero more than they ever imagined. They need deliverance of the heart as well as from Egypt. David is selected as king to prefigure the Hero-King that will ultimately rule all things that God had purposed. Israel's exile under the nations of the earth reveals that humanity cannot save itself and needs a Savior-Hero. After the 70 years of exile, some of the Israelites go back home to prepare for the coming hero. After 400 years, He appears. Fourthly, the climax includes the appearance of the Hero and the actions taken to rescue the victims and restore the original purpose. Jesus is the final Adam. He is also the final Israelite. He alone kept the covenant God made through Moses. He earned all the blessings of obedience, and He paid the full price of covenant unfaithfulness. He as the Messiah completed Israel's role in the story. Israel did bless the world by producing the Hero that restores all things. He was the lamb that atoned for sin. He was the king who defeated death and was established on the throne. From there He sent the Spirit to indwell the rescued humans who would again partner with God to push back darkness and establish His rule on earth. This is the fifth dynamic - the falling action that describes how we now live in light

of the climax and its implications. As God's restored people we are His living temple. We live in a community of faith captivated by the Spirit of God and fully engaged in practicing the good works for which we were created as God's new creatures.

One of the illuminating stories of the Old Testament (our plus one) tells about the events surrounding David and Goliath. I heard that story as a youngster and always thought I was to aspire to be like David with great courage. Later I learned that all the stories of the rising action are pointing toward Jesus who is the ultimate Hero of the big story. The setting: Israel is engaged with the enemy in battle. The Philistines are challenging Israel to send out their hero to fight Goliath, each representing their respective nation. Goliath was the hero of the enemy. He was a giant. Literally. Abnormally tall, big, mean, and equipped with a sword and shield that could not be matched. The rising action includes the strategies Israel could find to get someone to represent them against Goliath. Saul, who was a tall man himself, but no match for Goliath, even offered a great reward for any soldier who would go meet Goliath. Then the climax - a hero appears. It's little David who wants to know why the soldiers are letting an enemy mock the

army of God. He agrees to fight Goliath. He doesn't take anything with him but his sling and the reality that he represents God's people and purpose. He runs confidently down the hill to face the giant, and God guides his shot to the forehead of the enemy. David severs his head and holds it up to show the fearful Israeli army. The Philistines began to run. The heretofore fearful Israeli army chases them and collects the spoils of war.

This is ***the*** story in shadow form. It is not a story to inspire us to be more courageous. It is a picture of the ultimate David who fought the Serpent and crushed his head at the cross. We are the Israeli army who is now equipped and inspired to chase the enemy and get back what belongs to God. This story is like the others in the Old Testament that are part of the rising action part of the big story. All the stories point to Jesus in some way. We are not the central figures. Neither is Abraham, nor Moses, nor David, nor Israel. Jesus is the only one who fulfills the prophecies, promises, and predictions of the rising action. His work in the climax of the story is complete. He canceled every debt and curse brought on by our sin. He defeated the enemy and gave us the privilege of collecting the inheritance.

If this message is proclaimed continuously, the sheep will be fed and protected. No wonder the wolves have convinced much of the church we should proclaim something else.

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