

Parting Words

Jonathan K. Dodson | Acts 20:17-37 | December 18, 2022

Intro

- We had a tremendous party last Sunday celebrating God's work in this church over the past couple decades. Even the photographer was moved saying, *this is why I moved here from Chicago to be here tonight. It's unbelievable. I can't believe a community like this is ending.* Yet, this is the end, our final gathering as City Life Church, but it is not the end *of the church.* The church is eternal. That innumerable mixed multitude we saw in Revelation singing Hallelujah! over and over again. The 144,000. But the church is also local, the letters to the 7 churches, and local churches come and go. Begin and end.
- This morning we sit in the tension between the ending and beginning, sorrow and hope. How do we navigate it? For many, it will be tempting to ignore the tension. To not reflect on the past and run headlong into the future. Find a new church. But after investing several years into the church at Ephesus, Paul gathers their elders to reflect on the past and look forward to the future. Let's see what we can learn. *Tears, Leaders, Scriptures, Remarks.*

Tears

- Let's begin with the hard stuff. Paul mentions tears *four* times in twenty verses.
 - *Tears for trials.* People persecuted Paul: plots, wolves, afflictions, people speaking twisted things. I've shed many of those tears, so has my wife, our elders and their wives, staff, and some of you. The Lord places each tear in a bottle *because they are precious to him.* Tears for trials. Every tear was all worth it. *You* are worth it. *We* are worth it. The Lord Jesus was sorrowful even unto death

as he contemplated bearing God's wrath in our place for our sin. Love prevailed in Jesus' tears for our trials.

- Also *tears for temporary goodbyes*: "there was much weeping on the part of all." *They prayed, they wept, they kissed, they embraced, and they accompanied him to the ship.* Now I'm not asking for kisses or an escort, but I do want to encourage you to be people who embrace sorrow, as our Lord Jesus. Honor the sorrows of your life; it's where Jesus does some of his best work.

- When I fell apart last year, you were gracious enough to give me space to embrace my sorrows. It was there that I learned to honor the broken pieces of my life, like Kintsugi tea masters honor the broken pieces of their bowls, before they mend them. They sit and contemplate the brokenness before mending and beautifying the bowl. This is what Christ wants to do with your broken pieces: mend and beautify with his golden lines of grace.
- But our goodbyes are temporary. We will see one another again not just in Austin but in Zion. As my mother always says when we part it's: "Bye for now."

Leaders

- Next, Paul speaks with *the elders*: *called the elders of the church to come to him* (17). He appointed elders in every city. (Tit 1:5) Why? Because that is how a church is to be led (1 Tim, Titus).
 - You have been led by godly, faithful, persevering elders who love you. They don't just make executive decisions. Like Paul, *they taught the gospel from house to house, testifying of repentance of sins and faith in the Lord Jesus.* Think about how often they have helped you turn from sin to your Savior in City Group, discipleship group, informal conversation, and in prayer: week after week

after week. *Matt, John, Peter, you are worthy of honor, and it has been a honor to serve City Life Church with you.*

- Now, look for a church led by leaders like this: godly, qualified elders who don't just make decisions in a back room but shepherd house to house. Men of character and conviction who are in touch with their congregations. Men who testify of repentance from sin and faith in the Lord Jesus. Elevate this over programs, buildings, pet ideas, and vision statements.
- Why? Because Jesus is not an executive decision-maker, a visionary leader; he is our Chief Shepherd, does this with us. He calls us to repentance from sin and faith in his saving work. He beckons us for every look at sin, take ten looks at Christ. Jesus is your Chief Elder. Open your heart to him; he will shepherd you all your days. He will guide you to springs of living water and wipe every tear from your eye. *Jesus can be trusted above all. We love you.*

Scriptures

- Finally, Paul grounded his ministry and the church in Scripture: *Did not shrink from declaring to you anything that was profitable (20); All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work (2 Tim 3:16-17).* You want to be complete; to be a true Christian? Ground your life in a Scripture-saturated church.
 - Look for churches that cherish the eternal word of God over the ephemeral word of the moment.
 - Look for churches that don't avoid hard topics because they are unpopular, difficult, or might turn people away. Look for churches that make disciples not consumers.
 - Look for the gospel. Many preach the Bible without preaching the gospel. A gospel-centered understanding of

the Scriptures has shaped everything at City Life: counseling, preaching, community, mission, worship. Don't settle for a church grounded in biblical morals, life application, activism or storytelling. The gospel is what Paul and Jesus gave their lives to

- *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 (Ac 20:24).*
- The gospel is the good and true story that Jesus has defeated sin, death, and evil through his own death and resurrection and is making all things new, even us. Settle for nothing less.

Personal Remarks

- Being your pastor was a privilege.
 - *Supremely because I was entrusted with what is most precious to God—you, souls, men, women, and children made in his image, being conformed to his image. People the Son of God bled for, rose for, and will return for.*
 - *Being your pastor was a privilege because you have been the easiest to pastor. You are the seventh iteration of City Life Church, 7.0, and we know seven is symbolic for perfect! By easiest I mean most easily edified, least demanding, exceptionally supportive, hardly critical, often prayerful. Thank you. Robie, you have not been shoulders I stood on but a companion to run beside. You have run up and down the mountain with me, through sorrow and rejoicing, and we did something eternal, together, for God's glory. Thank you.*
 - *Being your pastor now comes to a close. I will pray for you as you come to mind, and I will ask God to give you godly,*

wise, loving, gospel-centered pastors who believe
pastoring is a privilege.

- **So it's "bye for now" because in Christ it is not bye forever.**