

Resolved to Live – As a Witness for Jesus

“...about all that Jesus began to do and teach” (Acts 1:1).

R₂L – Resolved to Live: With a Heart for the Mission Acts 18:18-23

18 Paul, having remained many days longer, took leave of the brethren and put out to sea for Syria, and with him were Priscilla and Aquila. In Cenchrea he had his hair cut, for he was keeping a vow. 19 They came to Ephesus, and he left them there. Now he himself entered the synagogue and reasoned with the Jews. 20 When they asked him to stay for a longer time, he did not consent, 21 but taking leave of them and saying, "I will return to you again if God wills," he set sail from Ephesus. 22 When he had landed at Caesarea, he went up and greeted the church, and went down to Antioch. 23 And having spent some time there, he left and passed successively through the Galatian region and Phrygia, strengthening all the disciples.

Perhaps, unlike most modern cookbooks, one old cookbook that contained a recipe for rabbit started out with this injunction: "First catch the rabbit." Simplistic? Yes! But the creator of that recipe knew how to put first things first. That is what we do when we establish priorities -- we put the things that should be in first place in their proper order. When we fail to put first things first, I promise you, our lives may be busy, but we will not be making the kind of progress that either or God desires.

Having misplaced priorities is a recipe for disappointment and disaster. If we do not keep reminding ourselves of our priorities, we will begin to make unwise decisions and start to make plans that move us further and further from where we know we need to be. The problem is, it is so easy to get sidetracked; so easy to become preoccupied with the wrong things. Then, one day we wake up to realize that we are far off course, heading somewhere we never intended.

This morning we are going to address the issue of priorities. What are to be the priorities in the life of a believer? There are a number of answers to that question, but from the book of Acts there is one bright and brilliant priority that we need to remain focused on; one priority that is to govern how we think as well as what we do and why we do it. So you know what the priority is? We find it in Acts 1:8. This is both a promise as well as a mission's statement. Jesus said, ***"But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest end of the earth."***

How much clearer could Jesus make His instructions? He promises the power and presence of the Holy Spirit so that His followers, those who name His name, might take the good news of what He has done on the cross to deal with humanity's sin problem to the world. Beloved, this is the church's mission. This is our mission, this is to be our priority, testifying, telling, and pointing people to the person and work of Jesus. I assume most all of you agree with me, right?!

I would also assume that most of you would agree that it is all too easy to be distracted from this priority. It is hard to stay focused on this priority. Why, because we get so wrapped up in the means, in the projects and the programs that we lose sight of the goal. The job which we once viewed as a gift from God becomes our *god*. Our homes, our cars, our education, our families, our relationship and a whole host of other things that we first recognized as blessings from God, can quickly become the things for which we live. Beloved, the very essence of staying focused is the avoidance of distractions. The culprit is not the obvious, but the subtle. The diversions we most easily rationalize are the most dangerous. When things or circumstances direct our paths and become the motivation for our decisions, we can be sure things and circumstances have become our god.

Resolved to Live – As a Witness for Jesus

“...about all that Jesus began to do and teach” (Acts 1:1).

Because it is easy to lose focus and forget our priorities, God has given us His Word; He has given us the book of Acts. In this history of the early church we are reminded of two things; the faithfulness of God to His church and the priority of the church the mission and glory of God. If you are like me, you know that the business of this life can easily distract you from the mission of making disciples of Jesus. How do we get back on track and reset our priorities? The text before us offers an answer and calls us to be resolved to live with a heart for the mission of the church; of seeing people come to know and to grow in the grace and knowledge of Jesus Christ. To do this, our resolve must be built around two key commitments. If you will resolve yourself to these two commitments, you will be on your way to keeping the right priorities before you.

I. We must commit to “going” (18-22)

Most of us are familiar with the commands of Jesus concerning evangelism; the process of telling other people about Jesus. In Mark 16:15 we read, **“Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation.”** In John 20:21 we read, **“Peace be with you; as the Father has sent Me, I also send you.”** And of course there is the ever familiar Matthew 28:19 which says, **“Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit...”** There is a common thread in these verses. It is the idea that there must be a “going”! The mission of the church includes “going.”

This is what we have seen in the book of Acts. In the 18 chapters we have studied, we have covered some twenty years of church history and what do we find? We find the church is constantly “going”. Everything started in Jerusalem (Acts 2-5), the church spread to take the message to Judea and Samaria (Acts 6-12), and finally it made its way to the remotest part of the earth, reaching the Gentiles starting in Acts 13 and running through the end of the book

We find ourselves at the end of Acts 18 and what we read here are the closing days of Paul’s second missionary journey. Let me remind you that Paul has traveled over 2000 miles. Starting in Antioch he journeyed through Asia Minor to Tarsus, Derbe, Lystra, Iconium, and Pisidian Antioch. Then he traveled northwest to Troas, setting sail across the Aegean Sea, arriving in Macedonia (modern day Europe). He preached in Philippi, passed through Amphipolis and Apollonia, and arrived in Thessalonica, then down to Berea and Athens. Eventually he made it to Corinth where God opened a door of fruitful ministry and where he stayed a year and a half. If there is anything we can easily observe from all these travels is that the mission of the church involves *going*. We will look at what “going” means and looks like in a moment, but let us answer the question, “What is necessary for us to be rightly committed to “going” for Christ?” In verses 18-22 we have three answers to that question.

First, we must be **devoted to the praise of God (18)**. We read in verse 18, **“Paul, having remained many days longer...”** Why did Paul remain behind? Let me take you back up to verses 9-10 where we learn that God told him to stay and speak to the people because the Lord had many people in the city to be saved. Listen carefully, Paul was where God told him to be and he stayed where God told him to stay. In the course of 18 months, Paul saw the church in Corinth established along with a strong leadership team in place that included men like Gaius, Sosthenes, Stephanus, and Crispus, all of whom Paul mentions later in his Corinthian letters. Paul knew it was time to be going. So we read again in 18 that Paul, **“took leave of the brethren and put out to sea for Syria, and with him were Priscilla and Aquila.”** Paul takes his ministry partners and then verse 18 concludes with, **“In Cenchrea he had his hair cut, for he was keeping a vow.”** This is strange to us. Why did Paul need a haircut and what was this vow he took? Remember I told you we need to be committed to praising God? Well, this vow that Paul took seems to have been what is called a Nazarite vow. We read about Nazarite vows in Numbers 6.

Resolved to Live – As a Witness for Jesus

“...about all that Jesus began to do and teach” (Acts 1:1).

The Nazarite vow was commitment a Jewish man would make when he wished to thank God for some blessing he recognized in his life. The Nazarite vow that Paul took meant that for the next thirty days he would neither eat meat nor drink wine and he allowed his hair to grow without cutting it. At the end of the commitment certain offerings were to be given in the Temple which included shaving his head and having the hair burned on the altar to God.

Why did Paul make this vow? He was praising God for the successful ministry in Corinth. Paul knew that the many people who came to Christ did not do so because of great preaching or evangelistic abilities. I have no doubt that he was a gifted communicator, but he knew that the only reason there was a church in Corinth was because God did His work. It was God who had protected Paul and it was God who blessed Paul's efforts. In order to say thank you to the Lord, in order to praise God, Paul took this vow, cut his hair, and headed for Jerusalem to consummate his promise.

Was Paul putting himself under the Old Testament law by doing this? Not at all. He did this voluntarily. He knew this was not a matter of salvation but rather was a matter of *devotion*. Much like our dedicating Jaxson earlier was not a matter of salvation, but of the devotion and commitment of David and Crystal to say thank you to the Lord for this gift and committing themselves to the task, by the grace of God and the support of this congregation, to raise him in the instruction and discipline of the Lord. Paul was committed to bring praise to God and he did what he knew in order to demonstrate it. Beloved, if our priorities are to be right, we need to begin with the commitment to praise and thank God for every success and even for every trial. Is this the way you seek to live your life? Devoted to praising God? But there is a second commitment...

Second, must be dependent upon plan of God (19-21). We read, ***“19 They came to Ephesus, and he left them there. Now he himself entered the synagogue and reasoned with the Jews. 20 When they asked him to stay for a longer time, he did not consent, 21 but taking leave of them and saying, “I will return to you again if God wills,” he set sail from Ephesus.”***

So Paul finally made it to Ephesus. While Corinth might have been a large and significant city to reach for the gospel, Ephesus was yet another step up. If Corinth was like our modern day Las Vegas in decadence and lifestyle, then Ephesus would have been more like New York city. The ministry possibilities were staggering.

You might remember that Paul had wanted to go to Ephesus a couple of years earlier on this missionary journey. Recall back what happened in Acts 16:6 where we read however, ***“They passed through the Phrygian and Galatian region, having been forbidden by the Holy Spirit to speak the word in Asia...”*** Paul had wanted to go into the province of Asia where Ephesus was, but the Holy Spirit forbade him. Rather, Paul received the Macedonian vision and ended up going into Europe. Now, on the tail end of this mission, Paul sought to go Ephesus and he actually made it!

To Paul's delight, upon entering the synagogue of the Jews, they asked him to stay and keep teaching. What do you think is a preacher's response when asked to keep preaching! That is like throwing a meaty bone to a hungry dog. Here Paul stands in Ephesus with some 300,000 people. Ephesus was the most important city in Asia Minor and it ranked as one of the top five cities in the entire Roman Empire, alongside Rome, Corinth, Antioch, and Alexandria. It was a true cosmopolitan city with a key harbor, located on an crucial intersection of trade routes. Ephesus boasted a theater that accommodated 25,000 people. I wonder if Paul thought about preaching there?

But according to our text, there in verse 21, Paul left. Why would Paul leave such an opportunity? We learn that Priscilla and Aquila remained, but he left. He told them he would be

Resolved to Live – As a Witness for Jesus

“...about all that Jesus began to do and teach” (Acts 1:1).

back, but he just left! Beloved, this tells us something about making decisions in ministry. We must be careful not to make ministry decisions based merely on personal preferences, simply because it seems like the right thing to do; nor because there happens to be an open door. Let me remind you that Jonah had an open door when he found a ship going to Tarshish, but it certainly was not the right decision for him to make. When it comes to making good decisions, we must come to know God’s will through prayer, the study of God’s word, through the counsel and insight of other believers and then we must obey (live out) *God’s will*. We must be dependent upon God’s plan and purpose not upon our feeling and circumstances.

So, why did Paul leave? Remember the vow he had made? He had made a promise to God that would last 30 days, and would end with him burning his hair as a thank offering before the Lord in the Temple in Jerusalem. It is believed that Paul wanted to get to Jerusalem for the Passover and with limited time, he had to leave Ephesus to fulfill his promise to God. Beloved, there is to stay and there is a time to move. Before you begin a new ministry in the church, you must finish the current one God gave you to do. Sometimes you might need to turn down a ministry opportunities for the simple reason that God already has given you an opportunity. This is what happened with Paul. He had made a vow and he was going to keep it. Beloved, if we are to be “going” forth, we must know and be completely dependent upon God’s will. Let me ask you, do you want more than anything else, to do God’s will? Pray it be so. Then there is a third commitment we need to make in order to be a “going” people...

Third, we must be dedicated to the people of God (22). In verse 22 we read, **“When he had landed at Caesarea, he went up and greeted the church, and went down to Antioch.”** Remember that Luke is limited with the space he has to write, so every phrase is important. Verse 22 is a summary of Paul’s trip from Ephesus that would have covered some 600 miles by sea, having him walk some 50 miles inland to Jerusalem and then on another 300 mile trek up north to Antioch. How do we know he went to Jerusalem from this verse? Because of the common used idiom “went up” which was used by the Jews to speak of “going up to Jerusalem.” Jerusalem was higher in elevation than Caesarea and Antioch, so he went up to the church in Jerusalem and then went down to Antioch. Now, I could ask you why Paul went to Jerusalem and you should be able to tell me...because he was fulfilling his vow to God. This is true, but Luke tells us more. He also went up to greet the church to encourage the believers there. Not staying long? To finish his vow, yes, but why else? Luke says he went up and *greeted the church*. And why did he go to Antioch? Because Antioch was the church was that sent him on this missionary journey. Now mark this, “*going*” is linked to the church. Those who go need the church. And the church needs those who go. We are in the task of this mission together.

The fulfillment of our mission of being witnesses for Christ involves the *going* of God’s people. Now God does not call everyone to be going around the world, but He does command all of us to be going across the street for the gospel, of moving for the ministry of the Word of God. The same faith that moves our missionaries to places like India, Japan, China and Ireland ought to be moving you across the aisle at work, or across the street in your neighborhood; we must participate in *going*. It is our mission. As we have had young missionaries come and share with us their hope and vision of traveling to some mission field to reach a people for Christ, such a plan is usually preceded with about a two year time frame needed to be trained and to raise the money to go. Do you realize that Paul conducted his entire second missionary trip in that time? To be sure, we need our missionaries trained, but for those of us who are on this current mission field here in Northwest Arkansas and Southern Missouri, would it be safe to say that we tend to do a whole lot more talking about going and doing for the gospel than we actually are doing for the gospel?

Resolved to Live – As a Witness for Jesus

“...about all that Jesus began to do and teach” (Acts 1:1).

Most of you remember that just before we began this venture of leaving the comfort of our own building to move into this temporary quasi-tabernacle of a meeting place, we gave you a survey of ministries and service opportunities in the church. You told the leadership of the places in which you would be willing to serve. Most of you knew that a huge area of service was going to open up with the start of AWANA and to the credit of the congregation and to the praise of God, we have amply staffed that ministry. But there are other needs and other ministries as well. There are many things will not and cannot take place under this roof. May I remind you that the ministry to which every believer has been called; the ministry to which it does not matter if you checked a box on a survey, or have had two years of training; the ministry that God expects you to be actively engaged in; constantly focused on; and completely devoted to is being a witness for Christ?

And where are you to be a witness for Christ? Anywhere and everywhere you go. You are to be a witness for Christ in your home; to your spouse, to your children, to your parents! You are to be a witness for Christ when you are surfing the internet. You are to be a witness in your neighborhood, at your job, in your school. And why are we to be a witness for Christ? Not only has Christ commanded it, but it is the calling of people to Christ, to become a part of the body of Christ, the church that we must be committed to. There is something wrong with inviting a person to come to know Christ but not inviting him or her to church. The church is God's plan, God's program, God's purpose at this time on the earth. Our going to tell people about Jesus is to assume the participation with God's people in the church. Our mission involves *going*. If you are a Christian, this is why you are on this planet. It ought to be on our minds constantly that there are people in this world who need to hear the gospel of Christ. If *going* is to be a reality for us, we must be devoted to the praise of God; dependent upon plan of God, and dedicated to the people of God. How are you doing? But we must be resolve to more than just going; there is a second commitment...

II. We must commit to “growing” (23)

And having spent some time there, he left and passed successively through the Galatian region and Phrygia, strengthening all the disciples.

I would like you to notice something about this verse. Paul's second missionary journey actually ends and the third missionary journey begins in this verse. And there is an interesting theme that closes the second journey that also becomes the opening theme of the third; the idea of *growing* disciples of Christ. We find Paul's passion for wanting believers to grow. We glean this from both the first half of the verse as well as from the second half.

First, we see Paul's passion for “growing” believers in that he committed himself and his time to the church that sent him, the church in Antioch. We are told that Paul “spent some time there”. While we do not know just how long this was, this does gives us some insights as to why Paul and thus why we as believers need the church. Did you know that you actually “need” the church? Let me show why. The key here is to tell you that if the great and eminent apostle Paul needed the church, how much more do we need the church. Consider with me three reasons...

1. We need the church for rejuvenation

When you consider the past couple of years of Paul's life; a life that included lots of rough travel, missed meals, hostile crowds that ran him out of town, jail time and even a beating or two, there is no doubt that his body and mind were worn out. On top of that, while Paul had preached a lot of sermons, he did not have an MP3 player or a Grace to You app where he could download and listen to other preachers for spiritual refreshment. Being physically weary,

Resolved to Live – As a Witness for Jesus

“...about all that Jesus began to do and teach” (Acts 1:1).

emotionally spent and spiritually hungry, where does he constantly go back? To the church. He does not pursue “sleeping in” on the church meeting day; in fact he most likely meet with the Christians most every day. At the end of a long, hard week, our flesh may cry out, “Let me be, let me rest, let me have some “me” time; some alone time;” but your spirit and soul needs the rejuvenation that comes with being engaged with God’s people. There is a second reason you need the church...

2. We need the church for responsibility

The church in Antioch was the church that sent Paul out; that was key in supporting him with prayer and resources. Paul knew that the church had given him a responsibility and that he was accountable to them. He owed them an explanation and testimony of God working in His life and so we find Paul coming back to Antioch. In like manner, as you are fed the word of God week by week; as you are given books to read, given ministries to be involved in, opportunities to meet and help others in this congregation; you have a responsibility to give an explanation and testimony of what God is doing in your life to this body. But there is one more reason I would give as to why we need the church...

3. We need the church for rejoicing

I know it may be reading into the text here, but I am most certain that Paul’s arrival was met with great rejoicing. How can I say this? Because of what Luke recorded the this church’s reaction when Paul returned from his first missionary journey. In Acts 14:27 we read, **“When they had arrived and gathered the church together, they began to report all things that God had done with them and how He had opened a door of faith to the Gentiles.”** The church gathered to hear and rejoice over all that God had done through Paul.

When we gather, we are to rejoice and give praise to what God has done for us in saving us through His Son, Jesus Christ. We also are to rejoice as we see the faces and hear the testimonies of new brothers and sisters He is adding to His church.

But pastor, sometime when I come to church I do not see or hear such rejoicing. Let me ask you, are you coming to church armed and ready with praise and testimony of what God has done for you? Do you come prepared to be an example to others of a rejoicing Christian. Rejoicing is contagious you know!

So, Paul demonstrated his passion for seeing believer’s grow, including himself, by engaging his home church in Antioch. But there is one other way by which we see this passion...

Second, we see Paul’s passion for “growing” believers in that he committed himself and his time to encourage and strengthen the faith of believers. The end of verse 23 ends with, **he left and passed successively through the Galatian region and Phrygia, strengthening all the disciples**

On Paul’s first missionary journey through the heart of Asia Minor, he led people to Christ and established the first ever local churches there (Acts 13-14). On his second trip we are told he went back to these churches to strengthen them with more teaching and he even recruited help, like that of Timothy, for further missionary work (Acts 16:1-5). What do we find Paul doing on his third journey? Once again, he is committed and passionate to seeing believers grow as he seeks to be strengthening the disciples. Let me close with two lessons we must consider if we would be resolved to have a heart for the mission.

First, it is imperative that we introduce people to Christ. Beloved, there is nothing quite like getting to share the message of salvation with someone who has never really heard or understood it before. To tell a person that he is a sinner, one who has offended a holy God, even

Resolved to Live – As a Witness for Jesus

“...about all that Jesus began to do and teach” (Acts 1:1).

if out of ignorance or neglect; but that this holy God has judged sin, condemned sin, provided payment for sin in the giving of His Son Jesus Christ, who died on the cross in the sinner's place, removing the wrath of God against the sinner if that sinner will believe Jesus did this for him; bringing with his belief repentance, a turning from sin in order to turn to Jesus as his Savior and Lord. God grants forgiveness to such a one as this, adopting him into His family.

I trust you all know and have responded to this message. Each one of you needs to act on this and know that you have called upon Jesus to save you from your sin. And what a blessing it is to share that message with people; but there is one more lesson...

Second, it is imperative that we help believers grow in the grace and knowledge of Jesus. Beloved, it is a joint effort and responsibility. Paul kept going back to these brothers and sisters in Christ, doing what? Strengthening them. In context, the word strengthening can be translated to mean, “causing the disciples - the followers of Jesus, to be strong in their faith” or “causing the congregation to be firm in their faith.”

We all enter into the family of God in the same way, as *spiritual babies*. And like physical babies, spiritual babies are weak and need to be *strengthened*. How are spiritual babies as well as mature believers fed? By teaching from the word of God. Note that even mature believers are exhorted in 1 Peter 2:2, “*like newborn babies, long for the pure milk of the word, so that by it you may grow in respect to salvation...*” We must have a passion for growing, for seeing ourselves grow so that we might encourage others, and then seeing other grow in the grace and knowledge of Jesus. Are you resolved to the heart of the mission, to be “going” out with the message of Christ and then “growing” and helping others grow in the likeness of Christ?

How do you become better at going and growing? Be in the word, surround yourself with Christians who want to talk about the word, pray that you would have the mind of Christ to share the gospel wherever you do and pray for the heart of Christ to make disciples who are maturing in the faith.

Community | Bible Church

Soli Deo Gloria

Copyright © 2013 Edward K. Godfrey. This message is the sole property of the copyright holder and may be copied only in its entirety for circulation freely without charge. All copies of this message must contain the above copyright notice. This message may not be copied in part (except for small quotations used with citation of source), edited, revised, copied for resale or incorporated in any commercial publications, recordings, broadcasts, performances, displays or other products offered for sale, without the written permission of the copyright holder. Requests for permission should be made in writing and addressed to Edward K. Godfrey, Pastor, Hope Community Bible Church, 2300 South 13th Street, Rogers, AR 72758.