
Resolved to Live – As a Witness for Jesus

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

R₂L – Resolved to Live: Living Life Without Regrets (Acts 20:13-38 - Part 1)

Acts 20:13-16

13 But we, going ahead to the ship, set sail for Assos, intending from there to take Paul on board; for so he had arranged it, intending himself to go by land. 14 And when he met us at Assos, we took him on board and came to Mitylene. 15 Sailing from there, we arrived the following day opposite Chios; and the next day we crossed over to Samos; and the day following we came to Miletus. 16 For Paul had decided to sail past Ephesus so that he would not have to spend time in Asia; for he was hurrying to be in Jerusalem, if possible, on the day of Pentecost.

I would imagine that many of us, reflecting back upon 2013, have some regrets. Regret, the feeling of sorrow or remorse for some act, fault or disappointment. For some, regrets reach further back than just last year. For some, regret almost paralyzes people; keeping them from looking forward to the future. We all have regrets, those things that we wish we could turn back time so that we might redo, re-say, react in a different way, if we could. But must we live with regret? Must our past determine how we live today, and will live in the days ahead, particularly as those who have been forgiven our sins, our past, by the work of Christ on the cross?

Many of you are familiar with H.G. Wells, the famous historian, philosopher, and author. At age 61 he wrote: “I have no peace. All life is at the end of the tether.” How is that for inspirational? The poet Byron once remarked, “My days are in yellow leaf, the flowers and fruits of life are gone, the worm and the canker, and the grief are mine alone.” Again, not very encouraging, is it? The literary genius Thoreau quipped, “Most men live lives of quiet desperation.” Ralph Barton, a cartoonist, left this message on his pillow before taking his own life: “I have had few difficulties, many friends, great successes; I have gone from wife to wife, from house to house, visited great countries of the world, but I am fed up with inventing devices to fill up twenty-four hours of the day.” What do all these men have in common? As great as they may have been, they all were weighed down at the end of their lives by regret; sorrowful and remorseful for how their lives were lived.

How can we deal with regret? There are a couple of ways. One way is to teach people how to deal with regret; to share with them the great hope available to them through an understanding of the grace of God that comes through a relationship with Jesus Christ. However, my purpose this morning is not to be found in teaching you how to deal with past regrets. What I wish to challenge you with is how to live your life from this point on without regret. Is there something you can be resolved to; committed to; and actively engaged in that promises coming to the end of your life and being able to say the words of the apostle Paul, **“I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith...”** (2 Timothy 4:7). Is it possible to live life in such a way so that at the end there are no regrets?

You see, if I simply expound from the word of God ways in which you might deal with your past regrets, I feel as though it would be like sending the ambulance to the bottom of a cliff to pick up the injured who fell over. But if I can show you from God’s Word how to live life without regrets from this moment on, then I it like building a sturdy fence at the top of the cliff that prevents you from falling in the first place. So then, for the next couple of weeks, you and I are going to partner together with the Word of God to build just such a fence; to learn to live in such a way as to have no regrets in our living for Jesus. Where do we find such lessons? We find them right here in Acts 20 as Paul gives his farewell speech to the Ephesian elders.

As we come to our text, beginning here in Acts 20:13, we find Paul looking back upon his own life and ministry. Anyone who knows anything about Paul, especially before his conversion

Resolved to Live – As a Witness for Jesus

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

to Christ, knows that there could be a number of things that Paul regretted in his life. But as we read what Paul writes, it is clear that he has no regrets. He knew he was not perfect. He knew he had made mistakes. He knew that his entire life and ministry was empowered by the grace of God. And by the grace of God, he claimed he had no regrets. That is the kind of life I want to live for God; a life of no regrets. How about you? Are you ready to live in such a way that whether you have 5, 10, 20, 50 or more years on this earth, you might live it fully, without regrets?

In Paul’s goodbye exhortation here in Acts 20:13-38, he reveals the pattern of living life without regret. If we imitate the faith of Paul; if we would live a life without regret, we must model the same purposes of Paul as seen in our text. So important and profound is the subject of this message that I do not intend to rush it, but to take these purposes of Paul, explain them to you and then exhort you to resolve to do the same with your life. My goal is to cover the first resolve of Paul this week and pick up the second and third resolves next week. Let us begin with this first resolve by which Paul, and we, might strive to live life without regrets.

I. **We must resolve to live in the will of God (13-16).**

Those who end their lives well are those who live their lives well. For the believer to live his or her life well is dependent upon knowing and living by this one key truth; a truth that runs counter to our nature and to our culture. What is that key truth? The believer comes to know and live his life by the motto, “My life is not my own.” The resolved Christian knows he belongs to God who created him for a purpose that God Himself has given. In short, the believer knows that what matters most is not his own will, but God’s will.

And each of you knows that this is the problem. There is not one of us here who is born with the desire to do God’s will. What matters most, from the moment we are born, up until whatever time we encounter God, is our own will. It is not *His* will that matters most to us. It is what I want, I need, I desire. Adam, upon eating that forbidden fruit, went His own way rather than following God way. And the bible tells us that we have inherited that rebellious nature. Our inclination is not to do our Maker’s will, but our own will.

But here come the blessed and amazing grace of God. While we would be content in our sin to go our own way, God took the initiative and set out to rescue self-serving sinners from certain destruction. It is God who sent His Son, Jesus Christ, on the greatest rescue mission known to man. Through this mission, through the obedience of Jesus to come, to live, to give His life in the place of wretched sinners, we may be transformed from the inside out. When we come to believe upon Jesus and receive His substitutionary life, death, and resurrection as having been done for us, God forgives that person and gives him a new heart and life. But just what is the indication of such a new heart and life? Beloved, when a person is truly saved, genuinely saved, he no longer is consumed with what *he* wants out of life. Rather, he now lives with a purpose, a resolve to live out what *God* wants for his life. If we would live without regret, it begins with the resolve to live in the will of God.

Beloved, let us be clear on this. If you do not desire the will of God to be known and followed in all of your life, if what matters most to you is your own agenda, your own wants and your own will; then you have no right to claim to be a Christian. Why? Because a Christian is a *follower of Christ* and Christ did not come to do his own will, but the will of the Father who sent Him. But just what does this resolve to live by the will of God look like? Let me show you from the life of Paul so that we might model this resolve. We find it revealed in two ways by Paul in verses 13-16. Before we look at this, let me remind you of the context. Paul is coming to the end of his third missionary journey. He had been ministering in Ephesus for almost three years, but left when the riot recorded in Acts 19 took place. He had taken a tour throughout Macedonia and

Resolved to Live – As a Witness for Jesus

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

Greece. Then, accompanied by a ministry team of some eight other men (20:4), he determined to head for Jerusalem to deliver a benevolent offering collected from the Gentile churches to give to the needy Jewish believers in Jerusalem. With that in mind, how did Paul evidence his resolve to live by the will of God?

A. We evidence our commitment to the will of God by what we do (20:13-15)

13 But we, going ahead to the ship, set sail for Assos, intending from there to take Paul on board; for so he had arranged it, intending himself to go by land. 14 And when he met us at Assos, we took him on board and came to Mitylene. 15 Sailing from there, we arrived the following day opposite Chios; and the next day we crossed over to Samos; and the day following we came to Miletus.

I would have you notice two things here that reveal Paul’s resolve to God’s will.

1. Paul made personal sacrifices (13)

Let me tell you this, *“You will never experience the thrill of living in the will of God without making personal sacrifices.”*

Did you catch that while the others took a ship and traveled around the peninsula from Troas to Assos, Paul walked across it? I have no idea why Paul did this. Perhaps he wanted or needed some time by himself to pray and mediate upon the things of the Lord. It might be that he desired to remain a bit longer in Troas so that he could visit with Eutychus, making sure he was okay. But I believe this information revealed to us by the Holy Spirit tells us much about kind of person Paul was. What would be easier, sitting down for a forty mile boat-ride, or making a twenty mile hike? It may seem to be a “little” thing, choosing to take the hike rather than sail in the boat. But it is the “little” sacrifices; the little things, the seemingly small but consistent application of God’s will that cause a true servant of God to stand out from the rest. Beloved, the willingness to deny oneself in common, unspectacular ways is something God uses profoundly. Paul often did such little things, giving up a night’s sleep in Troas to impart the truth of God’s word; hiking rather than sailing to Assos. This is a man who made personal sacrifices. Could this be said of you? Are you known for making personal sacrifices for the spiritual well-being of others? But there is more. Not only did Paul make personal sacrifices, but...

2. Paul took risks (14-15)

Just as you will never experience the thrill of living in the will of God without making personal sacrifices; “you will never experience the thrill of living in the will of God without taking risks for God.”

Let us not forget that in the day in which Paul hiked on unknown, unguarded roads; for every trip on the open seas in rickety old wooden vessels, there were risks to his very life. Paul understood this very well. In 2 Corinthians 11:26 he wrote: ***“I have been on frequent journeys, in dangers from rivers, dangers from robbers, dangers from my countrymen, dangers from the Gentiles, dangers in the city, dangers in the wilderness, dangers on the sea, dangers among false brethren...”***

When was the last time you took a risk for God? To say something to a stranger? To try your hand in a ministry or service you have not done before. We are not warriors for Christ. We set ourselves far behind the war front. We pursue, actively pursue a safe Christianity. We have come to accept that commitment means different things to different people and we tolerate varying degrees of commitment rather than pointing out the absurdity and incompleteness of one

Resolved to Live – As a Witness for Jesus

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

another’s commitments. We are like the young man who waxed eloquent as he poured out his heart’s devotion in a letter to the girl of his dreams, writing, ‘My dear, I would climb the highest mountain, swim the widest stream, cross the burning desert, die at the stake for you. P.S. I will see you on Saturday if it doesn’t rain.’”

How do we explain Paul’s willingness to make personal sacrifices and take the risks like he did? It is explained by his commitment to the will of God rather than capitulation to his own will. Paul did what he did because he had resolved to obey the will of God no matter what. We see it by noting what he did. But if we see Paul’s commitment to the will of God by what he did, we ought also see it

B. We evidence our commitment to the will of God by what we do not do (16)

16 For Paul had decided to sail past Ephesus so that he would not have to spend time in Asia; for he was hurrying to be in Jerusalem, if possible, on the day of Pentecost.

We are told by Luke here that there was something Paul did not want to do; something that sounds almost uncharacteristic of Paul. What was it? He did not want to go to Ephesus. Was it because Paul did not like the people there? No, we know he loved them. What we are told is that Paul decided, determined to sail past Ephesus because he had another destination on his heart, *Jerusalem*. And if possible his intent was to get there by the Jewish holy day of Pentecost.

According to Acts 20:6, Paul left Philippi after Passover. If he was to make it to Jerusalem by Pentecost, he had no time to waste. There are fifty days between Passover and Pentecost. We know that the trip between Philippi and Troas took up twelve days and the journey to Miletus took another four days. With sixteen days used up, there was just thirty-six days left to finish the journey to Jerusalem. So Paul sailed past Ephesus because he did not have the time. But we might ask what was so pressing about arriving in Jerusalem by Pentecost. We are not actually told in our text. What we know is that at Pentecost Jerusalem would be filled with Jews from all over the world who had traveled there for the holy day.

I imagine for Paul that he saw it as a ripe opportunity for evangelism. It would also be a perfect time to deliver the love gift of financial contributions collected from the Gentile churches. Think about it. If the Jewish Christians were already struggling from a famine (which we know they were), the extra people in town for Pentecost would make life even harder for them all. The money Paul was bringing could buy a lot of much needed food. It would also be a tangible evidence of Christian unity and love shown to the sometimes skeptical Jews that these new Gentile Christians really had changed.

But the point is, Paul did not do something that he might have. He did not go to Ephesus, which, may I remind you, was a strategic city. We might compare it to having the opportunity to see New York City become a hub of Christian activity. Would that not seemingly have a greater impact upon the country and the world than coming back to see Bentonville become a hub of Christian activity? But for Paul, it was like being from Bentonville and knowing that the Walmart stockholders event was taking place where people from all over the world were converging on this on little backwoods location and knowing that he might have a great opportunity to share the gospel which then would be taken to the ends of the earth. So, was it God’s will for Paul to go to Jerusalem rather than visit Ephesus once again? How did Paul decide this? How did Paul determine the will of God?

In the time we have left, let us consider some lessons from our text, as evidenced in the life of Paul that can help us discern the will of God for our lives. For if we would be resolved to live life without regrets; and if such a life is lived by resolving to live in the will of God, then we must know what the will of God is.

Resolved to Live – As a Witness for Jesus

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

So often, when speaking to you about knowing the will of God, I default to a true, but incomplete exhortation. I will tell you that one way to know the will of God in your life is to make sure you are doing what the Bible clearly reveals as being the will of God. For as we do what we know for certain to be the will of God as gleaned from the Word of God, then God begins to clearly reveal to us those things that are not so clearly seen in or from God’s Word. For example, if we want to know God’s will, we know that we must be praying. James 1:5 tells us, **“But if any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all generously and without reproach, and it will be given to him.”** If you want to know God’s will, but you are not praying, not asking, not seeking God, then you will not know or have confidence in knowing God’s will. So, you hear me tell you, “If you want to know God’s will, pray! If you want to know God’s will, abstain from sexual immorality (as Paul told the Thessalonians in 1 Thessalonians 4:3)!” In other words, do the things that you know for certain are God’s will.

But there is more to knowing God’s will than just doing what we know for certain God would have us do. Life is filled with many choices. Sometimes the choices are easy to determine the will of God; sometimes they are not. Sometimes we choose the wrong thing which leads us to what we started this sermon with, regrets. So, what are some of the lessons by which we might “decided” what God’s will is for our lives where the Bible does not clearly direct us? I warn you, what I am about to tell you will not make some of you feel comfortable; what I am about to show you will also reveal some of the very poor methods of determining the will of God that so many Christians appeal to. I see four things that must be considered in determining the will of God for our lives.

1. *In determining the will of God, we must not always equate open doors with God’s will*

How often do we assume that just because there is an open door, an easy route, a less difficult path that such automatically equates to God’s will? It might, but an open door of opportunity is not the only determining factor. How do we see this in the life of Paul here in our text?

Consider, Paul had found a ship that was going to sail very close to Ephesus. If you look at a map, it would be nothing for Paul to have ported in Ephesus. Thus, Paul might have easily thought, “I am so close to Ephesus, it must be God’s will to go there. For why would He bring me so close if not?” Have you ever reasoned like this? If God didn’t want me to do this thing, then why did He bring it on my path? But, beloved, just because circumstances look good to us does not automatically mean it is God’s will.

Let me remind you of Jonah. Remember him. Jonah was in direct conflict with the will of God by not going to Nineveh to preach repentance. According to the text, Jonah just happened to “find” a ship heading where he wanted to go, bound for Tarshish, away from Nineveh! The point is, we must be careful not to base our decisions merely or only on circumstances.

It is my contention that while circumstances are to be considered in determining the will of God, they must be at the very bottom of the list and weighed lightly in comparison to other things. I have heard some people that always go through the so called “open door” because it was the simplest thing to do, while not considering other factors. And my experience with such a practice is that it more often than not results in regrets. I have seen people go the opposite way as well, believing that if there is an apparent open door, the seemingly easier path, that it must be complete resisted; that unless the path is hard it cannot be the will of God. I don’t buy that thinking either. Let me clear, I am saying that trying to determine God’s will only by open doors, only by circumstance can easily lead to regrets. So we need something more. Paul employs some other considerations.

Resolved to Live – As a Witness for Jesus

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

2. *In determining the will of God, we often must choose between two or more “good” options.*

Let’s face it; if we are seeking to know God’s will; and we are presented with the opportunity to have a decent job, the pay is okay, no one will starve, but it is good, honest work; or being brought into a foolproof plan to rob a bank and instantly be a millionaire, I would suspect that few of us would have a hard time determining which of these two are the will of God.

But what of Paul’s choices; to minister in Ephesus, or to go to Jerusalem by Pentecost? Which of these options is sinful? Neither. Both were viable, godly options for Paul. So how then did Paul make his decision? We have to infer this from the text, but being a man of prayer and a man knowledgeable of the Scriptures, it would seem safe to say that he sought out the wisdom of God. And through some process of prayer and reflection upon the Word of God, Paul “decided” (v. 16) to sail past Ephesus.

Beloved, let me warn you of something I see Christian do far too often when faced with determining the will of God between two non-sinful options. Too often we will try to make one of the two options sinful. If you weigh out all the pros and cons of a decision; and inherently there is nothing sinful in either path, then God is giving you that choice. But which one is the will of God? Make a decision, choose that one path, knowing that you have sought to make sure of your motives and that there is nothing inherently evil in it and that is the will of God. But what if it was the other one? As soon as you decided, that is the will of God between the two viable options. There is a third consideration:

3. *In determining the will of God, we must know for certain our purpose in life.*

Far too many people do not operate with any real purpose in life. Too many people do nothing more than coast through life, bouncing from event to event like the ball in a pinball machine. Then there are those who have a purpose, but it is their own purpose rather than God’s purpose for them.

According to the Word of God, I have no right to create my own purpose for life. Why is that? Because, I am not my own. According to 1 Corinthians 6:19, I have been purchased, I have been bought, I have been redeemed with a price. The blood of Christ makes me belong to Christ. And if I belong to God, I have a God-directed purpose. This is what motivated Paul, His God-given purpose, to glorify God by making known to others the gospel of His Son. The purpose to be a witness for Christ affected “every” decision he made, including whether to go to Ephesus or Jerusalem.

When determining the will of God, we need to ask ourselves which option before us will result in the most glory to God. Sometimes the question needs to be this, of the options before me, which will allow me to “better” glorify God. We often sacrifice the best in place of the good. We must consider which option will affect most positively the spread of the gospel of Christ? This is what Paul did, choosing the option that best fit His God-given purpose.

Yogi Berra, the well-known catcher for the New York Yankees, and Hank Aaron, who at that time was the chief power hitter for the Milwaukee Braves, were playing in the World Series. As was his practice, Yogi was keeping up his ceaseless chatter, intending to pep up his teammates on the one hand, and distract the Milwaukee batters on the other. As Aaron came to the plate, Yogi tried to distract him by saying, “Henry, you’re holding the bat wrong. You’re supposed to hold it so you can read the trademark.” Aaron didn’t say anything, but when the next pitch came he hit it into the left-field bleachers. After rounding the bases and tagging up at home plate, Aaron looked at Yogi Berra and said, “I didn’t come up here to read.” He knew his purpose.

Beloved, do you know your God-given purpose in life? Can you state it clearly in one sentence? If not, I urge you to prayerfully search the Scriptures and ask God to help you develop

Resolved to Live – As a Witness for Jesus

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

one. For by this you may test every decision, seeing how the outcome will relate to your purpose. This is how to live a life without regret. But there is one more for us to consider this morning.

4. *In determining the will of God, we must make our decisions based upon convictions from God's Word rather than upon feelings in the heart.*

I will warn you of something that drives me and most pastors crazy. To have a member of the church come up to him as say, “Pastor, I just feel like this is what I need to do.” More often than not, such feelings are in contrast to the revealed will of God. I may feel like I don't want to get up, get ready, and go to church. If I act on that feeling, well, you won't see me. But the conviction of God's Word is that I would be neglecting the fellowship, missing out on an opportunity to have my faith increased by meeting with fellow saints.

Beloved, it is our tendency to do so many things in our lives based on a whim or hunch or merely because it “felt” like the right thing to do. Feeling, however, are so fickle, unpredictable and utterly unreliable. Paul had developed course of action, a plan, a plan that involved taking up an offering, traveling to churches for a couple of years to collect it, and then delivering that offering to Jerusalem. Because he had a conviction about that plan, he said “no” to what he might have “felt” like doing. He might have felt like seeing his friends in Ephesus and might have followed that if he had allowed his sentiment to dictate.

Beloved, if we are to live life without regrets, then this is essential. Let me boil it down to you like this. If you live to please yourself, you will have regrets. If you live to please people, you will look back with regrets. But if you will resolve to live for and by the will of God, you can finish life without regrets.

Discussion Questions

1. As Christians, what is the role of regret in our lives? What Scriptures might you use to support your answer?
2. What kind of personal sacrifices or risks have you made for God? How did they turn out? Have you seen others make personal sacrifices or take risks for God? How did that turn out?
3. What are some “common” personal sacrifices Christians ought to make in pursuing the will of God? What are some “common” risks?
4. What methods of determining the will of God have you employed in the past? Which ones “worked out” and why? Which ones proved not to be the best choice and why?

Soli Deo Gloria

Copyright © 2014 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.*