
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 (Part 4b)

Living to do the work of God (Acts 20:25-38)

Acts 20:32-35

“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. 33 I have coveted no one’s silver or gold or clothes. 34 You yourselves know that these hands ministered to my own needs and to the men who were with me. 35 In everything I showed you that by working hard in this manner you must help the weak and remember the words of the Lord Jesus, that He Himself said, ‘It is more blessed to give than to receive.’”

Seventy-eight; seventy-eight years is the average life expectancy in the United States. That equates to about 28,500 days. In just over a month, I will be 17,155 days into my 28,500 days, hopefully a few thousand more if the Lord would allow. Truly James was right when he wrote, **“You are just a vapor that appears for a little while and then vanishes away”** (James 4:14). Each one of us has a set number of days in which we live; either for ourselves; for the Lord; or in some combination of the two.

My question this morning is this; what are you doing with the days God has given to you? How do you “spend” your days? With what do you fill your time? Do you strive to remember that God has given you a live to live for His glory and thus for your good? Our lives are too short to wander aimlessly; too short to fill them with attitudes and actions that lead to regret; too short to pass up opportunities God has put in front of you. We must live for God today and not let any day slip away. To borrow from the title of book by John Piper, “Don’t Waste Your Life!”

In Acts 20, we find Paul’s farewell address to the Ephesian elders. We have been using this event and this speech as a an insight into Paul’s life; how after some 20 to 25 years of ministry; having been saved from a life of blasphemy, hatred, and even murder to become a slave of the very one, Jesus Christ; whom he has once mocked and persecuted. Surely Paul would make reference to the shameful things he had done in his past, if for nothing else, to serve as a warning to others not to follow in his footsteps. And yet, we find just the opposite. Paul speaks to them of all that God has done through him and calls these men and thus the church to follow in his footsteps as he followed in the footsteps of Christ.

Paul lived a life without regret, primarily because he devoted himself, his time, his resources, his energy, all that he had as a tool to reach others for Jesus. When we begin to see our lives; and all that they contain; our talents, our desires, our jobs, our families, our possessions, everything we have as being not ends in themselves, but tools though which we can reach people for Jesus, we are then on the road to living our lives with regret and to the glory of God.

Before we look at our text, I would to start as I intend to end; with a series of statements, biblical truism that are gleaned from the life of Paul, especially as revealed in this speech. These are practical considerations. If you don’t get them all right now, don’t worry; I will repeat them at the end of the message. Let me give you ten considerations for living life without regret:

1. Living a life of no regrets begins when we understand that God’s revelation equates to great responsibility.

Resolved to Live – As a Witness for Jesus

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

The more we come to know God’s Word, the more we realize God’s expectation on our life to love Him with ALL our heart, soul, mind and strength.

2. Submission to God comes only after recognition of God.

Until we see Him as Sovereign King self will seek to rule.

3. We will never do what God wants until we know who God is.

Until we are vested in the Word of God; we will not know the Will of God.

4. God is good and has determined good things for His children.

When we practice this truth, we see even the difficult and trying things of life as God’s working all things for our good.

5. Sometimes we do not think we are blessed because we are too focused on someone else’s blessings.

The only person we are ultimately to compare ourselves to is Christ; in whom we have every spiritual blessing.

6. Procrastination is sabotaging the good plans of God for you.

That is a bit strongly worded for emphasis; but we do miss out on many blessings because we put off what God has commanded us to do. It’s not that we are hurting God, because He corrects things; but we are hurting ourselves.

7. Delayed obedience to God is immediate disobedience to God.

Enough said.

8. What you fear will ultimately control you.

So do not fear what others think or what others could do; but fear God so that He is the one controlling you.

9. If you were standing in front of God today, would everything between you and Him be right?

Are you living your life with a view to pleasing Him?

10. If you are not dead, God is not finished with you.

Never forget that your life and all it contains is not your own; you belong to and are to be serving God in every area of your life.

There is a sense in which we have considered all these things from the life of Paul and these are the things that allowed Paul to live his life without regret. We never find Paul saying, “If only I had...” Rather we find Paul constantly stating what he had done for the cause of Christ. Paul was resolved to the will of God; to the word of God and now, here before us we find Paul resolved to the work of God; knowing that as he invests himself in God’s work; there will be no room for regret.

Resolved to Live – As a Witness for Jesus

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

III. Live with a resolve to do the work of God (25-38).

In verses 25-38, we are reminded that the Christian’s purpose in life is for something greater than living for some temporary satisfaction of the flesh. The Christian’s purpose, the things you do today, tomorrow, next week and in the years to come can and are to matter for eternity. Are the things you do today; are the things you will spend time thinking about and conversing; will they last? Are they moving you toward God; a better understanding of God for a better worship and proclamation of God and His salvation? Like Paul, we have work to do, God’s work. And as we noted last week, God’s work is for each of us to be in full-time Christian service, making Jesus known.

We are to be telling people who God is and why Jesus has come to the earth as the Lamb of God who takes away our sins? According to Acts 1:8 and the mission of the church, we are to be Christ’s witnesses, declaring His teachings about God, man, sin and salvation to the remotest parts of the earth. This is the work of every Christian. This is God’s work, a work that will take on one form in my life as a pastor and a complete different form for you as a student; as an employee; as a child; as a parent; as a spouse, as a friend. But our resolve must be to do this work of God; of rehearsing the truths of Christ before others. Paul had a resolve and passion for this work of God and the question for us is this, what is involved in a resolve for the work of God? If we would resolve to do the work of God, then there are three expectations that you and I MUST expect, look for, and be engaged in. These expectations are inferred by Paul in our text. Last week we noted the first of these three expectations noting that if we would resolve to do the work of God, we must...

A. Have the right pastoral expectations (25-31);

1. A shepherd is to be feeding the flock
2. A shepherd is to be leading the flock
3. A shepherd is to be heeding to the flock

This brings us to the final two areas of expectations we are to have if we would be committed to doing the work of God. The first one we are accustomed to. We expect pastors and elders to preach and teach the word of God; to give direction and guidance in our lives; and even to warn us of potential dangers to our spiritual lives. The final two expectations point the finger at you. What are you to expect from yourself. In other words, the responsibility for you to do the work of God does not fall entirely upon the pastors and elders; but also on you. If you would resolve to do the work of God, then you must...

B. Have the right personal expectations (32-35);

Beginning then in verse 32 and running through verse 35, we have what are to be our own personal expectations; those things we are responsible to know and cultivate in our lives. There are four such expectations. First, we must be...

1. Committed to the Message of Grace (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.

Having given this charge to the elders to feed, lead and heed to the flock of God, Paul now turns these men over to God. Our text says, **“I commend you to God...”** The word

Resolved to Live – As a Witness for Jesus

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

“**commend**” literally means “to place something beside, to set alongside or set something before someone” (Luke 9:16; 10:8; 11:6; 1 Corinthians 10:27). In classical Greek “to commend” described anything being deposited with a friend for the purpose of safekeeping. The idea is to **entrust** someone to the care, safekeeping or protection of someone; and in our text, Paul is placing the elders in the majestic; powerful and gracious hands of **God** as well as to the **Word of grace**; that is the Word of God, that they in turn might be able to feed the flock of God.

Beloved, you and I need to spend more time exploring and contemplating the majesty and grace of God. We don't need more motivational conferences, church growth seminars, new methods of ministry, and on and on. In the words of Jeremiah 6:16, we need to return to “**the ancient paths, where the good way is, and walk in it; and you (both the shepherds and the sheep) will find rest for your souls.**” The Majesty of Grace is a God who makes such a promise. And while it is important to see church members actively engaged in ministry, it is of first importance to make sure that we are first actively engaged with God and the Word of His grace. Men and women who are continually being filled with the Word of Christ (Colossians 3:16); cannot help but carry out the Work of Christ, in the energy of the Spirit of Christ, all for the Glory of God!

As we live in the dark times of the waning of American Christianity, let us pray that God may be pleased to revive His Church according to the message of the Word of Grace ministered by the Spirit of Grace. To this point, Mark Dever wrote that we ought to be....

encouraging churches to become more deliberate about “setting forth the truth plainly.” People are transformed and renewed in the likeness of Christ when they look at God as He has revealed Himself in both His written and His incarnate Word. The job of the church, then, is not to show people a reflection of themselves. We are instead biblically obliged to raise their gaze, redirecting their attention from themselves to their Creator. There is no secret to a transforming Christian ministry save the power of God's Word and the life-giving breath of His Spirit (Ezekiel 37:1-14). You don't need a catchy new metaphor. You don't need the latest evangelism program. You don't need to change the name of your church. You don't need a pastor with a grand scheme for growth and effectiveness and success as the world would define them. What is needed most today is a commitment to being deliberate about setting forth the truth plainly, because the truth as we gaze on it in Christ is what transforms us, what builds us up and sets us free (John 17:17; Acts 20:32; John 8:36). So a healthy church is a Godward-looking church. We look in dependence on Him for our message, our method, and the transformation of our churches into the image of Christ.

(The Deliberate Church: Building Your Ministry on the Gospel)

Paul wanted the Ephesian Elders and the Holy Spirit desires that the church be entrusted to God; having a confidence the God who has given us this message of grace! Are you entrusting yourself to knowing God and communicating His message of grace? What is this message of grace as preached by Paul; a message that builds up the church; a message that promises the inheritance of eternal life and all the blessings of heaven; a message that sanctifies us; sets us apart as God's very own? The message of grace reminds us that there is a heavenly drama being played out. We, you and I are God's special creation. But because God is also holy we are cut off from Him by your sin; our wilful rebellion and determined neglect of Him and His ways. Because of this treason committed against God, we are under His judgment and wrath; which is

Resolved to Live – As a Witness for Jesus

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

death. The Bible tells of the there is just one solution; provided by the God whom we have rebelled against; that Jesus, fully God and fully sinless man, ransomed us to God through His death on the cross. He paid our sin-debt and rose from the dead as proof that He is the way, the truth and the life. The message of grace is that this drama may be eliminated! How? By turning from our sin; by following Jesus and by putting our faith, confidence, and trust in who He is and what He has done.

We are to be commended to God; entrusting ourselves to Him. This means we are be striving to un understand God’s Word and principles better; to study our Bibles with more earnestness; to believe more fully than we have ever done; convinced that in the great Gospel there found every truth that we need, and guidance for all circumstances. It means to bring the principles of Christianity into our daily lives; to walk, behave, and act by the light of them; and to live in the radiance of a present God; so basking in the light of His glory that you radiate His glory to those around you. Why would any professing Christian desire anything less than to faithful reflect the glories of his Savior; to be light in darkness; to be a fragrant aroma of the gospel into every room he enters? When you enter; do people quickly behold the Savior; or do they only see your own self?

Beloved, are you expecting yourself; challenging yourself; committing yourself to grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. The message of grace can do what nothing else can do, namely, build up the people of God so they experience the inheritance God offers them in Christ. This word is the means by which God accomplishes His gracious work. It is the **“word of His grace.”** Beloved, this is what makes a life of service to God and a life lived without regret possible; *God* and His *grace*. But there is more; not only are we to be committed to this message of grace, but we must also be...

2. Committed to the Mindset of Grace (33)

I have coveted no one’s silver or gold or clothes.

Paul concludes by trying to communicate his heart, his mindset in ministry. He did not covet; strongly desire and strive after things like money and clothes. In other words, He wasn’t in it for himself, but for God’s glory and for the building up of God’s people. Paul did not desire earthly wealth. He had not lived among the Ephesians in order to obtain their property. He had set his mind on the things above and not those on the earth. This is the mindset of ministry; that to serve God; to give to others is what brings a true satisfaction to life. Beloved, seeking after temporary things empties a life; but giving the message of grace fills it. This is the mindset of ministry.

Pastor J. Sidlow Baxter once said, *“No man who is full of himself can ever truly preach the Christ who emptied Himself.”* This is quite an admission by Paul. As he looks back over his ministry in Ephesus he can say with all honesty, “I didn’t do it to get rich. In fact, I didn’t do it to get anything temporal.” He had no regrets how he lived his life. And yet, there are many in ministry today who cannot say this. The lavish lifestyles and pursuit of multimillion dollar empires are plaguing the church today. To be sure, a greed based theology has its reward. For example, when one well-known women televangelist, owns a ten million dollar corporate jet; a \$107,000 silver/grey Mercedes, a twenty-two million dollar mansion; and other homes worth another twenty million; all from a ministry that pulls in around 125 million dollars a year causing her to claim that these are simply deserved blessing from God. Something is dreadful wrong with her mindset. The following poem, “A Church Perish,” says it well.

Resolved to Live – As a Witness for Jesus

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

*There is a pastor, himself he cherished,
Who loved his position not his parish
So the more he preached
The less he reached
And this is why his parish perished.*

To do God’s work God’s way there is to be the elimination of self-seeking. Jonathan Edwards once said, *“I go out to preach with two propositions in mind. First, every person ought to give his life to Christ. Second, whether or not anyone else gives him his life I will give him mine.”* There is the mindset of God’s kind of servant; one who knows he has not served God for the wrong reasons. So, we are to be committed to the message of grace and the mindset of grace. Next, we are to be...

3. Committed to the Ministry of Grace (34-35a)

34 You yourselves know that these hands ministered to my own needs and to the men who were with me. 35 In everything I showed you that by working hard in this manner you must help the weak...

If you have not figured it out; to be an effective; truly effective in building up other in the Lord; it takes hard work. Ministry, serve to God requires a person commitment that says, “I will labor and strive with all that I have...” The language of Paul is clear in Colossians 1:28-29 when he wrote:

28 We (note the plural pronoun; “we – the church”) proclaim Him, admonishing every man and teaching every man with all wisdom, so that we may present every man complete in Christ. 29 (person commitment) For this purpose also I labor, striving (literally – “agonizing) according to His power (energy), which mightily works (energizes) within me.

Beloved, it takes more than the gift of gab and good people skills to do serve in the church. Paul did back-breaking work as a tentmaker so that people could not accuse laziness or of taking advantage of others. He made tents in the morning and late evening hours, taught at the lecture hall of Tyrannus in the afternoons, and conducted a house to house teaching ministry throughout the week. To do God’s work there must be a willingness to *work*.

James Boice observes, *“It is a scandal to the ministry that so many ministers are lazy. They can be because in most churches they do not have anybody to supervise them, at least not very well...So if the minister is not thinking about God and remembering that he is answerable to Him, it is very easy to waste a great deal of time. There are always easy things he can do rather than working hard.”*

Beloved, Psalm 100:2 says, “Serve the Lord with gladness...” Your job is not what defines you. Your parenting is not what defines you. The clothes you wear; the car you drive; the friends you hang out with are not to define you. If you are a Christian; then Christ defines you. You belong to Him. You are literally His slave 24/7/365. You are to serve God and you serve God first by or through serving His people. We are not to say, “Let’s pray about it...” No, get serving and pray as you serve. Beloved, we must be committed to this ministry of grace; faithfully serving, even when our schedules are full; even when we feel like quitting; even when our hearts are breaking; even when our children keep us up all night; even when we got in a fight with our

Resolved to Live – As a Witness for Jesus

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

spouse; even when we're grumpy; worn out; and feeling used up. Our example is Christ; who did not give up but went to the cross. Our example is Paul who agonized, did everything in his power to serve the body of Christ. This is a commitment to the ministry of grace. But there is one more personal expectation we can glean from our text. We are to be committed to the message; the mindset; and the ministry of grace. Finally, let us be...

4. Committed to the Modesty of grace (35b)

35 In everything I showed you that by working hard in this manner you must help the weak and remember the words of the Lord Jesus, that He Himself said, 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.'"

Paul set the example for these men; giving himself to the ministry; but his own example was that of Christ. Jesus had said, ***"It is more blessed to give than to receive."*** This statement has been called "the supreme beatitude" because, unlike the other beatitudes, it tells us how to be *more blessed!*¹ Beloved, anyone can call himself a Christian...but if you want to discern the real thing, look for the modesty of grace. And what is the modesty of grace? It is *the humility of Christ*. A true Christian lives with a radically different orientation in life; the same kind of orientation our Savior exhibited. What was that orientation? It was that living life is not about self but about *others*. It is not about what you can get but how you can give.

I know that Paul was speaking to the Ephesian elders and pastors here in our text; but all of these expectations apply to each one of us. If we want to do an effective, legitimate work here at Hope; this is what is expected of us; a commitment to the message; the mindset; the ministry and the modesty of the grace of God.

As we close; let me remind you one more time of those practical considerations I share at the beginning; considerations that sum up how to be committed to this message, mindset, ministry and modesty of grace by which we can live a life without regret:

1. Living a life of no regrets begins when we understand that God's revelation equates to great responsibility.

The more we come to know God's Word, the more we realize God's expectation on our life to love Him with ALL our heart, soul, mind and strength.

2. Only right recognition of God results in right submission to God.

Until we see Him as Sovereign King self will seek to rule.

3. We will never accomplish what God wants until we know who God is.

Until we are vested in the Word of God; we will not know the Will of God.

4. Acknowledgment that God is good and has promised good things for His children.

When we practice this truth, we see even the difficult and trying things of life as God's working all things for our good.

¹ Dr. Earl V. Pierce

Resolved to Live – As a Witness for Jesus

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

5. **Sometimes we fail to see ourselves as blessed because we are too focused on someone else’s blessings.**
The only person we are ultimately to compare ourselves to is Christ; in whom we have every spiritual blessing.
6. **Procrastination is sabotaging the good plans of God for you.**
That is a bit strongly worded for emphasis; but we do miss out on many blessings because we put off what God has commanded us to do. It’s not that we are hurting God, because He corrects things; but we are hurting ourselves.
7. **Delayed obedience to God is immediate disobedience to God.**
Enough said.
8. **What you fear will ultimately control you.**
So do not fear what others think or what others could do; but fear God so that He is the one controlling you.
9. **If you were to stand before God today, would everything be right between you?**
Are you living your life with a view to pleasing Him?
10. **If you are not dead, God is not finished with you.**
Never forget that your life and all it contains is not your own; you belong to and are to be serving God in every area of your life.

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, 1001 W. Walnut Suite 5a, Rogers, AR 72756.*