

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 4d)

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

Acts 20:36-38

36 When he had said these things, he knelt down and prayed with them all. 37 And they began to weep aloud and embraced Paul, and repeatedly kissed him, 38 grieving especially over the word which he had spoken, that they would not see his face again. And they were accompanying him to the ship.

Believe it or not, we have actually made it to the end of Paul’s farewell speech as recorded in Acts 20. This has brought us to the final three verses of the chapter, a short narrative describing for us what happened after Paul’s speech; the reaction of these people who heard Paul’s words as Paul readied himself for the next part of his journey to Jerusalem.

It might be easy to gloss over these words before us. In comparison to the great truths Paul had just given in his speech, this account may seem a bit anticlimactic. Yet, may I remind you that this is Scripture, authoritative Scripture; inspired by God; motivated by the Holy Spirit and profitable for us to consider so that we might be adequate, equipped for every good work.

So, how do these three verses equip us for every good work? ^[slide 03] What we have found in verses 28-38 are a series of “expectations” we as believers are to have if we would be rightly resolved or committed to the work of God. And what is our work? It is the communicating of the gospel to all peoples. There are three areas of expectations. First, we have already noted the pastoral expectations, those things a congregation ought to expect from their pastors and elders. In verses 28-31, we identified these pastoral expectations as feeding, leading, and heeding. Then, in verses 32-35 we saw the second area, noting four personal expectations believers are to have of themselves, including a growing commitment to the message, mindset, ministry and modesty of the grace of God as revealed in the gospel. This morning, we examine the last of these areas, what I have labeled as the public expectations believers ought to have if they would be resolved to do the work of God. By public expectations, I mean those things that a congregation ought to be known for by one another as well as by their community. The church is to be a demonstrable expression, a visible manifestation, a working and public laboratory of the grace of God. Not only is the grace of God to be experienced by those of us who gather week by week, but there is also to be an expectation that the grace we experience among one another will be exposed to the community. There are three such public expectations revealed in our text and these will serve as our outline.

If we would be resolved to live as those committed to the work of God in spreading the gospel, then we must expect that a congregation be committed to...

I. Praying with one another (36)

When he had said these things, he knelt down and prayed with them all.

Being a narrative, we need to be looking at what took place, in the case of our first point; we find Paul praying with the Ephesian elders, and then seek to look for any Biblical precept that might be gleaned from the activity. What we find in verse 36 is that Paul, upon completion of his heart-felt message before this audience, did not simply close in prayer; but rather he gathered with these folks and they all prayed together. This, beloved, was a time of what we would call corporate prayer. Not individual prayer; but praying together. There were evidently groups of

Resolved to Live – As a Witness for Jesus

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

people praying and Paul took the time to pray with them. This then, was a time when anyone who might have walked in on this scene, would know that this group of people was committed to prayer.

And so, set before us is this matter of prayer; but again, not just individual, closet or secret prayer; but rather corporate, open and visible prayer. Let me remind you that this was one of the first visible markers of the early church. In Acts 2:42 we read this commentary of the early church; that they were **“continually devoting themselves to the apostles’ teaching, to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.”**

The early church was committed to praying with and for one another corporately. It is nearly impossible to read the book of Acts and not find members of the church failing to gather together to pray with and for one another. New Testament Christianity is a church of people praying together. And yet, sadly, praying together, as a congregation, and as groups within this congregation is often inadequate. It ought to be unimaginable for us to be seen or perceived as a prayerless church.

But perhaps this corporate prayer habit of the early church was just a quaint habit of Christians long ago, in a culture far, far away. Beloved, if we see a disparity, a distance, a gross distinction between the prayer practices of the early church and the prayer practices of the church today; know that the fault lies with us today. What we find in the book of Acts is the promise of Jesus that the Holy Spirit would come and empower the saints (Acts 1:8) and then the demonstration of the power of the Spirit at work in them. And how did the Spirit demonstrate His power at work in the believers? Our first response might be; “well, they made Jesus and His gospel known.” This is correct, but there is more. For wherever you see the Spirit of God at work in the church in Acts, you see a people who are also, devoted to prayer.

Let me put it this way: what do people do when they are full of God? They eagerly pray with the church. This is what we find in the book of Acts. And so, if our hearts are cold; if we feel no compulsion to pray with God’s people, then our first step is to pray for God to come among us as He did among these believers.

In Acts 1:14 the disciples were together and praying. This was followed by the coming and empowering of the Holy Spirit by which these men proclaimed the mighty deeds of God in Acts 2:1-11. In Act 2:42 we find the church committed to practicing prayer. This is followed in Acts 2:43-47 with the people being in awe of God’s work; of these believers gathering from house to house; publically demonstrating their commitment to God and to the church. In Acts 4:31, after Peter and John had been released from their interrogation by the Jewish leaders; they gathered with the church and prayed together. This was followed by a most marvelous description by Luke who wrote; **“And when they had prayed, the place where they had gathered was shaken, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak the word of God with boldness.”** In Acts 6:1-7 there was a need for men, full of the Holy Spirit, to minister to the need of serving tables. The congregation selected such men and in Acts 6:6 we are told they prayed together for these men. What was the result? In Acts 6:7 we read, “The word of God kept on spreading; and the number of disciples continued to increase greatly in Jerusalem...” In Acts 12 we find Peter in prison and then miraculously released by an angel. Upon his release, Peter makes his way to John Mark’s home, where the church was meeting. What did he find them doing? In Acts 12:12 they were praying together. I could go on but the point of all of this is that if we would be truly resolved to the work of God, of seeing the gospel of God’s grace spread, we

Resolved to Live – As a Witness for Jesus

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

need to learn and practice more corporate prayer. T. W. Hunt, the author of *Prayer Life*, made this observation,

“If we examine the expansion of the church in the Book of Acts and the Epistles, we see convincing proof of the power of prayer. The early church had innumerable obstacles. Christianity was unknown and it was opposed by the authorities wherever it spread, it suffered constantly from false accusations and rumors...but by the end of the first century, it had spread in exactly the geographic pattern commissioned by Jesus—Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and the uttermost parts of the earth. This rapid geographical and ideological shift could have been accomplished only by supernatural forces. The instrument of expansion was the church and the force the church was using was prayer.”

From its earliest days the Church has always been at its best when its people have been people of prayer. Beloved, if we want to see God's power in our church work in a way that was in the early church then we should pray as they prayed. We should look at prayer as they did, as an indispensable source of unbelievable power. Acts 2 says the early disciples *continually devoted themselves, that is, they gave themselves over to a pattern and practice of prayer*. We must give ourselves to it as well...when we meet in our on Sunday mornings, in our Home Bible Fellowships, in our various bible studies, when we fellowship together, and yes, even in our own personal devotions. The fact is, if we are to be a *powerful* church we must be a *prayerful* church.

But just what might this look like for us at Hope CBC? While we do not have an official prayer meeting of the church; we do not necessarily need one. What we need is to simply pray; to purpose to pray whenever we are together. At the end of a service like this, our conversations should not immediately digress to matters concerning what is for lunch; how our favorite sports team is fairing; what is the latest and greatest YouTube video and the like. Our hearts should be intent on serving one another; of commenting on a spiritual truth and even then of praying for one another. Not that everyone must be praying at the end of a service, but what a delight to see pockets of people at the end of a service praying for one another, praying for the needs of one another and our congregation. I know that I have seen *some* pray at times, but if the Holy Spirit is among us; if we would not quench or squelch the Spirit, then perhaps we should be seeing more people praying.

Again, please don't take this the wrong way. I am not saying that everyone must immediately, at the end of the service, forsake any general conversation and go off somewhere to pray; but do you not agree that we ought to see more prayer among us if the Holy Spirit is indeed at work? And, by the way, such corporate pray needs not be only at the end of a service. How blessed would we be to have those who would come before the service to pray for one another and our church?

By way of application; what are some things for which a congregation gathered might pray? I have alluded to some of these already; but let me give some examples of things that we would do well to pray together:

1. Pray for the preacher and his sermon and the congregations' reception and practice of the truths of God's Word (Ephesians 6:19-20; Colossians 4:3-4; 2 Thessalonians 3:1)

Resolved to Live – As a Witness for Jesus

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

I love Paul's prayer request at the end of the letter to Ephesians. It is a request of every preacher. In Ephesians 6:19-20 he made this request:

19 and pray on my behalf, that utterance may be given to me in the opening of my mouth, to make known with boldness the mystery of the gospel, 20 for which I am an ambassador in chains; that in proclaiming it I may speak boldly, as I ought to speak.

E.M. Bounds, a late 1800's; early 1900's pastor, once asked, “If Paul was so dependent on the prayers of God's saints to give his ministry success, how much greater the necessity that the prayers of God's saints be centered on the ministry today!”

2. Pray for revival and reformation; that we the church would awaken to fulfill the purposes of God while faithfully proclaiming the truth of God. (Acts 1:8; Matthew 28:19-20)

Erroll Hulse, a South African Pastor, once said, “It is true that revival is the absolute prerogative of a sovereign God. Yet, in a strange way His purposes are joined to the prayers of His people.” In other words, our prayers for revival do not cause revival; but revival will not come without our prayers. Are we praying for changed hearts, changed lives and a change community? Let us begin afresh to do so to the glory of God.

I am calling the church; I am calling each of you; I am calling myself to be more intentional; more purposeful and more relentless to public, corporate prayer. The Puritan preacher, John Bunyan said, “*You can do more than pray after you've prayed, but you cannot do more than pray until you have prayed.*” These believers in our text were a people of prayer, of public prayer. May we follow their example.

If we would be a people resolved to the work of God, then one public expectation we ought to fulfill is that of praying with one another. But there is more. If we would be resolved to live as those committed to the work of God in spreading the gospel, then we must expect that a congregation be committed to...

II. Loving one another

37 And they began to weep aloud and embraced Paul, and repeatedly kissed him, 38 grieving especially over the word which he had spoken, that they would not see his face again.

Notice in our text the descriptions of affection that the Ephesian elders expressed towards Paul. Upon realizing that this might be the very last time they would ever see their beloved pastor, they “began to weep aloud”; they embraced, literally hurling themselves around the neck of Paul; and they were “grieving” – they were literally tormented by the idea of not seeing Paul again. All of these were rather public expressions of their deep affection for Paul.

Let me remind you that this was not taking place behind closed doors. This was a large gathering of the Ephesian elders, perhaps some other folks from the church at Ephesus, believers there in Miletus, Paul's missionary entourage and I can well imagine that there were a number of spectators just trying to get a glimpse of this event. And how did these men respond to Paul? They responded as they would to a brother. They demonstrated their love, their affection and their appreciation of Paul. Is this in fulfillment of a biblical precept? Indeed it is. Remember the words of Jesus in John 13:34-35 when He said;

Resolved to Live – As a Witness for Jesus

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

34 A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another. 35 By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.

Jesus clearly states that the love of the brethren is to be public; does He not? Our love and service to one another is to be done in such a way so that the public; **“all men will know”** that we belong to Jesus. That is a tall order; one that can only be done by the power of God; but it begins with a personal commitment to the body of Christ. It is a prayer request that we would develop such an intimate, tight, commitment to serve one another. I have given you this definition before; but let me remind you that the love we are to have for one another may be defined as “a one-way, unconditional act of the will that seeks the highest good for another, regardless of the cost, and all to the glory of God.”

Is this really the expectation we are to have? It is the expectation of Jesus and the Word of God. In John’s first letter he implores believers with the following words:

1 John 3:14

We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brethren. He who does not love abides in death.

1 John 3:16

We know love by this, that He laid down His life for us; and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren.

1 John 3:18

Little children, let us not love with word or with tongue, but in deed and truth.

Just what does this loving one another look like? I quickly came up with 37 biblical ways (how is that for a random number) by which we are to publicly and privately demonstrate love for one another. Maybe you can come up with more. I know that I would ask you to come up with practical ways to demonstrate these things. There are 37, so don’t expect to write them all down now. I will post these for you later:

1. Be devoted to one another (Romans 12:10).
2. Give preference to one another (Romans 12:10).
3. Be of the same mind toward one another (Romans 12:16).
4. Accept one another by withholding judgment (Romans 14:1).
5. Accept one another by showing deference (Romans 14:1–5; 15:7).
6. Esteem [highly regard] one another in love (Romans 14:5; Philippians 2:3).
7. Build up one another (Romans 14:19; 1 Thessalonians 5:11).
8. Counsel one another (Romans 15:14).
9. Serve one another by showing deference in matters of liberty (Galatians 5:13).
10. Bear one another’s burdens (Galatians 6:2).
11. Be gentle with one another (Ephesians 4:2).
12. Be kind to one another so as to preserve unity (Ephesians 4:32).
13. Speak truth to one another (Ephesians 4:25; Col 3:9).

Resolved to Live – As a Witness for Jesus

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

14. Submit to one another (Ephesians 5:21).
15. Show compassion to one another (Colossians 3:12).
16. Bear with the inherent sinfulness of one another (Colossians 3:13).
17. Forgive one another (Colossians 3:13).
18. Use Spirit-filled, Word-saturated music to teach and admonish one another (Colossians 3:16; Ephesians 5:19).
19. Comfort one another with the hope of Christ’s return (1 Thessalonians 4:18).
20. Encourage one another (1 Thessalonians 5:11).
21. Live in peace with one another (1 Thessalonians 5:13).
22. Seek good for one another (1 Thessalonians 5:15).
23. Encourage one another to forsake unbelief and hardness of heart (Hebrews 3:13).
24. Stimulate one another to spiritual growth (Hebrews 10:24).
25. Encourage one another by faithful participation in your local church (Hebrews 10:25).
26. Confess sins to one another (James 5:16).
27. Pray for one another’s spiritual and physical healing (James 5:16).
28. Be long-suffering and patient toward one another (1 Peter 4:8; Ephesians 4:2).
29. Be hospitable to one another without complaint (1 Peter 4:9).
30. Serve one another (1 Peter 4:10; Galatians 5:13).
31. Act in humility toward one another (1 Peter 5:5).
32. Show holy affection to one another (1 Peter 5:14).
33. Participate in the holy walk with one another (1 John 1:7).
34. Refuse to become resentful toward one another (1 John 3:11–12).
35. Give sacrificially to meet one another’s needs (1 John 3:16–17).
36. Fight fear together by growing in love (1 John 4:18).
37. Walk in truth together (1 John 3:18; 2 John 1:5).

Beloved, this is just the start of a number of ways in which we must demonstrate love to one another. The Christian life is all about relationships. It is God’s means for our personal growth, which then translates into church growth —the real kind. According to Jesus’ words in John 13:34-35, loving one another is one of the most powerful evangelistic tools in our arsenal. Let us use it to the fullest! If we would be a people resolved to the work of God, then we ought to have the public expectations of praying with one another and loving one another. Finally, if we would be resolved to live as those committed to the work of God in spreading the gospel, then we must expect that a congregation be committed to...

III. Being devoted to one another

And they were accompanying him to the ship.

I will not belabor this point since I actually used Romans 12:10 and the command “Be devoted to one another in brotherly love” as an example of how we might demonstrate love to one another. But if the main nuance of loving one another is found in demonstrating affection for one another, something that is accomplished by serving one another; then the main nuance of being devoted to one another is found in demonstrating in our service to one another by which we demonstrate our love to one another. You see, we might call demonstrable affection (loving one another) and brotherly devotion (serving one another) two sides of the same coin. They go hand in hand.

Resolved to Live – As a Witness for Jesus

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

But the point that I want to make here is that these believers public demonstrated a devotion; a commitment to serve Paul as long as they possible could. Luke records that **“they were accompanying him to the ship.”** The verb “accompanying” is interesting here; *propempon* (προπεμπον). It has the preposition “pro” being first, before, or ahead of; followed by the verb “pempo” – meaning to send on a task. What does this mean? Consider that Paul has been determined to go to Jerusalem. He is on a mission; literally from God. These believers, as we have seen, were greatly grieved by Paul’s leaving. But when it came time for Paul to leave; these believers did not just stand at the door and wave goodbye. They accompanied Paul; that is, they personally and publically escorted him. They picked up his bags, they packed his lunch; they set him on the ship. I am not sure about the lunch thing, but the point is this; everyone saw how these believers devoted themselves; gave themselves to the service of Paul up until the very last moment. And it is evident that they served Paul in a way that any who could see would see. It was a public expression.

Let me close with the words of Richard Baxter, one of the great Puritan preachers. He wrote:

Oh, then, let us hear these arguments of Christ, whenever we feel ourselves grow dull and careless: ‘Did I die for these souls, and will you not look after them? Were they worth My blood, and are they not worth your labor? Did I come down from heaven to earth, “to seek and to save that which was lost;” and will you not go to the next door, or street, or village, to seek them? How small is your condescension and labor compared to Mine! I debased Myself to this, but it is your honor to be so employed. Have I done and suffered so much for their salvation, and was I willing to make you a fellow-worker with Me, and will you refuse to do that little which lies upon your hands?’ Every time we look upon our congregations, let us believingly remember that they are the purchase of Christ’s blood, and therefore should be regarded by us with the deepest interest and the most tender affection.

And beloved, how can we regard one another with the deepest interest and the most tender affection? Let us “be the church”! Let us expect to pray with one another more; to love one another deeper; and to be devoted to one another in more fervent service to the glory of God.

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.