

The Purpose of God

Acts 20:17-27

4/ 17/ 05

Intro

At this point in our study through Acts, Paul is on his third missionary journey. He is now in the city of Ephesus on his way to Jerusalem for the last time.

Before he leaves, he gives some final words to the elders of the church to strengthen their faith and encourage them to not shrink back from God's purpose in their lives.

That speech is a great blessing to us because we also gain great insight for our lives. We also need to have our faith encouraged and we need to be challenged in the same way that we should also not shrink back from God's purpose in our lives.

The way Paul lives out his life is an example for us. We gain much wisdom and insight from his life of faith.

These are insights into living out the purpose of God in our lives.

I. We are Serving the Lord

A. To be done in all humility

- It might at first seem that Paul is not being humble to say what he is saying, but he is answering a charge of his opponents.

Illus – there is an old story about a church who honored their pastor by giving him a button that said, “Most humble pastor.” he wore the next week and they fired him.

- To be self-focused gets in the way of serving the Lord, because it means that we're actually trying to serve ourselves.
- Arrogance and selfishness is actually a great weakness; because we are not able to receive and learn what God desires.

II Chronicles 7:14, “and My people who are called by My name humble themselves and pray and seek My face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, will forgive their sin and will heal their land.”

B. God knows how to keep us humble

- God allowed trials in Paul's life throughout his ministry. There was hardly any time that he did not have troubles. The Jews were a constant problem for Paul.
- Paul also had a “thorn in the flesh” that God would not remove in order to keep Paul from exalting himself.

II Corinthians 12:7-9, “to keep me from exalting myself, there was given me a thorn in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to torment me--to keep me from exalting myself! Concerning this I implored the Lord three times that it might leave me. And He has said to me, ‘My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness.’”

- What we need to do is trust that the Lord knows what He is doing and receive the humility He desires in us.

Illus – There is a story about a fishing company in New England many years ago that was famous for its fresh fish. It was always firm and flaky. Someone came up with the idea that they could put water in a rail car and be able to sell the fish in the mid-west...

C. By repenting toward God

- This is the lesson that Paul learned for his life. He discovered that the importance of repenting toward God.
- We so often think about repentance as “repent from our sins.” But Paul here correctly says, “Repent toward God.”

Ezekiel 18:30-32, “Repent and turn away from all your transgressions, so that iniquity may not become a stumbling block to you. Cast away from you all your transgressions which you have committed and make yourselves a new heart and a new spirit! For why will you die, O house of Israel? For I have no pleasure in the death of anyone who dies,” declares the Lord GOD. “Therefore, repent and live.”

- To repent means to change your mind. Here, it is a reference to changing your mind about God.

Illus – Paul changed his mind about God and it changed his life. If we would change our mind about God, it would also change our lives.

- Faith then follows. When we turn toward God, this can only be done in faith.

Romans 1:16-17, “For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes... For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, “But the righteous man shall live by faith.”

II. Be Bound in Spirit to God

A. Be completely committed

- You get a sense from these words that Paul has “bound” his spirit to God’s purpose.
- In other words, he won’t let anything turn him.
- What a great example. There is no on again, off again, on again, off again with Paul!!

Isaiah 26:3-4, “The steadfast of mind You will keep in perfect peace, because he trusts in You. Trust in the Lord forever, for in God the Lord, we have an everlasting Rock.”

- There is peace of mind that comes when we stay steadfast of mind; because we know that God Himself is immovable.

I Corinthians 15:58, “Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your toil is not in vain in the Lord.”

B. Not knowing what will happen

- Paul’s commitment of spirit is not dependent on what happens. He’s not saying, “If things go the way I think they should go” or “As long as

things go the way I want,” then I will be steadfast.

- You never know what tomorrow brings.
- This is what Jesus meant when He said that we should establish a foundation deep in the rock of Christ.

Luke 6:47-48, “Everyone who comes to Me and hears My words and acts on them, I will show you whom he is like: he is like a man building a house, who dug deep and laid a foundation on the rock; and when a flood occurred, the torrent burst against that house and could not shake it, because it had been well built.”

Illus – We will be severely tested; but our faith must remain in Christ alone.

Luke 22:31-32, “Simon, Simon, behold, Satan has demanded permission to sift you like wheat; but I have prayed for you, that your faith may not fail; and you, when once you have turned again, strengthen your brothers.”

C. Hold nothing dear, but God alone

- This is a difficult statement, it’s true. But that is the clear meaning of what God is saying.
- Paul is saying that even his own life is not dear to him.

Matthew 16:24-26, Then Jesus said to His disciples, “If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross and follow Me. For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it; but

whoever loses his life for My sake will find it. For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul?”

- Paul later wrote to the church in Philippi that he considered all things as loss for Christ.

Philippians 3:7-8, “But whatever things were gain to me, those things I have counted as loss for the sake of Christ. More than that, I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them but rubbish so that I may gain Christ,”

III. Finish the Course Strong

A. Do not shrink back from God’s purpose

- Paul uses the illustration of a runner who is tempted to quit.

Illus – Running is something I do regularly... about every six months. But I know the feeling of wanting to quit.

II Timothy 4:6-7, “For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure has come. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith;”

- Run the course set before you and do not waver from what God desires for your life.

Galatians 5:7-8, “You were running well; who hindered you from obeying the truth? This persuasion did not come from Him who calls you.”

B. We need the whole counsel of God

- Paul taught them the whole counsel of God, because that is what they needed for life and godliness.
- The only way to know the whole counsel of God is to have all of God's Word.
- This is why we are committed to teaching God's Word chapter by chapter, verse by verse. Nothing is to be left out.
- Many people like this verse or that one, and don't like certain others. And their lives will eventually show that there is some counsel of God lacking in their lives.

Jeremiah 23:22, "But if they had stood in My council, then they would have announced My words to My people, and would have turned them back from their evil way and from the evil of their deeds."

Colossians 2:2-3, "and attaining to all the wealth that comes from the full assurance of understanding, resulting in a true knowledge of God's mystery, that is, Christ Himself, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge."

Conclusion

Run the race set before you, and finish strong. Do not shrink back from God's purpose in your life. Be steadfast, immovable and the peace of Christ will be yours.