

49—Acts 20.1-24—What is a Life Well Lived

- I. Introduction
 - a. How many of you have heard of George Verwer? He passed away April the 14th and his life was a life well lived for Jesus.
 - i. “Verwer's first contact with Christianity was through his neighbor, Dorothea Clapp, who gave him the Gospel of John and also put him on her "Holy Ghost hit list". Verwer attributes to her some of the reasons that he made a commitment to Christ, and for what resulted in his life.
 - ii. In 1953, as a 14-year-old student from...New Jersey, attending Ramsey High School, Verwer went to a meeting in which Billy Graham spoke in Madison Square Garden, in New York City. There he was converted to become a Christian, at the age of 16. Within a year, about 200 of his classmates became Christians.
 - iii. Verwer had a growing conviction to evangelize on foreign soil. He started with the distribution of the Gospel of John in Mexico in 1957 along with two friends.” (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/George_Verwer)
 - iv. “He went to Moody Bible Institute, and when he was 21, he led an all-night prayer meeting for the unreached nations of the world. The ripple effect was incalculable. Probably more so than the historic “haystack prayer meeting.”
 - v. Hoping to find donuts and girls, a Wheaton student named Greg Livingstone showed up at the prayer meeting. Instead of girls, he found a group of young men kneeling over world maps on the floor. Verwer put his finger in Greg’s face and said, “What country are you claiming?” Having no idea what that meant, Greg said, “What’s left?” Verwer said, “You’ve got Libya.”
 - vi. The reason that story matters is that George Verwer’s passion for the nations led to not just one large missions organization but two. Everyone who knows Verwer knows he founded Operation Mobilization (OP), which today “has 3,311 workers representing more than 110 nationalities . . . bringing God’s truth to millions every year.” What most people don’t know is that Greg Livingstone went back to Wheaton that night a changed man. He switched his major to Bible and went on to found Frontiers, the largest missions agency in the world devoted entirely to inviting Muslims to Christ.” (<https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/raw-passion-and-messy-missiology>)
 - b. Now you may never be a George Verwer or David Livingstone but you can be a Dorothea Clapp which is also a life well lived that led to George Verwer’s conversion and fruitful ministries.
 - c. We all have our part to play in God’s mission and sometimes our attempts are a bit messy. As expected, George wrote several books. You would think that one of those books would be on missiology—the study of mission. And you would be right but he titled the book—Messiology.
 - d. As you read these 24 verses, it seems messy. Paul and the disciples are all over the place changing plans but continuing to go. A life well lived for Christ can be messy. Let’s take a look.
- II. Main Point
 - a. Laying up treasures in heaven: A life well lived serving the Lord and testifying to the gospel of the grace of God.
- III. Outline—After the Uproar
 - a. A Damaged Church
 - b. A Courageous Church
 - c. The Church Gathered
 - d. The Church Scattered
- IV. Exposition
 - a. We pick up in the story of the Acts of the Risen Christ in chapter 20 where the uproar in Ephesus has ended for now. What follows seems to be a lot of travel plans with lots of moving around and changing

plans yet the providence of God leads them on. We could see the majority of these verses as a meaningless itinerary. However, let's take note of what just happened and how Paul responds to a discouraged Church.

- i. We've seen many professions of faith throughout Paul's stay in Ephesus. Yet professions of faith are not the end but the beginning. Genuine faith is persevering faith.
- ii. Why is more necessary? Because uproars cause damage. There's no way around it. The scene from last week where Demetrius and his fellow craftsmen were enraged over their loss of business due to the spread of the gospel resulted in two disciples being dragged off to the theater.
 1. The ripple effect of these close calls can be a very discouraging thing. We all tend to over-spiritualize these stories and not think about what just happened.
 2. The situation was dangerous. The disciples would not allow Paul to go in. His gov't friends urged him not venture in. This was no laughing matter.
 3. These are the reason why there in verse 1 that it says, "After the uproar ceased, Paul sent for the disciples" to encourage them."
 - a. If Paul leaves this discouraged church of Ephesus, what happens after he leaves?
 - i. A weakened church needs strengthening and satisfied in Jesus to face the persecutions and temptations of the world.
 - ii. I'm not sure we understand that very well.
 1. Everyone of you has ministry here in the gathering. We are to come expecting genuine fellowship. A fellowship that seeks to love each other by encouraging, praying, correcting, supporting, checking on, and calling those who miss. Arrive early and stay late. Risk having real conversations beyond the chit chat. Genuinely care for each other.
 2. Members who miss a lot are weakened in the faith no matter the reason. The gathering is a means by which we are strengthened in the faith each week.
 3. Members who are in open unrepentant sin need discipline. We cannot look at their lives validate their faith. Therefore, they must be urged to repent and if they refuse must be removed.
 4. Members who suffer are weakened too. They are depleted and need extra encouragement.
 5. We must change the culture of our church and start being the church.
 - iii. The Lord Jesus loves his church. He's the One directing Paul to strengthen these disciples here in Ephesus before his farewell.
 1. Yet after his farewell, he passes through many places encouraging the churches there in verse 2.
 - a. He makes his way to Greece and we know from other letters that Corinth is where he stayed for 3 months which is in Greece.
 - i. We believe he wrote the letter to the Romans while he stayed there over winter.
 2. The point is this: a life well lived for Christ involves the task of encouraging and exhorting each other. Whether in person or by letter, Paul sought to live his life in light of the resurrection.
 - b. As we move on in the story, we see a group of disciples who are courageously continuing the mission.

- i. A plot against Paul by the Jews caused him to set sail for Syria there in verse 3. And for whatever reason, we see the messiness of a life following Christ. Paul makes a change and decides to return through Macedonia.
 1. Verse 4 gives us a list of those courageous disciples who accompany Paul on this journey.
 - a. As I alluded to last week, he wrote in his letters about a monetary gift that had been collected for the church in Jerusalem.
 - i. (2 Cor. 8:1-5) We want you to know, brothers, about the grace of God that has been given among the churches of Macedonia, ² for in a severe test of affliction, their abundance of joy and their extreme poverty have overflowed in a wealth of generosity on their part. ³ For they gave according to their means, as I can testify, and beyond their means, of their own accord, ⁴ begging us earnestly for the favor of taking part in the relief of the saints-- ⁵ and this, not as we expected, but they gave themselves first to the Lord and then by the will of God to us.
 - ii. That's probably why Paul takes this route. He and those we will see in verse 4 are the representatives of these churches in region of Macedonia.
 - iii. But it does make you wonder why Luke doesn't mention the offering.
 1. Some have speculated that maybe the church in Jerusalem would not take the contribution.
 2. We simply do not know. But we can affirm that sometimes our attempts fail and they get messy.
 2. Whatever the case may be, these courageous disciples keep going and following Christ as they attempt to represent their churches when they present this contribution to the saints in Jerusalem.
 - c. After several stops Paul and his companions arrive in Troas where they stay for seven days. Here we get to see the church gathered.
 - i. There in verse 7, we see that they gathered on the first day of the week to break bread.
 1. This is a reference to the Lord's Supper.
 - a. It seems very likely that the church sought to remember the Lord's death in the Supper and remember the Lord's resurrection on every Sunday.
 2. There's a lot that we could talk about here but the witness of the church has been to meet on Sunday not Saturday.
 - a. We believe that day was set aside by the church to gather for worship because Jesus was raised from the dead on the first day of the week.
 - i. You see, we are all Sabbath breakers. The penalty for picking up sticks on the Sabbath was death. We've all "picked up sticks on the Sabbath."
 - ii. Now that's a problem because God's justice demands that we have perfect righteousness.
 1. Are you perfectly righteous? If you are not, you will be eternally condemned.
 2. The resurrection of Christ changed everything!
 3. Christ not only died on the cross for our sins, but he also lived a perfect life in accordance with God's perfect law.
 4. We gather for worship on Sunday because Christ is our Sabbath rest.

5. That means he not only pays our death penalty for our picking up of sticks on the Sabbath but his perfect keeping of the law is credited to our account by faith in Jesus.
 6. If we are in union with Christ through repentance and faith, Jesus is our Sabbath rest. He is our perfect righteousness.
 7. That's why we gather to worship.
- ii. What do they do as the gathered church? Now everything about this gathering is normal practice except the length.
1. The reason for that is there in verse 7--(Acts 20:7) Paul talked with them, intending to depart on the next day, and he prolonged his speech until midnight.
 - a. Because he was leaving the next day, he spent as much time as possible pouring into the church there in Troas.
 - i. Though they do not know this, this will be the last time they we ever see and hear from Paul in person.
 - b. Also, I think when it says "talked with them" should be understood not as a monologue but a dialogue.
 - i. No doubt monologues are what we are called to do but, on this occasion, Paul seems to work through everything possible through dialogue.
 2. I don't know if you noticed but the first-person plural is back in this story. That means Luke is with Paul on this journey.
 - a. Obviously, the comment there in verse 8 shows the particular details are recorded about having many lanterns in the upper room.
 - i. This seems to be part of the problem for this poor lad, Eutychus.
 - ii. It's midnight and probably way past his bedtime, the room is stuffy from the lanterns, the need of fresh air in the open window are too much for him as Paul talked still longer.
 - iii. He falls asleep but even worse, he falls three stories out of the window.
 1. They rush down to him and find him dead.
 2. There in verse 10, Paul went down and fell upon him.
 - a. This scene reminds us of those stories of Elijah and Elisha when they fell on those young lads in first and second Kings.
 3. Paul responses, "Do not be alarmed. (WHY?) Because his life is in him."
 4. Paul returns to gathering and you might expect him to dismiss the church. But that's not what happens. In fact, they continue to converse until daybreak.
 - b. What a beautiful ending to the gathering as it says there in verse 12—And they took the youth away alive, and were not a little comforted. That's how we out to leave the gathering—made alive by the Word!
 - d. The church gathers to prepare them to scatter. The gospel that we celebrate ought to be shared!
 - i. A Jesus who is not worth sharing with our neighbors and the nations isn't worth following or even showing up on Sunday for.
 - ii. As the itinerary continues to unfold, it continues to be messy. Plans change.

- iii. Last week, Paul revealed his plans to go to Jerusalem and then to Rome. These brothers are traveling with him as companions and representatives of churches as they seek to deliver that contribution that was collected to Jerusalem. That's one of the main purposes for the trip back.
 - 1. Nevertheless, it's like Jesus' journey to Jerusalem. If you go and read the Gospel of Luke, you will hear it said that Jesus was on his way to Jerusalem even when he was headed in a different direction.
 - a. Obviously, Jesus' journey to Jerusalem was an appointment to be the Passover Lamb nailed to the cross.
 - b. Paul's journey there was to bear witness about the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world.
 - 2. When we read verses 13-17 it's hard to understand what's going on. Luke doesn't give us the motives behind some of the decisions.
 - a. Like why did Paul seemingly want to walk the 30 miles alone instead of sailing with the rest of the group?
 - i. I can certainly think of some possible reasons but we simply do not know why.
 - ii. Such is ministry. Such is the path. It's messy and hard. But it's worth it.
- iv. The scattered church finally convenes in Miletus. The elders of the church in Ephesus are summoned to meet with Paul.
 - 1. They could have stopped in Ephesus but Paul wants to be in Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost if possible.
 - 2. He has a message for these elders and his companions and for us too.
 - a. With one more farewell, he explains what a life well lived for Jesus looks like.
 - b. He wants to encourage them to do that same.
- v. I don't know what you think a life well lived looks like. I'm sure there are numerous opinions among us. But let's hear what Paul thinks that life looks like. He doesn't want these disciples to waste their lives.
 - 1. He begins very emphatically, "You yourselves know how I lived among you the whole time from the first day that I set foot in Asia."
 - a. That's a sobering thought. Is it right to be that transparent? So many people call their faith private but I have no idea where that comes from.
 - i. One of the reasons why I wanted the sermons recorded was for everything to be in the open. I post my manuscripts for the public to see. I have nothing to hide. If I say or teach something wrong it's right there for someone to see and point out.
 - b. But how did Paul live his life before them?
 - i. He served the Lord in all humility and with tears and temptations that happened to him.
 - ii. A life well lived for Jesus is in service to our King. The only way to serve the one who bleed for us is to serve in humility and to never forget that we are here serving by the amazing grace of God.
 - iii. But in serving the Lord, there are many tears.
 - 1. I have a story to tell about this one but it's too long for details. One of my pastor friends shared his story of when they had to remove a fellow pastor for some egregious things. He wept uncontrollably during that gathering.

- iv. The temptations are numerous. People plot against you and drive you to dark places. You're tempted to give up among other things.
- v. You're tempted to shrink back from declaring anything that was profitable because sometimes what is profitable is hard to say.
 - 1. And he did that in public and in their house. Nothing was hidden. Whether in the public square or in the house church, Paul taught the same things.
- vi. He was a witness for Christ to the Jews and Greeks. It didn't matter to him. He called them to repent and trust in the Lord Jesus Christ.
- vii. And constrained by the Holy Spirit, he sets his face toward Jerusalem to deliver the contribution that so many of them are in need of.
 - 1. Yet, he knows that chains and afflictions await him there. He's willing to suffer for the One who suffered for him.
 - 2. He does account his life of any value nor precious to himself.
 - a. How do you value your life? A life well lived for Christ seeks not its own but notice there in verse 24, "if only I may finish my course and the ministry that I received from the Lord Jesus."
 - i. You have a ministry. I described part of it earlier.
 - b. What is Paul's ministry? For what does he risk so much?
 - c. To testify to the gospel of grace of God.
 - d. What do you live for? How do you live?

V. Response

- a. Returning to George Verwer for a moment. "In comparing himself with Brother Andrew, "God's Smuggler," he referred to himself as "God's Bungler." Which is why he loved the gospel of grace and forgiveness so much, and why, in his final podcast before he died, he said he wanted to be remembered for the message of his book *Messiology*.
- b. He summed up the content of that book like this: "I believe history will show that God was doing way more in the midst of our messes than we realized at the time." As if to illustrate the point, it was Greg Livingstone who wrote the foreword for the book — the fruit of a messy late-night prayer meeting." (<https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/raw-passion-and-messy-missiology>)
- c. Look, we might mess up in our attempts to be a witness for Christ but let's not mess up by doing nothing.
- d. Let's at least be the Dorothea Clapp's of Union Hill and trust the Lord to do whatever he will with our messes.