

A Life Worth Living Pt 1 The Faithful Example

sermonaudio.com

A Life Worth Living

By Jess Arnds

Bible Text: Acts 20:17-38
Preached on: Sunday, May 24, 2020

Providence Church
2146 Buford Hwy
Buford Hwy, Duluth, GA 30097

Website: www.providenceduluth.org
Online Sermons: www.sermonaudio.com/providencechurch

Will you pray with me as we get started today? There is much to cover. There's much I want to say and the struggle knowing what to leave out, and so, and I want to get you out of here before your stomach's get too loud. So, alright? So, I want to give you the word of God with the intensity, with the passion, with the clarity that it deserves.

Let's pray.

Father, we draw near to You today. We come to You by the blood of Christ who has made the way so that we can enter the Holy of Holies, we can come with confidence not in ourselves or in our own righteousness but confidence in You, confidence that by faith in Christ You have determined to do us good, You have determined that we would inherit all things along with Your Son, and so You are ready to help us, You are willing to help us, You love to help us, and so we drawn near to You calling upon You, Lord, today to help us to know You, to help us to love You, to believe You, to see the world as You see it, to align our will with Yours, to let go of sin and to truly treasure the Lamb of God in our hearts. Lord, I pray today that You would work this in us, that Your Holy Spirit, Lord, would work through the preaching of Your word and that You would apply it, Lord, to the souls of every individual here, that those who don't know You would repent, that the light of Christ would shine in their hearts and bring them to life. For those that are caught in sin and trapped in it, that they would be set free and motivated and instructed and taught how to follow you. And for those who are discouraged, to be lifted up; for those who are arrogant, to be brought low. Holy Spirit, You can do this and we look to You, Father, send Your Spirit to accomplish this among Your people. We pray in the name of Christ. Amen.

I've entitled this message "A Life Worth Living" and I want you to keep this question in mind: what makes your life worth living?

2 "Vanity of vanities," says the Preacher, "Vanity of vanities! All is vanity." 3 What advantage does man have in all his work Which he does under the sun? 4 A generation goes and a generation comes, But the earth remains forever. 5 Also, the sun rises and the sun sets; And hastening to its place it rises there again. 6 Blowing toward the south, Then turning toward

the north, The wind continues swirling along; And on its circular courses the wind returns. 7 All the rivers flow into the sea, Yet the sea is not full. To the place where the rivers flow, There they flow again. 8 All things are wearisome; Man is not able to tell it. The eye is not satisfied with seeing, Nor is the ear filled with hearing. 9 That which has been is that which will be, And that which has been done is that which will be done. So there is nothing new under the sun. 10 Is there anything of which one might say, "See this, it is new"? Already it has existed for ages Which were before us. 11 There is no remembrance of earlier things; And also of the later things which will occur, There will be for them no remembrance Among those who will come later still.

That's the opening lines from the book of Ecclesiastes, a very realistic view of life on this planet. You might not like it, you might prefer Walt Disney's approach to focus on the positive and chase your dreams, but in the end all of that toil results in vanity, vanity meaning worthless, useless, it blows away like soap bubbles, it's there for a second and then gone. Your accomplishments, they will fall. Your pleasures will be short-lived. The money and the property that you have so desperately worked to acquire will be handed down to some fool who will squander it. You will die and in a couple of generations no one will remember you. Let that sink in, right? Just take a short walk through any graveyard, you will find the names of people that no one remembers except that it's on a gravestone. Young, old, rich and poor, all in the same condition there under the ground no matter how they lived their life.

Ecclesiastes goes on, verse 17 he says,

17 ... I set my mind to know wisdom and to know madness and folly; I realized that this also is striving after wind. 18 Because in much wisdom there is much grief, and increasing knowledge results in increasing pain.

Right? Boy, we know that now today with the media right in front of our faces, the more we know, the more painful it is. They say ignorance is bliss and there's some truth to that. And I would also add the more we know, the less we seem to know, right? Is it masks or not masks? Wash your hands or don't? You can touch surfaces or not? You can eat inside or not? You can be within six feet or is it 10 feet or do you need to go isolate yourself for 30 days, 10 days, how long is it? Who's right? Does anybody know? The more we know, the less we know. It depends on which study you're looking at and which people you're studying. Nobody knows and yet even with all of that, it is vanity because in the end every single person who quarantined themselves, every single person who took every step to protect themselves will die. They will. You will die. All of this effort in the end will prove worthless and I'm not saying that we should not take these steps, I'm not saying that we shouldn't prolong life, but that is of secondary importance because it will all fade. All of these businesses we're trying to prop up and save, none of them will last forever. None of them.

Ecclesiastes 2:10 says,

10 All that my eyes desired I did not refuse them. I did not withhold my heart from any pleasure, for my heart was pleased because of all my labor and this was my reward for all my labor. 11 Thus I considered all my activities which my hands had done and the labor which I had exerted, and behold all was vanity and striving after wind and there was no profit under the sun.

Chapter 5, verse 10,

10 He who loves money will not be satisfied with money, nor he who loves abundance with its income. This too is vanity. 11 When good things increase, those who consume them increase. So what is the advantage to their owners except to look on?

The more you have, the more mouths there are to feed.

Ecclesiastes 5:16,

16 This also is a grievous evil--exactly as a man is born, thus will he die.

The context there is naked you come into the world and naked you will leave.

So what is the advantage to him who toils for the wind?

So if riches and pleasure and power and fame and buildings are vain and worthless, what is the point of life? Think about your life. What controls you? What dominates your thoughts? What do you strive and toil for? Is it money? Is it success? You toil for the good name, a good reputation in front of other people, is that what worries you and bothers you? Someone doesn't like you, does that throw you off? Is it safety? Think back to the last couple of months in this strange situation that we found ourselves in, what has this revealed about what you love? About your character? You know that statistically alcohol abuse, drug abuse, pornography, depression, suicide, divorce and domestic violence are all on the rise. We send everybody home, quarantine them together in their houses, home which is supposed to be a sanctuary is a war zone, the place where people feel most comfortable to express their depravity. What has this revealed about your character?

What is the point of your life? Has your life proven to be one of vain pursuits? Think about this, all this stuff we've been working for, I mean, the economy was going gangbusters just a few months ago, everything was optimistic, you know, Donald Trump in the White House, you know, pushing all of our agendas, everything's rich and prosperous, and this little thing that you can't even see spreads around the world and everyone freaks out and we lose, we lose family members, we lose businesses, we lose social, we lose friendships. Again, I mean, people have gotten divorced in the midst of this, families, this is crazy. All of these things that we want to hold onto in a moment is

lost just like that and this is just the foreshadow of the ultimate reality that every single thing in your life will be lost. Everything you've worked for.

Now that's kind of a depressing message, right? But Scripture doesn't leave us with that. It doesn't just say that life is worthless but it does tell us how to lead a life worth living. So how do we do that? How do we lead a life worth living? I want to show you one very very vivid example of what it looks like to lead a life worth living. Please open your Bibles to the book of Acts 20 and we'll read in verse 17 and following. I want to expose you to this faithful portrait, a faithful example in the life of the Apostle Paul and this was a man who led a life worth living. His life was not lived in vain.

Now just as a bit of context for this passage, Paul is nearing the end of his third missionary journey and he has set his mind to go to Jerusalem, he's been forced, he's been compelled by the Holy Spirit to go to Jerusalem to bear witness to the name of Christ there and he knows it's going to be very dangerous and yet he is insisting on going. So he goes to this place called Miletus and he calls the Ephesian elders there to meet him and we're gonna break this passage down into two messages. The first week is going to be the faithful example, and then next week is gonna be the solemn charge. The faithful example and the solemn charge. And as we begin to examine this, I want you to keep this in mind: if you want to live a life worth living, you must see your life as worthless. If you want to live a life worth living, you must see your life as worthless. So let's examine this, this model of the life worth living. Verse 17 it says,

17 From Miletus he sent to Ephesus and called to him the elders of the church. 18 And when they had come to him, he said to them, "You yourselves know, from the first day that I set foot in Asia, how I was with you the whole time, 19 serving the Lord with all humility and with tears and with trials which came upon me through the plots of the Jews; 20 how I did not shrink from declaring to you anything that was profitable, and teaching you publicly and from house to house, 21 solemnly testifying to both Jews and Greeks of repentance toward God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ. 22 And now, behold, bound by the Spirit, I am on my way to Jerusalem, not knowing what will happen to me there, 23 except that the Holy Spirit solemnly testifies to me in every city, saying that bonds and afflictions await me. 24 But I do not consider my life of any account as dear to myself, so that I may finish my course and the ministry which I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify solemnly of the gospel of the grace of God. 25 And now, behold, I know that all of you, among whom I went about preaching the kingdom, will no longer see my face. 26 Therefore, I testify to you this day that I am innocent of the blood of all men. 27 For I did not shrink from declaring to you the whole purpose of God.

So Paul is on his way to Jerusalem. He knows he is going to face afflictions and hardships, he knows that this is going to be the last time that he sees these elders from the city of Ephesus and why does this matter? He spent three years with them, three years with these people, night and day laying his life down, declaring to them the Gospel and as

he says, everything that was profitable he declared to them. So he loved these people and he is here and he wants to remind them of the example that he laid down for them and to inform them that now he is fading off the scene and it's their turn to take up the mantle. They can no longer rely on his leadership, they need to carry this mantle forward, and so he tells them, "I lived this way, I'm not going to be here anymore, it's your turn, imitate my example." That's the point of this passage right here and it's a very very solemn charge.

So let's go ahead and examine this model of a life worth living. He says in verse 18, "You yourselves know," or understand, "from the first day that I set foot in Asia, how I was with you the whole time." So there's a few observations to make here. First, the Ephesians were personal witnesses to how Paul conducted himself. Paul is not some tv preacher or ivory tower theologian or some author making great boasts about his life. The Ephesians themselves could verify every claim that Paul makes. This also points to the fact that Paul lived his life in front of them. This means that he purposefully allowed them to observe his conduct. He didn't do his works in front of them in order to receive praise but he did live openly in order to set an example. This is a stark contrast to false teachers who do this covertly, the savage wolves and others who sneakily pass around other forms of teaching, they go in under the radar. No, Paul was not underhanded, he was not manipulative, he didn't sneak around and he didn't find little books that contradicted, you know, the teaching of Christ and pass it around behind the scenes. He was straightforward and open. He did not flatter, he didn't say nice things in order to get control, in order to gain influence, he did not lavish gifts on people in order to gain their loyalty. No, he was straightforward in what he said and in what he did every day and that points to the third observation, he was consistent. He says, "how I was with you the whole time," meaning how he behaved. "You knew, you saw me personally, how I behaved the whole time for three years." This points to sincerity. He was not a fake or a fraud. He was not a hypocrite. A hypocrite could not maintain life on life consistency the way that Paul did. This is how Paul lived his life throughout the New Testament. In 2 Corinthians he says, "Our hearts are open to you. You know us." 1 Thessalonians 2:1-2 talks about the example he left for them. In Philippians 4:15 he talks about the example he left for them. 1 Timothy and 2 Timothy, Paul is always saying, "Imitate what I demonstrated for you. You know this," and no hypocrite could have maintained this life that Paul led.

Look at verse 19, what characterized this life of Paul? It says he was serving the Lord. Literally you could translate this slaving for the Lord. It's the same root word as slave. Paul's work was not simply a vocation, it was not a job or something that he just enjoyed doing, it was not a hobby, a side gig. No, he wasn't following his dreams to be a world renowned preacher. No, he was slaving. By definition, a slave does not do his own will but the will of his master. This is how Paul saw himself, as a slave of Christ. His work was to do the will of God and he didn't make up his own will and then stamp God's approval on it. He didn't make up his own sacrifice like Cain and offer it to God. No, he had very specific commands from the Lord and he submitted himself under the Lord's commands as the Lord's slave. He did Christ's will, Christ's way, for Christ's sake.

Galatians 1:10 is an example of this. He says, "For am I now seeking the favor of men, or of God? If I am striving to please men or if I were still trying to please men, I would not be a bond-servant of Christ." That word bond-servant is slave. You cannot have two masters. You cannot serve, you cannot serve the will of man and the will of God at the same time. You cannot please man and have that drive you and please God at the same time. Paul was a slave of Christ and this made him willing to endure a lot of things, this made him willing to do a lot of things that you and I and no person would normally do.

Look at verse 19 again. There's three words in this verse that describe his exemplary service, it's humility, tears and trials, and all of these things points to the authenticity of his ministry. He was authentic, sincere, without corruption, without ulterior motives. So first Paul was humble. This word for humility means to be low-minded, lowly in your own estimation. This is the opposite of arrogance, of self-righteousness. This is the opposite of a sense of superiority where you elevate yourself above others. And how is this humility shown? Philippians 2:3 says and not demanding your own rights or insisting on your own way, not asserting your own importance demanding that you be heard, that your voice be known, that you be elevated, exalted, recognized, appreciated. Someone who is low in mind does not mind being overlooked. Someone who is low-minded does not mind being dishonored by other people because you already have a low mind. So when people look down on you, that doesn't bother you.

Paul was humble. He didn't insist on these things, instead he regarded others as more important than himself. Others as more important. When you're low-minded, you associate with lowly people rather than seek the influential and the wealthy for your own gain, for your own advancement. When you're humble, you do not seek to flaunt wealth, power or importance. You don't seek praise. Jesus demonstrated this kind of humility when he left his glory and became a slave, even washing the feet of his betrayer, even obeying the Father to the point of death and not just any death, death by crucifixion, being stripped naked and publicly nailed to a wooden cross while people mocked him. That's humility.

I'm always amazed at Jesus' resolve when he faced such a horrific death from Matthew 26:47. Here we see the holy one of Israel, Jesus Christ, he's been betrayed by a kiss and a crowd of people with swords and clubs from the chief priest sees Jesus and, of course, this is where Peter cut off the ear of the slave of the high priest, right? And you remember what Jesus said to him, "Put your sword back in its place where all those who take up the sword shall perish by the sword, or do you think that I cannot appeal to My Father and He will at once put at My disposal more than 12 legions of angels?" Do you know how many people are in a legion? At that time in the history of Rome, a legion was 6,000 men. Jesus said here, "I could call on My Father to send 70,000-ish angels to wipe out this mealy mob of people." Think of this, while these wicked men insult Jesus, Jesus is aware that legions of angels stand at his disposal. He is essentially holding them back. Can you imagine what these angels were feeling? Here is the Lord of glory, their Master who they serve with their entire being, who has condescended and walked this earth, and they've witnessed how people mistreat him, misunderstand him, mock him, and now they're getting ready to arrest him, humiliate him and kill him, and these angels are

watching their Lord go through this and they're right there. They're ready. They're just like, "Okay, Lord, just tell me when. I'm gonna wipe these guys out." Right? That's the kind of zeal these angels have for their Master, they fight for him, and Jesus is essentially holding them back almost like holding the Red Sea back from wiping out the arrogant Egyptian army, just holding it back while they insult him and treat him like a criminal. He willingly endures the shame, the scorn, the arrogant looks of depraved men who look down on him with disdain, and yet he didn't revile in return. He did not insult. He didn't put them in their place. He didn't humiliate them. He humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death on a cross and the Apostle Paul imitates the humility of Jesus in his service on his behalf.

How did Paul demonstrate his humility? Think about the ministry to the Ephesians. Here's a man who spoke directly to the risen Lord Jesus who had the authority of an apostle, who had been used to cast out demons and heal the sick, he took a humble position as a slave. This is amazing. You can go back in a couple of chapters before this where Paul is ministering in Ephesus and there's a point where people are bringing handkerchiefs, touching it to Paul and then taking it to a sick person and they're getting healed. That's the amazing miracles being worked through Paul and yet he is being opposed, his authenticity is questioned, his motives are questioned, people challenge his authority as an apostle, the Jews plot against him constantly. Can you imagine? He had seen the risen Christ. There's even a point where he says that he saw a vision of the third heaven and that the Lord did not permit him to talk about it. It was so glorious and he was not allowed to talk about it and yet he is being dishonored constantly, treated like a slave because he humbled himself in order to be Christ's slave. He was beaten. He was imprisoned.

He worked to support himself rather than demanding payment for his ministry. He had every right. You know, a worker is worthy of his wages. It's a principle in Scripture. You know, you support the Gospel minister but Paul humbled himself and did not take that right to himself. He worked with his own hands in order to support himself and the men that were with him in order to serve the needs of others. It says that later down. We'll talk about this next week, later on in this passage. He worked hard in order to help the weak. That's humility. He personally used his own funds to take care of other people.

But it is not just for Paul to be this way. This is not just for Christ and the apostles. They are the examples for us. And I'll just give you these passages. Colossians 3:12, we're to, these are lists of character qualities we're supposed to have. Ephesians 4:1, in walking worthy of the Gospel, we're to walk with all humility towards one another. Philippians 2:3, in humility of mind we're to consider others more important than ourselves. 1 Peter 5:5 talks about how we are to clothe ourselves with humility. Younger men are to submit under the elders of the church and then it says all of you are to clothe yourselves with humility. The kind of humility that Christ showed. Husbands and wives are to be humble towards one another. Coworkers, masters to slaves in the ancient world were to be that way and vice versa. All of you and me are to have this same humility towards one another. That means we'll be patient when we are wronged by each other.

Well, Paul's example was not just one of humility but also of earnestness. Look back at verse 19. It says serving the Lord with all humility and with tears. Paul was earnest. This was important. He cared sincerely and deeply. This showed because he cried with them and for them. His message was important and he pleaded with people to leave their sin and idolatry behind. He knew that to reject the Gospel meant hell and hopelessness for these people and there's many examples of Paul's earnestness but listen to a few vivid descriptions of Paul's heart for people. 2 Corinthians 2:4, he says, "For out of much affliction and anguish of heart I wrote to you with many tears, not so that you would be made sorrowful but that you might know the love which I have especially for you." There was turmoil going on in Corinth, there was people trapped in sin, there was sin not being dealt with. They were turning on him and he experienced great anguish and tears. He wasn't like, "Hey, whatever. Oh, you're gonna send? Whatever. You know, do your thing. You do you." Right? "You know, no skin off my back." That wasn't his attitude. He wasn't stoic. "Oh, sovereignty of God. Well, you know, God's sovereign, whatever." No, that's not godliness. That's not what the sovereignty of God is meant to convey. He says in affliction and anguish.

Philippians 3:18, "For many walk, of whom I often told you, and now tell you even weeping, that they are enemies of the cross of Christ." He's weeping because people who had originally started, who had originally expressed some faith, had originally responded to the Gospel, they turned away it says there in Philippians 3, that their god was their belly. They loved the present world, this vain world that is passing away. They loved that rather than Christ and they turned away and Paul weeps for them. When was the last time you wept for the soul of another person, especially about them walking away from the faith? You see, Paul had this amazing affection for people. He loved them and they loved him and you see it at the end of this chapter, at the end where they hear they're not going to see him anymore, they're all on the beach sending him off weeping, weeping, these grown men weeping because they're not going to see their friend anymore.

Listen to Romans 9:1-3, one last example of this earnestness. Paul says, "I am telling the truth in Christ, I am not lying, my conscience testifies with me in the Holy Spirit, that I have great sorrow and unceasing grief in my heart. For I could wish that I myself were accursed, separated from Christ for the sake of my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh." He's talking about the Israelites, the Jews. Paul was a Jew, he was raised in a very strict order of Judaism as a Pharisee. He cared deeply. He was a sincere man and in this he expresses an amazing love for his countrymen and what makes this more amazing, what makes this more amazing, it was these countrymen that chased him throughout his ministry bringing him to prison to be beaten, to be flogged. There were plots to kill him from his own countrymen. These countrymen were the ones that he wished he could be accursed so that they would come to faith in Christ. He wished that he could endure eternal suffering worse than anything they would have brought into his life in order that they might avoid hell and be saved. Oh, that we would have a heart for the lost like that. O Lord Jesus, work in our heart. That can only come about by the power of the Holy Spirit working in the life of a believer. We need to pray earnestly, not just be like, "Okay, Paul, you know, it's good for you." Right? We need to pray for that kind of earnestness because there's two parts to that that really cause that to come to life, it's faith and love.

Faith meaning you believe this is true, and love meaning you desire the best for everyone else. You desire the best for every person you encounter. In fact, this is what Paul labored for at the end of Colossians 1, he says, "We labor and strive to present every single man complete in Christ. It is for this that I toil, for this that I wrestle, to present every man complete in Christ," because the only thing that will endure this world are the souls of men and women, the souls of people. Those are the only things that will not pass away from this physical universe. So think of this, this man known for his joy, the Apostle Paul known for his contentment, simultaneously holds great sorrow and grief in his heart for these countrymen. He even could wish that he could take their place in hell. That is true Christ-like love.

Yeah, there was, I don't remember if I mention this later. Oh yeah, I do, here we go. The next thing, the next word here in this verse 19 that characterizes his ministry is toughness. Paul was tough. What I mean is he persevered through trials. This perseverance through suffering was brought about, the suffering that was brought on by interpersonal conflict, this caused hindrances to the work and angst especially because of the strong opposition of the Jews and Paul endured so many trials because of his ministry. Think of what he endured: beatings, floggings, shipwreck, and threats on his life. And this is the verse I was thinking of with regard to his countrymen, 2 Corinthians 11:24, on five separate occasions, at least by that point that he wrote it in 2 Corinthians, "On five separate occasions I received from the Jews 39 lashes." These lashes, it's a whip with multiple strands on it and they would embed like marbles with like steel marbles and bits of bone in these things and they would whip these prisoners 39 lashes, and again because the tradition was 40 lashes would kill you so it's 40 lashes minus 1 meaning just short of death, right? That's from the Jews, that's what he received five different times.

You know, think about this, that's traumatic and why did he receive this on five occasions? I mean, if this happened one time, I think I'd be like tapped out, right? "Okay, I'm done. I want to go do something else now. I'm gonna go sell cars." The reason he received these lashes is because he preached the Gospel that undermined their self-righteousness, challenged their traditions, and exalted Jesus over their hero Moses and threatened their way of life, and so the anger and the vitriol that came from these people, the Jews that persecuted him was intense and unrelenting. The persecution of Paul started in Damascus where he had been saved. Almost immediately. He had to be secretly let down in a basket outside the city walls and as he traveled on his missionary journeys, he went city to city through the different towns in modern-day Turkey, Greece and Italy, in all of those places he would preach in the synagogues first knowing, first of all, that they were, that the promises were given to the Jews and that the Lord likely had some chosen Jews in that synagogue but he also knew that every single place he was gonna go, he was gonna face persecution. He knew they would hate it and yet he went again and again and again.

Yeah, so just one of these lashings would be a traumatic event. If you had one of those you would say, "I had a difficult life. Yeah, there was this one time I endured 39 lashes." Oh, man, wow. "Yeah, it messed me up for the rest of my life." And that's how, people have been through less traumatic things than that and it has scarred them, it has

debilitated them and yet Paul continues, Paul goes back, Paul endured it five times and that wasn't the only form of persecution, just the most painful. Endurance, afflictions, hardships, distresses, beatings, imprisonments, tumults, labors, sleeplessness, and hunger, he says in 2 Corinthians 6:4. And what was it that got him in trouble? It was what he says in verse 20, he says, "How I did not shrink from declaring anything to you that was profitable." This is the next characteristic of Paul's ministry here, his example is that Paul was courageous. He was courageous. He did not shrink.

So he was humble, not demanding his rights; he was earnest demonstrated through his tears; and he was persistent through suffering through the trials; and courageous, meaning as I said, he did not shrink from declaring anything that was profitable. He uses this phrase twice in this passage, once in verse 20 and then again in verse 27. Paul's emphasizing this. He says, "I did not shrink." The word "shrink" means "to shrink back," it means "to avoid; to be timid or to keep silent or to be hesitant." Paul says he didn't shrink back, avoid, keep silent, or hesitate to speak anything that was profitable. He was courageous, consistently, humbly, earnestly, and constantly to declare this.

He was, and this is the next characteristic, he was courageous, he was edifying. That's where this word, this comes from this word "profitable." The word "profitable" means "advantageous; beneficial." He doesn't say, "Well, I didn't shrink back from declaring my mind." He doesn't say, "Well, at least you knew where I stood on things." He doesn't say that, "I was willing to share my opinion whenever asked." He didn't say, "I gave everyone a piece of my mind." He doesn't say, "Well, I'm just being honest." No, that's not commendable. A fool, Proverbs 18:2 says, "A fool does not delight in understand but only in revealing his own mind." A fool delights in sharing his opinions, just putting them out there for everyone to see because he values his own thinking. That's not what Paul's doing here. He's not just revealing his own mind.

Paul sought to declare what was profitable and he expands on what that was in verse 21, solemnly testifying to both Jews and Greeks of repentance toward God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ. So what was the content of what Paul said? It's repentance toward God, faith in Christ. In verse 24 he says it's the Gospel of the grace of God. In verse 25, he calls it preaching the kingdom. And in verse 27, declaring the whole purpose of God. Paul declared what was profitable, what was true, what was the truth of God, and that is what he declared on a constant and continual basis as 2 Timothy 3:16 says that all Scripture is inspired by God and is profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction and training in righteousness. His own opinions were not that valuable and the opinions of secular man no matter how many degrees they have behind their name are not authoritative. They do not build you up in the faith. They do not make you more like Christ. They might give you some nice tips but they do not, they do not build you up in your most holy faith. Paul is here declaring what was profitable, not just being honest, speaking and declaring the truth of God. Psalm 119:99 says, "I have more insight than all my teachers for Your testimonies are my meditation."

As a side note, is the word of God what shapes your thinking? Not just systematic theology, not just some book you read, the word of God, do you meditate on it? If the

word of God is what shapes your thinking then that is what will come out of your mouth and will edify the saints. It will edify the saints and it will infuriate the rebellious. It will infuriate the hypocrite. It will infuriate the self-righteous. But it will edify the saints and it is profitable.

So the next characteristic of Paul's example here is that he was led by the Spirit. Acts 20:22-23, he says, "And now, behold, bound by the Spirit, I am on my way to Jerusalem, not knowing what will happen to me there, except that the Holy Spirit solemnly testifies to me in every city, saying that bonds and afflictions await me." Isn't that amazing? So Paul determined to go to the city, he knew in his own heart that's where he wanted to go and that's where the Holy Spirit was calling him to go, and yet at the same time while the Holy Spirit is calling him to go to Jerusalem, the Holy Spirit is also testifying that bonds and afflictions await him. Now he knew this was coming in every single city that he went to and his most vehement opposition came from Judaism and the Mecca of Judaism was Jerusalem, right? Jerusalem is, yeah, not the Mecca. That's... anyways. Judaism, the epicenter was at Jerusalem. And later on in the book of Acts Paul is given direct prophecy that the Jews are going to hand him over to the Gentiles to be imprisoned but Paul goes anyway because he was led by the Spirit, he was driven by the Spirit. He obeyed the Spirit of God. He obeyed what he had been called to do by God even when it meant suffering, in fact, it most often meant suffering, in fact, more often it meant suffering than not.

Following God does not always mean the end of trouble. I hear it so often, "Oh, we're just praying for God's will. I just wish I knew what God's will is so I could get on board with it," when really what they mean is that if they could only find God's will, then everything would be smooth sailing. "I wish God would show me what I need to do so that my life will be easier." That's what people are praying for. "I want to know God's will because somehow if I do that, God's gonna bless me and it's gonna be happy, it's gonna be fun, everything's gonna go great and I'm going to be prosperous." Nope. That's not always true. Now following God's will results in great blessings, absolutely. It is the way to live but in this life if you're gonna represent Christ, all who are godly in Christ will be persecuted and the world will hate you because they hate Jesus, and you will be blessed in eternity but this life will likely be hard.

So Paul is the model of a life worth living. Does this sound like a life worth living? Are you motivated to go do that now? It sounds kind of hard. It sounds difficult, doesn't it? But Paul is the model of a life worth living. How is that a life worth living? Well, he was consistent, humble, earnest, tough, courageous, edifying and led by the Spirit, but he had a mindset that informed this and this is our second main point here. We just saw the model of a life worth living, now is the mindset of a life worth living.

So why would Paul choose to live this way? Why would he choose to endure such suffering and continue to do the things that bring that suffering on? Look at verse 24, Paul says, "I do not consider my life of any account as dear to myself, so that I may finish my course and the ministry which I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify solemnly of the gospel of the grace of God." What a glorious verse that is. What a glorious verse. Paul

says, "I do not consider my life of any account as dear to myself." Another way to phrase that would be, "But I make no account of my life as though precious to myself, or I do not make my life precious to me." The ESV says this, "I do not account my life of any value nor as precious to myself." This is astounding. This is astounding. If his life had been precious to himself, he would have sought comfort, he would have sought ease, accomplishment, the three "P's": pleasure, pride, and pyramids, right? That's what he would have sought. He would have avoided all of this trouble if that's what he had sought.

Do you consider your life to be precious? I mean, all human life is precious, right? I mean, God, we know that every human life is precious in the sight of God, but do you consider your earthly life to be precious, something to hold onto? I'll give you some indicators. When was the last time you shared the Gospel? When you avoid that opportunity because your life is too precious to you. Is there someone who you need to speak the truth in love to, to build them up, that you are avoiding? Why are you avoiding it? It's because your life is precious to you. Are you being dishonest? It's because your life is precious to you. Are you neglecting what you know God would call you to do? It's because your life is precious to you. When you encounter opposition for the sake of Christ, not for your opinions but for the sake of Christ, do you quit? Do you learn to shrink back into your shell and avoid pain? Let someone else run out and get shot because your life is precious to you? What are you preoccupied with? Does the word of God dominate your mind or is it "The Office or Parks & Rec" or whatever other show that people binge watch? Is that what dominates your mind? Are you glued to the news more than you are to the word? It's because your life is precious to you. Are you preoccupied with stock markets and property values? I'm not saying you can't think about those things, but is that what dominates your mind? Is that what worries you? What do you weep over? Is it the lost souls or is it the lost, losing face, the lost good opinion of others? Is your life dominated by entertainment? Are you blowing money in order to spruce up your life, give you a nice lavish vacation, fancy cars, and mansions while you neglect the needs of the saints? It's because your life is precious to you. While our missionaries struggle, while they imitate Paul, we imitate, what was his name, Demas, who loved this present world? Abandoned the work? Do we sacrifice nothing for the Gospel other than a Sunday morning? Do you base your giving off of what kind of tax advantage it gives you or is it based off of the needs, urgent needs surrounding you?

Is your life precious to you because the only way to live a life worth living is to consider your life worthless. Worth less than the mission that God has called you to. Your life is worth less than the mission that God has called you to. What is that mission? I'll tell you one that applies to everyone, it is to go and make disciples of all nations and to teach them to obey and follow Jesus. You might have a secular job as your mission field. You might have a secular job to support that, to take care of the needs of others, to speed along the Gospel, but as long as your life is precious to you, it will be in vain that you live.

Listen to Luke 14:25, "Now large crowds were going along with Him; and He turned and said to them, 'If anyone comes to Me, and does not hate his own father and mother and

wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be My disciple." You see, this should not be news to us. This is intrinsic to the Gospel call. You are coming to Christ but you cannot bring your life with you. Do you understand what I'm saying? You cannot hold onto your life if you want life in Christ. Jesus calls you if you're gonna follow him, to count the cost. He says, "Which one of you when he wants to build a tower does not first sit down and calculate the cost to see if he has enough to complete it, otherwise when he has laid a foundation he's not able to finish, all who observe it begin to ridicule him saying, 'This man began to build and was not able to finish.' Or what king, when he sets out to meet another king in battle, will not first sit down and consider whether he is strong enough with ten thousand men to encounter the one coming against him with twenty thousand?" Verse 33, "So then, none of you can be My disciple who does not give up all his own possessions." That doesn't mean you have to give it all away right now but it means it's not yours anymore. It is to be used for the kingdom of God, for the good of others not for you.

You cannot serve two masters. You cannot serve God and money. Matthew 16:21, "From that time Jesus began to show His disciples that He must go to Jerusalem, and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised up on the third day. Peter took Him aside and began to rebuke Him, saying, 'God forbid it, Lord! This shall never happen to You.' But He turned and said to Peter, 'Get behind Me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to Me; for you are not setting your mind on God's interests, but man's.' 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? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul? For the Son of Man is going to come in the glory of His Father with His angels, and will then repay every man according to his deeds.'" When you came to Christ, was that the Gospel that you came to, is that the Gospel you came to? You see, faith means you've recognized that Jesus Christ and being right with him is more valuable than anything else in the world. That's what faith is. You believe that. You believe that your sin is worthy of eternal judgment and you are fleeing the wrath of God that is coming on the sons of disobedience, you are fleeing that wrath, you believe that that's coming and you believe that by faith alone in Jesus Christ you will have eternal life and you must run from Sodom and Gomorrah to come into his presence.

You cannot hold onto this life. You cannot treasure this life. Where your treasure is, there your heart will be. What will it profit you if you gain the whole world and then you die and your soul goes to hell? Do you believe that? That should impact us. I tell you what, if we really believe that and we remember that I think a lot of things would look different in how we live. Our neighbors would know the Gospel. Shame on us. Shame on us for our distraction, our love of comfort and ease and pleasure. Shame on us for that.

Paul says in 2 Corinthians 5:14, "For the love of Christ controls us, having concluded this, that one died for all, therefore all died; and He died for all, so that they who live might no longer live for themselves, but for Him who died and rose again on their behalf." Do you want to know what the problem in your marriage is? It's because you

don't live that way. You live for yourself. Do you know what the problem in your parenting is? You live for yourself. Do you want to know what the interpersonal issues are in our relationships? It's because we're not humble, it's because we live for ourselves, we consider ourselves more important than others. We don't believe this truth.

Galatians 2:20, "I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself up for me."

And one more passage, Revelation 12:10, "Then I heard a loud voice in heaven, saying, 'Now the salvation, and the power, and the kingdom of our God and the authority of His Christ have come, for the accuser of our brethren has been thrown down, he who accuses them before our God day and night.'" Of course, speaking of Satan. "And they overcame him because of the blood of the Lamb and because of the word of their testimony, and they did not love their life even when faced with death."

Next week we will explore the mission of a life worth living and the solemn charge to the leaders of the church but I don't want to leave you without first highlighting the grace of God because when you realize how you have lived selfishly, you have not died to yourself, Christ has been an accessory to your life to make it better for you, when you realize the horrible effect of sin, the way in which we have dishonored our Lord, the way we have failed to believe him and follow him, this should cut us to the heart but not to the point of despair because there is hope, there is hope for you, there is hope in Christ. Jesus Christ went through this in order to make a way for you to be saved by faith alone in him because he loved you and he gave himself up for you, and if you hunger and thirst for righteousness and you mourn over your sin and you come to him in faith and repentance, he will cleanse your sin as though it never happened. Not by anything that you can do to make it go away but by believing him, you're cleansed. By renouncing your own life and hungering and thirsting for righteousness, if that's what you want, that is what he provides. He is our righteousness. He makes us right before the throne and he stands to help you walk in righteousness today and some day you will stand before him completely blameless and we will live there together completely righteous. That is our hope and so that is what we set our minds on as Colossians 1 says, set your mind on things above because you have died and your life is now hidden with Christ in God. When Christ returns, then your life, then your life will really begin.

So I'm calling upon you to entrust yourself to the grace of God, to renounce, to renounce your life, to count it as worthless that you may fulfill the mission that he has called you to, to proclaim this Gospel to the ends of the earth.

Let's pray and ask that he would help us to do it.

Our Lord Jesus, great are You, holy are You, righteous are You. You are high and lifted up. The earth is full of Your glory and You are the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. Lord, we thank You so much for humbling Yourself and laying that example for us, for giving us the example of the Apostle Paul and, Lord, I pray that You would

help us to live a life worth living by counting our life as worthless, worth less than the mission You've called us to. Please give us grace to do that. Please save sinners, strengthen Your saints, and ignite in us a fervent love for Christ and for one another, a love that endures all trials until we see You face-to-face. We thank You, we praise You in Jesus' name. Amen.