

The Gospel, Grace, and Giving

It Is More Blessed to Give than to Receive

Thesis: To follow Christ is to live generously with your time, talents, and treasure. Our God is generous.

Text: Acts 20:17-35

If you were going to see someone for the last time, I wonder what you would say to him or her. Out of all that you could say, what would be most important for you to say?

Let me put you at ease. I am staying at Calvary. I am not going away except for a trip to Nigeria next week and then to Myanmar for February 15 – March 2. I asked the Lord for what to share with you on this last Sunday in 2018. I believe the Lord gave me a message and led me to this passage in Acts.

In Acts 20:17-35, this is the last time that Paul will see these leaders. What does he say?

He says three things to them:

1. I challenge you to be alert and watch out for yourselves and others as you care for others. Don't drift away from truth and don't fall into complacency (in other words, stay fervent and passionate) (Acts 20:28-31) or greed (materialism, covetousness) (Acts 20:33-34).
2. I commit you to the work of God and the word of God's grace in your lives (Acts 20:32).
3. I call you to generosity (Acts 20:35).

Let's read Acts 20:13-38 to get the context. Then, I want to look at Acts 20:17-35 more closely and make some comments from the text.

<i>17 From Miletus, Paul sent to Ephesus for the elders of the church. 18 When they arrived, he said to them: "You know how I lived the whole time I was with you, from the first day I came into the province of Asia.</i>	Paul set an example. He modeled and lived what he said and taught.
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<p>19 <i>I served the Lord with great humility and with tears, although I was severely tested by the plots of the Jews.</i></p>	<p>In the midst of severe trials and plots against him, Paul did what he did as unto the Lord, and he did it with humility and compassion (tears).</p>
<p>20 <i>You know that I have not hesitated to preach anything that would be helpful to you but have taught you publicly and from house to house.</i></p>	<p>Paul shared what he thought, felt, and believed. He proclaimed whatever he thought would help his hearers. And, he shared in congregational settings and in personal relationships.</p>
<p>21 <i>I have declared to both Jews and Greeks that they must turn to God in repentance and have faith in our Lord Jesus.</i></p>	<p>Invitation: turn from trusting yourself to run your life and turn your life over to Jesus. Faith is expressed in actively following the Lord Jesus.</p>
<p>22 <i>"And now, compelled by the Spirit, I am going to Jerusalem, not knowing what will happen to me there. 23 I only know that in every city the Holy Spirit warns me that prison and hardships are facing me.</i></p>	<p>Paul had revelation and confirmation of what was before him: prison and hardships. Yet, the Holy Spirit was leading him.</p>
<p>24 <i>However, I consider my life worth nothing to me, if only I may finish the race and complete the task the Lord Jesus has given me-- the task of testifying to the gospel of God's grace.</i></p>	<p>Paul didn't focus on his trials or hardships. Rather, he kept his focus on doing what the Lord Jesus gave him to do: testifying to the gospel of God's grace. The good news is that the Lord comes with grace—he forgives our sins and he helps us to live for him in righteousness. We don't earn the love and forgiveness of God. <i>For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith--and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God-- 9 not by works, so that no one can boast (Ephesians 2:8-9).</i> Grace is freely given and freely received.</p>
<p>25 <i>"Now I know that none of you among whom I have gone about preaching the kingdom will ever see me again.</i></p>	<p>The proclamation of the good news involves declaring the kingdom of God, what it is like when God rules and reigns. It is not just about getting saved and going to heaven. The good news involves the King redeeming and restoring everything to himself and to the way it was meant to be. And, we get to join him in that work today.</p>

<p><i>26 Therefore, I declare to you today that I am innocent of the blood of all men. 27 For I have not hesitated to proclaim to you the whole will of God.</i></p>	<p>We need to share with others what we think, feel, and believe, and we need to share in love. We just don't dump the whole counsel of God on people at once, but we share the whole will of God over time, like Paul did over 2.5 years. We get in step with the Holy Spirit in the lives of people and we share as the Lord leads. We want to help people follow Jesus. And when we have to share difficult things, we share in love and acceptance, not in judgment and condemnation. We appeal; we don't command or control. People get to choose how they will live and respond. And, we get to choose how we share with others.</p>
<p><i>28 Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers. Be shepherds of the church of God, which he bought with his own blood. 29 I know that after I leave, savage wolves will come in among you and will not spare the flock. 30 Even from your own number men will arise and distort the truth in order to draw away disciples after them. 31 So be on your guard! Remember that for three years I never stopped warning each of you night and day with tears.</i></p>	<p>This is the last time that Paul will see these leaders. What does he say? He says three things to them:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. I challenge you to be alert and watch out for yourselves and others as you care for others. Don't drift away from truth and don't fall into complacency (in other words, stay fervent and passionate—"night and day with tears") (Acts 20:28-31) or greed (materialism, covetousness) (Acts 20:33-34). 2. I commit you to the work of God and the word of God's grace in your lives (Acts 20:32). 3. I call you to generosity (Acts 20:35).
<p><i>32 "Now I commit you to God and to the word of his grace, which can build you up and give you an inheritance among all those who are sanctified.</i></p>	<p>I commit you to:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The Lord and to his work in your life 2. The word of God's grace; the gospel of salvation by grace <p>The work of God and word of God's grace in your life:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Can build you up in your faith 2. Give you an inheritance among the family of God, among those who are sanctified

	<ul style="list-style-type: none">a. Sanctified: holy in heart and holy in hand; set apart in affections and actionsb. Inheritance: to make you heirs; or to make you joint partakers with the saints of the blessings in reserve for the children of God. Those blessings are often represented as an inheritance, or heirship, which God will confer on his adopted children (Barnes' Notes on the New Testament).
<p><i>33 I have not coveted anyone's silver or gold or clothing.</i></p>	<p>Paul walks in the light about his heart motivation. It is not covetousness (greed).</p> <p>Greed or covetousness is what keeps us from being generous. When we trust in the Lord and look to him in faith, we are empowered to live generous lives. Any other idol or source of identity or approval will diminish us. For where your heart is, your treasure will flow to it.</p> <p>One commentator says it like this. "I have not desired. I have not made it an object of my living among you to obtain your property. Thus 2 Corinthians 12:14 he says, 'I seek not yours, but you.' Paul had power to demand support in the ministry as the reward of his labour, 1 Corinthians 9:13,14. Yet he did not choose to exercise it, lest it should bring the charge of avarice against the ministry, 1 Corinthians 9:12,15. Paul also had power in another respect. He had a vast influence over the people. The early Christians were disposed to commit their property to the disposal of the apostles. See Acts 4:34,35,37. [People of other religions] had been accustomed to devote their property to the support of religion. Of this propensity, if the object of Paul had been to make money, he might have availed himself, and have become enriched... amassing wealth" (Barnes' Notes on the New Testament).</p> <p>Paul was a minister of the gospel, not to gain anything to himself, but to please the Lord and to help people know and follow Jesus.</p>

	<p>In this passage, Paul shares his heart with others. Transformation conversations (walking in the light) help us to share our hearts with others and to become aware of what is going on in us. We want to be clear, authentic, and passionate when we share. Transformation conversations keep transformation alive in us and give the Holy Spirit room to speak to others.</p>
<p><i>34 You yourselves know that these hands of mine have supplied my own needs and the needs of my companions.</i></p>	<p>Paul lived by a guiding principle: to be a tent maker to supply his own needs and the needs of his team. He had the right to receive gifts, salary, and support from others. He chose to be a tentmaker.</p> <p><i>Don't you know that those who work in the temple get their food from the temple, and those who serve at the altar share in what is offered on the altar? 14 In the same way, the Lord has commanded that those who preach the gospel should receive their living from the gospel. 15 But I have not used any of these rights. And I am not writing this in the hope that you will do such things for me. I would rather die than have anyone deprive me of this boast. (1 Corinthians 9:13-15).</i></p>
<p><i>35 In everything I did, I showed you that by this kind of hard work we must help the weak, remembering the words the Lord Jesus himself said: 'It is more blessed to give than to receive'" (Acts 20:17-35).</i></p>	<p>Paul also had a guiding principle of working hard, not for selfish gain, but to enable him to help those in need.</p> <p>Paul lived a generous life because of the words and example of Jesus: it is more blessed to give than to receive.</p> <p>To follow Christ is to live generously with your time, talents, and treasure. Our God is generous.</p>

Making an application and giving a call to action

This is the last Sunday for 2018. I want to encourage you to finish the year strong in your giving and generosity, and to start the year strong in giving and generosity.

1. **Live a generously with your time, talents, and treasure.**
 - a. Our God is generous.

- b. Spend time in examin. How is your heart? What is your heart motivation? Where is your source of identity and approval? Family? Children? Clothes? Houses? Cars? Knowledge? Work? Position? Other?
 - c. Covetousness or greed can sneak up on us and steal the affection and attention of our hearts away from the Lord.
 2. **Give your tithes and offerings as an expression of faith in God and obedience to God.** Giving helps build up your faith in God, because you are saying that you commend your life to his work and his word of grace in your life.
 3. **Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse.**
 - a. I believe that the scripture teaches us to give the first 10% as an act of obedience and as sign and testimony that everything we have belongs to God (Leviticus 27:30; Malachi 3:10-12).
 - b. We acknowledge with the first-fruits that everything good we have comes from God (Proverbs 3:9-10).
 4. **Look for others ways to help others locally and globally.**
 - a. I give my tithe and first-fruits to this local congregation, this storehouse. Then, I give offerings over and above the tithe here at Calvary and beyond.
 - b. I support ministries that are making a difference in the world.
 - c. I support missionaries that are touching people with the love of Christ whom I cannot touch.
 - d. Look for ways to strengthen the week and to help those in need.
 - i. Note: While we don't want to be need driven, we do want to meet needs out of love and compassion.
 - ii. I am so encouraged by the stories I hear of people stepping up to meet needs in their small groups. Others show up to help friends with rides to doctor's appointments and other places. Others show up to serve in other ways. There are so many encouraging reports. Way to go. Keep up the good work of loving well.

Ministry Time