

Acts of the Holy Spirit – 24
Redefining Success - Acts 20:17-38
Week of Oct 28, 2018 - Bay Park Life Groups (Leader)

In his classic, *The Chronicles of Narnia*, C. S. Lewis described Aslan (God) as *not safe or tame, but good*. Acts reminds us that the good God who saves us, moves in ways that also scare us. He will not bow to our whims or be tamed by our wants. Instead, he calls us to step out in faith and surrender ourselves to him without holding back.

This makes reading Acts both thrilling and troubling. Thrilling because of the powerful and unexpected ways in which God moved and worked. Troubling because of the faith, sacrifice and demands he put on believers. Frankly, we would rather read the story of Acts than be part of it today. Acts creates a tension in us – are we satisfied with knowing church history or making church history? This is the same tension the believers in Acts wrestled with. How much of Jesus do I really need to be saved? How much influence do I want Jesus to have over my family ties, finances, work, leisure, ambitions and priorities? Whose definition of success will I follow, Jesus', the world's, or my adaptation?

1. Thoughts and comments on the statement above?

Read Acts 20:17-24

2. These verses give us a snapshot of what Paul prized and lived for. As his last words to the Ephesian elders, they represent the life summation or tombstone epitaph he was gunning for. Here are some other examples of last words:

I hope I haven't bored you. Elvis Presley's at his last press conference.

Abandoned in old age by wife and children. May God be more understanding and merciful. Andrew J Olszak, 1895-1979 (Tombstone).

Ma loves Pa – Pa loves women. Ma caught Pa, with 2 in swimmin. Here lies Pa... Lawrence L Cook Jr, 1934-2004 (Tombstone).

What are the most important words that can be said of someone? What words do you hope will be used to summarize your life?

3. On Sunday we saw that for the Apostle Paul, success is:
 - Serving God (v 19)
 - Finishing strong (v 24)
 - Pointing people to Jesus (vv 26-27)
 - Being a giver not a taker (vv 33-35).
 - a. Which definition of success speaks most to you and why?
 - b. What other definitions of success are found in these verses?

- c. How does the Apostle Paul's definition of success line up with yours?

I served the Lord with great humility and with tears and in the midst of severe testing.
~ Apostle Paul (Acts 20:19)

4. The Greek word for *humility* speaks of *being lowly* or of an *absence of arrogance*. At the time, humility was a uniquely Christian value as it was viewed as weakness by the likes of the Stoics. Even today, we want leaders to be people of power, positivity, victory and self-assurance. We don't gravitate towards leaders who cry or wear their weaknesses on their sleeves.

- a. Why is humility the only path to success in Christianity?

Without humility there would be no gospel (cf Philippians 2:6-8). Therefore without humility there is no gospel internalization or gospel witness (cf Philippians 2:1-5). Simply put, because of Jesus, the path to exaltation (success) is paved with humility (cf Philippians 2:9-11). Or as Tim Keller put it: *A humble and weak person will show a crucified savior better to a listener than a polished, pulled together expert. Because that's how it happened for us: we weren't saved by pulling ourselves together, but by admitting we were sinners and calling on the one who was pulled apart for us.*¹

- b. How has God been growing your humility?

*My life is worth nothing to me unless I use it for finishing
the work assigned me by the Lord Jesus.*

~ Apostle Paul (Acts 20:24)

5. When you think of counting your life nothing, what comes to mind? Anybody you know personally that exemplifies this type of living? To be obedient to Jesus, what area of your life needs to have "worth nothing" written over it?

Read Acts 20:25-38

6. If you had to pick one verse from this last section as your epitaph or life summary, which one would it be and why?
7. As you go to pray, remember Acts 20:18 - *You know how I lived*. Paul's spiritual impact on others flowed from his willingness to be transparent. As relational beings created in the image of the triune God, it should not surprise us that our spiritual growth and influence are proportional to our willingness to be real and transparent. Though self-disclosure is admittedly unnerving, the greater threat is self-protection because it breeds self-denial, self-deception and hypocrisy. How might this verse impact your prayer time together?

¹ J D Greear, *Paul's Tombstone*, pdf, July 27 2014