

Title: What do you live for anyway?  
Text: Acts 20.24  
Theme: The value of the gospel  
Series: Acts  
Prop Stmt: The goal of our life is related to the gospel because the gospel is the most precious thing in life.

Read Text:

I ended the sermon last week on this verse and walked away from the sermon thinking that I needed to explain this better. I pointed out that this statement by Paul helps us understand what he put value on. Here is the standard by which he measures his life. It is a well-lived life if he is faithful in sharing the gospel. What I need to do, is explain why. This morning I want to help you understand this at a deeper level because this statement by Paul reveals his motivation for why this is his driving passion. I want you to see what Paul saw. I want you to know what Paul knew. I want you to embrace what Paul embraced, so that you will live with this passion as well. The goal of our life is related to the gospel because the gospel is the most precious thing in life.

### 1. **Why is the gospel needed?**

The gospel is the desperately needed good news about the grace of God. (24b)

I want to tell you three stories to help you see this.

Bill Buckner. Bill Buckner was an outstanding baseball player. In 1974 he batted .314 and helped the Dodgers win the pennant. In 1980 he won the National League batting title with a .324 average. He was named as an All-Star in 1981, the year he led the National League in doubles. In 1982 he set a major league record for assists by a first baseman. He broke his own record in 1983 and broke it again in 1984. He was now playing with the Red Sox who had not won the World Series since 1918. The Red Sox made it to the World Series and were playing the Mets. In the 10<sup>th</sup> inning of the 6<sup>th</sup> game, Bill was playing 1<sup>st</sup> base when he allowed a ground ball to go between his legs and into right field. The Mets went on to win that game and then the 7<sup>th</sup> game (and the World Series) crushing the hearts of Red Sox fans, who for years poured out venom and hatred on Bill.

In 2003, a lifelong Cubs fan, named Steve Bartman was at Wrigley Field in Chicago sitting near the foul line in left field during the NLCS against the Marlins. The Cubs were winning the series 3-2 and were winning the game 3-0 in the 8<sup>th</sup> inning, when a Marlin player hit a foul ball to where Steve was sitting. Before the Cubs left fielder could make a play, Steve and a couple of other fans deflected the ball. Instead of getting an out, the Marlins extended the inning and won that game and the next, crushing the hearts of Cubs fan who for years poured out venom and hatred upon Steve.

Michael Richards is more famously known by his Seinfeld character, Cosmo Kramer. He had an enormously successful career as an actor and comedian until 2006 when Michael became angry at a couple of hecklers in a comedy club and unleashed a racist tirade on them. His rant was

captured on video and unleashed on the internet, where Michael could now join Steve and Bill and watch to their horror, their failures again and again and again. Steve and Bill lived for years in the sports hall of shame. Michael instantly was sentenced to the Celebrity Hall of Shame. How do you get out?

Political debates are a joke. There is so little substantive conversations that occur, because candidates have already spent boatloads of money trying to dig up anything about their opponent in order to shame them with it and rub their face in it. The truth is, if someone followed you around your entire life and took a video of you, there would be tons of footage of things you said, and did that you would be mortified if they were leaked to YouTube. But they happened and in some cases, there are people in your life who know what you said and what you did and not only do they not forget, but they make sure you know that they haven't forgotten. How do you get out of the hall of shame?

Some of you live with the fear that one day your kids will find out things that you had hoped would be kept as a secret. Some of them have already found out. How do you get out of the hall of shame?

The gospel is the desperately needed good news about the grace of God because we all live with shame. For some, the shame is imposed by others and it is silly and stupid (like the abuse heaped upon Bill and Steve). For others we have shame because we have seriously hurt people and we cannot go back in time and change it. For others we have shame because we have secrets that we fear will get out. We all have shame, not simply because of the things that we have done, but because of the kind of people that we are.

Paul has a lot to say to this. He spent his early adult career persecuting and executing people who were followers of Jesus. That is a fact of history that we read about in the book of Acts. But, that is more than information. There is a lot of collateral damage in that. Persecuting and executing people is bad. Sports fans accused Bill and Steve of ruining their lives. They didn't. But, Paul did. He really ruined lives. He ran the risk of running into children whose parents he had killed, or parents whose children he had killed. What could Paul say? How could he make it up to them? And if he couldn't make it up to them and fix it, then why didn't he just go away when his very presence would have been traumatic for some? How long do you have to carry your burden before you can put it down? And, who says that you have carried it long enough?

How did Paul get rid of his shame? How long does Michael have to be punished, or punish himself or go through sensitivity training enough to be declared forgiven, or prove to enough people that he is really sorry. And that is really worth exploring. Because we instinctively believe that when we fail, that we have to make it up somehow, or we have to prove to others that we are really sorry. But, the obvious problem with that, is that there is no agreed upon price that we have to pay. How do you know when you are sorry enough? How do you know when the other person is sorry enough? How do you put a price on persecution, separation, and even executions? Let's say that you could. Or let's say that you had to at least try your best. Let's say that the answer is: you have to spend the rest of your life trying your best to make it up.

Does that explain Paul? Is that what Paul is saying here in v.24? Paul was confronted by Jesus on the road to Damascus. Paul realized in that moment that he had been wrong. He was wrong about Jesus, wrong about Christians, wrong about the church and wrong about the gospel. Over time he would grow in his realization of just how wrong he had been. So, from that moment, are we to view all of the things that Paul did for Jesus as a lifelong pursuit of making up for all of the bad things that he had done against Jesus? How would he know when he had settled the debt and evened the scales? Is that what drove Paul? Did Paul live trying to prove to Jesus and others how sorry he was, so that everyone would now think nice thoughts of him instead of fearing him and perhaps hating him as before?

Let's look for that in v.24 (read)

Do you get this sense that Paul is living under the weight of a debt that he has to pay back to God for all of the things that he did? I don't see it. In every city imprisonment and afflictions await me, but it is only fitting. It's karma. What goes around, comes around. Is that it? I did that to others, so now it's being done to me. I should have thought of that before I did all of that. Is that what he says and believes? No. *"In every city, imprisonment and afflictions await me, but I do not account my life of any value nor as precious to myself, if only I may finish my course and the ministry that I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the gospel of the grace of God."*

We established last week that Paul counted his life as being a well-lived life IF he was able to faithfully finish out his life pointing people to the gospel. What I am trying to help us see this morning, is WHY. Why is pointing people to the gospel the all-consuming measurement that Paul uses for whether or not his life is well-lived? It all has to do with what actually happens to a person when he or she finally understands and embraces the gospel. It is nothing short of life-changing. But, it is life-changing in more ways than what I think many of you grasp.

## 2. Why is the gospel tied to Paul's motivation for life?

Paul would often give a summary of his life and conversion. There are two passages that I want us to look at where he does this. And I want you to ask this question. What is Paul's motivation for his life?

1 Timothy 1.12-17

What is Paul's motivation for ministry?

Repaying a debt? Is that the sense that you get from this text?

Fulfilling a job? (doing one's duty?)

Finding self-fulfillment and meaning?

Earning a good reputation?

What is it that fills Paul's heart with such joy that he explodes with praise? If you know, don't say it, yet. Let's look at another text.

Philippians 3.2-11

Here Paul recounts what he was and what he accomplished. Then we have another accounting term where he is comparing the value of one thing to another. On this side of the ledger he says that all of those things are in the column of “rubbish” (which is soft translation of a pile of manure). What is valuable to Paul? What has supreme (surpassing) worth to him? What drives his life? What makes his life well-lived? It is knowing (which means relationally loving) Christ. Loving Christ, being loved by Christ, drives my life. The love of Christ, being loved by Christ and being able to respond to the love of Christ by loving him in return, being in a relationship with Christ that is characterized by love is so glorious and so amazing that my heart wants to explode in praise, which is what he does in the 1 Timothy passage.

Paul’s motivation for ministry is not paying a debt, doing a duty, trying to find meaning or self-fulfillment, or repairing his damaged reputation. Paul’s motivation for ministry is love. He knows that he is loved. He knows that he is loved with an infinite and ultimate love and therefore, he can bank everything in his life on the love of God. He is so convinced that this love, that he describes as mercy and grace is so real, so powerful, and so enduring that he measures the very value of his life against it. How can Paul say this, believe this, live like this and call others to do the same? Is this self-talk, like, “hey you’ve got to learn how to forgive yourself” psycho-babble-ease? Obviously not! Paul has not gone on a PR campaign to rescue his reputation by telling people that he’s really not that bad. He’s done the opposite. Paul has said that he really is that bad and in fact worse. He is the chief of sinners. But, Paul is not boasting about his sin, nor is he destroyed by it. And the reason is the very nature of the gospel itself.

The gospel is the good news about the grace of God. The grace of God means that God has given me something that I did not deserve. Let’s think about what that is that God has given. It is common to think about God giving us eternal life. God has given us heaven, instead of hell. God has given us meaning and purpose instead of aimlessness. God has given us forgiveness. And yet, I get the sense that sometimes we think of forgiveness like a receipt. Here you go, your debt is paid. You can go now. But, the heart of the gospel is Jesus. Jesus is God. Jesus is the 2<sup>nd</sup> person of the Triune God. Jesus is the gift of God and is God, the gift. When God gave us Jesus, he gave us himself. The good news means that God has given us Jesus. And in giving us Jesus, he gave us Someone who lived a perfect life in our place and yet, even though he was perfect, he was treated as if he had done everything that we had done. Jesus was treated as if he was guilty of all of our public and private sins. Jesus was shamed because he carried my sin and my sin is shameful. Isaiah 53 says that he was despised and rejected. Jesus was shamed. He bore our griefs. He carried our sorrows. He felt my shame because my shame was placed upon him. Paul’s shame was placed on Jesus. Jesus bore Paul’s griefs and carried Paul’s sorrows. Paul’s griefs and sorrows, just like yours were real griefs and real sorrows. But, Jesus bore them. Jesus carried them. Jesus bore them. Jesus carried them. If Jesus bore them and Jesus carried them, that means that you can’t.

It’s hard to accept help from another, isn’t it? If someone wants to carry my suitcase, I instinctively say, “I can do that.” But, if you have trusted in Christ, Jesus has carried your born your griefs and carried your sorrows. And he died for them. He paid for them. They are forgiven. The record is clean. There is no debt for you to pay. So, even though Paul was the chief of sinners, his sin has been born, his sorrow and shame has been carried by Christ. It has been taken

away from him and in its place, Paul (and every one who trusts in Christ) is given (credited with) the righteousness of Christ. You cannot get the righteousness of Christ without getting Christ. That is why the gift of grace is the gift of God himself. When you come to faith in Christ, you get Christ. And when you get Christ, you get forgiveness, you get righteousness, you get eternal life, you get meaning, purpose and relationships with others because you get Christ. You get the One who loves you so much he gave himself for you. You get the One who loves you so much he took away your shame. And what he did for you, he will do for every single person who trusts in him.

A few years ago, Jerry Seinfeld took his friend, Michael Richards out for some coffee and they talked about the incident in the comedy club years before. Jerry encouraged Michael to let it go. He challenged him by saying, "That's up to you, to say, 'I've been carrying this bad long enough. I'm going to put it down.'" Is Jerry a nice guy? I think so. Does Jerry care about his friend Michael and feel bad for him? I think so. Can Jerry justify Michael? No. But Jesus can. While people are often hurt deeply by our sin, our offense is ultimately against a holy God. And when this holy God carries away my sin by his death and gives me his life, and then pronounces me to be justified, I really am righteous in the eyes of God because I am now in Christ.

This is the greatest gift ever. This is the greatest treasure ever. This is the most valuable thing ever. My shame is gone. My sin is forgiven. Because, I am united with Christ. God has given me Christ. I am in Christ, forever. The ministry that Paul received from the Lord Jesus to testify to the gospel of the grace of God is his happy passion because the gospel is the means by which his shame was taken away and he found Christ and it is the only means by which anyone is rid of shame and brought into union with Christ.

Michael Richards and you are tempted to live with the fear that you will forever be labeled with shame because you have not only done shameful things but because you are a sinner. But, neither Michael nor you have to live like that. There is a better way and that better way is through Christ. Do not trust in your attempts to punish yourself. They will never be good enough. Do not trust in the punishment and shame of others as if you've paid your dues. Trust in who Christ is and what Christ has done. Jesus is enough. You get Jesus. Let go of your shame, it was carried by one better than you. Let go of your sin, it was born by one bigger than you. Let go of your condemnation, it was taken by one who was condemned for you. Accept Christ as yours. Accept his death for you and accept his life now as your life. Your life is now hidden with Christ in God.

So what drives you? Seeking the salt-water validation of others? Proving to others that you are not a failure? Looking for someone to love you? Looking for relief from your shame? Running from painful memories? Trying to pay a debt, fulfill an obligation, repair your reputation? You'll never get there. What an exhausting and unfulfilling mission that is. Trust Christ and you get Christ. And you get him forever and everything that comes with Him.