

Title: The whole truth and nothing but the truth
Text: Acts 20.25-27
Theme: a great salvation brings a great responsibility
Series: Acts
Prop Stmtnt: We have the privileged responsibility of telling people the whole story.

Large cathedrals and other “sacred spaces” are designed to create a sense of awe, wonder and even intimidation. In many cases, the high ceilings and hard surfaces create such an echoey effect that visitors instinctively whisper. We tend to whisper when we believe that something more important than our voice is going on. Have you ever been in the room when someone is dying? You whisper, don’t you? Conversations take place in the corners of the room in hushed voices or out in the hall. There is something sacred, serious, and weighty that is happening. That is the tone of this text. The apostle Paul is on his way to Jerusalem for what may be the end of his life and ministry. On his way back east from Achaia and Macedonia, he stops at Miletus, where the elders from the church at Ephesus have traveled to meet him for a few hours. These brothers are very close to him and this meeting is like saying good-bye to your dad. It is priceless and hard. These relationships run deep. The love, trust and affection is real.

The man who taught everyday for several years and never seemed to run out of things to say, now had minutes left to speak. He knows these are his last words to them face to face. He does not have to shout for them to hear him. He does not have to argue in order to convince them. He speaks somberly and in measured terms. Every word feels pregnant with meaning, because it is. When we read this text, we feel as if we have been invited into a very private meeting. We’re not sure that we are even supposed to be here. So, we listen, we watch, we try to take in every moment, but we don’t even whisper.

Read Text:

I remember driving my son to college and I began to feel a sense of panic. There were so many things that I needed to teach him, that I don’t think I had. I remember thinking, does he know how to change a tire? Does he know how to change the oil in a car? Now, he was going away to college, but he would come home, I thought. I would get some more opportunities, but I remember feeling a sense of urgency because this moment had come really fast. What if, as I mentioned last week, you thought that you were going to die and you were meeting your friends and family for what was very likely the last time.

1. **Someday, you will die.** (25)

Paul’s life and ministry following his conversion has 3 periods: (broad terms)

- 34-47 preparation and private ministry in Antioch
- 47-57 church planting trips (3 missionary journeys), much public ministry, some writing, some prison and persecution
- 57-67 much imprisonment, some writing, minor public ministry

This event takes place around year 57. Paul's public ministry is winding down. He is going to go to Jerusalem where he will be arrested. He will get transferred to Caesarea where he will sit in prison for 2 years. He will be transferred to Rome where he will be under house arrest and will not be released until around 62. For the next 5 years, Paul is going to be in prison or house arrest. Best we can tell, he is released for a time (perhaps 2 years) and then is arrested again and finally is executed likely around 67.

Look at v.25 again. "*And now, behold*" - He just said this in v.22 which highlights the urgency of his words. He knows that he is not going to live forever and he doesn't pretend that he is. Do you know why some of you do not have wills or have done any estate planning, or have left any instructions in the event of your death? It is because you want to pretend as if you will not die. Eating healthy is nice (for some), but it doesn't mean that you won't die. Exercising can be a good thing, unless you spend so much time exercising that you don't have time to live. Have you ever thought that your obsession with healthy eating and exercise, and looking young may be an attempt to delude yourself into thinking that dying only happens to other people? On a side note, I found it interesting that a front-page article in a national publication ran a story on how grocery stores had run out of Lucky Charms, but still had okra. I thought of 2 things: 1) Out of Lucky Charms? Ok now, this is a crisis. 2) I've been telling you this for years. No one contemplates their potential last meal and says, I wish I had more broccoli.

"*Oh, I don't like to think about those things.*" Well, I don't like to think about running out of gas, but that doesn't mean that I don't put fuel in my car. So, when Paul says, "And now, behold" he is not only letting everyone know that he realizes that he is not going to live forever, but he is kindly, lovingly, yet clearly helping these elders face the same fact. What happens when you talk like this? Some people say, "Oh, don't talk like that. That isn't going to happen."

I remember when my dad was diagnosed with terminal cancer. He did not want to be discouraging to anyone, and he wasn't. But, if you asked him how he was doing, he made it sound as if he was either healed or was on the verge of being healed. Members of the church would come up to me and say, "that is such good news about your dad." And I could tell they were kindly chiding me for not telling the church. I would ask them what they heard and they would relate a conversation they had with my dad about good he was getting along. Again, he was cheery. He really was. But, while that was nice, I felt like I couldn't talk with him about some things that really needed to be addressed without upsetting the script. Eventually, I had to have a very difficult conversation with my dad and then with my mom. I didn't want to be the one to do that. But, someone had to. In this text, that someone is Paul. He is telling these men something that he is dealing with and they need to face it as well. They didn't want to think about this. They didn't like Paul talking like this. But, in the end, it helped them realize what was really happening in this event. They knew (v.38) they would not see him again, so it gave them the opportunity to tell him things that needed to be said.

Beloved, I would preach this text like this whether or not Covid-19 was happening. And there are two realities that I want you to know and embrace. 1) Life will not go on forever. Covid-19 does not make the death rate go up. The death rate is still 100%. You do not have some promise nor expectation that life for you is going to go on and on. Do not expect that life will just go on.

Expect that it won't. It will end. I will die. You will die. A pandemic, a war, a natural disaster, may move the date up, but it doesn't move the rate up. And secondly 2) life, as we know it will not continue as we have known it.

Look at 2 Peter 3.1-7. Look carefully at v.7. What does verse 7 say about this present world? It is fuel for fire, right? Well now, that certainly puts things into perspective doesn't it? This present age is not going on forever. What you see around you is not eternal. It was made. It had a beginning. It has a purpose and it will serve that purpose and then it will be gone. Do not live as if everything around you is going to keep on going as it always has. You hear it said that everything is cyclical. It is true to a degree that there are things that are cyclical, but it is not true in the ultimate sense. Everything isn't cyclical. In Romans 8, the groanings of creation (like a virus) rebelling against the abuses of her stewards, are described as being the pains of childbirth. Contractions increase in number, in duration and in intensity until the child is born. We should not expect that things go along smooth and painless until POOF! Jesus returns and then we go from an easy life straight to glory.

One day you will die. Are you ready? I have talked with some of you who have neighbors and co-workers who are afraid. I think that is worth exploring. Why the fear? As I mentioned, logically speaking, everyone is going to die anyway. But, we are not logical when it comes to death. We try to live as if it will not happen and things like Covid-19 force people to face reality and let's face it, most people do not do a good job facing reality. In the days to come, your life will face difficult seasons. Are you ready? Are you ready? Or, are you pushing things off? Do you really wish that I would stop saying this because I am reminding you of something that you need to hear but really don't want to hear? I want you to be ready to die. When difficulties confront you, I do not want to be accused of malpractice because I did not inform you of them.

You will be ready to die when your life is hid in Christ. Here is a visual that I use. Let me set it up I for you. I love my wife. I love my children, my grandchildren, you, my church. I derive great joy from you. But, I do not put all of my happiness and the treasure of my joy in you, because you are mortal. You are transient. You are vulnerable. You and I make promises saying, "Lord willing." I'll see you tomorrow, Lord willing. But, when the Lord makes a promise, he does not say, Lord willing. When he makes a promise, he is willing. He is Lord. Therefore, my happiness, my ultimate joy is safe in Jesus. So, I think of a throne in heaven. This is the throne that belongs to Jesus. This is the throne where he will set and be honored as king. This is the throne where he will rule from. In my mind, it is a large and glorious throne and under this throne is a large chest that has a thick, strong chain wrapped around it with a lock on it. My happiness is in that chest. In order to steal that chest and steal my happiness, you have to dethrone Jesus and no one is going to do that.

So, the stock market imploded this week. I was not planning on that. My retirement account took a hit, like some of yours. "*Oh, it will come back.*" People say. Maybe it will, maybe it won't. What happens if it doesn't? Well, let's see. Where is my happiness? It's in the chest under the throne of Jesus. Is that safe? Oh yea! That frees me to address my responsibilities in this world without being owned by them. Some of us in this church are going to lose our jobs, or have our hours cut way back. You were not planning on that. Oh, you can find something else. Oh, you will be fine. What happens if you can't, at least for a while. Wait, before you freak out, where is

your happiness? If your happiness is in your job, then you will freak out. If your happiness is in the chest under the throne of Jesus, then, no matter what happens to you, even if you die, your happiness is safe. If you have trusted in Jesus to save you from your sin. If you have trusted in Jesus to forgive you and cleanse you because he lived the life you could not live and then died on the cross in your place, then you are his forever. Forever, you are in him. Forever, you will be with him. Lucky Charms are not guaranteed. The stock market is not guaranteed, but Jesus is. Your job is not guaranteed, but Jesus is. Your health is not guaranteed, but Jesus is. If you trust in Jesus, you are ready to die and if you are ready to die, now, you are finally ready to live. If the biggest fear, the biggest problem is taken care of, then all other issues can be seen and dealt with for what they are.

Here is wisdom: Our lives as we know them will end and our lives as we know them will likely change in ways that we have not known. Beloved, suffering with joy is part of our calling. It is so important that you have a biblical theology of suffering. The Bible does not have a secret formula for how you can be protected from suffering. And anyone who tells you that is lying to you. Someone asked me this week, if live-streaming like this makes me a televangelist? If I ever had a full-blown panic attack, it was in that moment.

I want you to be prepared for it. We live in a sin-cursed world. Earthquakes happen. The creation is groaning. Hurricanes happen, the creation is groaning. Tsunamis happen. The creation is groaning. Locust plagues happen. The creation is groaning. Covid-19 happens. The creation is groaning. It affects everyone. Believers and unbelievers alike. We all live in this world. There is either a storm at your door, or one that is coming down your street. Does this mean that you should be afraid? No, but it does mean that you should realize how serious it is that you have joy. Your joy in Christ is a serious matter. You are not ready to live until you are ready to die.

2. **Live like it.** (26-27)

I am a card-carrying member of the baby-boomer generation. So, my ears perked up a little bit when I heard that the Covid-19 pandemic was being called the Boomer-Remover. But, if you think that you are going to live forever, then you will live as if you have all of the time in the world, because you do. If you know that you are going to die in 10 years, then you know that you have 10 years to get things in order. And if you really love those around you, then you will do everything that you can to make sure that you have prepared well for your death. You will not be around forever. You had better pass on your wisdom. You had better tell people the gospel. Do you see how this reality influenced the way that Paul lived. He knew that his time was limited.

A. **Tell people the truth.** (what they need to hear)

Look at the opening phrase of v.26. What does that sound like? It sounds like a courtroom scene where the witness is on the stand and has been instructed that this is no casual conversation. Think carefully about everything that you say. Paul is publicly declaring that he has fulfilled his charge. He can say, "I am innocent of the blood of all of you." In other words, I told you the truth. I told you what you needed to hear. That language of "*I am innocent of the blood of all of you*" comes from Ezekiel 3.16-21. (explain)

Why is Paul innocent of their blood? Because he told them the truth. While I am not responsible for how people respond to the gospel, I am responsible for sharing the gospel. Do you see the connection? The sands of time are sinking. The sand in the top part of your hourglass is filling the bottom part. Tell people the truth. Tell them about Jesus. They need to hear about Jesus. There is nowhere else where their happiness will be safe, but in Jesus.

B. Tell people the whole truth.

Paul did not shrink back from telling them the whole counsel of God. He told them the bad news as well as the good news. The health and wealth gospel is very attractive when there is no Covid-19, or when you are looking for some magic formula to not be affected by it. But the health and wealth gospel is not only false teaching, but it does not prepare people to live with joy in the midst of adversity. The health and wealth gospel does not tell people the whole truth. It acts as if adversity is the enemy and that faith in yourself is the magic formula to get rid of adversity. Imagine releasing “Your Best Life Now” book, key chains, and coffee mugs now. I saw a church sign that said, “This is your year.” The false prophets in the OT were the ones who were not willing to tell people the whole truth. They told the people what they wanted to hear, not what they needed to hear. Paul did not shrink back from telling people the whole counsel of God, the whole truth. Yes, heaven is real, but so is judgment. So is hell.

Do you remember the story of Israel’s final judge and first prophet after Moses? It is Samuel. You may remember how God called him. His mother dedicated him to the Lord and as a child he began living at and working in the tabernacle with Eli the high priest. One night, when Samuel was sleeping, the Lord called him. The text says (1 Samuel 3.1) that “the word of the LORD was rare in those days.” Many of you know the story. The LORD called Samuel and he thought it was Eli calling him. So, he kept running to Eli, until Eli realized that it was the LORD who was speaking to Samuel and told Samuel to respond to the LORD’s voice by saying, “Speak LORD, for your servant hears.” But, the story doesn’t end there. The LORD does speak to Samuel and he gives him a message of judgment and the judgment is going to happen to Eli and his family. The next morning, Eli asks Samuel what the LORD said. And Samuel tells him the whole thing. I believe that event was a test case for Samuel. What would he do with the word of the LORD? Would he tell Eli the truth, or would he water it down, or only focus on the positive?

I want you to know the whole truth. I want you to know that we live in a sin-cursed world where bad things happen, where the valleys can be deep and the road long. I want you to know that the sands of time are sinking. We will not live forever, so that, you are ready for what is next, because when you are ready for what is next and you know that your life is in Christ, you can face what is now with joy because your happiness is safe in Christ. And for those who are in Christ, what is next is beyond good. It is soul-satisfying, heart-filling, mind-blowing

The sands of time are sinking,
The dawn of heaven breaks;
The summer morn I’ve sighed for -
The fair, sweet morn awakes:

Dark, dark had been the midnight

But dayspring is at hand,
And glory, glory dwelleth
In Emmanuel's land.

The king there in His beauty,
Without a veil is seen:
It were a well-spent journey,
Though seven deaths lay between:

The Lamb with His fair army,
Doth on Mount Zion stand,
And glory, glory dwelleth
In Emmanuel's land

O Christ, He is the fountain,
The deep, sweet well of love!
The streams on earth I've tasted
More deep I'll drink above:

There to an ocean fullness
His mercy doth expand,
And glory, glory dwelleth
In Emmanuel's land.

The bride eyes not her garment,
But her dear Bridegroom's face;
I will not gaze at glory
But on my King of grace.

Not at the crown He giveth
But on His pierced hand;
The Lamb is all the glory
Of Emmanuel's land.

O I am my Beloved's
And my Beloved is mine!
He brings a poor vile sinner
Into His house of wine

I stand upon His merit -
I know no other stand,
Not e'en where glory dwelleth
In Emmanuel's land.