

A consecrated Life

Acts 20:17-24

v24

"But I consider my life of no value to myself; my purpose is to finish my course and the ministry I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the gospel of God's grace."

Paul in these scriptures gathers together the Elders from the church in Ephesus, where he had ministered for about three years. In that period of time the gospel had caused quite a stir.

When he first visited, he only stayed about a week and said he would come back again "if God wills." (Acts 18:21)

Well God did "will it" and Paul, on his return, ran into some some disciples. There was a problem however, when Paul asked them about their spiritual birth, he found some things were amiss. They had only received John's baptism and had never been told about the Holy Spirit. John's baptism was a baptism of repentance, telling people they should believe in the one who would come after him.

But Jesus Christ had come and they therefore needed to be baptised into His name (Acts 19:5). They needed a proper spiritual birth. So they are baptised into Jesus' name and Paul then lays hands on them, so that they receive the baptism in the Holy Spirit. The evidence of their receiving Spirit baptism is they begin speaking in tongues and to prophesy. There were 12 men in total.

"A small cloud the size of a man's hand" was rising in Ephesus, perhaps a sign, as with Elijah, of the outpouring to come. From polite acceptance in the synagog during his first visit, to now a handful of men, who had partial truth coming fully into the the truth of salvation and powerful anointing of God's Spirit.

Three months of public preaching then followed, but this led to persecution and Paul had to withdraw. Taking these new disciples, he conducted some discussions each day in a lecture hall. Not the kind of platform you would expect for a mighty move of God. Paul was not, however, one for a personal platform and he continued these meetings for two years. Two years of equipping the saints, explaining the scriptures and establishing firm foundations of doctrine in the church.

This approach was so effective that ***"all the residents of Asia, both Jews and Greeks, heard the word of the Lord."*** (Acts 19:10)

The reason people were being converted was because there was great anointing upon the word being spoken; **"God was performing extraordinary miracles by Paul's hands"** (Acts 19:11)

Items that had been in meetings where Paul was present were being taken to the sick and the demonised and they were healed and delivered. Paul recognised these were extraordinary miracles. God was doing a special and powerful work in the midst of godless idolatrous people.

Something else was happening too. The word of God was received with such power and conviction that a whole region started changing its behaviour. People who were practicing witchcraft and magic spells, came under the conviction of the Holy Spirit and committed their lives to Christ. They too were baptised and having been baptised they burned their books of spells. These were regarded as of great financial worth and the bonfire burned up the equivalent of 50,000 pieces of silver or in today's money possibly millions of pounds.

Testimony - We all need a bonfire of our old ways.

Get rid of so called "harmless fun" practices. Reading your horoscope, listening to certain types of music lyrics.

For others it's unhealthy or ungodly relationships, the language you use, priorities in life etc.

Holy Spirit can bring great conviction through God's word in ways that are not possible through endless reasoning and debate about what is right and wrong.

Are you aware of something in your life that is out of line? What are you going to do about it? No one is going to decide for you.

The gospel message, from a seemingly insignificant beginning even started to affect the local economy. An economy that, to a large extent, relied on the trade of artefacts bought and sold for the worship of the false goddess Artemis. The temple was considered one of the 7 wonders of the ancient world. It was huge and imposing and its continued use was now being threatened by the good news of Jesus Christ. Such is the power of the gospel message faithfully preached by those who consecrate themselves to God.

So this is just a bit of the background to the passage I have read. Paul calls the Elders to him from Ephesus and he pours out his heart. It is here **we start to get some insight into why God was able to move so freely through the Apostle.** He had been called and in response, given himself unreservedly to God. He was a living sacrifice. Dying to self and increasingly living for Christ.

Paul had a big heart for God and people.

Acts 20:18-19

"I was **with you the whole time**, serving the Lord with all humility, **with tears**, and during the trials that came...."

v31 "I never stopped warning you **with tears....**"

v37 "There were **many tears**" at his departure and farewell.

Paul was a man of deep love, concern and compassion. His message to the people came from a longing and urgency to see people established in the faith, escaping the wrath to come. He feared for their safety and was concerned that nothing should come in to corrupt the church and the foundation of truth he had laid.

During those three years, he poured out his very life. He loved them with the love of God and wept with and for them on many occasions. Perhaps because of people's brokenness, sinfulness, loss, as well as tears of joy. He prayed earnestly and gave himself completely to the task Jesus Himself had called him to. He speaks elsewhere of his life being poured out like a drink offering to God.

Paul modelled something of the love of God as He ministered and cared for others. This was sacrificial giving of self for the sake of others. There is a great cost but even greater rewards.

I want to focus on one particular verse:

V24

"But I consider my life of no value to myself; my purpose is to finish my course and the ministry I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the gospel of God's grace."

We don't hear the word "**Consecrated**" used much these days. However, it is a word I would use to describe Paul's life and the life Jesus' is calling his church; each one of us to.

In the bible the word describes **that which is separated and dedicated in its entirety to God. Of people, it is to separate yourself from things that are unclean, especially anything that would contaminate your relationship with a perfect God and to be wholly given over to God for His glory. It speaks of sanctification, holiness and purity.**

Paul had completely given his life over to God and repeatedly he urges all believers to do the same. This generation desperately needs to see a church full of people who love God more than any other thing.

What was Paul's motivation? What compelled him to give up everything for the sake of Christ? What could possibly compel us to do the same?

He had a revelation of the risen Christ and suddenly everything started to make sense.

Paul came to know Christ whilst he was persecuting the Church. In fact when Jesus spoke to him, He said "Why are you persecuting me?" Paul's persecution

of the church was a direct attack against Jesus Christ Himself. He had dragged people off to prison, approved of Stephen's stoning, and caused untold distress to many innocent Christians. **To him God's great love was overwhelming. He didn't deserve the favour of God and neither do we.**

There are a number of things that will motivate you to consecrate your life to God. Paul sums them all up using the word 'mercy'

Romans 12:1,2

"Therefore, brothers and sisters, in view of the mercies of God, I urge you to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God; this is your true worship. Do not be conformed to this age, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may discern what is the good, pleasing and perfect will of a God."

In the book of Romans, he spends the first 11 chapters explaining what the "therefore" is 'there for'.

He explains that people are without excuse, God's wrath is revealed against godlessness, such people are totally depraved and go about approving of one another's godless behaviour, His law shows just how far people have strayed and their powerlessness to do anything about it. "All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God."

But there is hope;

there is a righteousness that does not depend on our own ability to do good, but comes by faith. God made a promise to Abraham that all nations would be blessed through his seed. Death came through Adam but now life comes through Christ. Through him we are no-longer slaves to sin but to righteousness.

Instead of being held captive by the law of sin and death we are set free by the new law; the "law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus". It is a law of grace, not of works.

The Spirit helps us in our weakness to put to death the misdeeds of the body that we may live a new life (Oh how we need to be filled with the Holy Spirit!) The fruit of the Spirit is evidence we are the children of God. "It is by their fruit you shall know them."

Not only this; God has not given up on Israel as we read in Chapters 9-11. He has permitted a temporary hardening of their hearts in order to allow time for the full number of gentiles to be saved.

Ephesians 4:1,17; 5:1

We find exactly the same pattern in Ephesians. The first 3 chapters set out the goodness and provision of God; chosen, adopted, redeemed by His blood, forgiven, sealed by the Spirit, enlightened, called, yet **we were** in bondage and by nature children under God's wrath.

The cross ended this hostility so that we now have free access as co-heirs with Christ and part of a new family.

Mindful of God's great mercy, what is your response?

Paul says, the proper response is to offer yourself as a living sacrifice. To consecrate your life to God.

When your understanding is awakened to the love and mercy of God, your heart is filled and overwhelmed with gratitude. You want to love Him in return. The very first act of love on my part is total surrender to His will.

There are some beautiful examples throughout scripture.

Eg

Abraham offered Isaac

Hannah dedicated Samuel

Total Surrender opens the door for God to do what He intended all along.

Whenever people consecrated their lives to God, His glory came. This should also be our motivation; that we can now glorify God. He can be made known to others through us, as we demonstrate to them the love we ourselves have received.

Elijah on Mount Carmel is one of my favourite accounts in scripture.

Ahab and his wicked wife Jezebel did much to corrupt Israel in the Northern Kingdom. Worshipping Baal and the fertility goddess Ashteroth, practices that were totally detestable to God.

God sends Elijah to confront Ahab and pronounce a famine over the land. A famine that lasted three years and would have continued had Israel failed to turn back to God. They were not a particularly responsive lot. They remained silent when Elijah challenged their idolatry.

1 Kings 18:20 onwards

I want to draw your attention to Elijah's posture. He spoke boldly with great authority challenging the people to choose who they would serve, however when it came to restoring the alter he had a **quiet reverence and humility before God**. As I read this account, I can almost picture everything fading into the background so far as Elijah is concerned. He draws the people in and shows them what is pleasing to God, the kind of sacrifice He accepts. **See V30-32, 36-38**. No big noise or show. Deliberate and meticulous restoration of a true alter to God. He makes an acceptable sacrifice and says a simple prayer.

Why was the prayer powerful and effective? Because of the humble obedience of this God honouring man.
Yet Elijah, the scriptures tell us, **“was a man *just like us*”**.

Point 1.

The first thing therefore I want to say about consecration is **it doesn't look for other people's approval**. It is a deliberate act in humble obedience to God and him alone.

It happens firstly, as **an act of worship between you and God**.

Baal worshippers created an awful lot of noise, but where was the power? The frenzied chanting, dancing, cutting and whatever else they did resulted in.....silence. Nothing happened.

We see the contrast between Baal worshippers and the quiet assured faith of Elijah which resulted in the roar of fire from heaven.

The fire fell, people turned back to God and the rains came down.

Point 2

It's all in.

Being a Christian is not like doing the hokey kokey!
“In out, in out, shake it all about.”

Or

Like the chicken who tells the pig he needs to give some bacon to go with the farmers bacon and eggs. **“It's okay for you the, pig says, you only have to lay a few eggs, but giving him bacon costs me a lot more than that!”**

Elijah said to the people:

“How long will you waver between two opinions?”

Who are you going to serve?

These days Christians are torn between so many false gods, they may not take the form of the hideous images they worshipped, but they are no less enticing and no less abhorrent to God.

The people thought they could worship these foreign gods and also worship the Lord.

But God is a jealous God and we too must choose.

Show video clip - John Bevere

Marriage proposal.

Would you marry someone like that?

Jesus is coming back soon to marry the church. He is coming to a spotless, pure virgin with an undivided heart. He does not want a people who have one foot in the world. **He is after your undivided love and affection.**

On this point I also want to mention the 'burnt offering'. I'm not talking about last night's supper!

Leviticus 1:3.

The very first sacrifice we are introduced to in Leviticus is the Burnt Offering. It had to be a perfect male animal from the herd or flock. It was offered in its entirety, all of it was consumed on the altar. It was a free will offering and spoke of commitment and complete surrender to God.

Paul had this offering in mind in **Romans 12:1,2**
Offer yourselves....completely to God, as a voluntary act of worship.
It involves placing everything on the altar.

Point 3. First things first.

Offering ourselves to God is your starting point.

Consider for a moment the tabernacle, the tent of meeting. This was made for a meeting place with God during the wilderness journey.

Exodus 40:

It was to be set up on the first day of the first month.

Meeting with God is not an after thought.

The very start of anything of worth has its beginning in God.

Paul speaks of those who gave generously, out of their own poverty, to the work of God. They gave themselves **firstly** to the Lord and through their love for God, to the needs of others.

2 Cor 8:3-5

*"I can testify that, according to their ability, and even beyond their ability, **of their own accord**, they begged us earnestly for **the privilege of sharing in the ministry** to the saints, and not just as we had hoped. Instead they gave themselves **first to the Lord** and then to us by God's will."*

When constructing the tabernacle, Moses asked the people to provide all that was necessary. Women weaved fine linen, people gave bronze, silver, gold and precious stones. They gave of their time and resources for the work of God.

Consecration includes your work, your skills, your learning, your money and all your possessions. It is not just something you sing about. It includes everything.

If you want to honour God in your workplace, start tithing, giving of the first fruits of your labour and start giving generously to others in need. This acknowledges that you actually believe, God has given you the work as an opportunity, to serve His purpose, for His glory. It puts to use resources he has provided for the purpose He intends. It is an act of faith and honours God.

If God hasn't got your wallet, don't tell me he has your heart!

Word for today - Wednesday 31 Jan
How much do you love Jesus?

In one of the most unique corporation take overs, Stanley Tam legally transferred 51% of the shares of his company to God.

He started the United States Plastic Corporation with 37 dollars in capital. When he gave the business back to God, annual revenues were less than 200,000 Dollars. But Stanley believed God would bless his business and wanted honour God from the very start.

At that point most of us would be patting ourselves on the back. Not Stanley. He felt convicted for keeping 49% to himself. After reading the parable of the merchant who sold everything to obtain the pearl of great price , he made a decision to divest himself of all of his shares. 'He said a man can only one meal at a time, wear only one suit of clothes at a time, drive only one car at a time. All this I have. Isn't that enough?'

So on January 1955, every share of stock was transferred to God, and Stanley became a salaried employee of the company he started.

Before he was through, Stanley gave away more than 120 million Dollars to the cause of Christ, look at your Callander and credit card statement. They don't lie.

How you spend your time and your money are the two best barometers of your true priorities.

Is Christ your pearl of great price? He wants to be. He deserves to be.

Point 4 - Your decision to consecrate your life to Him reveals the depth of your gratitude for all He has done for you.

When the prostitute washes Jesus feet with her tears and dries them with her hair. Jesus explains that those who are forgiven much, love much.

When you realise the debt paid on your behalf, so that you may have eternal life, you willingly and joyfully lay down your life for him.

Perhaps the biggest barrier to a fully consecrated life is fear.

Let's deal very briefly with that.

The reality is, there are some things we know and others we don't know. We tend to be afraid of the unknown, of uncertainty.

Let's face it, you don't know what's going to happen whether you choose God's will or not.

So are you going to play it safe?

I would argue, if you don't know the future, it's always safer to do God's will!

Paul said "And now I am on my way to Jerusalem, compelled by the Spirit, **not knowing** what I will encounter there, except that in every town the Holy Spirit warns me that chains and afflictions are waiting for me."

This isn't exactly the prosperity gospel!

Honour God and you will suffer persecution, all manner of hardship, prison and probably death! **Okay, sign me up!**

The truth is, we don't know what lies ahead in this life. We do however know what lies beyond this life and that's worth living and dying for!

Paul said "**none of these things move me**"

Worst case scenario - I die. He's run the numbers and does not account his life as of value to himself. It's only of value so far as it is of value to God.

This is what consecration is, complete surrender to the will of God.
"Thy will be done...."

It's not so much about living long, living wealthy or living comfortable but living well. Living for His honour and His glory.

Prayer of consecration

Father, I thank you for your patience, goodness and faithfulness towards me. For your love that has softened my heart again.

This is a new day; the first day of the rest of my life and I choose to live the rest of my days for you alone. To be consecrated to you.

Help me in my weakness, lead me not into temptation, but deliver me from evil.

I choose not to live for other people's approval, but for yours alone. I choose to give you everything, holding nothing back. I give you my body as a living sacrifice holy and acceptable to you.

I lay my life down that you might graciously use me to glorify your name.

In the name of our beautiful saviour; 'Jesus Christ' I pray. Amen.