

Series: Renewing Strength

Message: Because Life is Better Together – Acts 20:17-38

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September 8, 2019

Are you as excited about today being Day of Service as I am? It is amazing to know that over 1,600 of us are going to be serving Tulsa in the name and the love of Jesus Christ.

I used to take our youth group to serve the inner-city children and youth of Denver every summer. We would serve at a “sports” camp similar to Kanakuk called “The Sky’s the Limit”. It was an exciting opportunity for our youth to serve in this way. One of the things that I have taken away from that experience is something that the director would say at the end of “staff” meeting each morning. “Let’s go out there and be Jesus with tennis shoes and t-shirts on”. I loved it, and I still do. To me it helps us understand how we should go and serve, and more importantly...why! The apostle Paul was an excellent example of this...

If you are able let’s stand together in reverence of God’s Holy Word will you join me when we get to verse 35:

Paul Speaks to the Ephesian Elders

Acts 20:17-38

Now from Miletus he sent to Ephesus and called the elders of the church to come to him. And when they came to him, he said to them: "You yourselves know how I lived among you the whole time from the first day that I set foot in Asia, serving the Lord with all humility and with tears and with trials that happened to me through the plots of the Jews; how I did not shrink from declaring to you anything that was profitable, and teaching you in public and from house to house, testifying both to Jews and to Greeks of repentance toward God and of faith in our Lord Jesus Christ. And now, behold, I am going to Jerusalem, constrained by the Spirit, not knowing what will happen to me there, except that the Holy Spirit testifies to me in every city that 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. And now, behold, I know that none of you among whom I have gone about proclaiming the kingdom will see my face again. Therefore I testify to you this day that I am innocent of the blood of all of you, for I did not shrink from declaring to you the whole counsel of God. Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to care for the church of God, which he obtained with his own blood. I know that after my departure fierce wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; and from among your own selves will arise men speaking twisted things, to draw away the disciples after them. Therefore, be alert, remembering that for three years I did not cease night or day to admonish everyone with tears.

*And now I commend you to God and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up and to give you the inheritance among all those who are sanctified. I coveted no one's silver or gold or apparel. You yourselves know that these hands ministered to my necessities and to those who were with me. **35**In all things I have shown you that by working hard in this way we must help the weak and remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he himself said, 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.'" And when he had said these things, he knelt down and prayed with them all. And there was much weeping on the part of all; they embraced Paul and kissed him, being sorrowful most of all because of the word he had spoken, that they would not see his face again. And they accompanied him to the ship.*

I think this passage can be broken down into three main points:

1. **Paul’s Message (vv.17-21)**
2. **Paul’s Mission (vv. 22-27)**
3. **Our Ministry (vv. 28-35)**

1. Paul’s Message

Paul’s message was not only the fact that he shared the gospel, but the fact that the way he lived, proved the truth of the gospel. He was being Jesus in tennis shoes and a t-shirt, or sandals and a robe...you get the point.

These verses show us that Paul believed the gospel was the only hope for the world. So, he gave all he had. Paul looked to God and God sent him into the world because the gospel message always creates a gospel mission.

2. Paul's Mission

When Paul accepted God's mission for him, he dove in headfirst. He gave it all up to pursue God's mission for his life. Nothing else mattered. Even knowing he would be persecuted (much like he persecuted others) he pressed on towards the prize.

When we like Paul, dive head first into God's mission, and believe whole heartedly in God's message, then we can say the same thing as Paul did in verse 24, Paul says, "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."

I was on a mission trip in inner city Houston with a group of High School youth. We were serving breakfast at a church across the street from Herman park. There is a large homeless population that "lives" in Herman Park. One of the Sr. boys in our group was handing out plates and asking everyone how they were doing. As you might expect, he got quite a few mumbles, some weird looks and a few fines and ok's. One homeless man stopped, looked this young man in the eyes, put his hand on his shoulder and said with a smile, "I'm blessed, young man, how are you?" I don't know if it was the look in his eyes or the way he framed the question, but it cut our Sr. boy to the core. He actually responded that he was good and asked someone to take his place. He chewed on that question all day. Later that evening in share time, the boy recalled the story and broke down. He came from an affluent family, had everything he ever wanted...and more. And a man that carried all he owned in a Walmart sack could proclaim that he was blessed. The problem for the young man, was he didn't feel as confident in his relationship with God. This homeless man challenged this young man, whether he knew it or not and this young man's life was for ever changed. This homeless man lived out the words, it is more blessed to give than receive. He was Jesus in tennis shoes and a t-shirt.

3. Our Ministry

The third part of this passage focusses on the ministry that God has given us. We like Paul, need to watch out for God's children, making sure that they have everything they need. So how can we do this? By relying on the person of God and the Word of God because that's where our strength comes from. We as humans will come and go, but God remains forever. This is why Paul reminded them of Jesus' words, "It is more blessed to give than to receive." You won't see these words in the gospel writings, rather something Paul heard and attributes to Jesus, probably because Jesus lived out the truth of these words.

This is the ministry God has called us to: Serving and giving in fellowship with one another and in relationship with the community. We're here to help others follow Jesus because we believe He is the key to life—now and forever.

Paul was broken hearted to leave the people he had been working hard to serve. They were broken hearted to see him go. They were blessed by him and he was blessed by them. In the process of giving, we also receive.

A large part of us are going out to serve today. Go be Jesus with tennis shoes and t-shirts on!