

“THAT OLD TIME RELIGION”

“Leaving a Legacy”

Scripture Reading – Acts, 20:17-38

From Miletus, Paul sent to Ephesus for the elders of the church. When they arrived, he said to them: “You know how I lived the whole time I was with you, from the first day I came into the province of Asia. I served the Lord with great humility and with tears, although I was severely tested by the plots of the Jews. You know that I have not hesitated to preach anything that would be helpful to you but have taught you publicly and from house to house. I have declared to both Jews and Greeks that they must turn to God in repentance and have faith in our Lord Jesus.

“And now, compelled by the Spirit, I am going to Jerusalem, not knowing what will happen to me there. I only know that in every city the Holy Spirit warns me that prison and hardships are facing me. However, I consider my life worth nothing to me, if only I may finish the race and complete the task the Lord Jesus has given me – the task of testifying to the gospel of God’s grace.

“Now I know that none of you among whom I have gone about preaching the kingdom will ever see me again. Therefore, I declare to you today that I am innocent of the blood of all men. For I have not hesitated to proclaim to you the whole will of God. Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers. Be shepherds of the church of God, which he bought with his own blood. I know that after I leave, savage wolves will come in among you and will not spare the flock. Even from your own number men will arise and distort the truth in order to draw away disciples after them. So be on your guard! Remember that for three years I never stopped warning each of you night and day with tears.

“Now I commit you to God and to the word of his grace, which can build you up and give you an inheritance among all those who are sanctified. I have not coveted anyone’s silver or gold or clothing. You yourselves know that these hands of mine have supplied my own needs and the needs of my companions. In everything I did, I showed you that by this kind of hard work we must help the weak, remembering the words the Lord Jesus himself said: ‘It is more blessed to give than to receive’.”

When he had said this, he knelt down with all of them and prayed. They all wept as they embraced him and kissed him. What grieved them most was his statement that they would never see his face again. Then they accompanied him to the ship.

‘But whatever was to my profit I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. What is more, I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish, that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a

righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ – the righteousness that comes from God and is by faith.’

Philippians, 3:7-9, NIV

This series, based on THE BOOK OF ACTS, is entitled ‘THAT OLD TIME RELIGION’.

The reason I want to call this series ‘THAT OLD TIME RELIGION’ is that we need to look back in order that we might really look to the future. The OLD TIME RELIGION needs to become the NEW TIME RELIGION because it is the ALL TIME RELIGION. If we get back to the basics of life in the Christian Church, we might better understand what the Holy Spirit can do through us today.

THE BOOK OF ACTS is the story of success; the story of a church triumphant.

It is the story of a small group of uncultured and generally unlearned people with meagre resources – very little money, no prestige, and no church buildings. This small group of people went out to tell the story of a publicly executed Jew. They went out against three obstacles – the imperial might of the Romans, the intellectual sophistication of the Greeks, and the religious bigotry of the Jews. They turned the world inside out and upside down for Jesus Christ.

The Acts of the Apostles is the story of a church on fire with evangelism and growth...

“LEAVING A LEGACY”

A few years ago, Elizabeth and I left a legacy at Disney’s Epcot Park.

Throughout history, people have marked important events by dedicating something meaningful to them. To celebrate the Millennium 2000, Disney created an opportunity for those who wished to have a picture of themselves displayed within the landscaping at the entrance to the park. In front of the fabulous SPACESHIP EARTH attraction, Disney Imagineering erected 35 huge monoliths of granite ranging from 3 to 19 feet high. The heaviest weighs more than 50,000 pounds. The monoliths have space for more than 750,000 of the one inch pictures.

If you want to ‘LEAVE A LEGACY’, it is not free – it will cost you about \$50.

A Disney employee takes your photograph using a digital camera, and the negative image is etched on to a huge sheet of metal usually within 48 hours. When each sheet is filled, they are bolted securely on to a monolith. Through the post you get a souvenir picture and information on how to access your picture via the internet.

What kind of legacy are you leaving behind?

When you leave the Malton Corps to go to some other place, or leave Earth to go to Heaven, how are you going to be missed? Will your life have made any real difference? Yes, I know that there will be those who will say nice things about you at your funeral – and some of it may be accurate, but what else will you be leaving behind? Is your life going to have had any real impact and significance?

I heard of a man who went into hospital and had surgery.

When he awoke in the recovery room, he noticed that all the window blinds and curtains were closed. He got himself all agitated so he cried out for the nurse to come. He wanted to know

who had closed the blinds. The nurse told the patient that she had closed them because there was a fire across the street and she did not want him to wake up and think the operation was not a success.

I hope that we do not wake up and find that our life was not a success.

The world measures success by brains, by brawn, or by bucks! However, God uses a different measurement. Many of those who were a success on earth will find that their success meant nothing at all to God. Those who are simple, weak, and poor may wake up in heaven one day to find that their whole life was a success because God has different priorities.

Michael Letitio's claim to fame is because he eats glass and metal.

Whenever he eats food, he grinds up something to eat with it. Since 1966, this peculiar Frenchman has eaten, amongst other things, ten bicycles, a supermarket trolley, and six chandeliers. His greatest claim to fame was when he finished eating a Cessna light aircraft! Can you imagine the conversation in heaven when God asks him what he did on earth and he replies, "Lord, I once ate an aeroplane"!

When Paul meets with the Ephesian elders in Miletus, it is an affectionate event.

They talk about all the good times they have shared together and how God has poured out his blessing upon them and the Church in Ephesus. They had been together through so many experiences that they were one in the bonds of Christian love and fellowship. It is not possible to make a neat analysis of a farewell speech which is so charged with emotion as this. Through all this scene runs the dominant feeling of an affection that is as deep as the heart itself. That feeling should be in every church – for when love dies in any church the work of Christ itself cannot do other than wither and die.

There is such a sweet spirit as their hearts melt together whilst on their knees in prayer.

It is then that the truth hits home. They all realise that this will be their last meeting together on earth with Paul, and they begin to weep. Paul is about to leave, and they are absolutely heartbroken about the fact that they will never meet again like this until they all get to heaven.

But Paul has left behind a beautiful legacy with these Church elders. A legacy that we would do well to learn from...

1. THE MANNER OF YOUR LIFE

'When they arrived, Paul said to them: "You know how I lived the whole time I was with you, from the first day I came into the province of Asia. I served the Lord with great humility and with tears, although I was severely tested by the plots of the Jews".'

Acts, 20:18-19, NIV

Paul boldly proclaimed: 'I SERVED THE LORD WITH GREAT HUMILITY'.

The Greek word for 'SERVED' is 'DOULEUO' and literally means 'TO BE A SLAVE TO'. It is not just a person who serves for the moment – this is a permanent condition in life. It is not simply being

a servant – because a servant is paid; it is being a slave – someone who is owned by another. A bond slave had no personal possessions and no personal rights. That means that if it pleased his master then the bond slave would die for him.

What was the manner, the characteristics, of Paul's life?

PAUL SERVED THE LORD WITH HUMILITY

There cannot be true greatness without true humility.

Humility is not about degrading yourself. Humility is not about putting yourself down. It is not saying that you are no good because that is plainly not true. The Bible shows us that Jesus paid too great a price for anyone to say that they are no good. If you are saved, then you are a child of God. He has made you into a heavenly prince. More than that, Jesus is not ashamed to call you his brother and sister. In a very real sense, we are next of kin to the Holy Trinity.

Those who have humility have the qualities of being modest and respectful.

Those who have true humility have made an honest and accurate estimation of themselves. It is characterised by meekness. If you have an unassuming nature, then you understand humility. I wonder if anyone has a life that is worth living. I wonder if anyone has a life that can be truly called a great life.

Those clothed with humility have the hallmark of service.

When God measures a man's life, he does not count how many servants the man has, but how many the man has served. One of the great sadness in Church life is that there are those who attend church to soak as opposed to serve. If you are truly to live a life of service with humility then you must find a place for service either within the church or in the community.

PAUL SERVED THE LORD WITH HEARTACHE

The apostle Paul was a compassionate man, who served with tears.

He knew how to weep. He knew how to enter into people's sorrows, and share in their hurts. Those who live for self, and for self alone, insulating themselves from the cares, toils, and problems of this world are not going to be missed by many people. But you show me a person who knows how to sympathise, a person who knows how to emphasise, a person who embodies the compassion of the Lord Jesus in his heart and life, and I will show you someone who will leave behind a lasting legacy. He will be sorely missed.

Do the things that break the heart of Jesus also break your heart?

Do you know how to weep? When was the last time you shed a tear over some soul that is mortgaged to the devil? Now, I know that there are some people who always seem to be weeping. Unfortunately, many of them are crying solely because of themselves. They cry because they hurt – not because of those who are hurting in the world. They cry because they are sad – but they are not sad because of the ills of the world.

The Bible tells us that Jeremiah was a man of tears. The Bible tells us that Jesus was a man of tears. The Bible tells us that Paul was a man of tears – and, therefore, we should surely be people of tears!

PAUL SERVED THE LORD WITH HARDSHIP

The apostle Paul underwent hardship and was severely tested.

There were people who were diametrically opposed to Paul. There were people Paul had to face who physically harmed him because of the stand he was willing to take for Jesus Christ. The truth is that there is no way that you can have a life that will count and make an impression on this world without making some enemies along the way. Unless you are willing to allow hardship into your life you will never leave behind a lasting legacy.

‘The way of the believer is not an easy road; being a Christian does not solve or remove all problems. Paul served humbly and ‘with tears’, but he never quit, never gave up. The message of salvation was so important that he never missed an opportunity to share it. And although he preached his message in different ways to fit different audiences, the message remained the same: Turn away from sin and turn to Christ by faith. The Christian life will have its rough times, its tears, and its sorrows, as well as its joys, but we should always be ready to tell others what good things God has done for us. His blessings far outweigh life’s difficulties.’

“LIFE APPLICATION BIBLE”, Study Notes

The reality is that all this flies in the face of the world’s thinking.

If you ask anyone in the world of business, or the world of education, or the world of finance, or the world of politics, or the world of sports, etc, you will not be surprised that they will not agree to any of this – but remember that the Lord looks at different things than what the world does.

If you want to have a truly great life, leaving behind a lasting legacy, you must recognise that such a life is filled with humility, heartache, and hardship.

2. THE MESSAGE OF YOUR LIFE

Every one of us will be known for something when we are gone.

They will surely think about us. But what will come to their minds about us? The one thing that I would like people to think about me is that ‘HE KNEW HOW TO CORRECTLY HANDLE THE WORD OF GOD’. If you come to the conclusion that my life was centred in the Scriptures and the Gospel of Jesus Christ, I will be more than happy with that assessment.

If we are to truly leave a legacy, we must be assured about what we say and what we do...

THE CONTENT OF PAUL’S MESSAGE

“You know that I have not hesitated to preach anything that would be helpful to you but have taught you publicly and from house to house. I have

declared to both Jews and Greeks that they must turn to God in repentance and have faith in our Lord Jesus.”

Acts, 20:20-21, NIV

Paul was known primarily as a preacher of the Gospel.

The message that encapsulates his life was repentance towards God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ. It was a narrow message. He did not stutter. He did not stammer. He did not equivocate. He simply kept on preaching this simple message.

THE CONVICTION OF PAUL’S MESSAGE

“And now, compelled by the Spirit, I am going to Jerusalem, not knowing what will happen to me there. I only know that in every city the Holy Spirit warns me that prison and hardships are facing me.”

Acts, 20:22-23, NIV

Notice what Paul is really saying in this verse: “I AM GOING BACK TO JERUSALEM. THE SPIRIT OF GOD WANTS ME TO GO. I HAVE NO IDEA WHAT WILL HAPPEN TO ME THERE. I ONLY KNOW THIS IS WHERE I HAVE TO GO AND HARDSHIPS WILL BE AWAITING ME THERE”.

The Holy Spirit showed Paul that he would be imprisoned and experience suffering. Even knowing this, Paul did not shrink from fulfilling his mission. His strong character was a good example to the Ephesian elders, some of whom would also suffer for Christ.

The question for you is: Knowing what lay ahead, would you have stepped into the boat?

‘However, I consider my life worth nothing to me, if only I may finish the race and complete the task the Lord Jesus has given me – the task of testifying to the gospel of God’s grace.’

Acts, 20:24, NIV

Do you know what is wrong with the average Christian?

He has opinions but not convictions. Paul had both, and his convictions always won through. He knew something of what lay ahead, but Paul would rather die with a conviction that to live with a compromise. What about you? Many of us would rather live with a compromise than to die with a conviction. You can understand how Paul was the way he was!

THE CONFIDENCE OF PAUL’S MESSAGE

“Now I know that none of you among whom I have gone about preaching the kingdom will ever see me again. Therefore, I declare to you today that I am innocent of the blood of all men.”

Acts, 20:25, NIV

What did Paul mean when he said: ‘I AM INNOCENT OF THE BLOOD OF ALL MEN’?

Paul is talking about soul-winning. If we do not tell our families, our friends, our neighbours, our brothers and sisters about the Lord Jesus Christ and they die and go to

hell, their blood will be on our hands. He knew that before long he was going to meet with the Lord. He knew he was pure; he was going to face the Lord with bloodless hands.

Let me illustrate: *If you had the cure for cancer and would only keep that information for use by yourself in case you got cancer, then you would be guilty of not only keeping a dying and suffering multitude in the dark, you would also have their blood on your hands.*

If you want to have a truly great life, leaving behind a lasting legacy, you must recognise that your message must be filled with the right content, conviction and confidence.

3. THE MOTTO FOR YOUR LIFE

“I have not coveted anyone’s silver or gold or clothing. You yourselves know that these hands of mine have supplied my own needs and the needs of my companions. In everything I did, I showed you that by this kind of hard work we must help the weak, remembering the words the Lord Jesus himself said: ‘It is more blessed to give than to receive’.”

Acts, 20:33-35, NIV

Every man has a motto for his life.

Maybe he has sat down and put it on to paper, maybe he has not. Nonetheless, there is something that motivates him, there is something that drives him, there is something that constrains him.

Paul was a great man because he spent his life as a giver rather than a receiver.

Jesus himself said: **‘IT IS MORE BLESSED TO GIVE THAN TO RECEIVE’**. People in life are generally divided into two categories: there are the givers and there are the takers. The takers eat better, but the givers sleep better. What you have spent has gone forever. What you have not spent will be left for others when you die. What you have given away will be awaiting you in heaven. Only that which you have given away will be yours forever!

PAUL’S MOTTO FREED HIM FROM COVETOUSNESS

Paul said: ‘I HAVE NOT COVETED ANYONE’S SILVER OR GOLD OR CLOTHING’.

Paul was satisfied with whatever he had, wherever he was, so long as he could do God’s work. Examine your attitudes toward wealth and comfort. If you focus more on what you don’t have than on what you do have, then it is time to re-examine your priorities and put God’s work back in first place.

One of the Ten Commandments is: ‘THOU SHALT NOT COVET’.

To ‘COVET’ is ‘TO WISH TO HAVE THE POSSESSIONS OF OTHERS’.

It goes beyond simply admiring someone else’s possessions or thinking: “I would like to have one of those”. Coveting includes envy – resenting the fact that others have what you do not have. God knows, however, that possessions never make anyone happy for long. Since only God can supply all our needs, true contentment is found only in him.

When you begin to covet, try to determine if a more basic need is leading you to envy. For example, you may covet someone’s success, not because you want to take it away from him, but because you would like to feel as appreciated by others as he is. If this is the case, pray that God will help you deal with your resentment and meet your basic needs.

PAUL’S MOTTO FREED HIM FROM IDLENESS

‘THESE HANDS OF MINE HAVE SUPPLIED MY OWN NEEDS AND THE NEEDS OF MY COMPANIONS.’

The Bible says that if a man will not work then neither should he eat. But there are some people who cannot work and those of us who can work need to do so in order to help those who are weak. Paul worked in order to meet his own needs, and the needs of others.

During World War II, the Nazis accused all the Jews in a Polish village of crimes against the state. They collected together all the Jews and marched them to a field, where they made them dig a ditch that would later become their graves. The Jews were stripped of all their clothing, lined up against a wall, and shot. Bullet after bullet flew into masses of quivering flesh, and the people fell head over heels into the mass grave.

One little ten year old boy was standing next to his mother and father, and as they fell, he fell with them. However, not one bullet had touched him. Because the boy was splattered and covered with blood, the Nazis assumed he was dead. He kept really still as the dirt was pushed over the bodies and the little boy was buried alive. His face was in such a position that he caught a pocket of air and was able to breathe. He lay for several hours on the mutilated bodies of his loved ones.

Eventually, the young boy started to dig his way out of his own grave. He was naked, clotted with blood and covered with dirt as he came to the surface in pitch darkness. He went to the house of a neighbour and knocked on the door. A woman answered and at once recognised him as one of the Jewish boys who had been marked for death. She screamed for him to go away and slammed the door in his face. The little boy knocked on another door and begged for help, but he was again told to leave.

At the third door, a woman answered, and, when she saw the little boy her face froze in horror. But before she could say anything to him, he said to her, “Do you not recognise me? I am the Jesus that you say you love”. At that she broke down and crying allowed this little Jewish boy into her home. At great personal risk, she sheltered the boy throughout his childhood.

Jesus said: **“IT IS MORE BLESSED TO GIVE THAN TO RECEIVE ... IN AS MUCH AS YOU HAVE DONE IT UNTO THE LEAST OF THESE MY BROTHERS, YOU HAVE DONE IT UNTO ME”.**

If you want to have a truly great life, leaving behind a lasting legacy, you must recognise that your motto must free you from covetousness and idleness.

‘I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, and so, somehow, to attain to the resurrection from the dead.’
(Philippians, 2:10, NIV)