

HOW DO YOU WANT TO BE REMEMBERED?

Chapel Sermon
Mount Vernon Nazarene University
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Acts 27:25; Acts 23:11
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INTRODUCTION

A. Assuming you have approximately fifty years left to live, when you come to the end of those fifty years, and you have nothing but death to look forward to and nothing but memories to look back upon, what will you need to see in order for you to come to the conclusion: "My life was a success?"

1. How do you want to be remembered? Students? Staff? Faculty? I have asked myself this question in recent months. I have concluded that, whether at death's door or next week when I conclude my ministry at MVNU, I want to be remembered as a person of intense faith and resolute courage. Let me explain...

a. Over and over again, during the past few weeks, I have been singing the chorus, *In His Time*.

In His time,

In His time,

He makes all things beautiful, In His time.

Lord, please show me every day,

As your teaching me your way,

That you do just what you say, In Your time.

b. The chorus and its meaning has shaped me fundamentally for over 30 years.

c. The underlying theme of chorus is this: God is faithful to His word of guidance, direction or vision to you and me regarding our future.

B. The chorus reminds me of a profound verse in the book of Acts; one of my life verses. The verse is Acts 27:25 (read).

1. If this verse could serve as one bookend of my "life" sermon, then the other text and bookend would be a rather obscure verse several chapters earlier in Acts 23:11 (read).

2. To really appreciate these "bookend texts," let me provide some context to these very meaningful verses and why they have been life changing for me.

C. The context is fascinating.

1. In Acts 20-23, Paul is concluding his third missionary journey.

a. He had taken a collection for the Jerusalem church throughout Asia.

1) He felt compelled to return to Jerusalem in person to give the money to the congregation.

2) He wanted to bridge some misunderstandings between Jews and Gentiles.

b. Knowing that he would not see his Christian friends again, Paul, on his way to Jerusalem, visited with Christians from Ephesus, Tyre, and Caesarea.

c. Then, in spite of warnings from them, he traveled on to Jerusalem.

d. In Jerusalem, as predicted, he was arrested.

- 1) He had gone to the temple for worship,
 - 2) and a riot began.
 - 3) He was taken before the Sanhedrin where he gave a beautiful defense of his faith.
 - 4) The following night, God gave a vision to Paul; “You have testified before the Sanhedrin here in Jerusalem, you will also testify about me in Rome” (Acts 23:11).
 - 5) I can imagine Paul saying, “Great! God will get me out of this mess!”
2. However, following the word of God spoken to Paul,
 - a. There was a plot against him.
 - b. He was transferred to Caesarea,
 - c. And was placed on trial before Felix (governor) and later Festus.
 - 1) Paul remained in prison for 2 years.
 - 2) He appeared before King Agrippa.
 3. Finally, Paul was sent to Rome for trial.
 - a. On the way to Rome, he experienced the typhoon
 - b. and the shipwreck mentioned in our text.

D. But, Paul finally arrived in Rome.

Transition: Defining life convictions from this drama filled story of Paul have gripped me during the past few years. I want you to know these “life convictions” and understand why I desire deeply to be remembered as a person of intense faith and resolute courage.

I. WHEN GOD SPEAKS a word of direction or vision to us individually, our family, local congregation, or a Christian university, DELAYS MAY OCCUR.

- A. In Jerusalem, God told Paul that he would go to Rome.
 1. He did not tell Paul when he would go, or how he would go, or how long the journey would take.
 2. In other words, when God speaks a word to us, He does not always tell us when or how He will accomplish His word.
 - a. Delays may occur. And, I don’t like delays, especially when I believe God has given me a vision or direction for His assignment for me. What about you?
 - b. Progress, at times, may not seem as evident in our lives and work as we desire.
 3. When this happens, can I, you, we like Paul, hold firm to the conviction that God has spoken; and that IN HIS TIME, what he has promised, he will fulfill?
- B. As I reflect on my spiritual journey, I have come to see that when God speaks a word of direction or vision to me regarding next steps, delays may occur.

II. WHEN GOD SPEAKS ...SUFFERING AND HARDSHIP MAY RESULT.

- A. Paul's experience also reminds me that when God speaks a definite word to you or me, suffering and hardship may result!
1. For Paul, there was a plot to kill him.
 2. He became a prisoner. (Chapter 23)
 3. In addition:
 - a. He was manipulated,
 - b. and insulted. (Chapters 24 & 26)
 - c. He encountered a typhoon,
 - d. and experienced a shipwreck. (Chapter 27)
 4. Hopefully, the suffering and hardships you or I experience are not as dramatic as Paul's.
- B. Our pain may include dangerous situations, and physical harm or verbal abuse.
1. More often, I have come to see, our suffering occurs when good and godly people differ and sometimes collide with us over vision and values – what we believe should be done, and how it should be done.
 2. And we experience intense pain and deep sorrow.
- C. In these times can you and I, with Paul, convictionally believe that,
- In His time, In His time,
 He makes all things beautiful in His time.
 Lord please show me every day, as you're teaching me your way,
 That you do just what you say, in your time.*
- D. When God speaks, delays may occur and sufferings or hardships may result.

III. WHEN GOD SPEAKS... LOOK AHEAD, DON'T LOOK BACK!

- A. God had spoken to Paul, but what was he to think about the vision during the suffering and hardship of the prison experience?
1. Paul no doubt remembered the warnings of his friends.
 - a. Chapter 21:4, says, "Through the spirit, they (his friends) urged him not to go."
 - b. The same chapter, verse 12, says, "They pleaded with him not to go to Jerusalem.
 - c. He could have said, "why did I not listen to my friends?" (or family?)
 2. He could have questioned his own judgment.
 - a. In chapter 26:32 King Agrippa states, "This man could have been set free if he had not appealed to Caesar.
 - b. Paul could have asked himself, "DID I MAKE A MISTAKE?"
 - It is not unusual for me to think like this.
 - I well remember my first night in Manila, where I moved to serve as president of the Asia Pacific Nazarene Theological Seminary. I asked the question over and over throughout the night, "Did I make a mistake?"
 - I was alone on that first night, tired, and weary. All I saw was poverty and a few resources. And I was a long way from family and friends. "Did I make a mistake?"

- Profound insights about God emerged within me, however, during those years of ministry in the Philippines... and during these 18 years at MVNU.
 - I have often been tempted to “whip” myself with these questions: Why did I say this ... or that? Why did I respond this way and not that way?
- B. Paul clearly understood God’s faithfulness. He didn’t doubt God; he wasn’t misled by others, nor did he waver in his conviction.
1. There was no “second guessing” in this phenomenal story.
 2. No “pity-parties” along the way.
 3. Even the typhoon and shipwreck did not shake his conviction,
 - a. Because his faith was grounded in the faithfulness of God.
 - b. “So keep up the courage, men, I have faith in God that it will happen just as He told me.” (27:25 text)
 4. Did you hear those words? Intense faith. Resolute courage. I desire deeply that these words will also be my epitaph.
- C. When God speaks ... delays may occur. When God speaks ... suffering or hardship may result. When God speaks ... push ahead, don’t look back.

IV. WHEN GOD SPEAKS... BELIEVE HIM, REGARDLESS OF THE COST.

- A. Look again with me at the situation in Acts 27 when Paul spoke the words of our text.
1. He was on his way by ship to Rome from Jerusalem.
 - a. Paul and his shipmates encountered a typhoon, and
 - b. were about to experience a shipwreck.
 2. He remembered the vision God had given earlier to him. (Acts 23:11)
 3. Then Paul spoke our text, “Take courage, men, for I have faith in God that it will happen just as He told me.” But ... In HIS time!
- B. Paul had intense faith and resolute courage, even when it appeared that God was silent. Especially during the long hours and challenging situations—Paul has taught me to sing,
- Great is thy faithfulness, O God my Father,
There is no shadow of turning with Thee,
Thou changest not; Thy compassions they fail not.
As Thou hast been Thou forever wilt be.*
1. Even when I believe I have a vision or direction from the Lord, and delays, suffering and hardships are experienced, I have grown and matured in my faith and in my courage.
 - a. In the good days, and in the not so good days, especially when I am tempted to be discouraged,
 - b. By Gods’ grace I can choose to believe and stand firm in my conviction that God is faithful to His word of direction to us. In His time.

Let me conclude:

- A. The last chapter of Acts (28) tells us that God kept His word to Paul.

He arrived in Rome.

1. Was everything okay once he arrived?
 - a. NO! Paul was placed (again) in prison!
 - b. But Paul didn't complain. Rather, in prison, he boldly taught and encouraged those with whom he came in contact..
 2. And, he wrote the Prison Epistles—Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, Philemon.
 - a. Paul used the situation wherein God placed him to minister to others.
 - b. He “bloomed” where he was planted—not complaining to God, nor wishing he had what some others had, dreaming he was somewhere else or had a different set of circumstances.
 - c. What a life lesson!
- B. Wherever God leads you and me, He will be there with us! And He will use us in ways we cannot imagine or even realize in this life.
1. I want like to be considered as a good administrator. I am grateful for progress that has been made in academic programs, property expansion and enrollment development. So very grateful.
 2. These accomplishments pale in comparison, however, to my passionate desire over the years to lead Christianly an academic community of faith, committed to shaping Christlike leaders for lifelong service and global impact.
 3. God, by His mercy and grace, has enabled me to see that to lead the university with the mind of Christ, I must have intense faith and resolute courage. For these two qualities, I have earnestly prayed over the years. This is how I want to be remembered.
 - a. God does not play games with us—to see if we will trust Him, only to leave us by ourselves when we stake our lives through radical trust in Him.
 - b. Rather He takes the offerings of ourselves and does with us so much more than we ever dreamed possible.
- C. Back to my opening question: Assuming you had approximately fifty years left to live, when you came to the end of those fifty years, and you have nothing but death to look forward to and nothing but memories to look back upon, what will you need to see in order for you to come to the conclusion: “My life was a success?”
- D. I challenge you to prayerfully consider the words of my text as you ponder your response. Take courage, my friends, have faith in God that He will do exactly what He has said He would do ... in your life – your family, your local church and at MVNU ... In His time. In His time! Amen.