

GLENWOOD COMMUNITY CHURCH

September 6, 2020

The Life Worth Living  
*Acts 19; 20:17-38*  
Pastor Paul A. Jackson

[music: "O Lord, My Rock and My Redeemer"]

*Pastor Nathan:*

Good morning. Welcome. It's really good to be here with you, gathered in person to worship the God of the Bible. To those of you who are joining us online, thanks for being a part of this gathering even from afar.

This fall we have a number of discipleship opportunities I want to highlight for us this morning; you've heard about them if you've been listening the last couple weeks. This Tuesday and Wednesday, our young adult groups are going to be gathered here in this room, and then they're going to disperse into groups of five throughout the month. Our youth ministry is kicking off.

Starting next week we have women's Bible study. They're doing a Jen Wilkin's study on the book of Hebrews. It's going to be really good. Not a woman, I'm not going to be there, but I wish I could be there. You can find more about that online, I'll have a place we can look for all these opportunities, it's [glenwoodcc.org/discipleship](http://glenwoodcc.org/discipleship).

We have life groups that are kicking off this month. We'll have some that are all Zoom, some that are a mix of Zoom and in person, there's even a group that's focused just on people who are newer to Glenwood. If that's you, this is a great place to check it out.

We also have a new kind of group called a discipleship group. These are groups of two to five people, and they'll be focused on community, engaging God's word, and growing together this fall and this year. Check out [glenwoodcc.org/discipleship](http://glenwoodcc.org/discipleship) for more on each of these opportunities.

Something else I was to share with you this morning is our two outreach opportunities for our church. The first is local; it's right here in Vancouver with Fish Food Bank. Fish is located in downtown Vancouver, and they serve the community by serving emergency food to families and individuals in need. Most of you, or many of us, I think, know James Fitzgerald. He's the executive director down at Fish and he's told us that they could use volunteers. This is just such a great opportunity to serve pressing needs in the community and demonstrate the love of Christ. If you'd like to know more about that opportunity you can go to our website, [glenwoodcc.org/fish](http://glenwoodcc.org/fish). That's easy to remember.

The second outreach opportunity is an annual ministry of our church that starts right here in Vancouver, but then it makes its way around the world through Operation Christmas Child. This fall we want to invite you to fill a shoebox, or fill ten shoeboxes, with playful and practical gifts for little children around the world. These boxes are really a doorway; they're an opportunity to, in a really tangible way, demonstrate the compassion and the love of Jesus Christ. Right? And so with Operation Christmas child, part of what they do is something called the Greatest Journey, and the kids who receive these boxes are invited to participate in this discipleship program where they can come to know Jesus and get connected to a local church. On October 18th and 25th, these are the days that we'll be having the boxes for you to pick up here. If you can't come here to get a box you can still participate; you can go online to their website and build a box. You can find out more information about Operation Christmas Child by going on our website - it's a good place to stay up-to-date with with it - and you can do that by going to [glenwoodcc.org/occ](http://glenwoodcc.org/occ). We're getting really good at these extensions for the website. With that, let's pray together. Father, You are so good, and it is good to gather here together as Your people with gratitude and joy. Father, we know that no matter what is going on around us, and no matter what is going on inside of us, You have

given each one of us hope. It's a sure hope to cling to in the face of chaos, in the face of injustice. And Father, we know the hope that we have for the future doesn't just bring comfort. It directs us and guides us in this world. You sent Your Son that we might live. And Father, now we know that You send us into this world so that others might live. Your Gospel is our hope for the future, and it's our purpose right now. Father, we ask that You would bring comfort and strength to our tired souls. We ask that this morning You would rekindle our awe at the beauty of the love that You've shown, at the sacrifice of our King, and at the power of Your Spirit to transform us into His image. Help us today to take our eyes off ourselves to look once again at the majesty of our crucified resurrected and ascended Lord, that we might rise again from the this place, from our homes, wherever we're at today, to bring the light of the Gospel, the goodness of God, Your goodness and the power of Your Spirit to a world that is in desperate need. Father, we ask these things in the name of our King Jesus Christ. Amen.

*Ben Rico:*

Amen. Would you stand with us as we praise the Lord for giving us such a solid foundation to stand on even in this world, even in this place in time, the foundation of Christ, His name Jesus. As we've been walking through Acts together, we've enjoyed being challenged to be active in sharing the Good News of the Gospel with others, and we've been challenged to become more aware of our reliance on the Holy Spirit as He gives us strength and brings us comfort on that road. Let us sing together to worship the name of Jesus.

[music: "The Church's One Foundation"]

Amen. Heavenly Father, help us to look to You so that we might see the church victorious. Help us to see Jesus as we look to the Enabler and the Perfecter and Founder of our faith. We praise You that You have brought us into an understanding of Your kingship over this world, and we pray that we would submit to you as the King in our lives as we confess our sin. As we look at our lives compared to Your

holiness, let us see Christ and His victory over our sin, over the sin and death in the world, and help us to live in Your reality of Your Kingship over this earth. We submit to You, and we praise You, and we hope that we will see Your kingdom because we hope in Christ.

Let us sing together.

[music: "King of Heaven"]

Amen, we want to see it. Please be seated.

*Pastor Paul:*

Thank you, Ben and Dianne, for leading us this morning.

If you take your Bibles and open to the book of Acts, Acts 20, we're going to look at verses 16-38. But Acts 20 opens with words that feel a little ominous. In Acts 20:1, the opening phrase, "*After the uproar had ceased...*" Just another day in the life of the apostle Paul. "*After the uproar had ceased.*" The city in Ephesus had been paralyzed by angry people and mob violence and false accusations against Paul and his ministry team, and they were dragged before civil authorities. The civil authorities had to intervene. The city clerk addressed these accusations against the apostle Paul and then resolved the mob and released Paul and his ministry team. And it's after this uproar had ceased in Ephesus that the apostle and his team--they meet with the believers in Ephesus, and they equip them, and they teach them, and they strengthen them, and then they say goodbye to the believers in Ephesus. And then they head their way into Greece. They head their way into Greece; they travel through Macedonia, and they collect an offering for the church in Jerusalem, the saints in Jerusalem. And so now Paul wants to turn with his ministry team in Acts 20, he wants to head to Jerusalem. We know the rest of the story. We know that as he turns to head to Jerusalem it's his last trip back to the city.

And it's in Acts 20 as he's headed back toward Jerusalem that he wants to meet with the leaders from the church at Ephesus, but he doesn't want to take the time to go to the city. And so instead he calls for the elders, the overseers, the leaders at the church in Ephesus, to meet him in a seaside town called Miletus. And it's there that the apostle Paul addressed the leaders. He tells them, he reminds them of his history, he looks back. He reminds them of what he was like and what he said and what he did and what he valued. He challenges them in the present tense, and then he looks forward to the future. It's one of those really significant moments in the life of the apostle Paul where we see what it's like to really live. Thank God for the life He gives, because the life that God gives to us in and through Christ is the only life worth living.

There's some moments in life where we can feel how big the moment is, the magnitude of it. My kids emerged into adulthood. Nancy and I invited my family and my brother's family to go on one of our favorite shared memory backpacking trips. We took our kids down and to Havasupai Canyon, which is this spectacular tributary of the Grand Canyon. And so the trip down was just a blast. It was a lot of fun. We went down and we enjoyed a week on Havasupai Creek and just enjoyed family. But the whole week I'm looking up at the rim of this mountain, this cliff. I'm thinking, "Okay, Paul, you got it to do." And then my brother tempted me; he came over and he whispered that he checked out the price of a helicopter. And I'm thinking, "No way, we can't do that. We would never live it down." So we start the hike back out, and we hit the rim, and there's switchbacks all the way up to the top. And my adult children were scampering up the mountain like they were mountain goats, and they're looking back at dad like, "Whoa, is he going to make it? Is he alright?" And it was there that I stopped and I thought, "Wow. I am truly between what once was and what will be." I once was the one who looked back to make sure you guys were all with me still, right? And now they're looking back wondering if I'm okay. I look up and I see this switchback going all the way up to the rim. I feel the weight of my pack, the burn in my quads. I look back from whence I came, and I can see my life. I see the history. I can see the grace of God and the goodness of God in doing what only God can do for those who really live a life that He gives.

And that's what we find in the life of the apostle Paul as he engages the leaders. It's a very poignant moment. In some ways it's intense. It opens with tears and it closes with tears. Paul cries, the elders cry, everybody cries. The passage the story opens with--what Paul knows about his life and his history, what they know of the apostle, of the life that he really lived, of all the time that he spent with them, twenty-four seven, day and night for three years, he ministered Christ to them, he went in public, he went in private, he spoke to groups, he spoke to individuals and to families. And the entire time, the entire three year period he invested in the lives of these other people. And then he looks forward and he sees the hardship. He doesn't know the details, but he knows it's going to start to get ugly, and there's going to be resistance. And then he warns the leaders at the church of Ephesus, "you're going to experience resistance and hardship." I mean, it doesn't look like the easiest life, but it is real life, and it is the life that God offers to those who follow Him in and through faith in Jesus Christ. And it is the blessed life in the fullest sense. Follow as I read in Acts 20. I'm going to start in verse 16 and make my way through verse 35, and then at the end we'll read the last section of Acts 20.

But beginning in verse 16, *"For Paul had decided to sail past Ephesus so that he would not have to spend time in Asia; for he was hurrying to be in Jerusalem, if possible, on the day of Pentecost.*

*"From Miletus he sent to Ephesus saying, call to him the elders of the church. And when they had come to him, he said to them, 'You yourselves know from the first day that I set foot in Asia, how I was with you the whole time, serving the Lord with all humility and with tears and with trials which came upon me through the plots of the Jews; how I did not shrink from declaring to you anything that was profitable, and teaching you publicly and from house to house, solemnly testifying to both Jews and Greeks of repentance toward God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ. And now, behold, bound in Spirit, I am on my way to Jerusalem, not knowing what will happen to me there, except that the Holy Spirit solemnly testifies to me in every city, saying that bonds and afflictions await me. But I do not count myself--or*

*consider my life of any account as dear to myself, so that I may finish my course and the ministry which I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify solemnly of the Gospel of the grace of God.*

*" 'And now, behold, I know that all of you, among whom I went about preaching the Kingdom, will no longer see my face. Therefore I testify to you this day that I am innocent of the blood of all men. For I did not shrink from declaring to you the whole purpose of God. Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood. I know that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; and from among your own selves men will arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after them. Therefore be on the alert, remembering that night and day for a period of three years I did not cease to admonish each one 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 were sanctified. I have coveted no one's silver or gold or clothes. You yourselves know that these hands ministered to my own needs and to the men who were with me. In everything I showed you that by working hard in this manner you must help the weak, and remember the words of the Lord Jesus, that He Himself said, "It is more blessed to give than to receive."'"*

This is what it looks like to really live. To really live the life that God offers in and through His Son Jesus Christ.

What does it look like to really live? Well first, it looks like a life that is nourished by God's Gospel of grace. The story opens with a rush. They're in a hurry to get to Jerusalem for Pentecost. Miletus is 610 miles away from the city of Jerusalem. His priority is let's go, let's get there, but he presses pause. He presses pause because he prioritizes the purposes of God, the people of God, the mission of God. And so he stops to meet with these leaders so that he can invest in them. It's the kind of life that we would love to imitate, and if we really do, we would be authentic from the inside out. Paul is so different than he used to be. They had a front row seat of how different he was. He was the hard guy, the bounty hunter, the one who

pursued followers of Jesus Christ. And now he announces the Gospel of Jesus, and he serves the followers of Jesus, and he does so with humility, the same kind of humility that Jesus evidenced, that Jesus demonstrated by leaving Heaven, coming here for the interests of others, considering others as more important than His own. And so Paul models Jesus Christ with a sense of humility, a correct sense of self. He serves them with tears.

If you've had relationships for very long, if you've lived very much life, you know that you've had to manage how you feel in relation to another person. And you know that sometimes the way we can manage who we feel is to cut off the emotion, or to step back and to distance ourselves from the relationship. So here's this really hard guy, so we think, and his lifestyle characteristic, night and day, is he so loved them and he so cared for them that he wept for them. He wept for them in the goodness of God, ensuring Jesus Christ. People mattered so much to him, even in the midst of trials and hardship--the time in Ephesus was marred by so much difficulty, check out verse 20, *"How I did not shrink from declaring to you anything that was profitable and teaching you publicly and from house to house."* He's teaching them the most important truths you could ever teach anybody, and he did so in every venue with which he had opportunity.

And what did he teach them? Verse 21, *"solemnly testifying to both Jews and Greeks of repentance toward God in faith in our Lord Jesus Christ."* Repentance is not the happiest message for some people. There are some people that, when you try to explain to them, yeah we do fall short of the glory of God, and you and I struggle with sin, and we're born in sin, and God would have us turn to Him in honest humility and admission and repentance, turn to Him from our sin--that's not the happiest thing for some of us to hear. But the apostle, that's his message, that we would repent and that we would turn to who God is, and that we would so resolve to speak the truth of God that, even when it's not the most popular thing for people to hear, we're going to share it with them and we're going to endure whatever comes.



Why? Verse 24, *"I do not consider my life of any account as dear to myself."* So that he's going to give of himself, and it's going to cost him. So he's going to make every life decision based not on what's good for me, but on what Christ commands of me, how I can serve him for the gain and good of others so that I can fulfill the ministry that God has entrusted to me. And what's my ministry? What's your ministry? It's the relationships we have with others, the responsibilities that God has entrusted to us, whatever our skill set, whatever our giftedness, that we would stay faithful and loyal to Jesus Christ, that we would follow him one step after another, no matter what's in front of us, that we wouldn't shrink back from doing what is right and taking the next right step right now. And at the core of it all is the testimony, the truth, the story of the Gospel of the grace of God.

It is only the grace of God that can transform the human heart that is constrained by sin. It is the grace of God that saves us, that we don't deserve, that God gives to us. And in the giving to us of His Son, Jesus Christ. Through His grace, now you and I are secure in Him. We're saved. And He begins to shape us and to grow us to become increasingly like His Son Jesus Christ. So Paul's willing to give up his comfort, to go wherever and to do whatever on earth, because his ultimate value is not wrapped up in his own comfort, his own preferences, his own ease of life, but in who Jesus is, what Jesus has entrusted, and what Jesus wants us to do right now and what next.

So what does this real life look like? Well, secondly, it looks like a life that is loyal to the whole counsel of God. He doesn't cherry pick which verses he wants to listen to, which verses he prioritizes over others. Instead he proclaimed to his listeners, to anybody that would gather, he proclaims the whole counsel of God. And in verse 25, he says, *"This is goodbye. You've heard me tell you of the kingdom of God,"* which sums up the Gospel of God. It's been seven or eight years of this relationship. And he says to them, *"I have given to you all I have to give to you."* *"I am innocent of the blood of all,"* means he has fulfilled his responsibility, the trust that God gave to him in proclaiming Christ to them, in investing in them, in disciplining them, in shaping them. He spoke the truth in full. Verse 27, *"I did not shrink from declaring to you the whole purpose of God."* The whole redemptive

recreation plan of God for the world, for humanity. Who God is, who we are, why we live.

"I have given to you all you need, but watch out. Watch out," he says. Watch out from within your own soul, watch out from within your own church, and be on the alert for those from outside who would divide and attempt to destroy the work of God in and through the church. So first he says to them in verse 28, "*Be on guard for yourselves.*" How do we do that? How do we care for our own soul? By bathing in the Word of God. By saying "yes" by faith to God in the moment. By trusting God through his Spirit to work in us and to do what only God can do in us. By taking the time to listen to God, to be quiet with Him. To be honest with ourselves about our attitudes and our thoughts. To confess sin, to ask God to reveal sin, to thank God for his forgiveness of sin. To humble our own heart when we would rather, as a human heart, elevate ourselves above another. So we would be on guard for ourselves.

And he says here to the leaders, "*and for all the flock.*" The sheep. The sheep have a shepherd, or shepherds. And he's speaking to the shepherds and the leaders of the local church or churches in Ephesus. And he says that the Holy Spirit has made you overseers; it's God's idea. God is the one who has led the Spirit--or the Holy Spirit has led the leaders, the overseers, to shepherd, and to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own own blood. That was an eye opening moment for me when--as a young man who grew up in a pastor's household, I saw all of these things that go on in a local church, and I just, I didn't know how my dad did that. But now I do. He saw the church as not his. He saw the gathering, the people, as followers of Jesus that God owns, that God bought, that He paid the ultimate price in the giving of His own Son, with the blood of God the Son. The church is not your church. It's not my church. God bought us. He paid the debt out of His goodness and His kindness and His grace. Paul was loyal to the full counsel of God. And you'll need to be. He says. "Watch out. Be on guard for your own heart. Shepherd the flock of God that the Spirit of God assigned to you."

"And watch out from outside, because there are wolves that will try to--they'll come from within and without, and they will try to distort the truth of God, the grace of God, the goodness of God, and they'll try to divide the people of God and to distract the people of God from the Gospel, from the word of God, and from the grace of God. Watch out. Stay true to the whole counsel of God, because I won't be near you to help you out when that time comes. It's your turn, you lead. I hand you the baton, you take it." So the Gospel of God is the grace of God, the word of God that declares who God is and who we are. He warns us that others will come in and try to draw away disciples after them. And so he says in 31, *"Be on the alert, remembering that night and day for a period of three years I did not cease to admonish or speak the truth to you, each one with tears."* This is truth and love. This is a heart that is tender to God, that cares for the best of the people that God has charged them to lead.

What does this real life look like? Well thirdly it looks like a life that trusts the God we love with those we love. There is a moment, if you've not experienced the moment that is coming, when we will live out the words of verse 32, in which the apostle says, *"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."* This is experienced by every parent who is a follower of Christ. It is experienced by the parent who shapes, leads, tends, shepherds their children. There is coming a day when they will leave your care, and they will launch on their own. And in--hopeful in our cases--our kids will confess their faith in Jesus. But there is this point at which we know our child, still our child, but we entrust them to God. We entrust them to the care of God and to the goodness of God, *"to the word of His grace, which is able to build you up and to give them the inheritance among all those who are sanctified."*

So he commends them to God, he entrusts them to God, he entrusts them to the word of God, called the word of His grace, because that's how God saves. God saves through grace. And that's how God builds; that's how God establishes; that's how God matures people and shapes people. It's through the word of His grace. That's how God builds His church, it's through the teaching of the word of grace.

And it's the word of grace that tells us that through faith in Christ we've received our given inheritance which God gives to us, so that right now we have our inheritance, but we've not yet experienced it in full. One day we'll experience our inheritance. That helps us put today in its proper perspective, because right now is not for long. Right now is not for long. Our internal inheritance is forever. And through the word of grace we are sanctified. We belong to God. We are secure in Him, His person, His work, His purposes, becoming like Him. As God is generous with us, so God commands or calls us to be generous with others. Paul gives his own life as an example. He doesn't consider his own life as any account, so he gives his life to God's purposes.

And in giving his life to God's purposes, he doesn't covet the life of another. You could do a 360 and you could see the wealth and the gold and the glitter around him, and he doesn't covet what others have. Rather, with his own gifts, he works so that he can be generous and so that he can share, and he quotes the words of Jesus, one of the few times that he does in exact detail, for Jesus said "*It is more blessed to give than to receive.*" So giving needs to be experienced for us to understand the blessing. And the blessing may not be that we receive more of what we just gave. The blessing instead is a gift that God gives to the giver. It could be a sense of satisfaction and a sense of "this doesn't have it's hooks in me, I can let go of it, I can share it." It could be the privilege of watching somebody who you've helped. Here he talks about the weak, how this is such a life giving encouragement to them, how you can be a part of God's redemptive purposes in the world. Even now the apostle is carrying an offering, he's carrying an offering from the Macedonian Greek churches to believers who are in Jerusalem.

Fourthly, what does this real life look like? A life led by the Spirit. Verse 23, the Spirit of God is leading him. The Spirit of God is leading him to go to Jerusalem. He has a dream; he has a dream to go to Rome. Well, he makes it to Rome, just not quite the way he dreamed. He doesn't know all the details. We know that the Spirit of God is leading him; he's headed to Jerusalem. Well, we know what happens when he gets to the city, because you got another riot, you got another angry mob, and the Romans have to sneak him out of town with a group of cavalry to protect

him from the people who are angry with him, and then he ends up going between a succession of political rulers in the region. Eventually he's sent to Rome by Caesar. And there in Rome he writes II Timothy 4 in which, in chapter 4, he says, "*I fought the good fight, I finished the course, I kept the faith.*" It's the Spirit of God that he listens to, the Spirit of God that God gives to every follower of Jesus, the Spirit of God who can so influence and move in us, the Spirit of God who helps us understand the word of God, He gives us the desire for Jesus. It's the Spirit of God that directs him, and it's the Spirit of God who called those elders and pastors and shepherd leaders from Ephesus and entrusted to them this work for which they will give full account. So we see the Spirit of God active in the lives of those who say "yes" to Him.

Then we have a truly moving moment. Verses 36-38, "*When he had said these things, he knelt down and prayed with them. And they began to weep aloud and embraced Paul, and repeatedly kissed him, grieving especially over the word which he had spoken, that they would not see his face again. And they were accompanying him to the ship.*" In the Bible there are a number of different postures for prayer. People pray standing up; they pray on their face. Here in this genuine humbling before God, he kneels and he prays for these leaders, for their life, for the redemptive purposes of God in Ephesus and around the world. And then they walk with him to the ship, and it is goodbye until we meet again.

I know a family that experienced something very similar to that. I grew up with a surgeon who came to Christ, and - actually he was much older than I am; his children were my age; he came to Christ as an adult. And when his daughter Nancy grew up she married a medical doctor, and they became medical missionaries to Africa. Their dad became very sick, and she and her husband came home from Africa, and they spent time with their dad. They knew that he didn't have long and that he wouldn't be on earth when they came back on their next furlough. So they came to the Portland airport, and they went as far as they could to the plane, and the last thing my friend said to his daughter was, "Nance, I'll see you in heaven." That's goodbye, but not for long. That is the goodbye that each of us will one day say.

And in God's grace and His goodness we are secure in an inheritance. We don't want to make this life bigger than it is. There is a reality outside of this life. There is a life with God which swallows up everything about this life and gives us the strength and tenacity and confidence to say "yes" to Him in this moment right here where we are, because He bought us. We are his. We belong to Him through the blood of the Jesus who died for us and who was raised to life to share the life. It is so fitting this morning that we get to remember Jesus' giving of His life together in this service of Communion.

Those of you on your way in, as you picked up one of the little cups, there is a very--you want to open it carefully, the little cellophane on the top is for the bread, and then beneath it is yet a bigger top that you pull off for the cup. In just a moment we're going to have the musicians come. They're going to give us a time to reflect and a time to thank God for His goodness in Christ, a time for us to invite God to examine our heart and ourselves, and then I'll return and I'll lead us in receiving the bread and the cup.

[music ]

[Matthew 26?], beginning in verse 26, *"While they were eating, Jesus took some bread, and after a blessing, He broke it and gave it to the disciples, and said, 'Take, eat; this My body.'*

*"And when He had taken a cup and given thanks, He gave it to them, saying, 'Drink from it, all of you; for this is My blood of the covenant, which is poured out for the many for forgiveness of sins.'"*

*Ben Rico:*

What a joy it is to celebrate communion together. Would you stand with us as we sing, as we celebrate together the victory Christ has won in this world and in our

hearts, enabling us to live for Him. As we project His greatness today as we sing, let that translate into how we project His greatness in how we live throughout the week, not just as we're here together celebrating in church. Let's celebrate the narrative of the Gospel of grace that Jesus Himself leads.

[music: "Man of Sorrows! What a Name"/"How Great is Our God"]

Amen. It is His greatness, His goodness that we live to tell the story of. Go in peace in Jesus' name.