

Pursuing the Interests of Jesus
Acts 20:1-16

Main Idea: *Paul's ministry activities (encouraging, organizing, healing, teaching, risking) reflect the main priority of his life: pursuing the "interests" of Jesus by pointing others to Him.*

Introduction: Good morning! Please open your bibles to Acts 20. If you are new to the Bible, you can find Acts 20 following the gospel accounts (Matthew, Mark, Luke, John)...

Orienting the Text: Where we are in the story

Last week Pastor Brad continued the saga of Paul's ministry in Ephesus. Following the riotous upheaval the gospel has caused in the city, in today's text Luke records for us Luke's travelogue as he prepares for a trip back to Jerusalem, and eventually onto his next mission target: Spain. To get to Spain, he needs to make a future stop in Rome and garner support from them.

Background to Paul's Travels: Encouraging, Organizing, Teaching, Healing, and Risking for the sake of Christ

At first glance, this section looks rather mundane and boring. It's just a bunch of travel details of Paul going from here to there, and with a strange story about how he put someone to sleep with his preaching, who then falls out of the window and apparently dies, only to be miraculously revived by Paul. So, if you have been reading along with our preaching team each week, I'm sure you came to this passage and thought, "Huh – I wonder how the pastor is going to try and make this interesting for the rest of the service..." Well friends, I have good news today: this passage is really interesting and very encouraging; but to experience it, we have to go into the details a bit. As they say, "the devil is in the details", well, in the case of the first sixteen verses in Acts, the gospel is actually in the details!

What do I mean? The list of activities and travels Luke records for us reveals something about what made the Apostle Paul tick; what inspired him, motivated him, and got him through all the frustration and suffering that he went through in obedience to Christ and the calling Christ had for him. In Paul's letter to the Philippians, he makes this very convicting statement about what makes his companion, Timothy, so different from all the rest.

Philippians 2:21 - Everyone pursues their own thing, not the things of Jesus. But Timothy is different, Paul says. However, this text implies that Paul himself pursues the interests of Christ, and in writing this I don't think Paul is trying to be cynical or even to subtly or passively-aggressively manipulate his readers. Instead, I think what Paul is doing here is calling them to examine their priorities ("interests") in light of Christ's interests and priorities. And if there is an incongruence there, Paul issues this call for them to realign their interests and their priorities with those of Jesus. So, this all begs the question: what is Jesus most interested in? What does Jesus ultimately want for His people?

Understanding the Interests of Jesus: A Biblical Catechism

Question: What is Jesus most "interested" in?

Answer: His Father's kingdom! (Matt. 6:33; Acts 1:3; 8:5; 13:15:15-18; 28:31)

Well, simply put: His Father's kingdom! What does His Father's kingdom consist of? Jesus is most interested in people love and worshipping Him and His Father. If you love and worship Him, you will obey Him! If you obey Him, you will carry out His commandments. And His commandments are centered around loving other people.

Question: How does someone become part of His Father's kingdom?

Answer: Salvation through Jesus! (Acts 4:12)

Now, the only way you can come to know, love, obey and worship Jesus and His Father, is if you are "saved" (i.e.: experience the salvation won for us by His death and resurrection by putting our trust/faith in His name, and devoting ourselves to Him).

Question: What is "salvation" through Jesus consist of?

Answer: Salvation through Jesus consists of those who have been brought into a saving union with Him (Rom. 6:6-7)

02-18-24

Pastor Grant Clay

Now, salvation is not just going to heaven when we die, it is a spiritual union with the Lord Jesus Himself, whereby we become a new creation, born-again, born from above, and indwelt with the Holy Spirit (the Spirit of Jesus). *The most loving (i.e. Christ-like) thing we can do for other people is to point them to Jesus!*

So the most loving thing anyone can do for anyone else is point them to Jesus, help them know Jesus, encourage their growth in Jesus! We can do this by word, deed, example, relationship, service, and so on. All of life – whatever we are doing – we do to the glory of God...(quote the rest of 1 Cor. 10:31-11:1). So this morning, let us learn how Paul points others to Jesus in all the activities that he does...

Exposition of Acts 20:1-16: Pursuing the “Interests of Jesus” (Phil. 2:21)

Paul encourages - Acts 20:1-3

The first thing we find is that *Paul encourages followers of Jesus to grow in their faith and devotion to Him*. Keep in mind this is likely also the time that he writes the book of Romans. Something important to note here is that in Romans, he tells the church that he looks forward to seeing them so that they can help on his journey towards Spain, the furthest west boundary of the Roman empire. Paul’s life is wrapped up in taking care of others (spiritually speaking). As long as he is able to do this, he is at ease with himself.

Paul organizes - Acts 20:4-6

We are to reflect the body, bride of Christ. Each of these names represents disciples from the major places he had been preaching the gospel. Together, they were likely the team who would help gather the collection and prepare it to bring to Jerusalem. What is the point of the collection? Simple: unity. The church is an “expanded Israel” (need to be careful here not to refer to it solely as a “new Israel” as if the old one has been replaced – no, it is expanded or now “true”). But the underlying issue is this: *Paul organizes concrete ways for the church to grow together in unity, love, and sacrifice for one another.*

Paul teaches - Acts 20:7-8

Here Paul returns to Troas (reminder: this is where he had the dream about the man from Macedonia calling him to come and help him). Here Paul teaches the believers, knowing that the time is short and it might be the last time he sees them. And so he teaches and teaches and teaches some more, late into the night. Why? Because he wants to be sure and deliver the best he can the whole counsel of God for their benefit! For the foundations of their faith and their own walk with Jesus, in case this might be the last time. Teaching is motivated by not simply the impartation of information, but their growth and steadfastness in Christ! *Paul strengthens the faith of believers by teaching them more about Jesus.*

Paul heals - Acts 20:9-12

But then we have an accident! A young lad (probably between 8-14 years of age) falls asleep and falls out a window. Tragedy! But Paul ends up healing him (we assume, though there is some debate on whether or not this is a healing). Why would this matter? Well, think about it: what a huge distraction and discouragement, but God wanted them to benefit from the teaching and not be dissuaded by circumstances out of their control. And so this incident reveals something of the mercy of God, and the shepherding of Paul.

Paul performs miracles in order to help people understand God’s mercy in visible and concrete ways.

Paul risks - Acts 20:13-16

For safety reasons (we assume), Paul did not accompany them and instead took a different route. He was hastening to be in Jerusalem for Pentecost, so he could deliver the collection there, and encourage the Jerusalem church and clear up any possible misunderstandings there might be. Now, this was a risky move! How would he be received, how would he fare, would he make it out alive? Paul knew he would be facing trouble (we’ll see more of why and how in the next chapter). But the point here is that Paul, knowing the risks, goes ahead with the trip anyway. Why? Because the integrity of the gospel, the unity of the church, and the fame of the name of Jesus were all worth it!

Paul takes risks for the sake of spreading the name and fame of Jesus to more and more people.

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Why? *That they may also experience and fully enjoy the same saving union which he himself has with God through Jesus Christ.*

Application: Are we interested in what Jesus is most interested in?

Although this section of Acts appears mundane on the surface, we find with Paul that his whole life (where he goes, what he does, how he interacts with people and so on) is all bent to this one sole purpose: get them to Jesus! Union with Jesus, fellowship with Jesus, grow in Jesus! It's all centered on Him. 1 Cor. 10:31-11:1

In this text, Paul says to do it all to the glory of God. But how do you "glorify God", specifically? Well, Paul tells us: give no offense! Put no stumbling block in someone's way; try to "please others" (not slavishly, but for their edification, growth, by giving up own rights or privileges for the sake of the good of others). Why? Here it is that they may be saved! It's Paul's grand motive! And then look at what he says: imitate him as he imitates Jesus. *According to Paul, Christians glorify God by living their lives a way that continuously points others to Jesus.*

The most loving (i.e. Christ-like) thing we can do for other people is to point them to Jesus! I have an encouraging quote: John Piper: *"This is what Paul lived for: the joy of other people in Christ. His whole ministry was a project of bringing others into the joy that he had known in Jesus Christ. Love [for Paul] means gladly embracing the quest to bring others into your experience of joy in God (through Christ) even if it costs you your life!"*

James Stewart: *"Possessed from the first glorious hour of discovery with an overmastering gratitude toward the Lord to whom he owed it, with an utter conviction that what had happened to himself could happen to everyone, and with a consuming passion to see it happening all over the earth and to share his Christ with all mankind, [Paul] threw everything he had, everything he was, into his response to the gospel challenge."*

So, my friend, what are you living for? What purpose, goal, are you pursuing and why? Is it for God's glory by pointing people to Jesus, or something else? Now some of you may be thinking: well, I don't have a job like you, pastor, that inherently gets the privilege of pointing people to Jesus. You get to come up here every Sunday and throughout the week, talking and teaching about Jesus. I have to actually go to a real job, with real people, in the real world; how do I do that?

Well, the good news for you, friend, is that Paul makes no distinction between someone who is in vocational ministry (like me) and someone who is isn't. *Your ministry is your life.* Your offering to God is the living the life he's given you, right where you are, doing what you are doing (provided it's not sinful), so that you can point the people around you (which He has sovereignly put there) to the Savior. So you are on the frontlines – I am the equipper. So, God needs me to be faithful to do what I'm doing for the sake of the kingdom; but He needs you to be faithful to do what you've been called to do for the sake of His kingdom. You see? It's a symbiotic relationship in which I encourage and strengthen you, so you can encourage and strengthen others. And, the by product is that, you also encourage me back to do what I am doing, so I can then be better at encouraging you. It's all the work of mission and ministry and the church, we are just each doing our individual parts. So please don't fall into the trap and the lie of thinking that you don't matter to the Kingdom of God; it's not true! You matter – provided that you are seeking to follow Him in whatever it is He has given you to be about. Some of you, it's in the workforce, some of you its providing a home environment, some of you its in school, some of you are retired now, and can use your time to invest in others.

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Application: Are we interested in what Jesus is most interested in?

The most loving (i.e. Christ-like) thing we can do for other people is to point them to Jesus!

Questions for Small Groups:

- 1) How does Paul define the "interests" of Jesus? (Phil. 2:21)
- 2) How do we find Paul pointing others to Jesus in his ministry activities he does?
- 3) What does it look like for you to "point others to Jesus" in your daily life?
- 4) How might God be calling you to be *more* intentionally pursue the "interests" of Jesus?