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I Spy God On the Move Testifying Acts 20:24

Today, we're going to finish off Acts. Next week we'll be talking about Saturday Night at Chapel Hill—our new worship service, which I am really excited about. The following week we'll be introducing our preaching series for the year: *The Story*. *The Story* is an abridged chronological version of the Bible. It tells the big story of God from the beginning of time to the end. Our whole church will be going through it together: children's ministries, student ministries, LifeGroups, Women's Life. We'll take nine months to work through it, and by the time we've finished, our hope is you'll understand the story of God. But this week, we're finishing off Acts. The last 2/3 of Acts is really the story of Paul. And this morning, I want us to ask: what was Paul's purpose? So kids, I want to invite you to come down the front, because we're going to watch a video all about Paul's life.

As they're doing that, adults, I want to ask you a big question: Why are you here? What's your purpose? What are you living for? I don't know if you've ever thought about the answers to those questions. Lots of organizations have. They often have something called a 'mission statement.' Their mission statement tells everyone what it is they are about. Chapel Hill has one of them. What is it? "...working together to present everyone mature in Christ." But what about you? What's your purpose? What's your mission? Do you know? This morning I hope we will get some answers in the story of Paul. So kids, and adults, as you watch this video about Paul's story, I want you to ask yourself this question: What was Paul's purpose? That is, what was his life all about? What was he living for?

<https://vimeo.com/30378739>

So what did you think? What was Paul's purpose? What was his life all about? [Take answers from kids]. I believe Paul gives us his mission statement in the book of Acts. I want us to read one verse this morning. Acts 20:24:

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.

So what does this verse say Paul's mission is? "Testifying to the gospel of God's grace." That's a lot of big words. Does anyone know what it means to testify? [Take answers from kids]. Testifying is telling people: 'This is the truth.' People often do it in court in front of a judge. So what was Paul testifying to? What was the truth he

was telling them about? “The gospel of God’s grace.” Does anyone know what gospel means? [Take answers from kids]. It’s a really old English word that means “good news.” What’s the best news you’ve ever heard? [Take answers from kids]. Paul’s was telling people the good news about God’s grace.

Does anyone know what grace is? [Take answers from kids]. Grace is like this. Let’s say you did something wrong, like you stole some money from your mom or your dad. The normal thing to do would be to punish you, right? You’d have to pay the money back, maybe your parents wouldn’t let you watch TV for a month, maybe you’d have to do extra chores around the house, or something like that. Well, grace would be, your parents saying, it’s okay, you don’t need to pay me back, and I’m not going to punish you either, instead I’m going to take you out for ice cream. What!?! It doesn’t make sense, does it? Well, the truth is, that’s how God is with us. He doesn’t punish us for all the wrong things we’ve done—the truth is he took that punishment himself in the person of Jesus—instead, he says: “Don’t worry about that bad stuff; that’s in the past. I just want to be with you, so let’s go spend time together doing something fun.” That’s God’s grace.

So, Paul’s mission is to tell people the truth about the good news that God doesn’t punish them for the bad things they have done, but just wants to be with them and spend time with them and has made a way for that to happen through Jesus. Paul’s whole life is about telling people: “God wants to be with you; he isn’t going to punish you for doing bad things. He wants to spend time with you; he loves you.” What an amazing thing to make your life about, right?

Kids, thank you for coming up and helping me out. I’d love you to go back to your seats, but keep listening because I’m going to tell all of us some more about Paul’s story and about my story.

What are you living for? Paul says in Acts 20:24: “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.” As you read the rest of Acts, which you really should do, we see this mission statement of Paul lived out. Paul doesn’t consider his life worth anything to him; he consistently puts his life in danger. We’ve already seen him be almost stoned to death, thrown into jail, nearly lynched by a mob, and in the rest of Acts he is arrested, comes within an inch of being flogged, is imprisoned for years, is shipwrecked and is bitten by a poisonous snake. These things don’t matter to Paul, he’s focused on one thing: testifying to the good news of God’s grace.

He takes every opportunity he can to do that. As you read through Acts you see him—as he is on his way to safety away from an angry mob—ask if he can speak to the mob. What does he tell them? About the good news of God’s grace. You see him imprisoned under the Roman governor, and what does he use that time to do? Tell him the good news about God’s grace; for two years! You see him visited by the Jewish king and asked to explain why the Jews want him dead; what does he

use that opportunity to do? Tell the Jewish king the good news about God's grace! You see him get moved to Rome under arrest and as soon as he arrives he gather all the local Jews, who in every city he has visited have tried to kill him. Why? To tell them the good news about God's grace.

Paul is single-mindedly focused on testifying to the good news about God's grace. Why? Because he knows that is his God-given purpose. Paul says in Acts 20:24: "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." Paul testifies because was given this task by Jesus. He knows Jesus didn't save him to sit around with other Christians, study the Bible and sing Kumbaya all day. Jesus saved him because he wanted him to testify to others about the good news of God's grace. Paul is single-mindedly focused on this task because this is the task God has given him: to testify to the good news of God's grace. God saved Paul by His grace, but for a purpose: to tell others. Paul says: "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."

That's Paul's mission. But what about us? What are we living for? What's our purpose? What's our mission statement? May I suggest it is the same thing? What does Jesus say to his disciples as his parting shot in the book of Matthew? "Go, and make disciples of all nations." What does Jesus say to his disciples right at the beginning of Acts? "You will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria and to the ends of the earth." If you are a disciple of Jesus, you have the same mission as Paul: to testify to the good news of God's grace. Our mission is to tell people about Jesus. Our mission is to make disciples. Our mission is to be God's witnesses. Our mission is to testify to the good news of God's grace. Why? Because God saved us for that very reason. It is our privilege to be involved in God's saving of the world.

So what are you living for? What's your purpose? The first time I really grappled with what my purpose was, was right out of high school. My purpose—as I was leaving high school, ready to go to Oxford and study Math—was to prepare me to go and make a name for myself in finance in London, and earn ridiculous amounts of money. That was what I saw my mission to be.

But that summer I took a trip to a small town in western rural Kenya to help with some community projects that worked with those suffering from the HIV/AIDS epidemic. The trip wasn't about building something or helping practically, it was simply about visiting HIV/AIDS victims in their homes, schools, widows' groups, and youth groups and bringing Jesus to them. When you are sitting in a mud-hut, face-to-face with two parents who are HIV+ and their four-month old baby is dying because they are also HIV+ and all you have is your Bible and the Holy Spirit, it asks questions of your life's purpose.

I walked away from that trip knowing that making money didn't matter, because even if we poured money and resources into the lives of those Kenyans it still

wouldn't help. Giving them money and medical help is a good thing, but at the end of the day, if we don't give them Jesus too, it matters little. As someone I know once said: "We'd just be making them comfortable for the trip to hell." They needed to know about Jesus. People need to know about Jesus. And I knew my mission in life had to be to testify to the good news about God's grace so that many might be saved.

Another time was when my first child Evelyn was born. I recall in those first few weeks, recognizing what a profound impact I was going to have on her life. As I looked at her, I began to ask myself: what do I want her life to be about? What are my dreams for her? Do I want her to be intelligent? Do I want her to have a happy childhood? Do I want her to go to a good school? Do I want her to get a college degree? Do I want her to go to Oxford? Do I want her to get a good job? What did I want for her?

The more I thought about, the more I realized that at the end of the day, these things weren't going to matter when she finally reached the end of her life. If I taught her to live for those things—happiness, money, success, education—it would be a waste of time. I knew that only one thing mattered: would she know Jesus? And the more I thought about it, the more I realized: I don't just want her to know about Jesus, I desperately want her to tell others about Him. If that's my purpose, why shouldn't I want that to be hers? I wanted her to spend her life testifying to the good news of God's grace. So that became my prayer. That still is my prayer. That's my prayer for my son Ezra as well. That Evelyn and Ezra would make their whole lives about testifying to the good news of God's grace.

When you and I reach the end of our lives, someone is going to stand up and give a eulogy about us. What do you want them to say? That you were a good person? That you were successful? That you helped others? That you were famous? What do you want them to say? The reality is that some of these things may be good things, but they are not the best. When you've been gone 50, 75, 100 years, those things probably won't matter. I mean, do you even know what your great-great-grandparents did? There is only one legacy that is eternal; there is only one mission that has eternal significance. There is only one life-purpose that will achieve everlasting results: testifying to the good news about God's grace.

One out of one people die. Everyone you know will one day pass from this earth. You have the opportunity now to impact their lives forever. Paul got this. He made his whole life about testifying to the good news about God's grace. His legacy was the eternal life of most of the church in the Mediterranean. In fact, without Paul, we may never have heard about Jesus, we may still be living life apart from the good news about His glorious grace. So what will your legacy be? What will you live for? What is your purpose? What is your mission statement?

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.