



Learning to Lead – Part 3

Motivated by the Finish Line

Pastor Mike Fabarez

Well, maybe it was because of my recent break, but I assume I, like you, have clicked on a variety of dumb little videos on the Internet and afterwards said something like, I wish I could have those 4 minutes of my life back. I assume you have. I have. We've felt that way. But the reality is, of course, that I can't get those 4 minutes back. You can't get them back. We can't get them back. And that's a weird thing about living in time, which we all do. I mean, think about it, you spent 168 hours this last week, and I mean, you spent it. It's completely spent. It's really spent. It's gone. It's in the books. It's irretrievable. Those hours are gone.

And you can shrug off a comment like that. I understand. You can say, "Well, I'm just going to start a new 168-hour week right now." Well, and you might. And that's true. But all it takes is accumulating about 87,000 hours for you starting to feel the pain of irretrievable time. 87,000 hours is about ten years. So when you spend ten years and start thinking back ten years, you start to think, wow, that's irretrievable. That's gone. Right? If you're in your fifties, you think back, well, when you were in your forties and you say, well, things are different now and I can't go back. I mean, if you're in your twenties, you think back to your teens, whatever's going on in your teens, that's done that's in the books, it's finished. You can't get those years back.

That's just the way time is. And the more you ponder that, the more you start to think about the reality of all that was going on in the past. Some things may maintain into the present, but a lot of things are done. The friends you hung out with it, those aren't your closest friends anymore. Jobs you had, that's not the job you have now, right? Places you lived, that's not where you're living now. I mean, there are a lot of things that change, people that change, settings that change, opportunities that change. And I think it's good for us to think about the irretrievable nature of the past.

And I don't say that to invoke guilt or regret in your heart this morning. That's not my point you'll see. It's actually just completely the opposite of that. I just want us to think about the past and the things that are no longer there in our lives in the present to start to motivate us to have a Christian mindset about living in time. The Bible has a lot to say about that. It's important that we gain the right perspective and to do that this morning I want to go back to our lecture, our words of the Apostle Paul as he says goodbye there in Miletus. He called the leaders of the church in Ephesus to chat with him. And what you'll find in this passage in Acts Chapter 20 as you turn there is that we jump back into this section of Scripture where he is saying, I know this chapter of my life has ended.

And he says it so definitively I think it's helpful for us just to let that resonate and say, "Wow, you know what? There are transitions like that in my life, too," and it's important for us to note those. And then to gather the wisdom that God would have us gather, that we might start to make the best use of the present, that we can really have the kind of biblical mindset that would have us maximize our fruitfulness, like right now. And I think that's what this will do.



So let's turn to this passage and pick it up where we left off in Acts Chapter 20. We're just going to study three verses. That means that the sermon is going to be extraordinarily short, three verses. That's all we're going to cover. Acts Chapter 20 verses 25, 26 and 27. And if you pull out your worksheet, you'll see I couldn't make it so simple just to have the first verse be the first point, second verse... No, we've complicated it a bit here so that we can homiletically pull out some truths that hopefully will send you home in your cars from this property saying, "I get it. I understand how God would have me adjust my thinking about the past, about the present, and about the future in a way that will make me a more fruitful Christian."

So let's glean from this text in the short part of his discussion about the fact that he knows, he's convinced, that this chapter of his life had come to an end. Look at it, verse 25. I'll read from the English Standard Version as he says, "And now, behold," which is a weird way to talk. We don't talk that way anymore. But when you see that kind of phrase, the old translations "look" or "behold" this idea of you got to really take this and ponder and chew on what Paul is about to say and it is painful. "I know that none of you among whom I have gone about proclaiming the kingdom will see my face again." That's pretty big.

Now drop your eyes on verse 38. How do they respond to that? After "much weeping" it says in verse 37, "being sorrowful most of all because of the word he had spoken, that they would not see his face again." And there's a lot of pain when chapters of your life end. I mean, depending on how good those chapters were, you say, "Wow, I'm not going to see those people. I'm not going to have those opportunities. Or the good health I experienced in my life in the past I won't have now." You can lament those. And we're going to talk about the emotional side of this when we get to studying verses 36 through 38.

But for today, I just want to think logically. I want to think objectively. I want to think in terms of being a planner in my Christian life to say, okay, he understands this particular section of his life, his ministry in Ephesus that had gone on for over three years, if you glance at verse 31, he'd been there at least three years and he was ministering among them. He was the preacher, he was teaching, he was a bi-vocational missionary. And all this now he says I know it's ending and it's going to cause a lot of weeping and crying and tissues being passed around. And he says, "Therefore, I testify," verse 26, "to you this day that I am innocent of the blood of all." Well, you didn't murder anybody while you were here, that's good. Congratulations Paul. No, that's not what he's saying.

This is an idiom that throws back to the Old Testament about the importance of making sure that if there's some kind of pending doom coming, that if you warn someone then you'll be exonerated of having any responsibility. And of course, we're not talking about any physical murder or physical doom. We're talking about eternal doom, which will be physical and spiritual, relational and emotional. And he says, listen, I did it. I did what I should have done here. I have I dealt with this chapter of my life in a way that doesn't leave me feeling great regret. Why? Because I had some boldness. Verse 27, "I did not shrink from declaring to you the whole counsel of God."



He's described what he's been doing in Ephesus as he's saying goodbye in Miletus to these leaders of the church in various ways. We got two in our passage. In verse 25, I'm "proclaiming the kingdom." I've been proclaiming the kingdom for years here, and he calls it here in verse 27, "the whole counsel of God." We'll look at that but I just want to start in verse 25 with the phrase, without that added phrase, that added clause. Just read it this way. "But now behold, I know that none of you ... will see my face again." We'll deal with the "proclaiming the kingdom" in a minute. But that is an important part of realizing that in the Christian life, all opportunities, they're all fleeting. Right? And not just this chapter, in this chapter, in this season and that season.

I mean, I dropped my daughter off at college on my little break. Right? So I know the feeling just recently of saying, well, this chapter of life is over. Has anybody done that this summer? You say goodbye to your child, right? It was easier with the boys. We're done with them. (audience laughs) But the daughter was like, wow, this is hard, this is emotionally hard. And even if she comes back, we hope she comes back for Thanksgiving and all that, but it's like, oh, that season of having her there in her, you know, girly-decorated bedroom and seeing her, you know, come down the stairs, all that's gone. It's gone. At least that particular season of life is gone.

And the reality of that is helpful to know that it's not just that season of life that the chapter closes on, but the next chapter of my life, well, that chapter will close. And in various ways we got chapters closing all the time. And eventually, here's the biblical thought, just to go out to the macrocosm of it all, all opportunities of life are going to end, right? Everyone. And that's the reality of the temporal nature of life. Everything about our life, every opportunity, every open door, every relationship that we know in this world, the temporal realities of functioning in this world are going to end.

If you're taking notes jot that down. That is a good place for us to start. "Remember All Opportunities End." All opportunities end. And I just want to say it that way in the way, you know, that I've just I've earned the master of the obvious award here with that statement, but I just want to stop and say, have you thought about that? Are you mindful of that, that everything you've got going on? If I'm thinking about investing in my daughter's life in the first season of her life before she leaves off to college and does whatever's next and who knows what's next? I don't. But I better make the most of it right now. And even at this particular stage, in terms of my parenting or my job or my relationships or the opportunities that lie before me, whatever they are, I just know, here's the deal. Those doors open and they stay open for a certain period of time and then they close.

And in some way I just got to think to the end and the horizon of my temporal life. Every earthly opportunity is going to close. Right? You would agree with that. If you don't agree with that, something's wrong with your head. You have to agree with that. All of our opportunities on this earth come to an end. And that's a biblical way for us to look at life. Some of the oldest literature that we have in the Bible is not found in Genesis through Deuteronomy. It's Moses writing a psalm when he just gets out of Egypt and everyone starts to die. It's Psalm 90 when



he starts talking about the reality of death and he says, wow, we're out here really with an assignment to have this generation die off. And as everyone's dying and you do the math on how many people left Egypt and how many people were having to die who were 20 years old and over, the funeral schedule for Moses and his team was huge.

And in contemplation of that, as the death starts to take hold, as people start dying off in the wilderness, he writes this psalm and he says, you know what? We've got to think about it. God is eternal and we're not. God lasts forever and our earthly life, it comes to an end. "Teach us the number of our days that we can present to you a heart of wisdom." We need to be wise in the present by thinking about the reality that everything about our temporal life, it comes to an end. And I want you to think not just about the big picture. We kind of did that last time when we were together studying the previous passage. But the reality now is I want you to think about the seasons that you have right before you. I want you to think about the things that you have going on right now, the opportunities that you have to do whatever it might be, they only exist for a particular finite period of time.

So for us to number our days as it says in Psalm 39 to think about the fact that everything will come to an end in my earthly life, including the things that are right before me right now, it's the beginning, really, of recognizing opportunities for what they are. And opportunities I think they need to be heightened in importance as they lie before us, because we think about the reality of what's going to be gone perhaps tomorrow or next month or next year.

I had a lot of criticism as a young preacher, rightfully so. I earned all of that except for one bit of advice I got from a pastor who was older than me, and I was a young preacher and I preached. And, you know, he sat me down and said here are some things about your preaching you need to change. And it was like most of that, I was like, okay. And I even tried to change what he said I should change about a phrase I used a lot in my preaching. And if you could go back to that conversation decades ago, you'd say, well Pastor Mike did not listen because he still uses that phrase all the time. And the phrase he didn't like that I kept using in my preaching was "this life" in this life, this life. He says you don't need that demonstrable pronoun to describe life because everyone knows it's this life.

And I tried to say, well, I guess I should get away from that. This guy's smart, he's been preaching for years. And then I started to think, I really can't get away from that. I can't get away from that because it's important for us when we talk about life to realize that this life is very different than the life that we're all here setting up our hope for. As Romans 8 says, our Christianity is us being saved in hope, hope that is not now realized. This life is temporary. Hebrews 11, right? The idea of us being sojourners and aliens in this life. And the more I found it in my study of Scripture, in my preparation for preaching, the more I thought I'm going to consciously disregard that critical advice in my life. And here you are. Some of you've been under my preaching for a long time saying, yeah, you know, you could keep score with how many times I use the words "this life."

And I lay out the phrase that you've heard often from this platform that Christianity is not about this life, right? It's about the next or as I like to say, it's not about the "here and now," it's



about the "then and there." And so we are understanding, as Jonathan Edwards says, that everything in this life is just a journey to get to where we're supposed to be. And where we're supposed to be is in the presence of God when God is in charge of all things and that reality is coming. For now we recognize that we have opportunities we will not have then, and we should make the most of them.

Matter of fact, as Paul writes back, this may be a familiar phrase to you, to the Ephesians, and it's a circulating letter. It goes to more people than just the Ephesians. But he writes back to the Ephesians and he says this: you need to make the most of your time. And that's not the word "Chronos." You've heard this distinction from the platform before. Two words that translate into our English word "time," are "chronos" and "Kairos." Chronos just talks about the linear clicking of the time on a calendar. That's why we call it chronology or your watch. "Pastor Mike you're wearing a chronograph today." It's just a regular, you know, ticking of time on a clock. And then there's kairos, which is "seasons."

Matter of fact, some translations translate that passage we should make the most of the opportunities. And the opportunities, that's the way I'd like to talk about it today, for Paul to minister among the Ephesians day in and day out, they were done, and he knew they were done. And he's moving on to Jerusalem to face the music there. And he's going to get in a ship and he's going to sail away and they're going to stand there with their tear-soaked faces watching Paul leave. He was our guy, preaching week after week in our church, discipling us and training us. Now he's gone. And guess what? It's the next chapter for the Ephesians, the next chapter for Paul. And off he goes.

And that's important for us to know that this life is filled with those temporal open windows of opportunity. If you want a biblical phrase for it, Paul liked to talk about "open doors." Right? There are open doors, they open and then they close. And there should be a sense of urgency about that in our Christian lives. And I just want us to get that urgency.

Which, by the way, here's an interesting insight into my study here recently. I'm studying for this sermon and I'm thinking, okay, there's so much that should lead pastorally to you and I thinking about the urgency of opportunities that lie before us. And I can think of so many examples like Paul in First Corinthians 16, he has an open door so he said, I was going to visit you in Corinth but I'm not going to because a door of opportunity is open for me. So the urgency of this open door, it's a temporal door that's open and I'm going to say no to this to go do that. And there's an urgency about that. Paul later says in Second Corinthians the same kind of thing. I was going to stay here, that was going to be fine, but "I could find no rest in my spirit." I had the pressure of knowing I had to do something else. And the open doors, commonly open doors close.

Here's what I was going to say about that. I go looking for books that might express that. So I start with my card catalog database on my computer and say what books do I have in my library about urgency as a virtue in the Christian life? And here's what I found. I found some and then I went further, of course, into our Compass Bible Institute library and then onto the Internet trying to find what Christian books have been written about the concept of feeling like



there are urgency opportunities. You better feel the pressure to move and grasp those and grab them. I could find books about that concept if I went back and back and back in publication dates. Right?

If I'm going back to the sixties, fifties, forties, I could find books about that that would present as a virtue that the Christian life should be filled with some urgency to do this that or the other. The more recent books I could find that tackled the topic or addressed the topic, guess what they said? Here are ways to get rid of the feeling of urgency in your life. Matter of fact, I just got a brand new book, it was just published this year and I thought, oh, this deals with the concept. So I sat down and I started reading this book to see what biblical insights it had. It was from a Christian professor of theology. I thought what does he have to say? And again, it matched all the other titles that were much more explicit about, hey, get rid of the tyranny of the urgent in the Christian life. You don't want to feel that.

So we need to recognize that the sermon I'm preaching to you this morning to talk about on Paul's closing chapter, to think did he make the most of it? He says, "Yeah, I did. I grasped it. I did it. I accomplished that. I went after that opportunity and I did it." And I'm saying, let's just think about closed doors. At some point the opportunities we have now are going to go away. And I'm trying to build in this first point some urgency in your life to make sure that you make the most of the opportunities that lie before you. And I'm just saying, that's not a sermon you're going to probably hear often, because most preaching and writing and teaching today is to try and give you that placid, comfortable, linear feeling of everything's cool and copacetic and I can put my feet up on the dashboard and drive through the Christian life. And I know everything in the Bible is supposed to help me feel calm and cool and collected.

There's a thing called peace. It is a very important Christian virtue. But the peace, if you study it, is not at the expense of sacrificing things that are a call to urgency in the Christian life. And even if you're not sold on that yet, if I haven't convinced you and persuaded you yet, here's one thing Christians that want peace and placid, non-urgent feelings in your life to grasp whatever's in front of you. I would say you would join with me in talking to the non-Christians in this room. Would you not? To say if you're not a Christian, you should have an urgency about becoming a Christian? Would you agree with that? Raise your left eyebrow if you would agree with that. You would agree with that.

If I said today that today is the day of salvation, don't wait. I think you would say, yeah, go get them Pastor Mike, because they should repent and put their trust in Christ today. I could start quoting passages from First Corinthians. I could quote Hebrews Chapter 3, Hebrews Chapter 4, "Today, if you'd hear his voice, don't harden your hearts," as they did in the wilderness. Right? Do it today. If you're feeling the conviction of the Spirit who was sent out on the world to convict you of sin and righteousness don't harden your hearts, man. The whole book of Hebrews is about that. I mean, it continually recurs with the warning that you better not harden your hearts, man. If you're hearing the conviction of God, you better respond. And you better respond when? Next week after you think about it for a while? No, today.



And so you would agree that God would have us feel a sense of urgency, certainly as we care for the lost, because I can't create urgency in a non-Christian to respond to the gospel unless me as a Christian sees the urgency of calling this man to repentance and faith. Do you follow that? And now let's just think of everything else. Paul says, yeah, I'd like to do this and I'd like to do that and I'd like to come see you here. But you know what? The urgency of this open door is so important that I can't do what I was going to do because I got to grasp this while it's available, while the door is open.

So I want you to start to think. I can't possibly touch on everything that might be facing you, but there are opportunities right now that you have. There are people who you work with that you probably need to invest in in terms of evangelism that may not be there in two years, three years. They may not be there in two months. Who knows what might happen? They may transfer, the wife might get another job and off they go. You need to grab the opportunities that are before you today. You need to see the urgency of all that.

What kinds of things, you know, should I go after? Well, let's now look at that phrase in the middle of verse 25. You see, I had 25a and 25c because I just gutted it of the phrase there in verse 25 when he talks about what he was doing to where he can get to verses 26 and 27 and say, yeah, I'm so glad I did it well, I feel no guilt about it. I don't have regrets about this season of my life. I did it and I accomplished it. But what is it that he was doing? Now, let's look at that phrase. Here it is, Acts Chapter 20 verse 25b, right in the middle of this. He says, "among whom I have gone about proclaiming the kingdom."

Now the context is I'm not going to be able to do that with you guys anymore. I am absolutely confident and he was resolved in this, I know that I'm leaving you and I won't be back. Right? So he feels that, senses that conviction, he gets on about warning them that this season and chapter of our relationship, our face-to-face relationship is over. It'll be through letters from now on. And he goes and he says, but here's what I did when I was among you. "I proclaimed the kingdom." Now that phrase, Luke loved that phrase even from the beginning of recording what Jesus did. He summarizes it between the period of time of his physical resurrection and the time when he ascended. It talks about how he went about proclaiming and talking about and teaching on the Kingdom of God, the kingdom. So that's important.

But there's a reiteration of that at the bottom of this in verse 27. At the end of verse 27 he said, "I didn't shrink from declaring to you," now here's the phrase at the bottom of verse 27, "the whole counsel of God." Now, if you've been in church for a long time, you've heard that phrase repeated so many times that it even influences the translators from the Greek New Testament into English to make sure we keep it there so that you don't miss it, "the counsel of God." But I don't know what comes to mind when you think of the counsel of God, but you need to be able to define that in your mind to make any sense of this passage.

Well, it is a reiteration of what he's just said in different words about teaching the Kingdom of God. Here's a synonym for the word "counsel" that might help you understand what this Greek word is trying to present to you. Plan, right? "I've taught you the whole plan of God." When you hear counsel of God, you probably think about the preacher standing up and



saying, "I preach the whole Bible. I didn't leave out any part of the Bible." In a sense, that's not a bad way to think of it, because the Bible is the plan of God. It talks about the plan of God and the fact that there is sin that comes into the world, and God is going to now fix the problem of sin.

And while sin reigns from Genesis Chapter 3 to Revelation Chapter 19, "I'm going to be redeeming individuals and calling them to myself and making them right with me and reconciling them to their creator. And then I'm going to come back, my Son is going to sit on a throne and we are going to have heaven among earth in the sense that I am going to have my Son ruling and reigning on the planet."

Now, we use words like that usually to describe the word "kingdom." Let me give you a definition of kingdom that'll help us build our second point. Are you ready? Here's a good layman's Southern California Sunday morning non-denominational church definition of kingdom. Are you ready? And I know this is the pinnacle of the iceberg of a lot of theological systems, but I just want to give you a simple layman's definition of the word "kingdom." Are you ready? Do you want it? OK, it will be worth the offering, whatever you put the offering this morning, here comes, it's worth it. Right? "God gets what he wants." That's the concept that God gets what he wants. God gets what he wants.

Think about the prayer in Matthew 6, right? "Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven." Well, how did it start? Right? "Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come." Okay. Kingdom, you can have a lot of definitions in theological textbooks about the word "kingdom." But here's what you need to think. God gets what he wants, what he wills. It starts to happen, right? And when it's happening, we'd say, well, there's a manifestation of the kingdom. So Paul's going around proclaiming to these people the Kingdom of God.

Now we know what he's proclaiming because you look back in verse 20 of this passage, it's repentance and faith. Well, that individually puts someone in line with their creator and they now repent of their sinful, wayward wandering sheep life and they align themselves with God by God's grace under the Lordship of Jesus, and they say, "Now Jesus is Lord." That's an old word, too. But the idea of he's in charge. I got my agenda. He's got an agenda. He's got an agenda for me. I'm going to align my life under his lordship. And so all of a sudden now guess what? For my life, he's starting to get what he wants in my life. I start to obey him. Whatever he says a Christian should be, I'm going to now fight the good fight of faith and align my life to do what he says. All the urges and ideas and all the things I want that are waging war against my soul, I'm going to try to say no to that. I'm trying to be holy, set apart, like he is holy in all my behavior.

So in that sense, the Kingdom of God is happening on an individual life-by-life reality. Every time someone is trusting in Christ, it's the reconciliation, which is a good word. It's the bringing back of the way things ought to be. And God gets what he wants with individual lives. So we're preaching and proclaiming the kingdom. But just like the prayer I just quoted from Matthew Chapter 6 when Jesus taught his disciples to pray. He said, "Your kingdom come,"



and you can say, okay, kingdom, reality, life here now aligning with God, another one under the Lordship of Christ. Here's another one doing what God says. And now we become this countercultural movement in our society, which is a great way to look at it. We are the "Ekklesia," the "called out ones" here doing what God would have us do, and that's great.

But it's really not the kingdom. Well, it is in the sense that now I'm doing what God wants as imperfectly as we do it as Christians. But I'm growing in sanctification and I'm being more aligned with Christ. I'm being conformed to the image of Christ and all that's great. But here's the thing. I live in a world where Governor Newsom is not doing what Christ wants, have you noticed that, right? President Biden's not doing what Christ wants. Right? No groans. We're not going to sign up for voting after this. But you ought to. Here's the deal. We live in a sinful, fallen society, right? Our world is a mess. Our country is a mess. Our state's a mess. Our county's a mess. Our city's a mess. Right? Your homeowners' association is a mess. Stay seated. Your homes. So, it's all a mess.

And what we want is the Kingdom of God. Because here's what we would want, God to get universally what he wants everywhere with everyone. That's what we want and that's praying for the kingdom to come. Now, the good news is I'm getting a taste of the kingdom every time I get someone under my wing in evangelism and they put their trust in Christ. They repent of their sins. And as I disciple them and move them along in the Christian faith, hey, we've got a kingdom citizen, a card-carrying member of the kingdom, but we're waiting for, praying for the kingdom to come.

Now, Christ came. He got all the endowment of God's authority, all authority in heaven and earth has been given to Christ. So in that sense he has been coronated as King. And I'm proclaiming the kingship of Christ, the Lordship of Christ. So I'm proclaiming the Kingdom of God by telling people, "Listen, Christ is King." But here's the thing. One day he's going to take his "great power" to quote the book of Revelation and "begin to reign." And the "Kingdoms of this world will become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he will reign for ever and ever." So I am praying "your kingdom come." I'm praying, Maranatha, come quickly. I'm praying I want you to come and establish your rule uncontested, unrivaled in every last thing, all the way down to quote the Old Testament prophets, to every little "bell on every horse" and every little thing "is inscribed 'Holy to the Lord,'" set apart to the Lord. It's all now doing what God wants. God's Kingdom. God gets what he wants.

And here's what he wants. He wants his will in the lives of everyone living on the planet. Now, to do that, he's going to have to exclude a major part of the world, right? "The way is wide and the gate is really big. It leads to destruction, and many are those who enter by it." And they hear this: "depart from me." They hear this: "into outer darkness where there's weeping and wailing." Outside of the kingdom are all these people "who do not bow their knee to Christ," gone. And now in this world demons are gone, Satan's are gone. Sinners who fail to embrace the grace of Christ, gone. And so by God's grace, we say recipients of his grace aligned with his will, we seek as imperfectly as we do it, to follow him and trust him. One day, universal, uncontested, the kingdom will arrive.



And it's going to take Christ, by the way, for the kingdom to arrive. There's a little of my theology for you astute ones. It's going to take Christ's appearance. That's what we need. We need Christ to come back and when he does he sits on a throne. He comes in glory with his angels. And he establishes a universal reign. He gets what he wants in this world, uncontested, unrivaled, complete, universal. And that's happening.

So that makes the Christian life and here's my apologetic for me saying "this world" and it's not about the "here and now," it's about the "then and there." It makes this Christian life all about looking forward to, as I summarized and paraphrased Jonathan Edwards, the idea of looking toward moving toward what's coming. I am always saved, Romans 8, in hope. If I had everything then it wouldn't be "hope," it would be "here." But it's not here. It's hope. So I'm waiting for this. And that means I need faith to believe that the things that are not here yet are coming. Therefore, I'm supposed to, conflating a bunch of passages together now, I'm supposed to "walk by faith" that God's promise is true. He's coming back. Christ is going to rule and reign and "not by sight." Because the things that I see right now in Washington, in Sacramento, in this world, they're temporal. "But the things that are unseen, those are eternal."

That was a big lead-in to give you the wording for the second point, right? You want to be able to look at opportunities and say what should I do with the opportunities that are before me? Well, here's what you should do, number two, measure importance. How important is it for me to do this, that or the other in the opportunity that lies before me, by eternity? Right? Number two, "Measure Importance by Eternity." There's talk a lot around here about an eternal perspective. And that's what we mean. As I often say, will it matter a hundred years from now? That's a good way for instance, okay, I have opportunities before me. Will this matter a hundred years from now in the kind of way that makes an eternal resonance? I mean, it goes on into eternity.

Now, I don't want to make too much of this. And again, it's like the first point. Master of the obvious. As long as I've started with my Ph.D. in being a master of the obvious, let me do this again in the second point. He's proclaiming the kingdom to whom? To the Ephesians, he has been for three years, right? Who has he been teaching the whole counsel of God to? Well, to people. We already learn from house to house and in public settings. He's been teaching people. He hasn't gathered the cows together in Asia to preach to them. He's gathered people together. So here's a master of the obvious, you can measure importance by the eternal nature of something. And here's something about every single person you meet. They will live on eternally, every person eternally, and they will be resurrected, Daniel Chapter 12, "Some to shame, some will shine like stars in the heavens." They will be glorified in a way that is perfect under all the will of God, the mastery of God, the Kingdom of God. God will get what he wants with those people's lives in a way that is glorious and beautiful.

So we got eternal people and we're hoping to move people from that "outer darkness to the kingdom of his Son," to quote Colossians 1. We want that because we know people are what matters. The buildings you build, the businesses that you cultivate, the awards that hang on your wall, the degrees that hang on your wall. I'm not saying those aren't important. And we



all have to go home and earn our mortgage money, just like Paul. He was making tents. Was that important? Well, it was important insofar as it could help him do what he needed to do and that is to take an interest in people because people are what matters.

And you need to be looking at your life, because some of you I know you, "I'm not a people person. I'm more of a things person." Well, that's great. You can be a things person as long as the things become a platform for you to invest in people. You got to be a people person or you're really not investing in something that matters for eternity. It starts there. Your life in this message is not about you doing more things to create things that make you comfortable, things that make you happy, things that bring you pleasure. As Jesus told parables about that, the man who did all this stuff so he could build big silos, put all of it in there and say, "Hey, soul, take it easy. You can have all this stuff. It's all piled up for my retirement." And God says, "You fool," right? Who's going to get what you got? You have not been rich toward God. You've been rich toward yourself.

So the goal of this sermon is not only for you to elevate the importance of every opportunity that lies before you, but it's looking at those opportunities and saying which opportunity should I take? If I were to take the context of that statement that Paul writes to the Ephesians and it says, "Make the most of the time," he's saying "you ought to discern what the will of the Lord is," this about five verses earlier. "You're a child of light," which means the light bulb should come on. You're in the kingdom of light. You should be able to discern the will of God. You should know what the fruit of light is, and it's what's good and what is true. The things that should rise to the top of your priority list are things that relate to people and things that matter in their lives for eternity.

So if I look at an opportunity, I get a job promotion opportunity at my work and I say, "Okay, I got this and I could buy a bigger house, I could go on better vacations, I could do it, or I could say no to that, which my family wouldn't understand and, you know, my coworkers wouldn't understand, but that would leave me the time to invest in the Partners Program at my church where I can disciple someone and build in their lives the kinds of biblical disciplines that will allow them to pray and fight temptation and know God better. I can do that and say, oh, well, maybe in this there's really nothing more to this other than my own comfort and my own satisfaction and my own adulation in my industry. But if I did this, this could be something investing in people to orient them to the Kingdom of God in their individual lives with the hope of looking forward to the universal Kingdom of God that's coming." And, you know, that's just going to help to sort out priorities in your life.

That's why some of you have said no to moving to the corner office and you've come to don the red, you know, outfit to lead games in Awana. Right? Why? Because you now are orienting your life in an increasingly effective, fruitful way and saying, how can my life affect other lives to orient them to the kingdom, starting with reconciliation to God and then fruitfulness in living their lives for eternity? That's what Jesus said, did he not? "Don't store up for yourselves treasure on earth," because all of that is temporal, "moths will eat it up, thieves will break in and steal it, rust is all going to destroy it. But store up for yourselves treasure in heaven."



God wants you to be more ambitious and you need to be ambitious based on the importance of the things that lie before you. And that means that some of you need to stop being passive about making decisions and you need to make decisions. Just like Paul was just saying, "It's time for me to go. This is a good job in Ephesus. I'm doing good work here, but it's time for me to go and it's time for me to grab this opportunity. And I'm grabbing this opportunity because it's making an impact in people's lives for eternity."

I know we all got to be plumbers. We all got to be architects. We all got to do what you got to do. You got to change diapers. You got to raise kids. You got to teach classes in algebra. You got stuff to do. But just like Paul was building his tents, he recognized that even in the industry there's opportunity as he joined hands with people who did that work and disciplined them and brought them to Christ. And we've seen that in the book of Acts already. And then he uses that only in so far as he can now be freed up to do the work in spiritual lives that he needs to have done. Super important for us to see that.

And some of you would think that this season of your life was a success, to put it in the words of this passage, if Paul got out of Ephesians, and said, "Man, I built the highest selling tent business in Ephesus. Did you know I did that?" And we would say, "Well, you know, I guess if I'm reading it in the Bible that's not all that exciting." But you'd be excited if that were your life. And I'm just saying really, why the disconnect? Paul is trying to be an example and a template for us to think about kingdom realities, which means eternal things that matter for eternity. And I'm just pleading with some of you not only to see the opportunities that lie before you and not to procrastinate, stop procrastinating, but say, what can I do to really up my investment in people where I'm trying to orient them to the king and having them live in a more fruitful way for eternity, storing up treasure in heaven.

Because here's the thing, they're going to high-five you 100 years from now. I guarantee it. Not just because you spent more time doing something else that really didn't accomplish it. Do you have to work? Yes. Do you have to do secular things? Yes. But you understand to redeem that is to understand it through the lens of you being salt and light, not only in your industry, but also making sure that you don't get so swallowed up by your industry or your work that you don't have the time to do what God has asked us to do in investing in people's lives for eternity. You've got to measure importance by eternity.

And there are a lot of things to go back to last time we were in this passage, there are a lot of things that they're not going to praise you for at your funeral, if it's a Christian funeral, they're not going to praise you for that. They're going to praise you for things where you were impacting people's lives. And so well stated in a prayer meeting I had this morning, someone saying about some of the recent funerals we've had. Just the decision to become a small group leader, that just one decision of investment, the impact that was even heard and reflected at funerals, is just amazing. And I thought about the funerals we've had this summer of people who died well, who lived fruitful lives. They had to make decisions month by month, year by year on what they were going to do with their time and their life. And I'm just asking you to get more active in doing whatever it is that's going to affect people for eternity.



What we need is not, you know, the "frozen chosen," as they used to say, where "we just got ours, we got our ticket to heaven, we're good, teach us more stuff so we can be smarter than the next guy at Bible trivia. Just I want to go to a church where I'm learning." Listen, I don't want you to be spiritually constipated. Can I say that at 9:00 on Sunday morning? I want you to be, and it doesn't work now that I've said that, a thoroughfare of information and building, don't think about that too long. (audience laughs) And I want whatever God has taught me about prayer to be able to be taught to someone else. I want whatever God has taught me about fighting temptation, I want to be able to pass that on and build that into other people.

So I'm pleading with you, right? See the importance of opportunities in life because they won't always be there. They will not always be there. And then I say, when you grab those things, make sure you're grabbing the things that make the most eternal impact. The whole counsel of God. I could say a lot on that and I got to be careful. The whole purpose of God is not about the "here and now." And you've heard those sermons so I'll stop with that.

Well, one thing. If you looked at ministries or churches or Christian books or Christian programs to listen to and you say, "Well, here are the ones I would recommend and here are the ones I wouldn't recommend." Sometimes you'd say, "Well, I wouldn't recommend this for my friend who's looking for a church or wanting to read a Christian book or, you know, listen to a program or a podcast. I wouldn't want them to listen to it because there's heresy in it. There are wrong things in it. They're saying the wrong things about God." And then I'm going to go, "Duh." Right? Okay. Yes, of course.

But here's something much more subtle. When we think about the purpose of God that I'm saying really puts the spotlight on eternal things, I'm just saying if we have a ministry, a book, a program, a whatever, a spiritual guru of wisdom that is really never getting there, that doesn't have that perspective, then I'm going to say you need to avoid that just as someone in a court can be convicted of perjury, not because they said something that was a lie, but just because they didn't give the whole of the truth.

You understand that perjury and people have been convicted of perjury, not because they said something that was wrong, but they said something that wasn't enough of the truth for us to get a good picture of the truth. That's why when you go to court and they say "you promise to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth." The whole truth, that little phrase, the whole truth that's gone back to medieval England, where there were people trying to make sure that people who stood up in a court said the whole story. And I'm just telling you the whole story is not about, you know, just having a better parenting experience or, you know, having more peace in your life or, you know, can I have a better marriage? That's not the whole story.

Matter of fact, I try to say here and maybe as a pendulum swinging against all the focus, particularly in Southern California churches, on the "here and now," I want us to know this is about prep for the "then and there" and what are we doing to prep for the "then and there." What are we doing to send forward the kinds of treasure that Jesus kept talking about, the



rewards that he kept talking about, the faithfulness in this life that gets us ready to have glory given to Christ and even rewards given to me in the next life? That's the reality of Christ's teaching constantly. It's always looking forward.

Christianity's preparation for what lies ahead. We got to wake up to that. So many great passages. First Thessalonians, Romans 13. "Wake up. Our salvation is nearer now than when we first believed." That's Romans 13:11. I want to feel the urgency of choosing what is most important, the best investment of my life. Because if you want to hang around and drag your feet, time is going to pass, doors are going to close, opportunities are going to be gone. And it's going to be what the Bible would call "wood, hay and straw." Remember that from First Corinthians 3. First Corinthians 3 says we're all going to be judged all the way down to the motives of our life. We're going to give an evaluation. Every Christian is going to stand before Christ and answer for the stewardship of his life.

And I think that's where this goes next in verses 26 and the first half of 27. Look at it with me in Acts Chapter 20. The idea here in this passage is that he says, verse 26, "I testify to you, I'm innocent of the blood of all." I have not wrecked anybody's spiritual life by what I've said. I have not put anybody in spiritual peril by what I've said. "I did not shrink from declaring to you the whole counsel of God." Shrink. That's a keyword. That's why the first word on your outline that I've already provided for you is the word "boldly," that adverb, boldly. We don't want to shrink, and we're [not] going to shrink back from putting the focus on what matters to God.

Number one, even his kingly leadership, his lordship in our lives. Some people don't even want to talk about, you know, the issues of our day, homosexuality or gender issues. I'm afraid, I shrink back at those things. I want to be able to tell you to believe and do the things that matter to God in eternity that are going to bring praise and not shame. I don't want you to get through life with more "wood, hay and straw" in that passage. I'd like you to get through life, at the end of life, to present to God a life that has more "gold, silver and precious stones."

And that idea of standing before God and his servants answering to the King is what Jesus hit on all the time in his parables. And the point of me seeing opportunities, judging the importance of those opportunities really should be understood in the backdrop, here's a little bit of the heavy part of the sermon, in the fact that one day I'll be evaluated, and God's going to say what did you do with what I gave you, what did I do with the opportunities I get? What did you do with the season of life that I gave you here, and the season of life I gave you there and the people I ran you into here? And what did you do with that? And I'm going to have to answer. And what I want is not just, "Well, I stayed out of sin," right? Wood, hay and straw. That can be good. You can be a good little employee. You can be a good member of the church. You can write your check in the offering, all the rest of that. But you never really find your stewardship of responsibility of saying I really need to build in people's lives for eternity.

So I want to think about that. There is a responsibility set upon us and Paul is giving us the statement, "I did it, I fulfilled it," which is no surprise, because even last time we were together on this passage, we looked at Paul's last extant words in Second Timothy 4 where he says, you know, "I ran the race, I fought the fight, finished it all, did it." "I'm ready to be poured out

like a drink offering. I did it." Now, how good would it be to end that way? Matter of fact, I hung that out as a carrot last time and said, I want you to think about can we end well? Well, you're only going to end well when you compound seasons of your life and opportunities of your life by choosing what's important and saying, I did it and I wasn't afraid.

I was bold, let's put it this way, number three, fulfilling my responsibilities. "Boldly Fulfill Your Responsibilities." And you've got responsibilities. And as long as I've quoted it, once you write that down go with me to the context of Second Timothy Chapter 4, where Paul says that and we'll glance at that just to make sure you can get oriented in the passage, but turn to Second Timothy Chapter 4 once you write that down. Boldly fulfill your responsibilities. Paul did it in Ephesus and he did it in Corinth and he did it in a lot of places and praise God for guys like that who really hit the target. And it seems like almost every season of his Christian life, fantastic. But look at this text, if you would.

By the way, just to give you that orienting context, verse 6, "I'm ready to be poured out like a drink offering, and the time of my departure has come." He's about to be killed by the Roman authorities. verse 7, "I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Henceforth there's laid out for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will award me on that day, and not only to me but also to all who have loved his appearing." If you don't see the kingdom's eternal perspective there, then you've missed it. You got to look at it again, right? "Not only to me, but all those who have loved his appearing."

You know what I think a lot of Christians think? If Christ came back right now, he'd mess up a lot of my plans. Right? Because really, I was hoping to get married. I was hoping to have kids and I was hoping to get that job promotion. I was just about to get a new house and that would have been so cool. And Christ is... Loving his appearance is someone who really is focused on the eternal importance of relationships with people because at that point like that's it. Paul says what's my joy and my crown. It is coming. It's people. It's people who I have made an impact. Not his tent business, not his house, not his reputation. What matters is that I've invested well in people's lives.

And so he says, I've done that and God's going to reward me. And if people really, truly loved his appearing, if they cried out Maranatha every morning, if they prayed "your kingdom come" and they meant it, they're going to be rewarded like I'm going to be rewarded. Context. Go back up just before this. He talks about how bad it's going to be in verse 3 "when people are not going to endure sound teaching." So you know this if you've studied First and Second Timothy, Timothy is just a more timid guy than he needs to be, he needs a lot of exhortation to be more bold. Right? People are going to have teachers being accumulated by people who "have itching ears, and they're just going to get teachers who are going to suit" their own desires, "their own passions, and they'll turn away from listening to the truth and they'll wander off into myths."

Now, you can just kind of just keep on saying things that don't offend them or just preach this or that and stay out of the weeds and don't talk about stuff that might... No. "As for you, always be sober-minded," right? Think about it. Think about what? I think where this is going.



Think about his appearing. Think about who you answer to. And I know that because of the way this chapter started. Matter of fact, we ought to go there. I know this is ping pong, but look at it, or pinball. Verse 1, "I charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge of the living and the dead, and by his appearing in his kingdom." Right? His lordship, his rule over all things that one day he'll establish. You got to do your job.

Which is where I want to go in verse 5. "As for you," he's a preacher, "always be sober-minded, endure suffering, and do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry." And I just want to say this because I can preach a sermon like this and a lot of you can put your feet up on the dashboard and say, "this doesn't apply to me. This applies to the Mike Fabarez types and the people who are training over at Compass Bible Institute, and I'm not going into ministry and I'm not going to be a Bible translator and I'm not going to do all that stuff and I'm not going into career ministry, so this isn't all for me." It is for you. It's for you because of the word I used earlier, a stewardship. God is invested in you. Your ministry is different than my ministry. I understand that. And here's the thing. Timothy was the pastor leading the pastorate there in Ephesus, as Paul writes him this letter and Paul was a traveling missionary.

And I'm just telling you, Paul's got a very different resume than Timothy does. Oh, yeah, he did some protege traveling with Paul, but here he is, pastor this church, do this work, evangelize these people, keep doing what you're doing. Preach the word there. I'm going to do this, this, this and this. And matter of fact, I'm at the end of my journey right now and I'm about to have my head lopped off and I'm done. But you fulfill your ministry. I've fulfilled mine. And Paul says in this season of life, I finished my course here in Ephesus and I did a good job. I fulfilled it.

Now, you and I, we feel shame when we hear that because we think I could have done better. But "forget what lies behind," to quote more Scripture for you this morning, "and let's strain forward to what lies ahead." And you've got opportunities right now before you and I'm just pleading with you, to see the importance of those open doors because they won't always be there. Grab them by faith, because you walk by faith and not by sight. It's not about the temporal things that you see. All of that really doesn't matter for eternity. You've got to pay your rent. You got to have a place to live. You got to sleep tonight. You got stuff to do that I understand seems mundane, but all of that needs to be parlayed in light of what am I doing to impact people for eternity.

And then just remember this. You'll answer for it. Not for what Paul should have done, but what you should do, not what Pastor Mike should have done, but what you should have done. So you need to see the stewardship of God's varied grace. To quote First Peter, he has invested in you. It's varied. It's different than the next person. But I know there are lots of things God expects all of us to do, and that is to be engaged in people's lives. Our chairs should go from side-to-side to face-to-face. If you're not doing that, I can start right there. Talk to non-Christians to get saved. Urgent.

Hey, Christian, you should feel the same urgency to make sure your life is not Sunday morning just sitting there passively listening to Mike Fabarez yak at you for an hour, right?



Your job is to make sure you take whatever you hear here, you incorporate it into your life, you turn your chairs face-to-face, you have a network of relationships in this church, and that's just step one. And then there are ministry posts. God has invested in you to do some things, and you should say, "God, I want to under the wisdom of other mentors in my life and the leaders of the church, I want to find what my ministry post is and do it well. And all of us are called to be good stewards of that because one day we're giving an account to God. Stewardship. That's First Peter 4 by the way if you want to look at that. Look at First Corinthians 4, First Corinthians 9. There are lots of pictures of stewardship in the Bible. It's required of a steward to be found faithful. We've got to be good stewards.

Even if Paul says in First Corinthians 9, I do this and I don't feel like doing it. I'm fulfilling my stewardship. And here's the thing. People go to small groups because they feel like going to small groups. People, you know, they serve in Awana because they feel like serving in Awana. That's what I'm saying. Sometimes you feel it and sometimes you don't. So stop being led by your feelings. Let's figure this thing out based on is this important. Is it an opportunity God would have me grasp, right? Then you just take the step and you do it. And some days you'll feel like doing it and some days you won't. But let's see what our opportunities are knowing we'll give an account to the Lord.

Which is a heavyweight to end this. But I just want us to realize whatever God's will is for your life, I know it's going to require some boldness because the darker the culture gets, the harder it will be to fulfill your ministry whatever that ministry is. And as Paul said to Timothy, things are getting bad in Asia Minor. It's going to be harder and harder for you to preach, but keep doing it in season or out of season. If your family applauds and your parents think it's great or whether they don't, do what God would have you do by faith, grab it and get at it today. Don't wait till tomorrow. Whatever it is, get yourself aligned to be useful.

Again, this sermon if you don't take it the way I intend it, it can increase regret. You can look back, but I've already quoted it, Paul said in Philippians 3 stop looking back. Right? We need to press forward. So what is it going to be? And when I say forward, I don't mean next year or next month, or in the next season, like in this season right now.

Is that enough conviction for my returning sermon to the church? All right. (audience clapping) That's called the golf clap that let's get on to the next drive because the next golfer may be much better than that. All right.

Let's pray. That's a bad homiletical ending, but let's let that resonate here in our hearts. Pray with me, God, before we sing this last song and think about you and who you are and the greatness of your kingdom, we want to make sure that right now we're good card-carrying citizens of the kingdom awaiting the appearing of our great God and Savior, the blessed hope that Paul preached to the Colossians. And we want to make sure that we're the kinds of Christians who are always evaluating present circumstances in light of eternity.

That we see, even based on looking backwards, we know that opportunities I had ten years ago I don't have right now. So I need to know that even what I'm facing now is going to not be



there in the future. So, God, please let us make the most of today. Which isn't always going to follow the template of the career path that my friends in college thought I would take. It's not always going to be applauded by our bosses at work. But God let us do what you have us to do, what you've equipped us to do, what you've called us to do in a way that would bring joy because it's got to be. We can only just extrapolate in our thinking what it was like for Paul to say, I did it. I'm not responsible for any bad in this city, but only the things that I did were the things I was supposed to do. I didn't shrink back from it.

God, let us be able to say that more and more. Let us mitigate guilt because this sermon has been preached. Let us say less months from now and years from now that we feel bad that we've missed stepping up and doing what you've asked us. So, God, we love you. It should be a pleasure and a privilege for us to serve you. And on days we don't feel like it, God, let us just double down and say we're going to serve our king. We're going to do what you'd like and what brings you pleasure. So God, I just pray you motivate us by all that. God, we love you. We're thankful for studying your word. We're thankful to the Apostle Paul for laying down a good template. And I pray you bring us all the energy and resolve we need to walk forward in faith this week.

In Jesus name, Amen.