

Paul's Epitaph

Acts 20-26

EPITAPHS ILLUSTRATION: As a Pastor my calling requires me to spend more time at the cemetery than the average person. At my last church the only walking track they had in the city was around the cemetery. Somewhere along the way I picked up the hobby of collecting Epitaphs. Some people collect coins, some collect stamps I collect Epitaphs. Here are a few of my favorite.

Silver City, Nevada

*Here lies a man named Zeke.
Second fastest draw in Cripple Creek.*

Food was the topic of many epitaphs.

*Here lies old Rastus Sominy
Died a-eating hominy
In 1859 anno domini
Savannah, Georgia*

In memory of Anna Hopewell

*Here lies the body of our Anna
Done to death by a banana
It wasn't the fruit that laid her low
But the skin of the thing that made her go.*

On an Auctioneer:

*Jedediah Goodwin
Auctioneer
Born 1828
Going!
Going!!
Gone!!!*

A few epitaphs are subtle and do not appear humorous until one thinks about them.

*Here lies the body
of John Round.
Lost at sea
and never found.*

**I think this is my favorite
Effie Jean Robinson
1897-1922**

*Come blooming youths, as you pass by ,
And on these lines do cast an eye.
As you are now, so once was I;
As I am now, so must you be;
Prepare for death and follow me.*

Which is not funny at all. But underneath, someone had added:

*To follow you
I am not content,
Until I know
Which way you went.*

Have you ever stopped to think about your Epitaph? How will you be remembered?

An old Pastor once told me that you really can't preach another man's funeral, but we preach our own funeral, write our own epitaph by the way we live.

Have you put much thought into it?

Adrian rogers *"until a man is ready to die he's not yet prepared to live."*

The primary thing you need to know about Paul was that he was a man prepared to die, and I want to show you why.

CONTEXT: *Last week we saw Paul at **Ephesus**, as was often the case Paul either cause a **revival or a riot**, well in Ephesus such a riot began that Paul was driven out of the city. From there he continued to visit a few of the cities where he had planted churches. Eventually he landed in Caesarea where he came to the home of Phillip the Evangelist.*

Acts 21:8–14 (NASB95) ⁸ On the next day we left and came to Caesarea, and entering the house of Philip the evangelist, who was one of the seven, we stayed with him. ⁹ Now this man had four virgin daughters who were prophetesses. ¹⁰ As we were staying there for some days, a prophet named Agabus came down from Judea. ¹¹ And coming to us, he took Paul's belt and bound his own feet and hands, and said, "This is what the Holy Spirit says: 'In this way the Jews at Jerusalem will bind the man who owns this belt and deliver him into the hands of the Gentiles.'" ¹² When we had heard this, we as well as the local residents began begging him not to go up to Jerusalem. ¹³ Then Paul answered, "**What are you doing, weeping and breaking my heart? For I am ready not only to be bound, but even to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus.**" ¹⁴ And since he would not be persuaded, we fell silent, remarking, "The will of the Lord be done!"

Paul didn't know it at the time but what would happen in Jerusalem would ultimately lead to his death.

In **Acts 21:21** Paul visits the **Mother Church in Jerusalem**. He went to see James, the lead Pastor of the Jerusalem church. James told Paul about the dissension that was forming between the Jewish and Gentile Christians over rumors that Paul was **dishonoring their Jewish customs**. The Elders at Jerusalem suggest that Paul honor his Jewish ancestry by **paying for the vows for four men** from the Jerusalem church. Paul agreed that this would be a good idea, so the next day he went to the Temple to follow through on the plan.

Paul Arrested - Acts 21:27–31 (NASB95) ²⁷ When the seven days were almost over, the Jews from Asia, upon seeing him in the temple, began to stir up all the crowd and laid hands on him, ²⁸ crying out, "Men of Israel, come to our aid! This is the man who preaches to all men everywhere against our people and the Law and this place; and besides he has even brought Greeks into the temple and has defiled this holy place." ²⁹ For they had previously seen Trophimus the Ephesian in the city with him, and they supposed that Paul had brought him into the temple. ³⁰ Then all the city was provoked, and the people rushed together, and taking hold of Paul they dragged him out of the temple, and immediately the doors were shut. ³¹ While they were seeking to kill him, a report came up to the commander of the Roman cohort that all Jerusalem was in confusion.

Acts 22:1 In Paul's **defense before the Jews**, he shares how Christ appeared to him on the road to Damascus, saved him and called him to preach. Paul's defense was overheard by the Roman commander who then intervened.

Acts 22:24–25 (NASB95)

²⁴ the commander ordered him to be brought into the barracks, stating that he should be examined by scourging so that he might find out the reason why they were shouting against him that way. ²⁵ But when they stretched him out with thongs, Paul said to the centurion who was standing by, "Is it lawful for you to scourge a man who is a **Roman** and uncondemned?"

Acts 23 there was a conspiracy to murder Paul, so the Romans moved to him to **Caesarea** where Paul is brought before Felix the governor. **Felix** thought perhaps he could gain a bribe from Paul, but that didn't happen.

Eventually Felix was succeeded by **Festus**. Now Paul was Festus' problem. While testifying before Festus Paul **appeals to Caesar**.

While this was taking place the great grandson of Herod the Great arrived in Caesarea **King Herod Agrippa II**.

Once again Paul makes his defense, this time before Agrippa. He retells the Damascus Road experience.

Acts 26:28–29 (NASB95) ²⁸ Agrippa *replied* to Paul, “In a short time you will persuade me to become a Christian.” ²⁹ And Paul *said*, “I would wish to God, that whether in a short or long time, not only you, but also all who hear me this day, might become such as I am, except for these chains.”

Ultimately the decision was **confirmed to send Paul to Rome** to appear before Caesar.

In Rome Paul was held on **house arrest for two years**. He had to constantly have a Roman soldier chained to him, which provided him with a captive audience. From that house arrest Paul accomplished some of his best ministry.

He wrote Ephesians, Colossians, Philemon and Philipians. The Prison Epistles.

What happens next is not **recorded in scripture**, so we can't be certain about how the final years of Paul's life unfolded. We do know that Paul was released at some point, then again **re-arrested, tried and sentenced to death by beheading**. Tradition states that Paul and Peter were executed on the same day. Peter was crucified upside down Paul beheaded as a roman citizen.

What was the dominating influence in Paul's life that made him able to endure such hostile treatment?

PAUL UNDERSTOOD THAT JESUS IS THE DOMINATING POINT OF LIFE.

ILLUSTRATION: Do you watch the average **sitcom**? Almost all of them have teenagers. Typically the teenager has a challenge – a contest, a sport, whatever and he is becoming stressed that he or she is tempted to cheat in some way, then this fatherly figure steps in to fix everything and they have a talk in the back yard or the kids room. It goes something like this: **Son don't do this for mom, or dad, or friends – do this for -----???----- yourself right! And that's supposed to help!**

What it does is cause that young man or young lady's life to revolve around their own happiness and self fulfillment.

ILLUSTRATION: Do you know what make the **Solar System** a System? The fact that all the planets have a common center of gravity - the Sun.

As long as the planets have a common center they can have unique orbits and a system is formed. But if each planet had a different center, they would inevitably crash into each other.

Well when you teach the kid that their own happiness is the center – they will learn real quick that outside of their family, **no one else has that center**. And their life becomes chaotic.

For 2,000 years that has been the message of Christianity. But in recent days preachers have made so much of man that it's a wonder we need a Savior at all.

ILLUSTRATION: Back years ago my Pastor announced on a Sunday AM that in the evening service he intended to call out his biggest problem in the church, he promised to identify this individual by name. That night there was an unusually high number at the evening service. The Pastor said, "My biggest problem at FBC Cherokee is....then he stated his own name"

LISTEN: Your biggest problem is not your job, it's not your spouse, it's not your sickness, it's not your age, your biggest problem is YOU and your only hope is JESUS.

Paul understood this.

Acts 20:24

²⁴ "But I do not 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.

If you could understand this it would revolutionize your life.

ILLUSTRATION: You see, I used to have an **inferiority complex** until I realized I was inferior. I am an inferior man who has been purchased by a **Superior Savior**. My life means nothing, his life means everything.

This is what Jesus meant when he said, **Matthew 16:25 (NASB95)**

²⁵ "For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it; but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it.

According to Jesus everything we have ever been told about getting ahead in this world is wrong.

- THE WORLD SAYS Stand up for your rights, JESUS SAYS Lay down your life
- THE WORLD TEACHES US Assert ourselves, JESUS TEACHES US TO deny ourselves
- THE WORLD SAYS Believe in yourself, JESUS SAYS believe in me
- THE WORLD SAYS Strive to be number one, JESUS SAYS the last shall be first and the first last
- THE WORLD SAYS Winning isn't everything it's the only thing, JESUS SAYS he who finds his life will loose it and he who looses his life for my sake will find it

John the Baptist understood this when he said, "I must become less, He must become more"

THIS PERSPECTIVE OF LIFE REVOLUTIONIZED PAUL'S PERSPECTIVE OF DEATH

When he wrote the letter to the **Philippians he was answering the fact that some were preaching Christ for false motives....1:18–24 (NASB95)**

¹⁸ What then? Only that in every way, whether in pretense or in truth, Christ is proclaimed; and in this I rejoice. Yes, and I will rejoice, ¹⁹ for I know that this will turn out for my deliverance through your prayers and the provision of the Spirit of Jesus Christ, ²⁰ according to my earnest expectation and hope, that I will not be put to shame in anything, but *that* with all boldness, **Christ will even now, as always, be exalted in my body, whether by life or by death.**

Paul figured something out that most of us spend our entire lives without knowing. He answered the **question of WHY?**

- Do you know why you are suffering?
- Do you know why you have a job when other's don't
- Do you know why you are single? married?
- Do you know why your life circumstances are as they are at the moment?

God has providentially brought you to this place and this time to EXALT CHRIST IN YOUR BODY, whether by life or by death.

That's the answer to why. **Now you can either work with it** and allow your circumstances to make you more like Jesus, to cause your life to reflect and point to Jesus or you can fight against it and totally waste your suffering, waste your blessing.

If you choose the former, you will redeem your suffering, redeem your blessing and ALL OF LIFE will make sense and so will death.

²¹ For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain. ²² But if *I am* to live *on* in the flesh, this *will mean* fruitful labor for me; and I do not know which to choose. ²³ But I am hard-pressed from both *directions*, having the desire to depart and be with Christ, for *that* is very much better; ²⁴ yet to remain on in the flesh is more necessary for your sake.

Paul understood that life was for the exultation of Jesus, death is for the greater exultation of Jesus. If that is the point of life your life will count.

If you put anything else in the equation it will not balance.

**For me to live is _____, to die is loss.
kids, grandkids, work, marriage, money?**

But if you recognize that to live is CHRIST then to Die only means more Christ.

As Paul came to the end of his journey in his final letter he wrote - **2 Timothy 4:6 (NASB95)** ⁶ For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure has come. ----

Paul's life was similar to the resounding hiss made by wine poured upon a hot alter. But because it was poured out to CHRIST. Though he is dead, yet he speaks.

APPLICATION: What is the dominating influence in your life? Let me ask it another way: What do you worry about the most?

Someone said, "A man is willing to relinquish anything at a moments notice for his god.

Do you find yourself saying, "No" to other things for the sake of Christ, or saying "no" to Christ for the sake of other things?

Consider the following quote from Martin Luther with supporting verses from the Scriptures: *Learn Christ and him crucified. Learn to sing to him and, despairing of yourself, say, "Lord Jesus, you are my righteousness, just as I am your sin. You have taken upon yourself what is mine and have given me what is yours. You have taken upon yourself what you were not and have given to me what I was not."*