

This Was Your Life

Acts 18:12-23

Introduction

An article that someone sent to me recorded things that young and older people have learned in their lifetime. Some of them are profound; some of them are humorous. Let me read a few of them:

- A twelve year old said, “I’ve learned that just when I get my room the way I like it, Mom makes me clean it up.”
- One mother learned that children and grandparents are natural allies.
- Another woman said, “I’ve learned that you can tell a lot about a man by the way he handles these three things: a rainy day, lost luggage, and tangled Christmas tree lights.”
- A seasoned traveler gave an interesting piece of knowledge, saying, “I’ve learned that motel mattresses are more comfortable on the side away from the phone.”
- Another traveler said, “I’ve learned that wherever I go, the world’s worst drivers have followed me there.”
- One young boy stated my all time favorite, “I have learned that you can’t hide a piece of broccoli in a glass of milk.”
- A fifty-eight year old made a profound statement, “I’ve learned that making a living is not the same thing as making a life.”

Peter Lynch, former Fidelity Magellan Fund manager, uttered the quote heard around the world when he said, “Nobody on his deathbed ever said, ‘I wish I’d spent more time at the office.’”

Since his statement, some years ago, anticipating one’s dying sentiment has become a popular pastime.

So the question was asked of experienced executives and business people who were over fifty years old, “Looking back, if you could change one thing . . . what would it be . . . what have you learned about life?” Their answers were printed in the *Wall Street Journal*. They include:

- Faith Wohl, one of DuPont’s first women senior executives said, “I wish I had gone to my daughter’s sixth grade field day.”
- J. Michael Cook, CEO, said, “I wish I had understood the importance of that Thursday afternoon soccer game. But it was a given that you dedicated yourself to your job, [first and foremost].”
- Randall Tobias, chairman and CEO said, “I can remember some blurry choices when my children were younger, when I may not have attended a play or a game because I had some conflicting business commitment. It’s ironic that twenty-five years later, I can remember the event I missed, but I can’t remember the business activity that I did in its place – in fact, in some cases, I have to stop and remember where I was working at the time.”

That is exactly what occurred in the life of a man who seemed to have it made. He appears briefly in the book of Acts and yet, teaches us the same profound lesson that people are still learning today; that is, it is possible to make a living and miss life worth living.

Review – Paul in “Sin City”

In our last discussion of Acts, chapter 18, we traveled with Paul to the pagan, immoral, “sin city,” called Corinth. It was here that Paul nearly threw in the towel. Perhaps you remember the Lord coming

with a promise to Paul in a night vision, in verses 9 and 10.

And the Lord said to Paul in the night by a vision, “Do not be afraid any longer, but go on speaking and do not be silent; for I am with you, and no man will attack you in order to harm you, for I have many people in this city.

As a result of this, we read in verse 11,

And he [Paul] settled there a year and six months, teaching the word of God among them.

Only two other times did Paul ever settle down in a city this long and teach. This was a remarkable turn of events for Paul, who came to Corinth and was filled with fear and weakness. Now this ungodly city becomes the location for a major eighteen month campaign, and the establishment of a significant ministry in Europe.

The First Life: An Indifferent Bystander

Now look at verses 12 through 17 of Acts, chapter 18.

But while Gallio was proconsul of Achaia, the Jews with one accord rose up against Paul and brought him before the judgment seat,

saying, “This man persuades men to worship God contrary to the law.”

But when Paul was about to open his mouth, Gallio said to the Jews, “If it were a matter of wrong or of vicious crime, O Jews, it would be reasonable for me to put up with you;

“but if there are questions about words and names and your own law, look after it yourselves; I am unwilling to be a judge of these matters.”

And he drove them away from the judgment seat.

And they all took hold of Sosthenes, the leader of the synagogue, and began beating him in front of the judgment seat. But Gallio was not concerned about any of these things.

Whether Gallio knew it or not, he was at this moment, an indifferent bystander regarding issues of life or death, heaven or hell, hope or despair, forgiveness or guilt.

You may have seen the advertisement, “Image is everything!” In our American culture, image is everything; character means nothing. However, in the Christian culture, image is incidental. It is the image of Christ reflected through you that is significant.

The American culture is no different than that of the Roman culture. And if image was everything, then Gallio had everything.

Gallio was the son of a prominent lawyer named Lucius Seneca. One of his brothers took his father’s name and was known throughout the empire simply as Seneca – the tutor of Nero; the brilliant philosopher and statesman. The other brother of Gallio was a famous poet. These three boys were destined for greatness, and all of them achieved it.

On May 1st, 52 AD, Gallio was appointed by the emperor to the highest political office at Corinth. This was an impressive political appointment in an impressive commercial center.

Two reasons Gallio was a follower instead of a leader

Gallio may have been in a position of leadership, but in reality, he was a follower! Let me give two reasons why.

Reason #1 – Gallio was indifferent about opinions outside the politically correct environment

1. Reason number one – Gallio was indifferent about opinions outside the politically correct environment

In Gallio’s day, Jews were unimportant. In fact, the emperor had only recently, according to verse 2 of this chapter, kicked all of the Jews out of Rome. The general consensus of the day was, “Jews stir up needless trouble; you’re better off ignoring them.”

Look back at the contempt with which Gallio treats them in verse 14b,

If I were a matter of wrong or of vicious crime, O Jews, it would be reasonable for me to put up with you . . .

In other words, “You guys are wasting my time. I’m an important judge; and, if Claudius thinks you’re not worth the trouble, I don’t think you’re worth the trouble.”

Just because a person has a title or position of leadership does not mean he or she is leading. They may simply be following the status quo!

I read of a group of local leaders who were invited to a private dinner as guests of former President Calvin Coolidge. They were a little nervous about using the proper table manners in order to win the president's respect. So they decided, out in the waiting area, that when they sat down to lunch, they would carefully watch Coolidge for the right cues. They eventually were seated at the banquet table, and coffee was served. Coolidge, to their surprise, poured his coffee into his saucer. The guests did likewise. Then Coolidge added sugar and cream. The visitors did the same. Coolidge then leaned over and gave the coffee to his cat.

Can you imagine being one of those dinner guests? "Here kitty, kitty . . ."

George Gallup polled several hundred Americans and found that when placed in a situation where they had to either follow the crowd or be different, the vast majority of them followed the crowd.

What is the status quo today? Think of an issue, and then consider how vastly different the status quo is from the scriptures.

Think of the current status quo concerning the unborn. Our society has rendered them non-persons. The status quo is that they are fetal tissue, not life.

What would the status quo say to the preacher and his wife who are very, very poor, already have fourteen kids, and find out she is pregnant with her fifteenth? They are living in tremendous poverty. Considering their poverty and the excessive world population, would you consider recommending that she get an abortion? If you answered, "Yes," you have just killed John Wesley, one of the great evangelists of the nineteenth century and founder by principles of the Methodist and Wesleyan churches.

Then, there is the couple where the man is sick with sniffles and the wife has tuberculosis. They have four children – the first is blind, the second has died, the third is deaf, and the fourth has TB. She finds she is pregnant again. Given the extreme situation, would you consider recommending an abortion? If you answered, "Yes," you have killed Beethoven.

There was a white man who raped a thirteen year old black girl and, as a result, she became pregnant. If you were her parents, would you consider recommending an abortion? If you answered "Yes," you have killed Ethel Waters, the great black gospel singer.

A teenage girl is pregnant and she is not married. Her fiancé is not the father of the baby and is very

upset. Would you consider recommending an abortion? If you said, "Yes," you have just declared the murder of Jesus Christ.

The status quo drowns out the voice of the Savior!

The status quo says, "Gallio, that little Jewish man who has been roughed up and brought in before you, is a nobody. Don't even let him talk. These people with their arguments over whatever . . . (verse 15a),

. . . *over words and names and your own law*
. . .

" . . . are not worth your time."

It is interesting to me that Gallio specifically mentions three things he is not interested in. They are:

- words – the Greek word "logos" could be a reference to the claim of Christianity that Christ was the "logos" of God (John 1:1 – "In the beginning was the Word ['logos'], and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.");
- names – this could have been a reference to the name of Christ being declared as the only name by which we must be saved (Acts 4:12);
- the law (or the Torah) – this could be a reference to the boiling debate in which Paul is declaring that Jesus Christ fulfilled the law perfectly and became the spotless lamb sacrificed for the sins of the world.

Reason #2 – Gallio was indifferent about anything outside the perimeter of his life and interest

2. Reason number two – Gallio was indifferent about anything outside the perimeter of his life and interest.

Notice verse 17.

And they all [the courtroom police or "lictors"] took hold of Sosthenes, the leader of the synagogue, and began beating him in front of the judgment seat. . . .

(in other words, Gallio had told them to leave and they all had, except for Sosthenes, the synagogue leader, who evidently stayed to argue with the verdict and got a beating because of it),

. . . *But Gallio was not concerned about any of these things.*

This is the ultimate proof that you are somebody – when you never have to bother with anything that you do not want to bother with; when it concerns somebody else; when the world revolves around you – you have arrived!

This was your life, Gallio!

But can you imagine knowing what he now knows? Can you imagine realizing throughout eternity, that you had had Paul, the chief ambassador of Jesus Christ, standing before you and recalling forever that you never let him speak? You had all the right connections, but standing before you was your connection to God, and you were too important to listen.

At this moment, ladies and gentlemen, Gallio missed life.

The Second Life: An Impassioned Believer

Now, by way of sharp contrast, the lens of scripture refocuses on Paul. While Gallio was an indifferent bystander, Paul was an impassioned believer.

Three observations about Paul

I want to make three observations about Paul.

Observation #1 – Paul was concerned about his personal commitment to Christ

1. Observation number one – Paul was concerned about his personal commitment to Christ.

We just saw Paul in the courtroom not ready to apologize and blend in with his Jewish crowd, but ready to defend the honor of Christ. The fact that he remains in Corinth, as verse 18 will tell us, “many days longer,” reveals his willingness to be different; to be unloved and misunderstood; to speak the truth and stand for Christ.

Notice verse 18.

Paul, having remained many days longer, took leave of the brethren and put out to sea for Syria, and with him were Priscilla and Aquila. In Cenchrea he had his hair cut, for he was keeping a vow.

Observation #2 – Paul was concerned about his private relationship with Christ

2. That leads me to observation number two – Paul was concerned about his private relationship with Christ.

Luke quietly slips in a personal note. Did you catch it? He does not tell us any of the details. He does not give Paul’s reasons for this vow that he has made, nor does he tell why Paul makes a visit to a small town barbershop in Cenchrea. Luke only wants us to know of Paul’s passion for Christ. It ran deeply into his private life.

We do know that Paul’s vow, since it involved the cutting of hair, was a Nazarite vow. It could be kept for life or for a period of thirty days. The hair was grown long and then cut to be offered with other sacrifices in Jerusalem as an act of thanksgiving. Since the Nazarite vow was purely voluntary, Paul was not violating grace for law when he undertook it. This vow was not a matter of salvation, but a matter of devotion.

I find it interesting that Luke does not give any details. The truth is, if he had, we would all be trying to copy Paul! The truly spiritual people would be those who have taken the Pauline vow! We would be saying, “Have you taken the Pauline vow yet?”

“Yes I have. In fact, I take the vow three times a year.”

“Okay, everybody sign up for the Pauline vow retreat. A veteran vow keeper will be speaking from his vast vow keeping experience.”

Thank God we were not told any of the details. We are to imitate, if anything, Paul’s deep passion, not his devotional plan.

Continue to verses 19 through 21.

They came to Ephesus, and he left them there. Now he himself entered the synagogue and reasoned with the Jews. When they asked him to stay for a longer time, he did not consent, but taking leave of them and saying, “I will return to you again if God wills,” he set sail from Ephesus.

Observation #3 – Paul was concerned about his public obedience to Christ

3. Observation number three – Paul was concerned about his public obedience to Christ.

There is a great expression in these verses – it is, “. . . if God wills . . .”.

We need to learn to think that way. Everything is under the control of a sovereign God. Paul was

saying, “If it is the will of God for me to be back, I’m convinced, I’ll be back!”

What confidence and assurance!

We need to recognize that this is coming from a man who is personally committed to Christ, a man who has just completed a personal vow to Christ, a man publicly obedient to Christ. It is that kind of person who can live with the confidence and assurance that, “If God wills it, I’ll be back.”

Conclusion

Two men, two different portraits!

Gallio had position, prestige, wealth, connections, and was on a first name basis with the high powered. You would read the news about Gallio. In fact, four Roman writers spoke highly of Gallio as a great man. But from the perspective of time, we would say, “He had nothing.”

About ten years after this courtroom scene, Gallio was summoned by half-crazed Nero to Rome. He was condemned as a conspirator, along with his famous brothers, Seneca and Melas. All three were forced to take their own lives by drinking poison. The man who allowed no time for talk of Christ in his courtroom was given no defense in the courtroom of Nero.

As for Paul, who in Paul’s day would want to read of his life? This man gave up prestige, walked away from his connections with powerful men like Gamaliel and the Sanhedrin, and forfeited the potential of personal wealth and comfort. But from the perspective of history and in the light of eternity,

we would say of Paul, “He had it all.” In fact, we find great delight today, in reading and studying his life.

What will history say about you? If it were written, “This was your life!” – what would the description be? Let me put it another way, “Is there anything about your life that is worth writing down?”

Can you imagine coming to the end of your life and realizing that what you should have been concerned about, you were not, and what you should have done, you did not? Can you imagine looking back and realizing that what occupied the primary passion of your life was, in the light of eternity, not nearly as significant as the things you overlooked or ignored?

In that list of things I read earlier, where people told something they had learned, one sixty-two year old wrote, “I’ve learned that sometimes life gives you a second chance.”

I am so glad God does! His mercy is new every morning; great is His faithfulness!

Perhaps for you, that second chance should begin today. The kind of life you are in the process of publishing is not really worth writing down. But today, you are going to begin:

- a personal commitment to Christ;
- a private relationship with Christ;
- a public obedience to Christ.

“Only one life, twill soon be past; only what’s done for Christ will last.”

This manuscript is from a sermon preached on 2/1/1998 by Stephen Davey.

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