SERMON GUIDE

Resolve Your Life Acts 20:24



SCRIPTURE:

Acts 20:24

SERMON NOTES:

Paul encouraged the Ephesians to resolve their lives to the sake of Christ and the Gospel. The Church must resolve their lives to the sake of Christ and the Gospel. Hearers will resolve their lives to the sake of Christ and the Gospel.

Good morning, TJC family? If you have your Bibles, and I hope you do, open your Bibles up to Acts 20:24.

My name is Christian Townson. For the past 3.5 years, I served The Journey as the Director of Missions and Mobilization. Just recently, I resigned that position as Danyel and I have prayerfully decided to move to New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary to pursue next steps to best leverage our lives for the sake of the Great Commission. As we look at today's text, that is my prayer - I pray each and every one of us would obediently leverage our lives for the sake of the Great Commission.

Luke is the human author of Acts, writing to his friend Theophilus the Second Volume of his series with the Gospel of Luke being the first entry. He is showcasing the Acts of the Apostles, but more importantly, the work of Jesus through the Acts of the Holy Spirit. While Luke physically wrote this, it is the inspired, inerrant, perfect, all-sufficient Word of God.

Let's Stand and read ACTS 20:24 -- But I do not account my life of any value nor as precious to myself, if only I may finish my course and the ministry that I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the gospel of the grace of God.

Let's talk about our 2024 resolutions...our Acts 20:24 resolutions. New Year's Resolutions are typically the rage during this post-Christmas week. How many of you have made your resolutions and have everything planned out already? You have your list with your color-coded markers and different categories. Y'all are my people. My wife Danyel is on the opposite end, and when I get in this mode, she likes to say, "Oh boy! Christian is pulling out the whiteboard." I love doing that.

How many of you just said, "Oh! I forgot that 2024 starts tomorrow." How many of you have completely written off resolutions because you don't think they work?

According to estimates, 122,840,000 resolutions are made annually in the US; what percentage do you think are kept? Any guesses? 9%. Only 9% succeed, with 23% of people quitting by week 1 and 43% quitting by the end of January. I have seen dozens of articles stating, "stop resolutions. Do this, instead!"

Why is keeping resolutions so hard? Because while making resolutions is easy, following through with resolutions is difficult. If we are committing to cut back on sugar or caffeine, to go to the gym, to write, to read our Bible daily, to memorize more Scripture, or to give up social media for a season, it's difficult to keep the resolution, because we must discipline ourselves to do something we don't necessarily want to do, even if we know doing it is better for us.

In the book Atomic Habits, James Clear concludes if we are to create a meaningful habit, we must think not only about the actions we plan to take but also about the foundation or the reason we plan to act in the first place. Clear says, "Every action you take is a vote for the type of person you wish to become." We have to think about what kind of person we want to be.

This should be no different with Christians. When we think about resolutions, we should begin not with what we think will simply make us better at something or help us personally. We should make resolutions in order to discipline and resolve ourselves to become who we are supposed to – especially who we are supposed to be in Christ.

When thinking about the types of disciplines we need to practice, we should shift our mindset away from doing the actions themselves. This is mainly because we naturally gravitate toward self-determination. We are like the donkey pulling the plow at my Pawpaw Royce's farm. The donkey was a great worker until its self-determination often led to him thinking, "I will not do what I do not want to do." And when he balked, he was useless as a farm animal. Or we may think the opposite, "I will only do what I want to do." We often find ourselves choosing our own paths or trying to make our own way. And while disciplining ourselves is good and necessary - especially in the Christian disciplines, including scripture intake, prayer, fasting, worship, evangelism, giving, and much more, I believe Scripture urges us to take a different approach to our goal setting. I believe it teaches us to make resolutions for something much greater than ourselves – we should make resolutions for the sake of Jesus Christ and the Gospel. See, if we are to be all we are created to be, Jesus – our Lord - must be the complete orientation of our lives. Everything else – even the best things we can have, obtain, or accomplish - must be counted as a loss compared to knowing and following Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior.

So, this is our Main Idea today: We must resolve our lives for the sake of the Gospel and Jesus Christ.

During his ministry, Paul undertook three missionary journeys to establish the early church among the Gentiles. On his last trip, on his way to Jerusalem, he summoned the church elders from Ephesus to meet him in Miletus for a final farewell. Miletus was approximately 30 miles or a 4-day journey away

from Ephesus. Paul made this unusual request of the Elders because his love for the people of Ephesus was so great that he knew he would stay too long if he visited his brothers and sisters in their hometown. Still, the fact that Paul made such a request of the Ephesian elders shows the importance he placed on this meeting. He had something important to tell them that he felt could not go unsaid. What was this message that was so important?

When he met with the Elders, Paul recapped his earlier ministry, acknowledging his faithfulness there over a tumultuous three-year period. He had served the Lord humbly, endured suffering, and did not omit any part of the Gospel, regardless of how people perceived its value. He reasserted the world's only hope lies in repentance to God and faith in Jesus Christ. He preached the Gospel to both Jews and Greeks, to the knowledgeable and the ignorant, in large gatherings and privately. By doing this, he demonstrated the authenticity and faithfulness of his ministry.

Then he then gives them a slightly worrisome comment. He reveals the uncertainty of his future. He does not know if he will live or die, be successful or perish. All he knows is the Spirit is guiding him to Jerusalem, where he will ultimately face imprisonment, afflictions, and suffering. He knows this is his last meeting with them; he tells them he will not return to Ephesus. They will not see each other again on this side of eternity.

You would think at this point that Paul would have stopped and let his friends deal with the shock and grief, but he pressed on using forceful language, instructing them to take care of themselves and the flock. The Holy Spirit had made them overseers of the church that Jesus acquired with His own blood, so they are to shepherd over it. He was ensuring they understood that they were part of something that was much bigger than themselves - the church is the Lord's, not Paul's. The Church of God, or Church of the Lord Jesus, exists because of what Christ did. Paul warned them about false teachers, comparing them to wolves. Paul emphasizes the need to protect the flock. He wants them to be built up in the grace of God, to stay alert, and to press forward.

The hinge verse of this text is verse 24. With all that Paul was about to potentially endure, he could have taken a turn. Paul could have been very sad and sought a reason to go back with the Ephesians and stop his ministry. He could have been convinced to say, "Maybe this is not God's will for me, or this kind of ministry isn't for me." But he did not. He says, "My suffering, the trouble, the adversity ahead of me "does not move me."

On March 30, 1981, two months into his term as President, Ronald Reagan was leaving the Hilton Hotel in Washington, D.C. after a speech when several shots were fired. A .22 caliber bullet from the gun of a would-be assassin struck him under his left armpit. Yet, after twelve days in the hospital, he returned to the White House.

2 months later, he is standing at a podium, giving a speech, when he heard a balloon loudly "POP!" He does not move. He immediately continues his speech, replying comically but resolvedly, saying, "You missed me". After being shot, President Reagan could have resigned from the presidency. He could

have hidden in the White House. But he did not. He pressed forward. There were more important things than his fear. The adversity "did not move him." Paul is the same in an even greater way. And Jesus is the ultimate example of this, letting no obstacle prevent his path to Calvary's cross.

Paul shares his resolve to encourage and challenge the Ephesians to resolve their lives for the sake of Jesus Christ and the Gospel. This is the entire point of his message. He demonstrated the authenticity of his faithfulness, leading them to make their lives count regardless of what awaits them. He wants to help them center the focus of their lives on Jesus and the Gospel because the truth of the gospel is what really matters in life. It is what sustains us in our suffering, what keeps us in faithfulness, and what helps us finish well.

Paul helped appoint these leaders, and he knew that while they could aim to do a lot of good things, but without their lives centered on Jesus and the Gospel, they would not endure. They didn't know it, but they were about to face their own imprisonments, afflictions, false teachers, and even death. They would blow away like the top of dandelions in the summer without being rooted in Christ. If they were to be faithful in this life, they would have to be resolved in the Redeemer.

This life throws us a lot of things as well. We don't know yet what 2024 holds. It may be the best year of our lives, or it may be the most challenging. We may have many wins, or we may take a few losses along the way. One thing is sure, no matter what life brings, the only way we can be faithful to our Lord and his calling on our life is to be fully resolved in him. So, that's our question, how do we resolve to live our lives in faith to the Lord in 2024?

At the heart of Paul's dialogue, he gives us the answer. Let's look at the resolutions of Paul. If we mirror his resolutions, I believe we can faithfully follow the Lord in 2024 and beyond.

Paul's Resolution #1: Consider Your Lives Worth Nothing To You

Paul begins with the statement, "I do not count my life of any value nor as precious to myself." I like the NIV version that says, "I consider my life worth nothing to me." Paul is not being nihilistic or self-destructive here. He knows his journey to Jerusalem will likely involve imprisonment and affliction. How does he respond? "I'm going because I consider my life nothing. Suffering for the Lord, facing prison and pain, but that is nothing in comparison to living for His sake."

In Acts 21:13, he says that he is not only willing to be imprisoned but that he is ready to die for the name of the Lord Jesus. This echoes **Philippians 3:7-8**. *"But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ. Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ and be found in him."* "The object of suffering and discomfort did not drive him away from his work. When he saw the storm rise, he did not hesitate but went on resolutely, preaching there, where he knew how dearly it would cost him."

Friends, our lives are worth nothing in a comparison game with God. Nothing. Jim Elliot said, "He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain that which he cannot lose." Not only are our lives worth so little, but God is worth so much. The God of the Universe, the Father, gave up the most priceless person for the most destitute of people. How can we not consider our lives nothing if Jesus himself considered his life nothing?

Maybe you have seen the videos of the moms and dads putting \$10,000 cash and a banana in front of the child. The child can choose whichever they want. Which do they normally choose? The banana. Why? Because they don't understand that if they give up the banana, they can buy thousands of bananas with the money. Do not laugh at the child, because we are the ones who are often taking the bananas and forsaking the object worth so much more. We take sin, selfish ambitions, and give up the One worth immeasurably more.

Friends, to resolve our lives for the sake of the Gospel and Jesus Christ, we must consider our lives worth nothing to us. Another version says, "But none of these things move me." Suffering. Comfort. What I want. What you want. These things cannot move us. We must be resolved to be moved by the cause of Christ for the sake of the Gospel and testifying to it. We must remove ourselves from being our own gods to realizing that our lives are worth nothing in comparison to Jesus Christ. We must "deny ourselves, take up our crosses, and follow Him." We must become last, because the first become last and the last become first. We must humble ourselves, for the exalted will be humbled and the humble will be exalted."

How do we consider our lives worth nothing to us? It begins by considering Jesus worth everything to us. He is the hidden treasure.

"Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a treasure hidden in a field, which a man found and hid; and for joy over it he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field." - Matthew 13:44 (ESV). The man had no issue giving up everything he had; why? Because his life was worth nothing in comparison to the treasure.

What if the man considered his own life more? He would not have sold everything he had. He would not have obtained the treasure. Friends, if we want to experience the fullness of joy in Christ, we must resolve our lives to say, *"Jesus, you are everything. I am nothing. I am your faithful servant, willing to do whatever you please. Thank you for calling me your brother, your friend, your beloved."* We must have the holy conviction to lay aside anything that can get in the way of becoming our god. Students and kids in the room - phones, tv shows, hobbies, friends. Adults - jobs, friends, coworkers, prosperity, selfish ambitions. Whatever it is, resolve yourselves to consider it nothing. We must see Jesus as the radiance of the glory of God, the beautiful baby boy who grows up to become the holy, overwhelming Savior who was poured out for our sake.

When we consider ourselves worth nothing to us, then we can finish the race of Christ and complete the race of the Gospel of God's grace.

Paul's Resolution #2: Finish the Race of Christ

Paul continues, "if only I may finish my course and the ministry that I received from the Lord Jesus."

Let's start with the course, or the "race" of Christ.

For the Christian, what is the race of Christ? It is our life. Paul elaborates in **2 Timothy 4:6-8** --For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure has come. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Henceforth there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will award to me on that day, and not only to me but also to all who have loved his appearing.

When Paul speaks to Timothy, he is nearing the end of his life in a similar conversation with the Ephesians. He compares his life to a race. Our lives have a starting line, many curves and bumps along the way, and a finish line. In Christ, our lives have another starting line. We are born again to a new life, in reality, a new race from running for ourselves to running for our Savior. We live for Christ. And we await the day when we will end this race and die for Christ, where we will be reunited with our Lord at our finish line, only to go to the eternal winner's circle with no finish.

Paul desires to finish well. He proclaims, "My life is worth nothing because I am here to live for Christ and die in Christ. I am ready for whatever he has." This is why he says in Philippians 1:20-27 that he is eager to die for "to live is Christ and to die is gain" and that no matter what, we should "let our manner of life be worthy of the Gospel of Christ."

Paul's aim in life is to live for the Gospel and die for Christ. Matthew Henry says, "He made it the business of his life to testify this and desired not to live a day longer that was not instrumental to spread the knowledge and savour and power of this Gospel." He exhorts us to do the same, to live our lives in a "manner worthy of the Gospel of Christ." Are we running the race well? Do we reflect Christ through joyful obedience, or do we begrudge our lives and live for ourselves?

Friends, we must be resolved to finish the race of Christ. How do you run a race? Intentionally and with endurance. When my wife and I run in our subdivision, she will naturally drift to run right in my path. I make fun of her for this, but this is how we too often run the Christian life. If we just start running without aim, we will get off course and run into the woods. Most importantly, the aimless runner will not receive the prize at the end – the prize of Jesus Christ. Jesus himself says the road to the kingdom is a narrow road and straight.

We have a responsibility to finish the race of Christ by following the one who has set the pace-Jesus himself. We are *"heirs in Christ"* who are meant to devote our lives to *"good works."* We exhibit the fruit of the Spirit as we walk by the Spirit and keep in step with him. We must live for Him all by His grace. What does it profit us if we gain the whole world and yet forfeit our souls, if we forfeit our great prize in the Promised One?

Listen to the first of the great American Revivalist Preacher Jonathan Edwards's 70 resolutions, which he wrote in his diary amidst the uncertainty and flux of being an 18-year-old pastor in New York City. These resolutions would supply a place for him to stand and a compass to guide him as he made his way.

"[1] Resolved, that I will do whatsoever I think to be most to God's glory, and my own good, profit and pleasure, in the whole of my duration, without any consideration of the time, whether now, or never so many myriad's of ages hence. Resolved to do whatever I think to be my duty and most for the good and advantage of mankind in general. Resolved to do this, whatever difficulties I meet with, how many and how great soever."

How do we run the race of Christ? We do whatsoever we think to be most to God's glory. This does not mean, "I sin to God's glory" or "I get to choose whatever I want to do for God's glory." Jesus said if we love him, we will obey him and we are to walk in a manner worthy of the Gospel. What does Paul instruct them to do? Spread the entire Gospel. Pay attention to yourselves and to the flock. Be alert. Preach repentance toward God and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. Abide in Christ.

How do we run the race of Christ poorly? By not running at all. By being lazy. By not training for it. There are things that we should be doing as Christians that we are not doing because we are not considering our lives worth nothing to us. We don't share Jesus because we don't think he is precious or valuable enough. Everyday, our life should begin with *"My Father, My Brother, My Holy Spirit, this day is for you, this life is for you."*

Friends, our resolution should be to run the race of Christ well, finish the race of Jesus Christ well, and hear him say, "Well done, my good and faithful servant."

We do this by considering our lives worth nothing to us, finishing the race of Christ, and completing the task of the Gospel of God's grace.

Lastly, Paul's Resolution #3: Complete the Task of the Gospel of God's Grace

The NIV splits the end into 2 verbs. We finish the race and complete the task given to us by the Lord Jesus Christ - the task of testifying to the Gospel of God's grace. We finish the race of our life, but we also complete the task.

What is the task? The task of testifying to the Gospel of God's grace, to make a solemn affirmation of the Gospel of God's grace. I love that Paul lays out exactly what he is speaking of. He tells them, "my life is to testify to the Gospel of God's grace. You've seen it in my life and ministry. I didn't shrink back from anything profitable. I proclaimed repentance and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ. I went from house to house and in public. I went to Jews and to Greeks. I make it my ambition to preach the Gospel where Christ has not already been named. I gave you the whole counsel of God." Paul says, "~My MO is to testify to the Gospel of God's grace, not about anything else.~"

Do we not see it? Our lives are to be about denying ourselves, living for Jesus, and letting other people know that "this is the way." Jesus is the way. No other way. No other path. There isn't a Jesus job fair where you get to ask him if there are any other options.

I do not care if you have been a Christian for the last five minutes or for fifty years. If you follow Jesus, then you must resolve your life not only to be a fan of Jesus but to follow Him. Following Him means that we do what He saved us for. Why did He save us? Why did He call us? Mark 3:13-14 puts it beautifully. He appointed the apostles and called them to Him *"so that they might be with him, and that he might send them out to preach."* If you are in Christ, you have heard and responded to His call to be with Him, to abide in Him, and He in you. And you have heard his call to be sent out to preach with authority. To be ambassadors. To make disciples of all nations. No excuses. No opt-outs. No *"I don't want that New Year's resolution. I want to make my own"* No opt-outs on each of us doing our part in completing the task.

We often talk about the culture swaying to and fro, but if we do not pay attention to ourselves, we will sway to and fro while looking like a Christian. We must be rooted deeply in Christ, resolved to obey all Scripture, not just the parts that we like or the parts we want to obey.

I have a missionary friend in the Middle East. He has been there 8 years, laboring faithfully in a hard place to spread the Gospel to our Muslim friends. He helps run a fitness business that provides him access to live among unreached people groups and engage with the local community. There are but a few followers of Jesus where he lives – no strong church – and after 8 years he had seen 24 teammates leave that area. Then his team leader's visa was not renewed - Make that 28 teammates now. My friend was distraught, wondering why all this was happening. He was thinking about giving up. Could the ministry even continue? Then, he gets a call from a local Muslim guy he had first met 7 and 1/2 years ago. He said, "I'm thinking about changing my religion. Can I come and talk to you about it?" My friend agreed, they spoke, and the Muslim man decided to follow Jesus and said, "I want to get baptized. They drove to the ocean and baptized him."

Friends, the task of testifying to the Gospel of God's grace is not an easy one, but it is worth it. We must be resolved to deny ourselves, delight in Him, display His glory to others, and deliver the most important news that we have- that Jesus Christ, the Son of God, lived and died for us because of God's grace, His goodness and loving kindness. And that He calls everyone to repent and believe in the Gospel that Jesus rose again and reigns today, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance. He gives us the task to testify to the Gospel of this grace, so, we testify faithfully

Consider your resolutions. Are you resolved only for ways to better yourself? Or are you resolved for our King? C.T. Studd, the great missionary who was the Rich Young Ruler but he gave up everything to follow Jesus, said,

"Only one life, 'twill soon be past, Only what's done for Christ will last. Give me Father, a purpose deep, In joy or sorrow Thy word to keep; Faithful and true what e'er the strife, Pleasing Thee in my daily life; Only what is done for Christ will last. The grass withers, the flowers fade, but the Word of the LORD will stand forever (Isa. 40:8)."

Friends, I do not want to assume that everyone here knows Jesus. It is pointless to make resolutions for Jesus if you have not trusted in Him as your personal Savior and Lord. The greatest resolution we can make connects to the greatest resolution Jesus made- when He resolved Himself to be the Savior of the world, to take on flesh and die as the innocent God-man for guilty, rebellious sinners. You may be one of the people who have kept every resolution you have ever made, that you believe you are a good person at heart. The Bible says that none of us are good, that we are all sinners in need of a Savior. The world plays this out. We are evil and wicked, yet while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. God showed His love for us in this way. Paul preached repentance toward God and faith in Jesus Christ, and I am now doing the same.

For the Christians, we see the resolutions of our Lord written all over Scripture.

Jesus considered his life worth nothing to Him but came down to endure and bear the cross we should have borne.

Jesus finished the race. He lived for us. He lived to manifest the all-sufficient merit in His life, death, and resurrection.

Jesus completed His task of testifying to the Gospel of God's grace. He made disciples of all nations. How can we not do the same?

Resolution 1: Consider Your Life Worth Nothing to You. Resolution 2: Finish the Race of Christ. Resolution 3: Complete the Task of the Gospel of God's Grace.

Let's pray the preface to Jonathan Edward's list of resolutions, "Being sensible that I am unable to do anything without God's help, I do humbly entreat him by his grace to enable me to keep these Resolutions, so far as they are agreeable to his will, for Christ's sake."

Let us resolve our lives with God's help for the sake of Jesus Christ and the Gospel.

LOOK BACK

- How was your week? What is one thing you're grateful for and one thing that challenged you?
- How did you GROW in obedience to Christ over the last week?
- Where did you GO to share the gospel or have a spiritual conversation with someone?

BUILD UP

- **REVIEW**:
 - Read Acts 20:17-35, focusing on verse 24, and then have someone else in the group read it again, preferably from a different version.
 - What big takeaways did you have from the teaching?
 - Additional Scripture:
 - Acts 20:22
 - Galatians 2:20
 - Philippians 3:13-14
 - Romans 15:16
 - Acts 9:16
 - 2 Timothy 4:7
 - Romans 1:16
 - Romans 3:23, 10-18
 - Romans 6:23, 5:8
 - Romans 10:9, 10:13,
 - Ephesians 2:1-8
 - Romans 5:1, 8:1, 8:38-39
 - 1 Corinthians 15:1-4
 - 1 Timothy 1:16
 - Galatians 5:19-21
 - 2 Timothy 3:1-5
 - 1 Corinthians 6:9-10
 - Romans 15:13
 - 1 Corinthians 13:13
 - Romans 8:24-25

• REFLECT:

- Why didn't Paul account his life as having any value or as precious to himself?
- What is the course that Paul is trying to finish?
- How does Paul testify to the gospel of the grace of God?

• **RESPOND**:

- In what ways do you value your life? How does this play out?
- If you are in Christ, then you also have a ministry to complete. What is the course or ministry or the race that God has given you? What are some ways to prepare for this race?
- MEDITATE:
 - Acts 20:24 -- But I do not account my life of any value nor as precious to myself, if only I may finish my course and the ministry that I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the gospel of the grace of God.
- MEMORIZE:
 - Galatians 2:20 -- I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.

SEND OUT

- **GROW:** How will you abide in Christ this week and grow in your love and understanding of Him?
- GO: Who in your sphere of influence needs to hear this story or the gospel?
- PRAYER:
 - Pray over any request from your group members.
 - Directional Elder Chris Townson
 - Ministry For the Nations
 - Pray for our long-term families on the field:
 - The Wilsons
 - The Grays
 - The Starks
 - Pray for our mid-term sent ones on the field:
 - Kaesi
 - Pray for the lost Unreached People Group (UPG): Bisaya in United States



■ Population in country: 15,000

- **Global population:** 93,000
- Christian Adherent: 0.00%
- **Evangelical:** 0.00%
- Primary Religion: Islam
- Primary Language: Bisaya, Sabah
- Summary: The Bisaya of Malaysia are located in western Sabah along the northern coast of Brunei Bay. Thousands of Bisaya have come to the United States seeking better lives and opportunities for their children. The Bisaya who have moved to the United States experience huge changes. They first must secure housing and food, which are very different from what they are used to. They must learn English as a second language and the children must enroll in American schools. The newly arrived Bisaya have physical needs like housing and food, which can be met with the help of American believers.
- Prayer Focus: Ask the Lord to send workers to help the Bisaya in their new home. Pray that Bisaya elders and leaders would come to know the savior and lead their families to the Lord. Ask the Lord to raise up a disciple making movement among the Bisaya living in the United States in this decade. Pray that American Bisaya believers would go back to Malaysia to share the gospel with their families and friends.
- Want to keep up with other Unreached People Groups? Download the Unreached of the Day App <u>https://joshuaproject.net/pray/unreachedoftheday/app</u>