

Live and Die With No Regrets

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I want to read a text out of Acts 20:22. Paul, the apostle. He was making one last visit with the Ephesian elders, as he was on his way to Jerusalem. In Acts 20:22 it says this, "And now behold, I'm going to Jerusalem. Constrained by the Spirit, not knowing what will happen to me there, except that the Holy Spirit testifies to me in every city that imprisonment and afflictions await me."

Now listen to this: "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. And now behold, I know that none of you among whom I have gone about proclaiming the kingdom will see my face again."

I thought these words were fitting at Richard's funeral. For one, the Apostle Paul, he's met with some Ephesian elders. He had them come down to Miletus. He's on a ship. He comes up. He doesn't have time to travel the 20 or 30 miles or so to Ephesus. He probably needs to be on time with the ship. He's headed for Jerusalem. He calls these elders from Ephesus, which is not too far away, and when they come, he tells them, "You're not going to see me again alive in this world."

And you know what? I think about those men. They remembered Paul. He prayed with them before he left. I can imagine them walking back to Ephesus, the 30 miles or so. And they talked about Paul and what he had taught. They weren't going to see him. They wept. And you know, I have a feeling those of you here, you've tried to think, when you heard that Richard had gone to be with the Lord, you tried to think, "where was the last time I saw him?" "Where was the last time I talked with him?"

Did you all do that? I did that. I talked with him at the men's retreat. It was a theological thing that I had been toying with in my mind, and I said, "Richard, we need to talk about that." And he came up and we engaged there. And I can remember, too, like some of the men, I looked over and I saw Richard leading the music. That last night, my truck was parked right next to his, and my son and I were sleeping in the back, and Richard, I think he stayed up till 4 or 5 in the morning playing a game with some of the guys. Craig said he heard him laughing at some unbelievable hour. And there my son and I are sleeping happily in the back of the truck, and sometime around 5 in the morning Richard turns his truck on. And the exhaust is right there by the back end of my truck. So not only is the thing [running], the fumes are coming in and I'm gagging on carbon monoxide. Just trying to remember Richard... The last time that I saw him, the last time I spoke.

I'm sure it was the same with these guys. Here's the apostle Paul, he passes through. This is how life is. Life here does not last forever. And the time we have with people, we just don't know when the last time has come. Paul had an idea he was not going to see their faces again. The Spirit had indicated that. They had a last time. We had a last time with Richard. But life is moving on. We can't put the brakes on. We can't bring Richard back here. They couldn't bring Paul back to Ephesus. When he left, he was gone - in this world. And that's how this is.

Think about how many of us in this room in 50 years, a day just like this is going to be somewhere in that next 50 years for each one of us. At least, those of us that are older. And you can start to think, I was thinking about it. Oh, if only I had known this was going to be the last weekend I got to be with Richard. If I could do it over again... I think with all of us men that were at the men's retreat, knowing what you know now, if you could go back to that third day, how would it be different? I know how it would be different. There would be a crowd around Richard the whole time. And maybe some of us have regrets. Maybe some of the men have regrets. "I didn't get to talk to him."

Brethren, we need to live for today. We don't want to live with regrets. There's a lot of opportunities - you and I are not going to have any more opportunities in this lifetime. It's like David said, his wife asked him, "Did you ever tell Richard that?" No. And maybe there's a number of things we never told Richard, that we wish that we would have told him. Missed opportunities.

But you know what? With death, with the passing of a brother like Richard? And maybe with the thought of some failed opportunities, we need to think about today, and not missing the opportunities now with others, because there's a lot of people around us that are still alive. And there's a lot of opportunities that we don't want to squander with them. The family of Richard's, you don't want to squander the words that he said to you.

You know, I don't know how many of you have ever prayed with Richard. I know this, I did pray with Richard. Typically, when we all stayed together Richard would not pray. But if you got in a group with him, he did pray. And he wept. I don't remember Richard ever praying without weeping. Our church had all manner of things, missionaries and needs in the churches, and things happening in the propagation of the Gospel. Richard would pray for his family. I can see some right here that he wept for. We need to live for today. And we need to not squander.

Notice how Paul lived for today. "I do not account my life of any value, nor as precious to myself, if only I may finish my course in the ministry that I received from the Lord Jesus to testify to the gospel of the grace of God." I want to tell you about the Apostle Paul. I'm not talking about Richard right now, I'm talking about the Apostle Paul. He lived for today. A surrendered life. It was surrendered to Christ. Here he is with his last meeting with these Ephesian elders in this world. What does he have to say to these guys? What would you want to say to others if you knew it was the last time in this world that you would see them? What would Richard have said to those at the men's retreat last weekend? Or to his family a week ago? What would he have said? Paul had that going for him. He knew that was the last time. We don't know the last time. What would Richard have said?

Here's what Paul said. Paul could say, "Guys, you know my life. And you're not going to see me again. My supreme aim is to honor the Lord Jesus Christ." He said it this way: "I do not account my life of any value, nor precious to myself, if only I may finish my course and the ministry that I received." He said to these men, you know how I lived among you. I was faithful. He said, you yourselves know how I lived among you the whole time from the first day that I set foot in Asia. Serving the Lord with all humility, with tears, with trials that happened to me through the plots of the Jews, how I did not shrink from declaring to you anything that was profitable, teaching you in public and from house to house, testifying both to Jews and to Greeks of repentance toward God and of faith in our Lord Jesus Christ.

You know what this is? This is a man who can look on his past. He can say, you're never going to see me again. I'm getting towards the end of my life. The Lord has another course for me. I'm not going to see your faces again, but I can tell you this, I've lived faithful. I've lived as one that does not have concern for my own life. I've lived for the Lord.

Brethren, friends, family of Richard's, you do not want to live with any regrets. Because when the day comes, folks, this is you and me soon. I don't know if Richard had any regrets. I don't know. But we don't want to live with regrets. Paul could look these men in the eyes, and he could say my life has not been precious to myself. I have lived it for Christ, and I was faithful among you and you know it. And as family and friends, we know a lot about how Richard lived among us. Don't live with regrets. If there's anything that death stares us in the face and says to each one of us, it speaks of our own mortality. We are not going to be around forever. Death sends a warning to all of us, that life is short. Richard was young. He did not expect this.

Look, a year ago when he was in the hospital, we expected this - his heart stopped several times. But this came suddenly! At the men's retreat, he was healthy. He led the singing! He did not expect this. And you don't expect this. We don't expect it. We don't want to live with regrets. Paul was not ashamed to show his past to others.

And what did that life look like? It was a surrendered life. It was a reality. He could show it to others. Paul was in no way ashamed to talk to others about his past in the presence of these men who knew him well. What a glorious thing it is to be able to examine our lives, and to be able to not have regrets. To get to that end. Whether you die suddenly like Richard, or whether you lay on a deathbed, where you can look over your life and say, no, it wasn't perfect, but I lived my life for Christ. I lived trusting Him. I lived for Him. Look, Paul's calling was as an apostle. It was as a missionary. That's not our calling. He desired to live his life for Christ, to finish his course, to live out the ministry that Christ called him to. His ministry is not ours.

Richard had a different calling in life. It wasn't the calling of an apostle. It was the calling of Richard. He had a part to play. He had people to encourage. He had people to speak to, people to be an example to. We need to live faithful. We need to live for Christ. Oh, to be able to say as Paul does, I've served the Lord with all humility. To be able to say that I didn't shrink back from doing what the Lord called me to do. He didn't serve for money, he tells them in verses 33-34.

Listen, we've got to move forward. We all have to move forward. And you know what? For the Christians here, there is a hole left. When soldiers of the cross are taken by our Lord, somebody's got to fill their place. We go on. Onward. Death looks at us. We need to be faithful. We need to press on. We need to press forward. Nothing could turn Paul back. That needs to be us. We go forward. Listen, we are going to encounter a lot of death. Many of us before we get to the end. Funerals are a part of this world. But we press towards the prize of the high calling. We press towards eternity. We press towards eternal life, where every tear is wiped away and where there is no more death. We press forward. And there is this faithful group of witnesses that have gone before us, and they bid us on.

Come, with our eyes upon Christ. Press forward in this race. Press on. Paul - he says I live for Christ. I did not count my life dear to myself. Can we say that? Are you living your life for yourself? Jesus calls us to follow Him. Jesus says, "Come unto Me." He says, "Come to Me." And He says, "Learn of Me." And He tells you to trust Him. And He tells you to follow Him. You

need to look to His cross, and live in the power of what was done there. That is our only hope. Living for Christ.

Oh, to be able to have the testimony of Paul. To be able to say what he said. This is reality. Death is reality. And it's appointed unto every one of us once to die, and then the judgement. And we are moving so quickly, speedily, towards that moment when we enter eternity. When we stand before the Lord. Paul is saying, look, here all for Christ, all for Christ. Forgetting those things that are behind and reaching, stretching towards that which was before and pressing towards the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.

I'll tell you this, you can't scare a man with death, who's living a life like this. You know what Paul would say? Why do you weep like this? I am willing to not only go to prison but to die, if only I might finish my course well. I want to live for Christ. I want to proclaim Christ. He is my all. He declared that he did not count his life his own. To him, to live was Christ. Church of God, this happens... It happened with Ila; undoubtedly with Johnny, though my mind is not remembering that so well. But with the death of our brother Richard, it makes me think of eternity. It makes me think of life. It makes me think of the brevity of life. It's quickly moving by, and what are we living for? Listen, to live for this world, to live for the toys and the trivialities of this world, what are those things? They don't satisfy the soul.

Vess is talking about looking over at Richard and seeing Richard welling up with tears and affection over what Christ did on the cross. Oh, to be moved by what Christ has done. To be moved by the Person of Christ. And to live for Him, and to be consumed with Him, all for Christ, and to live as though your life is not precious to you.

What did Paul mean by that? My life is not precious to me. What does that mean? It means it's not mine. I'm living for Another. And if He would have me lay it down for Him, Christ is precious over my life. And that is what Christ called us to. He called us to die. And to carry our cross and to follow Him. But Paul, what about hardship? What about the possibility of death? What is that to a man whose life is not his own? If that's what Christ calls me to, then so be it. Church, we need to press on, clinging to Christ. Let us run without regret.

The day's coming when it's all done. It's all written. The last chapter on Brother Richard's life in this world. The period is there. It's done. His story is done. And it can't be changed. And oh, to be able to say like Paul, you guys know that with all humility I ran well before you. What do you want? Not what do you want said at your funeral? Not what do you want inscribed on your tombstone? What do you truly want the Lord to say in that day? I want, "Well done, good and faithful servant." Brothers and sisters, if that's what we long for, then let us live the life that will meet Christ's approval in that day.

Think with me brethren. Live your lives well. Spend them well. Let Richard's death be a reminder to all of us of our own mortality. Live well while you have life. Live well. A converted Hindu was persecuted bitterly for accepting Christ. His relatives seemed filled with deadly hate against him for forsaking the religion of his ancestors. They did what they could to force him to deny Christ. Some sympathetic friends asked him how it was possible for him to bear so much trouble. He replied, "Ask me rather, how it's possible for me to bear all the joy that I have in the service and fellowship of Christ!"

That was the very same thing that was true of Paul. He never thought of confronting danger and prison as causing him to have to finish his course with sorrow. It was all joy to him.

Joy. Oh, to depart and be with Christ, which is far better. Living in the joy. Another voice in our brother Richard silenced for Christ. One more Christian removed off the scene of this world. Richard served. I could depend on Richard. I know he had some health issues. I could depend on him to be there early, all the time. I could depend on him to be in that seat behind that little table, whether it was here or it was over at the restaurant, I could depend upon him to be there. He was faithful.

I guarantee, he was animated in the preaching. He never slept. I knew if there was going to be one attentive listener, he was going to be. He was going to be there and he was going to be faithful to handle that computer and handle that projector. I knew that if somebody came in off the streets that looked shady, that he thought would be a threat to our women or children, he watched them. There were a lot of things that I just could depend on Richard for. I could depend on him to sing in tune. I could depend on him to sing well. I could depend on him in a lot of ways. And he's gone.

And we need God's people to rise up and fill the place and to be faithful. And I just end with this: "When I was in college," said Henry Hey, "a couple of men were sent out to West Africa to fill a vacancy. And before they had gone three months, there came a cable telling us that one was dead. In less than another month, a second cable came, telling us that the second was dead. At once, that matter was announced to the students of our college, and the question was asked, 'who would take their places?' where two had gone and died; six men at once stood forth and offered to go in their places, and two men were sent. In less than six months, these two men were dead. And a cable came again, and the question was asked, 'who will go?' On that occasion, I shall never forget it, it stands out as one of the thrilling moments of my life. When the announcement was made at the college table and the question was asked, 'who will go?' Every man in that college stood up and said, 'send me.'"

Richard's gone. And we need to stand forth, and we need to press on, and we need to walk in footsteps of those faithful who have gone before. We need to fill the spot, fill the gaps, take up the responsibility. Christian soldiers, arise. We are not yet done. Our battle is still at hand. Our journey is still before us. Our rest is not yet. We have not fallen into the arms of Christ as our brother has. Our time is not yet. The time for us to gird our loins with that sword and go forth into battle is still at hand.

Brethren, arise. Let the life of our brother be an inspiration to us to press on. To not waste your time, waste your days, waste your hours. Onward for Christ. Sold out to Christ. Hungry for Christ. Onward in the name of Christ. Be faithful to Christ. So that when you get there, there are no regrets. Brethren, no regrets! Death is real and death is coming. And as the song says, hell is coming. And hell is real. And those here who know not Christ, or play games at religion, hell is real and you will find out its reality soon if you do not cling to Christ in faith. He bids you, "Come."

And Richard, I know, most of you are here for the funeral because you knew him. And those of you that he knew who did not know Christ, he pleaded with you and he spoke truth to you. Let his words not fall on deaf ears. What he told you about is the greatest news in all this world, that there is salvation. The worst, darkest stained sinner can be set free and washed clean - cleaner than the new fallen snow by the blood of Jesus Christ. By faith alone. Calling on the Lord Jesus Christ. He said, "None that come to Me will be cast out."

You say but you don't know the things I've done. He does. And He came for the sick. He came for sinners. And He saves them to the uttermost. And if all of this sounds foreign to you, and you can't relate to all this, we call you, join the army of Christ. And the way in is not the way into the army in the United States. The way in is to come as a guilty sinner, and look to Christ to be saved, and to Him alone, trusting in none of your own abilities, and merits and anything else.

But Christ, Christ only. Oh, Christ, there is nothing sweeter. Our brother would cry and weep tears because of the beauty of Christ. There's nothing more beautiful. There's nothing more worthy to live for, than to pour out your life for Christ. God help us to be as the Apostle Paul. No regrets. A life surrendered to Christ. I leave you with that. Live for Christ with no regrets. No regrets. All for Christ.

Father, we thank You for the time together tonight. We thank You for the remembrance You've given to us. We thank You for the ways that You've enriched our lives with the life of Richard Gonzales. We thank You, in Christ's name. Amen.