

Of all the things that demand priority in your life, only Jesus satisfies.

You are meant for satisfaction - at the core of who you are, you were designed to experience fulfillment of expectations and need that you would find joy in it your satisfaction.

A longing for it is built into you. It is the reason you desire “stuff” both good and bad, and it is also why when you get the stuff you wanted you end up wanting something else. It then is a constant struggle to find satisfaction, contentment, pleasure even in life.

The list of things that lure you is long. Things that seem to make promises of fulfillment and demand your attention and time. They can actually take over your life, always striving toward them, achieving and then coming up empty again.

Real satisfaction is found elsewhere - beyond the American Dream or our idealized situation.

We exist to love God and enjoy him forever - it is why we are hardwired this way - always craving fulfillment - to find true, lasting, eternal satisfaction and the sooner we find it, the more ready we are for the adventure of real life.

There is a way to this satisfaction - God has come himself to provide it, to make things right and restore and reorder what has been broken by sin.

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And when we get it, we should probably share it!

Acts 21:1-16

...only Jesus satisfies, how do we get that from a travel tale? I think we can recognize it in Paul's response to the prophetic glimpse into the reality coming his way - how he resolved to go on, life or death.

Paul's apostolic team is making their way to Jerusalem for Pentecost and to bring financial support to the church there. Along the way they are stopping to encourage churches. And at each stop there is an increasing sense of impending danger for Paul.

He tells the Ephesian elders of it, that chains await, then the Spirit makes it clear to others as well. The story Luke tells here is one of how the church reacts to coming danger and how Paul keeps going - he won't stop because he knows something profound.

As we journey with Paul this morning, we will look at his Readiness to do whatever it takes as part of a life of Response to true satisfaction.

1) Readiness

“Paul you can’t go to Jerusalem - danger awaits!” We have all been in situations like this where those we love protect us or counsel us toward safety. Safety is not a bad thing - it is preferred. “Don’t go so close to the edge, you could fall!” “Don’t travel to that dangerous country.” “Don’t eat that third donut!”

So we know the feeling. We understand what Paul is going through. But Paul has a deeper more important purpose than safety. He will go on, he will continue the mission, he will do whatever it takes to make the name of Jesus known.

You can imagine the pressure, the heartache. He loves these people - formed into family as the church. These are those that came to faith through his preaching, through the ministry of others he disciplined, they share a defining sense of unity. He hears them, the believers in Tyre and then those in Caesarea telling him to not go on to Jerusalem - the visual prophecy of imprisonment that is sure to happen. Even his band of ministers - even Luke the author of Acts - urge him not to go up to Jerusalem.

Acts 21:13–14 “Then Paul answered, “What are you doing, weeping and breaking my heart? For I am ready not only to be imprisoned but even to die in Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus.” [14] And since he would not be persuaded, we ceased and said, “Let the will of the Lord be done.” (ESV)

Paul has experienced a lot of trouble along the way - he has been stoned, jailed, harassed, run out of town, threatened - so it is normal but he does not crave it. There is terrible opposition to the message he preaches, but he won’t shrink back because he knows it’s true.

And Paul is not without options. At this point he is revered, he could stay out of Jerusalem and pastor a church, watch it grow for years, be as comfortable as you could in the first century. He could settle down and start a seminary... He could soften his message, and make Rome a vital element to the kingdom, maybe even include some patriot Roman music during worship services...

He is satisfied in Christ! He doesn’t tell us in Acts 21 but when we view his whole ministry and pattern of life, it is a glaring fact.

Paul’s prison perspective: **Philippians 1:20–21** “as it is my eager expectation and hope that I will not be at all ashamed, but that with full courage now as always Christ will be honored in my body, whether by life or by death. [21] For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain.” (ESV)

Paul did not proceed toward this difficult date with destiny reluctantly - he sprinted to meet it! He gave God's plan for him higher priority than anything or anyone else. Such joyful abandon to the divine will would go neither unchallenged nor unrewarded.

“Paul says that his great passion in life — I hope it's your great passion in life — is that in his life Christ would be seen as great — supremely great. That is why God created us and saved us — to make Christ look like what he really is — supremely great.” Piper

In the eighteenth century in Britain, when a pastor or missionary called from counter-cultural obedience to Jesus, or when they lived fully surrendered to the mission of Christ they would call them an “enthusiast.” The most milk toast insult possible! We might call them radicals, or even extremists. Well Paul is an enthusiast.

Something is so driving him toward his goal that nothing will get in the way, not even his own life. He will take on the trouble, he will face prison, affliction, punishment, because at the core of who he is, he has something that far outweighs those trials and all the desire even for safety, physical comfort and proximity to his family.

He has surrendered all of the things that promised fulfillment but can't quite deliver. Especially those things that are “good” for the sake of telling everyone who will listen about Jesus. And it is not like Paul becomes a hermit and lives his calling alone. He is surrounded with this family of the church. Deeply loves and serves the brothers and sisters, but he won't put them before his mission, his response to Jesus.

Paul's satisfaction, his readiness is not unique to his experience - there are plenty of stories from church history and even in our day of similar sacrifice... it flows from and frankly is supposed to be the life of following Jesus.

This is the life we are routinely invited into when we gather and hear the word of God. It is the example of the church from its formation and it is the call of Christ to us. With Christ at the dominating center of our lives we will stand out. As salt enriches and preserves meat, so the church influences the world. But the salt has to be chemically different than the meat... It has to be salt - can't lose its saltiness. This is a reprioritized life. And it is exactly what Jesus promised.

This is a radical call to come and die, to surrender our existence to Christ because we have found satisfaction in him.

“Contrary to the message of our culture and the teaching of many in the church, Jesus does not put 'self' in front of actualisation but in front of denial. We will never become our true selves unless we yield our all to him. We lose life to gain it.” Sam Alberry

We pair this with Christ's commissioning of us to make disciples of all nations and we have what we were created for.

Are you ready for the radical life of adventure you have always felt called to?

Paul was ready. Millions more to follow him were ready. The heroes of the faith, the ordinary believers living in ordinary places were ready. The frontier missionaries and the lady that shares Jesus with her neighbor are ready.

Hebrews 12:1–2 “Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, [2] looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.” (ESV)

Our only hope to live this reality, the same motivation for Paul and the church the last 2000 years is a response to who Jesus and what he has done.

2) Response

As I studied Paul’s response to calls to safety and avoiding hard things ahead, I kept being brought back to the exact same situation for Jesus.

Following the confession that Jesus was the Christ, the son of the living God, Jesus marches toward destiny, unstoppable.

Matthew 16:21–23 “From that time Jesus began to show his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised. [22] And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him, saying, “Far be it from you, Lord! This shall never happen to you.” [23] But he turned and said to Peter, “Get behind me, Satan! You are a hindrance to me. For you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of man.” (ESV)

We rarely have clear vision to see how God uses the events of life to form his story... we understand Peter’s reaction - we sympathize with those urging Paul to stay. But Jesus has set his mind on the things of God. And what a glorious result it produced.

Jesus does whatever it takes to get you, to save you and make you an ambassador for him. “who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame.” He satisfied the wrath of God against sin for you that you could finally find satisfaction in Him.

He carries out the mission for you - realize that - as he has his face set toward Jerusalem, as he endures torture and is hung on a cross, you were on his mind. It was for you. He took it on so that you could once and for all experience eternal satisfaction in him.

It is not something we conjure up, invent or declare to be true but this satisfaction is something we receive. So once again, we seek him, we ask for the satisfaction only he can provide. That his grace, his life, death, and resurrection would transform us, that the Holy Spirit would enliven us, empower us and enthuse us with the life of Christ.

It has to start there... no guilt gets you there. No scheme to force obedience succeeds. But from satisfaction in Jesus, from the experience of transformation in him comes newness. Surrendered life. Sacrificial generosity. Unashamed passionate worship. Unrelenting sharing of what truly satisfies.

Be Satisfied - cry out to the Spirit to renew your heart, to open your eyes to what Christ says of you and the life he desires for you. Seek him alone in your times of quiet, seek him in community over shared meals and worship...

Are you open to him? Dive in, be satisfied, be surrendered, and live the adventure he has for you.

Live - "There is something worse than dying; not living." Your definition of adventure might be different, but there is not better life than the one you are meant for in Jesus. You might have the next 20 years mapped out in your head, well ordered to avoid hardship and a terrible demise. Maybe that is supposed to be turned over to Jesus for the abundant life he has invited you to.

"Today, our Lord calls us to accept the hardship of staying open to his will, his endless interruptions, his mid-course corrections." Ortlund

There is no risk in following Jesus. The race is already won, the game is over - go ahead and pull the goalie!

Pour out yourself for the glory of Jesus and the good of others, and then you will actually find life. Christianity is a call to give your life away - are we ready?

You are meant for eternal satisfaction and satisfaction is meant for sharing! Cut loose what holds you back from sharing Christ, from worshiping him as ultimate, from living in the freedom that Jesus won for you by his blood.

Of all the things that demand priority in your life, only Jesus satisfies. And when we get it, we should probably share it!

There is an old hymn call "Where He Leads Me, I Will Follow" and it is pretty clear the first one to sing it was Jesus! "Wherever you send me, Father, I will go. Whatever cup you give me, I will drink, for my meat and my drink is to do the will of the Father. It is as if Paul said to them, "Do you hear it? I can hear my Savior calling from Jerusalem, and where he leads me, I will follow." May we all be true to *our calling - whatever it takes*, whatever it costs us, wherever it takes us, that we may be ready to run the race until it is over." Sproul