

**Acts 20.17-38**  
**Lord!****Behold the servant of the**

**“But I do not count my life of any value to myself, if only I may finish my course and the ministry that I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the good news of God’s grace.”**

**Acts 20. 24**

I have quite a few different Bibles in my study, but one of the more cherished ones is the one that I was given 50 years ago this year, by the Sheffield Christian Education council, for passing their Scripture Examination five years in a row. It’s a Revised Standard Version of the Bible, one of the more modern translations available at the time, but the language now reads as quite dated.

I blame this Bible, though, for giving me a completely wrong idea of Paul’s life and mission, which I thought was correct for several years. You see the version that I have contains headings at various points in the text and some lovely illustrations by Horace Knowles, including maps of ‘Paul’s missionary journeys’. Together, the headings and the maps gave me the totally erroneous impression that Paul had these journeys completely planned out before he set off.

At the beginning of Acts 13 this Bible confidently asserts that Paul’s first missionary journey began and ran for 46 – 48 AD. It’s almost as if Paul went down to the local travel agents and picked up a brochure with the various ferry schedules in it and booked his passage – everything pre-planned, just as we would do today. But, of course, I now realise that it wasn’t like that at all and that to talk of 3 missionary journeys, as my RSV does, may perhaps be a little misleading.

In our passage for today, Paul is in Miletus, and from there he sends for the leaders of the Church in Ephesus – presumably to come and update him, as it were and we hear only what he has to say to them and it’s almost all about his calling to declare to them ‘anything that was profitable’. Paul doesn’t boast of what he has achieved but puts it all down to the Holy Spirit testifying in him.

Whilst I don’t in any way want to rank myself alongside St. Paul, I echo something of his experience.

When I began my working life, some forty years ago, I was very clear about my calling. God had called me to be a science teacher and, by the age of 40, to become head of a science department somewhere, anywhere except London, Birmingham, Liverpool and Manchester – the big cities. But I testify to God’s sense of humour, that plan to be a science teacher lasted for only six years and I never did get off the lowest pay scale! Since

then God has sent me to serve in London, Liverpool and now Manchester. It hasn't been all planned out; we have not known where we will be going for my next appointment at any time of this journey.

This will, God willing, be my last appointment as an active minister in the Methodist church. We don't yet know where God is calling us to serve in retirement but, with Paul, **"I do not count my life of any value to myself, if only I may finish my course and the ministry that I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the good news of God's grace."**

I trust that this may be the testimony of each one of us.

1 BEHOLD the servant of the Lord!  
I wait thy guiding eye to feel,  
To hear and keep thy every word,  
To prove and do thy perfect will,  
Joyful from my own works to cease,  
Glad to fulfil all righteousness.

2 Me if thy grace vouchsafe to use,  
Meanest of all thy creatures, me,  
The deed, the time, the manner choose,  
Let all my fruit be found of thee;  
Let all my works in thee be wrought,  
By thee to full perfection brought.

3 My every weak, though good design,  
O'errule, or change, as seems thee meet;  
Jesus, let all my work be thine!  
Thy work, O Lord, is all complete,  
And pleasing in thy Father's sight;  
Thou only hast done all things right.

4 Here then to thee thy own I leave;  
Mould as thou wilt thy passive clay;  
But let me all thy stamp receive,  
But let me all thy words obey,  
Serve with a single heart and eye,  
And to thy glory live and die.

Charles Wesley