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I Spy God On the Move Compelling Acts 20:17-31

Children's Sermon:

Good morning. I'm Pastor Bill. You know we're in a series on the Holy Spirit and we are using different words to describe how the Holy Spirit moves in the Book of Acts. The word we are looking at this morning is "Compel." Does anyone know what the word compel means?

I brought something to give us a little idea of what compel means. Do you know what this is? (magnet) Yes. You can see how it picks up certain kinds of objects – that are metal. (demonstration)

Here we have two magnets. And the interesting thing about this is that on one side of the magnet they attract each other, but on the other side of the magnet they repel each other – they push each other away. That has to do with positive and negative charges. A positive and a negative charge attracts, but two negative charges or two positive charges repel or push away from each other.

So the word that Paul uses today in our Bible passage is the word "compel" which actually means "to bind." Paul says he is "compelled" by the Holy Spirit to go to Jerusalem; in other words, he is powerfully drawn to go to Jerusalem. He can't help but go. That would be like the positive and negative attraction of the magnets. The magnets are powerfully drawn to each other.

Can any of you think of a time when you felt powerfully drawn to do something?
Sermon:

Read Acts 20:17-31

From Miletus, Paul sent to Ephesus for the elders of the church. When they arrived, he said to them: "You know how I lived the whole time I was with you, from the first day I came into the province of Asia. I served the Lord with great humility and with tears, although I was severely tested by the plots of the Jews. You know that I have not hesitated to preach anything that would be helpful to you but have taught you publicly and from house to house. I have declared to both Jews and Greeks that they must turn to God in repentance and have faith in our Lord Jesus.

And now, compelled by the Spirit, I am going to Jerusalem, not knowing what will happen to me there. I only know that in every city the Holy Spirit warns me that prison and hardships are facing me. However, I consider my life worth nothing to me if only I may finish the race and complete the task the Lord Jesus has given me – the task of testifying to the gospel of God's grace.

Now I know that none of you among whom I have gone about preaching the kingdom will ever see me again. Therefore, I declare to you today that I am innocent of the blood of all men. For I have not hesitated to proclaim to you the whole will of God. Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers. Be shepherds of the church of God, which he bought with his own blood. I know that after I leave, savage wolves will come in among you and will not spare the flock. Even from your own number men will arise and distort the truth in order to draw away disciples after them. So be on your guard! Remember that for three years I never stopped warning each of you night and day with tears.

Sermon:

Our series this morning in the Book of Acts is entitled *On the Move*. This morning we are looking at how the Holy Spirit is on the move compelling... Paul is "compelled" by the Holy Spirit in his missionary work for Christ.

Since it is Family Worship Month and our theme around the room is "I SPY"—as in where do I see God at work—I thought I would use the acrostic "SPY" to answer the question "How was Paul compelled by the Spirit?"

First of all Paul was compelled by the Spirit to: **SERVE** the lord with humility and with tears.

¹⁹ *"I served the Lord with humility and with tears...."*

Paul worked very hard among the Ephesians for three years—by day, providing for himself and the needs of his companions as a tentmaker, and by night teaching people about the Lord Jesus Christ. He lived simply and very humbly. He didn't want to burden the people of Ephesus with his needs.

He also said he served "with tears." In fact he says that in two verses—verses 19 and 31. In verse 31 Paul said, *"...I never stopped warning each of you night and day with tears."*

Why does Paul say "with tears?" Because Paul's ministry involved both the mind and the heart. Paul had a great mind and a great heart. He not only shared all of his knowledge about God and about Jesus with the Ephesians, but he also shared his heart. And when we open up our hearts in ministry it can be both a joyful and

tearful process. Sometimes life is painful and difficult, and people who love others “in Jesus’ name” are willing to come alongside people in those difficult times.

There’s an old saying in ministry that goes: “People don’t care about how much you know until they know how much you care.” Sometimes our most powerful ministry is just being with people in the painful times of life, when life is really hard, when things are not easy, and there are no words to say—just being with someone at that moment of need.

I remember as part of my pastoral training taking CPE (Clinical Pastoral Education). I had to serve full-time as a chaplain for three months in a local hospital as part of my ministry training. I remember hearing over the loud speaker at the hospital “code blue, code blue” which meant that someone’s heart had stopped. I walked quickly to the emergency room to see if I could be of any help. There in the hallway standing outside the emergency room door was with the family whose child had just “coded.” They were all huddled together outside the emergency room doors crying. When I saw them as I walked down the hall, I just put my arms around all of them and just wept with them. There were no words to say at that moment. Just to be present and sometimes present with tears.

That’s ministry. Sometimes we enter into people’s lives in joyful times, sometimes in painful, difficult times. Paul said I served the Lord with humility and with tears.

The “P” in SPY stands for: **PROCLAIM** the whole will of God.

Paul was also Compelled to proclaim the whole will of God. Paul did not hesitate to share the whole truth of the gospel.

²⁰ *“You know that I have not hesitated to preach anything that would be helpful to you but have taught you publicly and from house to house.”*

How was Paul able to be so bold in sharing the truth?

He received a lot of physical and verbal abuse for sharing about Jesus. It landed him in trouble with a lot of people and he usually got kicked out of a town or city. But people’s anger and displeasure toward Paul did not deter him from sharing the truth. Why? Because Paul knew that he was accountable to God with what he said and did with his life. Not to people. He said, *“Therefore I declare to you today that I am innocent of the blood of all men. For I have not hesitated to proclaim to you the whole will of God.”*

Paul is saying that when he stands before God he will stand as an innocent man, because he fulfilled the calling God gave him. He did not hesitate to proclaim the whole will of God to the people God sent him to. That’s a powerful statement.

Can we say that same thing today? Will we be able to stand before God someday and say that we shared the whole will of God with the people God wanted us to?

²¹ *"I have declared to both Jews and Greeks that they must turn to God in repentance and have faith in our Lord Jesus."*

Paul was an evangelist. He was compelled to proclaim Jesus Christ to both Jews and Gentiles. That was his gift, his passion, and his calling. But God calls us to. We're not all evangelists but we are called to communicate the "whole will of God" at any given moment.

Somebody said to me recently, "I can't hear the Lord speaking to me. I don't sense his direction in my life." And I had to say to them—because I know them really well and they know I love them—"It's because you're not following God. You can't hear the Lord speak, because you're choosing not to align your values and behaviors with what God has revealed in His word."

Those words were really hard to share. I didn't want to share them. I didn't want to create tension in the relationship. But more than that I do not want to be guilty before God some day of not telling the truth, not telling the whole will of God to someone who desperately needed to hear it, so it might possibly lead them to repentance.

Is there someone in your life right now that you need to share "the whole will of God" with and not compromise the truth? Paul said, *"I warned you, night and day with tears."* Do you ever shed a tear for someone who is not heeding the warning Jesus gives us concerning eternal life?

The "S" in SPY stands for Serve the Lord with humility and with tears, the "P" stands for Proclaim the Whole Will of God, and the "Y" stands for: **YIELD** to the spirit's leading.

Paul was compelled to yield to the spirit's leading: ²²⁻²³ *"And now, compelled by the Spirit, I am going to Jerusalem, not knowing what will happen to me there. I only know that in every city the Holy Spirit warns me that prison and hardship are facing me."*

Did I mention earlier that the word "compel" in Greek literally means "to bind?" Luke uses it both literally and figuratively.

In Acts 9:2 Luke writes about Saul.

"Saul was still breathing out murderous threats against the Lord's disciples. He went to the high priest and asked him for letters to the synagogues in Damascus, so that if he found any there who belonged to the Way, whether men or women, he might take them (literally bind them in chains) as prisoners to Jerusalem."

Paul uses that same word in Acts 20 to describe himself—that he is a man who is bound, he is a man who is compelled. *“I am compelled by the Spirit to go to Jerusalem...where the Holy Spirit warns me that prison and hardships await me.”* Paul is completely yielded to the Holy Spirit, so much so that when He senses the Spirit moving in his life he feels compelled to respond in absolute obedience.

So what is Paul saying to these Ephesian elders about yielding themselves to the Holy Spirit? What does he exhort them to do? He says: ²⁸ *“Keep watch over yourselves and the whole flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers.”* In other words, pay attention to how you are living. Guard your hearts. Guard your own souls. Before you can shepherd someone else’s soul you guard, protect, nurture your own soul.

So, elders, deacons, staff workers, volunteers, followers of Jesus, how are you doing at keeping watch over yourselves?

Someone shared with me recently an acrostic that helps monitor how you are feeling. This is important, I think, because our feelings influence our behaviors. How we feel often times influences how we act. This might even be worth writing down. The acrostic is B.E.A.R.

- B – boredom (loneliness)
- E – entitlement (I deserve this)
- A – angst (anger, anxiety)
- R – resentment (unforgiveness)

Feelings trigger us. They lead us to do things... both good and bad. Paying attention to yourself means knowing what is going on inside of you—knowing how you are feeling and being honest with yourself about your feelings. Before you can tend the souls of others, you must know the condition of your own soul and care for it first.

So this morning: How are you being compelled by the Holy Spirit?

Are you being compelled to:

- Serve the Lord with humility and with tears? Maybe you’re needing to be more open and transparent with others in your life, in your ministry. Are there people in your Life Groups that really don’t know important parts of you even if you’ve been with them for years?
- Proclaim the whole will of God. Is there someone you need to speak the truth to in love? Maybe you’ve been holding back and not telling someone something they really need to hear.
- Yield to the Spirit. Maybe you’re not keeping very good watch over your own soul. You might be coming to church regularly and doing religious acts, but

your soul is dried out, or afflicted because the secret you've been carrying around is affecting your relationship with God. You need to tell someone else, but you've been afraid, for fear of rejection. How is the Spirit compelling you today?