

All For Jesus!

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[0 : 00] But I would like us to take what he says and I would like the leaders of the church here this evening to apply it to themselves as we have to recognise his own leadership example and what he was sharing with the Ephesian elders and leaders.

But also I want the whole congregation, all of us as Christians, to see the same example, the same privileges that we have in our Christian lives to live with the kind of dedication and commitment that Paul lived with because we've received the same things from him in broad-stroke terms.

We've done that and that's what I would like us to do for a little while this evening. And remember the statement that he gives in verse 35 when he is defending his Christian commitment and his dedication and his service to the church in Ephesus.

He says to remember the words of the Lord Jesus himself saying it's more blessed to give than to receive. And that's kind of, in a sense, I suppose a theme of this evening in our Christian lives that we are more blessed.

We're more content, we're more happy, we are more fulfilled as Christians when we are serving, when we are giving rather than when we're receiving. That's counter-intuitive. We don't think that way. We like to receive.

[1 : 28] But here Paul is saying that Christ tells us it's a more blessed thing in our Christian lives when we are serving, when we are giving rather than when we're receiving. But in order for him to be able to say that and for Jesus to say that to him and to us, we recognize what Paul had been given.

Paul had been given the very best. Paul's life, Paul's apostleship, Paul's ministry, Paul's work was in response to God's transforming grace in his own life.

And so he knows and he understands what he's been given. He understands how significant the gifts in his life are that he's been given.

In verse 24 he speaks about, I'm going to flick through some of the verses this evening, that he wants to finish the race and complete the task. The Lord Jesus Christ has given me the task of testifying to the gospel of God's grace.

He humbly shared and lived that gospel of God's grace in his life. Paul had been transformed, Saul had been transformed by love, by love, by love.

[2 : 41] It was God's grace that had changed this angry, arrogant, murdering Pharisee into this servant of this fledgling New Testament church.

And in that moment when he was aware of his own blindness, physically symbolizing his spiritual blindness coming off the road to Damascus, and his spiritual guilt, and his sight being restored by the touch of the living God, by the touch of Jesus Christ, he knew he'd been forgiven.

So why do you persecute me? Can you see how that must have utterly turned his life and his thinking upside down? When he recognized with his samesthi against you, you only have a sin.

And this love of God transformed him. He'd been given freely this great gift. It's the craving that we all have to belong and to be loved, and at a spiritual level, we recognize that can only be fulfilled in the Lord Jesus Christ.

And it's a revelation for us to be able to accept that God loves us in the way that he does, in the way that's life transforming.

[4 : 04] It's not only a revelation, it's a revolution in our thinking. It transforms the way we act and react and respond in our homes, in our families, in our jobs, in our studies.

The love of God, he'd been given the very best this relationship with God, this forgiveness and this hope. But he'd also been given a unique message in verse 23, he speaks about, verse 25 again, he speaks about the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ.

He was different from us in the sense that he was made an apostle. He was one of the founders of the church. He says in 1 Corinthians 15 that he was appeared to as one abnormally born with a special message, this apostolic message of the gospel.

This is the message, the administration of God's grace that he says in Ephesians 3, that was given to me for you. That is the mystery made known to me by revelation.

So he was given not only the love of God in his life but he was given this unique message to share with the church. This great message of God's grace. He was given this message as an authoritative truth to the church by Jesus Christ, the gospel message of the Lord Jesus Christ.

[5 : 33] He wasn't a maverick, he wasn't going with his own ideas or his own interpretation of what happened to Jesus on the cross. He was recognized by the church, he was accepted by the church as an apostle of Jesus Christ.

And he says in 1 Thessalonians that the word that he gave was not the word of men but actually as it were the word of God, which is at work in you who believe.

So this really powerful message that he was given, the word of God, the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ, which we've been looking at in 1 Peter, well we were until Easter, we've been looking at 1 Peter, that great foundational truth, that message that he was given.

Greatest gift, this best message that he was given. And we also have that message. Paul, James Griffiths on Wednesday night mentioned that quite significantly, he was talking about sharing your faith.

He was talking about the misrepresentation that some people have whereby they say that you know, do all you can do and then if there's nothing left then share the message or words to that effect.

[6 : 48] And he says that's really a misrepresentation. It's not just about living a life of love and if all else fails, that will reveal the love of Christ.

We have and declare a clear message. It's what we've been given. You and I are ambassadors of Jesus and we are asked to share that message of good news with the world.

That will generally, well I've been a Christian roughly 32, 33, 34 years or so, and I kind of worked under a misrep, misapprehension that if I kind of live the right kind of life among those who are not Christians, that generally I'll get lots of opportunities to share the gospel or I'll get lots of, they'll ask lots of questions that will give opportunity for the gospel to be shared.

I generally haven't found that to be true, not necessarily because I haven't lived a life of love, I hope I have, but because there's an intentionality that we have to add to our lives, that we are going to share a message.

Generally people are not going to come up to you and say, well what must I do to be saved? Wouldn't it be great if that were the case? But generally we will need to know how to share this great message and we will know the privilege that we have, but the significance of learning to get that message across to people about their need of a redeemer, their need of a saviour. So he had been given the best, the greatest relationship and the greatest message, and he was aware of that.

[8 : 35] His life was turned round, it was transformed, and that enabled him to then live the kind of life that he lived that is summarised as it were in the short passage as he speaks to the Ephesian elders.

This is his response. His response as an apostle, as a leader in the church, was one of determined and powerful gratitude.

He was motivated heart and soul from within because of what Jesus Christ had, the very best that Jesus Christ had given him. He was aware of that, he knew the message was the best, he knew the love that he had received was the best, and therefore he was able to give of his best with the strength and power of the Holy Spirit and live this remarkable dramatic life in service of the Lord Jesus Christ.

He wasn't egocentric. There is a lot in the Epistles where he mentions himself, but he is clearly not egocentric. He is not measured in what he does, he is not conventional, he is not self-centred in any way.

We have this great servant spirit that is epitomised in this final moving address to the Ephesian elders.

[9 : 59] I just want to say he was all heart and he was all soul, and that we can learn from that as we live a life or as we recognise a life of gratitude to God for what he is doing.

It is miserable isn't it when we are driven by guilt or when we are driven by fear in our Christian lives? It makes our feet very heavy spiritually.

We drag our feet. We don't really want to do it because we are driven or we are motivated by fear or by guilt. It makes for poor Christianity, poor Christian living.

Paul was motivated by gratitude. His service wasn't an afterthought. It wasn't just measured at the end of his day. It was wholehearted response of gratitude. He was all heart and he was all soul.

That in much of what he says probably not least in the embrace that they share at the end of his address and the hurt that they feel that they will not see him again.

[11 : 17] It was a love motivated apostleship that he had and if you read the letter that he wrote to the Ephesians, it speaks in these great terms about that they would know that great love.

The width, the height and the breadth and the depth of that love that passes understanding because that reflected his own life and it reflected his own relationship.

He lived his Christian life and he served in his apostleship with grace coloured spectacles. He had moved from a place of violence to a place of love and that is a crucial motivation that enables us to serve God from our heart out.

When you love somebody, the motivation to do things for them generally is much easier. The passage I'm not sure what passage I'll read at the wedding on Friday but the passage is often read as 1 Corinthians 13.

Love is not easily angered and all these different characteristics. The love is expressed in these beautiful ways because the heart is a great motivation.

[12 : 32] As leaders in St. Columbus, that's what is to be our motivation for serving here and for leading the city groups and for being involved in the congregational life.

Our motivation is love for the living God. It's the power of God that courses through our veins. It must be our motivation and as believers also for one another love is to be what we seek earnestly after.

It's great. Hope is incredibly important in our lives but love is the greatest. That's what we are to seek after and look for and strive after in our congregational life as we reflect what we have been given, the same love and the same message that Paul has been given.

Easy to not think in these terms. Easy to hold our hearts back. Easy to be a closed book.

Easy to be uncommitted and simply living with the Christian community on the edges of our experience.

[13 : 48] Love is not measured in that way and is not something that is conditional at that level. He's all heart and his love but that is also matched by his phenomenal hard work.

He clearly was a hard working apostle. Love doesn't mean he just floated around all the time and had cups of coffee with people and said how much he cared for them.

He says in everything that I did in verse 35, I showed you by this kind of hard work because remember he didn't want to be supplied by the church, paid by the church. So he made tents as well in his spare time.

I showed you that by that kind of hard work we must help the weak remembering the words the Lord Jesus said, it's more blessed to give and receive. Paul's like that, wasn't he? And sometimes we make them contradictory, love and hard work, grace and hard work.

And yet he's saying, and his life was clearly showing that he was an apostle who also had a day job. He was someone who was a Christ-centered ambassador for God and he was a postie as well.

[15 : 06] If you want to take it up to date a little bit more, he did everyday work. He was hard working when he finished his day's work. Then he went on to teach and to preach and to share and so much so that Yeddaus fell over the top balcony because he preached all night right through to daylight.

He had astounding energy and ability to work hard given to him by the living God. But he was motivated by what he'd been given. He'd seen, he could see what Christ had done for him.

He could see that great love, that great message, that great relationship and it gave him the ability to work hard. Great energy, great discipline, great fitness.

We're coming up to the Olympics just now and you'll see the fruits of phenomenal hard work in people for the last four years. We see the kind of, the cream of it, we see the result of it at the Olympics, don't we? All the fantastic competitors, the world records being broken.

All these amazing things but there's just an iceberg under the water of hard work that has gone on to get them to this place. And so in grace, there's this great energy and hard work that Christ enables us to do as we're motivated by him and when we recognize that he gave his best for us.

[16 : 32] There's no place in the congregation for leaders who are lazy pietists. We want to be hard working and we aim to be hard working.

We know there's a balance, we know we can go over the score, we know of responsibilities to our friends and families and to relax and remember it's a marathon, it's not a sprint. We've heard all these things, we know them but we work hard for Jesus' sake and the gospel is hard work.

The gift is free but there's great hard work required for all of us. It's an extension of our love for him that we are not measured in our service but we simply become exhausted for Jesus' sake.

I hope that we can see and recognize that as we've been given the best, we can in return give the best, give the best of our efforts and our work in his service.

Following him and loving him because of what he has done. We're not measured, we don't give him just small parts of our lives.

[17 : 44] We don't look at our lives and say I'll work hard in my family and I'll work hard in my career and the ambitions that I can have and I'll work hard to do my very best and to earn. And when all of these things are done I'll just give just the dregs what might be left if I've got any energy.

If I don't fall asleep like you do, I'll just give him that last wee bit. Sometimes it can be like that for us, isn't it?

The church is the poor release, I don't mean the church as an institution. I mean the community of Jesus, the gospel community, it can be the poor relation of our lives, isn't it? When everything else is done, when I've spent everything else, if there's anything left I'll give it to his cause.

When I've used up all my gifts pursuing my own ambitions, I'll give what maybe is left for his cause. Because we don't recognise sometimes, and I don't see sometimes, the best that he's given, the best relationship of grace and the best message.

And as he is all heart, we see also his transparency, he speaks again and again of his honesty and of his innocence as he is sought to serve in verse 26, therefore I declare to you today that I'm innocent of the blood of all men for I've not hesitated to proclaim to you the whole will of God.

[19 : 12] He's honest as he is all heart, he's transparent, he's sincere, he has pure motives. He has nothing to hide as he reaches out to the gospel.

And as leaders of the church, that's what we should be like. That's what we should aim to be like with our people, honest, transparent, sincere, not duplicitous with nothing to hide.

We're not separate from them, we're not a closed book again, but as leaders we are vulnerable and open and genuinely real and transparent with our people, and also as people we are to be the same.

It's easy in a bigger congregation to hide spiritually, isn't it? It's easy to just come and go and be on the periphery of what happens, but through our city groups and through the accountability and closeness that we're trying to develop through that, we're looking to develop honesty, spiritual honesty, transparency, sincerity, so that we can help one another, so that we can develop and grow in our Christian faith, because we are all heart, we've been given the best, and so we in return are giving the best all heart.

And we see also He was all soul, and there's a real depth of spirituality in His relationship with Him.

[20 : 44] He taught them the gospel wholeheartedly in verse 20, He says, you know that I've not hesitated to preach anything that would be helpful to you, but I've taught you publicly from house to house.

He devoted to teaching the authoritative Word of God, the message that was given, the message that He takes and shares. He went into heaven to receive from Jesus and takes back and shares with the people.

He did it publicly and He did it from house to house. That's really the model that we seek to use and have in our church, to teach publicly from the Word of God, to teach the authority of the Word of God, to teach the message of the Word of God, and for you to receive that as disciples, or for all of us should I say, I include myself of course within that, to receive that.

But we also are encouraged because we've been given the best to share that truth, that message from house to house, in our houses today, in our homes, when we have people back for hospitality, in our city groups, sharing this message of truth.

One of the things, again, Paul was talking about on Wednesday about sharing our faith. Well, one thing he didn't mention, but that I mentioned, when I was speaking about that at the Youth Conference a couple of weeks ago, was how difficult it is to share our faith with other people when we never share it with each other.

[22 : 16] Why would we suddenly feel that we can speak to unbelievers about the Gospel? Why would we feel that is easy to do when we're unable to share it with ourselves, when we don't share Jesus Christ in each other's company, when it isn't natural or relaxed for us to do so?

We recognize what we've been given, and the message that we have in these jars of clay, then we're willing to be taught and learn and share that word with one another.

But not only did he teach, we recognized he was a great man of prayer, all heart, all soul in his prayer. A phenomenal prayer, Minus, verse 32, he says, I commit you to God to the word of his grace.

A great thing that we can commit one another to God in prayer. A great thing to do. I think sometimes that takes a while to get into our consciousness.

We're hoping to start a prayer breakfast once a month on a Sunday morning. Maybe five, maybe six there today.

[23 : 30] Maybe ten first time. A while, but I hope it will come into our consciousness that it's not a ritual, but as we give, I've been given the very best.

We give the best in return. We pray for one another. We can get up on a Sunday morning for nine o'clock. We can pray together, not because it's a ritual, not because we're guilty, not to do a favor for someone, but because we recognize the power of prayer and the value of prayer in our lives.

It's all heart and all soul. And what then was the result in Paul's ministry? Well, it was the best. He received the best.

He gave the best. And the result was really the best as well. What a great transformation the Gospel made in Ephesus. Oh yeah, there was riots, undoubtedly, because the Gospel has that effect.

It disrupts people's sinful peace and deadly peace. But it brings life. Life always has that effect.

[24 : 41] Fast transformation. And that's a great... Alarm bells should be ringing in our Presbyterian heads, where the word fast is connected to anything to do with what we do.

Because, you know, that's not generally what happens. The least change takes at least 150 years. But here in three short years, there's a massive transformation.

There's a church from nothing. There's conversions. There's mature leaders. There's vibrancy. The churches meet alive. It's transformed. The city of Ephesus turned upside down.

Chapter 19 that Tom looked at last week could be headed God at work. Or, secondly, riot in Ephesus.

The only way the challenge for us is to allow the Spirit of God to speak to us about the difference grace our love makes.

[25 : 46] Love made a huge difference in Paul's life. It transformed his eternal relationship with God.

And he knew what he'd been given. And it transformed his life. And so as we recognize God's work of grace in our lives, it also changes us.

It changes our bitterness, our grumpiness, our individuality, our self-righteousness, our disinterest, our careless living.

Whatever we happen to list, it changes that. It changes our leadership. It changes our service. It changes the Deacons Court and the Kirk Session. It keeps us from cynicism.

And it reminds us that we are people who recognize it's more blessed to give than to receive. That is transformational truth. And I hope it's transformational truth for us.

[26 : 48] And not just for Paul. Because it changes us. And if we are changed, then other people will be changed as well. So much of the time we want others to change, don't we?

Sometimes a good way. We want people to be saved or converted or situations to improve. But most of the time we want, if you hear a real humdinger of a sermon that's, you know, maybe particularly challenging.

You say, well, that would be a great message for them down there. For the person next, we really needed to hear that. We really needed to hear that sermon. We want them to change.

We want them to change so that they're more like what we want to be. Or more like that they're more like us.

But we allow the Gospel not only to change ourselves first, but then as we are changed, others will be changed. And we think of those that we long to see saved.

[27 : 54] I hope we don't have a 20-year wait to see a great Gospel awakening in our city. And the city transformed and turned upside down.

But may we not blame God if it's not happening. May we not care if it's not happening. But may we look to be changed by His grace because of the best that we've received.

And that motivates us to live our lives in such a way that's hard working and all heart and all soul. So that we will see the changes around us that will transform this church and this city.

I do hope and pray in my life and in yours that that will be the case. We're going to pray together and briefly.

And we're going to finish the prayer with together reciting the Lord's prayer, which will come up on the screen, I hope. You can actually just bring it up just now. But I'll just pray briefly and usher you into that prayer, which we will do together.

[29 : 01] And then we're going to finish in response to God with a couple of items of praise. So let's bow our heads in praise. Heavenly Father, we thank you for, again, the example of Paul.

But we ask that we would not put him on a pedestal. But remind ourselves that we too have been given the very best in our lives. Astonishing salvation that we found difficult to put into words this morning and feel that it's almost too holy and precious to do so.

But that we need to do so and we need to share it with others as we live it ourselves. And having received the best, may we give the best. May our service tonight, our lives, may they not be driven by guilt, by shame, by fear or by paralysis, may they be driven by gratitude and thanksgiving and motivated by wanting to love Christ more through obeying Him more.

And may that bring a smile to our faces and a likeness to our step and a joy in our sacrificial service and a blessing knowing that it's better to give than to receive.

So Lord, hear our prayers this evening and we thank you that we can pray together tonight in the prayer that you shared with your disciples and may we close our prayer at this time sharing these words together.

[30 : 32] Our Father in Heaven, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come. Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us today our daily bread and forgive us our debts as we also forgive our debtors.

Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from the evil one for yours is the kingdom, the power and the glory forever. Amen.