

Christ-Centred Ambition

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Date: 26 July 2020

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[0 : 0 0] The scripture reading comes from Philippians chapter 1, starting in verse 18b. Please follow along on the screen or your Bible. Yes, and I will rejoice, for I know that through your prayers and the help of the Spirit of Jesus Christ, this will turn out for my deliverance, as it is my eager expectation and hope that I will not at all be ashamed, but that with full courage, now, as always, Christ will be honored in my body, whether by life or by death. For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain. If I am to live in the flesh, that means fruitful labor for me, yet which I shall choose I cannot tell. I am hard-pressed between the two. My desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better. But to remain in the flesh is more necessary on your account. Convinced of this, I know that I will remain and continue with you all, for your progress and joy in the faith, so that in me you may have ample cause to glory in Christ Jesus, because of my coming to you again. This is the word of God.

Thank you, Kathy, for reading the passage. Sounds so much better when you read it than when I say it in my head. Good morning again. My name is Oscar. I'm one of the leaders here at Watermark, and it's really a privilege to be sharing the message with everyone today. Let me pray for us.

Father God, Lord Jesus, Holy Spirit, just pray that you have your way over the next 30 or so minutes, God, that your spirit would help me with clarity of thoughts and speech, that the message would be clear and concise. And I pray for all of us listening, tuning in, that our hearts would be soft and accepting of your word, God, and I just pray that it would fall on fertile soil. Help us to see this incredible Jesus that Paul loved, to see the beauty of Christ so much more clearly. Have your way, God, today. In Jesus' name. Amen. When I was young, my ambition was to be a professional tennis player.

From the age of 11 years old, I spent probably up to 25 hours a week on the court training, in the gym, and on weekends playing tennis tournaments. My parents spent an enormous amount of time, energy, and money on my tennis. I didn't have much of a social life when I was a teenager. In fact, if you ask me now, what did teenagers do in the 90s? I actually have no idea. I didn't do any of those things. Our ambition drives us to do many things. Our ambition drives us to work hard, to make sacrifices, to change our behavior because we think it would benefit us long term. Our ambition pushes us to persevere in the face of adversity because we have a vision, a goal, or a prize that we are striving towards. For some of us, maybe our ambition is to make money and retire. Perhaps if you are a university student, your ambition is to graduate, find a good job, and make a name for yourself in the world.

Or maybe your ambition is to get married and have a family. As we continue our sermon series on the book of Philippians, in today's passage, we'll look at Paul's ambition. Paul lays out his life school very clearly. In verse 20, he says, it is my eager expectation and hope that I will not at all be ashamed, but that with full courage, now as always, Christ will be honored in my body, whether by life or by death. If Paul had a mission statement, this would be it. This was his reason to exist, that Jesus Christ would be honored in his body, in life, and in death. The word honored can be translated as exalted, i.e. lifted high, or magnified, i.e. made big. In a word, Paul's ambition was that the name of

[4 : 52] Jesus would be glorified, glorified through him. He deeply desired that all who knew him, from the disciples that he planted at those churches, to the prison officials who guarded him day and night, that they would see through Paul a glimpse of the beauty, the kindness, as well as the sovereignty and majesty of Jesus. And how did Paul go about doing this? How did he glorify the name of Jesus?

Jesus by doing two things, by loving Jesus and by loving those around him. Sounds simple, but if we're honest, they're both pretty difficult to execute. And so, Christ-centered ambition, if we were to define it, is to glorify the name of Jesus Christ through loving him and loving others. And this morning, we'll try to unpack these verses and see what that looks like in Paul's life and in our lives.

Now, if you look again at the end of verse 20, Paul desired that Christ would be honored in my body, whether by life or by death. And then in verse 21, he follows it up by saying, for me to live is Christ and to die is gain. In Paul's life, we can pretty easily imagine how he glorified Jesus. He spent all of his time spreading the gospel. He suffered for the sake of Jesus. And he did all of this joyfully, not out of guilt or compulsion, but because he had a deep love for his Lord Jesus. But then he says this interesting thing in verse 21. He says, and to die is gain.

How does dying glorify the name of Jesus? How would he be able to preach the gospel if he died? Well, let's read on to see what Paul says about his own death. In verse 23, he says, I'm hard pressed between the two, i.e. living and dying. My desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better. Now, is Paul saying that he desired death because his life of suffering and persecution were too much to bear and therefore death would be a release? Or is he saying that he desired death because he believed that in heaven, in paradise, he'd be able to experience all those worldly carnal pleasures that he gave up to be in ministry for most of his life? Well, of course, Paul is not saying either of these things. Paul said, to die is gain because in death, he would finally be face to face with Jesus Christ, the one he loved and the one he adored above everything else he had ever experienced in the world. Can you sense Paul's deep love, adoration and desire for Jesus?

And so for the Christian, one way that Jesus is glorified is when we love him so much that we consider death as gain because we gain Christ.

[8 : 08] Now, let's not kid ourselves here. This is extremely challenging. I myself have been preparing this sermon for a little while now and this idea that death is gain is still very difficult for me to swallow because by definition, in death, we are forced to give up all that we deem as good and valuable, fun and exciting. Goodbye to all those worldly ambitions. No more retirement, playing golf and tennis every day. No more beach vacations in Thailand or Vietnam, which I personally love.

Your shoe or watch collection, they will return to dust. No more marriages. No more having children. But Paul says to die is gain because in heaven, there is something infinitely greater than any of the greatest experiences or relationships that this world has to offer. So now the question is, what did Paul see or experience that gave him such an incredible level of conviction in and love for Jesus?

Well, it's because Paul experienced Jesus. He had an intimate relationship with his Lord. He knew Jesus. Now, I'm sure Paul experienced Jesus in many ways. Let me just highlight two ways. First, he experienced the grace of Jesus. In your Bible, if you turn back a few books from Philippians to the book of Acts, in Acts chapter 7, there's a story about the stoning of a man named Stephen who was a disciple of Jesus.

Paul was there at the stoning of Stephen, but not defending Stephen, but actually persecuting him, encouraging his murder. Paul was a murderer. By any objective measure before he came to know Jesus, he was a terrible person. But upon repenting and giving his life to Jesus, he experienced the wonderful mercy and grace that only Jesus can offer. But Paul only experienced grace because he knew the depths of his own sin. In 1 Timothy 15, Paul says, Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners of whom I am the worst. The Bible's greatest evangelist, the man who wrote a lot of the New Testament, confessed, I am the worst of sinners. But instead of moping around, feeling depressed and ashamed of his past sins, Paul lifts the eyes of his heart up to the risen Christ. He sees the scars on the hands and feet of Jesus, and he rejoices knowing that his sins are not only forgiven, they're wiped from the face of the earth.

And not because of anything Paul did, but only because of what our Lord Jesus did on the cross when he gave his life for us. That is grace, undeserved and unearned. And Paul experienced that.

[11 : 17] And second, Paul experienced joy in Jesus. We know from last Sunday's sermon that Jeremy gave, that Paul wrote Philippians from prison. And it wasn't, it was probably not a white collar, nice prison with three hot meals a day and a big screen TV. It was probably a dank, dark, disgusting, rat infested prison. And Paul was on death row throughout his life of ministry. Paul was beaten.

He was stoned. He was persecuted. He suffered tremendously. And yet, look how joyful he was all the time. It's incredible when I think about it. Nothing, absolutely nothing can depress or bog him down.

If you look at this beginning of the passage in verse 18, Paul starts out with saying, yes, and I will rejoice. He's rejoicing because the gospel is being preached, even though some of those doing the preaching are doing so out of selfish ambition.

Now, Paul could have said, hey, let's stop those guys from preaching. Their intention is wrong. After all, they were probably diluting Paul's own message while he was stuck in jail. But instead, Paul sees God redeeming a bad situation for good. And for that, he rejoices.

Now, you and I, we can't escape suffering and challenges in this life. When one challenge goes away, another comes. But what the life of Paul and the entire Bible shows us is that in Christ, we can experience joy in all seasons. Now, most of us will probably not face the type of suffering that Paul faced, although some of us might. But we all do suffer and struggle in our own ways, don't we?

[13 : 09] For me, this season has been a particularly challenging time for my job and career. If you didn't know, I don't work at Watermark. I've been working in finance for the past 15 or so years.

And just a few months ago, I was notified by my employer that I've been losing my job. Now, if I'm honest, when I first got that call, I was pretty upset. I was angry. I was blaming everything I possibly could. But then after speaking to my wife, Celeste, and praying with her, and then doing the same with the Watermark elders and a number of other brothers in Christ, honestly, the sense that I've been feeling in my heart is one of peace and joy.

Sometimes when I tell a friend that I've lost my job, they look at me like, why aren't you more angry or anxious or upset? You have three children to feed and educate in Hong Kong. Are you crazy?

Maybe I am crazy. But I can just be honest with you that I feel great. I feel that God would take care of me because he's able to do immeasurably more than all I could ever ask or imagine according to the power that is at work within us.

I've lost my place here. I'm sorry. Excuse me. When we suffer or lose something like a job or a boyfriend or girlfriend, or when we lose control of our teenage child, our natural response is to worry. But what the Bible teaches us is to respond in a very different way by running to Jesus and experiencing his joy. How? By getting on our knees in prayer. By asking our brothers and sisters in Christ to pray with us, to pray for us, to intercede with God on our behalf.

[15 : 06] Look at Paul. In verse 19, he writes, through your prayers and the help of the spirit of Jesus Christ, this, i.e. his time in jail, will turn out for my deliverance.

Paul was a man of great faith, no doubt, but even Paul knew that he needed the prayer coverage of the saints and the power of God's spirit to carry him through his time in prison. I don't think suffering in jail was that easy for Paul. But he knew that joy doesn't come simply from positive thinking. It can only come, deep joy can only come from the one who created joy, and that is Jesus Christ.

So, what did Paul experience in Jesus that made him love him so much? One, he experienced the grace of Jesus, and two, he experienced joy in Jesus.

And part of Christ-centered ambition is to glorify the name of Jesus by loving him through experiencing his grace and joy, as we've just said. But it's also through loving our neighbors.

It's both upward to God and outward to those around us. Although Paul desired to depart and to be with Jesus, he knew God was calling him to remain in this world for some time, to love and care for the church, to love and care for his disciples and anyone else that he met along the way.

[16 : 32] In verse 24, Paul says, To remain in the flesh is more necessary on your account. Convinced of this, I know that I will remain and continue with you all for your progress and joy in the faith.

Ever said to yourself, I want to help my spouse, my CG member, or my friend have more joy in Jesus? Ever thought about that? Well, Paul did.

He was ambitious about spreading joy. He himself had this deep sense of joy rooted in Christ and his joy was highly contagious because he rejoiced in all circumstances, even in prison.

And that was a great encouragement to the church. But Paul was also intentional about spreading joy. And he did this by serving others, putting their needs above his own.

Paul prayed for the church. He visited the church. He wrote them letters. Paul prayed for the church. While in jail. He loved others and wanted those around him to receive the joy that he experienced.

[17 : 40] But loving others is not always convenient. In the midst of being persecuted in prison, Paul didn't just look inward at himself, which he could have.

He was in a tough spot. Instead, he looked outward at those around him and said, God has called me to help you receive the grace and joy that I have experienced.

Perhaps some of us think that before we can care for a Christian, before we can share the gospel to our friend, that we need to have our lives perfectly sorted first, that we need to have a stable job and income, or to have sent our kids off to university, before we have the mental and physical capacity to care for another person.

But Paul is teaching us in this passage actually the exact opposite. In the midst of suffering, in the midst of huge uncertainty, in all seasons, God is calling us to glorify his name through loving others.

Paul's life was messy. Our lives are messy. My life is incredibly messy. But it's exactly when your life is a mess that God can use you and I most effectively, because then it's not our glory, it's his glory.

[18 : 58] Now, I don't mean to pretend that we don't have pain or suffering, particularly in this time of coronavirus, what's happening in our city of Hong Kong.

But what I do believe very strongly is that as we struggle and wrestle through our challenges that we face, God actually wants to bless us with his joy. And if we can come to a place where in the midst of our struggles, we rejoice in God, and we can care for somebody else, man, that is an incredible way of glorifying in the name of Jesus, is it not?

But there's also often a cost when we love others. Paul said, my desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better.

Counterintuitively, Paul actually preferred death over life because in death, he'd be in the presence of his beloved Jesus. But he submits to God's authority to remain in the flesh because he knew that God would be able to bless others through him.

And Paul can freely submit to God's will for his very existence, despite the cost to him, because he saw Jesus as the ultimate example of one who surrendered.

[20 : 18] In Philippians 2, which we will study next Sunday, Paul writes that Jesus, who is equal to the majesty in heaven in all respects, he gave up his sovereignty, becoming just a man.

And if that wasn't enough, Jesus gave his very life as he suffered on that cross for you and I, the truest, purest, ultimate example of sacrifice and submission.

And so for us, at times, God calls us to love others despite the risk and the cost. I think of my wife, Celeste. A few months ago, she was chatting with her boss and the topic of faith and religion came up.

And Celeste quickly decided to share her testimony of how she fell in love with Jesus. Now, was that risky to share her faith in her workplace with her boss?

Possibly. But was it worth it to magnify, to make Jesus known in her workplace? Absolutely. And how about for some of us who are married?

[21 : 28] Sometimes between husband and wife, when we fight with each other, there's really no right or wrong. And yet we get so frustrated and angry.

How about instead of trying to rack our brains to figure out why I'm right and why my spouse is wrong, we can actually approach our spouse and say, Honey, I'm sorry.

Sorry I made you upset and angry. Can you forgive me? Can we pray together? How about in our community groups? There are conflicts in our community groups, right, if we're honest.

But how about when we have a conflict? Instead of approaching it with the mentality of I'm right and you're wrong, we can approach it and say, Hey, I made some mistakes. You approach that person, you say, Hey, I've wronged you.

I confess. Will you forgive me? You see, humbling ourselves and apologizing is costly because, well, it hurts our pride.

[22 : 28] But in Jesus, we don't apologize out of fear, but actually out of a deep sense of security, knowing that Jesus will honor our sacrifice and our humility because he was the one who humbled himself on that cross to a far greater extent than we will ever comprehend.

And when we share the gospel with someone despite the risk, and when we apologize and reconcile despite the cost, when we encourage, care for, and pray for someone and help them see the beauty of Jesus despite the inconvenience, but help them see the joy that you have and receive joy, man, we actually ourselves experience joy in Jesus.

We help someone receive joy and then we receive joy in return. This is how the ecosystem of the gospel works. So now we've seen how Christ-centered ambition is to glorify the name of Jesus Christ through loving him and loving other people.

But what about our other ambitions? Can Christ-centered ambition coexist with my other ambitions such as having a good career or raising a family?

Well, it's really a matter of priorities. At work is our sole and most important ambition to make money or can we work hard because we honor God with our work but our priority, what is most important to us is that at work we build meaningful relationships such that we can ultimately share the gospel with our colleagues.

[24 : 16] And with our kids is our main ambition for them to get good grades and to go to a good university to find a name for themselves in the world. Or is the beauty of Jesus so precious to us as parents that above all we prioritize our children's spiritual life over their academic life by actually spending time teaching them about the love of Jesus.

Or in relationships, do we only build relationships that can benefit us? Or do we prayerfully and intentionally look to invest in relationships through hospitality or discipleship or through sharing the gospel?

God calls us, God calls us, Watermark, to be a people who put the gospel ambition above our own ambition because Jesus is the prize that we strive towards and glorifying him is our goal.

because at the end of the day, worldly ambition, stuff that we are striving for every day, it will never satisfy us like Jesus can.

Look at Paul. I imagine that he was a pretty ambitious guy. Prior to meeting Jesus, he was moving up that religious ladder pretty quickly. But after meeting Christ, Paul said, whatever was to my profit, I now consider loss, nothing for the sake of Christ.

[25 : 48] What happened? He experienced Jesus. He met Jesus, he experienced Jesus and soon realized his worldly ambitions would never satisfy him like Jesus could.

And I think if we're honest, most of us would say the same thing. If our ambition is to make money, to make a lot of money, once we get to that number we think will make us happy, it never does.

We always want more. If our ambition is to set up our lives to have as much comfort and pleasure as we possibly can, we'll never get there because there are always diminishing returns in worldly pleasure.

Once you eat at a one Michelin star restaurant, you go to the two Michelin star and then the three. Pretty soon you'll have to make ten Michelin star restaurants and even those will never satisfy the most experienced palate.

because as C.S. Lewis famously said, if we find ourselves with a desire that nothing in this world can satisfy, the most probable explanation is that we were made for another world.

[26 : 57] No ambition in this world can truly satisfy our souls except the creator himself, Jesus Christ. the world will say to you, be ambitious, prove yourself to me, accomplish more, look better, and then I will love you.

What does Jesus say? Jesus says, you have nothing to prove to me, I already know you, I forged you in your mother's womb, I know you better than anyone else does, and I love you.

The world says have goals, work harder, do more, sacrifice, and then you'll be happy. Jesus says, come to me, all those who are burdened, burnt out, worried and anxious about their future because of all this uncertainty, and Jesus says, come to me, and in me you will find rest, and peace, and joy, and everlasting satisfaction.

You and I were created to know this Jesus. We were created to experience Jesus, to experience the joy and grace of Jesus. But to know Jesus and to experience him, we must prioritize him in our lives.

When I played tennis, I missed so many school events because I was off playing a tennis tournament. In fact, I even missed my college graduation ceremony. But I believed it was totally worth it because I love tennis.

[28 : 29] I put it above most things in my life. In the same way, if we want to experience Jesus, if we want to experience his grace and joy and satisfaction in him, we need to prioritize him in our lives.

Our love for Jesus grows day by day as we meditate on his word, as we pray and fast, as we spend time sharing our lives with our community.

In tennis, it took me years and hitting thousands of tennis balls before I was good enough to play in university. And in our faith, it does take time as well. And every time we experience a little bit of the joy of Christ, a little bit of the grace of Christ, every time we wake up and we pray and we're satisfied in him, it's like we put a brick down and then brick by brick by brick until those bricks become a tower.

And that is how our love for our beloved Jesus grows, but we must prioritize him. Let me close here. The world is constantly telling us to be ambitious for ourselves, to glorify ourselves, but that is the way to lose everything both in this life and the next.

As this passage from Philippians teaches us, Christ-centered ambition is to glorify the great name of Jesus Christ above all things through loving him and through loving those, loving people around us.

[30 : 08] It's the greatest commandment to love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength, and to love our neighbors as ourselves.

And as we prioritize Jesus in our lives, we experience him more and we grow to love him more. We experience more of his grace and joy and become more satisfied in him and less satisfied in the stuff of the world.

And as his love sinks deeper into our hearts, like Paul, we are compelled to love those around us. It'll be inconvenient, it'll be risky and costly at times, but for the glory of the name of Jesus, it'll be worth it.

Watermark, may our greatest ambition be to glorify the name of Jesus Christ in our city and in our world. Let's pray. Father, Jesus, Holy Spirit, thank you for your word, which is so powerful.

It changes hearts, it impacts lives, it turns dead people into life, sleepy Christians to those that are alive and on fire for you. God, as we continue to meditate on your word, not what I've said, but your word, Father, your Holy Scripture, I pray, God, that you would do an amazing work in us, Father.

[31 : 40] Help us to love Jesus, to see him, God, as Paul did, to love Jesus with an undying love, Father, and to experience joy in him, to experience more of his grace, to be more satisfied in him, such that the stuff that we're pursuing in this world, all our worldly ambitions would fade away, God.

Come, Lord Jesus, help us, Father. And I pray, God, as that happens in our lives, Lord, we'd be a church that would sacrificially love others, God, despite the cost, the risk, the inconvenience, and all those things.

Help us, God, to do so, not because we feel guilty, but because we love you so much, we want this good news to reach everyone, God, that we know, Father. Lord, may you be glorified in our city, in our world.

We love you. Pray this in your name. Amen. Amen.