

Live Like One Called to Belong to Jesus Christ

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[0 : 00] It would be very dangerous if I got up here without any sense of time at all. I forgot my watch. Now I have it, so you don't have to worry too much. I'm not going to ask for a show of hands, and it would be a little bit of an academic exercise anyway today, probably.

But how many men here would willingly be circumcised if it helped them to share the gospel with some friends? Probably not many of us.

I mean, that would really take an awful lot of conviction by the Holy Spirit for a man to be circumcised just so they could share the gospel with people and they could be better evangelists.

But that's actually something which is recorded as having happened in the book of Acts. I'm not going to read it now, but if you want to look at it later, it's Acts chapter 16. And one of the things which is so curious about the story is that Paul has just spent, had a huge fight over the issue of whether or not men had to be circumcised.

And in fact, if you read Acts 15, it sort of brings to, at least on an official level, a culmination of several years of argument that Paul had been involved in, precisely arguing that to be a Christian, you did not have to be circumcised.

[1 : 25] And then as soon as he's won that battle, almost, I mean, within about a paragraph of him having won that battle in Acts chapter 15, Paul feels called to go out once again on another missionary journey.

And the first thing he does is he takes Timothy and has him circumcised. And he has him circumcised precisely because Paul is concerned that as he goes into certain areas to evangelize, Timothy's not being circumcised will be a barrier to people hearing the gospel.

And so he has Timothy circumcised. Now, is Paul being just really inconsistent? Is he one of those guys, you know, one day he says this, the next day he says that, you know, he'd be the world's worst air traffic controller, move the plane over there.

No, no, no, no, I changed my mind back there. You can land. No, no, I changed my mind. You know, like you can just imagine all of the tragedy that would ensue. Is Paul like that? Is he just like a guy who can't make up his mind?

What motivates Paul is something that we're going to look at in a moment. It's just the part of scripture before the first Corinthians text, which we read. And one of the things is that we have to understand that the scripture is inviting us to understand that it doesn't matter at all, that there's countless things in this life that have been relativized by the person of Jesus Christ and by his death upon the cross and the triumph of his resurrection.

[2 : 56] We Christians should be the leading relativists in Canadian society. The problem is that much of Canadian society are moral relativists, and that's the area that we're not to be relativists.

We are to be the relativists who say, you know, it doesn't matter if you're a man or a woman. It doesn't matter if you're old or young. It doesn't matter if you're homosexually inclined or heterosexually inclined. It doesn't matter if you're rich or poor, well-educated or not well-educated.

You just keep on going. None of these things, all of these things that we think are very, very important and might be central to our identity are completely and utterly irrelevant because of the mighty act that God has done in the human race, in human history by sending his son to die upon the cross, bearing your sins and rebellion in mind and bearing your punishment in mind, tasting all there is to taste of death and triumphing on the third day, on Easter Sunday, triumphing over sin, everything that separates us from God, triumphing over death, hostile spiritual powers, hell itself.

Christ has triumphed. And all of these other things are part of a world that is passing away, and they are all pretty relative compared to this fundamental victorious act of God that you and I, mere mortals, are invited to share in.

Let's turn in your Bibles to 1 Corinthians chapter 7. If you're using your pew Bibles, it's page 991. But for all of us, it's 1 Corinthians 7, verse 17.

[4 : 45] And this is a passage that was read last week, and just as I was working through the text, I just wasn't able to fit it in last week, and I thought I'd put it in today as it leads into, in fact, it actually leads in better to the part that was read by Jason a few minutes earlier.

And this text, as we start to read it, it's really saying, wherever you are, live like one called to belong to Jesus Christ.

Wherever you are, live like one called to belong to Jesus Christ. In fact, now belonging to Jesus Christ. Let's listen to what it says.

Just pause here before we go any farther.

Sometimes Christians use the language of call to describe vocation. I could tell you, in my particular case, I'm maybe not, you know, normal in this sense, but there's lots of ways I'm not normal.

[5 : 54] But I actually have a very, very particular incident, a very, very particular moment where I realized that God was calling me to the ordained ministry. Like, you know, if I'd been keeping a journal, I would have been able to say on August, you know, whatever, 1981, I realized that I had been running from God, and that God had for quite a while been saying, George, I want you to be an ordained minister.

And it was as if God spoke to me, and I realized that I had been running from that for several years. And so sometimes Christians use the language of call to describe vocation, and that's completely appropriate.

Paul here is not using call in the sense of vocation. He's using call in the sense that every Christian has a call. He's using it as a way to understand conversion.

See, a way for us to understand conversion is that Jesus called to me to turn from my preoccupations and look to him and then say yes to him and follow him.

And for those of us who have been raised in a Christian home, there might be, there's not going to be any particular moment that that's happened, because in a sense, well, you know, what did I just pray for the kids?

[7 : 15] Like in a sense, we all, Christian parents have different ways of praying it, but in different words, but that's what we all pray. We pray that for our children, those of us who have children, we pray as they hear the stories of the Bible, and in a sense as they're brought to Christian gatherings like this, may they grow into confident, joyful disciples of Jesus Christ.

That's a Christian parent's prayer. And so for those of us raised in Christian homes, there might not be any particular moment where we're sensitive of a call. We're just always sensitive of the claim of Christ upon our lives.

And sometimes we maybe ignore that. Sometimes we stray from that. Sometimes we really get excited about it and live in it. But in a sense, you grow up always conscious that there is such a call.

But some of us have either really strayed from our Christian home or didn't have that type of background. And as teenagers or as adults, there comes a point in time when you realize that Christ has called you to be his.

For some of you, you might have literally a moment like I did around my ordination, and you might be able to say on August 20th, you know, if I say 1981, that half of you weren't born then, so you have to sort of move it to the appropriate age.

[8 : 30] But some of you might be able to say a particular moment, then you realize that Christ was calling you, and you realize you had to respond. And others of us might say that we became conscious of the claims of Christ, and at such and such a time, we were definitely not responding to it.

And at some point in time, one day, it was as if the Holy Spirit spoke to us and said, you know what, Sinclair, sometime over the last couple of months, you actually did respond to the call of Christ, and now you are living as a Christian.

And whatever way it happens, it doesn't matter, but everyone who comes to Christ comes because Christ has first called you. And so in all of this text which follows, Paul is using...

Paul... I'm getting too worked up. Paul is using called in that sense. Jack in the box preaching. And so let's just listen along.

Verse 18. We'll start at verse 17 again. But as God has distributed to each one, as the Lord has called each one, so let him walk, and so I ordain in all the churches.

[9 : 38] Was anyone called while circumcised? Let him not become uncircumcised. Was anyone called while uncircumcised? Let him not be circumcised. Circumcision is nothing, and uncircumcision is nothing, but keeping the commandments of God is what matters.

In other words, responding to the call of Christ, and then learning to live as a follower of Jesus. Let each one remain in the same calling in which he was called.

Were you called while a slave? Do not be concerned about it, but if you can be made free, use it. For he who is called in the Lord while a slave is the Lord's freed man.

Likewise, he who is called while free is Christ's slave. Here's the key verse. You were bought at a price. Do not become slaves of men.

Brothers and sisters, let each one remain with God in that calling in which he was called. Just sort of pause here before we go on. Now, if, what Paul is saying is this, that the way it works is not, that God sort of looks down from heaven at Sinclair and says, can't call Sinclair in this situation, can't call Sinclair in this situation, can't call Sinclair in this situation.

[10 : 56] Gosh, I wish George would have gone to that graduate school, or done this, or, you know, done that, and then finally I could call, doesn't work like that at all. Most of you have never had the honor of meeting Hugh Reynolds.

He died about five or six years ago. He was one of the very first people that I met when I came to this church. The first Sunday I came to do services, Hugh Reynolds sat at the very back pew, close to the door, and if you had asked me after the service to describe Hugh's background, I would have bet you \$100 that he was a retired sergeant major where chief warrant officer from the army.

He had the haircut, he had the bearing, and it was only after I had been in the church for several months that I discovered that he had spent 50 years as a street person. And it was while he was a street person, an alcoholic, that he heard the call of Christ to his life and turned around.

And boy, when he turned around, I mean, he still had some aspects. He had a temper. But when he turned around, he turned around. And if over coffee later on today, or if we were to have a potluck meal and we were to share with each other, you would say, you know, some of us heard the call of Christ when we were living in Rockcliffe and we were older in age.

And some of us heard the call of Christ when we were, you know, maybe experimenting with different religions. Maybe some of us heard the call of Christ in the midst of a real commitment to drugs and alcohol and all of the things that would go along with that.

[12 : 29] And some of us heard the call of Christ while we were suburban moms or dads. Some of us heard it in this situation. Some of us heard it in that situation. And what Paul is saying is, you know what? God doesn't care about that situation.

In the midst of whatever situation you are in, God has been, I mean, in a sense, in a sense, when we get to heaven, we will understand that from the moment we were conceived in our mother's womb, that God was saying, George, I want you to be mine.

George, I want you to be mine. And just finally, we get to that sitting affairs where we can actually hear and we can respond with a yes. Sometimes a reluctant yes.

Sometimes a frightened yes. And sometimes with a just yes type of excitement. And that's when the great adventure, that's when the great quest really begins when we say to Christ, you say yes to Christ.

And so Paul is saying this. You know what? Your situation doesn't particularly matter. It's relatively relative. What matters is hearing the call of Christ and then learning to live as one who is bought.

[13 : 42] You see, here's this great transaction that happens when I say yes to Jesus Christ. And when you have said yes to Jesus Christ, you now belong to him. I don't belong to myself.

The government doesn't own me. I don't own me. The banks don't own me. Christ owns me. And so the message throughout all of this is, you know what, George?

Whether you are a priest in St. Albans or whether you were a priest in the Arctic Circle or whether you were a missionary somewhere else, live every day.

Wake up every day and say, I belong to Jesus. Father, help me to live like one who belongs to Jesus. Stephen Harper claims to be a Christian.

In a sense, every day Stephen Harper should not wake up first and say, I am the Prime Minister of Canada. He should wake up every day and the first thing he should say is, I belong to Jesus. Father, help me to live like I belong to Jesus.

[14 : 45] If you are called in the midst of alcoholism, as an alcoholic, you are called to wake up and every day start to learn to say, Jesus, help me to live today like I belong to you. If you're retired, if you're a student, if you're in the fast track in your job, if you're about to be downsized, no matter what our situation is, Christ is saying to us, remember that you have been called by me and you said yes, you belong to me.

And that's what we'll be invited to understand and to live our lives, not as atheists, live as if nothing has happened, but learning to try to live every day, understanding that we now belong to Jesus Christ.

Christ. Let's just turn briefly, keeping all of this in mind, to the text which follows, beginning at verse 25. Those of you who are guests this morning, one of the things that we do at St. Albans now is we preach through the Bible.

It means I look at texts, I can tell you this, if it was left up to my flesh, if it was just left up to me using my worldly best wisdom, I would never preach on 1 Corinthians 7.

Like I'd probably give you a nice, comforting religious thought from Philippians virtually every Sunday, if it was completely up to me. But we are called to understand God's word written and we are called to search the scriptures and so we preach through texts.

[16 : 08] So let's continue reading at verse 25. Now concerning virgins, I have no commandment from the Lord, yet I give judgment as one whom the Lord in his mercy has made trustworthy.

Now, and we're going to read one more verse, 26, I suppose, therefore, that this is good because of the present distress that it is good for a man to remain as he is.

And there it could also be good for a man or for a woman to remain as they are. Now just want to pause here before we go any farther. The text as a whole is inviting us to live like we know the punchline or to live like we know the final word about the story of our lives.

Now, the first thing is we're going through this. This is a very unusual passage of scripture. I'm not sure if it's the only passage of scripture like it in the whole Bible, but if it's not the only, it's one of very few.

And it's because the text is so odd that it's caused much mischief amongst Christians. At the 8 o'clock service and the 11 o'clock service today, we said the Ten Commandments. And hopefully, if I get organized enough throughout the rest of Lent, every Sunday at this 915 service, we will say the Ten Commandments.

[17 : 22] I'm just not organized enough to have done it today. But the Ten Commandments are exactly that. They are commandments. It is not ten words of advice, ten suggestions.

You know, it's saying, when it says, you know, George, you shall not covet, the text is saying, George, coveting is wrong. Look at your life. Are you coveting things?

Stop it. You can't stop. Like, apologize to God. Call out to Him for help. Ask for the Holy Spirit that you might amend your life according to His Holy Word, but you shouldn't covet.

You don't commit adultery. You don't take innocent life. You know, and on and on and on. There are Ten Commandments. What we get now from 1 Corinthians 7.25 to the end, it's one of the few places in the Bible that what we get is advice.

Not a commandment. It's a very unusual passage of Scripture. We get advice. Paul is dealing with super spiritual guys. They are going to try to launch a sort of super spiritual, ascetic, celibacy campaign.

[18 : 30] They happen to know that Paul, who is maybe widowed early or whatever, he's been living a single, celibate life for quite a few years. They're trying to get Paul to join in with their campaign, and Paul is resisting them.

And he's also dealing with people who are in the midst of a distress. And Bible scholars and archaeologists, we don't know what it is, but there was some crisis going on in Corinth at the time when Paul is writing this letter and he knows about it.

We just don't know what it is now. And Paul is just giving advice. And the heart of his advice is this. consider godly singleness.

Just consider godly singleness. Don't consider ungodly singleness, which, you know, don't consider singleness that, you know, you're going to, you know, ignore marriage because you want to pursue your career or you're going to ignore marriage because you'd rather just date, you know, I'll speak to guys, a whole succession of women, embed a whole succession of women, and, you know, maybe you've reached 40 or, you know, life is sort of over, then you get married and have some kids and move on.

Like, you know, don't consider ungodly singleness. Consider godly singleness. Just some advice. Just think about it for a second. You know, if, you know, my wife tragically was to die, I mean, in a sense, this text is to say to me, George, consider whether, just spend some time in fasting and prayer and consider whether you are being called to godly singleness.

[19 : 58] Just consider it. Advice. You know, a moment from God, not a command, just something to prayerfully consider. And that's what this text is.

It's some advice, and that's why Paul carries around with saying, you know, my advice in verse 25, yet I give advice as one whom the Lord in his mercy has made trustworthy.

It's a language of just, just, you know, we're pell-mell, you know, we're pell-mell or we're distracted, and in the midst of being pell-mell or in the midst of being distracted or in the midst of just allowing ourselves to be carried along by the pressures of our culture, it's in a sense a call out to you and to me just to prayerfully consider something.

Just prayerfully consider it. So let's continue. Verse 27, are you bound to a wife? Do not seek to be loosed. Are you loosed from a wife?

Do not seek a wife. But even if you do marry, you have not sinned. If a virgin marry, she has not sinned. Nevertheless, such will have trouble in the flesh. That means, flesh here means the frail nature of our mortal existence.

[21 : 12] But I would spare you. But I say, brothers and sisters, this I say, the time is short so that from now on even those who have wives should be as though they had none.

Those who weep as though they did not weep. Those who rejoice as though they did not rejoice. Those who buy as though they did not possess. And those who this world and those who use this world as not misusing it for the form of this world is passing away.

I just want to pause. There's two really big ideas in this text which are motivating all of his advice. And it's advice to all of us at every time and situation in our lives.

Paul is urging us to live like we know the end of the story. Or the punchline. Now I'm not, this isn't being arrogant.

This is far from it. I know the final word about my life. And those of you who are in Christ, you know the final word about your life as well.

[22 : 22] See, this isn't being arrogant, folks. You know, if I, you know, if it wasn't for the, just the, I mean, I could give you endless lists of my failings and my sins.

And I am making no comment whatsoever about the fact that after this sermon is over, my failings will end and my sins will end. If there's one thing I know about me into the future, it is that I will continue to have failings and I will continue to sin.

I'm not saying this out of any sense of arrogance whatsoever. I am saying, for God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son to the end that those who believe in him will not perish but have everlasting life.

Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me for I am gentle and lowly of heart and you will find rest for your souls for my yoke is easy and my burden is light.

Part of what it means to become a Christian is this, that when we hear the call of Christ, when we respond with yes to the call of Christ, when Jesus, as a result of us saying yes to that, he, in a sense, he reveals to us that by saying yes, he has purchased us, purchased us, and we now belong to him, that in him, and we might not even recognize or realize this when we turn to Christ at first, that on him, as he lay dying, as he hung dying upon the cross, that he and his, he and his body and he and his person bare bore every single failing and sin and shame that has ever been part of my life and will be ever part of my life, and all of these things lay upon him as he hung upon the cross, and all of the appropriate punishment which those things deserve, they were all on him, and he trades his sinless relationship with the Father for my sins and my failings, and he buys me, and so, nothing can separate me from the love of God, and I know that when I die and I open my eyes, my loved ones will see me die, and they will then just see the body with the soul having been gone, but I will wake, and I will look at my heavenly Father, and he will say, welcome.

[24 : 51] I'm so glad you're here. That is the final word about my life, and it's the final word of the life of everyone who responds to the call of Christ and says yes.

Not weighing our merits, but pardoning our offenses. not because of works, but by grace alone, through Christ alone, through faith alone, that is the only reason that I can know the final word about my life, and Paul is saying, George, live as one who knows the final word about your life.

Become who you are. Every day, live as one who knows the end of the story. Shape your life in terms of the fact that you know the end of the story.

The end of the story, you know, the end of my story might be that I am too poor and too all of those things that I won't get an obituary in the National Post. I won't get an obituary in the Globe and Mail.

There won't be something about me on global television or CTV, and the flags won't fly at half-mast, and maybe there are all sorts of people that what really motivates them that they will have a fantastic obituary and we are to live our lives not concerning what the world will say about us in our obituary.

[26 : 13] We are to live our lives as one who will wake upon death and see our heavenly Father say, I am so glad you are here. I am so glad that you said yes to Christ and you are here.

Live like one like that. Listen again to what what Paul has just said in verse verse 29.

I say this, brethren, the time is short. That's what he means. He's painting a picture of the fact that you know the end of the story. It's an image here of knowing the end of the story so that from now on, even those who have wives should be as though they had none.

And here's the second thing which Paul is trying to communicate, that not only are we to live our lives as if we know the end of the story, but that we are to live and love. We are to love at the same time as we are detached.

It's a very odd idea, but let me try to give you one example to try to get what Paul is getting at. I don't know if you've ever met anybody who's gotten the bad word about cancer or some other serious illness and they know they maybe have a month to live or three months to live or six months to live.

[27 : 31] They know that there's nothing that can happen. Barring an unbelievable miracle of God, they are going to die. And I don't know if you've ever met anybody who knows that they're going to die and has come to peace about it.

And they have come to peace about it and so in a sense, they can just sort of look at the beauty of a grandchild and just love that grandchild but at the same time know that it's going to end.

And they can look at a sunset, they can drink coffee, they can do all of these things. And on one level, there is a profound love and enjoyment of each instant but at the same time they know that the story is about to come to an end for them.

That the time is over. And in a sense then what they do is they have this ability, this grace that allows them to love and to be detached.

To love their wife but know that they're not going to have their wife for much longer. To love their possessions knowing that they will not have their possessions much longer.

[28 : 42] In fact, many people in that situation, what they do is they love their possessions and give them away because they'd like to witness the smile on the other person's face when they give it to them or when they tell them this is yours, this is yours, this is yours, this is yours.

They give it away not because they hate it but because they love it. And it is this that Paul is calling us to. To live our lives every day understanding that we were bought with the price, we belong to Christ, to live every day as if we understand the final word about us and that does not lead us to presumption or to arrogance but to humility and thankfulness and gratefulness and an ability that when we fail and when we fall to turn to our heavenly father and say, father I am sorry, please pour your holy spirit upon me again and help me to live my life as you would have me live and we are open to understanding how we can love and love and love and love and love without possessing or thinking that we have to clutch it to ourselves.

Shall we bow our heads in prayer? Amen. Amen. Father, we ask that you would pour out your holy spirit upon us.

Father, we acknowledge before you it is so easy for us to get distracted. Father, we even seek distraction and it is so easy for us, just to be pushed around by the word, the world and our circumstances and forget about your word, forget about Christ, forget about your promises.

Father, we confess before you that often we spend a day as if we were atheists and not as ones who understand that we have, that your son has taken us for himself, that he will unerringly and powerfully bring us to you and he will present us to you and you will smile at him and at us and say welcome.

[30 : 54] Father, help us to live as ones who are bought and now belong to you. Help us to live as ones who understand that final word and desire to become what we are.

Help us, Father, to live and to love without desiring to possess and clutch and grasp. All this we ask in the name of Jesus, your son and our savior.

Amen.