Priorities of the Personal Christian Life

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Preacher: Pastor Ken

[0:00] I don't always know what is going on in the lives of an individual or individuals when I choose the hymns for the week.

And I couldn't help but feel like God clearly had His hand in this process, knowing how much has been on the minds and hearts of people and what they're going through for that song to be picked. And so our confidence in the midst of difficulties is in Jesus and in the cross. What a blessing. Thank you for singing that so beautifully.
When you consider the different miracles that are recorded for us in the Bible, such as giving sight to the blind or giving the ability to walk to a man who's been lame from birth, or even raising a man after he had been dead for a few days.
They are quite amazing. It's unimaginable, really, when you come across these accounts in Scripture and to even fathom what it would be like to be there and witness it and to see it firsthand.
[1:29] But there's still one miracle that stands head and shoulders above the rest. There's one miracle that takes place that is far greater than even those miracles themselves.

There is one that no other miracle really can touch. And that is the salvation of a lost sinner.
Warren Wiersbe says that salvation costs the greatest price, it produces the greatest results, and it brings the greatest glory to God. We've already witnessed at the beginning of Acts 9 how God is in the business of saving sinners.
Saul was a man bent on destroying the church. He enthusiastically arrested and voted to kill people who followed Jesus. But God showed that there is no soul too far gone, and there is no heart too hard to soften when He saved Saul on the Damascus road.
And two of the greatest words in all the Bible, you know what they are? You want to take a guess? Jesus saves.
[2:42] Anyone else? Nope. But God. But God. Think of Romans 5 verse 8.

But God shows His love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. In 1 Corinthians 1, 27 through 29, But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise.
God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong. God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are, so that no human being might boast in the presence of God.
Ephesians 2 verses 4 and 5, But God, being rich in mercy because of the great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ.
By grace you have been saved. It is made abundantly clear in Scripture that we are all sinners deserving the wrath of God. But God.
[3:47] But God. But God. Has done an awesome thing.

And because God has chosen to intervene on our behalf through the death and resurrection of our Savior, Jesus Christ, we have a tremendous responsibility and opportunity to make that known to others.
1 Peter 2 verses 9 and 10, I want to read that again.
That you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light.
Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people. Once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.
[4:56] Ladies and gentlemen, we have been bought with a price. And we are to live for a purpose. Let's make the most of the time that we have been given.

We're told in Ephesians 5, 15 and 16, Look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise, but as wise, making the best use of time because the days are evil.

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And again in Colossians 4, verses 5 and 6, Walk in wisdom toward outsiders, making the best use of the time. Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how you ought to answer each person.
God doesn't instruct us to simply use our time wisely. He instructs us to make the best use of it.
Now I'd like to look at Acts 9, verses 32 through 43, and see how the life of Peter shows us the priorities of the personal Christian life.
Or ultimately, how do we make the best use of the time that God has given to us? Acts 9, verse 32.
Now as Peter went here and there among them all, he came down also to the saints who lived in Lydda.
[6:26] There he found a man named Anais, bedridden for eight years, who was paralyzed. And Peter said to him, Anais, Jesus Christ heals you.

Rise and make your bed. And immediately he rose. And all the residents of Lydda and Sharon saw him, and they turned to the Lord.
Now there was in Joppa a disciple named Tabitha, which translated means Dorcas. She was full of good works and acts of charity. In those days she became ill and died.
And when they had washed her, they laid her in an upper room. Since Lydda was near Joppa, the disciples, hearing that Peter was there, sent two men to him, urging him, Please, come to us without delay.
So Peter rose and went with them. And when he arrived, they took him to the upper room. All the widows stood beside him, weeping and showing tunics and other garments that Dorcas made while she was with them.
[7:28] But Peter put them all outside and knelt down and prayed. And turned to the body. He said, Tabitha, rise. Arise, excuse me.

And she opened her eyes. And when she saw Peter, she sat up. And he gave her his hand and raised her up. Then calling the saints and widows, he presented her alive.
And it became known throughout all Joppa, and many believed in the Lord. And he stayed in Joppa for many days with one Simon, a tanner. So there's a lot to break down and really take from in these verses here.
And I'll try to do my best to do it justice in a fair amount of time. So first, as it relates to the priorities of the personal Christian life, as we see here in Acts 9 with Peter, first, we see that Peter visits the saints.
You got this in verses 32, 41, and 43. He visits the saints. The importance of spending time together as believers cannot be overstated.
[8:41] Yet there are many professing believers who forsake gathered worship and seek individualistic spirituality. Rather than identify with Christ through committed church membership and gathered worship on the Lord's Day, many have untethered themselves from the ministry and mission of the visible church.

They prefer a highly personalized spirituality or Christianity that they get from websites and books and podcasts and informal gatherings and fellowship.
Many prefer online worship instead of in person because of convenience and autonomy. They envision Christianity on their own terms, without accountability, discipline, or shepherding care.
The problem with this approach is that nowhere in Scripture do we see this kind of privatized faith.
A Christian without a church is like a lone sheep in the wilderness exposed to countless dangers.
There are also many people who've had negative church experiences. Maybe it's because of abusive leadership or toxic relationships in the church or false teaching from the pulpit.
[9:56] For some, the memories are extremely painful and very real. Even so, all churches should not be judged on the basis of negative experiences in some churches.

Christ understands the pain that's caused by bad leaders and unfaithful churches, but he also knows what's best for his followers, and that is gathered worship in the context of a healthy church.
And we see that's why Peter is visiting the saints, because that was important. That is what needs to be important. In Hebrews 10, verses 23 through 25, let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful.
And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the day drawing near.

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We are to gather as saints. We are to come together. It is a very important aspect of the church. And we gather together in order to stir up one another to love and good works.
[11:07] And we're not to neglect to meet together. Folks, there are many people today who do that. They neglect. They say, you know what? I don't need this church, this institutional, traditional church.

I don't like it. I disagree with it. I'm going to go off and do my own thing. That's very dangerous and unbiblical.
We're to gather, stir up one another to love and good works. And that's why we're created in Christ Jesus. Ephesians 2.10.
For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them. Our gathering, I don't want to get ahead of myself.
The fact is we gather to encourage each other to walk rightly and to pursue good works and do good things for the glory of God.
[12:09] And the fact that we see Peter visiting the saints wherever he went should encourage us to take seriously the opportunity to visit the saints wherever we go. You know, if you go on vacation, find a Bible preaching church where you are at and connect with those people.

If you're a snowbird, looking at you, Carol, be sure you're connected with a Bible preaching church near your other home.
If you're moving to another state or too far away to attend your current church, make it your first priority to find a Bible believing, Bible preaching church in your area where you can worship and fellowship.
There is nothing more important in your life than your relationship with the saints in the body of Christ. I am.
In Acts 9, verses 33 and 34, we see that Peter ministers to the needy and preaches the gospel. So talking about priorities in the Christian life, one is visiting the saints, two is ministering to the needy and preaching the gospel.
[13:15] See, Peter goes a day's journey, about 25 miles from Jerusalem northwest to Lydda, which is situated in the plain of Sharon and was a capital of one of the 10 local government areas in Judea.

It was in this city that Peter encounters a man by the name of Anais and we're told has been paralyzed for eight years. But what else do we know about this man?
What else do we know about this Anais in Lydda? Nothing. We don't know anything about this guy. We don't know how he became paralyzed. We don't know if he's a Jew or a Gentile. The name Anais is a Greek name, so maybe he's a Gentile.
We don't know if he's a follower of Jesus. We know nothing about Anais. We don't know his financial background, his stability.
[14:21] We don't know anything about his mental health. We know nothing about Anais other than he's been paralyzed for eight years. And all we know is that Peter encountered this man, maybe heard his story and he had compassion on him.

And by the authority that is in the name of Jesus and only by his power, Peter gives Anais the ability to walk again. This act of compassion brought an audience for the gospel, which Peter took advantage of and told people about Jesus.
And how do we know that? Because of Acts 9.35. And all the residents of Lydda and Sharon saw him, that's the man, Anais, and they turned to the Lord.
They saw that Anais was healed in the name of Jesus and Peter undoubtedly told them who Jesus is so they could believe. It's amazing to see how God uses acts of compassion to draw people to himself.
Those to whom compassion is shown are the ones who are most grateful for its source. And when the source is Jesus, who else can be given the glory? Peter wasn't looking for his own glory.
[15:40] He wasn't looking for his own name to be lifted up. He wasn't looking for his own audience, his own fame. He did it in the name of Jesus to a man that we know nothing about.

This guy could have been a scoundrel. He could have been the dirt that people walked on, basically, in their community. There's nothing great about this guy as far as we know.
Know nothing about him, but yet Peter act compassionately towards him in the name of Jesus. In John chapter 12, we see this happen as well. Verses 10 and 11.

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So this is after Lazarus is up and walking after his death. Great miracle of God. So the chief priests made plans to put Lazarus to death as well. So Jesus wasn't enough.
We've got to get rid of Lazarus as well. Because on account of him, on account of Lazarus, many of the Jews were going away and believing in Jesus. Lazarus was raised from the dead.
[16:39] I can't imagine what that is like. Now he's dead, few days, comes back to life. Now he's telling people all about it. I don't know what that would be like. What did he see?

What did he experience? What was it like? And probably to the dread of Lazarus, he has to go through it again. But because of an act of compassion, an extreme act of compassion, but one nonetheless, Jesus raising him from the dead, Lazarus obviously believed in Jesus and was encouraging others and telling others and others were coming to know Christ because of that act of compassion in his life.
On the radio years ago, before 89.3 became positive, encouraging, K-Love, it used to be Positive FM. One of the things that Positive FM did that I absolutely loved and I was getting onto and was becoming like more active with until they finally went out.
It was too soon in my opinion. But they promoted what they called PACT cards. Do you remember these things? PACT cards? Some of you do, some of you don't.
So a PACT card, just PACT stands for Positive Acts of Kindness. And so the station supplied these cards and asked its listeners to anonymously show God's love to someone in an unexpected way and to leave a PACT card when they were finished with the task.
[18:12] Some of Positive FM's listings of PACT tasks included help pay for the gasoline for someone at the gas station. That's a substantial act of compassion and grace today.

Help some pay for groceries or return their cart for them. Make a dessert or a meal for someone and deliver it with a PACT card. Wash a neighbor's car while they're away.
I don't know how well that would work. I was thinking about that. I'm like, my luck is, you know, there would be a dog that, you know, comes out and greets me in the process. Then I just throw the card on the windshield, I guess.
Send someone flowers and include a PACT card. I mean, obviously, endless things that you can do to show an act of kindness and love towards someone else.
But I love that. I love that initiative. I love that idea. I had gotten a small stack of them one time and then when I wanted to get more, they were no longer. But that, you know, causes me to think as I was reflecting on this, how are you showing the love of God wherever you go?
[19:28] How am I showing the love of God wherever I go? How am I, you know, spreading kindness and love, showing the mercy and grace of God? To this world is in desperate need of encouragement and our local communities are where God has placed us to serve Him.

So pray about being open to ministering to others in ways that will give glory to God. I think of Matthew 5, verse 16, let your light shine before others so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who's in heaven.
You don't do it for your own sake. You don't do it for yourself to be built up and made to look good. You do it for God's glory and to point people to Him. Finally, verses 36 through 41, we see Peter comforts the hurting and preaches the gospel.
Joppa, now, as we get there where Tabitha's at, it's the modern Joppa, change the P's to F's and you're all set, which is part of Tel Aviv and is located on the seacoast about 10 miles beyond Lydda. So about, what, 35 miles beyond Jerusalem? And while Peter is ministering Lydda, the disciples in Joppa suffer a terrible loss in the body of Christ.
[20:50] Tabitha dies. Now, there are details in this story that paint a clearer picture for us than just simply Tabitha dies. Now, we kind of just get Anais walks, right?

But we get a little more detail in the story with Tabitha. First, Tabitha's a disciple full of good works and acts of love. Her testimony endeared her to the church in Joppa.
She was a dedicated servant of God. She had what, she had a mark of a virtuous woman. Proverbs 31, 20 says that the virtuous woman opens her hand to the poor and reaches out her hands to the needy.
and she ministered among the widows there. She made tunics and garments for them. Widows were kind of on their own.
They didn't have a good support system. They didn't have government programs to provide for widows and orphans in those days. So that was up to the body. That was up to the grace and mercy

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of the community on individuals which wasn't always likely.
[21:59] But Tabitha, a follower of Christ, showed love and compassion toward widows and made them clothes to, you know, maybe it was every Christmas before they had Christmas or whatever.

She just made them things that helped provide for them. She was a virtuous woman. And we see that they washed her and laid her in an upper room.
That may not have stuck out to you as much as it did to me. The custom of the Jews at death was to immediately bury the body because they didn't do any embalming.
They couldn't just let the body just lay around. They immediately put the body in a tomb. Bury it.
The Mishnah, which is Jewish customs, prescribed a certain washing and then the burial.
But it was immediately. It was done quickly. But in this case they didn't bury her. It was very unusual because dead bodies were a very unsacred thing in Israel to a Jew and they didn't let dead bodies just hang around.
[23:13] Why didn't they bury her right away? What was going on? Well, we see that next thing is that two men were sent to Peter.

the disciples had insider information that Peter was not far off. So instead of burying Tabitha they held out hope that maybe he would come and raise her from the dead. Or maybe they sent these men to Peter to come and heal her before she had passed.
But in any case, he arrived, she's in the upper room. They sent for Peter. They're hoping that maybe by God's grace it'll be in the plan of God to heal her or to raise her up again.
Now he arrives, the widows show him how much Tabitha meant to them and how much she had blessed them. Now at this point, Peter could have just simply told the disciples move on.
She's gone. And if she's in Christ, she's with Christ. And he could have said that death is an experience in life because of the fall and God will always help us through it, to deal with it, to endure it.
[24:21] So just continue on. Instead, he showed compassion towards those who were hurting. He didn't push them off. He didn't tell them to get over it.

He showed compassion. And I imagine he remembered that he himself needed comforting after denying that he knew Jesus. And after that denial, when he knew Jesus three times, Jesus himself comforted Peter.
And now, Peter has the opportunity to bring comfort to others. And this is exactly what 2 Corinthians 1 verses 3 through 5 says. Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord, Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our affliction so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction.
God gives us comfort so we can give others comfort. And we comfort them with the comfort which we ourselves are comforted by God. For as we share abundantly in Christ's sufferings, so through Christ we share abundantly in comfort too.
And then after he performed this miracle in Joppa, many people came to believe in Jesus for the same reasons they did in Lydda and during the ministry of Jesus himself.
[25:50] People understood the message that was being preached was authenticated by God. So as I shared a few weeks ago, people don't care how much you know until they know how much you care.

And when we show genuine love and concern for others, it can open the door for opportunity for the gospel to be shared. Peter ministered to the needy in hurting, and he earned an audience in the process.
And his ministry was always tied to his fellowship with the saints. He was always visiting the saints. Same with Paul. Every city he went, he went and ministered to the saints.
Visited with them. Prayed with them. Our communities today are filled with people who are needy and hurting. And as we're gathered here this morning, who has God placed on your heart and mind to minister to this week?
How can you encourage or help someone else in their pursuit? We are gathered to stir one another up to love and good works. God's God's love and good love.
[27:08] This is the priority of the Christian life. To gather together, yes, encourage each other, pray for one another, hear the preaching of the word to be equipped to go for the work of service.

So do not leave here today feeling content in your walk with God. Seek opportunities to serve him and pray that he will open your eyes to those around you.

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That he will open your eyes to the opportunities that you have, uniquely yours, that you will take them as an opportunity to show the love and grace of God to people in need and the people who are hurting and need comfort.
Let's pray. Gracious Father, thank you for your word and thank you for Peter and his life and example. And Lord, I pray that as this message is preached for the benefit of others, Lord, I know that I need to take it myself.
And Lord, I pray that each one here, including myself, Lord, you would put on our hearts and our minds somebody, one person, one individual, Lord, that we can minister to this week.
[28:32] Whether they're needy or hurting, wherever they are, whoever they are, it doesn't matter their story, it doesn't matter their background, it doesn't matter where they came from, what they're going through, anything, Lord, what matters is that we are compassionate, genuinely concerned for them, showing them your love and introducing your comfort.

Lord, I pray for this church, that we would indeed be great commission-minded, followers of Christ, who want to see our communities come to know Jesus.
to follow him themselves. And Lord, help it to start with me. In Jesus' name, amen.
Amen.

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