

The Work That Will Last

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[0:00] The words of my mouth and the meditation of our hearts be acceptable in your sight. erfahren my Rock and Redeemer. Amen.

erfahren my Rock and Redeemer. erfahren my Word and Redeemer. first welcome this morning our friends from St. Andrews who are worshiped with us. We are so glad and honored that you'll be present with us on this Lord's Day to worship, to hear God's Word, to receive the body and bread of our Lord Jesus Christ. It's an honor and by God's providence you're seeing old friends. And I discovered this week also that Judy Moorhead, both parishes we'll know well, is visiting us with our daughter Carrie. Carrie and I are long, long friends, decades.

And I've got to know Judy and by God's providence she's visiting Syracuse again this Lord's Day. And so it's like a family reunion and it's wonderful. She's here for a family reunion, but she didn't know that she was going to be a part of another family reunion. So thanks be to God for that. I am glad that in God's providence you are here worshiping with us.

And I'm also glad that you'll be joining us later in the parish picnic this afternoon. Also, I want to say a quick word before we go into our text this morning regarding the events of yesterday. I'm sure you've seen through our series, through these, if you're early, people of early training, you've seen through our series, through this epistle of 1 Corinthians as we've been going through it. You've seen that the wisdom of the world is foolishness to those who are being saved. You, brothers and sisters in Christ, are those who are being saved.

Therefore, we are to conduct our lives, you are to conduct your lives, not according to the wisdom of this world, which is perishing, but according to the divine wisdom of God in the power of the Holy Spirit.

[2:24] And this is available, this power is available to us in God's word and prayer by which Christ's church is built as we faithfully gather to hear and receive from Him both the words of promise and His body and blood in the sacrament of the Holy Eucharist. We gather, we receive that power to live in this world that is perishing in the resurrection power of the Lord Jesus. And it is ever more important that we are a people shaped by these means of grace that our Lord has given to us as people. So let us know ever more, people of God, of Jesus Christ, let us know ever more of Him and especially the cross of Christ, that Christ is crucified, risen, exalted. And let us put our confidence and trust in the power of God and not the wisdom of men. So as the rest of this summer goes into fall and the fever pitch increases in our nation, be mindful that you are a people of God and you are to conduct and think and live according to the wisdom of God and according to the wisdom of this world. We can only do it in the power of the Holy Spirit, so we must also go to Him in prayer. Later this morning during the prayers of the people,

I invite you to lift up prayers to our merciful God on behalf of His church and on behalf of our beloved nation. Now, this morning, we come to the concluding sermon in our series through 1 Corinthians.

1 Corinthians. We've been in 1 Corinthians for a little, just a little over a year. And we'll be looking at verse 58 of chapter 15 this morning, particularly.

And let me just read that verse again. It's on page 1143, I believe, of your pew Bible. If you want to grab your Bible and follow along, you're invited, in fact, encouraged to do so.

Now, 1 Corinthians 15, 58. Therefore, my beloved brothers, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain.

[4:56] This verse is what Paul was leading up to throughout in the crescendo of chapter 15. As we read through the longest chapter in this epistle.

He was always leading up to this verse, verse 58. If Christ is indeed raised from the dead, and the dead in Christ will, like Him, rise in new glorified bodies, if this is true, which it is, then we must live out this reality in this present world that we are in.

Christ died for our sins, and He was raised. A new body, imperishable, impervious to the consequences of sin and death.

This same new life and body awaits us in the new kingdom of which we are already citizens.

Therefore, therefore, you've heard this numerous times from preachers, and I'm going to say it.

That is what there is there for. Right? In verse 58. It's all leading up to it. Therefore, if this is true, and it is, then here's how to live our lives.

[6:17] This verse is how we apply this wondrous truth of chapter 15. And in fact, actually, the whole epistle of 1 Corinthians, this is how we apply it to our lives.

And as it surmised in verse 58. So, Paul speaks of the work of the Lord. What is it? What is the work of the Lord?

Thanks to the Reformation recoveries of the 16th century, we've come to know that for the Christian, there is no such thing as sacred, secular divide in our work.

All that we do, I hope you know this, all that we do has essential value before God. Every work is to be done as unto the Lord.

But there is a work that is more important than any other we can do in this world. Yes, all that we do is to be done to the Lord. But yet, there is a general to specific distinction in the Christian's work.

[7:23] In general, all our work, what and how we work in our 9-5 day job, all of what you do in your 9-5 matters to God.

How you do it matters to God. He wants our diligence, our faithfulness, and even says it in His Word, that we must do all of these things as unto the Lord.

But ultimately, your 9-5 work, your earthly hobbies, your meticulous garden that you're keeping, your boat, if you have one, your motorcycle, right?

Am I hitting some bullseye here? Right? Whatever it is that you have, that you invest your interest and your energy in, all of those things, even things such as legacy work, like giving to the poor, or striving to end world hunger, world peace.

I think you will all agree those are really noble enterprises. Diplomacy. Reform in society. All of these things are work that is part of this dying age.

[8:47] They will perish. But there is a work that is more specifically kingdom work, or gospel work, that Paul is referring to in this verse.

The kind of work that will endure unto eternity. The kind of work whose dividend! It's treasures that are being laid up in heaven for you.

And it is this particular work that Paul is referencing in this verse as the work of the Lord. And so, so what is this kingdom gospel work? I think Peter all gives a helpful definition of it.

It is, what believers do to advance the gospel among unbelievers, and to establish believers in the gospel. What believers, that is Christians, do to advance the gospel among unbelievers, believers, and to establish other Christians, fellow Christians, in the gospel.

So you see, our kingdom gospel work has a specific goal in mind. One, to advance the gospel among unbelievers, that more may come to the saving knowledge of God.

[10:10] And second, to establish believers in the gospel, that we will belong to Jesus, may grow in increasing maturity into His likeness more and more.

These are the goals of gospel work. And all our work here at Holy Trinity, there at St. Andrew's, or whatever particular local church you belong to, all your work that you do in those contexts Our gospel work!

If, indeed, they have the right goal in mind, which is to advance the gospel and to build fellow believers in ongoing Christian maturity.

We proclaim Christ crucified, that more people will hear about the saving gospel of Jesus and may come to follow Him.

and we lovingly serve with whatever gifts God has given you. We've gone through 1 Corinthians, right? Remember chapter 12? We all have gifts God has given, but God the Holy Spirit has given His people to serve the body of Christ to build them up.

[11:29] Chapter 13, the way in which we use those gifts is in the context of love, right? And we have these gifts. And so, as we serve one another, we have these gifts that God has given us to

build up one another in the church, we are doing gospel work.

And notice also that this gospel work is centered not on institutions or buildings, but on people. You see it in verse 58.

People made in the image of God and invited to be renewed in the image of the Son. In other words, this gospel work by definition is other-focused, not self-focused.

Gospel work is not building your own empire. Gospel work is not building your own sort of peepdom. Gospel work is building whose kingdom?

God's kingdom. Christ as King and Lord. Paul reminds us in chapter 13 that all zeal, all giftedness that we may have in this work, as we do this work, gospel work, all our zeal, all our giftedness, absent of love, is futile.

[12:57] So, the setting in which the work is being done that we do, the gospel work, if it is going to have true building up, true edification, must be done in love.

Without it, we are just, as he says earlier in the epistle, we are just heaping up straw and hay to be burned up and destroyed on the last day. and so, the work of the Lord is advancing the gospel of Jesus Christ to unbelievers and building up fellow believers into ongoing Christian maturity.

And then, Paul goes on in this verse to talk about how we are to do this work. And he gives us three epic descriptions of how to do this work.

And let's look at each of it closely. First of all, he says, be steadfast. So, in other epistles, Paul used the word stand firm.

The two words have the same meaning, really. Stand firm. Be steadfast. The question, then, is this. Be steadfast in what?

[14:11] So, the exhortation, I think, is for us, as the people of God, to be steadfast in the gospel. To take our stand in it.

The gospel. What is the gospel? What does Paul say in 1 Corinthians the gospel is? It is the word of Christ that has been made known to us as it was made known to the 1 Corinthians in the power of the Holy Spirit.

Which tells us of the redeeming power of God manifested in the cross of Christ. Remember what he talks about, I desire to know nothing among you except what? Christ crucified.

That is the gospel. The redeeming power of God manifested in the cross of Christ. That by his atoning death, we have been made right with God. His death has brought us life and abundant life at that.

Which is ours. And now, and which will be fully realized on that day when the last trumpet shall sound. When we shall be raised bodily in imperishable glorious bodies to be with him forever.

[15:28] So in summary, the gospel has in view the cross of Christ is death, burial, and resurrection. The resurrection.

resurrection. From cross, from death to resurrection. Right? So that, so that if you're in Christ, you've died. And you will be raised, you will be raised up with him in glory.

That is the gospel. And so, Paul is telling us that we must be steadfast in this gospel. we must remain planted in the gospel.

Be planted, brothers and sisters, in the gospel of your salvation by which you've been delivered from death to life. And the power of God proclaimed and manifested in the gospel is the same power that is preached.

It is the same power that is preached throughout your Christian journey. What do I mean by that?

The gospel of your salvation is the same gospel that will keep you in your ongoing walk with God.

[16:35] We never graduate from the gospel. The first Corinthians unfortunately thought they did. And Paul reminds them, no, the gospel is the beginning and the ongoing means by which you remain steadfast.

your confidence in that. Confidence in that is how you remain in the family of God. And I think it's important to convey that this is not work that will earn your salvation.

Right? Because when we speak of work, our natural mind, perhaps more so because we're Americans, we naturally think work means something that I can merit, that I can do to earn something, a reward.

reward. It's not really a reward. It's what I'm owed because I've done the work by my effort. But that's not the kind of work that Paul is talking about here. This work that he's talking about is not the kind of work that will earn salvation because salvation is a gift of God.

Salvation is a gift of God given by grace to undeserving people through the saving work of Christ. Christ. So the work of the gospel is not an invitation to work for God so you can earn your place in his family.

[17 : 53] You've already been given a place in his family if you trust in Jesus Christ. So the work of the gospel is the work of a child who belongs in the family, who belongs in the father's house, working not to earn love because he has it, he's secured in the love of God, but working out of a heart of gratitude in the family business.

And this, brothers and sisters, requires a resolute, unwavering commitment to the gospel. That's why Paul says you must remain steadfast in the gospel.

You must not be like the Corinthians who have jumbled, who have a jumbled, confused attention to the gospel because they've moved on from the gospel, they've submitted to the wisdom of the world.

They've exchanged the gospel, the surpassing wisdom of God for the wisdom of the world that is perishing.

We must not be like them. So first, we do this work of the Lord by being firmly planted in the gospel. And then secondly, we're to be immovable. One thing I noticed about how doing gospel work is, is that all these three words that Paul uses in these verses, these three descriptive words, be steadfast, immovable, and then the next one, these three words are interconnected.

[19 : 21] You can't take one without taking all three. All three are meant to inform how we are to live and do the work of believers in God's vineyard.

So Paul does say, we must be immovable. This, of course, is not an excuse. Right? When you read the word immovable, it's not an excuse to be stubborn.

I'm just doing what Paul says. I'm sticking with what I think and my way or that way. I'm being immovable. No, that's not what Paul is saying here. It's not stubbornness. Again, we remember chapter 13, don't we?

What does Paul say about love? Love does not insist on its own way. Rather, what Paul has in mind is gospel faithfulness.

We've already mentioned the Corinthians who have moved on from the gospel. Remember them? Well, thinking themselves, they thought themselves wise in their own minds. They know more than God.

[20 : 22] They know more even than his apostle St. Paul. And what does Paul say about them? Paul says they are immature. Paul says they are undergrown children still in nappies, still drinking milk instead of growing into manhood.

That's how Paul described them in his epistle. Why? Because they have moved on from the root, the means by which they are meant to be growing in maturity, which is the gospel of Jesus Christ. This was so because they've deviated from the foundation that was given to them by St. Paul, Apostle Paul, the word about Jesus Christ.

Paul puts it another way in Colossians. He says this, If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God.

Set your minds on the things that are above, not on the things that are on the earth. Friends, we cannot presume to move on from the gospel of Christ crucified.

[21 : 35] We cannot presume to move on from that great wisdom by which we are being saved, Paul says, to the wisdom of the world. To do so is to remove our anchor from Christ, who is our rock.

And what happens when you remove your anchor, you will be left unmoored. You will be susceptible to being tossed around by the waves, by the lies and the falsehood of this world, which is foolishness.

instead, Paul encourages us, exhorts us, remains steadfast in the gospel. And that steadfastness in the gospel will keep us from being tossed about in the falsehood of this world, will keep us anchored to Christ Jesus, who is our rock.

And then, and thirdly, he says, always abounding in the work. So, steadfastness in the gospel will keep us grounded and immovable, will give us a defense against every wind of doctrine, every human cunning, of every, every manners of the world's craftiness and deceitful schemes.

But it, it would also free us. It would also free us to abound in the work. There's a freedom that comes from, from, being steadfast in the gospel and clinging to Jesus as our rock.

[23:11] Christ, being our steady anchor through this life, allows us to face any adversity. And, and you do know this, don't you?

We will face adversities. Many times, we will face adversities from the world. The world sees the message of the cross as foolishness.

And so, they will see you as a fool. And sometimes, we will face adversity, even from within the body of Christ, when we sin against one another.

And if we're honest, if we're honest, the natural thing we want to do when this happens is to find an exit. When there's turmoil within the body of Christ, when a brother sin against you, a sister sin against you, or when you feel like you're not being appreciated, you want to look for the exit. But here's what Paul is saying to us. If Christ is your anchor, then you have in him an abundance, an unquenchable excess of grace from which you can draw.

[24:32] And so, when you do face adversity, you might say, well, I just can't take enough. I can't take any more. I can't take any more of this disrespect, any more of this abuse, any more of this ingratitude.

I can't take any more. Whereas, Paul says to us, you have in Christ an abundance and unquenchable excess of grace from which you draw from, even in the midst of all the adversity that will come along.

You, remember, have been forgiven an incalculable debt. You've been adopted. You've been made heirs of God in Christ.

And none of this lavished, none of this love that is lavished on you has been earned or deserved.

Yet, it is yours in Christ.

Therefore, you have in him a fountain of abundant grace to draw from as you also forgive one another in the body of Christ.

[25:43] As you love one another without regard to what you'll get in return. Essentially, always abounding in the work is an invitation to love with abandon.

To love without looking for what's going to happen. Who's going to say, well done, while your Father in Heaven is saying, well done. And that is a far more greater worth than what anyone here can say. Any other reward you can get here on earth. You can love with abandon. You can risk much. In fact, you can risk all for the sake of your Lord.

We risk all for you. always abounding in the work. Knowing that in Christ you have a source of grace that when you're weary you can go to Him and draw from that grace.

And here's the last thing that Paul says. Knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain. your labor is not in vain.

[26:59] Remember, notice here how Paul now uses a different word for work. He uses the word labor. Earlier in chapter 3 and I think chapter 5 Paul has said, chapter 7 Paul has described his own work as a laborer.

And what's the image when you think of laborers? You think someone working in a cubicle in air condition office? You know, with a pen and paper? With a tie?

Is that what a laborer is? No. It's a man with dirty clothes. Hands that's soiled with dirt or oil or whatever it is. Grunt work. That's how Paul sees gospel work.

It's art work. It is a work that will task you. It is a work that makes demands of you. As it does. all war in Christ. And that's how Paul describes this work. But he says, hear what he says. He says, it is not in vain. And so when you face all those adversities, when maybe somebody doesn't understand you, or impeded the wrong motives to you, when you are hurt, as will happen in the family of God, when you're wrongly accused in the world because of your faith, or maybe even in the church, when all of these happens, abound in the work, and know that it is not in vain.

[28:31] Christ has been raised, and those who are in Christ will be raised. Therefore, because of the resurrection, this work of leading people to Christ, and building up people in Christ, is the most important and vital work there is to do.

And because it is resurrection work, it cannot be in vain. So as you labor, as you come every day and do a setup for the church, as you put on the coffee, so that when the rest of people in the church comes, they can have coffee to drink, as you help set up for the annual parish picnic, as you lead Bible study, as you help in the worship team, as you clean the church, as you clean the bathrooms, as you encourage one another in the Lord, as you give of your resources to the ongoing work of the gospel, brought at home and abroad, nothing is in vain.

None of it is menial. none of it is unimportant. In fact, all of it is important. Because as you do it, you're storing up treasures in heaven.

You're not going to miss out. Here's the lie of the enemy, as you're faithful, working in his vineyard, he's going to tell you, you're going to miss out. You are missing out on the pleasures of the world. you're missing out. Your sacrifice is meaningless, the devil will tell you. But here is God's word to you. You are not going to miss out.

[30:26] You are part of the resurrection age. He has been risen. He has been raised from the dead. And because you're in him, you also will rise from the dead.

you will gain more than this world can ever give you. What can this world give you?

It can give a lot. Respect. Notoriety. Fame. Respect. Fame. I'm repeating the words because those are the things that usually grasp our imaginations.

Money. Right? The pleasures of the world. They don't always have to be bad things. Right? You know? Pleasures of the world. Comfortable life. All of these things. But what are they going to do? They're all going to perish. They're going to go away. The things that will last is the work of the gospel. And as you do that work, that odd labor, it is not in vain.

[31:25] And so it is right that we should end our series through 1 Corinthians with this exhortation from St. Paul that reminds us that we are God's people.

That our work in his vineyard is important work. And that he sees it. And he's honored by it. And that it is not in vain.

Therefore, my beloved brothers and sisters in Christ, be steadfast, immovable, always, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord, your labor is not in vain.

Amen. it is not in vain. It is not in vain. It is not in vain. It is not in vain. It is not It is not It is not It is not in vain. It is not in vain. It is not in vain. It is not in vain. It is not in vain. It is not It is not It is not It is not It is not but it is not in vain. And that in vain.

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