

1 Corinthians 9:1-23 PM

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Preacher: Rev. Chris Ley

[0 : 0 0] This week, assuming there isn't some more snow, I'm supposed to be running the first of three come and see evenings.

Come and see are three sessions where a diverse group of people from completely different beliefs and backgrounds gather together, have a meal, and we then discuss one of the biggest questions of life.

So we discuss three big questions over the first three weeks, and the first week we ask, what is the meaning of life? Start with a nice easy one. What is the meaning of life?

And that question comes up in 1 Corinthians chapter 9 as well. Do you feel this evening you have a purpose? What currently gives your life meaning?

If someone asked you today, would you have an answer? Or are you just existing without knowing why?

[1 : 0 3] Is your life random, monotonous, and purposeless, or does it have a trajectory, a goal, and a purpose? If you write notes, spend a second and write down in super small font so no one can eavesdrop and read over your shoulder.

What's the purpose of your life? Well, just think about it for a minute in your head. And don't give me some polite, churchy answer. You're not going to hand your answers in at the front.

Be honest with yourself. Why do you get up in the morning? In 1 Corinthians chapter 9, our text tonight, Paul tells us the purpose of his life.

And he invites us to imitate him. Look at verse 23, the last verse Linda read in chapter 9. Paul writes, I do this all for the sake of the gospel, that I may share with others in its blessings.

What motivates Paul to live his life is the gospel. Everything he does, he writes, is for the sake of the gospel.

[2 : 1 2] Paul mentions the gospel 11 times in the entire letter of 1 Corinthians. Only 11 times.

But 8 of those 11 times are in our text tonight. 1 Corinthians chapter 9, a chapter on purpose, is all about the gospel. The foundation upon which Paul's life is built is the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Paul defines the gospel for us at the end of 1 Corinthians in chapter 15. So if your Bible's open, flip a few pages to page 961.

In chapter 15, verse 1, Paul shares that the gospel is the good news that Jesus is the savior of the world. He says in verse 3, Jesus died for our sins to rescue us from evil.

And that Jesus is the Christ, the king of the kingdom of heaven, sent to earth to bring his heavenly kingdom here. And to invite those who believe to enter in and to follow him.

[3 : 1 8] And we know that Jesus is the Christ. He's God's chosen king, the Messiah. Because verse 4 tells us that three days after he died for our sins and was buried, he rose from the dead.

And he then appeared to hundreds of people, including to Paul. Paul and these hundreds of people spread the gospel of Jesus with everyone they encountered. So Paul articulates what the gospel is.

It's that Jesus is our savior. It's that he's the Christ. And from last week, in chapter 8, verse 6, he tells us that Jesus is the one Lord, through whom we are, through whom are all things, and through whom we exist.

So this is the gospel, the foundation of Paul's life. Jesus is your savior. He died to save you from your sins. Jesus is the Christ. He's God's chosen king who brings heaven to earth.

And Jesus is the Lord. He's God himself. God the Son, come from heaven. And notice that the gospel, according to Paul, is the exact same as the gospel that was announced at Christmas by the angel to the shepherds.

[4 : 32] If you were here on Christmas Eve, that was exactly four weeks ago tonight. Do you remember what the angel says when they visit the shepherds? Luke 2, verse 11, Do not be afraid, for I bring you a gospel of great joy that will be for all people.

For unto you is born this day a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. Savior, Christ, Lord. That's who Jesus is.

That's the gospel. The gospel is the good news about a person who has come to us from heaven. Jesus, who has come to be our Savior, our King, and our God.

And we don't earn this gospel. It's graciously given to us by a merciful God. That's why it's good news. And this gospel gives purpose to Paul's life and to all who accept Jesus as their Lord and their Savior.

Okay, flip back to our text, 1 Corinthians chapter 9. Notice in verse 23 that Paul's purpose is not just to know the gospel personally, privately, but rather to share it.

[5 : 41] Paul's purpose is to spread the gospel. He tells us he does all things for the sake of the gospel, that in sharing it with people, they may share with him in its blessings.

Evangelism, sharing the gospel, motivates everything Paul does. Paul's purpose is to know and share the gospel. Paul has been gripped by the gospel of God's grace, and he now strives to share Christ with everyone he encounters.

And if you're a Christian, this should be your purpose as well. When people believe in Jesus and follow him, he commissions us to go and to make disciples of all the nations, teaching them to obey all that Jesus has commanded us.

So if you follow Jesus, your purpose is to share Jesus, to do all things for the sake of the gospel, that the people in your life may share with you in the blessings of the gospel.

This means that evangelism is not some pet project for a select few super-Christians. You know, those annoying Christians who somehow don't get nervous about sharing their faith in public settings.

[7 : 00] Evangelism is not an optional aside for the Christian. It's our purpose, our commission. It's our call to share Christ, to do all things for the sake of the gospel, that we may share with everyone we encounter in its blessings.

The purpose of life is to know the gospel and then to share it so that others may know the gospel. We exist to know God through Jesus Christ, to receive his salvation, and then to joyfully share this unbelievably good news with the people we encounter.

That's why you exist, whether you believe it or not. You were made by God to know God, to love God as he loves you, to enter into a relationship with God through Jesus that is defined by never-ending love, enjoying and sharing in his never-ending life.

Your chief end is to worship God and to enjoy him forever. And if you know the gospel, then you're invited to now live for the sake of the gospel, looking to share this unbelievably good news with all the people you encounter.

And tonight, Paul tells us how. I've just finished part one of this sermon where Paul reveals to us his purpose for life and our purpose too.

[8 : 25] We exist to know God through the gospel of his son, Jesus Christ, and to share his gospel that others may know him too. And part two now gets practical.

If life's purpose is to know and share the gospel, then how should I live? What does it look like for me to live for the sake of the gospel? So part one was, what is the purpose of my life?

And part two now is, how then should I live? And Paul answers this second question by focusing on our relationships with others. First, he describes how we should live toward other Christians.

Paul articulates a gospel-shaped posture toward other believers. This is the first 18 verses of chapter 9. And then second, Paul describes how we should live toward people in our lives who aren't Christians.

This is verses 19 to 23. So the purpose of life is to know and share the gospel of Jesus Christ. And now here's how to have gospel-shaped relationships toward first other Christians and then second toward everyone else.

[9 : 34] So first, how do we live toward Christians in light of the gospel? We have a theologian in our family and her name is Julia. Julia is six.

She's my daughter and she is patiently teaching me how to follow Jesus. My kids have learned that the way to extend their bedtime and to get more quality time with their parents is to wait until the precise moment when we're about to turn off their light and say goodnight.

And that's the moment when they pounce and they ask the really complicated questions about God that they know will be forced to answer and have an extended conversation. This final moment of their day is when the existential questions of the six-year-old psyche come out in our household.

Just when, as a parent, you think you're clocking out for the night, you're ending your shift, they get you with a buzzer beater. So a few weeks ago, with my fingers on Julia's light switch, she says, Daddy, at school we read a book that's about feelings.

And a special teacher, probably the school counselor, comes and reads us this book every time she visits. And the book always ends with this. Above all, look after yourself.

[10 : 51] Watch out for yourself above everyone else. Julia recites the book to me and then she asks, But Daddy, doesn't Jesus tell us that we should live our lives looking out for others and helping them, not just serving ourselves?

Well done, Julia. Jesus' first followers started jockeying around him to be considered the greatest. They tried to use Jesus' power and popularity to make themselves powerful and popular.

And then Jesus taught them, this is from our first reading, that whoever wants to be great among you must be your servant. And whoever would be first among you must be your slave.

Because even as the Son of Man came not to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many. The posture of the gospel-shaped Christian toward other Christians ought to be a posture of self-sacrificial love and service.

To put yourself last in order to put everyone else first. The gospel-shaped life is one where you sacrifice your own rights and freedoms to serve other Christians.

[12 : 08] This is where Paul finished in chapter 8 from last week. Look at verse 13. He writes, Therefore, if food makes my sister or my brother in Christ stumble, then I will never eat any meat, lest I make my brother or sister stumble.

Even if we have a right to eat meat, if eating meat is unhelpful to another Christian in my community, then I won't do it. I will become a vegetarian for the sake of your faith.

Or as Julia put it, Jesus teaches us to live our lives to serve others, not just ourselves. Paul, in our text, uses himself as an example of this.

In verse 1 of chapter 9, he asserts that he is an apostle. This means he's been handpicked by Jesus and commissioned to bring the gospel to the non-Jewish world.

Paul reminds us that he has seen the risen Lord face to face. And because of Paul's status as an apostle, the apostle that brought the gospel to Corinth and founded the church that he's writing to, he has a right to certain privileges.

[13 : 19] In verse 4, he tells us he has the right to eat and drink. In verse 5, he has the right to get married. In verse 6, he has the right to receive funding from the churches where he serves so that he doesn't need to make a living another way.

And yet, in verse 15, Paul tells us that he has made no use of any of these rights, nor does he plan to. He gladly gives up all of his rights as a Christian leader to serve others, to see others built up in their faith.

Paul's life is motivated by love rather than motivated by a salary or an impressive job title or sumptuous meals or even having a family.

That is what Paul is saying in chapter 9 through to verse 18. He's saying, live to love others, imitating Christ.

Sacrifice your personal rights and freedoms to love and serve and build up the faith of your sisters and brothers in Christ. Put their needs above your rights, just like Jesus did.

[14 : 31] Imitate Christ in your Christian relationships. Paul now pivots to show what a gospel-shaped life means and how we relate to the people in our lives who aren't believers.

This is in verses 19 to 23, and this is where we'll finish. Listen to what he says, beginning in verse 19. For though I am free from all, I'm not under the authority of any person.

I have made myself a servant to all, that I might win more of them. To those outside the church, Paul has made himself a servant to everyone he encounters.

Why? What motivates Paul to live his life this way? Look again at the end of verse 19, that I might win more of them.

Paul is not under the authority of any human person or institution. He's an apostle and servant of Jesus Christ, and he's responsible to him alone.

[15 : 35] But the way Paul exercises his total freedom is not by demanding money or respect, but by giving himself to be a servant of all.

And what motivates this self-sacrificial servitude is his singular motivation to see people saved. Sharing the gospel with his neighbors motivates all that Paul does.

Evangelism is everything to him. He accommodates himself to every person God puts in his life, serving them and striving to relate to them in any way possible. So if the person's Jewish, then Paul will practice all the Jewish disciplines and laws so that he might share Christ.

If the person isn't Jewish but is following the Jewish law, then Paul will do likewise. If the person's outside the law, meaning they don't know or obey what God teaches in Scripture, then Paul strives to relate to them as well on their own terms.

Not compromising his morals or his devotion to Christ, but meeting the person where they're at. If the person is weak, Paul will make himself weak rather than exhibiting his strength.

[16 : 46] The point is this. Become as your neighbor. relate to them on their level so that an opportunity to share the gospel may present itself and so that God may work through you to save them.

I live in a townhouse complex that's a cul-de-sac and our neighbors generally are really, really nice but not Christians. One neighbor is a really lovely man married to his high school sweetheart and together they have a young daughter who our kids adore.

This family has not expressed any interest in coming to church events despite subtle, gentle hints or non-threatening general invitations from us.

But through talking to this neighbor, I've learned that he's an avid frisbee golf player. He's joined a league. He plays all year at all the courses around the lower mainland.

He told me this week how you can play in the snow. He tapes glow-in-the-dark tape to his discs and lights up the holes so that he can play at night. Now he may not be comfortable coming to my home turf to church but he's invited me to his home turf playing frisbee golf.

[18 : 07] Now I've never played real frisbee golf with the actual small discs so I'm at risk of embarrassing myself. But I should still go because to the frisbee golf enthusiast, I shall become a frisbee golf enthusiast.

That on the drive to the course or over drinks afterwards, I may get an opportunity to share with him in the blessings of the gospel. Another neighbor on the other side is similarly fantastic.

He has a family with two kids around my kid's age. He's a Muslim and he's really interested that I'm a Christian minister. We have great garbage day conversations about education and faith and soji and raising kids in a secular city.

And he said that he's glad he has a God-fearer living next door to him. And once he mentioned that I should go with him sometime to daily prayers at his mosque. I should go.

Not to worship or pray to Allah, obviously, but to love my neighbor and to meet him where he's at. To the God-fearer, I will become a God-fearer. To take an interest in his life and his faith and look for opportunities to share Christ and the gospel.

[19 : 21] Maybe if I go to his mosque sometime, then he'll come to my church and he'll bring his family and all of them will hear the gospel and perhaps even share in its blessings. Evangelism should motivate everything we do.

That's the point. We think evangelism, sharing the gospel, is the work of the church. It's my job to tell your friends about Jesus and to get them to believe in him.

But that's not Paul's understanding. Because here's the problem. I'm never going to meet your friends unless they come to church. And realistically, none of them will ever come here if you haven't taken an interest in their lives, met them where they were at, served them, and when an opportunity has arisen, invited them.

The seeds of faith planted in our friends and our neighbors and our coworkers and our family members is almost always planted by you out there in the world rather than by some minister in here.

Christians out in the world are the ones who are sowing the seeds of the gospel and sharing Christ with our city. Most of our neighbors and friends would not be caught dead at a gathering like this one.

[20 : 40] So if all of our evangelistic effort goes to making these services evangelistic, then the people who need to hear the gospel never will because most of them will never come here unless we first go out there, meet them where they're at, love them, serve them, and invite them.

The purpose of Paul's life is to know and share the gospel of Jesus Christ, to imitate Jesus by loving other Christians and serving them and making himself a servant to those who don't know Jesus yet so that there may come an opportunity to sow the seeds of faith.

If you follow Jesus, he calls you tonight to imitate him in view of God's mercy, in light of the gospel of Jesus Christ, to sacrifice your rights and your freedoms to serve God by serving others, to become all things to all people so that by any means God may save some of them through you.

This is what we're called to today. And may God help us to joyfully give ourselves to follow Jesus by serving others. Amen.