

# 1 Corinthians 16:1-24 AM

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Date: 16 June 2024

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[ 0 : 0 0 ] Let us pray. Father, may the riches of your grace shine through the poverty of my words, so that the words of my mouth and the many meditations of our hearts may be pleasing and acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our Maker and our Redeemer.

Amen. You may be seated. Amen. It's wonderful when you get those moments where you get a window into what your children really think about you.

A couple weeks ago, I wasn't here because I had COVID, and so I got the rare experience of watching this service online with my kids. And as Jacob was wonderfully preaching to us and unpacking the scriptures, my kids were there, and about five minutes in, they wandered away.

And then they came back about ten minutes later, and my daughter was like, is this guy still talking? And to which my wife responded, yeah, and quite often it's Daddy up there talking.

And she goes, oh, no. I'm so glad I have Sunday school. So anyways, Father has no honor in his own household.

[ 1 : 2 9 ] But today's kind of a sad and special day, because we're coming to the end of the letter, first letter, Paul's first letter to the Corinthians. Next week, we're going to be starting a new sermon series in the book of Psalms for just about six short weeks, and it's going to be marvelous.

But I don't know about you, there's been something very special about journeying through this letter together. It feels like it's challenged us in all the right ways, and it also feels like God has strengthened us where we've needed it as well.

And as we come to the final chapter, there's always this temptation for us just to glide over, as Mark would say, all the bits and bobs that Paul seems to be placing at the end of the letter. You know, when you come to the end of chapter 15, you feel like we have reached the mountaintop of resurrection glory.

I mean, Paul has mocked death, stared it in the face and mocked it because of the resurrection of Jesus Christ. And it kind of feels like he says, now be steadfast and movable, always abounding in the work of the Lord.

We should just close the letter, go on and be triumphant in our faith in the world, because we know that Jesus has won the victory. But there's this wonderful sense, I think, that chapter 16 is so important to our understanding of the gospel and of the Christian life, because Paul acknowledges that our experience of the gospel is not always the mountaintop glory of victory, but it's often the valley of life in the ordinary.

[ 2 : 5 1 ] And that's precisely what Paul does here. He transitions us from chapter 15, where we see the hope of resurrection glory that is to come, into the day-to-day stuff in chapter 16 of daily life, where he talks about money and travel plans and schedules and visits and leadership issues and greetings flying all over the place from different people and households.

And what we come to realize is that the hope of the resurrection is lived by the Christian in the ordinary day-to-day stuff of life. And that's very important for us to get.

It's very significant. And there's another element that Paul adds here, is it's not just all the ordinary stuff of day-to-day life that he's talking about here. He chooses some very specific things.

And he couches all these very specific things within a vision of the church as the family of God. So notice how throughout this passage, there's the language about five times he describes us as brothers and sisters in Christ.

To be a part of the church is to be a part of God's adopted and beloved and unruly children. And then he speaks of this language of greet one another with a holy kiss.

[ 4 : 04 ] And in the ancient world, a holy kiss would have been something that was a familial thing. You would have done this with close family or close friends. It was a greeting of affection and endearment.

And he also speaks of how the church is meeting in particular people's households. There's this sense in which the church is like an extended family in the way that they relate and belong to one another.

So in chapter 16, I want to submit to you that Paul is not only speaking about how does our belief in resurrection, hope, and glory actually get lived out in the day-to-day ordinary life, but he's saying how does it get lived out in the day-to-day ordinary life of being the family of God together?

And there are three things that Paul highlights that I think are important to any family life. They're not the only things he could have highlighted, but he talks about money first, time second, and then love third.

So money, time, and love. And he begins in verses 1 to 4 with money. Look at it with me. Now concerning the collection for the saints, that is for the Christians, and he's speaking about the Christians in Jerusalem in particular, as I directed the churches of Galatia, so also you are to do, on the first day of every week, each of you is to put something aside and store it up as he is able or as he may prosper, so that there will be no collecting when I come.

[ 5 : 32 ] And when I arrive, I will send those whom you accredit by letter to carry your gift to Jerusalem. And if it seems advisable that I should go also, they will accompany with me.

This is really interesting. So remember, Paul's on his missionary journeys, right? And Paul, at this point, has been traveling throughout Asia Minor, preaching the gospel, establishing churches, and normally we stop there, but he also has been collecting money.

He sees this as actually an essential part of his apostolic ministry. He's been collecting money from all these churches in Gentile places. So we have in Corinth, in Galatia, in Macedonia, in Achaia, and in Rome, Paul is collecting money from all these different places for the church in Jerusalem.

And this is so significant to Paul that we actually see he mentions this collection in four of his different letters. So he mentions it here in 1 Corinthians, in 2 Corinthians. He gives almost a chapter or two to it in 2 Corinthians.

He mentions it in Galatians, and he mentions it in Romans. So there's four different letters in which Paul is talking about this financial collection that he is gathering from Gentile churches in order to bring to the Jewish church in Jerusalem.

[ 6 : 48 ] And when you look at all of these different books, you realize that this gift for Paul is not a matter of just financial aid. It's not just a matter of some have financial need and he wants others who have the means to provide it, although that's true.

You come to realize that there's a deeper significance for this gift in the economy of God for Paul. That this gift takes on significance as an expression of unity and reciprocity and solidarity between churches in different locations.

It's the sense that by giving a gift, we are sharing in the need and the ministry of churches that are gathering in other places from us. And Paul even speaks about how this gift is intended to produce in the people who receive it, the recipients, a heart of thanksgiving and prayer to God that God has supplied people to come alongside with them and journey and be partners in ministry together with them.

So this is a really significant thing for Paul. But most significantly of all for Paul, and we see this in 2 Corinthians, the next letter he writes, is that this gift is meant to mirror the very heart of the gospel itself.

So he says, for you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, for your sakes he became poor, so that by his poverty you might become rich.

[ 8 : 14 ] So according to Paul, when we steward our resources and our money, it is intended for the Christian to become a parable of the power of the gospel. As the gospel takes deep root in our hearts, the generosity of Christ sinks down and takes root into our hearts, it uproots the love of money and causes us to open our hands in generosity, generosity that reflects the generosity of Christ himself.

It's quite a marvelous thing. So Paul is describing here a reality that the gospel invites us to share what we receive and to pursue solidarity and fellowship with our fellow brothers and sisters in Christ wherever they are in need.

Now one of the things I love about this here is Paul's very sensible. Paul's very practical in this instruction. Notice here in verse 2. He gets, he says, on the first day of the week, that's the day of resurrection when Christians would have gathered together for weekly worship.

So he's just saying when you gather together for worship, each of you is to put something aside and it says, as he may prosper. That means basically as you are able.

So Paul realizes that different people are going to be in different conditions of life and they're going to have different means and often week to week they might go up and down and he says, just as you are able on a weekly basis.

[ 9 : 44 ] And then he says, and this is so that there will be no collecting when I come. It means, in other words, Paul wants them to do this steadily and consistently over time so that when he actually comes to get the money, they're not rushing and scrambling to try to get all the money all at once at the very end.

So Paul's just talking about practical financial administration. And then in verses 3 and 4, he talks about the fact that we'll be sure that we entrust this money to wise and trustworthy people to transport it all the way to Jerusalem because it's going to be a large sum of money.

So we want to make sure that those that are dealing with it and transporting it are trustworthy people. I just love how sensible this is by Paul. Right? He's not saying, this is how much I want you to give.

Here's a principle of tithing. Here's a percentage that you need to give. He's not guilt tripping people or coercing people or shaming people into giving. He's not even appealing to people's personal emotions or spiritual experiences or some abstract theological understanding of giving.

He's just saying that when you become a Christian and the generosity of God settles into your life, you will start to develop a way of life, a settled, mature, Christian way of life that includes thoughtful, wise, consistent, planned, transparent, purposeful giving to the needs of the saints as one is able as an act of worship unto God.

[ 11 : 09 ] It's a marvelous little thing. And Paul says this little act of money is actually a core way in which we live out the hope of the resurrection in our ordinary lives together as the family of God.

How do we steward what we have received? But then Paul moves from money to time. Any of you familiar with the book *The Five Love Languages* by Gary Chapman?

Yeah. I don't recommend it in all ways, but notice how we have here gifts, gifts, and then we now have quality time together. And so Paul goes on in verses 5 to 12 to outline three itineraries or travel plans for himself, for Timothy, and for Apollos.

And I want us to spend some time paying attention to the circumstances of these itineraries. While they may be outdated, I think their purpose is not. Look at Paul with me.

I think we learn from Paul's travel plans the importance of personal presence and unrushed time together. Look at verse 5. I will visit you after passing through Macedonia, for I intend to pass through Macedonia, and perhaps I will stay with you or even spend the winter so that you may help me on my journey wherever I go.

[ 12 : 31 ] For I do not want to see you just now in passing, I hope to spend some time with you if the Lord permits. Isn't that amazing?

Paul's pastoral visitation plans actually reveal something very tender and endearing about his pastoral heart towards the Corinthians. He wants and he needs their help.

And so you get this sense that he's not only coming to visit to strengthen them and encourage them, but also that there is this relationship of mutual support and help that exists between the congregation and its leaders.

We get a sense that Paul feels like we're in this together. We're in this mission together. We have different roles to play, but the Lord has given us the same mission and the same spirit.

And in the filling of God's mission together, Paul highlights the significance of face-to-face visits and personal interaction and time together and relationships. I remember this striking me when I lived in Scotland.

[ 13 : 32 ] I got a visit from somebody named Don Lewis who was a professor at Regent College and used to go to St. John's. A lot of you know Don, right? And you loved him. He emailed me when I was living in Scotland at one point and another friend of mine from Vancouver who was there as well, her name was Margie, and he said, hey, I want to have lunch with you guys in two months.

And we said, okay, sounds good. We scheduled it and named the place, all that sort of stuff. And at the lunch, we said, why'd you want to have lunch with us? You live in Vancouver. Why'd you come to Scotland?

He said, oh, I just wanted to check in and see how you're doing, see how your studies are going. I wanted to encourage you a bit. But he said, I only have two hours because I need to catch a flight to London after this.

And we were like, oh, well, how long are you going to be in the UK? He's like, oh, well, I'm going to be in London tomorrow. I'm going to visit so-and-so and then the next day I'm going to fly to New Zealand and I'm going to spend two days with a guy named Johnny and his wife and family.

And then I'm going to fly back to Vancouver to Regent College by the end of reading week. And we were like, wait a second. So you flew all the way to Scotland to have lunch with two people for two hours?

[ 14 : 39 ] Is that what you just told me? And he was like, well, yeah, I guess so. And my jaw just dropped. Fast forward a few years and I was watching online Don Lewis' funeral.

He died suddenly at 70 years old and it was gut-wrenching, right? We all loved him. And there were some 400 to 500 people in physical, personal attendance. But I was watching online and there were 1,000 people viewing it.

1,000 people. And one of his sons got up and said, you know, my dad was just a really awkward, shy Oxford academic until he was about 55 years old.

And then he kind of came of age when he was 55. And I was like, what in the world is he talking about? He said when he was 55, he said he sensed from the Lord that the Lord was actually inviting him into a ministry of friendship and mentorship.

And that he was to devote the rest of his years in some ways to developing that ministry. And so those 1,500 people that showed up at his funeral were the results of 15 years of investing in friendship and mentorship.

[ 15 : 54 ] And I came away that day going, whoa, do I have my priorities right? I have degrees I can show.

I have publications I can show. I have a number of things I can show. But how many friends and people that I've mentored would show up because I had the time and generosity to be with them and encourage them and visit them and support them in their lives and what God was doing with them.

And I think that's one of the things that is highlighted in a wonderful way as Paul unpacks travel plans and timelines and so-and-so is going to be here at this time and I really want to come visit you, but I don't want it to be in passing.

I want it to be so that I can actually spend some time with you because Paul realizes that within the household of God, within the family of God, personal presence and unrushed time together really matters, whether it's a coffee or a lunch or a trip to Scotland.

And it's amazing how he also extends, he talks about the travel plans of Timothy and Apollos as well. There's something really marvelous about this. He says, in Timothy's travel plans, it's less a matter of the timing and purpose of his visit and it's more about how he is to be received by the Corinthian church when he visits.

[ 17 : 11 ] So look at verses 10 and 11. When Timothy comes, see that you put him at ease among you, for he's doing the work of the Lord as I am.

So let no one despise him, help him on his way in peace, that he may return to me, for I am expecting him with the brothers. Remember here that Timothy is kind of like Paul's trainee, his protege.

He didn't have as much experience, years of experience or clout as Paul. And Paul realizes that it could be hard for him to minister if he sends him to the boastful and bombastic and very opinionated Corinthians.

It could be easy for him to get timid and withdraw. And it could be easy for the Corinthians to take advantage of him and run all over him. And so Paul says you should receive him well and you should make it easy and joyful for him to do the work of the Lord among you.

And Paul even says that he's doing the same work that I'm doing. So Paul doesn't see himself as any greater than the one that he is sending here, than Timothy himself. He's saying Timothy has the same ministry, the same authority from the Lord, and he deserves the same welcome and reception in the church of Corinth.

[ 18 : 26 ] And so we get this little window into the fact that not only is personal time and presence important, but Paul is saying within the household of God, how you treat your younger, less experienced ministers matters too.

And I don't say that with a vested interest. Paul's saying they've been anointed and commissioned by God to come into your presence. Welcome them with joy.

Make it easy for them to minister to you in their presence. And then finally he highlights Paulus. And I find this so fascinating. He only gives one verse to Paulus, but look at it in verse 12. Now concerning our brother Apollus, I strongly urged him to come to you.

Really, Paul? I mean, think back to chapter 1. Remember the context. Apollus is one of the ones that was the really famous preachers in Corinth and that they were gathering factions around him and saying, I'm all about Paul.

He's the great, magnificent preacher. I belong to him. And so, it's a fact, like why in the world would Paul say, I'm sending Apollus to you?

[ 19 : 31 ] Now it's likely that the Corinthian church was potentially begging Paul to send Apollus back to them. Seems like Paul's just said he's too busy. Peter is in Jerusalem.

Timothy's not that cool. Send us Apollus. We love that guy. He really fits in. He fills the pews and he is a phenomenal preacher. Send us Apollus.

And Paul spent a lot of time in the early chapters of the book unpacking how toxic this celebrity pastor mentality can be. And it doesn't take too long for us to look at examples in our modern day to see how toxic this is, not only for the church of Jesus Christ, but for the shepherds and the pastors of the church of Jesus Christ.

And yet, it's very interesting that here, Paul is not afraid to strongly urge Apollus to visit Corinth and Apollus essentially says, no, not now. So what's going on here?

I think there's two things. I think first, Apollus is implicitly showing us that ministry cannot be healthy if we go only where we are liked and we do only what will bring affirmation and approval.

[ 20 : 43 ] And I think second, it shows us that Paul trusts Apollus. He trusts that Apollus will make decisions that are best for the gospel and for the church, not for his ego and his career.

Paul leaves the decision to Apollus whether he's going to visit Corinth and in this case, he says, I choose to wait. And this little word here where it says, it was not at all his will, many commentators think that's actually referring to God's will, not Apollus'.

So Apollus discerned it is not at all God's will to come now. Basically, I will come when I have proper opportunity from the Lord. And so we learn from Apollus that within the household of God, prioritizing God's will over people's praises really matters.

And so what seems like such an ordinary thing, Paul giving us three itineraries, actually ends up revealing unraveling layers of what it means to live out the hope of the resurrection in ordinary family life together in the household of God.

Paul talks about money first and he says, if you believe in the hope of the resurrection, you will believe that God is going to provide for your every need and that not even death itself will steal the fullness of life.

[ 21 : 57 ] And so you can cultivate a consistent, intentional, discerning, and non-flashy pattern of generosity in your life. Where on a weekly basis you say, Lord, I worship you and I give to the needs of your people.

And second, if you believe in the hope of the resurrection, you believe that the people that God has put in front of you are going to be made like the Lord Jesus Christ in that final day, that they are infinitely precious and lovely, that as C.S. Lewis said, if it were not for our hearts being sanctified, we'd be tempted to worship people on that day because they will so reflect the Lord Jesus Christ and his beauty and glory.

If you believe in that hope of resurrection, then it is worth it now to make travel plans and to spend unrushed time and to connect with people and encourage them in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ.

And finally, Paul brings us back in the third thing. This is verses 13 through 24 to what he's been on about throughout the whole book and that's the supremacy and the ultimacy and the possibility of love reigning in our lives.

Verses 13 and 14. Be watchful. Stand firm in the faith. Act like men, which is just a symbol for be courageous. Put yourself out there.

[ 23 : 14 ] Be strong. Verse 14. Let all that you do be done in love. Mother Teresa has this wonderful little quote. Not many of us can do great things for God, but we can do lots of little things with great love.

And in verses 13 to 14, Paul unpacks, he unpacks love as an exhortation. He exhorts us to love.

And then in verses 15 to 18, he gives an example of love and then at the very end, he expresses love. And this is in verse 21. He says, I, Paul, write this greeting with my own hand.

If anyone has no love for the Lord, let him be accursed. Oh, Lord, come. The grace of the Lord Jesus be with you.

My love be with you all in the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen. So in the final verses of this magnificent book, Paul mentions love three times.

[ 24 : 19 ] He wants us to see the ultimacy and the supremacy and the possibility of love. And yet, it's not all warm, fuzzy feelings. Paul's not like, just all you need is love and you'll be good.

He gives a warning here. And this is two things that I want to highlight at the very end for you of this letter, is the ultimacy of love and the possibility of love.

And in verse 22, strikes at the core of our comfortable understandings of love like a lightning bolt from the heavens. If anyone has no love for the Lord, let him be accursed.

Oh, Lord, come. In chapter 13, Paul's already told us that love is eternal, that love never ends, that love is ultimate.

And now he's bringing that home in a very personal and piercing way because he's saying that those, he's saying, he's issuing a final warning to those who persist in not loving the Lord Jesus Christ.

[ 25 : 25 ] He is showing us that love so defiantly who we are. Who we love and what we love so defines what we are that it has eternal consequences and it bears eternal fruit.

That who we love and what we love will not only define who we are and what we are now, but it will define who we are and what we are for all eternity. And so Paul puts side by side one another this anathema, anathema, be accursed, and this maranatha, come Lord Jesus.

He puts side by side the fact that there is no love for Jesus and the fact that there is the grace of the Lord Jesus. And he basically says to us, these are the two options.

And we want to be really clear about that. Make no mistake about it. Now for many of us, we, well for all of us, if we're Christians, we have to learn this lesson.

And we've got to absorb it deeply in our lives. For some of us, we have to learn it when we first become Christians. And I think one of the things we have to learn when we first become Christians is that the fact that we have sin in our lives is not just a matter of disobeying the commands of God and not doing the things that God says we should do and leaving out the things that God says we shouldn't do.

[ 26 : 53 ] It's not about all that, although that's important. But sin is fundamentally a matter of disordered love in our life. It means that we don't love the things we ought to love.

And we do love the things that we ought not to love. Or to put it a different way, we love first things, second and third, and we love second and third things first. There's a disorder in our lives.

And there's also, I think this is something that we have to learn over and over again as we are Christians. We have to see that as we are Christians, our ordered loves are constantly getting disordered.

They're getting confused. They're getting out of whack and warped. And we constantly need the Lord to be restoring and focusing our love on the Lord Jesus Christ himself. I mean, this was the case with Peter, was it not?

Peter, who denied his Lord three times when Jesus invited him back to the beach for breakfast after his resurrection, what's the question that he asked him three times? He says, Simon, son of John, do you love me, right?

[ 28 : 00 ] It's about restoring Peter's love to the Lord Jesus. But notice the three words that he adds the very first time he asked the question. Jesus says, Simon, son of John, do you love me more than these?

There's this way in which Jesus is not just restoring Peter's love for him, but he is restoring the supremacy and the ultimacy and the priority of Jesus' love in his life, that Jesus is his first and his last love, his alpha and his omega, his beginning and his end.

But I think it leaves us with the question, how does this happen in our lives? Because I don't know about you, when I just try to conjure up love, it's not very effective.

And so I think that brings us to the second point and the final point that I want to make with you, and that's the possibility of love. Not only is love ultimate, but it is possible because of the grace of the Lord Jesus.

Look in verse 23, the grace of the Lord Jesus be with you all. Paul sneaks the gospel in one more time at the end of the letter. Notice he says, no love, he talks about grace, and then he says, my love be with you all in the Lord Jesus Christ.

[ 29 : 16 ] And I think the point is that Paul wants us to know that grace has the power to create in us a love that was not there before. Grace is the single word that summarizes all God has done and will do for his people in the Lord Jesus Christ.

And grace is the single word that can melt our icy hearts and take our hearts of stone and turn them into hearts that are alive with love for the Lord Jesus Christ again. So when we are faced with those moments in our lives where we go, what is going to strengthen my love for the Lord?

What is going to keep the inner flame alive when it seems like it's flickering and going to go out? What is going to transform my friend and my family from apathy and disinterest towards the Lord Jesus to loving him with all their heart, mind, soul, and strength?

What is going to fuel my love for other people when it is so hard to love them when they hurt me and when they misunderstand me and when they reject me? What is going to lead us as a church congregation from fighting and biting and boasting and jealousy and anger to patient, kind, hopeful, joyful love?

What is going to do that transformation in our lives? Because everything Paul has talked about in the book of 1 Corinthians is impossible for us to do if it is not for the transforming work of the Lord Jesus Christ, for the power of the Holy Spirit, for the magnificence of his grace to take us from a place of no love to a place of extravagant and joyful and sacrificial love.

[ 30 : 57 ] At the very end, Paul says, it's the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ that is with you and that will be with you. Those who drink from deep wells of grace develop deep hearts of love.

And that's why we have such a gift this morning. Throughout this letter, Paul has mentioned the Lord's table twice. It seems like the most sinful churches need to hear about communion the most.

After supper, the Lord Jesus Christ took the cup and when he had given thanks, he gave it to them and he said, drink this, all of you. For this is my blood of the new covenant which was shed for you and for many for the forgiveness of sins.

Whenever you drink it, do this in remembrance of me. Amen.