

It is Not in Vain

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[0:00] Well, we can turn back to our reading in 1 Corinthians 15. The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law.

But thanks be to God who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. 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.

1 Corinthians 15 is such a wonderful chapter as a whole. I remember when, before James McKeever left the congregation here, he went through the whole of this chapter just looking at the wonder of the resurrection and all that it means, and such a powerful passage.

And it really does give us a sense of focus on what we are to look at and keep our eyes fixed upon. We can look back over the summer months or even just the last few weeks, and we can see we have much to give thanks for.

When you think of things that have been going on in the congregation and in other parts of the church, there's much to give thanks for. We think of the holiday club. It was such a time of great blessing, seeing so many young people coming along there, sharing the good news of Jesus with them and seeing them learning from the Word of God.

[1:58] Of course, then we had the induction just a couple of weeks ago in Gravar. It's a time of great rejoicing. And again, I mention it again just because it just stays with you. The power of the singing on that evening was just something to behold.

If you are present, it is something that will remain with you, I'm sure, for a very long time, just that sense of power in praising God. Then, of course, last weekend, we have much to give thanks for looking back on a communion weekend, being under God's Word and having a time of fellowship together and remembering the Lord's death, having our eyes focused, our hearts focused on what He has done for us.

We had a great time yesterday, the church day out, where many came along to it. And then this morning, again, just seeing so many young people in the church so full this morning, there's so much to be thankful for.

We have much to rejoice and give thanks to God for. But as with anything, when we have these good experiences, these high experiences, when we enjoy the Lord's blessing in particular ways, we have to carry on as well.

We have to go on. It's not all about these high points. So often it's about the day-to-day things. And maybe we look ahead. We maybe look ahead with a sense of where do we go now? What do we do?

[3:20] How do we carry on? And that's the kind of question I want us to think about this evening. How do we go on? How do we go on? How do we keep going as we seek the Lord's blessing upon us?

Great as the high points of encouragement are. We don't rely on these things, on these occasions, to be where we find our blessing and encouragement at all times.

But instead, we are to remember that we are always to rely on the Lord, on his word, because that is where we find our daily encouragement.

When we daily come to him, seeking his face, seeking his presence, seeking his blessing. So this chapter that we have before us this evening, chapter 15, it's one of those where we are reminded that those who come to trust in the Lord Jesus Christ, have this great hope.

And it's this hope, really, that drives us on, that keeps us going. And that hope is that there is life in the Lord Jesus Christ. Life for all who believe, because he is risen.

[4:32] And we have these great words in verse 56, the sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. The pain that sin brings, that is the sting of death.

But then we see these powerful words, but thanks be to God who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. That there is encouragement there for us, whether it's for ourselves to be built up in the faith, or for our mission to reach out to those around us with this gospel that is life, that is hope in the Lord Jesus Christ.

And so we are to keep our focus on him. Our two readings this evening, the first and second Chronicles, and then here in Corinthians, they both have, you could say, something in common. They are separated by probably nearly a thousand years in terms of a period of time. They are separated by a great number of years, and a lot of takes place in between the two occasions that we are looking at here.

But you see that they have something in common. When you read in Chronicles there, we are reading about Asa and his reign. It was a time of great struggle for the people.

[5:51] You see that in the verses that we read there, how there was many who were turning away from God, who were rejecting God. And the same could be true in the days of the church in Corinth.

A difficult time, a place that was corrupt in so many different ways, idols all around them, people turning away and rejecting God, God's people discouraged, God being neglected and rejected by many.

You could say, well, that's what they have in common, that there's so much to be fearful about, so much to be concerned about. But that's not what I want to think about what they have in common. I want us to stand and look on something very positive that they both have in common. In 2 Chronicles 15, verse 7, as Asa has spoken to, it says here, But you take courage.

Do not let your hands be weak, for your work shall be rewarded. Asa is being told that as you are faithful to God, as you seek Him, as it says in that passage, you will find Him.

[7:00] He will be with you. And he is being told, Do not let your hands be weak, for your work shall be rewarded. And then you look at 1 Corinthians 15, and this verse that we're going to focus on, verse 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.

So there's a sense of, again, take courage, don't be weak, your work shall be rewarded. It has the same theme in common in Chronicles, as it does in Corinthians.

And there's great encouragement there for us as well. God's people are being told to be strong, to be willing, to be faithful, and that the work of the Lord will be blessed as we do so.

So there's three things in this verse, verse 58. I just wanted to take out of this verse this evening.

And the first is that sense of standing strong, be steadfast, immovable, standing strong.

The second is giving ourselves, always abounding in the work of the Lord. And then the third thing is going on in faith, keeping the faith, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain.

[8:28] So the first thing we see here is standing strong. You see there at the beginning of the verse, verse 58, therefore. So it's in light of what has come before.

Therefore, in light of the mystery and the victory that we have in Jesus Christ, in light of the power of the resurrection, the hope of the resurrection, in light of everything that he has said in this wonderful passage, therefore, my beloved brothers, be steadfast, immovable, stand strong. Where does our strength come from? We so often look at our bodies and wonder about our strength or our weakness at times.

In a physical way, we look at our bodies in that sense, whether we're strong or whether we're weak. Our bodies need nourishment. Our bodies need sustenance in order that we can grow on.

Otherwise, we will grow weak. We will grow weary. But that's not the strength that we are looking at here. But the same is true when it comes to our spiritual strength, our spiritual nourishment.

[9:40] It's not from self that that comes from either. It is from the Lord. It is the Lord who gives strength. It is the Lord who gives us that spirit to go on, to be steadfast, immovable.

The psalmist in Psalm 73 says, my flesh and heart doth faint and fail. He's recognizing there his own physical weakness. My flesh, my heart doth faint and fail.

But what does he say? But my God fails me never. There's that sense that it is God who gives us strength. And so, we are dependent on God and receiving from God.

Even looking back to last Lord's Day as we were gathered around the Lord's Supper, all who sat at the Lord's Table is for our strengthening. That's the purpose in it.

The Shorter Catechism makes that clear as we think of the Lord's Supper, the sacrament of the Lord's Supper. By faith, we are made partakers of his body and blood with all his benefits to their spiritual nourishment and growth in grace.

[10:55] Spiritual nourishment and growth in grace. It's about being made strong, being strengthened in the Lord. And the Psalms, they so often speak of that sense.

Psalms 46, we know it well, perhaps God is our refuge and our strength. There is that sense of dependence. Something that's repeated again and again throughout Scripture.

How can we be steadfast and immovable? It is by looking to and trusting in God. 1 Corinthians 15, 58, Be steadfast, immovable.

2 Chronicles 15, verse 7, Take courage. They have that same sense of being strong, just like Joshua hears, Be strong and courageous, for I am with you.

There is that sense of God being with us. Earlier in 2 Chronicles, in chapter 7, there are these well-known words in verse 14 and 15, If my people who are called by my name humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and heal their lands.

[12:21] There is that hope that as we turn to God that we can be strong in Him. So the call is there to return to the Lord and to His strength.

Seek the Lord as we were thinking about this morning. As we come back to Him, we look to Him. And so we see here that there is great encouragement for us to give thanks to God to go on in His strength.

Remembering we have this hope in Christ, this great hope. Constantly as we hear the Word of God, as we just reflect back on all that we heard last week, whether it was from Thomas or David Strain, the encouragement we heard in the preaching here or from Ian Thompson as well, there was so much to remind us of how we are a precious people, a redeemed people.

We are loved by God. We are His sons and daughters through faith, through all of these things.

How do we go on? Spiritual nourishment, steadfast, immovable.

What a hope there is through the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ. What a hope we have to look forward to because He is risen.

[13:50] There is a hope that enables us to go on. The word steadfast there, it literally means rooted and grounded. Strength is rooted and grounded.

It is immovable. We see around us when the winds come that those trees and the castle grounds that are weak roots, the wind will blow them over.

But here we are being told that when we are in the Lord we have that steadfast, immovable, rooted and grounded in Him. We have a strength that the Word of God promises.

Immovable has behind that sense of being stubborn. And we often think of being stubborn as being something negative. But it's very much a positive here.

Therefore, my beloved brothers, be steadfast, immovable. There are times when stubbornness is appropriate when it comes to the things of God.

[14:51] To be steadfast, immovable in them. Not to be shaken by other false teachings that we hear. Not to be shaken by people who mock our faith or ridicule or anything like that.

But to see death, sting, sin is dealt with. There is victory in Christ. Therefore, we can be steadfast and immovable.

So we seek that strength of God. The second thing we see here is how do we go on? We go on by giving ourselves. Always abounding in the work of the Lord.

Again, just as we reflected this morning, there's always behind all of these things. All that we do for the Lord. There is behind it always that sense of God is sovereign in all things.

Psalms 105 that we were looking at this morning. The bulk of it is made up of reminding us of just how God is in control of all things.

[15:52] And yet there are imperatives for us in that psalm. Things that we are to do, that we are to seek the Lord, praise the Lord. All of these things that we were thinking about this morning.

And the same is true for us here in this passage as well. God is sovereign. We see that. We have no power over death ourselves. We have no power over the grave.

It is all through Christ. There is victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. But because of that, there are to be consequences for ourselves.

There are things that we are to be confident in and to also go on doing. Always abounding in the work of the Lord. We are to be a people of faith and to live our lives out by faith in the Lord. Everything that we do for the Lord has a sense of activity behind it. Prayer is active. It may not seem to be active in the sense of moving around or anything like that.

[16:58] You are just maybe sitting in the quietness of your own home by yourself. Your eyes closed, your head bowed, praying to God. There doesn't seem to be much activity there, but it is active.

It is abounding in the work of the Lord because there is a labor in that. Our worship is active. It is active in coming. It is active in hearing. It is active in receiving. It is active in going and doing as we have heard. There is activity in that.

Our service, all that we seek to do for the Lord, it has activity behind it as well. So there is this active nature to our faith and we are always to be abounding in the work of the Lord.

There is a phrase that people sometimes use. God doesn't want your capability. He only wants your availability.

[18:04] If you'll give him your availability, he'll provide the capability. We are so often afraid of making ourselves available because we don't feel capable.

But what that person is saying is if you make yourself available, he'll make you capable. And it's so true. It is so true in so many of the people that God uses in so many different ways.

A sense of fear, a sense of trepidation, a sense of what do I have to offer. And yet when we make ourselves available, he can use us.

So are you available? always abounding in the work of the Lord. It's a command. You see that with all of these things, it actually commands that little word in the beginning of the verse, therefore my beloved brothers, be, be steadfast, immovable, be always abounding in the work of the Lord.

Be. Just like Isaiah chapter 6 verse 8, I heard the voice of the Lord saying, whom shall I send and who will go for us?

[19:27] Then I said, here am I, send me. That sense of abounding in the work of the Lord. We are encouraged to go on in his strength, we are encouraged to make ourselves available.

because as we look to this passage, remember it's in light of the therefore at the beginning of the verse, it is in light of what Christ has done for us.

In that he has given us the victory over sin, over death, because he gave himself, he gave his life. So there is this command, can you ever do too much for the Lord? The word here, abounding, it's about a fullness, overflowing, exceeding, going beyond.

It's doing for the Lord the things that we are uncomfortable doing, because the only reason that we would do it is for him and for his glory, because he has lavished grace on us.

[20:47] We seek to do for him. We seek to abound in his work, whatever we are doing. Whatever you're doing, you are doing it as to the Lord.

The littlest of things, your deceit is abounding in the work of the Lord. the little acts of service, the little acts of kindness, the volunteering in different things, all of these things, they are all abounding in the work of the Lord.

It's impossible to go too far for Jesus, to do too much for Jesus, because we are doing it always for his glory.

so we are to give ourselves and to go in him, and we are to go with that knowledge that he is with us.

There's a story told about a climber in the Alps, in the mountain ranges of the Alps. There was a man who had a disability and he wasn't, or he felt unable to climb the mountains there.

[22:06] But he loved the mountains. He'd grown up on the foot of the mountains. He'd seen others going up to climb and he knew so much about what it was to climb these mountains, but he still felt he couldn't go himself.

But he used to delight in telling others where they were going, all that they had to look forward to, and to give them a word of encouragement. And yet he'd never experienced them himself.

Until this day, there was a famous guide passing by who had heard of this man, and heard of his disability, and heard of his delight and joy in the mountains, even though he'd never experienced them.

And he said, how would you like to climb the mountain yourself? And the man's face lit up, but he said, but I can't, I'm not able.

But the man encouraged him, let's try, let's go. And the man who was disabled followed. And although he was slow, although it took time, because he had this experienced man with him, this experienced climber with him, they eventually reached the summit.

[23 : 17] That man had helped him reach a place he never thought he could get. And as a reminder to ourselves, when you are abounding in the work of the Lord, we feel so unequipped, we feel so unready for it.

But when we give it out all, he is able to do the rest. Always abounding in the work of the Lord. We are to make ourselves available. That is how we are to go on. The third and final thing we see here is we are to be a people who are keeping faith. Keeping faith.

Knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain. We are to go on doing in faith. Believing in all the promises of the Lord Jesus Christ.

When we are going on in our own strength, we can struggle in so many different ways. We can struggle. We feel we are not seeing anything happening. But when we go on in the strength of the Lord, we realize maybe we won't see anything happening.

[24 : 33] But we are reminded your labor is not in vain. Nothing you do for the Lord is in vain. There are many things that we do in life that are vain.

When you look at passages like Ecclesiastes, you see vanity, vanity, all is vanity. When there are so many things that we are doing in this world, it's just in vain, it's without purpose, it's without any goal, without anything that's going to be of any benefit at the end of it.

But when we are abounding in the work of the Lord, we know that in the Lord, your labor, it's not in vain. It is not in vain. Similar to what it says in 2 Chronicles 15, verse 7, for your work shall be rewarded.

! There is that hope that the Lord will bless. And again we see it in light of what Christ has done. Think of the death of Christ, was that in vain? Of course it wasn't. When you look at verses 56 and 57 here, the sting of death is sin and the power of sin is the law.

[25 : 45] But thanks be to God who gives us a victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. He was victorious. He was victorious in his death, in his resurrection.

He defeated sin and death and all of the consequences of it. His death was not in vain because he is risen and he will come again.

So we are to see that in light of everything that we do. It is not in vain for the Lord because he is the one who is able to bless it.

The empty tomb is that reminder to us that we have a risen saviour who is ascended on high, who is sitting at the right hand of God the Father, who will come again.

And so her labour is not in vain. We wait on him, we pray to him, we seek his will, and all of these things.

[26 : 45] We become impatient at times. We become discouraged. But we come back and look on our saviour. We come back and fix our eyes on Jesus.

And then we realise all that we do in the Lord is not in vain. We are not doing it for self. We are not doing it for our glory, but his.

And when we do, he will reward. It will not be in vain. So if we walk with him, if we work with him, if we wait on him, and all of these things, we can see that he will bless.

And what do we look for at the end of the day? Just to be a people who are faithful to him. Enjoying his blessings in the times of great privilege as being gathered round the Lord's supper, times of induction, times of great gatherings, but being faithful in the little things too.

Being faithful in our prayers, being faithful in the reading of the word, being faithful in our service to him, being faithful in encouraging one another, being faithful in encouraging those around us, being faithful in all things.

[28 : 06] knowing that our labor is not in vain. You know, perhaps over this last few weeks, you handed out maybe an invitation to the church service today.

Maybe you handed out one of these books to someone. Maybe they threw it back at you and said, I don't want it. Maybe it's been tossed into the corner, cupboard somewhere, and you think to yourself, they didn't come, they didn't read it.

What was the point? it was just in vain. While we are seeing here, nothing that we do for the Lord is in vain.

We might not see an outcome from it, but we can trust and pray that God would bless everything that we do, every little act that is done for him, done as a people, steadfast, immovable, trusting in him, the one who is risen, abounding in the work of the Lord, doing all for his glory, knowing that in all things, it is not in vain, in all things, he is able to reward.

And so may we go on today, tomorrow, in all the days ahead of us, encouraged, looking unto Jesus, being steadfast, unmovable in all of these things, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain.

[29:48] May he bless it to his glory. Let us pray. Lord, our gracious God, we do thank you for the hope that is found in these passages before us, the hope of the resurrection, the wonder of it, the mystery of it, and yet the victory that we are told about, that is ours through Christ Jesus, our Lord, that he came, he gave, he gave to the uttermost, he gave his life, he died on the cross, and yet on the third day he rose.

He rose victorious, victory over death and sin, and therefore we have that hope that we can be steadfast and immovable, we have that confidence in him and may our confidence only increase, may we be nourished and strengthened through his word, may we be abounding in his work, and may we know that nothing for him is in vain, we seek your blessing, we seek your grace, we seek your guidance over all of these things as we ask it with the forgiveness of our sin, in Jesus' name, Amen.

Amen. Amen. We're going to conclude by singing to God's praise in the same psalm that we had previously, Psalm 111, the Scottish Psalter version.

We're going to sing these last verses, 6 through to 10. Psalm 111, page 391, verse 10, to God's praise, we stand to sing.

Amen. may may may And if ye so, And ye words are truth and right, All is calm and search true, And thou wilt truth and the brightness Leve, warm, og, and, and,

[33:02] And ye, send me the light, And thou wilt truth and the light, And thou wilt truth and the light, He did come and holy his name, And reverend is always.

Words of beginning is gone dear, To understanding me, The Lord is calm and through, Let me send you all day.

After the benediction, I'll go to the door to my left. We'll close the benediction. Now may grace, mercy, and peace From God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit Rest upon and abide with you all Now and forevermore.

Amen. Amen.