

Be Yourself for Jesus

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[0:00] Now we're going to look at a theme tonight and there'll be a text for the first half and a text for the second half. For the moment if you could turn to Ephesians chapter 4 and verse 1.

Ephesians 4 verse 1. I therefore a prisoner for the Lord urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling.

To which you have been called. I want to think of the theme of calling.

Now I know that the word call is in your minds inevitably. And has been for some time and will be.

As you have talked and reflected and prayed about the choice and the calling of a minister.

[1:06] But I don't want to think about that theme tonight. I want to think about your calling. Or your vocation.

We sometimes hear it said that the three most important things about a property are location, location, location.

Well I want you this evening for the next 35 minutes ideally or so. To think about these three very important words.

Vocation. Vocation. Vocation. And to think of it very personally. Vocation is a great Christian word.

And it's the same as calling. So when I say calling or vocation back and forth. I mean the same thing by both words. The late legendary Callum MacLeod here would have told you that vocation is the Latinate.

[2:18] Straight from the Latin. Calling is the Anglo-Saxon. But they're the same word. Whenever I think of a call coming from above.

I think of my father a long time ago when I wasn't doing what he wanted me to do as quickly as he wanted me to do it. Talking about himself when he was a boy.

And there they were in Outend Call. And you look down onto the river. And then up to Upper Call.

And the boys would go and play down the river. They'd be fishing or mucking about. And they would go and play football as well on a flat piece of land by the river. There were no fences then to stop you running down and running up easily.

And they'd be playing football. And then my father would hear a whistle. It was too far away for his father to call him for his dinner or for worship or for whatever it was.

[3:26] So he would whistle. And the whistle would reach to the river. And it didn't matter. My father said if he was about to take the decisive penalty in this game.

He just had to turn and go. Absolutely instant. Turn around or run up the hill for whatever it was.

There's a picture of a father calling a child to obey. And I always have that picture for some reason coming back into mind whenever I hear of a decisive call.

Now as I said I want to look at two things tonight. The first will be very familiar to all of you. The second perhaps for a few of you will be a little unusual.

But I believe both of them are straight from scripture and straight from our own tradition. And they are first of all from beginning from this passage and looking at others as well.

[4 : 29] The idea of one calling. One calling shared by every single Christian. We have it in common.

The second will be different callings. The way that all of us are different. And the way that God wants us to live out our own individual vocation.

And the way that he has made us. And where he has placed us. And the providence that he has provided for us.

So one calling and then different callings. So let's think of this one calling for a little while.

I want to think of this in a couple of ways. First of all I want to think of it as a call to come to Jesus.

[5 : 28] That one decisive call that a sinner hears and responds to. And they actually come to Jesus.

They hear the divine call. And they respond and come to a savior. Now that's the personal call.

And the converting call of God himself. There's of course as you know a call that goes out in the gospel in a broader way.

But this is the effective call. Some of us have grown up with the language of efficacious call. An effective summons from God.

That the sinner responds to in the power of God. Now I believe that that call is a call from the triune God.

[6 : 27] Father, Son, and in a different way the Spirit are all involved. I think in the letters of the New Testament.

Paul here in Ephesians and in other places. The emphasis of these letters is on the call of the Father. So you read in Romans 8.

You know these words very well. God works all things together for good to those who are called according to his purpose. Now who is this God? Those whom he foreknew he predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son.

You see it's the Father who calls there. And those whom he predestined he also called. Those whom he called he justified. Those whom he justified he glorified.

Or as you have it at the beginning of 1 Corinthians 1 verse 9. God who has called you into fellowship with his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.

[7 : 30] So in these and many other verses it's God the Father who is calling us to come to know Jesus. But the Son of course is also involved.

And in the Gospels I think the focus is on the call of Jesus. And the power of the voice of Jesus. One of the clearest of that.

Though Jesus in the stories of the Gospels of course is always calling people powerfully. But John 5 tells us that he continues to do that throughout this age.

It's in John 5 24 and 25. Truly, truly I say to you. Whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life.

He does not come into judgment as passed from death to life. He goes on to talk about his call. An hour is coming and is now here. When the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God.

[8 : 30] And those who hear will live. Now in the next two or three verses he's going to talk about the call that he will issue to raise the dead. Physically at the end of time.

But in the verses I've just read. He says and is now here. He's talking about his own call spiritually in the Gospel. Calling the dead to life.

If you read from verse 24 to verse 29 yourself. You'll see that first of all he talks about a spiritual call. As he raises the spiritually dead to life now through the Gospel.

And then he talks about the call at the end of time. When he will raise the physically dead. By the power of the same voice. So Jesus calls us to himself.

Then we also know of course without going into it. That the Holy Spirit must be involved. In enabling us to hear that call. As the Spirit works in our minds and hearts.

[9 : 29] And enables us to hear the call of God. And to respond to it. It's the Spirit who enables us to say yes. So there's that decisive call.

That comes to every single Christian. Comes to a sinner. And they respond to it. They hear God the Father saying come to my son.

They hear God the Son saying come to me. And God the Spirit enables them to hear. And to come. And they respond. And every Christian here tonight.

Has heard the call of God. And has come to Jesus. And if you haven't heard that call yet. You could pray that you would hear it.

You could ask the triune God. To let you hear that call. Personally. Powerfully.

[10 : 30] Irresistibly. Invincibly. To hear that call. In your own heart. Lord please call me. In the way that you have called others.

And all of the Christians here. Could pray specifically. For their families. And friends. And others. Who haven't yet come to know God. That God would call them.

That others would hear that same call. In their own hearts. And souls. So. We have that one decisive call. That brings us to faith. The call to come to Jesus.

But still thinking about this one calling. That we all share as Christians. There's also this. We are called to live for Jesus.

We have an ongoing calling. Don't we? Paul is speaking about that here in Ephesians 4. To walk in a manner worthy of the calling.

[11 : 29] With which you have been called. So there's this. Ongoing responsibility. To live out our calling. Day by day. From the moment of our conversion.

To the end of our lives. We are to live as the called. And the Bible makes clear. That this calling. Involves all kinds.

Of things. Now I'm not going to take time. To give you. Chapter and verse. For the things that I'll mention. Very quickly now. But they're just illustrations.

Of the way that the New Testament. Uses the language of calling. To speak to the lives of Christians. So for example.

We're called to life in the church. Every Christian I believe is called to that. The word church. That we read in the New Testament. Is often.

[12 : 26] Translating a word that means the called. So when you become a Christian. Part of your calling. Is to be part of a community.

A fellowship. To be part of the life of the church. To be a member of the one body. In which you are called to peace.

As Paul says. Then. Every Christian is called to holiness. Aren't they? Paul will write things like. To those sanctified in Christ Jesus.

And called to be saints. But he will say. God who has saved us. And called us to a holy calling. Many verses like that.

Holiness. Is our calling. As Christians. To be like Jesus. Or. We were reading in 1 Peter chapter 2. About being called to witness.

[13:24] In the world. 1 Peter 2 and 9. That you may proclaim the excellencies. Or declare the praises of him. Who has called you out of darkness. Into his marvelous light.

We're to speak about Jesus. And live for Jesus. That's part of our calling. Or we also read in 1 Peter. That we're called to bear. Suffering.

Even unjust suffering. Verse 21 of chapter 2. Remember he said to these. Slaves. To this you were called. To suffer.

Because Christ suffered for you. Leaving you an example. You should follow in his steps. So. Christians are called to take up the cross daily. And follow Jesus.

Whatever it costs. And then we're also called to hope. Aren't we? Just as you were called. There it is in Ephesians 4. And verse 4.

[14:20] Just as you were called to the one hope. That belongs to your calling. And it's a hope beyond this life. To win the prize.

Of the upward call. For which God has called us heavenwards. In Christ Jesus. Or in 1 Peter. At the end of the book.

He talks about God. Who has called you. To his eternal glory. In Christ. So I'm simply making the point.

From these kinds of verses. That every single Christian. Has been called. To the same kind of life. Haven't we? We're called to be part of the church.

We're called to live holy lives. We're called to witness for Jesus. We're often called to suffer. And at last we'll be called. To heaven.

[15:16] Now. If you think about the. Possibility of anybody saying. That we're not called to these things. You realize how ridiculous it would be. Can you imagine a Christian saying.

Now. I'm a different kind of Christian. So. I'm not called to ever go to church. Or fellowship. Or learn from others. I'm going to be completely. Freelance.

As a Christian. And I'm not called to be holy. To want to become like Jesus. And I'm not called to witness. I'm never going to tell anybody. That I'm a Christian.

And I'm not called to take up the cross. And suffer. And I'm not called to heaven. I mean that would be. Somebody clearly showing.

That they haven't received the call of God. But all those who have been called. To come to Jesus. And who have come to Jesus. Know from the Bible.

[16:11] That along with every other Christian. They have these things. And other things. That are an indispensable. Part of their calling. Called to be part of the people of God.

Called to live for Jesus. Called to witness. For Christ. Called to take up the cross. And called to look towards the future. And at last.

To a future. In heaven. So we have this. I'll put it this way. We have this shared vocation. All of us as Christians. Are called to that same vocation.

We have this calling. In the Lord Jesus Christ. And we share it. Together. One. Calling. But I want now.

For the second. Half of our time. To. Ask you to turn. Somewhere else. As we. Look at a different.

[17:11] Aspect of this theme. To turn to first. Corinthians. And. Chapter. Seven. Because we're now going to think.

About how our callings. Can be different. I've been emphasizing. How. Our calling. Is the same. In many. Many ways. But now. I want to think about.

Our callings. Being. Different. If you just read. For the moment. In verse 17. Only let.

Each person. Lead the life. That the Lord. Has assigned. To him. Or to her. And to which. God. Has called. Him.

Or her. Now. Here's the language. Of calling. Or vocation. Being used. In another way. In a way.

[18:08] That it's been used. Especially. Since the. Reformation. In. The reformed. Churches. Stressing. That.

Every. Individual. Christian. Has a. Particular. Personal. Calling. Because. We are. All. Different.

Our. Personalities. Are. Different. Our. Ages. Are. Different. Our. Circumstances. Are. Different. Our. Jobs. Are. Different. Our. Homes. Are. Different. And. So. On. Everybody. Is. So. Different. In. All. Kinds. Of. Ways. So. They. Have. An. Individual. Calling. From. God. Now.

You can. See. That. Here. In. Verse. 17. And. Also. In. Verse. 20. Each. One. Should. Remain. It's. Actually. In. The.

[19:01] Calling. In. Which. He. Was. Called. When. God. Called. Him. And. God. Called. Him. Is. Referring.

To. His. Conversion. But. His. Condition. Or. Situation. Is. Also. The. Word. Calling. As. Well. So.

You. Have. A. Calling. In. Which. You. Were. When. You. Were. Spiritually. Called. To. Come. To. Know. Jesus. Now. In.

The. Context. Let me. Take. Two. Or. Three. Minutes. On. This. Context. In. The. Context. Here. Paul. Has. Three. Illustrations. Of.

A. Situation. Or. A. Calling. One. Is. Marital. Whether. People. Are. Married. Or.

[19:56] Single. And. That's. Discussed. You. Could. Look. At. Verses. Twelve. And. Following. For. One. Paragraph. Dealing. With. That. The. Second. We. Might. Call. Cultural.

Whether. Somebody. Is. A. Jew. Or. A. Gentile. And. That's. In. The. First. Few. Verses. From. Verse. Seventeen. And. Then. The. Third. One.

We. Might. Call. Social. Whether. Somebody. Is. A. Slave. Or. A. Free. Man. And. That's. In. The. Second. Half. Of. This.

Paragraph. So. Clearly. In. Corinth. Some. People. Thought. You. Have. To. Remember. That. People. Are. Coming. From. Nowhere.

As. Chris. Without. Any. Sort. Of. Background. And. Here. Are. People. Being. Converted. Because. They've. Heard. The. Gospel. And. They've. Fallen. In. Love. With. This. Jesus. And. All.

[20:49] That. He's. Offering. Them. But. They. Know. Hardly. Anything. About. The. Bible. Or. The. Faith. And. They're. Converted. And.

They. Think. That. It. Means. That. If.

They. Were. Converted. And. Their. Spouse. Was. Not. Converted. You. Could. Leave. Your. Spouse. And. Paul. Actually. Argues.

Against. That. Here. In. Chapter. Seven. He. Says. No. Stay. Together. If. That. Person. Is. Willing. To. Stay. With. You. Host. That. It.

Didn't. Matter. If. They. Were. Jew. Or. Gentile. That. They. Could. Forget. About. That. Heritage. Whatever. It. Was. And. Paul. Says. No. You. Have.

[21 : 41] That. Heritage. And. Others. Thought. Slave. Well. I. Can. Do. What. I. Like. In. This. Area. As. Well. And.

Paul. Is. Saying. It's. A. Big. Topic. I'm. where you are he's saying to each of these people you were called in a particular calling stay in that marriage stay jew or gentile with your heritage and stay a slave for the moment now he's not saying to them to accept this fatalistically so you can see in verse 21 that he says to these slaves if you can gain your freedom do it he's not saying you can't change your situation but he's saying to these christians in corinth however difficult your situation might be for the moment embrace it as your calling as somebody i used to hear using this expression that she was an american student in andrews and her mother always used to use it bloom where you're planted that's what paul is saying to these christians in corinth bloom where you're planted now i want to think about this theme a little further in the time we have left this idea of people having different uh callings let me highlight two aspects of this uh to get you thinking about it first of all your call to honor god as a christian in your working life your working life is part of your vocation now this idea of vocation or calling was very important in in the history of the church at the time of the reformation because what the reformers were reacting against in in this whole discussion was the medieval idea that you know just people like priests and bishops and monks and nuns and only such had a vocation so if somebody was a priest he would say i've got a vocation i've got a holy calling from god or if a woman was a nun she would say i have a vocation a divine calling from above the reformers had no time for that dividing of christians into first and second class christians some of whom have a vocation because god has called them to something and others who don't have a vocation because they're not involved in that kind of ministry the reformers believed in the priesthood of all believers and here's martin luther writing in something called the babylonian captivity of the church and he said that monks and nuns don't have one whit more claim to calling than the peasant in the field or the housewife in the home paid and unpaid unpaid work he says they are called of course he had other things to say that were very critical of uh the priests and the monks and the nuns and so on but just in arguing that case when they would say to him we have a calling he would point to a as he said himself a rustic working in the field a very poor farm laborer and he would say he's got a calling from god and a woman looking after her children

in the home and luther would say she has a calling from god and then luther would tell them that they didn't have a calling from god but these other people did so he and others spoke of all kinds of callings and all from god there was one time in 1520 when two young dutch priests who had begun to be convinced by the teachings of luther and their lives had changed and their theology had changed the next sunday evening they locked their church doors now you might say well what does that signify well what it meant for them was that they were telling people to go into the world and to live for jesus because people would say you know the things that happen in church are the holy things these are the things that god really likes so somebody might be out at their daily work or a woman is looking after her children whatever it might be and they say i'd like to do something spiritual i'll go to the church and light a candle it'll be good to do something spiritual for five minutes something holy these guys locked their church and they were saying to people in effect you don't need to come to a special building and do special holy things and think that god will be more pleased with you because you've done something that you think is holy the doors are locked go and be holy in the home and go and be holy in the workplace and go and be holy in the way you treat your neighbor and go and be holy in this and that and the other that we're saying to them you have a calling in the world and you have to be holy there and serve god there and some of you will know the names of some of these people i mean everybody knows about calvin and he wrote about this in the institutes the puritans wrote a great deal about this in england and the united states loads of books were written about christians and their calling it was really really important it's one of the key themes of the reformation that it's not just clergy and people in special jobs like that that have a divine calling every christian has their own vocation and it had immense cultural impact it gave such dignity to people's lives when you heard that the farmer at the plow had a calling the cook in the kitchen had a calling the artist at his easel the judge on his bench the mother by the crib everyone had their own divine vocation they didn't need to leave their work to serve god fully and you don't need to leave your work to serve god fully now this is not a denial of a call to ministry and special ministries in the church but it is a denial that only ministers have a call from god the vast majority of christians have to exercise their callings outside the church and we need to give all of these callings their validity biblically and under god as callings as callings from himself do you know that william wilberforce so famous for the end of the slave trade nearly missed his calling reading about it recently

he becomes a christian and he thinks well i'll have to go in for full-time ministry if i'm going to serve jesus and it was john newton who wrote amazing grace who persuaded wilberforce that god wanted him to stay in politics rather than enter the ministry newton wrote the lord has raised you up for the good of the nation after much prayer and thought wilberforce concluded that newton was right god was calling him to champion the liberty of the oppressed as a parliamentarian he said my walk is a public one my calling is in the world and i must mix in the assemblies of men or quit the post which providence seems to have assigned me using the language of first corinthians 7 17 that was his calling that was his vocation and he discharged it and another thing that gives our ordinary work and i don't just mean paid work but our working lives even as retired people can be very busy in all kinds of things and all of us are called in some way to be engaged in in work using our hands or whatever and one of the things that give that such dignity in the bible is that god continually uses work to describe himself these pictures so god refers to himself as a gardener or a farmer or a builder or a homemaker or a shepherd or a potter or an artist or a judge or a king or a teacher and so it goes on god is dignifying our callings in the workplace by using these as pictures and metaphors for himself and his own work so we're called to honor god in our working lives but we're also secondly called to honor god in the whole of life called to exercise my vocation in the whole of life you see the reformers discovered a truth about vocation and calling and work and work but in some people's hands that narrowed the biblical idea of calling just to work and then work becomes an idolatry as if nothing else really matters we even do it ourselves don't we you say what do you do or even what are you and somebody says

I'm a teacher now I've just said that's so important to your calling but is that who you are is that all you are of course not and so we need to broaden the idea of calling because we have a vocation when we're not at work we have a vocation when we give up work we have a calling from god if we're unemployed what do we not have a vocation in all the hours when we're not at the office or wherever it is we have a vocation all the time so we need to remember that we have a calling that we need to exercise for example in all of our time as we think about how we use our time the balance between what people call work and I don't know why they say it work life balance but you know what people say a balance between my working life and the rest of life the way I use my

[33 : 52] Sunday the way I set aside time to read the bible and to pray do I give time to spend with others do I need to do I give time to serve the church do I give time in the community or you think about your relationships these are central to our vocations as Christians all of our relationships so if I'm a husband or a wife that's part of my calling from God a son or a daughter a grandparent we have a calling in these areas these callings can change so somebody becomes a carer for somebody and that now becomes part of their calling they weren't a carer before now they are so their vocation has changed somebody starts teaching

Sunday school and do it for 10 years that becomes part of their calling they give it up they have a different calling somebody was thinking it watching the news last night these poor parents with a child born with damage because of the Zika virus now if a Christian parent is among them that parent now has a new vocation I mean it's a very very difficult one isn't it or location location location was in my mind the other night so I watched the program and there was a woman who had come back from Australia with her husband to be nearer her grown up family and grandchildren because her husband had been diagnosed with early onset Alzheimer's in his mid-50s now not saying the woman was a Christian but I'm saying if she was a Christian that would be a very very difficult providence but it's completely changed aspects of her vocation hasn't it if you're a

Christian and something like that comes into your providence it's become part of your calling and it's changed your calling and it changes the calling maybe of your family and of others around you and so with every other relationship you know you're in a relationship that changes your calling you have relationships with people at work colleagues you have relationships in a community with your neighbors and so on and so on I need to move towards a conclusion on this I'd like to talk about this till about midnight but I'm not going to but you're probably getting the point you probably got the point about 20 minutes ago when I started this second point but I think it's very important I actually think that for many Christians this could be life changing absolutely life transforming if they would only realize that they have a calling from God and that's the calling they need to discharge and that they have a unique calling because nobody else if you just think about your relationships nobody else has your network of relationships nobody else is married to your wife or your husband presumably you have children there's two of you but only one of you is the father and one of you is the mother you have grandchildren and so it goes on in all our relationships at work and in the community and everywhere else if you think about it nobody else has your life exactly nobody else has your background and your gifts and your interests and your secrets and your foibles and your personality and your marriage and your family and your workplace and your neighbors and your interests and your opportunities to serve in the church and your volunteering work in the community and your volunteering in politics and so it goes on nobody else on the planet has exactly your network of connections in that kind of way so you are unique and god knows you're unique and god wants you to charge your calling where he has placed you two doctrines are important in this too sovereignty and stewardship sovereignty because jesus wants to be lord of your whole life he's interested in every aspect of your life and so all of life is part of my calling under his lordship and stewardship remember the parable of the talents we're all been given different gifts and interests and abilities and aptitudes and so on and we're called to use these for the glory of god as god has given them to us i think this idea of vocation is very important for men and i've seen it transform the thinking of women about their own situation suddenly realizing that all this talk about calls and ministers is actually not just about ministers but it's about men and women and women wherever they are placed that they have a vocation from god in every single area of their life i think it also helps to deal with unnecessary guilt among christians when they wish they were like so and so or they wish they were doing the job so and so

is doing or discharging the service so and so is sometimes there's an envy of others and there's a guilt about oh i wish i was doing that god doesn't want you to do that god wants you to do what he's called you to do he made you to be you he placed you where he wanted you and he wants you to do what he wants you to do and nothing else don't be guilty about not being someone else with all of their gifts be yourself for jesus it has relationship to the issue of contentment as well that i accept what god has given me or where god has placed me and the challenges god has given me and that i am content to serve god with the vocation that he has given me and it also speaks about i'll finish with this though there were other things i wanted to say but i think i can round it off with a quote i like very much from john calvin talk about calling and pleasing god and knowing that god is pleased as we simply do what he wants us to do because he wants us to do it and he talks about this as a singular consolation that no task will be so sordid and base provided you obey your calling in it that it will not shine and be reckoned very precious in god's sight god thinks it a beautiful thing when his people live for him in every area of life when they recognize their own unique calling and vocation and simply want to live for him where he has placed them so don't try and be someone else don't wish that you lived in another place or in another century ask god what he wants you to be what he wants you to do where he has placed you in his providence and live out your own calling and your own vocation and god however humble other people might think it however insignificant the world might think it god is thrilled when his people live out the calling that he has given to them as a vocation given to them from heaven above i'll leave it there well let's finish by singing in the 90th psalm in the scottish psalter psalm 90 towards the end of the psalm this is on page 350 page 350 from verse 14 with thy tender mercies lord us early satisfy so we rejoice shall all our days and still be glad in thee and i choose it because of the words at the end that god might establish our handiworks our handiworks establish thou establish them each one i just say i won't go to the door at the end consider yourself hugged psalm 90 then we stand to sing 14 to the end oh with thy tender mercies for us and peacefully perish be satisfied so we be retarded shall all our days and still be glad in thee according to the day The days of thee, when in we thee have found, And here's where we ill have seen, So do thou make us mine.

[44:51] O let thy word and power appear, Thy servants face before, And show unto their children dear, Thy glory evermore.

O let the beauty of the Lord, Our glorious upon, Our holy word, Establish thou, Establish them each one.

We ask, Lord, that grace, mercy, and peace from Father, Son, and Holy Spirit be ours this night and always. Amen. Amen.