

Motto Text 2024

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Preacher: John Winter

[0 : 00] 1 Corinthians 15, have your Bible open, please.

And our motto text is verse 58, as you see on your card. Beautiful card. Thank you to Michelle for arranging that.

Could be Whitby Lighthouse, that, couldn't it? And the waves were pretty high this week, so I think. And over the last few days, I've been reflecting on a verse in Hebrews about our faith in Jesus being an anchor to the soul.

So the imagery is quite appropriate for a seafaring town like Whitby with our tradition, the lighthouse, the anchor, our faith in Christ that gives us meaning and hope and support in times of trouble.

And so it very much fits in with 1 Corinthians 15, 58, which reads, Therefore, my dear brothers and sisters, stand firm. Let nothing move you.

[1 : 10] Always give yourself fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain. I have told this story before when preaching, but it deserves to be told again.

It's from a book called Killing Fields, Living Fields by Don Comac, and it tells of the persecution of Christians in Cambodia under the regime of the murderous Pol Pot in the 1970s.

On April 17, 1975, the city of Phnom Penh fell to the forces of the Khmer Rouge. Soon, the brutality of the new administration became apparent.

A refugee report from a village in Siem Reap province tells of the death of Chaim, a Christian teacher, and his family.

Chaim knew that the youthful, black-clad Khmer Rouge soldiers, now heading across the field, were coming this time for him. Chaim was determined that when his turn came, he would die with dignity and without complaint.

[2 : 19] Chaim's entire family was rounded up that afternoon. They were the old dandruff, bad blood, enemies of the cross, sorry, enemies of the glorious revolution, CIA agents.

They were Christians. The family spent a sleepless night comforting one another and praying for each other as they lay bound together in the dewy grass beneath a stand of friendly trees.

Next morning, the teenage soldiers returned and led them from their Gethsemane to the place of execution, to the nearby VL Somlap, the killing fields.

Consented to Chaim's request for a moment to prepare themselves for death, father, mother, and children's hands linked, and they knelt together around the gaping pit.

With loud cries to God, Chaim began exhorting both the Khmer Rouge and all those looking on from afar to repent and believe the gospel. Then in panic, one of Chaim's young sons leapt to his feet, bolted into the surrounding scrub, and disappeared.

[3 : 33] Chaim jumped up with amazing coolness and authority and prevailed upon the Khmer Rouge not to pursue the lad, but to allow him to go and call the boy back. The knots of onlookers peering around trees.

The Khmer Rouge and the stunned family still kneeling at the graveside, looked on in awe as Chaim began calling his son, pleading with him to return and die together with his family.

What comparison, my son, he called out, stealing a few more days of life in that wilderness, a fugitive, wretched, and alone, to join in your family here momentarily around this grave, but soon around the throne of God, free forever in paradise.

After a few tense minutes, the bushes parted, and the lad weeping walked slowly back to his place with the kneeling family. Now we are ready to go, Chaim told the Khmer Rouge.

But by this time there was not a soldier standing there who had the heart to raise his hoe to deliver the death blow on the backs of those noble heads. Ultimately, this had to be done by the Khmer

Rouge commun chief, who would not witness these things.

[4 : 49] But few of those watching doubted that as each of these Christians' bodies toppled silently into the earthen pit, which the victims themselves had prepared, their souls soared heavenward to a place prepared by their Lord.

The spread of news such as this of certain Christians boldly bearing witness to their Lord in death was gossiped about around the countryside. Eventually, these reports were brought across to the refugee camps in Thailand, and not always by Christians, but by typical Cambodians, who until then had despised the Puyok Yesu.

It's quite a story, isn't it? Hard to read. I've read it many times. It still moves me so deeply. But you know, Cambodia didn't receive the gospel until the 1920s, and only very few people believed the gospel, even back in 1925, when the Bible was first translated into the language of the people. There were only around 500 Christians. But by 1970, there was a period of unprecedented growth, right up to 1975.

So, there were estimated around 10,000 believers in 1975. But in year zero, which is what is sometimes referred to as the assault of Pol Pot on the church, in year zero, there was a ruthless elimination of the church so that by 1979, there were only an estimated 200 believers remaining in the country.

[6 : 34] Thousands had been murdered. Millions of ordinary Cambodians, it has to be said, as well, who did not support the regime.

The point is, however, that Haim and his family's death was not in vain. They stood firm. They abounded in the work of the Lord, and even though they lost their life, they would discover that their labor for the Lord is not in vain.

It's an appropriate introduction to this verse because this verse comes in the context of discussing death and the resurrection. The death of our bodies and our resurrection to eternal life.

It's pointing out that there is a great cost to following Jesus. It can result in difficulties, suffering, pain, even death.

But even if we are called to pay the ultimate cost for our faith in Jesus, we are to stand firm. Let nothing move us.

[7 : 45] Always give ourselves fully to the work of the Lord, knowing that our labor, our service, our hard work for Jesus is never in vain.

So next slide, please. Our text encourages us to stand firm for Jesus because, next one, please, because we shall be victorious.

So Paul is writing to fellow Christians. He calls them his beloved brethren. And we're beloved brethren because we are all brothers and sisters in Christ.

God is our heavenly Father and we are accepted into the beloved. We are a family of believers who love one another. We are beloved brethren.

We have differences. We have the things that naturally we like or dislike and so on. But it's our common love for Jesus that brings us together.

[8 : 44] And these Christians in Corinth, these beloved brethren, were being encouraged to stand firm and perhaps the biggest threat they faced was simply the ungodliness of Corinth all around them.

Corinth was the center of the worship of a fertility goddess. Prostitution was openly celebrated as part of the worship of that community in that city.

And there were all kinds of ungodly behaviors in the church as well as a result because people newly converted to Christ, perhaps people who've been in the way of Christ for a while, found it difficult to separate their cultural traditions from their newfound faith.

What was permissible, what was not permissible. So there were arguments about whether you could eat meat sacrificed to idols. There was some discussion about behaviors toward women and toward young virgins and so on.

And we know there were some really indecent acts taking place in the church. Quite remarkable, really, that they should be called my beloved brethren. But it's a reminder to us that being a Christian is not about being perfect.

[9 : 58] It doesn't mean that we don't have hang-ups or we don't have issues that we have to deal with. Of course, we will. Being a Christian is not that we're perfect.

It's standing firm in Jesus and trusting in Jesus to make us more like Him as the Holy Spirit works in our hearts. And as we yield in obedience to Jesus, as we recognize that our bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit, this is Paul's argument in Corinthians, then we dedicate our lives to Jesus, not to the lusts and desires of the flesh.

But we are always a work in progress. And being a work in progress, we will have our ups and downs. We will have our strengths and weaknesses. We will have our failures and disappointments as well as our joys and our victories.

But the important thing is no matter what season we're in, we stand firm by faith in our Lord Jesus Christ. Because by standing firm in Him, we will be victorious.

Now, one of the challenges that they faced was also the intellectual challenge that came from those who were influenced by Greek philosophy, who believed that the only important thing about human nature, the human being, was his soul, the invisible, immaterial part of man that would survive death and transcend into the world of the shadows, as a language of Plato.

[11:30] Some sort of kind of ethereal world out there, remote world, in which a disembodied spirit would live in perpetual joy.

Imagine that. And therefore, the body was of no consequence. The idea was that the body would corrupt and die and that would be the end of it.

The body was seen as a prison house of the soul, keeping people back from living out their full potential. Because the body was the place of desire and desire is what corrupts us.

So better to be without it. There was no concept in Greek philosophy the idea of the body being good, created by God, and of value. So Christianity comes along and Paul preaches that the body is of fundamental importance to the human constitution.

That without the body, you are not truly human. All right then, so what happens when you die, when your body corrupts in the ground? Is that the end of the body? Paul says, no.

[12:34] I'm going to tell you of mystery. We'll not all die, he says, but we will all be raised again when Jesus returns. And when Jesus returns, we're all going to be raised again and we're all going to be given a new body.

And so people naturally would ask, what kind of body would it be then? Well, Paul said, look, there's all kinds of bodies. Humans have a certain type of body. Animals have another type of body. Fish and birds have another type of body. Seeds have a different type of body. God will create the necessary body that you need to live in the eternal world and then in an immortal and incorruptible flesh.

But the point is, it's going to be a real physical body that you're going to have. And that will take place when Jesus returns. Those who die currently are absent from the body, present with the Lord. The second coming of Jesus will bring about, will introduce the great and general resurrection in which the mortal will put on immortality and the corruptible will put on incorruption.

[13:48] I'm quite excited about what my body's going to be like. Maybe I'll be five foot ten like I always wanted to be. And I won't have any wrinkles or white hair, although I quite like having white hair.

It kind of suits my name. But the point is not really to speculate too much about it. We're just going to be at our best. You know, we worry about, well, will a baby be a baby?

And what about somebody who's been disabled? Will they still be disabled? Well, no. We'll be at our best, whatever our best is. But we will have a real physical existence.

That's Paul's point. And he said, this is so important that this is the gospel I preached and handed on to you. In 1 Corinthians 15, verses 3 and 4, if you look at that, he says, the gospel I received, I passed on to you, that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures, that he was buried and that he rose again according to the scriptures.

And you've got to hold on to this. You can't dismiss it and say it's of no importance, that all that matters is this invisible spirit that escapes the body.

[15:00] No, no. He says this is fundamental to the gospel. And if Christ is not risen, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins.

Absolutely fundamental to the gospel to believe in the resurrection of the body. And let no one tell you it's not. There are people who will deny the resurrection, will find it hard to believe.

I always think that's a funny kind of response to God. You know, I can't believe this. It's too hard to believe. We're supposed to believe in an omnipotent God, a God of all power, a God who speaks

the world into existence.

And we can't believe that God can give us a new body. You know, it's quite remarkable. You know, I've watched my children being born and I'm just amazed that this, well, I won't tell you how to start, but I'm just amazed about what goes on in the womb.

That, to me, is a miracle in itself. A God who can do that can gather together my dust and elements and raise me again to life.

[16:09] Not a problem. I don't need to be worried too much about whether I get buried or cremated. I personally prefer to be buried, but they're running out of ground. But what I know is that's not the end.

Sown in corruption, raised to immortality. Paul says, because you know that Christ has risen from the dead, and because you know that because He lives, you also will live, because you know that death is not the end for you, you're going to have a glorious and incorruptible body in an eternal world in which you can never die.

Stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always abound in the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor for the Lord is not in vain. That's why Chaim could kneel over that grave with his children and be willing to sacrifice his life for Jesus.

Because a little more time in this wilderness is nothing compared to the glories of heaven when we will be forever with the Lord Jesus Christ.

So that's the thing we've got to do. Stand firm, he says. Next slide. And let nothing move you. To stand firm just means to be steadfast, to be firm in your conviction, to believe.

[17:36] And this is not, of course, something that we can drum into people. It's not like you can say, well, you know, one and one equals two, and you keep repeating this, and you've got that conviction. Of course, it's not that kind of belief.

It's a belief that you stake your life on, your soul on, your whole future on. It's a hope you have when you face your own death, and it's a hope you have when you bury loved ones and surrender them to Jesus.

It's something we hope for. Something that we're convinced of. I know whom I have believed, says Paul, and I am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day.

And so he went to his death, being beheaded because he had run the race, he'd kept the faith, and he knew henceforth, there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness.

Nobody could take that from him. Think of all those whom we've loved in Jesus who have gone on to be with him. And think of the hope we have in having commended them to their Savior.

[18:52] Let nothing move you. Be firmly established in this. The Greek has the sense of being sedentary. But I think of like Martin Luther King and those who kind of sat down on the bridge in Montgomery, Alabama when they were faced with the racists.

We shall not be moved. We are determined to stand here. We are determined to sit here and not be moved by the injustice of those racists.

In the same way, we will not abandon our faith. We will hold firm to it, whatever the cost. So, lessons for us to learn.

Next slide. You will be victorious because even if you die, you will live again. You will be victorious because even if you die, you will live again.

We're all going to die unless Jesus returns. None of us like that thought. It's not kind of one of those things you kind of say, oh, great, I'm going to die. There might be some people that do that, but most of us kind of take precautions to prevent that, which is usually sensible.

[20:07] I don't speak about death because I enjoy it or have some kind of morbidity. I speak about it because it's just real. It's coming to us all. I'm entering my 61st year.

Amazing, isn't it? 61. I was only 60. I was 60 last week, it seemed like me. We were here having the party and now I'm going to be 61. How quickly time goes. But nearer to Jesus, it brings us.

And that's our hope. I can't think of any other hope of getting old. I meet old people. You notice I didn't say I'm old. I meet older people who keep saying to me, it's no fun getting old, you know.

Yeah, and it isn't really, is it? It isn't really, is it? It's no fun getting old. But nearer to Jesus. Because Jesus says to us, look, I am the resurrection and the life.

Whoever lives and believes in me will never die. And he said that at a funeral. He said that by raising somebody from death.

[21 : 21] But that person died again. But the one who lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this? Is this your conviction?

Your heartfelt faith? Yes, I might die. But actually then I live. I said before, I love to think of it like this.

You know, you go to bed, you fall asleep, you wake up, oh, I'm awake. I'll wake up one day in heaven and I think, oh, that was death. Wow, that was nothing. You will be victorious because sin and death has been defeated by Jesus.

The reason death is defeated is because sin is defeated. The wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord. And because Jesus went to the cross and died on the cross and paid the penalty for our sin, death is defeated.

And we know that we're going to be with Jesus because we trust that at the cross he paid the full penalty for our sin.

[22 : 33] All my sin, past, present, future, nailed to the cross and he bore it in himself. That's why my faith in Jesus is an anchor to my soul.

Because if I didn't have that, I would worry about dying and then worry about the fact that there were some things that I did that were so bad that I'm not sure God could forgive them.

But because I know God will forgive my sin in the death of Jesus, then I don't worry about the fact that I am unforgivable. When he went to the cross, he said to a murderer, today you will be with me in paradise.

Well, thank God I've never murdered anybody. Not yet. I've never done it. I don't intend to. I don't intend to. But if a murderer can be forgiven, so can I.

If an adulterer can be forgiven, so can I. If a blasphemer can be forgiven, so can I. You see, I'm not comparing myself with anybody. I just understand that if he can forgive grave sins like that, he can forgive mine, and he will, because of Jesus.

[23 : 47] And then, we have to think victoriously. We have faith in Christ. It is a triumphant faith that we have. Where, O grave?

Where, O death? Where, O grave is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting? I probably got the wrong way around. I was kind of unsure. But you get the point. That's a declaration of faith.

Yeah? That's real. Something I hold on to. Paul went around the Roman world preaching the gospel, facing terrible, terrible sort of trials and difficulties and persecutions, and he said, I don't care.

Death can't harm me. The grave can't control me. It will not hold on to me. I will rise again, and I will be victorious because of my faith in Jesus, the anchor for the soul.

Next slide, please. So, because we have faith in Jesus, and because we know we're not going to die forever, but we're going to be raised to eternal life, and because our faith can keep us strong in the face of all of those natural fears that we have in life, we should work hard for Jesus because we know we'll be rewarded.

[25 : 13] Therefore, my dear brothers and sisters, stand firm, let nothing move you. Always give yourself fully to the work of the Lord because you know that your labor for the Lord is not in vain.

Your labor for the Lord is not in vain. Work hard. Always give yourself fully to the work of the Lord. Why? Because he's the Lord.

He's the Lord Jesus Christ. Imagine if he came to your house. What would you do? Well, you'd get the best china out. You'd get Delia Smith's cookbook out. If you're daidary, you'd start kind of giving your best meal yet, and you'd do your best for him because he's gracing your house, and he's going to grace your table.

That's exactly what Martha and Mary did, really. Well, Martha did. But Mary thought, wow, the Lord's here. I'm going to sit at his feet and learn from him. That's fine, too. It's appropriate. They give themselves fully to the Lord.

And if we love Jesus and we follow Jesus, we believe in Jesus, wouldn't we do the same? So that's the challenge, isn't it? If we're always giving ourselves to the work of the Lord, we realize that actually, unlike our normal sort of everyday job, there's no retirement.

[26 : 36] Not this side of death. No retirement in the kingdom of God. Or you can have a rest now and again. I've just had a couple of weeks. But it wasn't a rest from Jesus.

It was a rest with Jesus. I love my couple of weeks. I kind of got my journals out, and I got my disciplines back, and I kind of set my agenda for this year, and I kind of, you know, and it sounds

like hard work.

It wasn't hard work. It was just a joy to have some space to breathe and to pray and to prepare. But always give yourself fully to the work of the Lord.

Let it be the most important thing in your life. Now, you've got other things to do. I understand that. Other responsibilities. And the Lord expects you to fulfill them.

You can't just abandon them and run off to some kind of nunnery or monastery or anything. You can't do that. Even while you're doing this, you do it unto the Lord.

[27 : 36] Like Brother Lawrence, who used to wash his pans, pots and pans in the monastery, and praise Jesus. So if you're working for your boss, or you're doing your homework at school, or you're working for your wife, or the other way around in retirement, because you never stop, do you?

Alan's shaking his head. No, no, you never stop. Do it abounding in the work of the Lord. To abound means to be really enthusiastic about it.

Yeah, I'm serving Jesus. But not, and that kind of sounded artificial when I said it, but it's because I don't do years very well. Except when we beat Sunday 3-0.

Thought I'd mention that. And we work hard for the Lord because it will never be in vain. Hebrews 6 verse 10, for God is not unjust, so as to overlook your work and the love that you have shown for his name in serving the saints, as you still do.

So next slide. This will be a great challenge. You're going to work for the Lord. It will be a great challenge. And the thing about the Lord is he's very clever, isn't he?

[28 : 52] Kind of like, say, come on, do this. And you say, I can't do that, Lord. And he says, yes, you can. You can with me. Come on, give it a try. So you give it a try. Say, thank you, Lord. I did it.

That's good. Now do this. I just did it. That was enough. No, no, no, no. The Lord will always challenge us to go further, go further.

One more, one more, one more. Because there's no retirement in the service of Jesus. It will always be a challenge.

And a challenge means that, you know, how far am I willing to push it? What am I willing to sacrifice? How hard am I prepared to work for Jesus?

Or when will I say to Jesus, no, I'm not doing that. It's too much. If we're honest, we do that. If we're honest, we put other things in front of him or before him.

[29 : 53] And Paul is saying, you've got to reverse your priorities. It's not this, then Jesus. It's Jesus, then this. Work hard.

It will always be a challenge. But it will not always be, only just be a challenge. It will be a great encouragement. Your labor for the Lord is not in vain.

There's nothing that you do for Jesus that he will not reward. Even a cup of cold water, he says, will have its reward. You don't do it to get the rewards.

In fact, I suspect we'll get kind of Jesus' well done, good and faithful servant for things we never thought about. That's the whole point of the parable of the sheep and the goats, isn't it?

When did we do this, Lord? We can't remember. He says, when you did it for the least of these, my brothers, you did it for me. See, the things that I think he should reward me for, I probably had those rewards because people have thanked me for them.

[30 : 52] The things that I never even give a second thought to, they will be the things he will say, well done, good and faithful servant. You know, you spoke to that person, nobody else does. You encouraged them.

You didn't know that. You didn't see that. Well done. You decided you were going to wash up this week. Nobody thanked you for it, but I saw it. Well done. You decided to give a little more in the offering.

You kind of thought, I can't afford this, but I feel I need to because there are needs here. Well, well done. I saw it. Nothing that you do for Jesus will fail to have its reward.

So, next slide, please. Behold, I am coming quickly and my reward is with me to repay every man according to what he has done.

We're all going to be evaluated one day at the judgment seat of Christ. And as the hymn writer once said, only one life will soon be passed.

[32 : 02] Only what's done for Jesus will last. Therefore, in 2004, I was going to say 1984, I don't know why that.

Therefore, in 2004, 2024, well, if you go back, therefore, in 2024, this year, my dear brothers and sisters, stand firm, let nothing move you, always give yourself fully to the work of the Lord because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain.
Amen. Amen.