

Alderwood Community Church
September 4, 2016

Marking Time or Marking Lives

Colossians 1:24-29

Intro: Some years ago a woman in Africa became a Christian. Being filled with gratitude, she decided to do something for Christ. She was blind, uneducated, and seventy years of age. She came to her missionary with her French Bible and asked her to underline John 3:16 in red ink. Mystified, the missionary watched her as she took her Bible and sat in front of a boys' school in the afternoon. When school dismissed, she would call a boy or two and ask them if they knew French. When they proudly responded that they did, she would say, 'Please read the passage underlined in red.' When they did, she would ask, 'Do you know what this means?' And she would tell them about Christ. The missionary says that over the years twenty-four young men became pastors due to her work.

Big Idea: God has called each one of us to use our gifts and experiences to publically declare who Jesus is and what he has done.

Context: If you received a letter from a man you had never met, a man who was a prisoner, accused of being a troublemaker, how would you respond? The Colossian believers faced that exact problem. They knew that Paul had been instrumental in leading their pastor, Epaphras, to saving faith in Christ. They also knew that Epaphras had gone to Rome to consult with Paul and had not yet returned. The church members had received Paul's letter, brought to them by Tychicus and Onesimus. But the false teachers in Colossae had been discrediting Paul and causing doubts in the people's minds. "Why listen to a man who is a political prisoner?" they asked. "Can you trust him?" Paul no doubt realized that this would be the situation, so he paused in this section of Scripture that we will be reading today to give some words of explanation.

Paul (1) explains his ministry, (2) he establishes his authority and credibility as an apostle of Jesus Christ commissioned to proclaim the gospel, (3) he silences the accusations of his enemies and (4) he stirs the affections of the Colossians as they realize how much Paul had done for them.

Why has God left this passage of Scripture for us to read? (1) So we would understand the context of Paul's letter. (2) So we would be reminded of the benefits of our relationship with Christ. Such as: (a) the Word of God in it's fullness, (b) the indwelling presence of Christ in each of our lives. (c) the assurance (*hope*) of our future home in heaven. (3) to learn from Paul, who models for us what it means to be an effective servant of Jesus Christ. This will be our focus this morning.

***Read: Colossians 1:24-29**

***I want us to learn from Paul’s model how to be effective servants of Jesus Christ and mark other people’s lives in our ministry and in our lives.**

Paul wrote in 1 Cor. 11:1 *“Follow my example as I follow the example of Christ.”*

1. Effective Servants of Jesus Christ have a humble attitude.

“The longer I live, the more I realize the impact of attitude on life. Attitude, to me, is more important than facts. It is more important than the past, than education, than money, than circumstances, than failures, than successes, than what other people think or say or do. It is more important than appearance, giftedness or skill. It will make or break a company...a church....a home. The remarkable thing is we have a choice every day regarding the attitude we will embrace for that day. We cannot change our past...we cannot change the fact that people will act in a certain way. We cannot change the inevitable. The only thing we can do is play on the one string we have, and that is our attitude...I am convinced that life is 10% what happens to me and 90% how I react to it. And so it is with you...we are in charge of our attitudes.”Swindoll)

A. A humble attitude begins with a proper estimation of your self.

“For by the grace given me I say to every one of you: Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the measure of faith God has given you.” Romans 12:3

Paul gets it. He knows his position. (1:23) He refers to himself as a servant of the gospel
 (1:25) He refers to himself as a servant of the church
 (1:25) He insinuates he is a servant of God having been given a commission to present the Word of God.

When the church at Corinth was divided as to who was their favorite servant of God, Paul reminded them, *“What, after all, is Apollos? And what is Paul? Only servants through whom you came to believe – as the Lord has assigned each his task. I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God made it grow.” 1 Cor. 3:5-6*

You and I too, are called to be servants of God.

“Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God’s grace in its various forms.” 1 Peter 4:10

*Have congregation say aloud: **“I am a servant of Jesus Christ.”**

B. A humble attitude enables Jesus’ servants to embrace suffering and even rejoice in it. (vrs. 24)

We are to embrace our role as servants and the consequences. Servants of Jesus put his agenda before their own. They put the needs of others before their own.

Paul says in vrs. 24 *“I fill up in my flesh what is still lacking in regard to Christ’s afflictions...”*

What it doesn’t mean: Paul is not saying that there is anything lacking in regard to the atoning work of Christ on the cross. That would contradict his whole argument in chapter 1:20-23 where he described how the Colossians (and all believers) are reconciled to God through Christ’s blood shed on the cross. Plus, this word *afflictions* refers to the “pressures” of life, the persecutions Paul endured. This word is never used in the New Testament for the sacrificial sufferings of Jesus Christ.

So what did Paul mean. There are 2- possible meanings:

- (1) Paul could be referring to suffering the affliction Christ would have suffered if he was still on earth. Paul was receiving the persecution that was intended for Christ. Jesus, having ascended to heaven, was out of their reach. But because His enemies had not filled up all the injuries they wanted to inflict on Him, they turned their hatred on those who preached the gospel. It was in that sense that Paul filled up what was lacking in Christ’s afflictions.
- (2) Paul is referring to how Christ suffers when any believer suffers. When Jesus confronted Paul on the road to Damascus as Paul was on his way to persecute believers, Jesus said, *“Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?”* (Acts 9:4) He associated the persecution of the church as persecution of himself.

So why did Paul rejoice in his suffering? I can think of at least 4-reasons:

- (1) Because the church at Colossae, the church at Ephesus, the church at Philippi and Philemon benefited from this imprisonment, because it was during this time of house arrest that Paul wrote these letters.
- (2) Paul also rejoiced, in that he hoped his imprisonment and suffering would spur the church to greater boldness and also be willing to suffer for Christ.
- (3) Paul, no doubt just like Peter and John in Acts 5:41, who after being beaten were *“rejoicing because they had been counted worthy of suffering disgrace for the Name.”*
- (4) Paul also knew that he would be rewarded for his suffering.

Paul was sometimes discouraged by his circumstances, but he maintained his joy. He described himself as “afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not despairing; persecuted,

but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed” (2 Cor. 4:8–9). He knew “great sorrow and unceasing grief” (Rom. 9:2) over the plight of unbelieving Israel. Whatever Paul’s circumstances, he never lost his deep-seated confidence that God is in control.

Joy is generated by humility. People lose their joy when they become self-centered, thinking they deserve better circumstances or treatment than they are getting. That was never a problem for Paul. Like all of God’s great servants, he was conscious of his unworthiness. Beaten and imprisoned in Philippi, he sang hymns of praise to God (Acts 16:25). Because he believed he deserved nothing, no circumstance could shake his joyous confidence that God was in control of his life.

All believers in Jesus Christ are called to suffer for him and should not be surprised when persecution comes.

“For it has been granted to you on behalf of Christ not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for him, since you are going through the same struggle you saw I had, and now hear that I still have.” Philippians 1:29

“Dear friends, do not be surprised at the painful trial you are suffering, as though something strange were happening to you. But rejoice that you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed. If you are insulted because of the name of Christ, you are blessed, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you....So then, those who suffer according to God’s will should commit themselves to their faithful creator and continue to do good.” 1 Peter 4:12-14,19

Jesus promises that we will be rewarded for suffering for him.

“Blessed are you when men hate you, when they exclude you and insult you and reject your name as evil because of the Son of Man. Rejoice in that day and leap for joy, because great is your reward in heaven.” Luke 6:22-23

Illus: The Insanity of God (find a story... Chinese believers)

Are you willing to suffer for Jesus?

Is Jesus worth it?

*I would like to buy \$3 worth of God, please.
Not enough to explode my soul or disturb my sleep,
but just enough to equal a cup of warm milk
or a snooze in the sunshine.
I don’t want enough of God to make me love a black man
or pick beets with a migrant.
I want ecstasy, not transformation.
I want warmth of the womb, not a new birth.*

*I want a pound of the Eternal in a paper sack.
I would like to buy \$3 worth of God, please. — Wilbur Rees*

2. Effective Servants of Jesus Christ are focused and diligent in their service.

A. An effective servant of Jesus Christ is focused on his/her ministry. (vrs. 25-28)

(1) This means you need to have a clear understanding of your responsibilities

(a) Paul did:

- (i) He was called to present/preach the Word of God in all its' fullness (25)
- (ii) He was called to explain the mystery of the Gospel (26-27)

Mystery – means something that was previously unrevealed or not full revealed in the Old Testament but now has been revealed in the New Testament.

The mystery is the church, that is now made up of both Gentiles and Jews.

“This mystery is that through the gospel the Gentiles are heirs together with Israel, members together of the one body, and sharers together in the promise of Christ Jesus.” Ephesians 3:6

The mystery is that Christ actually dwells within each member of the church.

The New Testament is clear that Christ, by the Holy Spirit, takes up permanent residence in all believers, both Jew and Gentile.

“Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your body.” 1 Cor. 6:19-20

Christ in you the hope of glory... The fact that Christ dwells in all believers is the very source for our hope of glory. When Christ comes to live in a believer, His presence is the anchor of the promise of heaven—the guarantee of eternal life.

- (iii) He was called to proclaim Christ (28)

Admonishing – warning especially regarding sin and its consequences.

Teaching – imparting spiritual truth regarding who Jesus is, what he had done on the cross on their behalf, and how followers of Christ are to live their lives.

With all wisdom – practical application of these truths to life.

(b) Do you have a clear understanding of your responsibilities as a servant of Jesus?

“Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God’s grace in its various forms.” 1 Peter 4:10

(2) Use your gifts, your circumstances (like Paul), serve others, faithfully administrate God’s grace.

B. An effective servant of Jesus Christ is focused on the goal of his/her ministry. (vrs. 28)

The goal of all ministry is the maturity of other believers. *“so that we may present everyone perfect in Christ. To this end I labor...”*

“It was he [Christ] who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God’s people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.” Ephesians 4:11-13

C. An effective servant of Jesus Christ is diligent and works hard at his/her ministry. (vrs. 29)

- (1) At times ministry is hard.
- (2) At times ministry isn’t convenient.
- (3) At times ministry requires sacrifice.
- (4) God supplies us with the energy to do the ministry he has called us to.

3. Effective servants of Jesus Christ have a persistent awareness of their accountability to God. (vrs. 25)

*“I have become it’s [the church] servant by the **commission** God gave me.*

*“commission” translated “stewardship” in the ESV, NASB. Stewardship translates *oikonomia*, a compound word made up of *oikos* (“house”) and *nemō* (“manage”). It means to manage a household as a steward of someone else’s possessions. The steward had oversight of the other servants and handled the business and financial affairs of the household. That freed the owner to travel and pursue other interests. Being a steward was thus a position of great trust and responsibility in the ancient world.*

Paul was keenly aware of his accountability to God for his ministry. He credited God with his calling... he is aware he will give an answer to God for this calling.

“Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God’s grace in its various forms.” 1 Peter 4:10

A. God has given each one of us a stewardship: The gospel, a spiritual gift, time, money, children and opportunities.

“For we are God’s workmanship created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.” Ephesians 2:10

B. We will be held accountable for what he has entrusted us.

“For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive what is due him for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad.” 2 Corinthians 5:10

C. We will be rewarded for our faithful use of what he has entrusted to us.

“Behold, I am coming soon! My reward is with me and I will give to everyone according to what he has done.” Revelation 22:12

Conclusion: What are you doing with the gifts and resources God has placed in your hands?

Are you making the most of the opportunities (like Paul, even in jail) that God has given you?