

Expressing (Christ's) Life
Galatians 2:20

Good morning! For the next few weeks, we will take a break from our regular expositional preaching of the Bible to focus on the progress the elder board has made in summarizing and fleshing out the many listening discussions we've had with all of you over the last several months. If you weren't here last week, I would encourage you to go to the website and listen to the message, as our vision and mission and core values were introduced by a few of the elders. As a reminder, here is the vision/mission.

Vision

That Christ would be seen by all

Mission

To bring pleasure and glory to Christ Jesus by expressing his life, obeying his will, and advancing his kingdom.

Last week, I preached on the vision and what we mean by Christ being seen by all. This week and the next following two Sundays, I will flesh out our mission statement and then Pastor Stan will do the core values upon his return from Africa. Now, for those of you worried that we've gone away from teaching the bible, I assure you we have not. Starting in January we will do a series on the book of Acts. During this series, I will attempt to ground all of our statements in scripture as well.

What does it mean for us to bring pleasure and glory to Christ Jesus by **expressing His life**? A year after my conversion, I was challenged to sign a pledge called WWJD (What Would Jesus Do) in any and every situation. Later, I learned that the idea of WWJD was inspired by a book (classic) by preacher named Charles Sheldon in the late 1800s, where a pastor challenges his apathetic church to apply WWJD to their daily lives, and a social revolution follows. Being zealous I signed it, assuming this would make me a better disciple. However, my experience didn't bring about the revolution I was hoping for. Despite my earnest attempts, I failed miserably and often to the point where I just threw the card away.

Now, for us to ask the question of WWJD in a given situation is not a bad thing. However, it's important to note that Charles Sheldon was writing out of a more older liberal tradition that believed that Jesus' life and teaching were universal principles that were useful in guiding humanity into a better tomorrow. The problem is that the premise of WWJD assumes that we have ability and capacity to imitate Jesus in any and every situation on our own strength – which we don't. In other words, it fails to take into account human weakness and sinfulness. Secondly, it reduces the Christian life to simply a form of moralism, where if we have the right information (the teachings of Jesus), we will be able to make all the right choices.

Now in our evangelical tradition, we would want to say more about the Christian life than Charles Sheldon would, and more about what WWJD actually means. We would want to say that what saves us is not trying to be like Christ but His death and resurrection for sinful humanity – by grace alone through faith alone. Our ethical life then is supposed to be a worshipful THANK YOU for what Christ has done. However, even this paradigm falls short of the New Testament understanding. It skips a major step – a major reality – for what it means to Christian and how the Christian life is lived out. John Calvin once said: "First, we must understand that as long as

Christ remains outside of us, and we are separated from Him, all that He has suffered and done for the salvation of the human race remains useless and of no value for us. Therefore, to share with us what He has received from the Father, He had to become ours and to dwell within us. For, as I have said, all that He possesses is nothing to us until we grow into one body with Him. It is true that we obtain this by faith.” – John Calvin, founding father of Protestantism

In other words, our salvation is dependent not just on what Jesus did 2,000 years ago in history, but on our receiving the benefits of the cross by being drawn into a *saving union with Him*. The key to living out the Christian life, and expressing the life of Christ is not WWJD, nor being thankful because we are saved, but its this: NOT I, BUT THROUGH CHRIST IN ME.

Let me show you how this works out in scripture. Turn with me to Galatians... Galatians is, in my opinion, Paul's first letter that we have. He wrote it following the completion of his first missionary journey with Barnabas in Acts 13-14. What prompted the letter was the fact that a group of Jewish-Christian missionaries were following up with Paul's churches and "correcting" his gospel message. They said, "Its great you believe in Jesus, but to complete the process of becoming holy and acceptable to God, you need to also be circumcised and follow the law of Moses. Only then can you truly be part of God's family." So these Galatian believers – who obviously wanted to be fully devoted followers of Christ – said ok, and were submitting themselves to circumcision.

Paul writes this fiery letter in response and says no! This is not the way of the Christian life! If you go back to the old ways of the Mosaic law you are denying the very thing Christ came to do for you! I want to pick things up here in chapter 2, starting in verse 16. Paul writes: Gal. 2:16-19. You see the Law's purpose was to point out our sin and prepare the way for us to find our justification – our right standing before a holy God – through faith in Christ alone. Now listen to this statement, one of the most important ones to come from Paul's writings, and maybe one of the most important in the whole bible: Gal. 2:20-21. The historic gap between what Christ did on the cross in Jerusalem and Paul's own personal experience is bridged with the presence of Christ – through the Spirit – coming to indwell believers. So His experience – dying and rising again to new life with God the Father – becomes our experience through the Spirit. This is one of those verses you need to memorize and remind yourself of each and every day. Not because its Paul's words about himself, but Paul writes these words for you. This is what he wants you to know about the Christian life: It is not I, but through Christ living in me.

I want to point out three things about our union with Christ from this text: First, *we have been crucified with Christ*. Paul says that his former self – his former life – has been crucified with Christ. Now, we need to ask what does that mean exactly? Paul says the SELF-directed life, characterized by personal ambitions, pleasures and our own proud achievements is really a dungeon of darkness, ignorance, and spiritual blindness. Remember who Paul himself was before he met Christ: a terrorizer of Christians. He had people put in jail, and in some cases even put to death. But through being crucified with Christ, Paul is now a free and liberated man. Listen to the words of Jesus in Matthew: "For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it."

There is a profound spiritual truth here that we need to hang onto in our day, because our culture teaches us the exact opposite. To find yourself, you have to look within. It's the way of the dungeon. But to really find your true self – you lose your life into Christ. C.S. Lewis had this

saying that the more you die to yourself, for Christ, the more you become the true self that God intended. The closer you follow Jesus, more you become like Him, and absorbed into His life, the more you become the real you God intended you to become. The way to be truly human is to be “in Christ”.

Secondly, *we have been raised with Christ*. In place of his old life a new one has been birthed, a new one: Paul is a man “in Christ”, with new desires, new life direction, new purpose. His entire identity is now based around Jesus – the one who loved him, and died for him. And it’s the same with us. The old life is gone, you have come out of the dungeon, to a new life, one with God. This means that we have been given a whole new life orientation – one that is freed from the burdens of selfish living. Think what a burden selfishness creates for us; selfishness fractures relationships, breaks up families, harms others, and ultimately, it destroys society’s. One of the key problems with our contemporary society is that we have tried to make selfishness a life philosophy, and it is our undoing. But now, in Christ, you’re free from the burden of yourself; and you get your life back – but not your own, but one with Christ, who redeems and reshapes our fallen nature to reflect His beauty and glory.

Listen to what Paul says in Colossians 3:1-4. Finally, *we live with Christ (and Christ lives with us)*. Paul says the life he now lives, he lives by faith in the Son of God who loved Him and gave Himself for him. And that is how are to live now too. For Paul, the EXPRESSING the LIFE OF CHRIST is not so much about *imitation* (imitating Christ, asking WWJD), but about *participation* in and with Christ. Expressing the life of Christ is first and foremost about where you ARE and WHO you belong to, and secondarily about what you do. In other words, what you DO flows out of who you ARE, as a believer. And who you are is this: “in Christ”, “with Christ”, “through Christ”, and “for Christ”.

“What a far cry this is from the exhausting idea that Christ has done his bit and now its time to do ours! We are not chained to the task of trying to pay back the huge debt we owe him. We are united to the Son so we can enter into his life. Our joy, our prayers, our mission, our holiness, our suffering, our hope: all are participation in the life of the Son. This means as you go through life, you can have the relief of knowing that you are not on your own, facing a list of tasks. Whatever you do, you are not the indispensable one. You are simply entering into the life of the Son, sharing His agonies, His concerns, His passions and joys. *With Him.*” – Michael Reeves, *Rejoicing in Christ*

Conclusion:

Now, next week, I will talk about the relationship between faith and obedience. Because the next phrase of our mission statement is “obeying His will”. But in crafting our vision and mission statement, the elders wanted to be sure that to get the foundational things right – and I believe we have. Bring pleasure and glory to Jesus – worship! And doing so be expressing His life, not on our own initiative or strength or will power, but by participating in His life which is already flowing through us.

But for this week, I want us to let the profound significance of Gal. 2:20 sink deeply into our hearts and minds, realizing that it’s not I, but through Christ in me. What does this mean, practically speaking, our life this coming week? Simple: when life gets hard, when temptations come, when trials hit – and they will, starting tomorrow morning, because tomorrow is Monday, and whatever we have been given some reprieve from here on Sunday morning comes roaring

back tomorrow when the alarm goes off. When Monday comes and whatever you're facing this week, remember to lean into your union with Christ. Rely on your union with Christ. Depend on your union with Christ – and know this, that all you need to face this next week and whatever is coming, will be supplied to you through Him. Because He loves you, and died for you, to make you His own. I don't know all you are going through – some of you I do - but a lot of you I don't know. But He does. He does! And He will see you through.

And for those of you here today, perhaps hearing about Jesus in this way for the first time. That being a Christian is not about trying harder, doing better, and imitating Jesus, but its about becoming set free from the dungeon of yourself, and your sin, and receiving from Him eternal life – a free gift! – through being joined to Him. A savior, who loved you and died for you. Will you this day turn to Jesus, and say yes to what He offers? Will you this day turn from selfish living and say yes to a whole new life with Him? Will you say yes to the God who created you, to whom you intended to belong to, and has gone to such extreme and sacrificial lengths (the death of His own Son!) to bring you to Himself?

My friend, He is here in this place and He's waiting for our response...