

“Living with Purpose”
(1 Corinthians 9:24-27)

I. Introduction.

A. Orientation.

This morning,

We were reminded of our purpose as the church –

Our purpose as Christians –

Which is to bring glory to Christ

By bringing His sheep into the fold –

Or to use another familiar analogy,

By being fishers of men.

Jesus is still gathering His people together.

The way He gathers them is through the Gospel.

But the way He communicates that Gospel to them is through us –

That work is our responsibility.

B. Preview.

But the question we ended with was,

How can we gather them?

How can we bring them in?

The answer is: Where there's a will, there's a way.

We must want to do this, and want it strongly, or we won't be very effective.

I would go so far as to say

That must be our main purpose in life.

To the degree our hearts are divided,

To that degree, we will be weakened.

Spurgeon writes in his *Soul Winner*, “It is a grand thing to see a man thoroughly possessed with one master-passion. Such a man is sure to be strong, and if the master-principle be excellent, he is sure to be excellent, too. The man of one object is a man indeed. Lives with many aims are like water trickling through innumerable streams, none of which are wide enough or deep enough to float the merest cockleshell of a boat; but a life with one object is like a mighty river flowing between its banks, bearing to the ocean a multitude of ships, and spreading fertility on either side. Give me a man not only with a great object in his soul, but thoroughly possessed by it, his powers all concentrated, and himself on fire with vehement zeal for his supreme object, and you have put before me one of the greatest sources of power which the world can produce. Give me a man engrossed with holy love as to his heart, and filled with some masterly celestial thought as to his brain, and such a man will be known wherever his lot may be cast, and I venture to prophesy that his name will be remembered long after the place of his sepulchre shall be forgotten.”

Last week, we saw that our Great Example – the Lord Jesus –

Was possessed of such a spirit.

When His disciples brought Him something to eat, He said,

“My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me and to accomplish His work” (John 4:34).

Fulfilling the purpose for which His Father sent Him

Was more important than taking care of His hunger:

He lived with a single purpose.

Paul did the same.

Once the Lord revealed Himself to him,

He set aside everything he thought he had accomplished,

Began to pursue what the Lord called him to do with his whole heart,

And held himself out to us as an example.

He writes in Philippians 3, “But whatever things were gain to me, those things I have counted as loss for the sake of Christ. More than that, I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them but rubbish so that I may gain Christ, and may be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own derived from *the* Law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which *comes* from God on the basis of faith, that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death; in order that I may attain to the resurrection from the dead. Not that I have already obtained *it* or have already become perfect, but I press on so that I may lay hold of that for which also I was laid hold of by Christ Jesus. Brethren, I do not regard myself as having laid hold of *it* yet; but one thing *I do*: forgetting what *lies* behind and reaching forward to what *lies* ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. *Let us therefore, as many as are perfect, have this attitude; and if in anything you have a different attitude, God will reveal that also to you*” (vv. 7-15).

There’s an old saying:

If you aim at nothing, you’re sure to hit it.

If you’re not aiming at what Jesus calls you to do,

You’re sure not to accomplish it.

You must pursue His kingdom, His work, His will,

With all your heart and all your soul

If you would hope to succeed.

This evening, Paul reveals a bit more

Of how he pursued this goal:

He had the focus, purpose and drive of an athlete.

Let’s look at three things: To glorify Jesus in bringing souls home to Him,

1. You must set your eyes on the prize God promises.

2. You must discipline yourself to seek that prize.
3. And you must put your full effort into winning that prize.

II. Sermon.

A. First, you need to set your eyes on the prize God promises.

“They then *do it* to receive *a perishable wreath*, but we an imperishable” (v. 25).

You need to know there is a prize – there is a reward – for your work.

What is it?

John Gill summarizes it in this way:

Commenting on what Paul writes in Philippians 3:14, “I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus,” he writes, the prize is

“The incorruptible crown; the crown of life, righteousness, and glory, that fades not away, James 1:12, styled ‘the prize of the calling of God’; because it is what God in the effectual calling calls his people to, even to a kingdom and glory, and to eternal glory and happiness; of which they have a sight, though but a glimmering view of it, and are blessed with hope in it; in which they rejoice, and see their right unto it, in the righteousness of Christ, and have a suitableness for it. This is named ‘the high calling of God’, because God is on high, who calls them to it, in allusion to the judge in the Olympic games, who was placed in an exalted situation, near the mark, with the crown in his hand, which he gave to him that came first; and because the grace by which the saints are called is from above, as every good and perfect gift is, James 1:17; and because the prize they are called unto consists of things above, where Jesus is, and is the hope laid up in heaven, Col. 1:5, and the inheritance reserved there, 1Peter 1:4; and expresses the great honor and dignity of called ones, who are called to a crown and kingdom, are raised from the dunghill, to sit among princes, and to inherit the throne of glory, and are made kings and priests unto God. It may also denote, that the calling to such high honor is from above, and not below; and is owing to the special grace and favor of God, and not to any merits of men; nor is the prize to which they are called, of him that wills and runs, but of God’s grace and mercy, Romans 9:16. Moreover, this calling is said to be ‘in Christ Jesus’; for both the purpose and grace, according to which men are called, are in him; the grace by which they are called, and which is implanted in them when called, is all in and from Christ; the blessings of grace, which they then in person enjoy, are spiritual blessings in him; and even the glory they are called unto is in his hands; not only the promise of eternal life, but that life itself; the gift of it is with him, and it comes through him; yes, they are called by him, and said to be the called of Christ Jesus. Now the prize of this calling, which is what God has

prepared from all eternity, which Christ has in his hands, and will give to all his, and which is of immense richness and eternal duration, and shall be bestowed on all Christian runners, or true believers, is what the apostle was pressing for, pursuing after, with much difficulty, through great toil and labor, diligent searching of the Scriptures, frequent wrestling with God in prayer, and constant attendance on the means of grace, and ordinances of the Gospel.”

This is what the Lord holds out to you

If you will run this race

With the kind of effort Paul speaks of.

Of course, to do that,

You must want this prize.

It must be precious enough to you to put out this kind of effort.

The only way it can be

Is if you're born again by God's Spirit.

Remember, Jesus said to Nicodemus,

Unless you are born again, you cannot see the kingdom of God –

That is, you can't see it as something so desirable

That you're willing to give up whatever you must to enter it.

B. Second, you need to discipline yourself to seek that prize.

“Everyone who competes in the games exercises self-control in all things. . . .

Therefore I run in such a way, as not without aim; I box in such a way, as not beating the air; but I discipline my body and make it my slave, so that, after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified” (vv. 25, 26-27).

If you are to win this prize,

Then you must train:

You must discipline yourself as an athlete would

Who trains for a competition.

Many of you are familiar with Arnold Schwarzenegger,

If for no other reason, that he was governor of California from 2003-2011

And has been an actor for many years.

Before he was governor, before he went into acting,

He competed in an athletic competition called bodybuilding.

I recently saw a YouTube video

Where he explained the level of commitment he needed to win.

It's the same as Paul tells us here.

To win – to be the best in this competition –

He had to set his eyes on the goal and strive towards it with all he had.

When he went to the gym, he had to work as hard as he could –

He always had to push himself to go further.

He constantly changed his program

So his muscles wouldn't get used to any routine.

When it came to nutrition,

He had to push away any junk food –

Anything that would move him in the wrong direction –

And eat only those things that moved him closer to his goal.

Paul tells us, that to excel in the Christian life –

Or as Spurgeon puts it, to be a better soul winner –

We have to do essentially the same.

We have to exercise self-control.

We have to get rid of the things that get in our way –

That move us in the wrong direction –

And do only those things that will move us towards our goal.

You must stop doing the things that weaken your ability to serve the Lord:

Stop flirting with your enemies:

The world, your flesh and the devil.

Sin will quench the Spirit's work in your soul.

It will weaken you.

It's like eating things you know are bad for you –

That will weaken you and make it more difficult to compete –

It's like missing your workouts,

Or going through them half-heartedly.

Why would you want to do anything contrary to your goal?

Usually, it's because you think it's fun –

That going to bring you some kind of pleasure.

Satan always baits his hooks with pleasure/fun,

But like any good fisherman, hides the hook.

Susanne Wesley had a very helpful piece of advice for her children,

That was meant to help them avoid the pitfalls of the pleasures of this world.

Whether that pleasure is sin or not, it can still get in the way.

She said, "Use this rule: Whatever weakens your reason, impairs the tenderness of your conscience, obscures your sense and sight of God, takes from you your thirst and relish for spiritual things or increases the authority of your body over your mind, then that thing to you is sin, however innocent it may seem in itself. By this test you may detect evil no matter how subtly or how plausibly temptation may be presented to you."

Sadly, most of the things in this world

Will have these effects on our souls.

If you want to excel at serving Christ, at winning souls,

You have to be able to set aside even the things that aren't sinful,

If they're slowing you down.

You also need to do those things that will strengthen your ability to compete.

As the athlete: train hard, watch what you eat.

Instead of engaging in things that weaken you,

Do the things that will make you stronger:

That will strengthen your ability to think,

That will make your conscience tender,

Give you a clearer sight and sense of God,

Strengthen your relish and delight in spiritual things,

That will give your mind control over your body.

Use the means of grace:

Read God's Word.

Study books that will help you understand it.

Pray and ask for God's grace.

Fellowship with God's people.

Worship together.

Spend time with likeminded believers.

These are not ends in themselves, but means to an end.

The end is that you might serve the Lord

With greater zeal and strength.

But they won't help you if you don't use them.

C. Finally, you must put your full effort into winning that prize.

“Do you not know that those who run in a race all run, but *only* one receives the prize? *Run in such a way that you may win*” (v. 24).

Once you've fed yourself with the right spiritual nutrients and trained properly,

Run!

As I said, everything else you do is a means to this end:

The end is that being filled with God's Spirit,

And being equipped to serve Him,

That you actually do serve Him with all your heart and soul.

If you've only been brought to the place

Where you know what He wants you to do,

And you want to do it,

But you never actually get around to doing it,

Then you're like an athlete

Who has conditioned himself to win,

But who never actually does,
Because he never actually runs.

You need to *run* –
You need *to do* what God calls you to do –
If you are to win the prize.
And you must *do it with the kind of zeal*
He says you must to win that prize –
With all your heart, mind, soul and strength.
Anything less won't do.

God offers you a gracious reward – as we saw before.
But if you want it,
You have to set your heart on it.
You have to discipline yourself that you might gain it.
And you must run after it with all your soul and strength,
Because that is the kind of effort the Lord says He will reward. Amen.

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