

March 11, 2018

## I Corinthians 9

I'd like to start off this morning with a story. Many of you in here have probably heard this one, but it's one of my favorites.

[read Paul Harvey's "The Man and the Birds"]

This story uses a great analogy to explain why God had to come to Earth as Jesus. He came in the form of a human to provide, communicate & show us the Way to Salvation. But as we discussed last week, our Salvation is not the end of our work with our Savior. We have a responsibility to be "our brother's keeper." Paul discusses what this sounds like in I Corinthians 9.

[read verses 19-23]

Paul states that among Jews, he keeps Jewish customs and laws. In this way he can bring Jews to Christ (by removing the issues of faith that would be stumbling blocks to them). Among the gentiles, he likewise adopts their customs (that don't violate the principles of faith) in order to bring them to Christ. In other words, Paul loves his brothers enough to put aside his personal preferences and feelings in order to bring them to Christ. This is Christ's law! **LOVING OTHERS**

As illustrated in the story, Christ became one of us in order to save us. Paul does the same for his earthly brothers and sisters, adopting their customs (but not their beliefs/lifestyles/anything that would harm his relationship with Christ) in order to witness. We should do the same!

## The Man and the Birds

by Paul Harvey

The man to whom I'm going to introduce you was not a scrooge, he was a kind decent, mostly good man. Generous to his family, upright in his dealings with other men. But he just didn't believe all that incarnation stuff which the churches proclaim at Christmas Time. It just didn't make sense and he was too honest to pretend otherwise. He just couldn't swallow the Jesus Story, about God coming to Earth as a man.

*"I'm truly sorry to distress you,"* he told his wife, *"but I'm not going with you to church this Christmas Eve."* He said he'd feel like a hypocrite. That he'd much rather just stay at home, but that he would wait up for them. And so he stayed and they went to the midnight service.

Shortly after the family drove away in the car, snow began to fall. He went to the window to watch the flurries getting heavier and heavier and then went back to his fireside chair and began to read his newspaper. Minutes later he was startled by a thudding sound... Then another, and then another. Sort of a thump or a thud... At first he thought someone must be throwing snowballs against his living room window. But when he went to the front door to investigate he found a flock of birds huddled miserably in the snow. They'd been caught in the storm and, in a desperate search for shelter, had tried to fly through his large landscape window.

Well, he couldn't let the poor creatures lie there and freeze, so he remembered the barn where his children stabled their pony. That would provide a warm shelter, if he could direct the birds to it.

Quickly he put on a coat, galoshes, tramped through the deepening snow to the barn. He opened the doors wide and turned on a light, but the birds did not come in. He figured food would entice them in. So he hurried back to the house, fetched bread crumbs, sprinkled them on the snow, making a trail to the yellow-lighted wide open doorway of the stable. But to his dismay, the birds ignored the bread crumbs, and continued to flap around helplessly in the snow. He tried catching them... He tried shoing them into the barn by walking around them waving his arms... Instead, they scattered in every direction, except into the warm, lighted barn.

And then, he realized that they were afraid of him. To them, he reasoned, I am a strange and terrifying creature. If only I could think of some way to let them know that they can trust me... That I am not trying to hurt them, but to help them. But how? Because any move he made tended to frighten them, confuse them. They just would not follow. They would not be led or shoed because they feared him.

*"If only I could be a bird,"* he thought to himself, *"and mingle with them and speak their language. Then I could tell them not to be afraid. Then I could show them the way to safe, warm... to the safe warm barn. But I would have to be one of them so they could see, and hear and understand."*

At that moment the church bells began to ring. The sound reached his ears above the sounds of the wind. And he stood there listening to the bells – Adeste Fidelis – listening to the bells pealing the glad tidings of Christmas.

And he sank to his knees in the snow.

# **Small Group Questions -- March 11, 2018**

## **I Corinthians chapter 9**

### **Read I Corinthians 9:7-12.**

We all (rightly) have biases against people who make themselves rich off of Christ's Word (Creflo Dollar comes to mind, among others!) But is it right to assume that preachers, missionaries, etc. must endure states of constant suffering? Why do some people think this way? What is Paul's take here?

### **Read I Corinthians 9:19-23.**

Paul describes the lengths to which he will go to bring an unbeliever to Christ. What are some things that hold us back from witnessing to everyone around us? What are some ways that we can overcome these obstacles? What "first step" will you take to do so?

### **Read I Corinthians 9:24-27.**

Paul often refers to athletic endeavors when making analogies for our Christian lives. In what ways do we sometimes fail to "run to win?" What can we do to change these behaviors and sharpen our skills? What would change if we lived like Jesus was coming back tomorrow?

**DAILY DEVOTIONS (1Corinthians 10)**      *Week of March 12-19, 2018*

**MONDAY: READ: 1Cor 10:1-5; Exodus 14**

*Compare Israel's exodus out of Egypt led by Moses with our exodus out of sin led by Jesus: Who is the cloud? What does the sea represent? Baptism in the cloud & sea? Spiritual food & drink? Why was God not pleased with the Israelites? Pray that our church continues to enjoy the pleasure of the Lord and responds to Him gratefully & generously in discipleship and stewardship.*

**TUESDAY: READ: 1Cor 10:6-13 & Others**

*Paul identifies 4 warnings from the "failed" experiences of Israel (7,8,9,10). Find and read these experiences in the Old Testament. How is our salvation different after Christ's passion? When you are tempted, do you look for God's way of escape? Do you feel like temptations are more than you have the power to withstand? Pray that you/we learn the connection between the testaments, the difference conversion makes, and the power available to us thru the Holy Spirit indwelling us today.*

**WEDNESDAY: READ: 1Cor 10:14-22; Luke 22:14-23**

*Paul refers to communion at the Lord's table by which we demonstrate our participation in 3 things: can you name these (16,17,18)? Why does Paul warn against participating in idol worship? Pray that the Spirit will give you/us more complete understanding of His written word as well as an increased awareness/sensitivity to the word He speaks to us.*

**THURSDAY: READ: 1Cor 10:23-30; 1Cor 8**

*Paul gives two scenarios about eating meat sacrificed to idols. What is the main difference between them? What does a Christian's response depend on? How does love affect his choice? Pray for a deeper dependence on the Holy Spirit in daily life experiences and decisions for you/us.*

**FRIDAY: READ: 1Cor 10:31-33; Luke 19:1-10**

*Paul encourages us to glorify God in everything we do. How do you acknowledge/glorify God among your unbelieving friends? How do you acknowledge/glorify God among believers of other denominations? Do you think Paul meant that he always tried to "please everyone?" Pray that God will help you/us see how desperately people need Jesus, His salvation, and our role as His witnesses.*

**SATURDAY: READ: 1Cor 10**

*What is the most important instruction or principle you've learned in this chapter? How can you begin to practice this? What subject matter may require more investigation/study on your part? Pray that you/we will take our training in righteousness seriously, and invite another believer to study with you.*