



2021 Weekly Devotions

Week of: Nov 1st - Nov 7th

Sermon: October 31st



November 1

2 Corinthians 6:10

As we saw in the message for Sunday, a life devoted to Christ and His glory is costly. The cost is certainly a consequence of choosing to walk the path that Jesus walked, but it is also a means by which God produces some wonderful and amazing benefits in our lives. Paul's writings contain many examples of paradoxes of life that exalt Christ but seem strange to man. The passage I chose for our "point to ponder" for today is 2 Corinthians 6:10. There the Bible says, "As sorrowful, yet always rejoicing, as poor yet making many rich, as having nothing yet possessing all things." A paradox is a statement like, "As sorrowful, yet always rejoicing." On the one hand, it makes no sense. How can you be sorrowful and rejoicing at the same time? Or how can you be poor while making many rich? That is why it is a paradox – it seems to be contradictory and yet it is true. The point I want to make today as a means of encouragement is to tell you that although the path of obedience to Christ is costly, it is also joyful.

Like Stephen, when we embrace with joy what it will cost to follow Christ, we make His worth and value shine to those around us. The high price that we are willing to pay will itself make Him look great. Paul said it this way in 1 Corinthians 2:2, "For I determined to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ, and Him crucified." He also later wrote, "But may it never be that I would boast, except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ" (Gal. 6:14). All that mattered to Paul was that Jesus shine through his life and his point in many of these verses is that Jesus shines brightest in our faithfulness in hardships. Now, that may sound all fine and dandy, but it does not make it easier. Is it enough to tell you that you make Jesus look more valuable when you are faithful in suffering? I hope it helps but is there more that might motivate us from a personal benefit perspective. I think the answer is yes.

In the first paragraph I said that there would be a cost to following Christ but is there a benefit beyond getting to go to heaven when we die? Surely there is! I also mentioned that the Calvary Road is the means to great blessings. What I mean by that is that God literally has chosen the path of suffering as the path on which He reveals Himself more intimately and deeply. This is why Paul could say in Romans 5:2-5 that he could rejoice in tribulations. The reason is because he knew that in the tribulation, God would ultimately pour love into his inner being (heart) which would increase his measure of hope (faith) in the promises of God. It is in the hard places that God increases our perseverance, proves our Christian character, and builds our hope. This kind of hope does not disappoint us in anyway.

A beautiful reality that I have come to know and understand is that the grace of God is the means by which God gives us knowledge, strength, and perseverance for our journey. Here is the clincher – that grace flows into our lives by faith. Paul put it this way in Romans 5:2, "We have obtained our introduction by faith into this grace in which we stand." It is by faith that we come into this grace that causes us to be able to stand. The simple point that I want you to ponder today is that God does some of His best work in our hardest days. It is there that He is drawing us in and taking us deeper into Truth. It is there that we will learn to love Him more and find that doing so becomes easier because we see His worth and value more clearly. The call to the Calvary Road and to take up our cross is a call of love. It is there that He will give us His greatest blessings. Embrace it.

November 2

Philippians 1:20-21

My hope this week as we journey together through these devotions is that we will be more encouraged to live for His glory because He is worthy of all glory and honor. I also want us to be fine with and eager to honor Him in our suffering and even our death. The question for us to ponder today is, how do we honor Christ in death? Well, a fantastic example of that was Stephen. Everyone who knows his story is inspired to faithfulness, courage, and Christlikeness. I can't begin to tell you how many times I have shed tears thinking of the moment when the stones began to pelt his body driving him to his knees. Then to read of the grace God gave him to literally see into the throne room of heaven where he saw Jesus standing as an ovation to His faith. Paul wrote in Philippians 1:20-21, "According to my earnest expectation and hope, that I will not be put to shame in anything, but that with all boldness, Christ will even now, as always, be exalted in my body whether by life or by death." Stephen was a perfect example of Paul's desire to honor Christ in life and death.

Friends, I want us to think a little today of what Paul wrote in our passage for this devotion. He said, "It is my earnest desire not to be put to shame." Now, if you stop right there you draw the wrong conclusion that Paul was concerned with his own image and maybe his own honor. After all, would we not say that the opposite of being put to shame is being honored? I think that is a fair conclusion. You must not however land there. As verse 20 continues he says, "...but that with all boldness, Christ will...be exalted (honored) in my body whether by life or by death." You see, he isn't concerned with not being shamed for his own glory but rather for the honor of Christ. He is saying, "I don't want to be ashamed because I don't want to bring shame on Christ. How do you not do that? Well, his answer would be to remain faithful and bold in good times and bad times. So, how do we actually honor Christ in our death?

Do not lose sight of Paul's single greatest desire in this life which was to make much of Christ – always and in everything. We exist to make Him appear magnificent to the world around us. In our death, we can make much of Jesus by demonstrating to the world that He is worth more than anything else in this world. He says, "To die is gain." That means, we must truly believe that to be with Jesus in heaven is more precious and valuable than anything on earth. If you really believe that, then in death you will live like it is true. He said at the beginning of verse 21, "For to me...." You see, he really believed this and so death was not the worst thing in the world but was actually the door to the greatest thing in the world. How do you magnify Christ in death? You must see death as gain.

I recently read a book by John Piper called Don't Waste Your Life. In the book Piper wrote, "It knit my heart together with many families as we bade farewell to friend after friend. And faring well is exactly what we believed they did." He was referring to the many funerals he did for old saints at his church when he first became pastor. I had never thought of that phrase before, "Farewell." From here on out I will. When we lay a believer to rest, let us remember that their death has been gain and we can absolutely conclude that as we sent them off, they fared well as death was gain and is gain to all who die in Christ. May we be so convinced of this that we will honor Him in our sickness and death because we too believe with all of our heart that to die is gain. So, let us determine today that we will not live in fear of anything but rather be faithful in everything.

November 3

1 Corinthians 15:31

I honestly have no doubt that in the passage in Philippians 1 that Paul is talking about actual physical death. However, I think it is important that we also understand that when we talk about honoring Christ in life and in death, we should remember a passage like the one chosen for today. In 1 Corinthians 15:31 Paul writes, "I affirm, brethren, by the boasting in you which I have in Christ Jesus our Lord, I die daily." You see, there is an ongoing dying to self that all believers are to experience. In a very real sense, we honor Christ in living as we learn to die to self daily. We could say that the life of a Christian includes many deaths. Again, Paul said, "I die daily." Let me explain what I want you to ponder today.

Remember what Jesus said in Luke 9:23, "If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross daily and follow me." In that verse, we have the idea of daily dying to self. It is here referred to as denying self. Genuine daily Christian living and daily Christian dying. Certainly, I am not talking about your heart stopping, blood ceasing to flow, and your lungs quitting. Rather, I am talking about dying to your personal desire for status and reputation, for your financial security and comfort, for safety, for family and wealth and so on. We must know that we could lose any of these things at any time as a result of faithfulness to Christ. Our lives, like Paul's should be a daily dying to self too. Our lives should be taking up our cross, the instrument of death, the way Jesus told us to and realizing that His call for us to walk this path is a call of love which leads to gain not loss.

This means that the way we honor Christ in our suffering and/or dying is to treasure Him above everything else so that when we lose those things mentioned above, we don't fall all to pieces because we still have our most treasured possession – Jesus Christ Himself. In other words, we are ready to suffer and to die when we see Christ as our treasure not the things He has afforded us in this life. Think about what Paul was saying when he said that to die is to gain. What he meant was that in death he would gain Christ which is great. He also said that in life, when he died daily to self, he would gain Christ. Look with me at Philippians 3:7-8. It says, "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." So, you see, to die to the things of this world that most people would consider gain, Paul let those things go so that he would *gain* Christ. Isn't that wonderful.

Let me close today by stating clearly that I am talking about the fact that God is seen as most glorious when we are settled and confident in Him in times of loss. The world is not impressed when in our plenty or wealth we say thanks to God. They are moved to consider our faith when they see its beauty in suffering. God knows this so He will give us the opportunity to shine by faith for His glory and our joy. I think about how horrible the prosperity gospel preachers are who cause others to lose the beauty of Christ for the lesser glimmer of His gifts. Oh, that the world would see us willing to give our "gifts" away for the sake of others and the glory of the One who is actually the prize. "When everything in life is stripped away except God, and we trust Him more because of it, this is gain, and He is glorified." - John Piper

November 4

2 Corinthians 1:8-9

I hope that I haven't gone to the well too many times this week around this subject, but I want to take one more devotion and talk about the great value and benefit of the God-ordained struggles in our lives. In the passage that I chose for today's point to ponder, Paul was making it crystal clear that concerning the afflictions that he and Timothy had been facing. In fact, he says, "For we do not want you to be unaware, brethren, of our affliction which came to us in Asia, that we were burdened excessively, beyond our strength, so that we despaired even of life; indeed, we had the sentence of death within ourselves so that we would not trust in ourselves, but in God who raises the dead." Paul wants us to see without hesitation that God is our only hope, and He is the real treasure that will last beyond all others. It is through the sufferings of this life that we come to know that fully. This is God's design for the Christian life, and we must not fight against it. Faithfulness in suffering is always worth the pain. There is so much of God's glory and truth that can only be experienced and learned in the dark places of our lives.

Another one of my favorite passages in the Bible is found in 2 Corinthians 4:16-17. Here Paul writes, "Therefore we do not lose heart, but though our outer man is decaying, yet our inner man is being renewed day by day. For momentary and light affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison." I know this may be a strange verse to be considered a favorite, but it is because it is so relevant and real in my life. Life is full of trials and heartaches and this verse helps me make sense of it all. God is not wasting the pain that He ordains in our lives but is using it to prepare us for the beauty and wonder of heaven. He can say that our sufferings are momentary because they are in comparison to eternity. Light refers to the suffering that we are enduring in comparison to the everlasting joy that will be ours when we stand in the presence of God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

So, when we are suffering and hurting in this life, we must remember that as hard as it is now, God is using it as an act of love to prepare us and those around us for something breathtakingly better. If we fail to hold on in faith, then we stand to lose this. We were made to see and to savor His glory and unfortunately, we are very blind until He gives us sight and changes our focus. It is true that our outer man is growing old and wasting away, but at the same time, for those who are loving and obeying Jesus the inner man is being renewed and made stronger day by day. Back to our focal passage for today, Paul said that he and Timothy were burdened beyond their own strength. It was so bad that he described he and Timothy as despairing of death. This meant they honestly thought they were going to die. It is important that you see why this was happening.

It is easy during these hard times in our lives to think that God has abandoned us or maybe is simply not interested or involved in our lives. The truth is that He was very involved in leading Paul and Timothy to a place of dependence upon Him and not themselves. Why would this matter so much? I want you to think about how this is yet another display of pure love. God knows that we are doomed to fail if we continue to live life thinking we are all we need. Not only is that incorrect, but it is also a means to experiencing life on a far less grand scale. My point is that life is going to be fuller, more complete, more exciting, and filled with more of His glory when we learn to trust Him and not ourselves. He will do whatever He must to bring us to a place where He can bless us richly.

November 5

John 2:19

I find it interesting that the false witnesses in our passage for this past Sunday accused Stephen of saying that Jesus said He would destroy the temple and spoke against the Law of Moses. If memory serves me correctly, I believe Jesus did make those statements. Now, before I get into our point to ponder today, I want you to know that Luke called them false witnesses because they were putting a false spin on what Jesus actually meant. He never spoke "against the holy place and the law" nor did Jesus ever speak "blasphemous words against Moses and God." Jesus was destroying it in a sense but a better way to look at what Jesus did in regard to the temple and the Law was to fulfill and not destroy. He "destroyed" the temple in the same way the morning sun "destroys" the need for a porch light. So, what did Jesus really mean when He made the statements like we find in John 2:19?

You could stop at the point of just believing that He meant that His body was going to be destroyed and then rise again on the 3rd day. That would certainly be true. But, is there more? What I have been taught and grown to believe is that Jesus meant: When I die the temple dies. I think he meant the whole sacrificial system with all of its sacrifices for atonement and all the priestly duties associated with it. In essence he meant that His death destroyed the Old Covenant need for that system because He was fulfilling all that it pointed to. In other words, Jesus was the reality that removed the shadow of what was coming.

Jesus took the place of everything in the temple which is why the curtain was torn in two when He died. All the walls that separated us from God were torn down and access was granted through Christ. Think with me for a moment. When He died, He rose again and ascended to the right hand of the Father in heaven where He now resides and serves as our Great High Priest interceding for the saints (Hebrews 7:25). Thus, there is no longer any need for other priests. In that way, the temple was destroyed. We also know that Hebrews tells us that Jesus offered Himself and His own blood to redeem us (Heb. 9:12, 25-28). There is no longer any need for all of those animal sacrifices and blood on the altar. In that way, the temple was destroyed. Finally, the temple is no longer the place where you have to go to be in the presence of God or to see His glory. Peter wrote, "God raised Him from the dead and gave Him glory" (1 Peter 1:21). James referred to Jesus as the "Lord of glory" (2:1). So again, in that way the temple was destroyed.

You see, it really was not destroyed in a negative sense but in a positive way. He fulfilled, satisfied, completed, and brought the reality of all that the temple and sacrificial system had pointed to for all of those years. We can praise God today that we have a great High Priest and is God and gives us access to the very glory of God. You can think of it this way: Jesus said that when He would die the temple would die because His death would cover sin once for all because He is the final and perfect sacrifice. He is our priest standing as our Mediator in the presence of the Father and all of the glory and radiance of God is seen in Christ (Heb. 1:3). Dear ones, we don't need earthly priest to make intercession for us – Jesus did it. We don't need to travel to some distant place to get near to God or see His glory – Jesus is near to us and is His glory.

November 6

1 Peter 5:10

It seems that I am often thinking about how I can help you grow to be and remain strong in the Lord. As our culture sours in our nation, I pray that your faith will hold and that you will not “shrink back to destruction, but instead be among those who have faith to the preserving of your souls” (Hebrews 10:39). The book of Hebrews was written to believers during a time of great persecution and struggle. If you read this wonderful book in God’s Word with that in mind, it will help you better understand the author’s intent. Take a look at chapters 10 and 11 and I think you will discover my heart for each of you in these troubling days. In fact, the entire 11th chapter is given as a source of encouragement for those who are struggling to maintain faith and maybe even considering giving up. God forbid that any of us would ever abandon the faith. As Hebrews 10:35-36 says, “Therefore, do not throw away your confidence, which has great reward. For you have need of endurance, so that when you have done the will of God, you may receive what was promised.” That is my exhortation for you today.

Now, why is faith so important? Oh, I know, as do you, the obvious answers such as, “It is impossible to please God without faith” (Heb. 11:6). Or that it is by grace flowing through faith that we are saved (Eph. 2:8). I want to add to the reasons why faith is so vital in light of my concern for your spiritual well-being. In Romans 5:2 it is written, “...through who also we have obtained our introduction by faith into this grace in which we stand.” I want you to think about the words “into this grace” for a bit. Notice that it is by faith that we have obtained this introduction into this grace. So, faith gives us access to grace. Grace becomes the means by which we are able to be strong in the Lord in the face of persecution and trials.

Peter wrote in 1 Peter 5:10, “After you have suffered for a little while, the God of all grace, who called you to His eternal glory in Christ, will Himself perfect, confirm, strengthen, and establish you.” Oh, my goodness! Do you see that? The God of what? GRACE! This is saying that God will provide the grace which will cause us to be perfected, strengthened, established, faithful, etc. Faith opens the door to the very source of strength and power that we need to maintain faith and not shrink back in the face of difficulty. Paul said it is in this grace that WE STAND back in Romans 5:2. That means that we stand steadfast and immovable.

Sunday, I preached about Stephen and how the basis of the grace and power in his life was the fact that he was full of faith and the Holy Spirit (Acts 6:5). As a result of the grace that was poured into him through faith, he was able to stand in the face of his enemies and keep on preaching Jesus even unto death. When threatened and eventually stoned to death, his face looked like that of an angel, he saw Jesus Christ standing in heaven, and he was able to ask God to forgive those who were killing him. How in the world? It was grace working all of this amazing strength and power into his life as a result of faith in Jesus and the Word of God. Beloved, that is how it must be for you and me today. Please take the time to get to know Jesus so that you will fall in love with Him, and I know that as you grow to trust Him (have faith), He will give you every bit of grace that you need to show His beauty and worth even in death.

November 7

2 Corinthians 3:7-11

I always stand amazed when a person stands unwavering and steadfast in the Lord while being persecuted. In Stephen's case, he was rock solid faithful even unto death. I mentioned in an earlier devotion that it was a result of being full of grace which came to him through faith. That is certainly the case. I wanted to end our time this week considering another victory that was his because of God's grace unleashed in his life. Let's look upon Stephen like his accusers did and notice his countenance (Acts 6:15). I want you to note that he was able to image Christ so beautifully because of grace and the power of the Spirit AND because God was saying something very important in that moment.

Verse 15 says, "And fixing their gaze on him, all who were sitting in the Council saw his face like the face of an angel." John MacArthur said, "That is one of the greatest rebukes I've ever read. They're saying, 'Evil, evil; blasphemer, blasphemer,' and he's sitting there with a holy face." His was the face of an angel, a holy angel of God, manifesting the glow of God that he receives from being in the presence of God. Why would MacArthur call this rebuke? Well, I think it will help for us to remember what God did with Moses on Mt. Sinai in Exodus 33 and 34. You can read the story yourself of the glory of God on the face of Moses. As he came down from the mountain with the glory of God on his face, he held in his arms the Ten Commandments which represented the old covenant. Now Stephen has proclaimed the new covenant, and God put on his face the same glow that Moses experienced. In both cases, God is saying that He approved of Moses and now approved of Stephen.

Here is how that makes sense. Peter said, "If you are reviled for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you" (1 Peter 4:14). The one who suffers persecution, upon him shall be the Spirit of God (grace) and glory. I believe Stephen had radiating from his face the glory of God. They had said, "You blaspheme Moses." They were wrong! God had put on Stephen the face of His own glory. Only one other man in the history of the world ever had the glory of God on his face. Who was it? Moses.

Look for a moment at 2 Corinthians 3:7-11. "But if the ministry of death" – now, that's a reference to the law because it simply condemned but could not save - "in letters engraved on stones came with glory, so that the sons of Israel couldn't look intently at the face of Moses, because of the glory of his face." If that was glorious, the old covenant, and Moses was lit up, verse 8 – "how shall the ministry of the Spirit fail to be even more with glory?" What we are seeing in the face of Stephen was the fulfillment of the glory of the New Covenant all the while the Council was rejecting it just as they had rejected Christ.

Dear family and friends, as we wrap up this week of devotions, we have marveled at bit at the amazing faith and strength of Stephen. Please let me remind us all that the real "star" of the show is always God. He is the One who gave Stephen the grace to live and die the way he did. God is the One who was making a huge statement about Christ, the Gospel, and the New Covenant that had come into the world for the good of humanity. Stephen was blessed to have a part in bringing glory to Jesus Christ. May we be willing to do the same with our lives.