

Sermon on 1 Corinthians 16:12-24 prepared by Jonathan Shradar

Angels rejoice when one sinner repents and believes in Jesus... It is a big party and Char (*our missionary to South America who has returned*) has been working to incite more parties! I think one day we will all take part in these celebrations, watching back key moments and cheering!

I like parties... I have noticed you all don't invite me to many. You should know I like La Croix water, I enjoy craft beer and good conversation... just know that I have to bounce at 7:30 because I have kids!

This morning I want us to think about leaving a party.... Some of you ghost and just kind of disappear - but those extroverts among us have to get in all the parting shots, say goodbye to everyone and perhaps verbally schedule when we will see each other again. There can be a lot of information in a brief burst of time as we walk out the door.

This is how we conclude the journey through 1 Corinthians. The grand party of gospel proclamation is winding down and there is some rapid fire encouragement and goodbyes to conclude the letter. Even so there is some important, and good news for us to hear.

The miracle of being “in Christ” is experienced beyond ourselves.

1 Corinthians 16:12-24 “Now concerning our brother Apollos, I strongly urged him to visit you with the other brothers, but it was not at all his will to come now. He will come when he has opportunity. [13] Be watchful, stand firm in the faith, act like men, be strong. [14] Let all that you do be done in love.

[15] Now I urge you, brothers—you know that the household of Stephanas were the first converts in Achaia, and that they have devoted themselves to the service of the saints—[16] be subject to such as these, and to every fellow worker and laborer. [17] I rejoice at the coming of Stephanas and Fortunatus and Achaicus, because they have made up for your absence, [18] for they refreshed my spirit as well as yours. Give recognition to such people.

[19] The churches of Asia send you greetings. Aquila and Prisca, together with the church in their house, send you hearty greetings in the Lord. [20] All the brothers send you greetings. Greet one another with a holy kiss.

[21] I, Paul, write this greeting with my own hand. [22] If anyone has no love for the Lord, let him be accursed. Our Lord, come! [23] The grace of the Lord Jesus be with you. [24] My love be with you all in Christ Jesus. Amen.” (ESV)

The miracle of being “in Christ” is experienced beyond ourselves.

In dealing with the local church's issues, responding to their questions about how to worship and seek the gifts of the Spirit for the good of the body, every answer leads back to Christ.

The pastor that preached nothing but Christ and him crucified, keeps on running the church back to their center, that their faith would not rest in the wisdom of men but in the power of God.

The cross of Christ is what defines them. This is what Christianity is all about. If you are visiting with us this morning, welcome, or if you have been confused about the point of following Jesus, maybe you thought it was about being good, or racking up enough points to go to heaven... it is this.

Made to be perfect, humanity rebelled against God and a vile infection spread to everyone, corrupting all things. And we could never make it right. Lost in our sin, our ongoing dismissal of God, he still chose to redeem, and in setting apart a people he communicated over hundreds of years the right response to his kindness and holiness... and most beautifully, the coming anointed One that would right the wrong and save his people.

This is Jesus, God himself, born, breathing and experiencing all that the mess of humanity does. Only he did it with perfect obedience before God and untainted by the corruption that infects the rest of us. The innocent, charged with blasphemy, beaten, executed on an instrument of torture. Darkness descended at midday and all of the wrath of God against sin, every ounce of it, was met and extinguished for those that believe.

On the third day he rose and those that believe in him are empowered by the Spirit and united with him by faith - taking on his righteousness, his reputation and inheritance. In Jesus, secure, redeemed...

Being "in Christ" is the central message of 1 Corinthians, and it is not merely an individual reality, because when you are part of the new covenant, you are part of a covenant community - with other believers - part of the church.

All along the way the goodness of being in Christ has been laid before the church as something to be lived out together, for others to see. In his parting words we see it still, that the miracle of being "in Christ" is experienced beyond ourselves.

Three brief points. We are made part of something bigger than ourselves, we are made better than ourselves and we are gloriously never by ourselves in Christ.

1) Bigger than ourselves

This is a letter to "those... in Christ Jesus, called as saints with everyone, in every place that calls on the name of Jesus." Each believer part of the local church and part of something bigger than

their geographical reality. In Christ. The church is larger, the kingdom bigger... It consists of everyone, in every place that calls on the name of Jesus Christ.

Everyone who has confessed and believed that Christ came, died and was raised...

Romans 10:12-13 “For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; for the same Lord is Lord of all, bestowing his riches on all who call on him. [13] For “everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.” (ESV)

This breaks down geographical distinctions, cultural distinctions and all others, tradition, even so far as unique theological distinctives...

The church is bigger than ourselves, the Corinthians church is an outpost connected by this shared kingdom reality, redemption in Christ. Identity, purpose and other people.

Where the inclination is to huddle, to organize behind certain leaders and claim independence, the thread of being part of something bigger runs through the new testament. The little girl in Corinth that believes in Jesus is part of the same body as the little girl in San Diego, or the little girl in Paraguay.

In the bigger reality there is unity and care. Apollos will come when he has the opportunity to encourage the saints and the churches in Asia send hearty greetings, in the Lord. “Greet one another with a holy kiss...” Not merely meant for Corinth, but a call to welcome every saint with a holy handshake or hug, as family.

‘One’s membership in a local church connects him or her to a global movement...’ Paul is essentially saying, “take an interest in what’s happening in the churches around you. Pray for their success and for the advancement of the gospel. Take an interest in the global movement of the gospel; support it through prayer, relationships, and finances...”

Where our inclination is to internalize, close ranks and become, in our minds, the special ones, the unique “church,” the Bible shatters that notion and urges us back to the bigger kingdom family.

How many churches in San Diego? There is but one, all those that call on Jesus.

The church is not only part of something bigger than ourselves, it is a people “better” than ourselves.

2) Better than ourselves

The message of Christianity is not behave, but behold. See Jesus, his work for you, his righteousness as yours, the promise of eternity. And in the beholding, there is a spiritual work of

transformation that makes us “better” than we would be apart from the church - apart from the care and challenge of the community.

It is as the church that we are equipped to steadfast, immovable, as resilient as the gospel we believe. “Be watchful, stand firm in the faith, act like men, be strong...”

‘Paul says “Be watchful” in order to provide a word of caution for the Corinthians to remain alert and to have their hope engaged for the return of the Lord who will make all things right. Then, “Stand firm in the faith.” This is shorthand for believing the core doctrines of Christianity. “Faith” is a call to mind the historical realities of what God has done for them in Christ. He is saying, “Make the gospel central to your lives.” In the following commands, “Act like men, be strong” Paul is not contrasting masculinity and femininity, but fullgrownness and childlikeness. (when a child reasoning like a child... giving up childish ways...) The gospel is to be central to all that the Corinthians say and do. Nothing can hold them together apart from the gospel.”

Those that on their own might be captive to weird philosophies, are together in the church made firm in their belief in Christ. Those lacking maturity are brought along, trained and nurtured to maturity in the faith... becoming steady, resolute, strong.

And maybe more striking, those that alone would be self-centered and callous toward anything that rubbed against their self-sovereignty are made to love and serve others.

Let all you do be done in love, in the church, in all of life, together as part of something bigger, loving is better. Those converted, that believe in Jesus devote themselves to other believers, as Stephanas and his household, and the church submits to this humble care and to all that labor to preach Christ and stir up the body to good work, labor in the Lord that is not in vain.

There is mutual reliance on one another, the church equipping one another in faithfulness. Recharging each other with the gospel, and recognizing each other for the way they serve. A community that has experienced the love of Christ will out of necessity, share the love of God with one another.

In light of the gospel, we are better together... in the local church, in the broader church, united we stand firm, we care, we encourage, we labor together. Bound together by the love we have received in Christ and the love we have for one another given to us by the Spirit.

Vastly different characters, in background, experience, personality, perspective, brought together in love - by which the world will know we are followers of Jesus.

‘Sadly, the majority of our interactions are not characterized by love. Some steamroll the individual for the sake of community. Others devalue the community for the sake of the individual. Mutual devotion and submission are rare. We approach the community with

hierarchical lenses. We value flashiness over faithfulness. Rather than reaching across great distances, we isolate ourselves....’

It is the gospel that breaks this in us, that imparts love that overflows to others and that is what Paul has consistently reminded the church of; being “in Christ,” in his love, in his power, in his church... called to something better, to this one another, bigger than ourselves community and we are brought there by the good news we say is central.

The church, made part of a global kingdom, family with those that were strangers, by belief in Jesus. The church made better by being connected, by mutual equipping, values and care for one another in love.

Part of something bigger and better than we could image of ourselves. But we are also, gloriously...

3) Never by ourselves

Paul closes out the letter taking the pen from his scribe to give the final word. It is essentially, “haters gonna hate, you have hope in Christ’s return and his grace now, and I love you!”

Verse 22 is interesting in that we don’t know if Paul is speaking specifically of one person harassing the church or even trying to lead them astray from within... or if this is the basic truth that those apart from Jesus remain under wrath for sin. that the O' Lord Come, can be seen as a call for justice... that those who reject God will see punishment in the final judgement.

But what is true is that we all were haters... now loved and loving in Christ. And we are made into this family together, not left alone as we follow Jesus.

Galatians 3:28 “ There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.” (ESV)

‘Union with Christ - being in Christ Jesus - is the basis of our unity with one another...

No matter the mess, we are given grace to live, to flourish, to love one another... “The grace of the Lord Jesus be with you.” Ever with you, that you are not alone. With you as he is with you. In you and you are in him. Together, united with Christ.

Together looking forward with hope and focus to his return. Working and waiting in love. “Our Lord, come!” Maranatha!

Part of something bigger, made into something better, together... with each other, with all the saints in every place that call on Jesus, and never left without his grace for us.

The miracle of being “in Christ” is experienced beyond ourselves. In the church, in the kingdom, serving, loving, nurturing, training each others. In the grace of Christ.

*Response: **Get in*** - Believe in Jesus, call on his name for salvation. Own you sin and rebellion and turn from it to Christ. Be renewed this morning in your belief, that Jesus’ righteousness is truly yours by his grace for you. Be reminded of his goodness toward you and his church.

Go Beyond - Engage as the church, with one another in love. Start with conversation, time together, sharing life. Our first reaction is usually time, I don’t have enough of it. But we all have the same amount of time. We do have though competing values - and we have just not valued this bigger, better reality of the church. I don’t think you can guilt yourself there... you need the Spirit to work in your heart. So going beyond yourself begins with asking for transformed values. As it happens, live in love. Live in the unity that Jesus prayed for.

As he closed his ministry... **John 17:20-23** “I do not ask for these only, but also for those who will believe in me through their word, [21] that they may all be one, just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me. [22] The glory that you have given me I have given to them, that they may be one even as we are one, [23] I in them and you in me, that they may become perfectly one, so that the world may know that you sent me and loved them even as you loved me. (ESV)

...the love foundation of the relationship that the Son has with the Father is what now fuels the church’s love for one another. To go beyond ourselves as part of something bigger, better, truer... for the glory of Christ. In Christ Jesus...