

“Reliance Upon the Spirit”

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Opening Prayer

Good Morning Beloved, I hope all is well with you and yours. The other night at Youth Group I asked our high school students what they would like to focus on for the next half of the year that we have left, what they would like to (or need to) learn. The response that I got that all of the students resonated with was on “How to overcome.” It is a good question! How do we overcome the drama in our lives? How do we overcome the anxiety and pain and fear that grips us on a regular basis? How do we overcome our own sins and temptations? How do we overcome the garbage that we face in this world. While we will be spending a fair amount of time on answering that question and its offshoots over the next few months with our students, this morning’s sermon topic speaks directly to answering that question. How do we overcome all of these things and find peace? We overcome by relying upon the Spirit that the Lord has placed within us through Christ.

I must confess, I think I have rewritten this sermon three or four times now. The book of 1st Corinthians speaks loudly to us in our modern age. While the book itself was written to people in the 1st century who resided in a busy trading city rife with immorality, idolatry, and cultural conflict, in many ways we can relate. The church of Corinth, a church started by the Apostle Paul on one of his missionary journeys, was plagued by division. There were divisions of every kind attacking this church that was filled with brand new baby Christians. In many ways our churches are similar. There is a lot of division today, we live in a hostile environment to the Gospel, and we too have many newer (or frankly less educated) Christians in our midst. This is how it is right? When Paul writes to the Corinthians in chapter two about how he himself relies upon the Lord, pledging to know only Christ crucified in their presence and encourages them to do the same, it is therefore still a pertinent message for us here and now. As a young preacher here with you, I must confess that the words of this chapter really spoke heavily to my heart this week. At first the message was going to be a bit scathing. I was going to focus on us as two congregations, how we fall short and are giving in to divisions regularly and are not seeking to know only “Christ crucified” in our world, but the Lord put on my heart not to preach that way. Secondly I was going to turn that scathing message around, and talk about how I as your preacher am called to know only “Christ crucified” in your midst, and how often I failed that standard in my ministry and thus should be encouraging you (and especially myself) to live into that calling better. But the final version, the thing that the Lord really put upon my soul to preach on is that basic reliance of us upon our Lord when we are in need. Whether in ministry, family life, our work days, etc. we are so desperately in need of that reliance upon the Spirit as Paul talks about in 1st Corinthians 2. Just as you rely upon water to satiate your thirst, and food to satisfy your hunger, you require (it isn’t optional!) the Lord within you to fill that need for peace in a waring world. We need to rely upon Christ alone.

In some ways this morning Paul is our example. The chapter we read begins with “When I came to you, brothers, I did not come with eloquence or superior wisdom as I proclaimed to you the testimony about God. For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified. I came to you in weakness and fear, and with much trembling.” The Apostle Paul is no ordinary man right Beloved? He is an Apostle, a learned Pharisee, and someone with a ton of experience in preaching and defending the Gospel, and yet here he tells these people who are struggling with division and temptation that he resolved to know nothing except Christ crucified in their midst. I must be honest, this hits home for your minister. I confess that every time I come up to preach, every time I lead Youth Group or a Bible Study, I am nervous and anxious. My tendency is to place the burden upon my own shoulders for success. I am always asking myself, “Did I preach it correctly? Did I do enough research and reading for this week? Am I lacking in what I am doing, and am I making a mockery of the Lord’s holy message?” But here Paul blatantly states that all he desired to do in building this church, though he did so in weakness and fear, was preach the truth of the Gospel. He lets the Holy Spirit take care of the rest. He recognizes that while he is an imperfect tool, the one who uses him is perfect in His execution. The same is true of us. I have heard from many of you that pray earnestly for your family, your friends, your coworkers, etc. that you desire to do it just right. You want to spread the Gospel as Christ has commanded you, but you are afraid to screw it up. Beloved I understand that wholeheartedly, because I worry the same thing several times a week... but we need not fear. We are told that although we are imperfect and although we have faults that we are always working on (we are to be diligent in serving the Lord of course), we are not responsible for the outcome. We rely upon the Spirit for that, the Lord Himself who does more than we can see. Our hope for a good outcome, whatever it may be, is not solely reliant upon our hands although again we are to work diligently. The hope for a good outcome, the hope for peace and conflict resolution and fulfillment is found in relying upon the Lord who dwells within us. We are not strong enough to overcome on our own... we need Him.

The entire chapter of Isaiah 55 comes to mind with regards to this, and I would encourage you to go home and read Isaiah 55 the second you have the chance. I will read to you just a couple verses that you may have heard before that relate to your doing and preaching the good word to those around you, and how God fulfills His word. Isaiah 55:9-11 reads “As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts. As the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and do not return to it without watering the earth and making it bud and flourish, so that it yields seed for the sower and bread for the eater, so it is my word that goes out from my mouth; it will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it.” In a world that is increasingly hostile to the Gospel, a world that is increasingly divided and angry (much like the church in Corinth that Paul is writing to), there is still much to be hopeful for because the Lord still acts. You, Beloved, are not responsible for changing the world with your own two hands. You are called to act in love, to be good stewards of the faith that God has given you, to be in prayer... but the final results are up to Him, and He does not disappoint. Beloved, we do not rely upon our own strength to overcome the evil things that come our way. We do not rely upon our own intellect to convince people to join the church, nor do we rely upon ourselves being

eloquent. We are called to be Christlike in our behavior, and leave the rest to Him. We are called to rely upon the Holy Spirit that resides within us.

“This is what we speak, not in words taught us by human wisdom but in words taught by the Spirit, expressing spiritual truths in spiritual words. The man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually discerned. The spiritual man makes judgments about all things, but he himself is not subject to any man’s judgement.” In this world that continuously beats us down, where do we find our hope? What do we rely upon? For the “natural man,” or the non-Christian, there are all sorts of answers. A person who does not rely upon the Spirit will rely upon his own strength, or his wealth, or his position of power, or the false comforts of some addiction, or any number of other things. What you really rely upon, what you find peace in at your core, can be seen when the crap hits the fan for you. How do you cope when stuff is bad Beloved? What do you rely upon to get you through? If we are honest, many of us still default back to things other than God. We will find ourselves looking for some kind of cheap pleasure (porn, chocolate, alcohol, etc.), or we will find our solace in things that don’t last like pouring more effort into our work or our hobbies. I encourage you to examine your own life this morning and to ask the hard question about what you rely upon. Do you rely upon the Spirit, upon the Lord, when life is hard? Do you run to Jesus when you are angry, frustrated, or in pain? How patient are you with the Lord when life gets hard? When you pray in anguish, or when something doesn’t go as planned, do you give the Lord time to make His will known? To the world, they will not understand.

To the world that reliance on the Lord is foolishness. In many ways to your old self that is foolishness. Whether or not your faith is strong can be seen when you are tested. For the Corinthian church, they were failing the test. They were giving in to temptations and vices and divisions because they were relying upon something other than the Holy Spirit. They were making room for things that didn’t belong in their lives. These are believers (saints Paul called them!) who are doing this, and it was tearing their church apart! In our time filled with political upheaval and covid and general animosity towards others many of us are guilty of the same thing. You often see Christian brothers and sisters who apoplectic about the world in its current state. Guess what Beloved, Joe Biden isn’t going to be in control on Wednesday. Guess what Beloved, Donald Trump wasn’t in control for the last four years. The boss you can’t stand? She isn’t in control. The school board that doesn’t want prayer in schools? They aren’t in control. The popular group of kids in the lunchroom aren’t in control. There is only one who is in charge, and His control does not change.

The world doesn’t understand or accept that Beloved, but that doesn’t make it untrue. The wisdom for a Christian starts and ends with knowing who the real boss is. Paul said in verses 7-8 still applies. “But we speak God’s wisdom in a mystery, the hidden wisdom which God predestined before the ages to our glory; the wisdom which none of the rulers of this age has understood; for if they understood it they would not have crucified the Lord of glory.” The world doesn’t know it, but Jesus already secured your eternity through His death and

resurrection. The Lord is not aloof, but is working in all things (even the things Satan would desire for evil!) for His ultimate glory... and ours. In everything, we do not need to rely upon ourselves. We rely upon Him who works within us.

So what are the takeaways this morning from 1st Corinthians 2? If you remember anything, please remember that as a Christian you must rely upon the Lord. As Isaiah 55 reminds us, His words do not return empty. If we are acting in faith, He will see us through. Just as Paul shows us, if we preach Christ crucified then we are doing what we are called to do. If you need hope, or peace, or a way to overcome, do not look to yourself or the stuff in this world. Look to your Creator and rely upon Him. Let us pray.

Closing Prayer