

Title: Not in Vain

Text: 1 Corinthians 15.58

Theme: Work in the Lord is forever

Series: 1 Corinthians #95

Prop Stmt. Christ-driven tenacity will bring fruit.

“Drudgery is the touchstone of character” Oswald Chambers said. Justin Martyr, a Christian apologist from the 2<sup>nd</sup> century, grew up very close to where Christ grew up and wrote that in his day, 100 years after Christ, the plows that Joseph and Jesus made were still being used in the fields. Christ did not let Peter, James and John stay on the Mt. of Transfiguration, but led them back to the streets, back to the ordinary work of daily duty. But, we disdain the ordinary. We are taught to pursue the incredible, accomplish the amazing, achieve the impossible, while lesser people do the mundane. And so, the common things become just a means to an end. School work is not done to learn, but only for a grade. Work is not done to the glory of God, but only for the paycheck. Amusement parks and movies are the poor man’s attempt at vicariously experiencing the amazing, while travel and sight-seeing are the rich man’s attempt at rubbing shoulders with greatness. What is lost on all is, as Os Guinness calls it, “the splendor of the ordinary.”

For the last two weeks, our spirits have soared and our hearts have pounded with delight as this text has thrilled our souls with the anticipation of glory and future joys. And so many of you have told me of what a blessing these services have been. But, this text does not end in the heavenlies, fascinating us with longed for celestial experiences. This text does not leave us in the church service on Sunday, but takes us to an ordinary Monday. This text takes us from the mountain-top into the field to plow, into the kitchen to cook, into the shop to work, into the office to carry-on, into the classroom to study and into the thousands of places where life goes on, where you are, and where reality exists. Buddhism and Docetism attempt to deny the world. Christianity embraces it. We have a two-fold vision. We see things as they will be, which enables us to worship God and we see God in life right now, in the ordinary. This text connects splendor with ordinary.

Read Text:

The early church began to spread from Jerusalem to Antioch to the Asia Minor region and into Greece and then to Rome. There were no seminaries or colleges, no theological journals or formal councils except for that of Acts 15. Each little church appeared to be a canoe in the ocean. How would they ever survive? There were so many pressures from without and so many issues within. Some of the internal problems appeared to be more of a personal nature, and other internal problems had to do with false teaching that was appearing on the scene. The church looked fragile and dysfunctional. To these churches, some of the apostles, particularly Paul, John and Peter wrote letters.

These epistles were written for the purpose of addressing these problems. Just reading the NT makes it very clear that God wants the church to address problems. You don’t help people by ignoring problems. The book of 1 Corinthians is a classic example of this.

The church at Corinth is torn apart over all sorts of issues which ultimately have their solution in the gospel. Paul begins this book by reaffirming the gospel. But, here in chapter 15, we find out that there is a movement within the church to deny that there is actually a resurrection. Responding to and correcting this problem is what chapter 15 is all about. It begins with a call. The call is to remain standing on the gospel. This same chapter ends with a call. The call is to remain standing on the gospel. In between, Paul is responding to a problem that threatened the gospel. Notice the first word in v.58. This is a great example of the bible study rule that whenever you read “therefore” you need to stop and see what it is there for. In this case, Paul is saying that based on the gospel, based on the resurrection, based on what is going to happen to your life, if you believe the gospel, based on your own resurrection, here is how you need to live!

Now, when I speak of the gospel, keep in mind that I am speaking of a collection of truths. In order for a person to become a follower of Jesus Christ, that person must believe and obey the gospel. But, they must believe and obey the right gospel. They must believe and obey the gospel as it is revealed in the Scriptures. Yes, I said believe and obey, because genuine belief will be seen in our actions. Belief without repentance, or belief without a change of affections, attitude and action is not genuine belief. If we tamper with the gospel, then it is no longer the gospel. Without the gospel there is no forgiveness, no justification, no salvation, and no eternal hope. So, Paul jealousy guards the integrity of the gospel. The integrity of the gospel is being threatened by those in the Corinthian church who were teaching that there is no resurrection. Paul is all over that like ugly on ape.

Even in these early days, we can see the influence of a movement that became known as docetism. Docetism taught that Jesus Christ only appeared to have a human body, but that he really didn't have one like us. How could the sinless Savior have a body of flesh and blood like ours? That was a big stumbling block for them and became a major problem in the early church that had to be addressed and corrected. In fact, it was this issue that the apostle John addressed in his letters. You see this in 1 John 4.2b, “Every spirit that acknowledges that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God.” You cannot deny the literal body of Christ without denying Christ and the gospel. So, in 1 Cor. 15, Paul is showing that just as Christ's literal, physical body was raised from the dead, so, our literal, physical body will one day be raised again from the dead as well. Your body matters to God. He owns it. He owns it forever. This is abundantly clear in 1 Cor. 6.9-20. What you do with your body matters to God because your body, just like the body of Christ will be raised again from the dead, because your body belongs to God. Your justification, your sanctification and your glorification affects your body and soul.

I think that we tend to be closet Docetists. We don't mind learning from the Bible. We can even enjoy a good sermon now and then, but applying it? Living it out? Changing our habits? Let me give you an example of what I am talking about. If we are saved *body and soul* and after death will have our bodies resurrected in order to be reunited with our souls so that we can forever worship and serve God with *body and soul*, how do you think we ought to worship and serve now? Body and soul! You cannot be worshipping God on the inside and it not affect you on the outside. Now, it is entirely

possible for people to pretend to worship on the outside while in church, whose affections and true beliefs on the inside remain unaffected. But, I am making theological case for worship to be participatory and not a spectator sport, because our worship of God (body and soul) drives our work for God, which is body and soul. Now, at the same time, becoming physically engaged in worship is not a substitute for obedience. Becoming excited about the doctrine of and the hope of the resurrection is not the end of it. The fruit of the Spirit is not chilly bumps on your arm. “The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.” So, when we get to the end of a worship service where the Word of God has fired our souls and our voices have been triumphantly and thunderously united in singing the great truths of the gospel, we are tempted to say, “That was great!” And it was, so far. The gathering for worship is not the end of it. The gathering for worship and instruction and edification is the launch pad that drives our work as worship, our obedience as worship, and our gossiping the gospel as worship. Wow, wasn’t church great today? It’s too early to tell. But if our love for God and each other and our world grows to where we consider others better than ourselves, if our joy for God and in God remains constant through the changing dynamics of the week, if our peace of soul and contented heart stays calm when under attack, if we remain full of faith through the shifting circumstances of the week, and gentle when assaulted and into our world we breathe grace and live gospel, then yes, church is good, and not just the worship service. “Therefore” means there is a connection between truth and life, between doctrine and duty, between revelation and response.

“My dear brothers” is an excellent translation, but Paul’s use of the masculine pronoun was gender inclusive in those days. “My very dear, fellow believers” is the point. This is a statement intended to include all of the Corinthian believers, some of whom may not like Paul’s style, habits or some of the things that he said to them, but there was no denying that he loved them.

### 1. **Don’t just do something, stand there!**

“Therefore, my dear brothers, Stand firm!”

The generation of twenty-somethings and younger have been raised with and are faced with more choices than any other in the history of the world. I googled “career” and in .08 seconds I had 499,000,000 websites to look at. I googled “schools” and within .11 seconds, I had 622 million websites from which to chose. If I spent one minute every day looking at each career site, it would take me 9,494 years. If, after 9,500 years, I figured out my career, it would only take me 11,834 years to check out all the websites on schools. So, after 21,000+ years, I could be ready to go to school.

I think that the overload of options contributes to a tendency to be uncommitted. If I have to pick one career, that means I have to say no to so many other things. If I have to pick one thing on the menu, how will I know if there isn’t something else that I would like better? If I pick one girl to build a relationship with and get married, how will I know if a better one won’t come along later? Guess what? If you get married, a better

one won't come along, and if you don't get married, a better one probably won't have you because you can't make a decision and lead!

The eternal "if's are paralyzing. Well, here is something that is not an "if" but is an "is." And that is the gospel and the promise that death will be swallowed up in victory. Brothers and sisters, that blows all other options away. Here is the truth that cannot be improved upon and the reason for that is because of three things: 1) The gospel is from God. 2) The gospel is established by God forever. 3) The gospel is eternally effective for everyone who believes.

#### **A. STAND THERE!**

Stand on the gospel. Anchor your life to it. Realize and accept that the truth of Christ and his resurrection and your life in him is the life-anchoring that forever is settled in heaven. When tempted to fear, stand there. When threatened with rejection, stand there. When ridiculed by your world, stand there. When facing disease, stand there. When staring at death, stand there. When flush with success, stand there. When in the throes of failure, stand there. When alone, stand there. When in a crowd, stand there. When tempted to give up, or tempted to give in, stand there. When you are disappointed by the failures of others, stand there. When you wake up in the middle of the night, feeling that your very soul is being assaulted, stand there. Stand on the gospel, because He stayed on the cross and didn't stay in the grave – you know what I mean? Stand there and let nothing move you.

#### **B. Stand there and don't move.**

The idea of this word means to not even flinch. Don't even shift your weight. Don't even think about moving. Since the gospel is true, since the sting of death has been removed, since death's victory is denied and it is God himself who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ, stand there. If you are going to believe it, then believe it. Don't run around and fret and worry, and get all worked up about the what if's and the what then's and the maybes, and the "I don't know's" fix your eyes on the gospel and stand there. But then he says...

#### **2. Don't just stand there, do something!**

You don't move off the gospel, and because of that, you have some work to do. Because of the gospel, keep going and don't quit.

In 1972, NASA launched the exploratory space probe Pioneer 10. According to Leon Jaroff in *Time*, the satellite's primary mission was to reach Jupiter, photograph the planet and its moons, and beam data to earth about Jupiter's magnetic field, radiation belts, and atmosphere. Scientists regarded this as a bold plan, for at that time no earth satellite had ever gone beyond Mars, and they feared the asteroid belt would destroy the satellite before it could reach its target.

But Pioneer 10 accomplished its mission and much, much more. Swinging past the giant planet in November 1973, Jupiter's immense gravity hurled Pioneer 10 at a higher rate of speed toward the edge of the solar system. At one billion miles from the sun, Pioneer 10 passed Saturn. At some two billion miles, it hurtled past Uranus; Neptune at nearly three billion miles; Pluto at almost four billion miles. By 1997, twenty-five years after its launch, Pioneer 10 was more than six billion miles from the sun.

And despite that immense distance, Pioneer 10 continued to beam back radio signals to scientists on Earth. 'Perhaps most remarkable,' writes Jaroff, 'those signals emanate from an 8-watt transmitter, which radiates about as much power as a bedroom night light, and takes more than nine hours to reach Earth.'

The Little Satellite That Could was not qualified to do what it did. Engineers designed Pioneer 10 with a useful life of just three years. But it kept going and going. By simple longevity, its tiny 8-watt transmitter radio accomplished more than anyone thought possible. "Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord." Be a Pioneer 10. This text makes three things pretty clear.

- A. There are no part-time Christians. – always.
- B. There are no half-hearted Christians – fully
- C. There are no lazy Christians – work of the Lord.

The point is; the gospel changes how you live. The gospel becomes the anchor and the reason for your living. We don't embrace the gospel so that life will get easier. We embrace the gospel because it is true. Because it is true, we pour ourselves into the work of the Lord. What is the work of the Lord? Is it the work that I do? Is it the work that I do because you pay me, and you come and sit and watch? Is that it? No, this text is to "my dear brothers". This is for all of us. So, what is the work of the Lord? Is it the work that we do in/with the church? Well, obviously that's part of it. The church is ground zero for God's plan of displaying his glory among the nations. But, do not view the church as this location. The work of the Lord is the work that the Lord does through his people. He works through you in your homes, in your jobs, in your relationships at school and in your hobbies and other pursuits. The work of the Lord is your full-time responsibility. You are his, body and soul. So, don't just stand there and say you believe the gospel, do something about it! And when you do, it is incredible the impact that you can have. There are no insignificant jobs in the work of the Lord. Everything that you do matters to God. Look at the last phrase.

### 3. **Don't forget what really matters!**

"because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain." Contrast the dailyness and ordinariness of this call, with a world that says only heroes really matter. Is that true? No. Coaches tell their teams, play within yourself. Do, what you are capable of doing – that's all. It is common grace counsel based on this truth. God doesn't call you to change the world, that's His job. He calls you to be faithful at your task, even if your

task doesn't appear breath-taking to everyone else. Edmund Burke said, "No man makes a greater mistake than he who does nothing because he knows it is not everything."

This is the daily stuff. This is the behind the scenes drudgery. It's the getting up by yourself and doing your task with an eye on Christ and an eye on your world. Anyone can get excited about playing a solo in the band concert, or performing in the choir when the crowd is large. But do you come to practice with the same passion? Anyone can get fired up for the homecoming game, but do you run just as hard in your lay-ups as you warm up for practice as you do when the stands are full of people? Anyone can feel significant when called upon to speak before hundreds, but what about before a class of seven year old boys, or washing the same clothes week in and week out? The world says, you only matter if you are on a stage! But your eternal hope in Christ means that everything you do now is on the stage before the audience of One. Your guaranteed resurrection is the foundation for splendor in the ordinary.

Some of you only respond to a crisis. You have to have an adventure, a challenge, or an emergency to motivate you to passion and work. You look for the grand, the glorious, when Jesus gives you a towel and a basin of water and says, "in my name." Don't just stand there, do something and in doing it, don't forget that it really matters because He really matters. Do it for God, and keep doing it for God. Oswald Chambers said, "Walking on the water is easy..., but walking on dry land is a different thing....We do not need the grace of God to stand crises, human nature and pride are sufficient, we can face the strain magnificently; but it does require the supernatural grace of God to live twenty-four hours in every day as a saint, to go through drudgery as a disciple of Jesus. It is inbred in us that we have to do exceptional things for God; but we have not. We have to be exceptional in the ordinary things, to be holy in mean streets, among mean people, and this is not learned in five minutes."

And only the Master shall praise us,  
And only the master shall blame;  
And no one shall work for money,  
And no one shall work for fame;  
But for the joy of the working,  
And each in his separate star,  
Shall draw the Thing as he sees It,  
For the God of Things as They Are!

Your standing on the gospel and your serving in light of the gospel will never be in vain.  
But, your labor in the Lord is not in vain.  
Here I stand, I can do no other, so help me God.